

The background of the entire page is a photograph of a serene night scene. A calm body of water, likely a lake, occupies the lower half of the frame. On the right side, a dense forest of trees, including some weeping willows, grows on a shoreline. The sky above is a deep, dark blue, filled with numerous small, bright stars. The overall mood is peaceful and contemplative.

# Under the Stars

BEATRIZ WILLIAMS

*Book Club Kit*

# Author's Letter

For a history native like me, the past is always present. This is especially true when you live in New England, where history appears around every corner, and your neighbors bear the names of ancestors who lived here hundreds of years ago.

In *Under the Stars*, I wanted to explore that connection between past and present: not just the infinite, invisible ways that the choices made and the secrets kept by earlier generations impact our lives, but the essential humanity of them—how they confronted the same dilemmas, the same painful and complicated truths of human nature as we do today. How they are us, only before we came to be.

I hope that as you read three narratives that weave through this book—Providence's story, Meredith's story, Audrey's story—you'll find all the ways they intersect, like a legacy passed down from parent to child, as each woman searches for her place in the world and the people to whom she belongs. While Winthrop Island is a fictional setting, it's inspired by a real-life location; Fishers Island off the southeastern coast of Connecticut is a place with a deep sense of history and belonging, and the ideal refuge to bring my flawed and sometimes deeply wounded characters to make those journeys of discovery and redemption and love.

And of course, I hope you'll discover a little more about an almost-forgotten episode in America's past, in which a heroic captain and a brave shipload of passengers and crew faced down a terrifying night and day and night in the jaws of a legendary New England nor'easter.

Happy reading!

*Beatriz*

*P.S. If the spell of this world holds you as fast as it holds me, I hope you'll read my other Winthrop Island novels and immerse yourself in the stories of some of the supporting characters in *Under the Stars*, and the parents and grandparents who shaped them.*

# Discussion Questions

1. The novel opens with a death, which apparently involves Audrey and Meredith. Did that plotline resolve the way you expected? Did it hook you immediately?
2. The sea is a looming character of its own in this novel. How did you interpret each woman's relationship with the island and the water around it?
3. Guilt and personal responsibility are common themes throughout the narrative, especially for Providence and Meredith. How did the various characters feel about their power to change the course of their own lives, and the decisions they made?
4. Audrey quotes Queen Elizabeth II when she says, "Grief is the price we pay for love." How do you think that relates to each woman's journey in the novel? Does that phrase resonate with you?
5. If you could assign the concept of "doubt" to one character—Providence, Meredith, or Audrey—who would it be, and why?
6. Why do you think the novel is called "Under the Stars"? Which of the three women's journeys do you think that theme develops most powerfully the most?
7. All three women make decisions out of desperation at certain times. Do you think those decisions, and their outcomes, were inevitable? How much control do we have over our own destiny?
8. Secrets play an important role of all three women's lives, but which reveal was most shocking for you? What is your understanding behind each woman's decision to keep the secrets she did? Do you think any of them owed their secrets to the people in their lives?
9. Who do you think was the rightful owner of the paintings found at the Mohegan Inn?
10. In your opinion, which love story was the most impactful in this novel? Who did you root for? Was there anyone you didn't root for?

# Audrey's Shepherd's Pie

## INGREDIENTS

- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 1 large onion, finely chopped
- 2–3 medium carrots, finely chopped
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 lb. ground lamb (or beef for Cottage Pie)
- 2 tablespoons tomato paste
- 1 cup beef broth
- 1 cup frozen peas
- 1 cup frozen corn
- 2 tablespoons Worcestershire sauce
- Salt and pepper to taste
- 4 cups mashed potatoes (prepared with butter and milk)
- 1/2 cup shredded cheddar cheese (optional)

## INSTRUCTIONS

1. Preheat your oven to 400°F (200°C). Heat the olive oil in a large skillet over medium heat. Add the onion and carrots, and cook until they start to soften, about 5 minutes. Add the garlic and cook for another minute.
2. Add the ground lamb and cook until browned, breaking it up with a spoon as it cooks. Stir in the tomato paste and cook for another 2 minutes. Pour in the beef broth, and add the peas, corn, and Worcestershire sauce. Season with salt and pepper.
3. Let the mixture simmer for about 10 minutes, until the sauce has thickened. Transfer the meat mixture to a baking dish and spread it out evenly. Spread the mashed potatoes over the meat mixture, smoothing it out with a spoon or spatula.
4. If using, sprinkle the shredded cheddar cheese on top of the mashed potatoes. Bake in the preheated oven for 20–25 minutes, until the top is golden and the filling is bubbling.
5. Let it cool for a few minutes before serving.
6. Enjoy!