

The Fitful Sleep of Immigrants

Orlando Ortega-Medina

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A lawyer grapples with temptation in Orlando Ortega-Medina's novel *The Fitful Sleep of Immigrants*.

Marc should be on top of the world. He is a successful lawyer, he has a loving relationship with Isaac, and he has been sober for years. But his latest case turns his life on its head: Silva, who was fired after rebuffing the advances of his superior, engages Marc's firm to sue the company, omitting important information in the process. What starts with a lawyer visiting his client in jail leads to a sordid tale of obsession.

The three men engage in a tense struggle: Marc is both a prize to be won and an active participant in his own downfall. He is ashamed and apprehensive about attending a Passover seder with his parents for the first time since getting sober and coming out. His partner, Isaac, is given a summons to appear in immigration court. And Silva, who is compelling in his wild-card role, is too alluring for his own good (and knows it). These issues put pressure on Marc and his sobriety, leading him to a breaking point.

There are multiple heavy plot lines at play: in addition to the relationship and immigration issues, there is a father-son reconciliation, as well as the difficult beginning steps toward self-forgiveness. And the book, which is set in late 1990s San Francisco, includes a fair amount of internalized homophobia. Still, clear, tight storytelling invigorates the scenes, including during the courtroom proceedings related to Isaac's asylum hearings and during the gentle conversations between Marc and his father, who is a rabbi. Tantalizing, sinister Silva and his machinations threaten to overwhelm these moments, though.

The Fitful Sleep of Immigrants is a charged psychological novel in which a lawyer navigates the crossroads of his past, present, and future.

DONTANÁ MCPHERSON-JOSEPH (May / June 2023)

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