



## **Right Behind You**

*Gail Giles*

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When he was nine, Kip set another child on fire. Now, after years in a juvenile ward, he is ready for a fresh start. But the ghosts of his past soon demand justice, and he must reveal his painful secret. How can Kip tell anyone that he really is--or was--a murderer?

## Right Behind You Details

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# From Reader Review Right Behind You for online ebook

## Arminzerella says

When Kip was 9, he set another boy on fire. He was young, he was angry, and he didn't really think about the consequences – he just lashed out in anger at something the boy had said. When Bobby, 7 years old, started screaming and burning, it was already too late. Bobby died 2 days later. Kip became catatonic. When he regained his faculties, he was in an institution for mentally disturbed (and violent) youth. Kip spent several years at the institution, coming to terms with what he did and learning to deal with his powerful emotions. Eventually, his therapist was able to convince authorities that Kip was no longer a danger to society. When Kip was released into his dad's custody, he learned just how hard things had been for his dad, the repercussions of his actions (neighbors burned their house to the ground, his dad lost his job and had to move, hateful retaliation followed his father wherever he went). They decided it would be best if they moved away from Alaska (and the scene of Kip's crime), and took on new lives and names. Kip became "Wade" and he and his dad (and dad's new wife, Carrie) moved to Indiana.

In Indiana, Wade follows his therapist's advice and he rapidly makes friends. He joins the swim team, he finds a girlfriend, he does well in school. Everything is going really well for him until one night when he sabotages it all by revealing who he really is and what he did. At first no one is sure what to think, but when Wade's story is confirmed he immediately becomes a pariah and all of the small town's fear and hatred becomes focused on him and his family. Again. Wade feels terrible – mostly because his self-destructive behavior has once again made things impossible for his father and Carrie. They make another escape – this time to the Texas coast, where Carrie has inherited a beach house from her deceased ex-step-father. It's there that Wade meets another broken teenager who helps him learn the hardest lesson – that he may never be able to forgive himself for what he did, but that he doesn't need to punish himself any longer.

Wade decides to share his story one last time (in this book you're reading) with the girl he's come to know – Sam, who has her own traumatic tale to tell, the one he wants more than anything to understand him. Before he writes it down, however, he clears it with his dad and Carrie, and he makes sure that Sam understands the effect it would have on his family if it were to be made public knowledge. And then he waits. He waits for Sam and hopes. But he also plans to leave if she's just one more person who can't accept the truth about him.

This was really gripping. Psychologically, Wade was a fascinating character. He's also smart and funny, too, which helps. And he's truly horrified by what he did. There was never any suspense for me as to whether he'd kill again (that's what everyone else seemed to be afraid of). He made plenty of other mistakes, but he knew immediately when he'd screwed up. This story could lead to some interesting discussions about forgiveness, punishment, unforgivable crimes, juvenile criminals, and what \*you'd\* do if you just found out your closest friend had killed someone. It was the people who responded to Wade's crimes with equal violence that worried me more than Wade did. Because they thought they were administering some kind of justice (however warped that might be). What kind of responsibility do we have to confront potential dangers to our society? Should we take steps to punish, seek vengeance or retribution, beyond what our criminal justice system offers? Uncomfortable, but satisfying read.

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## Patrick says

(Disclosure: I blurbed this book)

From the get-go, Giles catapults readers into this story of rage and redemption. The book begins with Kip as a child setting his seven-year-old neighbor in Alaska on fire, then follows his time in a facility for violent juvenile offenders, and his release back out into the world. Rather than asking the common question about violent teens (why?), Giles dares to ask a harder one (what now?). As in her previous novels, Giles spins a page-turning tale of psychological suspense with teen characters walking the hard line linking good and evil. The story of Wade / Kip sails the stormy waters between the jagged rocks of remorse and the hard place known as redemption. *Right Behind You* is a like a shadow; it is dark, it lingers, and it will make you jump and your hands bleed from turning the pages so fast.

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### **Rebecca McNutt says**

Disturbing but impressive book about a young man's hope to be accepted in society after committing an unspeakable act. *Right Behind You* provides a look into the mind of somebody asking for a chance, and its well-written and descriptive text is well-worth reading.

