The Fifth Child

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF DORIS LESSING

Doris Lessing was born to British parents in Iran, where her father was a clerk at the Imperial Bank of Persia. Soon after, her family moved to the British colony of Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) to farm. Though her father had hoped to make his fortune there, the experiment failed and the family remained poor. She went first to an all-girls Roman Catholic convent school before continuing her own education privately at age 13. She married twice, had three children, divorced twice, and decided to move to London with only her third son and her unpublished first manuscript, *The Grass is Singing*, all before she turned 30. In London, she became involved in communist, anti-racist and anti-nuclear activism, resulting in her being placed under surveillance by the British Intelligence Services for 20 years. Her most famous book, considered a feminist classic, *The Golden Notebook*, explores mental and societal breakdown, socialism, anti-war efforts and the women's liberation movement, hallmarks of her life reflected in her body of work. By the time of her death, Lessing had written more than 50 books and been awarded nearly every major literary prize in Europe, including a Nobel Prize in Literature, though she declined Damehood because of her problematic relationship to the British Empire. She died in 2013 at the age of 94.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Lessing sets her book in the 1960s, a moment when the regimented social order of the 1950s was giving way to a period in which Europe and the Americas were in the grips of left-wing political movements that sought to upend all kinds of norms. Harriet and David meet in 1965, just as the Sexual Revolution is gaining speed, making it all the more clear that Harriet, a virgin who is skeptical of the pill and wants to stay at home with a large family, aligns much more clearly with 50s ideals than with the countercultural changes of her era. It's worth noting that, at a time when recreational drug use, civil rights, socialism and the controversy of nuclear technology filled the headlines, none of these topics is mentioned by the Lovatts in the novel. It's as though they are shutting themselves off from the real world in their removed mansion in the country. Despite the absence of political turmoil from the book, Lessing acknowledges that the mass suffering she observed in refugee camps in Pakistan, Mozambique, Eritrea, Tigre and others had perhaps informed the anguish readers find in the characters.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Twelve years after the publication of *The Fifth Child*, Lessing published a sequel called *Ben, in the World*, following Ben into adulthood, absent of the Lovatt home. Both books' portrayals of Ben are indebted to radical psychiatrist R.D. Laing, who believed psychological breakthroughs could be achieved through breakdowns and that schizophrenia is a sane response to an insane world, forming a rather romanticized notion of madness. Lessing also maintained a close friendship and romantic relationship with Clancy Sigal, an American writer, and both created facsimilies of the other in their autobiographical fiction. Though most famously told through film, critics have identified Ira Levin's novel *Rosemary's Baby* (1967) as an influence on Lessing's novel, drawing comparisons between Harriet and Rosemary's difficult pregnancies.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *The Fifth Child*
- **When Written:** 1980s
- **Where Written:** London
- **When Published:** 1988
- **Literary Period:** Feminist
- **Genre:** Gothic
- **Setting:** A small town within commuting distance of London
- **Climax:** Harriet retrieves Ben from the institution where he's been abandoned and the family's contentment is immediately dashed.
- **Antagonist:** Ben
- **Point of View:** Third person omniscient, free indirect discourse

EXTRA CREDIT

You can never go home. Doris Lessing was outspoken about her politics throughout her life, causing her to be barred from entering Rhodesia and South Africa for her resistance to white minority rule.

Fit mother. When Lessing moved to London, she took with her only her youngest son. She saw this not as an act of abandonment of her other children, but rather as an act of bravery in fulfilling her own dreams.

PLOT SUMMARY

When old-fashioned David and Harriet meet at their office Christmas party, they fall in love and decide to marry. The look for a **house** outside of London where they can settle down and begin pursuing what they're surprised to discover is a mutual

goal: a large family with as many as ten children. The house they find is enormous and perfectly in line with their dreams, but it's expensive. They'll have to wait a couple years to begin having children, ensuring their double income until David moves up the payscale enough in his architecture firm to pay their mortgage alone. Almost immediately, though, Harriet becomes pregnant, giving birth to Luke in 1966. They ask David's wealthy father, James, for financial help and Harriet's mother, Dorothy, for help caring for the new baby.

Right away, the house becomes a hub of family life, drawing visitors including David's father, David's mother and her husband (Molly and Frederick), and Harriet's sisters Angela and Sarah and their families. Harriet finds herself pregnant again the same year and the whole family celebrates Christmas at their house. The second child, Helen, is born soon after, and the extended family continues to pay vists. Harriet's sister, Sarah, quarrels with her husband, William, but a divorce is not possible because they're expecting their fourth child, Amy, who is later born with Down Syndrome.

The family celebrations continue like this, and meanwhile Harriet and David's third and fourth children, Jane and Paul, are born. At Easter, William speaks up, saying what the rest of the family is thinking: that Harriet and David should stop having children. Harriet says they plan to wait three years to continue growing the family. Harriet's sister Sarah, frustrated at the amount of assistance Harriet receives, asks Dorothy to come help her instead and Dorothy complies. Harriet tries three different girls as nannies, but none of them is a fit.

Harriet finds out she is pregnant with a fifth child, and she is finding this pregnancy particularly uncomfortable. When Harriet and David tell Dorothy about the pregnancy, she reprimands them for their lack of responsibility, complaining that they think of her as a servant, but agrees to return to help out with the assistance of one of Frederick's cousins, Alice. Just a few months in, the fifth child is already moving around quite violently in Harriet's womb, trying "to tear its way out of her stomach." Harriet, concerned, visits Dr. Brett, but the doctor insists there is nothing out of the ordinary, prescribing her a sedative for her nerves. Harriet also begs her friends for additional tranquilizers, hiding this dependency from David. Harriet says they can't host Easter in her current state, but the rest of the family insists—the atmosphere has become hostile with the stress of the imminent pregnancy.

At eight months, the labor pains begin, and Harriet gives birth to an eleven-pound boy, caveman-like in appearance and surprisingly strong. They name him Ben. The child is violent in all his actions, including breastfeeding, and he doesn't show any signs of recognizing his family. Harriet also doesn't feel the same affection for this child that she did for her older children. Almost immediately they wonder: "What is he?" Attempts at answering this question, whispered through the family, include: goblin, dwarf, troll, changeling, gnome. Harriet and David stop having sex, worried they'll inadvertently create another child like Ben.

Harriet shuts Ben in his room alone because of the threat he poses to others, but Ben sprains Paul's arm by pulling it through the bars on his crib, and then a dog and cat turn up dead, seemingly victims of Ben's violence. Fewer guests visit the house, since they're frightened of the strange child. When Ben is 18-months-old, Dorothy offers to watch him alone for a week so the rest of the family can get away. They take a vacation to France and feel immediate relief. When they return, Dorothy delivers a difficult suggestion: "Ben has got to go into an **institution**." They refuse this idea and Harriet begins devoting her attention to Ben alone.

Ben begins to talk in short sentences, mimicking the speech and action of his siblings, but unable to replicate these gestures on his own. The Christmas after Ben turns three, the extended family sees Ben stalking the large dog that is Amy's companion and protection, prompting Frederick also to recommend they put Ben in an institution. David asks how they'll pay for such a thing without any sort of diagnosis, and both sets of his parents agree to contribute. Unhappy with their insistence, but awakened to its necessity, David takes over the process of transitioning Ben out of the home. Harriet, knowing that Ben won't be expected to live long in such an institution, protests, and David claims that Ben is not his son. Once Ben is placed in a van to the institution where he'll stay, the relief in the family is palpable. However, Harriet can't stop herself from thinking about what's become of Ben, and she insists on visiting him.

At the institution, Harriet races past dozens of drugged and disfigured children to find Ben clothed in a straightjacket and nothing else, lying unconscious on a urine-soaked cot. Seeing this, she knows she must bring him home. The orderlies, concerned at how she'll manage him, send her off with sedatives for the ride home.

At home, the family is horrified to find Ben in Harriet's arms. She realizes that her only way of controlling him is to threaten to take him back to the institution, which proves effective in mitigating his destructive behavior. David remains detached from Ben. A young man named John does yard work for the family and Ben takes a liking to him. Harriet proposes that John serve as Ben's nanny, allowing Ben to tag along wherever John and his friends go. John agrees.

Harriet and David go on a weekend trip alone to reconnect. Harriet suggests having more children and David absolutely refuses the possibility. Family arrives for the summer holiday, but not Molly and Frederick who cannot forgive Harriet for bringing Ben back from the institution.

Harriet and David can no longer lock Ben in his room at night and so the other children lock themselves into their rooms, barring Harriet from tucking them in or checking on them. When Ben is five, Luke and Helen request to be sent to

boarding school, their grandparents having already agreed to foot the bill because none of them like Ben. It also becomes apparent that Paul is emotionally disturbed because of the neglect he's suffered. Ben is finally of age to go to school, and Harriet anticipates horrible news from his teachers, but they insist that, despite his not picking up on the lessons, he tries very hard. At the end of the second term, though, Ben acts out, knocking down a little girl, biting her, and breaking her arm. Harriet threatens to return him to the institution and John also talks to Ben, explaining why he can't hurt others.

Harriet also asks Dr. Brett to arrange an appointment with a specialist. She worries that he'll forewarn the doctor that the issue is Harriet's not Ben's, and her fears prove justified. She hopes this new doctor might be able to diagnose Ben's condition, but the specialist, Dr. Gilly, states that the issue lies in the fact that Harriet clearly doesn't like Ben very much. After some back-and-forth, Harriet asks if the child is human and the doctor seems to entertain the possibility that he is not. Harriet suggests Ben is a throwback from another time, and the doctor says she's not qualified to determine this and wouldn't know how to proceed even if she were. Harriet settles for a sedative prescription she can use on Ben in moments of crisis.

At Christmas, the older children decline to return home, spending the holidays with their grandparents instead. Dorothy takes Jane to live with her permanently, they send Paul to a psychiatrist, and David works more and more to pay for these additional financial needs.

John announces he'll be leaving town to attend school and Ben begs for John to take him with, but this isn't possible. Ben remains incapable of understanding social dynamics, stories, or games. The family anticipates and fears Ben's imminent adolescence. The full family returns for the summer holiday in 1986, and Paul asks to be sent to boarding school like the others.

At the end of the holiday Ben moves on to secondary school, bringing home friends: Derek, Billy, Elvis and Vic. Harriet wonders if these boys pity her son, but, in fact, he seems to act as their leader, and the group is the envy of the entire school. Ben and the gang disappear for days at a time and Harriet notices an uptick in crime in the area, wondering if Ben's gang has something to do with it.

Harriet and David decide to move and David suggests they not tell Ben, who is off with his gang, where they're going. Harriet gives Ben the address anyway, but he discards it as though he cares little about remaining in contact with her. Harriet watches Ben hanging out with his friends one night, wondering what will become of him, wondering if he has found his tribe in these other boys or if he'll never find another being with whom he fully identifies.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Harriet Lovatt – Harriet, the novel's protagonist, is the wife and mother to the Lovatt family. While working as a graphic designer, she meets David at an office party and they quickly marry, buy a too-expensive **house**, and conceive a child. Harriet's parents remained happily married until her father passed away, and she uses them as the model of a successful marriage. Harriet is unfashionably traditional for the 1960s—her goal, which she achieves, is to stay at home raising a large family. For a time, this makes her happy, but the financial strain of having five children, coupled with the troubles of their psychologically disturbed son Ben, upends the traditional happy family Harriet desired. Throughout the novel, Harriet is shown to be devoted (if reluctantly at times) and idealistic, remaining committed to integrating Ben into the family, despite the danger he poses to the other children. While Harriet's compassion for Ben is understandable, she is consistently unable to put her decisions into a larger perspective and take actions that will benefit the family as a whole, which alienates her husband, extended family, and the remainder of her children. By the end of the novel, the Lovatt family is in tatters, and Harriet suggests that this fate is her punishment for always wanting more happiness, rather than being content with the abundant blessings the family once had.

David Lovatt – David, an architect, is Harriet's husband, and he is the father of Luke, Helen, Jane, Paul and Ben. David and Harriet fall in love at an office party after they discover that they are both shy and old-fashioned and that they want a large family. David grew up in the two homes of his divorced parents, each remarried. He saw his true home as being his bedroom at his mother's **house** in Oxford and this influences his firm belief that each of their children deserves a room of their own, where they can be safe and secure, even when the family is going through turmoil. Though he and Harriet are equally idealistic in the beginning of the novel about their potential to attain happiness through an ever-expanding family, David reveals himself to be the more pragmatic of the two once the couple's financial and familial difficulties begin. While Harriet concentrates all of her energy on the couple's troubled son Ben, David prefers to take actions that benefit the family overall, trying to save the unit in favor of pouring resources into only one child who might not ever improve. This leads David to put Ben in an institution at the suggestion of the extended family, which is a morally-fraught decision, in that he knows the institution will be cruel to Ben, but he prefers to focus on making sure that the rest of the family can live in peace and happiness. Unfortunately, the period of happiness while Ben is in the institution is to be the family's last. Once Harriet retrieves Ben from the institution against David's wishes, the family descends back into chaos, and David—ever the rational

pragmatist—blames their fate on a combination of bad luck and bad choices.

Ben Lovatt – Fifth child of Harriet and David, and youngest sibling to Luke, Helen, Jane and Paul. Ben is heavy-shouldered, stout and hunched. His forehead slopes from his eyebrows to the crown of his head, his yellowish hair coming low on his forehead. He has green-yellow eyes. His hands are thick and heavy and he is referred to by others as a troll, goblin, dwarf, throwback or changeling. Ben is unusually strong and tenacious, seemingly lacking sympathy for all other living things, despite the concerted efforts of Harriet to love and mother him into behaving as her previous children have. He watches the behaviors of his siblings, but fails to imitate them properly or understand why they behave the way they do. It is assumed that he is the one to have killed both a dog and cat in his youth, and he injures his siblings and caregivers with little remorse. His motives remain inexplicable throughout the book, though he does take clear pleasure in triumphs of his own strength and will, regardless of any malicious underpinnings. Ben is abandoned at and then rescued from the institution, Harriet's only way of persuading Ben to behave is by threatening to return him to the institution, a memory which forces him into a vulnerable submission. Despite Ben being a poor student, his teachers indicate that he puts a great deal of effort into the assignments, news that surprises Harriet, who expects him to get into more trouble in school. Eventually, Ben is able to form a connection by attaching himself to his male babysitter John who takes him under his wing, hanging out with his group of friends at the Café and on outings. Furthermore, in secondary school, Ben forms a group of friends among whom he takes on a role as leader. The group is the envy of the school, and Harriet believes they might be participating in a variety of crimes: mugging people and robbing businesses. In both the case of John's group of friends and the gang of boys from school, Ben seems to be accepted for who he is, rather than called out as being an outsider. Ben succeeds in finding an alternative family life in which he is comfortable, but he never assimilates to his parents and siblings, demonstrating that it's impossible to make someone the person you want them to be.

Dorothy – Dorothy, a widow, is Harriet's mother and she is Harriet and David's primary source of childcare throughout the novel, as the couple has more children than they can handle on their own. Though she maintains an apartment of her own in London, there's no question that she will come live with Harriet and David when they begin having children, as family is of the utmost importance to her. Dorothy is a voice of pragmatism, often recommending to Harriet and David that they think more carefully about the decisions they're making and whether they can handle the responsibility. When the extended family descends upon the Lovatt home for holidays three times a year, it is Dorothy who takes on the bulk of the work hosting them, and on multiple occasions she calls out the fact that Harriet and David treat her as though she is a servant, receiving little thanks for her labor. Though she wants to provide help, her other daughters are jealous of the assistance she gives to Harriet and David and eventually Dorothy absents herself from the Lovatt household to help care for her other grandchildren, taking in their daughter Jane when Jane can no longer tolerate life at home.

Paul Lovatt – Paul is Harriet and David's fourth child, who is born sweet and good-natured. As Paul was just born when Harriet becomes pregnant with Ben, Harriet is unable to nurture newborn Paul in the same way she has the other children, a trend that continues after Ben is born, since the infant needs a significant amount of attention and care. Paul, as a result, is the Lovatt child who is most affected by Ben's presence—he is regularly threatened by his younger, stronger sibling, and eventually he develops emotional "disturbances," which his parents don't take as seriously as Ben's issues. Eventually Paul leaves the **house** to go to boarding school to escape the threat of Ben.

Luke Lovatt – Harriet and David's first child. Though he tries to teach Ben certain skills and mentor him, eventually Luke asks to be sent to boarding school to remove himself from the threatening atmosphere that Ben creates at home. Luke grows up to be a natural observer like David: quiet, reliable and steady. He wants to take after his Grandfather, James, and build boats.

Helen Lovatt – Harriet and David's second child. Though she also tries to teach Ben certain skills and is very kindhearted, eventually Helen asks, at the same time as Luke, to be sent to boarding school so that she might no longer be in Ben's threatening company at home. Helen matures into a cool and distant young woman who is attractive and self-sufficient.

James Lovatt – James, a wealthy boat builder, is David's father who funds the Lovatt family through the financial strain of having more children than they can support on their own. James is divorced from Molly and remarried to Jessica, and David felt torn between his parents as a child—ultimately, he chose to live with his mother rather than his father. James is a member of the pragmatic faction of the family who believes that putting Ben in an institution is the best decision, and it's James who pays the bulk of the cost. James tries to set boundaries for what he'll pay for when he senses the family's financial needs becoming excessive, but ultimately, James agrees to pay for boarding school for both Luke and Paul.

