



## Sex Romp Gone Wrong

**Julia Ridley Smith**

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Julia Ridley Smith's *Sex Romp Gone Wrong* is a collection of twelve provocative short stories that delve into the murky terrain of motherhood, sexuality, loss, and family in contemporary America.

Funny, mournful, and alluring, the stories in *Sex Romp Gone Wrong* are diverse, focusing on characters living across the United States over multiple decades. However, the book is held together by its central focus on the lives of mothers and daughters striving for connection in a world marked by alienation, silence, and isolation.

In the title story, a middle-aged mother attempts to conceive as she struggles to rekindle the flame of her marriage. Meanwhile, her thirteen-year-old daughter makes her first steps into the forays of sexuality, only to be reminded of the costs of growing up a woman in twenty-first-century America. In "At the Arrowhead," a caregiver reconnects with an elderly patient, who, unbeknownst to him, played a pivotal role in the defining tragedy of her childhood. And in "Flown," the past once again brushes up against the present as a mother is forced to reconnect with her ex-best friend when her son shows up at her doorstep, leading her to confront a tangled web of jealousy and queer desire.

In every story, both blossoming and mature feminine desires are treated with delicacy and reverence. Throughout, more conventional stories are interspersed with shining moments of experimentation in stories including "Tooth" and "Hot Lesbian Vampire Magic School," which veer into the realm of the gothic and surreal. The book also focuses on the evolving culture of the American South as its characters reckon with the complex legacies of American racial and class divides.

At home on the uneasy ground between humor and solemnity, the expansive short story collection *Sex Romp Gone Wrong* devotes concerted care and attention to the hidden lives of women and children.

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