

MERMAID
TEARS



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SUSAN L. READ



IZZARD INK
PUBLISHING

IZZARD INK PUBLISHING
PO Box 522251
Salt Lake City, Utah 84152
www.izzardink.com

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LIBRARY OF CONGRESS CONTROL NUMBER: 2020930533

Designed by: Alissa Theodor
Cover Design by: Andrea Ho
Cover Images: Shutterstock.com/Alenka Karabanova

First Edition

Contact the author at www.susanread.com

Paperback ISBN: 978-1-64228-036-4

eBook ISBN: 978-1-64228-037-1

DEDICATED TO THE MEMORY OF
STEVE M. COHEN
WHO TAUGHT ME THAT "NORMAL" HAS NO MEANING.



AND TO ABBY
WHO BROUGHT SUCH PLEASURE WITH
WONDERFUL BOOK DISCUSSIONS.

PROLOGUE



Metamorphosis of a Mermaid Tear

Ejected from the Earth.

Weathered

by wind, rain, time.

Dormant for millennia.

The crashing of the ocean waves

my only companion.

Soothed

by the rhythmic pulse,

the ambient sounds

of my never-resting friend.

Witness to

the beginnings of life.



PART ONE

*“From birth, man carries the weight of gravity
on his shoulders. He is bolted to the earth.
But man has only to sink beneath the surface
and he is free.”*

- Jacques Cousteau



Why is it so hard
to be like other people?

Why is it so hard
to be normal?

Perhaps it would be better
if I wasn't even here.

ONE



I CAN'T BELIEVE MY ELEMENTARY years are almost over. That's probably why this year seems to be going by rather quickly. More quickly than I want it to. We'll go back after April break, we'll do the dreaded MCAS tests, and it will be almost summer.

In many ways I will miss elementary school. Adams Elementary is such an interesting building, even though I know the teachers are all looking forward to the new one, which will be ready in a couple of years. Our school was built during the early years of the Cold War era, and it has a fallout shelter in the basement. There's still a sign outside the main office announcing its location.

Although the shelter was never used for its intended purpose, it is very well used now as a place to store broken furniture and teachers' junk. I've heard the custodian saying many times that it's not a storage place for things that belong in a dumpster, but I know that every year teachers

send more and more of their belongings down there. Sometimes kids sneak down there, too, just to explore. But that's too creepy for me, so I've never ventured down in the six years I have been at the school.

Change is always scary, but maybe a change is what I need. There's no doubt that the past year or so has been getting more and more difficult for me, especially at school. Art class was always my escape. I used to really enjoy expressing myself through art. Used to. Until that art lesson last week, which changed everything for me.

We were working on sketching a still life in art class that day. There was a different arrangement of objects on each table, and we were allowed to choose which table to sit at. I chose the one that had the pine cones, a flower, and a large, beautiful seashell. I couldn't take my eyes off the shell. I was fascinated by its colors, its shape, and its shiny surface.

I started drawing, first the outline of the whole shell, then slowly adding the details. Fine lines. Shading. Texture. I worked carefully, putting all of my effort and concentration into this masterpiece.

Towards the end of the period, Mr. Miller asked us to put down our pencils. "It's time for our gallery walk," he announced.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

THERE ARE MANY PEOPLE I would like to thank for the role they have played in the telling of Sarah's story. Mr. Douglas, thank you for your support, suggestions, and encouragement. Thank you most of all for being "Mr. Douglas" to so many, of all ages, over the years. Special thanks to the real characters in my own life who have inspired Sarah's important people. Your contributions to Sarah's story, and to my own, are valued and appreciated.

Special thanks go to the designer of the beautiful cover, Andrea (our Parker connection makes this extra special for me), and to Jennifer, for all of her help with editing Sarah's story and for all that I have learned from her. And, of course, thanks to Tim of Izzard Ink for his assistance and guidance in the making of Sarah's story a reality.

There are also two organizations I would like to mention because they have had such a profound influence on the development of the person that is Susan L. Read. The Medfield Animal Shelter, in Medfield, Massachusetts, is

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the shelter that rescued the real-life Cyndi, giving her the shelter name Sara, the surgery she so desperately needed, and is continuing to work daily to rescue and rehome animals in need. National Mill Dog Rescue, based in Peyton, Colorado, has to date rescued over 15,000 dogs that were considered discards from the puppy mill breeding industry. These dogs all have a second chance at life in families of their own. Without NMDR, these dogs would all have been killed. The story of one of the 15,000, Poppy, will be featured in the next book in the Michaels Middle School series.