

Dear reader,

The book you hold in your hands is not just a novel; it is a love letter to Sri Lanka, my country of birth. A country you may only hear of when there is a natural disaster or a suicide bombing; a country that is as beautiful as it is flawed and whose complexities are lost in the perfunctory ordering of newsprint.

It is also a gift to my adopted country, America. In the aftermath of the tsunami, I traveled and spoke about Sri Lanka, translating its ecumenical embrace of four major religious traditions, its social practices, its fractured politics for my fellow Americans. I was moved by the interest that people showed in an island about the size of Maine, a place many had never heard of and most would never see. That desire that many Americans have, to learn something about far-flung places, is what makes international fiction relevant and necessary, a tradition to which I wished to contribute with my first novel, *A Disobedient Girl*.

I named and modeled the girl in this story after the servant who kept me company as a child when I visited my grandmother's house, far outside the city of Colombo, where I grew up. That Latha, so much like me in looks and in temperament, and so unlike me in circumstance, was my alter-ego. She was poor, and I was not, but we were both girl-children, chaffing at the expectations that surrounded us, yearning to be not merely successful but brilliant, not simply assets but forces. It is therefore also a story for my three young American daughters, so they may understand that no matter where they were born, or what they own, to be a woman, to be human, these things are always the same.

I hope when you finish *A Disobedient Girl* you will feel like you have discovered a different country than the one you may have caught on the news.

Ru Freeman