



## After Such Kindness

*Gaynor Arnold*

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## **After Such Kindness** Gaynor Arnold

When the writer, Oxford scholar and photographer, John Jameson, visits the home of his vicar friend, Daniel Baxter, he is entranced by his youngest daughter, Daisy. Jameson charms her with his wit and child-like imagination, teasing her with riddles and inventing humorous stories as they enjoy afternoons alone by the river and in his rooms.

The shocking impact of this unusual friendship is only brought to light when, years later, Daisy, unsettled in her marriage, rediscovers her childhood diaries hidden in an old toy chest. Will reading the secrets held in those gilt-edged pages help fill the gaps in her memory and explain why the touch of her kind, considerate husband fills her with such revulsion?

Inspired by the tender and troubling friendship between Lewis Carroll and Alice Liddell, *After Such Kindness* demonstrates Gaynor Arnold's extraordinary 'capacity to imagine the truth behind the facts'. With the same assured feel for the Victorian period displayed in her prize-listed debut, Arnold brings to scintillating life an idiosyncratic genius and his timeless muse.

## **After Such Kindness Details**

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Author : Gaynor Arnold

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## From Reader Review After Such Kindness for online ebook

### Jackie says

1865, a story inspired by friendship forged between a man and a young girl. Inspired by life of Lewis Carroll and Alice Liddell, the genius and his muse!

An exploration of Victorian social mores and the terrible truths they could hide. A very worrying read that turns tail at the end to reveal a shocking truth.

It tackles an age old, yet still current problem, all is not as it seems in relationships between the ages and sexes. The 'mores' may change but the misconceptions remain as do the terrible harms humans can inflict on those they are close to – families, control, friendships, misplaced ideas of ownership and love – all explored here and still relevant today

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### Alan says

Gaynor's new book comes out next week (July 5th) - I have read parts of it at the writers' group I belong to - I'm looking forward to reading the whole thing.

Bought it last night at the launch at the Ikon, lovely do, lots there. A nice hardback, started reading it on the train coming back but was a bit drunk (obviously went on to a canalside pub). Start again today..

..of course I'm hopelessly biased but this was just superb. In the middle I wondered if it was going to flag a little because it centred around the same incident from different points of view, but it gripped tightly after that and you realised it was all necessary. Proper review forthcoming...

here it is ( a bit muddled I think, I might come back and tidy up)..

I'm so glad that Gaynor didn't bring the whole thing to the group, as it would have spoiled the surprise of the ending, which is quite shocking and poignant. Once again, following *Girl in a Blue Dress* (which portrayed a fictional version of Dickens' wife), Arnold has used a 19th century literary figure as a basis for an exploration of the mores and morals of the period with a 20th/21st century slant. . As the author pointed out at the launch if someone today was taking photographs of young girls (11/12) naked or with few clothes, and inveigled himself into the family of a particular girl so that he could spend as much time as possible with her we would be very suspicious. Not so in the case of Charles Dodgson – pseudonym: Lewis Carroll – and his relationship with the real life Alice. It was a different world.

When Gaynor (seems daft to call her Arnold in this context) brought the first passage along, the Nabokovian frisson caused by 'I do not know if I will deserve her, my Daisy, my Day's Eye, my meadow flower' went through the group. But Gaynor had not read *Lolita* then, and didn't do so until after she'd finished *ASK*. The rest of the novel – although covering some of the same territory – is quite different in tone and structure.

*ASK* is told from four different pov's: Daisy/Margarite (the Alice figure as child and adult), both her parents Charles and Evelina Baxter, and John Jameson (the Dodgson/Carroll figure). There is also a coda from yet another point of view. You could be forgiven in assuming that the book may be a mite confusing. However this is not the case, everything is crystal clear. This is down to Arnold's tight control and lucidity; ironic in a

book about giving way to madness and illogic.

However – as in her earlier book - this is no straightforward re-telling or fictionalising of actual events. I remember some people being a bit frustrated that she didn't use real names in the Dickens book (eg my wife) but Arnold uses the situation to take off into her own novel, and it becomes remote from its source, and real names might have been too restrictive. This, like *Girl in a Blue Dress*, becomes its own thing: a novel that explores the role of women in Victorian society at large as well as the story of a particular few. Although it stays within the bounds of the possible, using the language and sensibilities of the era, it allows us to look back in hindsight to see the hypocrisies and stupidities of the time (eg blaming overheated imaginations for sexual problems). On the other hand it reflects on our own times when taking delight in the company of children is viewed with cynicism. It is a very strong, unflinching work. Not that it isn't also full of delights, as a book about the creation of 'Alice in Wonderland' (here called Daisy's Daydream) should be. The following may give an idea of the delights in store (and the book is full of them):

