

Book Review: After the End
By Barbara Abel

Thanks to NetGalley and HarperVia for this advance reader's copy, in exchange for an honest review. "After the End" has an expected publication date of December 9, 2025.

I understand that mysteries are chock full of twists and turns, always attempting to keep the reader off balance. But "After the End" made me *lose* my balance at times, and it wasn't a good feeling.

The story is set in a Paris, France suburb, and opens with a Prologue detailing someone calling the police because they believe someone is breaking into their house. Okay, that caught my attention. But the narrative then shifts to "Several Weeks Earlier" and doesn't touch on aspects of the Prologue until the next-to-last chapter. For me, that was too much of a gap. The connection was lost.

In the main narrative, Nora Depardieu has just left her work-obsessed husband Gerard. She takes her two children, Ines age 13 and Nassim age 8, and moves into the house next door to Tiphaine and Sylvain Geniot. We quickly learn that Tiphaine and Sylvain used to live in the house Nora has moved into. It was there their 8-year-old son Maxime died when he fell from a second-story window.

Almost immediately following Maxime's tragic death, the husband and wife living next door died (murder or suicide?), leaving their 8-year-old son, Milo, an orphan. Somehow, despite initially being suspects in the couple's deaths, Tiphaine and Sylvaine were able to become Milo's legal guardians. AND they move into the dead couple's home to maintain continuity for Milo.

Yes, it's getting convoluted.

And contrived.

And unrealistic.

The scenarios that follow are equally contrived. Like, Nora is sitting on her back porch with her best friend one evening just a day or two after moving in. Tiphaine pops her head over the hedges and offers to share a joint with them.

Really??!!

Or Tiphaine, while watching Nassim one afternoon, coaxes him to lean further and further out from his bedroom window until he almost falls. Is she that demented that she wants some twisted revenge for her own negligence of her son's death?

Also, the storyline makes regular reference to "the Events" surrounding Milo's parents' deaths, indicating Tiphaine and Sylvaine had something to do with it. But we never learn anything about those "events."

Beyond the convoluted storyline, the novel's structure leaves a lot to be desired. This could be, at least in part, because it was translated from its original French format. But that shouldn't account for chapters all too often ending in the middle of a scene, completely abandoning the book's flow.

Just two out of five stars for "After the End." No redeeming value here.