

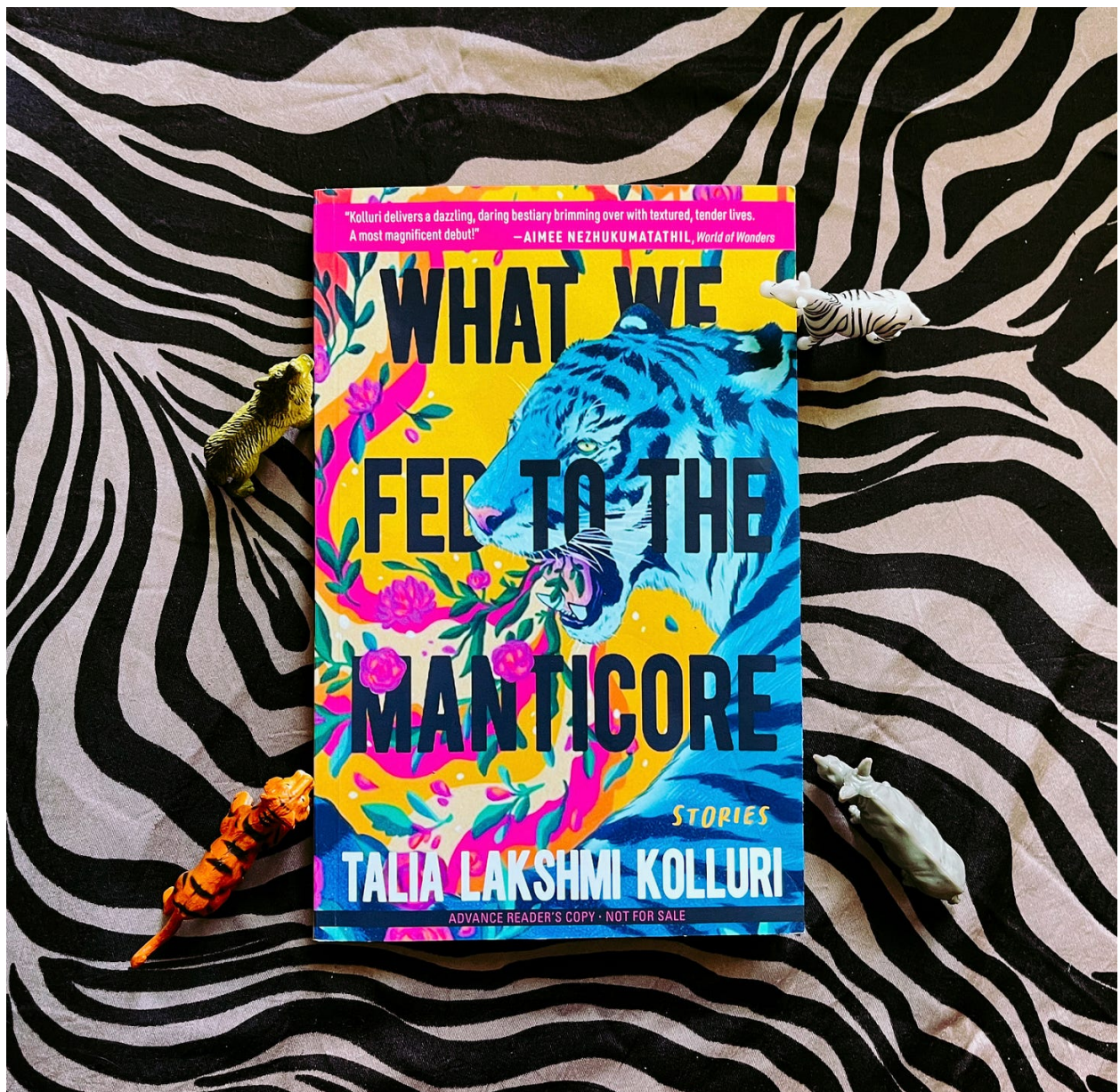
[Brown Girl Bookshelf](#)

Did someone say BOO(ks)?

On Our Bookshelf | October 2022

What We Fed to the Manticore by Talia Lakshmi Kolluri

Reviewed by: Julie Mehta



“What We Fed to the Manticore” takes readers on an evocative, deeply moving journey into the minds and hearts of animals besieged by war, poaching, habitat loss, and climate change. What might be gimmicky or preachy in the hands of a less sensitive writer is a pleasure to read, thanks to debut author Talia Lakshmi Kolluri’s vividly rendered settings, rich characterizations, and nuanced use of magical realism. The stories have a fable-like quality that suspends disbelief and lulls readers into seeing the world through the eyes of the curious and contemplative animal protagonists.

Each of the nine stories offers a glimpse into the memories, dreams, and rituals of domesticated and wild animals, such as a donkey, hound, whale, and pigeon. While humans cause suffering to the animals either directly or indirectly in many of these tales, they are also often adored companions. Bonds between different animals are similarly deep and complex: a hound tries to protect an endangered rhino from poachers; vultures help dead antelope transition to the afterlife; a polar bear and fox team up to try to survive amid diminishing ice floes.

Kolluri creates such a strong sense of place in each story that mangrove forests, vast snow fields, and whale songs almost become characters in their own right. The stories are set in real places and sometimes inspired by actual events; I learned more about remarkable habitats and various animal behaviors through the list of source materials included in the book.

I particularly enjoyed moments when Kolluri would delve deep into an animal’s thoughts or play with time in the narrative, such as in the powerful story where a wolf’s death at the hands of a hunter is told in three slightly different ways. While many of the stories have poignant or even bleak endings, I resonated most with pieces that included uplifting resolutions, such as a story set at the Charity Birds Hospital in New Delhi, in which a toymaker takes an injured pigeon under his wing.

Kolluri shares in her author’s note, “I dissolved the distance in my mind between myself and the wild world, which helped me understand that the story of my life includes the story of all the life that surrounds us.” Whether or not you’re an animal lover, the sweet, fascinating animals in this memorable collection will make you want to do more to protect all of our planet’s creatures.



Get your copy of [*What We Fed to the Manticore*](#).