



# The English American

*Alison Larkin*

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The English American: A Novel

## The English American Details

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Author : Alison Larkin

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# From Reader Review The English American for online ebook

## Elisha (Iishie) says

I liked the premise & the first chapter pulled me in, but the rest of the book left me wanting. I only kept reading because I actually liked Pippa. Too bad I didn't like many of the supporting characters... They seemed one dimensional & irritated me.

Plus, I get it, Americans cannot "make tea." Too bad this does not go over well for this Southern-Floridian raised Irish-American who won't touch anything but Twinning's Earl Grey w/ milk & sugar or honey, please. The English-American "differences" were not funny enough for me. Also, there's too much political commentary for a light read, imo. (Disclaimer- this is not my favorite genre.)

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## Judy says

Pippa Dunn was born in America but adopted by well-to-do British parents who gave her a wonderful home and life, but as an adult she craves knowledge of who she "really" is and seeks out her birth parents. She finds a crazy mother living in Georgia and working as an art promoter, and a mysterious father who might be a spy, might work for the CIA, or might be making money illegally from foreign governments. She quickly identifies with their looks and quirks, only to find out that she is more different from them than she thought.

After having read great reviews of this book and enjoying the beginning, I was disappointed by its entirety. In some ways it felt like a written-to-be-a-movie book, with somewhat over-exaggerated characters and events. I got irritated with Pippa "finding herself" in her birth parents. She was much more like them in looks and personality than I am like my mom or my kids are like me, and it felt stretched. Although not graphic, the casual sexual encounter with a man she hardly knew in America bothered me, as did her drooling over another British man she ALSO hardly knew (who turned out to be married with children). In t

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## Aaron says

I just could not finish this book. I tried and tried. I got halfway through, but most of that was a struggle. The author was also the narrator, and she was a very good narrator. But there was no arc to the story. It was like a bunch of little steps, one bit after another, but no plot, no storyline, almost no conflict or mystery or anything to grab you. It was just kind of bland and boring. And there were many miss opportunities for ... I don't know what to call it, maybe deeper analysis, or discussion of implications, but most of them were missed.

If I remember correctly, this is a novel based on true experience. Maybe that's the problem. There were a lot of irrelevant and boring details that might have been interesting if this were the memoir of a remarkable, unusual or famous person, but were boring as part of a novel.

Sorry, Alison. If the person in the book is anything like you, then you seem like a delightful, funny, and interesting person. But the book itself isn't doing it for me.

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## **Liz says**

Sometimes you come across a book that hits you at a time that you really either needed it or you can really relate to it--this is that book for me. This semi-autobiographical novel is about a woman who is adopted by an English couple whom she adores, but still longs to know her biological parents and goes on a journey of self-discovery as she finds them. She comes over to America and it is more than she bargained for! Alison Larkin's literary voice is both funny and moving and if you know me you know that I am a bit obsessed with all things British (I watched that Amanda Bynes and Colin Firth movie, "What a Girl Wants" over and over and over...I secretly think I was supposed to be British). I loved hearing what America looks and feels like from a different perspective and really related to her experience with her biological mother as I had a strikingly similar experience with someone in my own extended family. Enjoy, but it does have a little bit of language and sensuality which I say ahead of time!

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## **Rachel Lowry says**

This book had such a strong start, I was laughing and attached to the main character within pages, certain it was going to be a new favourite. Unfortunately, there were some inconsistencies with the main character that I struggled with, and I was wanting the book to focus on a few relationships more deeply, rather than many superficially. Despite these shortfalls, I enjoyed the main storyline of the book, that being an adopted woman raised by a privileged English family who finds herself living in America trying to fit in with her biological family.

Britain's famous 'Bridget Jones' could easily fit into this novel, because the wit and humour are a similar fit.

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## **Elizabeth says**

Not only is it completely hilarious, but it actually deals with some serious issues of identity that adults who were adopted as children face. What makes this story different from most adoption stories is her comedic ability. This is actually a memoir that she uses in her standup comedy routines. I find her ability to do this psychologically healthy and beautiful. I laughed and cried and sometimes at the same time! Bravo to her and her expressive abilities. It's entertaining, and also therapeutic.

