

Blood Harvest by S.J. Bolton **2010, Minotaur Books, 421 pages**

When the Fletchers built their beautiful new home in the tiny village of Heptonclough, they were seeking a quieter, simpler life. But their final boxes are barely unpacked when the trouble begins.

At first, the Fletchers assume that the neighborhood kids are playing pranks on the new family. Then Tom, the oldest Fletcher child, becomes the target of the village bullies. He's involved in a fight at school and some altercations in the neighborhood. When Tom tells his parents that he thinks he's being watched by a young girl who haunts the graveyard that adjoins their garden, his parents dismiss his fears as the product of an overactive imagination fueled by his problems with the bullies.

The "pranks" escalate into something much more sinister, and the Fletchers realize that someone is trying to run them out of their new home. Millie, the Fletcher's two-year-old daughter, seems to be the focus of the new threats.

Harry Laycock is the new vicar in Heptonclough. He's been assigned by the diocese to reopen the village church, which has been closed since Lucy Pickup, granddaughter of the most powerful man in the village, died in the church over four years ago.

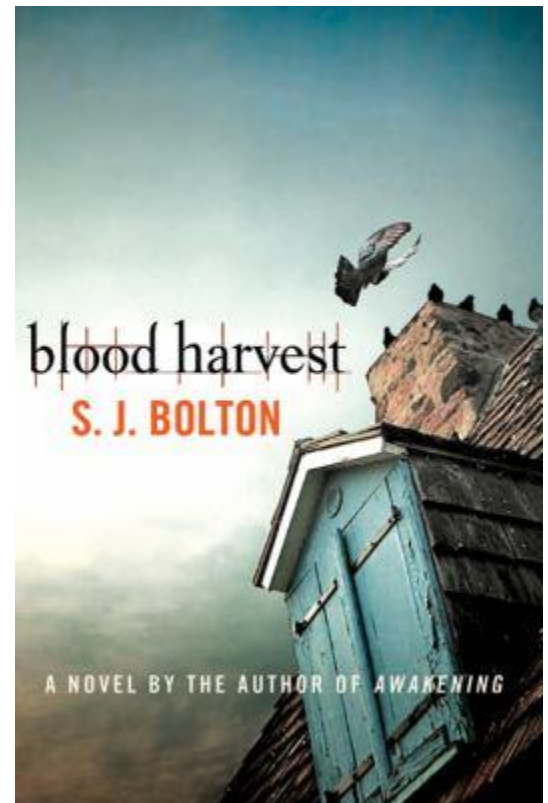
Therapist Evie Oliver's newest patient is Gillian Royle from Heptonclough. Gillian's daughter, Hayley, died in a house fire three years ago. The fire burned so intensely that Hayley's body was destroyed. Gillian has not accepted Hayley's death, and spends her days searching the moors around Heptonclough, convinced that Hayley fled the fire and is trying to find her way home.

As Harry gets to know the history of his new home, he discovers a disturbing pattern. Three toddler girls have died under mysterious circumstances in the last ten years. All of the deaths were determined to be accidental, but Harry feels that there is something more than coincidence at work.

Tom becomes increasingly insistent that his family is being watched by a mysterious and deformed girl, and is certain that she means to harm Millie. The adults in Tom's life try to convince him that there's no real danger, but on two separate occasions, someone takes Millie. The Fletchers, concerned that Tom may be acting out, contact Dr. Oliver, who believes Tom's version of events more than she wants to.

Joe, the middle Fletcher child, sees the girl as well, but refuses to tell his parents what he knows. He thinks she is their friend, determined to protect them from the evil that lies just beneath the surface of the picturesque village. When both Joe and Millie go missing, the Fletchers must confront the sinister village secret to save their children.

Blood Harvest is a gripping, suspenseful read. Author S.J. Bolton does a superb job of balancing the creepy, gothic elements of the story with page-turning psychological suspense. I stayed up way too late reading for a couple of nights because I HAD to know where the story was going. It did not disappoint!



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