

“Gonzalez’s debut collection delivers a layered portrait of Mexican American life rooted in 1980s East Los Angeles. An inviting tapestry.”—*Publishers Weekly*

Born in East LA Chicana’s First Book Features Hometown People

HOUSTON, TX— Estella Gonzalez vividly captures her native East LA in her debut, *Chola Salvation*, a collection of affecting stories about a marginalized people dealing with racism, machismo and poverty.

In the title story, Isabela is minding her family’s restaurant, drinking her dad’s beer, when Frida Kahlo and the Virgen de Guadalupe walk in. Even though they’re dressed like *cholas*, the girl immediately recognizes Frida’s uni-brow and La Virgen’s crown. They want to give her advice about the *quinceañera* her parents are forcing on her. In fact, their lecture (don’t get pregnant, go to school, be proud of your indigenous roots) helps Isabela to escape her parents’ physical and sexual abuse. But can she really run away from the self-hatred they’ve created?

These inter-related stories, mostly set in East Los Angeles, uncover the lives of a conflicted Mexican-American community. In “Sábado Gigante,” Bernardo drinks himself into a stupor every Saturday night. “Aquí no es mi tierra,” he cries, as he tries to ease the sorrow of a life lived far from home. Meanwhile, his son Gustavo struggles with his emerging gay identity and Maritza, the oldest daughter, is expected to cook and clean for her brother, even though they live in East LA, not Guadalajara or Chihuahua. In “Powder Puff,” Mireya spends hours every day applying her make-up, making sure to rub the foundation all the way down her neck so it looks like her natural color. But no matter how much she rubs and rubs, her skin is no lighter. In painful and sometimes humorous scenes, young people try to escape the traditional expectations of their family. Other characters struggle with anger and resentment, often finding innovative ways to exact revenge for slights both real and imagined. Throughout, music—traditional and contemporary—accompanies them in the search for love and acceptance.

ESTELLA GONZALEZ’s work has appeared in *Kweli Journal*, *The Acentos Review* and *Huizache* and has been anthologized in *Latinos in Lotusland: An Anthology of Contemporary Southern California Literature* (Bilingual Press, 2014) and *Nasty Women Poets: An Unapologetic Anthology of Subversive Verse* (Lost Horse Press, 2017). She received a Pushcart Prize “Special Mention” and was selected a “Reading Notable” for *The Best American Non-Required Reading*. Her story, “Chola Salvation,” won first-place in the Pima Community College Martindale Literary Prize and she was a finalist for the Louise Meriwether Book Prize for a collection of short fiction. She received her BA in English from Northwestern University and her MFA in fiction from Cornell University. She lives in Tucson, Arizona.

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