

Cracks of Light in the Darkness:

Images of Hope in the Work of Laurie Halse Anderson and an Interview with the Author

Author Laurie Halse Anderson is known for her guts and pluck in taking on such controversial topics as date rape, slavery, anorexia, and abuse. Anderson dives deep into the churning, stormy waters of adolescent angst, writing unflinchingly with her trademark audacious flair.

Anderson's novels submerge both her readers and her characters deep into the darkness where they often swim against the tide and struggle for redemption. Rather than leaving them drowning in despair, however, she brings both reader and protagonist up for light and air, skillfully instilling and infusing hope into each of her books. "Ending on an encouraging note is part of my moral code. Teenagers need to see a model of hope and growth," Anderson states.

Anderson's 1999 landmark novel *Speak* started it all, launching her into her own niche on the outer fringes of 1999's pink-jacketed young adult literature, and making the author a star. *Speak* was a revolutionary book, with its haunting, tree-adorned cover planting the Anderson firmly on the radar of reviewers, readers, teachers, and librarians.

Riding the wave of the Internet, the groundbreaking author started her website in the year 2000, opening the lines of communication with teens who related to her novel *Speak*. By 2005, Anderson started to become proactive in reaching out to her readers with the beginnings of a blog, "Madwoman in the Forest." Emails surged in: a torrent of words that reassured the author that her books were indeed touching—and changing—lives.

Anderson says that the word most often emerging in the emails is *honest*. "I don't sugarcoat anything,"

she said in a *School Library Journal* article.

My critical responses to Anderson's images of hope in her books *Wintergirls*, *Speak*, and *Chains* follow, along with the author's answers to my questions during an interview on August 13, 2009.

Wintergirls

The story of a teenage girl named Lia who is dealing not only with the ravages of anorexia, but also with the death of her best friend from the same disease, *Wintergirls* is a flight in the dark. The reader is catapulted immediately into Lia's shock and grief as she learns of her friend Cassie's death, and we fall with her into the blackest of nights.

Anderson brightens the darkness for the first time with a tentative flicker of hope in the image of an uneasy light in Lia's bedroom at night. "Plastic stars wait on the cold ceiling, watching the light switch, nervous, ready for the dark and their cue to glow" (p. 32). The hope here is a tense and edgy one, as jittery as the nervous plastic stars on the cold ceiling.

Anderson gives the reader a bit more hope and light a few pages later, with a flashback of Lia and Cassie's first meeting, back in third grade.

She showed me her antique dolls and plastic horse collection, and best of all, a real treasure chest that had rubies and gold and a piece of green sea-glass born in the heart of a volcano.

I told her that sea-glass came from the ocean.

"This is different," she said. "It's 'see-glass,' like seeing with your eyes. If you look through it when the stars line up right, you can see your future." (p. 37)

Anderson once again returns to the see-glass as a symbol of hope for Lia's friend in a scene that takes place at Cassie's funeral service:

I reach into my jacket pocket and pull out the small disk of green see-glass, born in the heart of a volcano, capable of showing the future. I stole it from Cassie's room when we were nine, but I could never make it work, no matter how the stars were lined up.

I slip the glass into her frozen hand. (p. 87)

In *Wintergirls*, the author also uses mirror glass as a symbol of hope and light. Here's a scene where Lia gazes wistfully into her old dance studio, which is lit up in the winter night:

I stop in front of the florist shop. On the second floor, the lights are on in my old dance studio. I spent a lifetime staring into the mirrors up there. I'd flex and leap, and bow and sweep; a sugarplum, a swan, a maiden, a doll. (p. 83)

Mirrors, now Lia's worst enemy in her battle with distorted body image, were once vehicles of fantasy and hope and light. Reflected in the glass, Lia could be a sugarplum, a swan, a maiden, a doll. The mirror here reflects the hope that perhaps Lia as seen in the glass might once again view the magical possibilities of life.

Later in the book, Anderson continues her use of glass as a symbol of hope, direction, and guiding light in this passage:

On my way to pick up Elijah Saturday morning, I stop at the store to buy a map and a compass. The GPS is on my Christmas list, in ink. What I really need is a crystal ball, but nobody sells them around here. (p. 130)

The wish for a crystal ball conveys Lia's hope for the future and for guidance, and it joins symbols of see-glass and mirrors in Anderson's "glass as hope" symbolism.

