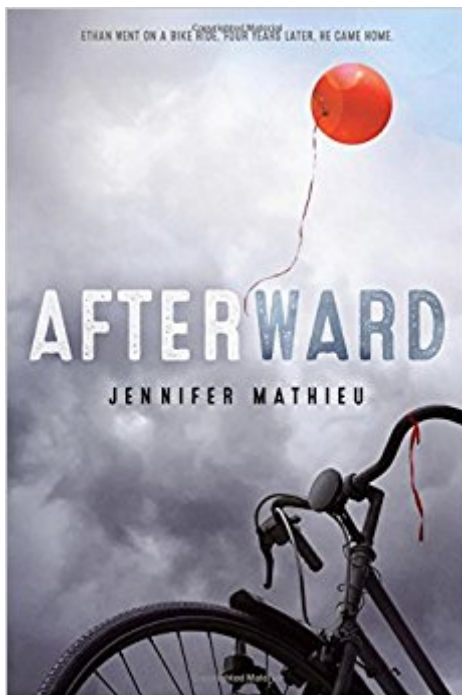


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Afterward: A Novel



Synopsis

A tragic kidnapping leads to an unlikely friendship in this novel about finding light in the midst of darkness from the author of *The Truth About Alice*. When eleven-year-old Dylan Anderson is kidnapped, his subsequent rescue leads to the discovery of fifteen-year-old Ethan Jorgensen, who had gone on a bike ride four years earlier and had never been seen again. Dylan's older sister, Caroline, can't help but wonder what happened to her brother, who has nonverbal autism and is not adjusting well to life back home. There's only one person who knows the truth: Ethan. But Ethan isn't sure how he can help Caroline when he is fighting traumatic memories of his own captivity. Both Caroline and Ethan need a friend, however, and their best option just might be each other.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Gr 9 Up—Kidnapped 11-year-old Dylan Anderson has been found after a harrowing four days; along with him is Ethan Jorgensen, 15, who has been missing four years— from the same neighborhood. Caroline, Dylan's 16-year-old sister, is desperate to help her brother with autism work through his trauma, but he only seems to be getting worse. She wishes her parents would see that Dylan needs professional help, but they are too busy fighting to notice. Caroline seeks out the only other person who might know why her brother is so hard to reach—Ethan. The author of *Devoted* and *The Truth About Alice* writes another electrifying tale of self-discovery and the powerful effect relationships have on the human mind. Mathieu takes great effort to point out the complicated consequences of blaming the victim through Ethan's capable psychiatrist, Dr.

Greenberg, and maintains the most important message of the book – the abuser is always the one to blame. She also switches the perspectives between Ethan and Caroline so readers can empathize with both aspects of tragedy: the victims and their families. Each character is portrayed with an aching sincerity throughout the novel, and as in real life, the flaws and quirks imbued in each person's struggle with their lot in life make for a compelling story. VERDICT In a social networking world where debates about abuse and victimization are widespread, this is an important addition to any YA collection. – Michael Marie Jacobs, Darlington School, GA

"A thoughtfully rendered story of the healing power of friendship in the wake of trauma, *Afterward* is equal parts hopeful, moving, and nuanced." – Julie Murphy, author of *Side Effects May Vary* and New York Times bestseller *Dumplin'* "Afterward is a brave story about the transcendent power of friendship, told with remarkable grace. I became utterly engrossed in the beautifully drawn lives and minds of Ethan and Caronline, and the sensitive, truthful depiction of the bond that begins to heal them both." – Ava Dellaira, author of *Love Letters to the Dead* "Heartbreaking and heart mending, *Afterward* is a beautifully crafted novel that shows the power of hope and the resilience of one incredible boy and the people who care about him. Jennifer Mathieu has again demonstrated the complexity and strength of survivors in an authentic and compassionate way." – Christa Desir, author of *Bleed Like Me* and *Fault Line* "Afterward is a perceptive depiction of recovery from a trauma most of us have only read about in the news. Fans of Jennifer Mathieu's earlier books should be ecstatic: this is her best one yet." – Cammie McGovern, author of *Say What You Will* and *A Step Toward Falling*

Afterward is the amazing story of two families that are given a second chance with loved ones they feared were lost for good. It's the dream ending for families who have had to experience their own abduction story. And while the return of Ethan and Dylan seems like the perfect ending, it's just the beginning for this story. The road Ethan and Caroline travel, each with their own trials, is not a smooth one. Yet, they are quite lucky to have each other, even if it seems like their pairing would cause more problems than good. Mathieu does an excellent job weaving the before and afters together. We don't spend a lot of time in the past, aside from watching as Ethan heals through vivid flashbacks, but it's enough to paint an unhappy picture of what the two boys had to go through before their rescue. Mathieu keeps the subject matter PG for the most part but the story itself could serve as a trigger for some so use your own judgement before reading. I was sucked into the story and invested in

Ethan's healing and for the most part as the story drew to an end I felt the satisfaction in knowing that our characters would be okay. I do wish that we could have had a more definitive answer for Dylan but I know that the book was too short to really dive in deep with his healing journey. This is definitely the type of book that has me holding my babies a little tighter as I tuck them in at night.

