

★ **The Winter's Child****Cassandra Parkin**

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Cassandra Parkin's *The Winter's Child* is a gripping thriller from beginning to end, certain to chill and haunt.

The novel traps us in the mind of Susannah Harper, a woman whose son, Joel, went missing five years prior and whose husband left because of related stress. When a psychic suggests that she will see her son again soon, Susannah's world begins to unravel. That unraveling is the foundation for the novel, a journey filled with skillful twists and turns on every page.

Still reeling with the trauma of Joel's disappearance, Susannah tries to cope by writing faithfully on her blog and spending time with family. But she certainly isn't living a healthy life before the psychic's premonition, which is the catalyst of the novel, comes into play. After the psychic's vision of Joel coming home, Susannah begins to see things she thought were long gone, and to hear sounds she knows can't be real. Her grip on sanity loosens as the five-year anniversary of Joel's disappearance looms; this fantastic, eerie story barrels towards a bittersweet, perfect end.

The prose is eloquent and skillful. "Nothing happens to warn me of events that have already begun to unfold," narrates Susannah, "like a paper flower dropped into water, like a cocoon hatching a tightly-folded monster." From the first chapter, the characters develop into tangible, fully realized people. The cast exists in a foreboding world, a dark atmosphere that Parkin deftly crafts with each scene. Because the narration is always from Susannah's point of view, her descent into madness is deeply disturbing, intimate, and effective.

Chapters effortlessly jump back and forth in time, bringing greater nuance to Susannah and her often tense relationships with others. In addition, there is an underlying commentary on gender and motherhood that further deepens the novel's scope.

*The Winter's Child* is a stunning, beautifully disturbing mystery.

MYA ALEXICE (July/August 2018)

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