



Night Swimming

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LILI WILKINSON

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Steph Bowe

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Imagine being the only two seventeen-year-olds in a small town. That's life for Kirby Arrow—named after the most dissenting judge in Australia's history—and her best friend Clancy Lee, would-be musical star.

Clancy wants nothing more than to leave town and head for the big smoke, but Kirby is worried: her family has a history of leaving. She hasn't heard from her father since he left when she was a baby. Shouldn't she stay to help her mother with the goat's-milk soap-making business, look after her grandfather who suffers from dementia, be an apprentice carpenter to old Mr Pool? And how could she leave her pet goat, Stanley, her dog Maude, and her cat Marianne?

But two things happen that change everything for Kirby. She finds an article in the newspaper about her father, and Iris arrives in town. Iris is beautiful, wears crazy clothes, plays the mandolin, and seems perfect, really, thinks Kirby. Clancy has his heart set on winning over Iris. Trouble is Kirby is also falling in love with Iris...

Night Swimming Details

Date : Published April 3rd 2017 by Text Publishing

ISBN : 9781925410457

Author : Steph Bowe

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Genre : Young Adult, Contemporary, Lgbt, Romance

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From Reader Review Night Swimming for online ebook

Text Publishing says

'A fun, quirky read with oodles of romance and capers.'

Readings

'She has an ease of style that makes you feel you are eavesdropping on a real conversation, not reading cleverly crafted lines of dialogue.'

ABC Radio Central West

'A funny, diverse, authentic story of family, love, musicals, crop-circles and goats.'

Lili Wilkinson

'Night Swimming is at once sweet and serious; a love-letter to outsiders, the kooky and complex—it's an ode to first times and best friends...but above all else, it's a reminder of how lucky we are to have a writer like Steph Bowe in our midst.'

Danielle Binks, Alpha Reader

'Steph Bowe's latest novel is the utterly charming story of two best friends, the small town they live in and the girl they both fall for. It is a tender and humorous tale of family ties, friendship and first love.'

Erin Gough

'This bittersweet comedy of romantic misunderstanding, life management and family relations is poised at the emotional intersection between forgiveness and self-acceptance. Despite its whimsical tone, Night Swimming tackles serious themes of mental health, family upheaval and sexual coming-out with commendable delicacy and humanity.'

Readings

'Brilliant and adorable and diverse and funny...Steph Bowe is basically my idol.'

Loony Literate

'Night Swimming is absolutely glorious! A charismatic, delightful and amusing narrative of a small country town, falling in love and immense dreams. Categorically enchanting and captivating until the final page. The diversity of characters were wonderfully portrayed.'

Diva Book Nerd

'I loved reading this. I ate it faster than a goat with a tasty golden slipper! The writing style and banter is honestly what I live for and Clancy and Kirby's friendship was so golden. Plus cute romance, delicious food, so much awesome awkward and all the coming-of-age fears and questions teens face which is just relatable.'

Paper Fury

'This beautifully written coming-of-age story by Steph Bowe explores, with the gentlest of touches, big themes such as identity, friendship, loyalty and the power of love in its many guises, with intelligence and humour. A winner of a story that will keep you hooked to the very end.'

Reading Time

'This is a story with a whole lot of heart and soul. A great representation of a multi-cultural community,

LGBTI issues, first love and country spirit...A lovely Aussie YA read.'

Kids Book Review

'Night Swimming is a quirky, adorable coming of age story featuring a lesbian main character. With complex family issues, an Indian love interest and a platonic male best friend, Night Swimming is a very real and relatable read that tackles diversity beautifully.'

Happy Indulgence

'A gentle, heartfelt tale of first love, friendship and fear of change set in a small, inland country town south of Sydney...Bowe works quietly and perceptively through a range of believable situations.'

Magpies

'Night Swimming is amusing, quirky, and all heart.'

Bookish Manicurist

'Night Swimming explores the challenges of not fitting in and finding the people who actually get you...A charming coming-of-age story.'

Northerly Magazine

'A tender, quirky love story full of charm, authenticity, and goats.'

