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Good afternoon, everyone.

Thank you for being here to celebrate the life of my best friend, my brother by choice, Matthew Cole Ramirez—our Matty.

I keep thinking about how he would have greeted all of us today. He'd spot Rosa and Antonio first, reach them in two strides, and hold on a few seconds longer than usual. He'd kiss Sofia on the forehead and say, "You're the brave one." He'd pull Priya into the kind of hug that made the rest of us laugh and look away. And then he'd clap his hands and say, "Okay, people—more love, more light, more leftovers for tomorrow." It was a toast, sure, but it was also a way he lived.

Matty was born on November 9, 1990, and somehow, in just 33 years, he managed to feed a city. He grew up in Phoenix, in a house where the door never seemed to latch on the first try because there was always someone coming in or going out. He was the first in his family to graduate college—Rosa and Antonio, I still remember the glow on your faces at that ceremony—and he carried that achievement like a gift he intended to pass on. He built a small catering business that became a neighborhood staple, not just because the food was good—though it was ridiculous—but because everyone felt seen when they walked in. He had a way of learning your name before you even told him. He was a chef, an entrepreneur, and a magnet for community.

We met freshman year of college, two scrawny idealists arguing about whether a taco can be art. He won the argument by cooking one. That became a theme in our friendship: I would talk, and he would show me. He showed me what fearless looked like. He showed me how encouragement can be a kind of fuel you pour into other people, and how connection is not something you stumble into—it's something you create on purpose.

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If you ever came to one of his rooftop pop-up taco nights, you know exactly what I mean. He'd string lights so they looked like constellations come down to listen. He'd marinate carne asada with a pinch of orange zest "for sunshine," he'd say. He'd throw on a vinyl, call out names like a host at a family reunion, and strangers would become friends somewhere between the first squeeze of lime and dessert. I watched it happen over and over—the quiet couple from down the block laughing with the soccer kids, the teacher trading recipes with the UPS driver, the teen who had never chopped an onion turning into a sous-chef. That rooftop wasn't just a party. It was Matty's classroom, his chapel, his living room, his open-heart surgery for a lonely neighborhood.

He believed food was a form of belonging. I remember the first time he made me say grace with him before a meal—not the churchy kind, but the Matty kind. He'd close his eyes and say, "Thank you for the hands that grew this, the hands that cooked it, and the mouths that will laugh while we eat. Amen." His spirituality lived in service and gratitude, in those little pauses before we dug in. He believed God showed up in full plates and in the quiet insistence that there should be leftovers—because tomorrow is as sacred as today.

He had a lot of todays packed full. He liked his hobbies like he liked his salsas—varied, bright, with a bit of kick. Street-food experiments that turned my kitchen into a lab. Salsa dancing until his shirt was pasted to his back and his smile was unstoppable. Pickup soccer at the park where he'd call every kid "captain" and somehow end every game tied so no one walked away with their head down. And photography at golden hour, when the whole city looked like it had been brushed with butter. He always said that's when the world admits it's beautiful.

Matty taught teens to cook, and not once did I see him talk down to a kid. He'd hand them a knife and say, "I trust you." It was never just about a recipe; it was an invitation to competence, to pride, to the idea that you could make something that would make others happy. Some of those kids are here today, and I want you to know—he bragged about you like he was your uncle. He kept

your photos, your first perfect tortillas, your handwritten notes. He kept people, always.

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He loved his family with a kind of loud tenderness. Rosa and Antonio, he talked about you every week. He honored your sacrifices by turning them into generosity toward others. Sofia, to him you were proof that strength can wear a smile and that big sisters can be guided by little brothers, too. And Priya—he was so proud to be your fiancé. He found in you a partner who could match him step for step: your mind, your fire, your patience with his late-night brainstorms. He told me once that your laugh was the sound he imagined when he pictured home. Thank you for loving him with such courage. You two planned a life full of spice, travel, and a kitchen with too many plants and never enough stools for all the friends who'd squeeze in. Some of those plans will change. None of the love has to.

What I'll miss most about him are the things that sounded small but never were. The 11 p.m. text: "Rooftop? Bring whoever." The way a simple invitation turned into a memory. His stubborn optimism—the contagious kind that wasn't naive. He knew life could be heavy. He just insisted on carrying it together. Meals that felt like hugs. Hugs that felt like promises. And that toast at the end of the night: "More love, more light, more leftovers for tomorrow." He'd raise a glass, and you could feel everybody lift a little higher with it.

He was vibrant and fearless, but he had a softness too. If you got there early enough, you'd catch him alone on the rooftop, hands on the rail, eyes on the horizon. He was always checking the weather, but not for rain—for wonder. Then he'd turn around, see the first guest, and become a human sunrise.

There's a photo he took at golden hour that I can't stop thinking about. It's a long table in the alley, mismatched chairs, mismatched lives. Salsas in jam jars. A blur of a kid sprinting past. And faces—so many faces—turned toward each other. If you didn't know, you might think the subject was the food. But the subject was us. It always was.

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To the neighborhood he fed and knit together: keep his table open. Keep a chair available for the person who walks in late and nervous. To his friends and fellow dreamers: say yes when it’s easier to say maybe, and say come over when it’s easier to say nothing. To the teens he taught: your first perfect scrambled egg, your first steady dice, your first meal cooked for someone you love—those are diplomas. Hang them up. To his family: thank you for giving us Matty. We carry him because you carried him first.

I want to share my favorite memory of him, the one that sits like a warm plate in my hands. It was one of those rooftop taco nights. The city air was soft, and someone’s abuela had brought flan that defeated all conversation. A guy who had come alone, new to the block, was standing off to the side. Before I could move, Matty was already there, plating two tacos with extra care, one in each hand like a bridge. He walked over, offered the plate, and said, “Got room at my table.” Not a question. Just a fact. By dessert, they were arguing about hot sauce and planning a weekend soccer game. Strangers became friends by dessert. That’s the line I keep repeating. Strangers became friends by dessert.

He built a small catering business, yes. But he also built this: a network of belonging, a map of people who found each other because he put a table between them.

If you are looking for a way to honor him, consider living that toast of his like a daily practice.

More love: Tell people what they mean to you before the music starts, during the meal, after the plates are cleared. Love out loud and often.

More light: Be the one who turns on the string lights first, even if you’re the only one on the rooftop. Share encouragement like he shared limes—generously, without asking.

More leftovers for tomorrow: Plan kindness like it has a second day. Make enough to share. Leave something good for the morning. Remember that hope,

like pozole, tastes even better after it rests.

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We will feel his absence everywhere—on the rooftop, on the dance floor, at the park, in the quiet minutes before we eat. And yet, we will also feel his presence where he always put it: in the circles we make when we pull our chairs closer. In the stories we swap while we cook. In the courage to keep inviting, keep trying, keep learning together.

Matty, you lived like a lit kitchen—warm, busy, impossible to resist. You taught us that we can make a life out of feeding each other, that joy multiplies when you pass it around, and that the best recipes are written in people.

We promise to take care of your people. We promise to keep the music on, the stove warm, the door unlatched. We promise to teach others what you taught us—that there’s a place at the table, and it already has their name on it.

So, my brother, as the sun tilts toward golden hour, we’ll set the table again. We’ll lay down tortillas like small suns. We’ll pour something bright into mismatched glasses. We’ll look at each other and say your words, and mean them, and live them.

More love.

More light.

More leftovers for tomorrow.

Thank you, Matty. For every meal, every laugh, every stubborn, radiant yes. We love you. We’ll carry you. And tonight, when the light turns honey, we’ll look up and see you there, grinning, waving us over.

Got room at your table?

Always.

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