

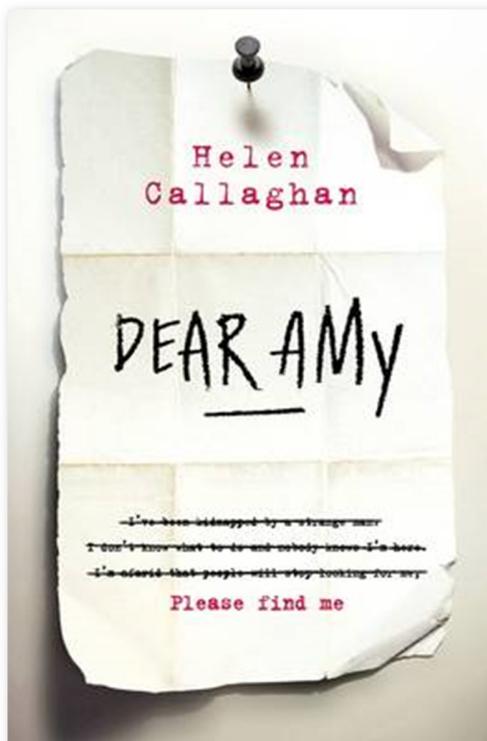


Helping you choose  
your next book

## LoveReading Reader reviews of **Dear Amy** by Helen Callaghan

PENGUIN  
MICHAEL  
JOSEPH

Below are the complete reviews, written by LoveReading members.



**Lynda DeFreitas**

***Gripping! From the moment I first saw the book wrapped in twine and with two facsimile letters tucked into it, I was intrigued. This is an amazing début novel.***

*There are two stories running in parallel – one is the original kidnapping and the other happening in the present day with the main protagonist being the link. She is the agony aunt to whom the letters are addressed and also a teacher of the girl who goes missing at the beginning of the book.*

*I found it hard to believe that the letters were not a hoax. How did they get posted if the sender was being held against her will?*

*Why was there a gap of nearly twenty*

*years between her disappearance and the arrival of the letters?*

*The psychological build up and final denouement are very strong. Throughout the story the descriptions of the state of mind of the perpetrator and the victims are very convincing.*

*I loved reading this book and found it hard to put down. It is well written and I will be looking out for further books in the future written by Helen Callaghan.*

## **Catherine Hogwood**

***A psychological suspense thriller that will constantly have you guessing!***

*I feel the most important thing to say is that this book bends your mind as it morphs into different directions! A true suspense thriller that'll leave you guessing until the end, only it isn't your typical 'who did it' story.*

*The main character is Margot, a school teacher who also writes an agony aunt column. She starts receiving letters from a school girl who was kidnapped long ago and her world begins to unravel in ways you would not expect. Margot doesn't know her own inner strength and ultimately she is tested to the limit to get to the truth.*

*To give any more away in a review would ruin this story but it honestly shape shifts into a different story you were not imagining from the outset.*

*This book is well written and the writing style makes it easy to slip into reading. The characters are fairly well fleshed out, enough to travel through the story.*

*The inner workings of someone's mind after serious trauma is a key focus point in this book and I feel it was described well.*

## **Emily Curnow**

***This novel is a plethora of twists and turns. Just as you think you can predict what is happening, it all changes.*** *The suspense is held throughout, making it a novel that is hard to stop reading. The main protagonist is a flawed character and the unreliable nature of her narration makes the reader question every point in the story. It is a novel that will appeal to readers who loved 'Girl on a Train' and 'Gone Girl'.*

## **Sarah Jones**

***Can an agony aunt solve the disappearance of a young girl? How is this linked to a twenty year old unresolved case? An interesting and compelling page turner.***

*Firstly I have to say how much I loved the presentation of this book! It arrived tied up in string with two 'handwritten' letters wrapped up with it. Instantly I wanted to unwrap it and start reading, so I did! Margot is a teacher and agony aunt for the local paper. When she starts to receive letters from a girl who went missing twenty years ago she sees similarities between the past and the recent*

*disappearance of one of her pupils and she feels compelled to find out more.*

*This book was quite edgy and interesting as it was told from a number of different viewpoints. I really liked the character of Margot and found it interesting to delve inside her mind, especially as she found out more about the disappearances. There were some quite graphic and gruesome details towards the end which made me a little squeamish but I coped! Fast paced, interesting and at times quite compelling. I kept reading as I needed to find out the ending!*

### **Alexandra Harper-Williams**

***Gripping from the first page to the last – imaginative psychological thriller that’s sure to increase your heart-rate.***

*Margot Lewis, Agony Aunt and writer of the “Dear Amy” advice column in a Cambridge newspaper, receives some disturbing letters that claim to be from a girl called Bethan Avery who went missing 15 years ago.*

