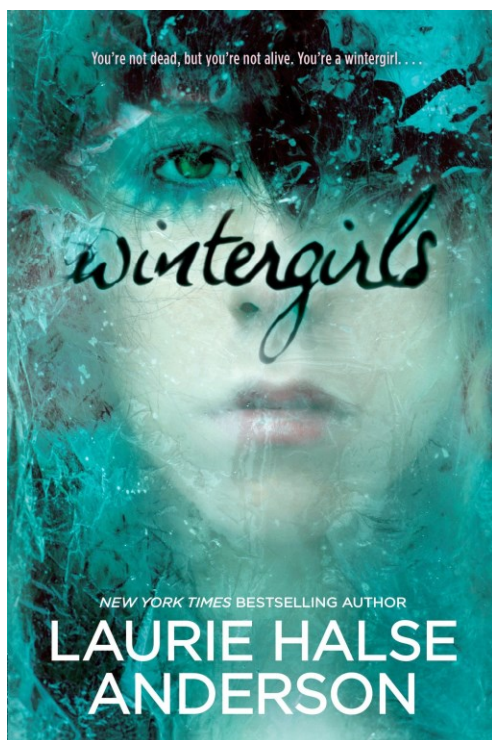


# WINTERGIRLS



*Young Adult*

**By Laurie Halse Anderson**

ISBN: 978-0-14-241557-3

## CONTENT WARNING

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**3** /5

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11	I was the reason she didn't eat a bottle of sleeping pills when her boyfriend cheated on her.
22	The halls fill with a river of bodies and voices whispering that Cassie was murdered/no, she hung herself/no, she smoked or snorted her way to the Final Exit. She'd try anything once, did you hear about the time under the bleachers/at the mall/at summer camp? She drove herself into a speeding train/jumped without a parachute/strapped on a weight belt and dove into the ocean.
32	I sit on the edge of my bed and dig into it, past the never-ending scarf/blanket project, past mateless needles and woolly balls of orange and brown and red, to the magic bottle of blush-colored Emergency Only pills. Cassie got them for me, but she wouldn't say where they came from. I take one, only one.
35	Not the magazines or the Web sites, or the knife-tongue girls in the locker room, or the neck-sucking boys on the back porch. Not her coaches or directors or counselors or the inventors of size 0 and 00.
52	<p>As I step on the scale, Cassie dreams.</p> <p>I open my eyes. 099.00 pounds. I am officially standing on Goal Number One.</p> <p>...At 099.00 pounds I think clearer, look better, feel stronger. When I reach the next goal, it will be all that, and more.</p> <p>Goal Number Two is 095.00 pounds, the perfect point of balance. At 095.00, I will be pure. Light enough to walk with my head up, meaty enough to fool everyone.</p> <p>At 095.00, I will have the strength to stay in control.</p> <p>...At 090.00, I will soar. That's Goal Number Three.</p>
60	<p>I take the razor blades out of the bag.</p> <p>::Stupid/ugly/stupid/bitch/sutpid/fat/stupid/baby/stupid/loser/stupid/lost::</p> <p>...The box opens and the razors slide out, whisper sweet.</p> <p>Used to be that my whole body was my canvas- hot cuts licking my ribs, ladder rungs climbing my arms, thick milkweed stalks shooting up my thighs. When I moved to Jenniferland, my father made one condition. A daughter who forgets how to eat, well that was bad, but it was just a phase and I was over it. But a daughter who opens her own skin bag, wanting to let her shell fall to the ground so she can dance? That was just sick. No cutting, Lia Marrigan Overbrook. Not under Daddy's roof. Bottom line.</p> <p>...All the badness boils under my skin, stingy gingerable bubbles fighting to breathe. I unbutton my jeans, sliding the zipper open one tooth at a time. I twist to the right and push down the fabric band of my underpants. My left hip arches up, glowing blue in the movie light.</p> <p>::Stupid/ugly/stupid/bitch/stupid/fat/stupid/baby/stupid/loser/stupid/lost::</p> <p>I inscribe three lines, hush hush hush, into my skin.</p> <p>Ghosts trickle out.</p> <p>...I put the blade back in the box, and the box back in the bag and press my hand against the wet cuts until the credits roll. Just before the lights come up, I stick my</p>

