



Evangelina Takes Flight

Diana J. Noble

"Noble propels the novel with vivid imagery and lovely prose, successfully guiding readers behind an immigrant family's lens." —*Kirkus Reviews*

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Dedication

To Russ, Taylor (x2), Adam and Sierra who fill me with inspiration, strength and purpose.



Acknowledgements

For someone who once thought, “I’m no good at creative writing,” and “I don’t have enough ideas to dream up an entire story worth reading,” it’s a wonder I ever got past myself enough to write this book. If it weren’t for a special group of family and friends, I wouldn’t have made it across the finish line.

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PART 1





Chapter One

The Coming Storm

May 19, 1911, Rancho Encantado (Enchanted Ranch) outside Mariposa, a small town in northern Mexico

Papá thought I didn't hear him talking to my brother, but I did, because I pressed my ear against the cracks in the barn wall, and now his hushed "Don't-tell-anyone-about-this" voice thunders in my head.

"We're landowners, *m'ijo*. If they do come here, they'll show us no mercy."

I grip the fencepost outside the chicken pen and command my legs to stop wobbling. He did say *if*.

I make my way to the kitchen on the backside of the house, my front apron pocket bulging with warm eggs.

Mamá stands behind the massive carved wood table dotted with woven baskets full of peppers, garlic, cilantro and limes. With nine of us to feed, she's either behind that table, at the sink or in front of the stove most of the day.

"I have to tell you something," I announce as I unload the eggs into the rust-colored clay bowl.

She puts down her knife and wipes her hands on the front of her apron. "Of course, *m'ija*, what is it?"

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"The soldiers are coming," the words spill out. "What's going to happen to us?" I open and clench my clammy palms.

Mamá sighs and steps toward me with outstretched arms, her expression a familiar mix of love, pity and exasperation. "Where did you hear that, *m'ija*?" Her arms fold around me. The warmth of her body melts into mine.

"Outside," I whisper into her shoulder. "Papá was talking to Emilio. I was feeding the chickens."

She pushes me back and studies my face. "So you were listening to someone else's conversation?"

"I wasn't trying to," I respond as I gnaw on the nail of my little finger. "Well, maybe I was. But, that's not important! Should we leave Mariposa?"

"Evangelina . . ." Mamá shakes her head. "Your father will let us know if there's any reason for worry. Right now we have a *quinceañera* to put on. In the next week, I'm going to need your help more than ever. All right? And, *m'ija*?" She purses her lips. "Stop it with the nails, such a dirty habit." She guides my hand away from my mouth.

"Yes, Mamá," I say dutifully through clenched teeth. She didn't give me any answers at all. "I'll go see if Elsa is up," I mutter and shuffle toward the bedroom I share with my sister.

"Evangelina?" Mamá calls from down the hall.

"Yes?"

"Do not say anything to your brothers or sisters about this."

"Why not?"

"Just do as I say."

"*Claro que sí.*" I swallow, but the lump in my dry throat sits like a rock in still water.

"Do I have your word?"

I close the bedroom door as if I didn't hear the question.

Elsa, my almost-fifteen-year-old sister, primps in front of the mirror at the dressing table. She pulls a hairpin from her pocket and pushes it in the long black braid piled neatly on top of her head in a perfect bun.

"Good morning, Evangelina! Did you get the eggs?" A perfect curl hangs in front of each ear.

"Of course, I got up an hour ago, hauled water from the river, fed the chickens *and* got the eggs while you were snoring away."

She looks at me, aghast. "I don't snore!"

"How would you know if you're asleep?"

"Mamá is going to make bread pudding, for the *quinceañera*." She ignores my question, turning back to the mirror. "We're going to need a lot of eggs."

I wrinkle my nose. "That's a Christmas dessert."

"I know, but it's my favorite, and Enrique's, too."

A *quinceañera* is more than a girl's fifteenth birthday celebration; it's an announcement to the world that she's eligible for marriage. Elsa and Enrique turn fifteen on May twenty-eight. My own *quinceañera* is less than a year and a half away.

"I'm worried," I whisper. I plop down on the edge of our bed.

Elsa turns in the chair to face me and folds her hands in her lap. "And?"

"Mamá said not to tell anyone, but I just have to or I'll burst."

She throws up her hands. "Don't be so dramatic. Are you sure you should tell me?"

I shake my head. "No."

She bites her lip for a moment. "Oh, just tell me! I don't want you to burst!"

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I lean forward. "I was outside this morning, early, while you were in here snoring." I throw that in again just because. "I fed the chickens like I always do. A few pecked at the feed, but most of them ran around all nervous."

"Evangelina, how do you know if a chicken is nervous?" She folds a handkerchief and places it in her apron pocket.

"They wouldn't eat. They just ran around flapping and pecking at each other."

"They're chickens. Does it matter?"

"A storm is coming. They can sense it."

"Evangelina, is that what you wanted to tell me? The chickens seeing a storm in our future?"

"Don't be ridiculous. I'm not just talking about rain and wind. Something bad is going to happen." I lower my voice. "Papá talked to the sheriff in Castillo yesterday, and this morning he told Emilio something—a warning from the sheriff." I take a deep breath. "The revolution is coming this way."

"What do you mean?"

"Have you heard of Pancho Villa?"

"Of course. Everyone's heard of him. He takes from the rich and gives to the poor, like Robin Hood."

"No!" I shake my head. "Well, maybe." I press the heel of my palm on the space between my eyebrows. "Maybe he *was* a hero, but now his troops are burning houses, stealing and . . . and worse." Papá said what "worse" is, but I keep it to myself.

Elsa grabs my hands and squeezes. "But the revolution's at the other end of the country."

"The sheriff said a battle broke out in Los Palos last week. The town was practically destroyed."

"What should we do?" Her face turns as pale as a cotton blossom.

"I don't know."

"What did Papá say after that?"

"Nothing. He and Emilio walked away." I stand up and look through the window. A see-through curtain of mist floats down and turns into a steady rain. Thunder rolls in the distance. A storm is definitely coming.

"Do you think we'll still have the *quinceañera*?"

"Mamá said there's a lot to do before then, so that must be a 'yes.' Let's just do our chores and try to forget all about this. It was selfish of me to say anything to you," I concede. I only told her to make myself feel better. "Please, please, don't tell Mamá I said anything."