



## The Beginning of After

*Jennifer Castle*

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Anyone who's had something truly crappy happen to them will tell you: It's all about Before and After. What I'm talking about here is the ka-pow, shake-you-to-your-core-and-turn-your-bones-to-plastic kind of crappy.

Sixteen-year-old Laurel's world changes instantly when her parents and brother are killed in a terrible car accident. Behind the wheel is the father of her bad-boy neighbor, David Kaufman, whose mother is also killed. In the aftermath of the tragedy, Laurel navigates a new reality in which she and her best friend grow apart, boys may or may not be approaching her out of pity, overpowering memories lurk everywhere, and Mr. Kaufman is comatose but still very much alive. Through it all there is David, who swoops in and out of Laurel's life and to whom she finds herself attracted against her better judgment. She will forever be connected to him by their mutual loss—a connection that will change them both in unexpected ways.

Jennifer Castle's debut novel is a heart-wrenching, surprisingly witty testament to how drastically life can change in the span of a single moment.

## **The Beginning of After Details**

Date : Published September 6th 2011 by HarperTeen

ISBN : 9780061985799

Author : Jennifer Castle

Format : Hardcover 425 pages

Genre : Young Adult, Contemporary, Romance, Realistic Fiction, Young Adult Contemporary

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## From Reader Review The Beginning of After for online ebook

### Casey (The Bookish Type) says

In *The Beginning of After*, Jennifer Castle explores what it means to survive. Though there are many such stories in the young adult genre, this novel stands out. It examines not just the grief, but the process of learning to live again when nothing will ever be the same. Laurel is understandably a mess, and it's impossible not to cry for her as she makes it through each day on trial and error -- going back to school, breaking down at a party, staying in bed for a week, rescuing strays and almost giving up altogether. Castle's portrayal of Laurel's struggle as she figures out how to carry on is heartbreakingly raw and honest. There are ups and downs and setbacks, people who try to help but only make things worse, and those few crystallized moments where the light at the end of the tunnel briefly illuminates the darkness.

It is inspiring to see Laurel's remaining family and friends rally around her, even as she pushes them away in her depression. Unlike many YA novels, Laurel's grandmother is a steady and necessary presence in the story. She is an amazing, compassionate woman who drops everything to care for the orphaned granddaughter she fiercely loves, their twin grief making the sense of loss all the more resonant and devastating. Her presence reminds Laurel that she isn't the only one who lost her family that day, and she isn't completely alone in the aftermath. Without each other, I don't believe either of them could have survived.

The relationship between Laurel and her best friend Megan starts off strong. The girls have been best friends forever and Meg is the first one there in the wake of the accident. I was hopeful that she would be a grounding force in the novel, staying at Laurel's side through it all. Unfortunately, Megan lets her own problems make her bitter toward her best friend, whose tragedy she can't even begin to comprehend. She (understandably) doesn't know what to say or do to help Laurel, but trying would have been enough. Instead she seems rather petulant, a poor friend when Laurel needs her the most.

David is an even bigger mess than Laurel, his mother dead and his father in a coma from the accident that killed Laurel's family. He comes and goes, seeming to care for no one but himself. Yet, he's the only one who can even begin to fathom what Laurel's feeling. He doesn't treat her with kid gloves, and, when he bothers to stick around, their heartfelt discussions give Laurel the dose of normalcy she so desperately desires. Still, their relationship is far from healthy. His constant disappearances leave Laurel abandoned and alone, and their frequent fights upset the delicate balance she's managed to achieve. They're both too broken to fix each other in the end, but the ties that bind them are too strong to sever.

*The Beginning of After* is a powerful tale of tragedy and loss, forgiveness and moving on. Readers will be in tears almost from page one, at both the magnitude of human compassion and the horror of unfathomable loss.

<http://thebookishtype.blogspot.com/20...>

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### tonya. says

In all fairness, this probably deserves to be rounded up to 3, but I was so disappointed I just can't bring myself to do it.

*The Beginning of After* tells the story of Laurel, and the way her life changes after her parents and younger

brother are killed in a car accident during her junior year of high school. I expected an intensely emotional read, one of grief and sorrow and healing, however what I got was mostly a story about boys and prom dates.

