



A Well-Made Bed

Abby Frucht

Laurie Alberts

Red Hen Press (Mar 1, 2016)

Softcover \$16.95 (302pp)

978-1-59709-305-7

In this compelling story, the characters change, and some grow, through choice and consequence.

In *A Well-Made Bed*, coauthors Abby Frucht and Laurie Alberts use strong and complex characters and an almost campy plot device to explore how two young women, both raised in strict households outside of the mainstream, react when faced with temptation.

Jaycee was raised 1800s-style, at Hillwinds Living History theme park. Skilled in churning butter and slaughtering pigs, she doesn't know the difference between a library card and an ATM card. Noor, the well-educated and beautiful daughter of Pakistani immigrants, is always aware of being an outsider and closes in on herself: "In Noor's book, if you were going to lose something, it was better not to have it ... better not to want it, either." Both dream of escape: Noor, from debt and a disappointing marriage; Jaycee, from Hillwinds Living History. Each learns of a betrayal by a trusted loved one and responds by shaking off her usual constraints and seizing the illegal, yet potentially lucrative, opportunity that comes her way, with off-kilter justification. According to Jaycee, "You can't say no to these things. You have to accept what life offers, not turn it away."

Strong secondary characters further illustrate gradations of morality. Hil, Jaycee's father, has built his entire identity on a fraud, while Hannah, Jaycee's mother, merely chooses not to see things. Perhaps the most genuinely honest and insightful character is sometime drug dealer Gerry, who observes, "Little Noor Khan, you're just scared. Scared to care."

The tale of these two inept and oddly paired criminals is often humorous, as when Jaycee snorts coke "through a hollow reed from a cobwebbed Christmas wreath she'd made from cattails in one of the Hillwinds school workshops." Fate scatters temptation like dandelion seeds. As Noor states, "That's all it took, a couple of minutes of conversation, to step over the line from being a clean nosed good citizen to being a felon. Anyone could do it." In this compelling story, the characters change, and some grow, through choice and consequence.

Lovers of literary fiction will appreciate the fullness of the characters, the topsy-turvy plot twists, and the thought-provoking themes.

KAREN MULVAHILL (Summer 2016)

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