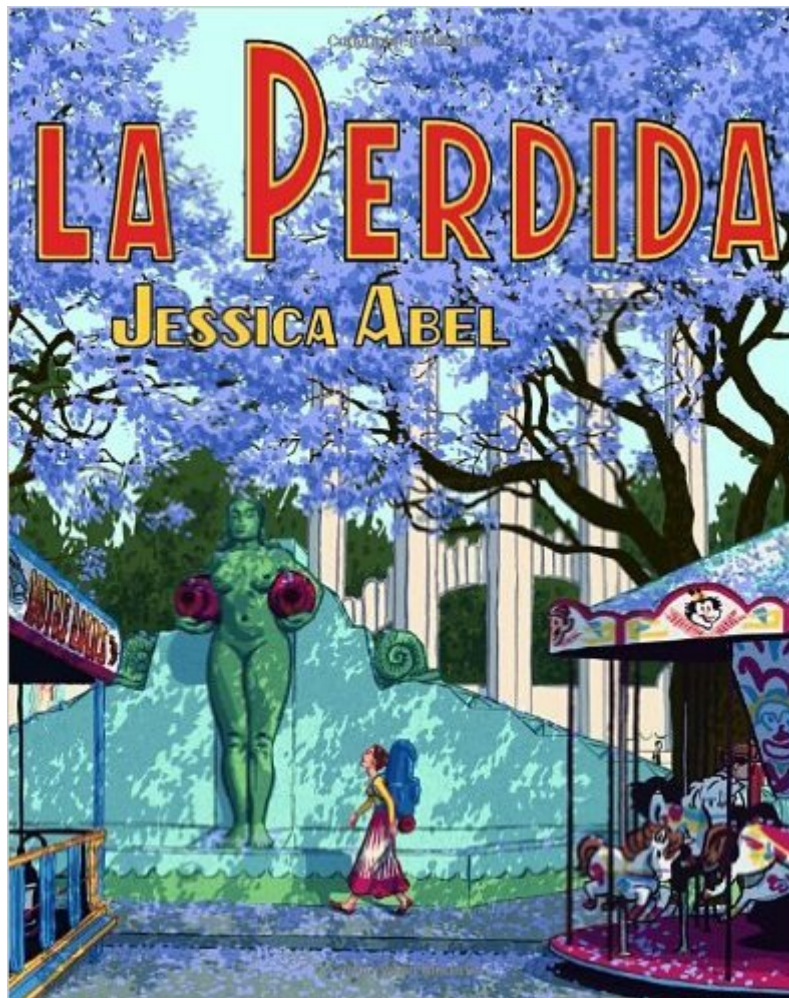


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La Perdida



Synopsis

From the Harvey and Lulu award-winning creator of *Artbabe* comes this riveting story of a young woman's misadventures in Mexico City. Carla, an American estranged from her Mexican father, heads to Mexico City to find herself. She crashes with a former fling, Harry, who has been drinking his way through the capital in the great tradition of his heroes, William S. Burroughs and Jack Kerouac. Harry is good-humored about Carla's reappearance on his doorstep until he realizes that Carla, who spends her days soaking in the city, exploring Frida Kahlo's house, and learning Spanish, has no intention of leaving. When Harry and Carla's relationship of mutual tolerance reaches its inevitable end, she rejects his world of Anglo expats for her own set of friends: pretty-boy Oscar, who sells pot and dreams of being a DJ, and charismatic Memo, a left-wing, pseudo-intellectual ladies' man. Determined to experience the real Mexico, Carla turns a blind eye to her new friends' inconsistencies. But then she catches the eye of a drug don, el Gordo, and from that moment on her life gets a lot more complicated, and she is forced to confront the irreparable consequences of her willful innocence. Jessica Abel's evocative black-and-white drawings and creative mix of English and Spanish bring Mexico City's past and present to life, unfurling Carla's dark history against the legacies of Burroughs and Kahlo. A story about the youthful desire to live an authentic life and the consequences of trusting easy answers, *La Perdida* is at once grounded in the particulars of life in Mexico and resonantly universal is a story about finding oneself by getting lost.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Jessica Abel crams heaping handfuls of story into each chapter of her gripping tale of self-discovery

and self-deceit, an excellent, completely engaging and essential graphic novel that belongs on every discerning comics fans' bookshelf. Carla, Abel's titular "la perdida" -- lost girl -- is a half-Mexican twenty-something who moves to Mexico City on a whim, looking to get in touch with her Mexican roots by fully immersing herself in the culture, quickly rejecting her fellow American expatriates in favor of two natives who (with a peculiar mix of selfish sincerity) embrace her: Memo, a Communist pseudo-intellectual, and Oscar, his good-looking if somewhat simple-minded friend. The first three chapters are Carla's story of trying to fit in and find her place in a culture that is completely foreign to her and not always welcoming, despite and in spite of her half-Mexican blood, and Abel does an excellent job of establishing a rather large cast of supporting characters so that in the fourth chapter, when things take a dramatic shift that in lesser hands would qualify as jumping the shark, she's able (no pun intended) to pull it off without derailing everything that's come before. Because she tells the story from Carla's perspective looking back on what happened, the reader is cued into details that Carla herself is missing at the time, so as events unfolded, I found myself cringing at some of her choices while always remaining engaged with her story. When it ended, somewhat abruptly, I found my head spinning a bit, chock full of images and anecdotes from Carla's experience as if she had shared them with me personally over coffee.

Carla, the narrator, is really oblivious. She is charmingly oblivious when she can't hold a taco right in the first few pages, but becomes more and more frustratingly oblivious as the story progresses: she has little direction or common sense, and so quickly gets dragged down by her circle of low-life "friends." Such a weak central figure deflates the work as a whole. Although readers are made to care about what happens to Carla while reading the story, afterwards, reading the book just feels like a waste of time. Carla is a dumb girl who learns very little, and doesn't apply that in life. The narrative gets very tedious at points. The story does go quickly, I suppose, but reflects the directionlessness of Carla's life. The plot is rife with little characters that make brief cameos, muddy the waters, and then disappear. Character development for recurring characters is a little flat; the characters don't flesh out much beyond the description in the dust jacket -- Oscar as a "pretty-boy who sells pot and dreams of being a DJ," and Memo as "a left-wing, pseudo-intellectual ladies' man." Harry is one-sidedly painted as a capitalist pig and privileged brat, and not allowed to develop much beyond that. That said, there are some good points about Abel's graphic novel. It captures Carla's reasons (albeit vague and poorly thought-out) for going to Mexico and her desire to find her roots, although more attention could have been given to the culture shock that inevitably comes with entering and living in a new country. The culture shock is basically glossed over; she finds a few

aspects of Mexico grimy but nets herself into even-grimier situations. The artwork is pretty good, but one or two panel transitions are confusing. The aesthetic is also very cluttered.

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