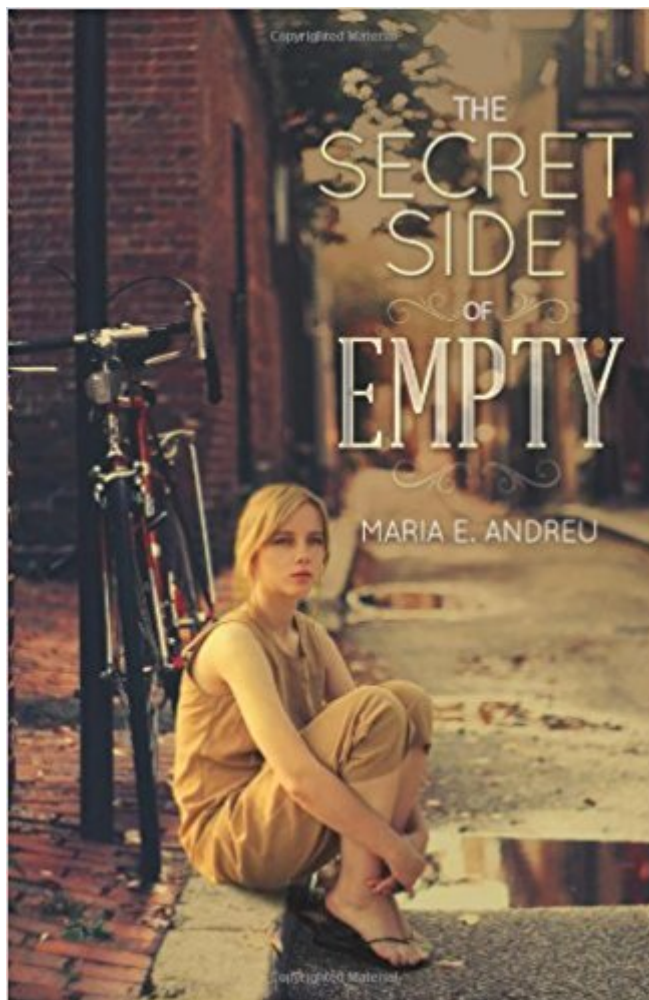


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# The Secret Side Of Empty



## Synopsis

A Junior Library Guild Selection, 2014  
A 2014 National Indie Excellence Award winner (young adult fiction)  
A School Library Journal Top 10 Latino Books of 2014  
With graduation and an uncertain future looming, M.T. must figure out how to grow up in the only country she's ever called home... a country in which she's "illegal." M.T. was born in Argentina and brought to America as a baby without any official papers. And as questions of college, work, and the future arise, M.T. will have to decide what exactly she wants for herself, knowing someone she loves will unavoidably pay the price for it.  
On the way, M.T. must navigate first love, letting go of her childhood friends as they begin a life she can't share, a difficult relationship with a father who grew up a world away and a mother struggling to find her way in America.  
What is it like when the only country you've ever known says you don't belong?  
The Secret Side of Empty offers an intimate, often surprising glimpse into a story you often hear on the news but have never heard told this way before. Author Maria E. Andreu draws from her personal experience as a former undocumented immigrant to explore issues of belonging, keeping secrets and what it's like to be undocumented.  
More than that, The Secret Side of Empty is a story that will touch anyone who has ever felt excluded or unsure about the future or has kept a secret she felt was too big to share.

## Book Information

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Literature & Fiction > Social & Family Issues > Emigration & Immigration #2633 in Books >

Teens > Literature & Fiction > Social & Family Issues > Family

## Customer Reviews

Gr 9 Up  
Monserat Thalia, known as M. T., describes herself as pale white with blondish hair. It's easy for her to hide the fact that she's an undocumented immigrant whose family came from Argentina to New Jersey. M. T. keeps this secret from everyone, including her best friend and

her eventual boyfriend. She excels in school and by all logic should be applying to colleges, but knows that her immigration status makes that an impossibility. As she watches her friends prepare for the next steps of their lives, the teen grows increasingly hopeless, uncertain how anything positive will come of her life as long as she remains in the country illegally. She doesn't fit anywhere—too American for her parents, but removed from the American culture around her. She begins to skip school, quits soccer, and stops tutoring other teens as her misery grows. Her father's physical and verbal abuse increases as she begins to lash out at her family and withdraw from her friends. It takes interventions from various people as well as finally sharing the truth for her to begin to see a way forward. M. T.'s narration is candid and at times heartbreaking. Told over the course of her senior year, the story reveals a captivating look at the life of one young immigrant and the challenges so many like her face. Andreu deftly captures the protagonist's desires, despair, and determination in this peek at a side of American life not often seen in YA literature. —Amanda MacGregor, formerly at Apollo High School Library, St. Cloud, MN