Molly – Molly, a large and untidy academic, kind and remote if not typically maternal, is David's mother. She is content to live a simpler, less well-to-do life than her first husband, James. Remarried now to Frederick, their **house** is the one David calls home. Molly and her husband aim at an appearance of uncomformity, and they judge David and Harriet's conventional family ideals. She provides financial support when her husband

recommends that Ben be put into an institution and also to help pay for Helen's boarding school, agreeing that Helen needs to get out of proximity to Ben.

John – A big, shaggy, amiable young man who is hired by the Lovatts first to do yard work and then to watch Ben in the hours when he is not in school. Ben takes a strong liking to John, who (though patient and sweet) treats Ben roughly, as though he is training a puppy. Ben seems to like this treatment, and John invites him along to hang out with his gang of friends, riding on motorbikes and hanging out at the café. John begins to manipulate the situation a bit, asking for cash to take Ben (and the rest of the gang) on outings, and Harriet complies, happy to have Ben out of the **house**. Johns's gang of friends, accept Ben as a mascot of sorts, though the names they call him seem cruel: "Dopey, Dwarfey, Alien Two, Hobbit, and Gremlin." Eventually Ben is disappointed when John and his friends move away to attend a vocational school.

Frederick – Husband to Molly. Unkempt, academic. Though Frederick normally occupies the role of objective academic, he steps out on a limb to suggest that Ben needs to be removed from the home and put into an institution. He presents this opinion as the only logical solution to the issues of safety developing in the Lovatt home.

Deborah – Sister to David, daughter of James and Molly. After the divorce, Deborah chose to live with James, whereas David remained with Molly. Deborah adopted her father's wealthy lifestyle, while David did not. Deborah is unmarried with no children, and she visits the Lovatt family only occasionally. Her failed love life is a good-humored family joke.

Sarah –Daughter of Dorothy and mother to four children, including Amy, who is born with Down Syndrome. It is Harriet's privately held opinion that Sarah and her husband William's quarreling causes Amy to be born with Down Syndrome, foreshadowing Harriet's belief that Ben's violent nature was brought on by her own greed for a large, idyllic family life. Sarah expresses frustration that Dorothy provides more assistance to Harriet than to her, despite Amy's special needs.

Amy – Daughter of Sarah and William. Amy has Down syndrome, which the family is embarrassed by at first. When Amy's sweetness is threatened by Ben's cruelty, though, the family quickly becomes protective of Amy. Amy has a large dog companion, which Ben threatens to strangle. This moment is the impetus for the family deciding to put Ben into an institution.

William – Husband to Sarah, with whom he quarrels often. Regularly out of work. He and Sarah don't believe divorce to be an option for them because of their financial circumstances and the four children they must support together. After his fourth child is born with Down Syndrome, William takes it upon himself to warn David and Harriet that they should stop having children or they might experience the bad luck he has.

Bridget David's younger cousin. She grew up in a complicated family situation, and initially admires and enjoys the Lovatt's big family and loving family life. However, after Ben is born she is the first to question the way that Harriet and David both lock him away while saying he is totally fine, and she never returns to the Lovatt's **house**.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Jane Lovatt – Harriet and David's third child. Sweet-natured Jane stays home a bit longer than Luke and Helen, and she is the only one to go live with Dorothy instead of going to boarding school. She is more practical than intellectual.

Jessica – Jessica, wife to James, is a noisy, kind, competent woman, with the cynical sense of humor of the wealthy. She is quite absent from the family gatherings as she dislikes England and prefers more tropical destinations for her holidays.

Angela – Daughter of Dorothy. Mother to three children. Angela does not receive Dorothy's help, because her needs are less than those of her sisters, and she resents this fact, but she helps with hosting duties when visiting the Lovatt **house** for the holidays.

Alice – Widow cousin of Frederick, down on her luck, who comes to help Dorothy care for the children. Dorothy resents having to share authority with Alice, but she is grateful for the help.

Dr. Brett – Harriet's regular obstetrician and pediatrician, who remains convinced that Harriet is overreacting to Ben's behavior. He insists that nothing is wrong with the child before or after he is born.

Dr. Gilly – A specialist that Harriet and Ben see in London who admits that something is different about Ben, but that there is no way to prove it and nothing to be done even if they could.

Billy, Derek, Vic and Elvis – Several of Ben's group of friends when he reaches secondary school. They embrace him as a leader despite his differences. They behave rudely, occupying the Lovatt home despite Harriet and David's protests. Harriet suspects that the boys are committing crimes, robbing people and businesses, and maybe even attacking women.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

NATURE VS. NURTURE

David and Harriet produce four sweet children in quick succession before birthing a fifth, Ben, who is violently willful and seemingly malevolent from the start. Through an exploration of Ben's personality, Harriet and David's parenting tactics, and their extended family dynamics, *The Fifth Child* asks whether nature or nurture determines a child's personality and, by extension, whether it's possible to change a child's personality through nurturing them. Though Ben's character seems to suggest that nature creates some problems that cannot be explained or solved, the trajectories of the family's older children demonstrate that nurture is still crucial, particularly for children who are naturally better adjusted.

David and Harriet's fifth child, Ben, is different from his happy and well-adjusted older siblings, and the novel attempts to untangle why Ben is the way he is. David and Harriet's first four children are compassionate, well-behaved, and content with their lives, which reflects well on the way they've been parented. However, Ben—who was raised in the same environment—seems to lack an essential empathy, killing a dog, a cat, and inflicting pain on his siblings and caregivers with little remorse. The glaring difference between Ben's character and that of his siblings raises the possibility that Harriet and David have had little effect; perhaps Ben is naturally troubled and his siblings are naturally good. Further suggesting that Ben's personality might be a product of nature, Lessing demonstrates that violence and discontentment have plagued him since he was in the womb—Harriet's pregnancy was a difficult one, as she was in constant pain from being pummeled from the inside.

However, Lessing does hint at familial circumstances that have soured since the births of their first four children, which leaves open the possibility that Ben's environment shaped him, even if subtly. By the time Ben is born (unplanned), some animosity has developed among the extended family who are increasingly burdened (in the form of finances and childcare) by the growing brood. Since the extended family is so involved in the lives of Harriet and David's children, it's possible that this discontent has infected Ben or made him feel unwanted, perhaps through his receiving more fraught care than the other children had. Despite this, Ben's sweet siblings and the longstanding nature of his problems point readers to the conclusion that Ben's problems are likely caused more by nature than by his family environment.

Though Lessing seems to favor the explanation that nature is more responsible for Ben's difficulties than nurture, she does not dismiss the importance of nurture to raising healthy and happy children. The stress of Ben's threatening presence in the **house** means that Harriet gives much of her time and attention to only Ben, trying in vain to nurture away his issues. Though her attempts to nurture Ben fail to change him, her resulting inattention to her other children affects them deeply. David and Harriet's fourth child, Paul, is the child that suffers the most. Born sweet and good-natured, he is deprived of his mother's love early on when Harriet turns her attention to her difficult pregnancy and then to the volatile child that results. Paul develops emotional "disturbances" because of this imbalance in attention, but not even his problems attract Harriet's attention—they're often relegated to the category of "normal," which means they receive less attention than Ben's issues.

Even the children who are less affected by Harriet's inattention become disillusioned by family life. By the end of the novel, all of the children but Ben have left David and Harriet's home, opting to live with their grandparents or attend boarding school to escape a stressful familial environment. Meanwhile, Ben—the recipient of the majority of Harriet's care and attention—is on the cusp of being subsumed by a street gang.

David and Harriet have lavished attention on their naturally troubled child but have failed to change him, while their failure to nurture their other four children has unintentionally overcome the good natures they were born with, destroying their family. By nurturing only one child, they end up isolating their other children and pushing all of them away. This irony encapsulates Lessing's dark view of nature and nurture: while nature can doom a troubled child, nature can't necessarily save a sweet one, so it's best to nurture children strategically.

IDEALISM VS. PRAGMATISM

Throughout *The Fifth Child*, Harriet and David struggle to figure out how to be pragmatic in a difficult situation. However, their individual interpretations of what constitutes pragmatic action diverges as the novel progresses: Harriet interprets the magnitude of Ben's troubles to mean that she should, in the name of pragmatism, focus her energy on him, while David takes a wider view of the situation, thinking it practical to focus on their other children and give up their idealist hopes of integrating Ben into family life. The novel's ambiguity about which actions are idealistic and which are pragmatic shows the difficulty of knowing, in the moment, what's right. Despite this ambiguity, though, Lessing seems to ultimately imply that David's approach—basing actions on a wide view of a situation—leads to better results.

At the beginning of the book, Harriet and David are two very practical people who find they have a common impractical desire between them: to raise a large family with as many as ten children. They marry quickly and buy a big, expensive home that they can only hope to afford if they work for at least two years before having children. While this plan may seem pragmatic, David and Harriet display their underlying idealism when Harriet quickly becomes pregnant—instead of downsizing, they decide they'll "manage somehow," despite the mortgage being beyond them. Almost immediately, they

diverge from the pragmatic plan they have set out for themselves, believing naively that everything will work out because they are so happy together.

In this moment, Lessing also begins to distinguish between Harriet and David's diverging pragmatism. While David is committed to working as much as possible to get the family back on track financially, Harriet seems content to accept financial help from David's father and help with childcare from her mother. After Ben is born, these differences between Harriet and David's ideas of pragmatism become even more pronounced. When Ben sprains his brother's arm, kills both a small dog and a cat, and then makes gestures toward strangling a larger dog, David's stepfather Frederick insists that there is no other choice than to put Ben in an **institution** because of the danger he poses to others. This is a decision based solely on pragmatism: he believes it is better to save the other children than to save only one. Harriet, still hoping that her child might be saved, is unable to accept this decision, and so David takes charge of arranging an institution to take Ben. When a car comes to take Ben away, it is David who has packed his bags and who wrestles him into the vehicle, taking the advice of the more practical members of their extended family.

Harriet and David experience the ideal family environment after Ben is taken away, enjoying their children in a way they've been unable to before. Harriet, however, is troubled by the idea of how Ben might be treated in the institution and she insists on visiting him. When she arrives, she finds Ben naked but for a straightjacket on a urine-soaked cot, drugged and unconscious. It becomes clear to her that he will die quickly in this place, and she decides to bring him home. Though she finds this choice pragmatic (due to her narrow view, which considers only Ben's needs), David considers this to be an idealistic decision based on a fantasy that Ben can be rehabilitated and coming at the expense of every other member of the family.

Once Ben returns home, chaos reigns and the family is ripped apart. With Harriet's version of pragmatism beating out David's, each of the other children becomes consumed by fear and frustration at Ben and, one by one, they leave the **house**. Meanwhile, though Harriet maintains her hope that Ben might find a way of existing in the world with compassion and purpose, Ben remains indifferent to the family, falling into the company of a street gang. This tragic ending implies that, though neither the choice to leave Ben in the institution nor the choice to bring him home would have been ideal, pragmatism that takes into account the sum total of factors in a situation, rather than narrowly focusing on one aspect, would have had better results.

CONFORMITY AND OTHERNESS

The Fifth Child is the story of a conventional, old-fashioned family coming into conflict with a troubled child who does not fit into their expectations for their life. Instead of accepting their child, Ben, on his own terms, Harriet and David try to change him so that he will conform to the family life they desire. However, their quest to change Ben not only fails, but it also rips the family apart, and Ben is left to find community and acceptance elsewhere. Through the story of the family's implosion and Ben's pursuit of familial connection outside of the family, the novel posits that strict conformity creates the conditions under which people become outcast. While this can be damaging to those who are made to feel different or inferior, however, Lessing demonstrates that communities of outcasts can still be a powerful refuge for those who aren't accepted elsewhere.

Harriet and David might have known better than to judge their son for being different; in the beginning of the book, they themselves are ostracized for their traditional values, which are out of vogue in the raucous '60s. David is fiercely conservative and old-fashioned, and Harriet is discarded by a series of friends for being a virgin, which made her a misfit. When David and Harriet meet at an office party, they believe immediately that they were made for each other, and they mitigate their social otherness by forming a family. However, their experience of being judged and othered does not make them more compassionate towards those with differing perspectives, values, or capabilities—instead, it ends up reinforcing their traditional values and closing them off to the idea that people who are different than they are should be accepted and valued.

This becomes most obvious when their fifth child, Ben, is born. Immediately, Harriet and David feel unable to connect with—or even love—this child, whom they deem a "throwback," "goblin," "troll," and "dwarf." Ben disrupts the traditional family life to which Harriet and David feel entitled, and instead of striving to accommodate Ben's needs and shifting their family expectations to account for his presence, Harriet insists that they try to change Ben, while David believes that they should institutionalize him to preserve the family dynamic that existed before he was born. To his conformist, suburban family, Ben represents an uncivilized streak in the human species that must be tamed or excluded from modern family life and society.

Ben's family harms Ben because they can't accept his differences, but other characters harm Ben by only accepting him under the pretense that he *has* no differences. Throughout the book Ben's doctor gaslights Harriet, pretending that there is nothing unusual about the boy and suggesting that instead the fault lies in Harriet's hysterical, paranoid behavior. Ben's teachers, too, act as though there is nothing extraordinary about him, despite his inability to retain any knowledge from classroom lessons. In refusing to acknowledge his disability and otherness, Ben's doctor and teachers become delinquent in their efforts to treat him, educate him, and prepare him for life beyond school.

While Ben's family acknowledges his differences but can't accept them, and Ben's doctor and teachers can accept him but

not acknowledge his differences, Ben ultimately finds refuge from his otherness among people who can both acknowledge who he is and accept him just that way. For example, Ben's attachment to his caregiver, John, a mostly unemployed youth, is driven by John's willingness to roughhouse with Ben, treating him like an active and disobedient puppy. John is playful but firm, ribbing Ben, while also ordering him about. The group of John's friends (outsiders themselves) accept Ben by adopting the same tone with Ben, calling him teasing but affectionate names like Dopey, Dwarf and Hobbit. Ben enjoys the way this indicates that he is a part of the group. Later, in secondary school, Ben also finds satisfying companionship with a group of other outcasts, taking on the role of leader and turning the Lovatt home into a sort of clubhouse for them. These relationships show that Ben is capable of family-like bonds when he is accepted and understood, contrary to the way his family rejects him for his otherness. Ben's burgeoning friendships outside of his family suggest that, if his family could only accept his differences, perhaps they, too, could have connected with him and made him part of the family.

BIOLOGICAL FAMILIES VS. NONTRADITIONAL FAMILIES

The Fifth Child, a story of a family unraveling, ends with that family destroyed. David and Harriet's once-strong bond has been weakened by the stress of raising their troubled son Ben, and the four older children have all left the **house** in hopes of finding a more stable home life with their grandparents or at boarding school. Though Lessing provides a fair account of the positive support that a family can provide, the book ultimately rules in favor of nontraditional support networks, focusing on the harm that can be done by traditional familial influence.

While the house that David and Harriet purchased was initially a hub of familial warmth and camaraderie for even the extended family, that atmosphere devolves quickly after the birth of Harriet and David's fifth child, the troubled Ben. Though skeptical of Harriet and David's decision-making from the start, the extended family is willing to put those judgments aside and help (both financially and through childcare) when all is going well. However, they disperse when Ben brings trouble, which suggests that the support of an extended family is unreliable

Lessing doesn't suggest that nuclear family is much more stable or helpful. For instance, Harriet's attempts at connecting with Ben fail from the start. When the child looks at her, she sees no recognition or affection returned to her, which casts suspicion on the traditional notion that the nuclear family is defined by an unshakeable bond. The faultlines of the nuclear family are also echoed in David's divorced parents, as well as in the sharply different paths David and his sister take. This shows that the nuclear family—an unstable and even unnatural construction—can affect individuals profoundly when it dissolves.

In the vein of family's effect on the individual, Lessing also considers whether Ben's infancy might have been less volatile if the extended family hadn't been so judgmental of David and Harriet for having become pregnant for a fifth time without the resources to support another child. Despite the childcare and financial support provided by the extended family, their belief that having a fifth child was a mistake creates a toxic environment. This atmosphere begins the dissolution of their tight familial bonds and poisons the family's ability to embrace Ben as they have the siblings who preceded him.

Instead of advocating for nuclear and extended family, Lessing shows the strength of nontraditional family that people can construct for themselves. Ben, despite his inability to connect with his nuclear family, constructs meaningful relationships with people outside the family. He first attaches himself to a young man named John, who becomes almost a nanny to Ben. Ben also becomes a sort of "mascot" for John's group of friends, taking joy in being ordered around and kidded by them. This shows that it's possible to forge a familial-type bond with Ben, which raises the question of what support or acceptance might be lacking in his biological family.

After John goes away to school, Ben builds a group of friends at his secondary school. Though Harriet at first believes the other boys' acceptance of Ben must be some sort of charity, it soon becomes clear that Ben is actually the leader of this gang and that the group is revered by the rest of the school. Ben's acceptance with this group again makes the point that, among a group of like-minded individuals, attachment is possible for him.

Despite the fact that this should be clear to Ben's immediate family, Harriet remains misguided at the end of the book. While watching Ben spend time with his friends, she imagines what the rest of his life will be like, wondering if he will always be "searching the faces of the crowd for another of his own kind." In this, she fails to recognize that he has found an alternative family for himself that is satisfactory to him. Because Ben has been denied the love and support of his nuclear family, he looks for and finds a non-traditional family which can provide those things for him. The Lovatts cannot find a way to love Ben, blinded as they are by their traditional ideals of family that have gone unchallenged for so long, and so Ben, in turn, rejects them, opting to align himself with a community that better fits his own natural way of being.

