

# A LITTLE MATCHMAKER

a novella

Mateja Saraja

A Little Matchmaker

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*For my mother.*

*She was the first one who taught me  
how to tell good stories.*

# CHAPTER ONE

The sun rose above the town. No clouds. Crisp morning. The tall buildings and white concrete houses stood like reminders that everything in the town was still the same. Smell of fresh rain in the air. Wet sidewalks and the road ... leading to the ocean and the beach. This was Sara's favorite morning routine – jogging to the beach, then walking on the pier and soaking up the sun. As she reached the beach, she took off her sneakers and the sand touched her bare feet. She could hear the seagulls on the pier, and people chatting in the shade. Not too far away was the hot-dog vendor that knew her all too well (and her strange food habits) and palms...that surrounded the beach as a reminder of the Mediterranean climate. People jogging on the beach with their dogs and the waves... The waves could wash away all of this chatter in her mind with their sounds. Smell of salt in the air and sea-grass. This is where she found her peace. When the turmoil in her world were too much, she would come to this place, close her

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eyes and meditate. Meditate for a better life. She would visualize herself successful and beautiful, with a fulfilling job, children and a handsome man. Her hair played on the wind and her body responded well, when the fresh wind came and relaxed the sun shining upon her. She exhaled and opened her eyes.

Walking to the pier was relaxing and she felt better after that meditation on the beach. The sunshine, hitting her eyes, made her look up at the sky and smile. This day is going to be a good day.

Jogging was the best exercise for Sara. Now, ocean being behind her, she ran towards her house. The steep road hurt her legs a bit, but she pushed through, making herself not give up only because of the hurt. She relaxed when she saw her white house, with yellow flowers in front of a freshly painted brown fence. Yesterday she painted it again, as every year before. The flowers blossomed in front, and that made her smile. It looked perfect. As she opened the door of the house, chaos entered her world again. She saw a little girl running from the kitchen towards the door, with her blue dress and black ponytail; she seemed to Sara as a cartoon character from one of the series she watches with her occasionally. Not that Sara ever watches cartoons, but she would read her book, and at the same time watch over her. Her sister Anna now, jumped like a frog and made faces when she saw Sara. She was six already, and that behavior

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sometimes worried their mother, who said all the time; "Anna should behave like a lady, not a frogman." Anna loved animals, and would always ask her mother about obtaining one of the stray dogs or cats in the streets, which made her mother panic and then, in panic, forbade her even to look at the animal on the street.

„Where did you go Sara?” Anna asked, with her head tilted, still pretending she is a frog or a dog, Sara could not tell the difference now.

„Running, sis, you know that,” Sara said warmly, and crunched next to her.

„I know, but...” Anna said, „I missed you.”

Sara picked her up, and went with her in the living room, then in the kitchen. There was their mother, and the smell of homemade pancakes made Sara go hungry in a second, so she put Anna down, and quickly stole one of the pancakes.

“Auch”, Sara said “They’re still hot”

Sara was now eating the pancake, but being too hot; they burned her inside mouth a bit, which made her go “Auch” many times. Anna repeated all of this “Auch” sounds, but was not able to reach the counter to steal one for herself.

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„Wait Sara, can you wait?” Her mother said, then put the plate on the other side so Sara can't reach it.

Anna was observing the plate now, and tried to reach it, but gave up soon after, and saw that Sara made a frown at their mother, and then looked at her. Anna frowned too, trying to copy her big sister. That made Sara smile, so she tickled her, chasing her around the house, which broke into a tickling competition. Their mother only sighed in the kitchen, trying to make sure the pancakes are not over baked again. The sound of the doorbell made Sara and Anna stop tickling, and they both looked at their mother.

„Who could this be?” their mother said, as though she was the only one who knew exactly who it was. That made Anna go „Daddy“, and Sara sighed, releasing her little sister from her grip.

„He ruins everything, as usual“, Sara said under her breath. She composed herself and walked over to her mother. Her mother was finished baking the pancakes, and put the foil on them to keep them warm. She looked stressed, and Sara knew that feeling. Waiting. Wishing. Hoping. Her mother never gave up on her marriage, after her dad's multiple affairs; she still believed they could work things out. Now, her dad being in love with one of his female friends, as he called her, and

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being out of the house, Sara finally gave up on the notion that their parents would ever get back together. In 20 years, as she has been in this world, Sara in that moment, looking at her mother, decided, she was never going to wait or cry, or hope, ever again.

Anna rushed to the door, acting out one of the animals, and opened it quickly as she could, with her hands barely touching the doorknob. Then, she screamed as high as she could, which made Sara and her mother look at each other in panic. They both rushed to the door, and then looked at Anna with her dreamy eyes and a dog, licking her mouth. Their father was smiling, and with every further smile, Sara's stomach turned over.

„Is it yours?” Their mother asked, trying to break the uncomfortable silence.

Anna was silent, and the dog...a small black and white dog, barked and licked Anna as though they found each other after long looking.

„Is it some kind of a joke?!” Sara asked, with her arms now crossed, she exhaled in protest.

Her father would do such things when she was little. The animals would disappear as soon as their father was over with them. Sara could remember everything about their father. His

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temperament, his mood-swings, the affairs, and the sneaking around. Everything came rushing into Sara's mind, and that dog...that dog represented everything Sara hated about her father. Sara would not even look at the dog that came next to her leg and stared at her, wanting to play.

