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### Where the Magic Came From

The evening of January 24, 1995, was dark, windy, and even cold, which was not very common in my city. I could smell the water in the air presaging that a storm was near. Inside the only room on the back porch, sitting on the left side of the bed next to my abuelita, was my mami. Abuela was wearing an old black shawl, the one she had been wearing every evening for the last couple of years. It was not fashionable or expensive looking, but instead comfy and something she had knitted herself. When I sat next to her, I could smell the mint from the ointment she used to rub on her chest, which helped her with a cough she had that never went away; the smoke from the vanilla candle she kept on her nightstand next to her Virgin Mary figure, to whom she was very devoted; and the sweet smell of a life of memories and endless hugs from all of her grandchildren. Mami was sobbing quietly, and nodding her head like a signal of acceptance. I could not hear their conversation, but it seemed like a serious and sad business. I knew Mami was suffering so much, and there was nothing I could say to fix her pain, but then I saw Abuelita cover her with her black shawl and hug her like it was the last time they would see each other. They both cried softly, breathed deeply, and gave each other the most loving smile. After that afternoon, everything changed.

Time has passed, and Abuela is in a better place now, and my mom kept the black shawl with her. It was hers now. The next time I noticed the shawl was when Mami was hugging me, but it was hard to recognize it now that it did not look like much. The color had faded with age,

and I could see the different strings and materials my mami had sewn on to keep the shawl in one piece in hopes of perpetuating its existence. Still, when I felt it, it was like a thousand little cotton balls rubbing against my skin, bringing me nothing but warmth and comfort, but this time when I breathed it in, I perceived something different: I could smell sweet almonds and honey; I sensed Mami's aroma impregnating the shawl. I put it on and could feel Mami's presence too. It was like having her next to me, hugging me and magically healing my suffering and erasing my pain, like only a mother can; after all, it belonged to her now.

When I was little and had my first breakup, Mami wanted to know everything so she could help me get through it, but in the end, all I needed to do was get under her shawl and have her arms wrapped around, hugging me, to bring me peace. During winter in Kentucky when I felt hopeless, having my baby battling for her life at the hospital, Mami and her shawl were there, and that hug gave me the strength to continue. The power of Mami and her shawl was magical, like going to the most peaceful place, no sounds, no pain, just love, and all my feelings were lined up, waiting for their moment to come out; it was soft like rose petals and warm like Mami's hugs.

When I look back on what has been the journey of my life, I always think about the decisions I made and the people who influenced them; my Abuela and especially my Mami have played a significant role in the process. I remember both of them wearing the same black shawl and being strong, hard-working women, who have dedicated their whole lives to provide a future with better opportunities for their children but never forgot to show affection and love. The magical Abuela and Mami's shawl is gone, but I have another one. I did not knit it, and still, it is not fashionable, but it is doing its job. Now, I know that the magic is not in the shawl itself, but

in the love we share when we wear it; the magic is not only in what I can give to those I hug, but in what I receive from those who hug me back.

I love having my daughters next to me under the shawl, hugging me, because I finally understand that the hug between Mami and me, and between my daughters and me is our unique and special way of communicating; that hug can say more than a thousand words.

After all these years, I know that the magic comes from Mami, not from the shawl, but having this shawl with me makes me feel Mami by my side, the same ways she feels Abuela next to her while wearing the old black shawl. The shawl is a symbol and a piece of love that was passed first to Mami, then to me and next to my daughters: “mis lindas.” I never realized how much I needed my mom until I left my home, got married and had daughters. When you have someone so special for so long, you forget to appreciate the little things and take them for granted, until eventually, you no longer have that person. The old shawl is long gone, but the way I used to feel every time Mami hugged me and called me “mi linda” is still the same, after all, what I need is Mami in my life.