Talking of the heat Jameson says *'If you still possessed your full head of hair, I daresay you would be quite melting away by now, and I should have had to catch you in my collapsible tumbler and take you home to your papa and mama with a label saying: Daisy Baxter in Liquid Form. I daresay they would have been terribly incommoded to have their child contained in a cup. They would have had to put you high up on the mantelpiece so as not to let any dog or cat lap you up for a drink of water.'*  
*'But wouldn't I have become a solid girl again when I grew colder?'* she asked in that earnest way of hers.  
*'Well,' I said. 'The laws of nature dictate you should, but sometimes the laws of nature surprise us by doing something perfectly contradictory, so they are not, on the whole, to be trusted.'*

Or this in a letter inviting her for tea:

*'..seems to produce jam tarts at the drop of a hat. Take care to bring your hat, therefore, or you may end up hungry.'*

The darker stuff is balanced by this interplay between the young and old and the rigidity of custom and the freedom of the imagination. A terrific book, with many memorable moments. One of my favourites is when Daisy wakes from a dream on the lawn to find herself four years older, with a bosom and arms and legs that have grown, so like Alice but with such dark and clever undertones.

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## Val says

I find this to be a disturbing image of a little girl:

<http://richardawarren.files.wordpress...>

Edith Ramage by Sir John Everett Millais

when compared with this one, which it is based on:

<http://www.fineart-china.com/upload1/...>

Penelope Boothby by Sir Joshua Reynolds. The position of the hands is different, the smile has become more of a smirk and the eyes more knowing, the title is suggestive and it all makes me wonder where those stairs are leading.

This one seems innocent:

[http://37.media.tumblr.com/tumblr\\_lgb...](http://37.media.tumblr.com/tumblr_lgb...)

Alice Liddell by Charles Lutwidge Dodgson,

as do the others in Dodgson's Wikipedia entry and elsewhere online (although dressing a girl normally only seen in public in her best clothes as a beggar might have been socially suspect).

Other people may see them differently.

This book is loosely based on the story of Alice Liddell and Charles Lutwidge Dodgson (Lewis Carroll), although there is no suggestion that any of the events or relationships in the book are factual. It contrasts views on morality in the 1850s with modern times and sometimes confuses them. It was considered eccentric if someone liked children's company and thought it more important for them to be happy and stimulated than good; it was not considered sexually suspect. In the story the character based on Carroll is not entirely innocent in his desires, but is much more so than some other characters. In the 1850s a gentleman might be criticised for entertaining an eleven year old girl in his rooms, not because she was a vulnerable child but because she was a woman of marriageable age. Such young marriages were rare, but not illegal; the age of consent was only raised to thirteen in 1875. On the whole the book treats a difficult subject sensitively and considers the emotional impact, without graphic details.

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## **nettebuecherkiste says**

Oxford im 19. Jahrhundert: Der Mathematikprofessor und Junggeselle John Jameson lernt bei einem Besuch eines Freundes dessen 11-jährige Tochter Daisy kennen. Schnell wird sie seine Muse – er bewundert kleine Mädchen, fotografiert sie und unterhält sie mit sprachlich kuriosen Geschichten und Witzen. Obwohl Jameson für Daisy zu einem wichtigen Freund wird, kommt es später zum Bruch zwischen ihm und der Familie. Was ist geschehen?

Wer sich schon einmal ein wenig Lewis Carroll befasst hat, erkennt hinter dieser kurzen Inhaltsbeschreibung gleich den berühmten Autor und seine umstrittene Beziehung zu seiner kleinen Muse Alice, für die er die wunderbaren Geschichten "Alice im Wunderland" und "Alice hinter den Spiegeln" verfasste. War Carrolls Zuneigung zu jungen Mädchen ohne Fehl und Tadel oder grenzt sie an Pädophilie? Gaynor Arnolds Buch stellt jedoch keinen Deutungs- oder Klärungsversuch dar, sondern ist tatsächlich eine reine Fiktionalisierung: Sie denkt sich eine Geschichte um die historischen Vorbilder aus, die keineswegs andeuten will, dass es so hätte sein können. Es ist schwierig, ihre Geschichte zu beschreiben, ohne zu viel zu verraten. So viel sei jedoch gesagt: Fans von Lewis Carroll brauchen das Buch nicht zu scheuen. Den Teil des Buchs, in dem es direkt um John Jameson geht, habe ich eher als kleine Hommage an den sprachlich genialen Autor empfunden, er macht Lust, die historischen "Briefe an kleine Mädchen" zu lesen – das Buch befindet sich jetzt auf meiner Wunschliste.