„Not a joke, it is yours, Sara.” Her father said, looking at the dog and Anna, who was still mesmerized by the dog, and yelled, “Can we keep him, mom, pleasseee?”

„Mine?” Sara asked, and then began laughing. „I don't want it. Anna? Congrats, you have a dog.” Sara said with her arms crossed, trying not to look upon this dog and have sympathy.

Sara didn't want to have anything to do with the dog or her father's sudden regrets. She felt her father was acting as if he is sorry, but she didn't want to give him any hope. Forgiving him for leaving them was too much.

Sara looked in silence, as their parents exchanged looks.

„She is too little to have a responsibility like this Sara”, her mother said and pointed at their father. “Please, take the dog, Matt, we don't want it.”

“I want it...mom? Pleaseee?” Anna wailed, as their mother and Sara looked uncomfortable at Anna, their heart breaking for the little girl, that wanted an animal her whole life.

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„I am done here, going to work,” Sara said, after a long silence and exchanged looks.

“It’s yours, I am not taking it back to the shelter”, her dad said and looked at Anna “If she doesn’t want it, it’s yours”

“Typical” , Sara said, while walking away from them.

Sara could hear Anna clapping her hands, and laughing, which made Sara jealous, although she didn’t want to admit that to herself. Sara’s mind rushed. She wanted to be at one place where no one could reach her. The library. She worked there after graduating high school, and even if it wasn’t the most prominent place for her as her mother said, she loved it. The library was not huge in her town, but on best days, was full of people. She loved to be around people, not so much talking with them, but being around other lives, made her forget her own. Especially the older people. She would occasionally overhear their life-stories and that made her appreciate every single moment. But, she forgot all about that, and the images of her father leaving and her crying for him to come back returned suddenly. She imagined a world where she could provide for her mother and sister, a world without men or fathers, a world where women would rule. She realized, her fist was clenched the whole time, so she released the grip and relaxed. Maybe, after work she could again, come to the beach and meditate, The book that she has been reading at work, was full of tips and tricks on how to visualize your perfect life and how to attract your own

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wonderful destiny. She thought the book was interesting, but she wanted to do, not just read about it. Sara wanted results, and so far, she couldn't see her wonderful destiny manifesting before her eyes. She was lonely, but most of all, she felt stuck in life, and although she was constantly surrounded by people, she didn't feel connected to any of them. Not in a real way.

The library was near the beach, overlooking the ocean, and many of her friends were jealous about that, how she had the perfect job. But, was it perfect? Sara was a librarian, full-time librarian. And even though she loved her job, she wanted to move up, be someone, take chances in life, and all she did was predictable. Any sane person would crack already, she thought to herself. Her perfect job required of her to read books (which she loved), review them on the libraries blog online and to work cataloging new books when they arrived. She read hundreds of book per year, and she only knew about something, but never experienced it. That made her think, and as she entered the old building, she realized she just ruined everything for herself again. Her thoughts lead her into a negative spiral, so she stopped herself at that moment, and decided she is going to ask for a raise at work.

One of the staff librarians, Dan, an elderly man with thick glasses and fake black hair, greeted her and surprised to see her so early, asked no questions, but only gave her a strange look. She didn't realize how she came in, until Lorie, her boss pointed her outfit. Sara gulped. She came in in her jogging

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outfit, with short pants and a T-shirt that said „You got problems?” She didn't realize she forgot to change and shower. But it was too late.

„Um...I am sorry...I was...my father...the dog...” Sara said, incoherently. She tried to explain what happened, but the words didn't come out right.

Lorie raised an eyebrow when she mentioned a dog, then she pointed at the desk at the entrance.

„You're working behind it today,” Lorie said.

„Alright”, Sara said, “And I want to talk to you about something later, if I can?”

“Sure, tomorrow Sara, I have too much work today”, Lorie said and pointed at the entrance.

Sara nodded in agreement, and slowly turned, walked over to the desk and sat down. She could feel the stares of other people now, but she cleared her throat and started working on entering the new books into the system. Sara didn't mind, and as always, the sting of other people's opinions didn't hurt her as much as before.

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Jack fixed the chair, and then the table. The new house in the city looked like someone was actually living there. He was breathing heavily from all the work now, so he pulled a beer out of the fridge and opened it. The sip of the liquid calmed him down. Leaning against the kitchen counters, he thought of his decision-making skills. New beginnings always frightened him, but now, he had hoped, this town, would bring the best out of him. The smell of beer reminded him of summer nights with his father, fixing up the wooden chairs and in that moment, he stopped himself. His father passed away while Jack was a young boy, and that cherished memories, he didn't want to taint. It is better he left the past in the past. He sipped the beer and looked at his dog Lassie. She was sleeping on the floor, in one of the

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boxes he unpacked. The smile widened on his face, and Jack felt lucky to have his best friend with him all the time. Lassie was an older dog, and she has been through a lot with him. He remembered getting her from the shelter a while ago, when he was fifteen or older, Jack couldn't pin point the exact time now. She was so frightened, Jack would sleep with her, and she would embrace him with her paws during night terrors. She had problems, he thought, and he had them too. The sip of beer helped Jack remember the time they were swimming together, when they sneaked into a movie theater together and then...when she almost bit the woman that left Jack.

