

The Torch Bearer's Exorcism

Linda Luisa Varela Tychsen

AuthorHouse UK (Jun 30, 2016)

Softcover \$18.24 (226pp)

978-1-5246-3633-3

Quiet and realistic in its examination of the dangers of young love, this is a sympathetic coming-of-age story.

In *The Torch Bearer's Exorcism*, Linda Luisa Varela Tychsen tells a painful coming-of-age tale about illusions and heartbreak. The stories people tell themselves can be more powerful than reality, as hapless heroine Cherie discovers firsthand. Cherie sympathetically chases love, but instead of finding it, falls into the trap of believing in an illusion.

In the 1980s, Cherie leaves an abusive home to embark on a college career. There, she meets charismatic David. Taken in by his charms, she falls desperately in love. But as their relationship proceeds, she learns that he may not be who he claims to be. Despite his declarations of devotion, signs point to perfidy on multiple levels. With her heart overtaking her reason, Cherie hesitates to address the mounting evidence and confront David for the truth.

The novel clearly establishes David's impending betrayal through his poor treatment of Cherie, first through multiple romantic encounters that he later fails to acknowledge in public, and then through his notorious flirtations with Cherie's acquaintances. The linking of David with other women would normally shatter the confidence of a hopeful girlfriend, but his silver tongue soothes away Cherie's doubts. Cherie's romantic misadventures are relatable throughout, reflecting the experiences of co-eds experiencing their first brushes with adult love.

While Cherie and David are fleshed-out characters, their tumultuous relationship falls into predictable patterns as the narrative proceeds, and they become a tedious couple. Less developed are the other people in Cherie's life. Brief glimpses into her parents' marriage offer insight into why she's easily taken by David's shiny facade, but they never reach beyond clichés. Other people display interest in the naïve heroine, but their overtures come out of the blue. Such characters are not leveraged as foils and mirrors for Cherie and David.

Despite its sympathetic look into college relationships, meandering prose weighs down *The Torch Bearer's Exorcism*. The writing fluctuates between a confusing stream-of-consciousness style and a distant summarization of events, a narrative structure that is made even more confusing by glimpses into Cherie's postcollege life that suggest a forthcoming epiphany that is never realized. More effective is the incorporation of illustrations and photographs that limn the heroine's mental state at key turning points, although their inconsistent placement is occasionally jarring.

An often cynical look at college years and romance, *The Torch Bearer's Exorcism* is a cautionary tale about getting too swept up in what looks like love. Rather than a vigorous repudiation of false love, the novel serves as a passive confessional about the inability to let go.

VERNIEDA VERGARA (November 7, 2016)

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