



★ **Where Rabbits Gathered**

Alisa Valdés-Rodríguez

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A Native American line of uncommon women endure the Spanish conquest in Alisa Valdés-Rodríguez's piercing historical novel *Where Rabbits Gathered*.

In 1598 in New Spain, an expedition gathers to colonize the lands that constitute modern New Mexico. The interests of rapacious men, including conquistador Juan de Oñate, clash with those of women who hope that reaching a new land will allow them the freedom to love each other. It's a land where Blue Water, an apprentice astronomer, lives in a Puebloan cliff dwelling whose water source is dwindling. Her only daughter, North Star, is fiery and independent. When North Star is called upon to appease the demands of a Spaniard, violence erupts.

The novel's focus on intimate and communal relationships is vigorous. Told via interwoven perspectives, the story reveals generational changes like the joining of clans; it addresses people's rituals and hardships too. Keen explorations of people's interior lives help to establish North Star and Blue Water's rich Indigenous world. And the cast beyond the focal women is robust, too, enlivening the inevitable clash between cultures.

Despite their vicious encounters with Catholic colonizers, the novel's women are courageous as they work to save their children. Atrocities multiply against them in the wider tale of Spanish injustice, as do hints of how much they have to lose—and how much to hope for. Childhood friendships yield loyalty, people find second chances through adopted families, and spirited competitions bring young lovers together. Women's talents at storytelling and midwifery also bind communities together. When Blue Water's descendants take part in reclaiming their people's losses, hope is refreshed.

In the gripping historical novel *Where Rabbits Gathered*, resilient women triumph across a century of violence in the Southwest.

KAREN RIGBY (March / April 2025)

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