

What Falls Away

Karin Anderson

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A disowned daughter returns to her Mormon home to care for her ailing mother in Karin Anderson's novel *What Falls Away*.

Cassandra, the only daughter in a family of boys, was raised in a strict religious household. But she hasn't been back to Utah in forty years. When she was seventeen and pregnant, the community she was raised in cast her out. But now, her oldest brother has beckoned her back. Her help is needed to care for their mother, who has dementia. She'll have to navigate tense family and community relations again.

On returning to Utah, Cassandra also reunites with the desert landscape that has long been a muse in her successful art career. The kinship she feels to the barren mountains is striking, used in juxtaposition to ideas about her family's isolation and complex dynamics.

Then Cassandra meets Matthew, an adopted journalist who resembles the father of the child she was forced to give up. Matthew used a DNA test to trace his origins to the region, and his presence ignites hopeful fear in Cassandra, whose memories abound.

Contrasts fuel the sharp, poetic prose, which moves between short sentences and long, vibrant depictions of the Utah scenery. It is emotive, too, matching Cassandra's experiences. Often, she feels like a heroine who is unknown to herself. Told via alternating timelines, her story commands attention. She recounts the events that led to her eventual departure from Utah, even as Matthew searches for his story. He discovers that he is one of many stray children of a bishop in the community. Themes of patriarchal standards dominate the book.

In the novel *What Falls Away*, a woman returns to her childhood home and reflects on identity, family, lineage, and healing.

LEAH WEBSTER (July / August 2023)

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