



Pretty Ugly

Kirker Butler

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From a producer of Family Guy, a satirical look at a dysfunctional family complete with a stage mom, 9 year-old pageant queen, philandering husband, his girlfriend, and the crazy grandmother

Miranda Miller's mission in life is to make sure her nine-year-old daughter, Bailey, continues to be one of the most successful child pageant contestants in the southern United States. Lately, that mission's been difficult. Bailey has been secretly binge eating to gain weight so Miranda will let her retire; and the reality show Miranda been trying to set up for Bailey (and herself) just went to their biggest rival, Starr Kennedy and her tyrannical stage mother, Theresa.

But Miranda's got an ace up her sleeve. She's seven months pregnant with her fourth child, a girl, thank God, and Miranda is going to make damn sure that this one will be a pageant champion, too.

Unbeknownst to her, Miranda's husband Ray, a nurse with a hobby of popping random pills, has knocked up Courtney, the less than brilliant seventeen-year-old orphan granddaughter of one of his hospice patients. With a wife, a mistress, two jobs, three kids (and two more on the way), a mountain of debt, and no real friends, Ray is desperately hoping his life puts itself back in order.

Meanwhile, the Millers' two boys are being "homeschooled" by Miranda's mother, Joan (pronounced Jo-Ann), a well-intentioned widow who spends most of her time playing solitaire and planning a murder with Jesus. Yes, that Jesus.

They're just your typical dysfunctional American family.

Pretty Ugly Details

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Nenia ? Queen of Literary Trash, Protector of Out-of-Print Gems, Khaleesi of Bodice Rippers, Mother of Smut, the Unrepentant, Breaker of Convention ? Campbell says

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I received a copy of this as an ARC a while ago, but I liked it enough that I bought a copy of it for a reread. I think the best way to describe PRETTY UGLY is to say that it's one part *Drop Dead Gorgeous*, one part BIG TROUBLE, and one part *Toddlers in Tiaras*. The humor in this book is pretty mean-spirited and crude, so it's not super surprising that this author has worked on shows like *Family Guy*, but unlike *Family Guy* (in its current incarnation, at least), PRETTY UGLY is actually funny.

PRETTY UGLY follows one dysfunctional family and takes a look at how child pageants shape all their lives. Miranda Miller, the mom, won a teenage pageant when she was young by process of elimination and it gave her a taste for winning. She's decided to live vicariously through her daughter, Bailey, who is sick of the whole circus and has decided to binge-eat so as to gain weight and spite her mother. Miranda has two boys, but she mostly ignores them and dumps them off with her crazy mother, Joan, to watch, who "home schools" them by letting them eat junk food and watch all the TV they want. Joan thinks she hears the voice of Jesus in her head, like he's her own personal life coach. Lastly, there's Ray, the husband. Ray works at a hospice, and his two major passions in life consist of 1: eating his patients' cocktails of pills and guessing what they are by the effects on his body and 2: having sex with the underage grand-daughter of one of his patients, because, in his mind the desperate emasculated SOB wants to feel like a stallion. Obviously, NONE of this is sustainable, and the family goes through major, MAJOR drama.

I've never really liked the idea of pageants. I'm a feminist, and think there's something inherently disgusting about parading women around on a stage before dissecting their features like they're attractive slabs of meat on a lab table. Doing it to children is even more inherently nauseating, because at least *some* women could argue that they feel empowered by pageants, that doing it gives them a stepping stone to other future projects and career opportunities, that it's *their* choice - but children have no way of truly consenting in the matter, and I suspect that many of them would much rather be playing with kids of their own age and being *kids*, instead of stomping around to Christina Aguilera songs on a stage while wearing a dress that has way too many dyed feathers on it.

