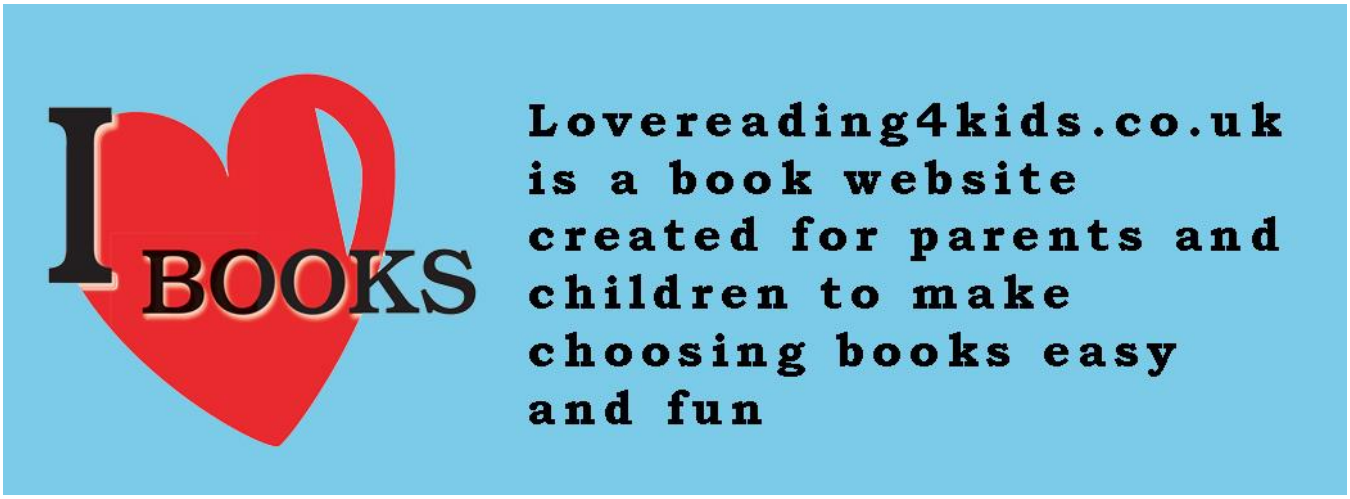



Opening extract from

# The Island at the End of Everything

Written by

**Kiran Millwood-Hargrave**

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# the Island at the End of Everything

