



The City Son

Samrat Upadhyay

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Set in Samrat Updhyay's signature and timeless Nepal, *The City Son* offers a vivid portrait of a scorned woman's lifelong obsession to get revenge for her husband's infidelity, with devastating ramifications for an impressionable young man.

Acclaimed and award-winning author Samrat Upadhyay—the first Nepali-born fiction writer writing in English to be published in the West—has crafted a spare, understated work examining a taboo subject: a scorned wife's obsession with her husband's illegitimate son. When Didi discovers that her husband, the Masterji, has been hiding his beautiful lover and their young son Tarun in a nearby city, she takes the Masterji back into her grasp and expels his second family. Tarun's mother, heartsick and devastated, slowly begins to lose her mind, and Tarun turns to Didi for the mothering he longs for. But as Tarun gets older, Didi's domination of the boy turns from the emotional to the physical, and the damages she inflicts spiral outward, threatening to destroy Tarun's one true chance at true happiness. Potent, disturbing, and gorgeously stark in its execution, *The City Son* is a novel not soon forgotten.

The City Son Details

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From Reader Review The City Son for online ebook

Mariana Gutierrez L. says

You might not want to start this book without knowing what it is about. I went into it blindly as my Nepal pick for my Reading Around the World challenge and got caught off guard by this skillfully and candidly told twisted story.

Bonnie Brody says

The City Son is a hard-hitting book, one that punches the reader right between the eyes, and then does it again. Its content matter is horrific but the writer knows what he is talking about as he describes a young boy groomed to be sexually abused.

Didi and her two sons live in the country. Her husband, The Masterji, is a learned teacher who lives in the city and often doesn't come home for a year at a time. As the book opens, someone comes to Didi and tells her that her husband has another wife and child in the city. The child is described as 'beautiful'. Didi picks up and heads to the city and walks in on her husband and his second wife, Apsara, and Aspara's son Tarun. Didi quickly takes over all the household duties like cooking, cleaning, and even the raising of Tarun whom she calls her own.

Didi's arrival and her manner of being make Aspara so distraught that, with time, she loses her mind and becomes too mentally ill to care for Tarun. Tarun is in Didi's care and she quickly begins to treat him more like a lover than a child. He is only about ten years old, or even younger, when the book starts, but Didi begins sexual play with him right away. The sexuality of their relationship continues up till Tarun's twenties and even after he is married. His obsession with Didi is so profound that he is unable to consummate his marriage.

The novel shows how a child is groomed into a sexual relationship, easily mistaking love and sex. Tarun has no other mother besides Didi and he is terrified that she will leave him. If he does something that does not please her, she withholds her affection and he feels lost. He feels shame, secrecy and silence which are the hallmarks of an abused child.

The book is very difficult to read at times but, as a psychiatric social worker, I found it rings true. Samrat Upadayay understands the nuances of sexual abuse and describes them perfectly. This is not a book for everyone, but it is written very well and tackles a subject that most of us don't want to look at or even know about.

Nikki says

Was not a fan of the writing style or subject matter at all. I can watch SVU, Psycho, or Bates Motel for better developed twisted and creepy mother/son relationships. This was an Advanced Reader copy I picked up, so hopefully the editing is better in the published version. I still wouldn't recommend.

Mayush Shrestha says

what did I just read? Like what is this?

eventhough the plot is so emotionally disturbing yet I can't explain how simple and good this book is. It had the capability to hold the readers heart. This is is mindblown book. Author "hands down"

I like how the author has kept the innocence of Tarun alive. That want to be loved. How perfectly cowardice he has portrayed the father. Didi is taunting and haunting character. It's so weirdly but gorgeously defined.

So simple but so beautiful. No unnecessary exaggeration. it's great great.

Andrea says

I've been struggling to work out how to rate this one. Should my distaste for the themes outweigh my admiration for the storytelling and writing? It's clear from the synopsis that this is about the sexual abuse of a child, therefore I knew what I was getting into, so in the end I decided *no, it shouldn't*.

What I really liked about this book was the authentic Nepali voice - I was totally there! I could picture the characters and locations so clearly. The way they spoke to each other, the way they hid their feelings, it was spot on.

