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Educated

Isabella León

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ISABELLA LEÓN

Her hands were softly scented with lavender, and her red nail polish was chipped, although she had made an appointment to get that fixed in the morning. Her day started at noon and ended when men stopped buying her drinks. Although her parents revered her as she crawled towards a business degree, she had never known the meaning of work.

Her hands were kept pristine all her life, but they were lovely and clean only because the ones that had come before them were rough and calloused. Her father had a scar that ran along his palm—a relic from his novice days with the sharp end of a curved harvesting knife—and her mother’s arthritis-ridden hands curled unnaturally as they searched for relief.

Her parents had never known the technique she had learned from long nights at the beer pong table, the way her wrists flicked and her friends chanted. They would be glad to know their 60 grand in tuition was being put to good use.

When she reluctantly came home for vacations, she would try to refer to courses like Intro to Psych to impress them with her newfound wisdom. She gestured heavily to her immigrant parents as she explained to them the joys of a college experience they’d never had and the “independence” they were paying for. All the while, her father rubbed his scar.

She had grown used to the tired eyes of her mother and watched as she masterfully ground up peppers in the molcajete. The mesmerizing way the chillies became dust was overlooked as a mundane occurrence in her household. She was used to ignoring the family traditions and her mother’s silent cries for help, heard only in the way she winced in pain while grinding.

In conversation, she threw around the word “exhaustion,” but her manicured hands gave her away. Her parents had clawed their way out of a life of poverty so they could make sure there would never be dirt under her fingernails, and everyone knew it but her.

Layout by Crisanta Wadhams. Photograph by Nina Bridges.