

## Between the Shores



Nicoya and Daniel are born in the same hospital in Jerusalem on the same date. At 2 a.m., their fathers exchange smiles in the nursery. When Nicoya is three months old, her mother takes her on a bus to the assisted living home where Nicoya's grandmother lives. In the back of the same bus, Daniel sleeps against his mother's chest for two stops before he is carried off the bus and down the street and into his home, eyes peacefully closed all the while.

They both read *The Phantom Tollbooth* at age eight and then carry the book around, fascinated by The Soundkeeper, who catalogues sounds in vaults just to enjoy the silence. They listen to "Free To Be You And Me" in the car during road trips. Daniel's family moves to Kfar Saba when his younger brother develops a rash like butterfly wings across his cheeks. The doctor who diagnoses his brother with lupus has a son in Nicoya's fifth-grade class. The two are friends, but Nicoya doesn't see him again after elementary school ends.

In the army, Nicoya works a desk job on base just outside Ra'anana; Daniel is stationed on the border in Ramallah. After serving three years, they both travel to Central America. They each find their way to Cerro Chato on different days and hike down the inside of the volcano, pushing the vines and overgrown branches aside to reach the freshwater lake. They each sit alone on a log by the shore, waiting for their fellow hikers to catch up, contemplating the dangers of wading in. The fog rolls low when they swim in the volcanic lagoon, and before they are called back to shore, he by his friends, she by her sister, there are a few moments when all they can see as they tread water is the hurling of waves against rocks and the whiteness of the cloud around them.

The lodge near the volcano has a traveler's book exchange. Daniel leaves his book of Robert Frost poems in exchange for a copy of *Galapagos* by Vonnegut. The next traveler takes the Frost poems and leaves *The Prophet* by Kahlil Gibran, which Nicoya picks up and brings with her to a tiny fishing village in Nicaragua where she and her sister live for two weeks on seventeen dollars a day. A man in the village takes her out on his boat and teaches her to scale and gut a fish. He almost persuades her to stay with him, but then she reads on page nineteen

that love should be the moving sea between the shores of souls, and she returns to Israel with her sister.

Daniel and Nicoya apply to different colleges. They study different fields, though she drops out before finishing her degree and becomes a secretary at a tech company in Tel Aviv. He is hired as a software engineer by the same company and, when a piece of his mail accidentally comes to her office, she registers how nice his name sounds before she drops the envelope in the mail forwarding pile.

They live around the corner from each other—chose that particular street because of the bookstore cafe. On April 13<sup>th</sup>, they both compliment the barista on her enamel earrings.

Daniel wants to be a teacher and interviews for a job at the University of Chicago, but he understands almost as soon as his interview begins that he can't live outside of Israel. Nicoya quits her job and flies to visit her cousin in Colorado. When she returns to Israel after a week of hiking, mostly alone, her first flight from Denver to New York is rerouted through Chicago. She sits across from Daniel at gate E12 but is crying over a boy killed in combat whom she hasn't even seen since elementary school. Daniel thinks about asking her what is wrong, if he can help, but he worries his foreign accent will scare her. They sit in separate sections of the plane.

Three years later, walking down the main street in Tel Aviv one afternoon, Nicoya stops to listen to a street performer picking the strings of his guitar like a bass. She drops some loose change from the pocket of her steel blue trench coat into his guitar case. As she walks away, the musician starts to sing "Famous Blue Raincoat."

"For you," he calls, playing the opening chords.

She turns and smiles, though she doesn't recognize the song.

When Daniel walks down the same block forty-five seconds later and hears the musician playing his favorite song, he stops and hands the musician the largest bill in his wallet, which is only a twenty, but still.

Nicoya gives birth to her daughter eleven months later in the hospital where Daniel's brother is having emergency surgery on his kidney. Nicoya's boyfriend never shows.

At their neighborhood grocery store on a Friday afternoon, she buys the last box of quinoa five minutes before Daniel arrives. He has promised to bring quinoa to a potluck dinner—it's the only dish he really knows how to cook—so he goes to another grocery store where he starts a conversation with a woman wearing an army uniform in the grains aisle and asks her out on a date.

When he marries the girl from the grocery store six months later, Nicoya sees the bride being photographed in Yarkon Park the afternoon before the wedding. As she pushes her daughter in the stroller, she steals herself from envy and thinks to herself that the fiancé of a woman with such an easy smile must be a lucky man.

Daniel accepts a job teaching at the Mada Tech Science Center. Five years later in Tel Aviv, before visiting his brother in assisted living, Daniel stops by the bookshop on his old corner and picks up a red picture book with a horse on the cover. The owner asks Daniel if he has children, and he tells him no, not yet, but the author of the book is a friend of his from the army. The owner smiles and moves the stack to the window display. Later, when Nicoya's sister walks by the bookstore, the red book in the window display catches her eye, and she purchases a copy for her niece.

One afternoon, Daniel finds Nicoya's daughter roaming the science center, separated from her school group, tears thick in her eyes. He crouches next to her, tells her the dinosaur skeletons won't hurt her if she's friendly. When the teacher finds Nicoya's daughter, she is telling the gigantosaur all about her favorite book, *Dad Runs Away With The Circus*, and its red cover with a horse on the front, and how mom says that daddy ran away but not with the circus and also isn't coming back like the dad in the book does in the end.

Ten years later, Nicoya reads the obituary of Daniel's brother at the breakfast table the morning after her daughter leaves for the army.

In their happy old age, Nicoya and Daniel live across the street from each other in apartments outside of Jerusalem. Her son-in-law visits frequently with the grandchildren; his wife's smile is as easy as it was on the day they married. Still, more than anything, they remember swimming alone inside the volcano through the rolling fog, nothing but whiteness, and no one else in the world.

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