

## LoveReading Reader reviews of The Looking Glass House by Vanessa Tait

**Below are the complete reviews, written by LoveReading members.**

### **Emily Curnow**

*The cleverness of this book lies in its beautifully detailed descriptions of Oxford, Victorian homes, morals and expectations. Using this and beautiful imagery the author completely persuades the reader that they are indeed in the 19th century. Tait's characters are interesting because they are revealed as being based on real people in the real situations. The protagonist Mary is a character who (through the narrator who can read her thoughts) begs sympathy from the reader as she struggles through the minefield of 19th-century morality. The plot revolves around Mary as a governess to the famous Alice (of whom Lewis Carroll wrote of), and of the uncertain relationship between Alice and of Charles Dodgson (Carroll). It is full of emotional twists and turns as we see the sexually naïve Mary develop an attachment to Dodgson.*

***An enjoyable novel gives a great, interesting, and believable insight into the world of Dodgson and of the Victorians, making it easy to feel the moral claustrophobia. Vanessa Tait has proved herself to be a talented writer who can easily drag the reader into the depths of her story. The novel continues throughout to hold the reader's attention with an unpredictable ending that certainly provided myself with some relief from the developing story.***

*Highly recommended for fans of Lewis Carroll's work.*



**Edel Waugh** - [www.edelwaugh.blogspot.com](http://www.edelwaugh.blogspot.com)

*I am a big fan of 'Alice in Wonderland', so this story about what happened before she went down the rabbit hole had me very excited. This story was inspired by the author who is the great grandchild of the Alice Liddell who was the inspiration behind the Lewis Carroll books. The story is told through the eyes of the governess Mary who is both frustrating and a likeable character and along with Mr Dodgson and Alice make up the majority of the story. Mr Dogdson is a character I was wary of, his intentions I was never certain off as he liked to take pictures of Alice a lot and it was never clear if he did it to get close to her governess or if he just liked being around children. **There is the same dreamy quality to the story at times as there was when I read 'Alice in Wonderland', magical and mixed with unease and innocent fun. I would recommend this to any fan of the Lewis Carroll's books.***

**Angie Rhodes**

***Oh wow!! Being a huge fan of 'Alice in Wonderland', this was a joy to read.***

*Alice is a talkative, questioning young girl, and when we meet her, she is waiting with her sisters Edith, Ina, and the Governess Mary Prickett, for guests, Mary finds herself drawn to two altogether different men, Mr Wilson, a sensible man, and the Charles Dodgson, a slightly odd man.*

*It's Mr Dodgson she dreams about and sees a lot of, with his constantly being at the Deans house.*

***Vanessa has written a beautiful dream style novel, including people you can say "Ahh. The Red Queen" etc.***

***I loved it, and learnt a lot about the real Alice.***

**Sarah Musk**

***A fascinating book giving a different fresh insight into the nature of the friendship between Charles Dodgson and Alice Liddell - his 'Alice in Wonderland' muse.***

*This is a fascinating read - made more interesting because the author, Vanessa Tait, is the great granddaughter of Alice Liddell who was Charles Dodgson's inspiration for Alice in Wonderland. The story is told through the eyes of the children's governess, a plain spinster named Mary Prickett. She is a sad,*

*frustrated figure who falls under the spell of Charles Dodgson and becomes deluded as to the true nature of his feelings towards her.*

*There has always been some controversy surrounding the nature of Dodgson's relationship with Alice and Vanessa Tait handles this in a subtle, tactful way leaving the reader to make their own mind up as to what Dodgson intended. She portrays vividly the suffocating, unfulfilled life a Victorian governess has to endure and the reader feels for Mary who longs for a husband and a home of her own. However, she is not a particularly warm character - she is of a 'prickly' nature and Dodgson and Alice are caught discussing her and making fun of her name and marriage prospects. On a few occasions she is shockingly cruel to Alice which appears to have been the norm for the time.*

*I know a lot has been written about Charles Dodgson and Alice Liddell but this book gave a fresh, new insight into their relationship seen from the viewpoint of a little-known close spectator who possibly paid a significant role in the ending of their friendship.*

