Terror Perpetrated Against Children Is The Theme.

The Fletchers beautiful new house is everything they dreamed it would be. Built between two churches in Heptonclough, a small village on the moors that time forgot, it ought to be paradise for this young family of five, but they barely have a chance to settle in before they find that they’re anything but welcome. Someone seems to be trying to drive them away--at first with silly pranks but then with threats that become increasingly dangerous, especially to the oldest child, ten-year-old Tom Fletcher, who begins to believe that someone is always watching him.

The adults in Tom’s life are trying to help, including his parents; the vicar next door, younger and more dashing than you’d expect a vicar to be; and a therapist, Evi Oliver, who believes him more than she wants to. But there are other clues that something isn’t quite right in Heptonclough, including the mysterious accidental deaths of three toddlers over the last ten years. It is not until Tom’s siblings, two-year-old Milly and five-year-old Joe Fletcher, go missing in turn that the little village’s evil secret turns the Fletchers’ dreams into a nightmare.

With Sacrifice, Awakening, and now Blood Harvest, S. J. Bolton displays time and time again her remarkable talent as a beguiling storyteller, a master of thrills, and the mistress of her own brand of modern Gothic tale.

My Personal Review:
Richly atmospheric, Bolton sets the pace for her riveting thriller from the first page in a gothic setting, an ancient cathedral in ruins and the graveyards that border the new home of a recently-arrived family. The rest of the village consists of tall, gloomy buildings, cobblestone streets and the
moors that surround man's attempt to civilize nature. A more modest house of worship stands near the ruins, a new minister arriving to tend to the congregation. The village of Heptonclough is steeped in the traditions of the old beliefs, harvest rituals, bonfires and bloody sacrifices to appease cruel gods. The occupants of the bright new house are thrilled with their location, bordered by overgrown cemeteries with tumbled gravestones and wild vines. But as the adventurous Fletcher boys, Tom, ten, and Joe, five, explore the spooky parameters of their property, young Tom grows increasingly subdued, sensing that they are being watched.

While the boys' freedom is spoiled by their fear and an increasing awareness of a girl who hides in the shadows, whether well-meaning or malevolent, there are an assortment of other characters to flesh out this moody thriller: the handsome new minister, Harry Laycock; Gillian, a tormented mother who wanders the moors in search of her young daughter lost in a fire; a disabled psychiatrist attempting to bring closure to the challenging Gillian; and the wealthy family that virtually owns Heptonclough, their sense of entitlement inviolable. Most terrifying of all: this place is not safe for little girls, as evidenced by the tiny skeletons unearthed when a cemetery wall collapses. The happy shouts of children and harried parents are stilled by the horror of the disappearance of five-year-old Joe Fletcher and his baby sister, Millie.

Something is terribly wrong in this idyllic village on the moors of Northern England, as evidenced by the loss of innocents and the sobs of distraught parents. While Tom can get no one to believe him about the girl in the shadows, the spark between Harry Laycock and psychiatrist Evi Oliver is tainted by Gillian's crush on the minister, and clear warnings—disappearing children and a chalice of blood—ratchet Heptonclough into a state of panic, malevolence seeping into every page as death draws near. Will little Millie be the next sacrifice? My heart in my throat, I cannot look away from Bolton's perfectly crafted tale. Luan Gaines/2010.

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