PRETTY UGLY is not a nice book and the people in it are not good people. I have a fairly dark and cynical sense of humor, so I found this book more amusing than most, but I think there's something in this book guaranteed to cause offense to virtually anyone. That's why I found it funny: I think it's a pretty pitch-perfect look at a certain group of people and what drives them to do the things that they do. It's worth reading if you think you can stomach the content. CollegeHumor's amusing new reboot of *Precious Plum* (a none-too-subtle parody of Honey BooBoo) is written much in the same vein, but PRETTY UGLY is far less crude and

cruel with regard to how it treats its victims.

3.5 to 4 stars

Christine says

I laughed out loud numerous times at this book which was like a bad train wreck where you just can't stop looking. Loved how one singular ludicrous event turned out to just be just a small piece of a bigger and more even more ludicrous event.

Jennifer Masterson says

I won Pretty Ugly in a First Reads Giveaway. Thank you St. Martin's Press! 4.5 Stars. It was downright hysterical! It's twisted and ridiculous but I loved it. I've never seen Honey Boo Boo or Toddlers and Tiaras but I'm guessing I should check them out because I enjoyed reading this.

Miranda is a pregnant pageant mom living vicariously through her child, Bailey, who is so done with the pageant thing after being a very successful 9 year old beauty queen. The Miller's are one big dysfunctional Southern family filled with a cheating (with a teenager!), pill popping husband, a grandma who receives personal messages from Jesus and lots of debt! Poor Bailey just wanted to eat while her mother is trying to get her to look sexier in photos! It's so crazy! There are no boundaries to Pretty Ugly's crazy!

This would be a perfect read for someone who enjoys twisted humor. It helped me get through a stressful few days. It's a fast, easy read and just tasteless fun! Recommended!

SUSAN *Nevertheless,she persisted* says

This book is the funny,irreverent cousin of "Toddlers and Tiaras" and "Honey Boo Boo"
It is tasteless,crass,rude and yet,very entertaining. There are quite a few LOL moments,so, if you are in the mood for light and amusing,this may be the book for you.

Sasha says

Oh my gosh this book is hilarious!! I was cackling in public, in bed with my sleeping hotel roomie (what? the hotel got screwed up, no big), grabbing a bite, sitting alone at work.. Kirker Butler, creator of Family Guy, definitely knows how to get a chuckle or a belly laugh out of his audience, and I'm so glad that it translated in book form.

So the story is of an ultimate dysfunctional family - my favorite. Miranda, the matriarch, sort of won a pageant back in the day, and is forcing her daughter, Bailey, to participate in as many pageants as possible to

relieve the glory. Bailey is getting real tired of her shit, so is secretly fattening herself up so that her mother is too embarrassed to put her up in any more pageants. Because fat girls become pathetic charity cases, you see.

Meanwhile, Miranda's husband - a failed doctor/nurse/hospice worker - is going around popping all kinds of pills and banging his client's under-age grandkid. But it's okay because he never hit on her - he just never said no to her advances! Miranda's mother, whose knees are crumbling into powder, struggles on to fail at homeschooling Miranda's unwanted boys while juggling her increasingly sketchy conversations with Jesus Himself. There are other plot lines too, and when everything comes together in a hair-pulling, tooth-knocking, screaming and bloody mess, it's purely glorious.

There are many classless moments, some gross-out humor and many clever writing gems.

Such as

Storming to the freezer, she pulled out a three-pound block of ice that encased the family's last usable credit card. A financial adviser had suggested she and Ray freeze their cards to help reduce impulse spending and rein in their mounting debt.

or

'Are you saying I'm not worldly? I've been to Cancun! Twice! I am totally worldly!'

and

Ray felt like he was being pulled underwater. He needed a plan, something simple and effective, like murder but not murder.

There are more, but you get the gist. The whole book is written like this. Yeah, it often relies on juvenile humor and puns, but there you go. Now you know how mature I really am.

While Butler is pointing his finger and laughing his ass off at these people, he also has a warm spot for them in his heart. I ended up rooting for everyone, and that's a sign of excellence in a book written about horrible people (such as this one, or Chum). The humanity, even when presented in a stereotypical character's body, shines through with beauty and ugliness. JUST LIKE A BEAUTY PAGEANT OMG.

