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Black Sheep

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~~Not a Choice:~~

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

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?Is it love at first sight, or death on the streets?? The strapline says it all, because it?s both. Dwayne is a ghetto ?sweet boy? and hard man, running with a gang since his early teens, the bane of his mother?s life and likely to end school with no GCSEs. Misha is an academically gifted posh girl, studying in a private academy and with her sights set on university. Despite their different backgrounds, they fall in love, and Robert?s novel is concerned with two questions: can their love survive and will Dwayne turn his life around? There is much to admire in the novel: it?s long but packed with incident and drama, from gang violence, which features twice but with telling effect, to the socially excruciating meeting between Dwayne and Misha?s family. It?s told alternately from Dwayne and Misha?s points of view. Dwayne?s use of street language is entirely convincing to an outsider like me; and the author is even-handed in her attitudes to their very different worlds. Robert is a Muslim and Islam has a place in the story, acting as a redemptive force for older gang members and for Dwayne, for whom *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* leads on to study of the Quran. Yet, there are one or two aspects of the story that puzzle me as a reader. First, that sex doesn?t seem to be a part of Dwayne and Misha?s relationship at all (although exploitative sex makes an incidental appearance elsewhere); and, secondly, that, while their social and family relationships are explored in some detail, they remain shadowy to me as individuals, perhaps because their lives are seen as so strongly socially determined. For instance, it is not until near the end of the novel that we see Dwayne doing what he most enjoys: DJing at a club. Robert tells her story with conviction and passion, from a strong, but never obtrusive, moral standpoint. Her story is driven by despair at the waste of young lives in our cities, but she finds creative energy and hope there too.

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