Gaynor Arnolds Fiktionalisierung ist eine psychologisch interessante Geschichte um Trauma und Verdrängung zu einer Zeit, in der das Thema Kindesmissbrauch unaussprechlich, ja undenkbar war und die Psychologie und Psychiatrie noch in den Kinderschuhen steckten.

Lesenswert!

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## **Girl with her Head in a Book says**

I was impressed by this book but I wouldn't call it a cosy read, but then neither was its source material. I have read versions of Alice in Wonderland, I remember reading the Ladybird book before I even started school. Still, somehow or other the story always left me cold. There was something weird about it that I didn't like, something cold at the very centre of the story - it wasn't a fairy story, Good didn't defeat Evil, I didn't like Alice or indeed any of the other characters. I am not alone in this scepticism - people have been pondering why they feel bothered by Alice since it was published. Apparently written to entertain the child Alice Liddell and her sisters, Charles Dodgson (aka Lewis Carroll) used young Alice as his muse and took some not-so-very-appropriate photographs of her before the friendship between him and the family turned rather suddenly sour. Gaynor Arnold explores this troubling relationship in this her second book, changing Dodgson into John Jameson and young Alice becomes Daisy Baxter.

For my full review:

<http://girlwithherheadinabook.blogspot...>

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## **Kirsty says**

This fictional take on Lewis Carroll's friendship with Alice Liddell (the inspiration for Alice in Wonderland) is charming and beautifully written, but with dark undertones.

The novel is written from four perspectives: John Jameson (the fictionalised Carroll), an eccentric academic at Oxford; Margaret Constantine (the fictionalised Alice), a troubled newlywed looking back on the childhood diaries describing her friendship with Jameson; and Margaret's parents, Daniel and Evelina Baxter. At first Jameson seems a rather sinister character and it's difficult not to see his actions and emotions through modern eyes. Nowadays it would be seen as suspicious and even shocking if a grown man wished to spend time with a little girl he was not related to – even in Jameson's time no-one can quite understand why he wants to spend so much time with an 11-year-old child. This, along with hints at Daniel Baxter's breakdown and various fractures within the family, adds a dark current to the novel that contrasts the childish voice of the diaries.

Fans of Alice will love the nods to various Wonderland elements. Although this is a fictionalised account, it's a joy to spot the parallels between Jameson's life and that of the book and imagine how it all came together in his mind. The story moves along well and each scene is beautifully drawn. As layers of the story are peeled back and Margaret begins to remember more about Jameson, the novel builds to a brilliant climax.

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## **Susan says**

This is an unsettling and fascinating novel, looking at the relationship between Lewis Carroll (whose real name was obviously Charles Dodgson and in this novel is renamed John Jameson) Alice Liddell (renamed Daisy Baxter) and her family. Of course, Alice Liddell was famously the inspiration for "Alice in Wonderland" and although this is a fictional account of real life, it is wonderfully done. The novel is told from the viewpoint of Jameson himself, Daisy as a young girl and as a grown woman, not quite sure why she is reluctant to read a childhood diary, Daisy's mother and her father.

Daniel Baxter is a vicar who meets John Jameson at Oxford, where they become friends. Over time, Jameson meets Baxter's family, including his three daughters, of whom Daisy is the youngest, and his baby son. During a birthday treat for Daisy, a picnic on the river, Mr Jameson averts a near disaster and is welcomed with even greater warmth into the family. Soon Daisy becomes his particular favourite and he arranges tea parties for her and her friends, as well as taking photographs of them, declaring, "girls, in my opinion, are the most delightful creatures in the world." Daisy obviously basks in the attention, but gradual disquiet is voiced about the relationship. The novel builds to a disconcerting and well written climax, as the author cleverly shows the point of view of all concerned, as well as the way behaviours which now seem very inappropriate were viewed in more innocent times.

If you enjoy this novel, and I am sure you will, you might like to read *The Alice Behind Wonderland* by Simon Winchester, which looks at Lewis Carroll and his photography (including his famous portrait of Alice Liddell) in greater detail. You might also want to read Gaynor Arnold's first novel, *Girl in a Blue Dress*, which also takes a fictional look at a real life relationship - in that case the marriage of Charles Dickens - and is also a wonderful read. Both novels by this author would make an excellent choice for a reading group, with lots to discuss and interesting themes. I look forward to reading more from her in the future.

