



The Madness of Mama Carlota

Graciela Limon

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It's 1852 in Cholula, Mexico, and three sisters, indigenous girls of the Chontal people, seek work at the Hacienda La Perla. They rapidly make their way from dish washers to the cook's assistants before entering the house as servants to the wealthy Acuna family. But when the youngest sister is viciously raped by a family member, they flee the estate--after taking their revenge--only to be caught up in the historic Battle of Puebla, where native Mexicans defeat invading French troops.

Fearful that the Acuna family will not rest until the sisters are found and punished, they keep moving, ultimately finding work as servants at the National Palace in Mexico City, where the French have recently taken control. There, the sisters' fortunes become intertwined with that of the Empress Carlota. Both beautiful and extremely intelligent, she dedicates herself to the empire, chastising Napoleon when he reneges on his promise to send troops and antagonizing the Church by proposing that the empire secularize at least part of its holdings. But her love for Mexico's people is not reciprocated, and soon the sisters have to decide whether to stay behind without the empress' protection or to accompany her to Europe.

Weaving the story of Mexico's indigenous peoples with that of the tragic Belgian princess who became the wife of the Austrian Archduke Maximilian von Hapsburg, acclaimed author Graciela Limon once again explores issues of race, class and women's rights. She skillfully crafts a gripping novel about a smart, wealthy woman who is not afraid to challenge powerful men, and re-imagines the story behind Empress Carlota's descent into madness and eventual imprisonment in a remote European castle.

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