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Charlie Blakeman has just published his first novel, to almost no acclaim. He's living on New York's Washington Square, struggling with his follow-up, and floundering within his pseudointellectual coterie when his college love, Sophie Wilder, returns to his life. Sophie is also struggling, though Charlie isn't sure why, since they've barely spoke, after falling out a decade before. Now Sophie begins to tell Charlie the story of her life since then, particularly the story of the days she spent taking care of a dying man with his own terrible past and of the difficult decision he forced her to make. When she disappears once again, Charlie sets out to discover what happened to Sophie Wilder. Christopher Beha's debut novel explores faith, love, friendship, and, ultimately, the redemptive power of storytelling.

What Happened to Sophie Wilder Details

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From Reader Review What Happened to Sophie Wilder for online ebook

christa says

Curses. Right now I'm sitting here wishing that I was in a book club that just finished reading "What Happened to Sophie Wilder" by Christopher R. Beha instead of not being in a book club and having just finished reading "What Happened to Sophie Wilder" by Christopher R. Beha. Alone. In a bathrobe. While my boyfriend is lying on the couch next to me, in the early chapters of "Gone Girl" by Gillian Flynn.

There are so many things I want to talk about. I want to deconstruct characters, especially Sophie. I want to talk about the way Beha writes about religion. I want to talk about dramatic quotes. I want to spoil the ending. (I won't). You know how some people associate numbers with color? When I think of this book I see a thick hearty sandwich with prettily layered ingredients where every flavor is distinct and fresh and really pops.

When the novel opens, Charlie Blakeman is 10 years removed from college but still living in this kind of post-college in-between zone filled with parties and pretentious banter. He lives with his cousin Max, a film critic for an alt weekly. Charlie has just gotten a novel published -- one of those thinly veiled memoirs -- and instead of landing with a thud it blew into the world and out the back door without notice. He's struggling to write his next book. Then: In walks Sophie.

They met in a college writing class and she was the star pupil. Instead of passing around six-page short stories for critique, she plops down 75 pages of well-considered plot. Sophie and Charlie develop a friendship -- sometimes more than friendship -- and act as slow dancing muses for each other. They have a falling out and never recover. It's been more than a decade since they spent any significant time together. If she can sit still long enough, this might change.

So what happened to Sophie Wilder? Well. She got married to Tom, a vanilla law school dolt. She wrote and published a promising book. Mostly, though, she converted to Catholicism and retired from the writing game. And fairly recently she took on nursing her husband's estranged and ailing father as he waited to die -- even though she, too, is now estranged from said husband.

Charlie's story is told in first person in alternating chapters with Sophie's, who gets third person treatment. Charlie tries to weave his way back into Sophie's life when he has the microphone, Sophie's story is about becoming a devout Catholic and caring for Bill Crane.

Beha has created an interesting dichotomy between Charlie, lapsed Catholic, and Sophie, who is living in a way that is 100 percent in compliance with the Pope. Beha handles her conversion and lifestyle in a way that is very tender, well considered, genuine and not at all the caricature it could have become. In one scene, Charlie thinks about when Sophie told him that she had tried to save Bill Crane's soul.

"I couldn't quite take it seriously. I'd been raised more or less Catholic myself, gone to Catholic school my whole life ... but I don't think I knew a single person who would have spoken in that way about saving someone's soul. The religious people I knew talked about their faith apologetically. It was an embarrassment to their own reason and intelligence, but somehow a necessary one. Their justification often suggested something vaguely therapeutic. They needed a sense of meaning in their lives. They wanted to believe that things happened for a reason. To speak of souls and damnation, to speak of intervening in another life for the

sake of salvation, was beyond all of this."

There are things I don't like about this book. Most importantly, Charlie Blakeman is a sad sack little loser. He's easily molded into submission by the wild child Sophie, who recreationally bangs other dudes not quite with his permission but with his understanding that if he wants to be with her he has to sign off on her rules. Of course, this might be worth it. Sophie is a really great character who teaches him a lot about literature and, artistically, they feed off each other (and booze and cigarettes). Together they make a really nice aesthetic of what you hope college will be like: Two people creating and getting bigger and better. Ultimately Charlie does stand up to her when she does something pretty unforgivable. Still, he forgives his cousin -- the other half of the unforgivable act.

Also: There are some wide load gestures with Sophie as a Christ-like character. There is a sponge bath scene where she washes away Mr. Crane's messy accident and in another scene she feeds him his pain pills in a way that smacks of communion. This is goes just a millimeter too close to getting walloped with a bible.

