



What Comes After

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A gripping portrait of a teen's struggles through grief and abuse - and the miraculous power of animals to heal us.

After her veterinarian dad dies, sixteen-year-old Iris Wight must leave her beloved Maine to live on a North Carolina farm with her hardbitten aunt and a cousin she barely knows. Iris, a vegetarian and animal lover, immediately clashes with Aunt Sue, who mistreats the livestock, spends Iris's small inheritance, and thinks nothing of striking Iris for the smallest offense. Things come to a head when Iris sets two young goats free to save them from slaughter, and an enraged Aunt Sue orders her brutish son, Book, to beat Iris senseless - a horrific act that lands Book and his mother in jail. Sent to live with an offbeat foster family and their "dooking" ferrets, Iris must find a way to take care of the animals back at the farm, even if it means confronting Aunt Sue. Powerful and deeply moving, this compelling novel affirms the redemptive power of animals and the resilience of the human spirit.

What Comes After Details

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From Reader Review What Comes After for online ebook

Suzanne says

This one earns a strong 4.

High praise for a book: when I want to read it at non-reading times, such as when I get home from work or instead of working during lunch. This one was that way. In fact, I was multi-tasking at work when I read a scene that nearly brought me to tears. Since the episode is alluded to in the newspaper account that opens the novel, I'm not counting it as a spoiler.

Iris is sent to live with her aunt and cousin in North Carolina when her vet father dies of a lung ailment and her best friend's parents experience marriage troubles, not allowing her to stay with them in Maine as planned. Craven County is a hostile environment--complete with casual physical, mental, and emotional abuse--that seems to steal the life right from her. To say that she doesn't fit in is an understatement. She gets no affection or even human kindness from Aunt Sue or her football-obsessed cousin Book, though her aunt has no problem spending the money her dad left for her needs. The only solace for this stranger in a strange land is the animals on Aunt Sue's farm, especially the goats, milked twice a day for goat cheese to be sold at the local farmer's market to supplement Sue's meager Walmart salary.

Iris is there when three male kids are born to one of the milkers, and she nurses them, cares for them, and plays with them with all the love that knows no other outlet. Then she enters into a battle with Sue about their planned slaughter. Iris, a vegetarian, is not only horrified that they will be killed and eaten but also that Sue can so easily take from her creatures she loves.

The scene that brought me to tears in the middle of a workday: Iris is locked in her room while her aunt and cousin attempt to slaughter the wethers when she can see them from her window. When Aunt Sue realizes Iris vandalized the gun to stop this, she ordered Book to kill him with a shovel. Iris' torment is well-written in the scene, but the book doesn't stop after Iris is beaten savagely a few chapters later. Instead, the narrative follows Iris with "WHAT COMES AFTER": hospital, foster homes, friends, and a reconstructed life. A book about survival worth reading. I know lots of teens that enjoy a good tragi-realism, so I am hopeful I'll be able to share this one with lots of kids.

Sarah Mapes says

What Comes After is a novel about a young girl named Iris, whose father died. She goes to live with her abusive aunt after her friend, Beatrice, parents started fighting and told her she needs to leave. Iris is a young teenager with a smart personality. She's vegetarian and loves animals a lot.

After being sent to North Carolina with her awful aunt, she realizes how bad of a person her Aunt Sue is and why they never talked to her. Aunt Sue is a classic hillbilly from the south. She is an awful person who has no respect for anyone besides herself. She has a farm with goats, and a dog. She has one son named Brook, and he's a hillbilly just like her, but he's scared of his mom. He abuses the goats and his dog. Iris after living there for a little while realizes that her Aunt Sue and cousin Brook are not good people at all. Later in the book, Iris finds out that Brook killed one of the goats, so she sets them free. After Aunt Sue finds out Iris did that, she beats her so bad she ends up in the hospital. After being in the hospital for awhile, she ends up living with a new family.

