

## Concurso de Calaveritas 2022: Honorable Mention for Short Fiction

Tu regreso

By Edgar Chavez/ Por Edgar Chávez

I was startled awake by the loud strums of guitars. My mom was blasting “La Llorona”, it was Día de Muertos. Ever since I can remember she has played this song on this day. “Esta canción me recuerda a mi mamá, por eso en este día la escucho,” She would always tell me. This day was important to my family, we would set up our Ofrenda, cook and pray for the ancestors before us... every year. Nothing different, nothing changed, the same songs every year, and honestly... I don't think I fully believe in this Día de Muertos business. I think about my siblings who have passed away every day, why should one day be any special. They can't come visit me, they're gone and I have accepted that, why can't my family. All these thoughts run through my head as I shower and get ready for yet another horrible day at school. Halloween was yesterday so that means everyone will be talking about the killer parties they went to and how many people they slept with. And, of course, I will be sitting in the back of the class just listening to the same idiots who have run my school for the past four years. “Te apuras después de la escuela! So you can help us with the ofrenda mijo!” my mom yells out to me as I drag my lifeless body to my car.

I get to school and drive past the preppy soccer team members with all their cheerleader girlfriends. Now it's not that I hated these people, but more like envied. I wanted to be a part of them. I've always been the weird kid, I could never connect with anyone. The only people who understood me were my siblings. We were so close, and they never judged me. Maybe because they had to cuz we were siblings, but regardless I loved them and they loved me. I realize I'm

just parked behind their cars just staring off into space. They honk at me to get out of the way. So embarrassing. The day drags on and on until it's lunch and I have to eat my arroz con pollo my mom packed for me because she doesn't waste money on food "si hay comida en la casa." I sit in the back of the cafeteria with the smell of home cooking filling my general area of course when I hear this booming voice come from the front of the cafeteria.

"AY AY AY AY!" howled Hector Martinez as he stood on a table. Hector was the school's token Hispanic, dark brown hair which perfectly complimented his golden tan skin. Every day he wore a jersey which hugged his body to the point where you could see the outline of every ab he had. All I could do was stare in awe. Everyone loved him, he was the school's hottest dude, and he's the best soccer player this school has ever seen. I wanted to get to know him, due to the fact that we are two of the only Hispanic people who attend our school but then again no one ever noticed me.

"It 's Día de Muertos Amigos! And to celebrate the icons that came before us from this school, I'm throwing a huge party at my house! I know y'all partied yesterday but we only live once! Be there to celebrate the dead!" he yelled as an office assistant dragged him off the table. "Dress code? Dress your best! And wear your skull makeup!" This was it, my chance to have at least one normal high school experience without anyone knowing who I was or judging me off the way I look! All I had to do was find a way to get out off staying home to work on this stupid ofrenda.

The whole drive home I spent thinking, *Como me voy a salir de esto, por Dios*. I pull into my house and it is lined with rows and rows of papel picado and cempasúchil filled my walkway. *Siempre*, I thought as I walked in. The smell of Mole filled the whole house, it was me and my siblings' favorite dish. "Mami, ya llegué! Huele rico!" I yell as I start looking for an outfit for

tonight. I went through my brother's old clothes, I kept it for memories but now this was necessary. He knew how to dress, while my wardrobe tends to be more dark goth, even though I am not really goth. I found his favorite bomber jacket, jeans, and his Air Forces. I walked out to meet my mom in the kitchen. "A ver, ven para aca, try th-" she stammers as she sees my outfit. "Leo, why are you wearing Brian's clothes? Is it for the ofrenda?" *Crap what do I say... Ugh! Se un hombre and tell her straight up!* "Mami, I want to go to this Día de Muertos party tonight." All she could do was stare in confusion. I wonder what was going through her head. "What are you talking about? Hoy es Día de Muertos! Hoy es de familia! You are gonna stay here and help with the ofrenda because it is the right thing to do!" All I could do was stare, my one chance and I was not going to miss it. "No Ma! I'm going to that party. I never do anything because no one likes me! This ofrenda is so dumb, our family is gone and they aren't coming back!" I yelled back at her. I instantly regretted it the minute I saw her face change but I wasn't going to take it back. I stood by it! "Si quieres irte a ese porri vete, but just know you will not be able to come back into this house!" she said, wiping the tears on her face. "Fine! No te necesito! I hate you!" as I ran out and grabbed my stuff. I knew she would get over it but I was hurt and she was hurt but that would have to wait. Tonight is my night to step out of my shell. I wiped the tears from my eyes and almost hit a car. Luckily I swerved out of the way, that would've been tragic.

I got to my uncle's place to finish getting ready and to do my makeup. Luckily mi tio always had a spare key and was out of town this weekend. I needed to look unrecognizable tonight so I consulted the only thing that could help me, TikTok. I scrolled through a plethora of tutorials until I found the right one. It was perfect, not that many details but just the right amount of color to make people notice. Every stroke of my paintbrush felt like I was shedding my old skin and becoming someone new. I looked in the mirror and I didn't see that weird lonely kid at

the back of the class. I saw a blank slate ready to be filled with amazing memories. Oh yeah...  
Qué comience la fiesta.

