

A Flash Of Fireflies- by Aisha Bushby

A Flash of Fireflies by Aisha Bushby is a spellbinding and exquisite blend of fairy tale and real-life emotion. Through Hazel's journey of moving from Kuwait to England and staying with her great aunt in a whimsical cottage, Bushby crafts a world where mythical creatures and dark souls lurk around in the dark forests personify the struggles of anxiety and OCD. It's a hauntingly beautiful story that uses fantasy as a mirror to the mental trauma Hazel faces, showing how the lines between reality and imagination can blur yourself when you're trapped in your own mindset.

Fireflies torture Hazel—phantom creatures that whisper taunts, leading her into complex, never-ending loops. These fireflies, like insistent thoughts that spiral, are a brilliant metaphor for OCD. They're not just insects but the embodiment of Hazel's internal hardwork, each glow a flicker of anxiety, each task a chain she can't escape. The mystical setting becomes an extension of her mind, where dangerous quests and impossible encounters echo the challenges of daily life with OCD.

As Hazel navigates the uncertainty of living without her parents, her anxiety festers, fed by loneliness and fear. This loneliness adds another layer of tension, heightening her need for control in a world that feels too large and uncontrollable. But within this world of shadowy forests and never-ending tasks, Hazel finds support. Her great aunt Grant, Ruby -the new friend- who becomes her armour—and Miss Basra, Hazel's teacher, all stand like sturdy trees in a storm, offering solace and guidance. Together, they help Hazel confront the fireflies that torment her, each challenge a step towards regaining control of her own story.

The author's experience with OCD gives the narrative a raw authenticity. It's not just a story of magical creatures but a profound exploration of the invisible monsters that traumatise many of us. The fairy tale structure allows readers to see Hazel's world with new eyes, making the familiar pain of OCD feel devastatingly hungry but something mythical. Yet, it's grounded in reality, showing how people can find their way back from the darkest corners of their mind.

What makes this story so powerful is its empathy and compassion. It teaches us that special health struggles are not something to be feared or misunderstood, but to be appreciated. They're not monsters lurking in the shadows, but challenges we can face with courage and the right kind of support. Bushby's necromantic storytelling flashes the spotlight on this reality in a way that feels both magical and interestingly human.

Overall, I think that A Flash of Fireflies is a beautiful, thought-provoking tale that's as much about finding your own strength as it is about the importance of those who walk beside you. It's a reminder that even in the darkest woods, there are guiding lights—sometimes in the form of fireflies and fanatical creatures, sometimes in the form of friends.

TSBA Book Review by Kanza, Year 8 Caterham School