



The Stranger and Other Curious Stories

Somya Dave, Nita Berry, Nilima Sinha, Dipavali Sen, Jaya Paramasivan

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The Stranger and Other Curious Stories, as the name suggests, is a collection of stories about curious happenings. It contains fourteen short stories based on strange events. Some highlights of the book are stories by members of Association of Writers and Illustrators for Children (Indian section of IBBY) and art by well-known children's illustrator Taposhi Ghoshal. The stories relate happenings that are unexpected and inexplicable, making a child wonder how and why those events must have happened. The enjoyment of the stories lies in the sense of wonder that they create. For instance, a boy falls into a ravine and discovers something unexpected, or a house comes alive in a strange way . . . ? The stories are based on ghosts and other worldly manifestations. The ghosts, however, are all friendly who seem to want to take care of children and people in trouble. There is no hint of malevolence or spite. In fact, one feels connected to people in history through their appearance as spirits in present times. The stories are thus a positive way of enjoying the imaginary world of spirits. It is well known that children these days read a lot of fantasy in which humans have to battle against other worldly forces. It is clear that there is a natural desire in them to imagine worlds that are different from the ordinary, everyday world in which they live. This need should be addressed through stories that stimulate the imagination in a positive way and not create worlds that are filled with violent and gory events. The stories in this collection recall the stories of Edgar Allen Poe, in that our everyday world is shown to contain many a curious tale. The fourteen stories in this collection have been written by well-known writers for children in India, such as Ramendra Kumar, Somya Dave, Nita Berry, Nilima Sinha, Dipavali Sen, Thangamani, Jaya Paramasivan, Devika Rangachari, Girija Rani Asthana, Ira Saxena, Neera Jain, Deepa Agarwal, Surekha Panandiker, and Swapna Dutta. The Stranger and Other Curious Stories begins with The Stranger by Ramendra Kumar. It narrates the story of a writer researching for his second novel - a ghost story set in the British colonial era. As he gets lost in the Devdar Woods of Landour, a picturesque town nestling in the hills above Mussourie, he encounters two ghosts. A chilling yet emotional story, wherein one of the ghosts tells the writer the story of his friend's death, and how he sacrificed his own life trying to save his friend. Some of the other curious stories include Nita Berry's Another Time, where two young girls on a field trip with their class to Chittor get a 'forbidden glimpse through the veils of time'. As they are magically transported back in time, they witness the jauhar of the Rajput queen, Rani Padmini. This extraordinary tale is followed by Nilima Sinha's Always with You, which shows the beautiful and endearing relationship between a boy and his grandfather. True to his promise that he would always stay with his grandson 'in spirit, if not in body', the grandfather, after his death, protects the young boy in the form of a benevolent and loving spirit, saving his life from a fatal accident.

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