

Saturday Magic

by C.W. Allen

cwallenbooks.com

"I haven't seen them anywhere, Abuelo."

"Well they didn't just walk away! Help me look, mijo."

Every Saturday with my grandfather is like this. Every Saturday, Mom nudges me awake while the sun is still rolling over and begging for five more minutes in bed. By the time pink smudges start leaking into the dark horizon I'm already standing in a puddle of porch light, ringing Abuelo's doorbell.

I guess I should say, "every Saturday *lately*." Because lately, a lot of things are different. Mom and I moved out six months ago, back to her hometown, and that was when the new Saturday routine started. Now that it's just the two of us, she says Abuelo and I need some Guy Time together. But if you ask me, what she really means is that she needs some Mom Time alone. That's okay, though. She may have her eye on the bag of chocolate chips stashed above the freezer and the last three episodes of that reality show she claims is "not for young ears", but she's right—Guy Time with Abuelo is pretty good, actually.

We have our favorite haunts. Some Saturdays we go fishing or unearth his stash of dusty comic books. Other weeks we walk to the corner store for fresh pastries and bottles of Jarritos. He usually goes for the tamarind soda and an oreja, one of the flaky, buttery pastries that look like giant ears. I prefer lime soda, and the seashell-shaped conchas.

Today's adventure was supposed to be breakfast at the old diner. See, his friends are early risers too, retired ranchers too accustomed to decades of beating the sun out of bed to give up now. Abuelo says they've been squeezing into the diner's cracked pleather booths every morning since they had dinosaurs for neighbors, sipping coffee from the same chipped mugs and swapping the same lame jokes. We really needed to get a move on if we were going to meet them on time. But first we had a treasure hunt

to finish. It's pretty tough to chew your chilaquiles without your dentures, and Abuelo had no intention of giving his buddies a new story to recycle until the end of time by showing up empty-handed. Or empty-gummed, I guess.

I dutifully made the rounds: not in the fridge, on the nightstand, or between sofa cushions. But as I crouched to scan the dust bunnies under the sofa, a scurry in the shadows caught my eye.

Abuelo hobbled past. "Mijo, catch that mouse!" I followed his accusing finger to glimpse something brown and furry tugging the dentures through a gap in the warped wood paneling.

We bumped heads as we crowded at the mousehole, each of us squinting one eye into the space behind the wall. I dug out my cell phone and switched on the flashlight app.

The mouse held the dentures to his ear, knocking uncertainly with one tiny fist. He frowned and gave one of the molars an experimental nibble. Then he dropped them in a torrent of angry Spanish. It was a bit too rapid (and too squeaky) for me to catch every word, but one thing was clear: he was *not* a satisfied customer. In fact, he rather sounded like he wanted to speak to the manager of this establishment.

Abuelo's jaw dropped. "Pérez? Is that you?"

"Wait, you *know* each other?" I asked. I *wanted* to ask how it was possible to "know" a mouse at all, but that was the first thing that came out.

"When you were little and pulled out a loose tooth, your Mama taught you to put it under your pillow for the tooth fairy, yes? Well in my childhood, we left our teeth out for the tooth *mouse*—Ratoncito Pérez."

The mouse raised a paw to shield his eyes from the flashlight's glare. "Fake teeth!" he complained, switching to English and wrinkling his nose in contempt. "What will you humans come up with next, glass eyes? Plastic fingernails? Rubber eyelashes?"

"Actually..." I began. But I stopped. No sense arguing with a creature that shouldn't be able to talk in the first place.

"Those aren't for you!" scolded Abuelo.

"Set them by your bed, didn't you?" Pérez argued. "Why leave them out, if you didn't want me to take them?"

"I have to take my dentures out at night! You said you didn't want them anyway. Now give them back!"

The mouse folded his arms and turned his back to us. "Maybe I should leave them right here and let you fish them out of the wall yourself. Serves you right, teasing me in the middle of a tooth shortage."

I didn't even ask what *that* meant. I didn't want to know what Pérez did with all the teeth he collected, much less why he was running low at the moment.

"How about a trade?" I suggested.

Pérez glanced over his shoulder, his tail swishing expectantly. "I'm listening."

