

Book Review: Table for Two
By Amor Towles

The title of Amor Towles' latest book, "Table for Two," is more a theme rather than a reflection of the plot. That's because "Table for Two" is not one story. It's a compilation of six short stories and one novella. It's also a most enjoyable and interesting read.

The short stories take readers from the bread lines in 1920s Moscow to a rare bookstore and Carnegie Hall in New York City around the turn of the millennium. They reflect the impact even brief encounters can have on our lives; the dark path down which temptation can lead us; and the importance of trust in relationships.

But as different as each of the six short stories is, their nexus is the theme of table for two. As the book's jacket describes, "Throughout the stories, two characters often find themselves sitting across a table for two where the direction of their futures may hinge upon what they say to each other next."

For example, in "The Line," Pushkin's life changes dramatically based on the conversations he has with fellow Russians while standing in bread lines. Timothy's life takes a dramatic turn following a conversation with Pennybrook, the owner of a rare bookstore, in "Ballad of Timothy Touchett." And Tommy's life is significantly impacted by his one-on-one interaction with Arthur in "The Bootlegger."

Each of these six short stories leaves at least one, if not more, of the characters humbled by an experience. And offers us, the readers, an opportunity to reflect on our own lives and elements like trust, kindness, and unconditional love. In that respect, Towles' expertise in storytelling touches effectively on many human emotions and experiences.

The novella, titled “Eve in Hollywood,” follows a young woman, Evelyn Ross, as she travels by train from New York – and a failed relationship – to Hollywood in the 1930s. Her interactions with several individuals – an aging, overweight actor; a widowed, retired police detective; and renowned actress Olivia de Havilland – help them re-discover their own worth as she journeys through a new part of her life. *And*, reflective of the book’s overall theme, there are many table-for-two-type conversations that take place.

Towles’ versatility as a writer is on full display as each of the short stories and the novella are distinctly different in form and structure, yet still share a common theme. My only nit-picky issue is with the ending to the novella. It’s abrupt – very much so. And left me with more questions and curiosities than I would have liked.

But perhaps that’s what Towles had in mind. “Eve in Hollywood” might not be the final chapter in the journey to new beginnings for Evelyn Ross.

“Table for Two” rates a full 5 out of 5 stars. I’m sure you will find a favorite among the six short stories, as have I, and hope you will share that with me should you read the book.