

The Chosen One Study Guide

The Chosen One by Carol Lynch Williams

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Plot Summary

The Chosen One is a novel by writer Carol Lynch Williams. Kyra is a thirteen-year-old girl who lives in an isolated community governed over by a prophet. The Prophet's word is law and everyone must obey it, even when the Prophet orders Kyra to marry her own uncle. Her uncle is a man more than forty years her senior who already has six wives. Kyra wants to be obedient, she wants to do what her three mothers and her father tell her, but the idea of marrying her own uncle is too overwhelming. Not only that, but Kyra has already found a boy who wishes to choose her as his first wife. However, the Prophet's word must be followed. The Chosen One is an honest look into the traditions and culture of a religious sect from the point of view of a young girl educated just enough to question the ultimate authority of her community's chosen leader.

Kyra attends a family meeting in which the Prophet is expected to join the family. Kyra's three mothers, twenty siblings, and father are all very excited by the Prophet's visit because they hope it means that he has decided to honor their father with becoming one of the apostles. However, they soon learn that the Prophet's visit has little to do with their father, but is about Kyra. Kyra will be fourteen soon, of marrying age in her community. The Prophet tells the family that he has had a vision from God telling him that Kyra is meant to marry Hyrum, her father's brother.

Kyra is shocked by this announcement and refuses the idea. Hyrum is much older than Kyra and at least twenty years older than Kyra's father, and already has six wives. This makes the match completely incomprehensible to Kyra. Kyra rushes away from the family home, leaving her eight-month-old sister sobbing in her absence. Kyra wonders if she is being punished for sinning. Kyra has been sneaking away for months, visiting a mobile library that passes by the enclosed Compound once a week, borrowing and reading novels that have been banned by Prophet Childs. Not only this, but Kyra has also been sneaking away from her mother's trailer at night to visit Joshua Johnson, a young boy a few years older than herself. In fact, in her shock and fear at the proposed marriage, Kyra goes to Joshua.

Joshua promises that Kyra he will fix things somehow. At the same time, Kyra's father promises to go to the Prophet and talk him out of this marriage. However, the Prophet is determined to see Kyra marry Hyrum and refuses to back down. Hyrum visits the family and arranges a date with Kyra. Not long after this, Kyra and her mother's make a trip into town to buy material for Kyra's wedding dress. The only thing helping Kyra deal with the reality of her situation is the hope that Joshua might be able to convince the Prophet to allow him to choose Kyra instead of Hyrum.

Kyra's date with Hyrum is a disaster, in part because of the open jealousy of his first wife. Later, Kyra is taken to the Prophet's office where she finds Joshua beaten and battered. Kyra and Joshua are accused of adultery and threatened with the ultimate punishment, death. However, Hyrum agrees to marry Kyra despite her indiscretions with Joshua. Kyra is beaten and sent home. That night, Joshua comes to Kyra and tells her he is leaving with a group of boys and that he will one day come back for her.



Kyra is desperate to find a way out of her situation. When she goes to visit the mobile library one last time, the librarian can see her bruises and her depression and offers to help. The man tries to drive Kyra into town, to get her out of her situation, but the mobile library is run off the road and the man killed. However, Kyra managed to hold on to the man's cell phone. Kyra runs again, but manages to call the police before the Prophet's men can overtake her. Kyra is rescued, taken to a strange world she does not understand, away from the people she loves most.



Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary

Kyra is walking with eight-month-old Mariah, imagining how she might kill the Prophet if ever given the chance. Mother Claire, her father's first wife, calls Kyra, frightening her as though she could have heard her sinful thoughts. At home, Kyra helps her biological mother, Mother Sarah, prepare her three full siblings for a family meeting that night. Prophet Childs himself will be coming to speak with the family. Kyra's father thinks he might be coming to tell him that he has been chosen to become an apostle. Kyra does not care what he wants, she simply wishes she did not have to be in the same room with him. Prophet Childs is not kind. Since taking over as prophet from his own father, Prophet Childs has made many changes in the community, including building a large fence around the community and ordering the deaths of all babies who are not born perfect, such as Kyra's simple sister, Emily.

