

In the Aftermath

Jane Ward

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In the Aftermath is a masterful novel in which a man's suicide leaves indelible marks on those he left behind.

In Jane Ward's novel *In the Aftermath*, a man's decision to take his own life has far-reaching effects on others.

Unbeknownst to his wife, Jules, David has driven his family so deep in debt that he is afraid they will lose their bakery business. Believing he has failed his family, and that no one will ever trust or respect him again, David commits suicide. His decision impacts many people in separate, somewhat connected ways.

Five people in particular—Jules; the couple's daughter, Rennie; David's best friend, Charlie; Denise, the detective who investigates the case; and Daniel, the lending specialist who works at the bank where David secured loans—are seen struggling with an array of emotions, including disbelief, guilt, and anger. Their disparate ways of coping are seen to suit their individual personalities and needs.

The early portions of the novel are given over to backstory; as such, they are light on drama. But once the characters have been introduced, the rest of the book reads as focused and intentional. Themes related to David's suicide, and its consequences on the lives of others, are handled in a logical, sequential manner. The characters are well constructed, and the setting is established ably, with the help of sound writing.

Indeed, the book's descriptions are painstaking in their detail, down to the baking processes of items in Jules and David's shop. Still, not all of this meticulous accounting moves the story forward: Denise's early arrival at her son's school for pick up, a trip during which she spots Rennie, is delayed by multiple paragraphs relaying what she could have been doing at home instead.

Still, despite the volume of the book's exposition, its lengthy descriptions are kept somewhat to a minimum. For most of the book, the attention is on David's suicide, and its rippling effect on others; this central theme is surveyed via multiple points of view. Momentum builds and is released as the book moves between the members of its cast. While this means that each person is developed in a limited number of pages, each person's story nonetheless proves to be deep—and essential to understanding the makeup of the whole story.

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FLORENCE OSMUND (August 17, 2021)

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