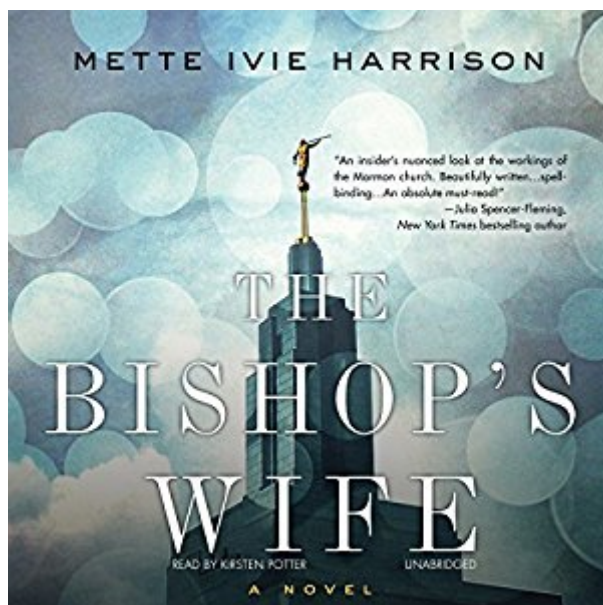


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The Bishop's Wife



Synopsis

In the predominantly Mormon city of Draper, Utah, some seemingly perfect families have deadly secrets. Inspired by an actual crime and written by a practicing Mormon, *The Bishop's Wife* is both a fascinating look at the lives of modern Mormons and a grim and cunningly twisted mystery. Linda Wallheim is the mother of five grown boys and the wife of a Mormon bishop. As bishop, Kurt Wallheim is the ward's designated spiritual father, and that makes Linda the ward's unofficial mother whose days are filled with comfort visits, community service, and informal counseling. But Linda is increasingly troubled by the church's patriarchal structure and secrecy, especially as a disturbing situation takes shape in the ward. One cold winter morning, a neighbor, Jared Helm, appears on the Wallheims' doorstep with his five-year-old daughter, claiming that his wife, Carrie, disappeared in the middle of the night, leaving behind everything she owns. The circumstances surrounding Carrie's disappearance become more suspicious the more Linda learns about them, and she becomes convinced that Jared has murdered his wife and painted himself as an abandoned husband. Kurt asks Linda not to get involved in the unfolding family saga, but she has become obsessed with Carrie's fate - and with the well-being of her vulnerable young daughter. She cannot let the matter rest until she finds out the truth. Is she wrong to go against her husband, the bishop, when her inner convictions are so strong?

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Stuck home with a nasty cold yesterday, I was intrigued by the polarized reviews of Mette Ivie

Harrison's recent mystery, *The Bishop's Wife*, so I bought a kindle copy and read it. Basically, it's a step up from cozy (it's been edited, for one thing!) but not a real crime novel. It still features a middle-aged female protagonist, but there's no romance sub-plot, as she is happily married. Also, this woman is not stupid (as in most cozies) and she has no "in" with any cops. Linda, the protagonist, is indeed the Bishop's wife, and the main plot begins when her neighbor, a young mother, leaves home without a trace. At the same time, another neighbor's husband is dying -- and he keeps raving about his first wife, a woman whose death is also clouded in mystery. I really liked this book, but people are going nuts with negative reviews. So, instead of giving a regular review of my own, I thought I'd comment on a few recurring themes in the negative reviews.

Negative theme #1: "It moves too slowly." Yeah, it kind of does move slowly. I agree. However, I think it's because Harrison gave it a Mormon setting, and, while an author can explain ordinary cozy hooks like baking or antique hunting with a few references, giving the non-Mormon reader some clue as to what life is like for Utah Mormons takes a fair amount of explanation. There just had to be a good deal of backstory. I'm not sure how Harrison could possibly have done otherwise.

Negative theme #2 "It misrepresents the Church." A reviewer (unfortunately) named Lisa gave this book low ratings on Goodreads, stating, "My chief complaint is that the book misrepresents the Church in some ways.... " Hers is a common complaint. Several readers objected to the fact that Harrison omits the Stake President in the story, which I found odd, because that position is completely irrelevant to the plot. Why would Harrison complicate things with even more Mormon backstory? I think that's also why she left out visiting teachers and home teachers; they aren't necessary to the plot, and the reader doesn't need to know every single thing about Mormons. Harrison also left out fast offerings, baptisms for the dead, and ward bulletins -- because they are necessary to the plot.

