



Under the Visible Life

Kim Echlin

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Fatherless Katherine carries the stigma of her mixed-race background through an era that is hostile to her and all she represents. It is only through music that she finds the freedom to temporarily escape and dream of a better life for herself, nurturing this hard-won refuge throughout the vagaries of unexpected motherhood and an absent husband, and relying on her talent to build a future for her family.

Orphaned Mahsa also grows up in the shadow of loss, sent to relatives in Pakistan after the death of her parents. Struggling to break free, she escapes to Montreal, leaving behind her first love, Kamal. But the threads of her past are not so easily severed, and she finds herself forced into an arranged marriage. For Mahsa, too, music becomes her solace and allows her to escape from her oppressive circumstances.

When Katherine and Mahsa meet, they find in each other a kindred spirit as well as a musical equal, and their lives are changed irrevocably. Together, they inspire and support one another, fusing together their cultures, their joys, and their losses—just as they collaborate musically in the language of free-form, improvisational jazz.

Under the Visible Life takes readers from the bustling harbour of Karachi to the palpable political tension on the streets of 1970s Montreal to the smoky jazz clubs of New York City. Deeply affecting, vividly rendered, and sweeping in scope, it is also an exploration of the hearts of two unforgettable women: a meditation on how hope can remain alive in the darkest of times when we have someone with whom to share our burdens.



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