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# The Butterfly Heart

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~~Not a choice:~~

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

4

In this beguiling tale of modern Zambia, twins Bul-Boo and Madillo are witnesses to a confrontation between a friend's dreams of her future and the manipulation of tradition to make her a child bride. Clever quiet Winifred longs to become a teacher but is to be married to the old fat drunken friend of her uncle, who, according to his interpretation of local custom and her mother's distress, has taken her dead father's place in her home. How can the twins help her? Will talking to Ifwafwa, the snake catcher, be of any use? Or should they rely on their friend Freddy's great-grandmother, who Freddy claims is a witch? Told mainly by Bul-Boo, but with help from Ifwafwa, it's a story with humour, charm and mystery. This derives both from the well-drawn characters, including gentle Ifwafwa and the children's teacher, the ungentle Sister Leonisa, a font of dubious knowledge and wisdom; and also from the play of tradition and modernity, faith and reason, the real and the supernatural, fact and fantasy in the children's everyday lives. But over all this, Winifred's likely awful fate casts a long shadow. Paula Leyden avoids outright condemnation of traditional beliefs and customs, and, through Ifwafwa, argues that the uncle's imposition of himself and his friend on Winifred and her mother is a distortion of a traditional practice which was intended to offer protection to a widow and her children. And it is Ifwafwa who resolves Winifred's situation, but in a way that, for this reader at least, comes down a little too heavily on one side of the fact and fantasy divide.

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