



Pam Muñoz Ryan

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## Readers' Theatre Script for *Esperanza Rising*

For Five Readers

Esperanza

Tio Luis/Alfonso

Mama

Lawyer/Narrator

Miguel



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**NARRATOR**

*Esperanza Rising* by Pam Muñoz Ryan

**ESPERANZA**

**(singing or reciting)**

*Estas son las mañanitas que cantaba el Rey David  
A las muchachas bonitas; se las cantamos aqui.*

**MIGUEL**

*These are the morning songs  
Which King David used to sing  
To all the pretty girls  
We sing them here for you . . .*



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MAMA

Esperanza heard singing outside her window. Before she was aware, she smiled because her first thought was that today was her birthday.

ESPERANZA

I should get up and wave kisses to Papa.

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NARRATOR

But when she opened her eyes, she realized the song had been in her dreams. Then, the events of last night wrenched her mind into reality.

ESPERANZA

Yesterday, Papa and his vaqueros had been ambushed and killed while mending a fence on the farthest reaches of the ranch.

TIO LUIS



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Esperanza's smile faded, her chest tightened and a blanket of anguish smothered her joy.

NARRATOR

The rosaries, masses, and funeral lasted three days. People whom Esperanza had never seen before came to the ranch to pay their respects, bringing enough food to feed ten families . . .

MIGUEL

. . .and so many flowers that the overwhelming fragrance gave them all headaches.

MAMA

Tio Luis and Tio Marco came every day, too. At first, they stayed only a few hours.

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NARRATOR

But soon they became like *la calabasas*, the squash plant in the garden, whose giant leaves encroached upon anything smaller.

ESPERANZA

Eventually, the uncles stayed all day, even taking their meals at the ranch. And Mama was uneasy with their presence.



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MIGUEL

Finally, the lawyer came to settle the estate. As the uncles walked into the study, Mama and Esperanza sat properly in their black dresses.

TIO LUIS

Ramona! Grieving does not suit you. I hope you will not wear black all year!

ESPERANZA

Mama did not answer him. Instead she maintained her composure and looked at the lawyer.

LAWYER

Ramona, your husband, Sixto Ortega, left this house and all of its contents to you and your daughter. You will also receive the yearly income from the grapes. As you know, it is not customary to leave land to women and since Luis is his brother, Sixto left the land to him.

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TIO LUIS

Which makes things rather . . . awkward. I am the bank president and would like to live accordingly. Now that I own this beautiful land, I would like to purchase the house from you for this amount. (Show Mama palm of hand.)



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MAMA

(disgusted)

The house . . . it is worth twenty times this much! This is our home. My husband meant for us to live here. So no, I will not sell. Besides, where would we live?

TIO LUIS

I predicted you would say no, Ramona. And I have a solution to your living arrangements. A proposal actually. One of marriage.

ESPERANZA

(to Mama, almost in a whisper)

Who is he talking about? Who would marry him?

TIO LUIS

Of course, we would wait the appropriate amount of time out of respect for my brother. One year is customary, is it not? Even you can see that with your beauty and reputation, and my position at the bank, we could be a very powerful couple. I am going to campaign for governor. And what woman would not want to be the governor's wife?



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ESPERANZA  
(shaking her head)

Mama? No!

LAWYER

Mama's face looked as if it were in terrible pain.

MAMA

I have no desire to marry you, Luis, now or ever. Frankly , your offer offends me.

MIGUEL

Tio Luis's face hardened like a rock and the muscles twitched in his narrow neck.

TIO LUIS

You will regret your decision, Ramona. You must keep in mind that this house and those grapes are on my property. I can make things difficult for you. Very difficult. I will let you sleep on the decision, for it is more than generous.

ESPERANZA

Tio Luis and Tio Marco put on their hats and left. The lawyer looked uncomfortable and began gathering documents.



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MAMA (to the lawyer)

Can he do this?

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LAWYER

Yes. Technically, he is now your landlord.

MAMA  
(confused)

But he could build another house, bigger and more pretentious anywhere on the property.

LAWYER

It is not the house he wants. It is your influence. People in this territory loved Sixto and respect you. With you as his wife, Luis could win any election.

ESPERANZA

Mama, marry Tio Luis? *Imposible*. Mama's entire body stiffened.



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MAMA

Please officially relay this message to Luis. I will never, ever, change my mind.

