



The Darling (Camino del Sol)

Lorraine M. López

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Latina bibliophile Caridad falls out of love again and again, with much help from Anton Chekhov, Gustave Flaubert, Theodore Dreiser, D. H. Lawrence, Vladimir Nabokov, Thomas Hardy, and other deceased white men of letters. Raised in a household of women, she rejects examples of womanhood offered by her long-suffering mother, her caustic eldest sister Felicia, and her pliant and sentimental middle sister Esperanza. Instead Caridad, a compulsive reader, educates herself about love and what it means to be a sentient and intelligent woman by reading classic literature written by men, and supplements this with life lessons gleaned from her relationships.

Though set in Los Angeles from the mid-1970s to the mid-1980s, the narrative reinscribes Anton Chekhov's short story, "The Darling," first published in 1899. Like Chekhov's protagonist, Caridad engages in various relationships in her search for love and fulfillment. Rather than absorbing beliefs held by the men in her life, as does Chekhov's heroine, Caridad instead draws on her lovers' resources in attempting to improve and educate herself. Apart from Chekhov, various authors of classic literature further guide Caridad's quest to find herself and to find love, inspiring her longing for love, while also enabling her to disentangle herself from unsatisfying to disastrous relationships by encouraging her to strive for an ideal.

In a moment of clarity, Caridad compares herself to a trapeze artist near the top of a striped tent as she flies from one man to the next, expecting to be caught and held until she is ready to leap again. Flying, she wonders—or is she falling?

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