Of course, considering the subject matter, it was really difficult to read at times. And in the back of my mind I was continually asking myself *Why?* This book is categorised as psychological fiction, yet it was the psychology that was missing for me. I just couldn't find anything to help me understand why the Didi I met at the start of the book became the monstrous Didi who so systematically destroyed the childhood (and very nearly the adulthood) of little Tarun. And she wasn't the only one. Why did Apsara and the Masterji end up the way they did? Why was Rukma stepping onto that same path, when realistically, she barely knew the Tarun who had so recently become her (arranged) husband? Maybe I will try again one day to see if I can reconcile this.

It's a short read, well-written, so if you think you can stomach the scenes of abuse, I would recommend it as a good example of Nepali fiction.

Lynda says

Original story, simple writing, disturbing, beautiful. Everything a book should be.

Xiaozhu says

Horrible subject matter - the sexual grooming of a very young boy by his stepmother - but I feel it was handled well by the author. The step-mother's complete control over Tarun's life and emotions, to the point

where he's self-harming because he thinks she's upset and sabotaging his own marriage, never lets up. It's a hard read, but not a bad one.

Cheryl says

4.5 stars

Athira (Reading on a Rainy Day) says

Didi was going through her sons' old clothes when some stranger woman stopped by to tell her that her husband (called Masterji through the entire book because he tutors students) has been cheating on her, and now has another wife and son living in the city. This is news to Didi but it doesn't seem to inspire in her the kind of reaction you would expect from scorned women. Earlier, the Masterji had sent her a letter saying that he will not be visiting her this year as he is quite busy (Masterji lives in the city while Didi stays in their native village with their two sons). Didi packs up her bags and arrives at the Masterji's city apartment with their two sons in tow, surprising her husband and leaving him no way to pretty his situation, in anticipation of her arrival.

Very soon, his other wife, Apsara, and their (maybe three- or four-year old) son, Tarun, arrive home, only to find that their sleeping arrangements have shifted a little. The two half-families do manage to somehow live together for a while though, before Apsara finally gives up and moves away, mainly on account of the Masterji's cowardice and lack of spine in asserting any sort of control or assurance of protection in the house. Although Didi hates Apsara, she has taken an intense fascination towards Tarun. She lavishes a lot of attention on him, feeds him anything he wants to eat, and shows him a lot more love than she does her other two sons. Didi is also very impulsive. Even a minor hint of being ignored by Tarun can make her feel venomous. Tarun also begins to love Didi more than anyone else. He has scant respect for his own mother, who is after all way too bitter and stuck with her own demons. But this attachment with Didi is preventing Tarun from socializing well with friends his age or expressing any interest in girls.

The City Son is what I would consider an explosive book. The author wastes no time getting into the story - there is no meaningless digressions or descriptions of the trees and the clouds and a person's complexion or similar, no pages of history before the main story starts - nothing that can divert the reader's attention. Instead he begins the story where it should (the revelation of Masterji's adultery) and proceeds to reveal the consequences. And what consequences they were!

At the core, *The City Son* deals with a taboo subject. Something very disgraceful and disgusting; something that destroys a lot of people in the process. That's about all I will say about it, but if you are curious to know what the topic was, comment below (or email me) and I'll email you. I wondered if I would have read the book if I knew what the taboo subject was, but I guess I probably would still, except I would be reading it with a sick feeling in my gut because I know it's coming. I'd love to spare you that anticipation (especially if you're planning to read this). Some books work because we know nothing about them.

I found it shocking that the taboo thing went on for years without anyone suspecting it. There are people who lost love because of it, people who lost confidence, and then there were people who suspected something vague and did not have the guts to save matters. The thing about reading such a book is that it keeps you at the edge of your seat. You want things out in the open, but there are people you care about caught in the webs, people you don't want to see hurt more than they already are. The author certainly had my attention

throughout - it was really hard to put this book down. I finished reading this 245-page book in under 4 hours, and let me put that number in perspective - it generally takes me about 4 evenings to finish a book that size.

Of course, as I pointed out earlier, the pacing of the book is real fast. I wouldn't really call this entirely a plot-oriented book, as it's really a long progression from cause to effect. As for the character development, some were fleshed out much better than the others. There were a few characters who I wished had their own chapters - it would have been nice to know what they thought. But I wouldn't say there was anything major in the character development department. The book starts off from Didi's perspective, then transitions to Tarun's, and finally to a woman named Rukma. The transitions between characters seemed like a big gray area, where every relevant character seemed to talk at once. I never quite enjoyed these in-between paragraphs because I wasn't quite sure which narrator to focus at.

