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Speed of Light by Joy Cowley

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Jeff is a teenager in a family that is struggling to cope with the stresses of contemporary life. He feels increasingly withdrawn from his domineering father and frazzled mother who argue a lot, while his loved elder sister begins to shut him out of her secretive plans. To compound their problems, his parents refuse to have anything to do with his older brother who is in prison for drug crimes.

Jeff tries to make sense of his fractured world through mathematical reasoning; particularly numbers which he considers have a reliability that is lacking in his family. He would love to find a way to draw them all together again but each day they seem to drift further apart.

A stormy night brings another dilemma into Jeff's life, a peculiar old woman who knows a lot about his family's troubles. The old woman challenges his thinking about what is real and what can be done to restore order to the chaos around him.

The eleven chapter headings are intriguing. Each initial paragraph contains mathematical, physics or science information which will interest readers who like to know fascinating facts. Jeff often finds the logic of such topics helps him understand aspects of everyday life.

The author gives a perceptive insight into an out-of-balance family troubled by financial strife, work stresses, and the emotional fall-out of children who make contentious choices. Jeff is a gentle young man who learns to trust his own inner strength and stand up for what he believes is right. The skilful writing offers readers many layers of thought to consider.

Reviewed by children's book author, Jean Bennett

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