



★ Nature and Necessity

Tariq Goddard

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It's not the ones who fight the hardest who survive, but the ones who learn to steer clear of fighting at all.

In Tariq Goddard's comedy of manners, *Nature and Necessity*, Petula Montague rules her adult children as only a narcissistic doyenne could. This thorough, perceptive portrayal of a socialite whose calculating nature masks a reluctance to confront herself is a wild study in character. Goddard features life in the English countryside with blistering effects.

Petula and her family reside in The Heights, a hobby farm in Yorkshire. An outrageous woman who denies her humbler past, Petula hungers for adulation. She fears inactivity and seldom second-guesses herself. An episodic plot details her children's formative years, her attempts to surround herself with important figures, her plans for a party, and her grown children's struggle to define themselves apart from her influence. From drug addiction to whinging to learned silence, the siblings display how a similar environment yields different results.

Goddard threads the novel with macabre humor. Daughter Evita's suicide attempts inspire an impressive set piece that showcases Petula's ability to rationalize anything—even her own involvement in a moment of violence.

For all the Montagues' domestic struggles—some tragic, others campy, and many the result of certain characters' imagined slights—a grain of loyalty binds them. Petula is more than a villainess. In her convoluted logic, every action is carried out for the benefit of others, even though she seldom considers what others might actually want. She's written with psychological depth that amuses and frightens; vanity twines with insecurity that is quickly brushed aside.

A few moments turn extreme, including a pedophile's exploits. Ribaldry in other contexts veers toward the farcical. These scenes offer a chance to weigh Petula's challenges. Despite the energy she expends in trying to stage every situation, her plans often run right off the rails.

This tale of dysfunctional interdependence, adaptability or the lack of it, inheritance, and reinvention takes a Darwinian view and turns it on its head. It's not the ones who fight the hardest who survive, but the ones who learn to steer clear of fighting at all.

KAREN RIGBY (July/August 2017)

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