HAPPINESS VS. CONTENTMENT

In *The Fifth Child*, Lessing portrays a family relentlessly pursuing happiness. Harriet and David believe that they are destined for happiness because they have a clear idea of what will make them happy and a plan for how to achieve it: they want to have a large

family, so they buy a big **house** and start having children. Though they believe that they are making concerted progress towards an attainable goal, Harriet and David are actually overreaching and compromising the happiness they already have in the process. The family's ultimate downfall—which comes after a blissful period that they felt was not enough—suggests that Harriet and David brought about their fate by refusing to be contented with the happiness they had already been afforded, even if that happiness didn't quite match their dream.

One reason for Harriet and David's dogged pursuit of a better and better life is that they believe that happiness is something that one earns through morality and concerted effort. As they grow their family inside their cozy home, they imagine their happiness to be a reflection of their righteousness, believing that they have made good choices and that they are admired for the life they have built. In response to their family's initial judgment of their extravagance, Harriet defends the choices she and David have made by saying, "This is what everyone wants, really, but we've been brainwashed out of it. People want to live like this, really." In this statement, Harriet fails to acknowledge that their life is made possible by her mother's free childcare and David's father's financial largesse—instead of acknowledging that her life is indebted to others, she prefers to subtly imply that the family's judgment is a product of their jealousy of her life.

In contrast to Harriet and David's notion that they are good people who are earning their happiness through prudence and effort, Lessing calls attention to the hypocrisy of Harriet and David's inability to live within their means. Though they claim not to be materialistic, they insist on owning a home that they cannot afford, hosting parties they can't supply on their own, and birthing children they have neither the time nor the money to care for properly. Instead of seeing their excesses as a sign of bad choices and fraught morality, they see their wonderful life as further evidence that they are on the right track. It seems no coincidence, then, that the troubled child is the final one David and Harriet bring into the world—a clear indication that this child marks some sort of tipping point, where, even with the generous assistance of their parents, David and Harriet can no longer maintain order.

As it's Harriet and David's inability to acknowledge the reality of their situation that leads them to overextend themselves, *The Fifth Child* can be seen as a morality tale in which a family, rather than contenting themselves with the happiness and privilege they already enjoy, ruins themselves in pursuit of the extravagant gratification that they believe they're owed. Had Harriet and David contented themselves with what they had, rather than always assuming they were owed their ideal of happiness without earning it, they might not have been "punished" for their greed and ambition.

At the end of the book, as their perfect life lies in shambles, Harriet explicitly avows this interpretation of the story, professing her belief that she and David have been punished for assuming they could be happy. However, David has a less moralistic interpretation: he believes that their misfortune has been the product of pure luck (anyone could have had an anomalously troubled child) and poor decision-making (had Harriet not rescued Ben from the **institution** where they'd admitted him, their family life might not have devolved to the extent it did). In their own way, both David and Harriet are pointing to the dangers of defining happiness too narrowly and failing to adjust expectations in the face of difficult circumstances. Whether this was a cosmic punishment or a banal case of cause and effect, Harriet and David's arrogant and naïve insistence on always reaching for more has clearly destroyed their chance of being happy at all.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

THE VICTORIAN HOUSE

At the beginning of the novel, Harriet and David purchase their dream home, an enormous house that they can't afford, but which they see as a starting point for the large family they plan to have. The house, therefore, is a symbol of the mismatch between Harriet and David's ideal life and the reality of their circumstances. The house is also tied to the dissolution of pragmatism, as Harriet and David plan initially to wait to have children until David can afford to carry the mortgage without Harriet's income, but Harriet immediately becomes pregnant, and the couple quickly abandons their pragmatism to start their family. Over the course of the novel, they continue to overreach, having more and more children that they can only support and care for with the help of their extended families. As such, the irresponsible purchase of the house encapsulates David and Harriet's tendency to pay lip service to acting pragmatically while allowing their whims and ideals to rule their actions. By the end of the novel, David and Harriet have decided to sell the house, as owning it has not, in fact, enabled their dream—though they had a large family, all of their children have moved away because Ben's troubled presence has made the house so stressful to inhabit. Ultimately, then, it seems that overreaching in service of an ideal, rather than being prudent, has done Harriet and David in.

THE INSTITUTION

When the Lovatt family determines that their idyllic family life is threatened by Ben's violent behaviors,

they decide to commit Ben to an institution despite his not having a diagnosis that warrants such an action. Harriet and David know that surrendering Ben to such a place means he will be mistreated, and so Harriet resists this option, but David insists. He would rather put Ben out of mind and focus on the well-being of his four other children than adjust his idealistic vision of family life to include Ben. The institution, then, represents the way "others" are shunned by society when the way their behavior differs from what's expected of them. While David goes to trouble not to see what is being done to Ben at the institution (both physically by staying home, and emotionally by trying to purge Ben from his thoughts), Harriet is unable to abandon her son in this way, even to the detriment of the other children. Harriet finds the institution where Ben is being held and abused, and brings him back home. Despite Ben returning home, Harriet is still unable to recognize Ben for what he is, trying to transform his personality into one that better matches what she observes in her older children. Harriet makes the mistake of thinking that her two options are either exiling her son or trying to incorporate him into her existing ideal of family life, rather than opening herself up to adjusting the dynamics of the family to embrace Ben's personality, which is ultimately another form of refusing who he is and pushing him away.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Vintage edition of *The Fifth Child* published in 1988.

Pages 3 – 33 Quotes

She knew his look of watchful apartness mirrored her own. She judged his humorous air to be an effort. He was making similar mental comments about her: she seemed to dislike these occasions as much as he did. Both had found out who the other was.

Related Characters: Harriet Lovatt, David Lovatt

Related Themes:

Page Number: 4

Explanation and Analysis

When Harriet views David for the first time at the office Christmas party she identifies with him immediately. Neither one is having a good time and they can tell the other feels the same. The final sentence of the quote oversimplifies the ease with which one might come to know another person. Over the course of the book, the way these two understand each other will flourish and then fade as they come to see other aspects of their spouse's personality emerge based on their circumstances. In this moment, they identify themselves as being likeminded to each other, but different than those around them.

But they meant to have a lot of children. Both, somewhat defiantly, because of the enormity of their demands on the future, announced they "would not mind" a lot of children. "Even four, or five…" "Or six," said David. "Or six!" said Harriet, laughing to the point of tears from relief.

Related Characters: David Lovatt, Harriet Lovatt

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 8

Explanation and Analysis

David and Harriet, upon finding the large house of their dreams, reveal here that they're both interested in having a big family. The one-upmanship of David and Harriet in this quote shows the way their desires feed off of one another and multiply. While both want several children, it's almost as though they challenge each other's limits in suggesting more and more, finding confidence and assurance in the fact that the other doesn't oppose the idea. The entitlement with which they approach their future is apparent in their expectation that they will be affluent and capable enough to have the time, money, skill and opportunity to care for this many children. Neither is forced to compromise their hopes in this situation and so compromise is not something they expect of the future of their union.

She did not realize, as David did, how annoyed these two parents were. Aiming, like all their kind, at an appearance of unconformity, they were in fact the essence of convention, and disliked any manifestation of the spirit of exaggeration, of excess. This house was that.

Related Characters: Frederick , Molly , David Lovatt, Harriet Lovatt

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 12

Explanation and Analysis

In this scene, Molly and Frederick, David's mother and stepfather, arrive to look at the house and immediately understand that David and Harriet expect to fill it with a large family. Advanced in age, previously divorced, living a financially modest life together, and viewing themselves as iconoclastic academics, Molly and Frederick see themselves as more progressive in their views, though Harriet and David are the ones who feel eccentric in this moment, since Molly and Frederick are clearly questioning the wisdom (and even the excessive optics) of buying such a large house and filling it with children. While Harriet is not yet aware of how skeptical Molly and Frederick are, Harriet will come to an acute awareness of the family's judgments of her lifestyle.

"You want things both ways. The aristocracy—yes, they can have children like rabbits, and expect to, but they have the money for it. And poor people can have children, and half of them die, and expect to. But people like us, in the middle, we have to be careful about the children we have so we can look after them."

Related Characters: Dorothy (speaker), Harriet Lovatt, David Lovatt

Related Themes:

Page Number: 16

Explanation and Analysis

Immediately preceding this, Harriet and David have made the case to Harriet's mother, Dorothy that it is normal in plenty of cultures to have very large families. Dorothy, visiting for the first time and also understanding the grand, if impractical plans that David and Harriet have for their family life because of the size of the hosue, warns David and Harriet of the immense amount of work it takes to raise a family and why the middle class must be the especially careful about the choices they make. Dorothy is a voice of practicality throughout the novel. She speaks from experience, acknowledging that while she lived an adequate and content life, it fell short of being comfortable or blissful. Her warning about the precariousness of middle class life and the need to be prudent in order to strike a sustainable balance is one that foreshadows the disastrous consequences of Harriet and David's excess.

Happiness. A happy family. The Lovatts were a happy family. It was what they had chosen and what they deserved.

Related Characters: Jane Lovatt, Helen Lovatt, Luke Lovatt, David Lovatt, Harriet Lovatt

Related Themes:

Page Number: 21

Explanation and Analysis

This reflection comes from the united point of view of David and Harriet after their third daughter Jane has been born in quick succession to the others. Harriet and David remain very much in love, convinced that their happiness is the result of their will and effort, rather than good luck or the beneficence of their parents. The verbiage of "happiness" rather than "contentment" is especially important, indicating that it's ecstatic bliss that colors their every day life instead of a more everyday satisfaction. The repetition of the word "happy" also serves to reinforce the way in which the Lovatts obsessively focus on their state of happiness.

Harriet said to David, privately, that she did not believe was bad luck: Sarah and William's unhappiness, their quarrelling, had probably attracted the mongol child—yes, yes, of course she knew one shouldn't call them mongol[...]David disliked this trait of Harriet's, a fatalism that seemed so at odds with the rest of her. He said he thought this was silly hysterical thinking: Harriet sulked and they had to make up.

Related Characters: Sarah , William , Amy , David Lovatt, Harriet Lovatt

Related Themes:

Page Number: 22

Explanation and Analysis

Harriet voices this opinion privately to David after her sister Sarah complains that she and her husband are the recipients of the family's bad luck when they have a disabled child. Harriet doesn't believe in luck and this marks one of

the first divisions between Harriet and David's outlooks. In the same way that Harriet believes she and David have earned the happiness of their family, she believes that her sister has brought unhappiness on herself. David's refusal to take Harriet seriously is also another first in the book. Throughout, Harriet believes that her opinions are not taken seriously and that she is written off as being unreasonable because she's a woman. This is the first time that David also commits this act.

"This is what everyone wants, really, but we've been brainwashed out of it. People want to live like this, really."

Related Characters: Harriet Lovatt (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 27

Explanation and Analysis

Harriet voices this opinion after her brother-in-law William has told Harriet she shouldn't have more children. Paul has just been born, and the entire family appears judgmental of Harriet and David's decision to have four children in such quick succession. The subtext of the fight is that, if Harriet and Paul are to continue having children, each child risks being born with a defect, as Amy was. Harriet defends their choices, offended by her relatives' judgment, and lashes out by accusing the others of being incapable of attaining such happiness and being repressed in their desire for a larger family. She is committed to the ideal family life in her head, ignoring the pragmatics of how they will support such a family, something the rest of the family seems more aware of. While she sees the others as being moderately content with their circumstances, she and David are striving for a purer type of happiness, which makes them feel superior to the others.

Pages 33 – 74 Quotes

And she silently addressed the being crouching in her womb: "Now you shut up or I'll take another pill." It seemed to her that it listened and understood.

Related Characters: Harriet Lovatt

Related Themes:

Page Number: 42

Explanation and Analysis

This occurs while Harriet is pregnant with their fifth child. Since the child is violently active even before he is born, Harriet's attitude toward this child is quite different than her attitude was in the pregnancies before. She's asked her doctor for sedatives to calm the baby, though the implication is that the doctor prescribed them for her not the fetus. Harriet's treatment of the unborn child in this way calls into question whether such behavior would be classified as nature or nurture. Is the child's behavior caused by the judgment and angst happening in the family or is the angst in the family being caused by the negative effect this baby is having on Harriet's demeanor?

The quote also foreshadows much of what's to come in the book. It is significant that the child is "crouching," as he's later referred to as a caveman-like being. Once the baby is born, Harriet also threatens the child in this same way in an attempt to discipline him, ruling through fear rather than the tenderness she used with the previous children.

"Suddenly the little girl found she was alone. She and her brother had lost each other. She wanted to go home. She did not know which way to walk [...] She wandered about for a long time, and then she was thirsty again. She bent over a pool wondering if it would be orange juice, but it was water, clear pure forest water [...] She bent over the pool [...] but she saw something she didn't expect. It was a girl's face, and she was looking straight up at her. It was a face she had never seen in her whole life. This strange girl was smiling, but it was a nasty smile, not friendly, and the little girl thought this other girl was going to reach up out of the water and pull her down into it."

Related Characters: David Lovatt (speaker), Jane Lovatt, Paul Lovatt, Luke Lovatt, Helen Lovatt, Harriet Lovatt

Related Themes:

Page Number: 44-45

Explanation and Analysis

The children ask their father to make up a story, a tradition on weekend nights. The story David makes up clearly parallels the recent changes in Harriet's personality. Harriet and David are no longer so likeminded as they once were, and so the girl (a stand-in for Harriet) finds herself alone and confused, moving about restlessly as Harriet does to

distract herself from the painful activity of the fetus. The sweet treats of the landscape have been transformed into more normal, less fantastic surprises. The girl she sees in the water is the recent nasty version of herself. David is calling out the way Harriet's recent behavior threatens their blissful family life, second-guessing the serious distress she has been experiencing throughout this pregnancy.

> "A real little wrestler," said Dr. Brett. "He came out fighting the whole world."

Related Characters: Ben Lovatt, David Lovatt, Harriet Lovatt, Dr. Brett

Related Themes:

Page Number: 48

Explanation and Analysis

When Ben is born, the strength and restlessness he immediately exhibits clearly indicate that Harriet was not exaggerating her agony while pregnant. While Dr. Brett notes the infant's surprising power, he does not go so far as to make a concession or apology to Harriet for questioning her credibility. That Ben comes out "fighting the whole world" is essential to his character. For all of his life he will battle against the expectations put on him, expectations that oppose his becoming who he is naturally meant to be. The nature that Harriet suspected of him is affirmed in his debut into the world.

> Harriet found herself thinking, I wonder what the mother would look like, the one who would welcome this—alien.

Related Characters: Ben Lovatt, Harriet Lovatt

Related Themes:

Page Number: 50

Explanation and Analysis

Harriet has this thought during her hospital stay after birthing Ben. While gaining the strength to care for him at home, the other children visit, but the baby won't look at them and he kicks Jane away when she touches him. It's clear that Harriet lacks the ability to bond with this child in the way she has the others, even going so far as to wonder if there is any mother who would accept this child as her own, since he seems so alien to her. The contrast of her four other children is what forces Harriet into this thought, reminded of how satisfied and connected with the other children she is compared to the newborn.

> "All right, all right—the genes have come up with something special this time."
>
> "But what, that's the point," said Harriet. "*What* is he?"
>
> The other three said nothing—or, rather, said by their silence that they would rather not face the implications of it.

Related Characters: David Lovatt, Harriet Lovatt, Dorothy

Related Themes:

Page Number: 53

Explanation and Analysis

The first line of dialogue in this quote remains, perhaps significantly, unattributed, though it must be Dorothy or David who says it. The sentiment is voiced after baby Ben has downed two bottles very swiftly in a row. Harriet, shocked at this display, calls the child a Neanderthal, convinced that the child is something other than human if he can accomplish this at his age. Her question of what the child is and the lack of response that follows is a pattern that will occur throughout the book: Harriet seeks an answer for Ben's condition and people politely decline to comment.

> The new baby had of course been offered to everyone to hold, when they asked, but it was painful to see how their faces changed confronting this phenomenon. Ben was always quickly handed back. Harriet came into the kitchen one day and heard her sister Sarah say to a cousin, "That Ben gives me the creeps. He's like a goblin or a dwarf or something. I'd rather have poor Amy any day."

Related Characters: Amy , Sarah , Harriet Lovatt

Related Themes:

Page Number: 56

Explanation and Analysis

When the family visits for the first time after Ben is born, Harriet struggles when they respond poorly to Ben's odd

appearance. Even though a precedent has been set for this in their earlier rejection of Sarah's daughter Amy who was born with Down Syndrome, Harriet has no such diagnosis for her child, and is frustrated that people pretend nothing is wrong publicly, but then speak about him otherwise behind closed doors. Even Sarah, who should have the most sympathy for Harriet's plight, badmouths the child. In this, we see the family rejecting Ben because he is without category, whereas at least Amy was recognizably and classifiably other.

One early morning, something took Harriet quickly out of her bed into the baby's room, and there she saw Ben balanced on the window-sill. It was high—heaven only knew how he had got up there. The window was open. In a moment he would have fallen out of it. Harriet was thinking, What a pity I came in…and refused to be shocked at herself.

