



## The Girl Who Lost Her Shadow

**Emily Ilett**

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In Emily Ilett's ethereal fantasy, a twelve-year-old girl on a Scottish island learns that she's braver and stronger than she thinks.

Gail and her older sister Kay once longed to be marine biologists. Swimming and sharing secrets, they were bound by their fascination with the sea. Now that their father's left, Kay's always sad, and both girls have lost their shadows. Gail wants to get Kay's shadow back but has little thought of retrieving her own.

Befriended by Mhirran, who informs her that "people lose their shadows because they lose themselves," Gail learns that Mhirran's brother, Francis, is a shadow collector. So begins a chase that spans cinematic terrain, from a tunneling cave network to lochs and woods, drawn with enough mystery to fascinate.

Between Francis's homemade, shadow-swallowing contraption and storms that manifest in humanlike forms, the story is an unusual, effective allegory for how vulnerable and disorienting mental illness can be. Francis's anguished reason for wanting to catch shadows complicates ideas of who's bad, while Gail's determination teaches her a lot about herself, including that it's normal to make mistakes. Side strands regarding pearl thieves and a whale rescue hint at environmentalism, but are less woven in to the main fabric.

The intense, repeated oceanic imagery results in an arresting story. Trapped as Kay is in her own mind, her influence and passion are always felt. Though it's no surprise that the shadows reunite with the sisters, the book's finale is a warm return home from an unusual quest. Artistic and moving, *The Girl Who Lost Her Shadow* is a love letter to sisterhood and the sea.

KAREN RIGBY (January / February 2020)

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