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	<p>fingers in my mouth. I taste like dirty quarters.</p>
98	<p>The stuffing/puking/stuffing/puking/stuffing/puking didn't make her skinny, it made her cry. ...I told her how strong she was and how healthy she was going to be and how proud I was of her and I dropped in how many calories I ate that day, the magic number on the scale, the number of inches around my thighs. We went to the mall and I made sure we used the same dressing room so she could see my skeleton shine in the fluorescent blue light. We went to the food court and she ordered cheese fries, chicken nuggets, and a salad. I drank black coffee and licked artificial sweetener from the palm of my hand. She asked me to guard the door while she puked lunch into the dirty mall toilet. We held hands when we walked down the gingerbread path into the forest, blood dripping from our fingers.</p>
103	<p>...I lay on the floor for a couple hundred crunches, until sweat pools in my belly button. New rules: 1. 800 calories a day, max. 500 preferred. 2. A day starts at dinner. If they make me eat with them, stuff in enough to keep them off my back. Restrict during the next day to make up for it. 3. If no breakfast, take the bus to school.</p>
111	<p>I blacked out and fell down a flight of stairs so I ate two bowls of cereal and now I feel so gross. How long do I have to run to get rid of it?</p>
129	<p>I try to keep calorie intake under 500. anything more is unacceptable. Mucho Love! Stay strong &lt;333 I am so disgustingly, horribly fat. Today I went for a 2 hour run and starved myself till dinner where I ate like a pig. Sometimes I feel so fucking helpless.</p>
157	<p>"Was she high?" "No, nothing illegal, but she was on two antidepressants, a mood stabilizer, and ulcer medicine. And vodka. Lots of vodka."</p>
159	<p>"...She drank, binged, and purged for two days." ..."Ripped open. Boerhaave's syndrome, usually seen in alcoholics who regularly upchuck after drinking too much. Vomiting forcefully enough can tear the esophagus." Mom looks down at her hands. "She was purging into the motel toilet when the rupture occurred. She was also, like I said, very, very drunk..."</p>
161	<p>Puke and starve and cut and drink because you need an anesthetic and it works. For a while.</p>
176	<p>I brought a backpack loaded with Tamora Pierce books, a small knife, and vodka stolen from Mom's liquor cabinet.</p>
177	<p>For New Year's Eve, her parents gave us a bottle of alcohol-free champagne. After they left for the party at the lodge ("Don't let anyone in, girls, we're trusting you") Cassie mixed it with my vodka.</p>
178	<p>I took the knife out of my pocket and cut my palm, just a little. "I swear to be the skinniest girl in school, skinnier than you."</p>

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	Cassie's eyes got big as the blood pooled in my hand. She grabbed the knife and slashed her palm. "I bet I'll be skinnier than you."
205	<p>The blade twists again. The laxatives I wolfed down when we got home are torching my guts.</p> <p>...Plus, there is a chance that I have been so gifted at starving myself that the empty string balloon of my guts is turning from pink to ghost gray as the cells die off from neglect.</p>
215	Or Professor Overbrook smoked weed laced with an experimental chemical and he knocked up Mom with mutant sperm.
220	<p>The scale shows up on the floor, the good one, the one that does not lie. I strip, stand on it, to weigh my faults and measure my sins.</p> <p>089.00.</p> <p>I could say I'm excited, but that would be a lie. The number doesn't matter.</p> <p>...The only number that would ever be enough is 0. Zero pounds, zero life, size zero, double-zero, zero point. Zero in tennis is love. I finally get it.</p>
221	<p>Nanna Marrigan's bond-handled knife slide out from under my mattress, slithers into the bathroom, and lies down to the left of the sink, blade facing the glass wall.</p> <p>The pills I took an hour ago bang through my veins like metal trash cans blowing down the street.</p> <p>...I use my shirt to wipe the steam off the mirror. It's beading up on my arms, too, peeling on my lanugo fuzz, the little white hairs I've started growing to keep me warm.</p> <p>Stupid body. What's the point of growing fur and letting the hair on my head fall out?</p>
223	<p>I stare at the ghost-girl on the other side, her corset bones waiting to be laced even tighter so she can fold in on herself over and over until she disappears past zero.</p> <p>I cut.</p> <p>The first incision runs from neck to just below my heart, deep enough so that I can finally feel something, not deep enough to flay me open. The pain flows like lava and takes my breath away.</p> <p>The knife carves a path in the flesh between two ribs, then, between the two ribs below that. Fat drops of blood splash on the counter, ripe red seeds. I am so very, very strong, so iron-boned and magic that the knife draws a third line between two ribs, straight and true. Blood pools in the bowls of my hips and drips to the tile floor.</p> <p>Black holes open in front of my eyes and the wild bird trapped in my heart beats her wings frantically. I'm sweating, finally warm.</p> <p>The music sto-</p>
264	It's snowing again. I eat two more pills and fade to white.
265	I really want to die, right now, this minute, in this empty place, I could stab myself in a vein; they're easy enough to see. I could walk into the blizzard and lie down in the snow and bleed out. Hypothermia and blood loss is like going to sleep, like

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	pricking my finger on a thorn or a spindle. I could.

Profanity	Count
Ass	2
Bitch	9
Dyke	2
Fuck	1
Piss	3