

Hello, Goodbye, and Everything in Between

Author: Jennifer E. Smith

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Ah, first love. Chances are that most teenage readers who are drawn to books about star-crossed lovers and heartbreak have never truly experienced the profound emotions written on the pages.

Yet, the concept is alluring. Two souls united for a brief flicker of a moment. Although these popular teenage romance novels are penned by adults, the adolescent readers are undoubtedly not hoping for a realistic portrayal of awkward post-pubescent love affairs. No; the reason books like *The Notebook* and *The Fault in Our Stars* fly off the shelves are due to the fantasy they sell.

More epic than dragons or wizards, love is the ultimate magic. Jennifer E. Smith's melancholic real-time romance *Hello, Goodbye, and Everything in Between* will likely end in the hands of someone hoping to clutch some Kleenex. However, they may end up crying for the wrong Reasons.

It is the last evening of summer vacation. It is no cause for celebration. Clare and Aidan are preparing to leave the next morning to college on opposing coasts. The brainy Clare is off to Dartmouth, while the bumbling Aidan is heading to UCLA. The two rising freshman are the kind of adoring high school sweethearts everyone pretends to despise, but secretly envies. They have enjoyed the roller coaster ride of first love, but are unsure what to do when the ride ends and everyone has already gotten off. So, Clare and Aidan prepare for one last night. Through the span

of an evening, the two reminisce about their relationship and attempt to figure out the impossible: stay together or break up. As they stroll around town visiting the landmarks of their relationship (such as their school, pizza parlor, and pier), they converse before Sunset-style in the kind of stream-of-consciousness dialogue pioneered by Virginia Woolf and James Joyce. Conversation topics include Aidan's tense relationship with his father, supposed rejection to Harvard, and a sudden rift with another friend. The melodramatic subject matter could end up a pile of chocolates and roses in a lesser author's hands, but Smith is as tough as she is romantic. There is no sugarcoating in this fairy tale.

An important topic is raised by Clare at the beginning of the novel. Are first loves doomed to die out? It is not a question ever given an explicit answer, but it does not stop the two halves of a slowly breaking heart from debating fervently. Aidan begins the novel a romantic, Clare a realist. Slowly, the two engage in a duel of the minds until they come to the heartbreaking conclusion that it does not matter what they agree on. Time will do with their love as it pleases. The mood throughout the story is bittersweet and poignant, but never overly philosophical or heavy. The characters are sorrowful, but they are still young and filled with hope for the future. I admired Smith's characterization. She neither dumbs her protagonists down, nor elevates them to a state of intellect above their eighteen years. Clare and Aidan are intelligent and articulate young people, but they are still heartsick teens. I could not help but root for them to somehow defy the odds and make it work, yet I knew that if Smith took the easy way out and gave the lovers a crisply packaged ending, it would be a disappointment. Still, it should be stated that Smith is no stone-cold cynic of teenagers in love. She is as devoted to Clare and Aidan's love as the reader will be. Make no mistake; this is a romance that will make you tear

up, but those tears will not be reserved for dramatic romantic gestures. Instead, the tears might come slowly; perhaps when Clare first says, “I love you” or when Aidan finally concludes what the reader knew all along. Either way, these little things all contribute to the giant heart at the center of the story. Even the strictest of heartstrings will reluctantly be pulled. “Hello” is a perfect novel for teenagers looking for a realistic, but not overly pessimistic portrayal of first loves. Even those who are not hopeless romantics will enjoy Smith’s witty prose and acerbic humor. As cliched as it sounds, this is a novel featuring laughter, tears, and swoons.

Yet, since there are some mild language and veiled sexual references, I would recommend this tearjerker for readers age 16+. Before you start reading, make sure to clear your mind of all the misconceptions about romance that might have been fostered by Nicholas Sparks. This is not a traditional literary story. It is perhaps a little too real, but all the lovelier for it.

Book Recommendations:

Tonight the Streets Are Ours by Leila Sales

Eleanor & Park by Rainbow Rowell

Nick and Norah’s Infinite Playlist by Rachel Kohn and David Leviathan

Amy & Roger’s Epic Detour by Morgan Matso