

Fallacies

The First Look

Maya Tripathi

Books by Maya Tripathi

Fallacies, Book 1
Fallacies, The First Look

Copyright © May 19th, 2016 by Maya Tripathi

All rights reserved. This book or any portion thereof may not be reproduced or used in any manner whatsoever without the express written permission of the publisher except for the use of brief quotations in a book review.

Published in the United States of America by Maya
Tripathi.

PO Box 7006 Olympia, WA 98507

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, businesses, places, events, and incidents are either the products of the author's imagination or are used in a fictitious manner. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, or actual events is entirely coincidental.

Contents

2022

2024

Choices



My eyes skim the hallway from the crevice my bedroom door creates. It's empty, leaving me an opportunity to listen in without getting noticed. I've heard them arguing for days about this. My grandpa's been over throughout the week to try and get me alone, but for some reason, my parents won't allow it. I focus my ears on the shouting from somewhere downstairs, unable to pick up exactly where it's coming from. If they're in the living room, they'll be there for a while and I may finally get an idea of what it is that they're hiding from me. If they're in the hallway, this will be over too soon.

“I won't let you!” my dad shouts, reaching the limit of his patience.

I close my eyes for a second, knowing that my questions about their mystery have already driven him up the wall. Whispering follows, but I can't discern it. I feel a nervous tension in my stomach and the light from the crevice becomes obscured by a shadow. With a sharp breath, I straighten out and take a few steps back. The door is pushed open towards me and my mom steps into the doorway, everything about her appearance angry. I can't decide whether I should start talking to reason with her or keep my mouth shut. With an exhale, she narrows her eyebrows.

“Don't eavesdrop,” she warns me. I'm surprised by how calm her tone is. It doesn't match her mood remotely. I open my mouth to explain my actions, but she shakes her head once in defeat. “You shouldn't be part of any of this. What did you hear?”

I swallow.

“Dad shouting,” I explain in a cracking voice, too dehydrated to stay composed.

“Is that all?” she tries, almost as if she's searching for information. I can't help but frown at her. She knows that I don't lie to her.

“Yeah. That's all of it. It's not like you and Dad tell me anything. It's ridiculous.”

“Sean, you have to understand that this is a very different... it's not something you have to be involved in. Stay out of it. Please.”

I roll my head back to look at the ceiling, thinking of how I can convince her to give me something; anything. When I look back down, she's more nervous than before. “You have to trust me. You have been waving it in my face for days. I'm not just going to ignore that.”

“You need to. I can't let him pull you into that.”

“Into what?” I practically cut her off. She needs to understand that I'm not playing around.

“Into *nothing*,” she stresses. “What did I just ask you?”

“To walk around blindly like Grandpa isn't trying to tell me something important,” I mumble.

She leans her head down in exaggeration like it'll give her a better look at my face. “Don't act like I'm doing this to punish you. I'm asking you to trust me and your dad. We know how dangerous this news is. OK? Do you really think that I'll let you get involved with someone that I can't trust?”

“Since when don't you trust Grandpa?”

“Since -” she pauses, clearly not having meant to say this. “It's not your grandpa. It's what he does; did. Please stop asking questions.”

“Just -”

“Hey!” another shout comes from outside of my bedroom, much closer than before.

Tired of this conversation, I march past my mom and through the doorway, looking left to see my grandpa standing just below the top of the stairs, my dad holding onto his upper arm and muttering something that sounds like a plea.

“Grandpa,” I say stiffly, walking towards them in irritation. They both look up at me and my dad becomes closed off. “Tell me what you've been trying to.”

“We need to talk in pr-”

“Don't you dare,” my dad interrupts. “He's my son; not yours. Don't say another word to him.”

“What's the secret?” I try again, keeping my eyes off my dad altogether.

“Sean! Go back to your room.”

“Fuck, no,” I tell him, avoiding what I'm sure is a shocked expression. I can't remember the last time that I swore at him. “Tell me.”

“Not now,” my grandpa retracts, taking a step back. A moment later, my dad releases his arm. “Later. Alone.”

He quickly proceeds down the stairs, grabbing his jacket off of the coat rack and disappearing through the door. He slams it shut a lot louder than I expect and I close my eyes reflexively. Immediately, I can feel my parents on either side of me and I slowly open my eyes, ready for the explosion.