“You’re too attached to that dog”, the woman said

Jack was now laughing at that memory, and the way Lassie barked, as though she knew that person’s thoughts all too well. Jack was that way also. He could feel a person’s intentions, their truth. But, no person could break the wall he put in his heart. No one knew Jack, and no one, bothered too, anyway. His papers now, spread across the floor, reminded him about the publisher’s deal and the contract he had. Lassie moved and looked up at Jack, as though smiling to him.

„I guess you found your spot“, Jack said to Lassie.

Lassie barked, tilting her head on the right, as though saying, „Are you okay Jack?”

Jack had many things to take care off here, and he wouldn't let himself get attached to anyone or anything here. He promised to her. The doorbell rang, which made Jack jump, but Lassie ignored it completely. He left the empty beer on the counter, and took one of the bubble-gums from his jacket, then checked his breath.

„Delivery for Jack Ho...r..vat?” the boy said, and excusing himself for pronouncing it wrongly.

„It's a Croatian surname, I know...my parents...“ He said, smiling, while signing the delivery sheet.

He wasn't proud about his last name, but everyone who didn't know his heritage, pronounced it with fear. He simply didn't care, he wanted people stop treating him like an alien here. Or anywhere he traveled. And he has seen a lot of the world's most beautiful cities and local attractions, but he wanted something else. He wanted to find his place, his home.

„Aha“, the boy said, not interested in his family tree explanation. „We have your things in the truck. “

„Thank you, you can just put them in this room“, Jack said and pointed at the room behind him. The delivery boy looked at the room and said “Nice. No TV?”

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Jack shrugged and explained he doesn't watch movies or TV.

"You must be old", the boy said

That ended the conversation, and Jack only shrugged again and smiled, not wanting to explain himself to a stranger.

Jack watched as they two huge men put his things in the room. The house wasn't large at all, and he purchased it for almost nothing, because the property belonged to an old lady who died in her home no one wanted to buy it. Jack didn't care about an old lady dying in her home. That only made him closer to life. And he loved to be close to the real thing, as much as he could. The men struggled with carrying all of the boxes, and Jack thought they don't have much exercise for a delivery crew, so he offered them help, which they politely declined. He offered them bear, a cold drink but they rushed to another delivery job, and Jack sensed like they just didn't like him.

Lassie wanted to play, but he had boxes to open and decorate the rooms, and the mere thought about decorating made him nervous. His mother would always say how much he resembled his father, in mere inability to make things prettier or simply look nice and homey. Jack pulled another beer from the fridge, and remind himself his mother isn't here looking at him, so

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he decided to place the things simply as he felt like it. He had no pictures, only paintings his sister made, and a few little sculptures of Greek gods. He pretended sometimes, they looked at him when he would write and bless or curse his efforts to be a good author. Author. He cringed and the memories of her came rushing in. Her smell, her hair, her voice.

“No, stop”, he said at loud, talking to himself “Jack , you have to stop thinking about her.”

Lassie looked at him, and then lay down, putting her paws on her eyes, not wanting to deal with him again.

“You have Lassie, you have a new life”, he said, strolling down the room, talking himself out of thinking about her.

He ran, he ran and he knew it, but now, no one is going to find him and everyone is going to leave him alone, finally. Jack put the manuscript that he was writing on his desk, and his old green typewriter was now ready for Jack. He sat down, and looked at the clock he managed to fix upon his wall, and it was 8 am. Lassie came to his side, and with her paw, demanded to be fed. Jack pet her on her head and then went to one of

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the boxes that was named „Lassie“, pulled a box of small treats and gave her one. Lassie barked, and began to chew happily on her treat.

Jack's fingers stopped, as he wanted to type something, as though stuck in time, Jack wanted to be somewhere else now. The picture of the beach came to him, and he remembered the ocean he saw when he flew with the plane, and now, he wanted to see it. Inspiration will come, he said to himself, or I will make it come.

Outside, the sun was shining, and Jack locked his new house, taking Lassie with him on a walk. Walking with Lassie was not a chore anymore, because she learned how to behave. She was an older dog, and couldn't run as fast and wasn't as interested at the outdoors as before, but still, Jack loved walking her outside. Maybe more for himself than for her. Inside his head, Sinatra was playing "My way" and it was as though inspiration gods were taunting him. He knew, walking would awaken them, and he didn't want to give up on his decision.

It was morning, and all he saw and wanted to see was the beach. His goal was to come to the beach and to see the ocean up-close. Feel the sand, smell the water, maybe even talk to the people. Lassie hurried to the beach, but when Jack came closer, a woman was just sitting there, her eyes closed, soaking up the sun.

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He stared at her sun-lit face. She looked like an angel and he didn't want to end this uncommon vision. Never has he seen a woman so calm and beautiful. Lassie sat down and looked at Jack. Jack was motionless. He remembered her, a woman he lost. This was as though she came into his mind, to remind him of his promise. A promise he certainly didn't want to break because of this. At that moment, Lassie pulled him away, and he snapped out of this vision. How could she remind him of her again? He was angry with himself, and now, swore to keep his promise. He finally looked away, and saw a hot-dog vendor nearby.

„Are you hungry, girl?” He said and looked at the vendor. Jack walked over to the vendor that was smiling and looking at Lassie.

„For you, on the house,” he said to the dog, and then looked at Jack „And for you, 3 dollars.” Jack smiled and pulled out his wallet.

“Salad for me, please”, Jack said to the vendor, and then turned back. The girl was gone.