Related Characters: Ben Lovatt, Harriet Lovatt

Related Themes:

Page Number: 60

Explanation and Analysis

As Ben grows at an accelerated pace, Harriet remains emotionally disconnected from him while still remaining obligated to care for him. Her mother's intuition sends her in to check on Ben, and she performs the action she knows she must even if she'd rather the outcome were otherwise. This is another pattern that repeats throughout: Harriet cares for Ben, while simultaneously wishing him ill. This dynamic suggests the complications of nurturing: is it sufficient to perform the technical actions of mothering without the emotional motivation behind it? Can a child distinguish between these levels of attention? Harriet, while ashamed that she feels this way, is not surprised.

"The trouble is, you get used to hell," said Harriet. "After a day with Ben I feel as if nothing exists but him. As if nothing has ever existed. I suddenly realize I haven't remembered the others for hours. I forgot their supper yesterday. Dorothy went to the pictures, and I came down and found Helen cooking their supper."

Related Characters: Ben Lovatt, Helen Lovatt, David Lovatt, Harriet Lovatt

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 65

Explanation and Analysis

In bed after Dorothy suggests Ben needs to be institutionalized, Harriet reasons to David that she has become accustomed to the situation, even while she realizes it's a disservice to the other children to spend all of her time on Ben. Harriet's pragmatic approach to caring for Ben is also a type of idealism, hoping the attention she lavishes on him might result in a child that is closer in demeanor to the others, despite the fact that there is no evidence that this could ever occur. In some ways, it's as though, when Harriet allows herself to focus solely on Ben, she is able to find a level of contentment. It's only when she considers the larger view of the entire family that she is dissatisfied.

He watched the children, particularly Luke and Helen, all the time. He studied how they moved, sat down, stood up; copied how they ate. He had understood that these two, the older ones, were more socially accomplished than Jane; and he ignored Paul altogether. When the children watched television, he squatted near them and looked from the screen to their faces, for he needed to know what reactions were appropriate. If they laughed, then, a moment later, he contributed a loud, hard, unnatural-sounding laugh.

Related Characters: Harriet Lovatt, Luke Lovatt, Helen Lovatt, Ben Lovatt

Related Themes:

Page Number: 68-69

Explanation and Analysis

Ben's watchfulness mirrors David's observant nature, but it's never compared to Luke's similar habits. Instead the way Ben watches the others for indications of how to behave is seen as strange because, though he's able to imitate the other kids, he isn't able to discern their reasons for behaving as they do, an echo of his fundamental lack of empathy throughout the book. It's as though Ben's internal life is either stunted or exists on an entirely different plane, perhaps one that is not human. Despite his behaviors being similar to those of the siblings who have come before him,

his are seen as other for a reason that appears impossible to identify.

She thought it not without significance, as they say, that it was Frederick who said, "Now look here, Harriet, you've got to face it, he's got to go into an institution."

"Then we have to find a doctor who says he's abnormal," said Harriet. "Dr. Brett certainly won't."

Related Characters: Dr. Brett , Harriet Lovatt, Frederick

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 71

Explanation and Analysis

Though Dorothy had previously recommended that Harriet and David institutionalize Ben, it's only after Ben attempts to kill a third pet that the recommendation is offered again and taken more seriously. The entire family witnesses this attempt and feels that the threat Ben poses to the rest of them can no longer be ignored. Frederick, David's stepfather, is the one who is willing to take the blame for voicing such a suggestion, though he knows he will have the support of the others. Harriet, having already attempted to have Ben diagnosed, feels slighted for her family's suggestion that having Ben institutionalized would be as easy as a decision. Though she knows this might be the ideal case, she knows it's not a practical option.

Pages 74 – 96 Quotes

"It's either him or us," said David to Harriet. He added, his voice full of cold dislike for Ben, "He's probably just dropped in from Mars. He's going back to report on what he's found down here." He laughed—cruelly, it seemed to Harriet, who was silently taking in the fact—which of course she had half known already—that Ben was not expected to live long in this institution, whatever it was.

"He's a little child," she said. "*He's our child.*"

"No he's not," said David, finally. "Well, he certainly isn't mine."

Related Characters: Ben Lovatt, David Lovatt, Harriet Lovatt

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 74

Explanation and Analysis

When it's revealed that Molly and Frederick have found an institution that will take Ben without a diagnosis, Harriet is surprised at the speed and callousness with which her family has found a way to remove Ben from the house. David immediately detaches from Ben, identifying him as an alien who will not only be removed from their everyday life, but also from their worlds entirely. Harriet, faced with the reality of the situation, knows that the care in these institutions is poor and that Ben's predilection for destruction, including self-harm, will surely end him sooner rather than later if he is out of her watchful eye. She makes a bid for retaining responsibility for him, already aware that such a transition will not be easy for her to accept, and David refuses this plea, focused on the pragmatic decision to abandon Ben so that they might properly care for their other children.

While she was part of the general relief, and could hardly believe she had been able to stand such strain, and for so long, she could not banish Ben from her mind. It was not with love, or even affection, that she thought of him, and she disliked herself for not being able to find one little spark of normal feeling: it was guilt and horror that kept her awake through the nights.

Related Characters: Ben Lovatt, Harriet Lovatt

Related Themes:

Page Number: 77

Explanation and Analysis

While the rest of the family is able to put Ben out of their minds after he is taken away, Harriet is unable to follow suit. While she does not experience the feelings she believes she is supposed to—loving and missing her child—she does feel a devotion to her duty as a mother and an inability to live with herself knowing what she's done, emotions she is confused to find absent in the rest of her family. Despite the idealistic environment resulting from Ben's absence, she can't help but strive for the next level ideal: all of them being home together, not having sacrificed Ben for the sake of the

family, and so Harriet insists on visiting Ben.

"Shit," said the young man, meaning her being there.

"Literally," said Harriet as the door opened on a square room whose walls were of white shiny plastic that was buttoned here and there and looked like fake expensive leather upholstery. On the floor, on a green foam-rubber mattress, lay Ben. He was unconscious. He was naked, inside a strait-jacket. His pale yellow tongue protruded from his mouth. His flesh was dead white, greenish. Everything—walls, the floor, and Ben—was smeared with excrement. A pool of dark yellow urine oozed from the pallet, which was soaked.

Related Characters: Harriet Lovatt, Ben Lovatt

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 82

Explanation and Analysis

The young man here is one of the attendants at the institution where Ben has been dropped off. Having been unable to ignore her concern over how Ben is being treated, Harriet's worry is affirmed by the state in which she finds her son. The sensory detail shared here appeals to the pathos of the reader, making it clear that Harriet has no choice but to remove Ben from the disgusting conditions of the institution. The institution, standing in for a place where extreme otherness can be relegated so it needn't be dealt with in every day life, is the perfect symbol of the harm done in not allowing people to behave as they truly are.

She cried out, "Yes, but you didn't see it, you didn't see—!"

"I was careful *not* to see," he said. "What did you suppose was going to happen? That they were going to turn him into some well-adjusted member of society and then everything would be lovely?" He was jeering at her, but it was because his throat was stiff with tears.

Now they looked at each other, long, hard, seeing everything about each other. She thought, All right, he was right, and I was wrong. But it's done.

She said aloud, "All right, but it's done."

"That's the *mot juste*, I think."

Related Characters: Ben Lovatt, David Lovatt, Harriet Lovatt

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 87

Explanation and Analysis

After Harriet arrives home from the institution with Ben, David is furious at Harriet for having undone what he believes was the positive change of removing Ben from family life. Harriet insists that her actions were pragmatic and unavoidable after seeing the conditions of Ben's life there, but David argues that the pragmatism needed to start earlier, preventing her from visiting the institution in the first place. When Harriet sees David's point, she argues that they haven't any choice but to care for Ben now, and David calls out that this decision marks the beginning of the end of their family's happiness, caused by her actions and no one else's.

David came back to sleep in the connubial room. There was a distance between them. David had made and now kept this distance because Harriet had hurt him so badly: she understood this. Harriet informed him that she was now on the Pill: for both it was a bleak moment, because of everything they had been, had stood for, in the past, which had made it impossible for her to be on the Pill. They had felt it deeply wrong so to tamper with the processes of Nature! Nature—they now reminded themselves they once felt—was at some level or other to be relied upon.

Related Characters: David Lovatt, Harriet Lovatt

Related Themes:

Page Number: 92

Explanation and Analysis

After Harriet invites John to care for Ben, and Ben is mostly absent from family life, Harriet and David are able to restore some of their care for one another even if the intimacy is mostly gone. Their fear over becoming pregnant accidentally and producing another child like Ben has forced Harriet to take the Pill, something that they were both opposed to, even when it was being widely embraced during the Sexual Revolution. Harriet's surrender to medical

intervention to prevent the outcome that Nature intends is a 180-degree shift from the views they held early on in their relationship. Nature's capitalization in this context shows the reverence with which they treated the concept up until this point.

But the last thing before they slept, the other children locked their doors quietly from inside. This meant Harriet could not go to them to see how they were before she went to bed, or if they were sick. She did not like to ask them not to lock their doors, nor make a big thing of it by calling in a locksmith and having special locks fitted, openable from the outside by an adult with a key. The business of the children locking themselves in made her feel excluded, forever shut out and repudiated by them. Sometimes she went softly to one of their doors and whispered to be let in, and she was admitted, and there was a little festival of kisses and hugs—but they were thinking of Ben, who might come in…and several times he did arrive silently in the door way and stare in at the scene, which he could not understand.

Related Characters: Ben Lovatt, Harriet Lovatt

Related Themes:

Page Number: 95

Explanation and Analysis

The way Harriet's commitment to allowing Ben to remain incorporated into family life distances her from the children becomes physicalized here in the locked door that divides her from her children. While the door protects the children from Ben, it also deprives them of the nurturing that Harriet has to offer them, and even when she is allowed to be affectionate with them, she senses a metaphorical barrier between them, one prompted by the fear of Ben. Harriet's refusal to go to the trouble of having special locks installed is notable because of all of the trouble that she's gone to in order to allow Ben to continue to exist in their family life. Ben's inability to understand the affection he sees between his siblings and mother is a continuation of his inability to understand human emotions or connect with any of the Lovatt family members

Pages 96 – 133 Quotes

"You think Ben is a throwback?" enquired Dr. Gilly gravely. She sounded as if quite prepared to entertain the idea.

"It seems to me obvious," said Harriet.

Another silence, and Dr. Gilly examined her well-kept hands. She sighed. Then she looked up and met Harriet's eyes with "If that is so, then what do you expect me to do about it?"

Harriet insisted, "I want it *said*. I want it recognized. I just can't stand it never being said."

"Can't you see that it is simply outside my competence? If it is true, that is? Do you want me to give you a letter to the zoo? 'Put this child in a cage'? Or hand him over to science?"

Related Characters: Ben Lovatt, Harriet Lovatt, Dr. Gilly

Related Themes:

Page Number: 106

Explanation and Analysis

This exchange is important in that it is the first time a person of authority, like a doctor, validates Harriet's concerns about Ben. While at first Dr. Gilly blamed Ben's behavior on Harriet (perhaps prompted by Dr. Brett), she comes to see Harriet's point of view, even considering the idea that Ben's condition could be as extreme as being of another species. Harriet voices, aloud, that her simple request is for someone to affirm her belief that there is something that makes her son fundamentally different from other humans. Dr. Gilly comes close to agreeing with this, but eventually begs off, claiming that she is not qualified to make such a determination.

Paul was even more difficult than Ben. But he was a normal "disturbed" child, not an alien.

Related Characters: Ben Lovatt, Paul Lovatt

Related Themes:

Page Number: 107

Explanation and Analysis

Paul, having been deprived of the care and attention the others received because of Ben's extreme needs, has severe emotional problems, but these are not nearly as troubling as Ben's problems, because they are comparable to many other children. Ben, however, remains the focus of concern

because he is inexplicable to the rest of the family. This differentiation points to the idea that Ben is given more care and attention simply because he is different, not because those differences are innately harmful to him. Paul's condition is an example of the triumph of nurturing (or lack thereof) over nature, while Ben is an example of the polar opposite. While David continues trying to refocus their attention on the problems Paul is experiencing, Harriet remains obsessed with Ben's otherness.

"We are being punished, that's all."

"What for?" he demanded, already on guard because there was a tone in her voice he hated.

"For presuming. For thinking we could be happy. Happy because *we* decided we would be."

"Rubbish," he said. Angry: this Harriet made him angry. "It was chance. Anyone could have got Ben. It was a chance gene, that's all."

"I don't think so," she stubbornly held on. "We were going to be happy! No one else is, or I never seem to meet them, but we were going to be. And so down came the thunderbolt."

Related Characters: Ben Lovatt, David Lovatt, Harriet Lovatt

Related Themes:

Page Number: 117-118

Explanation and Analysis

This exchange between David and Harriet is the ultimate expression of Harriet's fatalist strain. While she had earlier blamed Sarah for Amy's disability, here, too, Harriet takes on the same responsibility for Ben's problems. Their arrogance in believing it was their right to be happy has prompted the universe to deliver them misery. David, on the other hand, believes Ben's presence in their life was completely out of their control, not even acknowledging that he is a product of their genes. Both parties refuse to see that they might have taken different actions to result in a different outcome. Either religious punishment or bad luck absolves both of them of the responsibility of what has become of their family life.

These days the local newspapers were full of news of muggings, hold-ups, break-ins. Sometimes his gang, Ben among them, did not come into the Lovatt's house for a whole day, two days, three.

Related Characters: Ben Lovatt

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 122

Explanation and Analysis

The way the point of view drifts closer to Harriet throughout the novel is clear in this quote. Readers know that it is Harriet who is reading the news and it's clear that she makes a connection between the news and the absence of the boys, assuming they are related to each other without stating it explicitly. The changing environment of their neighborhood has been happening slowly over the course of the story. Harriet has also assumed, for all of Ben's life, that he would get into more trouble than he has. These two themes slowly building beside each other finally meet in this paragraph, uniting cause and effect, if unreliably, through Harriet's point of view.

He was not someone easily overlooked…and yet why did she say that? Everyone in authority had *not* been seeing Ben ever since he was born…When she saw him on television in that crowd, he had worn a jacket with its collar up, and a scarf, and was like a younger brother, perhaps of Derek. He seemed a stout schoolboy. Had he put on those clothes to disguise himself? Did that mean that he knew how he looked. How did he see himself?

Would people always refuse to see him, to recognize what he was?

Related Characters: Harriet Lovatt, Billy, Derek, Vic and Elvis , Ben Lovatt

Related Themes:

Page Number: 131

Explanation and Analysis

Harriet continues to think of Ben as someone whose otherness can't be ignored, but time and again, people look past it because of a reluctance to understand it. Harriet thinks back to seeing Ben on television and wonders how

much of the way he presents himself is intentionally an attempt to evade people's notice. How much is stealth and cunning, rather than pure happenstance? She wonders again if he is able to see himself clearly or if he views himself through a lens that is beyond her comprehension. She remains convinced of his otherness, even while thinking of him standing in a crowd of people with whom he identifies, and who, presumably, identify with him.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

PAGES 3 – 33

In the mid-1960s, David and Harriet spot each other across the room at their office Christmas party and know immediately that they are meant for one another. They stand at the outskirts of the crowded room, quietly dismayed at the noise and the attention-seeking gestures of their coworkers, noting that their grins could just as easily be grimaces of pain. Harriet, when viewed from across, the room forms little more than a pastel blur: unfashionable, stern, a body better suited for gardening than dancing. David, an observer, watches curiously as couples come together on the dance floor and separate. He is handsome enough to have lured girls' attention before, but his evaluative gaze eventually puts them off. Harriet is a graphic designer in the sales department and David is an architect.

The first thing readers learn about David and Harriet is that they met in a fateful way, drawn together because they feel like outsiders in their work environment. The pair, despite the pragmatism that prevents them from enjoying the party, fall immediately under the sway of idealism, believing in love at first sight. The details given about the characters establish their ways of being, rather than just their appearance. Harriet is grounded and severe, while David is observant if a bit anxious. From their professions, we come to understand that David has a more advanced position at the company.

Harriet and David are well-matched because of their antiquated ideas of sex in the 1960s: David has had only one affair with a woman he didn't like, who believed he was trying to reform her. She said, "I do believe *you* imagine you are going to put the clock back, starting with me!" After they parted ways, David found himself disappointed to learn that she had slept with most of the firm. At the party, David watches as she blows him taunting kisses from the dance floor, and he smiles back, not regretting his decision.

The story is set in during the sexual revolution, when norms about sex were changing quickly. Within this frame, David and Harriet are notably inexperienced. David's one previous girlfriend felt that David was trying to change her into a more chaste being. Instead of succeeding, David learns his attempt has had the opposite effect: she sleeps with many other people in the firm, marking the first instance of a character trying to change another and failing.

Harriet, a virgin, has been teased by her friends for seeing her virginity as a present she might give to a carefully chosen partner. She dislikes that promiscuity has become common and she blames women especially for what she sees as their acts of immorality. Harriet is well aware that those same girls are saying of her, "It must be something in her childhood that's made her like this. Poor thing." Indeed, Harriet wonders if there's something wrong with her because of the number of men unwilling to put up with her refusal. She spends time with a younger girl friend until that friend, too, loses her inhibitions. Harriet decides she is a misfit and seeks reassurance from her mother who confirms that Harriet is old-fashioned and that other girls would love to be like her.

