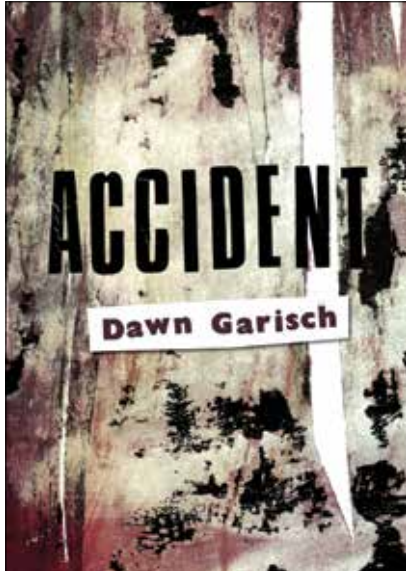


BOOK REVIEW



Accident

**By Dawn Garisch. Cape Town:
Modjaji Books, 2017. ISBN: 978-1-
928215-33-2**

Dawn Garisch lives in the Cape Peninsula, and is a prize-winning writer of poetry, novels and non-fiction. She is also a general medical practitioner.

This book is set in the Cape Peninsula, and the main interaction happens between Carol, a general practitioner, and her son Max, a performance artist. Carol is an over-concerned, rather obsessive mother and doctor, who (like many in the profession) pays little heed to her own health. Max, in a very different way, also pays no heed to his own health (or safety) while attempting to bring an awareness of significant problems to his viewers' attention. Dawn's description of Carol's Surgery will evoke a sense of familiarity in fellow practitioners.

The title, *Accident*, refers, I assume, to five different episodes involving Max or Carol, and through the course of the book one becomes aware of, and sympathetic to, the very different (from each other) ways in which this mother and son live their lives. Problems that engross her do not seem significant to him, and she initially finds it difficult to value his take on life. Over the course of the book, this changes, but in unexpected ways.

By its nature, performance art is transgressive and in your face, and it is this quality that makes one wince while reading the novel, but also, if one is open to it, reassess one's own moral certitude. Why Max has chosen to live on the edge in terms of his

art becomes clearer late in the book, and no moral judgement is given by the author. This gives thinking readers the opportunity to react freely to the material. The book leaves a number of issues opaque, which enhances the engaged reader's enjoyment and will generate discussion, such as around how the psychiatrist-in-training behaves, why Carol has never married and how the accident involving his friend affected Max's choice of career.

The author mostly leaves space for the reader's imagination, and the way the story ends is both unexpected and powerful. Although surprising from what we have come to know of the characters, it is congruent with the changes that have been wrought in both Carol and Max through their consciously suffering in their various ways.

This is a good read and one that will get you thinking about both art and medicine. It is also one that will touch readers emotionally, so, for the ending at least, have some tissues handy.

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