The vendor gave him his salad, and crunched down to give hot-dog to the dog. Lassie was overjoyed and ate her hot-dog, ignoring Jack completely. Jack was eating the salad on the go, and walked over to a joyful flyer on

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the bulletin board, near the beach. The flyer had lots of colors, that made Jack smile. They were searching for help in the local library, and they didn't need any credentials, only a will to work what is needed. Jack thought that would be a great idea for him to work, and to get out and be social again. He wanted to work, to put his mind somewhere else, than on the tragedy in his life. He looked at Lassie, who was now sitting next to him and licking his hand.

„What do you think girl?“ Jack asked Lassie. He was pointing at the flyer.

Lassie barked and sat down again.

„Approved“, he said and smiled.

Jack tore the paper with the number listed and walked to his new home. He felt good. He needed a new distraction, he needed to forget, move on, and find a new job. A new me, a new me, Jack triumphantly recited all the way to the house. He felt as if he can do this, be happy again. Lassie felt it too, so when they opened the door of the house, she ran in and started playing hide and seek with Jack. There was hope in Jacks heart. This is going to be a good day.

## C H A P T E R      T H R E E

„I don't have problems“

A voice snapped Sara out of her work routine. She looked up and saw a man looking at her. Unshaved beard. Curly, short hair, grey T-shirt and a dog. She immediately unlike him in her mind, although he looked interesting.

„Sorry, what?“ she asked and stopped staring and examining him.

“T-shirt. It says- you got problems?” the man said, pointing at her chest.

Oh, he is funny, Sara thought. She remained calm, and stern, although she wanted to smile.

„Are you new here in our library...we have a discount ...“ Sara said and picked a card, then handed

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him the flyer.

„No, wait...” The man said.

„Wait what?” Sara asked, staring at him directly in the eyes.

„I am here looking for a job...” He said, „I am Jack, Jack Horvat.”

„Oh“, Sara said, then picked up a phone. „Yes, Lorie, here is a man...Jack Hor...yes...okay“

Sara pointed at the right, where Lorie was standing and smiling and when she saw Jack, pointed at his dog. Jack walked over to Lorie, while Sara tried to get as close to them as possible, eavesdropping on their conversation, while pretending to store some books away.

„What is this?” Lorie asked Jack, and motioned to the dog.

„A dog?” Jack said, surprised.

„No, I mean.... What is this dog doing here?”

Lassie sat at the floor next to Jack and looked at Jack then at Lorie.

„I can't leave him alone in the house...I need a job, and you said I can come in for an interview...and I thought she could come with me.” Jack said, explaining the situation.

Silence.

„I am a hard-working person. I can learn anything. I was...” he said, then bit his tongue. „Nothing...”

„Well...no one really answered the ad ... except you Jack“, Lorie said and looked at Sara, who was staring at them, and storing the books on the shelves. The book fell from the shelf at that moment, and Sara uncomfortably smiled, picked the book up and went to her desk.

„We will contact you Jack...but...“ Lorie said „We can't have a dog in our library, the people here... are accustomed to peace and quiet.”

Lorie showed Jack the entrance door, and Jack shrugged and went outside, without saying a word. Sara felt bad about him, but was happy at the same time. She didn't like animals, especially dogs, and the thought of having a dog in her happy-work place was too much. She tiptoed to Lorie's side.

„Too bad, right“, Sara said, „We could use some help.”

„Yes, Sara. He was the perfect candidate. He said over the phone that he is a bookworm and he loves children.” Lorie said and turned, to face her office. “Later, we can talk, about the thing...you wanted ...”

Sara nodded and said “Of course.”

Lorie went to her office and Sara to her books. Her

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workday was almost over, and she didn't even ate anything all day. The bitterness of her father's gift made her full. Sara made the last preparations for the next day, then said goodbye to Lorie and Dan. Her shift was over, and it was Friday afternoon. Sara pulled her phone and dialed her friend's number. She wanted to have fun, and maybe have a drink with her friend at the local bar. Sara wanted to change, and the way to change is to do something about your miserable life, she thought.

„Do you have anything planned for the rest of the day?” Sara said, and heard rummage at the other side.

„Wait, my children are acting crazy right now... Ok, I can talk. What do you have in mind” , Karla asked.

The screaming children, made Sara cringe, but then, she raised her voice.

“I mean...beer , Lion pub. 9 o'clock,” Sara said

“Sure, but I'll have to give the kids to my mother. Sure. I'll be there.”

Karla hang up the phone, and Sara felt in control for the first time in her life. She hurried home, all the way thinking and hoping the dog will be gone. However, as soon as she opened the door, the dog ran towards her, barking and jumping on her leg. Sara pushed him gently away, and said “Sit” to his face. The dog looked surprised and pulled his paw up and down, up and down, as though taunting her to pick him up. Sara

refused, although his moves made her smile a bit.

“You’re home”, Anna yelled from the kitchen and hugged Sara’s leg. “How are we going to call him Sara?” Anna asked with a serious tone.

Sara shrugged and looked at Anna, then at the dog.

“I don’t care, little one”, Sara said and picked Anna up.

Anna frowned, and then smiled with an agenda on her mind.

“Maybe Paw or Shark”, Anna said, trying to soften Sara’s heart.

“No, Paw is not a name for a dog.” Sara protested, “Although I like Shark.”

“Shark it is.” Anna said “Shark...” Anna pointed at the dog.

