



# Difficulties with Girls

*Kingsley Amis*

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### **Difficulties with Girls** Kingsley Amis

Over 25 years ago, Kingsley Amis wrote TAKE A GIRL LIKE YOU, a comedy about a lusty young couple, Patrick and Jenny, each engaged with equal ardor in gaining an opposite goal -- he with getting her into bed, she with staying out of it. They both win.

In DIFFICULTIES WITH GIRLS, Jenny and Patrick are back with us. They're older, though not much wiser -- Jenny, devoted but aggrieved; Patrick, boozing and unfaithful. Each lives in a fantasyland projecting life through lenses not calibrated in this world.

"To have said so much about the human condition with such wit and humor is an extraordinary achievement ...even for Kingsley Amis." (The Sunday Telegraph, London)

### **Difficulties with Girls Details**

Date : Published January 1st 1988 by Summit Books

ISBN : 9780671675820

Author : Kingsley Amis

Format : Unknown Binding 276 pages

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## From Reader Review Difficulties with Girls for online ebook

### Calvin says

I've never enjoyed the disconnect that Amis had with his characters in his later work. Especially here when the same characters were the leads in a novel years before when Amis wrote with a good deal more wit.

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### Jerroleen says

Amis tries to be so clever, but he's no Jane Austen or Evelyn Waugh. This book was icky. Really. It made me feel icky. I stopped reading it about halfway, even though I had a feeling the ending would turn out okay. The characters were all people I had no desire to read anything more about.

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### Brad says

Many good one-liners, but not worth it for all that. I can't help but consider Amis's view of human relationships about the most depressing thing ever. The ending made me want to curl up into a little ball and cry. Don't bother -- only for hard-core Amis fans.

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### Tortla says

My conclusion (10 pages in): I just don't care.

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### Jim says

When last I saw the characters Patrick Standish and Jenny Bunn, they were just starting their relationship in Kingsley Amis's **Take a Girl Like You**.

Now, years later, they are stilled married, but childless due to Jenny's miscarriage. They've moved to a maisonette at 1 Lower Ground in London. Jenny is still the same sweetheart; and Patrick, the same opportunistic whorson. Jenny knows this and sorrowfully reproves his husband for his erring ways. Being in the book publishing business, Patrick goes to an inordinate number of parties where opportunities for excessive drinking and sexual provender abound.

Many of his problems are no farther than a few feet from his front door. His new neighbor Tim Valentine is a clueless young man who is mildly confused about his own sexuality and seems to pop in at least once a day. Next door are Eric and Stevie, a gay couple who are incessantly fighting each other. Also nearby is Wendy Porter-King, with whom Patrick has a brief but intense fling.

I have always enjoyed Amis's novels, even when they are not the best. I preferred **Take a Girl Like You**, but *Difficulties with Girls* is not at all bad. By now I have read almost half of his novels and will probably read more in the coming year.

## Mkfs says

It's a Kingsley Amis alright.

There's not really much to say about this one. The witty repartee is, the brutal asides are, and the air of misanthropy lingers long after, as in an elevator. The characters: real, pathetic, almost despicable. A few early caricatures turn out to be (surprisingly) fully-fleshed.

Amis tends to write most of his comic asides from the viewpoint of his main character/surrogate, in this case the of-course-drunk-but-not-as-bad-as-his-neighbors-or-colleagues Patrick. As usual, Amis allows for this character's general ignorance or short-sightedness and things turn out somewhat differently than telegraphed early on.

Expect serious alcoholism, a complexity to more characters than you'd expect, some overlong hand-wringing over cheating or thinking of cheating or even just getting it off and who with, and of course the good ol' K-A wit.

A couple of samples, for those who have read no Kingsley Amis:

"Now while I remember, you're to remember, if by any chance you do get offered a drink up there, grab it whether you want it or not. I'll find a use for it, I promise you." - to his wife, on the way to a party thrown by his employer

"He felt content, or more accurately, a good deal further from either vexation or panic than usual."

And one last one, on choice of drink:

"According to Jenny's father, whisky and water meant a whisky-drinker, but gin and water meant a serious drinker. Drunk for a penny, dead drunk for a tuppence."

Ah, gin, much-maligned back in the days when it didn't cost - what is it now, seven dollars? - a bottle.

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## Realini says

Difficulties with Girls, by Kingsley Amis  
10 out of 10

Kingsley Amis is a genius, his books are a delight, he is among my top favorite writers and has rightly been considered the best comedy author of at least the last half of the last century.

Difficulties with Girls has the same sophisticated, amusing, insightful, satirical, penetrating style that we can admire in

Lucky Jim, Girl, 20, Ending Up - all reviewed at [realini.blogspot.ro](http://realini.blogspot.ro).

