

Ruben Ramos

Professor Wood

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Just Like My *Papi Guero*

I remember my grandpa very well. Like a vault I can open up memories and look back to see his face, hear his voice, and feel his presence. That was the most noticeable feature about him; his presence was what everyone remembers about him. You always knew when he was around. However, the word *grandpa* seems so generic, and it always felt odd to call him that. To my brother, my sister, and me he was more of a father than a grandpa. In fact, everyone in our family knew he wasn't just our grandpa. He was our *Papi Guero*, and I remember wiping a tear from a pane of glass.

The summers I spent at my home in Juarez were the best summers of my life. I spent all day with my grandpa and my grandma just following them around, seeing what I could get involved with. I'm not even gonna lie—they spoiled me. That's what grandparents do right? My *Mami Viki* and my *Papi Guero* didn't shower me with gifts or give me any money, but I didn't care because they loved me like no one else. I looked up to them and on occasion when I needed to, I'd crouch down behind them when I was afraid. I could always count on them for my protection *cuando yo estaba chico*—when I was little. They were my guardians and I knew nothing could hurt me. I knew nothing could hurt me because my grandpa had his walking stick.

He carried his walking stick when he would roam around their property at night making sure the gate was locked and all the dogs were fine. You see my home in Juarez was not in a good neighborhood. Around my *casa* there was always the threat of a break in. *Mi Papi Guero* made sure that didn't happen. He made sure no one would get his grandson. He was not a violent man or anything, but he wasn't a pushover either. He carried himself very high and his eyes were always scanning the horizon. As he walked he ate his fruit. Usually it was an apple, but on occasion he had a peach when he craved it. In one hand he held his fruit, and in the other his walking stick—a machete. It was almost as if they were one. They shared the same characteristics down to even the smallest detail. Like my grandfather, the machete had its signs of age. The side of the blade had scratches that overlapped each other time and time again that looked like a matrix of lines. The tip of the machete was much broader than the lower end. As it came to the handle I could see where it had to be re-gripped and re-taped. The indents of my grandpa's hand remained on the grip even after it had long been put away for safekeeping. The entire machete may have looked like its days had come to an end, but like my grandfather, the edge of the blade was still sharp and a glimmer could be seen when the light hit it. That stick still had plenty of fight in it. Most of the time it was used to help cut an apple in half or maybe chop some tree branches that were beginning to be very annoying every time we passed by them. However, on those nights where the creaking wouldn't stop and there would be nonstop barking from the dogs, it was where it belonged: in the grip of my *Papi Guero*.

There were some nights where I could see his shadow from my bed putting on his coat. He would go and see what the dogs were barking at. It used to seem like an eternity until he

came back. Sometimes I'd catch a glimmer from the machete when the moonlight hit the edge of the blade just right. He would come inside and hang up his coat. His trusty sidekick was put right next to it on the wall, the same place that it always hung. He always knew I was awake and he'd whisper in my ear, "*todo esta bien mijo, duermete.*" With a kiss to my forehead, I'd fall asleep knowing that his walking stick was there. If he needed it, it was there and I knew it would never let him down. I knew he would never let me down. He was always there

The tear rolled down my cheek and landed on a pane of glass. It was the pane of glass that separated me from my *Papi Guero*. It was an open casket. The top had been removed, but in its place was a glass covering. There he was: my hero, my friend, my *Papi Guero*. My mom was by my side, but she was so distraught that I had to sit her back down. When we walked back to our seats, memories kept going through my mind. Then I wondered where his walking stick was. The thought stuck in my head until I was able to ask my mom about it later. She said they had locked it up, my *Mami Viki* couldn't stay there; it was too hard.

I don't know if they've unlocked the house or if my grandma has gone back to start boxing things up, but I keep thinking about the machete. It may still be hanging right where my *Papi Guero* left it. It could be boxed up, waiting for me to find it. I have my own machete now, and with it I keep thinking of my *Papi Guero*. It feels safe. It brings back memories of my childhood. It's soothing. It has a presence. Just like my *Papi Guero*.