Sydney Morning Herald, Brilliant Reads from 2017

Anne Little says

ADORABLE! Proper review to come :)

C.G. Drews says

This was a piece of adorkable cuteness for sure. And I'm so happy!! I've loved all of Steph Bowe's books (Girl Saves Boy will always be my ultimate favourite though. <3) and I'm so glad we've got a new one!! It's quirky and filled with dry humour and terribly excellent goat puns and features a super cute f/f romance. AND it's Australia. Let me just take a moment to flail, okay? OKAY.

So first we need to talk about the glory that is Kirby. She has the BEST voice. She's kind of dryly witty but also intensely awkward, too anxious to tell a girl she likes her, food enthusiast, scared of change, bookworm, and complete and utter dork. I also really liked how she was pretty much a dag?!? Yay for girls who want to wear ugly but comfy clothes! I'm onboard with this! I would've liked to see her actually reading more throughout the story (or at all??) but she frequently confesses she has a problem. A book buying problem.

Kirby, child. This is not a problem and start a blog. YOUR PEOPLE ARE HERE.

Kirby and her BFF, Clancy, are the ONLY teens in their town, so they're basically besties by default. I love reading books with girl/boy platonic relationships! I mean, Kirby is gay and Clancy is apparently straight but he was wearing a leopard print dress and doing musical theatre at one stage and said that

sexuality was fluid so who knows...so ya. Take that onboard. **But their banter was the BEST.** They're both complete dorky nerds and Clancy is a drama queen and Kirby is so calm and chill. I adored them!!

There is a love triangle, however. Which I'm going to say is my least favourite romance trope. However it's not like a dystopian love triangle where everyone is DESTINED and TORN IN TWO. Nope. Just Iris, a New Zealand/Indian daughter of a restaurant owner, comes into town and Kirby and Clancy both crush on her. Kirby won't admit it and Clancy more TALKS about it than actually DOING anything. It gets a bit angst at the end, but it was (a) nice to have 2 girls + 1 boy and the *girls* are the ship, and (b) it still focused on friendship first!! I REALLY love friendship stories and I love when friendship turns to romance. I think it makes the romance way stronger and more shippable.

OTHER THINGS I LOVED:

- beautiful but horrible puns which are life tbh
- the small country town vibe where everyone knows everyone
- Kirby was fat and while she fretted over it occasionally she was ok with her body and comfortable as her
- the romantic encounters were basically ADORKABLE with Kirby spending 5 hours sending a text that says "sure"
- bookworm appreciation
- a pet goat named Stanley who will eat your shoes and soul
- goat soap
- crop circles
- Aussie slang which is my favourite
- grandpa in the story!!!
- so much diversity with lesbian protagonist, Chinese best friend, Indian/NZ love interest, and a goat that wants to be a human <3 <3

One of my very smol quibbles, however, is that I think Iris was a touch shallow. She has a Secret Reason She Moved To This Town™ and it was barely mentioned and brushed over at the end. And I still don't get why she did most of the things she did. (view spoiler)**I also hesitantly say the Estranged Father subplot was a bit typical.** I have read that 398 times and it played out how they usually do. But ya know. Whatever.

I fully adored this book! I laughed out loud! I ate it faster than a goat with a tasty stolen slipper! The writing style/banter is honestly what I live for and Clancy and Kirby's friendship was so golden I'm just in love with them. Plus the cutest gay romance AND delicious food AND 99% awkwardness which is pretty much what being a teen is all about. #relatable

**** QUOTES ****

He knows I'm here, but he doesn't look up till I sit down across the table from him. HE grins.
"Had to finish the chapter." He tucks a bookmark in. I have a tendency to fold back the corner to mark my page, so he thinks I'm a heathen. I like my spines cracked and my books well loved. Clancy likes his possessions being neat and nice and in like-new condition.

#WELL #I #AM #CLANCY

"Could you say he *raised the baa* for goat's milk soap?" asks Iris.
I laugh. "You could."

She's wearing gold ballet flats, a dress patterned with pineapples, a yellow cardigan and a white beret, which she takes off before stepping into the shed. Silhouetted against the sunlit, Iris reminds me of Jesus, if Jesus was an Indian girl in country Australia, wearing a dress with pineapples on it.

