

Literary Spotlight: Kris Faatz

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Second Place for the Literary

Let Me Take Your Hands

By Kris Faatz

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On the summer night when the police took his housekeeper Consuelo away, Antonio Guerrero felt helpless for many reasons. One was that he himself had paid Consuelo's wages in cash for years, rather than insisting she become a tax-paying American citizen. Another was that the police refused to listen to him or release Consuelo on his recognizance: she was to be sent back to Mexico as quickly as Antonio would consign a failed mug from his potter's wheel to the slop bin. But most of all, he felt helpless and much too old because he could explain nothing to Tess, Consuelo's daughter.

Tesoro—Tess, in English—was her mother's treasure. *Un tesoro real*. Antonio knew that to Consuelo, it made no difference that Tess was the result of her mother's work as a prostitute, long ago in Mexico City, before Consuelo fled across the border. Nor did it matter that, as Tess grew older, it became clear that she would never be a normal child. She looked normal enough, certainly, but she didn't speak, couldn't stand to be touched by anyone but her mother, and often shrieked in seeming agony when something unexpected happened. "Something unexpected" could be chunky instead of smooth peanut butter on her sandwich, a bee buzzing against a window, or something Antonio could neither see nor hear.

The ICE police had been waiting outside the mountainside chapel, Our Lady of Tears, where Consuelo took Tess every evening to pray for the Virgin Mother's blessing. After eleven years, Consuelo still believed that if only she and Tess made enough trips to the chapel, knelt enough times in front of the statue of the Virgin in her sky-blue robe, and lit enough votive candles, the Virgin would heal her girl. The police must have known Consuelo's routine. They chose a mild, soft, cloudless evening to make their move.

If Antonio had not left his Catholic faith behind in Mexico City decades ago, along with the bodies of his friends who died in the *Guerra Sucia* riots, Consuelo's frantic phone call would have taken that faith from him. No just God would have allowed the ICE to make such a capture outside a church. But he went to the jail, driving out County Road 63L from Telluride to the San Miguel County Detention Center, while the sun went down in a wash of color behind the mountains. The color made Antonio think of copper red glaze fired on ceramic. Copper red was one of his favorite colors, one of the richest in his palette, but the sight of it in the sky did nothing to encourage him as he parked his car in the chain-link-fenced, barbed-wire-ringed lot.

In the jail, while Consuelo sobbed behind bulletproof glass and Tess screamed in some holding room down the hall, Antonio tried to tell the officers why they could not take this woman away. After so many years in this country, his voice still had the old lilt of home. "Can't you see," he said, "her daughter needs her?"

The officers, one black and one white, mouthed words. They were both big and tall, facing off against Antonio as if it took that show of strength to subdue one bent-backed old man. They said things like *no exigency plan for parents* and *no proof of demonstrable hardship*. Antonio suggested, angry now, that Tess's desperate noise indicated more proof of hardship than the police could possibly need, but anger made both his hands and his voice shake. The policemen told him Tess was having "a tantrum" and would "quiet down soon." They suggested Antonio take her home, because it was getting late, and "make sure she got some supper." She had been born in America, carried across the border from Mexico in her mother's belly, so she was not the police's problem.

Antonio could not offer Tess a hug to reassure her. He couldn't explain to her what was happening, when he himself could barely take it in. He did insist that one of the officers lead Tess by the hand out to his car and put her inside. The white officer obeyed. By now the sun had disappeared and the sky was the color of Antonio's cobalt glaze, with the first stars gleaming above the mountain peaks. In the policeman's grip, Tess howled and struggled, as if the strange hand was a rope of nettles wrapped around her arm.

The doctors said Tess had the mental age of a toddler, though Consuelo always refused to believe it. Toddler-mind or not, Tess had the bones and muscles of an eleven-year-old. Antonio thought of the bruises the girl's brand-new, shiny white sneakers were leaving on the police officer's legs, and tasted faint satisfaction. He braced himself to be deafened by Tess's ongoing screams on the drive back to his house from the jail, but when she found herself in the car,

she quieted. She had ridden in it before.

