

NOTES

A quinceañera is a special event celebrating the 15th Birthday of young women in the Latino Culture. In her first-person narrative, Cassandra Ortiz introduces us to a young girl, whose magical day celebrating her passage into womanhood turns into a family tragedy, when her father, separated from her mother, unexpectedly arrives at the celebration, and in a drunken rage, commits mass murder. This selection must be performed by a mature female and may be entered in either Dramatic Interpretation or Prose Interpretation. If used in Prose Interpretation, the drama mask icons are visible to show the performer when to turn the pages in her manuscript.

Guess how old I am. Go ahead. Guess!

I'm fourteen. Some of you may or may not think I look 14, but I am. I love it, because most of this year?... my Mom and I have been planning my *quinceañera*. So...what is a *quinceañera*? It's a celebration. It's sort of like a debutante ball. It's a tradition in the Spanish culture to celebrate a young girl's 15th birthday with a big dance. And all of the girl's family and friends come, because it means that the honoree is transitioning from childhood...into becoming a woman. *I'm* becoming a woman. I get to buy a beautiful new dress, and we're renting a banquet hall. We're going to get a DJ and everything! I've been looking forward to my quinceañera for over ten years now. It will be a night to remember.



Getting ready for a quinceañera is hard. It takes a lot of planning...and *money*. I'm so thankful Mom knows how important this occasion is to me, because we don't have a lot of money. You see, Mom and Dad split up last year. My brother, Eduardo and I—all these years—we didn't know how abusive Dad was to Mom. I guess that explains why she always wore heavy make-up... and why she would wear her Winter clothes year-round. Anyway, Mom said nothing in the world can keep her from throwing me the best quinceañera the world has ever seen. I told her that I know things are tough...with Dad not pitching in with any of the bills, but she told me not to worry one bit. She said I was her Princess, and Princesses deserve the very best. I love her so much. Once Mom told Dad she was filing for divorce, he didn't come around or anything. It's been hard on Mom, because Dad was always the breadwinner in the family. Now, she's working two jobs to make ends meet, but she still makes time for me and my brother.



The day of my quinceañera finally arrived. Now, there are typically six parts to the reception. The first?...the quinceañera (*gesturing to herself*) makes a grand entrance once most of the guests are seated. And that's just what I did. I

was escorted into the banquet hall by one of my favorite male cousins, Manuel, and everyone gasped as we walked through a trellis covered in white flowers... just inside the doors. Many of my relatives handed me a long-stemmed rose as we passed their tables. The next part of a quinceañera is a formal toast. My toast?...was given to me by my great aunt Camilla. She's not only my aunt, but she's also my Godmother. She talked about how I had turned into a beautiful young woman, and then it was time for the first dance.

Now, the biggest parts of any quinceañera are the dances, and the first dance is usually a waltz with the girl's father. Since my Dad wasn't there, I danced with the second most important man in my life—Eduardo. The second dance is called "the family dance" where the girl dances with all of her closest relatives and friends. In this case, that meant dancing a waltz with my *chambelanes* (my grandparents) and my best friends from school, Sarah and Michaela. The next dance is called *Baile Sorpresa*. This is the dance where the quinceañera chooses a contemporary song to dance to. Now, anyone who knows me *knows* that I love Justin Timberlake, but I chose *Despacito*. I just thought it would please most of my guests, and I felt like it would pick up the energy in the room after two slower waltzes. The final dance is typically just another waltz, but this time?...everyone is encouraged to dance and enjoy. Now, the average quinceañera costs between five and six-thousand dollars, so the family usually chips in by helping out with the food. Thank goodness my family knows how to cook! At my quinceañera the food was delicious, and my Aunt Sophia made me a three-tiered white chocolate cake filled with a sweet berry compote and garnished it with an assortment of fresh berries. It was beautiful.

We were all having a great time. Everyone was dancing...and eating...and really enjoying each other's company. But you know what they say: All good things must come to an end.



The celebration was in full swing, when my father...my father who hadn't so much as called to see how we were doing in over a year...stormed into the banquet hall. He had two duffle bags slung over his shoulder. In his right hand?...he held a small pistol. Now, I realize that this may sound like it all happened in slow motion...because in my mind?...it did. But in reality...the entire episode probably all happened in less than three or four minutes.

As soon as he burst through the door, Dad started scouring the room. It was clear to me he was looking for one person and *only* one person...my mom. I couldn't stop staring at him. He was crazed. He was huffing and puffing. His cheeks?...they were the color of the rich berries that covered my celebration cake. He was breathing hard. It was like...he couldn't catch his breath. He was winding his way through the crowd...and when he stopped?...I quickly turned my eyes in the direction of his gaze. There she was...my mom...standing there frozen...looking across the room at the one man who simply did not belong here today.