



Where the River Runs Gold

Books Reviewed:

[Where the River Runs Gold](#) [1]

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Reviewer:

[Sue McGonigle](#) [3]

~~Editor's Choice:~~

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

5

In this dystopian eco adventure story readers are transported to Kairos City where citizens are classified into freedoms, outlanders and paragons. Following a devastating hurricane, the Ark government introduce a system to meet the needs of the wealthy paragons. Children are trained to pollinate plants in the freedom fields; their small fingers replacing bees which have vanished from the city. Meanwhile other citizens rely on meagre rations from food banks while being monitored by the deceptively benign sounding 'Opticare' and policed by Ark security, nicknamed 'Crows'.

The main character is Shifa, fiercely brave and protective of her brother Themba who struggles to adapt to change and whose main source of solace and communication is his artwork. Their father Nabil has nurtured them by sowing seeds of stories in their minds of a former world of natural beauty. In a small act of quiet rebellion Nabil creates a secret garden of plants and a 'story hive', a stash of forbidden books. There is an underground movement of resistance too, artists painting 'Graffitrees', adorning buildings with beautiful paintings of former natural worlds.

When Shifa and Themba receive the call for training and then begin work in the freedom fields it is not long before Shifa realises Themba will not survive the regime and they will have to escape. She desperately seeks a plan however, it is through Themba and his relationship with the aged woman Lona that the key to their escape is found. Their precarious journey away from the dehumanising and unrelenting regime of the freedom fields and back to their father begins. When joined by another escapee Luca, Shifa's initial suspicion gradually disappears as she realises he offers friendship not betrayal. Her escape leads Shifa to discover the lies which have been told and the secrets hidden and triggers the hope that regeneration and true freedom can be found.

There are powerful and highly topical environmental messages in this story as well as social and political issues of wealth distribution, responsibility and fairness. Despite the harsh context of this clearly imagined storyworld, this is a book with real warmth, carefully drawn characters and sensitive relationships. There are strong themes of trust, love and the meaning of family. Shifa's devotion to her brother Themba shines throughout and her growing recognition of the importance to her of the love of Nabil, the man she has called father all her life. A gripping read, highly recommended.

Links:

[1] <http://booksforkeeps.co.uk/childrens-books/where-the-river-runs-gold>

[2] <http://booksforkeeps.co.uk/issue/238>

[3] <http://booksforkeeps.co.uk/member/sue-mcgonigle>