Grade: C+ Caroline's younger, autistic brother returns from being kidnapped, but can't tell anyone what happened due to his profound limitations. With Dylan, sixteen-year-old Ethan, who was taken four years earlier, is finally rescued. Attempting to understand Dylan, Caroline befriends Ethan and the two connect on a level only they understand. I love Jennifer Mathieu's writing. She creates characters with great voices. Her writing is crisp, clean and engaging. I love that she does her research. She portrayed Ethan's therapy in an authentic, yet interesting manner and provides no quick recovery for his trauma. Her attention to psychological detail was flawless. I was shocked and disappointed to reach 78% on my Kindle only to turn the page to the next chapter and see Author's Note. AFTERWORD just stopped. The novel didn't feel complete. AFTERWARD switched POVs between Caroline and Ethan, although the story was clearly his. He was the more developed character. I liked Caroline, but never really felt her as a character. I'll read anything Mathieu writes, but AFTERWARD is not her best work.

Jennifer knocked it out of the park with this one. As a public school teacher, I frequently work with students who have suffered trauma. Many of my students are frightened and distrustful of mental health care providers. The author has done her research, not only to depict trauma sufferers with realism and sensitivity, but to show the therapy and healing process in a positive (but always accurate) light. I have so much appreciation for the depth and thoughtfulness she has shown in her writing, and its potential for reaching some of my most vulnerable students. In addition to the skillful portrayal of trauma and recovery, Afterward tells a good story. It takes some solid writing skills to tell an interesting story about the aftermath of a disaster, instead of the disaster itself. I cared about the characters, and I cared about their relationships. Highly recommended.

This was a great story about the aftermath of two separate child abductions. The plot was intriguing, with well-drawn characters that I wanted to learn more about, and good pacing. It was one of those books that I picked up and had a hard time putting down.

Well written and researched. I found the back and forth between characters easy to follow and a nice blend. I wanted to keep reading, to know what happened to each character. I enjoyed this very much.

After reading *Devoted* by Jennifer Mathieu earlier this year, I knew I had to read her new release *Afterward*, and was very excited to receive a review copy from the publisher. *Afterward* immediately gripped me with its story. We follow a dual perspective between two teenagers, Caroline and Ethan. Caroline's younger brother was kidnapped, and when the police find him, another boy, Ethan, who had gone missing four years ago was discovered in the same home. Caroline desperately wants to find out what happened to Dylan, her brother, during the days he was gone. Dylan is autistic, and cannot communicate with words, but it is clear he suffered from something very traumatic. Thus, Caroline makes it her mission to befriend Ethan to see if she can help Dylan. When you pair this fascinating story with Mathieu's writing style, you are in for a real treat. I really love how Mathieu's writing captivates me as a reader. There is something so easy about the writing it is not overly flowery, but it's also not too simplistic. The writing flows really well and keeps me turning pages quickly to find out what happens next in the story. Plus, I was sucked into the plot from page one because I, just like Caroline, wanted to know what Ethan and Dylan went through with their kidnapper. Moreover, I really appreciate the research that I can tell went into this novel. I can feel how the story comes to life with the careful attention to detail, and the effort Mathieu puts in to create an authentic story. For example, it meant a lot to me that Dylan has low-functioning autism, and that it is represented very well. It is rare to see autistic characters in books, and I think it is important to create awareness and build empathy through the stories we read. Similarly, I think it was great that we got to see how Ethan and his family are rebuilding their lives with the help of therapists. Although what Ethan goes through is extremely rare, getting a glimpse into his therapy sessions normalizes it for others who may be afraid to seek help. The only thing I did not enjoy so much about *Afterward* is the ending. I was a bit underwhelmed with it, as I expected the story to go one way, but instead it focuses on something else. While I won't discuss this in detail due to spoilers, I do want to mention that I wish the book went a bit deeper into what Ethan went through during his four years in captivity. That being said, I really enjoyed this book, and highly recommend it. If you are looking for a gripping young adult contemporary that is not focused on romance, *Afterward* is a great choice. I fell in love with the characters and cared so deeply for them from page one. I know I will continue to pick up the books that Mathieu writes in the future, as they

are truly something different in the young adult section today.*This review originally posted on Adventures in Polishland

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