

Gilded Prisons

Linda Gould

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Set between Cuba and the US, the imaginative novel Gilded Prisons involves baseball, kidnapping, and a troubled marriage.

Redemption is available in Linda Gould's romance novel *Gilded Prisons*, in which an athlete is kidnapped at the behest of an ambitious seductress.

Guadalupe, the daughter-in-law of the Cuban president, once orchestrated the kidnapping of her ex-husband, a baseball player. Seven years later, she arranges for Justin, another baseball star, to be kidnapped, too. She holds Justin hostage in a White House replica. Then Justin's wife, April, learns that the American president, Deirdre, has ties with militant groups, and is complicit with Guadalupe. The women's complex, dynastic political games could result in a military invasion.

The tongue-in-cheek first half of the book involves absurd descriptions of Guadalupe inside of her Cuban compound. She's prone to venting and gloating in letters that she never intends to send; she is off-kilter, domineering, and doubtful, all at once. Between forcing Justin into unwanted encounters and facing Cuban officials who mock her "pantyhose diplomacy," she comes to embody the stereotype of a temperamental, feisty Latina woman—a trope that the text mines with relish.

Justin's kidnapping is defended with a vague mix of explanations; these include Cuba's desire for a greater role in American baseball, Guadalupe's lust, and Guadalupe's aspirations to do something for the world. There's humor in the disconnect between Guadalupe's aspirations and reality. Her rape of Justin, though, is not confronted with appropriate gravity, and the circumstances around it are far-fetched.

Short chapters alternate between Justin, Guadalupe, and April's perspectives; they are enhanced with clear explanations of how each person and country reacts to their situation. As the novel moves forward, though, punctuated by frequent italicized thoughts, it evades subtly and leaves its characters underdeveloped. A secondary focus on how Deirdre and Guadalupe—women in power—feel constrained by their roles is intriguing, but submerged for much of the book; later events return to the theme, featuring an abrupt political about-face.

An escape and a pregnancy lead to rushed inferences of PTSD, unbelievable altruism, and peacemaking; these developments are tinged with religiosity, and are a jagged fit with what comes before them. The book moves across years in its later portions to arrive at a revolutionary triumph; it takes great leaps in getting there, though.

The imaginative novel *Gilded Prisons* involves baseball, kidnapping, a troubled marriage, and considerable pain.

KAREN RIGBY (August 25, 2021)

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