

Dahlia

By Cassandra Ortiz

NOTES

Most people who have grown up in a Spanish-speaking household soon learn that Tejano music is an important part of one's Mexican heritage. In the following narrative poem, critically-acclaimed poet, Cassandra Ortiz, revisits her youth, as she shares how her cultural identity was, not only shaped, but redefined by the legendary performer, Selena Quintanilla. This personal narrative poem must be performed by a female and may be entered in either Poetry Interpretation or Dramatic Interpretation. This is a poetic tribute to one of the most prolific singers of all time, and the performers, both vocally and facially, should show just how much they truly love and admire the iconic singer, as she shaped their youth and gave them cause to not only be proud—but to embrace their cultural heritage. If performed in Poetry Interpretation, the drama mask icons are simply visible to show the performer when to turn the pages in her manuscript.

Dahlia Pinnata.

It is a flower found south of the US border.

It's known for its large blooms.

Two-toned in color

and comprised of interesting petal patterns,

Dahlia Pinnata is the national flower

of my homeland, Mexico.

It is also the name my mother gave me: Dahlia.

My father says it represents those

who stay true to their values.

Dahlia—

It's who I am.



The flowers in Mexico

are said to be more beautiful

than flowers found elsewhere on the globe.

They should be.

They've had to work harder to survive.

With Mexico's unapologetic terrain:

rugged mountains, low coastal plains,

and desert landscapes everywhere,

The flowers of Mexico *deserve* the praise of their beauty.



We moved to Texas when I was five,

and I always felt like an uprooted flower.

I always felt like I had been—

uprooted from my familiar soil,

Transplanted into a landscape that didn't value me.
There was no one I could relate to in my new 'garden.'
There was nothing connecting me to my homeland.
There was no one that I could look up to—
 that I could lift my hands towards,
As if stretching toward the sun
 craving its *warmth*—
 craving its *light*—
 craving to be *noticed*...

I yearned for the sun to—
 illuminate the path of my adolescence.
I yearned for the sun to—
 shine its rays down on this awkward, unsure, untrodden path—
My path, in this unfamiliar, new Garden Paradise,
 where I felt like—
 nothing more than an unwanted *weed*.



And then, one day, while my family
 entertained some visiting relatives,
I was playing in the backyard
 when I heard a voice coming from the small radio
 perched like a bird
 on our rusted-out patio table.
The voice belonged to Selena Quintanilla.
The song was *Bidi Bidi Bom Bom*.

My heart, like the lyrics of the song,
 went crazy.
My heart started to beat,
 as if for the very first time.
Bidi Bidi Bom Bom.
It excited me.
Selena's voice was mirroring what I felt in my heart.
Though the lyrics of this song were talking about a boy
 she saw that made *her* heart go crazy,
I was now crazy;
 because for the first time in my young adult life
I now had a connection with another girl,
 who like me, desperately wanted to *belong*—to be *noticed*.

Here I was, a young girl from Mexico,
 trying to grow, to *thrive* across the border.
Here I was in a new country—
 in a new foreign landscape.