Alexis Barragan

Brenda McKenna

Writing 1010

09/18/2013

The lights shine and the music starts playing. All eyes are on the beautiful *quinceañera* in her flowing lavender dress, her glittering tiara, and her radiant smile. This is her time and only hers. Start counting. *Stride-step-step-stride-step-step.* I gather her into my arms and she looks into my face just briefly. I look into hers and see only joy and gratitude. My fear is vanquished and replaced with a pleasant determination. The moves that I had been stressing about for months are now easy and natural. *Spin-step-step-spin-step-spin.* I let her down and we proceed with the final moments of her inauguration into womanhood.

\*\*\*

We have eight more weeks of practice. “How am I supposed to move like that??” I think as the dance instructor shows me how to do my next part in the routine.

“Watch how I do it, keep the count in your head, and swing your hips,” she says.

She probably guessed from an incredulous look on my face. Then it’s Patricia’s turn. I am in awe as I watch her smoothly and confidently transition from one position to the next, her lustrous long black hair swirling along with her. I am fourteen and I’ve never danced before in my life. My left foot trips my right foot— my body is as stiff as a board— I regularly lose the count of the music— I forget the next step— I step on the feet or dress of my partner. I’m about as elegant as a cow and as slick as sandpaper. I am the only guy and I dance with ten lovely teenage girls. Why did Patricia choose me for this? There are many guys that are way more qualified. “Just keep trying. You are doing great!” Patricia tells me encouragingly. Suddenly, trying to do the impossible doesn’t seem so bad. I can at least try. I’m really not sure why I agreed to her request, but I can’t quit now. One thing is certain, however: I need a miracle. Maybe a couple of them.

\*\*\*

“You should do it!” were my father’s words when I first told him that I was asked to be a *chambelán.* A girl will usually have one or more *chambelánes* in her groupbut will only ever have one *chambelán de honor.* He will dance with her exclusively as well as with all her female relatives*.* I happen to be the lucky one.Ever since I’ve been participating in the *quince* my dad has been very nostalgic. “How is practice going?” my father will regularly inquire. After, he informs me about how *quinceañeras* typically have a lot of food, how they usually last late into the night, and the different events that occur such as the thanksgiving mass. Then he hums a tune and dances around the kitchen and tells me how he had danced in so many *quinces* and how he had been a dance instructor for years. My baby brother will walk in when he hears my father and will start to happily waddle to the tune. I am glad that I am finally participating in the culture of my people and that my father is so proud. But I can’t help but feel reluctant about it. As of yet I do not feel the same joy that my father and brother feel as they happily twist and turn in the living room to some imaginary song.

\*\*\*

Today is the day I’ve been anticipating. “The *chambelán* looks a little strange,” I think as I quickly make sure my clothes are in order in one of the bathroom mirrors inside the cathedral. I would never have thought I would be wearing the selected white tuxedo with lavender vest and tie. It probably doesn’t help that I’m shaking and moving in place trying not to think of what’s going to happen tonight. Professional photographers are already fervently following and directing the group, trying to get perfect shots of the *quinceañera* and her friends. “I’m so nervous!” Patricia whispers to me. I realize for the first time how stressful this must all be for her. I decide to try to swallow my own insecurities and try to make her big day the best that I can. I hear the *damas* squeal in delight as an Escalade limousine pulls up outside of the magnificent Cathedral of the Madeleine. I find it quite amusing when, once away from the photographers, we go to get some burgers before the photo shoot taking place at the La Caille gardens. It must be quite a sight to see a limousine and a bunch of fancy dressed kids at a Carl’s Jr. As we drive to the party through downtown Salt Lake City, music blasting, everyone dancing and singing in the limo, I start to think that this might be a fun experience after all.

\*\*\*

I’m walking through the halls going to my French class when Patricia walks up beside me. This is odd. She is in my math class but I have really never talked to her. She tells me about her upcoming *quinceañera* and asks me if I would like to be her *chambelán*. I’m absolutely stunned. She wants *me* to dance with *her*? In my shocked state with my jaw most likely on the floor, I tell her that I have to think about it. “Okay, just let me know by Friday. Yeah?” she says and hurries to her next class. I sit down in French and can’t concentrate at all. I am by no means popular, or attractive, or skilled, or anything. And she is pretty much of all of that! I dread dancing and I have never danced before. And she wants me to dance with her in front of a couple hundred people? This is too much for me. I don’t think I can do this. As the day ends and I lie in bed when night finally comes, I start to wonder. Patricia asked *me* of all the other guys at school and all the other people she knows to be *her* *chambelán*. I don’t know why, but she thinks I can do it and she wants me to do it. Sometimes opportunities come and I let them pass by because I don’t recognize their worth. Sometimes I let them pass by because of my weaknesses as an adolescent or as a human. But most of the time I let them pass because I feel inadequate. I am nobody and I can’t do this. But someone else, someone that I don’t even know believes in me. And that is going to be enough for me.