

A Disappearance in Fiji by Nilima Rao

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By: Nilima Rao

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A charming and atmospheric debut mystery featuring a 25-year-old Indian police sergeant investigating a missing persons case in colonial Fiji 1914, Fiji: Akal Singh, 25, would rather be anywhere but this tropical paradise—or, as he calls it, “this godforsaken island.” After a promising start to his police career in Hong Kong, Akal has been sent to Fiji as punishment for a humiliating professional mistake. Lonely and grumpy, Akal plods through his work and dreams of getting back to Hong Kong or his native India. When an indentured Indian woman goes missing from a sugarcane plantation and Fiji’s newspapers scream “kidnapping,” the inspector-general reluctantly assigns Akal the case. Akal, eager to achieve redemption, agrees—but soon finds himself far more invested than he could have expected. Now not only is he investigating a disappearance, but also confronting the brutal realities of the indentured workers’ existence and the racism of the British colonizers in Fiji—along with his own thorny notions of personhood and caste. Early interrogations of the white plantation owners, Indian indentured laborers, and native Fijians yield only one conclusion: there is far more to this case than meets the eye. Nilima Rao’s sparkling debut mystery offers an unflinching look at the evils of colonialism, even as it brims with wit, vibrant characters, and fascinating historical detail.

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