

ROAR

Manjeet Mann

PENGUIN BOOKS

PENGUIN BOOKS

UK | USA | Canada | Ireland | Australia
India | New Zealand | South Africa

Penguin Books is part of the Penguin Random House group of companies
whose addresses can be found at global.penguinrandomhouse.com

www.penguin.co.uk
www.puffin.co.uk
www.ladybird.co.uk

Penguin
Random House
UK

First published 2025

001

Text copyright © Manjeet Mann, 2025
Cover illustration copyright © Kushiaania, 2025

The moral right of the author and illustrator has been asserted

The Audre Lorde quote in the epigraph is from *Sister Outsider*, first published in the USA
by Crossing Press, 1984, and in Great Britain by Penguin Books, 2019.
Text copyright © Audre Lorde, 1984.

Penguin Random House values and supports copyright. Copyright fuels creativity, encourages diverse voices, promotes freedom of expression and supports a vibrant culture. Thank you for purchasing an authorized edition of this book and for respecting intellectual property laws by not reproducing, scanning or distributing any part of it by any means without permission. You are supporting authors and enabling Penguin Random House to continue to publish books for everyone. No part of this book may be used or reproduced in any manner for the purpose of training artificial intelligence technologies or systems. In accordance with Article 4(3) of the DSM Directive 2019/790, Penguin Random House expressly reserves this work from the text and data mining exception.

Text design by Janene Spencer
Printed in Great Britain by Clays Ltd, Elcograf S.p.A.

The authorized representative in the EEA is Penguin Random House Ireland,
Morrison Chambers, 32 Nassau Street, Dublin D02 YH68

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978–0–241–64762–2

All correspondence to:
Penguin Books
Penguin Random House Children's
One Embassy Gardens, 8 Viaduct Gardens, London SW11 7BW

FSC www.fsc.org MIX Paper | Supporting responsible forestry FSC® C018179

Penguin Random House is committed to a sustainable future for our business, our readers and our planet. This book is made from Forest Stewardship Council® certified paper.

For the quiet ones

'Sometimes, we are blessed with being able to choose
the time and the arena and the manner of our revolution,
but more usually,
we must do battle where we are standing.'

– Audre Lorde

PROLOGUE

The warrior within

In ancient times there were female warriors.
Warriors who led armies into battle,
fought men twice their size
sizing them up on the field
before slaying them
fighting them and frightening them.

These warrior women
rode on the backs of lions.
Sword in hand they
revolted against kings,
gained control of kingdoms
and placed the kingly crowns on their own heads.

These long-forgotten warriors
fought for freedoms
thinking the battle was won
but here we are still fighting
still cycling through rising and falling
folding in on ourselves
trying to shrink ourselves and tell ourselves,

Don't be bright, bold, brave
be small, sexy, smiley.
Be. Nice.

And when some have had enough
we all rise with a hashtag
surfing on clouds.
Finally! We rejoice. We're there.

There where?
When there are girls being banned from school
and married off too soon
and when her body is presented battered and bruised
there are picket lines
stripping her of her right to choose.
It's hard to remember there's a warrior inside us,
when there are TikTok stars
who deserve to be behind bars.
It's hard to see that warrior
but she's there
you've just got to believe it.

Look in the mirror
and you'll see her
staring back at you
saying you don't have to be extraordinary
or have a gift
or a special power
some otherworldly god-like quality
you don't need a sword, a tiger, a boon
you can do extraordinary things and be perfectly
normal.

The warrior is in you.
The hero is in you.
Yes you sitting there one eye on the TV
one eye on your phone double-screening,
she's in you scrolling through socials sitting in a cafe
and you still in bed past noon
and you counting the pennies
and you back from the night shift
and you on the school run

and you clock-watching in maths
and you studying for your next exam
and you back-chatting the teacher
and you being bullied in the corner
and you dealing with anxiety
and you having to grow up before you had to
and you who haven't grown up enough . . . yet
and you
and you
and you.

We're not so different from each other
you over there, her on the other side of the globe.
Deep down we want the same
need the same
love the same.

Over there they have more money
over here more power
more of something
more than you
more than them
more than her on the other side of the globe.

But underneath it
we're all just out here
fighting, living, winning, losing
battling each day
in the only way we know how
the only way we can
from the depths of our stomach
from the heat in our blood
from the fire in our throat

some silently, some loudly, some unknowingly
roaring for more.

So, take courage and listen to the call.
That is the journey of the hero after all.

