

"Brilliant. Quite unlike anything I've ever read. Don't miss this one."

—Shari Lapena, *New York Times* bestselling author of *The Couple Next Door*

FIVE

A NOVEL

ILONA
BANNISTER

ALSO BY ILONA BANNISTER

When I Ran Away

Little Prisons

FIVE

A NOVEL



ILONA BANNISTER



CROWN
NEW YORK

CROWN

An imprint of the Crown Publishing Group

A division of Penguin Random House LLC

1745 Broadway

New York, NY 10019

crownpublishing.com

penguinrandomhouse.com

Copyright © 2026 by Ilona Bannister

Penguin Random House values and supports copyright. Copyright fuels creativity, encourages diverse voices, promotes free speech, and creates a vibrant culture. Thank you for buying an authorized edition of this book and for complying with copyright laws by not reproducing, scanning, or distributing any part of it in any form without permission. You are supporting writers and allowing Penguin Random House to continue to publish books for every reader. Please note that no part of this book may be used or reproduced in any manner for the purpose of training artificial intelligence technologies or systems.

CROWN and the Crown colophon are registered trademarks of Penguin Random House LLC.

Published in the United Kingdom by Juniper, an imprint of HQ, part of HarperCollins UK, London.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Bannister, Ilona author. Title: Five: a novel / Ilona Bannister. Other titles: 5. Identifiers:

LCCN 2025025262 | ISBN 9798217088027 hardcover | ISBN 9798217088034 ebook Subjects:

LCGFT: Fiction | Thrillers (Fiction) | Novels

Classification: LCC PS3602.A668 F58 2026

LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2025025262>

Hardcover ISBN 9798217088027

Canadian edition ISBN 9798217398621

Ebook ISBN 9798217088034

Editor: Amy Einhorn

Associate editor: Lori Kusatzky

Production editor: Natalie Blachere

Text designer: Andrea Lau

Production: Heather Williamson

Copy editor: Elisabeth Magnus

Proofreaders: Alissa Fitzgerald and Miriam Taveras

Publicist: Elora Weil

Marketer: Kimberly Lew

The authorized representative in the EU for product safety and compliance is Penguin Random House Ireland, Morrison Chambers, 32 Nassau Street, Dublin D02 YH68, Ireland, <https://eu->

contact.penguin.ie.

ep_prh_7.3a_155951266_c0_r0

CONTENTS

[Dedication](#)

[07:01](#)

[Emma](#)

[07:03](#)

[Mrs. Worth](#)

[07:05](#)

[Sonny.](#)

[07:06](#)

[Liam](#)

[07:08](#)

[Gideon](#)

[07:28](#)

[Acknowledgments](#)

[About the Author](#)

For Tim, Leo, and Rex, always, everything.

Time	Destination	Expected
1st 7:06	London Victoria	5 min
South London Service formed of 8 coaches.		
2nd 7:13	Bedford	12 min

07:01

Someone will die here this morning, at this suburban train station. It will happen in the next five minutes when the 7:06 to London Victoria arrives.

Four others have died here previously. In 1861, an alcoholic mourning his dead wife and child in a stupor of grief. In 1923, a World War I veteran, suffering from shell shock, bombs exploding in his head until his last breath. In 1972, a teenage girl, unmarried and pregnant, forced to leave home by her parents. In 1994, a seeing-eye dog who gave its life to save its owner when he stumbled perilously close to the tracks at just the wrong moment.

At least two of these deaths were accidental, one was intentional, and one seemed intentional but wasn't, but they will not be described here in detail because we have only a few minutes before the train arrives. And there is a great deal yet to discuss. And a fifth death to witness that may or may not be deliberate. It will be hard to tell when it happens.

Turn your attention now to the stairs descending to the platform. A small child struggles out of his mother's grasp. He shrieks. He bolts toward the tracks.

He looks over his shoulder and sees his stricken mother, running. He laughs and trots to the edge of the platform. He turns around to face her, his back to the platform edge and the tracks beneath it. He does not realize that he has crossed the yellow caution line. Even if he does realize it, he is too young to understand the yellow line's warning that another step back will be too far. He steps.