While Laurel's grief was poignant and well done in some instances, mostly I felt as though the author was ticking off check boxes every few chapters, making sure she hit every stage in the Kubler-Ross model. It felt a little obvious and heavy handed, however I don't think it would have been a detriment to the book entirely had the author not also clouded the story with unnecessary and clichéd love interest nonsense.

If you're seventeen years old and life as you have known it has been obliterated, is prom of all things going to be on your radar?

I understand the need to grapple for normalcy when everything else in life is out of your control, but the shift in tone from not being able to get out of bed to dress shopping and making out and (of course) trying to decide between two boys was too much. It made Laurel seem shallow and turned the book into your typical YA fare with a little death thrown in for a new spin.

Overall, *The Beginning of After* missed the mark for me.

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## **Mery St. Clair says**

Desgarrador, después de perder todo, ¿Que más puede motivarte en el mundo? Sólo queda dolor, resentimiento, uff, fue un libro que me hizo sentir como estar arriba de una montaña rusa, comprendía la ira de Laurel por David, él todavía tenía a su papá con vida (en coma, pero vivo), mientras ella lo perdió todo, desde su familia hasta sus amigos, no confía en nadie, y entonces aparece David, él tmb perdió a parte de su familia y ahora comienza a sentirse atraído por la chica que tiene prohibido sentir algo... ¿Las cosas pueden ponerse peor?

Sip, fue desgarrador, pero lindo. Volver a amar, a creer, y seguir adelante.

Hubo momentos en los cuales tanto hablar de dolor o resentimiento se me tornó aburrido, pero fueron pocos momentos.

Un libro que te hace valorar las personas a tu alrededor.

Un camino largo, un análisis sobre cómo te sientes, aceptación, buscar la felicidad y perdonar.

El único pero que le encontré, fue que sentí el libro demasiado corto

:(

Mi cita favorita:

Entonces, me recordé a mi misma lo que él me había arrebatado—una encantadora noche, un dulce primer beso, un recuerdo al cual aferrarme—Y eso trajo una ola de furia.

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## **Booknut says**

Laurel is a typical teenager living a typical life.

She has a mum.

She has a dad.

She even has a little brother.

She goes to school.

She has a best friend, Meg.  
She gets straight As.  
She does everything right.

One evening, when Laurel's family and the Kaufman family are having a dinner, Laurel does what she normally does.

Sits.

Eats.

Smiles politely whilst trying to avoid the eye of David Kaufman, her childhood friend who's probably forgotten all their history together and is far more interested in his gangster friends than her.

Teasing her brother.

It is on this evening that Laurel makes a life-changing decision. She tells her mother she wants to study and is going home early. Alone. David decides to leave too. As Laurel leaves, she waves to her family as they pile into a car with the Kaufmans to go out for icecream.

That was the last time she ever saw them.

An accident. A decision. Time slipping through her fingers. Laurel's world comes tumbling down when she learns of the death of her family, and the heart-wrenching truth about Before, Now and After. How it takes one thing to turn your life into a Before. Before the dinner. Before the hug. Before the smile. Before the wave goodbye. Before she walked away. All there is is Now. An endless Now that stretches out too far for a teenager like her to see. Sorrow fills every part of Laurel as she tries to face a world without what she used to take for granted. Love. Togetherness. Family.

Laurel learns how everyone grieves in their own way. And she finds herself torn on the subject of David Kaufman, whose father - the only survivor - lies in a coma he may never awake from. David's father could be the reason Laurel's an orphan.

But David could be the reason Laurel finds the strength to take her future into her own hands.

I personally loved the writing style - it was descriptive, quirky and from the heart. True, it lacked poetic finesse, but this wasn't what the story was about. It was about loss. Rawness. Truth. How sometimes our own thoughts can be so simple and average that they tear us apart...we long to FEEL something but in order to do that we have to let the floodgates down. I really think you need to have experienced some kind of loss to understand this book on a deeper level.