In a dream scene, where Lia encounters her dead friend Cassie and they fight for the see-glass, Anderson again utilizes the glass to symbolize the possibility of hope for the future. "She turns around as I hold it up again and look through the leaf-colored crystal out the window to the stars lining up above us" (p. 271). Here, through the see-glass, Anderson's character sees the future as holding stars amidst the blackness.

Anderson also uses the moon as a symbol of hope and light when the character Lia relates her fairy-tale version of how her mother and father fell in love.

They paddled a canoe to the middle of the water and laughed. The moon saw how beautiful they were and how much in love, and gave them a baby for their very own. Just then, the canoe sprung a leak and started to sink. They had to paddle hard, hard, hard, but they made it to shore just in time. (p. 74)

Later, the moon and stars again serve as symbols for hope in a scene where Lia needs to call her mother immediately in order to save her own life.

It takes almost the rest of my life to get to the office but because the moon is paying attention to my visions and the stars are lined up, the quarters are in the drawer and the pay phone does work. (p. 273)

Lia's descent into the darkness of anorexia resembles the archetype of a young woman (usually at the dawning of sexuality) who becomes spell-bound or enchanted. Lia reflects a familiarity that's found in both a mythological and a fairy-tale version of this archetype.

Borrowing from the myth *Persephone*, in which the entire world freezes into winter, Anderson uses the moon and stars, as well as a light in a motel room, in a tentative glimmer of hope at the book's darkest moment.

The snow has stopped. The crescent moon hangs high, stars rubbing their hands together, teeth chattering. I shuffled toward the office. The door to 113 is open. The lights are on. (p. 268)

Anderson uses not only the myth of *Persephone* in *Wintergirls*, but she borrows also from the *Sleeping Beauty* fairytale (Grimm, 1969), in which the main character, Briar Rose, reaches adolescence and falls into the curse of a deep sleep, surrounded by a hedge of roses. Rose images are to be found both in *Sleeping Beauty* and in *Wintergirls*, where Lia's journey is like that of a rose dying only to return to life. The hedge of rose thorns in the Brothers Grimm fairytale "held fast together, as if they had hands," creating a metaphor of Briar Rose as being held in captivity with no hope of rescue. In *Wintergirls*, "Thorn-covered vines creep across the floor, crackling like a bonfire. Black roses bloom in the moonlight, born dead and brittle" (p. 43).

Anderson's description of Lia's life gives us the impression of joylessness, a kind of limbo between life and death. This state could be said to relate to Briar Rose's spell of sleep. Just as Briar Rose and her

kingdom are imprisoned by the curse, so Lia and her family are bound by her disease. Both Briar Rose's castle and Lia's home life fall into winter, much as the curse in *Persephone*.

In the fairy tale, Briar Rose, pricked by a spindle of an old woman spinning flax, "fell down upon the bed that stood there, and lay in a deep sleep." In Anderson's novel, Lia is sleepwalking through life as an anorexic, a nearly self-induced state of sleep, and when she is hospitalized for her disease, she falls into the same lifeless sleep as Briar Rose. "They tell me I was ten days in the hospital. I slept. Dreamless" (p. 274). Anderson even riffs upon spinning imagery in *Wintergirls*: "I am spinning the silk threads of my story, weaving the fabric of my world. I spun out of control" (p. 277).

Briar Rose's castle is encircled by an impenetrable wall of thorns in the Brothers Grimm fairy tale. Anderson's character, too, is imprisoned by a wall of thorns, but an emotional one, rather than a literal wall. Upon learning of her best friend's death, the character in *Wintergirls* is confined in her own agony: "My walls go up and my doors lock" (p. 1).

Briar Rose's father, the king, is a loving parent. When his baby is born, the king "could not contain himself for joy," and he ordered a great feast. Lia's father, too, is a caring parent. "My father smooths my hair again. "Thank God you're safe" (p. 35).

In *Sleeping Beauty* (Grimm, 1969), Briar Rose is rescued by a king's son who ventures through the hedge and "opened the door into the little room where Briar Rose was sleeping." Anderson's Lia finds refuge in a young man: the motel employee who unlocks the door to the room where Lia's friend Cassie died.

Flower imagery is also used in *Sleeping Beauty*, as the king's son steps through the hedge—now covered with "large and beautiful flowers." In *Wintergirls*, Lia stops in the darkness in front of a florist shop, where "the girl reflected back from the window in front of me has poinsettias growing out of her belly and head" (p. 83). When Lia attends Cassie's funeral, a scene in which Lia refers to her friend as being Sleeping Beauty, "brown-edged chrysanthemum petals drop loudly from the wreaths . . ." (p. 85).

