

The Sink

In a city where skyscrapers swallowed sunlight and sidewalks hummed with the footsteps of ambition, Gregory Harmon existed as a footnote. His presence was a smudge on a windowpane: unnoticed until someone squinted. He wore beige sweaters that whispered of conformity and polished his shoes to a dull sheen, erasing any trace of the path he'd walked. His apartment was a museum of mediocrity: walls the color of dust, a sofa that sighed under the weight of unremarkable evenings, and a clock whose hands moved with the enthusiasm of a funeral march. But in the bathroom a single faded chrome faucet loomed above the sink looking down upon the world, its *drip-drip-drip* the only rebellion in Gregory's universe.

The first droplet fell at dawn, a silver tear slipping from the faucet's maw. Gregory startled awake. The sound was a needle stitching through the silence with each *plink* in the porcelain basin resounding like a metronome steadily beating at a mind-rending tempo. As he trudged out of bed and into his bathroom, light from the ceiling dome bathed the room in a dim orange filter. He approached the sink, his fingers tightening around the handle— a knight gripping his sword— and then he twisted. The drip paused, his breath held. Gregory believed he had won. Then, in an act of defiance it resumed; slower now, but growing louder like a distant war drum malevolently marching closer and closer.

Plink.

"Oh for the love of God!" The words sprang out from the drain like a striking serpent. Seven-year-old Gregory had spilled milk at the dinner table, the white rivers curdling under his mother's glare. The fragments of his cup glistened across the floor like a disco ball shattered mid-spin. Each shard was still clinging to its sparkle as if the party had ended too soon and left behind only glittering memories of what was once joyful. Her voice was a scalpel: carving her way into his soul. *"You break every last thing you touch! You can't even drink milk without ruining everything! I knew having you was a **mistake.**"* Whether or not she knew, whether or not she cared: in her fit of pointless rage, these words echoed throughout the room and burrowed into Gregory's memory.

By midday the faucet's rhythm had become a Morse code of malice. Gregory knelt before the sink, tools scattered like fallen comrades across the turquoise tiled battlefield. The wrench trembled in his grip as he struggled to turn the valve— his face lobster red and his knuckles turning pale with each passing second. Rust bled from the pipes, staining his hands the color of old bruises. The drip quickened; Gregory snickered. His reflection stretched over the faucet's chrome surface, contorting his features into a grotesque mocking grin.

Plink.

*"Jesus Christ, you're **worthless**."* The walls exhaled the word; the air was sultry and suffocating. A fifteen-year-old Gregory hunched over his math test while Mother's nail tapped the **B-** like a judge's gavel. *"Why can't you be like your cousin Emily? She gets straight A's."* Her disappointment pooled in his lungs, festering with each passing day like a fetid swamp. It was the highest grade he ever took home, it was his pride for all of 10 seconds. With one interaction, all of his hard work crumbled. *"It's not my fault you're so stupid. Why can't you ever apply yourself?! You're gonna end up making your career elbows deep in a toilet somewhere!"* Gregory never brought home anything higher than a **C** again.

With a heavy grunt, the valve snapped loose! Cold water erupted in a geyser of regret; as Gregory scrambled backward he nearly tripped and hit his head. He was now soaked and shivering, but the shiver was not from the chill moisture seeping through his clothes or from the hard cracked tiles beneath his knees. No, this was something else. The droplets multiplied into a choir now, each one echoing a syllable of her lexicon.

Plink.