"You're more of a Belle, anyway. Since you're a reader. Clancy should've put on *Beauty and the Beast*, that's one hell of a musical. I could've been a teapot."
"You'd be a great teapot."
"No one's ever said anything so nice to me." She grins.

"You've *goat* to be kidding me," she says.
"That's terrible," I say. "That's the worst pun I've ever heard."

Kelly (Diva Booknerd) says

Seventeen year old Kirby Arrow is one of two adolescents in the small country town of Alberton and has no inclination of departing. In their small ramshackle house, Kirby cares for her grandfather while her mother runs a small business from home. Kirby is a kind and compassionate young woman and devoted to caring for her grandfather who has been diagnosed with dementia, portrayed wonderfully with tenderness. Her mother is a stern woman who is insistent that Kirby experience the world beyond Alberton and her novice carpentry apprenticeship.

I cherished Kirby's relationship with the absurdly fabulous Clancy. Clancy is Chinese Australian in a predominately Caucasian town and an only child to parents who own a local family restaurant. Clancy is flamboyant with Broadway aspirations, waiting until he finishes his schooling to travel the well worn path to Sydney. Leaving Kirby behind. Although both Kirby and Clancy were raised in Alberton, Clancy yearns to connect with other adolescents who share a similar heritage. I appreciated Clancy initiating the conversation of inclusiveness, as it allowed Kirby to understand his perspective.

The new restaurateurs daughter is an exquisite and free spirited young woman, relocating to Alberton from New Zealand. Clancy is enamoured by Iris and devises an elaborate scheme to earn her affections. An amateur youth theatre group. I loved the tentative romance between Kirby and Iris, although Kirby attempts to resist the attraction and places her in quite the predicament. An impeccable example of fluid sexuality as orientation is never discussed.

The diversity of characters were wonderfully portrayed. Clancy is Chinese Australian and Iris is a biracial. Indian decent and formerly living in New Zealand. The narrative touches on socioeconomic, sexuality, mental illness and a neurological impairment as Kirby's grandfather is diagnosed with Dementia.

Night Swimming is absolutely glorious! A charismatic, delightful and amusing narrative of a small country town, falling in love and immense dreams. Categorically enchanting and captivating until the final page.

Rochelle says

Ten reasons why you should read *Night Swimming*:

1. Steph Bowe's wonderful writing.
2. Unique, non-stereotypical characters.
3. The awesome friendship between Kirby and Clancy.
4. The small town setting – it was actually refreshing to have a character that doesn't want to leave their small town.
5. Stanley, the coolest pet goat ever.
6. Restaurant rivalry.
7. A story of first love.
8. A story of being true to yourself.
9. Crop circles.
10. The whole thing.

Night swimming was a light, fun read but still had some serious moments that gave it depth. Steph Bowe delivers another standout read that lovers of YA contemporary are guaranteed to be satisfied with. Plus there are goats. Enough said.

rachel says

3.5 stars

Night Swimming was adorable. I absolutely and utterly adored our protagonist, Kirby. She had such a clear and distinctive voice, and her personality was so infectious. She was the perfect blend of genuine, awkward, sweet and funny. In fact, the humour in this story was all kinds of perfect. It was ridiculously Australian and

just... being able to read a book without having to Google American words and brands was so nice. It made me feel so at home. Kirby and Clancy's banter in particular just made this book. They had such a dorky sense of humour - filled with so many bad puns it made my heart melt - but I loved that it never made too many allusions to particular TV shows/movies/books. I hate feeling left out when I don't get pop culture references!

I do not know what I expected going into this story but the interracial f/f romance blew all my expectations. It was just so adorable. Kirby's crush on Iris was so realistic and sweet; everything from taking four hours to draft a text that says 'sure' to accidentally parroting her in conversation because she didn't know what to say. It all rang so true. I liked that Kirby did come out as a lesbian throughout the story but that it did not take attention away from the more central themes of the story. Her family was so lovely, and it was nice to see a small-town community be so supportive.

