

SMALL MERCIES

by

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FADE IN

EXT. SEMI-DETACHED HOUSE - DUSK

A MAN in a Burberry trench coat stands on the doorstep. He fumbles in his pocket in the fading light. He finally inserts a key into the lock and shoulders the door open.

INT. GLASS PANELLED HALLWAY - SAME

The silhouette of the man pushes open the door. TOM, mid 30's, enters the house, his expression vacant, tired to the point of exhaustion.

He closes the door and places his keys on a telephone stand at the foot of the staircase.

He removes his coat and drapes it over the banister. He looks up and loosens his tie as he climbs the stairs.

STAIRCASE LANDING

He almost walks past a door that is ajar but instead pauses, steals a look at his watch, and then enters the room.

BEDROOM

Tom snaps on the light and closes the door behind him. He glances around the room and then crosses to a small nightstand. He picks up a large white book and lies on the bed to read.

A slight movement makes him roll over.

The transformation is instantaneous. Tom's face immediately lights up at the presence of five-year old, TARA.

Her eyes are bright, her cheeks fresh and rosy. Her hair is a swirl of golden locks that frame her face. She is wearing her favorite Tinkerbell® nightgown and pink slippers.

She beams at her father.

TARA

Hi, daddy! I missed you!

She crawls over the bed to wrap her arms around Tom's neck. He hugs her small body tightly and closes his eyes with delight.

TOM

Hi, sweetie! I missed you, too. Is mommy home yet?

Tara looks towards the door and shakes her head.

TARA
Nuh-uh. Not yet. She'll be
home soon.

Tom looks at his watch again.

TOM
Yes, she will. Well,
sweetie, would you like me
to tell you a story before
she gets here?

Tara's smile broadens as she claps her hands.

TARA
Oh, yes please, daddy.
Goldilocks! I love that one.

They snuggle together on the bed, and Tom begins.

TOM
Once upon a time, in a
faraway land --

INT. HALLWAY - SAME

The front door opens and JACKIE, 30's, enters.
Wearily, she closes the door and leans against it.
She places her keys on the telephone stand. Then
she removes her coat and hangs in on a wall hook.

With a sigh, she begins to climb the stairs.

STAIRCASE LANDING

She almost walks past, but then pauses at the
door. She tilts her head, then presses her ear to
the wood.

TOM (O.S.)
(feint)
...but the third bed was
just right, and very soon
Goldilocks was fast asleep.

She knocks softly on the door, waits for a moment,
then slowly pushes it open.

INT. BEDROOM

Jackie enters the room, gives it a cursory look
and then smiles wanly at what she sees.

JACKIE
Tom? I thought I heard your
voice. What are you doing?

Tom smiles and looks up. Then he quietly closes
the book and places it on the bed.

TOM
Hi. I was just telling Tara
her favorite story.

JACKIE
Goldilocks.

TOM
Yes.

His smile fades as Jackie's eyes pool with tears.
Tom rises, crosses to her and hugs her tightly.

He lifts up her chin, looks deeply into her eyes
and wipes away a tear with his thumb. She closes
her eyes at the warmth of his touch.

TOM
Come on, honey. She's asleep
now. Let her rest in peace.

Jackie looks up at Tom and nods. They pause in the
doorway and turn around for a last look into the
room.

JACKIE
Tom?

TOM
Hmm?

JACKIE
Do you think she hears us?

As they step out and gently pull the door closed,
light from the hallway casts a silver beam across
the book on the bed. In the stark contrast, the
gold title reads, "Our Daughter."

TOM (O.S.)
I'm sure she does, honey. In
her own way.

FADE OUT.