

An Excerpt from *A Fracture in Time*

The moment the parents left the land, something shifted—not loudly, not violently, but with the quiet decisiveness of a breath being held. The girl felt it immediately: a faint tightening in her chest, a subtle pressure behind her ribs, like the air had changed density. She paused, hand hovering over the counter, listening to a feeling she could not name. Then she dismissed it just as quickly. Today was meant for creation, not worry. For focus, not fear. And certainly not for imagining all the ways her brother might get her into trouble.

Her little brother asked if he could go gather firewood. They had more than enough already; she knew that. But the request felt harmless—almost helpful. A way to keep him busy. A way to keep him near. She agreed, fixing him with a serious look and reminding him to stay close. He nodded eagerly and ran off, thrilled by the freedom of the task and the importance of helping. He was helping. That mattered.

As he disappeared into the trees, the girl exhaled in relief and returned to the kitchen. Music played softly as she lost herself in measurements and timing, in the familiar rhythm that steadied her hands and quieted her mind. Butter softened. Sugar dissolved. Time narrowed to texture and scent. For a while, the weight of the secrets she carried loosened its grip. She felt almost like herself—complete, unburdened, present.

The boy skipped across the land with a bucket swinging from his hand, scanning for the perfect pieces of wood. Each one he gathered felt like proof that he was good, that he would be noticed, that his parents would be proud when they returned. When the bucket was nearly full, he set it down, chest swelling with satisfaction.

Then he thought of his sister.

He wanted to bring her something special.

Spotting a lush hibiscus bush nearby, its petals impossibly vibrant, he stepped closer, reaching out for a flower she might like to tuck behind her ear. And then—without warning, without sensation, without sound—the world changed.

On the land they had called home, a ripple passed through the air, unseen but unmistakable. The birds fell silent. The jungle held still. In the kitchen, the girl froze, her body responding before her mind could catch up. Every instinct she had pushed aside surged forward at once. She called her brother's name. No answer. She turned off the burner and ran outside, scanning the trees, the paths, the spaces he should have been filling with noise.

Nothing.

Fear and anger rose together, sharp and breath-stealing. If anything had happened to him—no. She couldn't let her mind finish the thought. To do so would shatter her. She ran, calling his

name again and again, her voice tightening, thinning, becoming something she barely recognized.

And then, mid-stride, the land fell away.

She was no longer home.

The story continues...

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