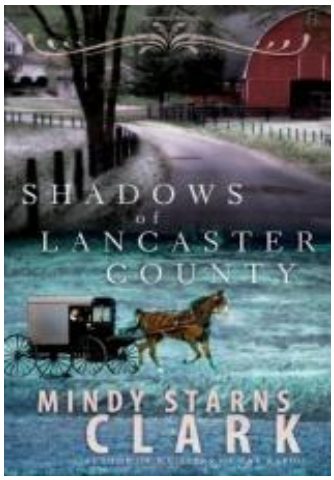
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Shadows of Lancaster County

by Mindy Starns Clark



About the Book

Following up on her extremely popular Gothic thriller, **Whispers of the Bayou**, Mindy Starns Clark offers another suspenseful stand?alone mystery full of Amish simplicity, dark shadows, and the light of God?s amazing grace.

Anna thought she left the tragedies of the past behind when she moved from Pennsylvania to California, but when her brother vanishes from the genetics lab where he works, Anna has no choice but to head back home. Using skills well?honed in Silicon Valley, she follows the high?tech trail her brother left behind, a trail that leads from the simple world of Amish farming to the cutting edge of DNA research and gene mapping.

Anna knows she must depend on her instincts, her faith in God, and the help of the Amish community to find her brother. She also must finally face her own shadows --- and pray that she?s stronger than the grief that threatens to overwhelm them all.

Discussion Guide

1. This novel is titled **Shadows of Lancaster County**. In your opinion, to what shadows is the author referring?

2. As you read this book, did you learn anything new about the Amish that you didn?t know before? Were you aware that the Amish allow modern medical treatment and frequently cooperate with DNA researchers?

3. At one point Anna muses about the Amish faith, wondering if most of the Amish are merely following the Ordnung out of respect for community and tradition, as Lydia claims, or from a genuine salvation experience, as Anna suspects. Many other Amish novels have also probed this question, with varying conclusions. In your opinion, do most people who choose to remain Amish do so out of a heart for God or because of other reasons (tradition, respect for parents, need for community, societal traditions, etc.)? On what do you base this opinion?

4. In the story, Lydia shares that the Amish in her community are not allowed to study the Bible. Does that surprise you? Does it change your opinion about the spiritual maturity of Amish individuals?

5. Where do you think the Amish find the strength to forgive so quickly and fully the atrocities that are committed against them? Were you surprised by the rapid forgiveness extended by the Amish after the school shooting tragedy at Nickel Mines? Given that, did you think the Amish forgiveness depicted in **Shadows of Lancaster County** was realistic?

6. Before reading this book, had you ever heard of the Amish tradition of rumspringa, (the ?running around? period that Amish teens go through before deciding whether or not to join the Amish church)? Do you think rumspringa is a good idea or not, and why?

7. Anna has carried the weight of her past for many years. In what ways does the tragedy she was partly responsible for in her youth impact her personality, emotions, and actions now, as an adult?

8. Anna is employed as a skip tracer, one who works to track down missing people for an insurance company. In what ways do these skills help in the investigation to find her brother? In what ways do they hinder her?

9. What did you think had happened to Bobby after the motorcycle accident that opened the story? Had you been in his position --- severely injured with an unknown assailant in pursuit --- what would you have done?

10. In your opinion, what is it about Reed that made Anna fall in love with him as a teenager? As you read this story, did you trust him now, as an adult, or find yourself suspicious of his actions and motivations? At what point in the story did you decide that he was good or bad? How many times, if at all, did you change your mind?

11. If you knew that you and your husband carried the genes for a fatal disorder but that there was a medical procedure which would ensure you could give birth to a healthy, disorder-free child, would you have that procedure? What if that procedure were illegal?

12. The letters and journal entries supposedly penned by Stephanie de Beauharnaise were fictional, though Stephanie herself was a true historical character who actually existed in the time period indicated. What other books have you read that place real people in fictional situations? When this literary device is used, does the author?s poetic license make you uncomfortable, or do you find it to be rather fun? How would you feel if someday an author placed you or someone you know into a fictional story?

13. Before reading this book, had you ever heard of Kaspar Hauser? (Perhaps you were familiar with the song Wooden Horse, which was written about him by Suzanne Vega?) Have you been inspired to do any further reading on the subject?

14. Were you surprised by Grete?s ?secret sin?? If you were Anna, how would you have responded to finding the camera and photographs? If you were Grete, what would you do next: confess to the Amish elders, or trust Anna's discretion and continue keeping your secret? What do you think of the Amish prohibition against photographs?

15. Near the end of the book, Stephanie states that ?true love begins with the giving up of self,? a thought with which Anna later concurs. Do you agree or disagree? Is it easier to give truly selfless love to a child (as Stephanie does) than to a spouse (as Anna hopes to do)? Why or why not?

16. When Anna tells Remy that she has been attacked by various people seeking the rubies, he realizes that he?s likely to blame, given that he posted too much information on his blog. Given his scholarly zeal, did you think the fact that he had done this was realistic? Do you think people in real life often post more information on the internet, particularly on blogs, than they should? What could be the consequences of such actions?

17. Bobby tries to send a letter to Anna by posting it as an anonymous blog on the internet, hidden in plain sight. If you were trying to disappear, how would you communicate with the loved ones left behind without leaving a trail?

18. Amish novels are very popular right now. Why do you think that is?

19. The scene where Bobby is found is written from his point of view. Why do you think the author made that choice? Did you find that chapter effective?

20. If you have read other works by Mindy Starns Clark, how did the character of Anna compare to the main characters in Clark?s other novels? In what ways are her heroines similar? In what ways are they different?

Author Bio

Mindy Starns Clark is the author of many books, which include the popular *Smart Chick Mysteries*, WHISPERS OF THE BAYOU, SHADOWS OF LANCASTER COUNTY and UNDER THE CAJUN MOON. In addition, Mindy?s plays and musicals have been featured in schools and churches across the United States.

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Publication Date: January 1, 2009
Paperback: 336 pages
Publisher: Harvest House Publishers
ISBN-10: 0736924477
ISBN-13: 9780736924474