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### **Jessica says**

Several things are inexplicably popular, at least allegedly, despite the fact that hardly anybody actually likes them. Evidence of this is seen with Fruit-Roll-Ups- nobody eats those anymore- and the Republican Party. Another good example is Social Issue Novels, which if awards like the Gateway are to be believed are the absolute most popular class of novel for teenagers. This is not true. Nobody reads social issue novels. Teenagers hate being told what to do with their lives; did you really think they would read entire books you wrote to tell them what to do with their lives? Nevertheless, they continue to hand out awards to these books like it's going out of style. (It was never in style.) Why? Well, because adults love it when other adults tell teenagers what to do. It provides the whole group with a sense of unity.

I bring this up because, much like "November Blues", the next Gateway Award book I will be discussing, "Right Behind You", is a social issue novel. It's based around the idea of child criminals, which is something the author read about on the internet once and thought sounded like a good idea for a book. Basically, child criminals are like in comic books when they tell you the supervillain was evil when he was a little kid because he ate his parents' eyeballs while they were sleeping or something, except it's real life. It's creepy and horrifying and quite frankly the kind of thing that should only ever have to happen in campy horror films, and I never really needed to know it was real life. The author of "Right Behind You" insists on playing out this plot in the most hideously realistic way possible, to the point that it's irritating. The protagonist, whose name escapes me because I don't care, killed a dude once when he was six or whatever, by setting him on fire, and now he's getting out of juvenile hall and has to pretend to be a normal kid again. "Normal kid" of course involves a lot of drinking and Betty/Veronica love interests.

With a premise like that, it seems unthinkable that this novel could be anything but interesting, and yet it frequently wanders into "complete boredom" territory. How is this accomplished? The author has chosen to go with the "too much information" method, in which he tells us way too much about fascinating details such as Murderer Kid's biology class. Nobody cares! This is a mistake I have seen many teen lit authors make- they forget that they are, in fact, writing for an audience of teenagers, who are going to take these things as a matter of course, and describe non-plot-relevant-but-important-components-of-modern-teenager-life-I-think things such as bitchy cheerleaders and wild teen parties as if they were strange rituals from an alien planet.

Which of course to your basic author they are. They never went to any parties or talked to any cheerleaders. None of us have. Another trap of bad writing the author tends to fall into is skipping over huge passages of time with merely a paragraph stating, more or less, "Then some time passed. Here's basically what happened to everyone". Needless to say, this comes across as a bit sloppy.

However, what I think is the book's biggest failure is that it's floundering around trying to address problems that are really much too big for it. The major theme is that of whether the protagonist can ever forgive himself for killing another child when he was young, and whether other people would ever forgive him, whether indeed he should be forgiven. While this is of course a fascinating moral quandary and all that sort of thing, it's a bit odd in that the author never seems to come to a definite conclusion about any of those questions, and while a lot of things happen in the book, sort of, Protagonist comes out of it all without any character development in any particular direction, and... I'm not sure why. Or how I feel about it, because while it's always nice to see the old Aesop subverted, I was left wondering why the hell I'd even bothered to read the book anyway. It's a book with no message that reaches no conclusions about the human spirit or unique teenage issues, and all in all I can't help feel that "Right Behind You" didn't do what it was built to do.

Also I've forgotten what the title means.

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## **Dracolibris says**

Kip McFarland is a murderer. In Alaska, Kip set a neighbor boy on fire when he was nine years old. Kip has spent years in a facility for violent juvenile offenders. Kip is 14 years old and is about to be released. It is time for Kip McFarland to disappear.

Starting over again in Indiana with his father and new stepmother, "Wade" enters school for the first time and tries to move away from his violent past. Things seem to be going swimmingly- he gets a best friend, a girlfriend, a newfound interest in the sport of swimming and good grades. But despite his therapist's warnings about hungry ghosts, he self-destructs his seemingly picture-perfect life in a drunken confession, and his past comes back to devour his future.

Starting over once again in a Texas beach house his step-mother has recently inherited, Wade has one more chance. Will he deny himself the opportunity for human contact in order to protect his family from further heartbreak, or will he take a chance on forgiveness?