But yeah, read this!

-I received an ebook from the publisher in exchange for an honest review-

Larry H says

Full disclosure: I received an advance copy of this book from NetGalley in exchange for an unbiased review.

Kirker Butler's *Pretty Ugly* leaves no stereotype untouched—pageant moms, philandering husbands, slutty teenage girls, even devoutly religious old women get torn apart in this satire.

When she was a young girl, Miranda Ford won a local beauty pageant. (Well, she didn't quite win, but she

eventually got the title.) It changed her life, and when she got married and gave birth to a little girl of her own, Bailey, she was determined to make her a true pageant star in the southeastern U.S. After eight-and-a-half years and more than 300 pageant titles, Miranda is just getting started, but Bailey is tired of sacrificing her life to pageants, tired of parading around in gowns and swimsuits, tired of being judged. Knowing there's no stopping her mother, Bailey starts binge eating in an effort to fatten herself out of contention, but even that doesn't stop Miranda, who is pregnant with another baby girl she has already named Brixton Destiny Miller. (Don't ask.)

Miranda's husband, Ray, has always tolerated her obsession with pageants, despite the financial and emotional toll it has taken on their family. Working two jobs as a nurse and a hospice worker to keep them afloat, Ray pops every random pill he gets his hands on, with often-interesting results. But a growing dependency on nearly every prescription drug imaginable isn't the worst of Ray's problems—his girlfriend, Courtney, the 17-year-old girlfriend of one of his hospice patients, has just found out that she's pregnant.

And then there's Joan, Miranda's devoutly religious mother, who home schools the couple's two sons because Miranda doesn't know what to do with them since she won't enter them in pageants. (Because they'd turn out gay, wouldn't you know?) Joan has frequent conversations with Jesus, and listens to everything He tells her—even when it comes to planning a murder.

Things go from bad—a pregnant Miranda gets into a knock-down, drag-out fistfight with the trashy mother of another pageant contestant while a reality show films it all—to worse—Courtney moves in with Ray and Miranda's family and befriends Miranda, although she plans to destroy everything by forcing Ray to marry her. (She doesn't realize, of course, that Joan—and Jesus—are watching.)

Pretty Ugly is a campy book, part Toddlers and Tiaras, part Here Comes Honey Boo Boo, with a healthy dose of soap opera thrown in for good measure. It's funny in places, ridiculous in others, and I thought the story was drawn out a bit too long, but Butler, a writer and producer whose credits include Family Guy, clearly knows what he's doing.

If you've ever wondered what the people involved in kiddie pageants are like but can't bring yourself to watch a reality show, this is the next best thing. More ridiculous than sublime, it's sure to make you chuckle—and/or offend you.

See all of my reviews (and other stuff) at <http://itseithersadnessoreuphoria.blog...>

Debbie says

Ha!! What a train wreck of a family this book was. I haven't seen a more dysfunctional family. I got more than a few chuckles out their antics. Good book, reads fast and very entertaining.

Thank you St. Martin's Press and Net Galley for providing me with a free e-galley in exchange for an honest review.

Rob says

The debut novel of TV writer and producer, Kirker Butler (Family Guy, Cleveland Show, The Neighbors, Galavant) tackles the world of beauty pageants for children. It focuses on the Millers, a misfit family from the south, whose mom Miranda, has delusions of grandeur for her increasingly disinterested daughter, Bailey. Bailey has had a string of successes on the pageant circuit (which Butler humorously details throughout the novel with details about the decidedly adult prizes she has won, including the name and location of the pageant), but has become so frustrated with the demands placed on her that she is purposely gaining weight and not following the exercise routine her mother has laid out for her. Meanwhile, back at home, Miranda's husband Ray is trying to stave off their ever increasing debt and his own personal demons by working two jobs. One as a nurse at a hospital where he makes a hobby of acquiring and taking any free medication he can find (regardless of its prescribed use) and at a hospice, where he falls under the spell of Courtney, an underage granddaughter of a patient who has a devastating surprise for him. Miranda's mom Joan stays home with Miranda's two boys and homeschools them, while following the instructions of Jesus, who speaks to her directly.

