

Welcome to Washington Fina Mendoza: A Fina Mendoza Mystery

Kitty Felde

Chesapeake Press (Jul 3, 2023)

Softcover \$12.99 (219pp)

978-1-73597-672-3

A grieving girl stumbles onto a supernatural distraction in the involving mystery novel Welcome to Washington Fina Mendoza.

In Kitty Felde's series-opening mystery novel *Welcome to Washington Fina Mendoza*, a girl whose father works in the government has an insider's glimpse at Washington, DC, goings-on.

After moving from Los Angeles to Washington, DC, because of her father's position as a congressman, Fina is at odds with her new surroundings. She misplaces her sweatshirt, struggles to make friends, and misses her life back in California, a place that holds strong memories of her late mother.

While looking for her sweatshirt, Fina hears mysterious noises in the Capitol Crypt. A policewoman tells her that it is the curse of the Demon Cat, and that bad luck comes upon those who encounter the crypt. Soon after, Fina's abuelita breaks her leg, Fina drops a spaghetti sauce jar, and Senator Something, the dog Fina walks for a congresswoman, runs into the street and is hit by a car. Convinced that all of her bad luck is happening because of the Demon Cat, Fina sets out to solve the mystery.

The book's adults behave in sometimes childish ways, resulting in awkward dynamics: the policewoman blames Fina when Senator Something chews up an item; Fina's father is waiting for Abuelita to unpack their boxes, prompting Fina and her sister Gabby to unpack by themselves; and when Senator Something is hit by a car, Fina guides an office worker to save the dog's life. In comparison, Fina is developed as a strong, thoughtful girl who's reminiscent of her mother. Her tenuous relationship with her sister is both argumentative and caring—reflecting their loving bond despite their large age gap.

While at first the Demon Cat mystery crowds out other concerns in Fina's mind, including those related to her missing sweatshirt, her new life in Washington, DC, and her family's grief, the separate storylines marry quite well by the novel's midpoint. Indeed, Fina's determination to solve the mystery is tied to her hope to protect her family (in particular, her father) from the curse: she fears losing another family member. In her dedicated efforts to solve the Demon Cat mystery, Fina also ends up addressing her complicated feelings of grief, love, and the desire to make her mother proud. These concerns lead to a satisfying and emotional resolution that addresses Fina's fears, Gabby's issues with the move, and their father's increasing understanding that he needs to be more present in their lives.

With captivating family dynamics and a smart, courageous heroine, the lighthearted mystery novel *Welcome to Washington Fina Mendoza* encompasses the struggles of loss, moving, and independence.

STERLING HOOKER (June 25, 2024)

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