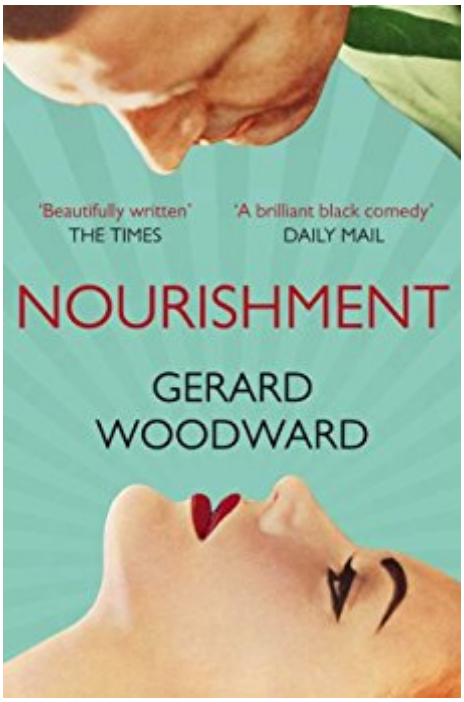
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Nourishment



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Synopsis

With her children evacuated and her husband at the front, Tory Pace is grudgingly sharing the family home with her irascible mother; working at the local gelatine factory - to help the war effort - and generally doing just about as well as could be expected in difficult times. Her quiet life is thrown into turmoil, however, when her prisoner-of-war husband, Donald, makes an outrageous demand for sexual gratification. He wants a dirty letter, by return of post! Horrified, at first, that Donald is being turned into some sort of monster by the Nazis, Tory’s disgust gradually gives way to a sense of marital duty, and taking in the libraries, bookshops, public conveniences and barbers’ shops of South-East London, she begins a quest to master the language of carnal desire: a quest that takes a sudden and unexpected turn into far more dangerous territory. Beginning with an act of unintentional cannibalism, and flirting with a scheme to end world hunger by the use of protein pills, Nourishment ranges widely across the Continent and yet always returns home: to family, to people, to relationships. Woodward offers a prescient examination of the ways in which we both nurture and consume each other in the face of adversity.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Gerard Woodward is a writer who deserves far more attention that he gets. He has wonderful grasp of language, reminiscent of Virginia Woolf.

I am really tired of having to explain why I like a book. This having to explain myself is tedious.

Nourishment (Picador, 2011)Gerard WoodwardSet in London during World War Two and in the succeeding austerity years, this intimate domestic drama centres on spirited Tory Pace and her abrasive husband Donald. While the bombs fall and long-delayed letters from Donald in a German POW camp filter through, Tory takes up war work in a gelatine-producing factory, where she is seduced by the owner and has an illegitimate son, Branson. A cynical war-wounded Donald returns to destroy any possibility of family harmony. He goes sadly downhill, an anarchic recluse who for years refuses to even look at Branson, sets himself alight when the police discover his illicit still, falls foul of the law and ends up in an asylum. All he wants is his food, of which there is precious little. Tory is obliged to take part-time work as a lavatory assistant to keep the family afloat. She clings on, however, even after her elder son Tom's suicide, brought on by Donald's refusal to allow him to take up a scholarship. In her underground ladies lavatory she begins writing a novel, based on her life. When life starves, art nourishes.Nourishment has no fairy-tale ending and Tory is never going to write a best-seller, but she is the life and soul of a book that could have been a dreary run-of-the-mill documentary. It could have been a bleak wartime saga, steeped in the miseries that flesh is heir to in time of war, but it is saved by humour, a light touch, and, ultimately, hope for the future.Time does not heal, but inevitably it passes and allows new growth. Woodward glides over a few years when necessary, so that later we find that even Donald becomes less acerbic. Here he is at last recognising the `adopted' Branson: `Is Daddy writing a book?' the boy asks his mother (Donald has found a market for soft porn): `Yes, he is.' `What's it about?' `It's about his time in the army.' `Did Daddy kill anyone?' It made Tory feel strange when he referred to Donald as `Daddy'. Stranger still, when Donald referred to Branson as `sonny'. The irony in the question `Did Daddy kill anyone?' will not be lost on the perceptive reader. In effect, of course, he was directly responsible for the scholar Tom hanging himself. Although the story is largely Tory's, I did wonder about the piggish Donald and just how much of his unpleasantness could be attributed to his incarceration. Obviously an ingrained male chauvinist, a bigot, a racist and a political reactionary, nevertheless he is not entirely unsympathetic. He does change and soften a little with time, ultimately coming out of isolation to show enterprise in his shady money-making activities (soft porn publishing and illicit distilling) and, after a struggle, allowing Tory's crippled mother to have the downstairs bedroom, and stoically

enduring Tory’s revenge when she starves him and, as seen above, finally acknowledging his bastard son. His breakdown after Tom’s death is especially moving. Donald’s viewpoint on life would make an intriguing sequel to a rich and rewarding novel.

Nourishment is a novel about the Pace family - their life during and after the second war. The story has many twists and turns as the ups and downs of the Pace family unfold. Tory Pace is the main protagonist.The novel is divided in three parts.Part I - World War II . Tory Pace lives with her mother (Mrs Head), and works in a gelatine factory. Her husband is a POW and her kids in exile. In this part, we see Tory meeting the demands of her husband (making an effort to write dirty letters) , keeping up with the kids (writing letters), feeding the desires of George Farraway the factory owner (having an illicit relationship and becoming pregnant with his child).Part II - End of war. The Pace family is united - Donald returns from the war, the children - Tom and two daughters return to London. Now the Pace family , Mrs Head and Branson (Tory’s illegitimate child) live under the same roof. Donald’s deterioration and loss of Tom the eldest son add to Tory’s miseries. She struggles hard to keep the family together and works as a toilet attendant to make both ends meet.Part III - This part is about how Tory takes charge and lives life on her own terms.The story is engrossing. The characters of Tory, Donald, Tom, Mrs Head and Branson are well developed. The two daughters of the Pace family , however, receive marginal treatment. The theme of nourishment/ undernourishment of body and soul runs throughout the novel -the characters lack nourishment of either food, love, sex and attention. Sometimes they provide nourishment to each other in curious ways- Tory’s ’dirty letters" provide Donald the resources to get food and goodies in the prison, Mr Dando -the butcher, as roast meat (maybe) for Tory and her mother.The drawback of the novel is that it lacks depth. The brilliant beginning sets high expectations. However, in the end the novel does not rise beyond the level of a good and interesting story.

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