Sad, lingering and aching with loss and yet with a bittersweet touch of first love, 'The Beginning of After' takes you by the hand and shows to you like never before the cycle of human existence, how fleeting true happiness is but that we have the ability to make it last, and to hold it forever in our hearts.

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## **Wendy Darling says**

This isn't a bad book, although it's not really a very deep one, and its hook--a girl embracing life after her family's death--may really be its greatest weakness. It actually took awhile for there to be any discussion about Laurel's grief or lack of it at all, to the point that I was thinking *This IS supposed to be the main point of this book, right?*

Here are a few things you might want to know about *The Beginning of After*:

1. The book cover is pretty.
2. It means well.
3. But contrary to what you might expect, this book is not really about grief at all. We are barely introduced to Laurel, her parents, her brother, and the Kaufmans when they are all killed (aside from Laurel) 12 pages into the book.
4. This book is more about dating. And if the guy who asked you to prom only did it because he feels sorry for you. (view spoiler)
5. But oh noes, what do you do when you're also interested in the guy whose dad killed your family?
6. This book did not make me cry. Or feel any particularly strong emotions at all.
7. I also did not finish reading it. I read 100 pages and then skimmed parts of the rest.
8. It is difficult to muster up much interest in the characters.
9. This book was not written by Sarah Dessen.
10. It was also not written by Gayle Forman.

It may not be fair to compare this book to the deeply poignant *If I Stay* or *The Truth about Forever*, both of which deal with similar topics in a much more meaningful way. But the truth of the matter is that even if those books didn't exist, *The Beginning of After* would still be considered--at best--a mildly entertaining book that only touches on any genuine depth of emotion. The thing that probably bothers me most about it is that there's so little internal dialogue, which is pretty important in a book like this one, and events seem to occur without smooth transitions between scenes.

This novel probably would have been better off if it had just set the story a few months after the accident. Because when something so tragic happens and the characters don't spend a reasonable amount of time thinking about it or emoting over it, it's really hard to care what happens to them. And really, it's a crying shame when you pick up a book like this expecting to share in a character's grief and joy and the best word you can use to describe the experience is "indifference."

*This review also appears in The Midnight Garden.*

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## Steph Su says

Oh, this book. Sigh. In the beginning I had no interest in reading yet another YA contemporary talking about grieving the death of family members. There's really, truly only so much I can read about grief plots. But then, inspired by high praise from early reviewers, I was convinced to give *THE BEGINNING OF AFTER* a shot—only to wish, after a long and drawn-out struggle, that I had just stuck with my original instincts.

To give credit where credit is due, I actually quite admire what *THE BEGINNING OF AFTER* attempted to do, and that is to talk about the less sympathetic aspects of grief. Meaning: When strangers learn of your tragedy and offer to do you favors, do you accept or reject? When classmates start paying more attention to you as a result, how do you react? I admire that Jennifer Castle unflinchingly let Laurel explore these unappealing and perhaps even shocking aspects of losing loved ones, because it's the truth: tragedy is tragedy, but tragedy in some cases is also opportunity, and we'd be willingly blindfolding ourselves if we don't acknowledge that.

However, I forced myself to get to the halfway point before I finally had to knowledge that *absolutely nothing relevant to the premise has happened yet*. The first half of the book is such a trove of Things to Avoid When Writing Yet Another YA Novel About Grief: popular girls approaching the MC, formerly uninterested guys approaching the MC, former best friend drifting away, etc. You might ask, where's David? as the very idea of him begins to seem far more interesting than reading about every single minute detail of Laurel's life. Well, you see, that's a very good question. Because for the first half of the book, David's

mostly on the other side of the country. How's that for plot and character development?!

Readers, I'm done. Maybe the second half of this overly long book has some merit, but if you've given me a 400-plus page book in which approximately 150 of the first 200 pages could be condensed into three chapters, I'm going to hand it write back to you and tell you to do some heavy rethinking in terms of revisions before you ask me to take it seriously.

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## Cindy says

**This review may also be found on *A Thousand Little Pages*.**

Nothing. Happened.

