



READING
PORTLAND
The CITY in PROSE

Edited by JOHN TROMBOLD & PETER DONAHUE

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DANIEL CHACÓN

Born in California, Daniel Chacón (1962–) grew up in Fresno. He graduated from California State University–Fresno and received an M.F.A. from the University of Oregon. Chacón taught at Modesto Junior College in California and Southwestern State University in Minnesota and is currently on the faculty of the Creative Writing Department at the University of Texas–El Paso. His short stories have appeared in such publications as Zyzzyva, Americas Review, Bilingual Review, New England Review, The River's Edge, and Callaloo, and his plays have been produced in California and Oregon. His two works of fiction include Chicano Chicanery (2000) and the shadows took him (2004). In this story from Chicano Chicanery, Chacón writes about Portland's first Chicano newscaster.

Aztlán, Oregon

When white people in Portland stared at Ben Chavez as if they had never seen a Mexican, it pissed him off. He had fantasies about coldcocking them, feeling their noses explode on his fist. Pulling open the doors of the Cafe del Cielo and walking in, sure enough, a white boy with round glasses and a head shaped like a pencil looked up from his book at Ben. It didn't occur to him that the guy might have recognized him from TV.

Mara Solorio sat in the corner reading a newspaper. She too looked up at Ben, who now stood across from her.

"Aren't you getting coffee?" she said.

"No, I'm fine," he said.

"Are you sure?"

"Really. I'm fine. Maybe we can go somewhere else."

She neatly folded up the newspaper.

"Where do you wanna go?"

"I don't know. I guess this place is fine."

Reluctantly he sat.

"Somebody's been asking about you, Ben," she said, pushing away a plate with a half-eaten blueberry muffin. "But before I tell you about it, you have to promise me two things. Two things, Ben, promise two things. Okay?"

"Are you going to eat that?"

"No, you want it? Two things: One, you listen to my advice without getting defensive. Two, nobody knows that I told you this. You gotta promise that. Ben, are you listening?"

Ben noticed that she'd taken only two or three bites of the muffin.

"So you're just going to waste it?" he said.

At fourteen he had learned not to waste food. One afternoon, he had plopped an egg into the pan, but the yoke broke, so he dumped it into the garbage