In fact, the diversity in this story was pretty incredible as a whole. We did not just have a diverse cast in the sense of different ethnicities, sexualities and religions (although we did). No, Bowe also smashed every conceivable gender role and *I loved it so much*. Our main male character (Clancy, Kirby's best friend) loved musicals, doing other people's makeup, wore dresses and was undeniably flamboyant and dramatic in personality... and he was completely heterosexual. As silly as it sounds, it literally made me tear up to read that. I do not think I have ever read a book where a character with such interests and personality traits was not homosexual. On top of that, we also had a female protagonist who wore comfy clothes, hated wearing dresses and did not know how to apply eyeliner *but never shamed other people (particularly other girls) for wearing makeup or being interested in fashion/cosmetics*. I can honestly count the amount of times I have read that on one hand. Almost every story I read where the (female) protagonist is uninterested in perceived 'feminine' activities, like cosmetics and fashion, they are only written that way to seem better than the other female characters that do and, therefore, more attractive to the love interest. It makes me sick seeing such tropes perpetuated, and I loved that Bowe stepped away from that nonsense. Kirby is also doing a carpentry apprenticeship. I am so here for that.

My biggest complaint about this book was Iris. I did not think she was particularly well-written and it made it hard to get fully invested into the romance. She just felt a little... distant? I know that she was keeping her depression a secret from the town and did not want to talk about herself too much, but this meant we did not get to know her particularly well. All of her conversations with Kirby were focused on Kirby. We knew some tidbits about her family life but it was not enough. I did not understand her motivations for certain actions (if you've read this then you probably know what I am referring to). I never really connected with her on any level and it bothered me. I was also not a massive fan of how her depression was brought up towards the end of the story, only very fleetingly. Iris displayed no real symptoms prior to this and I know that (1) she was technically in recovery and (2) that some people are adept at hiding their struggles, but... I don't know. I was just not satisfied with the MI rep. Personally, I think that removing that element of the story and focusing on Iris as a third culture kid - and how that affected her move and her relationship with Kirby - would have been a better use of time. It would have let her character have that three-dimensional feel without rushing - and poorly representing, in my opinion - her mental illness.

The other secondary characters were pretty well-done in my opinion. Nathan was literally my favourite character in the whole book. Maybe just because I also have a cousin called Nathan with the exact sense of humour and similar personality? Regardless, he was such a well-written, fleshed out secondary character and I loved how much he was involved in Kirby's life. He really was the cool cousin. Cyril was a fantastic addition to the story. I love having grandparents being an important part of YA protagonist's lives. I will say that I was not a fan of Kirby's mother myself but I do really appreciate showing a different kind of parent in YA. We still utilise the Absent Parent/s trope way too often so it was nice to see how her and Kirby's

relationship developed throughout the story. The entire subplot surrounding Kirby's absentee father, however, was unnecessary. I did not think it was developed quite as well as it should have been so, again, I think it would have been better to remove that extra subplot entirely.

Also, Stanley. I never knew I needed him in my life... but I did.

Overall?

Night Swimming was a sweet Australian contemporary. I adored the main characters, particularly Clancy and Nathan. The writing was simple but engaging, and the sheer Aussie-ness of the dialogue made me so happy. However, the plot tried to intertwine a few too many subplot; some of which did not get the attention they deserved. It made the story seem a little too abrupt at points or just... off. I was not a fan of the use of the Absent Father trope or Iris' depression. In fact, Iris as a whole was a bit of a mess for me. I did love that we had an unapologetically lesbian protagonist and an adorable f/f ship, I just wish Iris had been more fleshed out as a character.

Marianne says

“In real life, there’s no such thing as happily ever after, there’s just life passing day by day. After you ride off into the sunset, then you’re just in the middle of nowhere on a horse at night, aren’t you?”

Night Swimming is the third YA novel by Australian author, Steph Bowe. Everybody leaves Alberton. Seventeen-year-old Kirby Arrow can understand why kids leave: they have to go further afield for Years 11 and 12, and never seem to come back; her Grandma left (but returns intermittently); her dad left when she was still in nappies; her best friend Clancy Lee is still here, but only because he’s doing Year 12 by correspondence and helping his parents out in the Purple Emperor. And he’s dying to leave too, to pursue a career in musical theatre.

