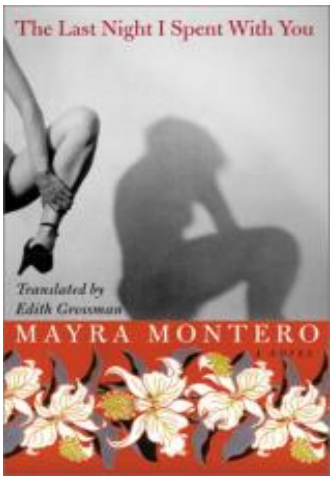
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The Last Night I Spent With You: A Novel

by Mayra Montero



About the Book

Each of the chapters in this exquisite, highly charged novel begins with the name of a Cuban bolero -- a style of music and dance written in 2/4 time that often tells a love story. In fact, the novel itself is a carefully choreographed bolero, alternating rhythmically between man and woman, past and present, ocean and land, fantasy and reality. The main characters, Fernando and Celia, are a well-to-do married couple whose newly married daughter has, up until her betrothal, been the glue that has kept them together. To "celebrate" their liberation from parenthood they are taking a long-planned Caribbean cruise during which they will visit a number of remote islands off the beaten tourist track. But nothing has prepared them for the real voyage they have embarked upon, one that forces them to confront their unspoken desires, fears, jealousies, and deceptions. Woven into the story is another tale of lovers whose passion and devotion to each other project in harsh relief the staid nature of Fernando and Celia's relationship. As this parallel story unfolds, and as the heady, sensual affects of the tropics work their magic, we watch as Fernando and Celia test the limits of their marriage in a wild and frenzied dance that brings them dangerously close to disaster.

Discussion Guide

1. "Women lose their inhibitions on ships," Fernando says, quoting a friend who has helped him plan the cruise. This friend refers to the dizzying effect the sea has on couples, "the open sea, naturally, when terra firma's lost from view." Why would the open sea make people, especially women, less inhibited? As the couple and their friend Julieta stop off at various islands, is there a change in their behavior on shore and off?

2. How do each of the characters use fantasy and deception to get what they want from each other? What do these fantasies and deceptions say about the characters themselves? How much of the novel is fantasy, and how much reality?

3. What did you think of the novel's erotic passages? Does any of the sexual action seem offensive or overly violent? How does the fact that Montero is a woman affect your reaction to these scenes?

4. At the end of the novel we understand the connection between Fernando and Julieta and between Celia and Conejo. How do these connections explain -- or at least illuminate -- Fernando and Celia's infidelities? What do you think Montero is saying about the connection between sex and death?

Author Bio

Mayra Montero was born in Havana, Cuba, in 1952, but has lived in Puerto Rico since the mid 1960s. She studied journalism in Mexico and Puerto Rico and worked for many years as a correspondent in Central America and the Caribbean. She is presently a highly acclaimed journalist in Puerto Rico and writes a weekly column in El Nuevo Dia newspaper. Montero's first book was a collection of short stories, Twenty-Three and a Turtle. Her second book, a novel titled **The Braid of the Beautiful Moon**, was a finalist for the Herralde awards, one of Europe's most prestigious literary awards. Each of her subsequent books -- **The Last Night I Spent With You**, **The Red of His Shadow**, **In the Palm of Darkness**, and **The Messenger** -- has been published in the United States in translations by Edith Grossman, as well as in several European countries. Her other nonfiction work appears frequently in scholarly and literary publications throughout the world.

Critical Praise

"Provacative."

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