

**PAN MACMILLAN  
BOOK CLUB NOTES**

# **THE DRY**

**JANE HARPER**



MACMILLAN  
Pan Macmillan Australia

# THE DRY

## BLURB

### WHO REALLY KILLED THE HADLER FAMILY?

*Luke Hadler turns a gun on his wife and child, then himself. The farming community of Kiewarra is facing life and death choices daily. If one of their own broke under the strain, well . . .*

When Federal Police investigator Aaron Falk returns to Kiewarra for the funerals, he is loath to confront the people who rejected him twenty years earlier. But when his investigative skills are called on, the facts of the Hadler case start to make him doubt this murder-suicide charge.

And as Falk probes deeper into the killings, old wounds are reopened. For Falk and his childhood friend Luke shared a secret . . . A secret Falk thought long-buried . . . A secret which Luke's death starts to bring to the surface . . .

## THE AUTHOR

Jane Harper has worked as a print journalist for thirteen years both in Australia and the UK. She lives in Melbourne and writes for the *Herald Sun*, among other publications. Winner of the Victorian Premier's Literary Award for an Unpublished Manuscript, *The Dry* is her first novel, with rights sold to over twenty territories.



Author Photograph by: Nicholas Purcell

# THE DRY

## COMPANY ENDORSEMENTS

This manuscript is without doubt one of the very best debut novels I have read in a very long time, and I've been reading them for over thirty years!

*Ross Gibb, Managing Director*

This is simply the freshest new Australian fiction I have read for ages. It's time for a major new voice in Australian fiction, and Jane Harper is the one.

*Katie Crawford, Sales Director*

The opportunity to establish Jane is incredibly exciting and the buzz is already spreading amongst those of us who have read the manuscript.

*Tracey Cheetham, Publicity and Marketing Director*

It has such a strong sense of place – I could picture the town and the people living there. Loved it!

*Maria Fassoulas, National Sales Manager*

Loved the setting and how most of the characters were not quite what you expected by the end of the book!

*Jane Phillips, Senior Key Account Manager*

I loved this! I can see this becoming one of the most exciting debuts for 2016.

*Praveen Naidoo, Product Director*

Warning: Do not start reading this book at work at the end of the day. You will be gripped by a page-turning compulsion. You will be late home. This is a rich, engrossing, surprising novel. I loved it.

*Claire Craig, Children's Publisher*

*The Dry* had me completely in its grip from the opening line. Such a masterful debut, and so exciting that we are publishing it!

*Mary Small, Plum Publisher*

This is a potent, elemental novel . . . an almost cruelly taut and immensely satisfying story.

*Mathilda Imlah, Senior Editor*

*The Dry* is THE most exceptional book I have ever read. I take a lot of pride in being able to predict an ending, and it isn't often that I am stumped. Jane kept me guessing till the absolute end. What a thrill that we are publishing such a phenomenal debut.

*Charlotte Ree, Publicity Manager*

When you fall in love, the feeling is undeniable and Jane's remarkable book possesses my two favourite things: brilliant writing and an Australian setting.

*Bruna Papandrea, Executive Producer, *Gone Girl* and *Wild**

# THE DRY

## PLOT SUMMARY

Severe drought has plagued the small town of Kiewarra in remote country Victoria for two years, and the township is dying. When Luke Hadler, a local farmer, shoots his wife and son in cold blood and then commits suicide, the town is horrified but not especially surprised. There is no one in Kiewarra who has not been affected by the relentless drought. But Luke's parents, and local police sergeant Greg Raco, have doubts. Why would Luke kill his son but allow his thirteen-month-old daughter to live?

Aaron Falk, Luke's childhood friend and a police officer himself, has not been back to Kiewarra since he left nearly twenty years ago following the death of sixteen-year-old Ellie Deacon. Falsely accused of being involved and subjected to continual harassment by Ellie's father and cousin, Falk and his father Erik moved to Melbourne, cutting all ties with their home town. But returning to Kiewarra for Luke's funeral re-opens old wounds, both for Falk and for Ellie's relatives.

Persuaded to stay in town to look into the Hadlers' deaths, Falk once again becomes the target of abuse for his long-ago association with Ellie Deacon. Zeroing in on Ellie's father Mal and cousin Grant, Falk begins to suspect a link between Ellie's death and the Hadlers'. Or is he simply blinded by the need to see Mal and Grant punished? As he re-lives the painful events of the past, Falk begins to come to different conclusions about both cases – and realises that all along he has been backing the wrong horse.

- There have been several cases of deaths like the Hadlers' in Australia in recent years. How does knowledge about these cloud the true nature of this case, both for the characters and the reader? In what ways was it a clever disguise for the perpetrator to use?

# THE DRY

## THEMES

### DROUGHT

The drought overshadows everything that happens in *The Dry*. In some ways it could almost be said to be a character in its own right.

*'Everyone's so angry. But they're not just angry at Luke exactly. The people paying him out the most don't seem to hate him for what he's done. It's weird. It's almost like they're jealous.'*

*'Of what?'*

*'Of the fact that he did what they can't bring themselves to do, I think. Because now he's out of it, isn't he? While the rest of us are stuck here to rot, he's got no more worrying about crops or missed payments or the next rainfall.'* (p. 19)

- What is it about the drought and its effects on the town that makes people less likely to question what happened to the Hadlers?
- How does the drought colour our impressions of Kiewarra, its residents, and the Australian bush throughout the novel?

