

## Text 1

### “Homemade Taffy” from *Love, Amalia* by Alma Flor Ada

1 “What is it, Amalia? Is something bothering you?” Amalia’s grandmother removed the boiling honey from the stovetop to let it cool. Then she wiped her forehead with a tissue and looked at her granddaughter. The light from the setting sun entered the small window over the sink with a soft glow. The geraniums on the windowsill added a subtle hint of pink. “You are too quiet, *hijita*<sup>1</sup>. Tell me what’s bothering you,” her grandmother insisted. “It is obvious that something is wrong.”

5 “It’s okay, Abuelita, *de verdad*. I’m fine.”

10 Amalia tried to sound convincing, but her grandmother continued, “Is it because Martha did not come with you today? Is she alright?”

15 Going to her grandmother’s home on Friday afternoon was something Amalia had been doing since she was little. For the last two years, since they started fourth grade, her friend Martha accompanied her most Fridays. Every week Amalia looked forward to the time she spent at her grandmother’s house. But today was different.

Amalia paused before answering, “She is not coming back anymore, Abuelita. ¡*Nunca más!*”<sup>2</sup> Despite Amalia’s efforts to control her feelings, her voice cracked and her brown eyes watered.

20 “¿*Qué pasa, hijita?* What’s going on?” Amalia’s grandmother asked softly, gently hugging her and waiting for an explanation.

Amalia shook her head, as she frequently did when she was upset, and her long black hair swept her shoulders. “Martha is going away. Her family is moving west, to some weird place in California. So far away from Chicago! Today she had to go straight home to start packing. It’s not fair.”

25 “That must be difficult.” Her grandmother’s voice was filled with

<sup>1</sup> *hijita*: Spanish word for “young lady”

<sup>2</sup> *Nunca más*: Spanish phrase meaning “never again”

understanding, and Amalia let out a great sigh.

For a while there was silence. The sunlight faded in the kitchen, and as the boiled honey cooled into a dark, thick mass, its sweet aroma filled the air.

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“Shall we knead the *melcocha*<sup>3</sup>, then?” Amalia’s grandmother asked as she lifted the old brass pot onto the kitchen table and poured the sticky *melcocha* into a bowl. The thick white porcelain bowl, with a few chips that spoke of its long use, had a wide yellow rim. Once, the bowl had made Amalia think that it looked like a small sun on the kitchen table. Today she was upset to see anything but the heavy bowl.

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They washed their hands thoroughly in the sink and dried them. Her grandmother’s kitchen towels each had a day of the week embroidered in a different color. Since today was Friday, the cross-stitched embroidery spelled VIERNES in *azul marino*, deep blue. Abuelita had taught Amalia the days of the week and the names of the colors in Spanish using these towels. Although her grandmother never seemed to be teaching, Amalia was frequently surprised when she realized how many things she had learned from Abuelita.

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After drying their hands, they slathered them with soft butter, which prevented the taffy from sticking to their fingers or burning their skin. Then, with a large wooden spoon, Abuelita scooped some taffy from the bowl and poured it onto their hands.

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As they pulled and kneaded, the taffy became softer and lighter. They placed little rolls of amber-colored taffy on pieces of waxed paper. Amalia had helped her grandmother pull the *melcocha* many times, but she never ceased to marvel at how the sweet taffy changed color just from being pulled, kneaded, and pulled again. It transformed from a deep dark brown into a light blond color, just like Martha’s hair. Thinking about Martha made Amalia frown.

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Her grandmother might have seen her expression but made no comment about it. Rather, she said, “Wash your hands well, Amalita. Let’s sit for a moment while the taffy cools down.”

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Before washing her hands, Amalia licked her fingers. Nothing tasted as good as “cleaning up” after cooking. The butter and taffy mixed together made a sweet caramel on her fingers, which was every bit as good as the raw cookie dough they

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<sup>3</sup> *melcocha*: Spanish word for “taffy”

“cleaned up” when she and Martha made cookies at Martha’s house.

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Once Amalia had washed and dried her hands, she followed her grandmother to the living room. They both sat on the floral sofa, which brightened the room as if a piece of the garden had been brought inside the house. Abuelita’s fondness for the colors of nature could be seen in each room of her house.

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“I know how hard it is when someone you love goes away. One moment you are angry, then you become sad, and then it seems so unbelievable you almost erase it. Then, when you realize it is true, the anger and the sadness come back all over again, sometimes even more painfully than before. I have gone through that many times.”

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Amalia listened closely, trying to guess who her grandmother was talking about. Was she thinking of her two sons who lived far away or her daughter who always promised to visit from Mexico City but never did? Or was she referring to her husband, Amalia’s grandfather, who had died when Amalia was so young that she could not remember him?

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“But one finds ways, Amalia, to keep them close,” her grandmother added. Amalia just wanted to end the conversation. It was bad enough that Martha had told her that she had a surprise and it had turned out to be that Martha was moving to California very soon. Martha’s leaving sounded so definite and permanent that she hated even the thought of it. Talking about it only made Amalia feel worse. She wished she did not need to wait for her father to pick her up and could just walk home. Maybe then she could call Martha and hear her say that it all had been a great mistake and they were not moving after all. And it would all disappear like bad dreams do in the morning.