



Title: The Impossible Knife of Memory

Author: Laurie Halse Anderson

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BOOK RESUME: THE IMPOSSIBLE KNIFE OF MEMORY

BOOK SYNOPSIS

For the past five years, Hayley Kincaid and her father, Andy, have been on the road, never staying long in one place as he struggles to escape the demons that have tortured him since his return from Iraq. Now they are back in the town where he grew up so Hayley can attend school. Perhaps, for the first time, Hayley can have a normal life, put aside her own painful memories, even have a relationship with Finn, the hot guy who obviously likes her but is hiding secrets of his own.

Will being back home help Andy's PTSD, or will his terrible memories drag him to the edge of hell, and drugs push him over? *The Impossible Knife of Memory* is Laurie Halse Anderson at her finest: compelling, surprising, and impossible to put down.

REVIEWS AND PRAISE

★"As in *Speak*, Anderson provides a riveting study of a psychologically scarred teenager, peeling back layers of internal defenses to reveal a girl's deepest wounds. Her heroine, 17-year-old Hayley, is no stranger to loss. Her mother died when she was small, and she was later abandoned by her father's alcoholic girlfriend. Now the only family Hayley has left is her father, a veteran of Iraq and Afghanistan, whose horrific flashbacks have brought chaos into their lives. After traveling the country in a "dented eighteen-wheeler," the two of them have settled down in her father's hometown. Hayley feels like an outsider at a high school populated by "zombies," and, at home, it's becoming increasingly difficult to pretend that her father is getting better. Then Hayley is drawn to Finn, a boy who seemingly likes her for who she is. Hayley's anxiety about her father's unpredictable behavior reverberates throughout the novel, overshadowing and distorting her memories of better times. It's a tough, absorbing story of the effects of combat on soldiers and the people who love them."

—*Publishers Weekly*, starred review

★"There's a compelling theme running through Anderson's powerful, timely novel, and it's this: The difference between forgetting something and not remembering is big enough to drive an eighteen-wheeler through. Hayley Kincaid won't allow herself to remember the happy times in her life, and why should she? After five years on the road with her trucker father, Andy, the two are finally staying put in her grandmother's old house in upstate New York. But military tours in both Iraq and Afghanistan have left Andy racked by nightmares of gunfire and roadside bombs, and alcohol and drugs are his means of coping. Short, gripping chapters presented in italics appear on occasion and are told from Andy's point-of-view as the war rages around him. As her father's PTSD grows

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worse, and the past is ever present, 17-year-old Hayley assumes the role of parent. But there's a good part of her life, too: Finn. He's got dreams for his future, and, as Hayley lets him in to her own scary reality, she tentatively begins to imagine a future of her own. Unfortunately or fortunately memories have a way of catching up, and as each hits, it cuts away at Hayley's protective bubble like a knife. This is challenging material, but in Anderson's skilled hands, readers will find a light shining on the shadowy reality of living with someone who has lived through war and who is still at war with himself."—*Booklist*, starred review

★"The book offers an eloquent portrait of the effects of both war and family legacies, and many readers will find reflections of their own struggle to keep family connections while obtaining their independence." —*BCCB*, starred review

★"Hayley is the daughter of a veteran, and his PTSD colors every aspect of their lives. After serving his country, Andy is trying to rebuild some stability for himself and his daughter, but each day is a challenge for them both. Hayley lives with the constant threat of her father harming himself or others while also dealing with feelings of abandonment after essentially losing her parental figures. She copes through snark and skepticism but begins to let her guard down when her charming, easygoing classmate, Finn, gives her a much-needed taste of normal teenage life. A relationship with Finn opens the door to the possibility of trusting again, but it's not easy. Through Hayley's tenuous search for balance, Anderson explores the complicated nature of perception and memory, and how individuals manage to carry on after experiencing the worst. Readers will be thoroughly invested in this book's nuanced cast of characters and their struggles. Hayley's relatable first-person narration is interspersed with flashbacks of Andy's brutal war experiences, providing a visceral look at his inner demons. The endearing Finn and Hayley's bubbly best friend, Gracie, add levity to the narrative, even as they, too, grapple with their own problems. With powerful themes of loyalty and forgiveness, this tightly woven story is a forthright examination of the realities of war and its aftermath on soldiers and their families. One of Anderson's strongest and most relevant works to date."—*School Library Journal*, starred review

★"It is Anderson at her absolute best, providing significant and touching realistic fiction."—*VOYA*, starred review

★"A serious subject is balanced by humorous cultural commentary, making this an intelligent, thought-provoking, and entertaining read."—*LMC*, starred review

"A family struggles to hold itself together in the wake of war. Hayley Kincaid and her father, Andy, a decorated veteran, have returned to their small upstate New York hometown after years of unschooling and long-haul trucking. Ostensibly, they're back so Hayley can have a typical senior year of high school, but it's clear that Andy's untreated PTSD has made it impossible for him to make a living as a trucker. Both Kincaids are bright, sarcastic loners plagued by agonizing memories that won't quite stay repressed, despite their best efforts, and that punctuate the

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narrative in counterpoint: Andy's experiences during his four tours in Iraq and Afghanistan appear fully formed, while Hayley's childhood recollections are more fragmented and less reliable than they at first seem. As Andy's mental and physical health deteriorate, Hayley is forced deeper into the role of caretaker. It's a part she's been playing so well for so long she doesn't even realize how much she resents the unfairness of it all until her sweet, bantering boyfriend, Finn, points it out. Anderson sensitively addresses the many problems--physical recovery, grief and survivor's guilt, chemical dependency, panic attacks and suicidal tendencies--that veterans can face when trying to reintegrate. This is less a bravura performance than a solid one, but Hayley's strong, wryly vulnerable voice carries the narrative toward a resolutely imperfect, hopeful conclusion. A characteristically honest and deeply felt exploration of the lingering scars of war." —*Kirkus*

