

The Uma, Little Flower of India Series.

Story One

# Uma's



# Dream

By Raymond Howell

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# Introducing Uma

## The Little Flower Of India.

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**T**he Uma Tales by R. Howell - written several years earlier but revised in the early part of 2023 for the website, [theannstories.co.uk](http://theannstories.co.uk)

Uma, Little Flower Of India is one of several tales about the life of a young Dalit girl growing up in modern India and was written at the urging of a Dalit who had escaped India's repression of his race.

This short and simple story introduces young Uma's favourite dream.

One night Uma, in her self-appointed role as village teacher, found herself able to speak freely to her class. For once they were out of range of the Caste's ever-listening ears and the stare of their coveting lecherous eyes. Instead of lessons she decided to tell her special dream to the class of children gathered beneath the stars and sat in the shadows of the village's teaching tree.

She was barely older than her audience which brought wry but soft smiles to the tired faces of those parents who had decided to hang nearby and listen as well - who in the village did not like Uma's tales and this one promised to be especially good, because Uma had said it was and she is never known to lie - unless it's to do with Gunter's chicken eggs, but that is another story for some distant moonlight blessed night.

Her full tales can be found at:

[theannstories.co.uk](http://theannstories.co.uk)

# Uma's Dream

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This is story one in the tales about Uma, The Little Flower of India by Raymond Howell.

It is dedicated to all those Dalits who suffer under the Indian Caste regime.

May You All See Freedom soon.

Raymond Howell. April 25th, 2023.

# Chapter One

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**D**reams have roots don't they Mama," six-year-old Uma suddenly asked while they were out foraging for kindling one evening. "And one day Mama I'm gonna find the roots of my dreams and encourage them to grow into something good."

"And what dreams might they be my little light", Mama wondered with a trace of tiredness creeping into her sing-song voice. But it was not because of the bright child's prattling. Oh no! Never that! Uma was her living treasure and joy. She was simply tired of life as a manual scavenger working for an Indian society that treats her kind so cruelly while contemptuously calling her an untouchable. That particular word is the trigger which sparks her rebellious thoughts. If you did not force such horrid work on me and block access to our wells I would not be an untouchable. It is the Castes doing, yet they taunt me with it.

Complain as she might, it was not a new or rare outrage. She is just one of the millions of Dalits who are born into abject slavery to suffer and endure forever because India's ruling religion orders it to be so. Just as they order the Caste to 'let the un-caste (The Dalits) have water, but only if it has passed first through the belly of a cow'.

And that is her and Uma's life. Bending so the Caste figuratively and occasionally actually can urinate on them. But as angry as she gets she does nothing about it because she cannot. The Caste would kill her if she rebelled. And then there is little Uma to consider. Oh, how the Caste would dearly love to ruin her... If not through rape and then murder like they did her other

daughter, they'll force Uma to slave as I do.

The idea of Uma working in the latrines collecting up the Castes faeces as she does without tools, except for a tiny flicker she weaves from reeds, a little basket, and of course, her hands, appals her. And where is the proper clothing she often rants, or the healing medicines for us when we fall sick with their germs? Angry words that she sends silently into the wind when she picks her herbs down near the marsh before the sun arises. And what do they do when I fall ill just as they will do to my Uma? They make me work. And nor do they pay me, just as they won't her. They would rather we starve or die through sickness than give us their precious rupees. And to refuse their work is to be punished or killed. And my Uma is certainly rebellious enough to want to fight back, she worries... And she's bright too, which the Caste can't bear to see in a Dalit.

It was no wonder then that Mama was down. She was simply worn out, but I have to keep going she says, again silently, every morning as she drags her tired body to work. For who else will look after my darling little Uma...

Uma for her part was young but not blind. She could see that Mama's remorseless and thankless work was taking its toil, just as surely as the constant bacteria and germs were. Those very ones her Mama says had poisoned Uma's father and two of her siblings. And although she has never met them she can feel their loss, because it is there in her Mama's eyes every day. And to Uma's further dismay, Mama was growing old before her time.

Years of having endured the Caste's contempt was in Mama's stoop, her ever-present cough and the dulling of her eyes which had once shone and sparkled and made her husband swoon every time he beheld them, or so she told Uma with a smile - as well as in the furrowing of her brow and wasting of flesh.