My blood is boiling as I grab the briefcase at my feet. Being here isn't good enough today; not for him. As I wrap my hand around the edge of the back passenger seat's roof and jump out, the black plastic slams against my upper leg, reminding me of the dozens of fliers he stuffed into it. I roll my eyes at myself, dreading standing in that Stadium, handing them out like a moron who doesn't know what he's doing. People shouldn't need them to decide whether to be a part of the military. We shouldn't be asking them to join at all. The Vice-General has already waved off my concerns of the overcrowding at the base. If I didn't know about the outposts, I would have called him an idiot, but that's the last thing he is. He knows exactly what he's doing. I feel like a pawn and I can't escape; not yet. I have to hold out until these six weeks are over.

"Davis," a deep voice says from behind me, snapping me out of my daze. I glance back irritably, already frustrated at having been escorted here by three men. It's as if they expected me to run, or forgot that I have my own car.

"Sorry," I mumble, daring him to nudge me forward.

He seems to get the subtle message, because he doesn't move. Flexing my shoulders back, I walk up the concrete walkway to the doors of the auditorium-like building that has progressively housed the Council's annual ceremony for the last four years. I've never attended one speech. They've somehow managed to do without me before. Yet this year, I'm crucial to the

success of their recruitment quota, something that I don't intend to fill.

The corridor in between the doors and entranceway to the auditorium is long and fairly narrow. Footsteps of the three men echo behind me. The path is completely empty, meaning that everyone must already be seated. As I catch sight of the bleachers facing a stage at the far right end of the room, my suspicions are confirmed. I have to take a second glance at the crowd as I pass them, surprised that at least a couple hundred people showed up. I never expected this event to be so popular. I break eye contact from them, nearly walking right into the back of a suit. Thankfully, the man ahead of me continues walking, giving me enough room to create a gap between us. It's clear that it's Aves, the other four Council members ahead of him. Every single one is all-but-oblivious to the crowd. One thing is on their minds. I suppress a groan as I climb the steps onto the stage. Guards are below it, blocking us in, and a microphone is centered at the front edge. Out of habit, I go to stand at the back of the stage beside the other Council members, thinking to myself that I've been to way too many of these spectacles to count. Aves breaks off from us and goes to stand at the microphone. The indistinct chatter from the crowd fades the second that he looks ready to speak and I focus attention on him, ready to hear whatever line of bullshit he's been rehearsing to himself.

“Thank you to all of you for coming today,” he speaks. “Today, we are here to commemorate five long years since the founding of Crestpoint. It has been devotion and the respect of all of our citizens for our future that we have come together and built a country for us to inhabit and grow. Each of us is gifted a home

here, a family, not because of us, but because of your efforts and undying loyalty to one-another. With these values, we have established a strong economy, an outstanding military, and a spirit that will surely preserve the life that we sought out to create for ourselves, for our friends, and for our children. Today, we gather to talk about preservation and as we have done each year, to set an annual resolution for our citizens as a whole to strive towards for the betterment of our society. With the level of strife and conflict facing us in the first stages of this country's development, we must take initiative to protect ourselves from a declining slope, as many other countries have done and continue to do. I can talk about building bonds with our neighbors and keeping an eye out for criminals, but those are practices that we already take to in our lives. At this point in our growth, we have a peaceful nation. What we need is a stronger public effort to keep criminals accountable and methods to ensure that accountability is met for those seeking to harm this peace. This is where our soldiers come into play. Over the past three years, we have taken significant effort to raise awareness for our military and build their skills in order to protect us in everyday life. We can only defend ourselves so much without the proper training and such training is costly and can only be completed by those who are strong enough. Each and every one of you plays an invaluable role in maintaining the safety of this society, but as in any country, some perform best as scientists, engineers, soldiers, and even architects. We all have different roles and must develop them for our nation to succeed. As such, to strengthen our count of soldiers, we are seeking to recruit a handful of capable men and women to lead

our nation in military capabilities. To give you the face of our soldiers, I would like to introduce you to Sean Davis, my First-In-Command.”

Applause sounds through the auditorium to compliment his speech and I straighten up a little more, ready to give my own rant of vague explanations.

