Clarion Review

Short Stories

Links: A Collection of Short Stories
Kaylia M. Metcalfe
iUniverse
978-1-4401-7185-7
Five Stars (out of Five)

Links is a collection of short stories for the postmodern era. Kaylia M. Metcalfe has crafted ten tales of people who are desperately in need of a true connection, yet hampered by the common inclination to hide their real selves behind masks of social acceptability.

Each tale creates tension by showing readers how the socialized front we put up may be used to thwart an authentic moment of relationship. “Aside” describes a mother and daughter trying to reconnect after years of separation. In “Coffee Date,” a couple awkwardly breaks up, but it nearly doesn’t happen because neither is willing to speak plainly from the heart. In “Angel,” a panhandler’s signature response to rejection, “God bless you anyway,” touches a woman, who turns back to give some change and is struck by a car. The panhandler holds her hand and comforts her in her dying moments.

With its dark view of humanity, where intimacy and connection seem impossible, “Nightscape” is the story of an aging housewife who is no longer fulfilled by her husband and goes out on the town to find inspiration for her art. In “Goals,” two college buddies spend the summer trying to get laid, until one of them realizes it isn’t even what he really wants.

Some of these well-written stories reach beyond typical relationships. “Reflection” is a bizarre snapshot of a psychotically jealous woman. “Wife” is set in an odd future, where social relationships are controlled by the state. And “Surface Dweller” presents the mask of social acceptability allegorically. A woman’s encounter with her inner self takes the form of a painting which reveals her true nature. When the painting is unveiled, the woman says, “I gasped and stumbled back, hitting my hip on her dresser. The images (faces, screaming faces) swam before my eyes, moving and dancing in the flickering candlelight…The disjointed feeling of extreme dizziness descended. I shut my eyes and turned away, my hands groping for the window. Fresh air. I needed fresh air.”

It is difficult for people to get in touch with the real “self” who lives inside, and sharing that self with others is a vulnerability that feels threatening. Reflecting that view of life, these stories by Metcalfe, about missed connections and dark hearts, will make readers question who they are inside. Links is a fascinating glimpse into the difficulty of relationships.

David George