Black Clouds

Black clouds lay off in the distance.
Like black buzzards, flying, far away.
Making noise, rumbling.
Black clouds
drifting off in the distance.
Like black buzzards, flying, so far away.
Rumbling, thundering.
Suddenly they descend.

The Floods of 1993 and Others

Old trees uprooted,
grasses, twigs, and branches,
all forced,
all pointing with limbs in the same direction,
as if telling us,
the one that did this to us went that way.

Barrel cactus,
hanging in uncactuslike manner,
upside down in between tree trunks and large branches.

They silently scream.
"My roots are still good, put me in the rocky soil."
The screams are inaudible.
Even if every curved thorn joins in
the Park Service employees don’t hear them.
Or if they do, they ignore them.
Too busy repairing concrete.

Bear grass.
With meticulously groomed hair.
Hair, just so.
Every strand in place.
The flooding water though has done its damage.
The groomed hair is now tangled, matted,
indistinguishable shapes.
Those sitting in a row, having the appearance of Diana Ross and the Supremes
of the ’60s.
Stiff, bouffant hair,
all pointing in the same direction.
Redundantly saying, “The one that did this to us went that way.”
Some gathered along the rocky borders,
posing possible solutions.
How to fix the hair.
Another flood perhaps, going in the opposite direction.
Highly unlikely.
Some secretly wished for the ultimate disaster. Fire.
One which they would survive with renewed opportunity.
They concurred.
Life is not so bad to have hair like a bird’s nest.
Gone are the days of arrogant, strutting comparisons.

Pigs.
“Pigs,” my friend remarked.
“I hated taking care of those pigs anyway.
“I was never so happy as when I saw them floating down the river when it
flooded.
In fact, I think I even waved. I was just a kid then.”
Remains.
His ashes are now at the bottom of the hill.
The rain has washed them down,
mixing them back into the dirt from where he came.
He screamed those silent screams.
You thought you heard them in between his laughter.
It was a confused message. Like many messages from adolescents.
A fifteen-year-old can’t be expected to understand them all.
The ashes have found their way to the four directions by now.
Mixed with clouds that bring rain.
Or perhaps they have made their way to the Gila River when it flows in Pima
country.
Surely some have made their way to the big rivers, floating on down to Mexico,
becoming part of the sandy, warm beach where you smile at the crabs that run
sideways.
Trails.
It is all mere dirt and rock.
Wiped off the side of a mountain as if by a child playing in a sandbox.
Tony and Ken run softly.
Their lungs rhythmically, quietly screaming,
Following the canyon trail loop.
A trail familiar with every turn, every incline.  
They welcome every gentle pain the rocks hand them.  
And like two sighted men suddenly gone blind,  
they feverishly try to find their trail.  
Down on hands they grope for rocks that should have been there.  
They feel trees that weren’t there before.  
The trail has fallen off the side of the mountain.  
They balk in their rhythm and look at the side of a mountain,  
a side that wasn’t there before.  
An inconvenience at best.  
They debate which way to go that would be closest to the original trail.  
Their time cannot be slowed by this act of nature.  
Grasses.  
Grasses caught in tufts of all sizes,  
hanging from every limb that was in the water’s path.  
All debris carried by water, reshaping a canyon.  
Limb caught upon limb in wild, frozen dance postures.  
Sand piled in places and manner unaccustomed.  
Nature’s features reshaped, molested by a watery monster.  
Touching everything except the U.S. Park Service picnic tables.  
Heavy concrete remains steadfast in the midst of nature’s war zone.  

Boulders.  
Boulders, the size of small cars.  
Now sit in the midst of empty streambeds,  
quizzically contemplating how to accessorize.
The annual seasons and rhythms of the desert are movements of wind, rain, and flood. The critical importance of weather and climate to native desert peoples is reflected with grace and power in this personal collection of poems, the first written creative work by an individual in Tohono O’odham and English, a landmark in Native American literature.

Poet Ofelia Zepeda centers these poems on her own experiences growing up in a Tohono O’odham family, where desert climate profoundly influenced daily life, and on her perceptions as a contemporary Tohono O’odham woman. These fine poems will give the outside reader a rich insight into daily life of the Tohono O’odham, or Desert People.