Antonio talked to her on the drive to his house, because he could think of nothing else to do. He navigated the streets he had known for decades and spoke in Spanish, the language he always fell back on in times of stress. He told Tess he would put her up for now in his own guest room. He asked, knowing he would get no answer, whether Tess knew of any family Consuelo had, anywhere. He asked, talking mostly aloud to himself now, why in her decade and more in Telluride, Consuelo had never formed friendships with anyone except him, more or less, and the statue of the Virgin at Our Lady of Tears. He told Tess he had no idea what to do now. He couldn't think of anyone less fit than himself to take care of a child, especially one like her.

By the time they got back into Telluride, Antonio's anger and fear had spent themselves into tiredness. The girl had sat silent and unmoving in the passenger's seat the whole time. Waiting at a stoplight, Antonio glanced over at her. Her face in the light of a street lamp had the wild lost look of a mountain mustang caught in a pen. Her big dark eyes stared straight ahead out the windshield and a shock of her dark hair fell across her face. Antonio had never noticed, before, how much her face looked like her mother's.

He heard himself saying, simply, as if she would understand, "*Lo siento, hija.*" *I'm sorry, child.* For everything.

Tess didn't respond to that any more than she had to anything else. Antonio drove on in silence.

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The next day, Antonio sat in his small home office with his laptop and the smartphone he had finally bought six months earlier. His pottery studio on West Colorado Street stayed closed, the first time he had skipped a workday in years.

Tess had not made a peep since the jail. Last night Antonio had given her one of his own nightshirts to sleep in. It looked ridiculously big on her, long and striped with floppy sleeves. She had gone to bed, in the unfamiliar shirt and the unfamiliar bedroom, without a sound, after pushing away the plate of *huevos y chorizo* he offered her. This morning he had peered around the room's half-open door to find her sitting on the bed, dressed in yesterday's clothes. She had tied the laces of her sneakers into perfect bows. Even as he struggled with the leftover haze of a sleepless night, Antonio wondered how someone with a toddler's brain could manage such bows. When he asked if she wanted breakfast, and pointed toward the kitchen down the hall, Tess folded her arms across her chest and sat motionless.

She was probably still sitting there, just like that, right now. She had eaten nothing since the peanut-butter-and-jelly sandwich Consuelo had given her for lunch the day before. With a cup of coffee sloshing in his stomach, making its lining burn, Antonio started down the list of law office phone numbers on his computer screen.

The secretary who answered his first call asked him to hold. As he sat, listening to the bland Muzak and his own heartbeat in his ears, he thought of the day he had first seen Consuelo and Tess.

It had been an August morning much like today. Consuelo had come into Antonio's pottery shop at the end of a long desperate pass down West Colorado Street. Antonio learned later that she had been peering through shop windows, hunting for any owners who looked Hispanic enough to answer her in her own language when she asked where she might find work. She had the frayed jeans, beat-up sneakers, and faded turquoise T-shirt she wore; the two-month-old baby slung in a red shawl on her back; and a yellow shoulder bag stuffed full of baby clothes, with patches of its fake leather peeling off the canvas backing like diseased skin. She didn't have so much as a fresh shirt or change of underwear for herself. Antonio learned she had spent her last few dollars on bus fare from Pecos, far away in Texas. She was running from the law of two different countries. According to both governments, although for different reasons, she was a criminal.

Antonio wasn't sure what made him help her. He didn't see himself as more misanthropic than most, but even by then, he had lived his quiet life for a long time. He hadn't particularly wanted to open that life to a teenager with a squalling baby, especially when the girl was an illegal alien and former prostitute. Consuelo had told Antonio the truth immediately.

But she had looked too small and thin even to carry the infant on her back. Perhaps it was that, or her big dark eyes, or the intensity in her voice that took him back to the long-ago time in Mexico City. Living here in Telluride, he wasn't the boy from the Pico de Orizaba anymore, the one who had come down from his beloved mountains to lead the crowd and shout himself hoarse in the *Guerra Sucia* riots. He wasn't the shadow who had slipped across the border, the young student with the government price on his head, whose only chance at survival was to leave behind the country he loved. But he took Consuelo in, because something about her gave him back some small piece of his past.

