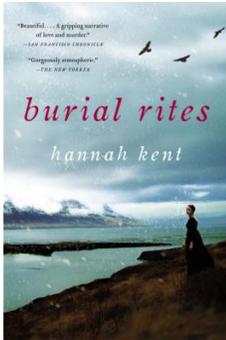


# Books by the Stack



## **Burial Rites by Hannah Kent**

Set against Iceland's stark landscape is the story of Agnes, who, charged with the murder of her former master, is sent to an isolated farm to await execution. Horrified at the prospect of housing a convicted murderer, the family at first avoids Agnes. But as Agnes's death looms, the farmer's wife and their daughters learn there is another side to the sensational story they've heard.

**Why you'll like it:** *Biographical, historical, dramatic, reflective, spare.*

**About the Author:** Hannah Kent was born in 1985 in Adelaide, Australia. She is the co-founder and publishing director of Australian literary journal Kill Your Darlings. She won the inaugural Writing Australia Unpublished Manuscript Award (2011). *Burial Rites* is her first novel. It won numerous awards including the ABIA Literary Fiction Book of the Year, the Indie Awards Debut Fiction Book of the Year and the Victorian Premier's People's Choice Award. (Bowker Author Biography)

### **Questions for discussion**

1. "I was the worst to the one I loved the best" - Laxdaela Saga. This is a statement that resonates with the regrets we all feel for taking for granted those whom we love; not for being careful enough or kind enough to those we care deeply for. But how does it relate to Agnes to whom no one has been terribly kind?
2. Read the passage 'I remain quiet...I will not be there.' (pp 28-9). What does it reveal about Agnes and how she perceives the world's view of her?
3. Natan is a chauvinist and arguably typical of men at that time --- 'Like Natan used to say, once you let it in, it doesn't leave you alone. Like a woman, he said. The sea is a nag.' (p 36). However there are several portraits of men which reveal very different attitudes. For example Jon and Toti both seem very caring towards women. Are the exceptions to the rule?
4. Fate and destiny are major themes in this work, for Agnes seems fated to have come to the end she does. Could she have escaped this destiny? Was there a turning point in her life which she might have avoided?
5. Blondal is the real villain of this piece. His dispassionate communications with those whom he controls are filled with venom and spite. What did you make of his decision to lodge Agnes with District Officer Jon and his family? Why did he do that?
6. Are Steina, Lauga and Margret changed by Agnes's time with them? Has her fate changed theirs in any way?
7. Agnes often comments on the ways in which she has been silenced, or had her story altered by the authorities. Why do you think she has such an anguished relationship to language?

- 8.** Agnes goes to her death holding Toti's hand, for they have discovered a deep need for each other. Is this story then about the loneliness of our end in life? Or does it celebrate the comfort that a person can bring to the dying?
- 9.** What do you make of the historical documents (both real and fictionalized) that begin each chapter? How did these change or aid your understanding of Agnes's story?
- 10.** Hannah Kent calls her novel a 'dark love letter to Iceland' (p 337) in her Acknowledgements. What does she mean by this? Did you read the novel this way?

*(Questions provided by publisher)*



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