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Stories that evoke emotions

The settings of the stories are easy to relate to. The book is author's attempt at exploring and understanding relationships

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The art of short-story writing is not as popular these days and one tends to miss writers like O Henry, who, in the space of one or two pages could convey a gamut of emotions and connect us to characters beautifully. Therefore, it is a pleasant surprise to get to read a collection of short stories, which actually stayed short, and did not go on to become novellas in the process.

Neeru Iyer's collection of short fiction, *Of Bridges Among Us*, is a promising debut. It is a collection of 10 short stories dealing with the complex web of human relationships. Her settings are mostly simple and easy to relate to. Most of the short stories are easy to read and stay well short.

Iyer's attempt through her stories is to explore and understand relationships. Whether it is the yearning of a woman's love for her husband as in *The Other Woman*, or that of a brief encounter between a child and a man, who is mentally unstable, as in *The Best Mango*, Iyer has strived to explore a range of emotions, which run through the human heart and mind, rather than describing the sundry details of houses and lanes.

Her first story in the collection, *Falling Stars*, is a good read. It is about the rare bonding between two women, with one acting as mentor for the other, till she realises that her husband is a part of the horrible mess. While it was easy to figure out where the plot was heading to while reading the story, it in no way took away the joy of reading it till the end. The way Iyer leaves this story and some of the others tempt the reader to keep moving.

The Best Mango was the most enjoyable. A short encounter with someone can leave us with a lifetime to dwell on. It is the author's best attempt. Similarly, *Fever* is another story that is well-written and is able to beautifully convey our longings for those who have made an exit from our lives due to the choices we make. In *Fever*, the woman is home alone in a feverish state and her grandmother, who hasn't spoken to her since the day she married a lower-caste man, drops in to check on her with a cup of hot rasam. A short while later, her father calls her to tell her about her grandmother's demise. Iyer very effectively brings out the dilemma we sometimes face in distinguishing the real from the imaginary, when our heart so desires for the latter.

In a debut that is overall promising, the weakest story is *A Stranger to Life*, which is unnecessarily long and a bit clichéd. Maybe the author put in too many elements in one story and then it got difficult to do justice to each one of these. The plot becomes convoluted after a while and one misses the brevity with which she has dealt with emotions and subjects in her other stories. Maybe Iyer needs to stick to shorter length of stories that helps her express her thoughts better.

Of Bridges Among Us by Neeru Iyer. Palimpsest. Pages 216. Rs 250