In my opinion, I feel this book is a great book. It explains the characters very well and the plot. I understood everything in this book and almost started tearing up because it was so descriptive. All in all, this book kept me wanting to read more, and I really enjoyed it. If feel that this book can be read anyone through the ages of 12- any age older than that. It does not matter what gender reads this book, but I feel girls will enjoy it more because girls are more emotional. Do not read if you don't like abuse stories though.

Sab H. (YA Bliss) says

I was blown away by the fierceness of this novel. It's hard to find a book as cruel as it is hopeful, especially when reading realistic fiction. Watkins created a wonderfully intricate plot out of several relatively mundane issues. But putting them together worked wonders. I've been reading a lot of books set in farms lately, but the way Watkins made it all come to life, his portrayal of the goats and the routines, were absolutely amazing.

Iris's voice was beyond astonishing. I'm always delighted to find the few gems in YA where the narrator's voice is what stands out the most. And this one was written by a man, so that makes it twice as astonishing. All the characters were deep and layered and exquisitely believable. Even the ones that are meant to be a villain-type figure were incredibly memorable.

Iris was smart and somewhat innocent and you can clearly feel you embarked this awful journey with her because you see her grow and change throughout the story. I have never admired a character the way Iris made me admire her. And there's something that just comes to life when a book has such beautiful writing. Everything just seems more relatable, even when the theme is as dark and hard to swallow as this one.

This is a hard story that shows the tough things in life and how to overcome them. A gorgeous and raw novel about growing up while life throws shit at you from every angle. And how we have the power to suck it up and keep going. This one will stay with me for a very long time. Lastly, if you love animals and have felt that special unspeakable connection one can have with animals, this is a book for you.

Raquel says

Please do not look at this book and cast it off as depressing fare. What Comes After by Steve Watkins is a heart-warming book full of hope in the midst of a lot of sadness. There are moments reading it when you will want to cry but there are plenty of others that will make you laugh and cheer. Iris is a strong female character. Having gone through so much, the abandonment of her mother, the death of her father, the abandonment of family friends, the emotional and physical abuse by her Aunt Sue and her Cousin Book, Iris has grown wise before her years and finds joy and happiness with Aunt Sue's goats. While others in dire circumstances can't find hope anywhere, Iris finds it in her love for animals. Her vegetarianism and interest in animals keeps her grounded in reality instead of escaping into the depths of depression. The organization of the story is very interesting. While it's chronological with very few flashbacks, the beginning of the story starts with a newspaper article of an event that happens in the middle of the book. So for half of the novel you are expecting this major event to happen and for the rest of the novel you are reading the aftermath. I fell in love with Iris. She's such a wonderful character that while I was reading the novel, I wished she would spring to life so I could meet her! I hope others will fall in love with this book as much as I did.

I listened to this book on audio and I have to say Emily Janice Card did a wonderful job in her performance. Her voice is very sweet and light which makes her sound like a young teenager and enhances the listener's

sympathy for Iris. I also enjoyed how Emily Janice Card did the Southern voices, especially that of Aunt Sue. I think well-performed audios like this one really make the listening experience wonderful.