Similarly to David, Harriet is considered prudish for her time and her friends tease and ostracize her for her old-fashioned ways. As the girls attempt to understand Harriet by guessing that something must have happened in her childhood to stunt her sexual development, Lessing introduces the powerful effects of one's upbringing on their adult personality. Harriet's mother's reassurance that the girls' judgment of her was rooted in jealousy foreshadows the way Harriet and David assume others are jealous of them as the novel progresses.

Harriet and David spot each other and begin their approach at precisely the same moment, moving to another room where they find a seat and talk to each other hungrily. They then retire to his apartment where they lay on his bed, kissing, talking, holding hands and then falling asleep.

David and Harriet moving toward each other at the same time establishes the even balance of power between them at the beginning of the novel. The innocent way they spend their night further shows how deeply rooted their ideals are.

Harriet moves into David's flat right away and they decide to marry in the spring, believing they're meant to be. It is revealed that Harriet grew up one of three daughters, to parents Harriet is proud to say never divorced. She expects to spend her life raising a family instead of being a career woman. David's parents, however, had divorced when he was seven, and David felt split between his homes. His mother, Molly, had remarried an academic, Frederick—both are "kind, if remote," and they live in Oxford. David spent most of his childhood with his mother, calling his room in her **house** his truest home. His wealthy father, James, had remarried wealthy Jessica and he lives the life of a jetsetter, relocating regularly. The division between his parents has caused David to envision a very different, stable family life for his own children.

Harriet and David move at an accelerated pace, right away, committing to each other and forming a family of their own, without taking much time to make sure they are making the right decision. In learning about their upbringings, it becomes clear that, though they had quite different family lives, they both arrived at a desire for the same ideal: a strong, intact family life. This result both affirms the triumph of nurture over nature and denies it, providing reasoning in the way they were nurtured for what they desire in their lives, but also indicating that two very different ways of being nurtured ended in the same result. Perhaps this suggests the possibility of an innate desire born into both individuals.

The **house** they find outside of London is enormous, three stories, and perfect for a very large family, which, it turns out, is exactly what they both want. They want as many as six kids, a truth they know they should keep to themselves for fear of judgment. The home is too expensive for them, but they decide to proceed, agreeing they'll manage somehow. They'll have to wait a couple years to begin having children, ensuring their double income until David moves up the payscale enough in his architecture firm to pay their mortgage alone.

The house David and Harriet decide to purchase is the clearest symbol of the idealist family life they hope to create. Despite the house being too expensive for the couple, they follow their ideals and decide to purchase it anyway, trusting that somehow they will make it work. They try to balance this idealism with the pragmatic plan to work for a while before having children to ensure their financial safety.

On the day the sale closes, Harriet and David wander the **house**, admiring every small detail and planning their life. They spend the day making love in their bedroom despite not having contraceptives with them. Harriet notes that David seems to be making love with purpose, and by the end of the day, they're certain they've conceived. When night falls, it feels as though the room has changed into a cave, and that Harriet doesn't actually recognize David. He quiets her with a surprisingly strong grip, and they wait for the ordinariness to slowly return to the room.

As soon as the house is theirs, Harriet and David abandon their pragmatic plan to wait to have children. When the room changes into a cave and David becomes suddenly strange and unusually strong, the reader becomes aware of Harriet's tendency toward anxiety and apprehension, as well as David's ability to be firm. This also foreshadows the strained atmosphere that develops much later in the novel.

It is confirmed that Harriet is pregnant and Harriet and David worry about how they'll pay their bills, and also how they'll be judged for having taken this responsibility on. David knows he could ask his father for money, but he never has before, unlike his sister who preferred his father's lifestyle. One afternoon, Molly and Frederick visit, surprised at the size of the **house** and at the large family that David and Harriet have planned. At dinner, Molly notes that they'll have to ask for help from James, which David finds uncomfortable to think about, but knows to be true. Molly comments that raising children is a lot of work, and David says it will not be so bad for Harriet as it was for Molly because Harriet is maternal, a slight Molly takes with a grain of salt.

David and Harriet, despite knowing the likelihood of pregnancy based on their actions, are somewhat overwhelmed by their deviation from their pragmatic plan. Molly and Frederick appear as voices of staid pragmatism, calling out the obvious fact that they'll need financial help and assistance with raising the children. Harriet and James, rather than seeing this as a voice of supportive concern, take these recommendations as judgments and they strike back defensively instead of reflecting on their choices.

Molly suggests that James should visit, and soon afterwards he arrives with his wife, Jessica. They stand outside the **house** with David and Harriet evaluating it. James confirms the house is a good price probably because it's too big for most people. He offers to take on the payment of the 30-year mortgage, admitting that he didn't give the couple much of a wedding present. Jessica reminds James they'll have to give something of equal value to David's sister Deborah, but James says they already have, and that, anyway, they have more than enough money. Jessica laughs at this and David acknowledges that he'll now be beholden to the wealth that he's otherwise rejected in his life. Jessica asks how many children they plan to have and jokes about how it wouldn't be her choice.

The way James and Jessica react to the house, as compared to the way Molly and Frederick responded, is important to note because it is closer to the response David and Harriet were looking for: praise for the investment they've made, financially and in their future, though Jessica seems put off by the size of the family they hope to have. James and Jessica also introduce the importance of nurturing both their children equally in acknowledging that a gift to one child should be balanced with a gift to the other. David accepts the offer, as reluctant as he is to owe his father any credit for their happiness.

Harriet and David assume that Harriet's mother, Dorothy, a widow, will agree to live with them and help Harriet with childcare. Dorothy appears immediately judgmental of the size of the **house**, though she keeps her opinion to herself for several days. She had a hard time raising her three daughters with her husband in a house where there was never enough money, and she knows "the cost, in every way, of a family, even a small one." One evening, Dorothy sits the couple down to warn them against rushing into everything. She observes that the young couple is behaving as though they might lose anything they don't pin down right away. Harriet and David agree that this is their point of view. Bad news plays on the radio behind this discussion. Dorothy begs them to reconsider, saying that sometimes David and Harriet scare her.

Harriet's only parent, Dorothy, more closely matches Molly and Frederick's surprise at the house's opulence, but it's important to note that Dorothy keeps this opinion to herself for days. Dorothy is a measured woman, careful to express herself clearly and think carefully about what she decides to speak up about and what to keep quiet on. Like Molly, she recognizes the hard work that goes into raising a family, especially because their income never quite matched their expenses. Dorothy's concern over their hasty decision making in essence is asking the couple if they might be content with what they have for a moment, rather than grabbing for more and more.

Harriet argues that in some countries, large families are not nearly so rare and David agrees. Dorothy counters this by saying that people in poorer countries expect half their children to die and don't need to worry about educating them, and rich people can have lots of children because they have the money for it, but middle-class people must be careful to have only as many children as they can properly support. In her eighth month of an uncomfortable pregnancy, Harriet worries aloud about why she and David are always criticized, and Dorothy, sensitive to having offended her daughter, mentions that at the beginning of the last war, people said it was irresponsible to have children at all, but she had them anyway, and David and Harriet find themselves vindicated.

In this interaction, Dorothy identifies the way that David and Harriet contradict themselves in having bought a house that is beyond their means while also wishing for the simple life of people who live outside the realm of a more formal society. She predicts that the decisions Harriet and David have made so far are not anomalous, but predictive of the way they'll proceed with their choices, and she forewarns the pair to reconsider what is most important to them. In the end though, Dorothy is able to identify, in her own life, a precedent for the way Harriet and David ignore the advice of others.

Just after Christmas in 1966, Harriet gives birth to Luke in the family bed. He's a good-natured baby who is easy to care for. David and Harriet grasp this new version of their happy family possessively. Right away, the **house** becomes a hub of family life, drawing family for a long visit around Easter including David's father, his mother and her husband, and Harriet's sisters Angela and Sarah and their families. It's clear to all that Harriet's family is of a lower class than David's. The big dining room table attracts people day and night, and the house is filled with laughter that thrills the young couple. Harriet and David keep it secret that they are pregnant again, despite their plans to wait before having more children.

Harriet and David's idealism is rewarded with a well-behaved first child and they desire to show off the perfection of their family life by inviting the extended family over for the holiday. While those present come from different backgrounds, everyone gets along quite well, a success that Harriet and David take personal credit for while not allowing this praise to be tainted by the judgment that might come from revealing that they've abandoned pragmatism again and become pregnant a second time.

When Harriet and David tell Dorothy shortly after, she takes the news quietly, acknowledging that they'll continue to need her help. Harriet is, again, uncomfortable and she vows to wait longer before their third child. The same guests from Easter arrive to celebrate Christmas for some ten days, including some additional family and friends, and they all agree that Harriet and David have a gift for hosting. David's sister Deborah also arrives, unmarried, normally not fond of family gatherings like this, but drawn in by this one. Neighbors appear at the party, but the sense of familial bonds pushes them away, and Harriet and David's values are reinforced by this effect.

Again, Dorothy withholds her judgment, instead focusing on the pragmatics of what the situation will require of her. Harriet, still blind to her insatiable idealism, promises to wait before having the next child, but a pattern has been established. Deborah provides a counter to the family life created here, as she lives the wealthy, single life of a jetsetter. Even Deborah, though, is not immune to the charms of the Lovatt house, which further confirms for David and Harriet that they're doing the right things.

The second child, Helen, is born in the family bed, too, in 1968. Helen moves into the baby room attached to Harriet and David's bedroom, and Luke is moved to the next room over. Despite Harriet's fatigue, she insists the extended family visit for Easter—Dorothy and Harriet's sisters must do the work of hosting. That summer of 1968, the **house** is full of visiting family and friends. Guests offer to contribute to the costs, but it's never quite enough because they're aware that the Lovatts receive financial help from James. In truth, money is always tight. Harriet's sister, Sarah, casts a shadow on the atmosphere by quarreling with her husband, William. A divorce is not possible because they're expecting their fourth child, though.

Harriet again exhibits her idealism in insisting that the family visit for Easter and the summer holidays despite how tired she is. She assumes that her mother and sisters will take up the work of hosting so that she might enjoy the festive atmosphere without having to do much of the labor herself. David must ask James for even more money, rather than ruin the illusion that the Lovatts are prosperous enough to host guest all this time. A precedent is set for a child being born in less than ideal circumstances in the discord established between Sarah and William, as well as the idea of a family staying together because of hard times, rather than being pulled apart by them.

Christmas and Easter are again celebrated by the larger family. Sarah's daughter Amy is born with Down Syndrome, confirming that Sarah and William must stay together to properly care for their children. Dorothy wishes there were two of her so she might help both Sarah and Harriet, and occasionally she leaves the Lovatt **house** to help Sarah instead. Harriet and David's third child, Jane, is born in the family bed in 1970. Dorothy scolds Harriet and David for moving too quickly and all of the children shift down a room to make room for the new baby. David and Harriet are blissful; they believe their happiness is "what they had chosen and what they deserved."

Sarah and William provide a counter to the Lovatt's situation in that they don't have the option of obtaining financial help from anyone else, and so must remain together to provide for their increasingly demanding family. The birth of perfect Jane in contrast to Amy provides an opportunity for Harriet to affirm her thinking that lives are decided only by choice and not chance, implying that her sister's daughter being born with a disability was what her sister deserved.

David fails to receive the promotion he expected he'd get. William also loses his job. Sarah jokes that she and William get all the bad luck, but Harriet mentions to David that she doesn't believe it's bad luck. Instead she thinks that Amy was born with Down Syndrome because of Sarah and William's constant fights. David criticizes this fatalistic line of Harriet's thinking. Crime has increased in the small town over the past five years. Gangs of disrespectful youths hang about cafes in town, brutal crimes and burglaries have become more common. Harriet and David force themselves to read the news, but would prefer to remain safe and sequestered in the unaffected sanctuary of their home.

If Harriet really believed her ideas on people receiving their just deserts, then David's failure to get the promotion he was seeking must indicate that they've earned a bit of bad fortune themselves, but the situation is still comparatively good, so Harriet blinds herself to this fact. Because William has lost his job, Harriet continues to see Sarah as the unlucky one, punished for her inability to remain civil with her husband. The mood in the surrounding area begins to become sinister in the way news of the outside world seeps into the well-sealed utopia of the house, despite Harriet and David's best efforts to keep it out.

In early 1973, the fourth child, Paul, is born in the **house** after another uncomfortable pregnancy. The family visits for Easter and stays for three weeks, and James needs to write an additional check to pay for it. The children move into one room to make space for guests, and Dorothy wonders why the children couldn't always stay together. David refuses this idea, insisting, "everyone should have a room," and the family bristles at this odd sticking point in his vision for happy family life. Angela, Harriet's other sister, admits that she feels that Sarah and Harriet use all of Dorothy's time and leave none for her. Sarah feels the need to hide little Amy behind a blanket because the sight of her upsets people. Harriet is irritable because she is overtired.

Paul, of course, is the analogous child to Sarah's fourth child, Amy, and so when he is born happy and healthy, David and Harriet feel affirmed that they're undeserving of any of the bad luck that Sarah and William have experienced. David's insistence that everyone have a room is tied to his belief that his one true home as a child was his childhood bedroom, rather than either of his parents' houses as a whole. Resentment is finally made plain in the way that Harriet and Sarah use up Dorothy's time leaving none for the third sister, an indication of the limited resources a parent can provide. This is the first indication that Harriet, previously cheery, is allowing her irritation to show through plainly.

William speaks up, saying what the rest of the family is thinking: that Harriet and David should stop having children. Harriet says they plan to wait three years to continue growing their family, but insists that this is the type of life most people want. It's just that they've been "brainwashed out of it." James says that the idea of family life being best is antiquated, but Harriet questions why he wants to spend time with them if that's the case. David's young cousin, Bridget, the product of a complicated family life, says she hopes for the same type of family life when she gets older. The family carries on fighting about whether the Lovatt children will be educated privately or publicly. James vows to help with those costs within limits. Eventually, the family gives up on convincing Harriet and David and they go for a picnic.

The frank conversation goes on when William, whom the rest of the family sees as being far from an ideal husband and father, advises Harriet and David to stop having children because they might be tempting fate to give them a child with some issues similar to what his daughter Amy experiences. James and Harriet argue in favor of the family life that the rest of them seem to enjoy fine until its threatened by the increasing demands on people's time and finances. Bridget provides an outside perspective on the dynamics of the family, convinced that she wants a similar life for herself, not having been made privy to any complications.

The family visits again for summer. Bridget is present again, soaking in the idyllic atmosphere of the family, and David and Harriet recognize, almost uneasily, their excessive happiness. They justify this feeling by believing that life is this happy if the right choices are made. Before Christmas, Harriet finds out she is pregnant with a fifth child, to the couple's dismay, despite their efforts against it. Dorothy is away helping Sarah and her children, and though Harriet has tried out three different girls as helpers, none of them has worked out well. Harriet complains that she thinks the new fetus might be poisoning her. Dorothy, despite her condition, begs David to host Christmas again because it's easier when she has help around. David worries about the cost of having company over again, despite his having taken on extra work to cover their expenses.

It is significant that David and Harriet begin to become uneasy about their happiness when they allow themselves to look on their situation from the outside. When living purely in the moments created in the family, the bliss is overwhelming, causing confusion when they feel judged by others for their happiness. When they allow themselves to look at their lives through Bridget's eyes, though, they see that at some point their happiness must have a peak. It's this awareness of the expiration date on their ecstatic joy that underlies Harriet's belief that there is something wrong with this fetus. Again, rather than pulling back on the reins of their aspirational happiness, they double down on their idealism by deciding they'll host Christmas, despite the strain it will put on the family.

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Dorothy phones to say that she's taking a break from helping Sarah and Harriet for a few weeks because she's tired. Harriet is beside herself at this news and Dorothy breaks down and agrees to come help. When Dorothy arrives, she knows right away that Harriet is pregnant again. She reprimands them for their lack of responsibility, complaining that they are selfish and think of her as a servant. Harriet rushes from the room, upset, and David tells Dorothy that he doesn't believe Harriet has been herself lately. Dorothy says she'll provide childcare again but that she can't do it alone. David joins Harriet in bed that night and Harriet asks David to feel her stomach. He feels an immediate jolt from the three-month-old fetus. They wonder if the pregnancy is further along than they thought.

Even when Dorothy tries to step away from the significant demands being placed on her time, she is unable to because of her empathy for her daughter's situation. Harriet is unable to prioritize her own mother's well-being over her own, an idea that will echo through the rest of the novel in other permutations. David refuses to agree with Harriet that the baby's activity at this stage is abnormal, instead looking for a more logical reason for the behavior. This begins a long series of people refusing to recognize this fifth child as being a special case of some sort.

Harriet visits Dr. Brett who admits he might be off by a month in estimating the date of conception, but if so, he says Harriet's carelessness is to blame. Harriet hopes for an explanation, but Dr. Brett insists there's nothing unusual about the child's movement. He recommends Harriet take it easy. The family arrives to celebrate Christmas and wait on Harriet, but each time David or Harriet enters a room, it's clear people have been talking about them. Paul, the youngest child, seems hungry for attention, but Harriet doesn't have the strength or energy to provide it for him. A fourth girl arrives to help with housework, but she isn't useful. The holiday ends more quickly because of the change in the atmosphere.

