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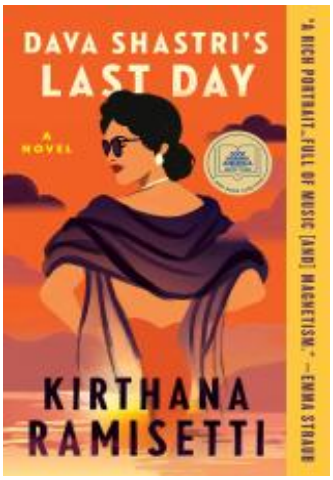
Dava Shastri's Last Day

by Kirthana Ramisetti



About the Book

In this thought-provoking and entertaining debut novel about a multicultural family, a dying billionaire matriarch leaks news of her death early so she can examine her legacy --- a decision that horrifies her children and inadvertently exposes secrets she has spent a lifetime keeping.

Dava Shastri, one of the world's wealthiest women, has always lived with her sterling reputation in mind. A brain cancer diagnosis at the age of 70, however, changes everything, and Dava decides to take her death --- like all matters of her life --- into her own hands.

Summoning her four adult children to her private island, she discloses shocking news: in addition to having a terminal illness, she has arranged for the news of her death to break early, so she can read her obituaries.

As someone who dedicated her life to the arts and the empowerment of women, Dava expects to read articles lauding her philanthropic work. Instead, her "death" reveals two devastating secrets, truths she thought she had buried forever.

And now the whole world knows, including her children.

In the time she has left, Dava must come to terms with the decisions that have led to this moment --- and make peace with those closest to her before it's too late.

Compassionately written and chock-full of humor and heart, this powerful novel examines public versus private legacy, the complexities of love, and the never-ending joys --- and frustrations --- of family.

Discussion Guide

1. The mission of the Dava Shastri Foundation is to support artists and empower women. If you had the funding and resources to build your own foundation, which cause would you champion?

2. Beatrix Island is named after the beloved children?s author Beatrix Potter, who created the iconic character Peter Rabbit. Beatrix Potter is also quoted at the start of chapter 2: ?I hold that a strongly marked personality can influence descendants for generations.? Why do you think the author chose to call attention to this particular author? In your own life, is there a story you read growing up that continues to resonate with you as an adult?

3. When Dava?s children arrive at Beatrix Island, they are instructed to leave their computers and phones in a lockbox. Have you ever gone on a trip without electronic devices or access to the internet? Did you find the experience freeing or confining? Why?

4. Dava?s compound, while palatial, is also described as feeling ?hollow,? and her design specifications as ?arbitrary and downright odd.? What does the way the house is described tell you about Dava?s personality and the values she holds most dear?

5. Dava wanted to make sure that her life --- and her death --- would have a genuine impact on the world. How important do you believe it is to leave a noticeable mark on the world? Is fame or public recognition something you?ve ever aspired to achieve?

6. The author takes the time to explore the backstories and viewpoints of each of Dava?s children. How did this affect your impressions of --- and sympathies toward --- the problems and prejudices facing Dava?s family?

7. Dava reconnects with Chaitanya when she is an adult but doesn?t tell her that she is her biological mother. Dava?s decision is a difficult one, but she is resolute in her desire not to let Chaitanya fully know her and her other children. Why do you think Dava did this? And how would you feel if you were in Chaitanya?s position, only finding out about Dava?s connection to her after her death?

8. In DAVA SHASTRI'S LAST DAY, references are made to climate change, technology and songs that Dava gravitated toward throughout her life. How did these mentions shape your understanding of the novel?s time, setting and place?

9. When Dava starts reading the headlines surrounding her death, she is disappointed to find that journalists are focusing more on her personal life than her professional achievements. Do you believe the personal and professional should be tied together or evaluated separately? Why?

10. As a woman, Dava is passionate and ambitious and driven and brilliant. She is also, at times, ruthless, selfish, calculating and secretive. How did the character of Dava make you feel, in all her complexity? Did you like Dava, or did you find her deeply flawed? Did her ?flaws? endear her toward you even more?

11. Rev tells Sandi that Dava asks a lot of her children, and he says so with exasperation and resentment. Parents often ask a lot of their children. Did you think Dava?s expectations for Rev, Kali, Arvie and Sita were reasonable or unreasonable? Why? What did you think of Dava?s insistence that each child play a part in her foundation?

12. After Dava receives her diagnosis, she elects to forgo any kind of treatment or procedure that would prolong her life because she believes the quality of her life would be greatly diminished. How did this decision make you feel? If you had been in Dava?s position, would you have made the same call, or would you have made a different one?

13. Arvid and Dava share a beautiful connection through music. What do you think of music?s ability to invoke memories or bring people together? What role does music play in your life? Do you share a special song with someone?

14. In chapter 8, Dava tells Kali she needs to break up with her significant others. What did you think of Dava?s interference here? If you knew your child was romantically involved with individuals who could hurt them in some way, would you intercede? Or would you let your child make their own mistakes?

15. Rev and Dava find ?free happiness? with one another by singing together. What?s something you do for yourself, or with friends and family, that brings you free happiness?

16. Dava asks her personal physician to end her life medically, a practice that is gaining legal traction for patients with terminal illnesses in some parts of the world. What do you think of society?s growing acceptance of individuals leaving the world on their own terms? How did this scene affect you emotionally and intellectually?

17. At its core, DAVA SHASTRI'S LAST DAY is a book about love and family. What did you think of the author?s portrayal of sibling dynamics in the novel? What about the dynamics between Dava and her children? Did the author?s descriptions complement or contradict the way you interact with your own family?

18. After Dava?s death, we are shown glimpses of her children?s lives several years into the future. How do these scenes demonstrate how they were affected by their mother?s passing and the events at Beatrix Island?

19. How did you feel when you read Dava?s letter to Chaitanya in the final chapter?

Author Bio

Kirthana Ramisetti is the author of THE OTHER LATA, ADVIKA AND OTHER HOLLYWOOD WIVES, and DAVA SHASTRI'S LAST DAY, a "Good Morning America" Book Club selection optioned by Max. Her novels have received acclaim from *TIME*, *Cosmopolitan*, *The Washington Post*, Buzzfeed, The Associated Press and more. Besides co-founding the newsletter Ministry of Pop Culture, her writing has appeared in many publications, including *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Atlantic*, *Elle* and *Salon*. She lives in New York City.

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