Samantha says

Plot: "What Comes After" is a book about a young woman whose life is living hell. In the beginning of this book Iris explains her previous life. When she was younger her mother abandoned their family due to psychological problems, and a while after that her father passed away due to asthma problems. She ended up living with her best friend starting high school. Around this time she thought everything was going okay in life even though she really missed having her own family. Even though life seemed okay now it was about to turn into hard working life for Iris. She found out her best friend's (Beastice) family was going through some major problems and could not take care of her. Iris was hurt and wondered where she would end up now. After a week of trying to contact some family members one finally answered. Her name was Aunt Sue, and she had a son named Book. Iris was very frustrated that she had to move away from all her friends. She ended up moving to North Carolina, which is far away from her home town, Maine. Once she finally arrived Aunt Sue was sitting in the parking lot waiting for her. Iris was still excited to meet people who are actually related to her, but turns out they were not excited to meet her. Turns out Aunt Sue ended up being a stuck up person, and Book would not speak at all. After the first few nights at the new house Iris is in charge of the goats and the chickens. She has a little experience with animals because her dad was a veterinarian. It was going to take Iris a little while to get use to all the new things. Her new high school ended up being a place where everyone chewed tobacco and smoked in the bathrooms. Iris's life was falling apart because she was an outcast at school then come home to a mean Aunt, and end up doing many chores. She really missed everything back in Maine, so to relieve some of her stress she wrote her dad letters. A month or so into the process of getting use to her new home things went downhill even more. Iris was a vegetarian and was forced to eat meat every night. Aunt Sue would get mad for the stupidest reasons and hit Iris out of anger. Aunt Sue also ended up stealing money from Iris several times. Iris soon fell in love with the goats and took care of them as if they were her brothers and sisters. Aunt Sue did not care about the goats. She only cared about making money off the goat's milk. A few weeks later Book and Aunt Sue were mad, and ended up killing one of Iris's goats. Iris got so mad she stabbed the tires on Aunt Sue's new truck. Book and Aunt Sue wanted Iris gone forever so they did some terrible things. They took her to a lake, and beat her up, until she was black, and blue, and could not move anymore. They also just left her there to die, but she didn't. In the end of the book Aunt Sue and Book ended up going to jail, and Iris ended up having new caring foster parents. Iris also decided she wanted to continue taking care of the goats, and her aunt's farm. She also joined her schools softball team, and is starting to make new friends after the beating. Aunt Sue and Book remain in jail for the next year.

Characterization: The main character of this book is Iris. Her personality in this book changes from being a city girl into a caring country girl. She is this young normal teenager. If you were to see her in town you would never know her past was so bad because she was so well at hiding it. Iris is one of the strongest characters I have read in many books. Her life completely changes, and she comes out as the same Iris.

I think this book is made for more of the high school level. Most 16 and up high school girls would enjoy this book. I would not recommend this book to anyone under the age of 16 because I believe they would not understand what was really going on.

Missy (Missy's Reads & Reviews) says

After reading this novel, the first thought through my mind was how unusual it was to have a book about a female character that focused more on her growth as a character rather than a romance. Did I mind it? Absolutely not! It was a refreshing change of scenery. Scenery that included one incredibly written main character... and animals. Yes, animals! Do I have your attention yet, fellow animal lovers?

Iris is one of those characters that you cannot help but love. Her best character is that she is human. She's relatable in the way that she's kind and very caring, yet she still has flaws - she takes falls and she struggles. Yet every time she falls, she has the resilience to get back up, dust herself off and move on. I love her for that. Her foster parents added some nice quirk to the novel while her aunt Sue and cousin Book... well, what they added I wouldn't exactly call 'quirk'. I sometimes felt a little for Book, but there was never a good excuse for what he and his aunt put Iris (and the animals) through.

This book is heavy - and I'm not talking about it's physical weight. If you're looking for a light-hearted book to read and feel good afterward, I would look the other way. This book is emotionally devastating and tugs at your heartstrings like no other. Don't get me wrong, it's a GREAT book! Just be prepared to cry... a lot.

This review and more can be found at Missy's Reads & Reviews

Danna says

What Comes After is a remarkable story about a remarkable young woman. Sixteen-year-old Iris becomes an orphan and goes to live with her abusive aunt after her father dies. She's a vegetarian and a huge animal lover and hates that her aunt and cousin treat the animals so poorly. After her cousin Book kills one of the baby goats, she decides to set them free and in turn, she gets beaten so badly by her aunt and cousin that she ends up in a hospital and into another family's hands.

I felt really bad for Book (here comes the booing from everyone). I know he did terrible stuff to Iris and the animals, but was it really his fault? I mean, his mother taught him everything and she also beat him when he screwed up. I blame everything more on Aunt Sue than Book.

Iris was a strong character and I loved that she stood up for what she believed in. Taking care of the goats when no one else would is something I could never do. I fell in love with her and her new family the Tutens' immediately. Littleberry was another character I adored. He was quirky and I loved how he helped Iris recover emotionally.

