

*My Name
is María
Isabel*

*by
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On the Way to School

María Isabel looked at the cup of coffee with milk and the buttered toast in front of her. But she couldn't bring herself to eat.

Her mother said, "Maribel, *cariño*, hurry up."

Her father added, "You don't want to be late on your first day, do you?"

But instead of finishing her breakfast, María Isabel just kept staring at the butter as it slowly melted into the toast, and at the cloud of steam that floated over her cup.

"You'll see, you'll like your new school," her mother said. But her mother's soft, reassuring voice didn't seem to convince María Isabel. María Isabel knew it wasn't going to be

easy starting at a new school, especially when the school year had already begun. She was probably the only new student. She kept thinking what bad luck it was that they had had to move two months after school had started. And she had had so many plans to spend her winter vacation playing with Clara and Virginia.

“You’ll make new friends soon,” said María Isabel’s father, as if he could read her thoughts.

María Isabel kept staring at the cup. But when her brother, Antonio, chimed in, “Come on, Belita, hurry up. You’re going to make me late,” she gulped down her coffee, even though it burned her tongue. María Isabel shook her head, trying to shake the nervous thoughts from her head.

She got up and grabbed her blue backpack. María Isabel had always wanted a backpack, and at the store last Saturday, this seemed to be just the right one. She had been so happy when her mother decided to buy it, even though it was more expensive than the red one. Later that day, when María Isabel was alone in the apartment, she had walked back

and forth with the pack on her shoulders and had even climbed up onto the toilet seat to see how she looked in the bathroom mirror. But now it just seemed heavy, and María Isabel couldn't understand why she had liked it so much.

“Good-bye, Mami,” María Isabel said softly to her mother, who was already washing the glasses and cups from breakfast.

“See you later, my love. May God be with you,” her mother answered back, giving María Isabel a kiss on the forehead. Then she dunked her hands back into the soapy water.

“Good-bye, honey,” her father said. “Be good at school and listen to your teacher. You know that your teacher at school is like your mother here at home.”

“Yes, Papi. Good-bye,” said María Isabel, and she got up on her tiptoes to hug her father. Then she took from the table the lunch bag her mother had prepared. María Isabel would have loved to stay in their warm kitchen with its smell of freshly brewed coffee. If only she could sit there all morning hugging her father, who always made her feel safe and secure. But



My Name Is María Isabel


For María Isabel Salazar López, the hardest thing about being the new girl in school is that the teacher doesn't call her by her real name. "We already have two Mariás in this class," says her teacher. "Why don't we call you Mary instead?"

But María Isabel has been named for her Papá's mother and for Chabela, her beloved Puerto Rican grandmother. Can she find a way to make her teacher see that if she loses her name, she's lost the most important part of herself?

"Captures the authentic flavor of Latino culture in this warm, yet never sentimental, story." —*Kirkus*

"An affirming study of heritage." —*School Library Journal*

ALMA FLOR ADA is the author of many books, including *The Gold Coin*, winner of the Christopher Medal, and *Where the Flame Trees Bloom*. A professor of multicultural education at the University of San Francisco, she lives in California.

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