



The Fifth Child

By Doris Lessing

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Doris Lessing's contemporary gothic horror story—centered on the birth of a baby who seems less than human—probes society's unwillingness to recognize its own brutality. Harriet and David Lovatt, parents of four children, have created an idyll of domestic bliss in defiance of the social trends of late 1960s England. While around them crime and unrest surge, the Lovatts are certain that their old-fashioned contentment can protect them from the world outside—until the birth of their fifth baby. Gruesomely goblin-like in appearance, insatiably hungry, abnormally strong and violent, Ben has nothing innocent or infant-like about him. As he grows older and more terrifying, Harriet finds she cannot love him, David cannot bring himself to touch him, and their four older children are afraid of him. Understanding that he will never be accepted anywhere, Harriet and David are torn between their instincts as parents and their shocked reaction to this fierce and unlovable child whose existence shatters their belief in a benign world.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

The married couple in this novel pull off a remarkable achievement: They purchase a three-story house with oodles of bedrooms, and, on a middle-class income, in the '70s, fill it to the brim with happy children and visiting relatives. Their holiday gatherings are sumptuous celebrations of life and togetherness. And then the fifth child arrives. He's just a child--he's not supernatural. But is he really human? This is an elegantly written tale that the *New York Times* called "a horror story of maternity and the nightmare of social collapse . . . a moral fable of the genre that includes Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and George Orwell's 1984."

From Publishers Weekly

A smug, conservative couple's fifth child (after four model children) inspires fear and horror. "The implications of this slim, gripping work are ominous," wrote PW. Lessing indicts those in authority who refuse to acknowledge responsibility for the violence inherent in mankind.

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From Library Journal

Mildly eccentric English couple Harriet and David Lovatt are the contented parents of four healthy children. Suddenly, their peace is forever shattered by their fifth child, Ben, a fiercely malevolent goblin-child with a penchant for violence. It is suggested that Ben is a throwback to earlier, precivilized time, that he represents a random settling of neanderthal-like genes that all humans carry. Only Harriet tries to civilize the boy, and he gradually learns to function on a primitive level and even collects a band of similar outcasts about him. Unwanted, they leave their homes to wander England like modern-day troglodytes. Society's complicity with their fate is a reflection of its callousness. Not major Lessing but sensitive and strangely compelling nevertheless. Laurence Hull, Cannon Memorial Lib., Concord, N.C.

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Users Review

From reader reviews:

Mark Carter:

The book *The Fifth Child* gives you the sense of being enjoy for your spare time. You can utilize to make your capable much more increase. Book can to be your best friend when you getting tension or having big problem using your subject. If you can make examining a book *The Fifth Child* being your habit, you can get far more advantages, like add your capable, increase your knowledge about some or all subjects. You are able to know everything if you like open and read a guide *The Fifth Child*. Kinds of book are several. It means that, science book or encyclopedia or other people. So , how do you think about this reserve?

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