



DOMESTIC APPARITION

A Novel by Meg Tuite

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Review by Susan Tepper

Drawing on what seems to be a Catholic upbringing, author Meg Tuite brings to the pages of *Domestic Apparition* a family of seven, who, though deeply quirky and more than somewhat disturbed, held me in captive awe. These seven live within violent extremes. Fights and conspiracies, conspiracy theories, loom. A nun-teacher consults with a stuffed reindeer then doles out punishments and beatings ac-

cordingly. Dead saints rule the moment. Catholicism hangs heavy like an impending cloud burst on what should've been a good day.

And this family collects things. All kinds of things. Some psychologists claim that people who cannot connect will collect.

The father is a rabid control freak who collects souls. He's pretty much gotten his wife's, and seems hell-bent on getting the kid's souls, too. The eldest sister, Stephanie, collects credit cards and drivers licenses that belong to other women. Nathan, the brother, is a walking factoid-machine, a sort of talking encyclopedia.

Our narrator, a girl named Michelle, collects dead insects: moths, spiders, flies, beetles, butterflies. Keeping them in her room along with a microscope, she is of the belief: "Truth demanding, at the very least, a static eye."

Like the rest of her family, she doesn't so much look at the world as scrutinize every facet. The world being a place to control. Because without control there can only be anarchy. The father has clearly established that in his actions and intentions, causing chaos even when his wife attempts to slice a simple tomato.

One night, Michelle, with her microscopic probe-brain, slips out of the house to measure a neighbor's (Mrs. Sullivan's) lawn using a yard-stick and flashlight. The girl concludes: "Twenty dandelions/square foot x 240 square feet = 4,800 dandelions to be picked."

In her personal belief system, people act on impulses having nothing to do with the actual act of what they're doing. "I have been watching for Mrs. Sullivan from my window the last three nights. I contend that long after all the neighbors are snoring and drooling as one, Mrs. Sullivan

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creeps out in her bathrobe with a headlamp and slides weed clumps back into holes like golf balls. I speculate that Mrs. Sullivan keeps herself occupied at night with this dubious diversion to spare herself from the slovenly clutches of fat man Sullivan, who would have squashed her by now, like he did his first wife..."

Danger, hilarity, violence, insanity ensues. These are tight-fisted brains at work, coiled springs, acting and reacting with little more than the desire to gain control over their mortality. To be spared the horrible death of Pope Formosus. The exhumed pope who Nathan tells the class had three of his fingers cut off before he got tossed into a river.

Domestic Apparition should become a modern classic. It is a novel for our times.