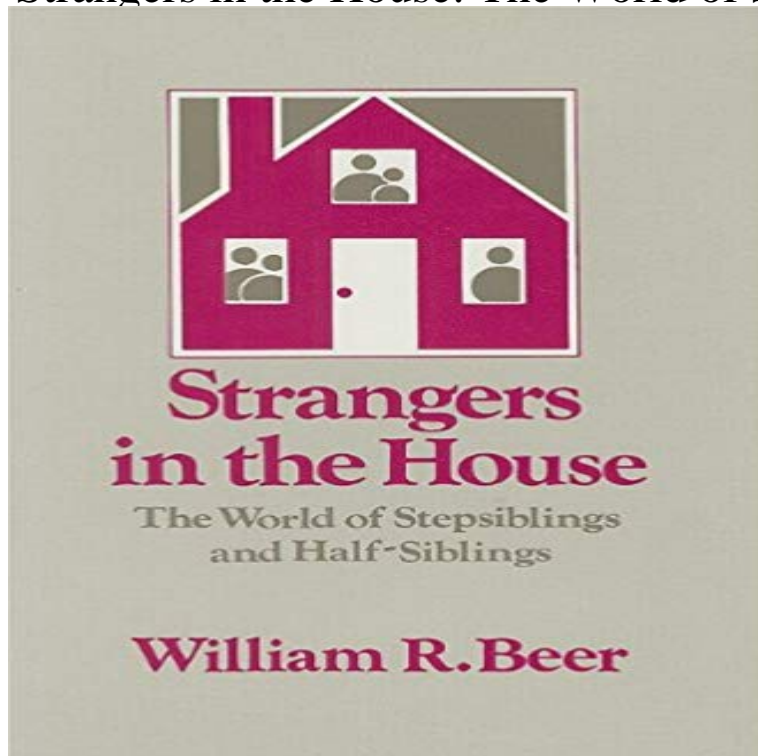


# Strangers in the House: The World of Stepsiblings and Half-Siblings



If present trends in divorce and remarriage continue, before the end of the century the stepfamily will outnumber all other types of family in the United States. In 1980 one out of five children under the age of eight were living in stepfamilies, and there were at least two million households in which the children were related only by marriage (stepsiblings) or who shared only one parent in common (half-siblings). How are these new kinds of family relationships working out? In particular, how are children faring in these kinds of families? There are a number of books on the successes and difficulties of second marriages that involve children, but most of these look at problems from the perspective of one or both spouses. Popular literature in particular had emphasized the problem of the new spouse who inherits a family, without really focusing on the relationships among stepsiblings. *Strangers in the House* focuses on the children of these marriages—both stepsiblings and half-siblings, and the relationships among them with the parents. It is a report on how they are faring, drawn from the results of original research by the author: case studies of stepfamilies, interviews with stepsiblings and half-siblings, a survey of members of the Stepfamily Association of America, and participation in three stepfamily self-help groups. The result is a vivid portrait of nontraditional family constellations that provides an overview of changes in American families, the increased divorce and remarriage rates, and how stepfamilies differ from other families. Beer identifies major problem areas in stepsibling relations and shows how youngsters are adapting to these special situations. He examines classic rivalries over love, attention, space, and property shows how these are worked out within these special circumstances. The book concludes with an overview of the dynamics of sibling relations in these

special families and analyzes how the stepsibling subsystem fits into the larger family structure. Beer shows that in many respects the problems of these families characterize changes in the social structure in postindustrial society.

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