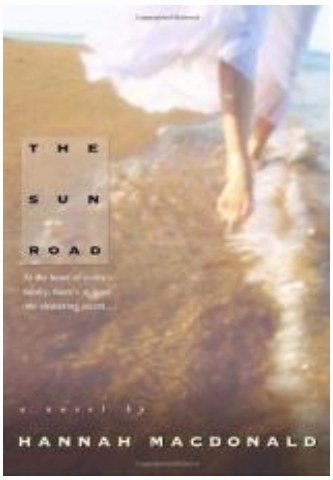
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The Sun Road

by Hannah MacDonald



About the Book

Readers of Charming Billy and Crow Lake will identify the landscape of quiet pain and years-held secrets that informs the lives our narrator, Beth Standing, and her mother, Lizzie, a woman who seems to have never been happy. As a child, Beth escaped across the busy London road to her best friend's house, finding solace in the energetic Frederick family: the perfect antidote to the stifling atmosphere of her own home. There, the question of why Beth's family was "different" never really needed an answer.

But as an adult embarking upon an affair with this childhood friend, Beth finds herself confronting memories she had long repressed as she faces the possible consequences of giving in to passion, and of losing one's future to the irrevocable choices of the past.

The Sun Road marks a promising debut for Hannah MacDonald, a novel perfect for discussing, for sharing, and for probing the questions of love, loss, and finally, hope.

Discussion Guide

1. Martin and Paul are the first characters to be introduced, though they exist throughout the novel in memory only. What is the effect of beginning the novel with scenes that exclude Lizzie?

2. What do you infer about Lizzie's marriage to Gavin? How might her relationship with Roger have evolved if Gavin had survived? Discuss the novel's epigraph in these terms. What does poet John Heath-Stubbs imply about the whims of the "Wheel of Fortune?"

3. What are your initial impressions of the Frederick household in Chapter Three, entitled "Kamikaze?" Why do Jacob's children appeal to Beth?

4. Does Rachel's approach to mothering mirror Lizzie's in any way? What do both women impart to their children about love?

5. What aspects of Beth's personality are carried from childhood through adulthood? In what way does her perspective change as she enters adolescence? How does Dan's presence (and absence) make its mark?

6. Hannah MacDonald elaborates on the novel's title in a beautiful beach scene near the end of "Frisk" (Chapter Four). As Beth and Dan observe the stream of sunlight, "Time lay ahead, glittering with potential, clear and directed as a race." What premonitions are made through the sun road?

7. Discuss Beth's path from prolonged sexual inexperience to becoming Jacob's lover. Do you believe that she was consciously trying to preserve her innocence as a young woman, or was sexuality merely shaped by circumstance in her life? Who or what led to the dissolution of Dan's innocence regarding sex?

8. Does Beth's attitude toward romance mirror her mother's perception of men or does Beth defy her mother's model? Why does Beth resist Dan later in life?

9. Who are the most resilient characters in the novel? Who are the most fragile? What do the book's images of childhood, such as the handmade birthday tokens for Rachel, express about the nature of love and longing?

10. Consider the meaning of the preface in retrospect. What is its message in light of the novel's ending? Is "the bravery it takes to fulfill promises made to both lovers and children" a reference only to Lizzie and Jacob?

11. The novel's chapter titles convey a range of moods. What is expressed by the name of the closing chapter, "Following"?

12. In what way do the novel's various time periods and locales reflect the corresponding shifts in plot?

13. Was it necessary for Lizzie to hide her life with Gavin? Would Beth's angst have been heightened or soothed by knowing the truth?

14. How does Roger's final illness shift his family's focus? What did he impart to Beth about men and about happiness?

15. What does **The Sun Road** illustrate about the nature of secrecy? Is it always portrayed as a destructive force in the characters' lives?

16. What unveiled revelations in your own family or community have shaped your life? How would you define your "sun road"?

Author Bio

Hannah MacDonald lives in London, England, where she is an Editorial Director at Random House UK. She is currently at work on her next novel.

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