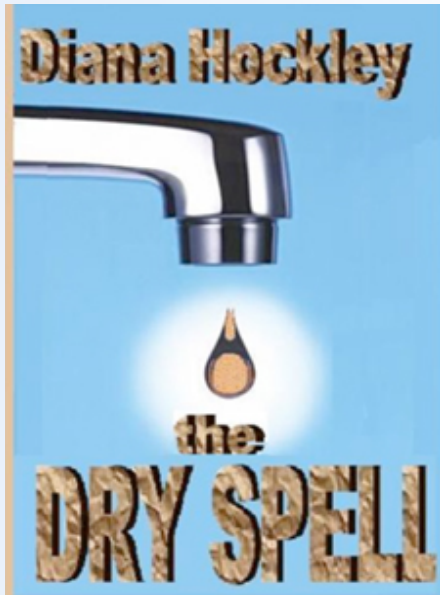


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We never know the worth of water till the well is dry.  
~Thomas Fuller,  
Gnomologia, 1732 .

#### HOW GOOD A READ WAS THIS?

- I could not get into it
- It was okay
- I enjoyed reading it
- I would recommend it
- I loved it

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He couldn't understand why everyone was making such a fuss about water. It was only a tool to use, something to drink, to cook in, swim, wash the car and manufacture whisky and soda, to which he was extremely partial. Water was a tool, something to make life comfortable for himself, Steve "Piggy" Mc Duff.

Piggy was a developer extraordinaire. There wasn't a spare patch of land available in or around his home town which he hadn't filled with monstrous houses on postage-stamp blocks. The provision of parkland, which council by-laws insisted on for all of his luxury estates, sent him into a snarling frenzy. Land-holders who wanted to keep paddocks vacant for pleasure or farming hoped McDuff wouldn't hear of them, for his powers of persuasion and well-filled wallet were legendary. Even his six-year-old daughter carefully hid her toy farm, complete with house, when her father was home.

Piggy scraped the egg off his chin and reached for more toast. Butter and marmalade dripped onto his newspaper, successfully obscuring the important bits in the Nasdaq index. An irritating noise interrupted his thoughts.

"Stevie? ...Stevie? " Screeched his wife, in exasperation. "Will you listen to me?"

Sighing, he folded his newspaper and looked up at her. His record in the marital stakes was not spectacular. Three wives down and one to go – if she didn't pull herself together, and worship him and his money a bit more enthusiastically. He eyed her with some displeasure, as she stood with her hands on her hips, face like a sucked lemon.

"Stevie? Are you sure the pool's arriving soon?"

"The wind's gunna change some day, Louise," he replied, "an' that poncy plastic surgeon of yours won't be able to fix yuh face. The pool's comin' after the reinforcin' steel's in, so you'll just have to wait for it." He threw his rose-coloured, embossed serviette down and got up, scattering sheets of discarded newspaper onto the floor.

"Where are you going now?" Louise demanded.

"I'm having a smoke, all right with you?" he asked, pausing to look back at her. The morning sun shone around her hens-bum mouth, highlighting returning wrinkles. Piggy decided there and then it was time to trade her in on a newer model.

While he thought about it, he would sit in the sun on the verandah, have a cigarette - in defiance of Louise who wouldn't let him smoke in the house - and savour the trappings of his success. His first appointment was not for an hour.

Piggy favoured the finer things of life. From the crown of his head to the toes of his top-of-the-range crocodile-skin shoes, he was a faithful portrait of a successful man. A diamond pinkie ring glittered on his finger; the mandatory Rolex clung to his muscular wrist; an Armani suit encompassed his stocky frame.

His plaited pig-tail, carefully cultivated since high school, became his trademark and his nickname as a matter of course. A leading city paper profiled him under the heading, "Local Developer Brings Exotic New Look to Building Trade." Piggy kept several copies which he occasionally took out, re-read and left scattered casually on the coffee table in the reception area of his office.

On arrival at his latest project, he slowed his brand-new, luxurious black LF-XH 4WD Lexus the better to admire the advertising signs posed artistically on each side of the entrance.

### **LIVE AT POOLSIDE PARADISE ESTATE**

Every house has the pool you always wanted!

Photos of impossibly skinny, elegant people sipping cocktails by a sparkling, Olympian expanse of water enhanced the enticing announcement. Piggy had designed the posters himself.

As he drove, he heard singing in the distance and wondered vaguely where it was coming from, but he was too busy thinking about the arrival of his pool, complete with golden dolphin fountains. He sighed with satisfaction, leaned back and draped his elbow over the door sill.

The singing got louder. he sucked his teeth in frustration as he recalled that the town arts festival was in full swing. The local council was celebrating the theme of water, in art, music, dance and fashion. Big deal.

'Water's water! So what ?' he muttered, as he pressed down harder on the accelerator and tore past the newly completed houses, pristine paint gleaming and sprinklers whipping water across squares of newly-laid turf glistening grass. At nine litres a minute, the lawns would be growing in no time.

There was a tight-knit band of people ahead, standing in the estate park watching members of their group dancing. A small band was playing, and people waved placards and clapped in time to the music.

As he came into the full view of the crowd they saw his car and started running toward him. The dancers stopped and joined in; the band laid down their instruments and waited for the fun to begin.

