

ALL MY

RAGE

A Novel



"A GORGEOUS,
STAR-CROSSED
STORY
ABOUT
THE COSTS
OF THE
AMERICAN
DREAM.

I READ
THIS IN A SINGLE
DAY." —JODI PICOULT

SABAA

TAHIR

ALSO BY SABAA TAHIR

AN EMBER IN THE ASHES QUARTET

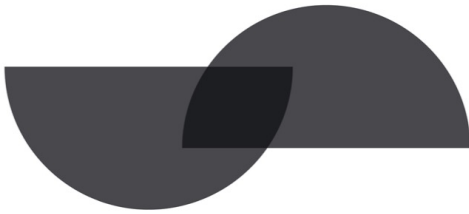
An Ember in the Ashes

A Torch Against the Night

A Reaper at the Gates

A Sky Beyond the Storm

ALL MY RAGE



**SABAA
TAHIR**





RAZORBILL

An imprint of Penguin Random House LLC, New York



First published in the United States of America by Razorbill,
an imprint of Penguin Random House LLC, 2022

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LIBRARY OF CONGRESS CATALOGING-IN-PUBLICATION DATA

Names: Tahir, Sabaa, author.

Title: All my rage / Sabaa Tahir.

Description: New York : Razorbill, 2022. | Audience: Ages 14 and up.

Summary: A family extending from Pakistan to California, deals with generations of young love, old
regrets, and forgiveness.

Identifiers: LCCN 2021049700 | ISBN 9780593202340 (hardcover) ISBN 9780593202364 (trade
paperback) | ISBN 9780593202357 (ebook)

Subjects: CYAC: Pakistani Americans—Fiction. | Family life—Fiction. Immigrants—Fiction. | Forgiveness
—Fiction. | LCGFT: Novels.

Classification: LCC PZ7.1.T33 AI 2022 | DDC [Fic]—dc23

LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2021049700>

ISBN 9780593202340 (HARDCOVER)

ISBN 9780593524176 (INTERNATIONAL EDITION)

ISBN 9780593202357 (EBOOK)

Cover art by Rodrigo Corral

Cover design by Kristin Boyle

Design by Rebecca Aidlin, adapted for ebook by Michelle Quintero

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For those who survive.

For those who do not.

Dear Reader,

Please be aware that *All My Rage* contains content that may be triggering. For a list of content, please see the next page.

All My Rage contains the following content: drug and alcohol addiction, physical abuse, Islamophobia, mentions of repressed sexual assault, tense exchange with law enforcement, death.

PART I



The art of losing isn't hard to master;
so many things seem filled with the intent
to be lost that their loss is no disaster.

—*Elizabeth Bishop,*
“One Art”

CHAPTER 1

Misbah

June, then

LAHORE, PAKISTAN

The clouds over Lahore were purple as a gossip's tongue the day my mother told me I would wed.

After she delivered the news, I found my father on the veranda. He sipped a cup of tea and surveyed the storm looming above the kite-spattered skyline.

Change her mind! I wanted to scream. Tell her I'm not ready.

Instead, I stood at his side, a child again, waiting for him to take care of me. I did not have to speak. My father looked at me, and he knew.

"Come now, little butterfly." He turned his moth-brown eyes to mine and patted my shoulder. "You are strong like me. You will make the best of it. And at last, you'll be free of your mother." He smiled, only half joking.

The monsoon rain swept over Lahore a few minutes later, sending chickens and children squawking for cover, drenching the cement floor of our home. I bent my head to the ground in prayer regardless.

Let my future husband be gentle, I thought, remembering the bruises on my cousin Amna, who married a light-haired English businessman against her parents' wishes. Let him be a good man.

I was eighteen. Full of fear. I should have prayed instead for a man unbroken.

CHAPTER 2

Sal

February, now

JUNIPER, CALIFORNIA

It's 6:37 a.m. and my father doesn't want me to know how drunk he is.

"Sal? Are you listening?"