“Thank you,” I say, looking at everyone in the crowd. “Military is a command central to a nation that needs leadership; a guiding hand that has experienced battle. It is a segment of the government and as such, it is entirely under the supervision and control of our citizens.” I pause momentarily, hoping that at least a few people in this crowd can see through my lie. “As soldiers, we fight as one under all lines of fire. We take responsibility for each other’s mistakes and take a stand for what is right even when it’s a direct risk to our own lives. However, we do operate in numbers. While our bonds are strong, there are only so many of us to fight for the safety of our families and this nation. That is why we recruit. We do not force any citizens to become a part of our ranks. We ask that others join us and we bring them into our family. We ask that all those who have a determination to fight for our country join us. Our family is recruiting those of you who are between the ages of seventeen and twenty-six. We will train each and every one of you to fight, to hold the values true to Crestpoint, and to defend our families and friends. We ask you to give yourselves up for each other and join as one. So, please come speak with me and anybody else in the Council about recruitment. I look forward to working with each and every one of you. Thank you.”

As I finish, I step back to where I was beside Tilus, perfectly content in letting Aves finish this up.

“Thank you to every one of you who came,” he says cheerfully. “I hope that you will leave today with a better understanding of the role our soldiers play in society and the value that each of our citizens holds to building a stronger, more stable country for us to enjoy. We will leave off on this note and I will see you next year during our annual parade. It has been a pleasure to collaborate on the safety and stability of Crestpoint. Farewell.”

Applause breaks out again and I relax, the hard part being over. With any luck, the Council will leave me alone to do the rest of my job. In a single-file line, we walk off the stage and go to stand behind a table that's set up at the base of it. The crowd slowly disperses, but it seems as if only the adults leave. As people begin to approach us, I reluctantly lay my briefcase onto the table and open it up to display the fliers, a lot more anxious to discourage everyone from joining by forcing them to grab one and go. Unfortunately for me, the first person to approach me is a teenage girl with deep blue eyes and blonde hair. I smile at her with disinterest and listen as she goes on a rant of why she thinks she'll be the best soldier ever. Before ten seconds have passed, my eyes transition to the growing line of people behind her and I accidentally drown her out. She doesn't seem to notice, continuing until a man drags her away by the arm, presumably her dad. Before I get to catch a single breath, another one jumps in front of me, both hands on the table, nose barely a foot from mine. I widen my eyes at her to get her to step back, failing to catch her attention whatsoever. Her eyes are too focused on my chest, managing to gape at me for so long that it's amazing that I'm the only one uncomfortable. I brush her

off with a flier and brace myself for the next one. A hand lands on my right shoulder, making me jump.

"You've got this," Aves says in a serious tone as soon as my eyes recoil to him.

"Yeah," I agree encouragingly, happy for him to leave.

He proceeds around the table from behind me and I watch as the other four Council members follow him out of the auditorium, along with all of their body guards. I have a hard time not getting angry at getting abandoned here by every single one of them to tackle this line. It shows how much commitment they have to their jobs. Time passes slowly, despite my best efforts to make it fly by. Thankfully, most parents don't seem to like the idea of their teenage children joining the military, making the line shorten exponentially. When the final girl leaves, I grab the excess fliers that a few of them left on the table and glance at my half-empty briefcase, wondering what the heck I'm supposed to do with the rest of them. Relieved to finally be alone, I raise my eyes to the bleachers to convince myself that this day is over, only to spot another girl sitting in direct eye-line of me, leaning comfortably over the edge of the rail. As frustrated as I am at having another person to stare at me, I can't help but wonder what she's doing all the way over there. She's looking at me, clearly interested in speaking with me. I question whether she stayed there to be polite, but her face becomes a little uncertain. I can't imagine her as a soldier. She's cute, her long, dark-brown hair and eyes sparkling in the light shining from the ceiling. She really doesn't seem determined to ask about joining and the thought somehow relaxes my body. Everything seems more familiar and as I begin to

question why, it dawns on me that she's the reason. She has to be the girl I remember. The resemblance is impossible to mistake. Natalie can't be serious about this. I won't let her do this.

Choices



Every document I can imagine has been released. Everything is out there and I don't know how I can face going to see him. So many things have gone wrong. I can't imagine that he's still OK. My hand wraps around the metal pole of the subway. Today, it feels warm and my mind fades from my body, so distant from reality that I can practically feel the pressure from the water sinking my head into darkness.

