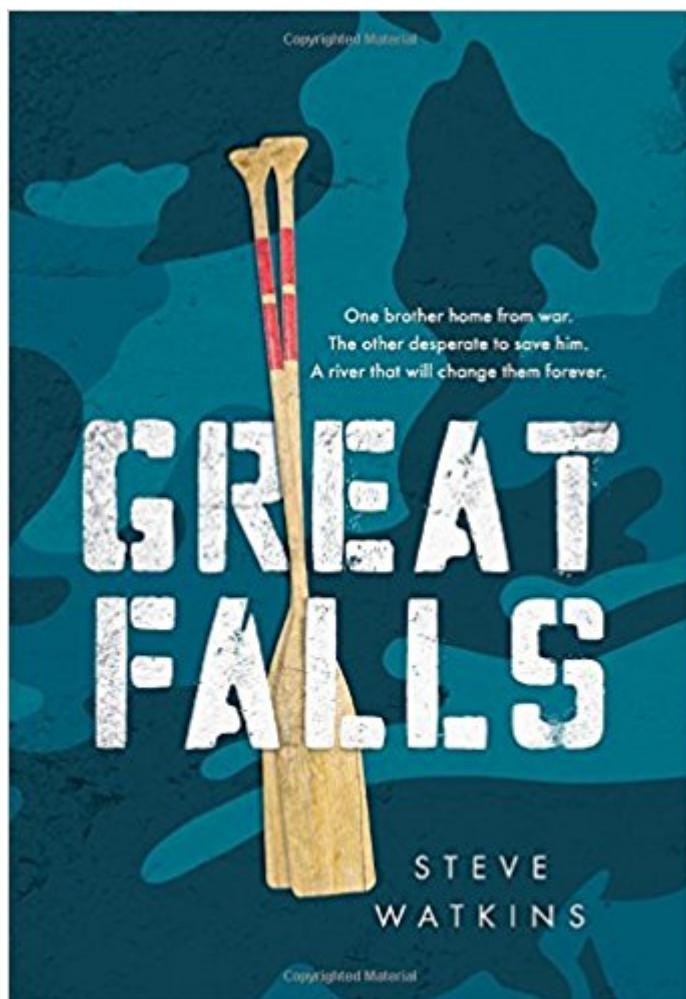


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## Great Falls



## **Synopsis**

One brother home from war. The other desperate to save him. A gripping journey together to the river's end. Shane has always worshiped his big brother, Jeremy. But three tours in Iraq and Afghanistan have taken their toll, and the easy-go-lucky brother Shane knew has been replaced by a surly drunk who carries his loaded 9mm with him everywhere and lives in the basement because he can't face life with his wife and two small children. When Jeremy shows up after Shane's football game and offers to take him to the family cabin overnight, Shane goes along both to get away from a humiliation on the field and to keep an eye on Jeremy, who's AWOL from his job at Quantico and seems to have a shorter fuse than ever. But as the camping trip turns into a days-long canoe trip down the Shenandoah and Potomac Rivers, Shane realizes he's in way over his head and has no idea how to persuade Jeremy to return home and get the help he needs before it's too late. In a novel at once gripping and heartbreaking, Steve Watkins offers a stark exploration of the unseen injuries left by war.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

Gr 8 UpShane's brother, Jeremy, is a Marine just back from three tours in Afghanistan and Iraq. Awarded a Purple Heart and Bronze Star, Jeremy saved himself and a private from grueling gunfire when they were separated from their unit. When Jeremy returns, his behavior is erratic, though his family makes the excuse of an adjustment period. Instead of living with his wife and two

daughters, Jeremy lives in the basement of his childhood home. Some things about Jeremy are certain: he's constantly on edge, is always drinking or drunk, and is usually cleaning his 9mm or M16. When Shane suffers a likely concussion on the football field and scores for the other team, he takes Jeremy up on an offer to get away, resulting in a brief stay at their stepfather's cabin, where Jeremy is gored by a wild pig. What follows is a canoe trip up the Shenandoah River to Harper's Ferry that ends tragically at Great Falls. Jeremy's post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is apparent and manifests through his short fuse, nightmares, jittery anxiety, trouble sleeping, and fits of violence. Jeremy doesn't know how to ask for help, and his family isn't equipped to look for the signs. This stirring untold story sheds light on issues that those in the military face. The gritty language underlies the young men's continuous struggles. VERDICT Watkins portrays family life with a returning veteran with PTSD in a way that will appeal to reluctant readers, especially those who like war or adventure stories. •Adrienne L. Strock, Nashville Public Library

Watkins' latest (*Juvie*, 2013, etc.) rings with the truth of the plight of veterans who've struggled to return to their daily lives after having witnessed what no doubt is sheer horror. Shane's present-tense narration is fast-paced, full of blunt, uncompromising, sometimes-shocking cruelty. Readers can't help noticing how Watkins plays Shane's football prowess against Jeremy's war stories. Both are battered warriors making sense of what they've been taught to do. A gripping, moving, disturbing tale of homecoming. •Kirkus Reviews (starred review) Watkins' treatment of the troubled Jeremy is unsparingly honest yet deeply compassionate, and his fast-paced, suspenseful story is a searing indictment of war and its impact on those who are trying to do a job in the face of unforgiving tragedy. •Booklist Online Watkins (*Juvie*) delivers a powerful, emotionally raw tale, heartbreaking in its portrayal of damaged veterans, the price some pay to serve, and the toll it takes on their friends and family. •Publishers Weekly This stirring untold story sheds light on issues that those in the military face. The gritty language underlies the young men's continuous struggles. Watkins portrays family life with a returning veteran with PTSD in a way that will appeal to reluctant readers, especially those who like war or adventure stories. •School Library Journal