All three families belonging to Mother Claire, Mother Victoria, and Mother Sarah, meet at Mother Claire's trailer. The children are restless, but none as restless as Kyra. Kyra worries that somehow the Prophet has learned about her sins and that is what this meeting is about. Months ago, on one of her regular walks, Kyra was outside the Compound when she saw the van belonging to Ironton County Mobile Library on Wheels pass by. The first two times Kyra saw it, the man behind the wheel nodded to Kyra. On the third week, he stopped and asked if she wanted a library card. Even though she knew it was not allowed, Kyra climbed into the van and began to look at the collection of books. The man offered her a book that he said he had read and believed was very good, *The Bridge to Terabithia*. Kyra is so overwhelmed by the emotional impact of this book that she continues visiting the mobile library despite knowing it is a terrible sin. Not only that, but Kyra worries that the Prophet also knows there is a boy.

When the Prophet arrives, he has with him several of the apostles, including Kyra's uncle, Hyrum Carlson. Everyone is nervous and Mother Victoria tries to keep Emily quiet because she knows the Prophet does not like her due to her disability. Kyra sits quietly with her sister, Laura, waiting for the worse. Instead of being punished for her sins, however, Kyra learns that the Prophet has had a vision from God that she is to marry Hyrum. Kyra is shocked, sure she has misheard at first. However, the Prophet is clear about what he wants, telling Kyra's father she is to be married in four weeks. Kyra runs out of the house, ignoring the pleas of eight month old Mariah.

Kyra hides in her trees, Russian Olives, where she often hides from her siblings for a few minutes of peace or to read her illegal books. As she waits for it to get dark and the Prophet to leave Mother Claire's, Kyra thinks about Joshua. They have known each other most of their lives, but only recently has Joshua shown an interest in Kyra. He followed her to the Fellowship Hall one day to watch her play the piano. Then Joshua asked her to teach him to play. With permission from her father, Kyra began teaching Joshua. Their relationship quickly grew and they began sneaking out late at night to



meet, often in a dark doorway behind the Temple. This is where Kyra meets Joshua tonight after waking him with gentle pebbles thrown against his window. When Kyra tells him the news, Joshua promises to help Kyra find a way out of it.

The next day, Kyra's mother is terribly sick from her latest pregnancy. Kyra puts her back to bed and feeds the kids. Kyra and her sisters work in the garden and do all their chores. The whole time Kyra thinks about her proposed marriage. Kyra hopes her father will have success in talking the Prophet out of it. When it comes time to go meet the mobile library, Kyra's father has still not returned. Kyra walks out of the Compound aware of many eyes watching her. When the van arrives, Kyra greets the librarian, Patrick, shyly before she begins looking at his collection of books. As she searches, Patrick tells her that she needs to hide. Kyra hides behind the collection of newspapers while Patrick speaks with Brother Felix, the sheriff from the God Squad, the police force on the Compound. Brother Felix warns Patrick to stay away from the Compound and not to speak to anyone from the Compound. When he is gone, Kyra quickly makes her selection and prepares to leave. Patrick tells her he will give her a ride into town if she ever asks. When she returns home, Kyra finds her father waiting for her.

Chapter 1 Analysis

The first chapter introduces Kyra, her family, and the conflict that will push Kyra to the climax of the novel. Kyra is thirteen, mature for her age because of her role in her family as caretaker to the younger kids. Kyra's father is married to three women, each with their own home and their own group of children. Kyra's mother is her father's third wife and mother of Kyra's three full sisters. However, her father is also married to two other women who have sixteen children between them, therefore Kyra is always busy helping with her younger brothers and sisters.

Kyra's family lives in a Compound run by their religious leader, the Prophet Childs. Everyone in the Compound must follow the rules set down for them by the Prophet, even when they disagree. The former Prophet was a kind man who allowed his followers to leave the Compound whenever they liked and did not fence them in. The current Prophet, however, is a cruel man who enforces his laws with brutality, often death penalties. In fact, the Prophet even kills babies who are not perfect because he says they are an abomination against God. The Prophet claims that his authority comes straight from God, that he has visions of what is supposed to happen and how it should be carried out.

Kyra has been breaking the rules of the Prophet. The Prophet has banned books in the Compound. Kyra has begun reading books. It is wrong for young people to fraternize with members of the opposite sex. Kyra has been seeing a boy. Kyra worries that by breaking these rules of the Prophets that she will be punished in some way. For this reason, Kyra is convinced that it is her fault that the Prophet has decided she should marry her own uncle, a man with six wives who is more than forty years her senior. Kyra is terrified at the thought of marrying this man and she fights it the only way she can, by being an obedient girl and hoping her father can talk the Prophet out of it. However, the

reader wonders if it could possibly be that easy, particularly when the reader takes the Prophet's cruelty into consideration.



