Violeta

by Isabel Allende



About the Book

This sweeping novel from the *New York Times* bestselling author of A LONG PETAL OF THE SEA tells the epic story of Violeta Del Valle, a woman whose life spans 100 years and bears witness to the greatest upheavals of the 20th century.

Violeta comes into the world on a stormy day in 1920, the first girl in a family with five boisterous sons. From the start, her life is marked by extraordinary events, for the ripples of the Great War are still being felt, even as the Spanish flu arrives on the shores of her South American homeland almost at the moment of her birth.

Through her father?s prescience, the family will come through that crisis unscathed, only to face a new one as the Great Depression transforms the genteel city life she has known. Her family loses everything and is forced to retreat to a wild and beautiful but remote part of the country. There, she will come of age, and her first suitor will come calling.

She tells her story in the form of a letter to someone she loves above all others, recounting times of devastating heartbreak and passionate affairs, poverty and wealth, terrible loss and immense joy. Her life is shaped by some of the most important events of history: the fight for women?s rights, the rise and fall of tyrants, and, ultimately, not one but two pandemics.

Through the eyes of a woman whose unforgettable passion, determination and sense of humor carry her through a lifetime of upheaval, Isabel Allende once more brings us an epic that is both fiercely inspiring and deeply emotional.

Discussion Guide

1. What did you think about Violeta as a character? How did she evolve throughout the course of the book? Which period of her life was the most interesting to you? Did you learn anything from her story?

2. Violeta tells her story in the form of a letter, a practice inspired by Isabel Allende?s own correspondence with her mother, Panchita. Since Allende was 16, she and her mother would write letters almost daily when they were apart, each writing one half of a shared monologue that recorded their lives. What does the epistolary style add to the overall effect of the novel?

3. The novel is bookended by two pandemics. Did that timeline encourage you to examine what it means to live during and through such times more closely? What does it take to keep going when the world is filled with turmoil and unease?

4. Allende chooses to leave the country unnamed in VIOLETA, though scenes in the novel are inspired by historical events in the region and Allende?s life --- such as military coups and dictatorships, the 1918 flu pandemic, The Great Depression, the Women?s Rights movement, etc. Why do you think she made this choice? How did the open-ended setting impact your reading experience?

5. Violeta experiences different kinds and stages of love --- expressed through family, security, passion, grief, kinship, tolerance, acceptance and good humor. Discuss Violeta?s various relationships. How does Allende capture the ways we love? In what ways does our capacity for love change over time?

6. Violeta says, ?It was clear to me from a young age that although I respected them, my mother and my aunts were stuck in the past, uninterested in the outside world or anything that might challenge their beliefs.? Discuss the ways different generations approach feminism.

7. Violeta is filled with playful, witty humor. What scenes or moments made you laugh? What does humor add to the overall effect of the story?

8. Violeta?s Aunt Pia observes, ?Better a boring husband than an unreliable one.? Do you agree? Do you think passion or loyalty is more important for a good marriage?

9. Memory is a major theme in this novel, made up of the unexpected events that make a life. Sometimes it?s a blessing and sometimes it?s a curse, as Violeta says. Discuss how the book explores memory.

10. In the last chapter, Allende writes, ?There?s a time to live and a time to die. In between there?s time to remember.? How did this book make you reflect on your own life? What did you take away from reading it?

Author Bio

Isabel Allende, born in Peru and raised in Chile, is a novelist, feminist and philanthropist. She is one of the most widely read authors in the world, having sold more than 80 million copies of her books across 42 languages. She is the author of several bestselling and critically acclaimed books, including MY NAME IS EMILIA DEL VALLE, THE WIND KNOWS MY NAME, VIOLETA, A LONG PETAL OF THE SEA, THE HOUSE OF THE SPIRITS, OF LOVE AND

SHADOWS, EVA LUNA and PAULA.

In addition to her work as a writer, Isabel devotes much of her time to human rights causes. She has received 15 honorary doctorates, been inducted into the California Hall of Fame, and received the PEN Center Lifetime Achievement Award and the Anisfield-Wolf Lifetime Achievement Award. In 2014, President Barack Obama awarded her the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the nation?s highest civilian honor, and in 2018, she received the Medal for Distinguished Contribution to American Letters from the National Book Foundation. She lives in California with her husband and dogs.

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