

# The OTHER SIDE of the RIVER

by Alda P. Dobbs

Petra Luna has finally arrived in the United States with her family after a long and treacherous journey across Mexico. This new land offers opportunities, but many hardships as well.

*"I [am] going to work hard to keep my family safe, learn to read and write, and find ways to bring Papa back into our lives." (p. 105)*



Poster by Arielle Brown & Julia Sanchez



The poster depicts Petra Luna and the people, places, and objects that play an important role in her journey. Petra is in the middle of the poster wearing her scarf and holding her baby diamond close to her heart. While she is headed to the United States, she's looking back to Mexico longingly. In the background, there's a train that could take her to San Antonio, over which the sun is rising, representing new beginnings.

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- ❶ **Petra's "baby diamond"** is a small piece of coal gifted to Petra by her papá from the mine he worked at. It reminds her to have courage and strength in the face of adversity.

*"I reached into my skirt's pocket and pulled out my black rock, my baby diamond—the only thing I had left of Papa ... every time I squeezed it, his words rang inside me just as clear as the day he gave it to me: 'When life's problems squeeze you hard, you grow stronger. You grow up to shine like a diamond.'" (p. 8-9)*

- ❷ **Petra's scarf** is a vibrant purple scarf and a meaningful gift from Marietta, the captain of the rebel forces. It has helped Petra feel safe throughout her journey and reminds her to be brave like Marietta.

*"Often, when I touched my scarf, I thought of Marietta—a captain of the rebel forces and the toughest woman I'd ever met." (p. 12)*

- ❸ **Abuelita, Amelia, and Luisito** are Petra's family that she crossed the border with. They are the only family she has in the United States and she will do anything to protect them and keep her promise to Papá.

*"After Abuelita, my siblings, and I had fled our village in Mexico, Luisito had become very sick, and Marietta helped save him. She took our family to a rebel camp, and thanks to her, we were spared from death. Yet ... I still had a promise to keep. A promise I'd made to Papa to keep our family safe." (p. 12)*

- ❹ **Doña Juanita** is Petra's neighbor in the camp and has helped her family since they arrived. She shares a special bond with Petra's little brother, Luisito.

*"Abuelita called Doña Juanita a godsend. She had nursed Luisito since our arrival at the camp, and thanks to her, Luisito's cheeks had turned rosy again." (p. 16)*

- ❺ **The wind** brings news of Papá and the revolution, at least that's what Abuelita says. Even on stormy nights, the harsh wind could be comforting. It knew about Petra's tough journey across Mexico and understood her struggles.

*"On this night, I intended to listen to the wind. Perhaps it brought news of Papa and his whereabouts in Mexico." (p. 9)*

- ❻ **Eagle pass** is Petra's first home in the United States, and it's the town where the refugee camp is located. All she has for shelter is a canvas tent, but she is grateful to be safe—safe from the federales and safe from the war.

*“Our camp had been set in the outskirts of a town with an English name that everyone pronounced as igle pas. Like Piedras Negras across the river, I’d been told this town’s name also had a meaning. It meant el paso del águila—the eagle’s pass” (p. 13)*

- ⑦ **The American flag** represents Petra’s freedom from the federales as well as the opportunities and obstacles she faces in the US.

*“American flags [wave] freely on many rooftops and store entrances, reminding me of the day I had crossed the bridge from Mexico.” (p. 128)*

- ⑧ **The train to San Antonio** could take Petra and her family to a big city where Petra could get a job and maybe even some education. San Antonio is where Petra has a real shot to make a better life for her and her family.

*“I’ll get train tickets and a job that’ll let me take care of Abuelita, Amelia, and Luisito.” (p. 62)*

- ⑨ **The Río Grande**, also called El Río Bravo, is a physical border that separates Mexico and the United States. It keeps Petra safe from the violence of the revolution but it also prohibits her from crossing back home.

*“The revolution is across the Río Bravo. It’s behind us. But our battles with hunger and now the disease—those are still with us.” (p. 12)*

- ⑩ **Petra’s Papá** is still in Mexico—in the revolution. He was forced to stay behind and fight for the federales. Even though Petra doesn’t know where Papá is, she is determined to keep her promise to him and protect her family.

*“Papa agreed to join the hated Federales to spare me the pain of seeing him killed.” (p. 9)*

- ⑪ **The Federales** are Mexican soldiers who fight on the side of the oppressive Mexican government. Petra despises them because they are the reason she had to flee her home and the reason she was separated from Papá.

*“The Federales, mounted on their horses, raised dust as they galloped downhill toward us. Their chase across the desert, full of violence and destruction, was ending here in Piedras Negras at the edge of the Río Bravo. Their fury and rage would soon be upon us, and our lives now lay in their hands.” (p. 1)*

- ⑫ **The Mexican flag** represents Petra’s homeland. It evokes conflicting feelings in Petra because she’s proud to be Mexican but she can’t return to Mexico due to the civil war.

*“The Mexican flag carried a proud eagle on its center, and I wondered if we were the eagles who’d stepped into this new territory.” (p. 13)*