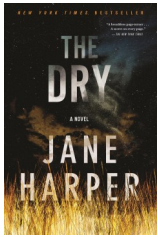


The Dry



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If you've followed the news reports about Day Zero in Cape Town, South Africa, you might understand what happens to people who live in a place with little or no water. In *Dry*, a fast-paced thriller set in Kiewarra, Australia, everyone goes crazy when lack of access to water threatens their livelihood.

It's the second year of massive drought: thirsty blowflies enter people's eyes and stick to open wounds; farmers struggle to find any water in their wells, many shooting their starving livestock. Friendship between neighbors turns to distrust and paranoia, and fences no longer only mark property lines—they serve as dire warnings not to enter. Federal Agent Aaron Falk returns to this dried-up part of Australia after reports that a farmer has gone berserk and killed his wife and son, then himself. Only one-year-old Charlotte has survived the killings—could that be because she can't talk?

This particular farmer happens to be Falk's childhood best friend, Luke Hadler. But Aaron hasn't visited his childhood home since a neighbor ran him out of his town when he was a teenager. The novel weaves between the present investigation Falk's past, when a local teenager, Ellie, has drowned. Many believe Aaron to be the prime suspect in her death; even now, the grocery store downtown refuses to sell him any food.

Falk plans to stay in Kiewarra only for the funeral, but when Luke's parents beg him to help with the investigation, he decides to stay. Although Luke's parents insist that their son is innocent, Aaron isn't sure. Gretchen Schoner, a beautiful single mother, also wants Aaron to clear Luke's name. During high school, she and Luke became a "thing" when, to Aaron's amazement, the pretty and popular girl joined the trio of social misfits: Aaron, Luke, and Ellie.

Aaron extends his stay by a day, then two, and finally more than a week. He rents a little room above the bar, where nearly every adult in town lands sooner or later. There, the school principal tells Falk what he's observed—as does the barman and the other town folk (at least the ones who agree to speak him, or do so under threat of the law). The landscape grows drier and drier as the people in Kiewarra lose more and more hope. As Aaron works the case, driving from Luke's farm to his neighbors', meandering the old paths by the dried-up river, the past constantly haunts him. One day he finds the tree trunk where Ellie used to hide things, and burrowing deep into it, he retrieves—all these years later—her old pack.

Hanging over everything in this story is the excessive heat and dryness; beneath everyone a baked land that can no longer feed animals or people. And under the author's hand, the plot line grows more and more taut, provoking sweat down the reader's forehead and glass after glass of ice water. Kiewarra's drought lingers—but Aaron ultimately discovers what happened in his own case and in Luke's.

Posted by Dory L. on February 11, 2018

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