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### **Karina says**

This fictional take on Lewis Carroll's friendship with Alice Liddell – the inspiration for Alice in Wonderland – deftly interweaves accounts from each of the characters; John Jameson, the eccentric academic; Margaret Constantine, now a troubled young wife, then an eleven year old girl; her vicar father Daniel Baxter and his wife Evelina.

When Margaret stumbles across her childhood diary, it reawakens buried memories of the summer she befriended John Jameson and inspired him to write a novel based on her. What exactly happened during that summer that caused her to blank out the years between eleven and fifteen? What drove her father to madness and shattered their family? With painful memories reignited by the diary, can the shadows cast by the past finally be laid to rest?

This is an assured and convincing novel, with each voice distinctive and vividly present, and the sense of layers gradually being peeled away ratchets up the tension to an almost unendurable climax.

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### **Flora says**

I've had this book sitting on my shelf for a while but I had been putting off reading it. A fictionalised account of the relationship between Lewis Carroll and the "real Alice", Alice Liddell - what would be the point? Wouldn't it just be salaciousness and rumour?

It's neither of those things, and in fact, I think the illustration of Carroll and Liddell look-alikes on the cover does the novel something of a disservice: *After Such Kindness* is certainly not a faithful biography of real people. Instead Arnold uses that story as a skeleton for her novel - keeping some of the known facts and changing others - but fleshing it out into something quite different.

The novel is really an exploration of Victorian society, and particularly its mores around children - specifically girls. It also show how those mores could allow abuse to happen and even to flourish.

Arnold has worked as a childcare social worker, and her experience of observing how children think about and process traumatic events really comes through, particularly as we see the grownup Margaret's agonised response to the seemingly innocuous prattle her younger self writes in her diary. Arnold's technique of layering different narrative voices works to build our understanding of what has happened, sometimes wrong-footing us at the same time.

The book is not disturbing - in fact at times it can be charming - but it does contain moments that are distressing. I was completely gripped by it.

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## **Grace says**

My rating is 3.5 stars

This was a peculiar book on a difficult subject. My one big criticism of the book was I found it hard to relate to the time period it was depicting and then over the course of reading it worked this out. It wasn't until near the end that the year was actually stated.

The title of the book doesn't give much away and certainly didn't prepare me for the subject matter. Would I have read this if I had known this? Probably not, that said it was well written and the story told how easy it was to groom a young girl in those times. I felt that the end of the book could have been written a bit better. We know that the victim sought professional help but we do not know how successful this was. Also there were four years that the victim "lost" or was confused by and the author didn't tell this part of the story to my satisfaction. At this point the book seemed to jump this time period (four years). I think that this could have been handled better by the author.

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## **Louise says**

I bought this book without really knowing what it was about, and had wrongly assumed it was inspired by the Carroll's character Alice, rather than the girl that inspired the character. I was therefor expecting whimsy.

A chapter or so in, it was clear I'd got the wrong end of the stick. It didn't matter, however, as this is a thoughtful and well written exploration of grooming behaviour, while the Reverend's character is sympathetically written, I felt tension as I read along, anticipating where the story was heading. The plot turn at the end was a surprise but I felt was let down by a fairly superficial and unconvincing exploration of motive, which was not in keeping with tone of the book. However, the end result was that of what one feels when hearing about abuse in the news: incomprehension, the feeling no explanation is good enough, and some anger at people who failed to understand the importance of intervening. So, that may well be the effect that was aimed for, and I don't necessarily think that's a bad thing. All in all, very good.

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## **Nasim Asl says**

Although numerous newspapers and reviewers have not stopped singing the praises of Arnold's second novel fictitiously exploring relationships of literary figures (her first being between Dickens and his wife), *After Such Kindness* was not for me.

Perhaps it is a direct consequence of reading this novel as a teenage girl, rather than an older counterpart, but I found that the relationship Arnold creates between Daisy and Rev. John Jameson to be, from the outset, creepily uncomfortable.

The novel commences with a description of Jameson (the fictitious Lewis Carroll) developing a photo of an unnamed girl (later found to be Daisy, the fictitious Alice Lidell), a simple enough act – however the innuendo used was uncomfortable to read, and put me off the book. I could not help but view Jameson negatively after that, but Arnold only served to increase the uncomfortable relationship between reader and narrator during the chapters from his perspective, due to his obsession with Alice, and the way in this was presented. Throughout the book, this only increases in intensity, and as a direct consequence, the novel reads more and more uncomfortably, and I found myself inclined to skim over certain portions of their interaction, due to the how uncomfortable I felt.

This unease occurs with other male characters in the novel – Daisy's adult counterpart, Margaret, and her husband have a series of awkward and uncomfortable physical encounters, and the traumatic events which Arnold creates for young Daisy make difficult and somewhat disturbing reading.