Overall, What Comes After was a beautiful story and I praise Steve Watkins for having amazing writing skills. This is an award winning book that is sure to take your breath away and it has a wonderful cover. 5 Stars!

Ivy says

What Comes After by Steve Watkins is a great novel, yet extremely sad. You'll be heartbroken, but there is hope!

What Comes After tells a story of a girl named Iris, whose father passed away and her mother who left at a very young age. When Iris' father has passed away, she had to go and live with her Aunt Sue and cousin Book.

This is where the story begins, when Iris has to live with her relatives, her remaining family. I really enjoy Iris' character because I feel like many people are able to relate to her as a person. She is sweet, caring, and an animal lover! She really does all she can to help her Aunt Sue and cousin Book out with the animals they have even though they mistreat her.

It is extremely sad to be mistreated and abused by anybody. Being abused by family is even harder to accept. Iris' job when she lives with her Aunt Sue and cousin Book is to help them with the animals they have. She has duties such as, milking the goats and help make goat cheese to sell at the farmer's market. When Iris sees how they are abusing the animals, she had to do something about it and she did in which she angered her remaining family. Aunt Sue and cousin Book went to jail for that and Iris went off to live with caring people.

Although Iris had to leave the animals and live with her foster parents, she disobeys authority and goes and takes care of the animals. She could not abandon the animals because she loved them so much. I really like her determination in taking care of these animals even though the animals were not hers. She is a strong and caring girl. I really admire her even though she went through so much. I feel deeply hurt that someone can abuse a girl like her. It really breaks my heart.

What Comes After is truly a great and heartbreaking novel! This is a must read!

Darlene says

What Comes After is truly a gift. Though I won it for free through GoodReads First-Reads, and though, by necessity I am a penny pincher, this is worth whatever price the author and publishers decide.

Steve Watkins wrote this with such skill that it grabbed me by heart and soul, right from the start. The story and characters are well developed over the course of the novel.

I had to keep looking at the cover to see who wrote this. It is very seldom that a male author can capture female thoughts and actions. Iris is no femme-fatale, helplessly waiting for the white knight. She is a strong girl with a mind of her own, and a heart that wishes only for the good. Unfortunately, life keeps throwing trucks full of lemons at her.

I am so sorry that the story came to an end. There is so much more I wanted to see Iris solve. Maybe there is a part two? It does come to a natural ending, it doesn't just leave you at a cliff. But, well, I think as a mother I grew to love her and wasn't ready for her to leave my nest.

What a pleasant surprise to find in the acknowledgements at the end of the book that the author is a fellow UU (Unitarian Universalist)! The Universal love is expressed through Iris and her actions of non-biased love. Kudos!

Now I will have to find other works by Mr. Watkins. What a story-teller!

I may read this again as I am curious, as a budding writer, how Steve pulled me through without my feeling it. That is talent!

This is an ARC and I couldn't set up a BCID for BookCrossing. But I will loan to my friends. They must bring it back to me! As I thought of parting with the book, I decided to get the Kindle edition. Now Iris isn't too far from home. :)

Ann Cardinal says

I was trying to tell a friend what I loved about this book. There's so much, it's hard to list. I'm thinking I'll go for bullet points.

- 1) It's a difficult read in terms of subject matter, but it is so beautifully written you can make it through.
 - 2) There's a romance, but it is not the central story line.
 - 3) Really strong, smart teenage girl protagonist. You feel for her and understand her from page one.
 - 4) the author manages to paint the "villains" of the book with broad brush strokes; you might not understand or like them, but you can see why they ended up the way they did.
 - 5) The rural setting is beautifully rendered. I could "see" the locations so clearly while reading it, though I've never been to that neck of the woods.
 - 6) and finally, it's a smart, well-written novel that doesn't talk down to its teen readers.
-

