

## **Q&A with Lorena Hughes, award-winning author of *The Spanish Daughter***



### **Where did the idea for *The Spanish Daughter* come from?**

I've always loved movies where people cross-dress, but I noticed that almost all of them were comedies. I had been reading a lot about real-life women who dressed as men to fight in wars, or practice medicine, or even to write, such as George Sand, so I knew I wanted to give the subject a serious treatment (although I can't fully escape the humor that sometimes filters in my writing). Around the same time, I found out that there was a small town in Ecuador called Little Paris (Paris Chiquito) where French landowners had grown cacao beans for export and turned the country into a top exporter.

That gave me my setting as I love to set my stories in my native country. The final inspiration came from a little-known historical fact I learned in an obscure corner of the internet: the inventor of the cacao and coffee bean roaster was a Spanish woman in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century (I even found her patent with her signature!) Somehow, I had to combine all these elements! My answer was Puri, the protagonist born from all these intrepid people.

### **What are your approaches to writing novels?**

I don't always have the same approach as the ideas for my novels come to me in different ways. Sometimes I get inspired by something I read, or something someone tells me, or maybe a place that I visit. After I get my initial idea, I think about how I'm going to execute it, who my characters are going to be, what's going to happen, etc. My next step is to write a long summary or an outline. This can take many days or weeks and it changes constantly. But the longest part, by far, is writing the first draft because sometimes the characters are so new I don't really know them, or I may get stuck on a plot point and it may take months to come up with a solution. After finishing the first draft, I take a break, and then I reread and edit the manuscript as much as possible before sending it out to my critique partners and beta readers.

### **How did you pursue writing?**

Since I was a child I was always interested in storytelling. However, I never considered the possibility of becoming a professional writer. Especially because I was more of a visual artist: I took painting lessons in high school, got a degree in fine arts, and worked as a graphic designer and illustrator after I graduated. When I had my first child, I quit my job, and during his naps, I would write short stories and my first novel (which at the time was meant to be a Spanish soap opera). From then on, it became an obsession and I couldn't stop.

### **What are some of your most favorite recent reads? And an all-time favorite?**

Lately, I've been reading many psychological thrillers, but I also read a lot of novels by Liane Moriarty. I love how she infuses humor in otherwise dramatic situations. I also enjoyed Susan Meissner's *Secrets of a Charmed Life*—beautifully written. I have many all-time favorites, but one of the books that started my

love for literature was a novel by Brazilian author José Mauro de Vasconcelos called *My Orange Lemon Plant*.

**What do you want people to know about your books?**

If you like unconventional settings, family secrets, lots of surprises and stories about women fighting for their dreams in patriarchal societies, you'll probably enjoy my novels.

**What did you learn about yourself while writing this novel?**

I learned that I can handle bad criticism a lot better than I ever thought I could.

**What is your favorite part of writing (drafting characters, making up scenes, plotting, developing emotional turning points, etc). Why?**

I love it when I'm not sure how I'm going to develop a scene, but everything comes together the moment I'm writing it. I love being surprised by what my characters say and do.

**When do you do your best thinking about your work in progress?**

When I'm detangling my hair in the shower (it takes a looong time, ha!) But I'm probably at my most focused when I'm writing an actual scene. Magical things happen when you let your characters' actions and dialogue flow in the page without censoring anything.

**Share something people may be surprised to know about you.**

People may be surprised to know that the walls in my parents' apartment are covered with pictures I painted during my teenage years.

**What's the best piece of writing advice you've ever gotten?**

I love this quote from Calvin Coolidge:

"Nothing in this world can take the place of persistence. Talent will not; nothing is more common than unsuccessful people with talent. Genius will not; unrewarded genius is almost a proverb. Education will not; the world is full of educated derelicts. Persistence and determination alone are omnipotent. The slogan 'press on' has solved and always will solve the problems of the human race."