Butler's TV legacy led me to believe he might go for the easy jokes at the expense of a world that most of us ridicule, but he actually turns these characters into real and likable people. While he doesn't go easy on mocking the rituals and destructive nature of these pageants, Kirker, a Kentucky native, nails the small town dreams and hardships of the people in the area.

I enjoyed *Pretty Ugly* greatly. It was not the madcap romp I expected, but instead pulls its humor mostly from the details and sharp observations Butler spreads throughout the book. Butler manages to take this group of misfits with some terrible misdeeds and make us care about what happens to all of them. Highly recommended.

(NOTE: I received a review ARC of the book from Netgalley.)

Lois Egenes says

Probably one of the worst books I've ever read, and I read a lot.

The plot was lame and confirmed what many believe about the south. Poor taste, disgusting characters, terrible situations. I felt that it was so bad it had to get better but it never did. I learned that I would never need to read another of this author's books. I feel it was a real insult to those in the nursing field.

Megan says

“Backstage at the 29th Annual Little Most Beautiful Princess Pageant was a dollhouse of grown women playing with smaller versions of their ideal selves. Fifty scantily clad prepubescent girls scampered about like the main attraction in a Bangkok coffee shop: sexy children marketed as wholesome family entertainment. The room reeked of anxiety, self-tanner, and schadenfreude.”

I noticed more than a few reviews of this book were offended by its tastelessness, vulgarity, and downright ungodliness. If you'll notice on the jacket cover, the author is a writer and producer for the show *Family*

Guy. It's not that much of a stretch of the imagination to assume that his writing in this book would be similar, eh? Probably have some race and sex jokes in it and maybe flippantly tear apart other politically correct standards. So if the show *Family Guy* is too much for you and the casual mention of drugs and flaccid penises makes you blush, this book probably isn't for you. I don't particularly like the show, but that's because I find the jokes stupid and repetitive. I did however used to binge watch *Toddlers & Tiaras* on TLC, which is one of the many things this book satirizes. It reads much like an epic saga of a reality TV show, offering points of view from all the incredibly fucked-up characters: 9-yr-old Bailey, who doesn't want to compete in pageants anymore so she starts binge eating with an admirable determination; grandma Joan (pronounced "Jo-Ann"), who has regular conversations with Jesus in her spectacularly vivid senility; Miranda, the mother of 1 girl she worships and 2 boys she doesn't know what to do with (and another baby on the way), who desperately wants to re-live her glory days as a pageant queen; and then there's misguided, pill-popping Ray, the poor bastard who has to deal with all this shit. See? It sounds like a zany, wild romp of a sitcom, with plenty of boobs and cuss words to keep the audience engaged. It was entertaining enough and would make a good beach read or something to pass the time of a commute. If you like Seth MacFarlane's particular brand of humor, you'll probably like this.

Rachel says

This book was so wrong , which is to say so right, for so many reasons!

Utterly hilarious in it's dysfunction.

I looooved it. From the first page I was laughing out loud, and I didn't pause until I had finished it.

I do, however, offer the caution that if your sense of humor is not in a Family Guy, South Park, "so horrible it's hilarious" vein, this book might not be for you.

For those who laugh at the completely horrid (because, let's face it, what other response is there?) I predict this will become an instant classic.

Maree Repa says

Oh this book is so funny. Such awful parents. Making their daughter enter those pageants. Such craziness!!
A fun read!

Donna Davis says

It's vulgar, utterly tasteless, and very, very funny. Pretty Ugly, by Kirker Butler, a man who is no stranger to edgy comedy, skewers a whole herd of sacred cows within the confines of its humble two covers. Just be ready!

Thank you and thank you again to St. Martins Press and Net Galley for the DRC.