*When Margot refuses to believe that this is just a hoax, she embarks on a dangerous and potentially life-threatening journey of discovery into Bethan’s past.*

*With this novel’s main protagonist, Margot, Helen Callaghan has created a very realistic, flawed and extremely likeable character. She drinks too much, is far too outspoken for her own good and is stubbornly determined to solve the mystery of Bethan’s disappearance.*

*I was hooked from the moment I started this book and keen to find out what had happened, because of the author’s intelligent storyline that kept on surprising me.*

*A highly enjoyable debut novel from a very talented writer. I hope you will be as captivated by this book as I was and enjoy reading how everything unravels.*

### **Humaira**

***Pulsing. Addicting. Downright hard to put down.***

*I’m not usually into thrillers but ‘Dear Amy’ gripped me nonetheless. I will never forget this book. I hope it turns into a movie, that’s how good it is. Helen Callaghan has nailed it with her flawless writing. Read this book because it’s so gripping, pulsing, and addicting.*

Follow Humaira on Instagram: [https://www.instagram.com/cookie\\_bookie/](https://www.instagram.com/cookie_bookie/)

## **Sarah Borley**

*'Dear Amy' is a book about a teacher that writes a column called 'Dear Amy' and when a student at her school goes missing she starts to get these letters from a girl that has been missing for years.*

*She starts to think that maybe this girl could still be alive and begins to investigate.*

***I started this book and was instantly gripped, it was full of mystery and every page you turned left you wondering when the next letter was coming.*** *The author did really well and put in plenty of plots and twists. I absolutely loved this book and was completely shocked by the ending, I was not expecting the outcome.*

*A perfect book for readers that like a bit of mystery and a good ending.*

[www.Sarahreviewer.blogspot.com.blogspot.com](http://www.Sarahreviewer.blogspot.com.blogspot.com)

## **Katherine Stewart**

***Interesting story but ultimately slightly disappointing for me.***

*This is the story of Margot, a school teacher and agony aunt for the local newspaper's "Dear Amy" column, who starts to receive letters from a girl who was kidnapped many years ago. The plot develops into a psychological thriller as Margot gets caught up in finding out what happened to Bethan and it is a difficult to give a sense of the story without giving away the surprises. However, it left me slightly underwhelmed. I found some side stories unnecessary and did not feel any connection to Margot. Overall this was a promising start, but parts of the story developed too quickly to seem believable.*

## **Stephanie Harding**

*Margot Lewis is the agony aunt for the local newspaper's advice column. One day she receives a letter from a girl called Bethan Avery saying that she has been kidnapped and is being held captive. The strangest thing is that Bethan Avery has been missing for nearly 20 years.*

*Is it a sick joke or is it real? Can Bethan still be alive and held captive somewhere?*

*As the story unfolds Margot starts to question her own sanity and why she cannot remember big chunks of her past.*

***This is a really gripping psychological thriller from an accomplished author that had many twists to keep you guessing. It tends to lead you down a path and then doubles back – it doesn't go where you were expecting and I love that.***

### **Phyllippa Smithson**

***This was good but it should/could have been brilliant a brilliant suspense thriller but it did not quite come off for me.***

*Margot is by day a teacher of Latin at a private school in Cambridge. She also works in her spare time for the local newspaper answering 'Dear Amy' letters received to the Examiner.*

*When one of pupils, teenager Katie, walks out of her home and disappears, it coincides with Margot receiving a letter signed by Bethan Avery, a child who disappeared and was believed to have been murdered 15 years previously (although no body was ever found).*

*After some convincing of the Police, Margot is able to get them to take some action on her belief that the letter and Katie's disappearance could be linked.*

*So far, so very brilliant. What I found difficult was the disjointed description of Margot's personal life that, in the end, evidently had direct bearing on the outcome of the story but getting there was hard work.*

*Very definitely worth reading but could have been much better.*

### **Mary Gibson**

*'Dear Amy' by Helen Callaghan is a psychological thriller set in Cambridge. The central protagonist Margot is a classics and English teacher, newly separated from her husband. Her other job is that of agony aunt for the local paper, the Dear Amy of the book's title. Haunted by the recent disappearance of one of her students, Margot starts receiving letters from a woman who went missing, possibly abducted or killed nearly twenty years previously. Seeking answers to this mystery, Margot's quest endangers her life.*

*I enjoyed this novel very much although the twist in the narrative comes halfway. **The character of Margot is delicately written and the novel questions the fragility of the human mind and its complexities.***

## **Richard Coe**

*My interest in this book was immediately piqued as a number of letters were tied to the book, very novel and instant book marks to use, this was an excellent start in my view.*

*The story is all about Margot Lewis, a school teacher at St Hilda's Academy in Cambridge. Margot is also an agony aunt and writes a "Dear Amy" column in a local newspaper called the Cambridge Examiner. Margot is married to Eddy but he ran off with his boss, Arabella Morino and a divorce is progressing.*

