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The Chosen One

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~~Not a choice:~~

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

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This is a heartfelt polemic about a polygamous religious sect, ruled by a leader known as 'The Prophet', in an isolated desert community somewhere in the United States. The author lives in Utah, the home of the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter Day Saints, so may well have some experience of those groups who still observe a practice long ago disowned by the Mormons themselves. The story is not so much about the nature of living in a polygamous family, although perhaps its most interesting parts are, but about the extreme gerontocratic male chauvinism that characterises this particular sect, which the author seems to suggest is implicit in the practice of polygamy. 13-year-old Kyra has been chosen by the Prophet to be the seventh wife of her 60-year-old uncle Hyrum, one of the elders of the sect. She has no choice in this, nor does her father, the husband of three wives himself, nor does her young boy friend, who, when he asks the prophet for Kyra's hand, is beaten and driven from the community. Kyra is a convincing character and her relationship with her mothers, her many brothers and sisters, and her gentle father is well drawn. Williams has a spare, compelling style and there is a heart-stopping moment of sheer horror when a baby is 'disciplined' by being plunged into ice cold water. But there are flaws in the story. Kyra's secret and solitary contact with a passing mobile library, which ignites the spark of her independence, is unconvincing and when she uses it to make her first bid for freedom, resulting in the driver's apparent murder by the sect's 'God Squad', the novel enters the surreal territory of a shoot-em-up action movie. The heart of the story is really Kyra's choice between freedom and family: a choice that might have been more difficult and more poignant if she wasn't also fleeing from violence and murder.

Running Order:

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