



The Pagoda Tree

Claire Scobie



Maya plays among the towering granite temples in the ancient city of Tanjore. Like her mother before her, she is destined to become a devadasi, a dancer for the temple, and her family all expect that the prince himself will choose her as a courtesan. On the day of her initiation, a stranger arrives in town. Walter Sutcliffe, a black-frocked English clergyman, strives to offer moral guidance to the British troops stationed in Tanjore. But he is beset by his own demons. As the British tear apart the princely kingdoms of India, Maya flees her ancestral home and heads to the steamy port city of Madras, where silks and satins are traded, poets vie for patrons, and fortunes are lost and found. When the shrieks of parrots fill the skies at dusk, Maya bows to the earth and starts to dance. Thomas Pearce, an ambitious young Englishman, is entranced from the moment he first sees her. But their love is forbidden and the consequences are devastating. Unfolding amid war and famine, *The Pagoda Tree* takes us deep into the heart of India as the country struggles under brutal occupation. As cultures collide, Walter Sutcliffe unknowingly plays the decisive card in Maya's destiny.

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