



The Accidental

By *Ali Smith*

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The Accidental By Ali Smith

Filled with Ali Smith's trademark wordplay and inventive storytelling, here is the dizzyingly entertaining, wickedly humorous story of a mysterious stranger whose sudden appearance during a family's summer holiday transforms four variously unhappy people. Each of the Smarts—parents Eve and Michael, son Magnus, and the youngest, daughter Astrid—encounter Amber in his or her own solipsistic way, but somehow her presence allows them to see their lives (and their life together) in a new light. Smith's narrative freedom and exhilarating facility with language propel the novel to its startling, wonderfully enigmatic conclusion.

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The Accidental By Ali Smith Bibliography

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

Before writing *The Accidental*, Ali Smith wrote *Hotel World*, shortlisted for both the Orange Prize and the Man Booker Prize, and several short story collections. Her work is absolutely original, with a trademark quirky style, with whole passages that seem to have been bound into the wrong book and occasional historical asides completely outside the narrative line. Don't be fooled; with Smith, every word has a purpose.

Amber is the catalyst who makes the novel happen. She appears on the doorstep of the Smart's rented summer cottage in Norfolk, England, barefoot and unexpected. Eve Smart, a third-rate author suffering writer's block, believes that she is a friend of her husband's. Michael is a womanizing University professor, but he doesn't usually drag his quarry home. He thinks that she must be a friend of Eve's. Everyone is politely confused and Amber is invited to dinner. She is a consummate liar and manipulator who manages to seduce everyone in the family in some significant way.

Magnus, Eve's 17-year-old son from a former marriage and Astrid, her 12-year-old daughter, are easy prey. Magnus is in despair. He played a prank on a classmate and it went horribly wrong when she killed herself because of the humiliation it caused. He cannot shake the guilt and is about to hang himself from the shower rod when Amber walks into the bathroom, the perfect *deus ex machina*. She bathes him and takes him back downstairs, announcing that she found him trying to kill himself. Everyone titters. Could it be possible? This is a recurring question as Amber's behavior becomes more and more outrageous. Is this really happening, or is it some family-wide delusion? To add to the mystery, there is a Rashomon-like character to the story in that the same events are recalled by the Smarts through their own filters.

This is a completely engrossing novel that raises as many questions as it answers. --*Valerie Ryan*

From Publishers Weekly

Starred Review. While the Smarts are a happy, prosperous British family on the surface, underneath they are as friable as a Balkan republic. Eve suffers from a block about writing yet another of her popular *Genuine Article* books (a series of imaginary reconstructions of obscure, actual figures from the past). Michael, her English professor husband, is a philanderer whose sexual predation on his students has reached critical mass. Teenaged Magnus, Eve's son by first husband Adam, is consumed by guilt around a particularly heinous school prank. And Astrid, Eve and Adam's daughter, is a 12-year-old channeling the angst of a girl three years older. Into this family drops one Amber MacDonald, a mysterious stranger who embeds herself in the family's summer rental in Norfolk and puts them all under her bullying spell. By some collective hallucination—one into which Smith (*Hotel World*) utterly and completely draws the reader—each Smart sees Amber as a savior, even as she violates their codes and instincts. So sure-handed are Smith's overlapping descriptions of the same events from different viewpoints that her simple, disquieting story lifts into brilliance. When Eve finally breaks the spell and kicks Amber out, it precipitates a series of long overdue jolts that destroys the family's fraught equilibrium, but the shock of Smith's facility remains. (*Jan.*) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

From [The New Yorker](#)

Smith's book, which has just won Britain's Whitbread Novel Award, concerns an attractive stranger who shows up on the doorstep of an unhappy family and is unquestioningly taken in. The visitor, armed with a perfect combination of candor, free-spiritedness, and rough love, proceeds to manipulate each of her hosts.

Just as abruptly, and, perhaps, predictably, she disappears. We never learn much about her—her only purpose, it seems, was to jolt the family members out of their respective messes—and her righteous self-assurance can get tiresome. But the novel is saved by its skillful and touching rendering of the mental state of each family member. Smith's well-honed, even obsessive prose gives a feeling of eavesdropping on her characters' innermost thoughts.

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Users Review

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