

Chances in Disguise

“A timely and intimate first-person courtroom drama”

—Kirkus Reviews

Diana J. Noble

Praise for *Chances in Disguise*

“Though fictionalized, the novel is grounded in true historical events which saw Mexican refugees and American-born Tejanos facing sham trials, vigilantes and violent policing without due process. This novel presents a story that is as relevant to and important for contemporary readers as it was in the early 20th century. A timely and intimate first-person courtroom drama.”

—*Kirkus Reviews*

“A vibrant and compelling story about a young woman’s courage and the heroic efforts by a community of friends to save her. *Chances in Disguise* is bound to illuminate and inspire us in our present struggles for justice.”

—Francisco X. Stork, author of *On the Hook*

Praise for *Evangelina Takes Flight*

A Junior Library Guild Selection

2018 Skipping Stones Honor Award

2017 Southwest Books of the Year

2018 Tejas Foco YA Fiction Award

2018 June Franklin Naylor Award for the Best Book for Children on Texas History

2018 Spirit of Texas Reading Program Selection

Runner-up, 2018 Texas Institute of Letters HEB Award for Best Young Adult Book

“Written in Evangelina’s conscientious voice and containing parallels to some of today’s current events, this hopeful, yet sometimes heartbreaking, novel is a fast and important read.”

—*Booklist*

“Using the first person with Spanish sprinkled throughout, Noble propels the novel with vivid imagery and lovely prose, successfully guiding readers behind an immigrant family’s lens. Loosely based on Noble’s own grandmother’s story, this debut hits awfully close to home in the current anti-immigrant political climate.”

—*Kirkus Reviews*

“Honest in its exploration of xenophobia, and timely in its empathetic portrayal of a refugee family, *Evangelina Takes Flight* is a vibrant and appealing historical novel. As much as this vital work takes on social issues, it’s Evangelina’s coming of age that resounds. Her abuelito’s maxim, ‘Challenges are chances in disguise,’ grows into a gorgeously woven message of hope.”

—*Foreword Reviews*

“Noble’s poetic yet accessible prose allows the reader to slip into Evangelina’s world and understand that problems can be overcome with perseverance and bravery.”

—*Latinxs in Kid Lit*

“Noble’s compelling debut novel follows the life of a young Mexicana as she and her family escape the uncertainty and violence of the Mexican Revolution into a segregated Texas. It is through Noble’s deeply poetic writing and deft depiction of 1910’s Borderlands that we see the indignities of war, racism and discrimination; but it is Noble’s humanizing point of view through the eyes of a girl that we witness the hopes, love and dreams inherent in any people engaging in the difficulties of a diaspora.”

—National Association for Chicano/Chicana Studies

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Disguise



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PIÑATA BOOKS
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Piñata Books are full of surprises!

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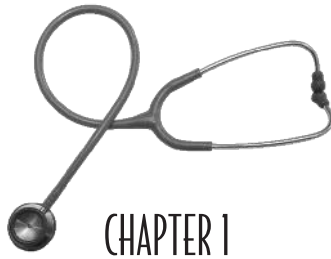
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Dr. John Morán-Gonzalez, please accept my deepest gratitude for writing an afterword that provides essential history and meaningful context for Evangelina's story. To learn more about historical events along the Mexico-Texas border from 1910-1920, please visit www.refusingtoforget.org.

"It is from numberless diverse acts of courage and belief that human history is shaped. Each time a man stands up for an ideal, or acts to improve the lot of others, or strikes out against injustice, he sends forth a tiny ripple of hope, and crossing each other from a million different centers of energy and daring, those ripples build a current that can sweep down the mightiest walls of oppression and resistance."

—Robert F. Kennedy



CHAPTER 1

Dirty Field Rat

Ramona Healy, a woman I met just two hours ago, lays on a thin mattress in her one-room home, too tired to swat at the fly buzzing around her face. I grab the narrow handle of a corn husk fan and shoo it away. It moves onto a pair of pigs' feet in the cast-iron pot on the woodstove. The vinegary brine they cooked in gives off a sharp, repulsive smell. The wind whistles through the cabin sidewalls where the binding mud between the logs has crumbled and fallen away.

I hand Mrs. Healy a ceramic cup filled with tea that Mexican *curanderas*, or healers, have used for centuries to ease pain. She turns it a bit to avoid the chipped edges and sips.

After a thorough examination, I find no unusual bleeding or sign of infection, and her vital signs are stable.

"Do not worry. I will take care of you," I tell her.

The tea helps with the pain, but it can only do so much.

When the discomfort in her back increases, and she can no longer carry on a conversation, I give her another herbal remedy I made myself that should dull the

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worst of it. She slides her thin arm across the bed and rests her hand on mine.

Click, click, click, the pendulum on the shelf clock swings.

Beads of sweat appear on her forehead and lip, and her thin smile gives way to wild eyes and gritted teeth. The contraction starts as gentle as a spring breeze and grows like a twister picking up speed.

I ask if she would like me to pray for her. She nods, so I pull out my Rosary.

"Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee. Blessed are thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus." Her lips move silently with mine.

The cabin door swings open, *BANG!* A light-haired man with round spectacles and a goatee steps inside.

"I'm Doctor Jedidiah Morley. Who are you, and what are you doing here?" he barks and inspects me from head to foot through narrowed eyes. "Oh, dear God! You're nothing but a dirty Mexican field rat! How dare you masquerade as someone capable of treating a woman in this vulnerable state! Get away from her!"

