The Disorder You Leave Behind
Author:
Carlos Montero

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ON A SCALE FROM 1 - 10 (10 being the highest score) how would you rate this book?9

El desordenquedejas, Carlos Montero's second novel, is a psychological thriller that has won the *Premio Primavera de Novela*. In an interview after the novel won this award, Montero admitted, "I am a big reader, but I tire quickly. I need a story to grab me right from the start, and that is what I have tried to do here—seduce the reader." If this was his goal, he certainly achieved it with this novel.

Set in small-town Galicia, in the northwest of Spain, *El desordenquedejas* tells the story of Raquel, a teacher who takes a substitute post at a high school. Shortly after arriving in town and starting work, she finds out that Elvira, the teacher she has come to replace, died in murky circumstances. Soon enough, strange things start to happen around her, and events take a sinister turn when she gets a note among her new students' assignments reading, "What about you, how long will it take you to die?"

The narration alternates between first-person in the present tense, as Raquel recounts her experiences, and third-person in the past tense, as other characters' activities unfold. The dialogue is snappy, fun, and dark at times. And it is linguistically interesting—the third-person narration is done in impeccable Spanish, while Raquel's first-person musings are much more colloquial and occasionally peppered with expletives. Locals sometimes express themselves in the Galician language, helping to establish a small-town feel and perhaps contributing to Raquel's feeling of being an outsider.

The pacing in this novel is excellent—fast enough to keep the reader wanting more, but slow enough to keep the suspense building. Frequent twists and surprises leave you eager to find out what will happen next. Montero has written for Spanish television, and it shows in the way he draws the reader in. The characters, too, are engaging—quirky in their mannerisms, diverse in their motivations. You connect quickly with the main characters, even those who are gone before the story begins.

And while the story has a very contemporary feel, as it deals with themes such as cyberstalking and hacking, it also addresses more universal and timeless themes, such as breakups, sex, love, drugs, manipulation, and guilt. The title, *El desordenquedejas*, could be translated as "The Mess You Leave Behind," which alludes to another recurring theme in the book: Everything we do leaves a trail of some sort.

This is a captivating, thought-provoking, sometimes funny, sometimes disturbing novel. It would do well with English-speaking audiences who are looking for something to “grab them right from the start” and keep them engrossed to the end.

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