He calls me Sal instead of Salahudin so I don't hear the slur in his words. Hangs on to our Civic's steering wheel like it's going to steal his wallet and bolt.

In the ink-black morning, all I see of Abu's eyes are his glasses. The taillights of traffic going into school reflect off the thick square lenses. He's had them so long that they're hipster now. A Mojave Desert howler shakes the car—one of those three-day winds that rampage through your skin and colonize your ventricles. I hunch deep in my fleece, breath clouding.

"I will be there," Abu says. "Don't worry. Okay, Sal?"

My nickname on his lips is all wrong. It's like by saying it, he's trying to make me feel like he's a friend, instead of a mess masquerading as my father.

If Ama were here, she would clear her throat and enunciate "Salah-ud-din," the precise pronunciation a gentle reminder that she named me for the famous Muslim general, and I better not forget it.

"You said you'd go to the last appointment, too," I tell Abu.

"Dr. Rothman called last night to remind me," Abu says. "You don't have to come, if you have the—the writing club, or soccer."

"Soccer season's over. And I quit the newspaper last semester. I'll be at the appointment. Ama's not taking care of herself and someone needs to tell Dr. Rothman—preferably in a coherent sentence." I watch the words hit him, sharp little stones.

Abu guides the car to the curb in front of Juniper High. A bleached-blond head buried in a parka materializes from the shadows of C-hall. Ashlee. She saunters past the flagpole, through the crowds of students, and toward the Civic. The pale stretch of her legs is courageous for the twenty-degree weather.

Also distracting.

Ashlee is close enough to the car that I can see her purple nail polish. Abu hasn't spotted her. He and Ama never said I can't have a girlfriend. But in the same way that giraffes are born knowing how to run, I was born with the innate understanding that having a girlfriend while still living with my parents is verboten.

Abu digs his fingers into his eyes. His glasses have carved a shiny red dent on his nose. He slept in them last night on the recliner. Ama was too tired to notice.

Or she didn't want to notice.

"Putar—" *Son*.

Ashlee knocks on the window. Her parka is unzipped enough to show the insubstantial WELCOME TO TATOOINE shirt beneath. She must be freezing.

Two years ago Abu's eyebrows would have been in his hair. He'd have said "*Who is this, Putar?*" His silence feels more brutal, like glass shattering in my head.

"How will you get to the hospital?" Abu asks. "Should I pick you up?"

"Just get Ama there," I say. "I'll find a ride."

"Okay, but text me if—"

"My cell's not working." *Because you actually have to pay the phone company, Abu.* The one thing he's in charge of and still can't do. It's usually Ama hunched over stacks of bills, asking the electric company, the hospital, the cable company if we can pay in installments. Muttering "ullu de pathay"—*sons of owls*—when they say no.

I lean toward him, take a shallow sniff, and almost gag. It's like he took a bath in Old Crow and then threw on some more as aftershave.

"I'll see you at three," I say. "Take a shower before she wakes up. She'll smell it on you."

Neither of us says that it doesn't matter. That even if Ama smells the liquor, she would never say anything about it. Before Abu responds, I'm out, grabbing my tattered journal from where it fell out of my back pocket. Slamming the car door, eyes watering from the cold.

Ashlee tucks herself under my arm. *Breathe. Five seconds in. Seven seconds out.* If she feels my body tense up, she doesn't let on.

"Warm me up." Ashlee pulls me down for a kiss, and the ash of her morning cigarette fills my nostrils. *Five seconds in. Seven seconds out.* Cars honk. A door thuds nearby and for a moment, I think it is Abu. I think I will feel the weight of his disapproval. *Have some tamiz, Putar.* I see it in my head. I wish for it.

But when I break from Ashlee, the Civic's blinker is on and he's pulling into traffic.

If Noor was here instead of Ashlee, she'd have side-eyed me and handed me her phone. *Not everyone has a dad, jerk. Call him and eat crow. Awk, awkward.*

She's not here, though. Noor and I haven't spoken for months.

