

★ **Eat the Mouth That Feeds You**

Carribbean Fragoza

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Blending the ancestral and the modern, the religious and the secular, the stories of *Eat the Mouth That Feeds You* come together to create something transcendent.

Women and women's bodies are centered throughout the collection. "Lumberjack Mom" finds siblings fascinated with the fierceness with which their mother gardens in the wake of their father's absence. Her hands become rough and her arms strong, externalizing a change that surely must be solidifying within. In the surreal "Me Muero," a young woman drops dead at a family gathering; she must dispense with her own innards before finding peace.

The title story sees a toddler take bites out of her mother and eat letters, photographs, and other ephemera from her grandmother and great grandmother. The body feeds her in more ways than one. In taking the nourishing relationship between a mother and child further than suckling at the breast, the story makes the passage of thoughts, emotions, and knowledge through generations a visceral, loving process.

There is a hidden sense of flow among the pieces. Following "Eat the Mouth That Feeds You" is "Mysterious Bodies," in which a woman attempts an at-home medical abortion with psychedelic results. "Ini y Fati," the story of a young girl saved from death via lightning strike by a child saint who questions the existence of God, is followed by "New Fire Songs," a story outside of time, in which a tribe of people living within a walnut grove, protected from the farmers who would hunt them, draw on their multiethnic ancestral roots for strength.

The collection revels in the unapologetic strength of the feminine, giving it a transformative quality. It reshapes the idea of Chicana womanhood as either meek or strong-willed, and shows that women are both and more. Fierce and feminist, *Eat the Mouth That Feeds You* is a soul-quaking literary force.

DONTANÁ MCPHERSON-JOSEPH (March / April 2021)

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