Our Beauty

I am constantly indebted to you for the greatest gift a mother could offer, her beauty. I am reminded each day that I purposefully gaze into my reflection in a mirror, a window, a rain puddle, and sometimes even a spoon. I am your daughter.

Many claim the sweet little girl was always gentle and calm. When you moved, I moved. When you spoke, I spoke. When you talked, I listened. Most parents left their children at home when it was time to visit the laundromat. But not my mami querida and her sweet little girl. No, we did everything together didn't we? And what a grand time we had.

Sitting there enamored by her pale face that suddenly reddened from jerking the warm dry clothes ever so quickly as a means to prevent any wrinkles. She propped me up on the bench and gave me the silly but important task of matching socks and folding underwear. No one in our home could go outside with mismatched socks, that would be silly. We were in charge of assuring the pristine folds and readiness for the clothes to be quickly pulled out of drawers for those early morning rushes. The important duty bestowed upon me to return each sock to its cherished partner was tedious yet quite easy. However, there was no way I could fold papi's work shirts yet as that job was for the more experienced older sisters and the perfected system of mami's hands.

How she shook each shirt and laid it down flat on the laundromat's plastic table which could be quite slippery for some fabrics. Quickly we cleared all other folded garments into the basket for optimal folding space. Then ever so delicately was the shirt folded from one side, then
the other, and then one more time down the middle. So perfect those shirts would be for *papi* in
the morning, and absolutely no ironing required thanks to her attentiveness.

Each time we visited the laundromat she allowed me the chance to attempt a perfect
*mami* fold. However, when it did not come out the same as hers, she quickly undid the shirt so
that no fine lines would set in, and wished me better luck next time with a quick grin. I was sent
on my way with the remaining quarters, a whole $2! With that, I could buy my sister and me
M&M’s from the vending machine and still have a go at the notorious claw machine. Well, you
see the M&M’s were only $1.50, no drink was necessary since we had brought our water bottles
from home, so that left me two rounds at the cheeky claw contraption. Everyone warned me not
to waste even a dime, but my small hands had beaten the mischievous machine once and were
determined to do so again.

The first quarter goes in and I line up the metal talon to the stuffed animal nearest to the
exit hole, as that was truly the only way to win. It was not always the prettiest toys nearby. I
would have much rather went for the simple small cat on the other corner. But I would not fall
for these tricks or temptations, no I knew better! I would love the neon-glittery seal with all my
heart if that was my destiny. No luck. The second quarter goes in, the claw ever so slightly
latches onto the tail, and right as it lets go, the sparkly seal is down the hole and right into my
arms as I bend over to snatch the darn ugly thing. Suddenly I realize I have an audience, a small
girl perhaps a year or two younger than me stands there awkwardly. I know what she wants and I
do not intend to do so. My reserved and non-confrontational body rushed to my dear *mami*’s side
as she conversed with the other *señoras*, who complained about their husbands and having to
make dinner. My clear green eyes search for those small beady eyes. A sigh of relief only lasted
so long when the tiny girl was called over to say her goodbyes. As I clung to my mami's arm, the girl did the same with hers. Only she pulled her mother's sleeve and whispered earnestly in her ear. A forbidden thing is to whisper in front of others, my mami taught me better than that! Her mother quickly frowned and whispered back into her ear (now we know where she got it from). Oh lord and here come the waterworks. I squirm hearing such childish wails, how is she not embarrassed? And there mami goes as she kneels and asks the pitiful thing what troubles her so deeply. Oh my mami, how kind she is to put up with such a delinquent. There she goes again with the whispering and oh- no- no! The stupid sparkly seal is no longer in my possession. No, it is in hers. My lips part as if ready to speak up and I eagerly looked at mami to understand what the game plan was. Is this a sharing situation for a little while? Or a- no. No, it is not. It is a giving situation. Her mother declines and tries to force the creature out of her talons, but these have a harsh latch. And there she goes running away with my hard-earned polyester plaything. In my expert opinion the women did not decline hardly at all, and really should have tried harder. I earnestly stared at mami as she continued talking to the girl's mother. But, oh mami, how can you talk at a time like this? As the other mother hears the dryer stop and goes to fetch her clothes. Ever so quickly and delicately she hands me two more quarters and a wink of good luck, and on my way, I go. Oh mami, you truly are the sweetest.

Once again I arrived at the laundromat's makeshift arcade, which was a couple of gumball machines as well as the claw machine. There stood the little girl, greedy for more cotton stuffed animals. I politely ask for her to “excuse me” and I am ready to go, focused, and zoned in completely ignoring her irritating gaze. The first quarter goes in, it latches, and down the chute, it goes! Well, I have one more quarter I might as well give it one more- and another one! Not only
did I get a non-neon-sparkly one but the cat from the corner as well. Very contently I grab my prizes and I am on my way when the gluttonous girl gargles up,

“That cat is cute”

“Well, yes, yes it is indeed,” I responded while trying to quickly remove myself from the scene as soon as possible.

“Can I have it?”

“No, you cannot,” I say with a twinge in my voice knowing I could be setting off a mommy alarm very soon for my response. But, no wails are heard, instead, she takes a step forward and slithers,

“Your mother is ugly.”

As my tiny heart starts pumping and my face fills with red the same way mami’s does, I feel my dearly beloved playthings drop to the floor and my fist curls up into a ball. There goes the mommy alarm.

Within seconds all the mothers gather and her’s pushes her way to the front recognizing that common bawl. Hot red streams from the girl's nose the same way my face filled with it only seconds prior. My mami suddenly knelt beside me searching everywhere on my body for anything. No, her dear little one would never, not unless provoked, right? Wrong. As I stare into her eyes with tears filling mine, her face shifts into confusion. I feel nothing but shame, not guilt, but definitely shame.

All the mothers disperse after realizing their kids are at home and not here at the laundromat being attacked by the deranged multi-winning claw machine game champion.
arm is forcefully tugged away and dragged to the nearest bench where my sister proceeds to scold me as warm tears ride down my face.

*Mami* fetched the ungrateful girl a cold wet paper towel and a thousand apologies to her mother. My heart stopped, and my sister grabbed my arm reflexively, as we heard the smack that drove across my *mami's* face.

Cecilia, our lovely friend, and owner of the laundromat rushed over and quickly escorted the lady out.

Finally, my composure is lost and now my mommy's alarm is going off. She walks towards me with her head held as high as ever. With one arm swooping me up, and the other her mom bag, that's filled with snacks, water, and my emergency bathing suit because you never know. She points to the basket of freshly cleaned and arranged clothes for my sister to carry out.

Strapping me into my seat a tear escapes her long majestic eyelash prison. I quickly wipe it away and as I open my mouth to try and justify my barbaric actions, she only grabs my small hand and places it on her soft wrinkled face. She places her hand on my, not at all developed chest, and I know everything is okay. Not everyone is as beautiful as us.