The end of *Sleeping Beauty* is much like the conclusion of *Wintergirls*: Briar-Rose and Lia both awaken and come back to life. There, Anderson uses flower imagery as a symbol of hope and healing. "Cassie's

parents show up the day the crocuses open. We cry" (p. 277). Spring comes and the ice melts, just as in the Persephone myth and in *Sleeping Beauty*, where the castle community awakes and the flowers and roses outside spring to life. *Sleeping Beauty* and her king's son "lived contented until the end of her days." Anderson's Lia starts to put her life back together with an image of spinning: "I spin and weave and knit my words and visions until a life starts to take shape" (p. 277).

Anderson's stories are not only about the fall into darkness; they are about the return into the light. Just as Persephone comes back to life and *Sleeping Beauty* awakens, so too do the characters created by Laurie Halse Anderson. On the book's last page, the reader knows that hope is possible with Anderson's use of a mirror and thawing ice. Despite the fact that this is not a happily-ever-after ending, the reader is left with hope.

There is no magic cure, no making it all go away forever.

There are only small steps upward; an easier day, an unexpected laugh, a mirror that doesn't matter anymore.

I am thawing. (p. 278).

Wintergirls glows with Laurie Halse Anderson's instillation of hope amidst despair, with water, snow, ice, candlelight, mirrors, green glass, and a wished-for crystal ball reflecting glimmers and shimmers of light for readers who may be struggling with the same issues as Lia. Hope is illuminated.

The author's choice of symbols in *Wintergirls*, whether conscious or not, are effective and illuminating. Moon and stars are symbols of light in the darkness; candles light the night; mirrors reflect who we are and who we hope to be; a piece of see-glass can foretell a future with hope, much as a crystal ball. With these items, Anderson has managed to suffuse illumination and enlightenment upon the darkest of subjects. She has used the clearest and most luminous of symbols—glass, candle, moon, and stars to light a path for the protagonist of *Wintergirls*.

"The truer the symbol, the deeper it leads you, the more meaning it opens up," said Flannery O'Connor (1969, p. 72).

In *Writing Fiction: A Guide to Narrative Craft* (Burroway & Stuckey-French, 2007), Burroway states that "when a literary symbol fails, it is most often because it has not been integrated into the texture of

the story” (p. 346). As Friedman puts it in *Writing Past Dark* (1994):

Before a thing can be a symbol it must be a thing. It must do its job as a thing in the world before and during and after you have projected all your meaning all over it. (p. 99)

Anderson’s symbols are all *things*, with jobs in the world beyond their roles in her fiction. Hope is illuminated.

In my interview with Laurie Halse Anderson, the author revealed that *Wintergirls’* images of light as hope were not intentional, nor were they conscious.

A: Did you consciously use symbols of hope in *Wintergirls*?

LHA: No. They snuck in. I still don’t really understand much about symbolism, and I have no clue what a theme is.

A: While gathering your crumbs of information for the book, did you purposefully start with the image of crumbs on the stepmother’s lips?

LHA: In early drafts, the book opened with the image Lia had of herself on an altar, surrounded by vultures pecking at her flesh. I changed it to the muffin crumbs because I didn’t want to slap my readers across the face on the first page.

A: In a book titled *The Copycat Effect*, Coleman (2004) wrote of the idea that reading something could cause some readers to copy the crime. He focused upon school shootings as being perhaps “inspired” by media coverage. In the 1970s, it was claimed that suicides were inspired by the movie *The Deer Hunter* (Cimino, 1978), and as far back as the 1800s, there was what was known as the “Werther Syndrome,” in which 200 young boys committed suicide as a copycat effect of reading *The Sorrows of Young Werther* (von Goethe, 1774/ 1989). I know that *Wintergirls* has sparked controversy and discussion of a possible “copycat effect” among teen readers prone to anorexia. Should we as writers worry about this so-called “copycat effect” and the possibilities of reactions to our own works?

LHA: You can only write the story that is in your heart. If you allow your story to be shaped by external forces and opinions, you might consider writing copy for advertising instead of novels because it pays better.

A: I believe that *Wintergirls* is your darkest book. How can a book about a really dark subject make a kid feel less alone?

LHA: Here’s a quote from an email I received yesterday:

So this has kinda turned into a thank you letter, because I feel something from that story, and I’m really glad I read it, because now I know that I’m not alone. Thanks for saving me, even though you didn’t know you were doing it.