Sydney Faestel says

The book what comes after was a really good book. Even though at some parts it was sad it was still really good. After her dad dies in Main Iris goes to live with her aunt and cousin, which she doesn't know, in North Carolina. Her Aunt Sue and cousin Book live on a farm with goats and a dog. As soon as she got there they made her start doing chores on the farm and didn't make her feel very welcome. Going from a big city in Maine to a small town in North Carolina was different for her. Aunt Sue is a very strict person. She never let Iris talk on the phone with her best friend Beatrice. If she wanted to talk to her at all she would have to do it at night when Aunt Sue went to work and hoped that Book wouldn't hear her. Iris didn't have much of a social life but she met a guy named Littleberry. For awhile she told him she couldn't hang out but that was because she had farm work to do. Eventually she started to enjoy doing farm work and taking care of the goats. In her father's will he had left her some money but her aunt was spending it on herself and she also got a new truck. That made Iris mad and she slashed the tires on the truck. When Aunt Sue found out what Iris did she slapped her and that wasn't the first time she had done this. One of the goats was pregnant and had her babies. Aunt Sue only wanted the babies for meat but Iris wouldn't let her kill the goats so she tried to run away with them. When she returned with the goats Aunt Sue lied to Iris and told her she wasn't going to kill the goats. Iris believed her and she went up to her room, but when she did that Aunt Sue locked her in there. Then Aunt Sue told book to go outside and kill the baby goats with the gun. But she didn't know Iris had taken the firing pin out. When they discovered that, Book went into the barn to get a shovel. Iris was watching the whole thing form her window while she was freaking out when Book came out with a Shovel. She eventually broke out of her room and ran outside and tired to stop Book, but it was to late. Iris then called the police but when they got there Aunt Sue lied to them. Aunt Sue had decided that Iris had taken it too far and she, Iris and Book, went out to the lake so the neighbors wouldn't hear what they were about to do. When they got to the lake they beat Iris almost to death and she woke up in the hospital and Aunt Sue

and Book went to jail. When Iris left the hospital she was put into a foster care. She started living with this family and eventually she went back to school. She was always worried about the goats. But the Tutens (the family she was staying with) wouldn't let her go to the farm to check on them. So she went to the jail to see Aunt Sue. Aunt Sue told her she could go to the farm as long as she paid all the bills, and Iris did. She made goat cheese and sold it, that's how she got her money. For a little while she didn't tell the Tutens that she was doing that and Littleberry was helping her. But she eventually told them they were a little mad at her, but they got over it and let her continue to do it. Iris got used to living with the Tutens and she liked it.

I would recommend this book to either high school or middle school kids. I think they would enjoy it. Because Iris is a high school student and it's a really good book. I don't really think many adults would be interested in it. On a scale of 1-5 I would rate this book a 4. I would have given this book a 5 but it takes a while for the book to actually start to get interesting.

Stephanni Thyng says

I absolutely loved this book. There were parts where I wanted to scream with the main character and times where I found myself in tears sympathizing with her. While there were some parts that could have been developed a little more thoroughly, there is a general understanding of why Watkins chose to leave out certain details that enhanced the characters point of view. All in all a wonderful story that I didn't want to put down.

Melissa (i swim for oceans) says

Iris hardly lives the life that every teen wants to live. After a tremendous loss, she's thrust into a world completely foreign to her that turns abusive, painful and emotionally destructive. So when things finally turn around for Iris and she's sent to another place that's quirky, but instills a desire for her to care for those animals she's left behind, no matter what. Is she brave enough to face the horrors she left, and can she do it for more than the animals...can she do it for herself?

I'm an animal nut. It's no lie. I have to cats and a dog, and if I ever won a million dollars, I'd start a cat sanctuary. But I digress. What Comes After combines all of my favourites into one neat little package - animals, the human condition and the desire to be better. With a pretty original premise in YA today that focuses on character development rather than romance, Steve Watkins has created a novel in What Comes After that just might have the power to transform our own agendas and make us think beyond our own needs.

