

A Million Things



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Emily Spurr

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FICTION, PAPERBACK

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ABOUT EMILY SPURR

Born in Tasmania, Emily lives in Melbourne with her partner, their twin sons and a deaf, geriatric cat. Shortlisted for the prestigious Victorian Premier's Unpublished Manuscript Prize, *A Million Things* is her first novel.

A READER'S INTRODUCTION TO *A MILLION THINGS*

Rae is ten years old, and she's tough. She's had to be: life with her mother has taught her the world is not her friend. Now suddenly her mum is gone and Rae is alone, except for her dog Splinter.

Rae can do a lot of things pretty well for a kid. She can take care of herself and Splinter, stay under the radar at school and keep the front yard neat enough that the neighbours won't get curious. But she is gnawed at by fear and sadness; haunted by the shadow of a terrible secret.

Lettie, who lives next door, might know more about Rae than she lets on. But she has her own reasons for keeping the world at arm's length. When Rae finds out what they are, it seems like she and Lettie could help each other.

But how long can a friendship last when it's based on secrets?

Tender, funny, heartbreaking—*A Million Things* is a story of grief and resilience, told with eloquent simplicity. In brave, spiky Rae, Emily Spurr has created a character you will never forget.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. How do you see the relationship between Splinter and Rae? Is he her protector? An extension of her? Her dependant (someone who needs her and keeps her going)? Or something else?
2. The character of Rae's mother, though central to the book, is never seen directly by the reader, we see her only through Rae's memories and thoughts. What sort of picture of Rae's mother do you, as the reader, form from this perspective?
3. Why do you think the author might have chosen to show you Rae's mother in this way?
4. The theme of home is strong in this novel. How do each of the characters Rae, Lettie and Oscar differ or coincide in their experiences of, and relationship to, home?
5. Consider what is unsaid in Rae's narration. Do you think there are insights to be gained into Rae's character and thoughts by what she does not say or address? If so, what do you think the reader can learn from the things Rae leaves unsaid?
6. Rae has a strong reaction to Lettie's relationship with her son, Chris. What parallels do you think Rae might be drawing between Lettie's relationship-boundaries with Chris and Rae's relationship with her own mother?
7. What do you think about Rae's reaction when she first sees Lettie's cleaned house? What do you think is behind Rae's response?
8. Briar Rose/Sleeping Beauty and the overgrown garden are reoccurring motifs in the novel. How do you feel these ideas tie in with the Rae's situation and the extended in-between, or transitional, space in which she finds herself?
9. *A Million Things* deals with deep loss, grief and mental illness. Do you believe these topics are presented in a realistic way? How did you react to these themes?
10. What was your interpretation of the overall tone of the book? Was it sad? Hopeful? Or something else?
11. What are your thoughts about Lettie's future? Do you feel the implication at the end of the novel is that things will be better for her? Or was it that that her life will go back to the way it was? Which one of these outcomes do you think is more likely, based your reading of the book?