The dog barked, and stood up, as though agreeing with the name.

“Shark, sit”, Anna said with power in her voice.

The dog tilted his head, and then ran into the kitchen. Sara carried Anna into the kitchen, and saw that the dog ran towards their mother, who was making lunch there.

“Oh, you’re home Sara, please, get the dog out for a

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walk, lunch is in half an hour", their mother said.

"Shark mother...Shark", Anna said victoriously then looked at Sara. Sara nodded. She wasn't happy about the dog, but she had her own little plan, so she agreed to take the dog for a walk.

"I'm going out with Karla around 9, mom", Sara said, as a fact not as asking for permission.

Her mother hummed something back, but Sara wasn't listening anymore.

"I'll be right back", she said and gave Anna to her mother, who was preparing something in the kitchen.

Sara took Shark and then put him a collar that made him nervous, so he tried to take it away from his neck.

"Stop that", Sara said, but the dog looked at her and continued to scratch.

At last, Sara looked at him and said: "I'll promise I'll give you a treat if you stop".

The dog, as though he understood what she meant, stopped scratching his collar and tilted his head. She reached for the treat out of the cupboard in the hallway, and gave it to him. Shark sniffed it and then ate it in a second.

"Good boy", Sara said, smiling.

Sara pulled a piece of paper and pen and then wrote

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something on it, reached for Shark and they went outside.

As they walked, Shark wanted to go in some other direction, that made Sara pull him closer to her side. She put the paper on the bulletin board next to the beach, and letting the dog ran away. Smiling, she went home, jogging. If her plan worked, she will never see Shark again.

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*Friday night, 9 pm, Lion pub*

Sara waited for Karla to come and people inside where chattering loud as Sara could see from her spot in the street. She wanted to drink, and forget everything she thought about the whole day. The man at the library made Sara uncomfortable, and she hoped she would never see him again. Feeling threatened by her feelings, she reached for her phone to call Karla, but someone pulled her by the jacket.

“Oh, leather jacket, new?” Karla said, and smiled.

Sara kissed her on the cheek.

“Not. That old thing? You look beautiful Karla”, Sara said

Karla twirled around in her blue dress, and then started laughing. Sara noticed her black hair was now shorter than before.

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“We should get inside, before it gets too crowded”, Sara said, and turned to the entrance door.

As they walked in, some people turned, and some ignored them, as they walked towards their spot. It was empty. No one liked to sit next to the sound speakers, but they loved it. It was their perfect spot. You could easily get a drink, and it was next to the bathroom. The heavy cigarette smoke reached them, and they coughed, then laughing, sat at the table.

„I almost forgot. Who is playing tonight?“ Karla asked

„Some irish band. Do you dance?“

„Girl, I didn't dance since my wedding day. By the way, I totally forgive you“, Karla said and looked in the distance.

Sara gulped. Karla's wedding. She forgot about that, and the thought of it made her sweat. Her father left, and she ignored everyone for the whole summer, and now, she pretended that everything was fine again.

„Now, tell me, who is that guy staring at you?“ Karla said and pointed at someone in the distance, staring at Sara. „Now...he is gone...I don't see him“, Karla added and shrugged.

Drink after drink, their night was going on good, as they laughed about their high school memories. Sara was getting drunk more and more, until Karla finally got her to dance. Dancing, she felt someone

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hugging her, and she thought it was Karla, but when she turned, she felt someone kissing her. Panic hit her, and she...ran towards the door, on the street. She collapsed on the floor and started laughing and crying at the same time.

“Hey, I know you, you’re that library girl...,” a man said and tried to help her get up.

“I don’t need your help,” Sara said, and pushed the man away.

Trying to balance herself, she started walking, but all the streets seemed the same to her, and she felt lost.

“I can help. Let me...Sara...” the man said “I am not going to touch you.”

Sara stopped walking, and looked the man in his face. The blurred face was getting clearer, and she realized it was Jack. But, then she felt nauseous and tried to hold it inside, but then she threw up on him.

“I am sorry...” she whispered to him

“Let’s get you home”, Jack said

“Where is your dog? Woofff? Doggy?” she laughed.

“She is at home; sleeping...I came for a walk to clear my head, when I saw you...” Jack said and helped her to stay upright. “Where do you live Sara?”

“I don’t remember anymore...I haven’t been in the pub

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for a long time..." Sara said

At that moment, her friend Karla came outside and screamed for Sara. Sara turned, and Karla ran towards Sara, then hugged her.

"I am going to get her home, okay?" Karla said and winked to Jack.

"Yeah", Jack said, looking at them both, as they went into the dark streets.

## C H A P T E R      F O U R

*Saturday morning*

Jack woke up with a headache. He didn't sleep all too well at night, and the thought of Sara made him shiver. The moment he saw her in the library, he felt strange, but didn't let his feelings get better of him. He wanted to protect her that night, although she made fun of his dog. That made him question everything, even the emotions he felt. He worried if they came home safe, and if he should have gone with them, making sure they were okay. But, that was now too late, and his headache was getting worse. He is not going to write today. His agent will need to calm down. The job rejection hurt him, and although he tried shrugging it away, he wondered what it would be if he didn't have Lassie. That made him feel guilty, and Lassie felt it. Jack sat on the couch in the living room, and Lassie came into the room and put her head on his leg. She

## A LITTLE MATCHMAKER

wanted to comfort him. That made Jack even worse, for even thinking he could get rid of Lassie.