### **Carolyn Huckfield**

***This is a fascinating story beautifully told by Tait. She makes us feel as if we are in Victorian England with all its rules and constraints.***

*The author is the great-granddaughter of Alice Liddell. Alice is known to be Lewis Carroll's model for his Alice in Wonderland and Tait has used her family's stories as her inspiration for her first novel. It begins with us meeting Mary Prickett, who has just got the job as governess to the three daughters of the Dean of Christ Church. Ironically Mary is not keen on children and finds all three of the girls hard to handle. However it is paid work and a comfortable job for her. She is jealous of Alice Liddell's lovely face and her precocious behaviour. When Charles Dodgson, a Christ Church mathematics tutor, meets them all at a party Mary believes he will change her life for the better. Sadly Mary is plain and is desperate for his attention. However Charles is more interested in Alice. After the party Dodgson takes photographs of the children and to spend time with Alice he has to use Mary to be with her. During this time Mary chaperones the Liddells on a punting trip, Mr Dodgson tells them the story of Alice's Adventures in Wonderland. When Mary realises she is not the person Dodgson is interested in she feels betrayed and sets about spreading poisonous rumours about him. The story is fascinating and beautifully told. We can make up our own minds and either feel sorry for Mary and know why she took such action against Dodgson or alternatively see her as a bitter young woman who misread*

*a situation and took her revenge. No one really knows if Carroll had sexual feelings towards Alice but gossip and rumours then as much as now can colour everyone's opinions.*

### **Vanessa Wild**

***An imaginative and cleverly written glimpse into the topsy turvy world of Alice Liddell and Lewis Carroll.***

*An imaginative glimpse into a portion of time within Alice Liddell's life, the little girl who was the inspiration for Lewis Carroll's 'Alice's Adventures in Wonderland' and was also the great-grandmother of the author, Vanessa Tait. The story is told in the third person mainly from the viewpoint of the governess, Mary Prickett.*

*It is very cleverly and beautifully written, but also quite whimsical and surreal. It touches on the weird and wonderful topsy turvy world of Lewis Carroll (pseudonym for Charles Dodgson) and the writing harks back to him in a certain way. I found the tale engaging and interesting. I loved that it combined fact with fiction. I thought the author did a fantastic job of reading between the lines. However, I did not particularly find any of the characters particularly likeable. Alice was a precocious, spoilt child and Mary a fool, in my opinion.*

*'The Looking Glass House' is to be published in July to coincide with the 150th anniversary of 'Alice's Adventures in Wonderland'. An engaging and unusual read which I am sure will appeal to those who love fairy tales and all things magical!*

You can follow Vanessa on Twitter: @Butterflybiblio

### **Judith Sharp**

***Fascinating look at the Alice Liddell story as seen by her governess. Fact and fiction are blended effortlessly as Mary Pickett becomes obsessed with Charles Dodgson.***

*The lot of a governess was not a good one in history. Mary Pickett wants something better and sees Charles Dodgson as a way out.*

*Unfortunately, Mary is plain & Charles Dodgson prefers the company of children.*

*Along the way we get to see how people & Victorian manners lead to the story 'Alice in Wonderland'. I never realised before how the Queen of Hearts is a*

*caricature of Queen Victoria.*

*Mary is a victim of her time & circumstances, which are very hard to understand from our modern view point. She therefore tends to be an unsympathetic character but is to be pitied.*

*Living near Oxford I enjoyed reading this book more because I knew the settings but this is not a necessity to enjoy the story.*

*Well written & thought provoking. I enjoyed it whilst thanking my lucky stars I was born in a more enlightened age.*

### **Lynne Rapson**

***A book which will fascinate lovers of Alice written by her great-granddaughter. Her access to personal papers gives an authentic touch to the novel.***

