

*A Gift for Abuelita: Celebrating the Day of the Dead*  
*Un regalo para Abuelita: En celebración del Día de los Muertos*  
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This morning's story is adapted from the book *A Gift for Abuelita* by Nancy Luenn.

Rosita and her grandmother spent every day together. Her mother was very busy, but Abuelita always had time for Rosita.

"Look Rosita, look," her grandmother said. She held up three stands of yarn. "Each takes a turn crossing over the other. One stand alone can be broken, but when they are woven together, they make a cord that is strong. Like my love for you and your love for me." With patient hands, she taught Rosita how to braid.

One morning, they made tortillas. Rosita loved the sound the tortillas made in her grandmother's hands – pla-pla-pla.

Abuelita scolded the day she discovered Rosita pulling up plants in the garden. "I'm weeding" protested Rosita. "Those are not weeds!" replied Abuelita. She showed Rosita what to pull and what to save. "These little plants are chiles. We will harvest them together. This year you can help make salsa. Rosita was pleased. She liked helping her grandmother cook.

Then Abuelita got sick. Soon she was too weak to work in the garden. Rosita sat by her grandmother's bed, braiding and telling her stories. "The chiles are fat now," she told Abuelita. "When you are well, we will pick them together."

But before the chiles could ripen, Abuelita died.

Rosita missed her grandmother very much. She missed the soap scent of her grandmother's dress, and the pla-pla-pla of her hands shaping the dough for tortillas. She missed the strong warmth of her grandmother's arms. She wanted to hear Abuelita's voice whisper "good night."

"Abuelita is in heaven with the angels," Mama told Rosita at bedtime. "She will watch over you while you are sleeping."

Rosita did not want Abuelita to be with the angels. She wanted her home.

"We need Abuelita here" Rosita told her grandfather in October. Her grandfather nodded and his brown eyes glistened. "Yes, I miss her too." He said. "You can show Abuelita how much you miss her by making her gift for when she visits on Day of the Dead."

On the Day of the Dead families remember the people they love who have died. Each family makes an altar to welcome the dead and everyone makes gifts for the altar.

But what can I make? Rosita wondered.

“What are you making for the altar?” she asked her brother, Carlos.

“I am making a lizard for Uncle Antonio. He always liked lizards.”

Rosita’s father was in the marigold garden. “What are you making?” she asked him.

“A harvest of flowers for the altar and graves. Grandfather Leon loved these flowers.”

Rosita found her mother in the kitchen. “What are you making?” she asked her.

“Chicken in mole for Aunt Dolores. It was her favorite.”

“What are you making?” Rosita asked her grandfather. “Is it for Abuelita?”

“Yes, I am weaving this blanket to keep her soul warm.”

Rosita remembered something she knew how to do. She asked her grandfather for 3 long stands of yarn. Then she sat near his loom in the courtyard and started to braid.

She braided wherever she went – while her family went to the market – where they sold some flowers and bought candles and incense, apples and bread of the dead.”

As often as she could Rosita worked on the braid. The cord reached from the tips of her fingers past her elbow.

In the afternoon, Rosita’s family prepared the altar. Mama and Rosita brought food from the kitchen – tortillas and chicken in brown mole sauce. Rosita helped her mother light candles for each soul they were remembering – one for Uncle Antonio, one for Grandfather Leon, one for Aunt Dolores and one for dear Abuelita.

Then everyone put their gifts on the altar. Everyone except Rosita.

“Where is your braid?” asked Mama. “It isn’t finished yet,” Rosita said.

All afternoon friends came to visit and added their gifts to the altar and Rosita hurried to greet them. “When will I see her?” Abuelita asked Carlos. “Silly” said Carlos, “You won’t be able to see her – Spirits are invisible.”

“How will I know she is here?” Rosita asked her Papa.

“You will feel that she is near” said Papa.

How will it feel? Rosita wondered

The next day Rosita and her family went to the graveyard. There they washed the gravestones and pulled the weeds until the graves looked new again. Then they spread a picnic on ground. As they ate they told stories of the people that they loved.

“Will Abuelita be here soon?” Rosita asked.

“Think of all the things you loved about Abuelita,” Mama suggested. “Then she will know where to find you.”

Rosita braided her cord and remembered. She remembered her grandmother’s husky old voice, and her hands making the tortillas. She remembered the tales Abuelita told while she cooked chiles for salsa. Rosita braided, remembering all she had loved.

At twilight, Rosita finally finished her braid. It was as tall as she was. Rosita sat by her grandmother’s grave, stroking the cord with her fingers. Into it she had braided the things she remembered about her grandmother.

Rosita closed her eyes and she began to feel arm as if she were safe in her grandmother’s arms. Soft wings brushed her face like a kiss. Then, in her hear, a husky voice whispered, “Good night Rosita”.

“Oh Abuelita you came! Look I made this for you.” Rosita laid her gift over the grave. And she knew that, like the braid, the cord of their love was too strong to be broken.