Then they were upon him, surrounding his gleaming four-wheel drive vehicle. Fists thumped on the roof of his precious 4WD; the glass smeared with saliva as gaping mouths pressed against the windows. Patches of mist were left as they withdrew. Eyes glared at him from all sides.

"Gerrout!" he shrieked, as a piece of plywood hit his ear. Hastily he wound up the window, flinching as a placard glanced off the glass, a couple of centimetres from his face.

"WATER IS LIFE!" shouted one placard.

"DROWN ALL SWIMMING POOLS!" advised another.

"WHAT ABOUT OUR RIVERS?" screeched one more.

He stared at them in speechless bewilderment, as they chanted:

"Yo woe, Piggy McDuff



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The time has come, we've had enough

Of people like you - bloody fools.

Water's too precious for swimming pools!"

It was then he realised they'd brought their silly festival onto the estate, specifically to attack him. Were they really too stupid to realise that all the dancing and chanting in the world wouldn't make him change his mind?

"Huh, idiots!" he snarled, but as he attempted to force the vehicle through the crowd, the demonstrators rapidly formed a solid wall, and his anger turned to fear. Piggy stopped the SUV, his hands shaking as he groped frantically for his mobile phone. His heart pounded, sweat broke out under his arms and his ear hurt. The noise deafened him. Before he could call for help, the door was wrenched open. Someone turned off the ignition, as hands dragged him out onto the ground. His phone bounced off his shoe. He scrambled to his feet and braced himself against his vehicle, trembling.

"All these pools!" a girl hissed menacingly. "There'll not be a drop of water left soon, Piggy! Are you out of your mind? Haven't you heard of global warming? What are you going to do when you turn the tap on and nothing comes out?"

"That'll never happen!" yowled Piggy defiantly, "you've all been fooled, there's no such thing as global warming!"

"Oh yes there is!" they screamed, brandishing bottles of water in the air. He could see the tonsils of the nearest protester.

"Oh no, there's not!" roared Piggy, clenching his fists, glaring at the circle of faces around him.

"Everyone knows! Even the government knows! Scientists have been warning the likes of you for years!" shouted the leader, a burly woman with arms like Christmas hams. They stood eyeball to eyeball for a long moment, staring each other down. Piggy was the first to look away.

"We can't live without water, McDuff! Water is the most precious gift given to us, to grow food, to drink ... and to live! And you flood it with chemicals and waste it in swimming pools?" she bellowed.

As he opened his mouth to retort, someone grabbed his pigtail and held on tight. He clutched it with both hands and pulled back; an unseemly tussle ensued before he broke free. Something was burning ... they'd set his pigtail on fire!

He struggled desperately to escape from his tormentors, pushing frantically through the crowd, and bolting in a cloud of smoke. Hands clutched at his pigtail and pulled him up short. Shrieking, he tugged his hair back again and "legged" it to safety, hurdling bushes and piles of bricks. Behind him, the crowd whistled and clapped. Then he saw the edge of a pool right in front of him. Gathering himself, he did a perfect, shallow racing dive.

He rolled onto his back, winded and coughing. Soil clogged his hair and eyebrows. A haze of smoke wafted around him, but the fire was out. His wife and daughter stood peering down at him in astonishment. Louise was not best pleased to see her husband rolling in the dirt at the bottom of the pool site.

"What are you doing down there, Daddy? You set yourself on fire with your cigarette. Mummy tried to catch you to put it out.' she announced, her lips pursed like her mothers. "And I helped her," she added sanctimoniously.

"Stevie, you idiot! You fell asleep on the verandah and had a nightmare. We tried to wake you up but you just kept running. I always warned you you'd set yourself on fire one day with those stupid cigarettes! Now, you're late for your appointment, I'm late for the hairdresser and Mercury is late for her Tweeny Weeny Junior Model class! How could you? And just look at yourself! It's humiliating." She turned and stormed off, Mercury trailing behind, giggling.

Piggy's pristine shirt and immaculate suit were tattered and filthy. His diamond pinkie ring was gone, at least ten centimetres of his cherished pigtail burnt and his crocodile-skin shoes were ruined from threshing around in the gravel. It was only a dream.

But what if his tormenters were right? Would it really affect the water supply if everyone had a swimming pool?

All of a sudden, he was tired of the whole thing. Interest in his pool with the golden dolphins faded, along with his enthusiasm for the luxury estate of which he'd been so proud. He'd heard about sea changes; maybe it was time for one. But when he remembered his wife's hens-bum mouth and thought about the luxurious lifestyle he'd created for her, he realised he was stuck with Louise and the estate. He owed millions of dollars which had to be recouped. There was no way he could go back on this project.

Slowly, he got to his feet and began to scabble laboriously up the sides of the excavation. For every step he gained, he slipped back two. Eventually he reached the top and limped into the house, scattering dirt, leaves and twigs from his socks and shoes across the gleaming tiles. His throat was dry and sore from screaming; sweat poured down his face and body. He desperately needed a drink. Breathing heavily, he got a glass out of the cupboard, went to the kitchen sink and turned on the tap.

Nothing came out.

---END---

## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

### **Diana Hockley**

Diana lives in a small country town overlooking the mountains of the Scenic Rim in south east Queensland, Australia.

Diana is voracious reader, amateur landscape painter, amateur pianist, and the presenter of a weekly classical music radio program. With a few stories published and some writing prizes won, she considers herself a would-be famous writer. She is also an active editor at Mezzo Magazine. We are sure that we will see more of her work published.

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