

THEY say fact is sometimes stranger than fiction. Who would know better than investment banker turned author Lavanya Sankaran? Even before being published, Lavanya's literary debut *The Red Carpet: Bangalore Stories* created a coup of sorts in the publishing world when it sold for a "significant" six-figure dollar deal, after an intense bidding war between nine publishers, over a three-day auction.

Even before she could recover from the unbelievable response and a two-book contract by Dial Press, an imprint of Random House, Barnes and Noble and Borders selected her book as a part of their Discover Great New Authors Program for Summer 2005 and Original Voices, respectively. "I couldn't have asked for more," says Sankaran making another desperate bid to hide her happiness.

And Sankaran shouldn't feel apologetic. How many writers manage to get an agent like Lane Zachary of Zachary Shuster Harmsworth and have publishers vying with one another to grab their book without having to do anything save sending the manuscript to a few literary agents? Not too many, actually.

The Bangalore-based author after graduating from Bryn Mawr College, Philadelphia, worked as an investment banker with CS First Boston in New

York, and later, as a business consultant in her home city. "I always had a strong penchant for writing and I always scribbled my own thoughts and observations on the kerb even as a student. I love the spreadsheets and at the same time the literary world, too," says the 37-year-old, who previously contributed regularly to *The Wall Street Journal* and

A Success Story

Lavanya Sankaran hits the jackpot with her literary debut

The Atlantic Monthly.

In fact, Sankaran always knew that some day she would pen her own book. What she, however, didn't know that it would happen so soon. Her collection of eight stories, *The Red Carpet: Bangalore Stories*, set in contemporary urban Bangalore have characters ranging from traditional mothers coaxing their

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Westernised children to get married, caste-bound chauffeurs to Anglo-Indian convent teachers. Sankaran weaves



compelling stories: at times witty, at times profound.

Ask her if she finds the short story genre easier to handle than a novel and she says, "Short stories are more demanding. Within a few pages you have to say your story and ensure that characters are well-rounded. There is little room for copious description or purple patches."

Sankaran is presently working on a novel. She is not willing to disclose any details about the plot at the moment but we are sure that it can't be more fascinating than her own story.

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