



The Darling

Lorraine M. López

The University of Arizona Press (Sep 24, 2015)

Softcover \$17.95 (272pp)

978-0-8165-3183-7

A complex and disarming young woman follows her heart, lust, and taste for adventure in an unusual route to maturity and self-actualization.

Lorraine M. López's *The Darling* is a coming-of-age story in the time-honored tradition, a tribute to literary giants, and a fresh perspective on life and love. Its heroine challenges assumptions, and after a winding and bumpy journey, evokes a spirit of celebration.

"On her wedding day, Caridad Delgado pined for a dead man." The dead man is Anton Chekov, whose short story "The Darling" preoccupies the reluctant young bride. When her husband suggests an open marriage, she is the first to implement the new policy, to his dismay; Caridad will ever after follow her heart, lust, and taste for adventure. She experiments in romance, sex, and cohabitation, and proceeds from her love affair with Chekhov to explore other classics—naturally, *Madame Bovary*, *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, *Lolita*, and *Moll Flanders*, but also Shakespeare, the Greek myths, and more. Accompanied by such tales, Caridad pursues headlong her own pleasure and identity. Along the way, she studies English literature and works in the college library and a chain of bookstores.

Caridad is complicated and inward-looking. She agonizes over her opinion of herself, criticizing poor decisions and affirming better ones; she makes the occasional pro-and-con list but more frequently jumps in and looks for consequences afterward. Her academic mind is sharp, but the attention she pays her relationships is often vague. It is no wonder that such a fascinating character attracts such a motley series of bumbling men as she does. The dialogue López assigns to these familiar but feckless characters rings true, and a twisty, engaging plot evokes affectionate exasperation and sometimes concern for her hero's personal wellbeing. If Caridad's life choices are a little harried, this pace and changeability is countered by her interior questioning, a thoughtful interrogation of what life has to offer. López's writing is enchanting, rendering that life and quest with immediacy and charm, in a literary style worthy of its subjects.

Breathless and captivating, with a complex and disarming young woman at its center, *The Darling* suggests an unusual route to maturity and self-actualization, framed by classic texts. Literary fans could ask for no better combination than the honoring of tradition with irreverence and feeling.

JULIA JENKINS (Winter 2016)

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