



Summer Cannibals

Melanie Hobson

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Melanie Hobson's *Summer Cannibals* is a vibrant, vicious family portrait in which three adult daughters come home.

The family matriarch, Margaret, has summoned everyone to rally around her very pregnant daughter, Pippa. The girls' father is enraged that Pippa's debilitating depression required her return, interrupting his preparation for a garden tour. As they arrive at the house, which sits on a cliff overlooking Hamilton, Ontario, the girls find that it is bursting at the seams—with resentments and groceries, priceless heirlooms and hurtful secrets. This is a place that is both rich and troubled—as are those within it.

From the first page, individual character dissatisfactions set the plot boiling. The daughters, all mothers themselves, are each otherwise very different, all with independent streaks. Some sort of doom is grotesquely palpable. Things seem bound to go awry at this reunion, and pity the stranger who'd interrupt it.

As each family member is developed, their differing attitudes about the others become clear; the effect is stunning. Rotating points of view (beginning with the parents) are used to piece together the present story. It is one of well-trod grievances, youthful adventures, and secret past horrors.

The family fascinates. Their story is compelling, and each member woos their listeners to regard the others as they do—effectively enough, until the vantage switches again. The audience is forced to shift alliances repeatedly as the girls' first day home shifts into the second, with more backstory revealed, and as the story hurtles toward the father's garden tour and its aftermath.

Discontent rumbles and then crashes down, thanks to the airing of decades of family offenses—resentments that have been carefully tended with the same attention that is given to the rose garden that wraps around the family's funky mansion. By turns darkly comical and horrifying, *Summer Cannibals* holds attention.

MEREDITH GRAHL COUNTS (November/December 2018)

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