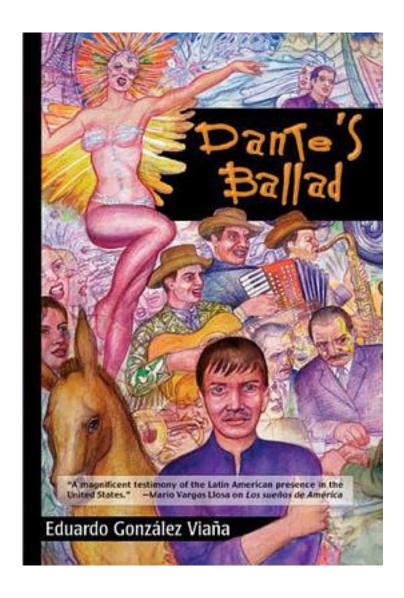
Dante's Ballad



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"Remember that we're in the U.S.," Dante Celestino is told when his daughter Emmita runs away. Friends and neighbors warn him that in the United States it's not considered so unusual for a fifteen-year-old girl to run away. But Dante had counseled Emmita to date only Spanish-speaking Hispanic boys, and never anyone who joins gangs or deals drugs. Yet she ignores her father's advice and--right in the middle of her quinceanera--runs away with a tattooed Latino who doesn't speak Spanish and rides a lowrider motorcycle. And to complicate matters, Dante is in the U.S. illegally, making it difficult to report the girl's disappearance to the police. So begins Dante's odyssey. Accompanied by a lame donkey named Virgilio and the voice of his dead wife, he sets out for Las Vegas, where Emmita's boyfriend--or abductor, as Dante considers him--supposedly lives. On a journey filled with the joy of music and the pain of flashback from his small-town life and marital bliss in Mexico. Dante encounters a series of eccentric characters: Josefino and Mariana, known to radio listeners as the Noble Couple, who change their listeners' luck in an instant: Juan Pablo, a young man who uses his computer genius to rob a Las Vegas casino so he can pay for his college education; and the Pilgrim, a famous balladeer who has crossed the border via underground tunnels so many times that even years later he smells faintly of dirt and death. In this bittersweet tour de force originally published in Spanish as Él corrido de Dante, the First and Third Worlds join hands, and Mexican pueblo life and Internet post-modernity dance together in one of the most memorable fables to shed light on issues such as immigration, cultural assimilation, and the future of the United States with its ever-increasing Latino population.

目录:	
Dante's Ballad	下载链接1

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Dante's Ballad_下载链接1

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