"Why can't you do anything right?!" Gregory was twenty-three, jobless, and *Her* hands were reaching through the phone to tie the noose around his ambitions. Another tear-stained college rejection letter in his shaking hands. Gregory barely managed to succeed in not hyperventilating as his *She* spoke with that signature cutting tone. *"I knew you'd fail. You can't ever just get your act together! Just see if Emily will let you get some kind of work at her firm. At least she made something of herself. God! What is wrong with you?! Are you **broken** or something?!"*

Night draped the city in a shroud, but the bathroom surged with electric fury. The cracked and yellowed-at-the-edge tiles glowed faintly under the harsh light of the bulb. An old window, its frame warped and painted shut, the glass streaked with decades of grime, rattled faintly against the wind. The medicine cabinet hung slightly ajar, its mirrored surface smudged with fingerprints and the faintest haze of steam. Below it, the porcelain sink bore the scars of neglect—a chip near the drain, a rust stain creeping from the base of the faucet, which hissed and sputtered like a wounded animal. The combination bathtub-and-shower loomed, its curtain patterned with faded flowers, the plastic liner dotted with mildew. The tub itself was a relic, its enamel worn thin in patches, the drain clogged with strands of hair and the residue of countless rushed mornings.

Gregory stood before the mirror: face-to-face with a wild-eyed stranger— frayed at the edges, hair disheveled. In the water's distorted reflection, she materialized: lips sharp as razors, eyes like shards of glass. Each droplet that fell seemed to carry another memory, another barbed word, until the weight of them pressed against his chest, threatening to crack him open.

Plink.

Mistake.

Plink.

Worthless.

Plink.

Broken.

He lunged at the faucet, his hands clawing at the chrome, his throat tearing open in a roar that shook the medicine cabinet; the bottles trembled from his sudden outburst. **“Shut up!”** he bellowed. There was a brief moment of silence as Gregory struggled to compose himself; it was finally his turn to speak. **“Shut up! Shut up! Shut up! You miserable old hag! You nasty, cranky, vulture! You don't get to make me feel like this, you... bitch!”** Tears streamed down his face while the salt mingled with the tap's bitter flow. As Gregory grappled the tap and began to wrestle back and forth with the fixture, his voice poured out into the city streets. **“I'm not Emily! I'm not you! I'm not anyone but me!”**

Neither her spirit nor the cold metal faucet would offer Gregory any retort. There was a pause. He screamed until his voice splintered, until the mirror fogged with the steam of his rage, until the faucet— bent, unresponsive, defeated— finally fell silent.

In the aftermath of the carnage, Gregory slumped against the wall, collapsing after a battle he never wanted to fight. His breath came in ragged gasps— the body surrendering before the mind. The bathroom tiles pressed cold against his cheek, yet the sensation felt borrowed, filtered through layers of exhaustion. His gaze drifted to the mirror, its surface spider-webbed with cracks from where his elbow or fist must have struck it during the struggle. A single shard dangled precariously from the porcelain, catching the light like a jagged tear.

When the wind rattled the window, his body flinched as if expecting another volley. His fingers brushed the sliver of the mirror. For three heartbeats he watched crimson bloom across his fingerprint; detached and curious, as though observing someone else's hand through a haze of smoke and ash.

The living room swallowed him in increments— a leg dragging over the threshold, torso listing sideways, skull meeting couch cushions with the dull finality of a coffin lid. The remote clicked beneath numb fingers. Laughter from the television skittered across his skin, tinny and voracious. He counted the seconds between each artificial guffaw, his tears charting salt trails over lips frozen in a stranger's grimace.

Somewhere beyond the faux joy, a man was sobbing. Somewhere beneath the canned merriment, a boy kept falling through black ice, hands desperately grasping at edges that dissolved upon touch. The audience applauded and cheered as Gregory cried until exhaustion finally shoved him into a restless slumber.

Dawn came, but it brought no mercy. The bathroom was a graveyard of failure—the faucet's neck twisted at an unnatural angle, its chrome jaw hanging slack. Rust-colored water had pooled in the sink, thick as old blood, and the mirror's shattered web of cracks reflected Gregory's face back at him in jagged warped pieces for only a moment. He couldn't bear to look at himself. He stood in the doorway, swaying slightly, his breath shallow. His hands were stiff, the knuckles split and crusted with dried blood. He flexed them, watching the cracks in his skin reopen, thin red lines weeping down his fingers.

