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Clarion Review

The Immigrant
Charles Clark
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Two Stars (out of Five)

In a plot that could have been drawn from recent headlines eleven-year-old Ignacio Narvaez's family is ripped apart through an escalading series of disastrous events. Ignacio's father seeking a better future for the family sneaks into the United States from Mexico. Along the way his older sister is separated from the group placed in the dubious care of the Madame of a high-end bordello and grievously injured while diving out of a moving limousine to escape. Jimbob the *coyote* who was hired to smuggle them across the border drinks half a dozen beers makes a wrong turn and crashes his pickup truck into an eighteen-wheeler. While everyone else in the vehicle dies in a fiery explosion Ignacio is thrown clear during the crash only to find himself placed in the indifferent care of the Immigration and Customs Enforcement Service.

A young lost child who doesn't speak English an empathic immigration attorney who wants to take care of him and a few desperate smugglers dangerous cartel thugs and twelve million dollars worth of illegal "blood" diamonds should make for a pretty decent thriller. While the plot's all there a gaping hole remains in this book: characterization. Readers cannot bond with the one-dimensional uninspiring characters so everything else becomes meaningless.

Take for example Megan the immigration attorney. Her motivation for risking her career cheating the system in order to take custody of an orphan she has just met and risking her life to tangle with desperate criminals is that Ignacio is the spitting image of Alex her little brother who drowned in the family pool when he was six. Beyond the fact that this impetus is superficial she explains the incident to her boyfriend Jeff in a single paragraph. Using the old adage of "show; don't tell" something this important to the story should have been played out in the prologue or as a flashback or dream sequence. As it is the memory carries no emotional impact.

And then there's Jeff. It is difficult to understand why he is included in the book. While his role could have facilitated compelling tension with Megan building both characters throughout the story he essentially just follows her around like a lost puppy. For example while Megan and Jeff have lived together and Ignacio's presence ignites Megan's "nesting instinct"

providing fodder for the old “where is our relationship going” routine this issue quickly fizzles to unimportance when Jeff almost instantly agrees to everything she wants. Furthermore even though he recently earned a partnership in his law firm another relationship crisis is averted when he is able to take a sabbatical with no advanced notice.

No character is particularly strong though most of the minor ones are at least somewhat believable. Nevertheless readers will find it challenging to enjoy a novel with such undeveloped characters.

Lawrence Kane