



The Island

By Victoria Hislop
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Introduction

The Petrakis family lives in Plaka, a small coastal village in Greece. Just off its coast is a tiny island called Spinalonga, home to a former leper colony, which haunts the four generations of women we meet in *The Island*. They include Eleni, who is ripped from her husband and two young daughters and sent to Spinalonga in 1939; Alexis, Eleni's great-granddaughter who visits Greece today to unlock her family's past; and Eleni's two daughters, Maria and Anna, who are as different as fire and ice and whose story is at the heart of *The Island*. In this enchanting novel their lives and loves are uncovered against the backdrop of World War II, and leprosy's touch on their family unravels the secrets they've desperately tried to keep.

Questions for Discussion

1. How does the island of Spinalonga compare to its nearest neighbor, Plaka, in terms of natural resources and amenities?
2. What enables Eleni Petrakis to endure the separation from her family that she faces as an exile on Spinalonga?
3. How is life with leprosy portrayed in *The Island*? To what extent does it differ from any prior knowledge about the disease that you may have had?
4. How would you compare Anna and Maria's temperaments as young children, and how do their personalities affect their relationship as adults?
5. How does Anna's initial encounter with her husband's cousin, Manoli Vandoulakis, anticipate the nature of their extramarital relationship?
6. In what ways does Fortini Davaras serve as the character who links past, present, and future in the story that unfolds in *The Island*?
7. How would you characterize Maria's feelings for Dr. Kyritsis? Why is the nature of their relationship something that must be kept secret from the other residents of Spinalonga?
8. Why is Ed resistant to Alexis's need to know more about her family's past, and why does learning the truth about her mother's childhood help Alexis to make decisions regarding her relationship with Ed?
9. Why does Alexis's journey to Plaka enable Sofia to reveal aspects of her past that she had previously kept shrouded in secrecy?
10. How does leprosy connect with secrecy in the Petrakis family, and how does illness serve as a larger metaphor for the characters in *The Island*?

About the Author

Victoria Hislop writes travel features for *The Sunday Telegraph* and *The Mail on Sunday*, along with celebrity profiles for *Woman & Home*. She lives in Kent, England, with her husband and their two children.