Yes, you read it right: nothing happened in the entire 400+ novel. Oh, mundane events occurred, all right. Laurel went to school. She went to her therapist. She cried on her bed. She got a job at the animal shelter. But nothing of significance appeared on the horizon. The novel was a gigantic blob of nothingness. I don't know about you, but when I pick up a piece of fiction, I expect to be dazzled or touched or experience some sort of change in the way I view the world. If I really wanted to bore myself with blobs of nothingness, I would pick up my Physics textbook instead.

I do realize that 1-star ratings are quite harsh since an entire team of people dedicated time and money on this piece of writing, only to have it hated on by a reviewer they kindly provided an ARC to. But hey, we have standards, and any book I think was a waste of time to read receives only 1 star.

OK, since Laurel's parents and brother pass away in a car accident near the beginning, you would expect the novel to be about healing and dealing with grief. But no, Laurel basically mopes around for a while and then dives into an entire vat of boy drama. Would you be worrying about boys when your entire family has just passed away? Sending flirty emails to your next-door neighbor, whose mother also died in the same car accident? No. No, you wouldn't.

While the characters themselves don't get on my nerves, their interactions are quite infuriating, with Laurel and David being the prime example here. It is understandable that both would be unstable after the deaths of their families and that seeking solace with someone who knows what you're going through helps with the pain. But the romance between these two; I mean, really. Laurel obviously pines after David for a good part of the novel, and David isn't even around half the time. But then one day, the author decided to wave her magic wand and *poof*, they're a happy couple. Not *every* single YA novel needs romance, you know?

I understand how others might have been moved by *The Beginning of After*, but this novel was not for me.

Book Source: ARC from HarperCollins via NetGalley

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## Aleeeeeza says

[image error]

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## **Kristi says**

I think I picked a horrible day to read this book. I started the day off crying this morning watching the remembrance ceremonies on television and spent the entire day in a somber mood, not only because of the day itself but because of this novel. Yet, at the end of the day I felt a sense of contentment. We may never forget, but we can still heal.

That is what *The Beginning of After* was for me. It wasn't a book about a girl losing her entire family. It was a story about a girl healing from a terrible event in her life.

I didn't particularly connect with any of these characters, not Laurel and not David. However, I did connect with this story, I was emotionally invested. There aren't many times that this happens to me, but sometimes the story is enough to get me through a book.

This book made me question myself, it made me think about the kind of person I was, the kind of person I wanted to be. It made me think about what I'd do if I was in Laurel's position or in David's position. I may not have enjoyed reading this story (I mean it was awfully depressing) but at the same time it got to me.

I think contemporary readers who prefer a strong story line will enjoy this one.

You might like *The Beginning of After* if you like: Sarah Dessen, Elizabeth Scott or C.K. Kelly Martin.

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## **Katrina Passick Lumsden says**

I'm not really sure how to review this book. I read it a couple of weeks ago, and I've forgotten a lot of the things that happened, so I don't think that's a very glowing recommendation. It definitely didn't stay with me, but I do remember it wasn't terrible. The writing is pretty good, the characters are actually fairly unique and all have their own issues. The pacing just seemed to drag, and I felt like there was a lot in there that just didn't need to be there. Laurel's entire family is killed in a car accident at the beginning of the book, and though we travel with her through the grieving process, not once did I even feel the beginning of tears. I simply didn't care. The writing is not emotional at all, and that's a bit of a killer when you're trying to write a story that requires emotional depth. It all felt kind of wooden. Like a textbook.

Laurel annoyed me with all of her wallowing, and I wanted to like David, but found I never really got to know David since he's hardly ever in the story.

Jennifer Castle has potential, but if she's going to craft stories around severe emotional upheavals, she needs to learn how to write emotions.

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## **Braiden says**

I usually don't like not finishing a book. In this case however, I approve myself that it's fine. I had many issues with this book from the 100 or so pages I had read, which then I couldn't go on any further wasting my time on it.

