The first crack of thunder silenced the crowd, as the monstrous beast of chaos began its reign. Rain drummed down, the steady beat of the pattering like a band of marching soldiers. At first, everyone stood still. Soon, they began to panic, scurrying to the nearest shelter. But Elise stood still. Her vision began to blur with tears, her head began to throb, and her ears muffled out sounds of people urging her to move. She wanted to move, to run, but something in her mind kept her feet grounded. She didn’t want to cry this time. Not on her 13th birthday.

Fear consumed her. Elise had always been afraid of storms, but this one felt different. Scarier, louder, closer. This time, it wasn’t the lightning that frightened her. It was the memory. The memory of the last time she heard thunder crack so loud. The memory of the night her parents never came home.

Elise squeezed her eyes shut as the haunting scene replayed itself in her head. Then, a comforting voice whispered into her ear. Not in the air, but in her mind.

*“Every storm will pass eventually,”* she heard her father say, *“They’re just a single star in the wonderful galaxy of life.”*

*“Remember Elise, storms are not there to frighten you, but to remind you of how strong you are, to remind you to listen to what your heart says.”* her mother whispered.

A single tear rolled down Elise’s cheek.

A soft breeze caressed her face. It was gentle and warm, like when her parents used to wipe the tears of her face when she was scared.

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

The storm had come on her birthday, but now Elise thought it wasn’t just bad luck. It was a reminder that even if she couldn’t see them, they were with her in her heart.

Elise snapped back into reality.

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

Elise beamed, bringing her grandmother into a warm embrace.

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

“Better than ever.” she replied, smiling.

As the storm cleared and she and her grandma took a walk through the park, Elise looked up at the sky, and thought of something her parents said.

“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 said,
“I don’t know. They just feel like home.”