



The natural way of things

By Charlotte Wood

First published in 2015

Genre and Subject

Suspense fiction

Kidnapping

Female friendship

Synopsis

Two women awaken from a drugged sleep to find themselves imprisoned in a broken-down property in the middle of a desert. Strangers to each other, they have no idea where they are or how they came to be there with eight other girls, forced to wear strange uniforms, their heads shaved, guarded by two inept yet vicious armed jailers and a 'nurse'. The girls all have something in common, but what is it? What crime has brought them here from the city? Who is the mysterious security company responsible for this desolate place with its brutal rules, its total isolation from the contemporary world? Doing hard labour under a sweltering sun, the prisoners soon learn what links them: in each girl's past is a sexual scandal with a powerful man. They pray for rescue - but when the food starts running out it becomes clear that the jailers have also become the jailed. The girls can only rescue themselves.

Author Biography

Charlotte Wood is the author of nine books. Her latest is *The Luminous Solution*, an exploration of creativity and the inner life. Her last novel was the international bestseller, *The Weekend*. It was shortlisted for several awards including the Stella Prize and the Prime Minister's Literary Award, both of which she won, among others, for her previous novel, *The Natural Way of Things*, in 2016. That title was featured in the 2021 ABC Television series, *The Books That Made Us*.

Belvoir Theatre Company in Sydney will stage an adaptation of *The Weekend* in August 2023.

In 2019 Charlotte was made a Member of the Order of Australia (AM) and named one of the Australian Financial Review's 100 Women of Influence. Her features and essays have appeared in *The New York Times*, *The Guardian*, *Literary Hub*, *The Sydney Morning Herald* and *The Saturday Paper* among other publications.

Discussion Starters

- 'You need to know what you are' (p.18). Consider this statement by Boncer. 'What' are these girls – to society, the media, the guards, their families and partners? And how do these conflicting perceptions ultimately shape the girls' sense of self?
- Compare and discuss your interpretations of 'Hardings International'. Who or what do they represent? And why do they want these girls removed from society?
- In what ways do you think gender impacted your reading of the book? If you have men and women in your reading group, discuss the different ways you related and reacted to the characters and events in the novel.
- Consider the developing relationship between Yolanda and Verla. What brings them together and, ultimately, sets them apart?
- Discuss the ways the book addresses issues surrounding the female body. How do the girls view their bodies? In what ways are they sites of both power and oppression?
- 'Animal blood and guts, the moon and the season. It was beyond her named self, beyond girl, or female. Beyond human, even.' (p. 193) What power and promise does the animal world increasingly hold for Yolanda? How does going back to a primitive state enable her understand herself and her world?
- Consider the conflicting representations of violence throughout the book. How does it challenge the boundaries between human and animal nature? Male and female? Power and oppression?
- Throughout the book, Wood creates a powerful tension between death and survival. Why do some characters die while others endure?
- What does the white horse symbolise for Verla?
- 'In The Natural Ways of Things, Wood creates a dystopian world through which we may better understand our own.' Discuss this statement.
- What is your interpretation of the final scene? Where are the girls going? And what kind of world are they leaving behind?

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