LAWYER

I will do that, Ramona. But be careful. He is a devious and dangerous man.

MAMA

(puts head in hands as if crying)

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ESPERANZA

Don't cry, Mama. Everything will be all right.

NARRATOR

But Esperanza didn't sound convincing, even to herself. And that evening, when she crawled into bed and tried to sleep, her thoughts kept returning to what Tio Luis had said about Mama regretting her decision.

TIO LUIS

Esperanza closed her eyes tight and tried to find the dream . . .

ESPERANZA



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. . . the one with the birthday song.

MIGUEL

The wind blew hard that night and the house moaned and whistled. Instead of dreaming of birthday songs, Esperanza's sleep was filled with nightmares - suffocating nightmares that made her choke and cough.

ESPERANZA

(coughing)

MIGUEL

She half-woke to someone shaking her.

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MAMA

Esperanza! Wake up! The house is on fire!

MIGUEL

Smoke drifted into the room.

ESPERANZA

Mama, (coughing) what's happening?



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MAMA

Get up, Esperanza! We must get Abuelita!

MIGUEL

Esperanza heard the deep voice of Alfonso yelling from somewhere downstairs.

ALFONSO

Señora Ortega! Esperanza!

MAMA

Here! We are her!

MIGUEL

Mama grabbed a damp rag from the washbowl and handed it to Esperanza to put over her mouth and nose.

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NARRATOR

Then she and Mama hurried down the hall toward her grandmother's room, but it was empty.



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MAMA

Alfonso! Abuelita is not here!

ALFONSO

We will find her. You must come now! The stairs are beginning to burn. Hurry!

MIGUEL

Esperanza held the towel over her face and looked down the stairs.

ESPERANZA

Curtains flamed up the walls. The house was enveloped in a fog that thickened toward the ceiling.

MIGUEL

Mama and Esperanza crouched down the stairs where Alfonso was waiting to lead them out through the kitchen.



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**NARRATOR**

In the courtyard, the wooden gates were open. Near the stables, the vaqueros were releasing the horses from the corrals.

**ESPERANZA**

Servants scurried everywhere. Where were they going?

**ALFONSO**

Esperanza felt dizzy. Nothing seemed real. Was she still dreaming? Miguel grabbed her.

**MIGUEL**

Where is Abuelita?

**MAMA**

When she didn't answer, he ran toward the house.

**NARRATOR**

The wind caught the sparks and carried them to the stables. Esperanza stood in the middle of it all, watching the outline of her home silhouetted in flames.



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ALFONSO

Miguel ran out of the burning house carrying Abuelita in his arms. He laid her gently on the ground.

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MAMA

He is on fire!

ESPERANZA

The back of Miguel's shirt was aflame. Alfonso tackled him, rolling him over and over on the ground until the fire was out.

ALFONSO

Miguel stood up and slowly took off the blackened shirt.

MIGUEL

Mama cradled Abuelita in her arms.

ESPERANZA

Mama, is she . . . ?

MAMA

No, she is alive, but weak and her ankle . . . I don't think she can walk.



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ESPERANZA

The fire's anger could not be contained. It spread to the grapes.

NARRATOR

The flames ran along the deliberate rows of vines, like long curved fingers reaching for the horizon.

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MAMA

They stood as if in trances, for hours, and watched *El Rancho de las Rosas* burn.

NARRATOR

There was no point in talking about how it happened.

ALFONSO

They all knew that the uncles had arranged the fire.



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MIGUEL

Still in her nightgown, Esperanza went out among the rubble and surveyed the surviving victims:

ALFONSO

the twisted forms of wrought-iron chairs . . .

MAMA

. . . unharmed cast-iron skillets . . .

ALFONSO

. . . and the mortars and pestles from the kitchen that were made from lava rock and refused to burn.



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MAMA

Avoiding the smoldering piles, Esperanza picked through the black wood, hoping to find something to salvage . . .

NARRATOR

. . . hoping for *un milagro*, a miracle.

ESPERANZA

But all that Papa had left – the grapes and the contents of the house . . . was gone.

MIGUEL

*Awake, my beloved awake.  
See . . . it is already dawn  
The birds are already singing,  
the moon has already gone . . .*

ESPERANZA

(singing or reciting)

*Despierta, mi bien, despierta. Mira que ya amaneció  
Ya los pajaritos cantan, la luna ya se metió*



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*End of scene*