Kirby is still here because she doesn’t want to leave her mum, Jess to run the family goats milk soap business with just cousin Nathan’s help. And there’s Grandpa (Cyril to most everyone), not getting any younger, who’s maybe heading into dementia. And her pet goat, Stanley. So, without her mother’s blessing, she’s “subverting gender norms” and apprenticed herself to Mr Pool in his furniture-making enterprise.

Alberton’s a small, inland town surrounded by farms: pub, Chinese restaurant, hairdresser, newsagency, IGA, vet, bakery. Everybody knows everybody (and all their business), so when an Indian restaurant, the Saffron Gate opens opposite the Purple Emperor, the whole town is talking. Clancy Lee is talking about “the Restauranteur’s Daughter”. When Kirby meets Iris, she’s immediately smitten. Ditto, Clancy, who endeavours to impress by inviting Iris to participate in the pub musical they are (suddenly) staging.

Meeting Iris isn’t the only thing affecting Kirby’s equilibrium: Jess is talking about putting Cyril into care (no way!!); Kirby spots an article about her dad in the newspaper (after 17 years she finally knows where he is!!); someone is making crop circles on surrounding farms (aliens? Everyone suspects Clancy Lee); Jess is apparently having a relationship with the IGA manager (how come Kirby’s the last to know?); cousin Nathan’s pregnant fiancée, Claire is sounding her out about being a bridesmaid (cool!); and a certain distraction causes her to cut off the top of her finger with the circular saw (ouch!).

Bowe's sweet coming of age tale is filled with characters that will be familiar to anyone who has lived in a small town, where quirkiness is, to some extent, de riguer; their individuality may be what endears them to the reader. Clancy Lee is a little reminiscent of Charlie Bucktin's friend, Jeffrey Lu, in Jasper Jones. Bowe easily conveys the attitudes to be found in small towns, as well as problems faced by isolated teens.

The pace is gentle: there's a bit of drama and quite a lot of humour. And there's a cat called Marianne!! This is a story that looks at the importance of love and loyalty and friendship, of ambition and acceptance, and of being demonstrative with those you care about. Excellent YA fiction that is certain to have wider appeal, from a talented young author.

Jeann (Happy Indulgence) says

3.5 stars

What a cute and adorable coming of age read! With a pet goat called Stanley, lots of Indian take out and a best friend with big dreams, there's a lot of random elements in Night Swimming, but it comes together beautifully. An adorable, quirky diverse read featuring a lesbian main character in a small Australian town. I really enjoyed this one and I loved how the relationship was approached.

Full review including an Author Q&A.

Sprinkled Pages says

what an amazing read!

this was my very first steph bowe novel and it was such an enjoyable ride! the setting of this book was so cool! i mean, rural australia? yes please!

other than the amazing setting, the characters AHA the characters. Kirby was such an enjoyable protagonist to read from the point of view of! she loved to read, was kind, cared about her family and clancy and was just such a sweet adorable person. on that note, clancy is such an adorable cinnamon roll too! he was so sweet and funny and his antics had me laughing out loud! iris was such a lovely person and i related with her SO MUCH!

she was half indian and had experienced the same things i had being from another country and her experiences in school we similar to what i often experience so i related with her 100%. and on that note, also, THE DIVERSITY! it had people of colour and those on the LGBTQI+ spectrum and i loved it because bowe didn't stick to the usual 'outback australia is filled with white straight people' storyline and went on her own, realistic tangent.

i loved loved loved this story so much and GAH i cannot deal <333

for more, read my no spoiler book review: <https://sprinkledpages.blogspot.com.a...>

K. says

Trigger warnings: grandparent with dementia, flood.

4.5 stars.

Oh, gosh. This was utterly delightful from start to finish. Let's start with the fact that there aren't enough books set in small Australian towns, then add in the fact that there aren't enough books with pet goats. And then finish up with the fact that there aren't enough F/F romances in #LoveOzYA.

All of the characters here are utterly delightful (with the exception of Kirby's father), and I loved the three main characters a lot. Like, a LOT a lot. The friendships are delightful, the relationship is delightful, the supporting cast is delightful. It's just a sweet, adorable, feel-good story and I loved it.

Emily Mead says

From reading a lot of small-town Australian books, you'd get the idea that Aussie authors are incapable of including diversity in their books. Steph Bowe, thankfully, proves that this is not the case.

