

The Bishop's Wife

a book review by Jean Shriver

Ever wondered what a Mormon's "special underwear" actually looks like? Aw c'mon, I bet you have. *The Bishop's Wife*, a new mystery by Mette Ivie Harrison, not only snoops into Mormon bureau drawers, it opens up a can of worms when a young wife disappears in the night, leaving behind an angry husband and bewildered five year old daughter. This Bishop's wife, Linda Wallheim, still mourning her own stillborn daughter, finds the deserted husband harshly judgmental and the disappearance of his wife suspicious.

But she is kept too busy fulfilling her responsibilities to the women of her husband's Ward, to do any investigating. In one day, she bakes cinnamon rolls for a troubled friend, assists with the preparations for a wedding and counsels a red-eyed wife. Even while rushing through her tasks, Linda can't quiet the questions swirling in her mind. Driven by affection for the motherless little girl, she starts poking her nose in where it is not wanted and uncovers truths far worse than any she'd imagined.

This is not a tell-all book by a disaffected member of the Church of Latter Day Saints. Harrison is a practicing Mormon, a writer, a woman with a PhD from Princeton, and five children. She writes about her church with affection, but ends up acknowledging that in every barrel, there's the chance of finding a rotten apple. The book touches on everyday life in Linda's home, on a Mormon wedding and a Mormon funeral. Before the funeral, as Linda and her friend struggle to put those mysterious undergarment on the corpse, she muses on their meaning to the faithful. Truthfully, the practice remains beyond my understanding.

The Bishop's Wife lifts a curtain on many corners of the Mormon church and might dispel some people's prejudices. I found much to admire in Linda's family and her daily life, though I am still puzzled over the Mormon insistence on the practice of "sealing" a family together for all time and eternity. What happens if there is a second marriage? Why can't people married outside the Temple be sealed together in Heaven? If I could have a long talk with Linda Wallheim, she could probably shed some light on this cornerstone of her faith. Though I might not agree, I'd expect honest answers. Here's hoping the stalwart and outspoken Linda will turn up in another absorbing mystery by Harrison.