

Purple Heart

Patricia McCormick

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The Purple Heart is centered around the story of Private Matt Duffy, who wakes up in an army hospital in Iraq and is honoured with a purple heart. Despite earning this merit, he does not feel like a hero because of a haunting memory of a young Iraqi boy being hit by a bullet in the chest. He has a lingering feeling that he is somehow responsible in some way but because he has a traumatic brain injury, he cannot recall how he was involved. Despite his injuries, he must return to combat and he re-joins his military family, complete with characters Justin, Wolf and Charlene. He desperately wishes to return to the soldier that he used to be, but the trauma of past events renders him incapable of pulling the trigger when the time calls for it.

One day, they are patrolling the Al-Hikmah Mosque sector, and Matt discovers that they are only a block away from the alley where the Iraqi boy (named Ali) was shot. When investigating the area, he remembers that only him and Justin were in the alley and sees the bullet hole, proving the incident in his memory is real. He also sees a window with a tattered curtain, which would have been a logical place where Ali could be shot. Matt realizes through all the clues at the scene that the only explanation for the scene was Justin shooting Ali. During all of this, a sudden explosion occurs and his team members Charlene and Wolf are both struck and killed. The conclusion of the novel wraps up with Justin admitting to killing Ali and explaining that the boy wasn't innocent but rather a spotter for the sniper they were trying to handle.

He also discovers that guilt is a very complex, multi-dimensional issue where there is no clear answer. I enjoyed this novel because the author revealed both the perspective of American troops and also the life of regular Iraqi citizens living in a country of war. This is certainly a PG13 novel because of the mature content and offensive materials, with soldiers using profanity and making crude comments about women. They additionally tease each other with gay stereotypes. If a reader is curious about wartime and soldier experiences, they can pick this book up from their local library.

Recommended Titles:

Firing Point by Mike Maden

Redeployment by Phil Klay

The Good Soldiers by David Finkel