

## SEPARATED BY WATER

Maya had always felt different. Her skin was darker than that of most of the children at her school in Norfolk, Nebraska. Some of the children would poke fun because she was 'different'. Maya was never included in 'the cool gang'. When studying history, their teacher would use the phrase 'The Land of Opportunity', and Maya wondered if this applied to everyone.

In Nebraska children become adults at the age of nineteen. It was 20<sup>th</sup> April and Maya's special day. Her father asked Maya to sit down on the settee in the living-room.

'Your mother and I have something really important to tell you.'

'Yes darling. We thought that now is the right time, as it's a very special day. Today you're officially an adult.' Both parents gave Maya a hug.

'You know your father and I love you, don't you? You know that you are even more special because you're our only child.'

'You're our world, Maya.'

'I'm not sure how we should say this, even though your father and I have been practising. Maya's parents looked sideways at one another.

'You know that we have always told you that we chose you?' Maya's father spoke in deep, slow tones.

'What are you trying to tell me? That I'm adopted?' The words came spilling out. Maya had suspected this since she was twelve, but had never said anything.

'But how did you guess? I mean, did you know...?' Charlotte's shock contrasted with Bill's nodding face. He had long since suspected Maya had known, but Charlotte had always stopped him from saying anything.

The news inspired Maya to investigate her family tree. Her parents gave her as much support as they could, being careful not to interfere. The adoption agency, and DNA profiling were Maya's biggest sources of support.

Months later, and the discovery was made. Maya's biological parents were Mexican. Her mother, Valentina, had given birth outside marriage and she had been persuaded to give Maya away. Valentina had cried tears as she waved goodbye to her daughter, with the promise of 'a better life' in the United States. Bill and Charlotte had received Maya because they couldn't have children of their own.

Exactly one year after her nineteenth birthday, and with the blessing of her parents, Maya boarded the plane. The three exchanged hugs and tears, before Maya walked up the steps to take her seat, 20 A. Despite her mixed feelings, Maya smiled. Perhaps it was a sign, or, more probably, her mother had chosen the seat deliberately.

The plane landed, before Maya went through customs, constantly checking her phone. Then her call was answered by a voice that had become familiar over the previous months. That woman over there! That face! 'I'm the woman in the blue jacket.' As Maya came closer, the strength of the voice on the phone was surpassed by the voice directly in front of her.

Maya stepped forward. 'Hello Valentina... Mother.' Their eyes met, before their mutual silence was broken by a hug.

'I can't believe... you look just like me.' Maya's reply was told by her tears.

Valentina helped Maya with her cases, as the words of each of them tripped over the other's, and they made their way into the world outside.

That night, the two of them sat down to share pozole, Valentina's favourite dish. Maya tried to focus on the food, as she wondered if the mixed meal was not a metaphor for the jumbled thoughts, spinning around her head.

'I just need to go to the bathroom,' she said, as the wine began to take its toll. Arriving back in the hallway, Maya checked her face in the mirror. At that moment, there was the sound of a key in the front door. Maya took the liberty of opening it herself.

Stunned, she saw a face identical to her own. Time froze.

On hearing the cries from the hallway, Valentina rushed out. 'I wanted you to discover each other for yourselves,' she said. Then the three women exchanged tears.

Later that night, Valentina explained that she had had two identical girls, and had persuaded her parents to let her keep one. Not able to decide, Valentina had put two pieces of paper in a bowl, one for Baby Twenty, as that was the date they were born, and the other for Baby Twelve, because that was the hour of their births. Camila, Baby Twelve, had been drawn from the bowl. Baby Twenty was to make her journey to a foreign land.

Maya understood the truth. Without water none of us would exist, and without tears we cannot truly signal our emotion. The name of the water separating the United States from Mexico does not matter, but the connection between those two lands does.