Note: I read the ARC edition, and it had plenty of Nepali phrases that were not explained. I hope the final edition straightened out that issue.

Asta says

Very hard book to get through - I had to stop and take a break a couple of times before continuing. I think being able to understand the Nepali words, especially the expletives, somehow deepened the entire experience. Complex characters and storyline which leaves you thinking about the book after you're done reading it. Also liked the feminist undertone and the author's message that everything is not so black and white all the time.

Jean says

I thought I could handle this one. However, it just creeped me out. Weird relationships and emotional abuse. I didn't wait around for the physical abuse.

Jeff Scott says

A disturbing tale of betrayal and abuse in one of the poorest countries in world. Young Tarun is born into a complicated situation. His beautiful mother has married a man who is already married. When the first wife returns (Didi), she dominates the household and eventually young Tarun. The twisted terror here will haunt Tarun far into his adulthood, affecting every aspect of his life.

The story begins simply enough. Didi's husband is a tutor in the city which makes it difficult for him to make regular visits. What's really happening is that he has taken up with one of his young tutees. He marries her and she bears him a son, unbeknownst to Didi. Once she does find out, she comes storming into the city and sets up camp. The husband through his timidity allows Didi to intimidate his new wife and they are forced to flee with her young son Tarun. Didi changes quickly from victim to victor as not only does she retake her household, she takes over the role of mother to young Tarun. Her intentions are not entirely motherly as time goes on leading to a very sick and disturbing story.

I felt the author gave himself a lot to work with. An impoverished country, a love triangle, all sorts of complications, but I felt he threw that away to tell the abuse story. It's a significant aspect of the story, but

Didi's abuse of Tarun goes from mention to graphic detail. I find it difficult to criticize this aspect since it's important to tell the abuse to raise awareness, but the level of detail seems gratuitous and takes away from the story.

Naomi says

Disclaimer: I received this book for free through a Goodreads' First Read's giveaway.

This one was incredibly tough to get through. The topic, child abuse, is not one that is ever easy to read, but I didn't realize just how disturbed I would be by this. The author does not hold anything back when talking about this taboo topic.

I can't decide if I'm only giving two stars to this novel because of the topic and my dislike of it, or because I actually disliked more about it. The plot did cause me to feel pity for certain characters, but more often than not, I greatly disliked most of the individuals involved. Either for the terrible things they inflicted on each other, especially the child abuser, or because the rest ignored what was going on, even though it was hard to not notice.

The child abuser in this novel acted in an incredibly calculated manner, and successfully ruined the lives of many individuals. Many past any hope of gathering the pieces up and fixing. It is hard to read anything where so many people are hurt, especially when I could see, as the reader, exactly what was happening and why. It is a special type of sick and disturbed person who could do something so terrible with no remorse whatsoever.

The ending does present some hope, and I would like to tell myself that things get better, but I feel like so much damage was done over so many years, that it may be too late to salvage those lives.

I'm not sure I would recommend this to others to read, because simply describing the novel to my boyfriend was too much, and I know he'll never pick it up. I'm afraid if I did recommend it to someone, they would wish I hadn't. A hard read.

Jo Dervan says

The setting for the book is Nepal and the main characters, Masterji and Didi are country folk. Didi is the unattractive girl whose marriage to the bright, attractive Masterji, is arranged to settle a debt between their fathers.

Masterji has gone off to the large city to teach, leaving Didi to raise their 2 sons in the country. However Didi learns of a second wife and child in the city and moves there with her 2 boys. The second wife, Apsara, eventually leaves the home and sinks into madness. However Didi becomes fixated on Apsara's son, Tarun. Didi's fixation turns into emotional abuse and eventually physical abuse, scarring the young man. This story of obsession is not one you will forget.

Lori M. says

An easy, yet complicated, read.

The author's use of words makes this a quick read, and easily and seamlessly weaving his native language into a novel written in English.

The complexity of this novel lies in the storyline, at once simply a very good read and the next, a jaw-dropping moment that changes the lives of so many.

I loved that the author told the story through the eyes of the three main characters, at different times: the scorned wife, the son of her husband's lover, and his wife.

Simply stated, one of the best books I've read this year.