Chapter 2

Chapter 2 Summary

Not only has Kyra's father failed to talk the Prophet out of forcing her to marry Hyrum, Hyrum himself arrives at Mother Sarah's trailer and demands a punishment for Mariah. Mariah cried for Kyra the night before after she left the meeting with the family and the Prophet, causing the Prophet to believe her to be a disobedient child. Hyrum forces Mother Claire to dunk the baby into a bath of ice water in punishment for her behavior. When Hyrum leaves, Mariah fails to breathe on her own for several minutes, causing a moment of concern. However, she soon recovers. Mother Claire later tells Kyra that is important for everyone to obey the Prophet no matter what the cost.

Mother Victoria comes that night to measure Kyra for her wedding dress. Kyra again tells everyone that she will not marry Hyrum, but later relents in an attempt to be more obedient. Hyrum comes to Mother Sarah's for dinner that night without warning, causing Mother Sarah to have to take dinner from one of the other mother's because she had not planned a meal. Hyrum makes it clear that he is looking forward to marrying Kyra and that she should not attempt to get out of the marriage again. That night Kyra asks her mother to tell her the story of Bill Trophy and Ellen. Ellen was forced to marry an older man with many wives and she cried all the way to the altar. Shortly after the wedding, Ellen was caught in an affair with Bill Trophy. Bill was beaten and run off the Compound while Ellen was killed.

Kyra prepares to meet Joshua that night. Joshua knows all about Kyra's books and her trips to the mobile library. Kyra has shared everything with Joshua and he still loves her. In fact, Joshua has told her that he wants to choose her. When they meet, they talk about their love for one another. Joshua tells Kyra that he plans to go to the Prophet and tell him that Kyra is the one he chooses and try to get her out of her wedding with Hyrum.

The next morning, Kyra goes into town with her three mothers, Mariah, and Laura. They stop at a fabric store to buy fabric for Kyra's wedding dress and other family needs. Kyra is shocked at the way the people in town dress and how they stare at Kyra and her family. Over lunch at Appleby's, Kyra is again overwhelmed with the differences between her way of life and the way people in the city live. Then Kyra tells her mothers that she does not want to be married to Hyrum and they order her to be quiet. Then, when she arrives home, Kyra is quickly prepared for her date with Hyrum. The date is difficult and awkward. Hyrum makes several comments on their intimate relationship after the wedding and Hyrum's first wife, who is serving them, acts with jealousy toward Kyra. Afterward, Hyrum walks Kyra home and tries to kiss her, but she fights him. Kyra's father comes out and sends Hyrum away.



Kyra knows that one way or another she will have to leave her family and she does not want to do it. Kyra is very close to both her mother and her three younger sisters. Kyra lays awake most of the night worrying over this idea.

The next day, Kyra is summoned to the Prophet's office in the Temple. When she arrives, Kyra finds Hyrum there and Joshua in a chair, badly beaten. The Prophet accuses Kyra of adultery with Joshua even as Joshua denies it. The Prophet threatens Kyra with death unless Hyrum wants to marry her anyway. Hyrum agrees. Joshua is taken away and Kyra is beaten for her sins. At home, Kyra's mother collapses at the sight of her. Mother Claire and Mother Victoria tend her bruises. Later, Mother Claire tells Kyra that she once tried to run away because she did not want to marry the man chosen for her. The Prophet later relented and allowed her to marry her current husband instead. Mother Claire tells Kyra that she needs to be obedient because things are different now and she could face terrible consequences if she tries again. That night, Kyra's father tells her that if she does not stop, he and his family could lose everything.

Chapter 2 Analysis

Hyrum proves himself to be as cruel as the Prophet. Hyrum forces Mother Claire to punish her eight month old child in a way that is so cruel that it would be unimaginable for an older child. Not only this, but Hyrum seems much too eager to marry a thirteen year old child and have children with her. It is clear that Hyrum is simply using religious beliefs to be cruel and to indulge his dark sexual desires.

Kyra continues to hope for a miracle even as she tries to be obedient to her father's desires. Kyra knows that obedience is an important part of her religion, an important way for her to make her way to heaven one day. However, the continuing pressure to marry Hyrum makes it difficult for Kyra to follow the rules and she continuously finds herself disobeying the Prophet's rules despite herself.

Kyra goes into the city for the first time and finds herself face to face with the modern world. Kyra has never seen much of the modern world except for Patrick and his mobile library. For this reason, Kyra is shocked by the way modern people dress, the way they talk, the tattoos on their skin, and the way in which these people stare at her. It is a very different world from the world Kyra has been living in and the reader can see how difficult it would be for her to leave her compound and survive in this world. This seems to narrow Kyra's choices in her current situation.

