



Daughters OF THE Stone

A NOVEL

DAHLMA LLANOS-FIGUEROA

PEN/
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Prize
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Finalist

A lyrical powerful novel about a family of Afro-Puerto Rican women spanning five generations, detailing their physical and spiritual journey from the Old World to the New.

It is the mid-1800s. Fela, taken from Africa, is working at her second sugar plantation in colonial Puerto Rico, where her mistress is only too happy to benefit from her impressive embroidery skills. But Fela has a secret. Before she and her husband were separated and sold into slavery, they performed a tribal ceremony in which they poured the essence of their unborn child into a very special stone. Fela keeps the stone with her, waiting for the chance to finish what she started. When the plantation owner approaches her, Fela sees a better opportunity for her child, and allows the man to act out his desire. Such is the beginning of a line of daughters connected by their intense love for one another, and the stories of a lost land.

Mati, a powerful healer and noted craftswoman, is grounded in a life that is disappearing in a quickly changing world.

Concha, unsure of her place, doesn't realize the price she will pay for rejecting her past.

Elena, modern and educated, tries to navigate between two cultures, moving to New York, where she struggles to keep her family together.

Carisa turns to the past for wisdom and strength when her life in New York falls apart.

The stone becomes meaningful to each of the women, pulling them through times of crisis. Dahlma Llanos-Figueroa shows great skill and warmth in the telling of this heartbreaking, inspirational story about mothers and daughters, and the ways in which they hurt and save one another.

READER'S GUIDE TO *Daughters of the Stone*

1. In which ways are the characters informed by their dreams?
2. What is the legacy passed on by Fela? Is it a gift or a curse?
3. What are the different ways of knowing in the novel?
4. In what ways do they change as we get closer to the present?
5. Who is the Lady and what role does she play in their lives?
6. In what ways are the women outsiders and what price does each pay for being different?
7. What does the stone represent to each of the main characters?
8. How does African mysticism/spirituality manifest itself in the life of each woman? How does it change with the move to each different culture and time period?
9. In what way does guilt/remorse affect each of the main characters?
10. How does language change/evolve from book to book within the novel?
11. How is language acquired, lost, and reclaimed throughout the women's lives?
12. How do the different characters express their creativity?
13. Sleep plays a major role in this book. What is the function of sleep in each of the main characters' lives?
14. How would you characterize the Tomás/Fela relationship? Is Mati born of love or rape?
15. What is the significance of storytelling in this family?
16. How does "the gift" manifest itself in each woman's life? How does it change over the course of the novel?

17. The structure of the novel is cyclical. Why does it begin and end in the same place?
18. What does the stone symbolize to you?
19. Escape is a major theme in the novel. How does each main character deal with this issue? What is she escaping from and what is she hoping to find?
20. Mati rejects traditional schooling for her daughter, yet there are many mentors in the narrative. Who are the mentors, and how is knowledge passed from one generation to the next?
21. Who/what is the antagonist in this narrative? How did the protagonist fight back?
22. There are many ways of resisting. How do characters in this book resist?
23. Are you from a culture different than the one explored in the book? Do any of the relationships/situations in the book remind you of people you know? How does a different culture inform the same type of relationships/situations?
24. Is there a strong woman in your life that has had to struggle to assert herself? What was her struggle? How did she fight back? What did she win? What did she lose?
25. What is the most important legacy left to you by your ancestors? What has it meant in your life?
26. What legacy would you like to leave behind for the next generation? Why?

BIOGRAPHY

Dahlma Llanos-Figueroa was born in Puerto Rico and raised in New York City. She is a product of the Puerto Rican communities on the island and in the South Bronx. She attended the New York City public school system and received her academic degrees from the State University of New York at Buffalo and Queens College-City University of New York. As a child she was sent to live with her grandparents in Puerto Rico where she was introduced to the culture of rural Puerto Rico, including the storytelling that came naturally to the women in her family, especially the older women. Much of her work is based on her experiences during this time. Dahlma taught creative writing and language and literature in the New York City public school system before becoming a young-adult librarian. She has also taught creative writing to teenagers, adults, and senior citizens throughout New York while honing her own skills as a fiction writer and memoirist.

The 2009 hardcover edition of *Daughters of the Stone* was listed as a 2010 Finalist for the PEN/Robert W. Bingham Prize. Her short stories appear in the following anthologies: *Bronx Memoir Project*, *Latina Authors and Their Muses*, *Chicken Soup for the Latino Soul*, and *Growing Up Girl*. Dahlma's work also appears in various literary magazines such as the *Afro-Hispanic Review* and *Kweli Journal*. Since her retirement, Dahlma continues to dedicate herself to her writing, speaking engagements, and workshops. She resides in the Bronx with her husband, photographer Jonathan Lessuck.

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