Hands pull at my right arm and lurch me up, just as I breathe in a lungful of water. Before I can register what's happening, I'm coughing, expecting to drown from the uncontrollable breaths that my body's taking to stay alive. Moments pass and I notice that the water is a lot sharper; colder. I can breathe. My body begins to regain feeling and my hands collapse onto muddy soil as someone drags me out of the lake and onto a spot of damp ground. My eyes look up in panic and soft, brown eyes stare back, just as worried as mine.

"Are you OK?" a shaky voice asks.

I nod hesitantly, questioning whether I should run or stay with him. My eyes skim his clothes and relief floods through me at the sight of a red hoodie. This man isn't a soldier. The last color I needed to see was black. In the past year, a black t-shirt has meant death. Not only for me, but for anyone who matters; everyone who could stop this catastrophe from escalating.

A sudden jolt sends my body forward fractionally, causing me to grip against the pole harder. I snap back into reality and glance around nervously to see passengers standing up and repositioning to exit the

subway. My hand lets go of the pole and I rub the sweat off of my fingers, containing the paranoia that I know is overwhelming me far too much. I release a breath that I didn't know I was holding and take my place in the disorganized line of exiting passengers.

Downtown Seattle is much different now than I imagined. A few days ago, I saw people pushing past each other, half-of-them mindlessly walking into traffic because they were too busy talking on their phones to notice. I couldn't blame them. Every trace of their personal lives was made public. It's scary to think that the government couldn't even help to bring it back under control. The virus was too efficient. Today, the urgency has subsided, not that the caution has disappeared. I find a taxi and hand the driver a small piece of paper with the address scribbled on it. I have no idea where it is; just that it's a little ways south.

An hour passes because of the mid-day traffic and we drive into a secluded part of a city a few miles from Seattle. I expect this to be a route to detour through the congestion, but the driver pulls to the side of the curb, right beside a fairly tall concrete building that's definitely abandoned. I glance down at my phone to double-check the address Sean texted me. There is no chance that this is his work.

"We're here," the driver announces. I look up at him questioningly.

"Are you sure this is the right place?" I ask, willing him to check the location. In response, he taps the screen of his dashboard GPS.

"Positive. You want me to wait for you?"

I glance back at the building and shake my head at myself. "No. I'll be fine."

He runs my credit card and I climb out of the cabin, hesitantly walking towards the glass doors. There are no lights on, so I stop at the glass, trying to get a glimpse of what's inside. There's nothing to look at. Everything has been stripped. Not knowing why he would send me here, I pull at the handle and it clinks against the frame. As soon as I take a step back from it, a figure starts walking towards it, keys hanging loosely off of a lanyard in his hand. When he reaches the door, I can make out that he's wearing a black business suit, but his face isn't familiar. He pushes the door open towards me.

"Kira Levid?" he asks. I nod and he steps aside, so I crease my eyebrows and walk past him, waiting for an explanation as to why I'm here. Instead of filling me in, though, he proceeds to lock the door, effectively trapping me in.

"Where's Sean?" I ask, questioning if he was really the one to send me the text.

"In the other room." He turns to face me. "I'll take you to him."

He walks ahead of me in the direction from which he came, leading me down a long corridor that ends at a yellow metal door with a diagram of stairs attached to it. He opens it and a ray of light shines the way down. I think that he's going to go first, but he stays still, holding the door open for me. Assuring myself that Sean wouldn't ask me to come here without good reason, I descend the stairs with the man following a close distance behind and continue down another corridor that seems to lead nowhere. A few doors are built into the walls on either side of me, but it's not until we're near the end of the corridor that the man walks ahead of me to open a door on my left. Another source of light

appears and I enter the room, stopping just inside of the doorway. The room might as well be an underground dungeon with how many broken pipes are scattered across the floor. At least eight people are inside, all but one standing. I focus on the one sitting on a cardboard box against the wall on my left and instantly recognize Sean. He's pressing a hand against the left side of his head like he's nursing a headache. Two men are watching him from a distance, almost like they're ready to detain him, and the door behind me snaps shut. I flinch, but don't dare to turn around, scared of what I'll see. I think to ask Sean what's happening, but the thought of what can happen as soon as they hear me talk worries me, too. He's not looking at me. He's too disoriented to notice anything. It's almost like he's just waking up.

"Nice to see you again, Kira," a voice says ahead of me. My eyes recoil towards it and I see Grant. My lips part in shock at meeting him here.

"What are you doing here?" I ask automatically.

"I need to have you talk with Davis."

