

"CINEMATIC AND INTIMATE...AN INTRICATE STORY ABOUT FAMILY AND LOVE." —Devi S. Laskar, author of *The Atlas of Reds and Blues*

DAVA SHASTRI'S
A NOVEL
LAST DAY

**KIRITHANA
RAMISETTI**

BOOK CLUB KIT



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 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?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

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?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

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?

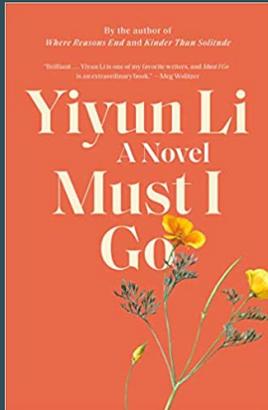
18. After Dava’s death, we are shown glimpses of her children’s lives several years into the future. How do these scenes demonstrate how they were affected by their mother’s passing and the events at Beatrix Island?

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



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Ramiseti

SHASTRI-PERSSON READING RECOMMENDATIONS

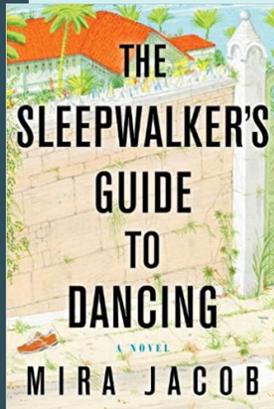
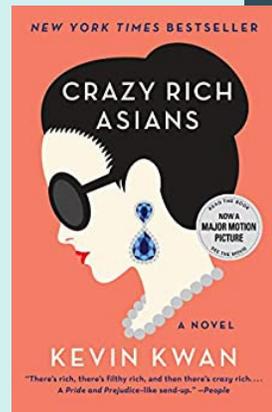


***Must I Go* by Yiyun Li - Dava**

Just like Dava, Lilia Imbody is an aging matriarch looking back on the grand sweep of her life, her romantic relationships and her connection to her children. Sharp and caustic, she doesn't brook fools or foolish behavior. Lilia and Dava would have been good friends, or at least good sparring partners.

***Crazy Rich Asians* by Kevin Kwan - Arvie**

Arvie loves the luxurious lifestyle his mother's wealth affords, but resents that Dava expects him to be involved in her philanthropic foundation. So he would enjoy reading about the ultra-rich and glamorous lifestyles depicted in this novel, and would likely see himself in Nick Young, the scion of a family fortune who finds himself torn between familial obligations and his own desires.



***The Sleepwalker's Guide to Dancing* by Mira Jacob - Sita**

Sita is always called upon to be the responsible one among her siblings. So she would find common ground with Amina Eapen, a daughter of Indian immigrants who feels she has to hold her family together when her father starts acting mysteriously and her mother needs her help. The crisis at home leads Amina to revisit her bonds with her parents as well as make crucial decisions about her future.

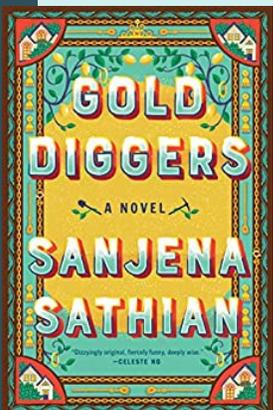
***All My Mother's Lovers* by Ilana Masad - Kali**

Kali longs to understand who her mother is beyond the strong, formidable presence she projects to her family and the world. So she would relate to the story of Maggie Krause, who decides to track down all the men her mother was illicitly involved with in order to learn her mother's true identity.



***Gold Diggers* by Sanjana Sathian - Rev**

As the youngest sibling, Rev struggles with having no direction in his life, so he would definitely relate to Neil Narayan. Floundering at home and at school, Neil undertakes a magical solution to help him finally succeed and realize his ambitions, with major consequences.





1. Academy Fight Song by Mission of Burma
2. Once in a Lifetime by Talking Heads
3. We Got the Beat by The Go-Go's
4. Cannonball by The Breeders
5. Happy House by Siouxsie and the Banshees
6. You Are Everything by R.E.M.
7. Thirteen by Big Star
8. Norwegian Wood by The Beatles
9. A Design for Life by Manic Street Preachers
10. Favorite Thing by The Replacements
11. Sheela-Na-Gig by PJ Harvey
12. Sunken Treasure by Wilco

Dava's Favorite Albums



The Beauty and the Beat, The Go-Go's

Let It Be, The Replacements

Dry, PJ Harvey

Deserter's Songs, Mercury Rev



AVVA'S RASAM RECIPE

This warm, comforting dish is a South Indian staple requested by Dava in Chapter 14. Test it out yourself or make it for your whole book club to take your discussion to the next level!

INGREDIENTS

- 2 medium tomatoes, diced into small pieces
- 6 garlic pods
- 2 red chilis
- 2 tsps cumin
- 2 tsps black pepper
- 2 tsps lime juice
- 1 tsp ghee
- 1 tsp salt
- several sprigs of coriander, chopped
- 5 curry leaves

DIRECTIONS

1. Add tomatoes to 4 cups of water and boil until they soften
2. Mix in the red chilies, garlic, cumin powder, and black pepper
3. Add lime juice, and stir together
4. Add ghee, salt and black pepper, also stir
5. Add coriander and curry leaves
6. Place on medium heat on the stovetop until hot
7. Enjoy!