“I have many dreams Mama” Uma declared brightly to cheer her up as she helped carry their meagre haul of kindling home to start the little fire to cook their scrap of rice which will be barely enough for one, let alone two. “But I dare not speak of my dreams aloud here Mama” she whispered. “Just in case the Caste hear and want to take them away from me - like they did my dearest sister...”

Mama did not miss the catch in Uma’s voice, how could she, for it was the same as her own whenever she speaks of her lost daughter. But as sad and as distressed as Uma was about it, she refused to be cowered by the Caste.

“.... One day Mama you will know my dreams. And I promise when they come true, you won’t be hungry, thirsty, sick, beaten, despised, or spat at again. Not ever my darling Mama. I promise.”

From the resolute way Uma squared her shoulders and marched ahead it was obvious to Mama that she had no intention of standing for the Caste’s nonsense. As she watched her daughter pause to cheekily hoot at an owl she was lost to know, do I cry for her future, as they will surely kill her if she stands up to them, or do I applaud her now for her ambition and nerve?

## Chapter Two

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One day, while talking with the village's wise woman, who many out of respect called Grandma, although she was barely fifty-eight years old, but that was considered to be a remarkable age in their village - eight-year-old Uma suggested, "When a pebble rolls by our feet Grandma we have four choices don't we? We can stop it. Kick it. Pick it up. Or simply leave the pebble to lie where it cares to rest."

"And which do you think would be the best choice?" Grandma asked while wondering where her favourite visitor might be heading with her question. Although she was not put out by Uma's unusual topic. Or by any of her many bright questions. Well... she might then smile before explaining, "That is until the child demands to know why some village men do certain things to themselves while they're in the toilet field."

The raising of that topic causes Grandma to shrug and send the child off on a sudden urgent mission. There will be another smile from Grandma as Uma rushes away to do her bidding that will say to any who might be close by and watching, 'That child has to know everything, even when it's not good for her'.

But that day, the question about the pebble seemed innocent enough, as was Grandma's reply which Uma answered easily.

"Oh, the last one, of course, Grandma" the child chuckled. "Because it will leave the pebble alone to be as it wants."

“But what if you tread on it with your bare feet child and it hurts you”, Grandma laughed. “I wonder, might you then kick it away in temper”

“Oh, No Grandma! I would never do that!” Uma replied firmly, but with her trademark smile which can light and lift the sternest of hearts. “I would remove it carefully from the path to spare the pebble and my friends any pain.”

“But in doing that child surely you *will* have changed its destiny.”

Unwilling to be caught up in one of Grandma’s clever traps Uma had her answer ready.

“You are right Grandma. But I believe the pebble will be waiting there for me to do just that. So it and I will be happy that I did. And I promise Grandma, I will make the change a good one.”

Although Uma failed to explain exactly what that change might be, Grandma let her alone, as she knew Uma’s heart and intentions for the Dalit. She simply smiled as she reasoned, the child has her dreams and her stories. She’ll give the pebble a grand adventure for sure or have it turn into something good for us villagers. “Won’t you Uma”, she whispered to the child’s back as she left for home, “and may our God bless you for that.”

## Chapter Three

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**L**eft to themselves Uma's dreams, her heart-held secrets, continued to unfold largely unmolested.

As did her remarkable ability to understand all the creatures inhabiting her village and to whom she introduced herself or visited with regularly - whether they liked it or not. Her natural sense of community and caring grew as well. She was, as many villagers agreed, simply a beautiful little flower growing in this horrid dust bowl who has been sent to lighten our day.

Some might also say, “and to confuse us with her infernal questions”, but always with a smile, just as there were usually answers for Uma. But not about the men’s toilet field habits. But her persistent questions about that aimed at a certain guilty party did earn some chicken eggs. The bribe had started out as one egg - “You can have a fresh egg from my chickens if you go away and stop asking me about... you know.” The man in question said. But Uma sensed the secret was worth more than an egg so she plumped for six and happily settled for five.

The resourceful girl also managed to hatch three of the eggs - don’t ask how... Please! Mama replies in shrieks of laughter whenever a neighbour asks how the child ever did it. Suffice to say, Uma’s method kept her Mama smiling for ages. The other two eggs Mama and Uma shared. Oh, what a luxury that was. Mama concocted an omelette to which she added those special herbs she gathers each morning before the sun fully rises along with a little of the peppers she grows in a tiny plot of soil at the side of the hut to which she also added a smattering of rice. It was a feast indeed.