None of these grievances are distracting enough to take away from the fact that this is a lovely book and a truly unique story.

Kerri Carter says

This story was hard for me to get into. The first part of the story was slow.... And it was almost frustrating at times to understand the relationships which were important in the story. The second half of the book I couldn't put it down. Things start to come together and you are left feeling more satisfied with the new information given by the author. The story is also told in an alternating fashion between past and present between chapters until they merge, or so it seemed. I would love to hear the perspective from others on the ending. A lot is left to the reader to determine reality from just another story that the characters were writing.

Núria says

El título de 'Qué fue de Sophie Wilder' es bastante inequívoco; tal como se puede adivinar, la novela trata de averiguar qué le pasó a Sophie Wilder, qué le llevó a pasar de ser una escritora prometedora llena de vida y entusiasmo, a convertirse en alguien desengañado y sin ninguna ilusión. Pero una transformación parecida le pasa también a Charlie, el personaje que intenta averiguar qué fue de Sophie Wilder; así, Charlie pasa de ser un idealista a ser un cínico que no se toma en serio en nada y que se escuda detrás de una ironía amarga, aunque en el fondo probablemente desearía poder volver a una época en que había cosas que sí que tenían importancia e ideas que se podían defender de forma ardiente. En el fondo se trata de la transformación universal del postadolescente idealista en el joven desengañado al que ya le toca entrar en la madurez.

Sophie y Charlie se conocen en la universidad y les gusta regalarse principios de historias, ya que comparten una pasión indomable por crear y escribir historias, hasta el punto que acaban confundiendo realidad y ficción. Su relación es tan intensa que les lleva aislarse del mundo y, al ser tan intensa, inevitablemente se acaba rompiendo, porque los límites empiezan a ser difusos y la dependencia limitadora. Diez años después, se reencuentran y las cosas han cambiado mucho. Charlie, una vez más, jugará a inventarse una historia sobre Sophie, a la vez que Sophie inventa una historia sobre el moribundo padre de su marido, un hombre

solitario y con muchos secretos. A veces, inventar historias puede ser un acto liberador que nos acerque a la verdad, pero otras veces buscar la verdadera historia puede llegar a destruirnos.

La novela es un juego de espejos entre realidad y ficción, una acumulación de relatos en forma de muñecas rusas, un laberinto narrativo muy interesante y veraz. 'Qué fue de Sophie Wilder' es rabiosamente contemporánea pero a la vez tiene un aroma de novela clásica, una novela sobre el fin de las ilusiones de la juventud, sobre amores perdidos irrecuperables, sobre una pasión desmedida por la literatura, sobre la fe religiosa como intento de dar sentido a la vida, sobre expectativas no cumplidas y fracasos amargos, sobre el vacío de la realidad frente al poder de la ficción. Se trata, pues, de una novela muy muy recomendable, escrita con agilidad y desenfado, pero también sinceridad y emoción.

Annalynn says

Its taken me almost two months to make my way through this book - I didn't like it at all for 90% of the book. Maybe I'm getting lazy in my middle age, but I'm not very fond of books jumping through time, switching narrators, switching narrative styles, and then opening new chapters without any explanation as to when you are setting the chapter. Its clearly a popular writing technique these days, but I find it confusing, and distracting from the writing and the story. I also didn't like Sophie, nor did I really care for Charlie. And having just slaved my way through A Visit With The Goon Squad, I was afraid I was 0-2 with unlikeable characters and writing styles.

This being said, something happens in the last few chapters that blew me away, and totally made me go back and re-evaluate what I had been reading. And something miraculous happened to me - my opinion of the book changed. Like that. I understood why the narrators changed, why we moved from first person to third person, and back again. What had been driving me crazy, I began to see as genius. Without giving away too many spoilers, for the haters out there who gave up, its worth reading it through the end. The last line that Sophie ever speaks to Charlie is so telling, and I'm glad I stuck with the book. Sad I couldn't make my book club discussion of the book, though, because I'm now dying to talk about it with folks.

Sandra says

Guess it is just me because I read the first 25 reviews and everyone liked this book. Three, four, five stars. I never could get 'into the book' and never picked it up off the table looking forward to turning the pages and finishing it. I thought Sophie was shallow, self centered and just disappeared whenever it was convenient. Poor Charlie was in love with a ghost! The ending was depressing and sad. Definitely not a summer read!