*I must admit that I am an Alice fan, so I was delighted to read this very interesting, well-written novel based on family papers and memories. The story is narrated by Mary Prickett, governess to the Liddell sisters. She is not pretty and is not hopeful of her marital prospects but somehow she manages to attract two suitors, one real, Mr Wilton, and one a suitor only in her imagination, Mr Dodgson. The book covers about a year and during this time Mary learns a lot about life and love. It tells in fiction what has been long known and indeed, unknown, about Charles Dodgson and his relationship with Alice and other young girls. He finds a willing ally in Mary who helps him to spend time with the sisters, particularly Alice. However Mary misunderstands his intentions and thinks that she is the object of his attraction. It is not until she finds his letters to Alice that she really understands that it is not Mary that he wants to be near. A bitter blow as Mary has rejected her other suitor in such a way that she cannot hope to receive his offer again. A sad story showing the class divisions of the day and the different treatment of children and servants. The post of governess was not always a happy sinecure. I recommend this book to all Alice enthusiasts.*

### **Jennifer Moville**

*This is a book about a character named Mary Prickett. She becomes the governess to the daughters of a wealthy family.*

*She does not like Alice - nor does she really like children at all.*

*Mary meets two men - a Mr Dodgson - a tutor and a Mr Wilson who works in a haberdashery.*

*Mary likes Mr Wilson but she thinks Mr Dodgson will make her his wife and so pursues him more.*

*As it is, it is Mr Wilson who proposes but Mary thinks Mr Dodgson is also about to propose and so rejects his offer.*

*After speaking to Mr Dodgson it is plain to see that he does not in fact want Mary but has been using her to get closer to the family she works for and in particular Alice but the family forbid any closeness or romantic notions from developing.*

***This is one of those books that draws you into the characters and like them or loathe them as you will, you find a certain fondness for Mary and her life.***

*Thanks for letting me read and review this book*

### **Beth Kemp**

*I am not a lover of Victorian or Regency 'manners' novels, which this feels like. I often do enjoy historical fiction because it is generally not written as though produced at the time, while this book very much felt like a Victorian novel.*

***'The Looking Glass House' is an interesting depiction of a famous relationship from a new angle. The book is likely to appeal to Lewis Carroll/Alice in Wonderland fans, but also to those who enjoy quiet literary novels about Victorian society and manners. The information after the novel to show how it relates to fact is a nice addition, and will definitely add value and interest for many readers.***

*Personally, I found it hard-going in places, at least partly because few (if any) of the characters were likable, and partly because there is not much here in the way of plot - the blurb introduces ideas which do not take off until 2/3 of the way in, which is a little misleading and led to me waiting for it to 'get started'. I also did not enjoy the writing style, partially because it felt Victorian in tone and also because at times the perspective jumped around, seeming to 'zoom in' on different characters a little erratically.*

*Sorry I cannot be more positive about this novel. I very nearly emailed to say I wouldn't be able to finish it or review it, but thought I ought to press on. I have tried to identify exactly what I don't like about it, as I feel at least partly this is a*

taste issue.

### **Lesley Mumbray-Williams**

*I live near Oxford so know the city vibrantly described in this book well, and have always loved the works of Lewis Carroll (ever since my father read them to me when I was a small child) so was looking forward to reading this novel based on Carroll's relationships with members of the Liddell family, especially as it is written by Vanessa Tait, the great grand-daughter of the real Alice. Sadly, it did not grip me as I had hoped. **All the ingredients for a good book are here: an interesting period in Oxford history, fascinating characters, romance, the intricacies of social class**, but this was ruined for me by the way that Alice, beautiful in photographs and marvellous as Lewis Carroll's eponymous heroine, is here portrayed as a pert and monstrous child who is totally spoiled and sulks if not the perennial centre of attention. Not a book I will read again, I'm afraid.*

