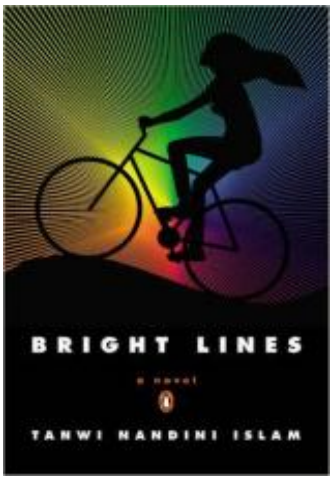
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Bright Lines

by Tanwi Nandini Islam



About the Book

A vibrant debut novel, set in Brooklyn and Bangladesh, follows three young women and one family struggling to make peace with secrets and their past.

For as long as she can remember, Ella has longed to feel at home. Orphaned as a child after her parents? murder, and afflicted with hallucinations at dusk, she?s always felt more at ease in nature than with people. She traveled from Bangladesh to Brooklyn to live with the Saleems: her uncle Anwar, aunt Hashi, and their beautiful daughter, Charu, her complete opposite. One summer, when Ella returns home from college, she discovers Charu?s friend Maya --- an Islamic cleric?s runaway daughter --- asleep in her bedroom.

As the girls have a summer of clandestine adventure and sexual awakenings, Anwar --- owner of a popular botanical apothecary --- has his own secrets, threatening his 30-year marriage. But when tragedy strikes, the Saleems find themselves blamed. To keep his family from unraveling, Anwar takes them on a fated trip to Bangladesh, to reckon with the past, their extended family, and each other.

Discussion Guide

1. BRIGHT LINES tells a very different story of what it?s like to grow up in New York than you would usually encounter in mainstream media. Do you now see the borough in a new light? Did you learn something about Brooklyn or New York that you didn?t know before?

2. What do you think is the cause of Ella?s visions, and are they a gift or a curse? Why doesn?t she seek help earlier?

3. What are your thoughts on Ella?s feelings for Charu? How does their relationship change when Maya enters the picture?

4. Throughout the novel, Anwar finds it difficult to communicate with the women in his life, especially Ella. Why do you think this is? In what ways does he show his love for Ella, Charu and Hashi, and how do they differ from his open love of his best friend Rezwan?

5. As Ella comes to learn things about herself, we discover that her loved ones often know more about her thoughts and desires than she suspects they do. How does their knowledge of Ella help shape the person she becomes? Can you remember a moment when someone showed or told you something about yourself you?d never been able to articulate before?

6. What are Ella, Charu and Maya?s differing relationships to religion? Does Maya change Ella and Charu?s perspective on Islam? How?

7. What is the significance of Rezwan?s head appearing to Ella and Anwar? How does his influence live on in their world?

8. What connections and relationships have Anwar and Hashi made in their Brooklyn community? How does this compare to the sense of belonging Ella and Charu come to find while visiting Bangladesh?

9. Why do you think Anwar felt so compelled to write the letter to Ella? Do you think he was a coward for not telling her everything sooner, or do you think he was justified in keeping his secrets as long as he did?

10. Earlier in the book, Anwar tells Ella: ?Each seed tells this story: Everything that happens is already written (p. 86).? What do you think he meant by this and how is this sentiment evidenced in other moments in BRIGHT LINES?

11. How would you describe the concept of *swadhin* (pp. 204?205)? How would things have been different for Ella if she?d encountered that idea sooner?

12. What are your feelings about the ending of the book? Were you surprised?

Author Bio

Tanwi Nandini Islam is a writer, multimedia artist and founder of Hi Wildflower Botanica, a handcrafted natural perfume and skincare line. A graduate of Vassar College and Brooklyn College?s MFA program, she lives in Brooklyn.

Critical Praise

?A Brooklyn-by-way-of-Bangladesh Royal Tenenbaums. A pot-tinged, PTSD Muslim ?Sesame Street.? With sex. Hallucinations, hijabs and handlebars on the always-busy Atlantic Avenue. The New York sense of place in BRIGHT

LINES rivals the recent memory of Teju Cole?s OPEN CITY.?

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