He should fix this. He **should**. But the thought slithered away, drowned out by the hollow ringing in his skull. The fight had left him empty, scraped raw. He knelt, pressing his palms into the cold tile, and let out a sound that wasn't quite a laugh, wasn't quite a sob. *Look at you. Can't even lose properly.* Mother's voice intruded into his stream of consciousness. At this point, mere existence felt like failure. He could feel her cold eyes casting judgement over every single action. For most of the morning, he was a child all over again.

The broom handle was slick under his grip as he swept up the glass, each shard chiming softly against the metal dustpan. A sliver caught the light— his own eye staring back from the fragment before he dumped it into the trash. The water stains on the floor wouldn't scrub away. He dug his nails into the grout, watching the brown streaks blur under his fingers, spreading like rot.

By the time he was done, the bathroom was clean. Not fixed. Not forgiven. But presentable. The kind of ruin you could hide behind a closed door.

The phone sat heavy in his hand. Three times he dialed the number, three times his thumb hovered over the call button before he choked and canceled. His breath came in shallow hitches— each aborted attempt another failure stacked upon the last. *Pathetic.* Her words slithered through him, familiar as a heartbeat. On the fourth try, his fingers moved before his mind could stop them.

The ringing tone pulsed once— twice— finally: "*Hello?*" a rough voice pierced through.

Gregory opened his mouth. Nothing came out but a wet, shuddering breath.

"*Hello? Anyone there?*" the voice repeated.

"I—" His throat clicked. The word dissolved. He swallowed, tried again. "**I need help.**"

The knock came at high noon, sharp against the silence. Through the peephole, a mountain of a man filled the frame— hands like weathered tools, a smile that cut through the dim hallway like a struck match. "*Hank*," he introduced himself as Gregory opened the door. Ducking slightly to clear the threshold, Hank moved through the apartment with the quiet certainty of someone who'd spent a lifetime stepping around broken things.

The bathroom still smelled of copper and sweat. Hank's gaze swept over the battlefield— the twisted faucet, the water-stained tiles, the mirror's spider-webbed glass clinging to its frame. His eyes lingered on the fractures for only a heartbeat before he set down his toolbox with a soft thud. No comment. No raised eyebrows. Just the unspoken understanding of a man who knew some cracks ran deeper than surfaces.

Gregory's shoulders sank with a deep sigh of relief. He was dreading Hank's reaction, but the quiet felt like a gift.

Hank rolled up his sleeves, revealing forearms mapped with scars and faded ink. "*Let's see what we're working with.*" For once, the word *we* didn't feel like an accusation.

As Hank worked, Gregory stood in the doorway, his arms crossed tightly over his chest. The plumber's hands moved with practiced ease, twisting and tightening, replacing and repairing. Gregory watched, his mind churning with the same old thoughts: **I should've been able to fix this myself.** His fingers twitched, and he opened his mouth, the words tumbling out before he could stop them.

"I'm sorry," Gregory muttered, his voice barely above a whisper as he spoke more to himself than to Hank at this point. **"I should've been able to handle this. It's just a faucet. I don't know why I couldn't—"** He cut himself off, shaking his head. **"I'm such an idiot. I can't even do something this simple."**

Hank paused, his hands stilling on the wrench. He turned his head slightly, his kind eyes meeting Gregory's. *"Hey now,"* he said, his voice calm but firm. *"None of that. You're not an idiot, and you don't have to apologize for needing a hand. Everyone needs help sometimes; that's just being human."*

Gregory blinked, caught off guard by the authority in Hank's tone. As he attempted to protest Hank held up a hand, stopping him before he could spiral further.

"Listen," Hank said, turning fully to face Gregory. His broad frame filled the small bathroom, but his presence wasn't intimidating—it was grounding. "You're beating yourself up over nothing. You called me, didn't you? That's what you're supposed to do when something's broken and you can't fix it. That's not failure; that's just knowing your limits, and that's smart, not stupid."

