

The Golden Door

Tom Milton

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What does it feel like to be an illegal immigrant? Tom Milton addresses this question directly in *The Golden Door*, a book written in the voice of Maya Mendez, a young Mexican woman who has spent fifteen years living in the US. She's an achiever with high grades at school, excellent soccer skills, and a brown belt in karate, and she's just won a scholarship to the University of Alabama when an immigration law is passed that makes it impossible for her parents to work and for her to attend university.

Written largely in the first person, the novel discusses her identity struggles as she moves between the differing opinions of her parents: her father, who wants to fulfill his dream of living in America, and her mother who believes they are unwanted in the US and should simply return to Mexico, where they belong.

Through her relationships with her mentor, Judson, her rich, white boyfriend, Shelby, and her friend, Erin, Maya tries to understand what it means to be an illegal alien. She tries to determine whether a life in America is something she should continue to pursue, despite the challenges implicit in a law that makes her an instant outsider. Initially, she feels exempt from its grasp. But then her father is deported and the university rescinds her scholarship after Shelby's father, an influential alumnus, tries to end Maya's relationship with his son by having her extradited.

The Golden Door tackles some relevant issues in a direct manner, using first-person dialogue between the characters to explain the various conflicts. At times this dialogue feels a little stilted and forced, but on the whole it succeeds in holding a reader's attention. Milton also succeeds in breaking some of the stereotypes associated with Latinos by giving us a protagonist who has everything in her favor. Not only is she attractive, but she's intelligent, ambitious, and the best soccer player on her university team. Clearly, she is an asset to the country. Her parents, too, struggle to understand how they are considered to be "taking jobs away from Americans," when there is a dearth of American labor to get those jobs done.

The Golden Door is a good read for young, thinking adults aged fifteen and older, and its address of immigration issues is easily applicable to American controversy on the same subject, as well as stereotypes that persist to this day.

LAUREN KRAMER (August 10, 2012)

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