

# Warrior's Blood

by Hannah Solis

"Hannah, Emma, I need to tell you guys something." My sister and I turn our bodies around to face our Aunt Noemi.

"My cancer is back." After hearing that, I can see her lips moving, but I can't hear the words she's saying. All sounds became muffled. A ringing in my ear almost. Time stopped. My heart fell to my stomach.

Again? She has cancer again? But she was just declared free? Can she...can she beat it again?"

My auntie makes her way around the couch, our eyes following her, and sits next to us. "Don't worry. I beat it once. I can do it again. Will you pray with me?" She reaches her hands towards us. I take her hand and my sister's. "Let's pray."

I can feel my eyes start to water, but I tell myself to hold them back. "I have to be strong." I open my eyes after praying, and I give my auntie a big hug, "Te quiero mucho" I say quietly. I don't really know Spanish, but I do know how to say I love you. Those were the first Spanish words I learned from my family.

"Yo Tambien", my aunt tells me as she continues to hold my hands and smiles at me brightly. She is a warrior. It seems to run in the family.



"Hannah, it's time to pray," my aunt tells me quietly while reaching her hand out. I take her hand as she leads me to the altar. She gets on her knees and looks back at me, mouthing the words, "Come, like me". I looked around the room because my mind was convinced that others were watching me. "But Auntie, I don't know how to pray." "It's okay, I'll teach you." my auntie pats the ground next to her. I slowly sit on the ground and adjust myself to mimic her stance. "Repeat after me." She closes her eyes. She slightly squints one of her eyes open to check that I was following what she was doing. "Close your eyes. Now, we start with Heavenly father" I repeat after her. "Then we say what we are grateful for and what we need. You try." As a seven-year-old would pray for, I thanked God for my family, for food, for everything. I prayed that I could have ice cream after church and that we could go to Disneyland. I guess a seven-year-old didn't have much to worry about, "Amen."

I get on my knees. Except this time, I don't naively pray for things like ice cream or Disneyland. My prayers don't sound very articulately with big, old-fashioned words. In my prayer, I simply plead with God to make my Auntie healthy again. "My Aunt has cancer again. Everyone says she is strong, and I know she is, but she is also human. So please, make her healthy again."

My Aunt was born in Acapulco, Guerrero, Mexico. My auntie became a school teacher, she worked with special children.

It's not easy to become a school teacher. She was proud of her accomplishment. I could tell, from the way she tells me stories of when she was a teacher, I see a mix of emotions that stir within her. Her excitable expression of when she was in front of the class teaching. As she finishes her story, her expression fills with sadness, feeling nostalgia from when she used to be a teacher. She married and had her three children, all now adults with their own beautiful families. She must've felt she was living happily ever after. But her dreams were shattered.

To be honest, I don't know much about her past in Mexico, stories not meant for a child's ears, maybe. As I got older, I came to know one of the main reasons she came to America was to escape her abusive husband. He beat her. I don't know much about him, just that he was not a good person. Black and blue and in pain. The monster of the man who preyed on her because she was weaker than him. It was hard for her to get away from him. We often hear domestic violence survivors stories. People's responses are always, "Why didn't they leave?" Little do they know there is so much more to their stories. The way fear freezes us as an attempt to protect us. How love makes us stay just a little longer. How hope robs us of the reality of our situations. How she hid her bruises from the world, so she could continue the image of a happy wife who has everything; everyone else envies.

With every hit her hope to return to how it once was, leaving, wincing on the floor, she made up her mind, she took her children and ran. Ran away from the monster and kept running until they were safe. She ran with her children until they reached America. She came to America for safety and a new start.

However, she couldn't keep being a school teacher since she wasn't a U.S. citizen, but she became a house cleaner, to supply for her children. To give them a life filled with American dreams and opportunities. I can't imagine the sorrow she must have felt from living in comfort to being scared every night to having your dreams taken away from you. From living in luxury to living in the projects in LA. My auntie was living happily ever after, but not like the ones in fairy tales. There was no knight in shining armor that came, saved her from the villain, and everyone lived happily ever after. No, she had to put on the armor herself and fight for her own happily ever after. Now, she's a grandmother. But I don't understand why now she has to have cancer. Why her? Not once, but twice?

Fighting...surviving...must be in my family's blood. We have warrior blood.