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Bruised

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~~Editor's Choice:~~

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

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A radio item about an alcoholic mother bringing home a bag of apples for her children's dinner, some lines from **The Merchant of Venice** quoted by a schoolboy, and a young girl's question, 'Would you ever think of writing a book where the mammy dies?'; these were the threads which Irish Children's Laureate Siobhan Parkinson has woven into the bleak story of **Bruised**. For almost all of its 256 pages, the harshness is relieved only by the unfaltering love of 14-year-old Jonathan for his young sister Julie and his own ironic humour and unconscious courage. In the final pages, that love strengthens into a determined hope that brother and sister will travel a difficult road together.

Jonathan tells the story, and he's an engaging, often self-mocking narrator with a feel for language his English teacher has noticed and confirmed. He has few reasons to be cheerful - a drunken, violent mother, an absent moody father, a penniless home, and the only stability of his early life swept away with the death of his grandmother. When his inebriated mother hits Julie hard enough to fracture her cheekbone, he decides it's time to run. So, with no more than his rucksack and her school bag, the two head west from Dublin to Galway, not knowing their mother lies dead in the house behind them.

They are soon helplessly snared in the machinery of social services and the Garda; the system separates them from each other. There's neither compromise nor sentimentality here. Jonathan's story is unsparing, though the adults he and Julie meet are not the unsympathetic stereotypes of much teen fiction. Rather, they're people struggling to help kids in an intractable mess. At times of extreme pain, Parkinson shouts Jonathan's anguish in jagged, enlarged type across the pages. You wouldn't have blamed Jonathan if he'd used the razor blade which chance throws his way; but his love for his sister is too strong. A 14-year-old shouldn't have to handle this stuff. But, Parkinson insists, some do.

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