

Dear Reader,

Ru Freeman's *On Sal Mal Lane* is a rare work of fiction, a one-in-a-million novel that succeeds in creating a rich inner life with which readers resonate, while at the same time bringing us important news from outside our own experience. Many novels only manage to depict the inner world, others the outer, but Freeman magically gives us both as she moves seamlessly from the myriad intimacies of the lives of the inhabitants on a single street in Sri Lanka, to the broader canvas of her native country's upheavals. That Freeman is able to illuminate the conflict between ethnic and religious groups that led to the civil war and yet still portray the intricacies of daily life is nothing short of a literary wonder.

The heart of the novel is woven around an unforgettable cast of vibrant characters, both Tamil and Sinhalese, Muslim and Catholic, and the children of three key families that live on the lane. The most memorable of these is the youngest of the Herath children: Devi. She is innocent, spoiled, impetuous, loving, a free spirit, vulnerable. Her best asset is her unconditional love for their unpopular neighbor, Raju, who is entrusted with her care. Unfortunately, though his heart is big, his particular brand of innocence proves a danger to them both.

But it's Ru Freeman's bold use of an omniscient voice—the voice of the street itself—that makes her telling of the story truly special. This voice warns us that clouds are gathering on the horizon. The first time I read the manuscript, I tried to ignore the warnings. Instead, I reveled in the details of the children's lives: their undiluted pride and joy in kite flying, cricket playing, and music making. The second time through, I thought I could ward off the danger by making a shrewd editorial suggestion here and a judicious cut there. Of course, that was beyond the powers of my pencil, and I found myself shedding copious tears at the end that I knew all along was coming.

But don't let these tears put you off! Read and thoroughly enjoy. See how Ru so artfully depicts the world of the children as she explores their friendships, both with each other, and with the adults around them, who are hopelessly stuck in their own, distant worlds. Learn, too, about an important but largely neglected area of world history. Above all, be one of the first readers of a novel that we are confident will be a bookclub, word-of-mouth, indie favorite next year. And do let me what you think of it, at: wolves@graywolfpress.org.

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Publisher