Dr. Brett blames Harriet for any mistake made in determining how far along her pregnancy might be and he minimizes Harriet's complaints by recommending only rest. Harriet remains agitated by both her physical discomfort and the lack of sympathy she receives from others. This carries through to the family when they visit for Christmas, judging Harriet and David for continuing on with what they see as careless pregnancies. Already the fetus's activity is pulling Harriet away from nurturing young Paul in the way he needs.

David and Harriet look for a trained nanny in London, but their search is unsuccessful. Instead, Frederick's widow cousin Alice, who is down on her luck, comes to help Dorothy, who struggles with having to share her authority. Harriet returns to Dr. Brett at five months. She feels as though the fetus is "trying to tear its way out of her stomach." Dr. Brett says the fetus is large and active and he prescribes Harriet a sedative for her nerves. Harriet also begs her friends for tranquilizers, keeping this dependency secret, even from David. David, too, seems overwhelmed by the fetus's strength, but he believes Harriet is overreacting. Harriet paces to distract herself from the intense sensations prompted by the fetus.

Harriet and David, having rejected all help from outside the family until this point, finally find a workable solution in a distant family member. Alice, who isn't a blood relative, is still tenuously family, which shows how this child is already redefining Harriet and David's ideas about family. Harriet continues her streak of seeing the fetus as malevolent, making no effort to hide this belief from the doctor, in an attempt to appeal to his sympathies. This effort backfires, and Harriet is treated as though she is simply a hysterical woman for not being content with her pregnancy as she has been before. David reinforces this point in refusing to take Harriet's complaints seriously. Harriet, because of this response, takes matters into her own hands, and communication between Harriet and David begins to break down.

Though Harriet says they can't host Easter in her current state, the rest of the family insists. However, when the rest of the family arrives, it's clear the atmosphere has become hostile because of the stress of Harriet's pregnancy. Harriet begins to refer to the fetus as an enemy. Time passes slowly for the sixth month of the pregnancy. Harriet thinks of the being inside her as a hybrid creature: a lion and a dog or a tiger and a goat. She imagines the fetus clawing her from the inside. In the seventh month, Harriet increases the amount of drugs she takes, hoping to quiet the fetus, and she speaks mentally to the fetus insisting he remain docile.

The family environment that Harriet and David have worked hard to establish is increasingly affected by Harriet's ill temper. Her attempt to control the child inside of her is a refusal of its otherness even before he is born. She begins to detach from her notion of it as her human child, imagining it as a fantastic beast, distancing herself from the idea that her own genetics are at all to blame for its behavior.

Luke begs David for a story one night during dinner. David tells the story of two children, a boy and girl who set out in the forest for an adventure. Jane watches her siblings to see how they react and copies them. Harriet hears a television broadcast about murders in a London suburb and flips it off. The children in the story find various sweets, including a pool of orange juice, to sate themselves and they nap under a bush. Suddenly, the little girl discovers she is alone and tries to find her way out, but cannot. When she comes upon the pool again, she finds it is water instead of orange juice. When she looks into the pool for a fish she might ask for help, she sees only the face of a girl staring back at her, but it's a nasty girl she has never seen before.

The story David tells clearly mirrors David and Harriet's marriage. The sweets represent all that is going well in the early years, and the reflection the girl finds in the pond is clearly a metaphor for the irritable turn Harriet's personality has taken. The way Jane watches the other children and learns how to behave is an important touchstone for the way children are socialized by their environment, which will come back later in the novel. The slowly changing environment of the suburbs around the house also positions the house as a safe haven, even when the outside world threatens to intrude.

The children beg to learn what happened. Harriet wants to tell David to stop because she believes the story is actually about her. Dorothy cuts David off and says that the little girl left the nasty girl in the water and ran until she found her brother, who was also looking for her, and they ran to safety out of the forest. David confirms this to be the end of the story. The children want to know who the girl in the water was, and David says he doesn't know, that she just materialized. David explains the word to the children saying, "It is when something that wasn't there suddenly is there." The children are ushered up to bed.

Harriet's ability to recognize herself in the story matches the way she believes she's being misunderstood, but she stops short of saying so in order not to frighten the children. Dorothy also seeks to protect the children by pasting a happy ending onto the story, even if it rings false in real life. David's definition of "materialized" is important in the way it suggests that the changes in Harriet's behavior are unprecedented.

On his way up to bed, Luke asks if everyone is coming for the summer holidays. Dorothy and David look to Harriet for the answer because she'll have given birth just before, but Harriet says yes. David compliments Dorothy again, thanking her, but Dorothy appears immune to the rote thanks. David encourages Harriet to put off a gathering until Christmas, but she suggests perhaps the baby will be born early, so it won't be trouble to have people for the summer holiday.

Harriet's refusal to acknowledge that family life is changing and her willful optimism that the child will be born sooner rather than later show her insistence on idealistic hope rather than setting more realistic expectations. Selfishly, Harriet also wants people around so that she might have help with the children.

At eight months pregnant, Harriet asks Dr. Brett to induce the baby. Dr. Brett is skeptical, not seeing why this pregnancy is different from the ones before. Harriet stops herself short of calling the fetus a monster, but she asks the doctor if he thinks she's an unreasonable woman. Dr. Brett won't go that far, but he says he believes Harriet is worn out and that she's never dealt well with pregnancy. Harriet begs him to see that the baby moving visibly in her stomach is a different case. The doctor prescribes more sedatives in response. Harriet believes the doctor refuses to see the difference in this pregnancy, just as the rest of her family also refuses to acknowledge the hardship of her situation. On the walk home from the doctor, Harriet fantasizes about cutting the child out of her. She can't imagine what she'll see emerge from her.

Dr. Brett continues his refusal to comply with Harriet's requests, expecting a consistency between prior pregnancies and this one, rather than recognizing an exception. The solution he suggests is a mere band-aid: more sedatives, an option that places the blame firmly on Harriet's state of mind rather than on any action of the fetus itself. Harriet's vision of removing the child from her is a metaphor for the distance she wishes to put between her and the child and the violence of the way she would do it is the first indication that she wishes harm on her it. She continues to see the fetus as an unimaginable other.

Soon after, Harriet goes into labor and insists on being taken to the hospital. The child fights its way violently out of her as she exclaims, "Thank God, thank God, it's over at last!" The nurses comment on the toughness of the baby and tell Harriet that she's given birth to a healthy boy. Dr. Brett says, "He came out fighting the whole world." The 11-pound child is placed in her arms and immediately it seems as though he is trying to stand up. David looks on with some alarm, calling the baby a "funny little chap." The child is strange-looking, with a sloped forehead and a wedge of yellow hair, thick hands and green-yellow eyes. Harriet does not recognize the child as her own and immediately pities him for this fact. She calls him a troll or goblin, and then tries to make up for it by cuddling him.

Harriet's joy at finally being separated from the fetus is a strange response for a mother giving birth. While the nurses and doctor recognize the unusual strength and temperament of the boy, they don't go so far as to identify him as abnormal. David, too, is stricken by the unusual appearance of the child, minimizing his surprise with a forced term of endearment. Harriet, however, is immediately conflicted about the child, feeling no connection to him, but already feeling bad about this response. She relegates him to the status of some other type of being and then tries to take it back by showing him affection.

Harriet tries to breastfeed the child, as everyone in the hospital room looks on, strained, but the child bites down hard. Harriet removes him and refuses to attempt to feed him again. The nurse reluctantly takes the child, who has not cried since he was born. The other children are brought in to meet their brother. Harriet notes David holding Paul and mourns the way she hasn't spent enough time with her last baby, one that seems rightly small and sweet. Harriet notes that the new baby seems of a different substance than her other children and states that they will name him Ben. Ben refuses the touch of his siblings and Harriet wonders "what the mother would look like, the one who would welcome this—alien." After a week, when Harriet feels herself up to the struggle of looking after Ben, they head home.

The idea of the child doing harm to Harriet continues outside the womb as he attempts breastfeeding for the first time. Harriet insists the child be taken from her despite the refusal of the staff, putting physical distance between her and the newborn. The baby's strength is reinforced in his lack of crying, and Paul provides a foil to the newborn in how comparatively easily Paul fits into the role of sweet little baby. Ben instinctively rejects the touch of his biological family, and Harriet fails to identify with the child so much that she can't even imagine what mother could be content with such a strange child. Harriet must bolster her strength for the reality of caring for this child on her own.

That night, at home, Harriet nurses Ben who empties the first breast in under a minute, biting down hard near the end. David watches, astonished, and Harriet bitterly quotes the hospital, calling ben a "normal healthy, fine baby." David bristles at Harriet's anger. Ben bellows, practically standing as Harriet tries to burp him. She lays Ben down on his cot and crawls into bed, worried David might sense the ugly thoughts in her head.

Harriet, despite her conviction that there is something wrong (or at least different) about Ben, begins a habit of quoting the words of others in defining how normal they insist he is. Ben shows an unnatural strength, and Harriet waits for David to acknowledge the issue rather than her having to be the one to call it out, but when David says nothing she fears that she is in fact alone in her point of view.

Harriet quickly grows intolerant of the constant, violent feedings and she tells Dorothy, who's been watching with some degree of fascination if not fear, that she plans to transition Ben to bottle-feeding. Dorothy, who Harriet believes would normally object, agrees at once that it's a good idea. Dorothy reminds Harriet that the family will be coming for the summer soon, and Harriet identifies with the change in Dorothy's voice: "So do people speak whose thoughts are running along secretly in channels they would rather other people did not know about."

Harriet continues detaching herself from this child at a more accelerated pace than with her other children by calling breastfeeding quits with the support of her mother who clearly identifies the pain and threat of continuing to feed Ben in this way. When Dorothy mentions the family visiting over the summer, it's as though she's waiting for Harriet to say that it might not be a good idea, unwilling to be the one to voice unjustified qualms about the child being in the company of others.

Dorothy buys the bottles and David agrees it's a good idea. Ben empties a bottle almost instantaneously and roars for another. He empties that one, too, holding it himself. Harriet calls him a Neanderthal baby and David pities the child. Harriet requests that he pity her instead. Someone tries to settle her, saying, "The genes have come up with something special this time," but Harriet questions what that something is. No one knows how to answer this.

The decision not to breastfeed is confirmed as a good choice though Harriet feels justified in criticizing the child, and David is not willing to go so far, trying to sympathize with the child. Harriet sees herself, not Ben, as the one who needs care, and she feels that she's been deprived all this time of appropriate concern. Ben's difference is again acknowledged but diminished in referring to his attributes as simply "special."

Ben eats twice the amount recommended for his age and comes down with an infection. When Harriet takes him to see Dr. Brett, he admonishes Harriet for discontinuing breastfeeding, but Harriet shows him her bruised breasts and asks for a prescription for diarrhea, saying "After all, I don't want to kill the nasty little brute." Dr. Brett responds that it's not unnatural to dislike one of your children. Despite Ben raising himself onto all-fours (at two months old), Dr. Brett insists there's nothing wrong with the child, but his tone contains a note of bafflement.

Dr. Brett continues to criticize Harriet's choices, minimizing her distress. Harriet proves her point, but takes on a nasty tone with the doctor, making light of wanting only to help Ben back to health rather than eradicating him entirely. Dr. Brett's words insist that Harriet's interpretation of Ben's behaviors rests more on Harriet's dislike of Ben than on his actual actions, but his actions seem to bolster Harriet's belief that Ben's strength is unnatural and unnerving.

The extended family descends on the Lovatt **house** for the summer holidays. Harriet notes the cheery way Paul behaves when held and entertained by everyone, and how this nature is often obscured by Ben's demands. Ben's cot is moved into the children's room to try to socialize him, but it doesn't work because of Ben's constant bellowing and refusal to be treated sweetly. The family seems flummoxed by Ben's odd appearance and behavior, and one day Harriet hears her sister Sarah say, "That Ben gives me the creeps. He's like a goblin or a dwarf or something." Harriet feels bad about this comment, but she can't help but agree.

The extended family's meeting of Ben is important in showing both the way people refuse to meet Ben's differences head-on and the fact that at least one of them is willing to relegate Ben to the status of other in the same way Harriet has. Harriet is affirmed in finally hearing someone else echo her thoughts, but she is also conflicted about the cruelty of such sentiments, especially when coming from another person. Ben continues to fail at being socialized and all of those efforts to nurture Ben begin to chip away at the care and attention owed to baby Paul.

Harriet tries to spend some time each day petting and playing with Ben, but he resists all tenderness. At four-months-old he pulls himself up to standing. Soon after, he bites into Harriet's thumb and she feels the bone bend. Ben smiles triumphantly. Harriet says, "You aren't going to do me in. I won't let you." Harriet tries to make Ben "ordinary," incorporating him into family life in the same way she has the other children, but the family scatters when Ben is in the room, since they're afraid of him. Eventually Harriet begins to shut Ben into his room alone, but he doesn't seem to mind. James stops through to drop off a check to pay for all the hosting needs.

Harriet tries to give Ben the nurturing the other children have needed, convinced she might change his nature. She sees him as innately set on harming her, though, and sees that Ben has the ability to threaten her well-being. Because Ben's presence is so unnerving and the family can't stand to acknowledge it, Harriet sequesters Ben, refusing him further opportunities to socialize. The Lovatts are clearly still experiencing financial hardship, as shown by James's appearance with a check in his hand.

Lying in bed one night, Harriet says to David that she believes people come to their **house** for a good time and nothing more. David, surprised, asks what else it would be they came for. It is revealed that they have not resumed lovemaking since Ben was born, as they both fear the possibility of producing another child like him, even if they were extremely careful. It's as though Ben had willed himself into existence. Just after the summer holidays, as the school year commences, Paul puts his arm through the bars of Ben's crib and Ben grabs Paul's hand, bending his arm backwards and badly spraining it. Dorothy and Alice free Paul from Ben's grasp, and Ben crows with pleasure. The children become fearful of Ben after this, and Dorothy and Alice remark on what a shame it is. Harriet feels this is an attack on her.

Harriet's distress at the way the family has treated Ben is revealed in the way she begins to resent their once-treasured visits, and David can't understand her change of heart. Despite Harriet being the only one to acknowledge Ben's concerning behavior verbally, the fact of their suspended intimacy shows that David, too, is not pleased with the outcome of their last pregnancy. Ben is seen not as a product of a natural process, but as some self-determined miracle. Paul is the first victim of Ben's brute strength and lack of empathy, and the children identify immediately the threat their brother poses to them, too. Harriet's belief that others blame her for Ben's behavior shows her growing paranoia and persecution.

The day after, Alice excuses herself from the **house**, saying she's no longer needed because Jane is being sent to school (a full year ahead of schedule, because of Ben's presence in the house, though no one will admit it). Privately Alice has told Dorothy that she believes Ben might be a changeling. David and Harriet wonder, to each other, if this six-month-old child might destroy their family life. At nine months, Harriet catches Ben just as he is climbing over the bars of his crib. He walks easily and breaks every toy they give him to pieces. One morning, Harriet wakes suddenly and runs to Ben's room, finding him balanced on the open windowsill. She rescues him, but thinks to herself, "What a pity I came in," and finds herself unsurprised by this sentiment. They install heavy bars on the window.

Alice, not tied to the family by blood, immediately separates herself after registering the threat of Ben. She makes excuses so as not to offend anyone, though she is willing to share her real thoughts with Dorothy. David, too, acknowledges that Ben has the potential to destroy everything good about the family. Ben's growing strength threatens not only his own life but also the condition of the world around him, symbolized in his inability to play gently with his toys. Harriet's mothering instincts are still strong, even though she wishes it weren't so. She believes it is still her job to protect him even if he is altering the idyllic family life they had before.

At the Christmas holidays, Ben is kept in his room. The family politely asks about his well-being, but doesn't press for details. The atmosphere is constrained by the specter of the child locked away upstairs. Harriet feels that the family looks at her as if she is a criminal for having given birth to such a "freak." David insists that Harriet exaggerates everything and hopes that they might align themselves again. Cousin Bridget visits at Easter and inquires as to what it is that's wrong with Ben, and Harriet, following others' suit, says nothing is wrong with him. Bridget leaves and never returns to the **house**. At the 1975 summer holidays, fewer guests visit, saying they haven't the funds to make the trip. Dorothy notes that people hadn't found it difficult to visit before for weeks at a time at the expense of the Lovatts.

The quick succession of family gatherings makes it clear that Ben's presence in the family is changing the once-merry atmosphere of the Lovatt house. Harriet feels blamed for this, though it's unclear if that's truly the case or if she's misinterpreting others' treatment of her. While Cousin Bridget had once been Harriet and David's ideal audience in their performance of ideal family life, Bridget is the first to question Ben's condition and then absents herself when Harriet continues her ruse of parroting that nothing is wrong with him. While family members make excuses for why they can't visit, and Harriet tries to force herself into believing them, Dorothy insists on a more realistic point of view.

Ben, over a year old and yet to speak a word, can't be kept in his room any longer. He observes how the children talk and behave, seemingly aware that he should be like them. The other children turn away from him, unnerved by his gaze. A summer guest brings along a dog that Ben obsessively follows around. One morning Harriet finds the dog dead and believes Ben is to blame. She locks Ben in his room again, fearing he might do the same to a child. The family, horrified, also assumes that Ben killed the dog, and a vet says the dog was strangled. Guests return home early. Three months later, the Lovatts' old grey cat is killed in the same way.

Ben, despite his attempts to assimilate, and his awareness that that is what's expected of him, can't control his violent nature. Though the family doesn't have proof that Ben is to blame for the death of the dog, their understanding of what he is capable of is understood if unspoken. Despite Harriet's locking Ben away, the few remaining guests are disturbed by this event and retreat from the house. A second occurrence of the same sort, though similarly unproven, reinforces these assumptions.

