



Breathing Underwater

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Reviewer:

[Ruth Thomas](#) [3]

Editorial Choice:

off

BfK Rating:

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This haunting and uplifting book is concerned with the pain of loss and the trials of first love. The story takes place during the summer holidays on one of the smaller Scilly isles. We see this world through the eyes of Freya, a 14-year-old girl grieving over the loss of her older brother, Joe, who died in a boating accident off the island the previous year. These events are described in chapters which appear in parallel with the account of the present, as Freya meets this year's visitors while being constantly aware of her brother's continued presence.

The central characters in this book are both articulate and artistic. Freya's absent father is an architect and her grandfather (who lives on the island) quotes Shakespeare as he empties his crab pots. The breathless ? but not always grammatical ? first-person narrative is written entirely in the present tense, even when dealing with events in the past. This provides an intimacy and immediacy to the story as Freya stands on the edge of ?mature? relationships ? last year observing Joe's infatuation with the cold-hearted Samphire (leading indirectly to his death), now having a crush on the slightly older Matt. Yet it is Matt's holiday girlfriend, the golden-haired Izzy, who becomes Freya's ?guardian angel? and who helps her to come to terms with loss and relationships. The idea of ?breathing underwater? recurs in the text, underlying the theme that all creation is one. As Matt says at a midnight beach party, ?All matter originally came from the stars ? so we're all made of stars really.? These broader themes contrast effectively with more worldly issues: Freya's parents have been on the verge of separating, and her grandfather becomes unwell.

This is a carefully crafted and hopeful book, which should be genuinely helpful to younger people in coming to terms with bereavement and growing up. It is likely to appeal more to female readers, and could be appreciated by mature 12-year-olds as much as by adults.

Running Order:

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