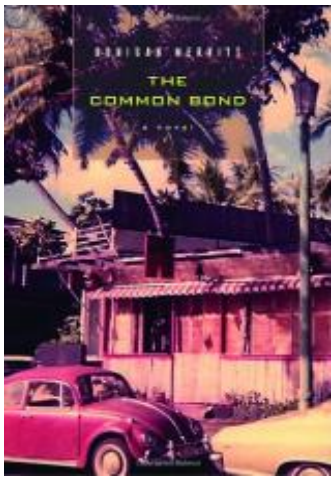
The Common Bond

by Donigan Merritt



About the Book

When Morgan Cary flies home to Hawaii after a decade spent in California, he arrives with a broken heart and an overwhelming sense of guilt surrounding the death of his wife. As he spirals further into his grief, the hope of a deliverance into the future appears through an unexpected friendship with a native Hawaiian family, and forces Morgan to sift through the worst of his memories as he searches for his life in the solace of the sea.

Discussion Guide

1. What kind of connection did Morgan have with Ben Kamakani? How does their friendship begin? With his strong feelings about *haoles*, why do you think Ben hired Morgan? Why did Ben have such a strong influence on Morgan in such a short time?

2. How do the native Hawaiians feel about the *haoles*? What impact do those feelings have on the friendship between Morgan and Tioni? What about fellow fishermen?

3. As Morgan is walking home from the fish auction (page 35) he looks in the windows of homes, envying the families because he presumes they are ?living lives of great depth? while he sees himself ?as skipping over the surface of life like a flat stone hurled across a pond.? How does that imagery reflect Morgan?s life? What is the danger in coveting another person?s life? Does Morgan ever find the contentment and security he longs for?

4. What are the differences in fishing on the Kona side versus the Hilo side of Hawaii? Why did Morgan choose to stay on the Hilo side when he had been a captain for years on the Kona side? Did returning to Hawaii and going back to work as a fisherman help or hinder Morgan in his grief?

5. Tioni was Morgan?s best friend and he also worked for Morgan. How did Morgan?s ?falling? for Victoria betray

Tioni on several different levels? How did each of the characters handle the betrayal? Did Victoria accept any responsibility? Why was Tioni able to forgive Morgan and Victoria?

6. Discuss Morgan and Victoria?s relationship. Do you think love is at the core of their relationship, or lust? How does it change when they move to California? Are Morgan and Victoria ever honest with each other? How do their lies contribute to Victoria?s accidental overdose and Morgan?s guilt?

7. How is Morgan?s relationship with Ana different from his relationship with Victoria? What draws him to Ana? How does Morgan compare Ana to Victoria? What are his feelings for Ana, and does he love her?

8. One reviewer calls Victoria?s story ?a novel within a novel.? Do you agree? How does Merritt?s use of the flashback add to the novel?

9. How did Victoria?s treatment by her mother, her aunt Irene, and the Higgenbottoms affect her development as a young woman? Why was her natural beauty such a burden? Do you think Morgan contributed to Victoria?s problems, or did he keep her from self-destructing earlier? What clues were there early in their relationship that pointed to Victoria?s volatility?

10.. As a child, Victoria valued loyalty and dependability. She was a champion for her ?sister? Alice. What happened that changed their relationship? What effect did that have on Victoria? What kinds of friendships did Victoria have as a teenager?

11. How did Victoria deal with the rape by Pooh Bear? How did it affect her relationship with Morgan? When she finally found Pooh Bear and had the opportunity to kill him, why didn?t she? What held her back from murder? How did she feel after their confrontation?

12. Do you think Victoria committed suicide or died accidentally?

13. How does Morgan?s novel **Decompression** parallel Merritt?s novel **The Common Bond**? Is the ending of Merritt?s novel the beginning of Morgan?s? What is your reaction to the ending?

14. Who is your favorite character? Why? Discuss Merritt?s development of the characters.

Author Bio

Donigan Merritt is a 1981 graduate of the Iowa Writers? Workshop and the author of six previous novels, among them **Possessed by Shadows** (Other Press, 2005), **My Sister?s Keeper**, and **One Easy Piece**. He lives in Washington DC.

Critical Praise

"Merritt goes to the Aloha State for his insightful latest foray into domestic upheaval?Merritt crafts a thorough emotional

examination of a couple who spend their lives side by side while managing to remain unknown to one another."

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