I try to explain myself. Why I'm here, how many births I've assisted with, my training with Doc Taylor in Seneca, but the man turns away. He opens his bag and pulls out a stethoscope, bandages, scissors, tweezers and a syringe the length of a toothbrush.

"Evangelina?" Mrs. Healy murmurs. "Will you stay with me?"

"No, ma'am. This girl's not the least bit qualified," the doctor says, then points at the door. "Are you deaf, girl?" he shouts at me. "You don't belong here. You're a fraud and a danger to this woman. Get out!"

"I'm sorry," I mouth to her as I put my things away and run outside, where I get on my bike and ride for the two hours it takes to get home.

She'll be all right, I tell myself. She's with a real doctor now.



I lay awake most of the night, wondering how Ramona Healy and her baby are doing. Childbirth may be the most natural process in the world, but it can also be a dangerous one. She would have done fine had I stayed. I've delivered babies myself without any problems and assisted Doc Taylor with countless others. Doctor Morley had no right to order me out of the way he did.

Of course, he's a licensed physician, and I am not. He's an adult, and I am just seventeen. But still, his abrupt entrance and insults startled the patient. And me.



The early morning sun comes through the tiny holes in the lace curtains, and the smell of brewing coffee lures me to the kitchen.

Mamá wears an embroidered sky-blue house dress and an apron with a rooster painted on one pocket and chickens with eggs on the other. It's the only apron she brought from our ranch in Mexico. One long black braid hangs down her back. A rusty-colored pottery bowl with *machacado*, shredded beef sits nearby. She picks up the cutting board and pushes diced garlic and tomatoes into a cast-iron skillet on the stove. Next, she'll add the beef and cook it until it gets crispy, then fold in the raw eggs.

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I love the sound of the sizzle and the instant steam that spreads a time-to-get-up smell that even sleepy heads like my little brothers, Tomás and Domingo, can't ignore.

"Good morning, Mamá," I say in Spanish, the language we use at home.

"Good morning to you, *m'ija*," Mamá replies, wiping her hands on a dishtowel. "You were gone longer than I expected yesterday. I was beginning to get worried. I couldn't fall asleep until I heard you come in."

"I'm sorry about that. I didn't expect to stay out that . . ."

"María Elena?" Papá calls from the living room. "The sheriff just pulled up in front of our house."

"Why would he come here?" Mamá asks as she pulls the skillet off the heat and sets it on a back burner.

My thoughts jump to my older brothers, Emilio and Enrique, working in the New Mexico coal mines. *Are they all right?*

Papá opens the front door. The sheriff, gray-haired, tall and thick around the middle, pushes past him.

"Excuse me, sir? What you want with us?" Papá asks.

The sheriff steps around Papá and faces me. "Are you Evanjellina duh Lee-on?" he asks.

"Yes, sir," I reply.

"You are hereby under arrest for the murder of Mrs. Otis Healy."

"What? Mrs. Healy is dead?" I ask.

Papá's eyes dart from the sheriff to me. "*M'ija*, what is he talking about?"

My older sister Elsa and younger brother Tomás shuffle into the room, Tomás in his rumpled pajamas, Elsa in her pink housecoat.

"You must be mistaken, sir. Mrs. Healy was alive when I left," I say.

"We can't verify that now, can we?" the sheriff retorts. "The woman's dead as a doornail."

"She asked . . . she asked me to stay with her!" I say. "There was nothing unusual about her labor. Her vital signs were normal!"

"Who is Mrs. Healy?" Papá asks.

"What about the baby?" I cry.

"Doc Morley saved the infant, a boy. That man's a hero," the sheriff says.

Mamá holds her palms up, her eyes wide as nickels. "I no understand. What she do—why you talk to my daughter like this?"

"Are ya feeble-minded? She killed Ramona Healy, a woman with child. Doctor Jedidiah Morley reported the crime to my office this mornin'."

Mamá shakes her head and looks at me to help her understand.

"Mamá, they think I killed the patient I was with yesterday. She died after I left the woman's home," I translate for her. "It must be a mistake."

"*¡Es una mentira!* That's a lie!" Mamá shouts.

The sheriff yanks me halfway around, claps the handcuffs on my wrists and walks me to the police wagon. Neighbors gather outside and stare.

"Where you take her?" Mamá pleads, following close behind.

"You people sure are stupid. Where do ya think I'm takin' her?" the sheriff snarls.

"Wait!" Papá yells as the sheriff pushes me into the wagon. "Evangelina never hurt no one!"

"Adán, do something!" Mamá shrieks.

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"She just a child—she only seventeen!" Papá says, rushing towards me.

Sheriff Pearl grabs his gun with one hand and slams the wagon door shut with the other.

"Get back, seen-yor," he says in a mocking Mexican accent, "or I'll shoot yer empty head clean off'a yer neck."

The weight of the wagon shifts as the sheriff climbs upfront.

"Hi-yah!" he shouts.

My body pitches back as the horse takes off with a jolt.

"We come for you!" Mamá yells.

Thump, thump, thump, thump, someone's feet pound the road behind us.

"Where are you going?" Tomás yells. "Evangelina, don't go!" His voice trails off as he falls farther behind.

The clip-clop of the horse's hooves and the beating of my heart join together in terrifying rhythm.

Did I kill Ramona Healy?