

## Everybody Here Is Kin

**BettyJoyce Nash**

Madville Publishing (Sep 19, 2023)

Softcover \$22.95 (279pp)

978-1-956440-35-5

A precocious teenager finds a makeshift family among strangers in BettyJoyce Nash's perceptive, sensitive novel *Everybody Here Is Kin*.

On their way to a promised Key West trip, Lucille, her stepsiblings, and their mother, Naomi, stop on Boneyard Island. There, Naomi reunites with a high school flame and abandons the children, leaving a note behind. Used to taking charge ever since her father was killed by an IED, Lucille meets Will, a terse veteran and the manager of the Palmetto Tourist Court. Other locals befriend her, too, including a woman who watches over nesting sea turtles.

The novel alternates between Lucille and Will's views. Both are wary about other people and find refuge in nature. She channels her worries into veganism, running, reciting facts about rising oceans, and caring for her siblings. He carves driftwood and tries to connect with a woman whose marriage is in flux. Meanwhile, Naomi's absence lingers, hinting at the pain of Lucille's unstable home: in her grief, Naomi became addicted to pills and short-lived romances. There are complex suggestions surrounding veterans and their post-war traumas, deepening ideas about people's struggles to return to their everyday yet altered lives.

Lucille's uncertainty about Naomi's whereabouts fades into her gradual relief over finding a wider community. As she explores the beach, Will warms to the children, and a tentative form of healing is secured. But when a storm upends island life and Naomi's addictions can no longer be ignored, Lucille comes to the tough realization that letting go of expectations is sometimes necessary.

In the emotional novel *Everybody Here s Kin*, a daughter in search of a place to call home navigates her mother's unreliability.

KAREN RIGBY (September / October 2023)

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