

RAJ KARAMCHEDU

ALL  
THINGS  
UNFORGIVEN

A NOVEL



*A story of men and women  
who want to be beautiful and radiant  
in their lives, but who go on unleashing  
their savage madness.*

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UNFORGIVEN

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*A Novel*

Raj Karamchedu

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FOR

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EXPLANATION OF NON-ENGLISH TERMS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

“TRUE! – nervous – very, very dreadfully nervous I had been and am; but why will you say that I am mad? The disease had sharpened my senses – not destroyed – not dulled them. Above all was the sense of hearing acute. I heard all things in the heaven and in the earth. I heard many things in hell. How, then, am I mad? Hearken! and observe how healthily – how calmly I can tell you the whole story.”  
– Edgar Allan Poe, *The Tell-Tale Heart* –

# *Part One*

*"Kill me, Kill Every-  
one!"*

IT HAPPENED IN THE SUMMER of 1996, on the fourth day after Arya returned home, having finished five years of study and work in America.

Sometime in the early evening hours there was a scuffle of some sort in the inner room of the house, an ordinary apartment in the city of Hyderabad, where this incident took place.

Loud shrieks were heard from inside, and within moments Arya was seen in a most extraordinary condition. With his hair disheveled, and with a look of a madman on his pale, distraught face, he was seen running from one room to the other, with a knife in his hand.

Those who claimed that they saw what exactly happened described it this way. There he was, they said, with the knife in his hand, his broken eyeglasses slipping on his nose, kneeling before a motionless figure of a heavyset woman,

who appeared as though she was staring at him intensely, fixing her gaze on him without blinking an eye.

Even those who were watching the incident from outside the apartment, through an open window, said there was indeed a knife in his hand, and that the heavysset woman was none other than Anasuya, the young man's mother.

Such was the sight that as soon as they saw it everyone dispersed, and there was an eerie silence in the hallway and on the stairs.

The truth is, even as Anasuya saw the knife in Arya's hand she was unable to realize why he was holding it. After a second or two she became conscious that she herself had fallen down on the floor, but she thought someone else had fallen, not she, and someone else's body, not hers, was being pummelled by his feet. From somewhere inside the house she heard a pleading voice that kept saying, "*Kill me, kill everyone...!*" - almost moaning at some point. She saw that Arya's mouth was moving in a strange way, and realized that it was Arya himself who was saying these words. She saw his face, the very same diamond-or-a-pearl face of her child who used to cling to her legs after being severely chided by her. In that moment she saw a mark of crime, dancing all by itself over his head, laughing at her, as though it was a mark of her own sin, flying out of her and landing on him, her unfortunate son.

She closed her eyes, and felt something blunt crack her temple and strike the back of her head. A moment elapsed. Anasuya was afraid. She experienced a strange feeling and opened her eyes.

Seeing Arya's feet now striking her stomach, she at once, as though in a pleasant condition, made a movement to rise

on her knees. What she really wanted to do was to clutch his arms, not letting them go, and to press her trembling head to his feet, soaking them with her tears of guilt, seeking his forgiveness.

But at that moment there was a struggle somewhere in the room, and she fell back, thinking to herself, "*Me?* All this happening to me? Me, who wished to study and improve myself?"

"Poor boy...!" Anasuya said, talking to herself later.

## *The Matchmaking*

THE FACT IS, THAT WISH to study and improve herself, the same that still dug in and worked its way in the pit of her heart even as Anasuya fell under the pummelling feet, was always there in her; and, having taken hold of her from the very beginning of her school days, it agitated her young desires, translating in her imagination everything that she was into everything that she wanted to be.

From her very early childhood days Anasuya – who, in her later years, turned into a pretty young woman with black gleaming eyes, with which she teased her children on occasion – possessed a peculiar mix of boldness, combined with a sudden shyness.

When she was still a teenage girl in school, a certain tendency, one that often can be seen in young girls at a tender age, to see the world around them in all its poignant beauty, descended all by itself into Anasuya. And this quality, by which girls in that state appear all at once irresistible, was causing Anasuya to get all tangled up with everything in

her sight.