Giles is a modern master of thought-provoking teen psychological thrillers. Self-acceptance, forgiveness, retribution and redemption are all important themes brought up during Wade's journey, and the reader is left to contemplate their own hungry ghosts along the way. Highly recommended for those looking for a "meaty" realistic teen fiction read.

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## **Kate says**

When Kip was a child, he set another little boy on fire because of a baseball glove. After spending years in a lockdown mental ward, Kip has a chance at a new life. Because the hate of the community pushed out his

father and stepmother, Kip and his family move from Alaska to Indiana and change their names. Now named Wade, Kip tries to pretend his crime never happened, yet he is consumed by crushing guilt that becomes self-destructive.

Kip's behavior was spot-on with someone feeling the way he does, although I felt like he was a bit too easily self-aware about it all - his sessions with his therapists seemed too easy. He was very likable despite his horrible crime and I was rooting for him the whole time. The backlash of the community seemed really extreme; I'm not sure two separate communities would condemn him in such a harsh way in real life - maybe I'm naive to think that people are more forgiving than that, or that it would be much more passive-aggressive. Kip's relationship with Sam was nice in the end and give it some hope. There were still a few unanswered questions, and I'm not totally sure I liked the blurbs throughout in Sam's voice (I had no idea whose voice it was for most of the book). Overall, it was an enjoyable read - but you know how I like books about mental hospitals!

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### **Charles Lai says**

The book I read was *Right Behind You* by Gail Giles, which starts with a young 8 year old boy named Kip who lives in Alaska with his father. He is also a boy you would probably never meet in real life. There is one day where Kip's life will change forever, he was helping his dad with work when a kids named Bobby comes to him showing off his birthday gift. Then Kip lights Bobby on fire. After that Kip goes to a ward and also has a therapist. During his time in the ward many bad things happened to his father. Later Kip is no longer, but now he is Wade. Wade, his father, and someone else special go move to Indiana to start a new life, but thing also go wrong there with Wade's secret getting out. The next part of his life, they move to Texas, where Wade will meet a special girl. *Right Behind You* was an amazing book overall and it's nice how everything ended.

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### **Megan says**

*Right Behind You* starts out strong, interesting and well written. It is the story of Kip, a guy who set fire to another kid when he was only nice years old. The thing is, Kip isn't a psychotic kid. He has some anger control issues and some family issues... but for the most part, he is a normal kid who through circumstances beyond his control was in a position to set fire to the other kid, and Kip did it without a second thought. Until said kid burnt up and Kip's life was forever altered.

For all of the tough issues this book brought up and addressed, in the end it shied away from anything too dark and gritty. We see a little bit of Kip's life in a ward for dangerous and psychotic minors. Then the majority of the book takes place as we follow him after he is released. Oddly, this is where the book goes downhill. No matter how normal Kip may have been before the fire incident and the incarceration, and no matter how much psychotherapy he may have had, the bottom line is Kip is still a teenager who should be struggling with normal teenager bad behavior *in addition* to his hot mess of issues from killing a kid and spending his formative years in a ward for dangerously mental ill boys. But when Kip is in the real world, he does pretty well. When he makes a mistake, he eventually realizes it and alters his behavior. He strives to be a good kid and do the right thing; and he frequently succeeds. Sorry, I'm not buying that. Author Gail Giles shows us Kip and other kids (in the ward) at their worst, yet she is unwilling (or unable) to show Kip truly having any difficulty adjusting to the real world.

Don't get me wrong. I loved *Right Behind You* while reading it, and it is a well written book. But for all of the interesting issues it brought up (child murderers, appropriate punishment, the media, forgiveness, teenage drinking, sexuality... just to name a few!) in the end, I couldn't help feeling that it glossed over the truly *tough* aspect of dealing with any these topics. Three stars while reading this one, but ultimately a two star book.