When Kyra escapes to see Joshua, he tells her that he will go to the Prophet and beg to be allowed to marry her. However, when he does, Joshua is beaten for being an adulterer even though he did nothing more than what normal teenagers would commonly do with one another. Kyra is also beaten and it quickly becomes clear that her only choice is to marry Hyrum or run away. However, if Kyra runs away, the Prophet could take her father's wives and children from him and give them to other men, assuring their mistreatment. Kyra's situation is beginning to look very bleak.



Chapters 3-4

Chapters 3-4 Summary

Chapter 3. Mother Sarah is sick again. Mother Claire comes over and pins the pieces of Kyra's wedding dress to her. Later that night, Mother Sarah goes into labor. The baby is too early and quickly dies. Kyra is convinced it is her fault for bringing too much stress down on her mother.

That night, Joshua comes to Kyra's window and tells her he is leaving with a group of other boys. They only have a short time before the God Squad will come after them, therefore they cannot take Kyra with them. However, Joshua promises that he will come back for her.

The next day, there is a special meeting in the Temple. The children are all called to the front. The Prophet talks about disobedience and about several boys who ran away the night before. As he talks, the Prophet looks down on Kyra. Kyra's family is puzzled about this, more so when Prophet Childs comes to the house and demands that Kyra be punished. Finally Kyra tells her father the truth about herself and Joshua. Mother Claire and Kyra's father are shocked, but they are mostly deeply afraid for Kyra.

Chapter 4. When Wednesday comes again, Kyra debates with herself about whether she should go to the mobile library again. Finally Kyra decides she should, but that this should be the last time. Then as she walks, Kyra thinks that even though she will be married, that she should still be able to sneak away to the library every day. When the library arrives, Patrick is shocked by the bruises on Kyra's face. Kyra breaks down and tells Patrick everything that has been happening, including her impending wedding and the death of her infant baby sister. Patrick is so outraged that he tells Kyra he is going to take her to the city and that she can stay with him and his wife until she figures things out.

As Kyra and Patrick drive past the Compound, Kyra hides in the back of the van. Once past the Compound, Kyra moves into the passenger seat. It seems they are free. However, a police car and several black Hummers suddenly appear behind them. Kyra tells Patrick to keep going. Patrick tries, but the van will not go very fast and they are soon overrun. The Hummers slam into the van over and over again. Patrick gives Kyra his cell phone and tells her to call for help as soon as there is a signal. However, the van is forced off the road before they reach a place where they can get a signal. Patrick is injured and dragged out of the van, beaten. Kyra is taken home.

Kyra knows that Patrick is dead and she feels guilty. The God Squad parks the van near Kyra's trailer where she will be sure to see it. After dusk, Kyra sneaks over and looks at the van and sees blood everywhere. After sleeping for a short time, Kyra knows what she has to do. Kyra sneaks off to the van, finds a spare key, and carefully drives out of the Compound. Kyra is soon pursued by the God Squad. However, before they can



force her off the road, Kyra is able to call 911. Police cars come from the city. One of the cops, a woman, has clearly seen people like Kyra before and she is very angry. In fact, she tells Kyra that they have a warrant for the arrest of most of the God Squad and Prophet Childs. After the God Squad is arrested, Kyra is taken to the home of a woman who often cares for children such as she. This woman, Samantha, was part of the Fundamentalists and she ran away with her infant daughter many years ago. Samantha takes Kyra to breakfast and discusses her future, offering to let Kyra remain in her home as long as she needs.

Chapters 3-4 Analysis

Kyra's mother, who has had multiple miscarriages in the past, goes into labor prematurely and loses her baby. It is clear to the reader that Mother Sarah could benefit from help from modern medicine. However, Kyra believes that Mother Sarah's labor and subsequent loss of her infant are her fault for causing her too much stress. It is a difficult situation that leaves Kyra more desperate than ever to change her own situation. While Kyra never expresses the thought, it is clear that Kyra does not want the same life her own mother has.

Kyra tries to conform, tries to do as her father wishes to protect the family as well as him, but she cannot. Kyra relents and allows the librarian, Patrick, to take her away. However, they are caught and Patrick is killed. This angers Kyra, causing her natural strength to come through. It is clear that Kyra is a very strong young woman and that she is too strong to allow these things to continue happening to her without cause. For this reason, Kyra stands up and runs away again, this time placing her own life in danger. However, Kyra is luckier than Patrick and she survives, leaving behind everyone she knows and loves, leaving her feeling as though it is a bittersweet victory.



