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FICTION BOOK REVIEW

The Immigrant. Manju Kapur. London, UK: Faber & Faber, 2009. ISBN-13: 978-0-57124-407-2. Price: £7.99. Pages: 352 (paperback)

Nina, a lecturer in English at a college in Delhi, dreads her thirtieth birthday. She is still unmarried, a condition much bewailed by her mother. Following her diplomat father's death, she and her mother had been forced to live in reduced circumstances, first with her disapproving grandparents and now sharing one room. Their every move is noticed and commented on by others.

Her mother arranges an astrologer reading and from this follows an introduction to the family of Ananda who is seeking a bride. Ananda is in Canada working as a dentist having re-qualified there. He left India after his parents were killed in an accident, initially to join his uncle who is married to a Canadian. Ananda has survived the first intense loneliness and the confusion of cultures and has reinvented himself as Andy. He is now a meat eater, wears Western clothes, and has left his uncle's house to live alone.

Eventually, the arranged marriage is completed and Nina moves to join her husband in Canada. She is isolated and unsure; her Indian clothes appearing like fancy dress to Andy's friends and relations. She buys Western clothes that make her look plump and middle-aged. Andy thinks she needs nothing but him and will soon be a mother.

Andy dwells on his premature ejaculation; Nina, bored and lonely (she cannot teach without re-qualifying), finds her way to the library where she devours the books and tries to make Andy read about sexual therapy. Andy secretly goes off to have surrogate sexual therapy, which sounds very like going to an expensive and skilled prostitute. Nina manages to get a job at the library and then decides to become qualified as a librarian. On her course she meets a bewildering spectrum of other ideas. Her husband acquires an exciting mistress, while she has a fling with a married student and the reader begins to see that she changes her ideas and behaviour more than he does.

The storyline drifts along and the occasional

sentence construction and proofreading errors are irritating. The contrasts between the propinquity of too many people, the overwhelming impressions of heat and noise in India and the cool, solitary and often isolated life in Canada are striking. The certainties of the codes of conduct and obligations to relations in India are contrasted with the amorphous confusing lack of accountability in Canada, adding to our understanding of the different cultures. Much of the book is about the adjustments, difficulties and misunderstandings in marriage. Couples may marry for love, for money, because of pregnancy, convenience, or by arrangement. The differences between the necessary adjustments between two people in this arranged marriage and any other seem slight, except that these two people are isolated from their traditional ways of behaving and have to find, or perhaps are enabled to find, their own solutions.

Reviewed by **Gill Wakley**, MD, FFSRH
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We hope that journal readers enjoyed reading *The Immigrant*, and also discovering whether their opinion of this book matched that of our guest reviewer. In the October 2010 issue, the fiction book under scrutiny will be *Private Life* by Jane Smiley (318 pages, Faber & Faber, 2010, ISBN-13: 978-0-571-25874-1, £12.99, paperback). We also hope to review two other books that Journal readers might be interested in reading: *Antigona and Me* by Kate Clanchy (273 pages, Picador, ISBN-13: 978-0-33044-933-5, £7.99, paperback) and *Daughter of Dust: Growing Up an Outcast in the Desert of Sudan* by Wendy Wallace (304 pages, Pocket Books, 2010, ISBN-13: 978-1847396358, £7.99, paperback). We want to remind journal readers that if they would like to offer to review an appropriate fiction title of their own choosing then they should contact the Journal Editorial Office by e-mail (journal@fsrh.org) in the first instance with details of their nominated title.