

AT MY MOTHER'S FEET

I promised I would do it so I did. Promises are promises, I always say and would like to believe I always mean what I say. It was a way to help out, a way to ease her stresses. Her, my mother that is, stresses, just the everyday living kind when you are ninety-five years old. And me, not so young myself anymore but not believing I am what I am, that is, seventy-two. So, I offered her a reflexology session, that is, a foot massage if you would rather call it like it is.

She settled into her chair, her now smaller frame seemed engulfed by the easy chair, and slowly lifted her tired legs to get her feet onto the chair's matching ottoman. And I, slowly too, and with a bit of caution, tried to find a comfortable kneeling position, an oxymoron when you are my age. Still wearing her walking shoes and socks, I slowly removed them, one piece at a time, taking my time so as to convey unconsciously, the care, love and concern I felt. I wanted her to know and feel this was an act of love, maybe even love making in a way. One shoe off, with one shoe on, two shoes off. Two socks on, then one sock on and now both feet exposed to the dim light, to my eyes, to my impending touch. As I cradled her left foot in my hands, applying a gentle pressure I began to notice ninety-five years of life on them and in them. They were not the smooth, taut skin I imagined nor did they hint at any sense of professionally pedicured nails and toes. They made me stop and stare and try to match them with the mother I knew. They should have been well groomed and flawless, they should have shown strength, they should have..... They were, rather, overpowered by my hands. The nails had become

hardened and cracked and a callous or two told of untold miles walked, miles between home and her husband's store, miles to school with her children, miles of walked errands for she never learned to drive, though had often tried.

I held this lovely foot and stroked the upper part and massaged the sole. An area, the reflexologists say, filled with nerve endings and linked to many internal organs and extremely sensitive to touch. With her eyes closed and breathing slow and even, and my eyes now accustomed to the dim light, I noted more imperfections, especially around the ankles. I did not know that some medications produced swelling of the ankles and perhaps some discoloration as well. How could this condition beset my mother? I noted them and then let them go and got on with my massage. A promise is a promise.

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