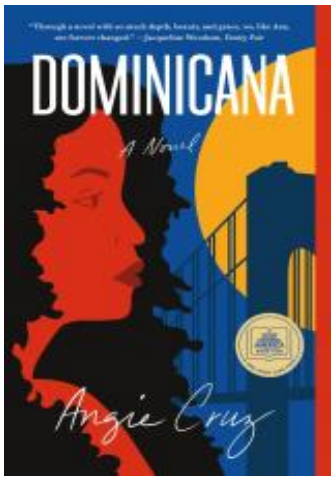
Dominicana

by Angie Cruz



About the Book

Fifteen-year-old Ana Cancion never dreamed of moving to America, the way the girls she grew up with in the Dominican countryside did. But when Juan Ruiz proposes and promises to take her to New York City, she has to say yes. It doesn?t matter that he is twice her age, that there is no love between them. Their marriage is an opportunity for her entire close-knit family to eventually immigrate. So on New Year?s Day, 1965, Ana leaves behind everything she knows and becomes Ana Ruiz, a wife confined to a cold six-floor walk-up in Washington Heights. Lonely and miserable, Ana hatches a reckless plan to escape. But at the bus terminal, she is stopped by Cesar, Juan?s free-spirited younger brother, who convinces her to stay.

As the Dominican Republic slides into political turmoil, Juan returns to protect his family?s assets, leaving Cesar to take care of Ana. Suddenly, Ana is free to take English lessons at a local church, lie on the beach at Coney Island, see a movie at Radio City Music Hall, go dancing with Cesar, and imagine the possibility of a different kind of life in America. When Juan returns, Ana must decide once again between her heart and her duty to her family.

In bright, musical prose that reflects the energy of New York City, Angie Cruz's DOMINICANA is a vital portrait of the immigrant experience and the timeless coming-of-age story of a young woman finding her voice in the world.

Discussion Guide

1. When Ana first comes to America, Juan buys her a ceramic doll at the airport: ?She wears a blue dress and a yellow sash around her waist. My sweet, hollow Dominicana will keep all my secrets: she has no eyes, no lips, no mouth.? What does that doll represent in the novel, specifically about Ana?s relationship with Juan?

2. DOMINICANA is set in 1965, the year the United States occupied Dominican Republic, Malcolm X was shot in Washington Heights, the World?s Fair came to Queens, and Dominican baseball players made the national news. How

do these historical events directly influence the lives of the Canción and Ruiz families?

3. What particular challenges does Ana face as an immigrant? What about the challenges for Juan? César? What resonance does their story have in our current political moment? What differences would they face if they were immigrants in New York City today?

4. Family is extremely important to both Juan and Ana. How are their lives shaped by familial duty and expectation? What do they each sacrifice for their families?

5. Ana calls Juan ?my monster and my angel.? What does she mean? How is domestic violence portrayed in this novel?

6. The novel is told primarily from Ana?s first-person narration, but occasionally we see Juan?s point of view, most intimately in his letters to Caridad. What does his perspective add to the story? Did it help you feel sympathy toward him?

7. Ana has very complicated relationships with Marisela and Caridad. Contrast these three women: What do they have in common, and how are they different?What particular challenges do they face as immigrant women? Do you think their behavior toward Ana is justifiable?

8. Discuss Mamá?s role in arranging Ana?s marriage to Juan. Even if she had her daughter?s best interests at heart, do you think she did the right thing? Ana then becomes a mother herself. How is motherhood portrayed in the novel?

9. Ana absorbs lessons on marriage from her mother?s stories, pop culture ("I Love Lucy" and telenovelas), politics (Jackie Kennedy?s speeches) and more. How does Ana view her role as a wife, and how does it shift over the course of the novel?

10. Discuss Ana?s relationships with Juan and César. What does each brother offer, and what are their drawbacks? Do you think Ana made the right decision in letting César go?

11. New York City itself becomes a sort of character in this novel, with scenes set at the Audubon Ballroom, the Queens? World?s Fair, the beach at Coney Island, and beyond. What is the influence of the city on Ana?s life? What was your favorite scene among her urban adventures?

12. Race is very much on the characters? minds in this novel, from the importance of Dominican baseball players to Juan and his brothers(and how their skin color changes the way they are perceived in the city); to the tensions with Hector?s Puerto Rican wife, Yrene; to Ana?s relationships with her neighbors in their building; to Juan?s distrust of the African Americans in Washington Heights. Discuss the contrasting forces of assimilation and cultural identity that shape the characters? lives.

13. DOMINICANA is in many ways Ana?s coming-of-age story. Does Ana remind you of any women in your own life or family? How does she change and grow over these pages? What do you think her future holds?

Author Bio

Angie Cruz is the author of the novels HOW NOT TO DROWN IN A GLASS OF WATER, SOLEDAD, LET IT RAIN COFFEE and DOMINICANA, which was shortlisted for the Women's Prize and a Good Morning America Book Club pick. She is founder and editor in chief of *Aster(ix)*, a literary and arts journal, and is an associate professor of English at the University of Pittsburgh.

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Publication Date: August 25, 2020
Genres: Fiction, Historical Fiction
Paperback: 336 pages
Publisher: Flatiron Books
ISBN-10: 1250205948
ISBN-13: 9781250205940