

## Somewhere Between the Shore and the Snow

Her name was Isla—like an island.

Born where the land kissed the sea, where the breeze smelled like garlic and seaweed, and rooster calls tangled with radio static, Isla belonged to the Shore. Not just any shore, but the Shore: a place pulsing with life, heat, and noise. Lolo (grandfather) cracked jokes over morning coffee; Lola (grandmother) scolded the rice like it had wronged her. The tiles were always warm, even at midnight. Love was loud, and so was grief, but at least it spoke.

Isla's mother was a ghost in pictures. She had left before Isla could braid her own hair. They said she was in the City of Skyscrapers, working to turn distance into dollars. Her father was a sailor—the sea took him and gave him back like it was playing a cruel game. Sometimes, Isla thought he loved the ocean more than her. When her mother returned, Isla was eight. But the woman who came back was a stranger—spine curved like punctuation, eyes hollowed by cities she never wanted to see. Her touch had the warmth of duty, not affection. They circled each other like moons without gravity. Isla wanted to reach her—but didn't know how to hold someone that had unraveled.

By twelve, Isla wasn't a child anymore. She became the house's silence keeper. The bill-folder. The go-between. She learned the sound of quiet arguments through thin walls, and how fear smells like Vicks and boiled water. She clutched everyone's secrets with small, shaking hands.

And no one noticed she was drowning.

She tried to laugh more at thirteen, to fit in with the girls who liked lip gloss and love songs. But she always felt like the echo, not the voice. Too sensitive. Too curious. Too much. She felt things

she had no names for. She listened too closely and noticed too quickly—the pauses, the pity, the pullaways. And the one person who truly saw her—her cousin Tala—died. Drowned before her eyes could understand the finality of silence. Isla was ten then, but she grieved like she'd lived a hundred years.

After that, she held every connection like it was a balloon—already floating away.

At fourteen, she was ripped from the Shore and thrown into Snow. Canada, they called it. Land of opportunity. Land of clean streets and silent eyes. The snow fell like ash. The silence here wasn't peace—it was exile. Everything was too quiet. Too wide. Too white. Isla's voice bent itself trying to fit in, her accent slipping out like a secret she wasn't allowed to keep. People smiled with their mouths but backed away when she spoke. They liked her better when she was quiet. So she made herself smaller, sharper, quieter.

But inside her, the Shore still raged.

She missed the cracked tiles. The tricycle horns. The mangoes sticky on her fingers. The warmth. The chaos. The knowing where she *belonged*. In the Land of Snow, she was not Isla. She was "Ella," or "Lisa," or "that quiet girl with the weird lunch." A body misplaced. A spirit paused. She walked halls lined with beige lockers and lonelier thoughts. Her heart was full, but no one knew how to hold it. So she gave it to paper instead.

She found Kafka. Found herself in cockroach metaphors and foreign words that felt strangely familiar. She discovered music that made her chest ache and books that read her better than people ever had. She built a home out of pages, choruses, and late-night journal entries.

Still, she longed for warmth.

“Maybe I’m just too much,” she whispered once to the snow.

“Or maybe,” it whispered back, “you’re just still becoming.”

So she began to write. And read. And sing.

Not for applause. Not for healing. But for survival.

She realized something: they say immigration is a sacrifice, but they never say it’s a burial too. You bury accents. Traditions. Laughter. Even names. You grieve versions of yourself in secret. But in the ashes of what was, something stirs. A stubborn spark. Because maybe hope isn’t fireworks or fanfare. Maybe it’s the quiet act of continuing—to feel deeply, to love recklessly, to *remember loudly*, even when the world tells you to forget.

Isla still walks between two worlds. Between garlic and snowfall. Between memory and becoming.

And somewhere between the Shore and the Snow, she is learning to bloom.