



We, the Wildflowers

L.B. Simmons

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A story told in seasons, L. B. Simmons's *We, The Wildflowers* unfolds across a little more than a year as Chloe enters foster care and the group home that changes her life in radical ways.

The Wildflowers—made up of Genesis, Adam, Chloe, and Lukas—have been chosen for a foster home that specializes in older juveniles. With only a short time left before they age out of the system, they learn the centrality of relationships in both healing and harming people. They find family in each other, and their interactions are the story's bedrock. Interdependence and growth are explored in the ways that they draw out, challenge, and cling to each other. Herein, rootlessness may be the gravest danger of all.

Much of the action is reserved for emotional processing, reflection, and self-analysis. Conflict is deferred until the book's final seasons. This focus on unpacking and sharing feelings means that dialogue does the heavy lifting, and it's not always up to the task. The teenagers' language runs the gamut from stilted stereotypes to guru-like, and the Wildflowers have a tendency to converse in mutual soliloquies. Their prescient clarity and diction is sometimes inauthentic. It's most successful in Chloe's internal monologues and the epiphanic moments that accompany her healing.

Trading on the trauma that teenagers in the foster care system undergo before and during care, *We, The Wildflowers* toes the line between needful representation and heavy inspiration. As much as the novel seeks to lift up teen difficulties and triumphs, there's a troubling neatness to its resolution that mortgages their adulthood to a system they barely escaped. Destined to find each other, the Wildflowers' childhoods were taken long ago; they find that blooming will require even more of them.

LETITIA MONTGOMERY-RODGERS (January / February 2020)

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