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[SPOTLIGHT]

Road Warriors

Mercedes Helnwein's sweetly comic novel

IN THE POTENTIAL HAZARDS OF HESTER DAY (Simon & Schuster, 256 pages, \$13), the heroine has an obese ten-year-old cousin with a tiny bladder, a taciturn husband whom she married only so that she could adopt a child, and a mother she can't stand ("I'm trying to give you what all these thousands of Mexicans dream of when they try and hop the border," she barks at her unappreciative daughter). Road trip! Hester, husband, and cousin run away from home and Mom in a camper bound for Chicago, later joining forces with a mildly addled hitchhiker. What sounds like a setup for a hatchet-killer movie is actually the start of a funny tale of love, divorce, and pies, the first novel by Mercedes Helnwein, who lives in Los Angeles when she's not in Ireland. // **ROBERT ITO**