Now, on the other end of the phone line, the click of someone picking up interrupted Antonio's thoughts. "Juan Aguilar speaking."

Antonio hoped a fellow Mexican might be more inclined or able to help Consuelo. The voice on the other end of the phone sounded young and briskly American. Antonio tried to control his own too-obvious accent as he explained why he was calling. "My housekeeper was arrested. They say she will be deported." He used the English words carefully, setting them in place the way he positioned fragile pieces to fire in the kiln. "Her daughter is eleven, autistic."

He found that word difficult to pronounce.

The attorney fired questions. "Does your housekeeper have a driver's license? Any form of American ID? Did she come into this country on a visa?" No and no and no. "What was her employment in Mexico?"

At the end of the questioning, Aguilar said, "You won't be able to do much for her, Mr. Guerrero. She was a criminal in her birth country. She has no legal standing here."

"But I can pay. Any fines, or for her paperwork..."

"I'm afraid it's too late." Did Antonio hear, then, the faintest hint of sympathy? "She should have taken care of her status years ago."

"What about her daughter?"

"You said the child was born in Texas, yes? So she has all the rights and protections of American citizenship."

That is not what I am asking. Antonio knew it was useless to say so. "Very well," he managed. "Thank you for your time." He hung up the phone.

Would any other attorney tell him anything different? The list of numbers on the laptop screen blurred. Antonio's hands ached for the smoothness of fresh clay, his ears for the regular thrum of the spinning pottery wheel. He had only made one call. He must not give up yet.

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By noon, Antonio had been sitting at his laptop for three hours. No one had been able to offer any help.

As if from somewhere on the ceiling, he watched himself dial another number. This lawyer, a white woman named Margaret Tillison, was far away in Denver. Antonio could neither imagine her helping him nor, if by some miracle she could, how he would manage to travel to the city to meet with her.

When she accepted the call from her secretary, Antonio laid out the words that by then had become routine. Aside from the pounding in his head, he could have been telling the lawyer about something that had happened to someone else.

She asked the usual questions, in a crisp, detached attorney-voice. To Antonio, she sounded older, possibly near his own age. Someone who had seen much of what life could throw at a person. When she finished questioning him, Antonio prepared himself to hear the usual answer.

After a pause, though, she said something different. "Did the ICE tell you how long Ms. Cordeiro would be held at San Miguel?" She pronounced Consuelo's last name perfectly, as she had Antonio's own.

Antonio tried to think. "I don't remember. I don't think so."

"You need to find out. I have one option for you to consider."

Antonio realized his fingers were going numb around the phone. He massaged his wrist with his free hand, trying to wake the nerves back up. "Please tell me."

She did. Antonio listened. The enormity and absurdity of the suggestion, the only thing he could do now to rescue a friendless woman, made it difficult to fit the idea into his head.

He forced himself to pay attention as Ms. Tillison finished, "It won't be easy, Mr. Guerrero. And you'll have to work fast. Most likely, she'll be moved first to Texas and then deported. Once she's out of Colorado, you won't have the option anymore."

"I see," Antonio said. He didn't see. This was too much for him to understand. "Thank you," he said.

She wished him luck. Antonio listened to the click when she hung up. The "option" couldn't possibly work...but suppose it could. Would it be worth it? Should he try?

He thought of Tess sitting silent in the bedroom, her arms folded across her empty stomach. He thought of Consuelo in a jail cell. He thought about what it would mean if he tried the lawyer's solution, and if it worked. For the first time in a long time, he heard the words of an old prayer in his mind.

Dios que nos ve a todos, dirijame. God who sees us all, lead me.

In the afternoon, Antonio went to his pottery studio. He could do nothing else until he sat at his wheel, the one place where the world always fell into order.