"Anderson's novels . . . speak for the still-silent among us, and force all of us to acknowledge the real and painful truths that are too dangerous to ignore."
—*New York Times*

"*The Impossible Knife of Memory* isn't always an easy read-Anderson's gritty, authentic look at PTSD is by turns painful and heartbreaking-but it's an important one."—*Entertainment Weekly*

"Laurie Halse Anderson has been lauded and awarded for her ability to channel the teenage mind (and heart) dealing with tough issues. In *The Impossible Knife of Memory*, she takes on PTSD through the story of a girl coping with her troubled veteran dad."—*Family Circle*

"Hayley Kincaid has spent the last five years riding shotgun in her father's rig, discussing fractions and evolution -- an on-the-road version of home schooling. Constant movement has helped keep the past at bay for both Hayley and her dad, a recent veteran plagued by graphic flashbacks and screaming nightmares. When they settle down so Hayley can attend her hometown high school for senior year, the dangerous memories threaten to overtake them both. Hayley's caustic observations about the "fully assimilated zombies" who swarm the halls and the oxymoronic "required volunteer community service" are trademark Anderson. Old friend Gracie shares childhood memories with Hayley, but her stories draw blanks. What Hayley does remember, and can't forgive, is her father's girlfriend Trish walking out on them. Now Trish has reappeared, and Hayley blames her for making Dad's drunken rages and blackouts even worse. How can she possibly care about math? Sweet, "adorkable" Finn offers to tutor her; he is smart enough to take it slow, and as she falls for him he even coaxes her to dare to think about a future. As ever, Anderson has the inside track on the emotional lives of adolescents; she plays high school clichés for laughs but compassionately depicts Hayley's suffering as well as the hurts of Finn and Gracie, whose families are struggling with their own demons. The novel's theme is woven artfully throughout as both Hayley and her dad fight the flashes of memory that

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are sure to tear them apart unless they confront them once and for all. lauren adams.”—*The Horn Book*

“Known for writing about difficult issues that affect contemporary teens, Anderson focuses her latest novel on 17-year-old Hayley and her father, Andy, who suffers from PTSD after serving in Iraq and Afghanistan. Julia Whelan's expert performance brings out the complexity of Hayley's character, picking up on her vulnerability and defensive toughness, mixing both with a good dose of teen attitude. Whelan's solid characterizations, varied cadence, and expressive reading strengthen the listener's connection to this emotionally intense story. Narrator Luke Daniels delivers the few sections told from Andy's point of view. His mature voice makes a believable contrast with Whelan's, and he captures Andy's tortured flashbacks and overwhelming feelings of survivor guilt. An unforgettable audiobook for older teens and adults.”—AudioFile Magazine

AWARDS AND ACCOLADES

- *New York Times* bestseller
- National Book Award longlist
- *A Publishers Weekly* Best Young Adult Book
- *A School Library Journal* Best Young Adult Book
- An Amelia Elizabeth Walden Award Finalist
- A YALSA Best Fiction for Young Adults Selection
- A CBC Young Adult Favorites Award Selection
- An American Indians in Children's Literature List of Best Books High School Selection
- A Junior Library Guild Young Adult Selection
- A Junior Library Guild Audiobooks Selection
- Battle of the Books, High School (AK)
- Grand Canyon Reader Award-- Teen category (AZ)
- California Young Reader Medal, Young Adult Division, Grades 9-12 (CA)
- Colorado Blue Spruce Young Adult Book Award-- Grades 7-12 (CO)
- Delaware Diamonds Award, High School (DE)
- Florida Teens Read (FL)
- Abraham Lincoln High School Award, for Grades 9-12 (IL)
- Young Hoosier Book Award, Grades 6-8 (IN)
- Iowa High School Battle of the Books, Grades 9-12 (IA)
- Iowa High School Book Award, Grades 9-12 (IA)
- Kentucky Bluegrass Award--High School (KY)
- Black-Eyed Susan Book Award, High School (MD)
- Nevada Young Readers' Award-- Young Adult Division for Grades 7-12 (NV)
- Garden State Teen Book Awards,-- High School Fiction for Grades 9-12 (NJ)
- On Your Mark, Get Set, Read! Summer Reading, Teen & Up (NY)
- NCSLMA YA Book Award, 2015-2016 -- High School, Grades 9-12 (NC)
- Pennsylvania Young Reader's Choice Award, Grades 9-12 (PA)
- SCASL Young Adult Book Awards, Grades 9-12 (SC)

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- Volunteer State Book Awards--High School Division, Grades 9-12 (TN)
- Tayshas Reading List, for Grades 9-12 (TX)
- Battle of the Books-- Senior Division for Grades 8-12 (WI)

MEDIA AND RESOURCES

- [TeachingBooks.net resources](#)
- [Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award Reading Guide](#)
- [Penguin Classroom Educator's Guide](#)
- [Indiana Library Federation Teacher's Guide](#)
- [Educator Activities from Author](#)
- [NPR Interview with Author](#)
- [World News Network Interview with Author](#)
- [ALAN Review Interview with Author](#)
- [Book Lust Interview with Author](#)
- [KitLit TV Interview with Author](#)
- [AdLit Interviews with Author](#)
- [The Writer Interview with Author](#)
- [Margaret A. Edwards Speech by Author](#)
- [EW Shelf Life Interview with Author](#)
- [Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award Acceptance Speech by Author](#)
- [ALMA Interview with Author](#)
- [88 Cups of Tea Interview with Author](#)

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