The first crack of thunder silenced the crowd. A wave of panic rippled through the gathering. People scurried for shelter, seeking refuge from the monstrous beast that was about to strike. But Elise froze. Her palms grew clammy, her head throbbed, and her ears muffled the sounds of people urging her to move. She wanted to run—but something kept her grounded. She didn’t want to cry. Not on her 13th birthday.

Fear consumed her. Elise had always been afraid of storms, but this one felt different. It wasn’t just the lightning that made her shiver - it was the memory. The memory of the last time she heard thunder crack. The memory of the night her parents never came home.

She shut her eyes as the haunting scene replayed itself in her mind. Then, she felt something warm - not on her skin, but beside her ear. Not in the air, but in her memory.

*“All storms pass eventually,”* her father used to say. *“It’s just one single star in the wonderful galaxy of life.”  
“Remember, Elise,”* her mother would whisper, *“when thunder strikes, think of it as our little way of saying hello.”*

A tear rolled down Elise’s cheek.

Just then, a soft breeze brushed her face - gentle and warm - like the way her parents used to kiss her and wipe away her tears.

“Hi, Mum and Dad,” she whispered. “I miss you.”

The storm had come on her birthday, but Elise now believed it wasn’t a coincidence. It was a reminder from her parents - that even if she couldn’t see them, they were always with her, in her heart.

Elise blinked back into the present.

“Elise! Come on!” her grandma called, rushing toward her with an umbrella.

Elise beamed and wrapped her in a warm embrace.

“Are you okay, mija?” her grandma asked, surprised by the sudden affection.

“Better than ever,” Elise replied.

As the storm passed and she said her silent goodbyes, Elise and her grandma walked through the park, admiring the sky as it gave way to a golden sunset.

“Grandma?” Elise asked.

“Yes, sweetheart?”

“I was just thinking… I’m not scared of storms anymore.”

Her grandma smiled. “Good for you. Why’s that?”

Elise looked up at the sky and whispered,  
“I don’t know. They just feel like home.”