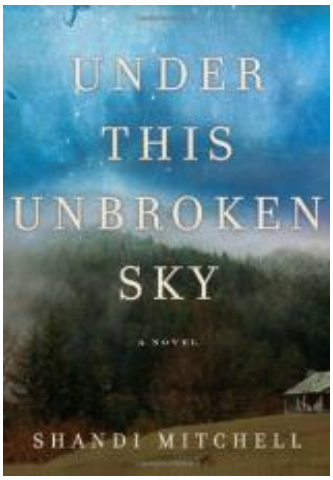
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Under This Unbroken Sky

by Shandi Mitchell



About the Book

Evocative and compelling, rich in imagination and atmosphere, **Under This Unbroken Sky** is a beautifully wrought debut from a gifted new novelist.

Spring 1938. After nearly two years in prison for the crime of stealing his own grain, Ukrainian immigrant Teodor Mykolayenko is a free man. While he was gone, his wife, Maria; their five children; and his sister, Anna, struggled to survive on the harsh northern Canadian prairie, but now Teodor --- a man who has overcome drought, starvation, and Stalin's purges --- is determined to make a better life for them. As he tirelessly clears the untamed land, Teodor begins to heal himself and his children. But the family's hopes and newfound happiness are short lived.

Anna's rogue husband, the arrogant and scheming Stefan, unexpectedly returns, stirring up rancor and discord that will end in violence and tragedy. **Under This Unbroken Sky** is a mesmerizing tale of love and greed, pride and desperation, that will resonate long after the last page is turned. Shandi Mitchell has woven an unbearably suspenseful story, written in a language of luminous beauty and clarity. Rich with fiery conflict and culminating in a gut-wrenching climax, this is an unforgettably powerful novel from a passionate new voice in contemporary literature.

Discussion Guide

1. What is the meaning of the title Under This Unbroken Sky? What would you have called the book? Compare alternative titles.

2. How does the introductory page preceding the first section, "Spring", foreshadow the events that unfold? The novel begins with a description of a photograph. Discuss how photos can tell stories about our lives. Can a photo reveal truth?

3. The novel is divided into four sections, one for each season. Why do you think the author structured the story this

way? How does each season affect the two families and the events that occur?

4. What does land mean to Teodor? To his wife Maria? To his sister Anna? To his brother-in-law Stefan?

5. What is the importance of animals in the story? Discuss the relationship of the coyotes to Anna, the rabbits to Myron, and the chickens, especially Happiness, to Lesya. Why do you think she chose the name Happiness?

6. What were the factors that led these people to emigrate from their native land? What were their lives like before and after they emigrated? Was leaving their homeland ultimately beneficial? How might their experience compare to modern immigrants?

7. Contrast Teodor and Stefan. What kind of man is each? What do they mean to their families? What about Maria and Anna? How do they compare to each other?

8. Think about the children. Which resemble their parents? Why? Because of their family's poverty they have no toys. What do they do to amuse themselves? Would you agree that, even though they are poor, there is richness in their lives? Explain.

9. What role does character play as events unfold? How are both the adults and the children weak? How are they strong? Are they proud or ashamed? Take the role of one of the characters --- one of the children or one of the adults --- and describe life from his or her viewpoint.

10. To what extent did Teodor, Maria, Anna, and Stefan play a part in their own tragedies? In your opinion, how much life is beyond our control --- whether in the hands of other people, God or the universe, nature, or even the economy? Can you draw any parallels to the problems facing our own society today?

11. The novel is set on the Canadian prairies. How might their lives have been different if they had settled in the United States? Analyze the attitudes of native citizens --- such as the police or the shopkeeper --- then and now.

12. What about your own background? Describe the immigrant experience as it applies to your personal history.

13. Towards the end of the novel, when the police search the house for Teodor's contraband, they describe their impressions of the family and the house. How do their notions compare to how you imagined the cabin and the Mykolayenko family?

14. What is the significance of religion in the immigrants' lives? What about Teodor? Explore his loss of faith. For those who have finished the story, how does this loss affect his actions at the end?

15. Share your thoughts about the novel's origins and what the story means to the author. Were you surprised by what you learned?

Author Bio

Shandi Mitchell

BIO

Shandi Mitchell is an award-winning Canadian filmmaker and screenwriter. Her short films have screened at numerous international festivals, and she is a recipient of a Canada Council for the Arts endowment. Mitchell spent her childhood on a military base on the prairies and now makes her home in Nova Scotia on the east coast of Canada, with her husband, Alan, and their dog, Annie. UNDER THIS UNBROKEN SKY is her first novel.

Critical Praise

"A magnificent novel?A powerhouse of a debut that grips from start to finish."

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