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CHAPTER 05 · I NEVER KNEW ANY OTHER WAY

My Father's Hands

A story about dignity

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When Lara was twelve, she was ashamed of her father's job.

He was a fisherman. He left before dawn every morning and came back in the afternoon smelling of the sea and salt and something that never quite washed out of his jacket. His hands were rough and wide. He never wore a suit. He drove an old van with rust at the corners.

When her classmates asked what her father did, Lara said "he works in the marine industry," which was technically true and sounded much better.

Then one morning, for reasons she could never fully explain later, she got up before dawn and found him in the kitchen eating his breakfast alone in the dark.

"Can I come?" she asked.

He looked at her for a long moment. "It's cold," he said.

"I know."

He poured her a coffee — real coffee, the first she'd ever had — and didn't say anything else.

On the boat, in the dark and the spray, Lara understood something she hadn't understood from shore. Her father was not simply doing a job. He was

doing something he knew completely, in his body and his bones, something he had done every day for thirty years with the same steady attention. He knew which way to pull the net. He knew the weather by the smell of the air. He knew the names of the other fishermen on every boat in sight, and they called to each other across the water in a shorthand that sounded almost like music.

When they came back in, the dock was busy with people buying the morning's catch. An old woman held up a fish and said something to her father and they both laughed.

"Who is she?" Lara asked.

"Maria. She's been buying from me since before you were born." He smiled at the fish in the crate. "She makes the best caldeirada in the city. Her family has eaten fish I caught their whole lives."

Lara looked at her father's hands lifting the crates. Rough and wide and capable of anything the sea asked of them.

That afternoon at school, someone asked again. "My father is a fisherman," she said clearly.

She didn't add anything else.

*The work a person does with their whole heart is never small, no
matter what it looks like from the outside.*

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A companion to “I Never Knew Any Other Way”

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