

READING GRADE 8

A. Story

Graduation Day

Even though it was only a mildly warm afternoon in early May, my brow was already covered in sweat as I adjusted the black cap. A few bobby pins clinked on my dresser as I struggled to pin the awkward cap neatly in place. The rough, cheap material didn't fit the shape of my head, but I had never been happier to wear a hat in my life. It wasn't just a hat. It was both a trophy for me and a gift for my mother. Plus, I was sure that Nona would like it a lot better than the torn, bright-yellow polyester hat I wore every day last summer after softball practice. She would always smile and say that at least yellow was a good color for me, as it had been for my mother when she was young.



With that thought, my eyes darted to the cardboard box of photographs at my feet. Unable to find my prized photo on the top of the stack, I frantically dug through the box of carelessly packed picture frames. I scolded myself for doing such a bad job of packing. The last two weeks had been so busy, with all of my time divided among studying, taking final exams, and trying to pack up my belongings. When my fingers grazed the familiar, sharp edges of the tarnished frame, I knew I had found it. I pulled the frame close to me and gazed once again at the faraway, faded face in the picture.

My mother had been a beautiful young woman with sharp black eyes and wavy, dark hair. I had always loved her dress in the picture. It was the color of daffodils, with small black checks on it and a wide black belt. She seemed so elegant and formal, but then again, she had only had a handful of pictures taken in her short life. In those days in Chile, you didn't get your picture taken on an ordinary day around the house. I wished that I could have known her.

Nona had always said how smart and brave my mother had been and that she had always wanted to go to college. Nona would never have been bold enough to leave home alone for a country where people didn't speak her language, and she claimed she would never have known how to get a job as a seamstress on her own. My mother's generation was a lot more independent than Nona's. Nona surely would have never come to the United States if my mother hadn't initiated the move first and set everything up for her, but I was glad that both of them had come.

I quietly placed the frame back in the cardboard box, this time wedging it carefully in a corner where I knew it would stay. After I had finally gotten the cap firmly in place, I paused to stare at my reflection for a few minutes, focusing intently on my own black eyes. Today, when I walked across the stage to accept my college diploma, I would achieve the goal my mother had always dreamed about.