### SECRETS AND LIES

At the core of this novel is the idea of secrets and lies, and the reasons why people keep them.

- Luke and Gretchen both keep the secret about their whereabouts on the day Ellie died, even from Falk, but for different reasons. How does the keeping of this secret affect their relationship with each other and with Falk? How does it impact the way the truth comes out about Ellie's death?
- Why do you think Gretchen is so reluctant to tell Falk who Lachie's real father is? Who do you think it is?
- Jamie Sullivan's secret needlessly hinders the investigation into the Hadlers' deaths, and yet his fears about what people in a small town might do if they found out about his – and Dr Leigh's – homosexuality are understandable. Similarly, Ellie Deacon keeps the secret of her father's abuse, with tragic consequences. What does this tell us about the nature of secrets, and the need for truth? Is it better for some secrets to be kept?

# THE DRY

## CHARACTERS

### AARON FALK

- *'Falk felt a sharp pang of longing for what might have been.'* (p. 119) How has growing up without a mother affected Falk's life? In what ways does this become especially apparent when he and his father move to Melbourne, cutting all ties with his childhood home?
- *'Why couldn't he let her in? Why wouldn't he let her in? Did he not trust her? Or did he not love her enough?'* (p. 147-148) Falk's adult relationships have not been what he hoped. How have the events surrounding Ellie's death, and his relationship with Ellie in life, affected Falk and his ability to engage with people?
- Do you think that leaving town was the right way for Erik Falk to deal with the situation he and Aaron were facing? How did his father's doubts about him affect Aaron?

### LUKE HADLER

*'I know Luke was your mate and Dow's a dickhead, but in a lot of ways they were quite similar. Both bolshy, larger than life, got tempers on them. Two sides of the same coin, you know?'* (p. 144)

- Luke is revealed to us as someone who had both good and not so good qualities. In spite of their long friendship, Falk cannot quite rule out that Luke might have committed the murders of his wife and son. In what ways did Luke differ from Grant Dow? What was it about Luke that made people think him capable of murder?
- *'As they shook hands for what would prove to be the last time, Falk found himself struggling to remember, once again, why they were still friends.'* (p. 193)
- In spite of their shared childhood, Luke and Falk had very different personalities. What is it that spells the end of their friendship? Do you think they would have remained friends if they hadn't lied about where they were at the time of Ellie's death, and/or if Luke had told Aaron where he really was in the first place?

# THE DRY

## SETTING

The fictional town of Kiewarra is the central setting of the novel.

- How does the town itself inform our ideas about the people who live there and the events that take place there? What are the positives and negatives of a small town's tight-knit community?
- The bush, the rock tree and the Kiewarra River are the scenes of several major events in the novel. Why do you think Aaron is drawn to these places? What does the contrast between the wild places in the novel and those tamed by human habitation show us?

## WRITING STYLE

Jane Harper has chosen to tell this story in the past tense third person, from Aaron Falk's point of view, with flashbacks from various characters threaded throughout.

- What is the effect of this? How does it shape the reader's understanding of Aaron himself, as well as of the other characters in the novel?
- Some of the flashback scenes are shown to the reader a second time in a more expanded form as the novel progresses. What does this device show us about the reliability of the assumptions we make about the events and the characters?
- The novel begins with a prologue that describes flies being drawn to the scene of the murders. Why is this approach such a powerful way to introduce the events of the novel?

# THE DRY

## Q&A WITH JANE HARPER

### **Q: Where did you get the idea for the town of Kiewarra and its inhabitants?**

Kiewarra is an amalgam of a lot of different communities, and not just small towns or even ones necessarily based in Australia. I wanted to capture that sense of claustrophobia that comes when people feel their neighbours all know just a little bit too much, but at the same time face shared problems. I think that happens in a lot of places, not just in rural towns. Kiewarra's inhabitants are a pure product of their environment. Many of them are dissatisfied and yet they all have their own reasons to stay, trapped by their livelihoods or their connections with family or the past, or just by their own inertia.

### **Q: Sadly, there have been a few domestic homicides/suicides in the news lately. Were you influenced by those tragedies in coming up with your plot?**

I had the start and the end of the plot worked out before the more recent cases hit the headlines, and I always felt this was a book more about a whole community than any one act. I was obviously aware of the incidents, but deliberately didn't probe too closely into the details. I wanted the novel to feel authentic, but I didn't want to blur the line between the piece of fiction I was writing and the real life tragedies those families and communities were suffering through. If a novel can help spark conversations about domestic homicides, or any other social issue, I hope that's a good thing, but *The Dry* is intended as fiction rather than a commentary.

### **Q: Will we hear again from Aaron Falk? What are you working on next?**

Aaron Falk will be back in my next book, which will be a thriller in the same vein as *The Dry* but in a different setting. Readers will find out a little bit more about the man outside Kiewarra, and hopefully Falk will enjoy some better weather.