



Esperanza Rising by Pam Muñoz Ryan

Subjects: Mexican Americans—California—Juvenile fiction; Agricultural laborers—Fiction

Awards: Pura Belpré Medal Winner, Ten Best Books for Young Adults, Notable Social Studies Trade Books for Young People

Book Lists: America, Grade 6, Grade 7, Latin America

Props: Flowers for hair, red rose

J

(Wear flowers in hair) I am Esperanza, only daughter of Sixto and Ramona Ortega, owner of the beautiful El Rancho de las Rosas. I had a beautiful life; a large house nestled among acres of grapes and cattle, surrounded by servants and people who adored me. I could not imagine living anywhere else. But I was innocent, childish. My country, Mexico, was still recovering from the revolution that ended over 10 years ago in 1930. There was still resentment against the large landowners who had won.

The trouble began on the eve of my 13th birthday. There were to be bouquets of roses, baskets of grapes, papayas, gifts, friends, and a sunrise serenade by Papa and the men who lived and worked on our ranch. I always loved their rich, sweet voices singing *Las Mananitas*, the birthday song. I would run to my window and wave kisses.

That night before my birthday, I was waiting in the rose garden for my papa, but he was late. I remember that I bent to pick a red bloom *(Bring out rose)* and my finger was pricked by a vicious thorn. “Bad luck,” I thought. I returned to the main house to ask where Papa was. My mama said that he was just a little late. But we both knew that was wrong. He was never late. He always returned home before sundown. As the evening wore on, ranch hands were sent to find him. My grandmother, Abuelita, and Hortensia, our housekeeper, came to sit with us while we waited. *(Put down rose)*

It was Mama who heard the riders. We ran to the door as the wagon came into view. There was a body in the back, completely covered with a blanket. “Where’s

Papa?!” I cried. No one would answer me but I knew. My heart dropped. My mother fell to her knees in despair and disbelief and we cried our misery. In the morning, my uncles came to visit us. They brought a lawyer with them. After spending many days at the ranch, they informed Mama that the house and its contents had been left to us. But as it was not customary to leave land to women, the land had been left to my uncle, Tio Luis. Tio Luis, a man I had never liked, was now our landlord. He said being our landlord would be awkward. He looked at my beautiful and influential mother and proposed marriage, not now, but in a year, out of respect for my papa. I couldn’t believe what I was hearing. Mama, marry a goat like him? But she said no and the horrid uncles went away.

I remember going to bed that night wondering why Papa had left us. I had only slept for a short time when I was awakened by someone shaking me hard. My mama was screaming my name, “Esperanza! Wake up! The house is on fire! Get up, we must find Abuelita!” I felt dizzy, nothing seemed real. Abuelita was not in her room. We ran from the house. My world was turning to ashes right before my eyes. How had this happened? What were we to do? Where was Abuelita?

Learn for yourself how a young Mexican girl of wealth struggles, triumphs, crosses borders and grows a new life from the stirred ashes of ruin. *(Hold up book)*
Esperanza Rising by Pam Muñoz Ryan.