“I am sorry, girl.” Jack said and pet her on her head.

Lassie barked a few times, as a forgiveness sign. Jacks mobile phone rang at that moment, and Jack stood up, reaching for his phone.

“Mister Jack Horvat?” a woman said

“Yeah, it’s me?”

“I am calling from the library. We want you to start tomorrow...”

“But...you said...” Jack said, and looked at Lassie.

“I know, but the management decided you’re our right fit...and Lassie too. There is only one catch.”

“What is the catch?” Jack asked, and looked at Lassie, who started barking at Jack.

“We want you to work with the children one day in the week...reading stories to them and watching them for 2 hours”

“Sure...I can do that”, Jack said

“We want Lassie there too. She can be a great asset to our library,” Lorie said.

“Sure. Great. I can start on Monday”, Jack said, making happy faces to Lassie, and Lassie wanting to

play again.

“And... don’t be late”, Lorie said and hung up the phone.

Jack took Lassie’s paws and started dancing around the room with her. He felt like he was finally given a proper chance to contribute to society. He was singing his own made-up tunes, and Lassie joined with her barking sounds.

“Did you hear that, girl...we have a job...together...who could have thought...?”

Lassie barked, and as Jack released her paws, she ran around the room making Jack chase her around the house.

At lunch, Jack decided to treat Lassie, so he decided to go downtown for a hot-dog, and he could eat a Greek salad. At the beach, the hot-dog vendor was there, and Jack ordered their meals, but Lassie pulled away from him, and started running on the beach. Jack excused himself to the vendor, and started yelling for Lassie to come back.

“Lassie, girl. Lassie”, Jack yelled on the beach.

This was not her normal behavior, Jack thought, but then he saw her sniffing a small black and white dog on the beach. The dog was shivering and looked like he has been there the whole day.

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“Are you lost little one?” Jack said and looked around, but no one was on the beach except them. He picked the little dog up and Lassie now, obeyed Jack and came by his side. The bulletin board was near the beach, so Jack’s eyes went straight to the note there.

*When you find a little black and white dog named Shark, you can keep him.*

How rude. What kind of a person would just leave a dog out there on the beach? Jack shook his head in disbelief. What a cruel person.

“Shark?” Jack looked at the little dog. The dog barked. “You’re coming with me Shark.”

Lassie barked in approval, and that made Jack smile, as Lassie started sniffing and licking the little dog.

Jack walked again to the vendor, who looked surprised but gave the dogs two hot-dogs on the house, and one Greek salad for 4 dollars.

Jack had not only Lassie, but now Shark too. He thought about explaining that to Lorie on Monday. He decided to be honest, and to tell the truth. He still couldn’t believe how could anyone leave a little dog out there. When the dogs where done eating the food, and Jack with his salad, he picked the little dog up, and the dog fell asleep on his arms after few minutes. Poor little guy, he must have been exhausted.

Lassie barked at the entrance of the house. A note was

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pinned on the door. Jack's heart started rushing in his chest. He feared it was something about the girls yesterday or something even worse. He picked the note and opened the door. Lassie found her place on the crushed boxes and Jack put Shark next to her. Jack inhaled, sat down and opened the note.

*"We are inviting you to a town's festival celebrating the end of summer, Monday, 8 pm. Bring lots of cake. Major Thomas Crake"*

Jack exhaled.

# A LITTLE MATCHMAKER

## CHAPTER FIVE

Sara woke up at the right time. Lunch was ready, and she was hungry. Her head pounded harder, as her mother asked her where she has been all night and then asked too many questions about the dog, but Sara gave too little answers.

“He ran away, mom”, Sara said, sitting down at the table and waiting for her mother to serve vegetable soup.

Anna frowned and went to her room crying.

“How could he just run? Did you even look for him?” her mother insisted

“No”, Sara said, and stopped there, biting her lips.

“You are going to find that dog. Put flyers on the board. After lunch.” her mother said, and walked to Anna’s room, comforting her little girl.

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Sara wasn't pleased. Her effort to get rid of the dog didn't go as planned, but she will put a flyer up, as she promised and then started looking for that little dog.

After lunch, Sara showered, changed her clothes and then walked to the beach, removing the note from the bulletin board, and put another one.

*If you have found the little black and white dog, Shark, please call this phone number.*

At the end of the note was her phone number and a way you can reach her – at the library.

This is all she can do right now.

"This is not my problem, at all", Sara said, while looking at her new note.

For twenty years, she has promised herself she will never have feelings for another animal, not after her father's affairs, and the leaving...and the crying. Her phone rang at that moment, and her heart leaped in hope someone found the dog, but the phone screen revealed it was Karla.

"Do you have someone to take at the summer festival?"

Karla was direct. Sara loved that about her.

"No, but I wanted to ask you, silly", Sara said, walking towards her house.

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“How are you silly? You scared me last night.” Karla added

“I am good...” Sara said “See you Monday”

“See ya”, Karla said and hung up the phone.

Sara could see her mother waving and calling her into the house. Sara rushed to her mother’s side.

“Did you found him?” her mother asked.

“No, no luck so far”, Sara said and looked at Anna, who rushed inside the house, not wanting to talk to Sara at all.

Sara felt guilty and sad, that her little sister was sulking at her. Anna knew that Sara didn’t like the dog, and she knew also that Sara was the guilty part in this story.