*The Beginning of After* from what I've read is about Laurel whose parents and brother die in a car accident

and then. . . life goes on as it usually does. That's all I had come out from the hundred pages I had read. Let's get this straight! If your family is killed and you're still alive, wouldn't you go into some state of shock, depression or other emotional turmoil or grief because of it? Alas! Laurel is in the middle of taking her SATs so she is free of those pressures on her educational life and . . . Oh yes! Her social life too. Yes everyone around her, friends, teachers, etc. felt sorry for her, but I don't think she felt sorry for herself. That's not the right way to say it; There was no genuine depth to her emotions. She wanted to sit her SATs because. . . it was the reason why she wasn't with her family and they weren't still alive. Yeah. Pity in its lowest forms.

I believe Jennifer Castle had a good prose, and may have executed it more effectively in a story that didn't 'begin' because of a death of one's family. I don't think her writing was best suited for this theme. There was nothing entirely touching or thought-provoking about it and as I said, there was no real emotion coming out of those words and as a consequence, from the characters; from Laurel. It's a real shame. At times, I too became confused. The transitioning between scenes was washy, and the flash-backs and reflections held really no significance to what if I were in the position, of what I would've remembered about my father, my mother, and brother. It would've been characteristics and what I'll miss about them, not tell a story about them and their jobs etc. It just wasn't executed well enough to be read any further. I hate myself for thinking like this, but hey, I was given this for an honest review in return and I'm giving it.

Wouldn't you be so unstable after a tragic accident such as that and deny going out anywhere, and most definitely not attend a prom! You have to keep living despite whatever setbacks are inflicted upon you as our dear old favourite philosopher Socrates says, but seriously, nothing felt truthful or real in this book. Laurel may have moved on and got with the boy and went to the prom and all this other fluffy stuff that teenagers do etc., but she moved on awfully fast. Hence, no emotional depth.

I'll leave it at that so I don't ramble on for any longer on a book I had not finished, and a book I did not enjoy.

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## **Laura says**

It pains me to say this, but *The Beginning of After* disappointed me. It had me by the heartstrings through most of the story, but Jennifer Castle eventually just broke my heart.

That said and out there, I will still recommend this book. There were a few hard and rare topics and feelings brought into this story of loss and grief which are typically not found in YA fiction. Castle talks about the different ways people grieve, selfishness in the process, and actually using the loss and grief to one's advantage. In our world, we don't know what to say or do for someone in pain after losing a loved one. So we give her a dress for 50% off or a pass on school work. Sad and a little disgusting, but we don't know any other way of expressing our sympathy. These are strong, positive points that need and should be discussed, but these same strengths also make it very difficult to like the characters.

And I really wanted to like Laurel and David. Whenever they were together it felt right. Some of their conversations were electric, but too few and far between. At first, this was a strength for their story. I actually found myself longing to see them talk or be together, but when they finally did see each other their time was abrupt and cut short with such force that it crushed their romance for me.

When Laurel began making decisions around her feelings for David, I kept wondering why. I felt like I still didn't really know David at that point. Hell, we knew more about David's dog than we did about him! I understand David's way of grieving was going—"being gone", but for a romance to build we needed more. I wanted to root for Laurel and David, but the fragmented bits of time together made it so hard to make room

for them in my heart.

This is a challenging story to tell. A story that tried to include overwhelming pain, suffering, selfishness one feels during grieving, accusations of selfishness or "it being all about you", and the different ways of trying to cope by running or staying—and then tried to throw in a romance! It was a huge, ambitious mountain to climb, but Jennifer Castle did not quite get there.

My heart did break, but with disappointment.

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## Cynn says

Realmente odié hacerme ilusiones con un libro con el cuál pensé que iba a conectar pero se tornó pesadísimo...

En *The Beginning of After* nos encontramos con una historia que quiere lograr tocarnos el corazón pero no llega a lograrlo. Como cuenta la sinopsis, la historia gira en torno a Laurel, una chica de 16 años que acaba de perder a toda su familia. Sus padres y su hermano mueren por causa de un accidente automovilístico en el cuál también estaban presentes sus vecinos, los Kaufman. En ese accidente no solo mueren su familia sino también la señora Kaufman y de milagro el Sr Kaufman queda en coma. Para complicar las cosas, Laurel se siente atraída por David, el hijo de los Kaufman quien, cuando eran pequeños, era su mejor amigo. A medida que se desarrolla la historia se vuelve más y más pesada, obviamente todo se trata del **mundo de Laurel** así que sí, las 432 páginas de este libro tenemos que escuchar los conflictos de esta pequeña chica.

