

The Natural Way of Things by Charlotte Wood

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A captivating and haunting novel by Charlotte Wood that ripples with anger.



Charlotte Wood's latest novel should be devoured in one sitting, and then reread and savoured for the beauty and poetry. In *The Natural Way of Things*, Wood explores the nature of misogyny through the clear and distinct voices of Yolanda and Verla, two young women imprisoned and humiliated together with eight other women. All of these women have been involved in a sexual ordeal with a prominent man, treated in the media as a 'scandal'.

Part of the draw of the novel is the way that Wood intertwines the vastly different landscapes within Australia. While the novel's events take place in a rural setting, we are brought back to the city in flashbacks, revealing the circumstances that led to each woman being imprisoned and humiliated. These include sexual harassment and assault, on a cruise-ship, in the army, in the corporate world, in sport and entertainment. These circumstances align with scandals readers encounter in the media. