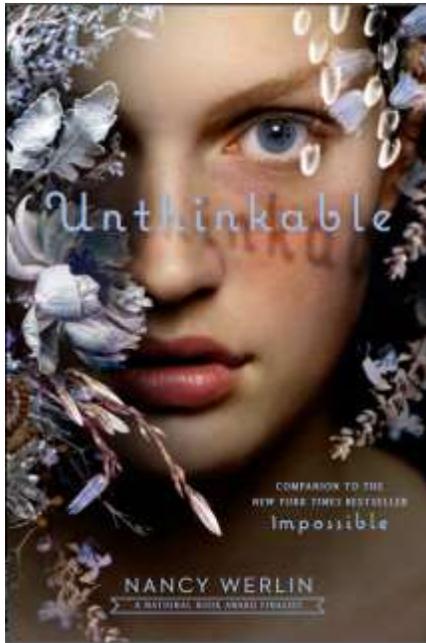


Unthinkable by Nancy Werlin



What's It About?

This long-awaited sequel to the New York Times Bestseller *Impossible* is a breathtakingly original fantasy.

Fenella was the first Scarborough girl to be cursed, hundreds of years ago; and she has been trapped in the faerie realm every since, forced to watch generations of daughters try to break the elfin curse that has enslaved them. But now Fenella's descendant, Lucy, has accomplished the impossible and broken this curse, so why is Fenella still trapped in Faerie?

In her desperation, she makes a deal with the faerie queen: If she can accomplish three acts of destruction, she will be free, at last, to die. What she doesn't realize is that these acts must be aimed at her own family; and if she fails, the consequences will be dire, for all of the Scarborough girls.

How can she possibly choose to hurt her own dear family (not to mention a new beloved she never expected to meet)? And if she doesn't, how will she possibly save them?

- [Scarborough Family Genealogy](#)

Discussion Questions

- ❖ In the opening scene of *Unthinkable*, Fenella Scarborough asks that the curse placed upon her – the curse that provides her with an inhumanly long life and health – be removed. This surprises the fey, because they are used to hearing requests for a longer life. Do you think a lifetime comprised of many centuries would be a gift or a curse? Why?
- ❖ The first act of destruction that Fenella must complete is to destroy safety. What signifies safety for you? What would it take to destroy it?
- ❖ Fenella has this reaction to Walker's ideas: *So human, she thought wistfully. Thinking that any day, life would grab you and catch you up into an exhilarating dance. But the truth was that, while you might get grabbed and caught, it wouldn't be a good thing. You wouldn't know what had trapped you, or how, until it was too late and your pathetic life was no longer your own.* What does she mean? Do you agree? Discuss.
- ❖ Compare and contrast the ways in which Fenella tries to manage the power of magic when she first meets Pdraig, with the manner in which she tries to complete the three acts of destruction. How is her character consistent? How has she changed?

- ❖ Author Nancy Werlin writes: *It came to Fenella with horror that she was telling the story of her victimhood, but in truth, she was now the villain.* How likely is this reversal of roles to happen in real life? How does it happen?
- ❖ *Unthinkable* is a sequel to a previous book by Nancy Werlin, *Impossible*, in which Lucy was the main protagonist. If you've read *Impossible*, compare the three tasks in that book to the three tasks in *Unthinkable*. Did Lucy or Fenella have the most difficult path? Why?
- ❖ Explore the literary role Ryland plays in this story. How does he help advance the plot? If you've read *Extraordinary* (another book by Nancy Werlin in which Ryland appears), compare the role he played in that story to his place in this work.
- ❖ As Fenella recalls how she tried to use what she gleaned from the tale of *Tam Lin* to outsmart Pdraig, she says that she was "strong in all the wrong ways." What does she mean? Have you ever felt that certain strengths got in your way of your achievement? Describe how.
- ❖ When discussing his sister's ability to rule, Ryland says: "Shouldn't the mind of a ruler be unmixed in its loyalties? Shouldn't it be inflexible?" Do you agree or disagree? Provide specific examples (historic or contemporary) to support your position.
- ❖ To succeed at her second task, Fenella must destroy love. She concludes that destroying Pierre, the dog, would be the lesser evil. Would killing the dog have destroyed love? What choice would you have made in her situation? Are there options she didn't consider?
- ❖ Literary fantasies are governed by rules. For example, only the fey know the portals to Faerie, and although Fenella can hear Ryland's thoughts, he cannot hear hers. What other rules can you recall? How do rules shape a fantasy? How would the reading experience be different without clearly established rules?
- ❖ Who is your favorite secondary character? Why does this character appeal to you?
- ❖ At one point Fenella says that she wishes she never agreed to her quest. Do you think she had a right to request a mortal death? Should she have agreed to commit the three acts of destruction?
- ❖ Challenging Fenella's belief that she should have simply accepted her lot, the Queen says, "It is not bad that you decided to be active. That you wanted to take control of your life, to pursue what you desired." Do you agree? Is it always better to be active than passive?
- ❖ After her second act of destruction, Fenella fears that people do not recover from tragedy – that they are changed, damaged. The Faerie Queen counters with: "Doesn't the regular process of life, and all its normal tragedies, change people anyway?" Do you think it's possible to go through life untouched by tragedy? Do we have any control over the outcome of tragedy -- that is, whether we are damaged or whether we grow?
- ❖ Do you agree with the Faerie Queen, when she says that all change requires destruction? What circumstances support your view?

- ❖ In *Unthinkable*, both Padraig and Ryland demonstrate contradictions in their nature. What contradictions did you observe? How do these contradictions affect your reaction to these characters?
- ❖ After the second task, Walker believes Fenella has used him, and is either mentally ill or evil. Yet he is still attracted to her. Do you think you can have control over who you love? Do you think he was wise or foolish when he lied to save her? Explain why you think this.
- ❖ Discuss the beginning of the poem by T.S. Eliot:
*I said to my soul, be still, and wait without hope
For hope would be hope for the wrong thing*
What does this mean to you? How do you think it relates to Fenella and her predicament?
- ❖ If you had to complete the three tasks that Fenella was given, which would be the easiest of the three? The most difficult? Why?
- ❖ In defending herself to Lucy, Fenella says: “Nobody wants to lose their ideals and their dreams and the certainty that they will always find a way to make things right. But that’s what happens when you grow up . . . You do all sorts of things you never thought you would. Some of them are—are bad.” Do you think this is true? Is it inevitable? Why or why not?
- ❖ At the end, Fenella heads upstairs to return the child and explain to her family what she did and why. How do you think Lucy, Zach, Miranda, Soledad, and Leo will individually react? Do you think time will change their reactions? Would you forgive her? Why or why not?
- ❖ Fenella began this journey in order to die. Contrast her views in the beginning of the story with those she expresses in the end. What has changed for her?

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