I have to be honest. What Comes After has all the makings of a great novel. Iris is a great character. She's relatable, caring and kind, and her innocence lends to the character development she faces through the novel. She struggles. She fails, and yet she has a constant desire to get back up again. The pain in this book is very raw and extremely tangible. She loses her father, faces adversity and yet she wants to find her way back to peace at all costs. Aunt Sue was a terrifying counterpart, and her foster parents added a hint of humour and quirk to an otherwise heart-wrenching tale.

What Comes After is not easy to stomach if you're in a feel-good movie. Yes, it has a message and reads extremely well, but it's not for the faint of heart. I cried. A lot. I give it a strong 4 out of 5, and I'd recommend it to fans of YA, especially those who enjoy contemporary fiction.

I received this ARC free of charge from the publisher in exchange for an honest review. This, in no way, affected my opinion or review of this book.

Nicola says

Wow - what a powerful and poignant story. Watkins took a disturbing true story and gave the characters a life and dimension that was truly engaging. One wanted to cry with, protect and cheer for Iris as she struggled through the loss of everything she had ever known and entered a life of fear and struggle. Despite the hardships she encountered Iris developed into a strong, capable and influential character. She took horrible situations, and usually by following her heart, found the good and encouraged that to grow. Instead of giving up, or caving in under the pressure, Iris persevered and flourished. She even got you to see some good in her Aunt and cousin (which mid-way through the book I could not imagine happening!) Watkins wove a deeply emotional and perturbing story into a tale of growth, hope and eventual triumph. **STRONGLY RECOMMEND.**

Pam says

Iris Wight doesn't remember much about her mother, she left when Iris was five years old and never returned. Now Iris is sixteen and she has just buried her father. The friends who promised her father they would care for her are having marital issues and can no longer keep their promise. She is forced to leave Maine and move to a farm in North Carolina to live with her Aunt Sue who she met once 14 years earlier. It soon becomes clear that the only reason her aunt agreed to take her was the money in her father's estate. Her life is lonely and difficult and the only comfort she finds is in the animals on the farm. But when Aunt Sue decides to slaughter her favorite goats Iris rebels and tries to save them. This results in an assault that lands Iris in the hospital and Aunt Sue and her son in jail. Iris is moved to a foster home and has to leave her beloved animals behind. Watkins has produced a touching novel about a strong, determined young woman who has been abandoned by those she loves for most of her life. Her response is to withdraw and try to do things on her own. But as the book progresses she realizes that she cannot accomplish her goal of keeping the animals safe all alone. She slowly opens up to the people around her, and even develops a relationship with a classmate who is dealing with his own loss.

This is one of the most heartbreaking novels I have read in a long time. This is not an action packed read, but rather a character driven story that was a delight to read. The main character, Iris, is a real teen who has had more hardship than should be allowed but her strength and determination shine through to allow her to remain strong and likable. She has abandonment woven into her life. It started with her mother leaving, continued with her father's sudden death and was seen in her friend's inability to keep their promise. When she is faced with the dilemma of having to leave her beloved animals when she was placed in foster care she could not abandon them as others have done to her, no matter what the cost.

The secondary characters are just as memorable. From the Buddha looking school counselor who preferred to sit on the floor instead of behind a desk to the quirky, ferret loving foster parents, I was drawn to each one and would be glad to have people like them in my life. Watkins even made the animals within the novel come to life, each one with a unique personality, making me feel just as invested in their safety as Iris was.

The violence Iris experienced at the hands of Aunt Sue and her son was shocking and as a mother I wanted to jump in and give her she the comfort she desperately needed. When they were put in jail for their actions the school bullies stepped in and continued to harass Iris. How she dealt with these issues was remarkable,

making her a memorable character.

On the surface this could be seen as a simple story about a girl who loves animals and tries to do what is right for them. But it is so much more. It is a wonderful tale about loss, grief and triumph over adversity. It teaches us that while everyone faces challenges in life, it is the way we decide to deal with them that dictates who we will become.
