

Book Club Kit



*“The curse is powerful.
But so am I.”*

Dear Reader,

This one's for my New Mexico homegirls, a lovesong to the girls and women of my hometown of Albuquerque, or as we affectionately call ourselves, Burqueñas. Before I started this book, I'd been discussing monsters with my fifteen year-old-daughter, and our talk about who and what monsters really are versus how people tend to see them (and us) led me to reconsider an almost twenty-year-old serial killer case here in our city, still unsolved to this day—The West Mesa Murders.

In some ways, the girls and women were found in my family's backyard. The volcanoes loom over us on the West Mesa. Formed by a rare fissure eruption and last active a mere 150,000 years ago, they're not dead though they are ancient. Cindercones that blasted basalt across the land my Ancestors tread for millennia. Where they carved sacred symbols into the pocked, black stone. One of my great grandmothers bled across this desert, where every day, daughters disappear. Daughters are stolen.

I talk to their ghosts. Perhaps not in the way we tend to imagine, no Ouija board involved, nor does the room ice over. Yet the channel is clear and the voices of my Ancestors, alongside those of our slain sisters who received no justice in life, speak through me.

I light my candles. Say a prayer. And open my heart.

We find bones in the desert behind our fence. Animal, usually. Bleached and dry against the sand. Fifteen years ago, when my family and I moved to the West Mesa and I was raising my young children at the edge of Albuquerque, we would often trek through the desert beyond our home.

During one such walk, someone told me of the women and girls buried here, but the callous way they spoke about the deceased, calling them “hookers,” gnawed at me. I wasn't upset that the girls and women had performed sex work in life. Only that the person had defined them by their work. As if whatever they'd done to survive before their gruesome murders and subsequent burials in a mass, unmarked grave in the desert under the watchful eye of the volcanic Sleeping Sisters had encapsulated them. The fellow hiker had called them “hookers,” and I'd heard “*daughters*.”

Over the years, as a mother-writer championing our sisters and daughters in the margins, I've felt called to keep telling the stories of Missing and Murdered Indigenous and Latina Girls and Women.

Although my act of reclamation through storytelling offers a fictional depiction, I hope that it helps you to reimagine the girls and women and the innate sacred magic of our Ancestors. I hope the monstrous mama energy of this novel awakens in you the fierce protector who will fight for all our homegirls.

Love,



Discussion questions

Warning! These questions contain spoilers

- 1 How do you think this story would have differed if Fortuna did not win the lottery? Would the family's lives be easier or more difficult?
- 2 Fortuna's children, Hawthorne and Poe, are both named after Gothic horror writers. How do their names predict their fates?
- 3 Fortuna constantly worries about her children, but in very different ways. How is this a reflection on larger societal issues vs Fortuna's own trauma?
- 4 Throughout the novel, Fortuna has a tenuous relationship with Mongo; loving him but also constantly second guessing his actions. Why does she feel this way and how does she handle it?
- 5 Fortuna has spent most of her life afraid, constantly looking over her shoulder and preparing for the worst. How has that impacted the relationships she has with the people she loves the most?
- 6 Through Fortuna, we learn a lot about Poe but do not get as much insight into Hawthorne. How does that affect how we as readers view the children? How would the story have changed if we had learned more about Hawthorne initially?
- 7 Jeanette and Fortuna both see and communicate with the ghosts of their past. How do they both reconcile with their grief? What are the biggest similarities and differences?
- 8 The curse in this story is often spoken about as an entity itself. How much of the curse do you think is real and how much of it comes from Fortuna's anxiety?
- 9 Which scenes resonated with you? Which ones did you find yourself thinking about upon finishing the novel?

Calabacitas Con Carne Molida

Zucchini with Ground Beef

Ingredients

- Olive oil
- White onion
- Two or more garlic cloves
- 1 pound ground beef - skip to make vegetarian!
- As many calabacitas (these cute little zucchinis can be found at your local grocery store, farmers markets or Latine food stores), chayote (Mexican squash), zucchini or green beans as you have in your fridge
- 1 ½ cups of fresh corn OR one can of sweet corn
- Three to four tomatoes OR can of stewed tomatoes con chili
- Green chiles - use hatch green chiles or Serrano pepper for high heat, jalapeño for medium heat, or poblano peppers for mild heat
- Season with salt, black pepper, Mexican oregano, ground cumin, and chopped fresh cilantro if you like it. You can also use packaged taco or fajita seasoning!

Instructions: Chop it all up, throw it all in a pan!

Just kidding! Kinda...

1. Pour your oil in your pan on medium heat and sauté your chopped onion and garlic.
2. Add your ground beef, cook until browned.
3. Add the calabacitas and corn and let them cook for 5 minutes.
4. Add the tomato and season with salt, dried oregano, chopped cilantro, and chile.
5. Cook until all the vegetables are completely cooked, about 10 minutes.
6. Taste for seasoning and adjust if needed.

¡Buen provecho!

Enjoy with warm, corn tortillas or
tortilla chips.

Sprinkle cheese atop and add as much
avocado and lime as you see fit!





Biscochíto

New Mexican Shortbread Cookies

Adapted from @somethewiser Allison Ruth's Biscochitos Recipe

Ingredients

- 3 cups flour
- 1 ½ teaspoons baking powder
- ½ teaspoon salt
- 3 teaspoons crushed anise seed
- zest of one orange
- 1 ¼ cups lard (or substitute butter/vegetable shortening)
- ¾ cup sugar
- 1 large egg
- 1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract
- 1 cup sugar
- 2 teaspoon ground cinnamon



Instructions

1. In a medium bowl, sift together flour, baking powder, and salt. Whisk in the crushed anise and orange zest.
2. In a separate large bowl, combine the sugar and lard. Then, using an electric mixer, beat the lard and sugar until light and fluffy - about 3 minutes. Alternatively, cream the lard and sugar by hand with a wooden spoon or strong spatula.
3. Add the egg and vanilla and beat to combine. Gradually beat in the flour mixture and stop as soon as mixture is combined. Dough will be crumbly and more like a pie crust dough than normal cookie dough.
4. Using your hands, work the dough into a ball, like you would a pie crust, incorporating all the loose pieces of flour mixture. Then, wrap in plastic and refrigerate dough for 30 minutes.
5. Preheat oven to 350 degrees Fahrenheit. Line baking sheet with parchment paper. In a small bowl, combine the sugar and cinnamon for topping.
6. Take the chilled dough and separate it into 3 balls, roughly the same size. Take one dough ball at a time and work it in your hands, kneading it until it is soft and smooth. If it feels crumbly when you try to roll it out, just knead it a little more until it comes together - the lard needs a little extra help. On a lightly floured surface, roll out dough to ¼ inch thickness. Cut out with cookie cutters or shape the cookies by hand.
7. Place cookies on lined baking sheet and bake until just barely golden and set, about 10 to 12 minutes (be careful not to overcook!).
8. Let cookies cool for 10 minutes on the pan, or else they will crumble. When they've cooled for 10 minutes, you can then carefully cover them into the sugar mixture. Place on cookie rack until completely cooled.

Thank you for reading *The Sleeping Sisters*



Make sure to checkout
The Sleeping Sisters playlist,
curated by the author!

