



Beloved

Laine Cunningham

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SHORTLISTED FOR THE WILLIAM FAULKNER AWARD

Neil Gaiman's *American Gods* meets China Mieville's *Kraken* in a haunting and atmospheric tale that pits an FBI profiler against monsters ancient and modern.

When FBI agent Priya Conlin-Kumar tracks two different serial killers hunting in the same city, she begins to see visions of a demon king. After one of the killers falls, she hones in on the seemingly inhuman predator who continues slaughtering at whim. The closer she gets, the more intense their battle becomes until it touches the law enforcement officers--female and male--assisting with the case.

As if called forth by powers too ancient to deny, the visions enter the material world. Inexplicable events soon make it clear that the gods and demons of mythology are moving through the city. Supernatural beings step into the battle between these two mortals, lending their immortal energies to a showdown between good and evil. Priya must access the dark, sensual power of the goddess Kali in order to face the demonic superpredator on his own terms.

Showcasing the urban surrealism that marks weird fiction authors and the New Weird category, *Beloved* blends the shadows of H. P. Lovecraft with the literary sensibilities of Ursula Le Guin in a story that sparks fury and tears through suspense, sex, horror, and a spare prose style.

Beloved Details

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Author : Laine Cunningham

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From Reader Review Beloved for online ebook

Scott says

If you are a fan of police dramas you will enjoy this book. It's got murder, intrigue, and... Hinduism. That's right folks, I said it, Hinduism. FBI Special Agent Priya Conlin-Kumar is the product of rape and the daughter of an Indian business man. Growing up surrounded by both Christianity and Hinduism she never would have thought that her Hindu upbringing would help in her career in law-enforcement. Boy was she wrong.

We begin our story with the grisly murder of Margo Teigman. A 19 year old coed with a big heart. Her murderer, Quinn Lawrence, a well-known furniture craftsman who is loved by many. When Priya is relocated to a small town in West Virginia to investigate this murder, Lawrence fixates on her and his crimes begin to follow rituals familiar to Priya. Her connection to the Dark Goddess Kali is what helps her to investigate and solve crimes, and it will help her with this one. This story will stay with you long after you finish it. Add it to your must read list today.

Emily says

"Beloved" is a beautifully written psychological crime mystery. The blending of some Hindu mythology and goddess belief (such as Kali, Shiva & the demon Ravana) has made the story an interesting and entertaining good read. However, the novel contains some very graphic description of violence and sexual scenes.

FBI agent Priya Conlin-Kumar, who is of Hindu-American heritage, is very intelligent and good at criminal profiling. She has been assigned to Wheeling, West Virginia to investigate two serial killers of different MO (modus operandi). As she is hunting down the seemingly immortal killer Quinn Lawrence, she has to be in his criminal mind state and to think like him.

As the investigation goes on, Priya often sees the visions of the demon king Ravana as well as the wise and powerful Kali and Shiva in the physical world. She takes that as the guidance and strength to help her to take down Quinn.

"Priya" means "Beloved" in Indian.

Yvonne says

OMG, couldn't put this down, I was totally captivated. But, be warned, there is a lot of VERY disturbing stuff in here, in fact I read a lot and I don't think I'll ever be able to verbalize some of the things, especially when you start thinking that this stuff actually goes on.

Angel Leya says

First off, this is not a normal read for me. I'm expanding my experiences, though, and I've heard good things

about this author.

I have to admit, I found the first part of the book extremely difficult to read. Like, I had to take a week off to get over it, and even then, I had to skim over most of the sections involving Cole. He's the serial rapist, and to be honest, the anger and brokenness of this character was a little too much for me to handle.

Once past that, I found Priya's character to be strong, beautiful, and compelling, and her relationship with Randal is kind of epic.

There was also a beauty to the way Lawrence, the serial killer, was portrayed. Despite his heinous crimes, something about the way they were described almost drew you into his delusions.

I think the author struck the perfect balance of beauty and evil, and the way Hinduism weaves throughout the story brings a touch of magic that is easy enough to follow along with, even for someone as uneducated in the religion as I am.

There is a lot of sexual content, some good and some repulsive, so if that's not your thing, I recommend you stay clear, but if you can handle all that, then I think it's worth the read.

I received a free copy of this book for review.

Jennifer (JC-S) says

'Ancient warriors knew that forgetting the conflict the night before a battle was best.'

Priya Conlin-Kumar, a South-Asian American FBI agent, has just been reassigned to Wheeling, West Virginia. Her assignment will be to investigate potential money laundering: important, but probably not very exciting. But, just as Priya is about to take up her posting, two bodies are found, and the FBI is asked to investigate whether Wheeling has a serial killer. Priya is despatched to investigate.

'It was never a matter of if they would kill again. The only question was when.'

A number of bodies are recovered. There are sufficient differences between some of the cases for Priya to question whether two murderers are operating. Not all of the local police are happy with Priya's involvement, which creates some tension between the various people involved and has the potential to slow down the investigation.

