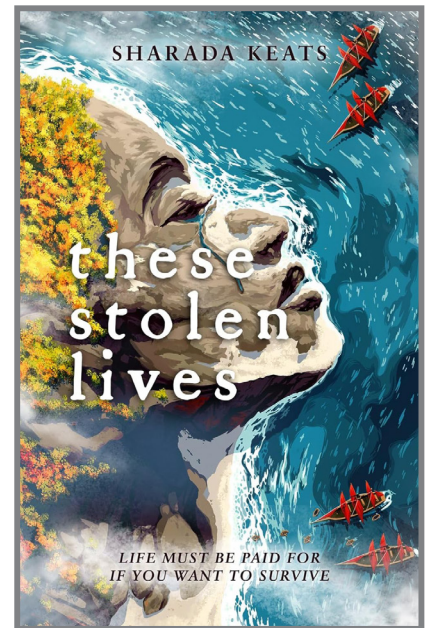


These Stolen Lives

AUTHOR

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RECOMMENDED FOR: Upper Secondary
(Violence, Sexual Content, Language)

SYNOPSIS

Six years ago, seventeen-year-old Mora survived the terrifying Skøl invasion. They stole her land. They took her family. And now, not even her life is her own.

Skøl culture revolves around one motto: Life is Golden. You must pay the government for the right to survive. If you can't, you're cast out at best—at worst, culled. Records of every citizen are held at the hallowed, highly secured Life Registry, which tracks who lives and who dies, who pays and who fails.

Colonised survivors like Mora, face endless servitude, repaying the 'debt' of their years lived before the invasion. Mora is resigned to her fate, finding glimmers of joy, her tentative friendship with another repayer, the handsome, elusive Kit.

But then, she finds out that twelve-year-old Zako, the closest thing she has to a brother, is to be put to death by the dangerous new Skøl Governor. Finding the courage to fight back, Mora and Kit conspire to smuggle Zako to safety. But their plan draws them into a dark mystery—and to a heart-pounding mission at the Life Registry itself. They must ultimately ask themselves: what are we worth to each other?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Born in Kalgoorlie in 1982, Sharada loves poetry, nature, reading, writing, electricity, hot running water, petrichor, a certain degree of cliché, and circumstances that ensure young people can enjoy basic human rights, be nurtured, and grow old happily and healthily. She feels strongly that people of all ages deserve a wider variety of stories and storytellers.

Sharada grew up in Australia and Canada, with parents from Guyana and Yorkshire—influences that still shape her writing. She studied agricultural economics in university, and has spent many years working in the third sector. Sharada now lives with her partner, two young children and ancient, old cat in London.

STUDY NOTES

- Before reading the story, look closely at the cover and title, and discuss what you can learn from the title and artwork. Some things to include in your discussion might be:
 - What genre do you predict that this book is likely to be? Why do you think this?
 - What can you see happening in the cover artwork?

- Where do you think the boats might be going?
- What emotion do you think the face on the cover is expressing?
- What is forming the face on the cover?
- What represents the face's hair?
- Where do you believe this book is likely to be set?
- What do you think the sentence 'Life must be paid for if you want to survive' means?
- What do you think the title of this book means? What is it implying about the characters within the novel?
- What do you predict might happen in this novel?
- As a class, discuss the role paperwork and records play both within the novel's plot overall, and within Skøll society in general. Compare and contrast the importance of Skøll paperwork to people's lives within the novel, and the importance of identity (and other) paperwork within our daily lives. Think about what similarities and differences there are between both the original purpose of paperwork, and the current usage of paperwork. As part of this discussion, consider how the life of someone in our society would be affected by a complete lack of paperwork, eg. if they have no birth certificate, or if their parents never registered their birth. What things would they not be able to do, that the rest of us take for granted?
- What are the direct impacts on an individual if their Life Record is shown to be forged? How does this compare to the direct impact on an individual in our society, if it is found that important personal documents, such as their birth certificate or educational records, were forged?
- What do you think happened to Felicity? Why do you think this?
- How did Mora survive her experience on the boat? Re-write the scene on the boat from the point of view of the second man on board, the one who helped Mora survive. Include in your retelling, a personal backstory for this character that explains why he risked his own life and position helping Mora.
- Draw a picture of someone you know well. Are they easily recognisable? Do you think that anyone would use your drawing as the image on a wanted poster for them? What does this exercise tell you about Mora's ability to accurately draw from memory?
- Ruzi was an instrument maker before the cull. If you were an instrument maker, what instruments would you most like to learn how to make, and why? In pairs or small groups, research what is required to make a quality guitar. Having done your research, discuss the different reasons why Ruzi did not choose to try to continue making instruments in his spare time. What are some other reasons that you can think of, aside from the simple difficulty of sourcing materials and tools, that he must have faced?
- Skøll society is cruel, and Ruzi, Kit, Mora and many others, were all slaves, bought and sold at a purchaser's whim. In spite of being slaves, none of them were locked up, nor were their general daily movements restricted (at least not until the curfew was first put in place). Given the harshness of Skøll society, and the unpleasantness of being a slave, why do you think that so few of the repayers ever tried to escape or run away?
- Zako was fascinated by the children's book, where a boy and a dog manage to live off the land and survive on their own. Can you think of a real-world children's book you could recommend to anyone wanting to learn how to live off the land on their own?
- Mora tells Kit 'I'm not yours to risk.' What do you think she means by this statement? How do you think Kit interprets this statement? Why might her meaning and his interpretation differ, and in what ways?
 - As a class or in small groups, attempt to analyse the different layers of meaning and implications inherent in this statement, especially as part of a conversation between two people who are legally owned by someone else.
- Babies and children, without parents, who are able or willing to pay for their life fees, can have them paid by the Sting Trust instead, at least until they turn fourteen. What happens to children and infants whose parents don't pay their life fees for them, and who don't have them paid for by the Sting Trust? Why do you think that there is so much social stigma attached to being a beneficiary of the trust? If the Sting Trust did not exist, what would have happened to these children?
 - What happens to children in our society whose parents can't or don't look after them? What do these two contrasting viewpoints, towards vulnerable and unprotected children, tell us about the principles upon which our society and Skøll society are founded? Why is it important, to us as a society, that we protect, nurture and educate

our children regardless of parentage? What happens to a society which does not value its children and invest in their wellbeing and future?

- The Skøl culture values measurable worth, but does not value human life, or less tangible things such as beauty, kindness or caring for others. Yet, it has still managed to produce people such as the Scarlets. How is it possible for an oppressive and cruel culture to produce kind and generous people, and how can good people manage to survive and live within such an uncaring and heartless society?
- Individually, explore the metaphor of Mora's memory cave, and the different ways in which she talks about it at different points in the novel. Why do you think that sometimes she describes it as something, which she in some way controls, or a tool she chooses to use, and at others she talks of it as if it is an independent entity which she experiences without volition?
 - If you had a memory cave, what do you think would be stored in it?
- Why do you think that Mora struggles to remember her mother's face, when she has a near perfect memory for absolutely everything else she has ever experienced, and everyone she has ever met?
- What do you predict is likely to happen to Mora after the novel ends? Write a short fictional blurb for a future book about Mora, showcasing your ideas about what might happen next.

AUTHOR OF NOTES
RAE CARLYLE