In their neighborhood there was one schoolboy, under the sway of a similar transformation in his own youthful bloom. The boy, distressed at seeing his advances on Anasuya coming to a cold end, and evidently having made up his mind to die in her hands, wrote her a note and slipped it into her schoolbag.

When Anasuya opened it, it went like this, "...so you must go to a shop, buy a sharp knife, put it in your bag and come to school – and then saying sweetly 'Oh, I want to sit next to you and put my arms around you,' you come near me and put the knife in my heart, and then twist it, and then keep it that way," to which Anasuya replied, on the same page, "I won't do that, I will just give the knife to you and ask you to do it yourself."

Somehow the boy's friends came to know of it and they cracked up laughing, but they were also surprised at Anasuya's boldness in even writing back.

Once when Anasuya was twelve she was in a rickshaw with Vasundhara, her sister-in-law, when her attention was diverted to an elderly woman on the far left of the busy street. At first, seeing the city clothes on the elderly woman, Anasuya was about to look away, but then observing the woman's limp all her hesitation disappeared. She stuck her head out of the rickshaw and opened her mouth to say, "Wherever are you going, Amma?" But in that same instant she was embarrassed for some reason and did not speak these words. By then the elderly woman had already walked to a distance, and before Anasuya said what she wanted to say their rickshaw drove past her.

When they returned home, Anasuya became unusually

quiet at first, but became angry when one of her brothers said, "Who knows who it was, but why concern yourself with such trifle matters...?"

That's how it was with Anasuya. Something about some stranger impulsively attracted her attention, making her restless.

IT WAS ONE SUCH RESTLESS, youthful day in Hyderabad, sometime during the middle of 1962; and as the sixteen year-old Anasuya listened to all the talk in the front room, her big black eyes anxiously widened, she didn't know what irritated her more, whether the words of Sarangapani, the visitor, or her own mother's willingness to be impressed by them.

Earlier that morning, just as Anasuya was preparing to go to school, this Sarangapani, the elder son of a Srivaishnava Brahmana family from Pillanagrovi village, opened the green gate of their house, and saying, "What do you say, Seshamma, it appears that he insists you buy him a bicycle," he stepped into the house, and went on and on, "Whatever else I may think of my brother, on this matter I see that he is perched high up on the tree. Only a new bicycle will bring him down!"

Anasuya knew that even before the guest came inside two or three beaming faces from the kitchen had at once peered into the front room, and that their condition had suddenly brightened at the sound of Sarangapani's voice.

"What of a bicycle? As long as the boy is as bright and red-cheeked as you say, then what of a bicycle, we may give him a scooter itself!" said Seshamma, her mother, who then stopped whatever she was doing and went out to receive the

guest.

And then not even a moment passed when Pandurangam, her forty-year-old elder brother, the very same whom Anasuya feared greatly and did not enter the drawing room in the mornings while he was still at home, even when she needed the ink pot for her pen, he too was seen going into the front room, with his golden-silk shawl shining brightly on him.

"Look here, Pandurangava, the matter has come down to the bicycle," said Seshamma, addressing her favorite son – the matter being the proposal for her daughter Anasuya.

Pandurangam stared at Sarangapani, the man who brought the question of bicycle into their midst, for a second, before emanating a soft smile.

"If the boy studied properly, has no habits of smoking and drinking, then a bicycle is a small thing," Pandurangam said in a silky thin voice. He then directly addressed Sarangapani, "Have you come alone?" but without waiting for a reply, he turned to no one in particular and issued orders to, "bring some coffee and tiffin," for the guest, and concluded with a renewed smile, "A job will be assured. Our sister will somehow manage."

Pandurangam always believed that his position, as the Chief Accounts officer in the city, amplified the meekness others experienced in his presence. Hence he always spoke with the calm reassurance of one who was forced to descend from a great height, but having reluctantly done so, conceded to display his benevolence as long as he was here.

At these words, a faint, almost imperceptible, frown briefly came over Sarangapani's face, and he smiled softly. But a moment later, thinking, "What does it matter that I

have to sit here and listen to his condescending talk? Is it not true that he is indeed at such a high position, so much higher than I can ever be?" he dismissed his indignation.

