

The Tie that Binds

Kelly Leigh Halsch

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This sweet retelling of the story of the Prodigal Son is ultimately about forgiveness.

In *The Tie that Binds*, Kelly Leigh Halsch sets the biblical story of the Prodigal Son in modern times. More than anything else, this is the tale of two sisters, one who left home and one who didn't, and how they relate—and don't. Halsch gently and sweetly crafts a journey for each sister, paths that eventually converge.

Amy and Beth grew up in a successful ski resort in Colorado. Having lost their mother at a young age, the two sisters—two years apart—are close to their doting father though not to each other. Amy, the older sister, is responsible and by the book. Beth is beautiful, gets a lot of attention, and is a bit bolder. One day, Beth demands her share of the family wealth, then leaves home to blow it all on partying in Europe, among other things. Amy resents her all the more, having already blamed her for their mother's death. A few years later, through ups and downs and the influence of loving new friends, Beth hears her home calling her.

Halsch's style is soft, gentle, affectionate—and this is reinforced by the soft-textured pages and cover and the choice of delicate font. Her tone is almost like a mother's (perhaps the missing mom of the two sisters), often overexplaining things in simple language to the point that the text can seem geared toward younger readers.

While the original parable of the Prodigal Son focuses greatly on the father and the idea of forgiveness, this tale is all about the sisters. Yes, it's still a story about forgiveness, but who is it that really needs forgiving? Halsch promotes a theme that everyone falls short and needs forgiveness, including Amy, the sister who dutifully stayed home and helped her father run the family business. With this, the author deftly alludes to another biblical story, one about two other sisters, Mary and Martha, the latter of whom must learn that being dutiful is no more noble than experiencing Christ.

Everything is predictable here if you know the Prodigal Son's story, and for the cynic (or realist), the story will be entirely too perfect—too whitewashed. People just aren't as nice and loving and flawless as you see here. Still, in the name of escapism, a sweet journey that goes well and ends happily can be a great read, can't it?

BILLIE RAE BATES (July 21, 2014)

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