

LIFE MARKS

Diana Continenza

"Come on, Becky! Our appointment is for 2:00 and we can't be late because I still need to find shoes before the limo arrives!"

Jane's voice echoed up through the stairwell and into my bedroom, but it barely registered in my mind. "Senior prom," I whispered to myself as I touched the beautiful ivory satin of my long ruffled gown. The dress was a real find, only sixteen dollars from the local second-hand store. It was sure to stand out in the crowd, as most of the other girls had chosen the basic short black dress. I could feel a little smile beginning to form when I thought about what my date would think. I would have been perfectly content to show up at the prom by myself, but Jane insisted that I have a date. "Poor Jane," I thought to myself. She was torn between her loyalty to me as a 'best' friend since our early days at camp, and her disapproval of my eccentric ways. Nevertheless, she had persuaded her boyfriend's cousin to accompany me to the prom. She had also persuaded me to spend a ridiculous amount of money 'getting the works--hair, make-up and manicure' done at a big name salon downtown.

"Becky!" Jane's voice, much closer now, startled me back from my thoughts.

"What world are you in? Are you coming or not?" she asked rather impatiently from my bedroom door.

"Yes, Jungle Jane, I'm ready," I said using the childhood nickname that always made her giggle.

"You don't wear gloves, do you dear?" the manicurist asked while examining my hands and shaking her head in disgust. "It is going to take a lot of work to make these look decent!"

I refrained from telling her what I thought out of respect to Jane who was a regular in the salon. I glanced over to where a middle-aged woman was

painting what looked to me like dried blood on Jane's manicured nails and engaging her in excited conversation. Jane caught my gaze, smiled, and waved with her free hand. 'Very sophisticated' was how she had described my hair and make-up. I felt more like a cheap whore ready to ignite into flames from all the hair spray they had used to bond my hair.

"Becky, soak your hands in here for ten minutes," said the manicurist, dipping my hands into a warm liquid. She started to tell me something about needing to wait on another customer, it being such a busy day and all, but my mind began to wander again before I could catch the end of her sentence.

"That's right, Rebecca! First you fold the dough, then press, then turn and then you start again. Fold, press, turn. Fold, press, turn," Nanna instructed. My small fingers raced to keep up with Nanna's on the small piece of dough she had given me to work with.

"Can we make the curly pasta today?" I asked trying not to fall off the chair I was kneeling on so that I could see above Nanna's large kitchen table. "Of course, Rebecca. Maybe curly pasta will curl your hair," Nanna said teasingly. She touched my nose quickly and then pushed the old toaster in front of me so I could see the mark she had made with white flour. I watched her hands, which had returned to their repetitive task, closely and with great admiration. I loved Nanna's hands! They were wrinkled and bent and colored with brown spots. I compared them with my own smooth, dimpled hands and was disappointed. How I longed to have hands like Nanna's! I loved the way they looked while making pasta, or while turning the pages of a book, or while cradling my baby brother, Jason. They always seemed to know what to do, unlike my own hands that Nanna sometimes called 'slippery'.

"Rebecca, if the dough starts to stick then you can do this," Nanna said and proceeded to pour a little oil in her hands. She rubbed them together and I watched in fascination as the coat of oil gave her hands a shiny glaze. The soft light in the warm kitchen danced on her glistening, wrinkled hands as she mastered that night's dinner.

"Nanna," I asked, "what are those marks on your hands?" Nanna laughed and held out her hand so that I could see.

"These are life marks," she explained, "The older I get, the more they come! I have one for all of the important times in my life. See this one. This one is for your Grandpa and forty-five years of marriage! And here is another for the day when I had my first baby, your Uncle Louie! And this sad looking one over here, that comes from the day when I lost my dear sister, Hannah."

I stared at Nanna's experienced hands in wonder and looked at her with a new realization. Nanna's life extended far beyond my brother and me. Her seasoned hands gave evidence of a lifetime of joy and pain, of cherished memories, and valuable lessons. I looked into Nanna's dark eyes in time to see a single stray tear escape. Nanna returned my gaze, held out her hand once more, and smiled.

"See this large one, Rebecca. This one is my favourite," she said with a slight pause, "because this one is for you!"

"Becky, you look stunning!" Jane whispered as I struggled with the zipper of my dress. "Thanks, Jane. You look great too!" I said, turning to admire her in a flattering, red and beaded dress. "I think I hear my Mom offering the guys some milk and cookies. Maybe you should run to their rescue. I'll be down in a minute."

"O.K.," Jane said, "Don't be too long."

I stared in the mirror and had to admit that I really did look beautiful. I grabbed my small purse and quickly threw in my lipstick and blush. I reached for my eyeliner, and then stopped. I glanced again into the mirror at my reflection. My thoughts returned to Nanna, dead now for two years. "I resemble her," I thought contentedly. Then, without knowing why, I took my brown eyeliner, held it against my manicured hand and coloured in my first lifemark!