

# The Returned

by Jason Mott

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## About the Book

"Jacob was time out of sync, time more perfect than it had been. He was life the way it was supposed to be all those years ago. That's what all the Returned were."

Harold and Lucille Hargrave's lives have been both joyful and sorrowful in the decades since their only son, Jacob, died tragically at his eighth birthday party in 1966. In their old age they've settled comfortably into life without him, their wounds tempered through the grace of time?. Until one day Jacob mysteriously appears on their doorstep --- flesh and blood, their sweet, precocious child, still eight years old.

All over the world people's loved ones are returning from beyond. No one knows how or why this is happening, whether it's a miracle or a sign of the end. Not even Harold and Lucille can agree on whether the boy is real or a wondrous imitation, but one thing they know for sure: he's their son. As chaos erupts around the globe, the newly reunited Hargrave family finds itself at the center of a community on the brink of collapse, forced to navigate a mysterious new reality and a conflict that threatens to unravel the very meaning of what it is to be human.

With spare, elegant prose and searing emotional depth, award-winning poet Jason Mott explores timeless questions of faith and morality, love and responsibility. A spellbinding and stunning debut, *THE RETURNED* is an unforgettable story that marks the arrival of an important new voice in contemporary fiction.

## Discussion Guide

1. In *THE RETURNED*, the Hargraves find themselves at the center of a world-wide phenomenon where people's loved ones are returning from the dead. If a deceased loved one returned to you, how would you react? Would you be scared? Grateful?

2. Despite constant questioning, Jacob can't recall what happened to him between the time he passed away in the river and when he awoke again in China. What do you believe happens to us when we die?
3. In Arcadia, and around the world, there are various strong reactions to the Returned. Which side did you identify with- those who believed it was a miracle, or those who thought it was a harbinger of the end times. Did your reaction change over the course of the novel?
4. Several vignettes feature emotional reconnections between loved ones. Does love --- either romantic or familial --- transcend death? If so, how?
5. Jason Mott includes an extremely touching author's note at the end of the text explaining his inspiration for the novel. How does his sense of longing for closure --- for one more chance to speak to his mother --- inform his treatment of the characters in THE RETURNED?
6. Fred Green is perhaps the most vocal opponent to the existence of the Returned in Arcadia. Why? Can you sympathize with him? Would his reaction have been different had his wife also Returned?
7. Near the end of the novel, we learn that in fact, Lucille never believed the Returned Jacob was her son. Meanwhile, Harold believed that he was. Were you surprised by this revelation? Do you think it could be a metaphor for different methods of grieving?
8. The Government intervention in Arcadia quickly escalates from peace keeping to near military governance. Could you imagine such a takeover happening in your town? Were you reminded of any other moments in history?
9. What is the role of religion in the novel?
10. Discuss the significance of the cross and Harold's search for closure after Lucille's death.
11. Do you believe in miracles? If so, what kind?
12. Harold often recalls the jokes he used to tell with his son. What are some of your favorite memories of a loved one you've lost?

## Author Bio

Jason Mott has published four novels. His first novel, THE RETURNED, was a *New York Times* bestseller and was turned into a TV series that ran for two seasons. He has a BFA in Fiction and an MFA in Poetry, both from the University of North Carolina at Wilmington. His poetry and fiction have appeared in various literary journals, and his most recent novel, HELL OF A BOOK, was named the winner of the National Book Award for Fiction, 2021.

## Critical Praise

"Mott's haunting debut is a crackling page turner."

*People Magazine* Pick, Four Stars

"An impressive debut novel."

*USAToday*

"One of the most emotionally resonant works in many seasons."

*Essence Magazine*

"Jason Mott's impressive debut novel...is a tense and touching treatise on life, death and life again."

- *USAToday*

"White-hot debut."

-*Entertainment Weekly*, Summer Must List

"In his exceptional debut novel, poet Mott brings drama, pathos, joy, horror, and redemption to a riveting tale."

-*Publishers Weekly*, starred review

"This book offers a beautifully written and emotionally astute lens at our world gone awry....Poet and debut author Mott has written a breathtaking novel that navigates emotional minefields with realism and grace."

-*Kirkus*, starred review

"Mott brings a singularly eloquent voice to this elegiac novel, which not only fearlessly tackles larger questions about mortality but also insightfully captures life's simpler moments....A beautiful meditation on what it means to be human."

-*Booklist*, starred review

"This is a masterly first novel for Mott...it speaks to many aspects of the human condition....Highly recommended for those who love a strong story that makes them think."

-*Library Journal*, starred review

"Thought-provoking, occasionally dreamlike...Mott's story of literal life after death will catch readers by their hearts and capture their imaginations....Grab this book as soon as you possibly can."

-Shelf Awareness

"THE RETURNED transforms a brilliant premise into an extraordinary and beautifully realized novel. My spine is still shivering from the memory of this haunting story. Wow."

-Douglas Preston, #1 bestselling author of THE MONSTER OF FLORENCE

"A wondrous surprise. With fine craftsmanship and a deep understanding of the human condition, Jason Mott has woven a tale that is in turns tragic and humorous and terrifying. Surely this will spark many a fabulous book club discussion."

-Eowyn Ivey, *New YorkTimes* bestselling author of THE SNOW CHILD

"A deft meditation on loss that plays out levels of consequence on both personal and international stages. Mott allows the magic of his story to unearth a full range of feelings about grief and connection."

-Aimee Bender, *New York Times* bestselling author of THE PARTICULAR SADNESS OF LEMON CAKE

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## **The Returned**

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