These shortcomings aside, there is no doubting the writing talent possessed by Arnold – she manages to switch, apparently effortlessly, between writing styles and voices. Each character who narrates a chapter has their own unique and believable tone and voice, and at no point do any of the characters seem wooden or fake – perhaps this realism contributes to the creepiness felt with Jameson – and I applaud the talent of Arnold for this.

It is equally obvious that Arnold has a love affair with Lewis Carroll and the real Alice – the novel is littered with specific and subtle references to Alice in Wonderland, many of which the reader is unlikely to even consciously notice. However, as Arnold has insisted on such a distance between the real Charles Dodgson and the fictional Jameson, these references appear somewhat confusing at first, and there seems to be a confusion of character between the two men, with the lines between a fictional novel and real life becoming blurred for the reader.

It is the novel's plot twist which is perhaps the most uncomfortable and disturbing part of the novel, and for younger readers, this is probably a book to avoid – it explores the grooming of a young girl in such a time when this was not such a taboo as it is now, and a grotesque pattern of abuse. The end of the novel contributes to this – yet, to reiterate – the fault is not in the writing of Arnold. For me, it is the subject matter that I do not respond well to, and many young readers are likely to feel the same.

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## **Dorothy says**

It's very hard to award stars to this book. Apart from one or two chapters, the writing is excellent - but I can't say I enjoyed it.

I did find the depiction of the relationship between the Rev Jameson and Daisy fascinating. These days we'd assume the worst, but it was clear that although the relationship was strange, it wasn't nasty in any way. In fact, the danger to Daisy came from someone else entirely - and that's where the book lost me.

There came a point when it was obvious what was going to happen to Daisy, and why she's so troubled as an adult. From that point on - and it's a huge chunk of the book - I was reading with an awful sense of inevitability. The facts of what actually happened were skirted around and hinted at and for me, it was just too long-drawn out. In particular, the scene where Daisy tries to tell her husband was excruciatingly slow and felt contrived. And having ploughed through that scene, I was annoyed to see the author use the (view spoiler)

To cap it all off, the perpetrator is never brought to justice and we never learn whether Daisy recovered, so the ending was unsatisfactory all round.

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## **Sibyl says**

Gaynor Arnold has woven an ingenious narrative which uses Charles Lutwidge Dodgson's friendship with the young Alice Liddell as a starting point. (The Oxford don Dodgson becomes 'John Jameson' while Alice is 'Daisy Baxter'.)

We are led to believe that this will be a story about the abuse of innocence - and this is, up to a point, true. However the man whose intentions are suspect in the eyes of society, may himself be a (relative) innocent, while no one in the heroine's respectable middle-class circle is willing to contemplate who has really harmed Daisy, and in what way.

There are interesting parallels here with the 21st obsession with 'stranger danger', when children are far more likely to be abused by those who are closer to home. Is there a suggestion here that in our own vigilance to protect the young from adults who are 'eccentric' and 'different', we end up exposing them to still greater risks?

I felt that the most powerful theme in the book was that of loneliness. At the novel's outset Daisy is a solitary figure, stranded between her older sisters and an infant brother who is the centre of attention. When her beloved nursemaid is dismissed, she is even more alone - and no one apart from Jameson seems willing to listen to her questions about the stiflingly conventional world around her. When Daisy is transformed into the newly married 'Margaret', life is even more wretched.

As with her earlier 'Girl in a Blue Dress' Gaynor Arnold paints a compelling picture of the dependency of the Victorian wife. The scene in which Margaret attempts to explain her past to the horrified vicar who is her husband - but cannot make herself understood - is painfully vivid.

I also admired the portrayal of Jameson. In many ways this is a courageously insightful portrait of a shy man, who knows himself to be unsuited to family life, and for whom the company of female children provides a needed antidote to a sterile donnish existence.

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## **Gina Dalfonzo says**

A heartrending but very well-told story. The threat to Daisy, the child at the center of the novel, doesn't come from where you originally think it will, and yet none of the characters aside from Daisy is truly innocent; tragically, even the more likable figures end up using her innocence for their own purposes, and not really thinking about how their actions will affect her. Striking, memorable, and psychologically insightful, but sometimes difficult to read because of the subject matter, even though it's carefully and responsibly handled.

I'm torn over whether to give it three or four stars. "Liked it" doesn't seem strong enough, but "really liked it" seems too strong for a book where so many characters are so difficult to like (even though it has to be that way for the thing to work!). "Really respected it," or "really struck by it," would be more accurate. Oh well, I guess I'll go with four!

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