Helen says

This was unlike any book I have ever read before. When I finished it, I sat for a very long time thinking about the ending, and all the pieces that came together. To say this was well-crafted is an understatement. It also contains plenty of ambiguity, which is what makes good literature. This is one book I wish I had read in a class where I could discuss it with others...that good, that complex, that compelling. I am happy to say I have Behe's memoir here to read, which also promises to bring many gifts.

Pamela says

I read this book both because a trusted friend highly recommended it to me and because it was published by my new publisher, Tin House. It's a treat to read a novel that is simply *different* from the regular run of fiction, however excellent, that fills one's reading days. *Sophie Wilder* is brief and the prose is unshowy (sometimes sliding into unexpected loveliness) but the intention and the intelligence behind the work is unabashedly serious. Charlie Blakeman, the 28-year-old narrator, meets Sophie Wilder when they are college freshmen, and they form a deep friendship based on their passion for reading and writing and (less reliably) each other's bodies. Sophie is an elusive type, prone to emotional and physical disappearing acts. Eventually she and Charlie have a falling out, and when Sophie next appears in his life she has married and converted to Catholicism. The questions at play--what are the demands of religious faith? What do they have to do with invention and the imagination? Are they compatible with earthly happiness?--unravel throughout the remainder of the novel. The last pages dramatically reconfigure everything that comes before--not an easy feat to pull off.

James Smith says

I hope it's not cliché if I say this novel felt to be a fitting continuation of folks like Mauriac, Greene, O'Connor, and Walker Percy. I don't mean to pigeonhole it with that—just to say I felt that the book did justice to the complexities and ambiguities of both faith and doubt, to what Charles Taylor describes as the “cross-pressure” of our secular age. The end of the story heartbreakingly inhabits that space without letting us off the hook. And I'll be honest: page 133 is going to make a regular appearances in talks I give around the country (with due acknowledgement, of course), and probably into my next editorial for Comment magazine.

I loved the light-handed but suggestive architectonic of the book (The Stars Above/The Law Within)—but I suppose philosophers are not exactly representative readers. However, I also appreciate Beha's psychological sympathy, the generosity of his voice when letting us peek into the hearts and minds of his characters. (There was just one point where Crane felt a little *deus ex machina*, but that vanished as his character developed.) I'm also envious of Beha's ability to craft the sorts of pregnant lines that do so much with so little, like: “If I could be just one thing now, that would be it: someone going somewhere with Sophie Wilder;” or “She only nodded in response, as if to say: I know he did; that's why I found you.” Gold.

I am unofficially declaring this the companion novel to *How (Not) To Be Secular*. ;-)

Bonnie Berry says

I would have liked this book better if I did not dislike the character of Sophie so much.

Christina "6 word reviewer" Lake says

I have to break my modus operandi because I can't review this book in six words, and I can't stay silent about it, either. It really bugged me. But not because I think that Beha is a poor writer—on the contrary, I could not put the book down and read it within a few hours. (This is not common for me at all). The subject matter is intensely interesting to me, and the prose is sophisticated, beautiful. But what bugs me is that this is a novel that is, at least in part, about a woman's conversion to Catholicism, and Beha seems to me quite literally to be unable to imagine why a talented and beautiful young woman would want to convert. Now let me be clear: I can understand why Beha's stand-in for himself (Charlie Blakeman) never could get his mind wrapped around the mystery of Sophie, and that is fine. Then he should have stuck to the first person point of view and not tried to tell the story from Sophie's perspective at all. In short, the third person omniscient perspective on Sophie made little sense to me: how can someone obviously so smart and observant seem only to have vaguely T.S. Eliot-like reasons for so significant a life change? That is Blakeman's view, not anyone who would actually convert.

TI Wagener says

This author is a beautiful writer -- he obviously cares very much about all the words and sentences he offers. He might be a little too much in love with his own process, however. His story and characters need more color and energy. Some of the most important events happen "off-screen," (SPOILERS: Examples -- the aquarium, what actually happened to Sophie Wilder) There is no conversation re the clippings with Bill Crane or Tom -- where is that? We need to be there for these events. Charlie's non-reaction to SW's final choice is confusing. More words are spent on his visit to the convent than his arrival home.

I suspect "confrontation" is not something this writer does very much in his life. (Pardon the armchair therapy.) Once he has a little more life under his belt, these essential scenes might make an appearance. They need to.

The book, itself, is gorgeous, and I commend Tin House for the product.

I have read both books from this writer, and my best counsel would be -- get out and live more. A life of the mind begets thoughtful prose, but we want to get out of our heads and out of your head and into new and remarkable worlds.