“Anna, look...we will find him”, Sara said, picking Anna up in her arms.

“You lost him on purpose”, Anna said, and put a finger on Sara’s heart.

Sara felt as though being seen by her little sister, so she put her down and smiled.

“Yes, Anna, I don’t like dogs. Okay? I don’t.”

Anna frowned.

“How can someone...not like dogs?” Anna shrugged

M a t e j a   S a r a j a

“You’re six years old, how can you know ....” Sara said, and rushed to her room, slamming it shut.

She didn’t cry. The tears wouldn’t come. She was numb. At least, that was something that she counted on. Her numbness, her strong will, her stubbornness. That is what was born out of her, after...all of that. Images, flashing in her mind. Her life, her living with her mother and little sister. Did she wanted more than just that? She didn’t knew. She didn’t care.

# A LITTLE MATCHMAKER

## C H A P T E R     S I X

*Monday morning*

The morning announced a new opportunity for Jack. His beard, shaved. He pondered what to wear, but decided if he is going to talk to children, he doesn't want to scare them off with a tie and suit combination. So, he decided to wear his blue shirt with a pastel yellow T-shirt underneath, and jeans. After his vegetable meal, he gave the dogs their dog food, and then he walked outside. He felt fresh, good, and full of optimism and then he stepped into a water puddle on the street. Lassie barked.

But, Jack didn't feel like this is going to stop him. He entered into the library, with two dogs by his side. Everyone looked at him, and Dan only said "But..."

Jack walked into Lorie's office with two dogs barking. Lorie looked surprised and smiling, but then she saw

another dog.

“Where...where did you get that one?” Lorie asked, as though one dog was not enough for Jack.

Jack smiled, and sat down.

“It’s a really long story...” Jack said, as a master storyteller would only begin” But I will shorten it.”

“Go ahead”, Lorie said, her arms crossed. “The short version, please!”

Jack began telling Lorie about how he found Shark, that only an unloving, cruel person would leave a dog like that, and that the management depends on him as a children’s storyteller. Lorie agreed.

Jack told Lorie that he could bring many children into the library, then Lorie smiled, and Jack added it could only profit the library and the children that the dogs, both of them, stay.

“I hope you have a wonderful time here”, Lorie said, smiling, showing him the door. “Please, find Sara, she’ll show you the room where you’ll read to the children.”

Jack nodded, and as he walked away from her office, felt like nothing can break him anymore. Invincible and strong, with the dogs by his side, he felt like nothing can go wrong today.

Sara was nowhere to be found, so he asked Dan to

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show him the room. Silently, Dan stopped rearranging the books and walked to the room, then unlocked it and said "Here", and then he pointed at his clock and said "8 pm". Jack understood. Children are coming in an hour, and he needed to find a book to read to them. That made him sweat. What if...he thought, what if they find out the truth. He didn't think before, and now the thought of them finding out, made him shiver. He went to the shelves and picked up Red Riding Hood story then he returned it, thinking it is too graphic and then he picked up Little Prince. Yes, a nice story about love and cherishing what you have, Jack said to himself. He was satisfied with his choice, so he put the book and waited. 8 o'clock came and he saw one child entered into the room with her mother. He waited outside. Then it was 8:15 am, and the little girl who entered into the room with her mother, exited the room excusing herself, because she thought it was a public bathroom. Jack was still smiling, and then when 10 am came, he sat in the playing room and read the book to himself. The dogs were sleeping by his side, and Jack gave up on waiting after he finished the book, then told Dan he could lock the doors, and give him some work to do until it was time for him to go home. Defeated inside, he didn't let it show outside. Still smiling, he asked Dan if he has someone to take him to the summer's festival. Surprised, Dan smiled and said "No."

"Well, if you want to go...we can go together, you know..." Jack smiled, and handed him the books he was putting on the shelves.

“Sure. We can meet outside, 7 pm”, Dan said and pointed at his clock.

“And bring cake...it says, you should..” Jack said

Dan gave him the look, and then said, “I bring cake every year.”

Their stares interrupted Sara. She came towards Jack, then stopped and gave Jack a strange look, then pulled him to the side.

“Jack...what are these dogs doing here?” Sara asked.

“Didn’t you hear? I got the job. I am the new storyteller here.” Jack moved his hands, and the dogs moved closer to Sara. Shark sniffed her and started barking, wanting to play. Jack looked at Sara.

“Do you know this dog?” Jack asked. Sara looked completely guilty.

“Yeah, well...maybe...” she said, clenching her teeth.

“It is yours?” Jack said in a complete shock.

“Well, I can explain....” Sara said, but Jack was appalled, and walked into Lorie’s office and started pointing at Sara.

“She is...her dog...she left her dog”, Jack yelled and pointed at Sara.

“Is it your dog Sara?” Lorie asked

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Sara was furious and panicking, but Jack wouldn't stop pointing at her. Then, he stopped and felt angry with himself, but it was too late.

"Sara, please, pick up your stuff. You no longer work here. The management hired Jack now, and he is a better suited for this job than you are for now." Lorie said.

Sara gave Jack a look, but Jack looked down at the floor tiles. She picked up Shark and went outside the office. Lassie barked and tried to go with Shark.

"No, girl, no", Jack said "He is not ours, Lassie."

"Jack, please, go and tell Dan that he gives you something to work on", Lorie said and sat down, looking in the distance, Jack saw that Lorie wasn't happy about the decision she had to make.

