



## The Absence of Nectar

*Kathy Hepinstall*

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## **The Absence of Nectar** Kathy Hepinstall

If only Alice could get rid of her new stepfather, Simon Jester. No one wants to believe that the pieces of his tragic past don't seem to fit-or that he is trying to poison Alice and her older brother. Until the one night her mother comes in to kiss her goodnight and instead whispers a single word..."RUN."

## **The Absence of Nectar Details**

Date : Published August 27th 2002 by Jove (first published January 1st 2001)

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Author : Kathy Hepinstall

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## From Reader Review The Absence of Nectar for online ebook

### Jean says

I've read historical novels by this author which I liked a lot. I knew this was a coming of age novel when I started it, and I like this genre. It is also a mystery, another favorite genre. However, the premise behind this novel is a bit extreme and an unlikely coincidence is revealed at the end.

I'm being generous giving it \*\*\*.

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### Robert Beveridge says

Hepinstall returns with her second novel, and what a twisted one it is. Part coming-of-age novel, part crazy-preacher novel, part slice-of-life novel (but a slice of the kind of life one finds in, say, Joyce Carol Oates' more depraved characters), and all charming, in the same sort of way Ted Bundy is said to have been charming.

The plot is pretty straightforward (girl finds evidence that her stepfather is trying to kill her), the pace is adequate, the pages turn themselves with relative ease, and Hepinstall keeps us interested enough; all this would make for an average mystery/thriller in most circumstances, but Hepinstall pulls herself one step above by creating characters more memorable than most. The family from *The Hills Have Eyes* adopted a few characters from Steve Aylett's *Bigot Hall* (with a dash of Stewart Home's *Come Before Christ* and *Murder Love* for good measure) and stopped by *Twin Peaks* on their way to Kathy Hepinstall's pen. Among the menagerie to be found within these pages are a brain-damaged dog who spends his days carrying a live toad around in his mouth, a pair of five-year-old twins who are both destined for the Serial Killer Hall of Fame, a teenager confined in a mental ward whose hobby is escaping, and the aforementioned crazy preacher. Set beside them, our narrator, a precocious eleven-year-old with an encyclopedic knowledge of poisons, seems normal.

This is wonderfully fun stuff. Quite highly recommended for those who don't mind their laughter with a deeply disturbing tinge to it. \*\*\*\*

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### Kerry says

I liked it. Not my typical genre, but set in East Texas, author from Austin, was recommended and my interest was peaked. All of the pieces fit very nicely together, too nicely for my taste but still a good read.

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### Marie says

Napínavý p?íb?h, tušení neustále p?ítomného zla, sv?t vid?ný o?ima dít?te, bezmocného v??i zlov?li dosp?lých. Není to úpln? šálek mého ?aje, ale napsané velmi dob?e.

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**Anita says**

This is a weird little book, with weird characters...and I loved it!

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**Jaime says**

Lyrical and haunting; scary, sad, and gorgeous. I loved this book. Hepinstall's best book.

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**Nancy says**

The writing is stilted. Conversation is not realistic

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**Amanda says**

After reading the other two books by Kathy Hepinstall, I was excited about reading this one. Though different from the other two, the book still flows poetically with descriptions of place and time that take the reader back to the early seventies and into the world of a young child. Maybe that's part of why I liked this book so well...it's told from the innocence of a twelve year old but with the knowing of a smart young girl who knows she's in trouble but is fairly helpless to do anything about it.

On a day of picnicking with their mother Meg, Alice and Boone watch as a stranger saves Meg from near drowning. But from the beginning, Alice doesn't trust the man. As he becomes closer to being part of the family, the children find out just how cruel the man is. Each deals with it in their own way...Alice sacrifices things to some invisible God she's unsure about and Boone prays to his the God of heaven, preferring to find the goodness in their new stepfather while Alice just wants him gone.

As the stepfather becomes angrier and more volatile, so too does the premonition that something bad could happen. When their mother one day tells them to run away, they do so in fear of what their stepfather might do. Hiding out by the lake on a hidden island with an teenage girl who escaped from the mental hospital, the two must decide what to do.

As in the other books, there are subtly told twists that make the story even better to read (one I knew soon and one I never saw coming). The only part I had a hard time dealing with was the spousal and child abuse, but I have a hard time with that anyway. For this book, those descriptions were needed to tell the story.

This is definitely one I recommend for anyone.

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**Kay Kay says**

I really liked this book. The characters were interesting and well formed. It moved along at a nice pace, and the story was engaging.

