

*Their bond is unbreakable*



# One

*Sarah Crossan*

*Carnegie Medal shortlisted author*

BLOOMSBURY

# *Sarah Crossan*



Sarah Crossan has lived in Dublin, London and New York, and now lives in Hertfordshire. She graduated with a degree in philosophy and literature before training as an English and drama teacher at Cambridge University. Since completing a masters in creative writing, she has been working to promote creative writing in schools.

To find out more about Sarah and her sensational books visit **sarahcrossan.com** and **@SarahCrossan**.

# the WEIGHT of WATER

Shortlisted for the CILIP Carnegie Medal 2013

Winner of the Eilís Dillon Award for a first children's book, CBI Book of the Year Awards

Winner of the Coventry Inspiration Awards in the Read It Or Else category

Winner of the We Read Prize 2013, [www.weread.org.uk](http://www.weread.org.uk)

Winner of the UKLA Book Award 2013 (7–11 category)

Shortlisted for the CLPE Poetry Award

Shortlisted for the Hazelgrove Book Award

'Poignant, powerful, just perfect'

*Cathy Cassidy*

'A compellingly beautiful, utterly seductive debut novel'

*Scotsman*

'This poetic novel is sheer perfection'

*Irish Examiner*

'A unique and compelling read'

*Bookseller*

'What's so disarming and charming is the way the girl reveals her inner self with a poetic and resonant simplicity'

*John Agard*

# APPLE AND RAIN

Shortlisted for the IBW Book Awards 2015 in the  
'Children's' category

Shortlisted for the CILIP Carnegie Medal 2015

Shortlisted for the CBI Book Awards

Shortlisted for the Bord Gáis Energy Irish Book Awards  
2014 in the 'Children's Senior' category

Shortlisted for the We Read prize 2015

'This poignant, realistic tale is about learning to love and  
taking responsibility, and about how poems can tell the  
truth, as Emily Dickinson put it, at a "slant"'

*Sunday Times*

'Crossan's skill as a writer is at its most pronounced,  
contributing to a portrayal of adolescence that is  
subtle and humane'

*Irish Times*

'An inspiring tale'

*Irish Examiner*

'It'll make you laugh and cry ...'

*Company*

*'Apple and Rain* is a beautifully crafted story about painful reunions, loyalty and the true meaning of love; a story with a deep emotional core, both heart-wrenching and heart-warming'  
*Sita Brahmachari, author of Artichoke Hearts*

*'Sarah Crossan writes with insight and honesty in this moving story of family, friendship and love'*  
*Clare Furniss, author of The Year of the Rat*

*'Honest, funny and at times heart-breaking. Apple and Rain is perfect for readers who want to read about an ordinary person with an extraordinary family'*  
*Rebecca Westcott, author of Dandelion Clocks*

*'Apple and Rain is a wonderful feel-good kind of book, the kind that doesn't offer you an unrealistic happy ending, but rather an ending which leaves the reader full of hope. A wonderful book indeed'*  
*[www.librarymice.com](http://www.librarymice.com)*

# One

*Sarah Crossan*



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*For Ben Fox (1988-2014)*  
*— ride on*





*AUGUST*



# *Sisters*

Here

We Are.

And we are living.

Isn't that amazing?

How we manage

to be

at all.

# *The End of Summer*

Summer's breath begins to cool.  
The ink of night comes earlier and earlier.  
And out of the blue  
Mom announces that Tippi and I  
will no longer be taught at home.  
'In September  
you'll join a class of juniors  
and go to school  
like everyone else,' she says.

I don't make any  
ripples.

I listen  
and nod  
and pull at a loose thread in my shirt  
until a button

falls away.

But Tippi doesn't stay silent.

She detonates:

‘Are you *kidding* me?  
Have you lost your *minds*?’ she shouts,  
then argues with Mom and Dad for hours.

I listen  
and nod  
and bite at the skin around my fingernails  
until they start to  
  
bleed.

Finally Mom rubs her temples, sighs, and gives it to  
us straight.