At Christmas, the **house** is half empty. Harriet reflects on the worst year of her life. Ben has taken to trying to escape the house, running down the street. Harriet has had to run as much as a mile, chasing him through traffic, desperate to save him, but also thinking, "Oh, do run him over, do, yes, *please*." Eventually she catches him and wrestles him into a taxi. Harriet takes Ben to Dr. Brett who says he's hyperactive. He asks what Harriet expects him to do: "Drug him silly? Well, I am against it." Harriet would appreciate this outcome, but keeps it to herself.

Harriet is unable to find joy in the introduction of Ben into the Lovatt family. Though she wishes him gone, she can't help but try to keep him safe by chasing after him when he runs away, while simultaneously hoping for the worst. This conflict is essential to understanding Harriet's psyche. Ben's running away seems to indicate that the baby is also not happy with his family life. Dr. Brett offers no solutions to Ben's behavior, reducing his misbehavior to minor issues.

Dorothy suggests she might stay alone with Ben for a week in August so the rest of the family can have a vacation together. None of the regular extended family has asked to visit this summer. Harriet, David, and the four oldest children go to France and marvel at their happiness sans-Ben. When they return home, Dorothy is tired and bruised. She sits David and Harriet down in the kitchen to tell them that Ben must be put in an **institution**. Harriet says that no institution will take him because the doctor says he is normal.

The family gatherings have truly come to a close here, signaling the end of the era. Dorothy's offer to care for Ben on her own indicates her understanding that Ben's presence is negatively affecting family life. Harriet feels guilty for enjoying her time away from Ben so deeply, but is snapped quickly back to reality when Dorothy's time alone with Ben (when Harriet had previously been his sole caregiver) prompts Dorothy to recommend they permanently remove Ben from family life. Harriet's imagination can't accommodate such a possibility because Ben's otherness has been so consistently denied by everyone else.

Harriet and David resume making love, but it's not the same because of the apprehension they bring to the possibility of accidentally conceiving again. At night, they discuss what can be done about Ben. Harriet regrets that she became so consumed with looking after Ben that she forgot to feed the other children one night, and Helen stepped in to make dinner.

Harriet and David, even when physically close again, remain distanced from one another because of Ben's presence in the family. Harriet regrets her neglect of the children, but is unable to see what other option they have when Ben demands such devoted care. Harriet is blinded by her devotion to Ben, despite her dislike of him.

Harriet invites the family, determined to have a regular Christmas. Sarah asks if Amy will be safe in the **house**, and Harriet says yes, as long as they never leave her alone with Ben. Sarah comments that they've both been dealt a bad hand, but Harriet doesn't believe fate is to blame for Amy's Down Syndrome. At Christmas, the house is festive and noisy, but Harriet is eager for it to end, strained by watching Ben monitor Amy's every move. Amy, adored by all now, tries to show Ben affection, but she, too, can tell that something is off about Ben.

Harriet's competing idealism and fatalism are still vying for the spotlight. While she wants to pretend that the family can still have a pleasant holiday together, when her sister tries to commiserate with her about having children who require special attention, Harriet refuses to identify with her. Harriet registers the differences in behavior between Ben and Amy, surprised that even Amy can recognize something wrong with Ben.

Just after Ben turns two years old, Paul is sent to a nursery school to get away from Ben. Paul has begun having violent tantrums to try to get Harriet's attention away from Ben. Dorothy departs to help with Sarah's family for a while and Harriet is alone with Ben during the daytimes. She plays with him and he is able to mimic her actions, but he can't seem to understand why he would want to. Harriet sees him stalk a bird in the yard and nearly catch it.

Harriet sends Paul to nursery school in an attempt to protect him, but this gesture has also had the negative effect of making Paul feel further distanced from his mother. Harriet spends time trying to connect with Ben, but she notes in him an inability to connect the what with the why. He has a fundamental desire to conform, but it lacks reasoning. His predatory instincts are confirmed in his hunting of the bird in the garden.

One day, Ben begins to talk, surprisingly in full sentences, saying, "I want cake." The children encourage him and Ben watches them closely, studying how they act and react. Harriet notes that Ben is easier now, but Dorothy, returning to the Lovatt home, says that that is just Harriet's point of view. Dorothy tells Harriet that she leaves the mothering of the other children to Dorothy, focusing all her attention on Ben, and that it's not right. After Ben turns three, the **house** is only partly filled for Christmas. Amy brings along a large companion dog that all the children love, but one morning Harriet sees Ben approaching the dog with his hands out and calling to him. The dog runs away and everyone sees this interaction.

Ben's ability to talk in full sentences shows that he is taking in more information than the rest of the family can tell, suggesting that they might be underestimating his intelligence. Harriet's credibility as a protagonist is called into question when Dorothy says that Harriet's belief that Ben is better behaved now is only her point of view. Dorothy criticizes Harriet's distribution of her attention. Harriet continues, uncertain of what other option there might be, remaining devoted to Ben, perhaps even more-so, when he nearly attacks Amy's pet dog at the holidays. Ben's predatory nature is spotlighted to the family.

After seeing this, Frederick tells Harriet that Ben must be put into an **institution** and Harriet says they'll have to find a doctor willing to diagnose Ben as abnormal. David asks who will pay for such a thing, and Frederick answers that James will have to pay the majority, but that Frederick and Molly will chip in (the first time they have offered financial help), though everyone knows their chipping in won't be significant. James says he'll do what he can, but that business has not been especially good lately. The family acknowledges that they'll need to find a place that exists purely to take on children that families want to be rid of, because the alternative is catastrophe. David agrees firmly and Harriet agrees reluctantly.

Despite Dorothy having recommended such a drastic measure before, it's a man who is not related to the family by blood who is finally listened to when he recommends Ben be removed from the house. The necessity of this action is so clear, that even Molly and Frederick, who have been previously stingy in their support, offer to pay some of the cost of an institution. While it's assumed James will cover the rest of the cost, even James pulls back, claiming his business isn't currently flourishing, but doubt is cast on this idea, suggesting that, in fact, his reason for not wanting to pay could be that he doesn't want any responsibility in this matter.

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A few days later, Frederick calls to say that a place has been found and a car will come for Ben the next morning. Harriet realizes that David has been working to arrange this privately, David says that Ben "has probably just dropped in from Mars. He's going back to report on what he's found down here." Harriet realizes that Ben is not expected to live long once he gets to the **institution** and admonishes David, saying that Ben is their child. David denies that Ben is his. David and Harriet observe the children playing in the backyard and note how far they've come from their wild, free youths.

Harriet, who has kept several secrets from Ben at this point, realizes that David has also been keeping secrets from her. She is disturbed by the way in which David minimizes Ben's departure from the house by painting Ben as alien to them and she is horrified when David coldly fails to acknowledge both the fate they're committing their child to, as well the child's origin.

In the morning, a black van shows up. David loads the bags he's packed for Ben into the car and then deposits Ben in the car, too. They hear Ben's screams as the car pulls away, and David assures Harriet they had no choice. Harriet weeps with shock, relief, and gratitude. When the children arrive home from school, they're told Ben is gone and they express joyful relief. At dinner, Jane asks if her parents will send the other children away, too. Luke assures Jane that Ben was sent away because he wasn't really one of them.

It is important that Ben, who has tried to run away from the family of his own accord, violently rejects being placed into someone else's custody. His rejection of this alternative life is not a solution for him, so much as a selfish gesture on the part of the family. Harriet feels conflicted—she's happy to be rid of him but still guilty. While the children are happy to find Ben gone, they also become aware of the possibility that, if they misbehave, they may suffer the same fate. Luke, the oldest and most aware, however, shows that he, too, could tell there was something fundamentally different about Ben.

The family thrives in Ben's absence, but Harriet can't distract herself from thinking about how Ben is prisoner somewhere and she is overcome with guilt and horror. One morning she wakes up and says that she must visit Ben. David tells her not to, but Harriet phones Molly and convinces her to share the address. Harriet drives the five hours to the **institution**. She waits a long time for a girl to come to the front desk, and Harriet realizes that no one visits their children here. While she waits for the girl to retrieve a manager, Harriet hears high screams coming from the wards. Finally, a young man in a dirty lab coat emerges with the girl. He tells Harriet she can't visit Ben, but Harriet insists.

Harriet's idealism remains in conflict with her pragmatism. While it is pragmatic to have Ben out of the house, allowing a more idealist family life to proceed, Harriet can't divorce herself from her pragmatic responsibility of caring for her son, or from the idealistic vision she holds of having the full family intact, with Ben reformed enough that he can happily spend time with the rest of them. Harriet hopes visiting the institution might prove her worst fears wrong, but instead they are affirmed.

The young man says he'll retrieve Ben, but Harriet lets herself through the door, wanting to see what it is they're trying to keep from her. Harriet walks through a ward of malformed children, drugged into sleep or silence. She finds the attendants entering a cell. In a padded room, she sees Ben laying on a foam mattress soaked in urine and smeared with excrement, wearing only a strait-jacket, unconscious. The two attendants carry Ben to a bath and wash him down, before dressing him in a fresh strait-jacket.

Harriet has come all the way to the institution to check up on Ben, and she is unwilling to blind herself to the condition of the other inhabitants of the institution, insisting she get a full picture of what life is life for the children there. The squalid conditions of Ben's cell are contrasted with the gentle actions of the attendants, a mirror for the conflicted way Harriet herself treats Ben.

Harriet thinks Ben almost looks normal, unconscious as he is, and Harriet decides to take him home. The young woman asks Harriet what she'll do with him, saying she's never seen a child so strong. They advise Harriet on how to get him home and tell her that no one lasts in this job longer than a few weeks. They load Ben into Harriet's car and the young man gives Harriet some drugs to subdue Ben when he comes to. Harriet asks how long Ben would have survived at the **institution** and the two attendants tell her he wouldn't have lived long because of the large amount of drugs it took to subdue such a strong child.

Harriet is somewhat relieved (if also frightened) that the attendants are similarly confused by Ben's condition. While Harriet pretends that she knows how to handle the situation, the attendants know better how Ben has changed since coming into their custody, and they insist Harriet take tranquilizers with her to control Ben when he regains consciousness. Harriet believes she has done the right thing when the attendants reveal that Ben would not have survived long in their care.

On the way home, Ben wakes up and screams with fear. When Harriet pulls over and looks at Ben, she feels as though he doesn't recognize her. She injects him with the sedative and arrives home at night. She carries Ben into the **house** and faces her family, explaining that the **institution** was killing Ben, which frightens the children. Harriet takes Ben to his room where he wakes up, screaming. She feeds him and then injects him again.

While Harriet and Ben had, at one point, found some semblance of common ground, that progress has been erased in Ben's time away. Similarly, while she had managed to reconnect with her other children in Ben's absence, Ben's return (and her complicity in it) further distances her from her children.

Harriet defends herself against David's anger saying that if he would have seen what they were doing to Ben, David would have saved Ben, too. David counters that he was careful not to see. Harriet says that what's done is done and David calls out "done" as the key word. The children, tear-stained, refuse to look their mother in the eye. David sleeps in another bedroom.

David's admission that he willfully avoided thinking about the pragmatics of his son's existence in the institution show his own commitment to idealism, even as he criticizes Harriet's idealist insistence on keeping Ben a part of family life. The rift between David and Harriet grows a great distance here.

Harriet repeats the cycle of feeding and sedating Ben. She tries to reassure Ben that he is home and safe and that if he behaves she will take off the strait-jacket. He struggles and Harriet sees that the police have come to the **house** because of the disturbance. David sends them away. When the children are due home, Harriet, again, asks Ben to quiet down, and exhausted, he complies. She bathes him and threatens to put the strait-jacket back on him if he misbehaves, realizing that she must use fear to control Ben. Finally it seems as though Ben recognizes her. Harriet remains with Ben that night, feeling as though she is shielding the rest of the family from him as she reteaches him all the social skills he lost in the **institution**, but the family feels as though she has chosen Ben over them.

That Harriet resorts to ruling Ben with fear shows how desperate she is to make this situation work. While she would never think to use the same tactics with her other children, she feels she has no other choice but to use this type of discipline with Ben, a concession to his difference, if a cruel one. It is the moment when Harriet gains control that Ben shows some sign of recognition. Harriet again feels persecuted for focusing her attentions on Ben, even if her reason for this is to assimilate him back into the family, something she feels obligated to do.

The first time Ben sees David, he hisses, remembering it was David who put him in the van. David doesn't apologize, now believing that Ben is Harriet's responsibility, and the other ("real") children his own. Ben resumes copying the other children and things return to the way they were before Ben left, except for Ben's distrust of David. Harriet hires a young man named John to come help clean up the garden, and Ben takes a liking to him immediately. John is kind but firm with Ben, bossing him around like a puppy that needs training. Harriet goes to the café where she knows John hangs out with some of his other unemployed friends. She asks if John would be willing to care for Ben during the day until he's old enough to go to school, and John accepts the offer.

The house is clearly divided at this point. David remains firm that Ben is not his child, though he claims full ownership of the rest of them. While some equilibrium is found over time, Ben holds a grudge against David for sending him away, and Harriet, seeking an alternate solution to their family life, calls upon someone outside the family to provide Ben care. Recognizing that their immediate family falls short of what Ben needs, but that Ben is able to connect with someone who's not a relation, she allows Ben to begin forming a connection with someone else, hoping it might allow the rest of the family to remain intact.

John arrives each morning to pick up Ben on his motorbike. Family life is improved if distant. David returns to sleep with Harriet and Harriet begins taking the Pill, indicating a growing lack of trust in Nature. Harriet asks if Dorothy might watch the children so that she and David can have a weekend away together. They go to the countryside. Harriet suggests having more children and David bristles at the idea. Harriet says that another Ben couldn't happen and David asks if they're just supposed to forget the children she's already neglecting. Harriet suggests that another child might draw the family together. In David's silence, Harriet recognizes what a bad idea it is. David asks what they should do about Paul, who is damaged by the way he's been refused attention because of all that his younger brother requires. Harriet hopes he'll get over it, but David disagrees.

While Ben forms his own bond with John, the rest of the Lovatts attempt to repair their severed ties, but a fair amount of distrust has been seeded into their interactions with one another. While Harriet had previously been skeptical of the Pill, which is otherwise embraced by the masses, she decides to take it now in the hopes of preventing another unwanted pregnancy. Despite this precaution, Harriet still harbors her idealism in the hope that perhaps another child could be the glue needed to firmly pull the family back together again. Harriet continues to remain blind to Paul's problems, while David is this time the one who is trying to address them, counter to the way he tried to look away when they abandoned Ben at the institution.

Some people visit for the summer holidays because Harriet has explained that Ben is hardly ever home. Molly and Frederick do not attend, unable to forgive Harriet for bringing Ben home. Among the guests is Deborah, newly divorced. Ben has become a mascot for John's group of friends, treating Ben roughly, ordering him about, calling him "Dopey, Dwarfey, Alien Two, Hobbit, and Gremlin." David picks up extra work, and much of this money goes toward paying for outings for Ben. Ben is moved to a regular bedroom, where they can no longer lock him in for fear of his protest. This causes the other children to lock their own doors, barring Harriet from tucking them in or checking on them. On the rare occasions when Ben observes Harriet tucking the other children in, he doesn't seem to understand the gesture. Sometimes Harriet wakes to find Ben watching her sleep.

Harriet continues to try to convince the others that the Lovatts are leading an ideal family life, an indication that she, too, wants to believe this. Ben, on the other hand, has found a comfortable place as the little brother of a less traditional family, one that seems inscrutable to Harriet. Whereas Harriet had tried to act sweetly with Ben, she sees him responding more favorably to rougher treatment. She is unable to see that she could mirror this same behavior to similar effect, and indeed it's possible that such a shift in her actions would be too little too late. Ben's freedom in the house continues to hinder her connection to the other children.

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When Ben turns five, Luke (13) and Helen (11) ask to be sent to boarding school. They've asked James and Molly, respectively, to pay their school fees. Luke informs them that it will be better for them because they don't like Ben. Immediately before this proposal, the family had found Ben crouched on the table eating a raw chicken. Ben defends himself by saying, "Poor Ben hungry." It breaks Harriet's heart to think that Ben sees himself as Poor Ben. The time comes when Ben must go to school, despite it being clear he isn't very good at proper learning. Harriet asks John try to reason with Ben and John tells Ben that all of the gang went to school, though they snicker because of the way they'd played truant as kids. Harriet takes Ben to school and John picks him up and looks after him until bedtime.

The biological family drifts apart further here. While Harriet had convinced herself that their family life had improved, Luke and Helen had secretly been planning their escape, seeking support from the grandparents with whom they identified most closely. While likely long in the works, this revelation is immediately preceded by Ben savagely devouring a chicken and then defending his actions. Harriet tries, again, to understand her son in the way he refers to himself, wondering if he is just repeating the sentiment of others or if he's capable of pitying himself. When the time comes for Ben to go to school, spending less time with John, it is John, with whom Ben has the truest connection, that is able to convince Ben he must attend.

With Helen and Luke away at boarding school and Jane hanging out with friends after school, Harriet finally has some dedicated time to spend with Paul, who is now a shrill, difficult child. He seems never to be at ease and he's demanding of attention, having been denied mothering when it was most crucial. When he hears Ben arriving home on the motorbike, he wails.

