CARROT CAKE

by Itzel Montoya Hernandez
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Age 9
Tomorrow is Saturday, and Samuel is excited because on Saturdays, he visits his Grandma Luz. They are going to make their favorite desserts like fresas con crema and carrot cake. Baking with her makes him happy. On Saturdays, Samuel gets to sleep over at Grandma Luz’s, and she tells the best bedtime stories because she would use voices and action. Whenever there was a special occasion, Grandma Luz would be there. She would never miss it. Honestly, Grandma Luz is Samuel’s favorite person in the whole world.

While Samuel was packing his bag for tomorrow, his parents came in. They didn’t look too happy. Actually, it looked like mom had been crying. “Son come sit down. We need to talk,” said dad. Samuel left what he was doing and went to sit next to his parents. “Samuel,” his father started, “you won’t be able to go to your grandma’s house tomorrow.” Samuel looked disappointed. “Why?” he asked. His mom spoke through tears, “She is sick and has to go to the doctor.” Samuel could tell that it was serious. He didn’t want to make his parents more stressed, so he didn’t insist on going, even though he was disappointed.
Throughout the whole of next week, Samuel thought about going to see his grandma every day. He couldn’t wait because they had a lot of catching up to do. When Friday came, Samuel raced home to pack his bag, so he could prepare to see Grandma Luz. When he got home from school, his mom was on the phone. His dad was standing next to her, holding her up. Mom collapsed onto the floor, and she was crying, loudly.

“Mom? Dad?” Both of Samuel’s parents looked at him with tears in their eyes. His mom said, “Son I need to tell you something, but you need to be strong.” “What happened? Mom?” “You can’t go visit your Grandma Luz anymore.” “Is she still sick?” Mom began to sob some more. Dad reached out his hand to pull Samuel into a hug and said, “No, she passed away, and that means you can’t see her anymore.” Samuel didn’t understand what his parents were telling him, but he felt very sad and started to cry.
STAGE 1: DENIAL

It wasn’t possible that his grandma passed away because that would mean no more special events, no more bedtime stories, no more baking, and worst of all no more hugs. His parents had to be lying to him, and his grandma was still alive. Samuel pulled away from his parents and went to his room. It was Friday which means he needed to pack his bag, so he could go see Grandma Luz. What mom and dad said isn’t true. She just went away for a little bit, but she’ll be back tomorrow.
As he began shoving items into his bag, he noticed something move out of the corner of his eye. He looked up. Perched on the edge of his bed was a jaguar. It looked at Samuel and spoke. “What are you doing?” Stunned, Samuel stuttered a reply, “I’m p-p-packing to go to my grandma’s house. W-w-what are you?” “Me?” the alebrije replied. “I’m an alebrije. I’m here to help you.” Samuel looked confused. “Help me, with what?” The alebrije hopped off the edge of the bed and moved closer to Samuel. “Help you move on. Right now, you’re hurting because your grandma died.” “She didn’t die!” shouted Samuel. “She just went away for a while.” The alebrije looked at Samuel. “You’re pretending that she is still here because you love her.”
Samuel took a deep breath in and sat on the bed as he exhaled. “I can’t believe this is happening.” The alebrije sat next to Samuel on the bed. “I know it’s hard. You must be feeling confused and hurt. You had plans with your Grandma Luz, and now, you can’t do any of those plans with her.” A tear began to fall down Samuel’s face. “I just, I just... she is my favorite person in the whole world, and I didn’t get a chance to say goodbye. Never got a last hug. Never had a last bedtime story.” Samuel began to cry even more. The alebrije laid its head on Samuels shoulder. “What was your favorite thing about her?” Samuel smiled. “I loved how she was always there for me, but now, now she’ll never be there again!” Samuel began to feel angry.
STAGE 2: ANGER

While he packed his bag, he felt his face getting hot from the anger he felt. He was mad at his parents for not letting him see his grandma one more time but especially at his grandma Luz for leaving him without saying goodbye. “It’s okay to feel angry about not seeing your grandma anymore, but instead of being mad at your parents, how about you talk to me” said the alebrije. Samuel faced the alebrije and said, “I don’t get why she left without saying goodbye. Did she stop loving me?” “No, she didn’t stop loving you. It was simply her time to go, and she had no choice in that”