Vasundhara – the wife of Pandurangam – a good-looking woman of thirty five, with a sharp chin and bright eyes, dressed in orange saree with golden-yellow patterns on it, came in with the plate of puffed rice.

Seshamma then resumed, "Did these men get to such a status all by themselves?" referring to her other sons and sons-in-law. "It was Pandurangam himself who begged Lord knows how many government officers on their behalf! You can see for yourself what sacrifices he makes!"

Vasundhara stood back near the door. On her face was an expression of ambivalence, common in daughters-in-law.

"When it is in our Pandurangam's hands then is there any doubt?" Seshamma continued. "Let the boy pass the degree examination today, and then see if he will not get him a job tomorrow!"

"Whatever did you imagine, Seshamma?" Sarangapani exclaimed, as though injured by the very question, raising his aggressively proud finger. "Just last week itself he passed the engineering degree, in no less than first class!"

Then, carried away by the same emotion, Sarangapani cried, "State, state-wide, he ranked first!" hardly able to contain his excitement. "No one in our whole district came even close to my brother's marks!"

At once his expression softened. He got up from his chair, stood in front of Seshamma and bent forward, a grim intentional look now occupying his face. With a firm pressure he placed both his palms on Seshamma's chair, and said, "A boy like that, such a bright and young boy, I am

placing in your hands, Seshamma, and thereafter it is all up to you!"

Having said these words, Sarangapani leaned back and abruptly relaxed, beaming at everyone in the room, just as someone who placed on the table every precious possession he had, and was himself impressed by it.

"Let it be that way then! As you wish then!" replied Seshamma, visibly pleased, her enthusiasm elevated by the force of Sarangapani's words.

She then leaned forward, and with the vigor of someone who had just taken over the ownership of that very precious possession, said, "Look here, Ranga!" staring brightly into Sarangapani's eyes. "Now listen to me. I say to you today, now, on this auspicious day, on this blessed morning hour, that from now on your brother is like my own son. We are not giving away our daughter, but we are gaining a son!"

With these words she embraced Sarangapani. Sarangapani wiped his eyes with his shawl.

A few moments of silence elapsed. Vasundhara came forward, took the plate complaining he hadn't even touched it and offered more coffee. Sarangapani submissively took the new coffee glass, and enquired if children had already departed for school.

HAVING SERVED THE GUEST, VASUNDHARA left the front room, and without knowing why, entered the large study room, where Anasuya was sitting at the desk, already in the long dress she usually wore on the school day.

At the sound of the footsteps Anasuya closed the book, and with that familiar derisive twist of her mouth, she looked coldly at her sister-in-law, and abruptly left the room.

Later that afternoon, when the house was quiet, Vasundhara came into her bedroom and stood in front of the enormous almirah, sighing heavily. She was moved by a recollection in her own heavy heart. She recalled the despair that had overwhelmed her, when, as a new bride nearly ten years ago, she had entered this house as though entering a dark tunnel. As with many daughters-in-law who enter new families, Vasundhara had also experienced the dread that from this enormous dark tunnel there was no way out.

Now, imagining that such a dark tunnel also awaited Anasuya somewhere else, Vasundhara felt a slight lessening of her own agitation. But the next moment this feeling of kinship in dread for Anasuya gave in to the pity that rose in her heart.

AT PILLANAGROVI, AT THE SAME hour that Sarangapani had hurried to the bus stop, Rushi was lying on his back, on the stone-slab bed in the front yard, already awake and remembering his achievement in the engineering degree examination. "You have to have self-reliability first," he said to himself, experiencing a feeling of one who was elevated to a great height from which everyone appeared benign, harmless and even distant.

Then hearing the voice of Janakamma, the wife of Sarangapani, and seeing the thick smoke that began to come out of the kitchen, Rushi remembered the special mood of everyone in the house these days, and remembered the purpose of his brother's early morning rush. "Now *this*, Lord, what an ordeal!" Rushi thought. Recalling the people of that other house, he tried to summon Seshamma's face in his imagination, "Daughters are usually prettier than

mothers..."

