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CLARION REVIEW ★★★☆☆ GENERAL FICTION

Intimate Strangers

Anne M. Strick
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Nobody is required to get a license in parenting before having a baby. There are no prerequisite classes, no forms to sign, no legally binding, notarized documents which state that you, as parents, will keep this child's interests foremost in your mind. Unless, of course, you're adopting. Adoptive parents face a whole different set of challenges, and in the end their hold on their children may not be as legally binding as they might believe.

Such is the case with the Januses and their son, Timmy. After two years of ignoring the fact he has a child, Timmy's biological father decides he wants to take Timmy away from the home and parents he's known since he was four days old. And, according to the California courts, a biological father has more legal right than the parents who have nurtured, loved, and provided Timmy with every comfort.

But friends of the family—Georgie Allcheck, and her business partner, Dru Cunningham—won't let Timmy go without a fight. With the help of an intrepid journalist, Macauley Daniels (who also happens to be Timmy's adopted uncle), they use all the ammunition at their disposal—words, expert opinions, legal documents—to keep Timmy where he belongs. In the midst of the battle they discover their own internal connections, which bring Timmy's precarious situation into sharp relief and help them admit to the gaps and wounds in their own lives.

Anne M. Strick, a Los Angeles-based author who worked for years in the movie business, writes with an infectious passion that will engage readers and keep them reading until the last page to discover what happens to Timmy, who easily becomes the innocent hero. She has a clear grasp on the legal system surrounding adoptions and distills complicated procedures and techniques into manageable details.

However, one major drawback to the book is Strick's highly-stylized prose:

> *What made any of them think—.*
> *"I'll cross absolutely everything", she said.*
> *And make it come out all right.*
> *Make it.*
> *Attachment.*
> *Danger.*
> *Attachment was danger.*
> *Attachment meant pain.*
> *Why did people never learn?*
> *Dru looked at the Amicus again.*
> *Powerful words.*
> *Whoever Georgie was—or had been.*

This overbearing cadence dominates most of the pages and muddies both the plot and the characters' motives.

Strick also tests the power of coincidence by aligning events in a way that reveals hidden parallels on almost every level. Predictability is another problem; the author provides many revealing hints that begin to feel teasing rather than enticing, and by the time the connection is laid bare, readers may find it to be old news.

Despite a few issues, *Intimate Strangers* provides a fascinating, fictionalized glimpse—based on real-life

events—into the way the country's legal system fails its most important charges.
ANDI DIEHN (March 1, 2011)

Disclosure: This article is not an endorsement, but a review. The author of this book provided free copies of the book and paid a small fee to have his/her book reviewed by a professional reviewer. Foreword Reviews and Clarion Review make no guarantee that the author will receive a positive review. Foreword Magazine, Inc. is disclosing this in accordance with the Federal Trade Commission's 16 CFR, Part 255.