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The Teardrop Island: Following Victorian Footsteps Across Sri Lanka

Cherry Briggs

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After discovering the travel writings of a Victorian explorer and writer, Cherry Briggs decides to retrace his footsteps across the island of Ceylon—now known as the recently war-torn, tsunami-effected Sri Lanka

Mr Fernando led me into a dark room that was lined with book-cases and smelled of leather and damp. The polished, concrete floor of the library was covered with white jasmine flowers that had blown through the windows during the storm. He began to select from the shelves a collection of disintegrating books. 'If you are going to read any of them, it should really be this one,' he said as he passed me two thick volumes, embossed with gold lettering and spotted with damp. The work was simply called Ceylon and was written by an Irishman named Sir James Emerson Tennent, who had been sent to the island in 1845 by Her Majesty's Government.

The Teardrop Island follows in the footsteps of the eccentric Victorian James Emerson Tennent, along a route which takes Cherry to pilgrimage trails, into tea estates and rural regions inhabited by indigenous tribes, as well as through restricted areas of the former warzone, delving under the surface of the contemporary culture via cricket matches and fortune tellers.

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