

AGES 9 – 14

NOIRACIEL

CHAPTER 03 · THE ROOTS WE CANNOT SEE

What the Old Tree Knew

A story about the things we inherit

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The oak tree in Sofia's grandmother's garden was older than anyone could remember.

"How old?" Sofia asked one afternoon, sitting underneath it with her avó, who was teaching her to shell beans.

"Your great-great-grandfather planted it," her grandmother said. "He brought the acorn from the north, from his village, when he moved here as a young man. He wanted something from home to grow where he was going."

Sofia looked up at the tree. Its branches spread so wide they covered half the garden. Birds had built nests in it. A cat slept in the fork of the lowest branch every afternoon at exactly three o'clock.

"He never got to see it like this," she said.

"No," said her grandmother. "He died before it was even as tall as you. But he planted it anyway."

Sofia thought about that while she shelled beans. "That's strange," she finally said. "To plant something you'll never see."

Her grandmother smiled and didn't say anything for a while. Then she said: "When I was your age, I didn't understand it either. But now I think he

understood something I was too young to know. That what you do doesn't only belong to your own life. It belongs to the lives after yours, too."

Sofia looked at her hands — thin fingers, short nails, a small scar on the left thumb she'd got falling off a bicycle. Her grandmother's hands were doing the same movement: pod, press, drop.

"Are my hands like his?" she asked suddenly.

Her grandmother looked at her with an expression Sofia couldn't quite name. "Your hands are like your mother's. Your mother's are like mine. Mine are like my mother's. And hers—" she paused "— hers, I was told, were like a man who planted an oak tree and never saw it grow."

Sofia looked at the tree. She looked at her hands.

It was a strange feeling — to be connected, by something as ordinary as the shape of your fingers, to someone who had stood in this same garden a hundred years ago and done something kind for people who weren't born yet.

She felt, suddenly, less alone than she ever had.

*We carry more than we know — and more people carry a piece of
us than we'll ever meet.*

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A companion to “The Roots We Cannot See”

Contributions help fund The Invisible Roots Scholarship —
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