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### **Lena says**

The thing I liked the most was the writing, really different from what I've read so far. The story in itself was interesting and thanks to the said writing I really got caught in the character's point of view, I could read her mind and feel that she felt. The plot twist was an important point for the plot and I think it was well done even though, in my opinion, it was quite predictable. I really liked the suspense, the atmosphere was pretty stressful and the characters were perfectly built.

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### **Venus says**

I read this book years ago and immediately wanted everyone I knew to read it as well. Now I'm reading it once again and I remember why I enjoyed it so much.

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### **Cathe Olson says**

I picked this up by chance at the library book sale last weekend and it was great. The book is about a twisted new stepfather who doesn't like his stepchildren very much (to say the least). It reminded me a bit of some of the evil stepfather movies I've seen but this had the added twist of one of the kids idolizing a teen girl who poisoned her parents who he constantly writes to in prison and tries to make contact with on one of her frequent escapes from a mental institution. Good creepy fun.

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### **Panpanpandy says**

As the survivor of an abusive stepdad of my own, this story resonates with me in a way few stories ever have. I originally picked it up used as a teenager, maybe in some vain hope that it would give me some pointers on how to deal with my own abusive stepfather, and it's even more chilling to re-read as an adult, knowing just how normal Simon's actions seemed to me as a child.

There are parts of the story that seem a bit far-fetched, yes, but more than anything else, this book reads like an abused child's revenge/survival fantasy. There is a part of me that wholly believes that Kathy Hepinstall either has experience with an abusive adult, or is very close to someone in a similar situation. She does an amazing job of showing Alice's steady loss of faith in her god and her mother, and her decline into helplessness and hopelessness. For someone who has experienced a violent, unpredictable stepdad and a passive mother, this was chillingly familiar.

The ending seems a bit rushed, with little more than a list of what happens over a period of time, but it's ultimately quite satisfying. The ending itself is what solidifies my belief in Kathy Hepinstall's experience with abuse; while the story is wonderfully detailed up until that point, painfully familiar to someone with my own background, the "happily ever after" sort of ending speaks far more of wish fulfillment than experience.

A good read for sure, though.

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### **Jeanette Stingley says**

For those of you who are writers, we all know that you must hook your reader within the first few pages to keep the reader turning those pages. With *The Absence of Nectar*, Kathy Hepinstall jumps right into the tragic tale of our narrator, Alice. Alice is 12 but is more mature than most her age. The story begins with a scene of abuse from her step-father, Simon.

After Alice's father leaves his family behind for a new woman, her mother, Meg, falls into a terrible depression and leaves Alice and her brother Boone to fend for themselves. Alice prays for a man everyday to come into their lives to make their mother happy again. Meanwhile, Boone becomes obsessed with a teenage girl who manages to constantly escape from juvenile detention center that she has been placed in for poisoning and killing her parents.

Simon is extremely abusive to the whole family once he makes his way into their lives. I adore how this story was written even though at times it was frustrating because you wanted to reach into the pages and shake the madness from Meg for allowing things to go on or reach into the pages and strangle Simon yourself! I wasn't expecting the twist and turns of the plot. Just when you think things can't get worse, they do. From the start, Alice suspects Simon is trying to poison her and her brother. There are many passages from Alice becoming obsessed with learning of poisons and what symptoms to look for if you are poisoned. Boone tries very hard to see the good in Simon. Boone is always talking of God and how God would want Boone and Alice to love and except Simon.

The story is slow to start but once Boone's letters are answered by Perseley, the escape artist, the story grabs a hold of you and it is hard to put the book down! Normally, I am disappointed with how a story ends. The ending was so so for this. I am glad the story ended the way it did but I was hoping for a little more drama like the rest of the story. Definitely a great book for a lazy weekend read!

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### **Simone Jeffrey says**

Such poetic beauty.

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### **Karis!! says**

Let me talk about this book.

"In the living room, God's Bible sits open on Simon's chair, where he'd been leafing through it, bloody. This part of Texas can't save us. We eat our chicken." - *The Absence of Nectar*.

I devoured this book in a day. The characters are wonderful and well-rounded, the story is so much deeper than you think upon first picking it up, and the setting is perfect. Everything about it pulls you in. Generally, I read fantasy. I've been trying to branch out lately, especially into the Southern Gothic genre, and I am glad

I came across this. I now want to read everything Kathy Hepinstall ever wrote. Her writing is beautiful, poetic, and poignant. This book will stick with me for years to come, and I already want to re-read it.