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## **Kristin says**

Loved this book; it takes you on the journey of a young woman adopted by Brits to find her American birthparents, across a raw emotional landscape, and through cultures as farflung as the eccentric rural south, gay bars in NYC, and the secretive world of Washington DC military contractors. Home base is what she's looking for. Does she find it in a cozy cup of tea with her frumpy but contented adopted family in England? Or her adventurous but confusing birthparents whose allegiances are both guarded and shifting? What really makes this story riveting is not just that it's true- it is - but the author's youthful exuberance and wit that permeates every page. Should be read by everyone who has adopted a child from another culture.

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## **Shirly says**

Well, Alison, how many months has it taken me to get started on this? In my defense, I've been reading books on meditation for a training I did at Kripalu, and as a follow up to figure out how that training applies to me, personally.

Once I let myself pick it up, I barely put it down.

"I think it's one of the saddest things in the world -- don't you? -- when people are upset because the direction they're going in feels all wrong for you -- and you know you just have to go the opposite way."

It touched me, made me laugh and made me think. For what more could I ask?

I should have known you are a fellow slob. I could tell right away there was something I like about you beyond your quick wit and charming demeanor. Must have been the crumbs of vegan kale something or other all over your sweater when I met you killing time in the dining hall before your massage.

The downside, is that the meditation books do a very good job of lulling me to sleep. I was up most of the night finishing this one. Sucked me right in.

Thank you. I look forward to the next one.

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## **K says**

This was a good book for a vacation, I guess, but despite my wanting a light read, I just couldn't get past the standard chick lit cliches and forced humor.

Pippa Dunn is an adoptee from the U.S. raised in a British home. Although her adoptive family is appropriately loving, she feels she has never fit in, and at 28, goes on an odyssey to meet her American birth parents. This premise is a convenient excuse for the tired old British vs. American jokes (English = emotionally constipated; American = too much information; English = tea as a science; American = tea as instant, etc.), and I found the idea of not fitting in as an adoptee because you're genetically programmed to be a loud, boisterous, clumsy American as opposed to a delicate Brit just a wee bit contrived. Not to mention the standard chick lit cliché, namely, the guy she's passionate about is really a jerk, and guess what? The steady guy who was a "friend" all along actually secretly likes her, and you know what? Now that she realizes that, she realizes that she likes him too! Oh, please. Can we say...predictable? Even for a vacation read, this just didn't do it for me.

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## **Karol says**

This should have been a good book, based on its premise of an American-born girl being adopted and raised by British parents, then returning to the U.S. to meet her birth parents.

Unfortunately, the birth mother was so disgusting a character - a total liar, utterly selfish, hateful and unfair towards some people and a true user of others - that I could hardly stomach the book. Also, although described by both birth parents as a product of a "great love", Pippa (the adopted girl) was actually the product of merely a great lust.

Had Pippa come to the realization that love was modeled by her adoptive parents but not her birth parents, I might have liked the book better. But in the end, she thinks of how much her birth parents had loved each other and that made me feel a bit ill.

I would not have finished this book had it not been chosen by a reading group I am in. As it is, I am glad I did not waste money buying a copy. I look forward to returning it to the library first thing on Monday.

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### **David Swanson says**

This book is utterly charming and a great audiobook. The narration is perfect. Having lived in North America for many years and now in England, the characters' idiosyncrasies are recognisable and real. You can see the ending coming from a mile away but that doesn't detract in the least from enjoying the rest of the book. A lovely break from the type of book I usually read.

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### **Sara says**

What did I think? I loved it! It's been a long time since I laughed and cried while reading a book.

This is a wonderfully poignant, engaging novel about a woman's personal growth. After 10 or so years of dating, Pippa Dunn, 28, realizes that she can't love another until she knows and loves herself. Pippa Dunn's story of the search for her birth parents is thoroughly enchanting and amazing.

Like the main character, the author was born in America and was adopted and raised in England.

I urge you to listen to this on your iPod or iPhone or CD player or MP3 player. The book was read by the author herself and it was a pleasure listening to her fine British accent. Alison Larkin lives in Great Barrington, Massachusetts and has been performing this story in a one-woman show which may be developed for TV.

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### **Lynn Grubb says**

The English American (a review by Karen O'Keefe and Lynn Grubb)

As published (in part) in the Union Jack News, June 2008.

As a reunited adoptee, I could strongly relate to Pippa Dunn--a creative and "appallingly untidy" English girl searching for the missing pieces of her identity. Her discovery at the age of 15 that her birth parents are American, coupled with her lifelong desire to unmask her fantasy birth parents into real humans, is best

described by Pippa herself: "There's a natural law with secrets. It's the same law that applies to kettles. If you block the ventilation hole, there will, eventually, be an explosion."

