



## Malcriada & Other Stories

“In the middle of the Caribbean Sea, aboard an illegal voyage from the Dominican Republic to Puerto Rico, a twelve year old learns her name; a former cacao farmer finds a constellation on his lover's thighs; best friends become strangers and find the essence of themselves in the face of deception; an old man exchanges his homeland for a New York City bodega storefront; preteen boys grapple with authority; female cousins come to terms with their first shared sexual experience; an alcoholic woman finds serenity at the bottom of the sea; feminism is deconstructed by opposing views; on the back of a motorcycle, self-awareness is found; and a woman discovers that healing is a series of choices.”

Malcriada & Other Stories is the debut collection of short stories by Afro-Kiskeyana author Lorraine Avila. These narratives explore love, identity within the African Diaspora, domestic violence, immigration, girlhood, police brutality, mental health and a number of other important themes. Ultimately, this collection reckons with the self-realization needed for true freedom.

### Discussion Guide:

1. At the end of “Malcriada”, the young girl reaches into her pocket for food and instead finds a letter from her grandmother. In the handwritten letter, Malcriada’s grandmother apologizes and writes, “Tu nombre no es Malcriada. Tu nombre es Naomi. Te nombré yo porque tu madre no sabía inventarse entre el dolor y la sangre.” What is the significance of this letter? What does it reveal about her nickname and the relationships between the women in this family?
2. “Nereyda’s Stars” was inspired by bachata, a popular, disproportionately male-dominated, Dominican music genre where men have carved a space out to sing about heartbreak. How does this story (and the genre of bachata) speak to the stereotypical roles of men and women in Dominican culture?

3. Domestic violence is an epidemic in the Dominican Republic. Violence against women is not just rampant, it is normalized. We see this truth in "Papi." How does the violence in this story shape the children who bare witness to it?
4. Lauren does not like her food mixing together on a plate. What does this represent in terms of Lauren's relationship with her family, friends and loved ones? ("Cuero")
5. In "Justice," Elidania contends with the heaviness of dating a man with serious mental health issues as well as the dynamics of being an Afro-Latina dating a Black man. At the end of the story, she receives a message from her deceased mother through a dream El Super had. In the dream, she told him "Tell my negra to be free." What was holding Elidania captive?
6. "Pastelitos" shows us a young boy and girl cradling a new romance as he makes her something to eat for the first time. What does the meal he chooses to make reveal about him? How does the food in this story speak to a larger personal and cultural narrative?
7. It is safe to say that the relationship between urban youth and police officers is, and always has been, strained. Beyond the personal struggles this generation has to overcome, they are inundated with images of Black violence and death at the hands of the very people that are supposed to protect them. Discuss the moment that Quante freezes as he watches Sammy surrounded by police officers and forced into a straight jacket.
8. The way that Lauren and Michelle Maria, as well as Estella and Solgone, come into their sexuality is shrouded in silence and forgetting. How is sexuality portrayed in these short stories?
9. Mental illness and death are reoccurring themes in this collection. "Romo" ends with the line "You were never here to stay," and is followed by Jay R's experience of an afterlife in "Heaven." What do both of these characters reveal about purpose and peace?
10. "Mija" is about a young girl who survives childhood sexual abuse. How do her experiences shape her girlhood and relationships with others? What does she learn in the process of healing?
11. The final story "You" is written in the second person and spotlights all the lessons "Malcriadas" in this world will come to learn. Underline all your favorite lessons. Reflect and examine what lessons you have learned so far in this journey of healing.
12. The older sister in "Bodysuit" sacrifices a lot to take care of her family and yet her relationship with her sister Lisbel is still strained. How does this story portray feminism for lower and middle class working women?