

Book Corner

Make Your Home Among Strangers

by Jennine Capó Crucet



This is the story of Lizet, who is trying to succeed in her first year of college, as the first one in her family to go beyond high school. Her goals are not appreciated by her sister or her mother. She has a full plate of challenges to face as the year progresses. Flashbacks fill the reader in on Lizet's relationships with her family and her boyfriend.

The story is finely crafted, and one of Crucet's special gifts is the pace at which she introduces characters, allowing the reader to gradually become acquainted with each one. Lizet's father and her older sister both appear in the opening chapter, but her mother, who drifts farther and farther away as the school year commences, doesn't appear till the fourth chapter.

When Lizet returns home for Thanksgiving break, she finds her mother consumed with the t.v. coverage of Ariel Hernandez, whose rescue is front page news for months. The character of Ariel is based on the true life story of Elian Gonzalez, found on Thanksgiving Day in 1999, floating in an innertube, after his mother drowned trying to bring him from Cuba to America.

Like the real life Elian, Ariel's American relatives want to gain custody of him, while his father in Cuba fights for his return. Although Ariel himself is peripheral to Lizet's story, his situation, and people's

attitudes towards his plight bring into focus many of their attitudes about Lizet's own Cuban-American heritage. As Lizet's mother becomes more and more fixated on Ariel, she withdraws further and further from her own responsibilities to her daughters. Eventually she even stops going to work, putting an additional burden on the financially stressed household.

Lizet's father is not in the picture initially, except in a series of flashbacks, including the day he deserted them. Lizet's older sister has a young toddler and is not married.

Everyone, including Lizet's boyfriend, Omar, accuses her of being a snob about attending college. And there are complications at school, too. The tenacity that got Lizet through high school, and brought her to a very good school, far from home, is not sufficient to protect her from calamities in this new place where she hasn't yet made friends.

At college, and during her visits home, Lizet is confronted with painful moments which she faces with determination. The reader will be rooting for her to succeed, even while turning the pages to see what happens next.

** Editor's note: This book is available at Hammonton Library.*