



A Children's Bible

Lydia Millet

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Imagination is a lifeboat, and complacency an albatross, in Lydia Millet's visionary novel *A Children's Bible*.

A gaggle of families converge at an ocean-adjacent mansion for a summer of revelry and reconnections, bringing with them the tensions of their outside lives and a host of their dubious children. The younger generation resolves to ignore their parents, connecting to one another in relative anonymity. They explore the nearby beaches and streams, experiment with intimacy, and take care of the youngest among them. Their parents self-medicate their way through nights and days.

Among the children is Evie, who wishes that the adults would acknowledge the challenges to come. Glaciers are melting and species dying off; the rich are building inland bunkers and planning for the apocalypse. But instead of preparing, her parents insist on functioning "passably in a limited domain. Specifically adapted to life in their own small niches," even if it leaves their children flailing.

When the storm finally hits, Evie and her cohort take charge, wrangling the children and relocating them to a nearby farm. Their parents stay behind, among the murk of the hurricane's detritus and languishing under a virus not familiar in their climate. The children bring with them an illustrated children's Bible that Evie's brother translates for them: God is science. And science can either kill or restore.

In the sometimes surrealistic *A Children's Bible*, the young and savvy inherit the Earth; the meek fade away. Eerie biblical illusions—to crucifixions; old lives left behind; angels, saviors, and tormentors; and plagues and resurrections—couple with stark, realistic examples of how human beings behave when they're pushed past the familiar. That its young cast remains so centered, even as waters rise and systems collapse around them, is part of what makes this atypical cli-fi novel so riveting.

MICHELLE ANNE SCHINGLER (May / June 2020)

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