I walked to the party because thankfully it was just a few blocks away, the fresh autumn breeze helped me keep walking every time I got scared and tried to turn back. *It's 9 pm*, I thought as I stood outside of Hector's house. It wasn't so different from my house, Calaveras lined the driveway, Papel picado hung everywhere, and the whole place was also covered in cempasúchil. I weirdly felt at home, which made me miss it, but I brushed that thought away and gained the confidence to finally walk into the party. As soon as I walked in, I saw almost the entire senior body there. It looked like a scene from a movie in slow motion. Boys jumping up and down from the excitement of beer pong, the ridiculous amount of couples making out without stopping to take a breath, and the very attractive people dancing all up on each other on the dance floor. It was almost comical but so alluring that it pulled me in. I walked into the kitchen and made myself a drink, a long island. "That seems like a pretty strong drink, sure you can handle it?" a voice says behind my ears.

It sent shivers down my spine but I quickly responded, "I've been drinking since I was fifteen, this is nothing." I turned with a smirk on my face.

"Can I try it?" I look up to see the most irresistible hazel green eyes with a jawline that perfectly outlines his face. I stop dead in my tracks when I notice his letterman jacket, embroidered was his name Hector— *Oh my god! This is HECTOR.*

"I'm Hector, and you are?" he nudged me while taking my drink from my hand and taking a sip. He winced at the taste of all the liquor. "Wow, um you surely can drink."

"I uh... I am uh... Leo" All I could do was stammer over my words because I was in disbelief that the most attractive boy in school was talking to me. "Well, Leo, can you make me

one? They're pretty strong but I could get used to it." I down my drink to get some liquid courage and start pouring.

"Of course, don't mind if I do." He jumps on the counter watching my every move while I pour both of our drinks.

"Aye, Hector! Ven Pa'ca! It's our turn for beer pong!" "Ay voy"

His Spanish was like a soft melody playing in my ears, he grabs his drink and starts walking away. *Great Leo, you made your mark, as a bartender.*

"Hey, come on" he grabs my hand and it sends butterflies straight to my stomach as he says, "I need a good luck charm, guapo." I stand off to the side as he greets his fellow teammates and starts playing. I contemplated walking away but I couldn't take my eyes off of him. It was so easy for him to interact with everyone. It was amazing. He glanced over to me and winked as he made the winning shot. After he finished playing, he motioned me over to the dance floor, one of my favorite Spanish songs was playing. I don't know what came over me but I let loose and began to dance. He stared at me almost in awe and chuckled.

"What? I know I don't know how to dance but I love this song" I said with a smile on my face.

"No, it's nothing. You just look really cute that's all."

I could feel myself turning as red as a tomato but thankfully my makeup hid that. The night went on and we danced and danced until finally everyone decided to go jump in the pool as an act of solidarity for the dead. Hector cheered his friends on then turned to grab my hand and walked me upstairs. The house was quiet and you could only hear the muffled party goes on the patio. He showed me to this room covered with Star Wars posters and a genuine lightsaber displayed on top of his dresser with lights to show it off. I could not believe something so geeky

could be in Hector's room. He saw me looking at it and began, "That lightsaber was used in one of the actual movies, bought it in mint condition. Cost me an arm and a leg."

"So why haven't I seen you around before, Mr. Leo? You look like someone I would love to get to know."

I stammered, "Oh- Uh well... I'm just not one of those people that other people notice, I tend to be the one who never gets the attention."

"Well, you have my undivided attention."

My hands were getting clammy, and I could feel my heart racing. It felt like it was going a mile a minute. I tried to speak but there was a tremor in my voice. "I- I- am also Hispanic. I tend to avoid speaking Spanish though because I think I sound dumb."

"That could not be possible, a ver háblame en español, quiero oírte."

"Okay pues, solo lo hago porque estamos solos, y me pones nervioso."

"See it's not bad at all, it is so adorable."

He just smiled at me and I giggled because I could just feel so happy at that moment in time. We talked for what felt like hours. I had never felt this way before, as we talked he understood me and I actually felt seen. No one aside from my siblings ever really got me and for someone like him to do so felt amazing. We shared old family stories, we bonded over shows and movies, and geeked out over a lot of similar stuff. I felt like I had made a genuine friend and wished for more honestly. We ended up dozing off on his bed and when I woke up it was almost four thirty in the morning. I didn't want to wake him so I got up and headed towards the door.

"Where are you going, guapo? It's late."

"Yeah very late, meaning I gotta get home before my parents kill me."

"Let me take you home then, don't want nothing happening to you."

He drove me home while old norteañas played, and I felt safe. It reminded me of home when my parents would get so drunk all they wanted was to listen to sad music. *Damn, I should really apologize, they didn't deserve that.* We got to my house and the street was silent, only the crickets were making sounds. I got off expecting him to drive off but he walked me to the door. I was shivering my butt off, the autumn breeze had turned into an autumn cold front.

