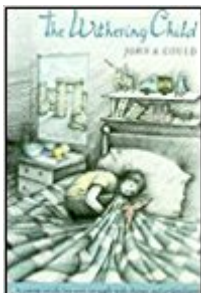


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The Withering Child



Synopsis

When his parents moved to England from the United States, five-year-old Gardner developed anorexia and lost a third of his body weight. Told from a father's perspective, "The Withering Child" is the story of a young boy's profound reaction to the disruptive forces of change.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

In August of 1990, Gould (*The Greenleaf Fires*), a secondary school English teacher, his wife Jane, an Episcopal priest, and their two young children left their Boston home for a year's sabbatical in England. By November they had returned, hoping to save their five-year-old son's life. Shortly after their arrival in Oxford, the sensitive, stubborn and active Gardner complained of leg and stomach cramps. He was given to vomiting, stopped eating and often screamed from pain. His increasingly desperate parents sought help with little success. Gardner lost nearly a third of his body weight and one night, seemingly resigned to death, he told his father to give his favorite toy to a friend. Gould chronicles the horror of parents watching their child deteriorate. He reports on Gardner's restored health back home: the diagnosis of borderline attention deficit disorder, therapy and his return to school. With this unsentimental, unsensationalized profile, Gould makes an eloquent plea that guardians should see children as individuals with their own rhythms and developmental timetables, and that they understand that children can have problems that are not due to faulty parenting. Copyright 1993 Reed Business Information, Inc.

A family drama and a literary guidebook uneasily cohabiting within the same covers--the former riveting, the latter frustratingly beside the point. In the fall of 1990, John and Jane Gould, an English teacher and Episcopal priest, respectively, move to Oxford for a year's sabbatical, bringing with them their two young sons. Sam, two, adjusts fine, but five-year-old Gardner, always an inflexible and rather difficult child, stops eating. At first his parents chalk it up to the strangeness of the new English environment (where the hot dogs taste like boiled suet) but, as the weeks pass, Gardner gets no better. He wakes up most nights vomiting and writhing with leg cramps, and grows so weak and listless that, finally, the head of the school he's attending can't cope with him. Adding to the distress, the Goulds are provoked into behavior they swore they would never engage in: There are some harrowing scenes of this idealistic English teacher and his priestly wife lapsing into verbal abuse of their suffering, intractable child for ruining the year both have looked forward to for so long and have invested so many scarce resources to bring about. As if to demonstrate that some good came out of this blighted journey, Gould includes accounts of visits he managed to make to literary landmarks--but these belong in another book. At last, after four months in England, when Gardner has dropped one third of his body weight, the Goulds face the inevitable and head home. Stateside, the boy quickly recovers and, through counseling, his parents begin to understand the limitations and quirks of his nature that made him almost fatally unable to adapt to the move. The Goulds also begin to forgive themselves, and to consider the loss of their dream a small price to pay for the restoration of their son's--and their entire family's--health. Except for the extraneous travelogue: an unusually powerful story of a family in crisis. -- Copyright ©1993, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved.

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