Born into a world not quite fitting in
they search in every corner of their skin
searching for themselves,
swimming through a sea of voices
so confused they don't recognize their own reflection,
so lost that when they hear the call to roar they deny it.
They lock the door and hide behind it
but the call, it doesn't quit, it keeps knocking
until finally the hero, shaking in their boots, opens to a crack of light
and steps out. Frightened and falling
they start on their path, ready for a fight.
The hero builds muscle and gathers an army
they slay dragons and topple gods
until finally
they come face-to-face with themselves
and see themselves.
It's as clear as day.
No more confusion,
no more hiding,
no more swimming through voices.
They take what they know,
the wonder, the secrets, the magic of it all
back to the ordinary world
and show the people they too
can roar for more.
That is the hero's journey after all.

So . . .

Let's spin the globe now.
Let's meet our hero.
Zoom in, closer, closer, closer
until you see a white mansion sitting in the middle
of a gated community among other white mansions
nestled in an environment of unequivocable exclusivity
in the city of New Delhi.

We begin at the end.
An epic ending to an epic tale.

It's the middle of the night and a young woman
who came into this world with a roar
fists clenched ready for a fight
stands looking at this house
thinking about how she got here
thinking about the people who turned her into a fugitive
thinking about where she'll run next.

She's only seventeen.
An ordinary young woman fighting ordinary people
who have given themselves the title 'god'.
But these so-called gods
did not bank on coming up against
such an extraordinary young woman.
A young woman wielding her own Kali.
A young woman with her tribe of divine women
weapons in hand, tiger on command,
roaming the ravines
slaying dragons, toppling gods
and ready for revenge.

She stands looking at this white mansion.

It's so quiet, she thinks, not a soul in sight.
Crickets providing a soundtrack to the night.
The night hot and sticky,
the air dry, the wind warm.
It's the height of summer
just before the rains.
She thinks about this house,
the house that started it all,
beads of sweat trickling down her temples
hair sticking to her forehead.
She is a world away from the young woman she once was
when she lived behind these gates, gates that protect
this community from people like her.
The person she has now become.

This is our warrior,
our hero and

her
name
is

Rizu.

She smiles at the moon.
It'll be her only witness tonight.
Lingering in the quiet
she draws in a deep breath
lifts her head and

roars.

ONE

Metamorphosis

Come out, come out wherever you are,
I whisper into the night.
My words shake, swallowed by shadows.
Rama purrs, a steady rhythm to my unsteady heart.

What now, Rizu? Annika asks.
Her fingers dancing
a nervous ballet across her lips.

You can turn back if you want, I say.

You shouldn't be alone for this.

I want to tell her
I am best alone, stronger even.
Fine.
We wait for them to leave.

I concentrate on my target as lights dim one by one,
their darkness – my silent cue.
A final command, an enthusiastic goodbye,
one by one they leave the house.

A smile creeps across my lips
as memories flood my mind.
Before the hunt, the chaos,
the tribe, the splintering, the plan.
Before the change.

I look at my reflection in the fountain.
It is a stranger's face now.
Remarkable, unrecognizable,
my metamorphosis –
complete.

Look at these self-made gods, Rama.
They think of themselves as invincible
yet their power is a fragile illusion.
Tonight, Rama, their delusion will be crushed.

Rama growls, tension ripples through his muscles.
Annika edges away.
The tiger still startles her.
I stroke his strong, powerful back.
Rama chuffs and licks at my feet.

We wait, watch as the servants leave
on the back of mopeds
thundering their way out of the mansion complex
and into the freedom of the Delhi night.

It's time, I say.
Annika pours petrol around the house,
up the walls, doors and shutters.
I hold the match, a flicker of destiny in my hand.

What are you waiting for?
Do it now, quickly!
Annika's body pulses with panic
but I have no such fear.

I allow the flame to kiss my fingertips,
before releasing it.
Rama moans,
we step away.

The flames waltz across the ground
drunkenly drinking up the petrol
dancing around our feet
thirsty to consume everything in their path.

The smell of burning petrol
takes hold of our senses,
smoke fills our lungs
as fire devours the walls of the building.

I can't help but smile,
seeing how the flames destroy everything so easily.
It pleases me to see it.
There's liberation in this destruction.

There's plenty more to turn to ash, Annika,
and self-made gods to topple from their self-made thrones
and from the parched earth something better will rise,
something new and fair, somewhere everyone can thrive.
This is our quest.
This is how we rise.
This is how we roar.

This is how we roar . . .
As Annika repeats our manifesto
I sense the words sticking in her throat.
We need to go, Rizu, before anyone sees us.

I'm transfixed by the flames,
feasting on the fiery image.
The cries, the chaos, the collapse –
it fills me up, feeds my spirit,
a wild dance of fury and pain.

Rama nudges as sirens wail in the distance.
It's time, I say.

And away we run.
From flames, from destruction,
the heat, the noise, the mess of it all.
I feel wild, free, untamed by fear.

They made me what I am,
I scream to the moon.
Spirit soaring,
running and leaping,
tripping and tearing
away from the heat of the flames
and into the heat of the night.