Characters

Kyra Carlson

Kyra is the main character of the novel. Kyra is a thirteen-year-old girl who has lived all her life in an isolated compound. Kyra's family is part of a religious group that believes that a man must have three wives to earn his way into heaven and that marriage at thirteen is normal and expected of all females of the community. Kyra will be fourteen soon, therefore it is no surprise that the Prophet, the leader of the Compound, has decided it is time for her to be married. Unfortunately, Kyra is to marry her elderly uncle rather than the young man she loves.

Kyra is a good girl. Kyra spends much of her day doing chores and caring for her many younger siblings. However, Kyra is also a normal, curious teenager. For this reason, Kyra has begun sneaking books from a mobile library, learning about the outside world and the ways of modern civilization. At the same time, Kyra has fallen in love with Joshua, a sixteen year old boy who also lives in the Compound. Joshua wants to choose Kyra as his wife, and in the past this would have been acceptable, but under the new Prophet, this becomes an admission of adultery.

Kyra loves her family very much and she knows that by disobeying the Prophet she is placing all of them in danger. However, Kyra cannot imagine marrying a man so much older than her, a man who is her blood relative. Kyra tries to find many ways to get out of this marriage, finally deciding her only choice is to run away even though she knows this means that she could be leaving her remaining family members in trouble. It is a difficult choice, but Kyra must make it before time runs out.

Mother Sarah

Mother Sarah is Kyra's mother, her father's third wife. Mother Sarah is only in her late twenties, but she seems much older than she is because of her many pregnancies and her pregnancy loses. Mother Sarah is a kind and gentle woman who has filled her daughter with delightful memories despite their lifestyle. However, the lifestyle has had a bad effect on Mother Sarah, leaving her often broken, sick, and emotionally distraught.

Mother Claire

Mother Claire is the first wife of Kyra's father. Mother Claire is a woman in her thirties, though she appears much older because of the bearing of many children and the stresses of her daily life. Mother Claire appears to be a hard, uncaring woman, but in truth she only appears this way because she believes this makes her a good wife and mother. Mother Claire confesses to Kyra in the course of the plot that she once was rebellious, that she tried to run away when she was told she must marry a man much older than herself. Mother Claire's rebellious ways ended when she was allowed



instead to marry a man closer to her own age. Mother Claire has since tried to be an obedient woman and she tries to stress to Kyra how important this is.

Mother Victoria

Mother Victoria is the second wife of Kyra's father. Mother Victoria is a quiet, gentle woman. Mother Victoria has a child who is not whole, a daughter considered by the new Prophet as an abomination. Had this child been born during the new Prophet's time, she would have been killed at birth to prevent her strain on the community as a whole. Mother Victoria is very protective of her children and is unhappy when Kyra's actions appear to place the entire family in danger.

Prophet Childs

Prophet Childs is the leader of the community in which Kyra and her family lives. Prophet Childs claims to receive visions and messages directly from God that tells him how to govern the community. Prophet Childs claims that he has seen a vision in which Kyra must marry her own uncle, Hyrum. In the end, however, the reader gets the impression that the Prophet prefers to give the young girls to the older men of the community because it satisfies their desires and keeps them loyal to the Prophet. The Prophet is a very cruel man, who often orders the deaths of women in the community who have done wrong, while sending the men away into the modern world, and killing infants that he feels are unwhole and therefore a burden on the community as a whole. The Prophet is running the religious community like his own social club, making it a very unhappy place for many of his followers.

Hyrum Carlson

Hyrum Carlson is Kyra's uncle by her father. Hyrum is an Apostle, one of the chosen ones who help govern the community and are allowed to live in nice houses rather than trailers. Hyrum is fifty years Kyra's senior and has six wives. The Prophet has seen a vision in which Kyra and Hyrum are married. Kyra is sickened by this idea and tries many ways to get out of the marriage and remain in her community, but when all of these things fail, Kyra runs away.

Hyrum is a terrible man who relishes punishments against all children, including infants. Hyrum is a man who does not care for other's feelings and who places his own needs in front of all else. Hyrum admits to Kyra that he has wanted to make her his wife since she was a small child. This implies to the reader not only is the Prophet lying about his vision, but that Hyrum is the kind of man who finds very young girl's sexually exciting.



Laura Carlson

Laura is Kyra's sister. Laura and Kyra are very close to one another, each other's best friends. When Kyra learns she must marry Hyrum, one of her biggest concerns is leaving Laura. Kyra also worries about Laura having to marry an old man such as Hyrum. Kyra knows she must change what is happening in her community because of Laura and all her sisters, but she does not know how to go about it.