Inside the kitchen Janakamma broke a few more dry sticks, and a moment later the yellow fire from the woodstove cleared up the smoke.

Abruptly displeased by his thoughts, Rushi rose.

Rushi was a young man who displayed a special brightness and a tendency to excel in his studies, but this excellence was sporadic. While it was customary for the male members of the family to memorize the scriptures and develop the mastery to recite them, Rushi showed no such interest. From his earliest childhood he possessed a striking talent for artistic painting and sketching, though no one saw him practice, and his father did not teach him either. At school he did not show any particular adoration towards the teachers, but he was well-liked.

There was only one primary school in Pillanagrovi village. Mud walls separated one class from the other and children sat on the floor. When Rushi completed fifth grade his father insisted that he be sent to higher secondary school, even though it was ten miles away.

So they bought the young boy a bicycle, and every morning his mother Kanakamma wrapped his tin box of lunch in a soft cloth, watched him ride his bicycle to school, and sighed with heaviness in her heart.

In the late afternoon, on his way back, Rushi would not go straight home, but would ride for a while, stop near the fields, and rest his bicycle against a tree by the dirt road. He would then sit in the shade, open the school library book and read until the evening cacophony of birds disturbed his concentration. Then he would get on the bicycle and ride brightly, replaying dreamily in his head what he had just

read, smiling at the empty tin box swaying on the handle bar.

While the villagers revered the father, and were even enchanted by his gentle manner with which he dismissed their petty lapses, drawing their attention instead to the tales that caught his fancy, it was Rushi they were fond of the most.

"Just the same as his father," they said, referring to a quality of tenderness he possessed, which he retained even at his present age of twenty.

BY MID MORNING, HAVING BATHED and soaked his healthy body, pouring buckets of cold water over his large shoulders while one of the children teased him by hiding the soap, Rushi entered the kitchen with his bare feet. He uttered a few quick words of prayer under his breath, and unable to reach the cadence that he usually heard in the recitation of Sarangapani, he sat on the floor and playfully began calling his young toddler nephew Kittu, who had just discovered running.

"Wasn't it only yesterday that you finished the college? So where are you off to now this early?" asked Janakamma. "Well, go if you want to, but what's the use of wasting your time with the little one if you are in a rush?" she said, filling his steel glass with water.

"Let him go where he wants to," came a voice from the adjoining room, of his mother Kanakamma. "How many more days he will go fancy-free anyway, even as we speak isn't our Ranga talking to the girl's people in the city?"

Pretending to ignore these words, evidently aimed at pinpricking him, but experiencing an elevated mood

nevertheless, Rushi took a long time eating his meal, playing with Kittu.

Kittu climbed up on him, sat on his strong forearms, and began to laugh as Rushi kept opening his palm and, just as the little boy was about to catch the blue marble in it, closing his unyielding fingers.

"See that face, how red it turned at the mention of marriage!" said Kanakamma. "I don't know how the girl turns out to be, but all the world's shyness is in this boy's cheeks."

Then complaining at Kanakamma and Janakamma that a man alone can hardly survive such an onslaught that came from all sides, Rushi took his bicycle and came out.

Throughout that day Rushi experienced a heightened awareness of his present condition. During the phase of his university days Rushi believed in the theory of the nobility of loving all humanity, but when he applied himself to it he experienced nothing but the coldness of the other, which disappointed him. But now, just a few days after his graduation, he did not remember that antipathy; instead, a joyful enthusiasm now infected his views of the world and for the people around him; and his current reminiscing was filled with moments when he ran with other caste boys, sat with them on the cane fence, smoked cigarettes and walked with them while talking voraciously and dreamily about some new thing he had just observed.

That was how it was with Rushi.

## *The Marriage*

EIGHT DAYS AFTER THE VISIT by Sarangapani agitated her, Anasuya completed her tenth-grade final examinations, and unable to resist her desire to see the new movie, she closed the novel she was reading, got up from the sofa, and hearing people talking outside, stepped out of her room.

