



Sacrifice on the Border: A Mother Searches for Her Stolen Child

Cecilia Domeyko

Book Baby

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Part psychological thriller, part love story, Sacrifice on the Border is a grisly novel about the trauma of losing a child.

Cecilia Domeyko's propulsive thriller *Sacrifice on the Border* follows a young mother grieving the loss of her child and the people who endanger and protect them both.

Seventeen-year-old Yoali is duped by Guayo, a human trafficker, into traveling illegally across the US border with their two-year-old son, Elisito. Wounded pride propels Guayo to steal Elisito from Yoali and dump Elisito with his boss, Coyota. The gruff leader's bond with the child, Yoali's perseverance, and help from more than a dozen people are the thin veil between Elisito and a monstrous fate.

Elisito is a perceptive young hero who reflects on the loss of his mother and on his introduction to Coyota in lingering terms. He knows that Coyota doesn't smell like his mother, and his yearning for Yoali is matched only by her yearning for him. Their bond changes as the book progresses, but its complexities are handled in tender terms. As Elisito grows older and Coyota grows to love him, his lack of memories threatens his bond with Yoali; the juxtaposition between this and Yoali's enduring heartbreak centers the novel.

Coyota, meanwhile, is a complicated antihero whose relationships are affected by the monstrous choices she has made. She is estranged from her mother, has loveless sex, and has henchmen instead of friends. Her love for Elisito thaws her dormant heart and reignites her emotional capacity, leading to fragile new relationships that help her to rebuild her self-image. But the book's other perspectives are less commanding, and some are built on stereotypes. For example, Yoali's love interest, Frank, is a police officer in a US border town; he is straightforward but uninvolved in his role as the "good officer"—an archetype that he's directly aligned with by Yoali's roommate—and he approaches Yoali more as a savior than as a partner.

The prose is direct but effective, though it does eschew certain Spanish-language nuances to its detriment—*piropos* is translated as "compliments" rather than "pickup lines" or "flirtations," for example. Unnecessary exposition and repeating details impede the story, though, as do missing periods and misspelled character names. Still, the book's constant action, plot twists, and gruesome violence hold attention to the end.

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LEAH BLOCK (September 30, 2023)

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