



Woman Hollering Creek

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The twenty-two sketches and stories in this collection, ranging in length from two to thirty pages, are set in Texas and Mexico. In the first two sections the protagonists are children and adolescents—mostly girls, mostly poor—struggling to live happily, freely, and passionately in a repressive traditional culture. In the third and longest section the characters are grown up; their difficulties, though characteristic of a different life stage, are similar.

Cisnero's children are strikingly well-realized. Whether writing about a birthday marred by an unwanted gift ("Eleven"), the delirium of a bonanza of slightly fire-damaged dolls ("Barbie-Q"), or simply the joy of being young ("My Lucy Friend Who Smells Like Corn"), she catches the flavor of childhood and, at the same time, the injustice and repression to which children are subject. A story about an older child, the eighth-grade narrator of "One Holy Night," is darker and stranger but equally strong: The narrator, sexually initiated and left pregnant by a man claiming descent from Mayan kings, discovers that he was in fact a madman who had murdered eleven women; and she must live with that knowledge, and with her stubborn love, as with her child.

Of the stories about grown women, one of the strongest is "Woman Hollering Creek," detailing the repression of Mexican-American women by the men upon whom, for economic survival, they must depend. "Eyes of Zapata," the only story set in the historical past, tells of the Mexican revolution led by the Indian general Emiliano Zapata—but tells of it through the eyes of his mistress, who reveals what it did to the ordinary people who lived through it or died in it.

This is an important collection. Out of finely rendered, richly textured detail emerges a resonant affirmation of life.

Sources for Further Study

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Woman Hollering Creek: Woman Hollering Creek

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