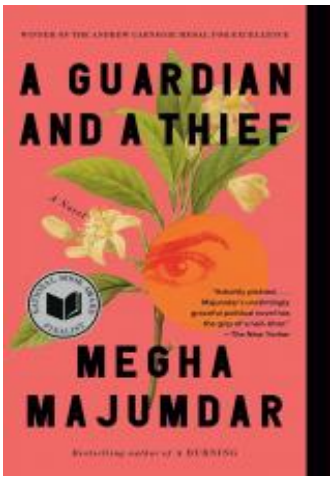
A Guardian and a Thief

by Megha Majumdar



About the Book

Megha Majumdar?s electrifying new novel, following her acclaimed *New York Times* bestseller, A BURNING --- longlisted for the National Book Award --- is set in a near-future Kolkata, India, ravaged by climate change and food scarcity, in which two families seeking to protect their children must battle each other. A piercing and propulsive tour de force.

In a near-future Kolkata beset by flooding and famine, Ma, her two-year-old daughter, and her elderly father are just days from leaving the collapsing city behind to join Ma?s husband in Ann Arbor, Michigan. After procuring long-awaited visas from the consulate, they pack their bags for the flight to America. But in the morning they awaken to discover that Ma?s purse, containing their treasured immigration documents, has been stolen.

Set over the course of one week, A GUARDIAN AND A THIEF tells two stories: the story of Ma?s frantic search for the thief while keeping hunger at bay during a worsening food shortage; and the story of Boomba, the thief, whose desperation to care for his family drives him to commit a series of escalating crimes whose consequences he cannot fathom. With stunning control and command, Megha Majumdar paints a kaleidoscopic portrait of two families, each operating from a place of ferocious love and undefeated hope, each discovering how far they will go to secure their children?s future as they stave off encroaching catastrophe.

A masterful new work from one of the most exciting voices of her generation.

Discussion Guide

1. Megha Majumdar suggests that ?a guardian and a thief lives in each of us.? How do you see this play out in Ma?s and Boomba?s stories? Do you think their actions are more about morality or survival?

2. Kolkata is ravaged by famine, heat and floods. In what ways does the city itself function as a character in the novel, shaping the choices of Ma, Dadu and Boomba?

3. Ma risks everything --- her integrity, her dignity, even her safety --- for the chance to leave for America. What does the novel suggest about the costs and limits of hope?

4. Dadu and Mishti embody opposite ends of the age spectrum. How does each experience and interpret the crisis differently? What does their relationship reveal about resilience across generations?

5. Both Ma and Boomba steal (Ma from the shelter, Boomba from Ma). Does the novel frame one theft as more forgivable than the other? How does it complicate our understanding of justice?

6. Passports and visas become symbols of salvation and survival. What does the book suggest about the arbitrary power of documents in determining who lives securely and who doesn?t?

7. Both families are driven by love: Ma for her daughter, Boomba for his younger brother, Robi. How does Majumdar portray the ways family responsibility can be both life-giving and crushing?

8. From cauliflower to protein paste, food is central to this novel. What roles does food play beyond sustenance? How does hunger shape morality and imagination?

9. Even moments of kindness --- sharing water, feeding a stranger --- are tinged with desperation. Where did you see the strongest moments of compassion in the novel, and what risks did they carry?

10. The narrative recalls earlier famines in Bengal (1770, 1876, 1943). Why do you think Majumdar chose to explicitly reference these historical crises? How does this deepen your reading of the present catastrophe?

11. How does the spectacle of the wedding feast on the floating hexagon island expose the extremes of inequality? Did you see echoes of contemporary real-world disparities?

12. The novel concludes with flights canceled and the dream of America deferred. How did the ending affect you emotionally? Did you find it despairing, realistic or strangely hopeful?

Author Bio

Megha Majumdar is the author of two bestselling novels.

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Her debut novel, A BURNING, was a "Read with Jenna" Book Club pick and longlisted for the National Book Award, among other

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