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## Grace says

*Murderer. Murderer. Murderer.* Those words resonate through Kip McFarland's brain every time his name is spoken. *I am a murderer.* When Kip was only a kid, homeschooled in Alaska, he set fire and burned another child to death, by accident. Accident or no, the death stayed with him for every moment of his life. Kip was just getting rid of the aftereffects and the shock of watching his cousin and writhe and scream, but the memory never left him completely. The officials had already sent orders for Kip to be institutionalized in a juvenile ward. There, Kip grew hardened, only the shadow of his former self. He even needed a shrink for analyzing his every move, and his father visited frequently to check up on him. After years of this cycle, finally Kip's father offers a way out of this madhouse. A chance to start over, with a clean slate, a new name, living in the state of Indiana. The whole package, too good to be true. Soon Kip McFarland is no longer Kip, but Wade Madison. Wade is your typical high school kid, complete with a circle of friends and being the star of the school's swim team. However, Wade/Kip knows that this arrangement can only be temporary. Without coming clean about his past, there is no peace in Wade's mind. The question is, how long before Wade burns away his only sanctuary? After, will he be able to piece together the remaining ashes of his life? Gail Giles will light a spark in readers' hearts, a burning desire to read on. The spark starts a raging forest fire, and readers will devour this book the way flickers of flame devour wood.

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## Betryal says

I didn't know what to expect when I ordered this book, it arrived and I tackled it. It's out of my league on what type of book I usually read. It's Young Adult, true, but it's not M/M either and it's no romance novel either.

Basically it's about Kip and I'm not going to repeat what the summary already tells you about this book, but rather what it does not. It'll go into minute detail on what was going through Kip's mind when he was at the young age of 9 and set that boy on fire. A boy his age who lives for only 3 days before he died. It'll tell you what him and his father had to deal with as he was growing up, and each time he thought he could trust someone and tell about his true identity, he was let down and relocated to a different city, different state to get away from those who in my opinion were no better than murderers themselves. Why? Because they wanted this young boy Kip to die as well.

Strange, but I didn't shed a tear reading this one and remained indifferent. I don't know. I'm not heartless, but the scenes were not there that it would make me shatter emotionally. I was very angry. Not at Kip though. At everyone else besides Kip.

It's one book I would read again at some point in the future and a great topic launcher for a discussion.

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## Aisha says

3.5

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## Jenna says

Right Behind You by Gail Giles is a new take into the mind of a child killer. Although most novels portraying the stories of child murderers, psychopaths, killers, or criminals use a more psychiatric approach, this novel, even though it is fiction, takes its approach by actually using the point of view of the criminal- in this case a child murderer. When I use the term “child murderer”, I am not referring to an adult who murders children; I’m referring to a child, who at a young age murdered another child. Throughout the book, you really get a take on how much someone’s personal decisions affect themselves and their loved ones; it even goes into depths about how much someone’s personal guilt never truly leaves them.

The book within itself is not exactly a novel. The first page is actually from the point of view of Sam, one of the arguably main characters, who does not actually show up until towards the end of the book. It’s from her perspective that we find out that the book is actually a series of journals given to her by our main character Kip/Wade. Throughout the book, there are moments when it flips to Sam’s point of view and describes her reaction to what has happened, even though some of it involves herself. This isn’t just a set of journals given to a random stranger; these journals were given to Sam as Kip’s way of confessing his dark past and up until the end, the thing that helps him finally move on after so many years of torturing himself.

The beginning shows that from as early as his childhood, Kip was harboring a lot of dark feelings, especially about his parents- his dad making them live out in the Alaskan bush and his parents constantly fighting. It’s probably his harsh childhood that brings him to finally snap, causing him to light another child on fire due to the other child’s seemingly perfect life. Kip goes into shock for months on end, closing himself up to the world until he finally begins to talk again. Even after his first words are uttered, Kip is very withdrawn and finds it hard to grasp what he did. Eventually Kip will go into denial, anger, and finally remorse and guilt- not only for the death of the child, but for the threats, job transfers, and overall suffering his dad has had to go through. When the time comes for Kip to leave the juvenile facility with the new identity of Wade, things finally start to look up for him: he’s feeling better, he’s surrounded by his loved ones, and he gets an entirely fresh start. The only problem is that he is never truly happy with himself- he allows himself to suffer because he feels that he doesn’t deserve happiness, ruining himself by exposing who he really is or closing himself off to others when he eventually transfers to new locations. The real turning point for Kip/Wade is when he meets his new neighbor, Sam. Still burdened by the guilt, he tries to avoid her for as long as possible, until eventually he and Sam start to make a connection. Kip’s guilt forces him to grow up and tell Sam who he is before he gets too far into their relationship. It’s at that moment that he realizes that although you can’t change the past, you can help to make your future and the future of others better. Although his guilt isn’t completely gone, Kip allows himself to finally be happy and in doing so trusts Sam with his secret.

