



The Heiress of Water

By Sandra Rodriguez Barron
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Introduction

When young Monica Winters Borrero loses her luminous mother in an accident at sea, she is exiled from the tropical paradise that was her home. Grieving and cut off from a life among El Salvador's elite, Monica and her American father move to Connecticut, vowing never to look back.

Years later, an intriguing stranger, who has endured a terrible loss of his own, enters Monica's life, bearing an unusual request. Monica is propelled back to her lost world, retracing the shadowy last days of her mother, a marine scientist who had been on the brink of understanding the therapeutic applications of a rare, venomous sea creature. Now, her research is being corrupted by a secret clinic that claims the power to restore consciousness to the comatose.

What Monica discovers will shatter the family's delicate truce with the past, and compel everyone involved to challenge their deepest notions of what it means to be alive. Atmospheric, thought-provoking, and timely. *The Heiress of Water* is a stunning parable of paradise lost and found.

Questions for Discussion

1. Seashells are ever-present in this novel. How are these objects a controlling metaphor in the story? Are there any similarities between the nature of seashells and the nature of any of the characters?
2. Monica is said to have an unusual talent for massage that is based on a razor sharp tactile intuition. How does this characteristic relate to, lead to and perhaps foreshadow the unusual talent that she discovers in the end?
3. Will Lucero and his mother-in-law both love and care for Yvette, yet are constantly at odds about the decisions relating to her care. Were your sympathies weighted with one character more than the other?
4. Will Lucero is torn between his loyalty to his wife and the hopelessness of her medical condition. At what point do you think the spouse of a mentally incapacitated person can move on emotionally to love another person?
5. The object of Alma's quest, the *Conus Furius*, is never found in the span in of the story. Do you think that the pursuit of something that could potentially do so much good is worth a lifetime of sacrifice, even if it is never found?
6. Monica falls in love with Will first because of his physical appeal, then his humanity, then the intimacy of their situation as they struggle together in El Salvador. Did you feel conflicting loyalties toward Monica and Yvette?
7. Do you think that the subconscious can influence the body during a traumatic event or illness? Did the cone venom treatment ultimately free Yvette or did it kill her?
8. Monica was herself a victim of adultery. When she reports her mother's errant behavior to her father, she unwittingly sets off a chain of events that caused a tragedy. Was Bruce Winters wise in hiding that fact from Monica all these years?
9. The sea is as much a character in this novel as are the people. Have you ever lived in a place where nature affects the routines, work, emotional or spiritual nature of the humans that live nearby? How does Monica's description of her life in Connecticut set up the contrast to the mystical aura of Negrarena?
10. Throughout the novel there is a tension between opposites: Catholicism versus the spiritual nature of the sea, traditional medicine versus experimentation, wealth versus poverty, marriage versus adultery, anger versus forgiveness. Do you think that Monica has managed to strike a balance between these forces by the end of the story?
11. Monica is ultimately rewarded with three gifts that she did not initially seek: love, money and a rare spiritual/intellectual inheritance. Do you think that Monica is better equipped than her mother to handle these gifts?
12. Do you think that Monica and Will might eventually get together--or will Monica's newfound gifts set her on a new, solo path? Is Will a good match for her, given who she becomes at the end of the story?
13. Do you think that Monica will repeat her mother's footsteps in any way?

About the Author

Sandra Rodriguez Barron was born in Puerto Rico, has lived in El Salvador, Connecticut, France and the Dominican Republic. The daughter of a Salvadoran mother and a Puerto Rican father, her family moved from El Salvador to Connecticut to avoid the violence of El

Salvador's civil war. She earned an undergraduate degree in Communications from the University of Connecticut, and has an MFA from Florida International University, one of the top ten MFA programs in the country. For thirteen years she has worked in the field of charitable, academic and cultural fund-raising. She lives in Connecticut with her husband and son.