Samuel didn’t believe the alebrije, and he got mad at it as well. His breathing started to get heavy, and he felt like throwing something. Samuel saw his iPad on his bed and flung it across the room. That wasn’t enough so he aggressively threw all his stuffed animals on the floor while yelling, “WHY WOULD YOU LEAVE ME?” over again until he was tired.
Samuel looked at the alebrije jaguar and asked, “If you’re here to help me why don’t you take me to see my grandma Luz again?” “No Samuel, I am here to help you heal. We can talk about your grandma, so you can understand your feelings and what we can do to help you feel better.” Samuel thought about what the alebrije said but he responded with “NO I want to see my grandma right now!”
STAGE 3: BARGAINING

“Please let me go see her. I’ll do anything” Samuel said with a calmer voice. He started cleaning up the stuffed animals off the floor and neatly putting them back on his bed. “Look I’m cleaning everything up” as he walked across the room to pick up his iPad. The alebrije said to him, “Samuel your grandma Luz passed away and when someone passes away you can’t see them again in real life.”

“Please alebrije I’ll do all the chores, and my homework without complaining. I’ll be a really good son to my parents I promise.” Just as the alebrije was about to speak Samuel cut him off and said “Please let me go see her you can have all my stuffed animals. Look you can even have my favorite teddy bear that my grandma gave me when I was little.”
“Samuel there is nothing you can do to bring her back, but you can remember your times together by looking at pictures or videos. You can also remember her on the Day of the Dead when we honor our relatives that have passed away.” “It’s not the same, I want to see her again one last time, so I can say goodbye. I want to hear her voice again and have one last hug” Samuel said as his voice started to tremble.
Thinking about his grandma’s hugs made him feel sad, and he started to cry. He was going to miss everything about her. She was his favorite person, and now she’s gone. The alebrije pulled Samuel into a hug to comfort him. For some reason the hug felt so familiar, and the smell of carrot cake started to fill the room. “It’s okay to cry Samuel; it’s a natural thing we do when we feel sad and need to express our emotions.” The alebrije kept hugging him until he stopped crying.
Crying had helped Samuel, but he still felt sad. The alebrije suggested to do stuff that he liked such as playing soccer or go watch his favorite movie. Samuel didn’t feel like doing that because it only made him think more of grandma. She would go watch all his soccer games he had. When he went to her house, they would watch his favorite movie together all the time and it just made him sadder that he wouldn’t be able to do that stuff anymore.

“Samuel, I know you’re going to miss your grandma but think about how she felt.” “What do you mean?” Asked Samuel. “Your grandma was sick, and she probably felt tired. Now that she’s passed away, she is no longer sick and is at peace.” The alebrije said as he wiped a tear coming down Samuel’s cheek. Samuel thought about what the alebrije had said and he hadn’t looked at it like that. He was right though his grandma probably felt very sick, and she didn’t have to go through that anymore.
SAMUEL was starting to realize that even as much as he wanted his grandma back it wouldn’t be possible. He thought about all the things the alebrije had told him and he was starting to like the idea of honoring her. “Alebrije how can I honor my grandma?” The alebrije smiled and said “You can honor her by making an alter on the Day of the Dead. You can put her favorite things and put up pictures of her.” The thought of decorticating something for his grandma made him smile thinking that his grandma would love it.
What am I supposed to do when it’s not the day of the dead?” “You can continue to keep doing the things you guys did together. Since you guys liked baking you can still do that and remember how much fun it was. By doing all the things you did with her it’s like if she was there with you.” The alebrije also said, “You also talk with your parents about your grandma and they can tell you what they remember of her. During a time like this is when you need to be together as a family and get through it together.
Samuel surprisingly felt a bit better, and it was as if a pressure was lifted off his chest. “Alebrije, thank you so much for everything. It really means a lot to me.” “That’s what I’m here for.” The alebrije helped Samuel create an offrenda in his bedroom. Samuel used the picture of him and his grandma as the centerpiece. Once finished, they said goodbye to each other, and then the alebrije went flying away through the window. Samuel went back out into the living room and hugged his parents. “Mom, dad, let’s make a carrot cake.”