

## How to Mend a Broken Life

*First, you have to start with finding your determination,* were the first words Russell skimmed over when he opened the book. These were not the words he wanted to hear at the moment, but he was bored, so he figured why not skim a few more pages. His tall frame topped with dark hair, the same color as the ink on the pages he read, rested against the wooden shelving of the library. *This does not mean put on sweat pants and work out to 80's music. However, if you do not have determination, conviction, or the inner "want" to change your life, then it will be all for not. Just to be clear, without this first step, even if you get to the last step, it will be for not.* "So, in other worlds," Russell thought, "I need some heartwarming, Disney ballad filled with inspiration." He huffed out a sarcastic laugh and brushed back his hair. Russell looked down at his arm holding the book. It bore a devilish-looking skull tattoo swarming with dark black crows and a bleeding heart at its center. He pondered to himself if he was in need of such a book and why he was even in the self-help section in the first place.

He glanced at his phone with its smooth touchable surface and checked the time. It was a few minutes past noon, so he still had less than an hour left to wait. His mother had dropped him off while she went to buy groceries or something. He hadn't been listening well. She was yelling at him about his tattoo, but he was eighteen, so why did she care. He liked it and he can still cover it up with sleeves at school, so what was the big deal. He started reading again to ebb his frustration: *The next step is to start small at first. Do NOT overwhelm yourself. This does not mean you can sit on the couch covered in crumbs from potato chips and magically your life will start getting better. Not quite. But, this is a turning point on the crossroads of your destiny, so you do not want to get burnt out in the beginning. The "small" things begin with positive thinking.* This time he laughed out loud. Russell imagined the library overthrown with cartoon

characters from his early childhood, all singing and dancing. He thought this would be pretty stupid. Plus, he already thought in a positive way, like how he was lucky his mother had not thrown him out over his “sweet ink”. He may have not been some goody-goody jock kid, but his mom was lucky to have him as a kid. He had pretty good grades, well passing at least, and he only drank once, but he had ended up throwing up on a girl he liked. Also, he had never done drugs, so that was a big plus. She should not care about *one* tattoo. It’s not like he was covered in them.

His fingers gripped hard at the little book in his hand. Russell was still angry and the whole thing with his mother seemed stupid. Whatever. He tried to read a little more: *Try to remember that good and bad events happen to people every day. Already today someone has stubbed their toe, spilled their coffee all over themselves on their commute to work, or realized they have to buy milk today. No matter what, the universe is throwing curveballs and you must decide how to observe the situation. Is it growing experiences or the gods pissing on your head for sport?* This time Russell dropped the book he was laughing so hard. He did not believe that a book like this actually made any money or how any idiot could buy. But still, he liked it for some reason, even though he still thought it was stupid. Did people really have to be told to think happy thoughts? Did anyone really need guidance to be determined to make themselves happy? Was life really that hard?

Russell laughed a little more and sat down on the floor now, resting his back against the wooden shelf. Life wasn’t that hard, he thought now caught up in his own questions. He knew his mom had it easy, always home and able to do what she wanted. What was so hard about that? Russell had school, homework, his driver’s test, and he was trying hard to get this girl with pink hair to notice him at school. His mother had been bugging him about college too, but why worry

with that now? It was months away. He pondered on this more and remember how his mother had been a few months ago when Grandma Gracie died. She cried a lot and it made him feel weird. He did not like to see her cry. She had been crying again when she dropped him off at the library.

His lips tightened and he began to read again: *Just remember the arguments with your spouse over whose turn it is for dishes, or the way your father looks at you with that disapproval glower from behind his eyes as he stuffs a sandwich into his mouth, or do not forget the way your boss overloads you with the work he was supposed to do, but decided golfing was more important for him to do today. Then, use that to ignite your inner drive and use the ashes of your misery, self-loathing, and depression to birth the great phoenix of happiness into your existence.*

Russell sat for a moment re-reading the words a few times over. His mother did not have a husband to argue with now about dishes, just Russell. Her father had died before Russell had been born, so it was only him left to glower at her while he ate. She did not even have work anymore to overload her. His father's life insurance took care of bills for now, so it was just Russell who overwhelmed her with trips to the mall, laundry, and money for lunches, even though he could make them. He thought about when his grandmother was still alive and how much she had started to come over after his father died about eight years ago. He wondered about his mother now, about how she must be struggling from losing all the people around her that she could count on.

A sudden buzz from his hip jolted him from his thoughts. He pulled out the smooth black phone again to see a text message from his mom. She was here. He stood up and brushed off his

pants. Russell spotted the little book perched on the floor. He picked it up and examined its title one more time before setting it back on the shelf.