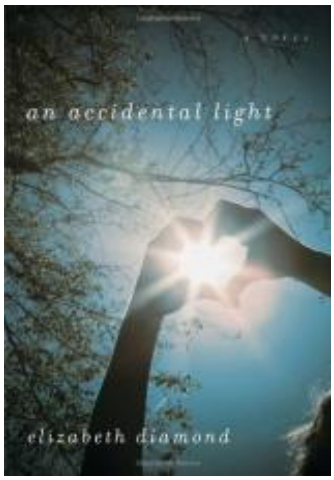
An Accidental Light

by Elizabeth Diamond



About the Book

On a quiet road just outside London, in the blue half-light of dusk, a fatal car accident takes the life of thirteen-year-old Laura Jenkins, and her death changes the lives of two families forever. For Jack Philips, a married police officer with two small daughters, the consequences of that evening behind the wheel will force him to reassess everything he loves and to confront long-buried secrets from his past. For Lisa Jenkins, the loss of her daughter seems unbearable. As she struggles to find the courage to rebuild her life, her husband grows ever more reclusive, and Laura?s presence continues to haunt her. Eventually, Lisa?s and Jack?s paths cross in surprising and shocking ways as they both try to regain their footing.

In this poignant and heartwarming debut novel, Elizabeth Diamond explores the ripple effects of a single moment of tragedy --- the journey from guilt to peace, from vengeance to forgiveness, from sorrow to hope --- and even, ultimately, to joy. **An Accidental Light** is a tender and deeply affecting story that is not easily forgotten.

Discussion Guide

1. Consider what Diamond writes on page 154: ?The right direction. How do we ever know what that is? We drive home from work one day, taking the usual route, and a kid runs out from behind a bus, and the right direction becomes the wrong one?You think you?re on one path, and then you?re on another. You?re lost. You may never find your way again.? What choices have Jack and Lisa made in shaping their adult life and how do these choices reflect their childhood experiences?

2. Lisa and Jack are two strangers linked by a sad twist of fate. Consider how something as arbitrary as running into the street at dusk can change everything. Examine chance and free will as it is portrayed in the book in that it is often not about the event but how you choose to deal with it.

3. The scent of gas triggers Jack?s memory of his mother?s suicide. Discuss memory, childhood trauma, and coping mechanisms, as they relate to events in the book.

4. Compare Jack?s experience of his mother?s suicide with Lisa?s loss of her father when she was sixteen. How does each character deal with abandonment? How are the relationships with their remaining relatives similar and different?

5. Lisa?s therapist speaks of the many stages working from grief toward peace, while Jack?s depression seems to come in waves, as trauma from his childhood mixes with his present crisis. Consider the different types of sadness that they suffer and how they manifest.

6. In his journal, Jack addresses his therapist, while Lisa writes to her dead daughter. What does this reflect about their coping mechanisms? About grief?

7. In comparison to Jack?s and Lisa?s forms of coping with grief, how does Derek deal with his emotions? How does Sam deal with the upset in their lives? Are her actions justified? Overall, consider how such life-changing events can bring people together or drive them apart. Compare Jack, Lisa, Derek, Sam and their reactions.

8. Forgiveness plays a major role in the grieving process in that the main characters must not only forgive each other for their actions, but themselves as well. How does forgiveness help Jack and Lisa move on with their lives? How do Derek and Sam's actions fall within this theme? In the end, what does the novel say about one's need to forgive?

9. In the book, the blue light of dusk recurs as a symbol for the divide between day and night, between sleep and wakefulness, between sanity and insanity. How does the author use color to show the many shades of human emotion?

10. The book is set in England. Identify any cultural differences that you find relevant to the story, and how mental illness might be treated differently in other countries.

11. Laura appears in the same outfit ? a pink anorak with a fur trimmed hood ? to both Jack and Lisa. Can you explain this? Do you believe that her spirit physically manifests in these pages or is it just a coincidence that they both envision the same ghost?

12. How is Laura portrayed? Is she a ghost? Or could she be a physical manifestation of grief and trauma?

13. Consider the ending. Does Laura save Bethan?s life or does Bethan jump out of the way?

Author Bio

Elizabeth Diamond lives in Devon, England. She received a British Arts Council grant for **An Accidental Light** and her second novel, **Underwater**, is forthcoming from Picador in the UK.

Critical Praise

"Diamond's remarkable talent lies in the engaging immediacy of her characters' voices: we find ourselves compelled by the mundane details of people pulling their lives together"

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