



Book Review: González & Daughter Trucking Co.: A Road Novel with Literary License

Written by María Amparo Escandón

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*I was never in the same place twice. Sleeping by the side of the road on coyote nights and indigo dawns. Running from no one, camouflaged by my father's fears.* (p. 190)

After a lifetime on the road with her father, Libertad has found herself an accidental inmate in a Mexican woman's prison. And oddly, she feels at home. It is the first time in her life that she's had the opportunity to make friends. It is the first time that her bed doesn't have wheels underneath it and that her showers are free. Despite the security she feels in her new home, she still finds herself unable to share the story of how she arrived there. She wants to share what happened with Maciza, her friend and cellmate, but every time she tries to speak, the words simply won't come out.

Libertad suggests to the warden that she might host a Library Club, since she is one of the only inmates able to read, and her idea is quickly approved. While reading aloud, Libertad realizes that she is not reading the story in the book, but has begun to share her own story, from the beginning, starting with her father, a literature professor, fleeing from the University of Mexico when it was invaded by the Mexican army in 1968. After hiding in a university bathroom for more than a week, he escaped, hitched a ride with a trucker, and eventually stowed away in a cargo container to cross the border into the United States.

When the door to that cargo container was opened, he came face to face with a beautiful female trucker. They fell madly in love. She taught him all he needed to know about trucking and they lived on the road with no need for anything but each other. Eventually, they were blessed with a child, but happiness was not to be. After a fateful accident, the mother was lost and Joaquin was left alone with an infant daughter and a truck. This was how they became González & Daughter Trucking Co.

Joaquin raised his daughter on the road, taught her through books they read aloud to one another and through any educational experiences he could find, often taking detours for museums and bookstores while on their way to deliver a load. Convinced that the Mexican army was still looking for him and that everything was dangerous, he changed both his name and hers frequently, buying fake documentation and burying their cash in various locations along their routes. Eventually, his paranoia grew out of control. Every reminder that Libertad was becoming closer to a woman and further away from a child seemed to infuriate him. He became more controlling and possessive, often starting fights at truck stops and even with clients, if one of the men looked in Libertad's direction too long or spoke with her without her father around.

As Joaquin tried desperately to protect himself and his daughter, she encountered young love and a desire for independence that lead to a series of runaway attempts and finally, to the Mexicali Penal Institution for Women. It is in this place, through the shared stories of the inmates, that Libertad discovers her voice and her freedom.

In this coming-of-age story, the reader is drawn into a world defined by immigration. The reader follows as a professor of literature is forced to leave behind his hard-won credentials and his family as he flees for his life. A daughter is raised on the road, constantly moving from one place to the next, fantasizing of the mundane moments she could experience if only she had a home. And the experiences of women living in a border-zone are explored through Libertad's relationships in the prison. Most of the characters in this story do not know where they belong. Neither country feels like home and nowhere feels safe. It isn't until the past is confronted that all are set free.

María Amparo Escandón, an immigrant herself, was born in Mexico and currently lives in the United States. Her novels focus on the experiences of Latin Americans, and specifically those of Mexican immigrants. Escandón writes in both English and Spanish.

Readers aged 14 and up can find a window into the immigration experiences of a family in other books, such as Vaddey Ratner's (2012) *In the Shadow of the Banyan Tree* and Cristina Henríquez's (2014) *The Book of Unknown Americans: A Novel*. They will also find similarities between coming-of-age experiences of children of immigrant families as seen in Junot Díaz's (2007) *The Brief and Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* and Guadalupe Garcia McCall's (2011) *Under the Mesquite*. This spirited novel of hope is an opportunity to explore what it means to be Mexican, to be American, to be a family, and to be yourself.

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