It was before noon and the female members of the family had just gathered in the vast bedroom. Children went from one room to another with a slight after-meal slumber and sat wherever they wished: a bed, an arm-chair or on the floor, lazily playing with toys and picture books. The house servants were speaking freely to each other, exchanging personal matters in playful tones, with which they sometimes speak when the mistress of the house has no more orders to give. Pandurangam had not yet come home for the afternoon meal.

Voices were heard from one of the inner rooms.

"...then the boy can stay with us, what is in it?" Seshamma was talking with animation as usual.

Though Anasuya was aware that since Sarangapani's visit the family behaved as though something special was about to occur, their conversations frequently mentioning "Sarangapani," and occasionally another name "Rushi," she decided that this matter was not any of her concern. But somewhere within her a feeling of annoyance began to rise.

She approached the small side bedroom, and softly opened the door to see if Vasundhara was there.

"Have you finished reading your book already? Come in, come in, it's just me here alone," spoke Vasundhara's voice, seeing her.

Anasuya stepped in and saw that Vasundhara had just finished cleaning her veena, and was setting it quietly by the side of the bed.

Anasuya whispered brightly, "Ey, Vasu...?" but even before she finished speaking, it was plain that even Vasundhara was thinking the same thing – the new movie.

"But Amma is sure to say no if we ask her now," Vasundhara said gravely, remembering Seshamma's mood. "Besides, tomorrow they will visit us. And they are bringing him and everybody!"

"Who are coming?" Anasuya frowned. "Who are they?"

Seeing that her sister-in-law was about to turn cold in anger, Vasundhara took her hand, pulled her toward the bed, and with a rising whispering voice, said, "If you already start behaving like this then how will it be when they see you tomorrow!"

"Who is asking them to come? No one tells me anything!" Anasuya said, pulling her hand away, and sitting on the bed. "Did anyone ask me? Even so, why should I marry now anyway? I am still in school. I want to study!"

"How are studies and marriage tied in this case? Won't they allow you to study after the marriage? Why should they not?"

Saying these words Vasundhara looked at her sister-in-law with an expression of a womanly delight that filled her ever since Sarangapani's visit. Seeing that Vasundhara did not comprehend the turmoil in her, Anasuya became even more irritated.

"But what of all that now!" Anasuya said, suddenly raising herself from the bed. "Are you coming with me to the cinema or not?" her pale, defiant face staring directly into Vasundhara.

An hour after this exchange, by which time the two girls have reconciled, they obtained Seshamma's permission. Seshamma ordered Gopalam, Anasuya's brother, to accompany them and insisted that they go to the matinee show so the girls return home by evening.

THE AFTERNOON WAS ALREADY HOT, so they went in rickshaw while Gopalam followed them on his bicycle.

Though Vasundhara tried all she could to elevate Anasuya's mood and distract her from thinking about the next day, the two girls ended up talking about the very same topic in the rickshaw.

While Vasundhara was speaking reassuringly that Anasuya could still study even after the marriage, Anasuya drifted into an involuntary recollection. Years ago, when Vasundhara herself was still new in the house, she was often seen in the mornings with her eyes swollen red from crying and lack of sleep. Now such memories added to Anasuya's despair, and gave rise to even more apprehension

about her own present condition. At once she experienced an overflowing pity and kinship for Vasundhara.

By the time the rickshaw reached the cinema theater, the crowd was already inside the gates, with bicycles and rickshaws going in, and men and children jumping off them and rushing to the ticket lines.

Guarding her shining black-and-green dress while climbing upstairs to the second class door, aware that several pairs of eyes were looking at her, Anasuya went inside the hall following Gopalam's lead, tightening Vasundhara's hand in her grip at the sudden darkness which engulfed them as they entered.

When she sat down on the seat and settled, Anasuya once again remembered the circumstances in which she found herself at home.

Then a young boy, of no more than thirteen or fourteen years of age, appeared in a soldier's uniform on the screen. At once emerging from a despairing crowd of men and women of the village, who gathered at the center of the scene, he jumped on the black horse. Holding its reins, he swerved the agitated animal towards the audience and swore to fly at once to the king's court and punish the queen's cousins who trampled on the old man causing his death. Despite his high sounding words, and the youthful energy with which he kicked his horse and sent it flying forward, it was evident that he was just a boy who wished to appear as a brave soldier. "They are going to kill him!" Anasuya cried, at once dismissing a voice inside her which said it was only a movie and there was no one actually dying.