He couldn't leave Tess alone in the house, so he took her with him. She still hadn't eaten anything. She turned her face away from the sandwich Antonio offered—smooth peanut butter with grape jelly, what Consuelo always made—and jerked her arm back when he tried to take her hand to lead her to the car. She followed him outside, though, and folded herself into the passenger's seat when he opened the door for her. On the short ride from Galena Street to the studio, she sat there with no more life in her than a doll.

"*Tienes que comer,*" he told her while he drove. *You have to eat.* He didn't know if she heard or understood. Perhaps this was better than screaming, but right now he would have traded all her silence for one yell, to show that there was still a living child in there and her soul hadn't disappeared along with her mother. And if she opened her mouth, he might have a chance to stuff a bite of sandwich in. That rejected item, wrapped in Saran wrap, sat in his shirt pocket.

He wasn't a parent. He had no idea what to do for any child, much less this one. He had never asked for, or wanted, this kind of responsibility.

Ms. Tillison's suggestion banged around inside his head. If he went through with it, if it worked at all, he would have greater responsibility than he had ever imagined. Of course, technically, it would not be real. It would be a legality: but he, and Consuelo, and this girl beside him, would all have to live by it, at least for a while. If it worked.

If it could.

On Colorado Street, Antonio took his usual space in the narrow public parking lot. Tess followed him silently across the street to the studio. She wore yesterday's long jeans, but didn't seem to care about the heat beating up from the pavement. Antonio sweated in his own khakis and thought about how he would have to take the girl to Consuelo's apartment at least for a change of clothes. At the jail, they had given him Consuelo's keys. He wondered if, once Tess set foot in her home again, he would be able to get her to leave.

He unlocked the studio door and pushed it open. The bells inside clanged against the glass. Consuelo and Tess had seen the showroom before, but they had never come through to his workspace at the back of the shop. Antonio didn't know what to expect as he let Tess through into the pair of rooms that held his kiln, his wheel, his glazes, and the shelves of finished and unfinished work. What if the strangeness of everything overwhelmed her? What if she turned violent, the way she had with the policeman last night? Might she decide to break things, smash the pots, the weeks' worth of Antonio's time and income?

He pointed into the kiln room and told her in Spanish, "Best not to go in there. It's hot." Again, he couldn't tell if the words meant anything, but surely she could feel the heat on her skin through the almost-shut kiln room door. He waved around at the shelves in the workroom, his wheel, the row of glaze buckets, and the glaze samples on the wall. "You can look around in here," he told Tess. "I'm going to work for a while."

He drew his apron on, cut a rough pound of wet clay from a fresh block, and sat down at his wheel. If he could spend five minutes, or ten, working, before anything else happened. He didn't need to finish anything. He only needed that rhythm under his hands, so he might be able to think what to do next.

As he tossed the clay from hand to hand, shaping it into a rough ball, he watched Tess out of the corner of his eye. At first she stood still, in the middle of the room, as empty as a shell. Then, in the same moment that he threw the clay with a solid thump onto the center of the wheel, she seemed to come to life.

She walked over to the glaze buckets. Now she was directly behind Antonio, so that he couldn't see her and work the wheel at the same time. He had to hope she wouldn't decide, for instance, to tip the buckets over and cover the floor with glaze. When he managed to glance over his shoulder, once he had the wheel spinning at the right speed, he saw her standing on tiptoe, with her hands clasped behind her back, examining the samples on the wall.

He had always liked the sample display himself. It was made up of rows of small square pieces of clay, glazed and fired, showing how pairs of glazes looked individually and combined. Copper red with Tyman's White. Sand Yellow with cobalt blue. The board made a mosaic of possibilities, all the colors he could create.

Perhaps Tess liked colors. Certainly Antonio didn't hear any noise from her, no buckets sloshing or pottery crashing to the floor, as he began to shape the clay on his wheel. He gave it a wide angle at the base. It might become a bowl. In spite of the girl's strange presence, and the endless worry that chewed at him, peace settled on him as he worked.