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### **Christian Engler says**

A multi-layered, rousing novel of suspense that fuses psychological terror and violence with childhood innocence, *The Absence of Nectar* is a novel that is unified by different literary genres that forms a reading experience that is not simply unique, but also intellectually edifying, entertaining and occasionally corrosively comical. The protagonists - Alice and Boone Fendar - could be an updated Texan version of Jem and Scout Finch from *To Kill a Mockingbird*. But their battle is not with the evils of racism and those who are benighted by unbridled hate; it is against an evil of equal horror: Simon Jester, a psychopathic stepfather whose rancorous and injurious deeds knows no bounds. It is the summer, a time of carefree, languorous innocence, a time for swimming, softball, drinking homemade lemonade to gobs of other summer fun - or so one would believe. As life is good for some, it is less so for others, the others being Alice and Boone. The crack-up of their family darts forth when their father abandons them, leaving Meg (the mother) to fend for herself as a beekeeper. But for someone who has consistently been dependent on the economic progression of the husband - the primary bread earner (in this case) - the task of becoming 'career-oriented' or evolving into a 'learned' woman of business, is something less than easy. An emotional struggle ensues within Meg - a battle against depression and all the mental infirmities that commonly strike women who are slowly stripped away of not only their identity and confidence, but most importantly, their perceptions of themselves, their self-worth. She takes drastic suicidal actions to prevent the obvious from occurring. The act fails, but it invokes enough of a scare to keep the family thinly glued together. But it does not last. Hence, things become unhinged, a role inversion happens: Meg becomes vulnerable and dependant while the kids become the caretakers. In order to regain a degree of family normalcy, the kids take their mother to Hollow Cove on Lake Shine, and while there, Meg nearly drowns but is later saved by a stranger who eventually becomes husband #2. As Meg is blind sighted by all that she has endured, she fails to see what is most obvious to her children: Alice, keen in insight, rebellious in manner and Boone, lovingly innocent and somewhat odd, for he has a deep attraction to Persely Snow, a famous teenage murderer with a liking for poisons. The obvious is that Simon Jester has a very questionable past, the death of his wife and 'son.' The latter is a jaw dropping surprise. *The Absence of Nectar* is quirky, because it encompasses crime, coming-of-age cuteness and hard, trim prose. To relegate it as traditional fiction would be inaccurate, for it is mystery, literature, young adult and contemporary - all nicely knitted together - a coming-of-age novel that is not overly imbued with oozing saccharine hyperbole. Fans of Hepinstall's earlier novel, *The House of Gentle Men*, will not be disappointed with *The Absence of Nectar*.

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### **Merline White says**

Fabulous!

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### **Gale says**

EVERY BETRAYAL DESERVES A SACRIFICE!

Simon Jester is deadly serious about teaching children lessons in loyalty. Wives and pets too. No one is exempt in this dizzying novel of insensate bitterness, in which Hepinstall has created a world devoid of the sweetness of human compassion and divine love. All must suffer, for many sacrifices are expected by a jealous man who sees monsters in still waters--whose lurking insanity reaches out with a ripple effect to touch all within his sphere of hatred. Why does no adult realize that a bizarre tempest is brewing in Meg's house? What kind of community forces its children to fight battles for their very survival, completely on their own? Is the sweltering, shimmering heat of Texas vaguely responsible for this microcosm of humanity gone amok?

Meg's bees are not the only ones who require nectar; she herself is emotionally dying after her husband leaves her. But her children, 11-year-old Alice and 13-year-old Boone, are suspicious of their stepfather. Narrated by the cynical sister, this book focuses on the activities and terror of these youngsters over a year--a story about kids but written for adults. It is a tale of distorted and tested faith: Alice sacrifices her possessions to a do-nothing god in the bush, while Boone steadfastly believes in the hope of a forgiving God.

Their mother naively trusts in men, while Simon believes only in his personal avenging power. Unfortunately these fatherless kids serve as catalysts for mayhem; each is privately drawn to freaks of society. Despite the weird family next door, the greatest menace to Meg's home is the monster she invited into their lives. Drowning in Simon's tyranny the family struggles to recognize the truth of their situation, but who will ultimately save the children? Expect swirling tensions as this book hooks you from the first page.

(April 11, 2012.)

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### **Ariane says**

You will love to hate the father in this book. I had a very ragged copy that I got for free from a thrift store. Truly a diamond in the rough. The story is very involved and I could not put it down.

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