From the moment the young soldier was introduced into the scene a tender emotion had taken hold of Anasuya, and

rapidly grew in intensity. In her intimacy with the soldier she had already begun to suspect that the gradual building up of his life was only due to one motive in the movie creator's mind, which was to kill him off. She was moved by the young soldier's innocence, and she experienced the same anxiety that the soldier felt, and she knew that the soldier would be killed before she herself, Anasuya, had said everything she wanted to say to him. And she wanted to say so many things to him about herself, about her life; and to ask the soldier about his life, and to listen to him.

None of this happened however, and the young soldier was killed off remorselessly, just as smoothly as he was made to enter into the scene, galloping from far away mist in the rainy evening, his shiny black horse carelessly stepping on mud puddles.

When the scene was concluded, Anasuya whispered, "*Amma...!*" softly to herself; and discovering that she was crying, she laughed, wiping away the tears. An overflowing affection, and a feeling of pity, for her brothers, for her mother, for Vasundhara, and for everything in her world, flowed in her heart.

A FEW DAYS LATER, IN a short and a brief ceremony in the temple, Anasuya was married to Rushi.

The day before her wedding she went into her room and stood near the dressing table, in front of the tall mirror that had flower patterns on its brown frame. Her eyes lowered for a few moments and her fingers, on their own, detached from the whims of her heart that was evidently thinking of something else, pretended to grab hold of something on the table. Then she looked up and stared straight through

herself, twisting the red sewing thread round and round her finger, as though she wished to twist it round and round her very heart.

She then opened her black diary, stared at it for a few minutes, and with a heavy sigh tore off the pages from it. But before she threw away the pages, she took one last look at them.

It was a journal entry she had written a few months earlier, when she was carried away by an especially elevated state she was in, and not another soul knew of it.

It happened when a handsome young man, the very same boy who had slipped a note in her school bag years ago, had sent Anasuya a present and Vasundhara had taken it to her discreetly. It was a small, elegant, transparent crystal jar, and in it was a milky white egg. Anasuya lifted the crystal high in front of her eyes, stared at it directly, and saw that the egg, visible in the center, was suspended in mid-air like an Olympic gymnast. Mesmerized, and feeling an inexplicable rush of sensation in her body, Anasuya sat down, unable to control herself from crying. That night she took a long shower, went into the kitchen, boiled the egg and ate it privately all by herself. She then came into her room and wrote the words in these pages.

This long entry, which she was now going to throw away, went like this:

“Strangest thing!” she had written. “I was about to resume my study, but wanted to just sit in the sun for a minute or two, to lose my sleepiness. Though it was bright afternoon, the April sun was just warm. I imagine I drifted into some place, then suddenly was woken up by a soft rubbing sensation. It was near my cheeks, but my eyes were

still closed so I could not see what it was. From a distance somewhere, but directly in my field of vision something very bright, very red, very pink, was spinning rapidly. I could sense it was also approaching me because its size kept increasing and increasing. As it got closer, it became visible as a red, round egg spinning like a top with ever increasing speed, emanating in a spraying motion something smooth, not hot, not warm, but just smooth, from all around its circumference. As it got closer the smooth soft rays were brushing off my cheeks. It got closer and closer and suddenly merged into my face and I felt a sensation of having touched that delicate, supple egg, red and pink. I involuntarily opened my lips and nibbled the egg that was already almost in my lips. Suddenly it shuddered, and I took its pink top, that was already quivering a bit, into my mouth; and all through this the smooth rays kept caressing my cheeks, kept brushing against my lips, playing with them, trying to pry them open. I open my mouth wider and suddenly, at once my mouth engulfed the entire thing that was in front of it...or so it seemed, but instead the thing itself engulfed me, sending electric currents of a peculiar joy through my back, my neck and my fingers. "What could this be?" I wondered and was about to open my eyes but no matter how much I tried, I could not open my eyes. Suddenly the spraying intensified, and now I knew what it was...it was a smooth jet of fine, warm, bright sun rays that kept blasting out of this spinning red egg that was entirely inside my mouth. These bright sun rays completely filled my mouth, my throat, my heart, my innards, reaching rapidly into my arms and suddenly my finger tips began to glow brightly intensely, from the excessive overflow of these sun rays

