

Treasures in Heaven



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From Publishers Weekly This last installment in Alcal 's trilogy of loosely linked novels, which began with the award-winning *Spirits of the Ordinary* and *The Flower in the Skull*, resumes the story of well-born Estela and her young son, No. Escaping the scandal surrounding her family and fugitive husband, Zacarías, Estela and No leave their small town for a new life in turn-of-the-century Mexico City. Soon running out of money and hope, Estela contacts her former lover, handsome Dr. Victor Carranza, only to discover that he is married. Victor helps Estela by introducing her to liberal-minded "La Señorita," a woman of wealth and style, who uses her money to help the poor. She hires Estela to run a school for the children of prostitutes. Both Estela and No become involved in the birth of Mexico's social revolution, coming of age in a corrupt society where the rich enjoy material treasures, the wise enjoy spiritual treasures and the poor must wait for their "treasures in heaven." Alcal 's extensive research provides pertinent information about the political and economic turbulence preceding the Mexican RevolutionDfrom underground feminist actions to the contradictory roles of the Catholic Church as both agent of insurrection and supporter of the government. Alcal 's championship of the redemptive power of change, one's duty to community and family, equality of the sexes and spiritual enlightenment still resonate, but her saga has lost much of its freshness.

Unfortunately, the dynamic historical facts aren't enough to redeem a weak plot and banal characters. The Flower in the Skull disappointed many of those who enjoyed *Spirits of the Ordinary*; regrettably, this third volume will not restore readers' faith in Alcalá, and may fare poorly. (Oct.) Copyright 2000 Reed Business Information, Inc. From School Library Journal Adult/High School-Set in Mexico City in the mid-19th century, this treasure of a novel offers readers history, romance, politics, and a handful of mysteries. When Estela and her youngest child arrive from the provinces, she enters a metropolitan culture rife with Parisian fashions, high standards for education among the upper class, and disregard for the rights of women. Her lover, a doctor with useful connections, puts her in touch with a mysterious spinster who runs a school for the children of prostitutes. Estela becomes La Se-orita's helper, business partner, and as close to a confidante as La Se-orita can tolerate. In addition to educating the children, Estela teaches the prostitutes not only to read and cook, but also to care for their bodies and consider the political ramifications of their sexual servitude. With the doctor's illustrative help, she begins to produce a patently feminist publication, utilizing the services of a mysterious Jewish printer. The plot moves quickly through a couple of decades, taking in various deaths, including, eventually, that of La Se-orita. Estela's son becomes an investigative reporter and the story ends happily, unpredictably but credibly, with his union to Estela's lover's daughter. Chapters are brief; details concise, sensuous, but rarely graphic; and characterizations of both men and women sharp. Francisca Goldsmith, Berkeley Public Library, CA Copyright 2001 Cahners Business Information, Inc. See all Editorial Reviews

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