



Secrets of the Casa Rosada

Alex Temblador

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Alex Temblador's magical *Secrets of the Casa Rosada* follows Martha George, a sixteen-year-old girl whose rootless and impoverished life with her mother shifts.

When Martha's mom says they are going to Texas to visit her mysterious grandmother, Martha assumes that they are being evicted and have no other place to go. She is horrified and hurt when her mother abandons her in her grandmother's home. Martha speaks no Spanish and her grandmother speaks no English. Martha's loneliness is keenly felt, even when she is welcomed by an unexpected, large extended family.

Martha is an amazing lead, a young woman who is faced with a multitude of difficult obstacles but who does not hesitate to adapt. She learns a new language and embraces her new circumstances. She wants to learn as much as she can about her mother, but her grandmother—a respected and feared healer, a *curandera*—does not want to share any details from her daughter's past, and the rest of the family will not cross her.

The book is evocative with a strong sense of place. From the first page, Laredo, Texas, is described in beautiful sensory detail. The culture of its primarily Mexican community is brought to life as Martha explores her new environment.

Her grandmother decides to teach her to be a *curandera*, and Martha discovers that she has a natural talent for it. She must carefully navigate family secrets, the awe and fear with which the community treats her grandmother, and a fellow teen's baffling but dangerous hostility as she tries to find her place in this new world.

Secrets of the Casa Rosada is a fascinating story with a strong protagonist and a glimpse at some unique aspects of traditional Mexican culture.

CATHERINE THURESON (November/December 2018)

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