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Abela

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~~Not a Choice:~~

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

3

This is a short book, considering the cultural and emotional journeys that are made in its pages. There are three voices here: one is the narrator, the others belong to two girls, Rosa and Abela, both with Tanzanian fathers but, as the story opens, living on different continents in very different circumstances. In Tanzania, Abela's father has already died of AIDS and her sister and mother are dying. In Sheffield, Rosa, whose father returned to Africa not long after she was born, has to come to terms with her mother's desire to adopt, and the loss of her position as an only child. Astute readers will, even at this early stage, anticipate the ending in which Rosa and Abela become sisters, but a lot happens to them both before that. The strength of the story is the author's empathy with all her characters, and her skill in engaging the reader with their feelings; but there are perhaps too many issues in play, including human trafficking, AIDS in Africa, and cross-cultural adoption. Sometimes I had the feeling that characters were being manoeuvred rather hastily according to the requirements of the plot and its message. There is a difficulty, too, in Doherty's attempt to tell the story, at least partly, from Abela's point of view. The picture of Abela's life in Tanzania is impressionistic, and the authoritative point of view given to the reader is often that of Europeans. Throughout, Rosa and Abela take it in turns to tell their stories. At the close of the book, Rosa says of her new sister, 'I have a sense that deep down she's wiser and cleverer than me? I look into the blackness of her eyes and I see wild creatures and unknown frightening places and unbearable sorrow? She has come through all those things? I think she will become a great person.? I turned the page expecting to find out what Abela might think of Rosa and her new life in England but there was nothing more. At the last, in the book that bears her name, Abela is silent.

Running Order:

80

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