



The River Flows North

Graciela Limon

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"There is a pathway traveled by migrants that cuts away from the Mexican border as it slithers north through the Arizona desert up to Interstate 8. Migrants know this highway as *la Ocho*, the road that takes them to a better life, but the trail that leads to that highway is ruthless and unforgiving."

In Sonora, a group of immigrants circles around a coyote, Leonardo Cerda, who will for a price lead them across the treacherous desert to the United States. Fearful that Cerda may be one of those who will collect their money up front and then leave them stranded to die, the travelers ultimately are forced to put their trust in him and begin the dangerous crossing to a new life. Afraid even of each other, they initially avoid eye contact or conversation. But as the three-day passage across the blistering landscape progresses, the fight to survive the grueling trip ensures that their lives and deaths are linked forever.

While trudging along, placing one exhausted foot in front of the other, the travelers each remember their lives and the reasons they have been forced to abandon their land, homes and loved ones. Among the immigrants is Menda Fuentes, a *salvadorena*, the only member of her family to survive a massacre during her country's civil war. Then there is Julio Escalante and his young grandson Manuelito, who pay the full fee even though they plan to go only halfway. By their side is Encarnacion Padilla, an ancient indigenous woman who has survived ostracism and her involvement in the Zapatista uprising. Next to her walk Nicanor and Borrego Osuna, two brothers who suffer the ultimate indignity just to make it to the United States. Finally, there is Armando Guerrero, shifty, suspicious-looking, and clearly different from the rest because of his fancy clothes as well as the mysterious bag to which he clings.

In addition to confronting their own internal demons, they must also face the dangers that they encounter on the trail: poisonous snakes, debilitating dehydration and exhaustion, and a ferocious sandstorm that tears the group apart. This riveting novel explores the lives behind the news stories and confirms Limon's status as one of the country's premiere Latinas writing about issues that affect us all.

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