

BOOK CLUB KIT

BERKLEY



DEAR READER,

It's always a scary time when you play mother bird with your book and push it out of the nest, watching as it finally flies out into the world. It was even more so this time around, because even though *Island Witch* is my third novel, it's been the one closest to my heart. Through it, I was able to explore elements that have always enthralled me—from the way exorcisms and demonology were practiced in ways different from the West, to the impact of colonialism and religious moral superiority, and how women's voices struggle to be heard.

It also examines rage—probably more than I initially intended when outlining the story. I wrote *Island Witch* during Sri Lanka's political and economic crisis in 2022. The story clawed itself into existence amidst rolling power cuts where I would pray my laptop battery wouldn't die, a fuel shortage that necessitated me to finally learn to ride a bicycle, and my joining the protests against the government as often as I could.

If this book is a rage-filled read, it's because I was very, very angry when I wrote it.

And yet it's not with anger but rather with an immensely grateful heart that I'm handing over *Island Witch* to you. I'm deeply humbled that you would choose it, and I hope you enjoy reading it as much as I enjoyed writing it.

With much love,
AMANDA

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Amara's ending might not have been happy, but was it satisfying? Do you think that, given everything that happened to her, she could have had a different ending to her story?
2. Amara and her father stay loyal to the traditional cultural practices on the island, whereas Neha and her family adapt to the new ways of the British. Do you think this shift in ideology was only natural given their higher social status? Do you think there were any other factors that motivated this change?
3. The story discusses exorcisms and demons using a traditional Sinhalese belief system. How does this differ from the way these phenomena are depicted in the West? How are they similar?
4. Daphne had always been Amara's tormentor. Why do you think that was? Was Daphne perhaps threatened by Amara on some deeper level, or was she simply just a bully?
5. Amara left her first meeting with Bhagya thinking she'd met a kindred spirit. But this feeling soon dissipated when some of Bhagya's views challenged her own. What do you think was at the root of Amara's change of heart?
6. Amara was quick to blame Leelawathi rather than her own father. What parts of Amara's own experiences do you think impacted her judgment and conditioned her to see things that way?
7. Why do you think that Kumari still kept up communication with Jeevan, even after what happened? Was it love, money, or something else?
8. Why do you think Amara is so drawn to demonology? Is it genuine interest, some sort of inherent talent, or just to be closer to her father?
9. Amara's grandparents appear to want to make amends. They paid for Amara's schooling, and even tried to arrange a marriage proposal. What do you think drove them to do that? Was it love for their daughter, an attempt to save their own reputation, or something else?
10. The older woman with "the sight," Heen Achchi, scares Amara at the beginning of the story. Do you think there was a deeper reason why Amara was afraid of her?