

The Fanfare of Life: A Collection of Short Stories

Bakilinna Warjri

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Based in truth, The Fanfare of Life is a lighthearted short story collection that views the world through a child's eyes.

Told in the form of short stories, Bakilinna Warjri's memoir *The Fanfare of Life* compiles inviting and formative childhood anecdotes.

The book's fifteen chapters function in the manner of short stories; they focus on outwardly everyday moments from Warjri's childhood in India, and often moments that later proved to be significant to her. Warjri is not their sole focus, though: the book includes kaleidoscopic tales about a family dog and about a classmate dealing with poverty, as well as stories from the lives of relatives and friends.

Indeed, a new ensemble is introduced with each passing tale, though there is some cast overlap between stories. Warjri's narration teases out what is unique to each person, resulting in a sense of realism; this extends to the particulars of people's speech patterns and actions, habits that are ably used to flesh out their personalities.

Still, where these individuals show up in Warjri's own story is not always clarified; people's relationships to her are often under defined, and their significance to her own story is not often fleshed out. Relational markers, like "dad" and "grandpa," prove to be beneficial in some scenes, but many people are introduced in more vague terms, as with "the kids." Questions about why certain people were featured in the book arise, but remain unanswered. Such impersonal touches muddle the book's cohesion.

This is especially true with the book's final story, "Metro Ride from Start to Finish," in which two boys and their families are made focal; Warjri is not present in, or clearly impacted by, their story. This last tale also takes place in Hong Kong, rather than in India. Indeed, it is an odd fit with the rest of the collection.

The book's arrangement is chronological, and Warjri, where present, visibly ages and matures as it progresses. In the beginning, she is four years old; by the end, she's a teenager, and is dealing with, and aware of, more adult topics. Still, even as serious topics, like poverty and death, are discussed, they are covered with a sense of innocence and lightheartedness; there's an element of ignorant bliss throughout. But rich, thought-provoking sensory imagery also saturates the text, which captures many scenes in a few thorough words.

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MELISSA LANCE (January 7, 2022)

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