*The letters (tied to the book) are sent to Margot via her Dear Amy column and are from Bethan Avery, a teenager when she was kidnapped in the 90s, some two decades ago. Another girl has recently gone missing from St Hilda's and she is called Katie Browne. Can the letters really be from Bethan, can Katie be saved, can the kidnapper be caught and is Bethan Avery still alive? Margot is assisted through the book by Dr Martin Forrester, a criminologist from Cambridge University.*

***This is a great debut novel, easy to read and quite a big twist as you progress through the book, it took me by surprise.*** *I cannot say anymore as this would reveal too much of the book and be a spoiler.*

*One reviewer gives it 5 stars on Amazon and I agree.*

## **Mollie Mayson-Simpson**

*Not an easy read, and an unfamiliar genre - I was drawn to the novel by curiosity, and came to the review task with no preconceptions and no acquired expertise in relation to the genre. I emerge from the experience feeling like one recovering from attending a party consisting of total strangers who challenged all my existing expectations. As I say, not an easy read, but well worth the effort.*

*I would call the genre 'psychological thriller'. A schoolgirl, Katie Browne, missing from home, falls into hands motivated by murderous intent. I found it hard to read about her period of terrifying imprisonment, and suffered alongside the girl in the cellar, my mouth dry and heart pounding.*

*Meanwhile Margot Lewis, a teacher who augments her salary by writing an 'agony aunt' column in a newspaper, receives a letter from someone calling herself Bethan Avery, saying she is being imprisoned by a man who intends to kill her. But Bethan's case was filed away unresolved many years previously. What connects these three women? Can we trust any of the men to whom they*

relate?

*The novel requires us to open our minds to issues such as personality blurring, identity theft, and the ability of a mind to suppress memories too painful to be owned. Perhaps an acknowledgement to Freud ought to be included in the Prologue? Whatsoever, **the total package is intriguing, if sometimes difficult to process, and a very challenging read. I'm glad I went for it.***

### **Victoria Emerson**

***A solid, well written debut.***

*I looked forward to reading Dear Amy and it didn't disappoint me. It is a well written British thriller.*

*I liked the twists and turns in the plot.*

*The one thing that I didn't like/ couldn't understand is why the abducted girl would write to Dear Amy and not to the police.*

*All in all a very good read.*

### **Nicola Cooper**

*I couldn't wait to get started on this book when it arrived due to its presentation with the kidnap letters tied under string. Great debut novel from Helen Callahan. 'Dear Amy' is the story of pending divorcee and teacher Margot Lewis who is also an agony aunt for the local newspaper. The thriller starts in the form of letters from a Bethan Avery who has been missing for nearly 20 years!! . It is also the story of Katie Browne, a young troubled school girl, a scholarship student at Margot's school. As the two stories begin to come together we find not everything is as it seemed in those opening chapters and lives are in peril.*

*Although I did predict the twist, I liked the plot and enjoyed this book immensely. It was easy to read and the characters and silent clues kept my interest throughout. **A great storyline and look forward to reading more from this author. Highly recommended, can't wait for the next one.***

## Edel Waugh

*This is the story about an agony aunt called Dear Amy. Amy's real name is Margot. When Margot receives mail one day for her newspaper column claiming to be from a missing girl asking for help, it opens a can of worms more disturbing than could ever be imagined.*

*The story is gripping from the opening pages and stays that way throughout the story, you are never certain if the letters are real, sent by a sick joker or by someone even more depraved.*

*The story is a very interesting one as you are never quite sure how reliable the main character is, the story is also **terrifying and thought provoking**, seeing inside the head of the victim just before the kidnap made me get goose bumps. I had to admire Amy, she is a gutsy female in a subtle but very effective way and she makes a great main character. I recommend this if you liked books like 'The Girl on the Train' and 'Gone Girl'.*

<http://edelwaugh.blogspot.ie/2016/03/dear-amy-by-helen-callaghan-review.html?m=1>

## Jacki Moorcroft

***A superb psychological suspense thriller, Helen Callaghan's book seduces the reader leaving them begging for more with engaging characters and compelling story.***

*Margot Lewis, is a school teacher and also the agony aunt of the Dear Amy advice column of local newspaper the Cambridge Enquirer. Pupil Katie Browne disappears after a family argument and Margot suddenly receives a Dear Amy letter from Bethan Avery a schoolgirl who disappeared nearly 20 years ago. Bethan claims she has been kidnapped and begs Margot to help as she is sure her kidnapper is going to kill her. Thus the story begins interweaving Margot, Bethan and Katie's lives. Why does Bethan start writing now? Why to Margot? Does the same kidnapper have Katie? Questions which continue to be asked and finally answered in this superbly written psychological thriller on a disturbing theme which has been compellingly written leaving you wanting more.*

