ESSAY

Anecdotes and Pending Hugs

by Selene Lacayo



"Morning" by Riya Samanta

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You asked someone to find me online and let me know your mom was gravely ill, guessing that I would like to be there for her. When I reached out asking for your help to send her an audio message, I was surprised to see your immediate reply. I wonder what prompted you to respond during such a difficult time for your family. To you, I was just a name, a ghost in your mom's life whose path had never crossed with yours. In your first message you wanted me to know how much she loved me, how I had been an important part of her life. Maybe it was your knowledge of my bond with her that made you confide in me the severity of her situation, inviting me to join you at that anteroom of the inevitable.

Your tone tasted like hopelessness, and I couldn't help but to picture myself in your role as a daughter, imagining me as an intruder at the side of her hospital bed. Wanting to bring her comfort in that place plagued with bad news and repay with hugs for the voice she had given me as a teen looking to forge my own path. I could not walk up to her, but I could be a friendly stranger to you. I had no other way to thank you for sending that farewell to your mom so that she would hear me saying that I adore her and learn from my own voice all the ways she had left her imprint on me — even if I could not hear her, even if she did not say the goodbye that I would have liked to have.

For someone else that would have been enough, but a fire in me, that of my impulsivity your mom experienced since I entered her sixth-grade classroom, led me to contact you again.

It had been my birthday, the first in many years that I spent without her kindness from the distance, international borders separating us. I missed her and I needed to know how she was doing, how you were holding up. You opened to me as if we had known each other for years.

A few days later, you told me that your sister had seen my birthday marked on the calendar in your mom's kitchen. I was filled with bittersweet tears finding myself infiltrated in her daily life. I confessed to you how in an emotional outburst, I had sent a message to her phone with a picture of us, knowing that she would never see it. Who did this desperate message reach? Perhaps you.

If friendships have a beginning, for me this was the one for ours.

I could no longer stop accompanying you, and I entered your life through the half-open door, imagining that your mom would have liked me to check in on you. I became your distraction by sharing an intriguing novel that I had just read, turning myself into your audiobook in daily installments. You didn't know then how much that helped me — doing something for your mom by being there for you.

The dead minutes of the day became my time to talk to you in monologues. When the book ended, I came up with more ways to keep you company. Between the incessant words of my

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chatty Gemini spirit, you started to get to know me outside of your mom's anecdotes, and I became attached to you as an instant friend.

One sleepless night a month after our first exchange, I felt cold creeping into my chest and the unmistakable presence of your mom. Despite the early hour, I couldn't help but to send you one of my daily distractions believing it would do you good to think about something other than medications and vital signs. When you replied telling me that your mom wasn't with us anymore, my whole soul crumbled.

There was nothing more to say.

Along with the gray cloud that glued itself onto my back came the insecurity of having the right to feel so much for the loss of *your* mom. I thought myself an impostor when seeing her as my mom too. How could I go through this unfathomable grief without being a burden to you?

I should have given you space. I should have kept my feelings to myself and left you alone, but my need to be with her and with you was stronger than my willpower.

It gnawed at me not being able to go to her farewell Mass as I live in another country. You sent me a video of the homily in her honor, audios of the church music, and a photo of the pamphlet that was distributed allowing me to take part in her celebration of life, inviting me to be close to you — her family. When I asked you why you were so good to me, you told me the most generous thing you could have written:

"To my mom, you were another daughter."

That phrase still resonates in my head, validated my feelings and gave me the spot in her life that I thought I had only imagined. I had always loved her as a mom, and I had a sense of being adopted by her as a daughter from the very beginning of our relationship. To have it in words was truly a gift.

I wanted to take care of you and stay by your side, each with our own grief. My sadness amplified every time I put myself in your place, imagining all the gaps in your daily life left by her absence. I wanted to be for you what she once had been for me — a safe place to be true to yourself and honor your feelings. I wanted to remind you to feel grief in your own way while ignoring people’s expectations for you to move on.

I stayed with you, but you also stayed with me. Through the hundreds of messages exchanged, we found our undeniable resemblance. Your mom probably knew how similar we were, and I'm convinced that, in her own way, she brought us close to one another.

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Our conversations had become very deep, having shared strong moments, unruly thoughts, and painful confessions while being so far away. The only thing missing was being able to share it all face to face when an unplanned trip to Mexico happened. Naturally, my first thought was to close the gap between us by meeting you in person. We planned to go out for breakfast the day after I had visited your mom's crypt. I was leaving pieces of my broken heart scattered all over my hometown as I visited her crypt and found memories of times with her in many spots; seeing you would be some of the glue to help put it back together.

I planned to arrive before you to give myself time to calm my nerves, to get a table to sit and write at before seeing you. As you came in, I recognized you from your photos, but I had already felt your presence before I stood up to shorten the distance between us. I gave you the hug that seemed to have been pending for years. You broke down in my arms, and I felt your mom there between us, crying our same tears of absence and of the excitement of a reunion.

It was easy to start that intimate conversation, recognizing your mom's smile in yours. Your sad eyes revealed the serenity of being able to talk with the palette of emotions at your disposal. You painted the image of her last days for me, of the huge hole in your heart, and of the difficulty of spending the first significant dates without her.

Leaving the silent walls of your Virgo essence behind, you were able to share with me in person everything that you had not written in the past weeks, allowing me to be where I had questioned if I truly belonged.

Exchanging anecdotes, we realized that we had known each other for almost three decades through your mom. You opened my eyes to the many things I don’t know about her while confirming the many ways she confided in me. Your mom gave me so much in her lifetime by being a constant guide and caring presence. But now that she's gone, she left me this unbreakable bond with you.

There are blood sisters and others who are a gift from life. I am convinced that we fall into that second category.

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