‘Donations from well-wishers have dried up  
and we simply can’t afford to homeschool you.  
You know your dad hasn’t found a job yet  
and Grammie’s pension  
doesn’t even cover the cable bill.’

‘You girls aren’t cheap,’ Dad adds,  
as though all the money spent on us  
—the hospital bills and special clothes—  
could be saved if we’d both  
only  
behave a little better.

You see,  
Tippi and I are not what you'd call normal—  
not what you see every day  
or *any* day  
for that matter.

Anyone with a jot of good manners  
calls us 'conjoined',  
though we've been dubbed other things, too:  
freaks, fiends,  
monsters, mutants,  
and even a two-headed demon once,  
which made me cry so hard  
I had puffy eyes for a week.

But there's no denying our difference.

We are literally joined  
at the hip—  
united in blood and bone.

And  
this  
is why  
we never went to school.

For years we've been cooking up chemistry potions  
on the kitchen table  
and using our yard for P.E.

But now  
there's no getting out of it;  
we *are* going to school.

Not that we'll be in a state school  
like our sister Dragon,  
with kids who pull knives on teachers  
and drink Tipp-Ex for breakfast.

No, no, no.

The city won't fund our homeschooling but  
they'll pay  
for a place  
at a private school  
—Hornbeacon High—  
and Hornbeacon is willing to have that one place  
count for the two of us.

I guess we're supposed to feel lucky.



But lucky isn't really how  
I would  
ever  
describe us.

## *Everyone*

Dragon stretches out on the end of the double bed

I share with Tippi,

her bruised feet pointed while she

paints her toenails a deep metallic blue.

‘I don’t know,

you might like it,’ she tells us.

‘Not *everyone* in the world is an asshole.’

Tippi takes the polish, starts on my right hand and

blows my fingernails

dry.

‘No, you’re right,

not everyone’s an asshole,’

Tippi says.

‘But around *us*,

they all morph into them.’

## *A Freak Like Us*

Dragon's real name is Nicola,  
but Tippi and I changed it  
when she was two,  
when she was fierce and fire-breathing,  
stomping around the apartment and  
chomping on crayons and toy trains.

Now she's fourteen and a ballet dancer  
she doesn't stomp anywhere—  
she floats.

Lucky for her she's completely normal.

Although

I do wonder if being our sister  
sucks sometimes,

if being our sister  
makes her a freak  
too.

# *Ischiopagus Tripus*

Although scientists have come up with ways to  
categorise conjoined twins,  
each and every pair that ever existed  
is unique—  
the details of all our bodies remain a secret  
unless we want to tell.

And people *always* want to know.

They want to know exactly what we share  
down there,  
so sometimes we tell them.

Not because it's their business  
but to stop them wondering—it's all the  
wondering  
about our bodies that bothers us.

So:

Tippi and I are of the ischiopagus tripus  
variety.

We have  
two heads,  
two hearts,

two sets of lungs and kidneys.  
We have four arms as well,  
and a pair of fully functioning legs  
now that the vestigial leg has been  
docked  
like a show dog's tail.

Our intestines begin  
apart  
then merge.

And below that we are  
one.

It probably sounds like a prison sentence,  
but we have it better than others  
who live with fused heads or hearts,  
or only two arms between them.

It really isn't so bad.

It's how it's always been.

It's all we know.

And actually,  
we're usually  
quite happy  
together.

# *Milk Trudge*

‘We’re out of milk,’ Grammie says,  
brandishing an empty milk carton and  
a mug of steaming coffee.

‘Well, go and get some,’ Tippi says.

Grammie wrinkles her nose and pokes Tippi’s side.  
‘You know I have a problem with my hip,’ she says,  
and I laugh out loud;  
Grammie is the  
only person on the planet who ever pulls  
The Disability Card  
with us.

So Tippi and I trudge to the corner store  
two blocks away,  
which is how we get everywhere:  
trudging  
    and lumbering  
        along,  
my left arm around Tippi’s waist,  
    my right slung over a crutch—  
    Tippi mirroring me.