Watkins can really write. *Great Falls* is poignant, bittersweet, tragic, and heartfelt. I purposefully set the book aside to read over Memorial Day weekend. *Great Falls* is a powerful reminder that our collective neglect of America's veterans continues to be nothing less than a national disgrace. As Watkins drills home, these soldiers, with wounds both visible and invisible, can greatly affect the

lives of those around them. A thought-provoking read for mature YA through adult.

Perfect shape.

Jeremy has returned after doing three tours of duty in Iraq and Afghanistan but he is not the same Jeremy that left. The town thinks of him as a hero but Jeremy doesn't feel like a hero, he is haunted by the war and when he thinks about his fellow serviceman Atwell, Jeremy is overcome with emotion. Did he really do everything he could have done? There is a hardness to Jeremy, a wall that he brings with him and he not willing to remove this wall or share why this wall came home with him. Camped out in the basement of his childhood home, his wife and children live close by and he does stop to see them but he tries to keep his distance. Shane, his younger brother is on the football team at school and after getting hit hard in a game, makes a touchdown for the opposing team. Humiliated, Shane immediately walks off the field, where he finds Jeremy and the two boys decide to take off. Life is just too difficult for them both right now. It is a concussion that Shane has suffered which made him confused when he made the touchdown for the opposing team, but he had let his team down and he feels ashamed. It just feels right that the two of them get away for a while, perhaps Shane can help his brother with the issues that he has been having. It's not an emotional time for the boys, it is more of an adventure as Jeremy takes Shane on a canoe trip that Shane feels lasts forever. Shane mind is elsewhere at first, as he is worried and scared concerned about where this trip will take them but as the trip continues the relationship between them changes. I liked the relationship between the brothers. They each were trying to protect each other in their own way and they each had their own issues that were dealing with. Shane tried to look out for him yet, Jeremy was looking out for him also. The ending, I wasn't expecting that, but it worked in its own way. Jeremy's issue took center stage in this novel and I liked the way that the author drew attention to it without throwing it in your face: the way Jeremy was constantly taking apart and putting together his M16, the way he looked over his shoulder repetitively, the way that Shane looked at him, and the way that he never slept, etc. A great book about living with challenges, about war, and about family and relationships. I received a copy of this novel from Candlewick Press, thank you for sending me a copy of this novel. This review is my own opinion.

This seemed a story quite different from what I usually read, and the topic was of interest to me. It says on the cover "One brother home from war. The other desperate to save him. A

river that will change them forever. *Afghanistan* is a book that had my attention immediately. This book was not a disappointment. Shane is his older brother's biggest fan, but Jeremy has done three tours in Iraq and Afghanistan and is not the same as he used to be. He is troubled, very troubled, and can't even function around his wife and two very young children. He is drinking too much and seems to be paranoid and nervous all the time. Jeremy has PTSD and needs help. Jeremy manages to show up at Shane's high school football game, but when Shane suffers a concussion resulting in his making a very bad play, Jeremy offers to take him away for a night to escape the humiliation. Shane agrees, hoping it will also be a turning point for Jeremy, that he can convince him to get the help he desperately needs. That's where the adventure really begins, and things go from bad to worse, with Shane never giving up on his brother. *Great Falls* is a novel that is gripping, raw at times, and that takes the reader on a worthwhile journey. Even though there is some violence and strong language in it, one must remember this realistic story is about a war veteran who suffered horrific things that just won't leave his mind. Once you start reading you may not want to set it aside until you finish the book. I didn't, honestly!

Shane knows he's living atop a powder keg, both literally and figuratively. His step dad acts like he's running a marine corps division, even though he never really saw combat and is retired. His mother is intimidated by her husband, but does try to keep peace after he explodes. The real ticking bomb, however, lives in the basement. That's where Shane's older brother, Jeremy hides from the world and his demons. Jeremy served three tours in Iraq and Afghanistan and now can't deal with peacetime back home. The invisible scars inside him fester, preventing him from sleeping, finishing out his tour at Quantico, or living with his wife Annie and their two infant daughters. Shane feels adrift himself, not sure how to deal with Jeremy, angry at his stepfather and becoming detached from his teammates on the high school football team. He's ambivalent about his feelings for Annie, even though helping her and offering a supportive ear make him feel better. That feeling of being adrift takes on a whole new meaning when Jeremy coerces him into skipping school and taking an impromptu canoe trip down the Shenandoah and Potomac Rivers. What transpires between the brothers and how the trip ends up make for a very well done and gripping read. It reminded me of Laurie Halse Anderson's *The Impossible Knife of Memory* in terms of getting readers to understand the scope and severity of war induced guilt, dreams and PTSD. While there is violence and strong language in the story, both are integral parts of it and shouldn't deter libraries from adding a copy to their collection. This is an excellent and gut-hitting story.

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