



## Linn Ullmann - A Blessed Child

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Famous parents (Ingmar Bergman and Liv Ullmann) aside, Norwegian author and former child actress Linn Ullmann is perhaps best known on these shores for her highly acclaimed 2001 novel, 'Stella Descending'.

In 'A Blessed Child', Ullmann reprises some of her earlier themes – identity v social conformity; sexual freedom v fidelity; the inherent dysfunction that underpins families' emotional dynamics – and gives them a new twist. It's a disarmingly simple story, set over a series of summers in 1970s Sweden, about the life and loves of serial womaniser Isak Lövenstad.

Each summer, Isak's three daughters by three different women visit him at his holiday home on the island of Hammarsö – the only time they see their father or each other – until a shocking incident changes their lives forever. Twenty-five years later, the sisters reunite to visit Isak, now an elderly widower living in self-imposed exile on Hammarsö, and finally to confront the spectre of that terrible summer, which continues to cast its shadow over their lives.

With clinical precision, Ullmann intersperses the details of each sister's life during the intervening years with vivid flashbacks of their childhood summers, all the while maintaining a masterful suspense, her spare prose coolly revealing the series of events leading up to the climactic 'dark secret' at the heart of the novel. But once this is disclosed, Ullmann abruptly returns to the present and the novel ends, perhaps prematurely, with a cinematic flourish as the three sisters – who appear largely unaffected by the disturbing tragedy – set out in the falling snow for Hammarsö. Unsentimental to the end, this is a well-crafted and compelling read.