I think books about dark subjects help many readers face the harsh realities of the world and make more intelligent, healthy decisions when the darkness creeps up on them.

A: You used the myth of *Persephone* for inspiration in telling the story of *Wintergirls*, incorporating the image of the whole world turning into winter. This winter also recalls *Sleeping Beauty’s* long dreamless sleep and the way the thorny hedge surrounded her for all those years. I thought that was brilliant, and the contrast of sparkling white snow with the black psyche of an anorexic girl struggling to stay alive was striking. Do you think that writers might find it helpful to take a look at mythology while writing our own novels, especially those with dark subjects?

LHA: Myth is our air and water. To ignore it is like only allowing yourself to use half of the letters in the alphabet.

A: Have you ever thought of *Wintergirls* in terms of swimming in the dark and coming up for air and light?

LHA: Honestly? Not really. But I see life through the lens of hope, and I suppose it is inevitable that my perspective leaks into my stories.

Speak

In her novel *Speak*, Laurie Halse Anderson (1999/2009) plummets into the tormented psyche of a girl named Melinda, who refuses to talk after a summer date rape incident. We readers immerse ourselves in Melinda's mind, empathizing with the character who believes that "It is easier not to say anything. Shut your trap, button your lip, can it. Nobody really wants to hear what you have to say" (p. 9).

Anderson's protagonist finds hope in art, as well as in innocent childhood activities, nature, and (once again) ice and mirrors. "Art follows lunch, like dream follows nightmare," (p. 9) relates the narrator Melinda.

His room is Cool Central. He keeps the radio on. We are allowed to eat as long as we work. He bounced a couple of slackers who confused freedom with no rules, so the rest of us don't make waves. It is too much fun to give up. (p. 77)

Mirrors, too, reflect hope in *Speak*. A mirror's absence is a symbol of lost hope in this passage: "I get out of bed and take down the mirror. I put it in the back of my closet, facing the wall" (p. 17). As in *Wintergirls*, the mirror is a symbol of self-image, and the protagonist is losing hope and faith in her strength, and so she hides her reflection.

In addition to the light and mirrors, *Speak* leaps into new territory with a thematic strand that utilizes physical activity and play as a symbol and image of hope.

Running makes me feel like I am eleven years old and fast. I burn a strip up the sidewalk, melting snow and ice three feet on either side. (97)

Tennis symbolizes hope and power in a passage in which Melinda triumphs over her opponent:

I bounce the yellow ball, one two three. Up in the air like releasing a bird or an apple. . . . My racket takes on a life of its own, a bolt of energy . . . I'm tough enough to play and strong enough to win. (p. 170)

Innocent childhood play symbolizes the possibility of a return to purity in a winter break scene where Melinda makes a snow angel.

I tromp to an unmarked piece of snow and let myself fall backward. The scarf falls over my mouth as I wave my wings. The wet wool smells like first grade, walking to school on a cold morning with my milk money jangling in the tips of my mittens. . . . I believed in Santa Claus. (p. 71)

Anderson uses not only snow angels, but bicycle riding to communicate a sense of innocence that translates as hope for a return to better days. As the character Melinda pedals through the streets of a sleeping suburb, she relates: "I ride like I have wings. I am not tired. I don't think I'll ever have to sleep again" (p. 190).

Childhood experiences are also used in an Easter scene in which Melinda's hope for a return to innocence is clear: "I made hard-boiled eggs for lunch and drew little faces on them with a black pen" (p. 143). Melinda's lack of typical teenage self-consciousness is an effective communication to the reader that the little girl inside might prevail and win the battle that's raging inside her silence.

As in *Wintergirls*, nature, too, symbolizes hope in *Speak*, along with the changing of seasons and the coming of spring.

May is finally here and it has stopped raining. Good thing, too—the mayor of Syracuse was about to put out a call for a guy named Noah. The sun appears butter-yellow and so warm it coaxes tulips out of the crusty mud. A miracle. (p. 165)

Tulips aren't the only flower imagery appearing in *Speak*. Melinda plants marigold seeds and says, "Too much sun after a Syracuse winter does strange things to your head, makes you feel strong" (p. 180).

Tree metaphors abound throughout the book, coming to a powerful climax with a description of Melinda's tree art at the end of the novel.

