



Descanso for My Father: Fragments of a Life (American Lives)

Harrison Candelaria Fletcher

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When his father died, Harrison Candelaria Fletcher wasn't quite two. His mother packed up his father's belongings, put the boxes in a hall closet, and closed the door. The "man in a box" remained a mystery, hardly mentioned, and making only rare appearances in stories when Fletcher or his siblings inquired. Meanwhile, his young Hispanic mother transformed herself into an artist, scouting the back roads and secondhand shops of New Mexico for relics and unlikely treasures to add to her "little shrines," or descansos. "Look closely," she'd say to her son. "Everything tells a story."

This book is Fletcher's literary descanso, a piecing together—from moments and objects and words—of a father's life, of the life lived without that father, and of his own mixed-race identity. Fletcher's reflections unfold like a collage, offering a rich array of images and stories of life with his single mother, organizing weekend family car trips to explore graveyards and adobe ruins; of growing up on the fault lines of class and culture; of being a father who never had one of his own to learn from. From incidents and observations, Fletcher assembles a beautifully crafted portrait of his family's unspoken affliction with loss over the decades, a portrait that finally evokes the father at its heart.

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