“Here take my jacket, it'll keep you warm.”

“So I hope I'll be able to talk to you on Monday, without the makeup on. It'll give you a chance to return my jacket. The boy behind the mask.” I was scared to know what if he saw the real me, would his actions change.

“You just might. But just as an FYI you won't be getting this jacket back. I love it too much.” He was about to leave when I grabbed his hand. “Um Hector? Thanks.”

“For what?”

“For making tonight memorable, I have never had such a fun experience before. You made it amazing.”

“Well, si me permites, I'll make it even better.” He leaned in and I felt his warm hand trace the outline of my face. I almost melted in my shoes. He then kissed me and his kips felt like soft pillows that just perfectly enveloped mine.

“Good night, guapo, I'll see you Monday.” he said as he walked to his truck and drove off.

I walked in feeling on cloud nine then I saw my parents asleep on the couch. They must've waited for me. They looked like they had been crying. I felt so good a second ago now I feel like total scum because they look like they've been crying. Let me pay my respects to the ofrenda. I walk up to the ofrenda lit up with candles and next to my siblings' pictures and I see

my picture there as well. It was my senior portraits that I had taken two months ago for graduation. *Why is my picture on the ofrenda? Are they actually trying to say I'm dead to them. They couldn't be that mad at me.*

I couldn't help but to feel the tears well up in my eyes, when I suddenly had a flashback to earlier today. I was crying and driving, and I couldn't see because of the tears in my eyes and I almost hit a car and swerved on the street. I was safe, yet I wasn't. *Oh my God, I swerved off the main road, I went down the hill and hit a tree. Why couldn't I remember that? Did I die?!*

I tried to wake my mom but she wouldn't budge. "Mami! Mami! Wake up! What's going on?" I couldn't stop crying, It felt like my heart was breaking and there was no fixing it. My tears fell on my mom and she moved. She got up slowly and nudged awake my dad and she felt a cool breeze.

"Papi, esta aqui! He finally made it." she said as he voiced trembled with tears in her eyes. "Leosito... ay papito lindo. I'm so sorry I said those horrible things to you. I didn't understand why you needed to go, and I might never pero I'm sorry, bebe." She fell to the floor as my dad helped her up. I couldn't take it, I hurt my family because I was selfish.

"Mami Perdón! I love you so much I did not want to leave this earth mad at you. I'm sorry!" I yelled as I pulled her into my arms and she felt it. She grabbed me and it felt amazing to feel her embrace even for just a few seconds. Even without hearing me, it's like she knew exactly what I said.

"I forgive you, flaco. You are my son and I will forever love you mijo, and until we meet again I'll miss you." She began to sing to me the lyrics of "Amor Eterno", a song that always helped put me to sleep when I was a kid. We stayed there for a while until she fell back to sleep



and I was ready to go, but then all I could think of was Hector. He would never know who I was. I needed to at least say goodbye.

I walked over to his house before the sun came up and found him asleep. His house was somewhat orderly. He must have come home to clean up after he dropped me off. I found him asleep in his bed barely covered with his blanket so I took off his jacket and laid it on him. I was so sad that I would never get to see him again, but happy that I got at least one night. No one could take that away. I gave him a peck on the cheek goodbye and went home.

Día de Muertos was almost over and I didn't know how much time I had left or where to go, I was lost. As the sun rose a light came from my dark hallways. Two figures walk towards me and all I could do was sigh in relief. It was my sibling. My eyes got cloudy and I cried, it had been a while since I had seen them.

“What about Día de Muertos not being real? Because it looks like it's pretty real to me” Brian's voice wrapped around me like a soft warm blanket.

“Let's go, naco, it's time” my older sister said as she grabbed my hand and walked me to the doorway.

“Maybe in the next life though, don't drive while you're crying, genius.” my brother joked as he walked right behind us. All I could do was laugh with tears rolling down my face. I felt happy again.

Hector woke up that morning and saw his letterman jacket on him. He was very confused but decided to go outside and get the morning paper. He brewed his cafe con leche as he read the latest story. *Local Family Mourns Death of Last Child.*

“Wait, that's Leo's house, that doesn't make sense.” He turned the page and saw my picture on the back. His eyes widened, it's like he was able to recognize me without the makeup.

He quickly realized what I did. I was a ghost who had just recently died, and because I was in an ofrenda I was able to be in the physical realm. Who knows why he could see me, all I know is that I am glad he could.

A year later, Día de Muertos came around and we went to go visit my parents, how I missed them so. They made mole, and the house was lined with papel picado, and cempasúchil filled the driveway. I was home and I loved it.

Although I had a feeling I was being called to another ofrenda though, and as I walked the path of cempasúchil lined on the streets from my house to there I realized where I ended up. I walked up to his room and looked around, nothing had changed except the lightsaber display was gone. In its place was an ofrenda, with only one picture in it, my picture.

“I was hoping you’d show up.”