As for those chickens which Uma hatched literally, and their chicks and their chicks - well... They are happily kicking up dust and chirping and escaping Uma's attempts to herd them together somewhere far off in another part of her story. Where no doubt she'll learn how to catch them. But for now one of Uma's special dreams is demanding attention.

# Chapter Four

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**A**lmost from the very beginning it was obvious to Mama that her child was destined to be a teacher. She caught Uma at three years old laying down with a handful of worms she had dug out with her fingers from the edge of the marsh which encircled most of the village. She placed them on the dusty path in rows and was teaching her class the best way to wriggle. How could she not be a teacher, Mama smiled as she discreetly watched her child at work. Where there was never a crossword when one or other of the worms, as they do, attempted to go their own way.

Where in the way of such things teaching became one of Uma's dreams.

At six years old for one ecstatic glorious day wearing a brand new second-hand dress that was hardly marked, and her dead sister's underpants (slightly too large) she attended the town's school, only for her number one dream to collapse into a ghastly nightmare.

Devastated and physically broken for a long time, Uma continued to learn her letters and read in her village. Nothing would stop her from doing that. She read everything which came her way - discarded newspapers Mama fetched from the open latrines she laboured in, through to labels on old cans and packets. "Everything is knowledge" Uma explained to her Mama. "And I intend to learn all those things the Caste don't want me to. And I promise Mama I will learn them well, so I can help you and the other villagers."

# Chapter Five

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**B**y the time Uma turned nine she was teaching the village children about the creatures in their village and beyond, and also how to read and write.

One evening, shortly after the tall grass had been cut down at the edge of the village and from around the toileting field, which in happy shrieks and grass fights the children had gathered to be used as fodder for the village's only goat, Uma called the children together for their lesson beneath the beautiful teaching tree. And it was, despite the area's impoverished poor soil and the villager's constant need for firewood, as well being surrounded on three sides by rancid marsh, it not only managed to survive but it had grow tall and strong.

Just like we Dalits will do one day, Uma vowed as she watched the sun tint the sky with wonderful dusty shades of apricot, pinks and yellows before slinking away, as if in shame for having presided over yet another hungry, exhausting and terrible day for many of the Dalit villagers.

"Well children, clearing the grass was a job well done," Uma said as they gathered together. "You should be proud of yourselves."

"But you helped as well," one of the children reminded her.

"Yes I did," Uma agreed with her customary smile, "and it pleased me to do that for us. By cutting back the long grass you have prevented the Caste boys in the next village from using it as cover to creep up and spy on us as they do."

And that makes me very happy.”

What she did not need to explain, or care to, was that it will make it harder for the Caste to secretly pick out their next victim to drag off for a beating, or worse. It also meant she felt free to speak her mind without the risk of the Caste overhearing and rushing into the village and beating her for it.

As the day’s light finally turned grey and small fires sparked up to glow like tiny bright blessings in the coming darkness, some of the Dalit parents settled in to listen to Uma teach their children, but on this evening, feeling happy that there was no threat of being overheard by the sneaky Caste boys Uma declared. “I’ve decided there will be no lesson this night my friends. I thought instead you might care to hear about one of my dreams.”

Not a single dissenting voice was heard, which caused Uma’s wonderful smile to sparkle even more than her Mama’s was doing in pride for her daughter.

# Chapter Six

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"**L**ift your eyes to your God children and make a wish." Uma gently encouraged those who sat in a semi-circle before her.

While Uma waited patiently for the children as they raised their eyes skyward to send their heart's wishes to their God some of the parents watching close by smiled. The girl's the same age as many of those sat before her and yet she is so much older in attitude - even older than some of the parents here, a few thought spitefully.

When the children's eyes returned to gaze upon her once more Uma asked kindly, "Are you done, my friends?" Where they each added a smile to their nodded yes, while lightly placing hands upon hearts to show they had stored their wishes there as she has taught them to do.

"Good," she chirped brightly while lighting the night up with her genuinely warm smile. "You don't want to lose your wish now, do you? So keep it safely locked away, because it belongs to you and no other. And now my friends, I wonder, are you ready to hear my wish..., or should I say, my special dream."

