

Advance praise for Hotel Juárez: Stories, Rooms and Loops

"Chacón masterfully crafts tales and loops that feel local and international all at once, where the tensions and negotiations of space and relationships on the Texas-Mexico border are alive and electric. This is one of our finest storytellers brilliantly stretching the boundaries—truly a magical ride."

—Lee Herrick, author of Gardening Secrets of the Dead

"So many of Chacón's scenes are like images taken by a skilled photographer . . . This is his most ambitious, thoughtful and beautiful book. Chacón takes risks that are both aesthetically successful and emotionally rewarding. His language is disciplined, pure, profound. It is a joy to read a writer who has learned to be so brave on the page. This is a book I will read and reread for many years to come. Daniel Chacón has reminded me, to use his own words: 'A book can whisper at you, call you from the shelves. Sometimes a book can find *you*. Seek *you* out and ask *you* to come and play.' Oh, but these stories are so much more than play. This is serious business."

—Benjamin Alire Saenz, author of Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe

"Like fictional spheres created by Italo Calvino, Aimee Bender and George Saunders, Daniel Chacón's *Hotel Juárez* embarks on an unforgettable excursion into fabulous and fabulist worlds, where sentient and nuanced characters often find themselves out of place and out of time, intermittently gazing back at troubling shadows from the past while looking forward into the terrible beauty of the future."

-Lorraine López, author of The Gifted Gabaldón Sisters

"Though this magical, funny, occasionally nightmarish book is part of the lush and flowering tree of Latin American political fiction, its exquisite intelligence and fabulism is wholly Chicano. For the risks he takes and the great, unnamed war he's documenting, Chacón has no peer in contemporary American letters. In all its disparate beauties and sorrows, *Hotel Juárez* is his *Guernica*."

—Tony D'Souza, author of *Whiteman*

"Daniel Chacón's *Hotel Juárez: Stories, Rooms and Loops* is a profoundly necessary collection of stories. He brings to life—in extraordinary, compelling and exquisite writing—the violence and beauty of the 'border.' In these brief and powerful *rooms* and *loops* he takes us into an extraterritorial region of self and other, and his stories help us to confront the human heart in ways 500-page novels barely begin to do. There's great mastery and accomplishment in Daniel's writing, and if you are like me, you'll find it difficult to checkout of the *Hotel Juárez*.

-Fred Arroyo, author of Western Avenue and Other Fictions



Daniel Chacón



For those who still believe

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Recovering the past, creating the future

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The Order of Things

". . . esas visiones son minuciosas." —J.L. Borges

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Part I

The Purple Crayon

"Some called them 'turgid and confused,' while others claimed they were incomparable masterpieces." Douglas R. Hofstader on Bach

Broca's Area

The baby's first word was *water*, which at first he pronounced as *ahh-eh*, and it was the babysitter who heard it. She thought he had said Papa.

She said, Oh, how cute, and, Too bad your daddy's not here, but later it was clear what he was saying.

Water

He said it over and over until he got good at it, from *ah-er* to *ah-tur* to water, water, water. The babysitter thought that maybe the child was always thirsty, so she would fill his bottle with water, but he never wanted to drink, he just wanted to say water, although he pronounced it not like *water*, with the stressed syllable on the *Wa*, but wa*Ter*, with the stress on the *Ter*.

His next word was snake.

The babysitter was curled up on the couch looking out the window past the store homes of Kern Place at the mountain up the street and imagining on the other side a hundred blocks of rooftops, past Fort Bliss, where she lived in a hot apartment with her mother and her three brothers. She was just thinking of whatever dropped into her head, and she heard the baby say *snake*.

She thought he was saying cake or lake, and she pictured a cake by itself in the rain, the icing running down the sides like a clown crying in his own make-up.

The baby kept saying it over and over again, until it became very clear that he was not saying cake, he was saying snake.

Then he would say water and then he would say snake and then he would say water snake.

Did they hang from trees and fall into your bathing suit as you walked by? Did they live underneath the shadows of rocks in the shallow part of the water, waiting for your ankles?

One time, as the baby played with plastic colored blocks on the floor, the babysitter was taking a bubble bath. He tossed a block inside the water, and her reflex shifted her weight in the bathtub. She created an air pocket that popped underneath her thighs, and she felt something slivering down there, so she stood up and screamed.

The baby, looking at her dripping body, screamed, *Water snake!*

She stepped out of the tub and grabbed a towel. She wiped the fabric across her back and front, but she was too spooked to finish, so still wet, she threw the towel on the floor and took the man's robe from a peg and wrapped herself in its musky fluff.

The next word was gate.

He said it perfectly the first time, gate, and then he said it again, gate.

He repeated it over and over again—gate gate gate at the exact moment when she was looking out the bedroom window onto the backyard and the lawn and past the pool to the *gate!*

And he said gate gate gate.