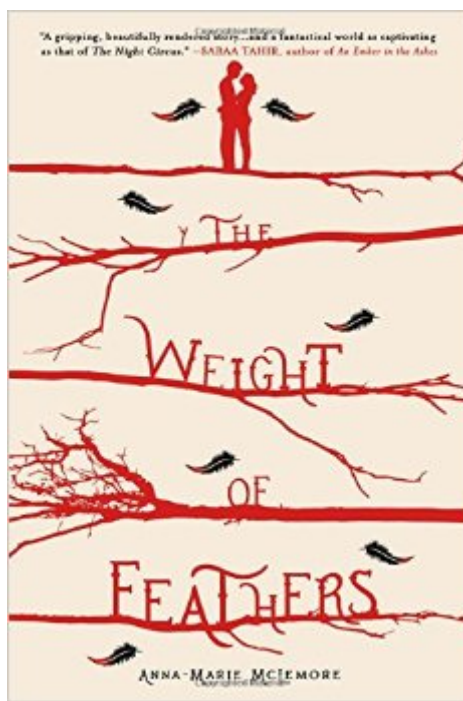


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The Weight Of Feathers



Synopsis

A finalist for the William C. Morris YA Debut Award, Anna-Marie McLemore's *The Weight of Feathers* is an utterly captivating young adult novel by a talented new voice. For twenty years, the Palomas and the Corbeaus have been rivals and enemies, locked in an escalating feud for over a generation. Both families make their living as traveling performers in competing shows—the Palomas swimming in mermaid exhibitions, the Corbeaus, former tightrope walkers, performing in the tallest trees they can find. Lace Paloma may be new to her family's show, but she knows as well as anyone that the Corbeaus are pure *magia negra*, black magic from the devil himself. Simply touching one could mean death, and she's been taught from birth to keep away. But when disaster strikes the small town where both families are performing, it's a Corbeau boy, Cluck, who saves Lace's life. And his touch immerses her in the world of the Corbeaus, where falling for him could turn his own family against him, and one misstep can be just as dangerous on the ground as it is in the trees.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

**** Trigger warning for violence, including domestic abuse, as well as rape. **** “The rain on her dress and his shirt would stick them to each other, dissolve the skin between them, until their veins tangled like roots, and they breathed together, one scaled and dark-feathered thing.” •Lace’s first encounter with Cluck is in the parking lot of a convenience store located on the outskirts of Alondro, California, a sleepy little town. Three of her cousins are attacking Cluck, pummeling him with their fists and feet, for no reason other than his perceived difference. Well-versed in the art of

taking a beating “ thanks to his older brother Dax “ Cluck just lies there, taking it, hoping that his lack of participation will sap some of the fun out of their game. • Lace chases his attackers away, and then offers Cluck ice cubes wrapped in her scarf to sooth his cuts and bruises. Both mistake the other for a local “ when, in fact, they are members of two rival families of traveling performers. The Palomas and Corbeaus travel all across North America, but always cross paths in Almendro; the crowd drawn there by the annual Blackberry Festival is just too good to pass up. For years, they were simply rivals, showpeople competing over the same sets of eyeballs. But one flooded lake and two dead performers “ one from each family “ turned them to enemies. Each blames the other for the “ natural disaster, “ with the stories and superstitions becoming more outlandish year after year. Each family can agree on one thing, however: the only acceptable way to touch a Paloma (or Corbeau) is in the pursuit of violence. Their next meeting comes under even worse circumstances, if you can imagine. It’s after sunset, and both Lace and Cluck’s respective shows have concluded.

The Palomas and Corbeaus have a long-standing feud, twenty years to be exact. Not only are they rival performers (with the Palomas swimming in the water like mermaids, and the Corbeaus dancing in the trees like birds), they’ve had what they believe to be personal loss inflicted upon them by the other. Two weeks out of every year the families end up performing at the same time, in the same small town. Since childhood the Paloma’s have always been taught to stay away from the Corbeaus and their magia negra. Likewise, the Corbeaus have always been taught never to go near the Palomas with their magie noire. Unless of course they’re throwing punches, that contact is highly encouraged. This is the first year Lace Paloma will get to wear a tail and perform with her cousins in the show. She doesn’t want anything to mess up this chance, she’s been dreaming about it forever. But when disaster strikes the small town of Almendro where the families are performing, Lace’s life is saved by one of the very people she’s been warned away from. Cluck may be a Corbeau by name, but he’s treated like le diable by most of his family. Not being allowed to perform in the trees with his brother and cousins, Cluck contributes by making their beautiful wings. When he saves Lace, he doesn’t know at the time that she’s a Paloma. When Lace figures out the boy who helped her was a Corbeau, she’s cast out of the family. Trying to get back in the Palomas’ good graces Lace sends up incorporating herself into the very family she’s been taught to hate. In doing so, Lace begins to question the very superstitions that reign supreme within both families. Magical Realism is one of my favorite sub-genres of fiction.

This enjoyable, though not spectacular, Romeo-and-Juliet story focuses on two competing families of performers, the Spanish-speaking Palomas (Doves) and the French-speaking Corbeaus (Crows), who travel through central California and put on their shows in small towns. The Palomas perform in the water, with their women dressed in fish-tailed mermaid costumes, while the Corbeaus, whose act is descended from tightrope-walking, put on huge homemade wings and dance gracefully in the branches of trees. The families' schedules overlap each year in the fictional Central Valley town of Almendra, but it is not a happy reunion. Each family hates the other, believing that the opposing family is soaked in black magic so strong that even touching a member of that clan is dangerous. Each blames the other for a disaster that occurred twenty years before, when a sudden flood in the lake near Almendra killed members of both troupes. During one of these meetings at Almendra, another disaster—an explosion at a nearby adhesives plant that makes toxic chemicals rain from the sky—introduces Lace, a young Paloma woman, to Cluck, a Corbeau teenager rejected and mistreated by his own family (he got his nickname from the fact that the fingers on his left hand curl inward like a chicken's claw, the result of his bullying older brother's having broken them when he was a child). The two slowly become fond of each other, a process that continues even after Lace discovers that Cluck is a Corbeau (Cluck does not learn Lace's family name until late in the book). For most of the book I was not sure whether it was a fantasy or not.

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