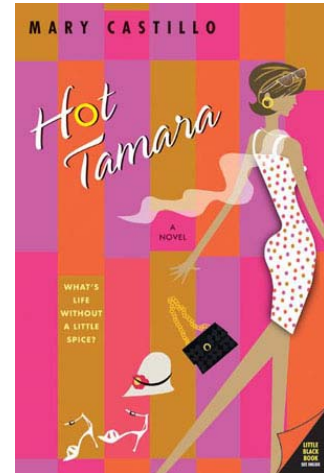


HOT TAMARA

AVON'S FIRST LATINA ROMANTIC COMEDY WAS PENNED BY COSTA MESA'S MARY CASTILLO

Love and laughter Latina style hit the shelves February 1 when Avon Trade, an imprint of HarperCollins Publishers, releases *Hot Tamara*, a first novel by local talent Mary Castillo. Set in Los Angeles, *Hot Tamara* (Avon Trade, \$13.95) is about a young Latina who struggles with her traditionally minded parents, love and career.



Rising with the tide of popular Latina novelists like Alisa Valdes Rodriguez (*Dirty Girls Social Club* and *Playing With Boys*) and Lynda Sandoval (*Unsettling*), Castillo's debut has been eagerly anticipated by readers. HarperCollins selected *Hot Tamara* as a First Look Feature, a new online program that allows readers to preview advanced reading copies; *Latina Magazine* called Castillo "an author to look out for" (Aug. 2004); and *Dallas Morning News* profiled her as one of three debut novelists.

Castillo started the novel during a prolonged period of unemployment in early 2002. She then became a reporter for the Laguna Beach *Coastline Pilot*, painstakingly revising the novel during her lunch hour, at night after work and on weekends. But the hard work had just begun.

"I started *Hot Tamara* before *Dirty Girls Social Club* arrived," she said. "I'd walk through bookstores despairing that there were no other books like mine on the shelves. Alisa's book changed that."

Castillo quickly learned that in publishing, if at first you don't succeed, try 17 times. She has a file of each and every one of her rejections, most notably the letters that said her novel wasn't "Latina enough."

"I still don't know what they meant by that," she said. "But all it took was one yes by someone who understood that Latinos are incredibly diverse within their own cultures. Now three years later, almost to the day I finished the first draft of the book, my dream has come true."

Almost immediately after selling *Hot Tamara*, she sold a short story that will be featured in the first Latina "chick lit" anthology, *Friday Night Chicas* (St Martins Griffin/\$12.95) to be released in April 2005.

Castillo has also developed a website for fans (<http://www.MaryCastillo.com>) and an e-newsletter for writers (<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/mariyecastillonews/>). Her third release, *In Between Men* (Avon Trade) has been scheduled for March 2006.