



Sophie's House of Cards

Sharon Oard Warner

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Everyday life in the American Southwest makes for an apt landscape for this coming-of-age novel of family secrets and maturing love.

In Sophie's House of Cards, teenage Sophie's loud-mouthed whimsy and fragile attempts at sincerity are as bold and endearing as her head of dark curls. But when she discovers she is pregnant, Sophie and the adults around her hesitate to move forward with their newfound reality—until, that is, the past pays a visit. Stripped of the comfort of her boyfriend, best friend, and father, Sophie must make her way, trembling, through the end of her childhood.

Sharon Oard Warner deftly explores family life in present-day New Mexico alongside images of communal living from the 1960s. Sophie's mother, Peggy, a former hippy and tarot-card reader, is adept at hiding things, like the remnants of her commune days, the big rum bottle from Costco, and the paternity of her daughter. When Peggy's old friend Candace comes to Albuquerque, it doesn't take long before what was once half-heartedly obscured spirals into view.

Warner captures the New Mexican landscape beautifully: the gold of cottonwood trees in fall; the gush of desert spring; the delicate and smothering way snow falls in the mountains. But it is the placing of everyday human life directly inside this landscape that allows Warner to create such a striking portrait of the American Southwest. Her descriptions illuminate not the grandeur of a Western-film backdrop but the details of real life: making chorizo for breakfast; owning a small business; the ordinariness of sex and infidelity.

Peggy's old tarot deck provides an interesting frame for the novel, with illustrations and explanations of certain cards beginning each chapter. Warner also plays with verb tense throughout, a stylistic choice that merges well with the narrative thread of fortune telling. In the end, it is perhaps the very tentativeness of all the houses we build around and within ourselves that Sophie's story reveals most.

MARGARET FEDDER (Winter 2015)

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