With her blonde hair and pale skin, Monserrat Thalia (M.T. for short) is as American as apple pie. Her grades are impressive; she would be the perfect candidate for an Ivy League school, and she dreams of a perfect life and a perfect boyfriend in a perfect world. But that's all it is—a dream—and not one she feels she can act upon. Like her parents, she is in the country illegally, and no one, not even her best friend, has a clue. Being undocumented isn't her only challenge: her father, frustrated with their situation, is abusive toward her. When events force M.T. to feel as though she has nothing more to lose, she admits to her status and is surprised to learn she can get help moving forward with her life. With immigration reform a hot button issue across the country, this book couldn't be timelier. Written with the compassion and raw emotions of one who has lived in the shadows herself, Andreu's debut offering is a winner. Grades 9-12. --Jeanne Fredriksen

I started this book a few years ago and put it down because I just wasn't in the mood for YA contemporary at the time. Fast forward a few years later when an audiobook has since been released, I gave it another shot since my preference is for audiobooks of any genre. I think what made me pick the book up in the first place was because it was advertised as a "different" kind of immigration story, and I do agree with that assessment of it, I just didn't connect to it as well as I thought I would have. I've been reading really good books centering on young girls and immigration that I think I just had high hopes for this one. *The Secret Side of Empty* follows Monserrat (I love the

pronunciation of this name) or M.T. as she likes to be called, and her struggles with being undocumented "Argentina". I think what initially drew me to this one was that most immigration stories are centered on "brown" latinos. Mexican or other Central Americans; never from the voice of a white latina. Because M.T. was white, I think it confused her that she didn't have the luxury of all of her rich, equally white friends. This wasn't supposed to be happening to her. She believed should've been privileged in a way her friends were but she wasn't and for this I really struggled with her narrative. The book features a lot of heavy topics that I wasn't expecting. The abuse was a lot for me to handle considering I come from a history of domestic violence towards women. The ending was just not the one that I hoped for but I do think this story is really important. I've just read ones I enjoyed more.

Secret Side of Empty follows the character M.T., a teenager living undocumented in the U.S. What I found really interesting about this story is that it isn't you stereotypical immigration story. For all intents and purposes, M.T. is an acculturated American. She grew up in the U.S. and speaks perfect English. She just happens not to have that piece of paper. It's eye-opening and heartbreaking. On the surface, this is a story about immigration, but it's so much more than that. It taps into a broader truth: We all want to belong. While the topic SSOE tackles has been highly politicized, it does not take a political position, and the lessons it imparts are not heavy-handed, like so many similar stories tend to be. Simply put, it's the story of a young woman trying to fit in. SSOE is fast-paced, well-written and emotionally satisfying. I couldn't recommend it more.

"I will always be a stranger everywhere. With my parents, I am too American. With Americans, I am a spectator with my nose pressed against their windowpanes, watching their weird rituals and rites of passage, never quite understanding them completely." (98) M.T. appears, from the outside, to just be a typical high school senior trying to make it to graduation: Vice President of NHS; going on excursions with her best friend, Chelsea; falling in love with the cute guy who asked her out on Facebook. The problem is, none of these things show others how she truly feels or what she's going through, and no one can understand how painful it is for her to get through every day with her head up. M.T. is an illegal immigrant from Argentina, a fact that permeates every aspect of her life. At home, her father, nagged by money worries, abuses her to no end, while her mother helplessly watches on. While her friends excitedly chat about their college plans, M.T. is faced with the knowledge that she will never, ever be able to leave, not without a social security card or the wealth that others so easily flaunt. And no one can ever know about any

of these things, or else she is risking the deportation of her parents and little brother. With breathless glimpses into a life that mirrors ones of so many people in the United States, Maria Andreu reveals a devastatingly conflicted story of a girl forced to grow up and deal with dilemmas that no one should have to face. Written in a frank and honest teenage voice, the book deals with topics that, usually heavy-handed, are instead portrayed as incredibly readable human-rights issues. This is a great read for middle and high school students, not only because it is at the appropriate reading level, but because it gives the story of someone who is both incredibly relatable and requires the help and understanding of those around her.

When I first opened the book and started to read the first few pages I knew this book was something special. I immediately connected on a personal level with MT. Being an illegal immigrant as a high school student, I emotionally connected with the struggle of belonging and hiding the truth from my close friends. I am glad this book touches on the immense issue of immigration but in a more humane view instead of the typical stereotype immigrant. I hope this book touches the young lives that are going through this difficult situation now and gives them a token of hope. Brilliantly written by Andreu, made me cried, smiled and sympathized with being a teenager in this country and not having that very important paper. I look forward to reading more books in the future by this new amazing upcoming author. I highly recommend it.

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