He had never worked with clay until he came to Telluride. Back then, barely more than a boy, he had been running from his own memories. The riots in Mexico City. The police firing on the crowd. The screams he heard in his nightmares. And he had been running, too, from the constant ache within his own body, the piece that had been ripped away when he lost his home. He had been trying to forget his mountains, the great Pico de Orizaba with its craggy white summit, the giant in whose shadow he had grown up, always promising himself that one day he would make it to the top and breathe the crystal-fragile air up there. He had landed in Telluride when his money ran out. At least there were mountains here, though they were not the same. Nothing could be. He had known he would never see his home again.

He had gotten a job as an old *viuda's* shop-cleaner and errand boy. The widow, part Mexican, part Navajo, had sold crafts to the tourists, mostly quilts and silver and turquoise jewelry, but she made some pottery of her own. Without much knowledge, Antonio had still been able to see she wasn't very good at it. One day, as he was sweeping the floor in her shop, he had glanced up to find her examining his hands on the broom, moving her eyes up to his back and shoulders. "*Ven aquí,*" she had said, pointing to her workroom. *Come here.* That afternoon, he had first sat at a wheel.

He'd had no skill. Even so, that first time, he had felt thoughts and memories and nightmares running out of his fingers and into the wet clay. "*Para la arcilla, se necesita fuerza,*" the old woman had told him. Working the clay needed the right kind of strength. She didn't have it, but she told Antonio he did. "*Te lo enseño.*" *I will teach you.*

Now, in spite of himself, Antonio lost track of time. The bowl took shape under his hands, growing slowly and smoothly off the spinning wheel. In this work, you never knew what something was going to be until you finished it. Each piece had its own life.

A scraping noise against the floor made him look around. Tess had maneuvered one of the glaze buckets over beside his stool. She sat down on it, leaning forward to watch the spinning clay, so near Antonio that a strand of her hair brushed his shoulder.

Never, that he could remember, had she willingly gotten so close to anyone but her mother. He felt her nearness like the hot kiln, warning him to back away before someone got hurt. But when he glanced at her face, ready to look away in an instant if his eyes upset her, he saw she had attuned her whole self to the clay between his hands.

Without a word to her, he kept working. Her presence stayed there, as warm as a banked fire. The bowl rose off the wheel, the clay smooth between Antonio's fingers. The slurry stained his hands gray. The bowl itself was slick and shining. Carefully, he applied light pressure at the right point, while the wheel spun, to make the bowl's lip flare out. Then he re-compressed the lip between thumb and forefinger, running the thumb of his other hand along its edge.

He was sorry to let the wheel stop spinning. The bowl sat there, as well-shaped as a flower. Tess was still watching him. In her face, Antonio saw her question as clearly as if she had said it aloud: *Now what?*

As he got his wire tool and slid it carefully along the wheel, cutting the bowl free, he found himself explaining his work to her, as if she had been the student he never had. He showed her the drying board and told her how the bowl would sit there for a few days, until it was as hard as leather. He pantomimed putting it back on the wheel, upside-down, and showed her the shaving tool that would trim the base, cutting away the extra clay and giving the foot its shape. Why he told her all this, he didn't know. He had no idea whether she understood, but her eyes followed him as he moved around the room, pointing at tools, picking up a piece of once-fired greenware to show her how the bowl would look after one round in the kiln.

He had started to tell her about glazing when she stood up abruptly and went over to his block of fresh clay, on the worktable next to the wheel. She put her hand on the plastic that covered it and looked at him with another question in her face.

Certainty bloomed in Antonio's mind. "*Lo quieres probar?*" he asked. *Do you want to try it?*

She didn't answer or nod, but Antonio felt sure he was right. Perhaps he was riding on the wave of exhaustion, caffeine and confusion from the morning. Perhaps he and this girl could only reach each other after all thought and striving ran out. He said, "*Te lo mostro,*" *I'll show you,* and then took the Saran-wrapped sandwich out of his pocket. "But first," he told her in Spanish, "you have to eat some of this."

Her face changed then. The look of disgust and annoyance, her clear disappointment that he had outsmarted her, was so obvious that Antonio had to swallow a laugh. He unwrapped the sandwich and held it out. "Eat. Then I'll show you."