I admit: I skipped all the parts about Catholicism. I suspect you might have to be Catholic to have them resonate. If you don't know NYC, you might skip some of the detailed walks, too.

I will read more from this writer. He'll get better. As his life goes on, I have no doubt he'll have more adventures, and turn them into fiction.

Judith Hannan says

What Happened to Sophie Wilder covers a lot of territory--relationships, coming-of-age, family, jealousy, faith, right and wrong/good and evil. When listed like that, it would be easy to think this was a large, far ranging book. Instead, it is intimate and precise, characters and situations serving multiple purposes,

particularly Charlie and Sophie around whom the story revolves.

I had a hard time entering the story at first, which alternates between the present, when Charlie encounters his former lover, Sophie; and the past, when the two first meet in college. Despite the fact that I like spare writing, I felt there was a little too much left out, too much space between what the reader is being told and what is being asked to presume or suppose. But about halfway through the book, the author, Christopher R. Beha, finally draws one into Sophie's inner mind. It is an intriguing place to be as we go through her conversion to Catholicism and how this dictates her actions throughout the rest of the book.

It is not a spoiler, I don't think, to say the drama revolves around Sophie caring for her dying father-in-law whom she had never met. If for no other reason, this book is worth reading for the way Beha takes us through the final minutes of life: "Sometimes it seemed that he wasn't there inside, that she was watching a husk from which he had already escaped. But he had moments, sudden bursts of startling lucidity, when he came back fully into himself. She wondered if these times felt to him like small islands of consciousness surrounded by hours of floating, if he had the sensation of coming up for air, or if those brief moments were all that existed for him, the stretches between them striking him as dreams or not at all." And when he dies, "Sophie kneeled alone beside the pile of flesh that Bill Crane had left behind and tried again to pray."

This is also a book about writing and writers. The dynamic between Charlie and Sophie gets some of its tension from their differing talents as writers--Sophie being more naturally gifted than Charlie but also the one who stops writing when she doesn't see a point in it anymore since it is not a practical skill. "What have you got when it's done? You can't sit on it, no matter how sturdy it is." When Charlie counters that you have made a work of beauty, Sophie responds, "Beauty can only be arrived at while meeting some real need."

There are other characters in this book whose role it is to tip the lives of Charlie and Sophie in one direction or another. They can seem minor but they have profound impact.

What Happened to Sophie Wilder seems, at first, like simple and straightforward narrative, but it is just odd enough to keep your mind and emotions traveling in not often entered territory.

But, as the title implies, the point is what happens to Sophie. Because of my personal interest in how faith effects actions and how some people are "struck" by faith, I wanted to know what happened to her. Even by the end, where we are given a physical resolution, a fully satisfying answer is never actually given. And I think this is as it should be.

Amanda says

I don't usually write reviews, but I was so astonished by some of the bad ones that I felt compelled to say something. I loved this book. I have read it at least three times, maybe more, since it came out. It was one of those books where I was pleasantly surprised to find that it more than lived up to the hype surrounding its release. I went to something like three bookstores to find it, and finally cracked and bought the Kindle version after reading the sample. I read it all that night and cried (seriously) when I looked down and realized I had read 90% of it. And then I bought it in book format. So it's safe to say I really enjoyed this book, and thought it deserved every glowing critical review it received. And as a writer, I thought that it perfectly captured what it is to be a writer in a way that managed not to feel precious.

That said, I know some people didn't. I've heard people whose opinion I respect tell me that they didn't like it, that Charlie was too whiny, etc, and I see some of those comments echoed here. And I'm not sure why that is, but now I think it may be because a lot of those people? Weren't writers. So now I'm curious. Did anyone really love this book that wasn't a writer? And if not, does that say something really revealing about writers, or just me?

Stephanie says

I read this recently and don't remember what it was about. Oh, right, it's about a guy drifting though life who runs into his former college girlfriend. During college, they would walk for hours in NYC making up elaborate stories for their future best-selling novels. She got published and became semi-famous. He got published and became unknown. She marries and finds Catholicism. He drifts some more. Several years pass and they meet again at a party. It's destiny, he thinks, yet ultimately, not the destiny he wants. The books goes back and forth in time, every other chapter telling the story of the girl, Sophie, and the years in between college and the party.

At times, the book is more of an internal discussion about life, love and remembrances than a story with dialogue and action. It's well-written, if muted and "meh". There was a potential section where I perked up from the doldrums and thought, wow, this just gave the entire story new meaning, but it was just my wishful thinking. A borderline two/three star.

Nuria Castaño monllor says

3,8.

Me ha gustado mucho la segunda parte
