

BOOK REVIEW

If Tomorrow Doesn't Come by

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Jen St. Jude's first book *If Tomorrow Doesn't Come* was published on 9 May 2023. The book falls under the Young Adult (YA) Apocalyptic Romance genre which combines speculative fiction LGBTQIA+ themes contemporary fiction and conversations about mental health. Avery Byrne, a queer adolescent battling undiagnosed clinical depression and an unspoken love for her best friend Cass is the protagonist of the story. On the day that Avery intends to take her own life, it is announced that an unstoppable asteroid will strike Earth in nine days. Avery fights for her life facing her secrets and looking for hope in the face of impending disaster determined to spare her loved ones more suffering. The book has 30 chapters/ The book has received accolades for its moving examination of depression queerness and the state of humanity at the end of the world. This book is an important contribution to modern young adult literature because it delivers a gripping story that combines themes of love mental health and existential urgency.

Jen St. Jude explores love loss and the quest for identity in depth in her poignant and emotionally charged book *If Tomorrow Doesn't Come* especially as it relates to the LGBTQIA+ community. The book explores tough topics like mental health suicidal thoughts and the difficulties queer people face in a society that frequently doesn't understand them through the eyes of its young adult protagonist. The book explores what it means to feel unheard and invisible, in all its rawness. And how the weight of these feelings can often influence choices that can potentially

change one's life. There are secrets about Avery Byrne. She has undiagnosed clinical depression, is queer, and is in love with her closest friend, Cass. However, the world learns that there are just nine days left until an asteroid is destined for Earth and that no one can stop it on the morning when Avery intends to jump into the river next to her college campus. Avery tries to survive for only nine more days in order to save Cass and her family more suffering. Avery would stop at nothing to save the people she cares about as time runs out and secrets gradually surface. Above all, though, she learns how to save herself, by telling the truth and getting her the help she requires. Rekindle hope in the remaining tomorrows.

Avery struggles with whether she should stay in a world that feels so isolating all the time as the weight of internalized shame and social rejection pushes her to the limit. A central theme in *If Tomorrow Doesn't Come* is the quest for self-acceptance in a society that is not always accepting of queer people; the novel does a remarkable job of capturing the emotional complexity of coming out of the closet. Anyone who has struggled to balance their personal identity with external expectations can identify with Avery's struggles. Fundamentally, *If Tomorrow Doesn't Come* is about the transformational potential of love and connection. Even though Avery's emotional journey is full of hardship and hopelessness there are times when a human connection gives her otherwise gloomy world a glimmer of hope. Her relationships both romantic and platonic serve as a reminder that love can be the driving force behind our existence and that others can offer us understanding and healing. Even though Avery's relationships, her friends, her love interest and her quest to comprehend her family, are complex, they are, ultimately, sources of strength. These exchanges demonstrate how even in the most trying times connecting with people and reaching out to them can provide a lifeline even if it initially appears flimsy or far away.

Jen St. Jude writes in an approachable and emotionally impactful style. The steady pacing alternates between introspective self-doubting moments and frantic fast-paced scenes that illustrate Avery's sense of pressure to make decisions regarding her future. The structure of the book also effectively illustrates Avery's internal development. Avery's emotional state is gradually revealed to the reader as the story progresses allowing them to fully comprehend the extent of her distress. The story is able to portray Avery's internal conflicts such as her

battle with depression suicidal thoughts and the difficulties of navigating her queer identity because of this close-knit viewpoint and a fragmented process of thought. Avery frequently uses jumbled fragmented sentences to reflect on her life throughout the book reflecting her internal conflict and emotional instability. When she thinks about her queerness or her loneliness this is particularly clear. For example, Avery may experience sudden swings between feeling briefly optimistic about a relationship and giving in to her intense sadness over her lack of acceptance. Her mental health issues are highlighted by this fractured thought pattern which also captures the erratic nature of depression and self-doubt.

It illustrates how Avery's feelings of rejection and bewilderment are unavoidable combining her pain from the past and present into a continuous battle with no apparent end in sight. A few sight, without moments of clarity and reflection. Avery's epiphanies in which she momentarily experiences empathy or understanding are frequently framed by a change in tone in the story. The language becomes more thoughtful and grounded when Avery confides in a friend or starts opening up to a new romantic interest. Her capacity for recovery and personal development is demonstrated by these epiphanies which stand in stark contrast to the novels darker moments. For instance, following an emotional, connection Avery may briefly feels hopeful again and the story slows down and uses more coherent and descriptive language to represent her capacity to regain emotional and mental control.

Occasionally, Avery may address the reader directly sharing her anxieties about the future or candidly describing her emotional state. The narrative's contemplative frequently disjointed style reflects Avery's mental state her thoughts are occasionally disorganized alternating between hopeful and depressing moments which is consistent with the books examination of mental health. The narrative is a characteristic piece of stream of consciousness, and considering the theme, the disconnected confusing narrative style of the novel is in sync with the disorientation caused by mental illness, which the book effectively portrays. Her journey toward self-acceptance and healing feels urgent and personal because of Avery's unvarnished unadulterated voice which allows readers to share in her loneliness and confusion. The novel's themes of emotional upheaval, the need for connection and the potential for change are

all expertly complemented by the narrative style and reflective moments. This strategy highlights the intricate non-linear process of navigating identity and mental health issues, while also encouraging empathy for Avery's character.

If Tomorrow Doesn't Come is an essential and relevant addition to the current queer literary canon. This book serves both a warning and a ray of hope in a world where the suicide rates among LGBTQIA+ community are still startlingly high. Many readers, especially the queer readers, can relate to Avery's journey because of her struggles with her mental health and suicidal inclinations. The book also imparts an important lesson: even when it seems like tomorrow will never come, that love, hope, and healing are all possible. The book's most essential part is its acceptance of the problem but at the same time showing its readers, practically, that love, hope and healing are 100% attainable even if at the time it may not seem like it. Therefore, the book's strength lies in its capacity to confront the problem head front and ultimately saying that, even though there isn't a spelled out solution, because every individual's problem is different, healing is certainly possible and attainable. This book is a recommended reading for anyone who wants to explore the complexities of queer identity and mental health. It is not only a comprehension aid but also a source of consolation and validation for readers who may be facing similar issues. *If Tomorrow Doesn't Come* is an important work in the conversation of queer mental health and suicide as St. Jude's book sensitively and honestly portrays mental health difficulties.