When she took it from him, her fingertips brushed his. If the touch startled her, she didn't show it. She ate the sandwich in a few bites. She must have been starving. After she gulped a couple of mouthfuls of water at the sink, she went back to the worktable and put her hand on the clay again, waiting.

"*Bueno,*" Antonio said. He cut a fresh piece of clay, but when he started working it into a sphere, she shook her head and reached out to catch hold of it herself.

"You want to do it?" Antonio asked. "Fine. But it has to be a ball." He mimed the shape with his hands. "Can you do that?"

Again the look of annoyance. She tossed the clay from hand to hand as he had done, shaping it quickly and capably into a sphere. Antonio found himself thinking again of her neatly tied shoelaces.

When she finished, she went to the wheel and sat down on his stool, waiting to be shown what to do next. Antonio half-wondered if she would be able to throw the clay herself, if she had learned that much by watching him. He threw the clay anyhow, to center it, and showed her how to press the wheel's foot pedal. "You want it to go steady, not too fast," he said.

Almost immediately, she kept the wheel turning at a good speed. When she put her hands on the clay, though, trying to shape it as he had, right away she pushed it off center. In frustration, she pressed the pedal down harder. The wet clay whipped around, throwing slurry in the air. Antonio saw some of it hit Tess's shirt. Her foot snapped off the pedal and the wheel stopped. She shook her hands off and stared down at the gray drops on her clothes. Her eyes looked wild and lost.

"Hija," Antonio said. "*Está bien.*" *It's all right.* He found himself thinking about what the doctors told Consuelo. *Mind of a toddler. Can't learn.* He realized Tess would have heard those things too. People had said them in front of her as if she didn't understand.

She was trying again with the wheel now, but it couldn't work. The clay was far off center, her hands were too wet, the wheel spun out of control. Over its hum, Antonio heard a whine of frustration, a rising, gut-felt sound ready to explode in sobs.

Before he thought, Antonio reached out and caught Tess's arm. "*Déjalo, hija.*" *Stop.*

She jerked her hands off the clay, yanked her arm away, snapped her foot off the pedal again, and rounded on him, all in a single heartbeat. He saw anger, pain, and unbearable sorrow mingled in her face.

In that moment, he knew what he must do. For her and for her mother.

"*Te mostro,*" he told Tess again. *I'll show you.* He reached out and repositioned the clay, pushing it to center, smoothing its shape, using a sponge to sop extra water away. Then he said, "*Déjame cogerte las manos.*" *Let me take your hands.*

She glared at him. He saw the trapped mustang again, and at the same time, he saw Consuelo, sobbing behind the bulletproof glass at the jail. Yes. He must do this thing now, and then he must do another thing later.

"I'll show you," he repeated in Spanish. This time he was certain she understood. "Let me have your hands."

She didn't reach them out to him, but when he made to take them—something he never would have dared to try before—she didn't resist. Her muscles were tense under his fingers as he gently placed her hands on the clay, where they should be.

When he told her to spin the wheel again, she did, carefully this time. Guiding her hands, he showed her how to press the clay down in the center, how to make first a thick-bottomed almost-doughnut and then, gradually, the wall of what would become a cylinder. A mug, perhaps, or a vase.

He felt her hands relax under his. Standing over her, he saw her shoulders relax too. He saw her drive her energy into the clay, pressing it now with more confident fingers, channeling thoughts and feelings and the words that she couldn't speak into its smooth texture. As he watched her work, he spoke aloud, telling her the other thing he now knew he would manage.

"I will bring your mother home."

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The lawyer had said it would be difficult, and indeed, it was far from easy. There were calls to law offices in Mexico in the frantic search for Consuelo's birth certificate. There were arguments through the bulletproof glass at San Miguel, after Antonio explained to Consuelo their one desperate chance. "But Señor Antonio," she said, still addressing him formally after so many years, "this is not right. You should not have to do this." She assumed he could not want to, but he brushed that aside. Personal wants did not matter. There was the rapid filing of paperwork in a race against time and the legal system. Then, finally, there was Antonio's signature, and then Consuelo's own, on the marriage license, signed in the presence of San Miguel's notary.

