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The Pavee and the Buffer Girl

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~~Editor's Choice:~~

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

5

[Siobhan Dowd](#) [4] first wrote this story for an anthology on racism. Reissued now as a graphic novel with expressive illustrations by Emma Shoard the story has lost none of its power to move readers; the spare text is as powerful and direct as when first written, while the story feels horribly current.

Young Jim Curran is a Traveller, a Pavee in his own language. He and his family have recently arrived in an Irish seaside town and are immediately met with suspicion and hostility. The town's young people share their parents' attitudes and Jim and his cousins are labelled 'dirty Gyps', 'tinker-stinkers', the name-calling soon turning to physical attacks. Not all the Buffers (non-Travellers) are cruel: there's a kind man in the chip shop, once a Pavee himself, the school librarian looks out for Jim, and then there's Kit, a girl in Jim's class who is almost as much an outsider as he is. Jim and Kit become secret friends, meeting in a cave in the cliffs, sharing more than one 'short kiss in the dark under the dripping stalactites'. Their relationship is beautifully depicted, a real tenderness between the boy and the girl he thinks of as his skylark.

Meanwhile the hostility of the rest of the community continues, culminating in two shocking incidents: Jim's little cousin Declan is so badly bullied he ends up in hospital, and the local police raid the Travellers' camp, smashing their possessions and threatening more harassment. The family decide to leave, not just the town, but Ireland itself. Jim has to say goodbye to Kit though for this reader anyway, there's a feeling that one day he might return.

Siobhan Dowd worked for the rights of Travellers and her book gives real insight into their lives, not just the prejudice they endure, but the warmth and closeness of their communities. At a time when hostility to those regarded as 'other' or outsiders seems almost entrenched in society, this powerful, beautifully told story seems ever more important.

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