Ashlee steers me toward campus, and launches into a story about her two-year-old daughter, Kaya. Her words swim into each other,

and there's a glassiness to her eyes that reminds me of Abu at the end of a long day.

I pull away. I met Ashlee junior year, after Ama got sick and I dropped most of my honors classes for regular curriculum. Last fall, after the Fight between Noor and me, I spent a lot of time alone. I could have hung out with the guys on my soccer team, but I hated how many of them threw around words like "raghead" and "bitch" and "Apu."

Ashlee had just broken up with her girlfriend and started coming to my games, waiting for me in her old black Mustang with its primed hood. We'd shoot the shit. One day, to my surprise, she asked me out.

I knew it would be a disaster. But at least it would be a disaster I chose.

She calls me her boyfriend, even though we've only been together two months. It took me three weeks to even work up the nerve to kiss her. But when she's not high, we laugh and talk about Star Wars or Saga or this show *Crown of Fates* we both love. I don't think about Ama so much. Or the motel. Or Noor.

"MR. MALIK." Principal Ernst, a bowling pin of a man with a nose like a bruised eggplant, appears through the herds of students heading to class.

Behind Ernst is Security Officer Derek Higgins, aka Darth Derek, so-called because he's an oppressive mouth-breather who sweeps around Juniper High like it's his personal Star Destroyer.

Ashlee escapes with a glare from Ernst, but this is the second time I've pissed him off in a week, so I get a skeletal finger digging into my chest. "You've been missing class. Not anymore. Detention if you're late. First and only warning."

Don't touch me, I want to say. But that would invite Darth Derek's intervention, and I don't feel like a billy club in the face.

Ernst moves on, and Ashlee reaches for me again. I stuff my hands in the pockets of my hoodie, the stiffness in my chest easing

at the feel of cotton instead of skin. Later, I'll write about this. I try to imagine the crack of my journal opening, the steady, predictable percussion of my pen hitting paper.

"Don't look like that," Ashlee says.

"Like what?"

"Like you wish you were anywhere else."

A direct response would be a lie, so I hedge. "Hey—um, I have to go to the bathroom," I tell her. "I'll see you later."

"I'll wait for you."

"Nah, go on." I'm already walking away. "Don't want you to get in trouble with Ernst."

Juniper High is massive, but not in a shiny-TV-high-school kind of way. It's a bunch of long cinder block buildings with doors on each end and nothing but dirt between them. The gym looks like an airplane hangar. Everything is a dusty, sand-blasted white. The only green thing around here is our mascot—a hulking roadrunner painted near the front office—and the bathroom walls, which, according to Noor, are the precise color of goose shit.

The bathroom is empty, but I duck into a stall anyway. I wonder if every dude with a girlfriend finds himself hiding from her next to a toilet at some point.

If I'd been hanging out with Noor instead of Ashlee, I'd already be sitting in English class, because she insists on being on time to everything.

Boots scrape against the dirty tiles as someone else enters. Through the crack in the stall door, I make out Atticus, Jamie Jensen's boyfriend. He enjoys soccer, white rappers, and relaxed-fit racism.

"I need ten," Atticus says. "But I only have a hundred bucks."

A lanky figure comes into view: Art Britman, tall and pale like Atticus, but hollowed out by too much bad weed. He wears his typical red plaid and black work boots.

I've known Art since kindergarten. Even though he hangs out with the white-power kids, he gets along with everyone. Probably because he supplies most of Juniper High with narcotics.

"A hundred gets you five. Not ten." Art has a smile in his voice because he is truly the nicest drug dealer who's ever lived. "I give you what you can pay for, Atty!"

"Come on, Art—"

"I gotta eat too, bro!" Art digs in his pocket and holds a bag of small white pills just out of Atticus's reach. A hundred bucks? For that? No wonder Art's smiling all the time.

Atticus curses and hands over his cash. A few seconds later, he and the pills are gone.

Art looks over at my stall. "Who's in there? You got the shits or you spying?"

"It's me, Art. Sal."