Kip, a young boy at the beginning of the book and a young man at the book’s end, is so filled with guilt and darkness that as a young child he commits the crime of murder, setting a younger boy on fire. Throughout the book, you see Kip go from a troubled, angered young adult into someone harboring so much guilt, that it



is impossible for them to make their own life any better. It seemed that just as things were starting to look positive in Kip's life, he would bring them crashing down upon himself as a way to try and bury some of the guilt that he has carried with him throughout his whole life. A real turning point for him is when his family, his dad and stepmom, are forced to move to his stepmom's inherited house by the beach after Kip reveals his true identity in his previous town. It is there he meets Sam, a young woman about the same age who harbors just as much pain in her past as Kip does. Her confidence and perseverance that led her to shed her shame, leads Kip to come to grips with his own guilt, almost transforming him into a different person.

I gave this book a five out of five because I feel that it was very well written and harbored a lot of good life lessons and advice. It's rollercoaster of emotions left me want to continue reading and I would definitely recommend it to others. I would more specifically recommend this book to a mature audience (14+) who have a love for psychology, human nature, or books dealing with a troubled main character. I would recommend it to either gender with the hopes that they enjoy all of the twists and turns the book has to offer. This is definitely one of my favorite books.

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## **Jean says**

The story is located in Alaska. Kip is a 9 year old kid who lives with his father in a cabin. His mother died with cancer.

One day Kip was busy doing some work, his aunt showed up and wanted to take him away from his father and to add more to the problem, his friend was irritating him with his brand new baseball glove. Too many things going on at the same time for Kip, so he didn't think; he grabbed gasoline, spread it in his friend's body and set him on fire.

He was sent to a mental hospital where he talked with his doctor everyday.

He was 13 now, he got released but he changed his name and last name for the security of his family, also they moved to Indiana.

He started his freshman year, really nervous because he couldn't say a word about his past. In his sophomore year he got a girlfriend and found his new passion, swimming. Until his junior year, he exploded.

He and his team had won a swimming competition, so they were to party. They were drunk and high and one of his friends was jealous of his "perfect life" so Kip couldn't take it anymore and he said everything. Now everyone knew about it. Kip's stepmother owned a beach house in Texas, so that was their only choice, they moved there.

This time Kip wouldn't go to school, he was gonna be homeschooled for his security.

Sam, his neighbor, was Kip's age and she was gonna teach him how to sail.

They were good friends, even Sam told Kip his dark past, but still Kip couldn't say a word about his.

Kip decided to do it anyway so he writes a book about it and gives it to her.

The book was really good, I really liked it. But, I'm not a fan of this kind of endings that let you hanging there. Kip gives Sam the book and nothing happens, they don't say what happens to them after that.

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## **Haven Wright says**

3.5 stars.

I really enjoyed this book. Don't read the book sleeve synopsis if you pick up this edition because it doesn't do it justice and sounds very teeny bopper(?). The premise is great and the pacing remains fairly constant throughout. The only thing missing from this was more substance. The writing felt like summaries of events rather than the events themselves which as the reader makes it harder to really submerge in the story. The flow was good too but there was a lot of jumping between events rather than fluid transitions which I think would strengthen the writing a bit.

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## **Bethany says**

This book was fabulous! The story handles a very delicate issue of rehabilitation and a person's ability to carry on their life after committing a horrible act.

A year after losing his mother to cancer, 9-year-old Kip McFarland's horrible act was that he set a 7-year-old boy on fire because he was jealous of the kid's baseball glove. How does a child recover from such a terrible thing? Well, for Kip, he spends 4 years in a lockdown psychiatric facility and with the love and support of his Dad and stepmom, Carrie, Kip tries to make a new life for himself. His journey is difficult, yet profound. It rings so true to the inspiring strength that teenagers manage to muster up every day.

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