Follow Jacki on Twitter: @moorcoftj

## **Taflyn Pearson**

***Very well written book - character was sympathetic and the twist was completely unexpected.***

*I received a copy from the publisher in exchange for an honest review - the book came in a parcel with two copies of the letters written to Amy which was a beautiful touch! I mention it because I am not sure that it will be sold that way to the public, but it was a very endearing gesture.*

*The subject matter was always going to be a little emotional, and I must admit **I was completely enthralled in the book** until the twist was revealed, at which point I became quite distraught. **THIS IS A FAILING WITH ME AND NOT THE BOOK!** I would recommend it to any emotionally robust reader.*

## **Angie Rhodes**

*'Katie Browne is packing' so begins for me, **one of the most intriguing books I have read this year.***

*Margot Lewis is a teacher and Dear Amy an agony aunt for local newspaper, The Cambridge Enquirer and she begins to receive letters, from Beth Avery, nothing wrong there except that Beth Avery when missing a time, ago and they come with information that was not made public.*

*Margot is convinced the letters are real, add to the equation another girl has gone missing in the circumstances, Margot decides to investigate, but this could cost her dearly.*

## **Kathy Howell**

***This is a very compelling read. I wanted to put it down....but I needed to know what would happen next!***

*The book begins with the abduction of Katie Browne. She is a pupil at a local school where Margot Lewis is a teacher. Margot is also the agony aunt on her local newspaper and, after Katie has disappeared, she receives letters from Bethan Avery, a girl who disappeared many years before. Bethan is apparently writing from her "prison". Margot thinks that the two girls' fates are linked and goes to the police to try and help find them. A reconstruction of Bethan's disappearance is staged and broadcast on television. This prompts various reactions from the public and Margot is followed and finds herself in danger from a man who begins to follow her. Margot has many secrets in her past and*

*the police investigation begins to trigger memories for Margot which she needs to confront because her full story may help Katie to survive.*

*I would thoroughly recommend this book as it is very well written and the twist was kept well hidden. I will certainly look for others by this author.*

### **Kathryn Whitfield**

***Wow! Fantastic story I thoroughly enjoyed it.***

*Amazing psychological thriller. I loved everything about it, the characters, the setting and the plot, the author kept the suspense throughout the book. I enjoyed the twist in the story, I didn't see it coming.*

*This book should definitely be up for an award and I will be looking to read more from this author in the future.*

Follow Kathryn on Twitter: @kathreenieA

### **Jennifer Stoddart**

*I absolutely loved 'Dear Amy' by Helen Callaghan and I sincerely hope that there are more books to follow from this author. **It was a gripping tale of lost girls twenty years apart and I found the approach taken by the author in telling the tale highly original.** The presentation of the book was excellent - the book was tied up with string and there were two letters inside addressed to Amy (the agony aunt of the title), begging her help to escape a sadistic kidnapper. The story itself was deftly unravelled and I did not foresee the twist. The scenes involving Chris were chilling and showed all too well how easily teenaged girls could be abducted. I found all of the characters believable and I was very happy to have been given this title to review. I would say that anyone who enjoys good crime fiction, with solid plotting, convincing characters and a taste for the darker side of human nature would relish this novel. Thank you for letting me preview it before publication, I wish Helen Callaghan much success in the future!*

### **Sharon Wood**

***I was enthralled by the synopsis of this book and delighted when it arrived intriguingly tied with brown string with two "handwritten" letters from the book.*** *These were the letters sent to the agony aunt of a local newspaper, the "Dear Amy" of the title, seemingly from a teenage girl,*

*kidnapped many years ago and never found, presumed dead.*

*It promised to be a psychological suspense thriller and I thoroughly enjoyed the first half or so of the book. I liked the slightly irreverent character of Margot, the aforementioned column writer, and the author's modern and chirpy way of writing. But then there were a couple of discrepancies (and that immediately puts me on my guard) and then the storyline began to get more and implausible. Describing why would spoil the whole story for anyone about to read it, but for me, it just became too farfetched to be enjoyable.*

### **Tracey Poulter**

*Margot Lewis, the agony aunt 'Amy' for the Cambridge Enquirer, receives a letter from Beth Avery saying that she has been kidnapped – but Beth has been missing for years &, if she is being held captive, how is she getting the letters to Margot? Another girl has recently gone missing and the police are treating her as a runaway but Margot is not so sure...*

***Helen Callaghan has written a superb novel.** She has cleverly constructed the plot and populated it with real characters. **She has mastered the art of allowing the reader to use their imagination to fill in the blanks. It is a true psychological thriller** because the hints you are given are even more menacing than if graphic details were supplied.*

*This doesn't feel like a debut novel – more like a seasoned author with many publications under her belt. Highly recommended*