There's a really cute f/f romance - Iris's dad is Indian and her mum is from New Zealand (she's the love interest btw).

Kirby's best friend Clancy is Chinese-Australian.

There's also representation of depression that was only brief but really well done, and rep of dementia as well.

I LOVED IT, BASICALLY. Some of the pacing felt a bit lagging, but for the most part it was excellent. I loved the banter. I LOVED Kirby's voice (she's so funny and it's very AUSTRALIAN humour, I think). I loved how much she cared for her granddad. I loved the goats.

And now I really feel like samosas and/or scones and/or a bag of mixed lollies.

But basically, if you want a diverse Aussie YA book - read this one. Funny and heart-warming and diverse and excellent.

Nadia King says

A pet goat called Stanley, crop circles, and life in a small outback town. Night Swimming is a salute to living real, following your dreams and coming to terms with being a quirky teenager embarking upon adulthood.

Night Swimming is an example of all that is best of YA Fiction. It celebrates diversity in an authentic way, and explores complex issues such as sexuality, mental health, family dynamics, friendship, and rural life.

Seventeen-year-old, Kirby Arrow lives in the small outback town of Alberton with her pet goat, Stanley and

her emotionally vacant mum. Kirby is training to be a carpenter, her best friend Clancy is seriously into musical theatre, and Kirby's beloved Grandad is showing signs of confusion and dementia. Throw a perfect human being into this one-pub town and Kirby is thrown into a tailspin. Not to mention, Kirby is still wondering who her father really is.

Night Swimming is the third book from Australia's talented Steph Bowe. It's truly a delightful, and easy read and guaranteed to leave you with a contented smile. I'm even in love with the cover and I'm thoughtfully using my goat soap and wondering about Stanley and the little goat farm in Alberton.

Available from Text Publishing from April 2017. My copy of Night Swimming was courtesy of Text Publishing.

Lizzy (Bent Bookworm) says

~*Full review here on The Bent Bookworm!*~

Feels : Just...awwww. Lots and lots of awww moments. Between the besties Kirby and Clancy to the awkward anxiety of a new crush, there was just so many times I got a case of the warm fuzzies. Also, Kirby's grandfather. My heart hurt for him, and for Kirby and her family. I remember my great-grandmother as dementia set in for her, and it was absolutely heart breaking. It's difficult sometimes as a teenager or young adult to see our loved ones growing older when we feel like we're just starting out in life.

Characters : I love Kirby. She is unapologetically (though sometimes embarrassed) nerdy and unfashionable, and I wish I had her self confidence. Her quirky family, complete with unaffectionate mother and absentee father, is endearing even while they exasperate Kirby. Clancy is just hilarious and unpredictable (except to Kirby, who knows him better than he knows himself, it seems) and I loved how he repeatedly scandalized their small town with his antics.

There is a lot of minority representation in this book. That was probably my favorite part, besides the general Australian-ness (is that a word?) of it, which had me chuckling over slang I didn't quite understand. Kirby is gay, while Clancy and Iris are both minorities. I was a little sad that the book glossed over Iris's mental health issues, but I guess you can only do so much in a relatively short book.

Plot : So, this is where I felt the story was a bit weak. The plot line just sort of dragged while it skipped around somewhat and left me a little bit confused about what was going on in places (though maybe if I had paid a little more attention to the dates at the top of some of the chapters, that would have helped). There are a couple of side plots that were interesting but then turned out to not be so interesting or they were just finished off so quickly it felt a bit disjointed. Then at the end it felt like the author realized something exciting needed to happen and threw that little disaster in the works to shake everything up. Which it did, but it didn't have enough time to resolve, in my opinion.

Oh! How could I forget.

STANLEY! You should definitely read the book just for Stanley. Because everyone, apparently, needs a pet goat.

Overall, 3.5 stars. 1 flame because there are a couple slightly sexy scenes but nothing over the top or that I felt would be inappropriate for a young teen reader.

Trisha says

Kirby's narrative voice is hilarious and snarky. I loved everything about this gentle romance and satisfying family story.

Shirley Marr says

My most anticipated book for 2017. I cannot contain my excitement for new Steph Bowe. Cannot.
