ForeWord Reviews

GENERAL

Ocotillo Dreams
Melinda Palacio
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The issue of immigration, particularly in America's Southwest, has become so politicized and inflammatory that one often forgets it is an issue of human suffering, struggle, hope, and despair, of life and death. Melinda Palacio's *Ocotillo Dreams* manages to take the reader inside the world of those trying to make new lives for themselves, whether honorably or nefariously.

The story takes place in Chandler, Arizona, in 1997. The government was in the process of detaining and deporting thousands of migrants, often secretly in the dark of night. To even look Hispanic often meant a quick ticket to a detention facility. Isola is the protagonist, initially living in San Francisco, who inherits her mother's house in Chandler. While packing up the house, she gradually pieces together her mother's hidden history and meets several undocumented immigrants who knew her mother well.

As *Dreams* develops, Isola realizes she is more tied to Chandler, its people, and its past than she could have imagined. Eventually she begins to discover herself through the life her mother led. Love, pain, loyalty, confusion, and inspiration all play key roles in Isola's ultimate self-discovery, which is inextricably tied to the immigration battle raging in Chandler.

Perhaps Palacio's greatest feat with *Ocotillo Dreams* is how quickly and carefully she develops her characters. The reader cannot help but to feel deep concern for them. The imagery and unconventional flow of the story's timeline work perfectly together in a way that continually drives the tale and keeps the pages turning. Rich symbolism and metaphors make the novel more akin to a short story or novella, fertile stomping grounds for allegory.

To put a human face on, and show the intricate complexities of, an overly generalized political talking point is no mean feat, and Palacio manages it with grace, style, and utmost care. *Ocotillo Dreams* is a must-read for anyone truly wishing to gain an inside perspective of immigration and what it means to those on both sides of the border. Here is a case where in fiction, one finds truth.

Chris Fisher