Priya is a very interesting character, her tragic backstory is important, as is her Hindu heritage. The title 'He Drinks Poison' is from The Ramayana which itself is part of the backdrop for the novel. Priya is a worshipper of Kali, and the visions she experiences from The Ramayana become more important when it becomes clear that one of the serial killers is fixated on her.

There is plenty of action in this novel, and some very explicit, graphic descriptions of violence. Who are the serial killers, and what why do they kill? Will Priya work though the clues the killer is sending her before others are killed? Can she find happiness?

I found it difficult to put this novel down. Early on we find who the serial killers are, and the motivation for one is comparatively straightforward. But the second, more organised serial killer challenges Priya on a number of different levels.

If you like deep, dark stories with a number of twists and turns, and you can stomach explicit and graphic descriptions of violence, you may well enjoy this novel. The fight between good and evil – depicted in part using Hindu mythology – adds an extra, interesting dimension to this story.

Note: I was offered, and accepted, an electronic copy of this novel for review purposes.

Jennifer Cameron-Smith

Rhonda says

A really good psychological crime story with an interesting link to Hindu symbolism and ritual. It was a very interesting and unique read, but contained quite a few very graphic and disturbing scenes not for the faint of heart. But if you can stomach the graphic nature and descriptions contained, and enjoy an edgy serial killer crime story then this is a book for you!

Tj Lawson says

"He Drinks Poison" is an incredibly interesting, well-written psychological thriller. I recommend this book to anyone who enjoys the genre, this book is a great read.

A story is told of Quinn Lawrence, a horrific murder/rapist terrorizing the West Virginia Northern Panhandle region. The book begins with him bestowing his "gift" upon 19 year old Margo.

Priya Conlin-Kumar is an FBI agent who works violent crimes. She was born of a violent gang rape in India, and has dedicated her life to stop violent rapists.

Cole Bennett is a completely different kind of cold-hearted killer, and he happens to be hunting the same area in West Virginia.

Priya must convince the local police that there are 2 separate killers, because they believe it is all being done by one person. If only one person is arrested for all the murders, then a killer will walk away free.

Laine Cunningham has a great skill, her ability to write passages that make you able to easily picture the situation. The book is fast paced and climactic.

Robin Perron says

Rape, murder, Hinduism, intrigue. All of these things and more can be found in Laine Cunningham's He Drinks Poison. A child born of rape, FBI Special Agent Priya Conlin-Kumar is anything but your average woman. Devoting her life to fighting the bad guy and protecting victims of violence, Priya will do anything to counter her violent beginnings.

He Drinks Poison is a captivating thriller that takes place in a small town in West Virginia where the lives of two serial killers collide. Cole Bennet and Quinn Lawrence are 2 very different breeds of evil, and when their murderous paths cross, the FBI takes notice. We begin the story with the grisly murder of a young girl. This murder gives a glimpse into Lawrence's mentality.

When Lawrence's world collides with Priya's our journey gets interesting. If you are a fan of psychological thrillers or love Law and Order or NCIS you will thoroughly enjoy this book.

M.J. Webb says

I've been on holiday, but I was stuck in a caravan for three days reading this book!

What an excellent read it was too. A fast-paced, intriguing, exciting, disturbing psychological crime thriller which is in the James Patterson mould, but with an extra adult twist in the language used at times as well as the nature of crimes committed.

Our hero is a female FBI agent with more than her fair share of baggage. The product of a violent gang rape, Priya must battle her own demons as well as the local law enforcement prejudice/inexpertise to track down and apprehend not one but two very different serial killers. This she does with the help of a local sheriff who adds a love interest to this multidimensional novel.

The story is filled with twists and turns and the suspense is palpable. It is very well done. Laine Cunningham's style pulls no punches however. At times her narrative is brutal, shocking, but that all adds to the feel of this gritty tale and in a curious sort of way the language was not out of place at all. As you read on you can't help but identify and empathise with Priya and the other characters. You loathe some, and root for/love others. If you like crime thrillers, do yourself a favour and give this a try, for all in all this is a very entertaining read. Be warned, it's for adults only though.

I will certainly be reading more from this supremely talented author.

Matthias Ender says

It's a thriller that keeps going fast and doesn't let up. It's got a strong local setting (I love it when places I never knew - or thought I wanted to know - snowed-in West Virginia anyone? - come alive). And I love it when the personal history and the cultural background of the characters become the clay that makes them three-dimensional. Many facets of Indian society, religion and metaphysics form both the protagonist and drive the story along. Mind-blowing, mind-expanding, powerful. Good to read about a strong woman, too!

Bill says

Laine Cunningham is an outstanding writer. He Drinks Poison is proof of this. It is however a very violent disturbing thriller and not recommended for those who can't tolerate this type of writing. If you could handle Girl with the Dragon Tattoo, then you will be able to handle this. The story is filled with constant action involving the protagonist, FBI agent Priya Conlin-Kumar and a couple serial killers. The main serial killer is much smarter and sophisticated than the other and is the main emphasis of the story. We also need to throw in the Deputy Sheriff, love interest, and we have a tale that moves at an incredible pace and will keep you in suspense from start to finish.

