



THE ACCIDENTAL TOURIST by Anne Tyler  
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A book review by Evelyn C. Leeper  
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When I returned from Readercon this year, I had a huge reading list of all the suggestions made by people there. Oddly, enough, though I'm sure this book was mentioned, it was on that list. Then I found myself with some time to kill in a friend's bathroom, and this book was there....

The characters are certainly interesting: Mason, a man who writes travel books for people who hate to travel, telling them where they can get decaffeinated coffee in Paris and what restaurants in Tokyo have Sweet 'n' Low, his sister Rose who has even more of a penchant for organizing things than he does, and Muriel, the free-spirited dog trainer who suddenly comes into Mason's life. What makes it hard to write this review is that the characters are so like me and people that I know. One character, for example, is described as having a kitchen so alphabetized that you would find the any poison next to the allspice. Well, I don't alphabetize to that extent, but I must admit that I \_ d \_ o alphabetize my spice rack. (Well, how else could anyone find anything? I mean, all those little jars look alike.)

Muriel is exactly the opposite. Living a life of refined chaos, she buys her clothing in thrift stores and makes a living at about a half dozen jobs, including dog training and errand running. Her son Alexander is just about the age that Mason's son Ethan would have been, and Mason is attracted to him as much as to Muriel. But he still yearns for the comfortable and ordered life that he had before all this happened.

This book is not so much about what happens, but about how people react to what happens. The disorderliness of the universe is contrasted with Mason's desire for a plan for everything. His life is changed by chance happenings, accidental meetings, odd turnings. The ending is not pat, not neat, but it is realistic. Few recent books that I have read can equal this as a study in character. And for people who think of themselves as organized, this book is a must.