By the time we reach the store we are both  
breathing hard  
and neither of us wants to carry the milk home.  
'She can run her own errands in future,' Tippi says,  
stopping  
for  
a moment and  
leaning on some rusty iron railings.

A woman pushing a stroller passes by,  
her mouth  
a gaping cavern.  
Tippi smiles and says, 'Hey there!'  
then snickers  
when this woman with a perfectly formed body  
almost topples over in surprise.



# *Picasso*

Dragon spreads a thousand jigsaw pieces  
                    across  
the kitchen table.

The picture on the box promises that the mess will  
turn into a  
painting by Picasso  
    —‘*Friendship*’—  
a surreal arrangement of  
    limbs  
and lines,  
    of solid blocks of  
    yellow,  
    brown, and  
    blue.

‘I like Picasso,’ I say.  
‘He paints the essence of things  
and not only what the eye can see.’

Tippi huffs. ‘It looks impossible.’

Dragon turns the pieces  
    face up.

‘The harder the better,’ she tells us.  
‘Otherwise, what’s the point?’

Tippi and I plop ourselves next to her  
on an

extra-wide dining chair

as

Dad

shuffles

down

from his bedroom

bleary-eyed and smelling stale.

He watches us

rummaging to find the puzzle’s frame

—the edges

and corners—

then reaches over Dragon’s shoulder

and places in her palm

the top right-hand corner piece.

He sits at the table opposite us

and silently slides bits we’ve been looking for  
into line.

‘Great teamwork,’ I say,  
beaming at Dad.

He looks at me and winks.  
'I learned from the best,' he says,  
and gets up from the table to search in the  
refrigerator for a  
beer.

# The Launch

Mom and Dad prepare Tippi and me  
for our first day at school  
like they are  
    launching astronauts  
  into space.

Every day is packed with appointments.

They arrange for us to see our  
therapists, doctors, and dentist.  
Then Grammie highlights our hair  
and shapes our nails  
so we will be ready for our  
    Great Public Appearance.

‘It’s going to be *fabulous!*’ Mom says,  
pretending we aren’t being  
thrown into a ring of lions  
without a weapon,  
and Dad smiles  
    crookedly.

Dragon, who’s about to become a freshman,  
rolls her eyes

and tugs at the cuff of her cardigan.

‘Oh, come on, Mom,  
don’t pretend like it’s going to be easy.’

‘Well, I’m leaving if I hate it,’ Tippi announces,

and Dragon says,

‘I hate school. Can *I* stay at home?’

Grammie is watching *Judge Judy*.

‘Why would anyone hate school?’ she caws.

‘Best days of your lives, girls.

You’ll meet your sweethearts there.’

Dad turns away,

Dragon blushes,

and Mom doesn’t speak

because

they all know

that finding love is

something

that will never

happen

for us.

# *Therapy*

'Tell me what's going on,'  
Dr Murphy says,  
and as  
so often happens  
I sit in silence  
for ten whole minutes,  
worrying at a button in the brown leather sofa.

I've known Dr Murphy  
all my life, sixteen and a half years,  
which is a long time to know anyone  
and to have to think of new things to say.  
But the doctors insist we come for regular therapy  
to support our mental health,  
as though that's the bit of us that's broken.

Tippi is wearing headphones and listening to loud  
music  
so she can't hear what I'm saying,  
so I can  
spew all my suppressed feelings into  
Dr Murphy's notebook  
without hurting any of Tippi's.

And I used to rant a lot,  
when I was seven or eight,  
and Tippi had stolen my doll  
or pulled my hair  
or eaten my half of a cookie.

But now there's not much to say  
Tippi doesn't already know,  
and the talking seems  
a waste of money we don't have  
and of fifty perfectly good minutes.

I yawn.

'So?'  
Dr Murphy says,  
her forehead furrowed  
as though my problems are her own.  
Empathy, of course,  
is all part of the service.

I shrug.

'We're starting school soon,' I say.

'Yes, I heard.