Lola Fow says

He Drinks Poison is a terrible title for an incredibly well written novel. The title alludes to a tale from Hindu mythology, but it is impossible to know that without reading the book first, and without that knowledge it seems generic, belying the complexity of the novel. That said, this is a crime thriller with a literary twist. Centering on a female FBI agent who tracks serial killer, Priya Conlin-Kumar is a brand new kind of agent,

one we've never seen before. The daughter of an inter-racial and cultural marriage, she has grown up both American and immersed in the Hindu culture of her father's homeland. She is however unsure of her actually paternal biology as she was the product of rape, which has driven her to her profession, but which has also made her both strong and uncertain in the world. The depth of characterization is one of the great strengths of the novel; Cunningham is interested in how people are formed and what creates their behaviors, so she generates both detailed heroes and villains. She is also interested in how the examination of certain subjects then affects (and perhaps infects) the examiners (hence the title). That is worth thinking about.

Conlin-Kumar arrives in a small town where a serial killer appears to be operating, only to realize soon into her investigation that there are actually two at work, even if the local police force don't want to believe her. The killers' eyes soon turn to her, but nothing is as easy as this turning into a cat and mouse game. Instead Conlin-Kumar has visions from one of the great Hindu mythological epics, which begin to resonate with the killings and her own state of being and everything begins to meld together. Drawing both strength and primal fire from the Hindu deities, Conlin-Kumar begins to transform, but so do serial killers, upping the ante in every way.

It's exciting stuff, but it's also sadistic and gruesome. A lot of people love this kind of sex-crime based genre, and if you do, you'll really enjoy this book, but if the exploitation of women gets to you, you will find this book fairly unpleasant. I'm always unsure where the line is with this genre; is it actually just perpetrating more violence? In the end does this book end up doing what the title is alluding to?

Grady says

'In ignorance he drinks poison, in arrogance he refuses the antidote.'

The title of this review is from *The Ramayana*, the obvious source of the title of this latest book by the gifted North Carolina author Laine Cunningham, and indicates the rather extraordinary novel theme of a work that is likely to become the recipient of many awards (it has already been Short-listed in the Pirate's Alley William Faulkner-William Wisdom Contest). Reading this intensely compelling novel that places serial killing in the context of fantasy, spirituality, and mystical otherworld atmospheres may be an introduction to this author for some (this reader included), but likely her degree of finesse will result in a strong following. Cunningham's credentials are solid: her own writings have garnered multiple awards (the Hackney Literary Award, a James Jones Literary Society fellowship and well as fellowships from the Jerome Foundation, the Vermont Studio Center, the New York Mills Cultural Center, Wildacres Center for the Humanities, the ecumenical Blowing Rock Convention Center, among others. But of interest is her 'second career': she writes highly successful book proposals and she has ghostwritten or rewritten nearly 400 manuscripts in a variety of genres. She has also restructured, developed and edited hundreds more for clients ranging from thrillers and crime novels to self-help, business and medical books. Her specialties: book-length fiction and nonfiction manuscripts and collections, book proposals, query letters, development, coaching, consulting and editing. This is a writer who knows her trade from every angle.

The book opens with a grisly passage of a serial killer's devastation of a young girl - a scene setting situation that immediately seduces the reader into the concept to the story. We then meet Priya Conlin-Kumar, a mixed heritage of Indian and American (she is the product of a gang rape of her mother in India) who moved to the USA, and now working with the FBI for the past fifteen years. Priya is well-schooled in the law (FBI) but equally influenced by her studies of the *Ramayana*: *The Ramayana* is one of the great epics of Hinduism depicting the duties of relationships, portraying ideal characters like the ideal father, ideal servant, the ideal brother, the ideal wife and the ideal king. *The Ramayana* is not just a story: it presents the teachings of ancient Hindu sages (Vedas) in narrative allegory, interspersing philosophical and devotional elements.

Visions based on this spiritual source aid her in uncovering the mystery of two serial killers. There is also a powerful love interest between Priya and the local sheriff and this crossover between the brutal killings and the sensually dark passion Priya is experiencing gives her access to the power of the Dark Goddess Kali. Her ability to solve the heinous crimes satisfies both the laws of man and spiritual laws. And it is this admixture of carnal lust with the influence of the mysticism of the identities from the Ramayana that results in a tapestry so well woven that it literally is a story that remains with the reader permanently. Highly Recommended.

Peyton Sloane says

OMG, couldn't put this down, I was totally captivated. But, be warned, there is a lot of VERY disturbing stuff in here, in fact I read a lot and I don't think I'll ever be able to verbalize some of the things, especially when you start thinking that this stuff actually goes on.
