Falling Together: A Novel by Marisa de los Santos

Amazon Exclusive Essay: Marisa de los Santos on Falling Together

I am an incorrigible homebody. I like my own pillow, my own imperfect showerhead, my coffee and pizza and bagel shops, my little rituals. I am quite old lady-ish about it. I like to write in—and only in—my radically unbeautiful office (I share it with guinea pigs). I like to drive my kids to swimming. At night, the moment when I shut my book, turn off my bedside table light, and know that everyone is sleeping under the same roof, our roof, is as close to a state of grace as I ever hope to come. I have always been this person.

So it is probably not surprising that, until now, my writing has stuck close to home, as well. In the first two novels, my characters did a little meandering but rarely outside of the 95 corridor, never outside of the country. They needed no passports; they never suffered jet lag. And now, with Falling Together, what have I done but put Will, Augusta, Jason, and my poor aviophobic Pen on airplane after airplane and sent them clear across the world? What was I thinking? I was thinking about the story, mostly, and that these were people who, each in her or his own way needed to go in quest of something (apart from Augusta, who has everything she needs). Also, I was thinking that the Philippines, where my father grew up, is too beautiful, too much a part of the landscape of my heart not to write about.

I visited the Philippines for the first time when I was 22 and on Christmas Day, woke up to voluminous sunshine, enfolding heat, a houseful of relatives, and a roasted suckling pig, pointy-eared, tiger’s eye-orange, and smelling like bliss. I was not in Kansas (or Virginia) anymore. I rode in dazzlingly painted jeepneys; I visited roadside fruit stands as resplendent as parade-floats and cemeteries in which people laughed, ate, and talked as though they were in their own living rooms and the gravestones were furniture or friends. I ate a lot: the little fists of bread called Elordes after
the boxer; rice sticky with coconut milk; fish with blue bones like a secret; fruit shaped like sea anemones, hedgehogs, brains; heavenly, palm-sized mangoes with flesh you can scoop like custard.

Amid all of these discoveries, the best part was the people, a branch (or palm frond) of my family tree that I had only seen in glimpses. Now, this family surrounded me. I learned that traits I thought were uniquely my father’s—having conversations with his eyebrows, a brusque, instinctive generosity that shrugged off thanks—were family or cultural traits. I learned that home is a word that can stretch. Since that first visit, I’ve been back many times since, especially since my parents retired there six years ago, and every time, home stretches to include something new: a coral reef, a helper’s bewitching baby, a soup made of mung beans, a tiny tarsier’s enormous eyes.

In Falling Together, Pen goes to the Philippines in search of her friend, but I think she finds more than that. She sits in a banca boat with a school of jackfish shoaling beneath it and thinks, awestruck, “All this time, every second: this.” She experiences the world as big and small at the same time. While I sit at my desk, drive my children around, sleep under my roof, all the time, every second, there is another version of home, my home, vibrantly alive and unfolding itself thousands of miles away. The least I could do was put it in a book.

A Look Inside Falling Together Click on the images below to open larger versions.

Alona Palms: This endless pool is at the beach resort that inspired the fancy one where part of Falling Together is set. Charles and Tarsier: The author’s son in the tarsier sanctuary with a tiny friend. Chocolate Hills: The famous hills in Bohol, from the same overlook where Jason bursts into tears and Pen comforts him.

My Personal Review:
As I did with Marisa de los Santos previous books, I galloped easily through FALLING TOGETHER. Its the story of a triangular college friendship between Pen, Will, and Cat that had a physical divide but a permanent emotional bond. While Pen and, to a lesser degree, Will are fully developed characters, I never felt that I understood why Cat was so beloved by either of them. She is not remotely fleshed out as a character, and I find that dissatisfying, as she is the object of great and engaged affection and this reader cant help but wonder why. Since the search for her is arduous and expensive and complicated and at the heart of the book...its a problem.

The internal dialogue is one of de los Santos great gifts--so real and wise--but there was just too much of it. Coupled with a denouement so
unbelievable that it put the stake in my readers heart and mind, I am disappointed--even though the book was utterly readable and beautifully written.

For More 5 Star Customer Reviews and Lowest Price:
Falling Together: A Novel by Marisa de los Santos - 5 Star Customer Reviews and Lowest Price!