

## Prompt

*Life is full of people and events that we remember for various reasons. Write of an event that involved someone you are close to and exemplify how important it was to you.*

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With fingers long and elegant, and nails always red, my mother's hands once held the magic power to soothe my woes. As a child these hands wiped my tears and pulled me close enough to her to smell her motherly scent — a mixture of Nivea lotion and *achiote*, evidence that she had spent her morning in the kitchen. Years later, these same hands incited my tears.

In Ecuador, my mother was invincible, but upon our arrival to the United States she became a shell of what she once was. I had grown accustomed to seeing her youthful hands well manicured, but melancholy and hours of hard labor had silently taken over them in a matter of months. Blisters and dark spots invaded her smooth brown skin, while thick and stubborn blue and green veins crept up from the backs of her hands to the tips of her fingers.

Fatigue and two jobs had ruined who both my parents used to be, and I began to value the little time I had with my mother more than ever before. This little time could not make up for the time I spent alone, however, nor could it assuage the envy I had of the little girl my mother looked after. She, though not my mother's daughter, had the privilege of having my mother and her delicious cooking all to herself; I would always get the leftovers. She also had the privilege of having my mother pin her silky blond hair into a pretty bun before ballet classes while my dad wrestled with the hairbrush to pull my thick brown hair into two lopsided ponytails before dropping me off at the bus stop. But I couldn't blame the girl for depriving me of my mother; her parents had also been consumed by their jobs.

My mother's hands caressed me less and less, and by the age of 12 I had become nearly indifferent to her cold and rare touch. My family had turned into a group of strangers that happened to be living under the same roof while chasing the American Dream.

At 4 a.m. on May 3, 2009, I woke to a soft and unfamiliar cry. Scared and confused, I put on my slippers and tiptoed to my parents' room. There, in the moonlit darkness, I found my mother, the woman of iron, once again defeated. Phone by her side, fists clenched, curled up like a child, she sobbed uncontrollably. I did not need an explanation; I knew right away that my abuelita had passed away. I pulled my mother close to my chest and wiped away her tears. And for the first time in several years, I uttered the words *le quiero mucho Mami* (I love you, Mom). She looked up at me with her big, brown, tear-filled eyes, and whispered, *y yo a tí* (I do, too). The distance that had silently emerged between us since we left Ecuador was suddenly erased. I had become my mother's protector, as she had once been for her mother. I held her callused hands between my own and realized that despite their smoothness, my hands were not much different from hers.