"I have nothing to say with you here. I came to see Sean; no one else."

"Kira," Sean says at a volume that's barely above a whisper. "What are you doing here?"

His head is a little more lifted to look at me, but his hands are now on his lap. The first thing I notice is a bruise forming on his jawline. There's no question that he's not here voluntarily.

"What happened to you?" I ask.

"Nothing," he tells me, his pride getting in the way. His eyes shift down, telling me everything that I need to know.

"He did this to you, didn't he?" I look indignantly at Grant, my hands clamping into fists. He smiles apologetically. "How did you even get near him? Last I checked, you were a wanted man."

"We're not here to discuss that," Grant tells me, his voice getting colder than should be possible. "I brought you here to talk some sense into him. You know what the radicals are capable of. I need you to convince him to work with them. It's the only way we can win against them."

"I know exactly what they're capable of," I snap. "You were one of them. You're the reason they tried to drown me in that lake. Why would I ever help you?"

"Because that's our only chance. He needs to cooperate."

His eyes shift to Sean and the exhausted expression on Sean's face makes me lose control. "He shouldn't do anything but stay as far away from them as he can! What the hell did you do to him?"

He doesn't answer as they continue to stare at each other, until finally, Sean looks away.

"Tell him what you found," Grant directs at me. "Whose files did they want access to?"

I sigh, running my hands through my hair.

"Sean's," I admit. "And Natalie's." Sean's head shoots up in response to her name. "Anyone who was connected to him was searched, but they didn't get anything. He shut the virus down too soon."

"Oh really?" Grant asks. "Then why is it that I managed to bring him here?"

"What did they get on Natalie?" Sean asks, too distracted to focus on anything else.

"Not much," I assure him. "You protected her information enough that the virus didn't touch more than what could be seen in a government database."

"So everything," he scoffs. "Everything that I had could be found through a government agency. That was the whole point. Her citizenship; her passport. I made it accessible to make it real."

"You need to cooperate with us," Grant affirms to him.

"I'm not working with the radicals."

"I'm not a radical."

"Well, you could have fooled me."

"He used to be," I agree. "You can't trust him."

Grant glares at me to be quiet. "I did nothing to you. The only thing I ever asked of you was to get closer to them. You're the only one who could and so far, it's worked well for us. I didn't try to hurt you. You always seem to ignore that I'm the reason Chase found you when he did."

I glare back. "*You* always seem to forget that if you didn't sell me out to them, I wouldn't have needed rescuing. I'll never recommend that Sean work with them *or* you."

"Then he'll die. She will, too."

"You stay away from her," Sean warns.

"So that you can continue protecting her as well as you did yourself?" Grant presses, raising his eyebrows skeptically. "She's the only reason that you're here. If I could capture you so easily by distracting her, what makes you think that they can't lure her into their trap with a few voices calling her to them? You got her involved in this. Now, you can't protect her."

"I can do just fine! Stay away from her."

"I'm not going to go near her. I have no reason to. I'm telling you that unless you work with us, she'll never be safe. You can't protect her forever. You don't know enough about them to keep them away. They've chased Kira for a long time. She's alive because they think she died and they don't care enough to look harder. They will never stop looking for her until they've gotten what they want out of you. She won't make it out of this alive."

I expect Sean to tell him that he's wrong, to continue arguing, but he stays silent, letting the words sink into his brain. As much as I'm unwilling to accept that Grant is on the correct side for once, I can't deny that what he's saying is true. I could never get away from them and Natalie will matter a lot more to them than I ever will, just with the fact that she's the most precious thing to Sean. They have nothing else to use against him that he won't cut ties with. Without working with them, I don't know that he'll be able to keep her safe, but I know that he'll lose her eventually if he tries.

"Sean -" I start to tell him not to do this, but he cuts me off with a look of defeat.

"Don't," he tells me, before looking back at Grant with resolve in his voice. "I'll do it."

Maya Tripathi

Fallacies

The First Look

Maya Tripathi is a twenty-year-old novelist living in the Pacific Northwest. Having moved to the United States from Ukraine at the age of seven, she developed a love for traveling and literature. Her experience in a lasting relationship has given her the taste of love and adventure that inspired her to begin writing her first novel. On April 7th, 2016, she published *Fallacies*, a start to a series that she hopes will impact her readers in the same ways that her relationship has impacted her.