



A Pocketful of Stars

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Editorial Choice:

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

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This moving beautifully told story introduces us to a distinctive central character with a very particular story to tell. Yet, as with all the best coming-of-age stories, it contains truths for everyone and insights for all readers.

Safiya's parents are divorced. She chose to live with her father and believes that she's a disappointment to her mother, even that her best friend the more worldly and confident Elle is closer to the person her mother wishes her daughter to be. The opening chapter features one of those rows that will probably be recognisable to all mothers and daughters, the sort in which emotions run too high, that end with slammed doors and things said deliberately to hurt. Shockingly, Safiya is denied the chance to apologise when her mum suffers a stroke and falls into a coma. But time alone at her mum's hospital bedside brings dreams that transport Safiya back to her mum's childhood home in Kuwait and a chance to watch her mother as a teenager. The dreams are linked to Saff's love of gaming and she embarks on a quest to find objects that matter to her mother in the belief that by succeeding she can save her life. In the process she learns much more about her mother, and most importantly, a chance for them both to say how much they love each other.

The experience changes Saff's understanding of her mother and their relationship; indeed, she realises that: 'If you cut Mum and me open we'd be filled with the very same fire, glowing red and orange and gold.' Seamlessly woven in is a backstory about changing relationships at school and we watch as Saff gains the strength to form new, better friendships and to stand up for what she knows is right.

Aisha Bushby maintains a delicate balance between the dream world and the everyday one, keeping both equally vivid, credible and compelling. An impressive debut and a skilful examination of grief, love and growing-up.

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