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Dream on, Amber – Emma Shivah

Publisher: Chicken House

RRP \$16.99

This is a more complex and therefore more interesting story than many that are written for the 8-12 year old girl. It is a major step up from most of the fairy, princess, horse or boarding school series that may have sufficed for 6-10 year olds.

Line drawings on most pages add to the flow of the story and the chapter headings in three languages eg TWO DUE NI plus the three flags of Britain, Italy and Japan emphasise Amber's split allegiances which are behind some of her problems.

Amber is finding life tough with a mother (Italian) who won't buy her a modern cell phone (!) and an absent father (Japanese). "My dad leaving feels like there's this massive black hole in me, like the ones in space. It twists in a dark, silent spiral, super heavy, sucking some of the good things in and swallowing them up. I don't know why it bothers me so much when I've lived nearly half my life without him but there are times when that black hole crushes me from the inside."

Amber (11) tries to help her younger sister (Bella, 6) cope with bullying and with her dreams of her father, while at the same time facing challenges of her own – a new school, new kids and teachers, and in particular a class she finds herself in each week which is for the children of divorced or otherwise absent parents. No way does she want to open up to this group! Nothing will induce her to participate in group activities.

With assistance from her imaginary adult friend, she finally does face up to a challenge which, with her particular skill in one subject, lead to Amber being able to form meaningful friendships, empathise with others, overcome some of her anger and assist her younger sister Bella as best she can.

I would give this book five stars for the able reader and empathetic reader.

As the Dedication says:

"This book is dedicated to children all over the world who – for one reason or another – are growing up without a father. I know how it feels. This book is for you."

My granddaughter (8) couldn't put it down.

Reviewed by Chris Wright

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