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Toffee

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~~Editor's Choice:~~

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

5

Sarah Crossan's latest verse novel explores more aspects of life at the edges of modern society. Allison has fled her abusive father and found a temporary home with Marla, an old woman living with Alzheimer's: 'I am a girl trying to forget. Marla is a woman trying to remember.' Told through Allison's eyes, the novel is about, among other things, how we might understand and acknowledge our ties for someone who has yet damaged us deeply? Alison's face is literally branded by her father's cruelty? and also how the old and vulnerable may be treated by the rest of us who may be concerned most with our own comfort and security. There are few writers who have Crossan's forensic ability to expose human cruelty, not so much as active evil or villainy but as indifference to the needs of others or the deflection of our own incapacity and instability onto those who need our care. Both perpetrators and victims are 'people running away or struggling to stay put', as Allison puts it in another context. And there are a number of such people here, damaging themselves and others, in ways great or small, from the violence of Allison's father, to Marla's infrequently visiting son Donal, paying no attention to her as a person, only as a burdensome responsibility. If this is one of the novel's strengths, then the other is Crossan's careful demonstration, in the development of Allison and Marla's undeliberate friendship, of how salvation can be found in enjoying and caring for each other.

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