My tree is definitely breathing; little shallow breaths like it just shot up through the ground this morning. This one is not perfectly symmetrical. The bark is rough. . . . Roots knob out of the ground and the crown reaches for the sun, tall and healthy. The new growth is the best part. (p. 196)

Melinda's art project is the ultimate symbol of hope, with new growth, breath, height, and reaching for the sun creating a commanding image and planting hope for a happy (yet, like the tree, not perfect) ending. Melinda's tree takes on an even greater beauty and sense of strength and hope with this passage:

My tree needs something. I walk over to the desk and take a piece of brown paper and a finger of chalk . . . I practice birds—little dashes of color on paper. It's awkward with the bandage on my hand, but I keep trying. I draw them without thinking—flight, flight, feather, wing. Water drips on the paper and the birds bloom in the light, their feathers expanding promise. (p. 197)

The final image of hope, on *Speak*'s last page, comes as it does in *Wintergirls*—with the melting of ice:

The tears dissolve the last block of ice in my throat. I feel the frozen stillness melt down through the inside of me, dripping shards of ice that vanish in a puddle of sunlight on the stained floor. Words float up.

Me: "Let me tell you about it." (p. 198)

With the thawing of the ice, the character has found her voice . . . and hope.

A: Is *Speak* something of a metaphor for your own "speaking out" as an author who's not afraid to speak—or write—the truth?

LHA: Absolutely. The writing of *Speak* was me daring myself to find my voice and use it. That's the most outrageous thing any artist can do. It is also the most necessary.

A: I love the scene in *Speak* where Melinda holds a sliver of glass to the boy's neck and says: "I said NO." In my opinion, these three words instill hope in the reader that Melinda will indeed be okay. Do you agree?

LHA: Yes and no. The most hopeful words for me are at the end of the book, when she turns to her teacher and starts to talk to him.

A: *Speak* was told in first person, as was *Wintergirls*. Do you believe that a first-person voice is more effective in telling a difficult story?

LHA: Not necessarily. But it is very effective in YA literature because of the intense amplitude of adolescent emotions.

A: Before beginning your novel *Speak*, you heard the literal voice of Melinda in the darkness one night. Have you heard any voices for other works? How can we as writers tune in to our own voices?

LHA: The trick is to *not* tune into your voice. You have to let it creep up on you, like a fawn in the forest.

Chains

Laurie Halse Anderson's historical novel *Chains* (2008) is the story of Isabel, a 13-year-old African American who is waging an excruciating war for freedom from slavery. Held in slavery by a hateful New York City couple, and straining to glimpse a sliver of light within these blackest of days, Isabel and her sister Ruth find hope and light in nature. The first kernel of hope for Isabel is found in a jar of seeds that her late mother never had a chance to plant.

I looked around our small room, searching for a tiny piece of home I could hide in my pocket.

What to take?

Seeds. (p. 13)

Isabel's hope is a tentative and uncertain one, and she reflects: "I didn't know what they'd grow into. I didn't know if they'd grow at all" (p. 14).

Isabel also finds hope in the ghosts of her ancestors, who she believes just may have the power to save her. In a scene where Isabel and her sister are being transported on a boat to the city of New York, Isabel ponders the fact that salvation can't arrive while she's on the water. "Momma said that ghosts couldn't move over water" (p. 25).

Isabel ventures forth with a show of hope when she plants her mother's seeds.

When the fat moon rose the next night, I planted the mystery seeds I had taken from Momma's jar. I did not know what they would grow into, but planting them deep in the cool dirt was a comfort. (p. 84)

As in *Wintergirls*, Anderson uses the moon as a symbol of hope in *Chains*.

"The moon was my friend. It lit up the library enough for me to make my way without stumbling into anything" (p. 98).

Hope is also found in Isabel's dreams:

In my dream I stood on a sandy beach, my back to the sea, the moon over my left shoulder. An enormous map was unrolled at my feet. The roads on it were marked with velvet black ink, rivers a pearly blue, mountains a speckled green. It was a map of a country I had never before seen. (p. 130)

In a horrific dark scene where Isabel is branded with a hot iron, her hope appears in the misty ghosts of her parents. "My momma and poppa appeared from the shadows. They flew to me and wrapped their arms

around me and cooled my face with their ghost tears” (p. 148).

As Isabel’s body and soul are racked with pain from the fire branding, the ghost of an ancestor soothes her. “She talked Jamaica, more song than words, and brought bitter tea to my mouth and made the world smell of lemons and told me to sleep” (p. 149).

Isabel finds “spots of hope” at Christmas, with a wreath stuck to the front of a tent, a butter churn, and wood smoke. “Smoke swirled slow from the top of a chimney, dipped at the roof line, then rose up to the stars” (p. 248).

