

**Booktalk: *Everything All at Once*, by Katrina Leno**

[Hook: Read aloud from first page]:

*“The day we threw Aunt Helen’s ashes into the Atlantic Ocean was very windy. I’m assuming you’ve never seen someone get a mouthful of their dead sister’s ashes, but that is exactly what happened to my dad, in slow motion, his mouth opening into an O as he lifted the top off the urn and thrust it forward”*

That’s the beginning of *Everything All at Once*. Now that you have that image in your head, let me give you some context.

Imagine there’s this book series, the Alvin Hatter books, about a boy who lives forever. They are the most popular children’s book series *in the world*. Ever. They’re more popular than *Harry Potter*! The author is known all around the world. People are constantly stopping her on the street or writing her letters to say how much her characters mean to them.

Now imagine that this woman is your aunt. Well, she WAS your aunt, because she just died from cancer. So you’re trying to cope with your aunt’s death, and also your regular anxiety is getting really intense, because you can’t stop thinking about death, and all the ways people can die, and why do we even do things if we’re all just going to die?? You’re really sad, but the rest of the world seems heartbroken too. Millions of people wore black on the day your aunt died. You see her face on the cover of magazines and all over the tv and the internet. You see random people holding your aunt’s books in bookstores and sobbing.

But what all those people don’t know, what even your own parents and brother don’t know, is that your aunt left you 24 letters, to open over the course of 3 weeks. Each one has a request -- something for you to do. They start off small and then get a little bigger. First it’s: Have fun at a party. Go get a book from a man at a record store. Then: Do something a little reckless. Do something you’re not supposed to do.

And they’re all leading up to your aunt revealing her deepest, darkest secret. What could it possibly be? Does it have something to do with the Alvin Hatter books? And what’s the deal with the mysterious boy who says he was your aunt’s student and he wants to help you follow through on the requests in the letters, but sometimes seems really really sad, like maybe he has a secret of his own?

It’s a lot to suddenly have put on the shoulders of a 17-year-old girl, right? It’s like suddenly you’re dealing with EVERYTHING ALL AT ONCE, by Katrina Leno.

If you loved  
*Everything All at Once*,  
by Katrina Leno,  
try one of these read-alikes:



**We Are Okay,**  
by Nina LaCour

Marin left her old life behind, but a friend's visit reminds her of all she's lost. This quiet book is about loneliness, love, and learning to live again after loss.



**Final Draft,**  
by Riley Redgate

A risk-averse young writer is given a series of challenges by her teacher to push her out of her comfort zone. Will they help take her writing to the next level, or push her over the brink?



**All the Bright Places,**  
by Jennifer Niven

Two teens meet on a ledge and reveal their darkness: her grief and his obsession with death. Together, they set off to explore the natural wonders of their state.



**Wild Blue Wonder,**  
by Carlie Sorosiak

Quinn's family's summer camp is a magical place. But after a terrible accident, she shuts down. Will the new boy in town help draw her out of her shell?

Book Talk #2:

*Laura Dean Keeps Breaking Up With Me*,  
by author Mariko Tamaki and artist Rosemary Valero-O'Connell

Hi, my name is Freddy Riley. "I was named after my dad's Aunt Frederica, who died trying to save whales (pretty gay)." (3)

A little about me: "I live in Berkeley, CA. I like making things out of other things. I like the smell of strawberries, but not the taste. I'm a good kisser. I think." (3) I work at this great sandwich shop where all the specials are named after famous queer women. ("New Ellen is veal. Old Ellen is beef." You know, "because New Ellen is younger." (235))

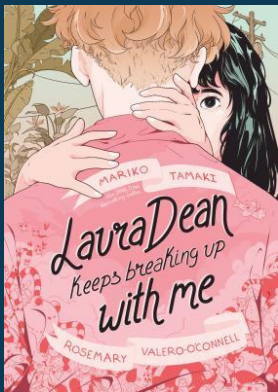
Anyway, here's the deal. For almost a year now, I've been in love with this girl named Laura Dean. I'd always known *of* her – "she's one of the most popular people in school. Everyone knows her." (64) I assume she knew who I was too – I mean, we've gone to school together for years. "I just wasn't, y'know, on her radar." (64) But then one day in gym, we had to do square-dancing. (I know). "We were do-si-doing or something" and, "from the moment she first touched me [...] it was like a thousand heart attacks all over me." (66) "And I remember thinking, *now* we've met." (66-7).

Fast-forward to now, and not only have we dated, but she has also broken up with me. Not once, or twice, but three times. The first time was on the 4<sup>th</sup> of July, when she was going to go hiking in Oregon with her parents and probably wouldn't have any phone service for a while. The second was at a Halloween party, when she thought she might want to date boys for a while. The last time was after the Valentine's day dance – the less said about that, the better, but let's just say there was some post-dance debacle. And the breakup itself happened over text. As my best friend Doodle said, "this is why modern technology will be the end of us." (22) And yeah, I *have* noticed that it always happens around holidays, and no, I don't know what that's about.

I know that my friends are "struggling to muster sympathy for my increasingly ridiculous situation." (23) And like, I know there are queer activists "who fought for centuries for me to have the right" "to get broken up with and publicly humiliated just like my hetero friends. I am progress" and all that (30-1). But that doesn't mean it doesn't suck.

I can't bother my friends about this again. So I'll ask *you* – should I take her back?

If you  
liked  
this...



# Try these:

*Bloom*,  
by Kevin Panetta (Writer)  
& Savanna Ganucheau (Artist)



*Kiss Number 8*,  
by Colleen AF Venable (Writer),  
& Ellen T. Crenshaw (Artist)

