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Autobiography & Memoir

My Mother's Funeral
Adriana Paramo
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This moving ode to the legacy of the author's mother sheds new light on the trials of single parenthood and Alzheimer's.

Coming to terms with her mother Carmen's death is only part of this beautifully crafted memoir, in which Adriana Paramo also shares the more important story of Carmen's life and her relationships with her children and a sorry excuse for a husband. The narrative floats seamlessly from the past to the present and back again. Along the way, Paramo, anthropologist and author of the award-winning *Looking for Esperanza*, reveals insights into the hard life for a female-dominated family in Colombia during the 1940s to '60s.

Carmen falls under the spell of Mr. B, whom she marries when she is nineteen. The honeymoon ends quickly—figuratively and literally—when the newlyweds must flee from the whorehouse where they spend their wedding night, an establishment where Mr. B is well known. Mr. B, Adriana's father, deserts the family when she is seven, and he only returns when he is dying from cancer because he knows Carmen, always the good Colombian wife, will take care of him.

Adriana, as she matures from a rebellious child into a single parent herself, comes to see Carmen not just as a mother but also as a woman of strength and conviction. The author is so good at recreating dialogue and vividly portraying characters, readers will feel they are first-hand observers.

Paramo chillingly casts a pall in the form of the Alzheimer's that inevitably results in the decline of the once strong and vibrant Carmen. This scenario will evoke sympathy from those with family members or friends similarly affected. Many moving passages are included throughout, all memorable. In one scene, for example, Carmen, showing signs of Alzheimer's, tells Adriana that she was the result of an accidental and unwanted pregnancy.

Readers will likely raise questions that the author only hints at: What happens to Adriana's siblings? Why did she move to Alaska? What were her experiences in college and in Alaska? Hopefully the author will answer these in an eagerly awaited second memoir. For now, Paramo offers readers a vivid, humorous, and moving account of not only her mother's life and death but also the legacy that a resilient and thriving woman bequeathed to her daughter.

Karl Helicher