



Title: **Choices**

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Synopsis:

Binge drinking, date rape, family secrets, and pregnancy collide in this convincing coming-of-age story about a fifteen-year-old sophomore at an all-girls Catholic academy in Colorado.

“Cherry Creek High School”....could this be the same high school my children would attend in a year? I teach in a middle school that

feeds into a high school of the same name and I couldn't believe she would be writing about the same school. She was and she nailed it. Buckley has captured the school, its students, and the community perfectly.

I found the characters to be well developed and relatable. Told in first person, Kara takes us through her sophomore year and all the trials and tribulations she encounters along the way. She is a normal teenage girl who attends an all-girls Catholic school and believes her parents are too hard on her and restrict her life; and, like any normal teenage girl, she pushes the limits set by her parents and the community of people she grows up with in Colorado. She always follows the rules and hasn't put a foot out of line before now.

Now she feels overwhelmed by the attention she receives from the Cherry Creek H.S. star basketball player she meets. He calls her and asks her out on dates that she knows her parents would freak about, so she sneaks out to meet him and attend parties and games. He seems like the perfect guy and her life is perfect in the eyes of her friends at school and the jealous girls at his school. The only problem is that he is more mature than she is in a lot of ways and if she is going to keep him around, she will have to change her ways. At least, that is how she feels when she is with him.

Unfortunately, she gets drunk the first time she tries alcohol and is not thinking when he asks her to go upstairs during the party. He believes she wouldn't have agreed to go upstairs with him if she wasn't prepared to sleep with him. She tries to tell him she doesn't want to have sex, but he rapes her. The scene is not graphic, but you know as a reader what has happened. Her emotions following the party are handled in a very honest and heartfelt way.

She finds herself pregnant and forced to face it alone since Jake has already moved on to another girl. He says he will pay for an abortion, but beyond that, he wants nothing to do with her or the baby. She finally confides in her best friend and, being worldlier than Kara, she knows where to find the information she needs to make an informed decision. I found it refreshing that an author made it a point to present all the sides of the teen pregnancy issue and asked those tough questions only a teen mom may face, not the least of which is whether or not to tell her parents. This was handled beautifully.

The book covers several topics besides teen pregnancy including Catholicism and its beliefs, abortion and its many sides, teens and alcohol/drugs, and the parent-child relationship. For such a short book, Buckley managed to touch on each of these subjects with thoughtfulness and understanding. The book reminded me of *Speak*, by Laurie Halse Anderson, but it takes it one step further and ends in pregnancy.

The novel is heart breaking on many levels, but the relationship that develops between Kara and her parents as a result of the night is touching. I felt myself rooting for them to figure it out together and be a team, which in the end they are. I highly recommend this novel.