Gregory's shoulders slumped, but Hank's steady voice held his gaze. **"I just... I feel like I should be better than this,"** he admitted, his voice cracking. **"Feel like I should be able to handle things on my own."**

Hank nodded as if he understood perfectly. *"I get that,"* he said. *"But here's the thing: you don't have to be perfect. Everyone needs help sometimes, even I do. I have my own shortcomings just like anyone else. We aren't one big encyclopedia of infinite knowledge. We all have our own strengths that make us unique as individuals. You don't have to be some kind of superhero who never needs help."*

Gregory's breath hitched. The words echoed in his mind, reverberating against the walls of his self-doubt. *Good enough.* He wanted to believe it, but the habit of self-criticism was hard to break. **"I just... I don't want to be a burden,"** he said quietly.

Hank's expression softened and he stepped closer, placing a hand on Gregory's shoulder. The weight of it was comforting; the action nearly had Gregory undone at the seams. *"You're not a burden,"* Hank said firmly. *"You're a person; and people aren't meant to go through life alone. We're meant to help each other. That's how it works."*

Gregory swallowed hard, his throat was tight. He wanted to argue, to insist that he wasn't worth the trouble, but Hank's words were like a lifeline pulling him back from the ledge. **"I... don't know how to stop feeling like this,"** he admitted, his voice barely audible.

Hank gave Gregory's shoulder a gentle squeeze. *"You start by being kind to yourself,"* he said. *"You start by realizing that you don't have to earn your worth. You already have it. Pipes don't fix themselves, kid. Neither do people. That's why we got wrenches— and each-other. You don't have to apologize for existing, okay?"*

Gregory nodded slowly, his eyes stinging. He felt something shift; a weight he'd been carrying for years had finally begun to lift. "Okay," he whispered.

Hank replied with a warm genuine smile that reached his eyes. "Good," he said. *"Now, let's get this faucet fixed so you can enjoy your weekend without any more drips."*

As Hank turned back to his work Gregory stayed where he was, watching the plumber's steady hands. While Hank worked his magic, Gregory felt a flicker of hope. It all felt lighter now, as if the house itself had taken a deep breath and decided things might just be okay.

"And with that, we have water." Hank said as he turned the faucet on and then off. The silence of the newly repaired sink was a symphony that filled the apartment. *"Good as new. Sometimes these things just need a little care and the right touch."* With a small grin, Hank began to pack his tools up.

Gregory nodded, his throat tight. "Thank you," he managed, the words feeling inadequate but sincere.

Hank stood up, clasping Gregory's hand in a firm shake. *"Anytime, buddy. You take care of yourself, alright? Feel free to reach out if you need anything else."*

"I will. Thank you again, Hank. It's been a pleasure— sincerely." Gregory returned the handshake with as much enthusiasm as he could. When Hank left, Gregory stood in the bathroom; the silence now a balm rather than a void. He turned the faucet on, then off, marveling at the absence of drips.

The fractured mirror held his reflection— not shattered, but scattered. Each shard caught a different angle of his smile. One fragment caught his eye; a glint of chrome from the repaired faucet winked back at him. The sink beneath stood silent, its stillness like a freshly minted promise kept between them.

Gregory sat on the couch, listening. The apartment held its breath— no drip, no echo, just the murmur of rain against the window. A sigh unraveled from his chest. The city blurred into watercolor, its sharp edges dissolved by the downpour. The TV clicked on. A knock came just as the rain eased.

Unexpectedly, Hank was standing in the doorway with a paper cup steaming in each hand. *"Figured you could use this,"* he said, offering one. Gregory's fingers closed around the warmth— no shake, no second thought. The TV turned off. The faucet was fixed. The rain had washed the weekend clean. As Hank settled into the armchair and began filling the room with some story about his dog and a misplaced wrench, Gregory realized:

None of this felt like an ending. This is just the beginning.