

# Curandera

By Pat Mora

They think she lives alone  
on the edge of town in a two-room house  
where she moved when her husband died  
at thirty-five of a gunshot wound  
in the bed of another woman. The *curandera*  
and house have aged together to the rhythm  
of the desert.

She wakes early, lights candles before  
her sacred statues, brews tea of *yerbabuena*.  
She moves down her porch steps, rubs  
cool morning sand into her hands, into her arms.  
Like a large black bird, she feeds on  
the desert, gathering herbs for her basket.

Her days are slow, days of grinding  
dried snake into powder, of crushing  
wild bees to mix with white wine.  
And the townspeople come, hoping  
to be touched by her ointments,  
her hands, her prayers, her eyes.  
She listens to their stories, and she listens  
to the desert, always, to the desert.

By sunset she is tired. The wind  
strokes the strands of long gray hair,  
the smell of drying plants drifts  
into her blood, the sun seeps  
into her bones. She dozes  
on her back porch. Rocking, rocking.

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Born in El Paso, Texas, poet, writer, former teacher, university administrator, museum director, and

consultant, Pat Mora is a popular national speaker who promotes creativity, inclusivity and bookjoy. She is the author of many books of poetry and children's books. Mora and her husband live in Santa Fe, New Mexico.

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