

Waves of Shards

By Shera Rinaldy

Mara adored the ocean. The gentle breeze by the shore swaying the tall palm trees that cast shade on her against the shining sun. Seashells in various shapes and colors—broken, chipped, or tarnished, colorful and bright, or dark and mysterious—were washed up on the soft white sand. The sound of the Bali Sea washing on the shore was the only thing that was existent. Mara walked past old logs, approaching the shoreline.

The heart-stirring view held many memories, bittersweet ones. Mara would remember the time when she would go to this quiet part of the beach every day. She thought of the ocean as a mother figure who would listen to her complaints, worries and anxieties in her heart. Mara would scream her pain away into the distance, or simply sit there with the ocean keeping her company in silence—the heart did all the talking. The ever-changing wave understood her feelings. When she'd yell her lungs out the ocean was there with soothing waves as if trying to calm her down. Mara would sit there for hours, maybe with a book or two, until the ocean veiled herself in the darkness of the night.

The soft, soothing tune of the breeze equivalent to a mother's lullaby sang her to sleep, under the trees that shaded her much like a mother's warm embrace, despite her never having had the chance to feel such a thing. The feeling of comfort, protection, and being loved—the ocean alone was able to give her that. A feeling she wished she could have.

As the wind blew strands of her raven hair, she pressed her feet into the sand and felt the water brush her ankles. *Warm*, she thought, *but why warm?* Then suddenly, she felt a sharp pain in her heel. Mara winced at the sudden impact. She lifted her foot. Blood was trickling from her sole. Mara's chocolate orbs widened at the cause of her pain: It wasn't small rocks nor broken seashells, it was a big shard of glass. Not long after, she saw glass and plastic bottles floating not far from her.

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Mara washed her feet at a nearby foot wash, carefully rinsed her wounded foot, not bothering to treat the wound. She was used to it. When she was about to head back to her spot, Mara heard the sound of cheers and applause from afar. She decided to check what was going on—and it made her heart sink. There were men on a boat cheering for one of them. They went silent for a moment only to be greeted with a huge splash. The men cheered again as dead fish started to appear on the surface of the water.

Her heart brimming with anger, Mara's face went blood red. They were destroying the peace, they were hurting her "mother"—their own "mother". Like a mother, the ocean provided her children with gifts: food, salt, water and fascinating sea creatures to entertain and broaden their knowledge. Her kindness was endless but she didn't receive what she deserved in return. Mara was about to give the men a piece of her mind. As she stomped in anger (despite slightly limping), she saw the men's boat coming on shore. One of the men noticed Mara walking towards them and decided to speak up.

"Hey pretty lady! Where you heading to?" a man in his late-30s called out.

Mara's pace started to decrease. She got cold feet.

"Come on, let Uncle take you back home yeah?"

At this point, her heart was pounding fast, alert for signs of danger. Mara took a seashell nearby and limped back to her spot as fast as she could.

Finally back in her safe zone, she plopped down on the white sand and hugged her knees. She was afraid. *What was I thinking?!* They were fully grown men, she thought, and as for her, she's only a child, to make matters worse, a girl! How could a frail young girl win over adult men? Her screams and pleading go unheard by those who claim themselves to be *adults*. Mara hated their ignorance, but she hated herself more for the fact that she knew what they were doing was wrong, but she couldn't do anything. She was helpless, powerless. Oh how she wished to be someone else, someone of power. But the truth was harsh for the naïve girl.

Mara sat by the shore with a book by her side and her legs folded close to her now-calmed heart. She sat in silence, staring away towards the horizon where the sun was disappearing into the ocean. The clinking sounds of shattered glass matched her heart as she thought how awful the ocean must feel. But then the ocean glistened in the sun, catching Mara's attention as the breeze comforted her heart, as if the ocean were trying to say, *I'm okay*. Tears brimmed in Mara's eyes, threatening to spill out.

Then a voice interrupted, "Mara, stop blanking out! *God*, this child. You'll be sent off abroad tomorrow for an early start of school. This is for the company's future so you better do as I say," she demanded.

Mara wiped her tears, stood up straight and took one last look at the ocean. Once again, the light reflected in her eyes. She gave a thin smile. *I will return as someone able to help. Wait for me*. She dusted off her clothes, leaving the white sand and said, "Yes, mother."