A frozen winter’s morning shines with optimistic possibilities for Isabel.

The sun rose bright the next day, catching in the icicles that hung from the eaves and jumping off the snow like a mirror. The linens pegged out on the line were froze stiff as wood and covered in a lacework of ice. The clouds scuttled away and the sun blazed, turning the yard into a garden of jewels. (p. 267)

In *Chains*, as in *Wintergirls* and *Speak*, ice and snow symbolize hope and a mirror is used as an image of light. A mirror reflecting the protagonist’s image also reflects hope in a scene where a candle and a mirror illuminate Isabel in the night. Her parents’ ghosts and memories blend together in the image, joining as one reflection that is Isabel. “My nose and mouth recollected Momma’s, but the set of the eyes, those came from Poppa. As I stared, their two faces came forth and drifted back, until I could see only me” (p. 286). Isabel touches the branded letter “I” that’s now “a pink ribbon embroidered on my skin,” and she finds strength and hope and beauty in the scar that came from the branding. “*This is my country mark*. I did not ask for it, but I would carry it as Poppa carried his. It made me his daughter. It made me strong” (p. 286).

In the last pages of *Chains*, Isabel’s hope is found in water. “I rowed that river. I rowed that river like it was a horse delivering me from the Devil” (p. 298). Isabel’s hope and light come with her strength, and muscles born from hard work and slavery.

My back, my shoulders, my arms, they pulled with the strength of a thousand armloads of firewood split and carried, of water buckets toted for miles, of the burdens of every New York day and New York night boiled into two miles of water that I was going to cross. (p. 298)

The water is both hope and obstacle in this scene, and the results of slavery (the muscles) serve as both servitude and hope, blended together into one push across water that will result in freedom.

Ghosts and moon once again symbolize hope and light when Isabel realizes that the ghosts of her ancestors can indeed move across water, as the spirits tug Isabel’s boat forward with their strength. “My eyes closed and the moon drew me west, away from the island of my melancholy” (p. 299). When Isabel opens her eyes, she discovers that the boat has reached shore. Wood smoke is used as hope when Isabel notes: “Heaven was crystal lit with white angel fire, colored peach at the edges. Heaven smelled of wood smoke” (p. 299).

The branches over the boat are covered in ice, as is Isabel, but as in *Wintergirls*, the ice begins to crack. “I was coated in ice, too, that fractured and crackled as I moved” (p. 300). The image of the water and of the rising sun and of the river flowing south out to sea lets Isabel know that she has arrived in Jersey . . . and set herself free.

The symbols of hope found in water, sun, ice, and wood smoke are Isabel’s triumph and her freedom.

A: I once heard Louise Hawes say that we as readers get communion from the best books, and that writers and readers meet halfway and do together what they could never do alone. I believe that *Chains* was a form of communion between present and past, white and black. Have you ever thought of writing as a form of communion? Is there a book from your own childhood with which you felt that connection?

LHA: For me, writing is a communion with a Spirit that is much more vast than I can comprehend. With readers, it’s more a conversation around a campfire. . . . I suppose that has elements of communion, too, but at a different level.

A: Some reviews observed that *Chains* ended on a note of redemption for the characters. Are redemption, salvation, and hope all the same thing? If not, which would you rather leave with your readers?

LHA: Redemption and salvation are religious constructs that do not have universal resonance. Hope

rings true to every heart; I pick that one, please.

Laurie Halse Anderson may be a doyenne of darkness, but she is also a harbinger of hope. In Anderson's stories, there is always a harbor of hope, a resting place in which readers may find a safe haven. Whether it be through glass, mirrors, candles, water, moon, stars, ghosts, ice, or snow, Anderson's symbols reflect and illuminate, allowing cracks—or beams—of light into the darkness. Anderson's characters grow and change, and the light guides them along the way.

Unintentional and subconscious as they may be, Laurie Halse Anderson's symbols of hope shine intuitively, and her moral code of including hope in her stories is a fulfilled responsibility. In the darkest moments of Laurie Halse Anderson's books are found the light of transformation and of hope. My final question to the author was this:

A: Some say it was F. Scott Fitzgerald who said that hope was the one thing man could not live without. Jacqueline Susann alleged that hope was a drug. Edgar Allan Poe contended hope was a shadow or illusion meant to tempt man to madness, and Raymond Chandler thought that hope was for suckers. What is hope for Laurie Halse Anderson?

LHA: Hope is a decent reason to get out of bed every morning.

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