



The survivors

By Jane Harper

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Genre and Subject

Australian fiction
Missing persons – Fiction
Thrillers (Fiction)

Synopsis

Kieran Elliott's life changed forever on the day a reckless mistake led to devastating consequences. The guilt that still haunts him resurfaces during a visit with his young family to the small coastal town he once called home. Kieran's parents are struggling in a community which is bound, for better or worse, to the sea, that is both a lifeline and a threat. Between them all is his absent brother, Finn. When a body is discovered on the beach, long-held secrets threaten to emerge. A sunken wreck, a missing girl, and questions that have never washed away...

Author Biography

Jane was born in Manchester in the UK, and moved to Australia with her family at age eight. She spent six years in Boronia, Victoria, and during that time gained Australian citizenship.

Returning to the UK with her family as a teenager, she lived in Hampshire before studying English and History at the University of Kent in Canterbury.

On graduating, she completed a journalism entry qualification and got her first reporting job as a trainee on the Darlington & Stockton Times in County Durham.

Jane worked for several years as a senior news journalist for the Hull Daily Mail, before moving back to Australia in 2008.

She worked first on the Geelong Advertiser, and in 2011 took up a business reporting role in Melbourne.

In 2014, Jane submitted a short story which was one of 12 chosen for the Big Issue's annual Fiction Edition.

That inspired her to pursue creative writing more seriously, breaking through with *The Dry* at the Victorian Premier's Literary Awards in 2015.

Jane lives in bayside Melbourne with her husband and their two children.

Discussion Starters

1. The book is named after the sculpture called 'The Survivors' that stands sentry at the caves in Evelyn Bay, and which is almost a character in its own right. Discuss the meaning and significance of the title and the sculpture in the context of the book and its characters. How did the memoir demonstrate the way media and legal systems frame perpetrators versus victims? Who has the power to tell their story? Who is offered sympathy and humanity and who is not? How does that affect people?
2. After the storm, Kieran accepted that he was partly to blame for the deaths of his brother and Toby. How do you think this influenced the way he lived his life from that point on? How do the events of the novel change this, and what effect might that have on Kieran's future? The case lasted for years, involving several people, especially Chanel's family and loved ones. How did the case impact Chanel as the victim, including the people she cares about?
3. Why do you think Kieran is more successful than some of the other characters at living with the trauma he experienced? What are some of the ways in which the other characters try to cope, and how successful are they?
4. How has meeting Mia and becoming a parent changed Kieran's perception of his parents and Trish Birch?
5. Kieran's relationship with his parents was irrevocably changed after his brother's death. How has Brian's dementia wrought further changes, both positive and negative?
6. How has Olivia's life been affected by the loss of her sister Gabby in the storm?
7. Liam Gilroy says to Kieran, 'You kind of ruined my life, you know?' (Page 158) How have Liam's father's death and the circumstances in which it occurred shaped the man Liam has become?
8. The opening of Chapter 11 (page 95) describes all the ways in which Finn Elliott was 'the real deal'. Later, we see some examples of behaviour that paint Finn in a less flattering light. However, many of these more questionable behaviours are excused, or even celebrated. What do you think this says about the idea of masculinity in our society?
9. What effect has the secret of Gabby Birch's death had on Sean's life since the storm, do you think?
10. Ash and Kieran were once very close, but have grown into quite different men. Why, do you think? How have their experiences differed, and what effect has this had on them?
11. The small Tasmanian coastal town of Evelyn Bay is the central setting of the novel. How does this setting inform our ideas about the people who live there and the events that take place there? How does the setting itself impact the events of the novel? George Barlin says of Evelyn Bay, 'Places like this, they need to be tight-knit to work. Once the trust is broken, they're stuffed. Whether people see it or not, the writing's on the wall.' (Page 326) What do you think he means? Do you think this is true?
12. Jane Harper has chosen to tell this story in the third person past tense, almost entirely from Kieran's point of view. What is the effect of this? How does it shape the reader's understanding of Kieran himself, as well as of the other characters in the novel?

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