that the spinning red egg kept spraying and spraying inside my mouth. I experienced a sensation of being lifted above the ground, far above the ground, but strangely I could still feel the smooth silky sensation of a soft skin on my outer lips. Now I too, like the spinning red egg-top I saw before, was spinning at the distant field of vision of my own self. It was me seeing myself. Then I recalled, "Oho.... I remember closing my eyes...and then I lost consciousness..." and immediately realized that I am simply sitting there, still in the sun and while I experienced all this, only a few minutes passed by. So here my heart, is the story of what happened to me when I nibbled on this warm egg, and imagined all sorts of things under the hot sun."

Many years later, after her children were born, when some unknown feelings elevated her sadness, Anasuya sighed again, thinking of this journal, but dismissed the wail in her heart, chiding herself.

ON THE FIFTH DAY OF the wedding ceremony, as the euphoria of the festivities came to an end, towards evening the remaining guests began to leave.

All of a sudden, but still as though she too was waiting dreadfully for it, uncontrollable tears choked Anasuya. She felt that life has now become so different and so overwhelming that only the warmth she felt on her cheeks seemed real to her. Wiping her eyes she imagined the figures of her mother, of her brothers, and of her sisters-in-law also in a similar state.

At the sight of the men who did not hesitate to expose their bare upper bodies during the prayers until the previous day, now coming out in their shirts and trousers, talking

with animation, the yellow pasupu marks still at their finger tips; and at the sight of the women talking and laughing in groups, seeing that they had already crossed the front gate, now smiled vigorously at each other before parting at once, Anasuya experienced a terrifying feeling that into the torrent which surrounded her there was about to descend a sudden quietude, and that somehow this quietude would be unbearable.

At times she had a look of surprise on her face. She was surprised that even after such an inexplicable sadness swamped her, even after *such* a separation from her family, there was life around her in her new house; and that such a life still went on and on with a vigor that was as full as it was in her mother's house.

And no matter how self-satisfied Sarangapani was, how joyful everyone in the house felt, and how, like a fresh flower, Anasuya's presence lit the house with bright smiles, she was still only a new bride, still only a daughter-in-law and not the daughter, in that Srivaishnava Brahmana house. As a result, soon it became clear to Anasuya that the new household did not share her dream of continuing her studies.

Rushi left the decision, hence the fate of Anasuya's study plans, in the hands of Sarangapani and Janakamma, where it languished and died.

"What's the use?" they said. "She has already achieved what any woman dreams to achieve, marriage."

From that moment on, a peculiar expression, something resembling a frown, but not quite, began to accompany Anasuya's every movement.

In the volatile interior of Old Hyderabad, where the majestic tops of its extraordinary mosques stick out into the serene skies, lives a south Indian family, steadily descending into ruin.

Passionate and ambitious Anasuya dreams of bettering her education, but when she discovers her husband's affair, she is consumed by a desire to exact revenge.

Bright and joyful Rushi, brimming with resolutions and desires, believes in loving all humanity. But in a moment of frenzy he nearly kills his wife.

Growing up in this oppressive midst is their son, the spirited, sensitive Arya, unwavering in his love for them, but who from early on develops disturbing tendencies.

And when Arya, having left for America as a young man filled with shame, returns home in a troubled state, everyone's lives are changed forever.

Immersing the reader in cultural and moral dilemmas of modern India, *All Things Unforgiven* is an unsettling debut novel that depicts the whole of this south Indian family and charts their descent into oppression and violence - and their strivings for forgiveness and love.

*All Things Unforgiven* is the first English language novel published by Saaranga Books, a new publishing house committed to presenting high quality south Indian fiction.



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