

Flounder in Society

It was May 6th. Samantha Crystal was on the bus with her classmates on their way to a science field trip at the beach. She dreaded the day with all her heart, just like she dreaded school—not because it was hard, but because of her classmates.

Samantha was 5'5", 13 years old, and had chestnut hair, and green eyes. She was very pretty and had a cute sense of style, but she wasn't popular among her classmates. She had been at the same school with the same students for ten years. Throughout that time, she had grown to dislike almost all of her peers.

In Samantha's class, there were two ways to be classified: popular (also known as a "Pick-me") or unpopular. If you didn't have social media of any kind, if you weren't covered in makeup, and if you treated everyone with respect, you were considered unpopular. The popular "Pick-Me" kids were the complete opposite: faces full of make-up, disrespectful, and posting nonstop public images of themselves on social media. Samantha was considered "unpopular." Because of these kids, she never felt confident and always doubted whether she was good enough.

The bus stopped and her classmates jumped out onto the beach. As they walked through the sand, Samantha reached into the pocket of her blue Levi's and realized her phone was missing.

She turned to Becky, the most popular girl in school, and with panic in her voice asked, "Have you seen my phone?"

Becky replied, "No. Why am I even talking to you? Yuck."

Without thinking, Samantha ran back to the bus, where she had possibly left it. Her phone wasn't there. She turned back and couldn't see anyone from her class. All she saw was miles of sand, in all directions, except where the vast ocean sprawled out in front of her.

She gave up hope of finding her phone and started walking towards the ocean. She decided to take a dip in the water to cool her nerves. Suddenly, she saw something splashing in the salty waves.

Just my luck, she thought. If I get eaten by a shark, no one would even know I died because I have no way of contacting anyone.

Out of the salty waves, appeared a tiny flounder fish. It was white, with splotches of light pink and gray (the same gray color of pencil lead) on its rotting fins. To Samantha, it was the most magnificent creature ever created.

To her surprise, the fish spoke to her in a Boston-accent, "Hey, kid. Empty your water bottle and fill it with the same water we're swimming in now, then put me in it."

Feeling as though she shouldn't disobey a talking fish, no matter what its size, Samantha did as it asked.

Then the fish said, "I'm a genie. The name's Sir."

"A genie? But you're so small. Also, are you going to give me three wishes that you have to grant?" Samantha asked, confused yet intrigued.

"First of all, big gifts come in small packages. Second of all, I am not like the genie from *Aladdin*. Instead of giving people what they *want*, I give 'em what they *need*, even if they don't know what they need." Sir said.

“Great, just what I need,” Samantha said sarcastically, “some weird fish to come and screw up my life even more.”

Sir begged, “Come on, Samantha! Take me with you. My time as a genie is running out! Whenever a genie fish doesn't give at least one person what they need, the genie power fades and the fish dies. Genie fish usually have three years before this happens, though. You're my first person in almost four years, and truth be told, I'm very weak. Just look at these fins. So keep me around 'til you get what you need. My magic will be restored and I can assist more people in the future.”

Samantha filled the bottle with the salty water and put Sir inside of it. Because she still didn't see her class, she decided that her only option was to walk home. Unfortunately, her parents were out of town, her house was eight miles away, and the sun was already starting to set.

When finally she got home, it was 10:30 p.m. She put Sir in her room and went to sleep. She was exhausted after her whirlwind day. Little did she know, she would get what she needed very soon.

The next day at school, it was the same thing as always: the “Pick-Me” kids wouldn't let her sit with them, so she spent all of her free-time sitting alone on a bench. She started crying. *Why do they judge me just because I am not popular?* She wondered. *Why do they care if I don't wear make-up or have social media?* she thought.

When she returned home from another terrible day, she went to her room to see Sir. To her horror, he was dead. She broke down. The one creature who actually wanted to be her friend was gone, before he could even teach her what she needed—whatever that was.

She closed her eyes. Suddenly, an idea bubbled to the surface of her mind.

The next day, Samantha went to school, stood in front of her classmates, and said, “I am Samantha Crystal, and I am *not* unpopular. I am normal. You all believe you need to change yourselves to be popular. You are so afraid others won't pick you, so you give up on being who you really are. Maybe what you really need is to be the one who picks you.”

No one said a word. But somewhere, someone inhaled.

That afternoon when she arrived home, she found Sir swimming in his bottle.

“You're alive?” she asked in amazement.

“You saved me, kid,” Sir said.

“How?” she queried.

“I think you know.” Sir winked.

Samantha returned Sir to the ocean, finally feeling confident with everything about herself.

The End