Paul, having been born with a sweet nature, has developed problematic behaviors because of the lack of nurturing he received. He also shows that he has been conditioned to respond poorly to indications of Ben's return home. Both of these facts lend credence to the notion that nurture has a stronger effect on how a person develops than nature.

Harriet inquires about how Ben is doing in school and the headmistress says he tries very hard, but that he doesn't fit in and that the teachers are at a bit of a loss. Harriet asks the headmistress if she's ever seen a child like Ben before, and the teacher confirms that he might be hyperactive, but Harriet senses there is much that goes unsaid between them. At the end of the second term, Harriet receives word that Ben has attacked a bigger girl on the playground, knocking her down, biting her, and breaking her arm. The headmistress says Ben showed little remorse. Paul hears of the attack and fears for his own life.

The headmistress, like many people before her, declines to admit that there is something wrong with Ben, reducing his differences to hyperactivity. This lack of proactivity has a price, though, when Ben injures a little girl. Only after this occurs is the headmistress willing to admit that Ben shows a surprising lack of remorse for his wrongdoing. Even before Harriet arrives at the school, Paul is hysterically responding to the news of his brother's behavior.

Harriet takes Ben home to talk to him. She asks Ben if he remembers the **institution**. It's clear he does and Harriet tells Ben that he'll need to go back there if he hurts anyone else, but she knows she could never do this. Ben seems terrified of this possibility and he walks away, leaving behind a trail of urine. Harriet summons John to talk to Ben, and Ben leaves with John after he talks Ben into behaving more gently.

Harriet continues to discipline Ben with fear, threatening to return him to the institution, removing him not just from the Lovatt house, but also from the company of his true family, John and his gang. Harriet again shows her conflicted feelings when she calls John to talk to Ben, hoping Ben might respond better to John's firm kindness than he did to her threats.

Harriet asks Dr. Brett to set up an appointment with a specialist, asking that he not dismiss her to the other doctor as a hysteric. Dr. Gilly observes Ben first while Harriet waits, wondering what it is she wants of this doctor. She decides that what she wants for someone to acknowledge that Ben is different. Dr. Gilly tells Harriet that the problem is not with Ben, but with Harriet not liking Ben. Harriet insists that Dr. Brett must have told planted that idea in Dr. Gilly's mind.

Harriet again feels attacked for Ben's behavior, which she believes she has little to do with. Because the story is told mostly from Harriet's perspective, it is hard to tell if indeed her behavior is to blame for Ben's actions, or if it's possible Dr. Brett has biased Dr. Gilly's opinion with the information in Ben's file.

Harriet presses Dr. Gilly to say that there is nothing strange about Ben, and Dr. Gilly demurs. Harriet asks for Ben to be brought into the room so the doctor can look at him again. The doctor assesses his appearance and sends him out. Harriet asks, "He's not human, is he?" Dr. Gilly pauses, distressed, and then jokes away her uncertainty suggesting that Ben is from another planet. Harriet suggests that, rather than an alien, Ben might be a throwback and asks that the doctor say *something*. Dr. Gilly says that even if such a thing could be true, it's outside of her competence. Harriet thanks Dr. Gilly, asking if she might give Harriet prescription for a sedative for the times she can't control Ben. The doctor complies, and Ben finishes out his first school year without additional incident.

Harriet, frustrated with Dr. Gilly's response and sensing that there is more being left unsaid, tries to force Dr. Gilly into being more frank. While the doctor, like many before her, laughs off the possibility of Ben being some other type of creature altogether, she actually entertains the possibility somewhat seriously, and this admission alone provides solace to Harriet. A woman of significant intelligence has not reduced her concern to hysteria, even if she's admitted there's little to be done because the situation is so uncommon.

At Christmas, Luke stays with James and Helen goes to Molly's **house**. Dorothy stays for three days, but takes Jane back to her house with her at the end of the visit. Ben spends all his time with John. David works longer hours. Paul remains home, but is even more difficult than Ben, though he is considered to be "disturbed" in a normal way. He spends most of his time watching the violent news on TV.

This marks the first Christmas without some of the children, a significant amplification of the way the Lovatt house's existence as a hub of family life has broken down. That Paul's "disturbance" is seen as being more familiar (and therefore less of a problem) than Ben's strangeness is an important detail in identifying people's rejection of Ben; they are more disturbed by his unfamiliarity than by any danger he poses to himself or others.

Luke stays mostly with James, though occasionally James brings Luke to visit, sensing that Harriet and David miss him. Helen stays with Molly, visiting very infrequently. Jane remains living with Dorothy and Sarah's family, and when she visits the Lovatt **house** it's clear she's careful not to criticize them. Again David suggests that Paul needs a psychiatrist, taking on a part-time job at a polytechnic to cover the cost. Paul goes to therapy almost every afternoon, attaching to the doctor's family more than his own. One afternoon, Harriet finds Ben trying to strangle Paul, but he can't reach. She thinks Ben was only threatening his brother, but Paul believes it was a true attempt. Harriet calls Ben off and Paul runs away. Harriet wonders if Ben experiences the world as a human or as something else. Harriet withholds this incident from David.

At this point, all of the children have formed alternative families for themselves. Harriet and David, who had dreamed of a perfect nuclear family, have lost their hold on this reality entirely. David has slowly transitioned to the absent father role he once refused to inhabit, hoping to provide Paul the therapeutic help he needs to make up for all that has gone wrong in their family. When Ben threatens Paul directly, Harriet remains (perhaps overly optimistically) convinced that Ben was only teasing Paul, not intending to hurt him. Harriet even comes close to empathizing with Ben at this point, wondering if perhaps his entire reality is framed in an inhuman way.

John tells the Lovatts that he and his friends are leaving for a job-training school in Manchester. Ben takes this news poorly, asking why he can't go along with John. Harriet thanks John for all he's done. Ben misses John and the gang immensely, and Harriet finds him at the café alone one afternoon, as if waiting for them to arrive. One afternoon, Ben races into the **house** and a policewoman shows up to make sure he wasn't lost. The policewoman recommends Harriet not let him run around on his own like that for fear of being kidnapped, and Harriet says, "No such luck." The policewoman departs, laughing.

Ben's surrogate family breaks up and he finds himself equally as forlorn as Harriet was when Ben's arrival disrupted their otherwise pleasant family life. Back in Harriet's company, Harriet finds herself wishing Ben might be kidnapped, similarly to the way she used to wish he'd fallen out a window or been hit by a car. The appearance of the policewoman also foreshadows future concerns of Harriet's having to do with Ben getting in trouble with the law.

Harriet recognizes that David has become what he vowed he would never be, focusing mostly on work and paying all their bills, except for the support James gave to Luke. Harriet, David and Paul leave to visit Helen and Luke, and Dorothy is left alone with Ben, whom she hasn't seen in a year. David asks Harriet if she realizes Ben will be an adolescent soon—the idea of him being sexual scares David. After this weekend away, Dorothy asks Harriet if she thinks Ben asks himself why he is different and if there are more people like him in the world. They agree they don't want to know what other kinds of people have lived in the history of the earth after having met Ben. Dorothy also notes that Ben is no longer a child despite the fact that they treat him like one.

Harriet and David strive to maintain some connection with the children who have left them behind, but even this gesture is disrupted by the fact that Harriet visits one child, while David and Paul visit another. The family is not able to be whole. David, Harriet and Dorothy's concern that Ben is soon to be an adult shows the way they predict his violent behavior might map to sexuality. Dorothy and Harriet can't help but wonder if the survival of a human of Ben's kind is the product of a long line of such violence.

The two years before Ben goes to secondary school are not pleasant for him. He watches TV indiscriminately, but can't seem to understand what he watches as a story. He tries to play games, but fails. He loves musicals, but can't sing. When Paul taunts Ben, Harriet warns him not to do that. One afternoon, Harriet looks for Ben in the **house** and finds him staring out the skylight in the attic. He hears her and leaps to the shadows, and she feels her body go rigid with an animal fear.

Ben's way of dealing with the loss of his surrogate family is to detach by watching television, but not in the same way other people detach. Ben doesn't hold the details of the narratives in his mind or follow the logic of story. The visceral response evoked by musicals appeals to him, but he has no ear for tunes. Harriet's discovery of an especially animal-like Ben in the attic confirms how much further he has withdrawn without anyone he identifies with.

Sensing that David deserves their charity, the family returns for a week in the summer holiday. Harriet resents that the family sees her as a scapegoat for all that's gone wrong. She tells David that they're being punished and David asks why they would be punished. "For presuming. For thinking we could be happy. Happy because *we* decided we would be," she replies. David disagrees, saying, "It was chance. Anyone could have got Ben." Harriet says they wanted to be better than everyone and David says they wanted only to be themselves. Molly and Frederick bring Helen, now an attractive, self-sufficient, if distant, sixteen-year-old. James brings Luke, now a reliable eighteen-year-old observer. Dorothy brings Jane, a non-academic fourteen-year-old. Paul, eleven, asks why he can't go to boarding school like the others, and David says he'll pay for just that.

Harriet believes that the family is visiting only for David's benefit, not her own, which is further evidence of the way she sees the family blaming her for all that has gone wrong, though it's not clear whether this is truly the way they feel. The conversation between Harriet and David is essential in showing the height of Harriet's fatalism, believing they are being punished for pursuing further happiness when they were already content. David's belief that their circumstances are due to pure luck and that they have no responsibility in the outcome of Ben's upbringing is extreme in the other direction. Indeed, some balance of these two points of view must be the truth, but the difference in their points of view show how far Harriet and David have drifted apart. The personalities of the children on their visit home further show the importance of this balance of nature and nurture.

Molly tells David and Harriet they must sell the **house**. David publicly agrees with Harriet that it's not time yet, but privately he says something different. Harriet explains that living in a small house with Ben seems impossible to imagine, but David can tell that Harriet is still holding out hope that the family will come back together.

David and Harriet's differences of opinion are further intensified in the revelation that David is being honest with members of his family, while keeping his true opinions from Harriet, an echo of the way they arrived at the decision of where to institutionalize Ben. David's actions show both pity and frustration for the way Harriet remains tied to the idea of possibly reuniting the family.

In 1986, when Ben turns eleven, he goes on to secondary school. Harriet checks Ben for bruises to see if he's been fighting and waits for a letter or call saying he's behaving badly, but instead, Ben comes home with a friend, a fifteen-year-old named Derek who reminds Harriet very much of John. She wonders why Derek puts up with Ben, who is so much younger, but she notices that Ben seems like the older of the two. Soon, other friends join the group: Billy, Elvis, and Vic. Harriet continues to wonder why these boys like Ben so much, observing that Ben seems to dominate them. She assumes the boys are a group of outcasts, unable to match up to their contemporaries, until she hears that "Ben Lovatt's gang" is the most envied in the school.

Harriet's assumptions that Ben will get in trouble and have trouble making friends are again proven wrong, casting further doubt on Harriet's ability to judge Ben accurately. Still unable to properly connect with his biological family, Ben begins to form another surrogate family for himself that more closely mirrors the gang of John's friends who embraced him earlier in his childhood. Not only is Ben able to make friends, his company is coveted by many in the school, a fact that Harriet continues to be confused by, so unable is she to appreciate Ben for his good qualities.

Harriet watches Ben and imagines him as a caveman or mole person, living underground, surrounded by others like him. The group of boys lounge about, eating everything in her fridge and watching anything that comes on TV. The more violent evening shows appeal to them most, eliciting excited reactions. Harriet connects the newspaper stories of "muggings, hold-ups, break-ins" and even rapes in the area to the fact that sometimes the boys are gone for days at a time and they're reluctant to say where they've been. They always seem to have plenty of money. Harriet examines the boys, trying to match them to the reports she's read, and she feels afraid of them, wondering which of them is smart enough to plan all these crimes.

Harriet's continued insistence that Ben is some other species of human grows and shifts as she sees the way he interacts with others "of his kind," though she still calls out ben as being essentially different from his friends in some way. Her assumption that Ben is causing trouble also grows, as she connects the progressing trouble in the area to the behavior she fears the boys capable of showing, including her earlier fears around Ben's imminent sexuality. Though Harriet has noted that Ben is the dominant leader of the group, she still sees him as being unintelligent enough to plan crimes like the ones she sees reported on the television, further evidence that she continues to underestimate him.

Harriet realizes that the gang is sleeping in the **house**, too, and she tells them that's not allowed. The boys don't seem to take her seriously, joking that one day they'll take the house over themselves. Harriet notes this as one of their "revolutionary" remarks. The boys take David more seriously when he commands them to clean up their messes and go home, but Ben leaves with the others. When they are alone, David tells Harriet it's time to sell the house. Harriet says she wants to keep it for the children and David exclaims, "We have no children, Harriet. Or, rather, I have no children. *You* have one child." Harriet tells David that she senses Ben will leave with the others soon, and never return. David asks Harriet if she will be able to stop herself from going out and bringing him back, but they let the conversation end there.

Harriet refuses to let Ben's non-traditional overwhelm their biological family, forbidding them to fill the rooms in the way their guests used to. Again, she resents the fact that the boys fail to listen to her, but they respond to David's requests, echoing the way she has not been taken seriously for much of the book. Harriet continues to hold out hope that her family might be reunited, but David disavows not only Ben, but also the other children at this point, acknowledging that they've lost their hold on family life entirely. When Harriet expresses regret that she will lose even Ben if they move away from this house, David doubts her ability to let him go, harkening back to the way she rescued Ben from the institution instead of letting him go all those years ago.

That night, David and Harriet lock the door, so Ben will have to ring the bell if he wants to come in. Harriet suggests buying a more sensible **house** elsewhere, but David has already drifted off. Ben and the others disappear for a few days and Harriet sees them on television at a riot in London. Harriet hears news that a small shop nearby has been broken into, four hundred pounds stolen, and the employees beaten and bound. The gang of young men return home that night, excited, pulling wads of money from their pockets. Harriet tells them she saw them on the TV and they confirm, and then she tells them the house will be sold soon. Ben barely reacts to this, and Harriet wonders if the house no longer feels like his true home.

Harriet and David attempt to remove Ben from family life, but he doesn't return home as they assumed he might, so Harriet isn't forced to exercise her will. A riot in London confirms her suspicions that they have been the ones committing the crimes in their area, though this logic isn't airtight. When Harriet tells the groups of boys that the house will not be an option as their hideout for much longer, Ben shows no reaction, further evidencing that he anticipates moving on with his nontraditional family rather than remaining with his biological one.

Harriet gives Ben information on where she can be reached if he can't find her. Ben takes the sheet of paper, marked with Molly and Frederick's address, but Harriet finds the note discarded on the floor and she doesn't try to tell him again. In spring and summer, the gang passes through the **house** infrequently. Harriet automatically assumes any crimes can be attributed to this group of boys, but she recognizes this is unreasonable. Harriet wishes them gone and finds herself ready to sell the house. She cleans up after them when they visit and registers them now as an "alienated, non-comprehending, hostile tribe." Harriet regards their dining room table lovingly, remembering all that has happened around it. She regards her reflection in the polished surface of the table and sees that she's become old and drained.

Harriet, despite her claims otherwise, tries to ensure that she and Ben might remain in contact by sharing her information with him. The fact that this hope is completely one-sided is established when she finds the note cast aside. The way in which Harriet wishes the boys gone but continues to clean up after them mirrors the way in which she often protected Ben while also wishing him dead in his childhood. The once-pristine dining room table now shows the signs of wear the years have caused, including her own weariness which she sees reflected in its surface.

Harriet shifts her gaze to Ben, who is apart from the others, observing them. She compares him to the other boys and sees Ben as "a mature being. Finished. Complete," of a "race that reached its apex thousands and thousands of years before humanity." She wonders if his people had raped women and left genes in the "human matrix" to show up again at a later time as Ben's have. Harriet lets all the questions she has about him wander through her head, wondering what it is Ben knows. Does he realize that because she brought him home, all the other children left?

Again, Harriet registers Ben as being of a different kind than the other boys in his group, continuing her refusal to recognize him as a human who might be sympathized with rather than ostracized. Harriet maps her own sense of guilt about having forced the other children away so that she might bring Ben back into the fold onto Ben, wondering if he himself feels responsible, while still refusing to acknowledge her own complicity in these events.

Harriet wonders what will happen to Ben now, and imagines him in abandoned buildings analogous to caves. She imagines him as a police suspect, but then transitions to questioning why it is that people have so adamantly refused to recognize Ben for what he was. She envisions an anthropologist being the one who sees Ben and she decides he must examine him to figure out why he is the way he is, taking him apart piece by piece. She knows that this is unlikely, though, and that he will either be caught by the police or succeed in evading them. Harriet imagines the boys going off one final time and waiting for them to return. She sees herself living in a new **house** "(alone) with David," watching TV and seeing Ben standing apart from the crowd, with "goblin eyes," "searching the faces in the crowd for another of his own kind."

To the last, Harriet remains convinced that someone might be able to identify what it is that makes Ben different, shifting her focus to the thought that all this time she's been asking doctors when perhaps an anthropologist is the one who might to figure out the truth, though aware that such a close study of his being would also surely mean his demise. She can just as easily imagine Ben and his cohort being caught by or eluding the police, but she flashes back to seeing him at the London riots on the TV, and imagines the distanced look in his eyes as a search for people of his own kind, still convinced that Ben has not found anyone with whom he might identify, despite evidence to the contrary.

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