El libro está narrado en 1º persona por nuestra triste protagonista. Los pensamientos que tiene son molestos y encontré que no es una persona agradable, es decir, sé que si se te mueren todos tus familiares estás en luto pero ella...estaba ausente y era desagradable. No quería olvidar a su familia pero al instante decía *"¡Basta! Ellos ya no están así que sigue con lo tuyo y vete a comprar ropa así estás bonita*. Lo peor de todo es que descuida a todos alrededor. Pretendía crear otra identidad, estar dónde no la conociera pero...Ajj me molestaba tanto, que no sentí una conexión real con ella. Empezaba a simpatizarme cuando recordaba ciertas acciones con su familia pero ya reventaba la burbuja con algún detalle molesto sobre su nueva "vida".

Los personajes no lograron gustarme, salvo la abuela de Laurel, quizás ella era lo más real. Bueno, se habrán dado cuenta de mi **poca simpatía** hacia nuestra protagonista **Laurel** pero vamos a tratar de explicarla un poquito. Quizás es tan molesta en todo el libro para que en el final nos demos cuenta de: *"¡Oigan, Laurel al fin decidió seguir con su vida pero teniendo en cuenta a su familia"*. Pero ya era demasiado tarde cuando comenzó a gustarme. No lo sé, tenía 16 años casi 17 años pero parecía de 12. ¿Realmente no había dado su primer beso aún? No lo entiendo, nadie habla de relaciones sexuales...pero ¿UN BESO? Joder. UN BESO. A veces la notaba algo egoísta sabiendo que había gente queriéndola ayudar y ella no mostraba nada a cambio (no hablo de la "gente" que antes no estaba para ella, hablo de su **familia** la gente que de verdad importa).

**David**. Un personaje que no me cayó ni bien ni mal, estuvo **ahí**. Sin dudas es un personaje importante ya que cuando está alrededor de Laurel se convierte en otra persona pero...estuvo ausente casi el 80% del libro. Está en constante conflicto ya que Laurel lo culpa de que por culpa de su padre, su familia está muerta. Si tengo

que darle puntos es por lo bien que trataba a su perro...Masher, era muy tierno con él. Aún así no llegamos a conectar tampoco con él ya que lo conocemos muy poco. Aparecía y desaparecía

El romance(va si se puede decir que hubo romance) realmente no me gustó. No me gustó sobretodo porque entra en juego un personaje que realmente me agradó. Sé que la idea es mostrar que eran dos tipos de chico diferente pero...no había necesidad de que se formara este triángulo NO amoroso ya que no sabés realmente si había sentimientos de por medio. Simplemente se volvió un libro en el que el dolor se dejó a un lado y lo importante era ver con quién debía tener una cita.

**The Beginning of After** es un libro que trata de construir una historia trágica errando por completo. La historia es lenta, se torna pesada y difícil de conectar. Es una reseña muy crítica pero realmente tenía esperanzas con este libro y me mostró que me equivoqué a lo grande.

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## Diane ? [ Lestrangle ] says

Just seeing the title, the cover and the book's description you'll expect this novel an amazing book. A gigantic emotional ride toward moving on from the past? The heck, a must read right?

Being what this book is, I know writing this kind of story is a hard work for authors. They have to make the readers [us] to feel the impact of the story by making us care for the characters. And in order for us to care for the characters they have to make the voice of the protagonist a powerful or a distinct one. They have to insert a great depth of emotion into the story that is realistic and a story line that imaginative enough for the readers not get boring of it. And lastly an eventful acceptance is a must for this type of book.

I will not say that I enjoyed reading this book because this kind of tragedy is immensely depressing for me. But I'll say that is a good one. It examines a lot of interesting issues such as the process of grief, life changes, and what are our lives are supposed to be. The story is gentle, a bit of heartfelt and real. Laurel's journey through grief is long and difficult. She didn't know how to handle the sudden changes; from being a part of a happy family to being part of nothing.

