



[Home](#) > Again, Again

Again, Again

Books Reviewed:

[Again, Again](#) [1]

Issue:

[244](#) [2]

Reviewer:

[Geoff Fox](#) [3]

Not to be chosen:

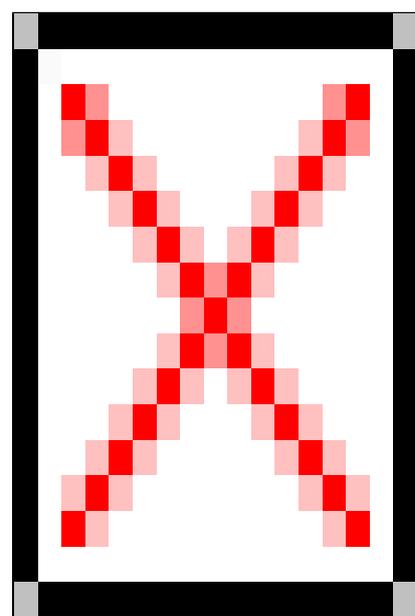
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Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

4



Chapter 1 is headed: A LOVE STORY. Below that, *This story takes place in a number of worlds. But mostly in two.*

Readers might see these opening lines in so many different ways; an enticing invitation maybe, a challenge, or a confusing conundrum. But before we get to that, some reasonably firm ground. We're in rural Massachusetts. It's summer vacation on the campus of Alabaster Academy, a co-ed American boarding school. Facilities are lavishly funded, the curriculum, the teaching faculty and the backgrounds and preoccupations of the students suggest affluence and liberal intelligence. This is contemporary, well-heeled, East Coast America. Those students are frequently highly articulate about themselves and their relationships; they are adept in exploratory, sometimes intense, often witty conversation with each other.

Adelaide Buchwald and her Dad, Levi, are on campus for the summer. Levi teaches English at Alabaster, where Adelaide is approaching her senior year ? so college applications are on her horizon. Things are not good at the moment. She has just been dumped by Mikey Double L (you'll need to read the book); and she's very worried about her many-

layered relationship with younger brother Toby, back in Baltimore in a rented house with their Mom. Toby's in rehab ? a recovering user.

That's it for the solid ground. Readers should quickly realise that they must expect the unexpected from e. lockhart. From page 1, the text varies in lay-out in terms of line length. Paragraphs dissolve into single uneven lines perhaps suggesting fragmentary thoughts; or maybe a few words gain extra emphasis by owning their own line. Another regular device sees the narrative flow paused. Type face changes to bold. Maybe four or five lines are repeated from a few pages back but then the earlier narrative is replaced by a very different alternative, often over several pages. That process might immediately be repeated, using the same 'starter lines' before offering a third 'what-might-have-been?'. Multiple mini-Groundhog Days, you might say.

Few events involving substantial action occur. Rather, we're offered Adelaide's thoughts or conversations between the limited cast of characters. This is a third person narrative, but Adelaide is almost ever-present on the page, so that we share her responses as she falls in and out of the early intensities and excitements of love with three dissimilar boys. Maybe these are her speculative explorations of what might or might not be ? of what she's looking for. Then again, maybe not. At times, her fear that she has failed Toby also preoccupies Adelaide. Brief or disjointed texts and phone conversations alongside those reworked passages increase the possibility of ambiguity and misunderstanding. The summer's experiences, searching dialogues, frustrations, self-examinations and speculations do bring results; by the final pages, there are signs of a hopeful way forward into that senior year.

Some will engage closely with Adelaide's discovery of new ways of seeing others and herself as they find new ways of being a reader. At the far end of a spectrum of responses, others may have abandoned ship not too many chapters in. Depends on what they're ready for.

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[2] <http://xn--www-rp0a.booksforkeeps.co.uk/issue/244>

[3] <http://xn--www-rp0a.booksforkeeps.co.uk/member/geoff-fox>