Joshua Johnson

Joshua Johnson is a boy who also lives in the community. Joshua begins flirting with Kyra months before the Prophet announces she must marry Hyrum. Joshua is a kind boy who believes in their religion, but also has a more open mind than the Prophet, reading with Kyra books that have been banned from the Compound. In the end, Joshua promises to get Kyra out of her marriage to Hyrum by asking the Prophet to allow him to marry Kyra, but this is rewarded with accusations of adultery and a bad beating. Joshua ends up running away with a group of boys who have also offended the Prophet in some way, leaving Kyra with a promise that he will one day come back for her.

Patrick

Patrick is the librarian who drives the Ironton County Mobile Library on Wheels. Patrick is a kind, gentle man who allows Kyra to use his mobile library even though her neighborhood is not one of his usual stops and she is of a community that keeps to itself. Patrick reaches out to Kyra on many occasions, trying to befriend her, but she is too scared to share much of herself with him. However, when Kyra goes to the mobile library and thinks it will be the last time, Patrick's expression of concern for her causes her to break down and tell him everything. Patrick tries to help Kyra by driving her to the city, to his own home, but they are run off the road by the community's sheriff and the God Squad. Kyra believes the God Squad killed Patrick for trying to help her.

Samantha

Samantha is a woman who was once part of the Fundamentalists and who ran away with her infant daughter. Samantha understands how difficult it is to run away from such a community and she often takes in young people who have run away from these communities and helps them adjust to the modern world. Samantha takes in Kyra after she runs away and offers her a permanent home in the modern world.



Objects/Places

Books

Books have been banned from the Compound by the Prophet Childs. Kyra, however, has begun reading novels after finding the Ironton County Mobile Library on Wheels.

Cellphone

Patrick gives Kyra his cellphone when they are trying to outrun the sheriff and God Squad from the Compound in the hopes that they will come to a place where there is reception so she can call 911. This fails, but Kyra later uses the cellphone when she runs again and this time is able to get through to 911 and get help.

Spare Key

Before they drag him from the van, Patrick tells Kyra where she can find a spare key for the van. Kyra uses this spare key to make a second escape attempt from the Compound.

The Piano

Kyra has a gift for music. Kyra has been playing the piano since she was small and continues to practice it in the days before her impending wedding.

Wedding Dress

Although she does not wish to marry Hyrum, Kyra's three mothers help her purchase materials for and sew her wedding dress.

Snake Tattoo

Kyra is fascinated with a snake tattoo she sees on a woman when she and her three mothers travel to the city to buy material for her wedding dress.

Russian Olive Trees

There are a stand of Russian Olives outside Kyra's family trailer. Kyra often hides in the trees to escape her many siblings. Kyra also hides her books from the mobile library in the trees. Kyra is later surprised to find Russian Olives growing outside her bedroom in Samantha's house.



Trailers

Kyra's family lives in three trailers, one for each of her father's wives. Kyra shares hers with Mother Sarah and her sisters, Laura, Margaret, and Carolina.

Fellowship Hall

Kyra likes to practice the piano in the Fellowship Hall because she likes the piano there and it is often empty during the day.

The Temple

Kyra and Joshua often meet at a door outside the back of the Temple.

The Compound

The Compound is the isolated, fenced property where Kyra lives. Within the Compound contains houses and trailers to house the many families, a Temple, the Fellowship Hall, a small store, and the school. The Compound is self-sufficient and does not require much from the outside world.

The Ironton County Mobile Library on Wheels

The Ironton County Mobile Library on Wheels is a van that contains shelves with many books on them as well as newspapers and magazines. The mobile library takes the library out into the rural community to people who might not be able to go to the library in the city. Kyra begins visiting the mobile library each week after seeing the van drive by near the Compound while out on her daily walks.



Themes

Misuse of Power

The theme of misuse of power is a clear theme of this novel because of Prophet Childs. Prophet Childs is a very different leader from his father. The previous Prophet was a gentler man who allowed his followers to go into the city whenever they had a cause, who allowed the reading of fiction from the modern world, who did not lock his followers off from the rest of the world. Prophet Childs, however, built a fence around the Compound as one of his first duties as Prophet. Prophet Childs also banned books, forcing everyone to burn all their books. Prophet Childs created many rules difficult for some of his followers to obey, including the idea that premature or babies that are somehow imperfect are to be killed because they are an abomination.

