



Everybody Hurts

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Media type:

Book

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If Lexy had been there, Sophia tells us, she'd have said, 'This is totally like **Romeo and Juliet**'; and the annoying thing is that Sophia knows Lexy would have been right. Lexy is Sophia's ICE friend (In Case of Emergency); she insists on taking the role, since she's a drama queen and Sophia's a walking life-or-death drama, given that she's got a tumour the size of a tangerine growing in her brain. That tumour is the reason Sophia has an appointment at Mickey's (aka St Michael's Hospital, Leeds) where, out of nowhere and after a few witty exchanges, a boy she's never met before kisses her. On the lips. Which is when Lexy's comment would have come in, since the whole thing is not unlike Romeo's first kiss with Juliet. It's love at first sight. Not in Old Capulet's hall crowded with Verona's glitterati, but the canteen at Mickey's where Matt - the unknown boy - has just used some fake coins to get a plate-load of trans fats at the McDonald's counter.

Matt and Sophia tell the tale in alternating chapters which often race along in breathless stand-up comedy mode. Matt's a novice at chatting up girls, let alone kissing them. Sophia's more experienced, at least as far as the technical side of things goes. But neither has known anything of what they might call love; and even though page 1 of *Everything Hurts* lists 5 things Sophia doesn't believe in and No.5 is 'Love at first sight', both Sophia and Matt long for subtleties and connections which go well beyond fumbling sex for sex's sake. There are further echoes of **R&J**: a party when things are clearly going to go badly, a violent fight between rival gangs ending in a bloody stabbing - though here the feud is not between 'two households, both alike in dignity', so much as the cultures of two schools from different sides of the tracks, one private, one comp.

Their narrative voices, however, could hardly be less Shakespearian. A trawl of a few random pages produces: Fucknuts, wankers, knobhead, 'he's such a dick?', frick-fracking (Sophia's favourite, as in 'frick-fracking Jesus?'), effing (as in Justin effing Bieber, effing baboon's ARSE or Killimaneffingjaro). Yet at the same time, there might be references in Sophia's chapters to Sartre, Joni, Leonard Cohen and 'frequently' **The Great Gatsby**; while Matt reveals an old-fashioned decency and an honesty about what he's finding out about himself. In the privacy of their writing, both couple intelligence with reflection.

Much of their narration thinks through their feelings for each other. Nadin and McGowan may employ elements which are very familiar to experienced YA readers: the serious illness, the catastrophic party, the fight, the funny and

empathetic gay best friend, the alternating narrators. But beyond these features, they also explore an intimacy which lies outside the grasp of Sophia and Matt's closest friends (complex characters in their own right with psychological disabilities you wouldn't wish on anyone); and also beyond their parents who in different ways - in yet another YA stereotype - display a lack of understanding worthy of Lord and Lady Capulet.

The abrasive energy of the words and actions around Sophia and Matt ? and even those over-used YA features ? stand in contrast to the sincerity and delicacy of the love between them, often expressed through tenderness, quick and responsive humour, and the gentle, searching language of both words and bodies. To communicate such a love is a challenge for authors who allow themselves a plot time-span of just nine days, though a final 'One Year Later' chapter gives a glimpse of how things develop. It's not giving too much away to disclose that the story of Sophia and Matt doesn't conclude as terminally as **R&J**.

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