The Millers are a good Christian family. Naturally, they would never send their children to public schools; instead, they are home-schooled by grandma Joan, who receives personal messages from Jesus, with whom she has a personal relationship. Papa Ray is never home; he works as a nurse, popping whatever narcotics and other prescription meds happen to be lying around, treating them as his own personal escapist lottery.

Miranda, now a mother, was once a beauty queen herself, and she's made daughter Bailey into the family's own teensy beauty queen industry. Hey, who doesn't love a good kiddie pageant?

"Fifty scantily clad prepubescent girls scampered about like the main attraction in a Bangkok coffee shop: sexy children marketed as wholesome family entertainment. The room reeked of anxiety, tanner, and schadenfreude."

Ray has found every conceivable way to avoid going home. He's taken a second job as a hospice nurse, working five nights weekly, imbibing his patients' pain medications and waiting for them to die so he can put another notch on his belt.

And now there's Courtney.

This won't be a novel to everyone's taste, but if you lean slightly to the left and like your humor dark, Butler's soon-to-be-released gem may be right up your alley!

Linda says

I judged this book by its cover. Received through my postal book group, I did not want to read this book. I do not watch reality TV. I have never watched Honey Boo Boo or Toddlers and Tiaras or Family Guy (which the author works on). All seem vulgar to me. This book isn't different, but it was terrible and funny at the same time. I didn't like any of the characters. Looking at the forest, rather than the individual trees, made for a good read.

Nicole says

As a person living in these times, I am surrounded (and sometimes assaulted) by beauty and reality tv. From Botched (where two doctors who were or were once married to Real Housewives stars fix plastic surgery) to The Swan (where plastic surgery is done on someone to make them beautiful), producers have made beauty intrinsically a part of reality tv. However, it wasn't until Toddlers and Tiaras that we saw just how ugly the beauty could be. The series, featuring toddlers and their momagers shows the dark and ugly underbelly behind the scenes—it is this world that provides the backdrop for Kirker Butler's Pretty Ugly.

Bailey Ford is a nine year old, doing all she can to get her mother, Miranda, to allow her to retire from the world of beauty pageants. She's gained weight and spends her elliptical sessions sneaking chocolate bars. Miranda, pregnant with her second daughter, Brixton (the next pageant queen) has time only to focus on all things pageant. So much so that her husband, Ray, pulls off two jobs, a mistress and a pretty troubling drug addiction without Miranda suspecting anything. Miranda's mother, Joan (pronounced Jo-Ann) spends her days 'homeschooling' Miranda and Ray's two boys via television wrestling and listening to Jesus' sound advice—because Jesus is the only one who listens to Joan. Suddenly, when Ray's best kept secrets start to spill into their daily lives, their whole world is changed—but will it be for the better?

For a dark literary comedy, Pretty Ugly takes the cake. Kirker Butler's writing style is similar to Chuck Palaniuk, but with a bit of Carl Hiaasen mixed in. I did not expect this to be as compelling as it was, but not only was I impressed, I decided to add future Butler titles to my watchlist.

As characters go, the most growth was exhibited by Miranda and Ray's girlfriend, Courtney. While Courtney starts off the novel as Ray's 17-year-old mistress, without spoiling anything, she ends the novel very differently. Each of the women were pretty vapid at the beginning of the book, but throughout the course of the novel's events, they each grow in a believable and organic way—it is a far cry from their awful introductions.

I expected to feel sorry for the children, especially Bailey. When Bailey voices her request to retire from pageants, she is able to retire (it also helps that Miranda does something pretty awful). The boys, whom have been overlooked simply because of their gender are non-characters in *Pretty Ugly*.

As previously stated, I would love to read more from Kirker Butler, and am currently looking for something in a similar vein, or in a similar setting.

Thanks to Thomas Dunne Books (St Martins Press), I was given an ecopy to read in exchange for my honest review. You can pick up *Pretty Ugly* by Kirker Butler today at your favorite retailer—it is available in hardcover or ebook form.
