



Catalyst

By Laurie Halse Anderson

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Meet Kate Malone-straight A science and math geek, minister's daughter, ace long-distance runner, girlfriend, unwilling family caretaker, emotional avoidance champion. Kate manages her life by organizing it, as logically as the periodic table. She can handle it all—or so she thinks. Then, like a string of chemical reactions, everything happens: the Malones' neighbors get burned out of their home and move in. Because her father is a Good Man of God (and a Not Very Thoughtful Parent), Kate has to share her room with her nemesis, Teri Litch, and Teri's adorable, troublemaking little brother. And through it all, she's still waiting to hear from the only college she has applied to: MIT. Kate's life is less and less under control—and then, something happens that blows it all apart, and forces her to examine her life, self, and heart for the first time. Set in the same community as the remarkable *Speak*, *Catalyst* is a novel that will make you think, laugh, cry, and rejoice—sometimes at the same time.

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Catalyst By Laurie Halse Anderson Bibliography

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

Chemistry honors student and cross-country runner Kate Malone is driven. Daughter of a father who is a reverend first and a parent second ("Rev. Dad [Version 4.7] is a faulty operating system, incompatible with my software.") and a dead mother she tries not to remember, Kate has one goal: To escape them both by gaining entrance to her own holy temple, MIT. Eschewing sleep, she runs endlessly every night waiting for the sacred college acceptance letter. Then two disasters occur: Sullen classmate Teri and her younger brother, Mikey, take over Kate's room when their own house burns down, and a too-thin letter comes from MIT, signifying denial. And so the experiment begins. Can crude Teri and sweet Mikey, combined with the rejection letter, form the catalyst that will shake Kate out of her selfish tunnel vision and force her to deal with the suppressed pain of her mom's death? "If I could run all the time, life would be fine. As long as I keep moving, I'm in control." But for Kate, it's time to stop running and face the feelings she's spent her whole life racing away from.

Catalyst, Laurie Halse Anderson's third novel for teens, is a deftly fashioned character study of a seldom explored subject in YA fiction: the type-A adolescent. Teens will identify (if not exactly sympathize) with prickly Kate instantly, and be shocked or perhaps secretly pleased to discover that life is no easier for the honor roll student than it is for the outcast. Anderson earns an A plus for this revealing and realistic take on life, death, and GPAs. (Ages 12 and older) --*Jennifer Hubert*

From Publishers Weekly

Like its cross-country-running heroine, Anderson's (*Speak*) latest novel starts off promisingly, then loses its pacing about midway through. The narrator, 18-year-old Kate Malone, has placed all of her eggs in one basket: she has applied only to her late mother's alma mater, MIT. Calculus is a cinch, chemistry is her favorite subject, even physics comes easily to her, but when her MIT rejection arrives, it acts as catalyst for the slow unraveling of her delicately balanced life. A preacher's daughter, she struggles between "Good Kate" and "Bad Kate" as she singlehandedly keeps the household running (her mother died nine years ago). Anderson excels in conveying Kate's anxieties and her concomitant insomnia, and frequently intersperses evidence of Kate's sharp humor (she calls Mitchell A. Pangborn III "my friend, my enemy, my lust"). But Kate's relationships with others remain hazy. While this seems to reflect Kate's state of mind, since she slowly shuts everyone out as her MIT-less fate becomes clear, her detachment may create a similar effect for readers. This aloofness becomes most problematic in the dynamics of her relationship with Teri Litch, who once beat her up habitually. After Teri's house burns down, she and toddler Mikey Litch come to live with the Malones, and the action escalates to the point of melodrama. Yet another tragic event spurs a reconciliation between Kate and Teri, but the underlying changes in the individuals that lead up to this event remain unclear. Teens will take to Kate instantly, but as the novel continues, they may be confused about what makes her tick. Still, the universal obstacles she faces and the realistic outcome will likely hold readers' attention. Ages 12-up.

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From School Library Journal

Grade 10 Up-Laurie Halse Anderson sets this intense story (Viking, 2002) in the same town as *Speak* (Farrar, 1999), whose heroine makes a cameo appearance in this book. High school senior Kate Malone has spent half her life running-her favorite sport as well as a metaphor for the defining obsession in her life. Her mother died of pneumonia nine years ago, and since then Kate has devoted herself to running literally and figuratively from facing that devastating loss. She is good at everything she undertakes-her grades, her part-

time job, her relationship with her boyfriend, and the way she runs her household. Her minister father remains fairly oblivious to Kate's burdens as well as her use of them to shield herself from confronting her emotions. The meaningful title evokes the chemical images so beloved by Kate's scientific mind as well as the major events that cause her reaction to the reality she has created. Good Kate and inner Bad Kate try to hold together in the face of being rejected by the only college she's applied to-her mother's alma mater-and the tragic developments affecting her neighbor and childhood nemesis, Teri Litch. Narrator Samantha Mathis delivers a riveting portrayal, with pitch-perfect tone and speech patterns evoking a girl constantly on the edge, flirting with emotional disaster yet possessing an incredible range of resources. Listeners will be totally involved as Kate runs closer and closer to a breakdown. The ending offers hope, but there's no easy resolution either. Mathis makes the story even more compelling as an audiobook by adding dimension to an exceptionally complex character through voice alone. A good choice for high school and public libraries.

Jane P. Fenn, Corning-Painted Post West High School, NY

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Users Review

From reader reviews:

James Williams:

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