The main characters here are Jenny and her husband Patrick Standish. Although the man is definitely genial, intelligent, creative and male readers would surely identify with him on many levels, Jenny is the real Wonder Woman.

She has to - well, not really, she does not have to - put up with a spouse that is a serial philanderer and furthermore acts like a fool, as she says.

Even when driving their Mini car - and on multiple other occasions - there are incidents when it is so evident that the man cannot abstain from assessing, desiring the ample or less prominent chest of women and alas, often go to bed with them.

The hero works in a printing house, where Simon Giles is his boss - at least for a good while - and the man interested in more than a business relationship as becomes clear at one stage in the narrative.

He does not want to become intimate with his employee - a man he had hired after just a couple of hours and who used to be a teacher of Latin - but thinks coital closeness between Patrick and his wife would bring peace to his home.

This is not the only ménage a trois explored in the story, albeit let us not disclose if and what happens in these planned threesome or Devils' triangles in the language of the now Supreme Court Judge who was such a ridiculous, loathsome character in his youth and during hearings...Kavanaugh.

The philanderer of the novel is also a very heavy drinker, he had accepted his new position after consuming so much alcohol as to doubt what happened after the fact.

Timothy Valentine enters the frame - a character that pretends this is his name, although we would learn that it is just an alias.

Tim has had Difficulties with Girls...he is actually the first one to mention the phrase.

He has abandoned his wife and seems to be affected by the Coolidge Effect - this was an American president who joked about the rooster and the hens during a visit to a farm.

Nevertheless the analyst that is supposed to be treating him - who should be shot or at least jailed in the view of the Standishes - purports that the Difficulties are a result of homosexuality.

Tim becomes a regular visitor and a friend of the heroes, actually moving into an apartment nearby and then meeting at one point first Stevie and then Eric.

Stevie and Eric are two gay men who live together in the apartment next to the Standish family, from where frequent noises are heard.

Eric refers to his partner as "she" attributing to "her" female traits, shortcomings, exaggerated emotions, melodrama, multiple scenes of jealousy.

Indeed, when Tim first enters the apartment of the couple, where Eric's boss was visiting with his wife, a pathetic scene ensues.

The drama, conflicts between the two flamboyant gay men reach a climax when a stabbing takes place.

Meanwhile, Jenny receives a visit from Tim's sister, another heavy drinker, who explains the real situation of her brother, the abandoned wife, his job as a lawyer and other details.

Patrick sleeps with the wife of another neighbor, Harold, and when he tells his wife the truth, she is more infuriated by that than by the mere knowledge and a silence over the matter.

Before this gratuitous and offensive confession, Jenny had understood that her spouse has slept or is about to with this woman.

Difficulties with Girls is a complex, glorious, fabulous chef d'oeuvre.

## Tony says

94. DIFFICULTIES WITH GIRLS. (1988). Kingsley Amis. \*\*\*.

Amis was one of the premier comic writers of his day, often associated with Waugh and his school. He won the Booker prize for the novel before this one, "The Old Devils." And was the father of Martin Amis. In this book, he has taken his crew of literary characters and shaken them up in a box to see what comes out. This one definitely reminded me of "Peyton Place," though set in London and peopled with men and women allied with the publishing industry. The story itself is about several couples who all move into a relatively small neighborhood. They are very modern couples and open to experimentation. Unfortunately, nothing stays secret forever, and troubles begin. The dialog among the characters is witty and, often, learned. I'd love to quote lots of it, but have restrained myself. Needless to say, Amis has an acute ear for language, and a clever mind when it comes to repartee. All of this being said, this did not turn out to be one of his better books.

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## Chris Taylor says

This book draws some very authentic characters and follows them through a chunk of their lives in 1960's London. It feels a little like a period piece. The themes feel dated - do we think of adultery in the same way as people like this did in the sixties or seventies? - and the lives that Amis is describing are engaging but don't seem to be conveying anything urgent or necessary. It seems that the main male character, who is an absolute cad, is let off a bit too easily here. Still, it wasn't boring. The dialogue in particular is very well-written and funny.

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## Stephen Bywater says

Meandering

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## Greg says

I made it 30 pages or so into this and just wasn't drawn into it at all. Maybe it was the setting or the style, but life's too short (and my to-read list is too long) to put up with books that aren't gripping.

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## Sa says

"I think that trip's going to be what we call a notional benefit, something they tell you when you start off you might get and then phase out before it happens."

Kingsley Amis explains the misleading praise on the back of the book.

