

The New American

Emilio believes he is living the American Dream: his parents, who emigrated from Guatemala to California, sacrifice daily to ensure it. And his life seems relatively normal until he turns sixteen. Like most teenagers, Emilio is determined to get his driver's license—however, his mother discourages it. When Emilio asks why, his parents reveal a shocking secret: he is undocumented.

Emilio adjusts to his new normal. He attends UC Berkeley. He falls in love. All is going well...until Emilio gets into a car accident and—without a driver's license or any documentation—the policeman on the scene reports him to Immigration and Customs Enforcement [ICE].

Emilio is deported to Guatemala. But he is determined to get back to California, the only home he has ever known. It is an epic journey that takes him across thousands of miles through remote towns, lush jungles, and eventually the Sonoran Desert of the US-Mexico border, meeting thieves and corrupt law enforcement but also kind strangers and new friends.

The New American is the latest novel by Micheline Aharonian Marcom and puts a very human face on the questions of migration, undocumented immigrants, refugees, and the lives of those consigned to living in the shadows. The novel will be published by Simon and Schuster in August, 2020.

Reviews

“In Marcom’s powerful, heartbreaking latest (after *The Brick House*), an undocumented college student makes the long odyssey back to California from Guatemala after being deported. Emilio Matias, 21, is a UC Berkeley student in 2012 when he gets in a car accident. After he is unable to produce a valid ID, the police turn him over to ICE, who jail him for months before sending him to his aunt’s house in Todos Santos, Guatemala. Desperate to return to his home, his studies, his family, and his girlfriend in California, Emilio embarks on a violent and treacherous trip hopping freight trains with four other migrants. Along the way, members of their group become victims of thieves, rapists, and sadistic police, and must contend with unreliable smugglers. There are also safe houses and villagers who provide food, water, clothing, and medical care, and generous fellow migrants. Marcom’s prose is steady and soulful, particularly during the graphic, harrowing account of an excruciating Sonora Desert crossing, and the narrative is deepened by a series of lyrical interludes describing dangerous journeys of

unnamed refugees (“they and all of our stories are dark phenomena of this dark earth,” one reflects). Marcom’s remarkable tale credibly captures the desperation and despair of those who undertake the dangerous trek north.” —**Publisher’s Weekly**

“Emilio desperately wants to go home so he won’t miss out on too much of the semester at UC Berkeley. Unfortunately, he is a DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) status youth who has been deported to his birth country of Guatemala. Award-winning Marcom’s (*The Brick House*, 2017) latest is a poetic nightmarescape that hums with foreboding and the anguish of lost innocence. As Emilio heads back north, he and the stalwart companions he finds along the way—each with their own compelling reason for making the deadly trek—progress through a gauntlet of violence, hunger, and danger from all sides, they are graced with love and compassion in the most unlikely ways: the gift of an orange from a child, shelter from a terrified couple, and a bag of sweaters from an old man. Told mostly from Emilio’s point of view, though peppered with scenes from others’ lives, each section is also embroidered with Emilio’s dreams. Marcom masterfully navigates the graphic ugliness of deportation and anguished immigration with entreaties to a remote and capricious God, creating a tough but necessary and beautiful novel.” —**Sara Martinez, Booklist**

“[A] harrowing, heartbreaking story...Marcom’s plotting and pacing are well honed, and her prose is often revelatory...a gripping novel.” —**Kirkus**

“[Marcom’s] telling resonates with heartbreaking authenticity. And despite the travails she is describing, Marcom’s writing is vibrant and often poetic....Today’s headlines will not let us forget that thousands of other children riding the Bestia. Marcom’s compassionate novel illuminates their painful journey.” —**New York Journal of Books**

“[An] emotionally piercing, compulsively readable novel.” —**San Francisco Chronicle**

“[Marcom] depicts inhumanity with visceral force, but her bracing empathy (and hope) shines above all.” —**Entertainment Weekly**

“What animates *The New American* is the bare truth of the journey countless migrants have undertaken, from La Bestia to the deadly stretch of the Sonoran Desert that Emilio must eventually drag himself through. Firsthand experiences related to Marcom guide the work, along with the persistence and belief evinced by each interviewee—qualities she says continue to surprise her.” —**Brandon Yu, KQED Arts & Culture**

“The spare prose style in *The New American* never lingers too long on any horrific image, keeping the narrative from becoming openly voyeuristic. Just as the protagonists must push on, the book documents each tragedy and advances ever onward.” —**Washington Independent Review of Books**

“The book isn’t a thriller, and it doesn’t attempt to sensationalize a migrant’s journey; instead, it’s emotionally wrenching because that truly reflects the experience of undocumented immigrants in the United States.” —**Bitch Mag’s 15 Books Feminists Should Read**