

# The Snow-Child

*by* Lem Cacho

"Where are you going?" asked the young man. Teary-eyed and beaten, he gently put his hands on the shoulders of Snow-child, her back turned from him.

"Home," Snow-child said. "I'm going back to Norway." They both spent summer together in a barrio in Pangasinan near the 100 islands as if it were springtime and a sexual union of air and earth took place. Snow-child will fly back to Oslo in three days leaving behind her farm boy, her fisherman.

"Will I see you again?" the young man asked. He knew the question was pointless. She would never come back. Not with Snow-child's vindictive father who caught her mother in the arms of another man.

It was a month-long vacation. It was planned a year ahead with the sole purpose of visiting Snow-child's relatives in the barrio. That's where Snow-child met her farm-boy-fisherman. That's where her adulterous mother went to see her teenage love.

Snow-child couldn't look farm-boy fisherman in the eyes. She knew that if she looks a little longer, her gray eyes would miss those dark-brown 15 year-old eyes. In Oslo she stayed as late as 12 midnight, surf the net and chat with friends. She hated the thought of flying over to the Philippines, thanks to her two-timer mother, and not being present at her friends' sleepovers for the entire summer. When she came here, lights were turned off as early as 8 pm to save on energy as if the entire universe shuts itself off from her. That's the time when she saw her farm-boy fisherman and his dark-brown 15 year-old eyes (she didn't notice those eyes until the next day). She was at the balcony at the time. Farm-boy fisherman was pulling his nets into the boat after failing to catch any fish from the dried northern sea.

Snow-child slipped off from her parents and like stealth managed to get away and run swiftly near farm-boy fisherman. "Is that easy?"

she asked. "Huh?" farm-boy fisherman said. "What you're doing," Snow-child continued. "Do you speak English?" No response except a mannequin image of a scarecrow looking into a rice field of space. "Norse?" Snow-child asked playfully, although she knew there's no part of this galaxy that this boy, this poor boy with fishing nets would be able to speak English, much less Norwegian.

"No," he said, still beleaguered by a white foreign presence a few meters away from him. "'No' it's not easy pulling the nets or 'no' you don't speak English?" Snow-child teased. "'No' is English, right?" the boy with the phantom brown-eyes said. There they stared at each other for two minutes of eternity with two moons guiding their every breath. It was there, in silence, that they knew that the two moons, one in the sky, the other in the sea, were speaking on their behalf.

Farm-boy-fisherman continued to pull his nets into the *banca* while Snow-child slowly inched away from where she stood. She heard concerned voices of elders from a distance. "I should get going," she said. "Is that Norse?" farm-boy-fisherman asked. They both smiled.

Snow-child forgot about the sleepovers, forgot about web surfing, forgot about chatting, and forgot about walking on earth. She was flying as she went back to her Lola's house. She was confused but happy. How could she feel what she felt for a boy in torn-out clothes and crinkled hands and feet? How could a girl like her, white as snow, city-dweller, would steal a moment away from her parents and spend five minutes with a boy who is as dark as the barren mountains of Luzon and who never knew play? But if her feet had wings it was that moment.

Farm-boy fisherman couldn't sleep. He couldn't understand. What was that apparition? Was it because he was too tired and too hungry that he saw that ghost in white pajamas? He couldn't be tired. He pulled the fishing nets into the *banca*, to his surprise, with ease and in Herculean fashion. He couldn't be hungry. He had flakes and crackers while at sea as he waited for those fish to be

foolish-friendly. And the language he'd been practicing he finally spoke. He promised to teach himself English since he was eight so that when chance presents itself, he would swim to Florida to look for his African-American soldier father who knocked his Ilocana mother up. He couldn't sleep. But he dreamt. It was a beautiful dream. It was about white pajamas.

Songs were sung at the break of dawn. And Snow-child's songs were being sung without words. She brushed her teeth, ate breakfast (or pretended she did but she couldn't eat), took a shower, and put on her favorite summer outfit. "You look fine today," her Lola said. "The sea got you enchanted in your last night's stroll?" Snow-child didn't understand what her Lola meant. "I'm going out for a walk, granny," she said.

She waited. She waited near the docks where the *bancas* were. *Isn't he coming out?* She asked herself. She waited. For three hours. She was annoyed at his farm-boy-fisherman. How could he stood her up? She missed breakfast for cryin'-out-loud! And when she was about to give up, there from a tiny shelter, a worn-out Favela according to Sao Paulo standards, out came his dark boy.

She went straight to him like what she did the night before. She slapped his shoulders hard and said, "What took you so long?" Wide-eyed farm-boy-fisherman was left speechless. He was waiting for thunder to drum the sky and wake him up. He knew he was dreaming because the pajamas were replaced by micro-walking shorts. "I was standing here for hours," Snow-child said. "Sorry, I overslept," he said. She held his hands and dragged him into the boat. "Now catch me a fish," Snow-child said.

It went on, those holding of hands, those trips to the sea, for weeks. Snow-child learned how to catch fish while farm-boy-fisherman honed his English. It was liberating for Snow-child. She never missed her friends back in Oslo not one bit. It was liberating for farm-boy-fisherman to learn to catch in his net Snow-child's heart.

"Why?" he asked. "Why me?" while holding Snow-child's arm with his left hand while his right is on the net. "Don't ask," Snow-child answered. "It's bad luck to ask someone why she loves you. You don't ask. You just know." And just when things were about to get mushier, the current changed its attitude and a hot breeze blew from the east. "We need to get back. It's going to rain."

When they got back to shore, the whole barrio could hear the commotion in Snow-child Lola's house. She could hear someone threatening who while a loud wailing sound bursts out of the windows. She saw her father rushing towards her. "Pack your things," he told her. We're leaving." They left, alright. A few blocks from her Lola's house where there was a lodge for tourists. It rained hard that night.

He didn't see Snow-child for days. No apparitions in pajamas or her snow-white fingers.

"I'm going home now," Snow-child said. Her gray eyes turned blue. So was farm-boy-fisherman's. "I'll never see you again. But we still have the fish and the sea."

Since then farm-boy-fisherman made a resolve. He'll be stronger so he could swim, not to Florida, but to Oslo. He'd practice a new language the kind that his African-American father won't understand. And he had two moons as his witnesses.

