



Clarion Review

Romance

65 West 55th Street

Gagan Suri

iUniverse

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Two Stars (out of Five)

65 West 55th Street, Gagan Suri's debut novel, follows the classic star-crossed lover scenario.

Karan has been living in the United States for several years after moving from his native India to attend college. He works for the Hyatt Regency hotel chain and is living in Knoxville, Tennessee, but anticipates moving to Washington, DC, a larger market that will enable him to climb the corporate ladder. By chance, one evening he talks by phone to Zeina, a fashion designer living in New York who is a friend of a friend. Karan soon wins her over with a serenade, and he is instantly smitten with her as well. They arrange to meet and a love affair ensues.

Complications quickly arise in Karan and Zeina's relationship, and the pair has much to overcome. For one, they come from warring cultures: Karan is from India and is Hindu, and Zeina is a Pakistani Muslim. They also have very distinct personalities. Karan is structured and disciplined and Zeina has a more carefree lifestyle, but these differences actually seem to strengthen their affection for each other. Their shared experiences of adapting to a new culture further draw them together. Still, the couple's greatest obstacle becomes trying to convince their families to support the relationship, a necessity since they both have strong family ties and value their parents' and siblings' approval.

The premise established in the first third of the narrative is engaging, and many readers will be able to relate. Even though Suri highlights India-Pakistan tensions, the circumstances are similar to most intercultural, interfaith, and interracial relationships. However, in the last two-thirds of the book, Suri includes too many details about events that are not fundamental to the love story, instead focusing on more mundane aspects, such as Karan's job, the process of gaining a work visa, and his decisions to move several times. As a result, the pace slows considerably.

Protestations by family members who try to discourage Karan and Zeina in their relationship also become repetitive. In the latter section, Suri further shifts attention to peripheral characters, including Zeina's mother's health battles, rather than focusing on the couple and their romance, which is the most appealing element of the narrative. In addition, the title, which represents Zeina's address in New York, has little connection to the central story. Karan never lives in New York, and much of the pair's relationship is carried on long distance.

This sweet romance has a heartwarming premise. However, the story arc does not quite have the strength to sustain reader interest throughout, and Suri does not delve deeply enough to offer new insights into the characters' *Romeo and Juliet*-style struggle.

Maria Siano