"Yes! Yes! Yes!", they chorused happily, almost together in one joyously sweet, but slightly ragged a-cappella moment, while their parents nodded along. They have heard many of Uma's stories and she weaves good ones, but this promised to be even better, because it was one of Uma's secret dreams, and her Mama always said that Uma's dreams were big and strong. The parents just as eager as the children to hear the dream settled quickly as

Uma said quietly and breathily, “OK then, if you’re already, we’ll begin.”

Out of the enwrapping hush, for even the teaching tree had stopped rustling and the little fires close by had settled into gentle respectful glows, as did the glimmering stars above them, her soft lilting voice grew and rose. Before her first sentence was even completed her sweet harmonies were flowing through the air like a magic carpet, lifting the audience’s souls and carrying them off to the world of her dream.

And it was to prove a big dream too.

## Chapter Seven

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"In my dream I was wandering through those hills we see growing in the far distance when I stumbled across a special jewel." Uma started.

"My heart instantly knew it was the largest and most purist gem of its kind."

"Oh my", she sighed. "How that jewel sparkled so gloriously with a magic light that lived in its heart. Then suddenly in my dream, I find myself inside a big palace kneeling before the Indian President and I'm holding the jewel out in my hands. When I raised it towards him the light falling through the windows struck the gem. Causing a rich tapestry of colours to burst from the jewel and dance through the air to play upon the walls and glisten upon the faces and in the hearts of those who had gathered in witness.

I was happy. I wanted those who witnessed it to be awed by the jewel's beauty. I wanted their hearts to be enthralled by its presence. And they were children, believe me. Hundreds were gathered but they hardly made a sound, even their covetous breaths were stilled as I said to the president. "Sir this is for you."

With a secret smile, I watched as a host of emotions flooded his greedy wicked face. He was yearning to own my unique once-in-a-lifetime jewel. But truthfully, it was hard to tell which shone the brightest, my jewel or the greedy possessive light flaring in his piggy eyes.

And even now as I reveal my dream to you I can see his pudgy bejewelled hand twitching excitedly as he reached out to snatch it from little me - yes

children, the little me he says is nothing but a lowly Dalit fit only to be ridiculed, robbed and enslaved at his will - just like the other 350 million of our Dalit family are.

“But hold on Sir! Not yet!” I say sternly and bravely in my dream as I sharply pull my hands away from his. “Firstly, there is a ceremony of giving to be performed.”

In his eager excitement, yellow drawl dribbles sickeningly from his fat overfed mouth as I place the jewel on the ground before my rag-covered knees. Then I pull out a glistening blade and that horrid mouth drops open as his eyes bulge in sheer shock and terror. He had suddenly realised the knife was a magic one, but before he can finish shrieking “STOP HER... STOP HER!” I have cut a large slice out of the gem and in doing, destroyed its value and the purity of its beauty forever.

Oh, how he gnashed and screamed in rage, but before his soldiers could drag me away I rose and explained my purpose loudly for all to hear.

“Sir...” I said as I pointed accusingly at him, "...this jewel represents all that India presently is. With my blessings, you may have it, but first I took care to remove the heart of the stone, the heart of my nation. And I shall name the missing piece, The Dalit after my people. Those your kind - the invaders - unjustly enslaved thousands of years ago and wickedly still do. So, Sir here is my gift and long may you enjoy the incompleteness and the corruption of all that was once beautiful before your ancestors ruthlessly destroyed it.

I then lamented loudly as I placed my hand on my heart - my dream's font.

“Oh, India, my India my heart and home, you have been truly shamed.”

Then I say to those gathered in the palace. “May you all feel as robbed and as

denied and as empty as my kind do.”

Then returning my eyes to the president I say, “And my words Sir are the real gift which I send from my heart for you to keep and to remember for your eternity.”

Uma’s eyes caught by the light of her tiny fire’s glowing embers suddenly seemingly flashed an angry red as she looked down at the children. Already enthralled and heartened by Uma’s telling, gasps rippled along the rows to disappear into an awed silence which in their imaginations could only be freed by Uma’s magic knife.

She was not one to disappoint them.

Into the hushed stillness, Uma coldly for one always so kind and loving and sweet looked up at the stars and declared. “And may his next life be as cruel to him as the one he gifts to us over and over again, every single wicked day.”

That is the end of this tale, but not of her story.