



Everything Hurts: A Novel

Bill Scheft

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Phil Camp has a problem. Not the fact that he wrote a parody of a self-help book (*Where Can I Stow My Baggage?*) that the world took seriously and that became an international bestseller, or that he wrote the book under a phony name, Marty Fleck, and the phony name became a self-help guru overnight. Phil cannot be Marty Fleck. He can barely be himself.

No, Phil's problem is that he has been walking with a limp for nine months. Phil is in constant pain, yet there is nothing physically wrong with his body that would cause such agony. This problem leads him to the controversial Dr. Samuel Abrun, a real doctor who wrote a real self-help book (*The Power of "Ow!"*) that made thousands of people pain-free.

So what happens when the self-help fraud meets the genuine item? Does he get better? Can he hobble out of his own way to help himself? Most important, can the reader make it through fifty pages without thinking, *Wait a minute. Is that a twinge I feel in my lower back or just gas?*

Phil embraces Abrun's unorthodox psychogenic theories passionately but manages to save some passion for Abrun's daughter, Janet, herself a doctor who has her own theories about, and remedies for, chronic pain. If all this weren't enough, Phil tries to delve further into his past with his unconventional psychotherapist, the Irish Shrink, even if it means revealing dark secrets he never remembered telling him the first two or three times. To top it all off, Phil confronts his alter ego's nemesis, right-wing radio blowhard Jim McManus, only to find out they share a common enemy -- the same family.

Like Carl Hiaasen and Larry David, author Bill Scheft understands that the best humor is always excruciating. That fits the story of *Everything Hurts* and its lesson: Pain is the ultimate teacher. By the end, Phil Camp, the self-proclaimed "self-help fraud," turns out to be the real thing. And the real thing turns out to be flawed and confused, but hopeful. In other words, human.

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