Jack went out of Lorie's office and looked at Lassie. Lassie tilted her head, and barked.

"I know, girl, we messed up some things", Jack said

## C H A P T E R      S E V E N

*SUMMER FESTIVAL, 8 pm*

The perfect night of the last day of summer. The crickets, the ocean smell and the barbecue made it perfect even more. Jack and Dan were drinking beer by the pier, while Sara and her friend Karla walked near them. Jack felt bad; in fact, he felt it all day until he had to get ready for the festival. He liked Sara, the moment he saw her in the library, and that feelings mixed with the fact that she was the one who left the little dog out on the beach. He tried to explain that to Dan, but Dan only mumbled something in his beard and smiled.

“She looks miserable too,” Jack said to Dan.

“She doesn’t to me”, Dan said and pointed at her. Sara was laughing with Karla and eating popcorn.

“Ok, maybe I want her to feel miserable”, Jack said

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“You don’t even know her, Jack”, Dan said “I even don’t, and I worked with her for two years”

That was the longest sentence Dan said in a while, but made Jack think.

“Yeah, I don’t know her.” Jack said.

Lassie was sleeping near Jack, while Jack leaned over to see Sara and Karla, laughing and joking around. At that moment, he leaned too far and tipped over the fence, into the ocean. Dan shocked, started yelling for help. Lassie woke up, and started barking.

People stood around, everybody looking for Jack, but no one wanting to jump. Sara and Karla walked over to Dan at that moment and asked about the commotion.

“He just fell into the ocean”, Dan said, shocked “Call 911”

Sara panicked, and gave Karla her bag and jumped into the ocean. Karla looked at Dan, and then she called 911.

Sara pulled Jack on the shore. He was breathing, but unconscious. With her mind completely still, she looked at him, and gave him CPR.

“Come on you...don’t die on me”, Sara said and at that moment Jack started coughing out water.

Ambulance came to the shore, and Sara waited until they had him in the ambulance van.

“What about the dog?” Dan asked Sara

“I’ll take her in for now”, Sara said and took the dog with her.

Sara was walking with Lassie, soaked wet, and freezing, all the way to her house. Lassie was completely silent, as though she knew what happened. Sara let Lassie in her room, and she sniffed around, and then lay down on a pile of clothes on the floor. Sara didn’t mind, and as she changed her clothes, she got into her bed and tried to sleep. Lassie wailed and howled then, which made Sara sad, sadder than she was.

“Come here, girl”, Sara said, and Lassie jumped on her bed. “I know...”

Sara’s dreams were disturbing, as she dreamed of the dogs trapped, and Jack dying. She woke up, sweating, and Lassie sleeping next to her. She didn’t even know the guy, but she felt connected to him. Silently, she pat Lassie on her head.

“You know, I am silly, really”, she said to Lassie “That moment in the library when I saw him, I felt like a schoolgirl again, but then...how can you...you know...I wasn’t even planning on... falling for someone, especially someone with a dog.”

Lassie stretched his paws in her bed, and barked.

“And now... I am petting you here, and rescuing him,

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who am I exactly? “

Sara felt confused, and the more she thought about Jack, the more she felt embarrassed.

“At the end, this just isn’t meant to be,” Sara said and concluded “It is safer I just return you when he comes back and that is it. Everyone goes on their merry way.”

Lassie was now enjoying Sara’s hand petting her, and Sara felt like this dog could change her Scrooge-like heart.

## C H A P T E R E I G H T

Jack was now pacing back and forth in his home. They let him out from the hospital, and the moment he came home, Lassie wasn't there. He panicked and called Dan, who told him Sara took his dog, and that she is on her way to give him the dog back. The doorbell rang, and Jack immediately opened it, because he was staring at it for a few minutes.

“Sara”, Jack said “Lassie....

Lassie barked and jumped on Jack. She was too happy to see him again. Sara was quiet, but happy too.

“My job is done now”, Sara said, turned and wanted to go.

“Wait”, Jack said “I wanted to thank you. You saved my life. You aren't so bad after all, I think...Maybe...” Jack said, and smiled.

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Sara gulped. She wanted to tell him how she felt, but she couldn't. She turned, and the sun lit up her face in front of his house. Jack's heart stood still. It was her. Sara was the girl on the beach, when he stared...when he stood still... The girl with problems, was...the girl for whom his heart leaped for.

"Umm...are you okay?" Sara asked

"Yeah...fine...Thank you, again", Jack said, and then Lassie barked and jumped to Sara's side again.

"Silly dog", Sara said, smiling. "She is a good dog, you know."

Sara crunched down, and hugged Lassie. Then Lassie went forward and Sara almost fell, making Jack leap forward to help her, and he crunched to Sara's side.

"I am sorry...for the way I am...I am..." Jack said.

Sara took the chance, as though her heart would burst into flames if she didn't.

"Maybe we could...grab some coffee sometimes?" Sara said.

Lassie barked and tilted his head towards Jack.

"Sure, I would...like that", Jack said "but only if this little matchmaker can come too."

"Of course", Sara said "That would be...perfect."

## About the Author

Mateja Saraja is a writer from Croatia. She has a bachelor's degree in Multimedia, design, and application. In her spare time, she brainstorms by walking in her garden, or watches a movie on the weekend. Her goal is to inspire people to create, express themselves artistically, and trust their intuition in the process.

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