



The 10pm Question

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~~Editors Choice:~~

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Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

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12-year-old Frankie's mum works from home making cakes for restaurants. Frankie, who suffers from chronic anxiety and imagines every worst case scenario is about to happen, takes comfort in asking her at bedtime about his latest anxieties - hence the book's title. As the story unfolds we come to realise that not only does Frankie's mum work from home - she never leaves it. For the last nine years she hasn't put a foot outdoors. Despite having a great best friend, Gigs, and a new friend, Sydney, an elder brother and sister and a loving father, it also emerges that Frankie thinks it is his job to look after his mother: when cake ingredients are needed, for example, she depends on him to go to the shop. And despite the 10pm question moment with his mum, there are the questions that Frankie finds he can't ask - why does his mum not go outside? Does his own anxiety mean that he will turn out like her?

De Goldi has created a subtle, engaging and humorous portrait of a family that appears 'normal' yet its members are complicit in not addressing the disturbance and fragility at its core. As the tale progresses Frankie comes to resent the responsibilities he has unwittingly taken upon himself and experience them as a burden - and thereby emerges the possibility of asking what has seemed unsayable.

The world of boys on the threshold of puberty is richly depicted - the collections (words, model soldiers), the creation of private language, the rituals, the sharp observation of and delight in the idiosyncracies of adults. This is a powerful depiction of a boy struggling to engage with the world despite his mother's difficulties in so doing. Not since Jacqueline Wilson's **The Illustrated Mum** has this been achieved with such sensitivity and wit.

(Those adults for whom it could be problematic should note that the language is sometimes robust.)

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