Clarion Review

Romance

The Education Of Amal
Shirin Humzani
Shirin Humzani
978-1-4783-5403-1
Three Stars (out of Five)

Amal seems to have every advantage a young woman could hope for: a wealthy family, a bright future, and a natural beauty so stunning that everyone who crosses her path is overcome by it. But appearances can be deceiving, and beneath the flawless exterior, Amal is an injured soul. Her encounters with two very different men lead her on a journey that proves dangerous, both physically and emotionally.

As Amal struggles to break free of her stifling home life, she is constantly thwarted by the selfish machinations of her parents. Their insistence that she grant her attention to a certain young man despite the fact that he makes her uncomfortable leaves Amal feeling trapped. When she meets Hunter, the popular and arrogant son of her father's business rival, a series of misunderstandings between them adds even more pressure and results in an interesting complication to her parents' plans. The day Amal witnesses a horrible crime becomes a turning point for her, and she soon comes to realize that neither of the young men is exactly what he seems.

The Education of Amal is an often compelling and occasionally melodramatic tale populated with several intriguing characters. The novel is structured well and flows smoothly toward a satisfying conclusion. The editing is meticulous, and the vivid cover is appealing, though readers may find the lack of standard opening pages curious. While the setting is not stated outright, readers will be drawn into the cultural atmosphere through the characters and their actions. The dialogue is primarily clear and effective, able to convey character thought and action sufficiently.

Shirin Humzani, who makes her home in both Pakistan and the UK, succeeds in conveying the self-centered and insensitive mind-set of Amal's parents, particularly that of her mother, whose greed consistently overshadows whatever maternal affection she may possess.

Amal's father shows a softer side, however, and eventually comes to regret his blindness to Amal's pain. "He figured his daughter would shine like a star. But in his eagerness, he had forgotten that stars do not shine in a polluted atmosphere."

Other characters are given ample depth as well. Hunter, whose deceptively confident personality hides scars much deeper than the one on his face, is well-characterized as a young man whose privileged lifestyle has left him emotionally empty. The other character attempting to win Amal's affection, a conniving and dangerous young man who manages to install himself in Amal's life with the help of her oblivious parents, is also well-realized.

Humzani's protagonist, Amal, is explored with depth, and her yearning for love and acceptance is effectively portrayed, which elicits reader sympathy. Even so, readers may be disappointed by her overly emotional reactions and her lack of autonomy. Amal occasionally protests her mistreatment, yet she ultimately allows others to pull her along, never choosing to act assertively on her own. Hunter, whom she had decided early on to despise, becomes her unexpected protector and eventually draws her out. But the overall characterization of Amal is that of a young woman who bemoans her situation but never gathers the strength to change it. While some of this may be due to cultural constraints, readers may become frustrated by her inaction. The excessive focus on Amal's physical beauty also quickly becomes tedious.

Humzani is a capable writer and storyteller, and *The Education of Amal* is likely to engage many readers. Although a more assertive and engaging heroine would add much to the story, the novel is effectively written and will leave many readers satisfied.

Jeannine Chartier Hanscom