

## 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 lives in southeastern North Carolina. He has a BFA in Fiction and an MFA in Poetry, both from the University of North Carolina at Wilmington. His poetry and fiction has appeared in various literary journals. He was nominated for a 2009 Pushcart Prize award and Entertainment Weekly listed him as one of their 10 "New Hollywood: Next Wave" people to watch.

He is the author of two poetry collections: WE CALL THIS THING BETWEEN US LOVE and "...HIDE BEHIND ME..." THE RETURNED will be published internationally in over 13 languages and is a *New York Times* bestseller.

THE RETURNED is Jason's debut novel and has been adapted by Brad Pitt's production company, Plan B, in association with Brillstein Entertainment and ABC. It airs on the ABC network under the title "Resurrection."

THE WONDER OF ALL THINGS is Jason's second novel. It was published in October 2014.

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**Publication Date:** March 25, 2014  
**Genres:** Fiction, Suspense, Thriller  
**Paperback:** 352 pages  
**Publisher:** Harlequin MIRA  
**ISBN-10:** 0778317072  
**ISBN-13:** 9780778317074