And how do you feel about that?' she asks.

'Not sure.'

I look up at the light shade,  
at an unspoiled web and a spider gorging  
on a fly bigger than itself.

I fold my hands in our lap.

'Well . . .' I say,

'I suppose I'm afraid the other students will pity  
me.'

Dr Murphy nods.

She doesn't tell me  
they won't

or

that it's going to be fantastic  
because lies are not her style.

Instead she says, 'I'll be really interested  
to hear how it goes, Grace,'

and looking at the wall clock  
chirps,

'See you next time!'



# *Tippi Talks*

We go next door  
into Dr Netherhall's office  
where it is my turn to wear the headphones  
and Tippi's turn to tell all.

Which  
I think  
she actually does.

She talks quickly,  
her expression serious,  
her voice  
sometimes loud enough for me to catch  
a stray

word  
or two.

I turn the music up,  
force it to swallow the sound of her  
and then I watch

as  
she  
crosses her foot over mine,  
uncrosses it,  
pushes her hair out of her face,

coughs,  
bites her lips,  
wiggles in our seat,  
scratches her forearm,  
rubs her nose,  
stares at the ceiling,  
stares at the door,  
all the time  
talking  
until  
finally she taps my knee  
and mouths the word  
'Done.'

# *The Check-up*

Mom drives us all the way to the specialist  
children's hospital  
in Rhode Island  
for our quarterly check-up,  
to ensure our organs aren't making plans to  
pack it in.

And today,  
like every other time before,  
Dr Derrick parades his  
wide-eyed  
medical students  
and asks if we mind them  
watching the exam.

We mind.

Of course we mind.

But Dr Derrick's stethoscope and white coat  
do not permit disagreement  
so we shrug  
and allow ourselves to be  
ogled  
by a dozen trainee doctors  
with tight mouths

and narrow eyes  
who  
    tilt forward,  
    ever so slightly  
    on their toes,  
as we lift our shirts.  
By the end we are blushing  
and only want to  
    leave.

‘They’re all good?’ Mom asks hopefully  
when we’re back in Dr Derrick’s office.  
He taps the top of his  
desk.

‘Everything clear  
as far as I can see,’  
he says.

‘But as always,  
they have to take it easy,  
especially now they’ll  
be at school.

Right?’

He points a playful warning finger at us.

‘Right,’ we say,  
not planning to  
change a thing  
about how we live.

# *Influenza*

Two days after our visit to  
Dr Derrick  
it knocks us down  
flat on to our backs  
without any warning.

I shiver and shake  
and cling to the duvet  
popping two white tabs of paracetamol  
into my mouth every four hours,  
hoping  
to keep the chills away.

Tippi is lying next to me  
shuddering,  
sneezing, coughing,  
and making her way through  
a second box of Kleenex.

Our sheets are wet with sweat.

Mom delivers boiling  
drinks  
and tries to make us  
eat a little toast.

But we are too sick  
to move.

## *I Cannot Shake It Off*

I cannot get these shivers to go away  
and though Tippi seems way better  
she has to stay in bed, too.

While I  
    fight the flu.

# *Worrying*

Mom calls Dr Derrick  
and gives him  
    a list  
    of our  
    symptoms.

He isn't worried,  
for now.  
He tells her to keep us hydrated  
and in bed for a few more days.

He tells her to watch us.

But Mom can't help watching.

She can't help worrying.  
    And why wouldn't she  
    when so few of us manage to make it to  
    adulthood.

The older we get  
    the more she frets.



As time ticks by  
the chances of us  
suddenly  
ceasing  
to be  
get  
quite  
high.

That's just a fact  
that will  
never  
go  
away.

## *I Get Up*

I don't want to.

My legs are wobbly.

My throat is coated in sand.

And my heart feels as though it's beating  
extra hard

just to

get me from the bed

to the bathroom.

'You sure you don't want to lie down?'

Tippi asks.

I shake my head.

I can't confine her to bed

just because I can't get my  
act together.

I shake my head

and suck it up.