After breaking up with a boyfriend chosen for the purpose of security, Pippa impulsively contacts the adoption agency in America. A kind social worker, whose hands are tied by the US closed adoption laws, informs Pippa that her birth mother wants to be contacted, but the laws bar her from revealing her birth mother's identity. Refusing to be thwarted, Pippa hires an independent investigator to locate her birth mother--a bigger-than-life lady with southern charm and a talent for manipulation. As Pippa is transplanted from her beloved England to America, she finds herself betwixt and between two worlds where she learns to embrace the monsters under her bed and the shock and elation of self-discovery.

The author's description of how it feels to be adopted was right-on-the-money. Adoption issues such as abandonment, loyalty, fear of rejection, and deep-seated feelings of being different will strike chords with adoptive families everywhere. I found myself riding up and down the rollercoaster of Pippa's emotions as she took in each piece of her history. I especially applauded the way Pippa's parents were portrayed: as empathetic guides who supported Pippa in her search, without pressing their own feelings and needs to the forefront.

#### **We Agreed**

This book is a "must read" for adopted and non-adopted people alike; and it should be required reading for adoptive parents! The English American was published in hardback by Simon and Schuster in March of 2008.

You can find more information about Alison Larkin at <http://www.alisonlarkin.net>

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#### **Alison says**

As an American who has always felt very much "at home" in British literature, I've always thought of myself as an "English American" of another sort. I purchased the book after listening to an interview with the author on an XM radio show. Ms. Larkin sounded very clever and witty, and I had high hopes for the book, but was disappointed and abandoned it at about 2/3 of the way through. (My New Year's resolution is to quit wasting time finishing frivolous books that are giving me no pleasure; classics are excepted from this rule). "The English American" was overly plot-driven, the setting and character development thin, at best. This made the narrative choppy and meaningless. While the author made attempt at getting into Pippa's head, mostly through the letters to her friend, the effort came across as just that-effort. I was also put-off by the political tones. Ms. Larkin just casually dropped her own beliefs into the narrative, in off-hand comments, with no explanation as to why Pippa had those beliefs. If you're going to include so much about Pippa's political beliefs, you have to explain why Pippa holds those beliefs. If they're really just the author's beliefs, then the author should be writing a memoir or political piece.

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#### **Jen says**

Pretty disappointed in this book. I really wanted to like it; I'm a total Anglophile so this book's premise was very appealing. It started off well, but became bogged down in over-the-top characters whose personalities overshadowed the story, or what story there was.

The book is about a young woman nicknamed Pippa who was adopted from America at birth by a British couple who thought they couldn't have kids (but wound up having a birth daughter a year later after the adoption.) Because she always felt so different from them, and wants desperately to feel like she belongs, Pippa seeks out her birth Mom and Dad in America.

Her Mom turns out to be an eccentric artist type whom Pippa initially feels she can relate to more personality-wise, while her Dad is a conservative, political type whom has never stopped loving (or obsessing over?) Pippa's birth mom. Pippa moves to America to better know her parents and figure out who she is and to finally find a place to fit in. To go much more into the story is pointless because I didn't feel there was a real strong plot line- there's a few love interests thrown in and eventually Pippa wisely realizes that the fantasy birth family she's dreamt about her whole life isn't what it's cracked up to be, but not before she puts up with way more than I think most people would have stood.

I feel like this had the potential to be a good story. I was expecting a charming, witty look at what it would be like reuniting with parents who share your genetics, but are complete strangers, as well as the clashing of cultures; instead it was a book about a bunch of overly-eccentric characters whom, for the most part, were not very likeable. Pippa was okay, and would have made a decent heroine of a "Shopaholic" type novel, but put in this setting she eventually became as irritating as the other characters. To me, a book should never have more than one or two eccentric people, yet this one had a whole cast, save her adopted family (they were just typical British eccentric.) It sometimes felt like crazy characters were thrown in just to make sure we all know how wacky her birth family really was; almost gives American's a bad name.

Maybe it's the Anglophile in me speaking, but I couldn't understand what the appeal of staying with her birth parents was when she had a pretty cool life back in London. I kept hoping she'd just go back to London and the book would turn into a witty, British romantic fiction.

Ultimately, I just didn't connect with the characters, not really caring what happened to Pippa or her American family; I found myself skimming too many pages that I contemplated not finishing it. Pretty much sums it up.

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