As the wife of an American citizen, with her newly issued green card, Consuelo could safely remain in the country she had chosen. Antonio promised himself that he would make sure she got full citizenship next. Once she did, the marriage, which was only a legal arrangement, could end. Consuelo could have her freedom.

The day after her release from prison, Antonio brought Consuelo and her daughter to his studio. He also brought a pair of folding chairs, so that Tess could use the room's only stool.

She sat at the wheel. After Antonio cut the clay for her, she shaped it into a ball with quick, practiced motions. Then she threw it, centering it squarely. It had taken her only a few tries to learn how.

Consuelo had never seen her daughter do this before. Antonio had found time every day, during Consuelo's time in prison, in between arguing with the county clerk, arguing with a lawyer in Mexico, and carrying papers to and from San Miguel, to bring Tess here and teach her his work. He understood the kind of peace it gave her. Now Consuelo watched as Tess started the wheel spinning, wet her hands, and pressed them against the clay.

Antonio had already taught her the two basic shapes: cylinder and bowl. After her first frustration, she had quickly learned a kind of patience and meticulousness that even he, after all his years at the wheel, had never achieved. He still didn't know how her mind worked, but he imagined her calculating how the clay should move, how to apply pressure to make the shapes she wanted. If she chose, Antonio felt sure that one day she could be an extraordinary potter. Now he watched as she pressed the clay gently out, beginning to shape a bowl.

He didn't need to keep an eye on her. She knew what she was doing. Instead he watched Consuelo, who sat with her eyes fixed on her daughter's confident and steady hands.

Tess made the bowl quickly. When she stopped the wheel, she looked around at Antonio. This was their signal. She didn't yet cut the clay herself: the wire tended to twist between her fingers and he didn't want her to hurt herself or damage the work in progress. He sliced the bowl free, set it on the drying board, and cut her another piece of fresh clay.

When he sat down again, Consuelo moved her chair closer to him. She brushed her face, as if smoothing hair away, but he saw she was crying.

She motioned at Tess. In Spanish, she whispered, "I never thought she could do something like this."

Antonio saw the gold band gleaming on her finger. His wife. It wasn't true, not really, only a legal convenience, but for some reason his throat hurt and he had to swallow before he answered. "She has a gift."

Another tear ran down Consuelo's cheek. This time she didn't wipe it away. No one would have told her such a thing about her daughter before. She said, "The Virgin heard my prayers. She gave you to us."

Antonio's face flushed. When had he and God last had anything to do with each other? If Consuelo had stayed in Mexico, if she could have had a life other than the hardscrabble one she had known, she would have gotten married in a Catholic church full of incense and flowers. Her family would have given her a feast, with drinking and dancing long into the night. Instead she was here, a barely-redeemed criminal, bound—at least for now—to an old man. What did God have to say about that? What did He ever do about the world's injustice?

Consuelo reached out. Her fingers closed around his. "Thank you, Antonio."

Not *señor* this time. Antonio found himself taking her hand in his.

She let her head rest against his shoulder. The two of them sat, listening to the hum of the wheel, watching Tess shape something new.

Kris Faatz (*rhymes with skates*) is a fiction writer and musician. Her first novel, *To Love a Stranger*, was a finalist for the 2016 Schaffner Press Music in Literature Award and was released May 2017 by Blue Moon Publishers (Toronto, ON). Kris's short fiction has appeared or is forthcoming in *Kenyon Review Online*, *Potomac Review*, *Glassworks*, *Reed*, *Bluestem*, *Luna Station Quarterly*, and *Digging Through the Fat*, among other journals. She has been a contributor at the *Kenyon Review Writers and Novel Workshops* and the *Sewanee Writers' Conference*, and will return to the *Kenyon Review Writers Workshop* in 2017 as the recipient of a Peter Taylor Fellowship.