

As we look at policies that keep families apart, this Mother's Day story becomes a talisman we must keep close to our hearts. The young author, a student at Patchogue/Medford High School, catches feelings we see over and over, in this poignant excerpt from a longer piece that took her a semester to write. In her bravery in touching on these feelings, she dares us all to feel as deeply as she does, to work for the change that we need.

The Perfect Basket

I hugged my grandmother and ran after my sister. At school I met my friends to go to our classroom and get ready to go out and sing. My sister left with her friends. At that moment my heart was beating faster than normal, it was as if I had run a marathon. My friend, Paola, came up to me and said, "Don't worry, everything will be all right. Also, remember that your mom will be here."

I looked at her with tears in my eyes and whispered in her ear, "You know, I don't know my mother. I've only seen her in a few photos. I don't even know if I'll be able to recognize her."

The music teacher came in and told us, "Everything is going to be okay. Relax. We're ready for this. Now let's go out and demonstrate everything we've practiced."

After the principal was done speaking and welcoming us, we went on stage and formed rows, and since I was one of the small students in the group they put me in the front row. My friend held my hand tightly as we sang. I couldn't help moving my eyes. My eyes were only looking for my mother, the woman I had only seen in photographs, but never in person. My heart would break into pieces every time I would see her memorized image in my mind. The only person I saw was my sister, Fernanda, who was applauding me. There was no one else from my family.

At that moment many questions came to my mind: *Why isn't my grandmother here? Did she go to pick up my mother? Maybe they're sitting on the other side?* Then I started to look closely at every corner, but there was no one there. I was so confused. I didn't know what to do. I just wanted to run away and scream as loudly as I could. My eyes filled with tears, but my mind told me, *You can't cry, everyone is looking at you.* Immediately, those tears vanished in the darkness of my soul.

After the performance, the teacher invited everyone to go to their children's classrooms. He then called us to the hallway and gave us the baskets to give to our mothers. All my classmates came in and gave their baskets to their mothers or their representatives. I raised my head waiting to see my mother or at least my grandmother, but what I saw was all the parents hugging their children, congratulating them and thanking them for their baskets. I lowered my head again to look at my basket, the basket that I had made with so much effort and love. I had the best basket, but what good was it if I didn't have someone to give it to. My tears fell on the candy in the basket as I walked down the hallway in search of a corner. When I found one I sat down and cried. I could feel my heart shrinking, and an intense pain piercing through its fragile walls, filling it with anger, hatred, and frustration.

A few hours later my grandmother and aunts arrived; when it was all over. I was sitting in the hallway when they called for me. On my way down I saw my sister playing with her friends. I got closer and told her, "Nana, Mama Rosa is here, let's go."

My sister came, hugged me and said, "Your basket looks beautiful."

"Thanks," I said with a fake smile.

When we got home, my grandmother just hugged me; I suppose my puffy eyes said it all. Once at the house, she sat next to me. She didn't say anything, she just sat next to me to watch the birds and the blue sky with me, to watch as the puppies played, and to watch the river that wasn't far from my house. In my hand, I held a purple dahlia, remembering what my grandmother once told me. She said that my parents would come back by airplane. When I was younger, I used to run behind the airplanes shouting at them, "Mom! Dad! I'm here! Don't go! Get off quickly!" But they never arrived.

My grandmother got close to me and said, "Darling, don't be sad, your mother will come someday, maybe something happened."

In a shaky voice I replied, "Yeah sure, someday, when I'm dead."

My grandmother hugged me and cried with me. She then said, "I'm sorry for not arriving sooner, but I had to go to you aunts' school and your brother's school."

We went in the house after that. The only thing I remember is that I got up in the middle of night. I'd fallen asleep. I went down to the kitchen and heard my grandma talking with my sister about Maria. I sat on the steps and started looking at the stars while I asked God to take me with him. In silence I cried and said, *God, why did you bring into this world? Why did you let me be born? I never asked to come to this world. I hate this life. I hate you, Maria. Why did you have me and leave me? God, I don't want to be here anymore, please, take me with you. I just want to sleep and not wake up.*

After that, I returned to my room and looked for a necktie, which I used to tie around my neck; just like my uncle did. When I was done, I went to sleep hoping to not wake up.