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*For my husband*

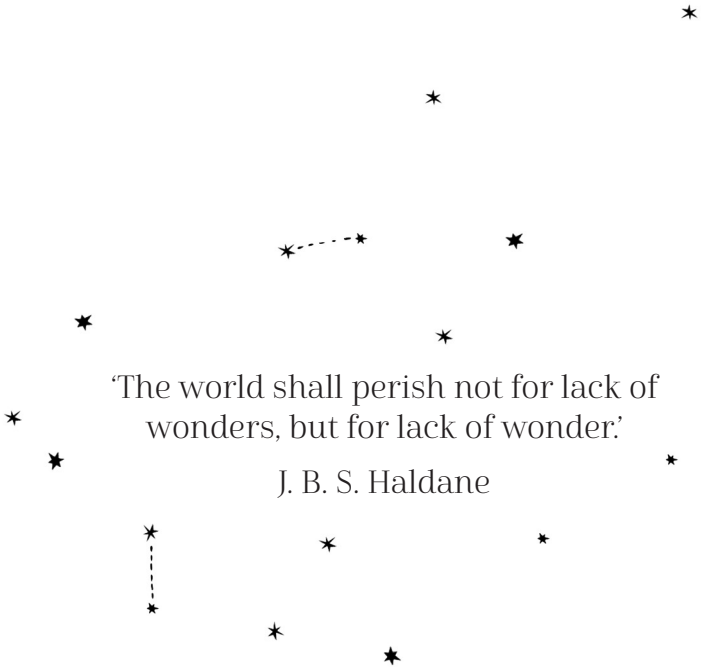




Also by Kiran Millwood Hargrave

*The Girl of Ink & Stars*



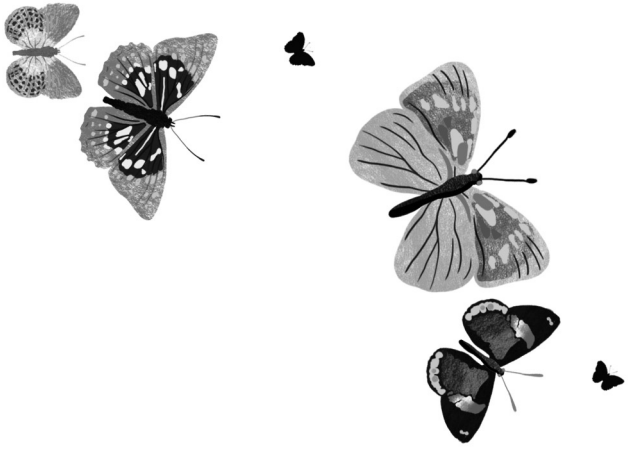


‘The world shall perish not for lack of wonders, but for lack of wonder.’

J. B. S. Haldane

# GLOSSARY

| | |
|---|---|
| *Nanay* | Mother |
| *Ama* | Father |
| *Lolo* | Grandfather |
| *Gumamela* | Hibiscus, a kind of flower common in the Philippines |
| *Tadhana* | Fate |
| *Takipsilim* | Twilight |
| *Habilin* | Something given to someone for safekeeping |
| *Lihim* | Secret |
| *Diwata* | Guardian spirits, usually of nature |
| *Pitaya* | Dragon fruit |
| *Pahimakas* | Last farewell |





# CULION ISLAND, THE PHILIPPINES 1906

There are some places you would not want to go.

Even if I told you that we have oceans clear and blue as summer skies, filled with sea turtles and dolphins, or forest-covered hills lush with birds that call through air thick with warmth. Even if you knew how beautiful the quiet is here, clean and fresh as a glass bell ringing. But nobody comes here because they want to.

My *nanay* told me this is how they brought her, but says it is always the same, no matter who you are or where you come from.

From your house you travel on horse or by foot, then on a boat. The men who row it cover their noses and mouths with cloths stuffed with herbs so they don't have to share your breath. They will not help you on to the boat although your head aches and two weeks ago your legs began to hurt, then to numb. Maybe you stumble towards them, and they duck. They'd rather you rolled over their backs and into the sea than touch you. You sit and clutch your bundle of things from home, what you saved before it was burned. Clothes, a doll, some books, letters from your mother.

Somehow, it is always dusk when you approach.

The island changes from a dark dot to a green heaven on the horizon. High on a cross-topped cliff that slopes towards the sea is a field of white flowers, looping strangely. It is not until you are closer that you see it forms the shape of an eagle, and it is not until you are very close that you see it is made of stones. This is when your heart hardens in your chest, like

petals turning to pebbles. Nanay says the white eagle's meaning is known across all the surrounding islands, even all the places outside our sea. It means: *stay away. Do not come here unless you have no choice.*

The day is dropping to dark as you come into the harbour. When you step from the boat, the stars are setting out their little lights. Someone will be there to welcome you. They understand.

The men who brought you leave straight away, though they are tired. They have not spoken to you in the days or hours you spent with them. The splash of oars fades to the sound of waves lapping the beach. They will burn the boat when they get back, as they did your house.

You look at the person who greeted you. You are changed now. Like flowers into stones, day into night. You will always be heavier, darkened, marked. Touched.

Nanay says that in the places outside, they have many names for our home. The island of the living dead. The island of no return. The island at the end of everything.

You are on Culion, where the oceans are blue and clear as summer skies. Culion, where sea turtles dig the beaches and the trees brim with fruit.

Culion, island of lepers. Welcome home.