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The Impossible Knife Of Memory



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.

Book Information

Lexile Measure: HL720L (What's this?)

Paperback: 416 pages

Publisher: Speak; Reprint edition (June 2, 2015)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0147510724

ISBN-13: 978-0147510723

Product Dimensions: 5.5 x 1.1 x 8.2 inches

Shipping Weight: 7.2 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.3 out of 5 stars 217 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #52,047 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #35 in Books > Teens >

Historical Fiction > Military #42 in Books > Teens > Literature & Fiction > Social & Family

Issues > Depression & Mental Illness #60 in Books > Children's Books > Literature & Fiction >

Historical Fiction > Military & Wars

Age Range: 12 and up

Grade Level: 7 and up

Customer Reviews

Gr 9 Up — 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. —Allison Tran, Mission Viejo Library, CA --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

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 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.

HIGH-DEMAND BACKSTORY: A major marketing campaign, including a national author tour, backs up this latest from multiple-award-winning Anderson. Grades 9-12. --Ann Kelley --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

What impressed me most about this book: *LHA is a master of character. All her characters--primary

and secondary--are vibrant and fully-fleshed-out. They are flawed and fierce and memorable. I especially loved Hayley's voice and observations, as well as how Finn was a spot-on representation of a teenage boy who was well on the path to being a feminist man/decent human (without a hint of preachiness from LHA). As a teen in real life, Hayley probably would have terrified me. As a protagonist, I was 1000% in her corner. And I loved the development of the dynamic between Hayley, her dad, and her dad's ex as the family spiraled toward crisis. It was authentic and painful and still full of hope--like the entire novel.*LHA deftly captures a very real contemporary experience on both the small and large scale of this book. Whether it's passing mentions of fracking, rape culture, genocide (contemporary and historic), or the larger issue of teens growing up with parents who served overseas and are suffering from PTSD, the novel is steeped in now and the social awareness many teens have.*The novel is excellently paced. Like dominoes or a chain of firecrackers, one thing leads to another and another, pulling you through the book. Just read it. It's phenomenal. :)

"The Impossible Knife of Memory" (IKM) is very good, a 4.5 star rating. Hayley is a high school senior, somewhere in the Albany, NY area. She has been "home" schooled by her Dad, a haunted war vet suffering from worsening PTSD for several years. The quote marks because home was the cab of a tractor-trailer rig that Hayley and Dad rode for years until it became just one more job that he lost due to fights and/or drunkenness and/or whatever. So for the first time in years Hayley has classmates and teachers, and she's not dealing with it well. Missed homework, insubordination which leads to frequent detention, poor test results, etc. etc. But early on she slowly builds a relationship with classmate and neighbor Gracie, and through Gracie meets Finn, a bright, glib, persistent ex-swimmer who slowly gets under Hayley's skin. But life for Hayley is not easy. Frequent flare-ups with her Dad, and then one of his ex-girlfriends returns, and Hayley, once again, is not at all pleased with that. But there are also happy moments with Finn, but they don't last long before another crisis flares up. Things finally reach the boiling point....The IKM characters are the book's great strength. They are likeable, real, well drawn. Lots of tension and a very good storyline. Nice relationship between Hayley and Finn; a strong physical attraction between the two but Hayley draws the line. And that is exactly where too many YA books fail. Authors too often patronize their targeted audience, creating an environment where "everyone IS really doing it", but thankfully not here. But the pressures and the tensions and the desires are there, and dealt with. This is the area which the really excellent YA books (like "Eleanor and Park" and IKM) handle well. The only criticism I have of IKM is that once again in YA fiction, parents are MIA. There are no adult role models here.

Obviously, Hayley's Dad situation is central to the plot and real, but other parents and teachers in the book just don't have their heads screwed on right. After sex, it is that portrayal that too many YA authors exaggerate which one suspects is only about building a faithful audience for future books. But lots of books go way beyond IKM in that regard and so it's still a 4.5 in my books and I'll read more by Laurie Halse Anderson.

Truly, Laurie Halse Anderson's THE IMPOSSIBLE KNIFE OF MEMORY deserves much more than 5 stars....more like 10, just for starters. Wow. From the moment I started reading this book, I was hooked. After a day or two of reading small chunks, I couldn't stand it anymore; I couldn't put it down and I finally just kept reading until I finished it! This is a book that you will WANT to stay up late to read--if not all night. This is a book that will tear your heart out, but make you believe in Love and Life and Hope and the eternal power of the fact that no matter how bad things get in life, life does go on and we just have to hang on for the ride, doing the best we can--one day at a time. I love so much about THE IMPOSSIBLE KNIFE OF MEMORY. Yet it's difficult to say that this is a great book because the subject matter is so difficult and powerfully heart-wrenching. While I am not a soldier who has seen the horrors of war, I am a woman who has SUFFERED horrors of life. I understand the coping mechanisms that drive people to do things they never would have done if they hadn't SUFFERED the things they've suffered. Hayley is an incredible young woman who simply wants LIFE with those she loves around her yet she fights on a daily basis to keep a tenuous grasp on LIFE. She is stumped by normalcy, including school and dating while being drawn to normalcy as a moth to a flame. Like Anderson's book SPEAK, THE IMPOSSIBLE KNIFE OF MEMORY is a book that will be with you long after you close the book. This book is sure to become an instant classic and be at the top of any avid reader's reading list and is definitely added to my list of books I suggest that EVERYONE read....Truly. Now. What are you waiting for? Do you need a copy of the book? I'll loan you mine, but you have to promise to give it back to me as soon as you finish. Then again, you might as well buy your own copy because you're going to want a copy of your own.....Seriously.

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