



# Blood Family

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Editorial Choice:

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

5

This narrative allows its reader no respite. We are thrust into one of those desperate enslavement situations the media reports in detail but which it's hard to grasp imaginatively: a mother and young son brutalised for years by a beast of a man. An elderly neighbour is brave enough to blow the whistle. They're rescued, but the mother is now no more than a shuffling husk. Young Eddie goes from fostering to adoption; almost all the adults he meets care, or try to care within the system; yet, since Anne Fine doesn't sentimentalise or compromise, you know the consequences of those terrifying years have yet to unravel.

The structure of this novel provides some reassurance which may shift the reader's focus away from what might happen ? the *fear* of what might happen ? to a more detached viewpoint. The story is told by several narrators. Eddie, the neighbour, his foster parents, a therapist, a social worker, a policeman, teachers, the adoptive parents (with their differing anxieties), his sister (also adopted) and so on. But where, and when, are they speaking ? or possibly writing - *from*? That's never made explicitly clear though there is just a hint that the invisible author is at times *listening* to (some of) them. What *is* clear is that most of the narrators, including Eddie, are looking back on what's happened. There is therefore, from the beginning, an increasing sense that Eddie's grim difficulties will be resolved, which leaves space for a reader to make judgements, to ask questions, to weigh up characters' actions and motives. We're safe in the knowledge that it's all going to be okay, or at least sort-of okay. Otherwise, how could this older Eddie be looking back on his experiences with such articulate perception and, somehow, a sense of security about himself? The multiplicity of viewpoints means that characters criticise each other: the policeman has a stereotypical pop at social workers; Eddie's adoptive mother Natasha is clear-eyed about the difference between her response and that of her husband Nick when the domestic volcano erupts; while sister Alice reveals more spontaneous insight and action than either of them. The structure also avoids the cliché of closed-minded adults ? these are uncertain people, struggling to learn, and often failing.

All of which means that the slightly distanced reader can be absorbed by what's happening to Eddie and at the same time, consider such issues as the effectiveness of the systems in which he finds himself; and also take a view on the Nature *versus* Nurture debate which torments Eddie.

For at the core of the despair which triggers his fall into drugs, booze and a half-life in the most miserable of squats lies the dreadful discovery that Bryce Harris, the man who destroyed his wretched mother, is indeed his father: his blood

runs in Eddie's veins, the face in the mirror looks more and more like Harris's day by day. So is he fated to become a monster? Readers will sense that everything that happens to Eddie has been accurately researched ? yet it doesn't seem so. Above all, this story is artfully crafted ? yet the art draws no attention to itself. Through that crafting, the reader may be well-placed to explore several levels of satisfaction.

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