"We've got some real nice cheese in the fridge," I began. "Cheddar, Cotija, might even be a bit of Manchego—"

The mouse sniffed indignantly and turned away again.

"Or—" I added hastily, "I could find you some *real* teeth."

That caught his attention. His ears perked up, but he tried to paint on a disinterested face.

"Where?" he asked dismissively. "You working on a loose one?"

I gulped. My last baby tooth fell out years ago—the promise slipped out before I really thought it through. Although technically, I remembered, that tooth didn't exactly *fall* out...it had a little help.

"What if you didn't have to go searching for lost teeth every night?" I told him.

"What if the teeth came to you?"

"Go on..."

"Humans have special doctors just for teeth," I explained. "My dentist spends all day either patching holes in people's teeth, or pulling them out. She probably ends up with dozens of discarded teeth every day."

"What does she *want* with them?" Pérez asked.

I shrugged. "She doesn't want them, they just need to come out. I guess she probably throws them away."

I might as well have suggested tossing gold bars in the gutter. "Just...*throw away* perfectly good teeth?" he protested. "Like common garbage?"

"But if you lived in her office," I continued, "you could wait until closing time to

rescue all those poor unwanted teeth. Save them from being wasted."

"We were just headed out to breakfast," said Abuelo. "We could take you to the dentist's office on the way."

"In exchange for the dentures, of course," I added.

Pérez tapped his tail to his chin, thinking. Then he shuffled closer, stuck one skinny arm through the mousehole, and held the dentures out to Abuelo. "This magical 'dentist's office' better not be some fairy tale you invented."



It was late afternoon when Mom came to pick me up. "How was Guy Time?" she asked.

Abuelo and I traded glances. His mustache quivered with the effort of suppressing his grin. "Oh, just the usual," he said.

"Pretty normal Saturday," I agreed.

After all, every Saturday is Guy Time. And Guy Time with Abuelo is always magic, no matter what we end up doing.

Literature Circle Questions

for "Saturday Magic"

1. Every story is told from a **perspective** or **point of view**. Sometimes a narrator tells a story about someone else, using words like he, she, and they. This is called **third person narration**. Sometimes a character in the story talks about things that happened to them, frequently using the word I. This is called **first person narration**.

Which point of view is this story in? How do you know?

2. The **main character** in a story is sometimes called the **protagonist**. Based on the information given in the text, what are some things we know about the protagonist of this story? What are some things left up to the reader's imagination?

Activity Idea: draw a picture of the protagonist and the other characters.

3. Reading is a great way to expand your vocabulary! Because the protagonist is bilingual, there are several Spanish words included in the story. Make a list of these words, then use the **context** (the way the words are used in the sentence) to guess what they mean.

Activity Idea: Write a sentence explaining what each Spanish word means, or create an illustration that shows what each word means.

4. In parts of Spain, Portugal, Mexico, and South America, children believe Ratoncito Pérez comes to collect children's lost baby teeth. What does your family do with lost teeth?

Activity Idea: research how the story of Ratoncito Pérez became a tradition. It's a really fascinating history about a boy who became king of Spain the day he was born!

Activity Idea: nearly every culture around the world has some kind of

tradition for what to do with lost teeth. Choose a country and research what children there do when a tooth falls out. Write a short report, or create an art project explaining this tradition. Mark this country on a map.

5. What do you think Ratoncito Pérez does with the teeth after he collects them? How did he get this job in the first place?

Activity Idea: write a short story about Ratoncito Pérez. It might be a **prequel**, telling us what happened to Pérez before "Saturday Magic" begins, or a **sequel**, telling us what happens after "Saturday Magic" ends.

BONUS ACTIVITY: use the attached picture file to make your own Ratoncito Pérez bookmark!

Bookmark Instructions

- Print the Mouse Bookmark .pdf file on a Landscape page setting.
- Copy it onto white paper or cardstock and make as many copies as you will need for your classroom.
- Cut the page vertically into thirds so each student can have one bookmark.
- Each student can decorate Ratoncito Pérez however they like! The blank portion of the bookmark can be used for the student's name or more decoration.