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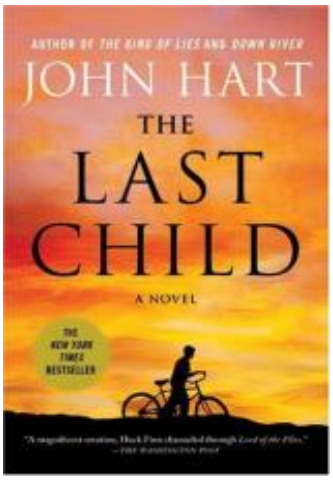
The Last Child

by John Hart



About the Book

Johnny Merrimon, 13, had the perfect life: a warm home and loving parents; a twin sister, Alyssa, with whom he shared an irreplaceable bond. He knew nothing of loss, until the day Alyssa vanished from the side of a lonely street. Now, a year later, Johnny finds himself isolated and alone, failed by the people he?d been taught since birth to trust. No one else believes that Alyssa is still alive, but Johnny is certain that she is --- confident in a way that he can never fully explain. Determined to find his sister, Johnny risks everything to explore the dark side of his hometown. It is a desperate, terrifying search, but Johnny is not as alone as he might think. Detective Clyde Hunt has never stopped looking for Alyssa either, and he has a soft spot for Johnny. He watches over the boy and tries to keep him safe, but when Johnny uncovers a dangerous lead and vows to follow it, Hunt has no choice but to intervene. Then a second child goes missing?

Discussion Guide

1. What is the meaning of the title? Who is **The Last Child**?

2. The novel is not just about Johnny?s search for Alyssa. It?s also about his quest for power. Where does Johnny look for power and does he ever truly find it? If so, where?

3. In the beginning of the novel we find Katherine in a state of utter collapse. Is her condition understandable, given the circumstances? If not, does she redeem herself?

4. Why does Detective Hunt care so much for Katherine and Johnny? How do those feelings contrast with the way he sees his own son? His own life?

5. Revisit the opening of Chapter 14: Johnny?s ritual with the fire. We find out that Johnny has had a severe crisis of faith since Alyssa disappeared, and for what he was about to do, he ?needed older gods.? What draws Johnny to ?older

gods?? What kind of power do they have that the God of his childhood does not?

6. By the end of the novel, Johnny comes to believe that Freemantle was, indeed, set in motion as an instrument of God. If this the case, by what means did God put Freemantle in motion? And given the debt that Freemantle owes to Johnny?s family, was the price too high, or was it fair? Is life, indeed, a circle?

7. We see two preachers in Johnny?s life, one described as, ?fingernails buffed and fat face shining,? and one described as ?a blade of a priest in white, flashing robes.? How do these figures reflect the changing nature of Johnny?s faith? At the end of the novel, does he believe in the same God he believed in before Alyssa disappeared or does he still believe in other sources of power?

8. Freemantle believes that crows have the power to collect the souls of the dead. This is why he fears them. If the crows are not after the soul of Freemantle?s daughter, as Freemantle originally believes, why then are they following him? Do the crows have another goal in mind? Is the goal accomplished?

9. Explore the different father-son relationships in the story. How does each relationship evolve throughout the course of the novel? What are the similarities and differences between each father-son relationship? How do the fathers? actions effect those of their sons?

10. Many people blame themselves for things that have happened in the past --- Johnny, Hunt, Katherine, Jack, Levi Freemantle and others. How does guilt motivate each of them to act? Where does the real guilt lie in the story?

11. The novel opens on a view of the North Carolina back country. What role does the setting have in the story? Do you think Johnny?s story have the same impact if it took place in a different state, or in a different country?

Author Bio

John Hart is the *New York Times* bestselling author of THE KING OF LIES, DOWN RIVER, THE LAST CHILD, IRON HOUSE, REDEMPTION ROAD, THE HUSH and THE UNWILLING. The only author in history to win the Edgar Award for Best Novel consecutively, John has also won the Barry Award, the Southern Independent Bookseller?s Award for Fiction, the Ian Fleming Steel Dagger Award, and the North Carolina Award for Literature. His novels have been translated into 30 languages and can be found in more than 70 countries.

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