It is clear to the reader that Prophet Childs is a man who has different ideas about what it means to be a Prophet of God. Rather than guiding his people in their religious beliefs as his father did before him, Prophet Childs treats his followers as though they are children who need discipline more than guidance. Prophet Childs uses his people to make money for himself, to provide himself with a glorious home while his people live in trailers, to provide young women as wives for himself and his apostles, to be his servants rather than his followers. Prophet Childs clearly misuses the power given to him by his people.

Religion

Religion is a theme of this novel because it is religion that governs the way in which Kyra and her community live. Kyra's community believes that men should have at least three wives in order to be assured a place in heaven. They also believe that children should be plentiful. Kyra and her community believe that obedience is very important to ensure a place in heaven, one of the few things about her religion that Kyra has trouble following.

The people in Kyra's community believe in hard work, in family first, and in an afterlife in the light of God's love. The whole purpose of daily life in this community is assuring a place in heaven. Kyra's community is very religious, starting and ending their day in prayer. While many readers might not agree with the way in which Kyra and her family live, as, in the end, neither does Kyra, but the religious parts of Kyra's life are not the main problem in their community, but the rules of the Prophet and the darkness with which he yields his powers. However, religion does play a major role in the novel and is therefore an important theme of the novel.

Lifestyles

Kyra has always lived in the Compound and has never been outside its gates except for her daily walks and her one trip to the city to buy material for her wedding dress. This causes Kyra to believe her way of living is the only one that exists. Although Kyra is aware that there is a whole world outside the Compound that is much different from the one where she lives, she does not really experience it except vicariously through novels.

Kyra makes a trip into the city to buy the materials for her wedding dress. This gives Kyra the opportunity to see what life is really like in the real world. Kyra sees modern people for the first time, sees how they dress and how they behave. This causes Kyra some curiosity, but what Kyra sees more than anything else her first time in the real world is the stares that she and her mothers receive from modern society.

When Kyra runs away, she suddenly realizes that she is in a world she does not understand, one she will eventually have to conform to. It is difficult for Kyra to accept this because she has always done things her own way, wearing homemade dresses, braiding her hair, wearing only one kind of shoes, long dresses, modest clothing. The idea of wearing modern clothing where someone might see her bra strap is overwhelming and leaves Kyra frightened. Despite the knowledge that she had no choice but to escape the Prophet, Kyra finds herself in a new world she is not sure she wants.



Style

Point of View

The novel is written in the first person point of view. The narrating character is Kyra, a thirteen year old girl who lives in a Compound governed by a Prophet. Kyra is perfectly happy in this compound until she is told that she will have to marry her much older uncle. Kyra tries every way she can to find a way out of it without upsetting the community, but finally decides her only choice is to run away.

The point of view of this novel is the most intimate a fiction writer can choose. The first person point of view keeps the reader very close to the narrating character, not allowing any confusion for the reader as the author remains solely with one character throughout the novel. The first person point of view also creates an intimate relationship between the reader and the main character, causing the reader to be deeply concerned about what might happen to the main character as the plot develops. This is very important in a novel such as this where the main character's lifestyle is controversial and might make the reader feel some animosity for the main character if not for the intimate knowledge of the main character's thoughts and feelings.

Setting

The majority of the novel is set in the Compound. This compound is a small community of religious people who live nearly self-sufficient, isolated from the modern world in a community that includes a small store, a Temple, and a police force. The Compound is like a small town, a place where people are free to live any way in which they wish without fear of persecution or ridicule from the outside world.

The setting of this novel is important because it creates a world that provides for the main character both a happy, secure home life and a place of danger where the main character finds herself torn between obeying the Prophet to remain near her family, or escaping the horrible marriage that the Prophet is forcing her to make. The author does a great job of creating this little world, showing it to the reader completely through the eyes of a thirteen year old girl who has never known anything else, yet has learned enough of the outside world to understand that what the Prophet is forcing on her is not something she really has to do.

Language and Meaning

The intended audience of this novel is young adults, therefore much of the language of the novel is very simple English. The main character is a young girl who has been raised in a highly religious, isolated community. For this reason, the language this young girl uses does not include slang or other language that a modern teenager the same



age might use. At the same time, the girl is not excessively educated, therefore her language is simple and this is reflected in the dialogue and narration of the novel.

The language of this novel remains authentic to the characters as well to the intended audience. The author uses a good job keeping the language simple in order to reflect the very simple life of the main character. While educated, the young narrator is not highly educated, nor is she unintelligent. Therefore the language of the novel fits the main character very well.

