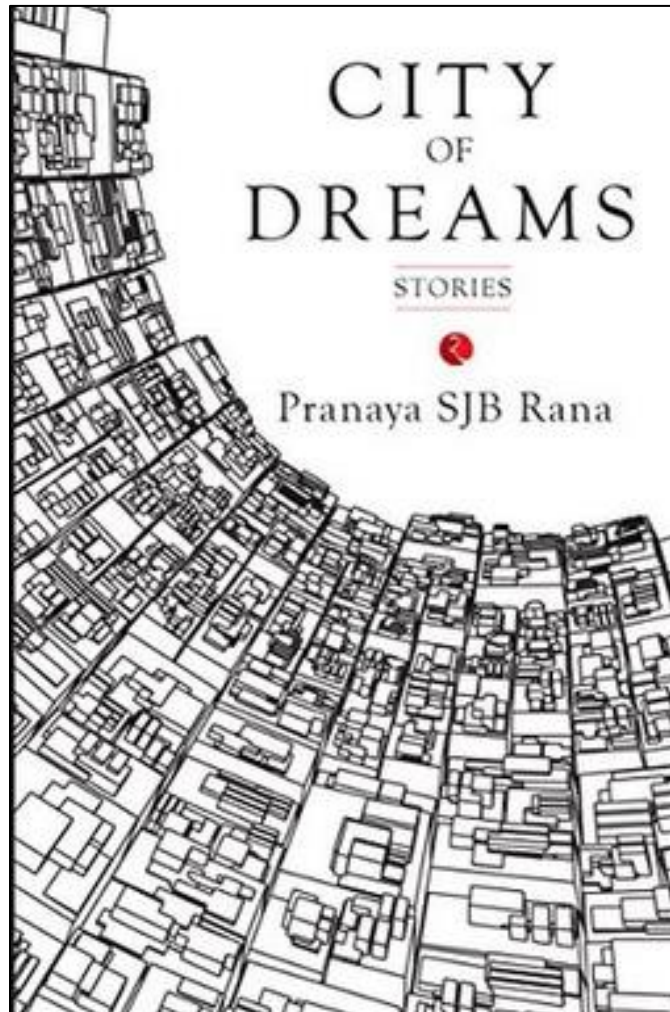


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**A Book Review: City of Dreams**



Author: Pranaya SJB Rana  
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**Introduction:**

Pranaya S.J.B. Rana is a writer, editor, and columnist. He grew up in Kathmandu, where he has worked as a journalist for Nepali Times and The Kathmandu Post. 'City of Dreams', written by Pranaya SJB Rana, weaves a web of different stories that are closely connected to a central theme. Rana's stories corrupt traditional expectations of South Asian writers by delivering bold, unconventional stories. What sets these stories apart is the meticulous attention to detail that improves the reader's journey through graphical descriptions and immersive storytelling. This collection offers a comprehensive exploration of character, setting, and emotion, inviting readers to delve deeper into the complex layers of each story.

**The Stories in Brief:**

In "Our Ruin," Prasit, Tara, and Pranaya are portrayed as inseparable friends during their school years. However, as they grow older, their lives take different paths, causing their friendship to slowly disintegrate. Pranaya, particularly, grapples with the fear of change and the inevitable shift in their bond. Despite their efforts to rekindle their connection through music and their favorite hangout spot, the demands of adulthood gradually pull them apart.

The title "Our Ruin" symbolizes not only the crumbling of their friendship but also parallels it with the decay of a house, emphasizing the simultaneous breakdown of both. Pranaya's unspoken affection for Tara adds complexity to the narrative, as he fears risking their friendship by confessing his feelings. Themes of evolving friendships and the struggle against inevitable change permeate the story, showcasing Pranaya's yearning for their past closeness while acknowledging the reality of their growing distance.

In "The City of Dreams," this chapter delves deeply into Pranaya's internal conflict. It vividly portrays his emotional turmoil, the longing for the past, and the fear of losing what they once shared. The author intricately weaves moments of nostalgia with the harsh reality of their drifting apart, creating a poignant exploration of friendship dynamics and the human resistance to change. Pranaya's hesitation to confront his feelings for Tara adds a layer of tension, heightening the complexity of their fading bond. The chapter beautifully captures the bittersweet essence of growing up and the inevitable transformations that accompany it.

