

PUBLISHER EXCERPT

THE ALCHEMY OF A SHAPESHIFTER

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ONE

THE IMPOSSIBLE THING

People think the hardest part of transition is surgery.

It isn't.

Surgery lasts a few hours.

Rejection can last a lifetime.

The strange thing about finally getting everything you dreamed of is that sometimes the people you hoped would celebrate never show up.

I spent years imagining this moment.

Years.

Doctor appointments. Courtrooms. Endless paperwork. Blood tests. Waiting lists.

Therapy appointments. Arguments. Hope. Fear. More waiting.

The kind of waiting that slowly becomes the background music of your life.

When I finally had my surgery in Bangkok, I expected to feel different.

I expected fireworks.

I expected some magical moment where everything suddenly made sense.

Instead, I woke up tired.

Relieved.

Sore.

Happy.

And strangely quiet.

For the first time in my life, there was nothing left to fight for.

I had done it.

The impossible thing.

The thing people told me would never happen.

The thing strangers debated online.

The thing politicians built careers talking about.

The thing family members argued about as though I wasn't sitting right there listening.

I was finally me.

And then I waited for my phone to ring.

TWO

THE SILENCE AFTER

“

Not everyone who helped create you will help celebrate you.

It never did.

No call.

No congratulations.

No “I’m proud of you.”

No “How are you feeling?”

Nothing.

There is a specific kind of grief that comes from realizing someone has chosen not to show up for one of the biggest moments of your life.

Especially when that person is your father.

You tell yourself stories at first.

Maybe he’s busy.

Maybe he forgot.

Maybe he’s processing.

Maybe tomorrow.

Then tomorrow becomes next week.

And eventually you have to stop making excuses for someone else’s absence.

That was one of the hardest lessons of my life.

Not everyone who helped create you will help celebrate you.

Some people only love the version of you they imagined.

Not the one standing in front of them.

THREE

CHOSEN FAMILY

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Bangkok never asked me to apologize for existing.

The funny thing is that while I was losing pieces of what I thought family was supposed to look like, I was finding family everywhere else.

I found it in nurses who checked on me at two in the morning.

I found it in friends who sat beside my hospital bed.

I found it in strangers who became chosen family.

I found it in Bangkok.

Bangkok never asked me to apologize for existing.

Nobody stopped me in the street to debate my identity.

Nobody demanded that I justify my life.

Nobody asked me to become smaller to make someone else comfortable.

For the first time, I lived in a place where I could simply be.

Not “Jessie the issue.”

Not “Jessie the debate.”

Not “Jessie the controversy.”

Just Jessie.

A teenage girl building a life.

That freedom changes you.

FOUR

WHAT BANGKOK GAVE ME

“

It gave me peace. It gave me space to breathe. It gave me a future.

People assume I promote Bangkok because of surgery.

I don't.

I promote Bangkok because it gave me something much bigger.

It gave me peace.

It gave me space to breathe.

It gave me a future.

And sometimes, when the place you were born can no longer recognize you, the place that helps you become yourself starts feeling a lot more like home.