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The Heaven Shop

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~~Not a Choice:~~

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

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Deborah Ellis continues to add to her gallery of children caught up in some of the world's humanitarian crises. Binti begins the story as something of a celebrity in Malawi because of her role in a radio soap opera that aims to offer education about health and particularly HIV and AIDS. When her own father, a coffin maker, dies of AIDS, she experiences for herself the shame and isolation that is fed by ignorance and poverty. Once again, Ellis shows that she is adept at creating real individuals with whom a wide child audience can identify and at treating difficult subjects honestly and with integrity. After Binti and her brother and sister are neglected by indifferent relatives, her brother ends up in prison and her sister as a prostitute, tragically contracting HIV herself from unprotected sex. This is described without sensationalism, within the understanding of a younger teenager. Only the dedication of an AIDS health worker and Binti's grandmother, who has gathered a colony of AIDS orphans around her, gives Binti the support that she needs to begin her life again. She re-establishes The Heaven Shop, her father's coffin business, reunited with her brother and sister. As in her past work, Ellis balances an understanding of how cruel life can be with the firm conviction that people of good will working together can make a difference and build anew even in the shadow of death. There are two afterwords to the story: a short summary of the appalling impact of HIV/AIDS on families across Africa; and an interview with Ellis discussing the genesis of the book.

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