

**KIRKUS REVIEWS**

**August 1, 2012**

**WHAT THE NANNY SAW**

**By Fiona Neill**

**WHAT THE NANNY SAW**

**Author: Neill, Fiona**

**Review Issue Date:** August 1, 2012

**Online Publish Date:** July 22, 2012

**Publisher:***Riverhead*

**Pages:** 464

**Price ( Hardcover ): \$26.95**

**Publication Date:** August 2, 2012

**ISBN ( Hardcover ): 978-1-59448-716-3**

**Category:** Fiction

A university student gets an insider's look at the world banking crisis when she becomes nanny to a London financier, from the British author of *Slummy Mummy* (2007).

In 2006, Ali Sparrow has mounting tuition debt and a rocky affair with a professor she would like to escape. To solve both problems, she takes a year off from university to nanny for the Skinner family. In the world of London nannies, populated by buxom Eastern European refugees, Ali is quite a find: Though without experience, she is legal and in possession of a driver's license. For her part, Ali has never seen such wealth. Father Nick is in charge of Lehman's London branch and Bryony runs a financial PR firm. Their Holland Park mansion is filled with art (Ali stashes her Francis Bacon poster in the closet when she notices the real thing is above the fireplace), a ridiculous pug, a Philippina housekeeper and four children. Jake is 17 and soon off to Oxford; Izzy is 14 and flirting with boys and anorexia; and then there are the twins, Hector and Alfie, Ali's primary charges. Ali's story—a bright girl from a fishing village making good, with a junkie for an older sister and an unspectacular love life—really plays second fiddle to the drama at hand: the rise and fall of the glamorous Skinner family. Nick is mysterious and perhaps guilty of insider trading, Bryony is intense and controlling, Bryony's father, Foy, is a fabulous drunken lothario, and the twins are a bit eerie, what with their secret language, empathic responses and refusal to be separated. It is all too much and not enough at once—a life lived extravagantly and shallowly, a series of parties, meetings and personal tragedies to schedule.

Not much happens in Neill's novel, but her portrayal of the family is happily addictive and their greed-driven downfall a little bit delicious.