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If You Find Me

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~~Not a Choice:~~

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

5

Carey Violet Blackburn believes she is 15 years old. She lives with her six year-old sister Jenessa in a broken-down caravan in the middle of a wooded nature reserve in Tennessee. Their mother shares the caravan but uses drugs and often disappears for periods of time. To get money for drugs, Carey's mother forces her to have illegal sexual relations with men for money.

The sisters' mother has told them that they had to get away from their father because he was not a good person. An incident occurs ? its nature not revealed till near the end ? which causes Jenessa to become silent. She will whisper to Carey but otherwise remains mute.

Responding to a note from Carey's mother stating that she is unable to care for the children, their father and a social worker appear on the scene. The children are to rejoin their father in the civilised world. Murdoch's book now relates the sisters' readjustment to their new life. It also involves the gradual unveiling of Carey's great secret, the secret that struck her sister dumb.

The sisters must adapt to a wholly new environment. They now have a father, a step-mother and a step-sister Delaney. Poor Delaney has little chance of offering Carey and Jenessa anything like a welcome. All her life, her father has been seeking his other daughters.

In the modern world we all recognise, Carey is a stranger in a strange land. Murdoch's accomplishment is that she enables the reader most convincingly to see that world from the viewpoint of a new re-entrant. Carey's voice is utterly persuasive, the almost-silent voice of her sister no less so. In the relationship between Carey and Jenessa, this reviewer saw more than a casual reminder of the relationship between Scout and Jem Finch.

The reader sees three distinct identities competing for control of Carey's psyche. She is the girl in the woods, tough and determined, obliged to act as a substitute mother. She is the teenager acclimatising to a new world of school, friends and boys. And she is what her mother made her, a former teenage prostitute. The battle that takes place at the heart of the book is mortal combat.

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