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## Tomorrow is not Promised

All too often, bad things happen to good people, leaving others questioning, “Why *them?*” What did *they* do to deserve such a punishment?” Unfortunately, there is no superstitious or hidden reason *why* someone was chosen. However, families who have lost, tend to congregate and speak of the incident. One recurring phrase which permeates is: “I just wish we had *one* more day to spend with them.”

Christian was proud to be a Sentinel. He never complained about waking up every morning and biking to school, being greeted by the welcoming white sign at the front entrance reading: Belmont High School *Home of the Sentinels*. Christian recited two things every morning: prayers and his pledge to maintain his one true goal: To move out of the -- as he called it --“ghetto,” and support his family when he is older.

Christian was a hard-working boy. He dedicated three years of academic labor to continue graduating top 3, and he was getting ready to complete a four-year 4.275 GPA streak for high school. His parents, Teresa and Manuel, could not be any prouder of their boy. His work ethic was not only obvious academically, but also at home and at work when he helped his parents construct and clean houses in Westwood. He would marvel at the elegant palaces within the gated communities and turn to his parents and say, “Mama, Papa, one day, we will live in homes like these, I promise.” His parents would smile, and in their minds was no hint of doubt that he would live up to his promise.

Christian’s motivation was his parents, who struggled every day to provide for their one and only son. He would speak to his mother as he would fix her uniform and straighten her nametag. Each day, he loved to assure her: “Don’t worry Mama. Life will not always be this

hard. Yes, when I'm in school, I won't be around to help and earn income for our family. But look at the bright side, when I am gone, that will be one less mouth to feed and one less problem to worry about!" Teresa and Manuel would laugh when they heard that, but they knew they would miss him. They had one more year to spend with him before he would be off to college.

Christian held high hopes for the future, and each day that passed he considered another day toward his success and his graduation. He was approaching his final months in high school, and each day he would anticipate receiving word of his college acceptance.

May 27th brought about a warm spring morning. Christian awoke to the smell of eggs and sausage and quickly performed his daily recitations then hurried to the kitchen. He could hear the door shut behind his father as he left for work. "Good Morning Mama."

"Good morning love. I've got exciting news for you!" replied his mother.

"Wait wait wait Mama. Don't tell me. Uncle Bobby is out of jail?"

"Ayee no Christian! You and I both know uncle Bobby is going to be old enough to admit himself to a nursing home by the time he gets out. But seriously mijo, it's about your college applications!"

"No way! What happened? Which of them replied?"

"Most of them replied Chris! I am sorry honey, all of them but UCLA responded; but that's okay! You still have many opportunities ahead of you, Christian. Six colleges are waiting to know if *you're* still interested!"

"Six of them responded? I am pretty sure they didn't all respond overnight Mama. How long have you known this? I applied for UCLA and UCSB months ago."

"Well. .. I have had your acceptance letters for some time now. I was waiting for your UCLA acceptance letter to arrive, but it hasn't shown up and their site claims they have already

sent the letters. I wanted to surprise you with your UCLA letter, your father and I were almost certain you would be accepted. I am sorry mijo.” Christian’s mother walked over to him and kissed him on the forehead.

“It’s okay Mama. Please do not worry about me, I will be fine. I have to get to school now. Bye Mama, I love you.” and with that Christian went out to the back, hopped on to his bike, and headed off to school.

The breeze against his face dried the tear forming in his eye, as he headed off for the day. He promised his parents he would succeed in life, and he knew he would do just that. The sound of nearby police sirens muddled Christian’s thoughts as he imagined the college acceptance letters he received. When he returned home later that day, exhausted, as usual, he could hear his parents arguing as he approached the door.

“Manuel, how are we supposed to afford Christian’s college? There is no way we can manage to overcome those expenses. I am sorry but Christian has to go to a local college.”

“Teresa, do *not* give up hope. He-”

“I am not losing hope in him, Manuel” interrupted his mother. “I am just being realistic.”

“You’re right Manuel; I will search for a program tomorrow.”

Christian walked in his house, greeted his parents, and went straight to bed. He was in no mood to talk or watch T.V. Besides, the local news was always the only channel ever on, and it seemed bad news was only ever on.

After another long day, Christian returned home to his happier than usual mother. HE could barely get through the door, when she rushed over to embrace him. “Your father and I will find a way for you to attend UCSB. Her voice was muffled in his shirt collar, as he pulled her close. He sighed with relief, and kissed her on the cheek. He knew he would someday make it.

Christian seemed to effortlessly excel from that point on. He managed to maintain top 3 at his high school and at his graduation would be draped with academic cords adorning his gown. He affirmed with UCSB that he would be attending their college; he would depart to college in three days. He was all packed and would dedicate one final day alone with his family.

"Christian, miyo, you're father and I are so proud of you. You have become such an amazing young man, and just know that we love you and we are going to miss you so much sweetheart," said Teresa.

"Thank you Mama, thank you Papa, I love you both too. I could not have done it without your support. Don't miss me too much though, I will visit whenever possible. Oh! I almost forgot! My friend Martin from school said he has a surprise gift waiting for me at his house! He lives just two blocks over. Do you mind if I go?"

"Of course, Christian. Just be safe."

Christian shut the door behind him and walked into the cool evening. The sound of loud music playing, and dogs barking in the distance reminded him of how happy he was to be leaving.

As Christian entered the intersection, he heard the scream of brakes. He lay there staring up at the starry night. He heard a car door, followed by approaching footsteps. He tried to respond to the horrified scream, but the fluid buildup in his throat muffled him and slowed his breathing. His eyes watered and his mind raced, searching for an answer to what just happened. He heard people talking, calling, helping. He wanted to stand, but his legs refused to comply. He thought about his mother, his father; school and college. Then, there was only black – against light.