

A woman with dark hair styled in a braid, wearing a black and white checkered halter top and a matching skirt, stands with her hands on her hips. She is positioned in front of a wall covered in graffiti, including a large blue outline of a face and the word 'na' in blue. The background is a mix of purple and red tones.

SCOPE
SHORT
FICTION

THE
QUINCEAÑERA
TEXT

BY ERIN FANNING



AS YOU READ, THINK ABOUT:

What makes a gift valuable?

The present's wrapping paper crinkled in my hands. I shook it, but the box remained silent—not even a revealing thud. I wouldn't have heard it anyway, what with Juan, my baby brother, wailing from Tía Lupe's arms, and Papá

singing along to Tío Jaime's mariachi band.

"Ana, hurry. Abuela's watching us." My cousin Consuela nodded at the present. "Could it be a phone?"

"It's the right size." I looked around. My grandmother winked at me from the other side of the patio. She wagged a finger then took a forkful of tamale, catching a scoop of shredded pork and popping it into her mouth just before it dropped to her lap. **Behind her, a table swelled with frijoles, tortillas, and pollo en mole.** The smell of its chocolate sauce drifted across the patio. How many times had I helped Abuela chop the garlic, onions, and other ingredients that went into the dish? **I knew her kitchen—the dried peppers hanging from the ceiling and Abuela's recipe book propped up against mixing bowls—better than my own bedroom.**

In the center of this food mountain sat my Quinceañera cake. Red-frosting flowers cascaded down one side of the four tiers, and a figurine woman with black hair and a white gown, nestled on top.

The colors of the doll's hair and dress matched my own, but I didn't feel as elegant as she looked. And I certainly didn't feel like a woman, even though that's what the celebration was all about—my "coming of age," as Papá said: my 15th birthday, La Quinceañera.

I longed to ditch the frilly dress, let down my hair, and throw on boots and jeans. I'd then saddle up my mare, Esperanza, and ride out into the desert surrounding our house. Instead, I was stuck as the center of attention.

"I'm sorry your Quinceañera had to be so, you know . . ." Consuela blushed and fiddled with a bow on her dress. "I don't mean it's a bad party."

For a second, I felt a shiver of resentment, remembering Consuela's Quinceañera—the banquet hall, chandeliers, and gleaming dance floor. My anger, though, vanished when I saw the embarrassment on her face. "It's OK. If Papá hadn't lost his job, then maybe it would be different. **But I really don't care.**"

The presents, of course, helped. And if one of those boxes contained a phone, then my life would be complete. I'd no longer be one of those losers at school without one.

"You're too young," was Papá's reply when I asked for one.

Mamá, though, told me the real reason. "Too much money."

I picked up another box. "Consuela, watch for Mamá just a little while longer. She'll be mad if she catches me going through these."

No reply.

I turned around. Consuela was texting away as usual.

"Oh, sorry," she said. "It's a mess—"

Mamá clapped her hands. "Time to open the gifts."



MOOD

The first paragraph is packed with details. What mood do these details create?



WORD CHOICE

What does the word "swelled" tell you about the state of the table?



INFERENCE

What does this detail tell you about Ana and Abuela's relationship? (*Abuela* means *grandmother* in Spanish.)



CHARACTER

Do you believe Ana? Why or why not?



LITERARY DEVICE

Why might the author have chosen this simile?

INFERENCE

What can you infer Abuela is feeling at this moment?



CHARACTERIZATION

What does this observation reveal about the way Ana is feeling?

CRAFT

“¿Te gusta?” means “Do you like it?” in Spanish. The author uses many Spanish phrases. What effect does this create?

Everyone wandered over to us. Even Esperanza, ears pricked up, trotted to the corral fence. All eyes watched me as I opened present after present—turquoise earrings, midnight-blue cowboy boots, lip gloss—but no phone.

I tried to push away my disappointment, but **it gripped me as tightly as Papá lassoing a calf.** When the last present, a flat box without a card, was placed in my hands, I knew I wouldn't be getting what I wanted. I yanked the paper off and opened the lid. Abuela's recipe book rested in a bed of tissue paper. “Recetas” was written across the cover in a spidery scrawl. I'd seen it about a million times, usually surrounded by pots and pans.

“Why?” My voice must have captured my confusion, because Mamá frowned.

“Hija, a little gratitude,” she hissed. Louder, she added, “A family tradition. The libro de recetas goes from grandmother to granddaughter on her Quinceañera.”

Jaime and his band singing “De Niña a Mujer” drowned her out. It was time for another tradition—a dance with Papá. He bowed and led me to a clear space on the patio. **I caught a glimpse of Abuela, her shoulders slumped, shuffling to a chair.**

Papá tripped on a patio stone and stumbled. “Your old Papá is a little stiff,” he said.

“I'm not exactly Señorita Suave.”

It wasn't only my feet, though, that lacked smoothness. My heart felt brittle too. Papá twirled me around, and I glimpsed Abuela leaning back in her chair. **She sank into the shadows, and her face disappeared into a streaky gray smudge, as if it were being erased.** I held back a tear.

Other dancers joined us when the song ended. Mamá cursed me with her eyes, but Lupe saved me when she dumped Juan into Mamá's arms.

The libros de recetas sat where I'd left it on a love seat. I flopped down and opened it to the first page. Smearred ink read, “1881, Guadalajara, Juanita Alvarez”: my great-great grandmother. Flipping through the book, I stopped when I recognized Abuela's handwriting. I whispered some of the ingredients. “*Canela, azúcar, caramelo.*” It sounded like poetry.

The setting sun flamed across the patio. Papá twirled Mamá, her arms encircling Juan, and Jaime serenaded Lupe. Consuela texted from the porch, unaware that Manuel, a friend from school, was giving her a lovesick look.

“¿Te gusta?” Abuela said from behind me.

Her dress billowed around her as she joined me on the loveseat. When had she lost so much weight? I scooted closer, remembering how her knees creaked when she knelt at Mass that morning.

“I like it very much. Will you teach me some of Juanita's recipes?”

She smiled, her black eyes disappearing into the wrinkles in her face. “I teach you everything I know.”

I ran my fingers across the leather cover, tracing the word “Recetas.” It may not have been a cell phone, but it spoke to me all the same. ●

WRITING CONTEST

Consider this proverb: “Happiness is not having what you want. It is wanting what you have.” What does this mean? How does it apply to the story? Answer both questions; use text evidence. Send your response to **ABUELA CONTEST**. Five winners will get *Under the Mesquite* by Guadalupe García McCall.



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