

Arribada

Estela González

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In Estela González's novel *Arribada*, a terrible loss forces a Mexican family to reevaluate their lives.

Mariana is her family's great hope. She's sent abroad to attend school and becomes a concert pianist. But after two family tragedies, she returns to seaside Ayotlan, which suffered severe environmental degradation from overfishing and tourism. Here, Mariana becomes involved with an effort to save the community's most vulnerable people—an effort that may have been the catalyst for her uncle's disappearance, leading to the rewriting of her relationship with her family.

Mariana also deals with her sick mother, Clavel, and her growing feelings for Fernanda, an Indigenous conservationist. Like Mariana, Fernanda was pushed to make something of herself, and to overcome the barriers that society placed in her way. The women cling to each other as their worlds become more complicated and dangerous. Racism and colorism loom in their everyday lives, perverting family relationships and threatening—but not weakening—their burgeoning love for each other.

But there is much more to Mariana's family's troubles than it first seems. After the biggest secret is revealed, flashbacks provide insights into the truths that Mariana is forced to reckon with. The hard realities of being a woman—especially a poor woman—are laid bare with stark, horrifying details that cast the entire family in a new light. In particular, Clavel—strong, flawed, and the linchpin for both halves of the story—is revealed in full. Whether those truths are enough to earn Mariana's forgiveness remains an open question.

Arribada is a novel about how even the most painful truths can bring power and freedom.

EILEEN GONZALEZ (May / June 2022)

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