

## The Little Snake by A. L. Kennedy

5 stars

An enchanting fable that deserves to become a classic

Mary is a wise, clever, lonely little girl who lives with her parents in a cramped flat with a small rooftop garden. All around her is a fascinating, bustling city that fires her imagination, a city filled with all kinds of wonderfully diverse people, yet the divide between rich and poor is starkly apparent. Into Mary's tiny garden one day comes the little snake, a beautiful golden creature with red eyes like jewels. Although he is proud and boastful, Mary strikes up a friendship with him and names him Lanmo. The little snake, in turn, becomes intrigued and eventually fiercely protective of her, constantly returning to visit her and converse with her as she grows up.

Lanmo had never thought much about humanity before Mary: he acted simply as an agent of death when people's time had come. However, the little snake's friendship with Mary gradually changes his perspective, teaching him about the nature of love, his own ability to love, and the capacity for good in human beings. Over the years, as the world crumbles, and the gulf between rich and poor widens, the little snake will always watch out for Mary, always come back to her, even if one day it may be for the last time.

Combining the magical essence of a fairy tale and the elemental morality of an Aesop fable, *The Little Snake* has all the hallmarks of a literary classic. Written in a captivating, almost poetic prose style that works on many levels, it will have an ageless appeal to children and adults alike. The story and its themes brilliantly encompass a spectrum of searing observations about the human condition. Many of the little snake's encounters are examinations of the darkness of man's heart, exposing humans' greed, cruelty, callousness, selfishness, hypocrisy, and lust for power. Yet Mary and Lanmo's journeys are moving, poignant and heartfelt revelations of the light which is at the core of humanity as well: kindness, generosity, selflessness, sympathy, empathy, compassion, joy, optimism – and, above all, love, which transcends all.

The author acknowledges a debt to Antoine de Saint Exupéry, and the influence and inspiration of the marvellous *The Little Prince* is evident. But *The Little Snake* can easily stand alongside Saint Exupéry's masterpiece. Its deceptively simple, dark and devastating depictions of deprivation, injustice, and man's inhumanity to man are both timely and timeless. However, at the same time, the power of love, beauty, faith and imagination are so vividly expressed – and often with such delightful wit and humour – that the reader cannot help but feel uplifted, leading to a powerful ending that is both heart-breaking and hopeful. A lovely gem of a book.

Arwen Evenstar

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