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The Weight of Water

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~~Editor's Choice:~~

~~New Talent~~

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

5

Kasienka and her mother come to Coventry from Poland, looking for Kasienka's Tata (Father), who walked out on them two years earlier. Their story is told throughout in first person narrative by Kasienka. At school, where she is 'Cassie?', Kasienka encounters prejudice and bullying, while life in the gloomy bedsit she shares with her mother is no easier. Obsessed with tracking down her husband, her mother has little time for her daughter and when Kasienka does meet her father again, she finds he has a new family. Redemption for Kasienka comes through swimming, which she loves, and a place on the school's team, and also through a blossoming romance with fellow swimmer, William.

This is a poignant and moving book, but what makes it unusual and very special is that Sarah Crossan has chosen to tell the story in blank verse. Contrary to what many might expect, this doesn't make it a difficult read. The verse is no barrier to accessibility, but the opposite: spare and seldom overly lyrical, it works to provide both a strong narrative drive and direct emotional connection for the reader with Kasienka. We're aware of the care she must take choosing words in English, and the form expresses this perfectly. It also brings language to the fore. When Kasienka's mother learns her daughter has been visiting her father in secret, she is silent in her anger. Kasienka puts down the bully Clair 'In a language I think she'll understand', a whispered 'Why don't you just piss off?', though in the same stanza, she explains 'When suddenly she sees my joy /My win/ And her power dissolves.' Highly recommended.

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