This was a book I chose purely by title: it sounded comedic and vapid, much like most movies starring Meg Ryan/Jennifer Aniston, and I wanted something similarly simple, mindless, and happily-ever-after. A quote from the back says the book is about a man falling in love with his wife. Because of that, I put it in a romance bookshelf, but the book has little romance: It really more like a man grudgingly settling.

The main character Patrick Standish is unrelatable and unlikable. The plot focuses on his uncontrollable selfishness via various liaisons with married women. When not in a clinch or drowning his self-made difficulties in alcohol, he speaks of his colleagues and friends contemptuously, save for a few which he mocks but mostly tolerates. At one point, he proposes to equalize his marriage/guilt by setting his neglected wife, Jenny, up with an extramarital affair. Throughout the book, one hopes for his redemption, but in the end all transgressions are merely forgiven with a conveniently-timed conception by his wife.

Jenny as a main female character in a time where feminism was in its second wave does the movement no favors. She opts for a part-time job in order to have more time to play house and please her husband. Her main concerns are dealing with Patrick's infidelities/idiocy, and coping with her potential infertility. I hold nothing against a woman who feels sorrow at not being able to have a child, but it is hard to fathom a woman who wants to raise a family with a whiny, distracted boor. Still, the miracle marriage-saving pregnancy speaks more of the author's lack of planning, or lack of comprehension of relationships, more than the character's moral fiber.

Near the end, she finally gives Patrick an ultimatum, but it is quickly forgotten in the explosive climax of a sub-plot, and afterwards the aforementioned pregnancy is discovered and hope is only temporarily renewed: "She was going to have him all to herself for at least three years, probably more like five, and a part of him for ever, and now she could put it all out of her mind." This is quite possibly the most sickening, disappointing final line of a book I have ever read.

The supporting cast of the book is colorful and initially endearing, but overall stupidity and lack of foresight makes them all fascinating in the way of a particularly gruesome car accident: Patrick's boss is miserly and offers his bored wife to any who will take her; a new neighbor leaves his wife in order to "try" homosexuality; more neighbors (also homosexual) spar dramatically and incessantly; even more neighbors are concerned with appearing well-off and worldly. It is as if Amis drew stereotypes and cliches out of a hat to make ultimate trash.

After finishing the book, I learned it was the followup to *Take A Girl Like You*. The younger Jenny and Patrick struggle over her desire to maintain her virginity, until he finally takes advantage of her while she is drunk. She leaves him, but she obviously forgives him as they reunite and marry. To know that he relentlessly pursued her, but then eventually grew bored is depressing. Reality is often tragic and confusing, but these two are just plain thick. There is no lesson or moral to be learned by their story, save that trust is immaterial. It's a shame, as I really did enjoy the writing style: dialogue-driven and matter-of-fact.

In short: the book is set in the sixties (though written in the eighties), and tries to give off a socially progressive and tolerant tone, but the author's own stunted knowledge and simplistic interpretation of homosexuality and the female mind make this book invariably dated and offensive. I won't be sad to dump it through the library drop-slot.

## **Paul E. Morph says**

'Difficulties With Girls' revisits Jenny (née Bunn) and Patrick Standish eight years after the conclusion of 'Take a Girl Like You' (it was written almost thirty years later) and for the first half of the book I had written it off as an entirely pointless sequel written by an author who seemed to have lost most of his wit.

In the second half, however, the scales fell from my eyes as I started to put together the actual message of the book, rather than the various horrific messages the characters were spouting.

Amis gets a lot of stick for being misogynist, racist and homophobic, and I'm not even going to attempt to determine how much of that was actually true as, quite frankly, I don't have nearly enough evidence one way or the other, but it would be a mistake to make the assumption that the characters in his books are voicing his own views. They put forward many completely conflicting viewpoints for a start, so it's hard to identify which side of the argument the author actually supports.

The message of the book, when boiled down to brass tacks, seems (to me, anyway; YMMV) not to be an attack on any one section of society but a despairing sigh over the mess society is in as a whole... and it's difficult to argue with that, wherever you happen to sit on the political spectrum. What Amis is saying, to my ears, is that, wherever one may be on the sexual/gender scale, we're all human and that means we're all deeply flawed and the world we inhabit reflects that.

Is it possible the liberal side of me is making excuses for an author whose work I enjoy? Ah, it's possible, I suppose; I too am only human. Whatever you might think of its message, though, it's undeniable that this book is exceptionally well-written and that there's more going on in here than is immediately obvious.

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## **Margaret Vincent says**

not an easy read, but truly compelling dialogue.

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## **Deborah Wickham says**

Nasty little book full of sexist and homophobic tropes.  
It says a lot that the only character I gave a shit about was the cat that went missing. I don't even like cats.

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