What Drowns the Flowers in Your Mouth

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Burdened by poverty, illiteracy, and vulnerability as Mexican immigrants to California’s Coachella Valley, three generations of González men turn to vices or withdraw into depression. As brothers Rigoberto and Alex grow to manhood, they are haunted by the traumas of their mother’s early death, their lonely youth, their father’s desertion, and their grandfather’s invective. Rigoberto’s success in escaping—first to college and then by becoming a writer—is blighted by his struggles with alcohol and abusive relationships, while Alex contends with difficult family relations, his own rocky marriage, and fatherhood. Descending into a dark emotional space that compromises their mental and physical health, both men eventually find hope in aiding one another. This bittersweet chronicle of the bond between brothers provides an honest and revealing window into the complexities of Latino masculinity, the private lives of men, and the ways they build strength to bear the weight of grief, loss, and despair.

Rigoberto González is the author of seventeen books of poetry and prose, including the memoirs Butterfly Boy: Memories of a Chicano Mariposa (winner of the American Book Award) and Autobiography of My Hungers. He is a contributing editor for Poets & Writers magazine, serves on the board of trustees of the Association of Writers and Writing Programs (AWP), and is a professor of English at Rutgers–Newark, the State University of New Jersey.

Cover painting: Tino Rodriguez, The Lover, oil on wood, 9 x 7 inches, 1995
Cover design: Ann Weinstock

Also by Rigoberto González

“With gut-wrenching, skin-close honesty, Rigoberto González—already decorated for the stunning achievements of his two previous memoirs—offers a riveting account of the sustaining love between brothers in the midst of raw grief, trauma, and wrenching poverty. The stakes couldn’t be higher or the writing more intense.
—Joy Castro, author of Island of Bones

“A powerful and moving portrait of a complex and troubled family and of memory and regret. González looks back not in anger but with great generosity of spirit.”
—Guillermo Reyes, author of Madre and I

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