Negative theme #3: "It's feminist." Yeah, it is. And that's a good thing, not a bad thing. Get over yourself. One reviewer who goes by "mindful" calls the book "a wolf in sheep's clothing." He identifies himself as a former Mormon bishop and is clearly offended by the fact that Harrison shows a lot of the turmoil Mormon women face. But it is precisely that realistic turmoil that makes the book work! Linda deals with everything from blatant misogyny (Alex Helm) to benevolent patriarchy (her own husband and every other "good" man in the plot) -- and she struggles with it. She also struggles with the eternal polygamy (in the afterlife) which still exists in the church. I know NUMEROUS women who are very, very troubled by this. I don't know a single man who worries much about it. Therefore, this "mindful" and the reviewers like him who pat women on their heads and tell us not to trouble ourselves with all this feminist thinking are EXACTLY the reason why books that deal with these issues need to be read.

Negative theme #4: "The men aren't like real Mormon men." Several reviewers commented that

there are no "good" men in this book. Huh? Linda's husband, her five sons, Tobias, Cheri Tate's husband, and her new son-in-law are all good men. But the book is about a crime, so it naturally focuses on the "bad guys." What do you expect in a mystery novel? reviewer L. Hawkins, who appears to be "Lisa" on goodreads, said, "In my forty-plus years of Church membership, I have never met anyone who believed that women are inferior as several of the men in this book do." My response to that is that in my lifetime, I've met many, many men who have no problem with women as second class Mormons -- as well as a fair number of men who've hid some pretty nasty stuff behind a facade of church righteousness, some of whom were never even reprimanded for it. Thus, I find Harrison's characters to be fairly plausible, given that this IS a mystery novel. So, would I recommend this book? Yes, I would -- to readers who can get through all the necessary backstory about Mormons and to Mormons who already know that backstory. If you're an impatient reader who needs constant action, if you couldn't make it through *The Scarlet Letter* and all its introspection, skip this one.

The novel, Harrison's first venture into adult fiction, was gripping and hard to put down. She said she was encouraged by her publisher to put more Mormon doctrine and culture into it, I thought she overdid that part of it, and this was confirmed by a non-Mormon friend who put it down because of how deeply it got into the Mormon weeds. It appeared to me that she had not gotten away from the fantasy of her young adult novels when the protagonist of the book made herself "invisible" to a SWAT team and walked into the throat of danger to save the day. A review in the Salt Lake Tribune pointed out that few Mormon readers would read the book because the LDS book dealer, Deseret Book, refused to carry it. As a former Mormon bishop, I could see nothing in the book that should be offensive to practicing Mormons.

I've lived in Utah my whole life, no longer a member of the Mormon church but the language and descriptions were familiar. I don't know people who are as overly devout as some of the people in this book, although I'm sure there are people like this. It's supposedly based on an actual case but I don't remember hearing about it. The main character, the bishop's wife was likeable and what mainstream Mormons are like. I don't know why anyone outside the Mormon church would be interested in this book. They would find the people odd.

This is a terrific mystery set in a western Mormon community. Multiple crimes are investigate during the periods of time in the story. A case of child abuse is the main cause of concern and as the case

is being investigated other concerns are brought to light. I loved the Mormon background setting, and while some of it may be made up, I learned a little bit more about the Mormon way of life and their church. I enjoyed the new setting and the topic was treated well.

I wanted to like this book, which came highly recommended, but I was extremely frustrated by it. The writing was stilted and awkward, the protagonist's behavior was annoying, the characters didn't ring true psychologically, and the plot twists, although bizarre, were telegraphed so far in advance that nothing that happened was particularly surprising.

I love this book. I am waiting for the second to come out in paperback. The circumstances of abuse and incest are very current. What protection can a woman count on in an atmosphere of second class status and complete male domination. The questions asked but not necessarily answered really do provoke thought. There is thoughtful consideration of Mormon doctrine and of the challenges of raising young men to regard women as more than possessions

Fascinating depiction of what I took to be real life in a Mormon community. The author seems to be attempting to be objective but it feels more like she's apologetic about the way Mormon men treat their women. Yes, love can be complicated but Linda Walheim is too free with making assumptions that come out wrong. Glad I read the book but won't continue with the series if it is a series. The writing was too straightforward and too sanitized and as nice as Linda is, I didn't warm to her, her friends or family.

I didn't care for the interjection of the author's perception of doctrinal issues in the Mormon faith as the plot progressed. The personal issues in the plot are real and a book exposing them helps us to open our eyes to the quiet suffering that occurs around us, but confining them to within a Mormon community creates a negative slant, I believe. BTW, I don't live in Utah and have been a bishop's wife. My perceptions of being in this position are different than Harrison's so hopefully other readers won't think this is a novel that typifies all bishops' wives.

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