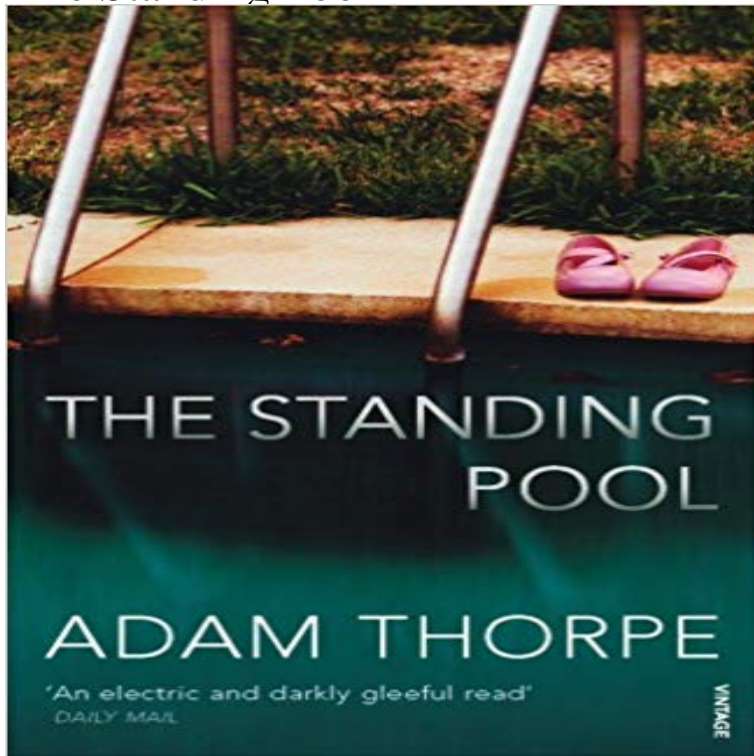


The Standing Pool



An idyllic, old farmhouse in France is the background to a gripping story suffused with tension. Two Oxford historians, Johnny and Sarah Thomson, take a sabbatical with their three small and lively girls in a remote and beautiful old farmhouse in the hills of Languedoc. But the farmhouse has its own histories, rather more fraught and alive than those the Thomsons are used to dealing with on the page. As the illusion of Eden retreats, the Thomsons start to feel the vulnerability of being aliens in this unpredictable wildness. While Sarah frets about the danger of the swimming pool and the night-time visits of well-tusked boars, Johnny is more concerned by the locals particularly Jean-Luc, the gardener. Is his taste for hammering tiny nails into dolls, collecting arcane rubbish, and secretly photographing Sarah, more than a harmless pastime? And how should they react to his eager befriending of their girls? The novel, narrated from several points of view (most importantly from Jean-Luc's), is about being among strangers, and being a stranger oneself. Writing, as always, with linguistic elan, imaginative flair, and an alert ear for dialogue, Adam Thorpe allows the comic to occasionally seep through, before returning us to the terrifying mysteries that feed at the heart of this thrilling novel. From the Hardcover edition.

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