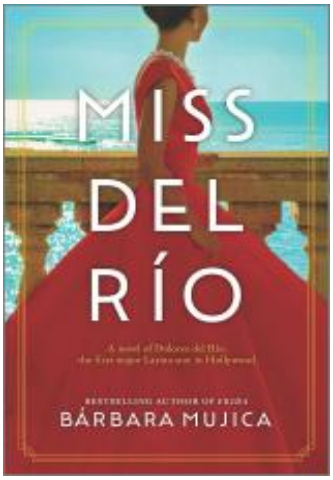
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Miss del Río: A Novel of Dolores del Río, the First Major Latina Star in Hollywood

by Bárbara Mujica



About the Book

1910, Mexico. As the country?s revolution spreads, Dolores, the daughter of a wealthy banker, must flee her comfortable life in Durango or risk death. Her family settles in Mexico City, where, at 16, she marries the worldly Jaime del Río. But in a twist of fate, at a party she meets an influential American director who recognizes in her a natural performer. He invites her to Hollywood, and practically overnight, the famous Miss del Río is born.

In California, Dolores? stardom quickly rises, and her days become a whirlwind of moviemaking and glamorous events. Swept up in Tinseltown?s glitzy inner circle, she takes her place among film royalty such as Marlene Dietrich and Orson Welles. But as her career soars to new heights, her personal life becomes increasingly complicated with family tragedy, painful divorce and real heartache. And when she?s labeled box office poison amid growing prejudice before WWII, Dolores must decide what price she?s willing to pay to achieve her dreams and if her heart and future instead lie where it all began...in Mexico.

Spanning half a century and narrated by Dolores? fictional hairdresser and longtime friend, MISS DEL RÍO traces the life of a trailblazing woman whose legacy in Hollywood and in Mexico still shines bright today.

Discussion Guide

1. Compare Lola?s upbringing with Mara?s. What do their upbringings tell us about the social structure of pre-Revolutionary Mexico? How does the Mexican Revolution influence the trajectory of each woman?s life?

2. How does Lola and Mara?s friendship blossom and sustain them throughout their lives, despite the obstacles they encounter? Have you had a similar lifelong friendship?

3. Discuss Lola?s romantic relationships in the novel. Why do you think she often makes poor choices when it comes to men? Did you understand her decision to marry Jaime del Río? Is Mara right to judge Lola harshly for her relationship with Carewe? How is Lew Riley ultimately different from the other men who came before him?

4. What does Mara expect from marriage? How are these expectations similar to or different from Lola?s?

5. What do Lola?s early experiences in Hollywood tell us about the exploitation of women in the movie industry? How have things changed or not changed today?

6. What is the role of the press (as represented in the novel by Carla Myer and *Star World*) in the creation of a celebrity?

7. How do attitudes and laws concerning race affect Lola?s career?

8. What is the role of education in the lives of Lola and Mara?

9. Is Tía Emi a positive or a negative influence in Mara?s life? Did your perception of her change over the course of the story?

10. Discuss Ramón and Mara?s friendship. Why do you think they have such a strong connection?

11. Doña Antonia and Lola are both described as cats with strong survival instincts who are able to adapt to different circumstances. Where do we see them act this way in the novel?

12. How does World War II radically alter the lives of both Lola and Mara?

13. Discuss Lola?s relationship with Frida Kahlo.

14. Why does Lola decide to return to Mexico? How does she rebuild her life there?

15. How do Lola?s efforts to establish day care centers in Mexico alter our perception of her?

16. Would you have liked to live in the Hollywood of the '20s and '30s? In the Mexico of the '30s and '40s? Why or why not?

Author Bio

Bárbara Mujica is the bestselling author of four novels, including FRIDA, which was translated into 17 languages. She is also an award-winning short story writer and essayist whose work has been published in *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post* and *The Miami Herald*, among others. A professor emerita of Spanish at Georgetown University, she lives in Bethesda, Maryland.

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