



Love Frankie

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[Love Frankie](#) [1]

Issue:

[245](#) [2]

Reviewer:

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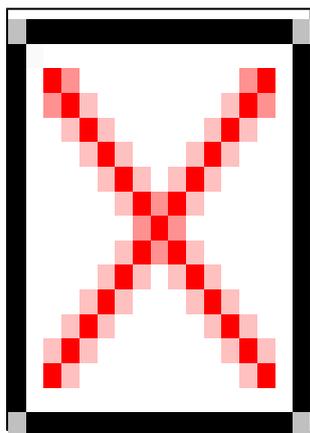
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4



Francesca Bennett (Frankie) is aged thirteen and the middle of three sisters. The oldest, Zara, at age fourteen is fashion conscious. Rowena is the youngest, aged seven. She adores Sylvania families. The three girls live with their mother, a primary school teacher who has multiple sclerosis. The girls see their father quite regularly but since he abandoned their mother after she was diagnosed, Frankie feels very bitter about him. Frankie has a best friend named Sam. He and Frankie have been best friends since they were children.

At Frankie's secondary school there is a girl named Sally Macclesfield. Initially as a result of the remarks Sally makes about Frankie's mother and her illness she and Frankie become enemies. The narrative of Wilson's book unfolds around the change in the relationship between Frankie and Sally, and the impact that change has upon Frankie's search for her sexual identity.

As might be expected with a Wilson novel, the characterisation of the book's protagonists is clear and the bonds between them strong. The novel describes in the most convincing manner the details of Mrs Bennett's illness and its gradual encroachment on her life and capability. It also gives an accurate account of her struggle to cope with the increasing burden of her impairment. It is still something of a rarity to encounter a parent with a chronic illness in YA literature.

What then is the sexual identity that emerges from Frankie's experience in this book? Wilson leaves the issue unresolved. For a reviewer it is easily possible to understand but readers might find this nuanced ending delivering something short of complete satisfaction.

Incidentally the Bennett family's canine companion, Bear, offers top quality comedic value and threatens to walk off with the book.

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