



## State of the Union: A Fina Mendoza Mystery

**Kitty Felde**

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*"Sometimes you have to do things that make other people mad if you want to change something that is wrong," learns a precocious young investigator in the involving mystery novel State of the Union.*

In Kitty Felde's informative mystery novel *State of the Union*, a child detective tracks down a rogue bird that she believes may have a message for her from beyond.

Ten-year-old Fina spends a lot of time in the US Capitol. Her father works in the House of Representatives, and she works as a dog walker for the pets of members of Congress.

When Monica, the woman who works at the Capitol's cafeteria checkout, tells Fina that she keeps hearing the squawk of a Chickcharney, a legendary bird from her home in the Caribbean, Fina is skeptical. But when a bird swoops in and poops on the president's head during the State of the Union address, Fina is convinced that what Monica said is true: the Chickcharney is here, and it has a message for her from her late mother. Though Fina's investigation lands her in trouble with the Capitol Hill security guards and complicates her relationship with her father and her abuelita, she races to find the bird before animal control can take it away.

Fina is an intelligent and precocious heroine who uses her critical thinking skills and keen observational senses to suss out information on the Chickcharney and the other mysteries in her daily life, including her inscrutable math homework and her teenage sister's angst-motivated choices. Fina attributes her humility to the example of her Mexican American abuelita, who is a proud pro-immigration activist; she knows she is lucky to live in close proximity to the White House too. In the course of the novel, she shares insider information such as that "reporters don't applaud" and that it is "against the rules to use a government phone or a government office to help you run for re-election." Her affable voice and desire to do her best make her an endearing guide through the capital city.

Fina's investigation takes place on the internet as much as on the Capitol's grounds, but her alternating disappointment and excitement at her dead ends and discoveries make her digital search just as action-packed as her physical one. Encounters with cantankerous Capitol police and listless reporters bolster the book's suspense. While Fina seems to lack friends her own age without explanation, her dog-walking companions and her abuelita, who has high expectations for her kin, round out her extra-detective activities. And her abuelita's and father's political motivations interweave with Fina's investigation for additional intrigue.

In the process of searching for the Chickcharney, Fina lands on another message from her abuelita's activist friends: "Sometimes you have to do things that make other people mad if you want to change something that is wrong." While Fina's goal is always to find the Chickcharney, her understanding of its potential message shifts over the course of her investigation. In the political battle over whether the bird that pooped on the president's head during the State of the Union speech should be killed or lauded, Fina only wants for it what she wants for herself: a sense of belonging.

*State of the Union* is a delightful mystery novel with a message of unity and cooperation modeled in the goal of

catching a runaway bird.

AIMEE JODOIN (July 2, 2024)

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