For a guy who careens from one illegal activity to another, Art is uncannily oblivious. "Sal!" he shouts. "Hiding from Ashlee?" His laughter echoes and I wince. "She's gone, you can come out."

I consider silence. If a dude is dropping anchor in the bathroom, it's rude to have a conversation with him. Everyone knows that.

Apparently not Art. I grimace and step out to wash my hands.

"You doing okay, man?" Art adjusts his beanie in the mirror, blond hair poking out like the fingers of a wayward plant. "Ashlee told me your mom's up shit creek."

Ashlee and Art are cousins. And even though they're white— and I stupidly thought white people ignored their extended families—they're close. Closer than I am to my cousin, who lives in Los Angeles and insists all homeless people should "just get jobs." Usually while he drinks Pellegrino out of a ceramic tumbler he ordered because a Pixtagram ad told him it would save the dolphins.

"Yeah," I say to Art. "My mom's not feeling great."

"Cancer sucks, man."

She doesn't have cancer.

"When my nana Ethel was sick, it was miserable," Art says. "One day she was fine, the next she looked like a corpse. I thought she was a goner. She's fine now, though. And she got a painkiller prescription she never uses, so that's lucrative." Art's laugh echoes off the walls. "You good? Cuz I could give you an old friends' discount."

"I'm good." Not even tempted. One shit-faced person in the house is enough.

I hurry away just as the bell rings. The dirt quad empties out quicker than water down a drain. As I turn the corner to the English wing, Noor appears from the other side.

The sun hits the windows, painting her braided hair a dozen colors. I think of the pictures she has all over her room at her shithead uncle's house, taken by a massive space telescope she told me about once. That's what her hair is like, black and red and gold, the heart of space lit from within. Her head is down and she doesn't see me, instead intent on racing the bell.

We reach Mrs. Michaels's door at the same time. Noor's face looks different, and I realize after a second that she's wearing makeup. She pulls out her headphones, hidden in her hoodie, and a tinny song spills from them. I recognize it because Ama loves it. "The Wanderer." Johnny Cash and U2.

"Hey," I say.

She gives me a nod, the way you do when you've stopped seeing someone because you've got your own shit to worry about. Then she ducks into the classroom, a blur of beaded bracelets, dark jeans, and the cheap, astringent soap her uncle sells at his liquor shop.

For a second, the Fight hangs between us, specter versions of ourselves six months ago facing each other at a campground in Veil Meadows. Noor confessing that she was in love with me. Kissing me.

Me shoving her away, telling her I didn't feel the same. Spewing every hurtful thing I could think of, because her kiss was a blade tearing open something inside.

Noor staring at me like I'd transformed into an angry kraken. She had a pine cone in her hands. I kept waiting for her to peg me with it.

The door slams behind her and I grab the handle to follow her. Then I stop. The bell rings. The hall clock behind me plods on, each tick a dumbbell slamming to the floor. A minute passes. I read and reread a sign on the door for a writing contest that Mrs. Michaels has been bugging me to enter.

But even though I've walked into AP English every day for five months, today I can't make myself do it. I can't sit across the room from Noor, knowing she'll never tease me about my llama socks again, or kick my ass in *Night Ops 4*, or come over on Saturday mornings and eat paratha with me and Ama.

I try to remember Ama's smile when she was well and would pick me up after class. The way she lit up and asked me about my life, like I had climbed Everest instead of merely survived another day at school.

"Mera putar, undar ja," she'd tell me now. *My son, go inside.* I sigh, and as I reach for the door, a bony hand grabs my arm.

"Mr. Malik—" The handle slips from my grip. Ernst's pale green eyes bore into me, daring me to snap, or wanting me to. "What did I say earlier?" he asks.

"Don't." I jerk away from him. *Shut up, Salahudin.* "Don't touch me."

I wait for him to paw at me again. Suspend me. Call Darth Derek. Instead he lets me go and shakes his head, a man sternly disappointed in a rebellious dog, giving the leash a little yank.

"Incorrect," Ernst says. "I said 'first and only warning.' Detention. My office. Three o'clock."