"Two" in "The City of Dreams" unveils the aftermath of Anam and Akriti's breakup, focusing on Anam's hidden struggle with depression. Despite appearing outwardly composed, Anam battles inner turmoil and numbness, masking his emotional distress. The narrative delves into Anam's mental state, depicting his silent suffering and the emptiness that consumes him. He copes by overeating, seeking solace in food as a means to alleviate his emotional pain.

The chapter intricately portrays the complexity of Anam's mental health, revealing the stark disparity between his outward demeanor and internal turmoil. While the story may seem mundane on the surface, the author employs Anam's perspective to unravel the depth of his emotions and the profound impact of heartbreak on his psyche. Anam feels trapped in a cycle of monotony, where everything around him seems ordinary, yet he feels exhausted and worn out by the repetitiveness of his daily life.

The chapter emphasizes Anam's struggle with his mental health, highlighting the discrepancy between appearances and the hidden emotional turmoil within. The author masterfully captures Anam's silent battle with depression, conveying the subtleties of his despair and the coping mechanisms he employs to navigate through his heartbreak. It's a poignant portrayal of the internal struggles often concealed behind a facade of normalcy.

"Knife in the Water" in "The City of Dreams" revolves around the disturbing dynamics of spousal abuse within a relationship. The wife, despite enduring signs of mistreatment from her husband, perceives it as a distorted expression of his love for her. The narrative ends with a devastating revelation: as the husband approaches death, he declares his undying affection for his wife, leaving her heartbroken and filled with regret that she didn't hear those words sooner.

This chapter meticulously explores the complexities of an abusive relationship, where the wife's adoration for her husband blinds her to the severity of the abuse. The husband's actions, while rooted in a twisted perception of love, inflict emotional and psychological harm on his wife. The story captures the tragic essence of a relationship marred by manipulation and misunderstanding, culminating in a poignant moment when the husband's declaration of love, belatedly voiced, leaves the wife grappling with profound regret.

The line, "He wasn't a selfish lover. "She didn't know what she wanted, and he didn't know what he was doing," perfectly captures the agonizing aspects of their relationship. It draws attention to the sad discrepancy between their goals and conception of love, which finally has tragic consequences. The chapter serves as a powerful exploration of the complexities and devastating

consequences of abusive relationships, delving into the intricacies of love, manipulation, and the human inability to comprehend the destructive nature of such dynamics until it's too late.

"Dashain" in "The City of Dreams" follows Rabi's quest to impress his friend Varsha by demonstrating courage and independence during the Dashain festival. He decides to showcase his bravery by beheading a goat, aiming to prove himself as fearless and worthy of Varsha's admiration. However, during the act, witnessing Varsha's pitying expression, Rabi realizes that she values him for who he truly is, not for his attempts to impress her with false bravado. The story emphasizes the message that authenticity and being true to oneself hold more significance in gaining someone's admiration than trying to embody an idealized version.

This chapter intricately portrays Rabi's misguided attempt to win Varsha's favor by conforming to societal expectations of masculinity and bravery. The author vividly captures Rabi's internal struggle to meet perceived standards of impressiveness, only to realize the futility of his efforts. Rabi's revelation comes from recognizing Varsha's genuine appreciation for his true self, devoid of pretense or exaggerated displays of masculinity.

The story resonates with the theme of authenticity and self-acceptance, conveying the message that genuine connections are built on being true to oneself rather than striving for an artificial image of perfection. Rabi's journey serves as a poignant reflection on the importance of embracing one's true identity and vulnerabilities, rather than seeking validation through superficial displays of courage or prowess.

### **Conclusion:**

"The City of Dreams" is a mesmerizing collection of stories, with "The Ruin" shining as a standout narrative. This particular story delves into the intricate dynamics of friendship, focusing on Prasiit, Tara, and Pranaya. It beautifully captures the evolution of their bond from inseparable friends in school to their gradual drifting apart as they navigate the changes and challenges of adulthood.

The tale masterfully portrays the bittersweet essence of growing up and the inevitability of change in relationships. Through the experiences of Pranaya, who grapples with the fear of losing their cherished friendship, the story resonates with readers on a deeply emotional level.

Various scenes that address fundamental topics like love, identity, societal expectations, and the human experience are interwoven throughout the book. Every story offers a different viewpoint,

engrossing readers in the lives of fascinating characters and providing deep insights into the complexities of interpersonal relationships and emotions.

"The City of Dreams" is an outstanding collection that is highly recommended overall. Its captivating storylines and thought-provoking themes have earned it an exceptional rating.