However, for some reason it didn't resonate with me as deeply as I expected it to be. It's not moving enough that will brand and touch your heart deeply in it. I'm not an expert at giving a review, but being an almost long time novel reader I find the lack of internal protagonist feelings, which is important to book like this. And there's the process of grief and Laurens daily activity after her family's death part that I find undeveloped. The first pages are quite interesting. I even find myself pity and nearly in a crying state for just thinking of what Lauren and David will do now. My mind keeps jumping to conclusions like both of them going to a road trip or something. Come on, It's the best idea for escaping a town that is suffocating in a way that they keep treating you as an orphan right? But no, it didn't happen. It just goes to living a daily mundane activity with only her grandmother and the David unexpected appearance in their life.

For me it will work better if it's a two perspective read - Lauren's perspective and David's. They are both in the same situation right? So why did the author make only one side? Plus for me hearing David's thoughts is more interest than Lauren. Everything she did was only cautious that makes the journey quite vapid.

Well, overall it wasn't the story line that I found dull, it is mainly about the writing. That's not to say that it's bad. It's good despite the lack of the vivid descriptions, undeveloped storyline and characters personality.

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## Lauren says

Hopeful, beautifully written, and nothing short of spectacular, *The Beginning of After* wraps the reader in for a long and amazing journey full of laughs and tears and smiles as Laurel and David make their trip to the after from the beginning. I simply could not have asked for a better contemporary read and I am sure many will agree.

They say everything can change in one quick second, but Laurel never realized this until that fateful day when everything fell apart. Before that day, Laurel was the average girl: smart, shy, and pleasant. She had a picture perfect family life, a best friend who she could count on, and the promise of an amazing future. However, everything changes when a police offer arrives at the front door bringing with him sad news: Laurel's parents and brothers have been involved in a car accident and are now dead. Filled with grief and anger, Laurel does not know what to do, or who to blame. Should it her neighbor Mr. Kaufman because he drove the car, or should it be herself for not being there to save the day? Either way, Laurel does know one thing; she should not be feeling strange and new things for David, the local bad boy and Mr. Kaufman's son. Nevertheless, she cannot stop herself, because with David she can relate. He understands where she is coming from, and best of all, he is not tiptoeing around her like everyone else is. Though, are they meant to be, or this one big mess in the making? Moreover, will she ever be able to move on? Only time and more pages can tell in this fantastic story of grief, loss, and moving on.

To begin with, I loved the characters in this, especially Laurel and David. Charming and sweet, Laurel was relatable and likable from the start. There wasn't a moment where I wasn't cheering her on from the sidelines. However, what I liked best about her was the fact that I feel anyone would be able to resonate with her feelings over death and loss. David, on the other hand, was the perfect example of the "bad boy." Misunderstood yet charismatic in his own right, David was the type of boy a reader cannot help but love. I particularly adored his relationship with Laurel, not only because of the way it was developed slowly (finally a YA relationship that takes time to develop!), but it was based on so much more than just attraction, instead feelings and actions played a big role, and I loved that. The side characters in this were also a breath of fresh air, as each one had their own distinctive personality that added an extra flavor to the story.

Moving on, while *The Beginning of After* basic premise is the basic death cliché, Jennifer Castle fully brought it alive once again and made it her own. From the plot lines, to the characters, and finally the writing, each played such a huge part in making this story simply fantastic! I particularly enjoyed seeing Laurel deal with day-to-day life such as her volunteer work and school because they added layers and charm. Best of all, I loved that *The Beginning of After* was so much more than just a "death" book, instead it was more about moving on and coming to peace with the past while keeping part of it close.

As mentioned before, Castle's writing was also fabulous. She truly knows how to write an emotional read, which makes me truly think she's going to be the next big gem in YA.

So, pick up some tissues and prepare for a long night, as Jennifer Castle's spectacular debut is one you will not be able to put down once you start, not even for a second.

Grade: A+