Structure

The novel is divided into four chapters. Each chapter covers a short period of time, some less than a day. The novel is written both in dialogue and narration, showing a story rather than telling. The story is told in a linear fashion, but also includes many flashbacks, allowing the reader to see things that have happened in the past in order to explain the way things have changed in the Compound and how Kyra has broken many of the rules set down by the new Prophet.

The novel has one main plot and several subplots. The main plot follows Kyra as she learns she must marry her uncle and her attempts to get out of the marriage, eventually leading to her running away. One subplot follows Kyra's trips to the mobile library and her budding friendship with the librarian, Patrick. Another subplot follows Kyra's relationship with Joshua to its tragic end. Another subplot deals with the relationships between Kyra and her three mothers. All the plots come to a satisfying conclusion at the end of the novel.



Quotes

"We wait. All of us together. Father, all the Mothers, all of the children" Chapter 1, p. 11).

"But. Here is another secret. Another sin. Because I am not allowed to be with Joshua. I am not allowed to feel this way. Tingly when he looks at me. Weak when his hand is near my. And the worst part - I couldn't help but wonder how it would be to kiss him" (Chapter 1, p. 25).

"How is that possible, to feel frozen and as unsteady as water at the same time" (Chapter 1, p. 37).

"As soon as I see his face, as soon as I see Mother's face, I know that Father's request has been denied" (Chapter 2, p. 42).

"I look Mother Claire right in the eye. Why stay here, I wonder. And she answers with a shrug like she hears my thoughts" (Chapter 2, p. 46).

"Including Ellen, one of Brother Bennion's daughters, who had to marry Brother Mathias, an Apostle. He was at least seventy years old then. His teeth, yellow. His eyes, too. Like an egg almost" (Chapter 2, p. 53).

"I don't want to leave my family. This is the first thing I think when I open my eyes and stare at the ceiling the next morning" (Chapter 2, p. 69).

"But I can only think of myself. I hurt all over. Bruises have appeared on both arms, my legs, and across my back. When did that happen" (Chapter 3, p. 78).

"Mother Claire slips next to Father. She takes his hand, hardly making a move to do it. Mother Victoria stands next to Mother Claire. They are a line of bodies in front of me" (Chapter 3, p. 86).

"I can read. Women can read" (Chapter 4, pg. 89).

"I've left my music behind. And my sisters. And mothers. And father" (Chapter 4, p. 91).

"I am not me. Any. More" (Chapter 4, p. 96).

"I am free" (Chapter 4, p. 106).



Topics for Discussion

Who is Kyra? Where does she live? Why does she take so much responsibility for her siblings? Why does Kyra answer to three mothers? How many siblings does Kyra have? For what reason? Why does Kyra like to hide in the Russian Olive trees? What makes this mildly dangerous? What does Kyra often hide there?

How did Kyra come to check out books from the Ironton County Mobile Library on Wheels? Who is Patrick? Why does he try to befriend Kyra? What is dangerous about Kyra coming to this mobile library? What is the first book Kyra checks out? Why does she choose this book? How does Kyra respond to this book? For what reason?

Who is the Prophet? Why does he come to the Carlson home? What does Kyra's father think he wants? What does Kyra think is the purpose of his visit? What is the real purpose of his visit? How does Kyra respond to this? For what reason? What is wrong about the Prophet's announcement? How does Kyra's parents react to this announcement?

Why does Hyrum insist on punishment against Mariah? What did Mariah do? How old is Mariah? What happens after the punishment? How does Kyra feel about this punishment? What does Mother Claire say to Kyra about this punishment? What does this punishment suggest about Kyra's future? How does administering this punishment in front of Kyra change the relationship between Kyra and Mother Claire?

Why is a trip into the city such a big deal to Kyra? How does Kyra respond when she sees people staring at her, her sisters, and her mothers? Why do people stare? Does Kyra do the same to the people around her? Explain. How does this situation foreshadow difficulty for Kyra should she ever leave the Compound?

Why is Mother Sarah sick through most of the novel? What causes her illness? What does Kyra do to try to help her mother? Why does Kyra feel guilty when her mother's illness worsens? Why does Kyra think that modern medicine might have helped Sarah? Why does Sarah not seek modern medicine? Why does the Prophet look down on women such as Sarah? Is Sarah's situation her own fault?

Why does Kyra think Patrick was murdered? Was he? How was Patrick trying to help Kyra? Why did Kyra let him? Who attacked them? Why does Kyra continue to try to escape the Compound? What will happen to Kyra's family if she is successful? Does Kyra not care about what will happen to her family? Explain. What does happen when Kyra tries to escape again?