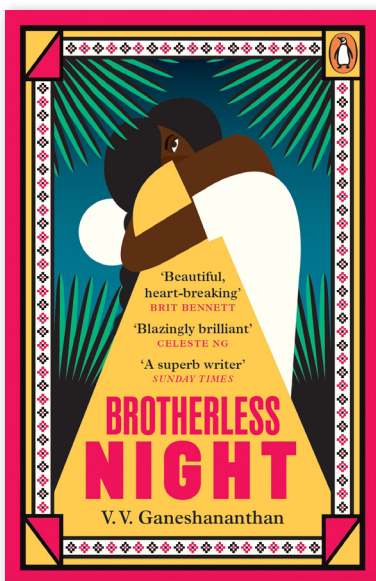


Brotherless Night

by V. V. Ganeshanathan



PLOT SUMMARY

Sixteen-year-old Sashi wants to become a doctor. But over the next decade, as a vicious civil war tears through her hometown of Jaffna, her dream takes her on a different path as she sees those around her, including her four beloved brothers and their friend, get swept up in violent political ideologies and their consequences. Desperate to act, she must ask herself: is it possible for anyone to move through life without doing harm?

WHAT TO LOOK OUT FOR

Brotherless Night opens with a striking scene, when Sashi is scalded badly and K comes to her rescue, cracking raw eggs onto her burn. This, we are shown, is an old folk remedy that K has learned from his family and something which the doctor who visits approves of. Despite it being an unconventional solution, it works.

This powerful opening sets up the theme of medicine, doctors and patients in the novel, and also prepares us for the sudden, traumatic tone of what is to follow. In Sri Lanka at the time of the novel, life is perilous and danger is everywhere. The scald is a metaphor for sudden perils that can wound and kill without warning, and prefigures all the events that will hurt Sashi and her family.

This scene also shows us K's character. He is a calm and thoughtful boy who does what is necessary for Sashi's injury, just as he later does what he believes is necessary by dying by hunger strike on behalf of the Tamil people.

This powerful beginning to the book – even though it shows a simple household accident seemingly unconnected to the bigger events around Sashi – sets the tone for the dramatic events of the novel and draws the reader in immediately.

>



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“A powerful book that has the intimacy of memoir, the range and ambition of an epic, and tells a truly unforgettable story about the Sri Lankan civil war.”

AYÒBÁMI ADÉBÁYÒ, 2024 JUDGE



DISCUSSION POINTS

Since 2017, Ganeshanathan has co-hosted a podcast called fiction/non/fiction with novelist Whitney Terrell about the intersection of literature and the news.

Early on in *Brotherless Night*, Sashi says: ‘I didn’t know if the whole of any violent story could be told’.

What do you think are some of the difficulties and advantages of writing a novel about a specific historical period and cultural context, especially a time where so many violent events have happened? Can a writer ever depict the true reality of wars, famines, holocausts, terror? Can the full truth of any violent story ever be told? Is it the duty of a writer to try? How much can the reader tolerate?

Further, since a novel is a fictional form, how realistic can it be, and how much has to be made to fit a narrative? How can a novel help people to explore and understand a factual subject in a way that non-fiction may not?

QUESTIONS

How did you feel about Priya setting off the bomb? Was that a difficult part of the book to read?

How does Sashi’s character compare to her brothers?

Sashi’s credo as a doctor is ‘First do no harm’. Is it possible to move through life without doing harm?



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

V. V. Ganeshanathan is the author of *Love Marriage*, which was longlisted for the Women’s Prize for Fiction in 2009. Her work has appeared in *Granta*, *The New York Times*, and *The Atlantic Monthly*, among others.

Brotherless Night draws on 16 years of research into the Sri Lankan civil war. She teaches in the MFA program at the University of Minnesota.



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If you enjoyed this book try some of our recommended reads on the next page.

Seelan asks Sashi, 'Are you so surprised that people want to join the movement?' and Sashi reflects that there is no way to truly know what you would do, without being in the situation. Can you understand why people join protest and/or terrorist organisations?

NEXT STEPS

Write some journal entries as one of Sashi's brothers. What are his private thoughts about the civil war, about their family relationships, about the politics in Sri Lanka? What are his hopes and fears? How does he feel about Sashi studying to become a doctor? You might prefer to invent some stories from their shared childhood that shaped the young man he became.

Alternatively, you might like to seek out a new podcast – try one that covers subjects you are less familiar with. You might look at non-fiction book podcasts or shows that cover history, politics, climate change or technology. ■



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If you enjoyed this book...

RECOMMENDED READS

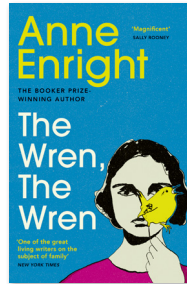
In *Love Marriage*, V. V. Ganeshanathan explores fractured family relationships in modern Sri Lanka, and the advent of Western-style marriage on formerly traditional Tamil families. *Love Marriage* was longlisted for the 2009 Women's Prize for Fiction.

Home Fire by Kamila Shamsie is an urgent, fiercely compelling story of loyalties torn apart when love and politics collide. It won the Women's Prize for Fiction in 2018.

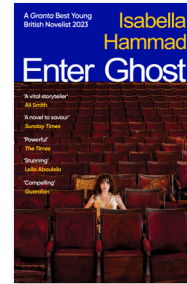
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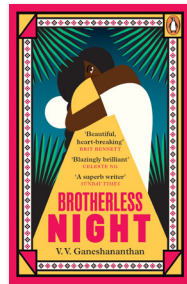
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by Anne Enright



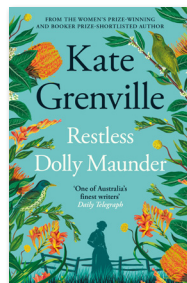
Enter Ghost
by Isabella Hammad



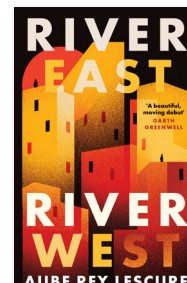
Brotherless Night
by V. V. Ganeshanathan



Soldier Sailor
by Claire Kilroy



Restless Dolly Maunder
by Kate Grenville



River East, River West
by Aube Rey Lescure

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We run free writing workshops, online book clubs and an annual book festival to bring our community together. And listen out for our podcast *Bookshelfie*, where each week a guest picks her five favourite books written by women and

discusses the impact they have had on her life and career.

The Women's Prize Trust is a registered charity, and we appreciate donations of any size to support our outreach work with writers and readers from disadvantaged backgrounds. So, however you wish to, **join us and help put more books written by women into the hands of more readers.**

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