### **Kath Martin**

*I was unsure about this book before I started it. I thought it might be a bit strange or dull maybe or.....well, I just wasn't sure. However, I soon became totally involved in the story of Alice who influenced, and inspired the writing of 'Alice in Wonderland'. The way it is written, from the viewpoint of the governess, is a brilliant idea. It is difficult to know where fact and fiction start and finish. **I absolutely loved all the little references to the 'Alice in Wonderland' story and have great admiration for the author.** I think she showed great restraint, and brought the story to life. It is difficult to write about your own family! Sticking to the known facts, and fitting them all together and adding the missing pieces of the jigsaw.....**it is a remarkable first book.** I would like to think Ms Tait will write another book, perhaps telling the story of Alice's life after Alice!"*

### **Zarina de Ruiter**

*A fictionalised retelling of the childhood of Alice Liddell, the girl who was the inspiration behind the classic character of Alice from the Wonderland novels.*

*Written by the great-granddaughter of Alice Liddell, the girl who was the inspiration behind the classic character of Alice from the Wonderland novels, 'The Looking Glass House' is a fictionalised retelling of Alice's childhood. The*

*lives of the Liddell sisters are seen through the eyes of their governess, Mary Prickett, who becomes fascinated by a family friend, Charles Dodgson, who in turn seems incredibly fond of the three young sisters, Alice in particular.*

*Dodgson is nowadays of course better known as Lewis Carroll, and from the moment that this became clear within the novel I felt incredibly intrigued by the hints to the wondrous tale that were sprinkled throughout and served as the seeds for Dodgson's classic novels. It was not only the three sisters I recognised from within the pages of the children's classic, but family acquaintances too and even the governess central within *The Looking Glass House* makes an appearance. It was **a marvellous treasure hunt through Victorian England and Dodgson's imagination** – and one that with my love for the original *Wonderland* tales and whimsical characters I wish could have been the sole focus of the novel.*

*Unfortunately this wasn't the case. **As the story progressed it took a more bizarre turn**, one that seemed to come completely out of the blue considering the novel's cover and blurb, **and it really wasn't something I felt interested in reading.** ‘*The Looking Glass House*’ sadly just wasn't what I expected and hoped it to be. Instead of letting me return to the wondrous tales I grew up with, it has now forever changed my perspective on a favourite novel in an unfavourable way – and that's a shame.*

[www.pagetostagereviews.com](http://www.pagetostagereviews.com)

## **Laura Delve**

***A readable book, but not quite what you expect. Would not recommend to those who have innocent views on Alice in Wonderland.***

*This year marks the 150th Anniversary of Alice in Wonderland, so naturally there are a few new books coming out to help with the celebrations; ‘*The Looking Glass House*’ being one of them. I really was so excited to read this. I love the story of Alice in Wonderland and have already bought a 150th Anniversary edition of the book, so I loved the idea of finding out about how the story came about, especially as it is written by the granddaughter of the inspiration of the story, Alice Liddel.*

*‘*The Looking Glass House*’ tells the story leading up to how the story of Alice in Wonderland came about. If I'm honest, I thought this story was going to be a lot more magical, especially as the cover looks just like that, but it wasn't. Although*

*I did like reading the real Alice's story and how she was the inspiration behind Lewis Carroll's (pen name) magical story, I really did not take to the massive speculation in the story around Dodgson's intentions towards Alice, and at one point I really did think that the story was going to take a VERY nasty turn - thankfully it didn't, but the hint was there!*

*Vanessa Tait is however a good writer and I commend her simple descriptions and the way she crafted the story, and it still kept me reading to the end. I also liked seeing where Dodgson got his character inspiration from for 'Alice in Wonderland', especially the similarities between the Queen of Hearts and Queen Victoria. The character development itself is also really good, it was just the story that fell a little flat for me.*

<http://lauraslittlebookblog.blogspot.co.uk>

You can follow Laura on Twitter: @Midnighstar3

### **Kathryn Whitfield**

***A beautifully written and wonderful story about the inspiration for Lewis Carroll's Alice's Adventures in Wonderland.***

*I enjoyed reading this book and liked most of the characters especially Mary and Charles and felt these were the main characters rather than Alice. I enjoy books set in history and the writer captures the victorian era effectively. I maybe was expecting a little more from this story but understand that most was fact so the writer had to fill between the lines with a bit of spice which she did perfectly.*