



# Unbecoming

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~~Editors Choice:~~

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Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

5

Katie is confused. Intelligent, destined to aim for a top university, happy to conform, yet she feels hemmed in by her mother's attempts to guide and control. She is unsure about what she feels about boys or why she is so drawn to girls, in particular Simona. Then Mary arrives. Mary, her grandmother whom she does not know; Mary suffering from old age and memory. And what about her brother with special needs, Chris? Or her Dad now with a new family. Life is complicated especially when it is full of secrets.

This is a substantial read - indeed, this would be my main criticism, the length. However, the result is still a satisfying novel that explores many issues that young readers and modern families can and often do, experience; the relationship between the generations, the problems faced by both those who suffer from dementia or Alzheimers and those who care for them, identity and choices. On the face of it there might be an overload of issues. However, Downham manages to avoid the tick list and her writing is both fresh and vivid. Katie's family, though dysfunctional never seems anything but normal and believable. Drawing everything together are Katie and Mary. The story is told through their eyes - Katie's in the present, Mary's both in the past - and interestingly, the present. Here are two characters the reader can inhabit, experiencing emotions, frustrations and situations that are both of their time and yet universal and timeless. Just as the title *Unbecoming* hints at a variety of meanings, so Downham's novel is not a simple story of family relationships or even of a girl growing up. It is, perhaps, a work in progress, and the reader leaves with a strong sense that the lives of Katie and her family will continue even when the book is closed.

Yes, it could have been edited down but it remains a book to recommend to teen readers who want to be taken below the surface of the story. Excellent.

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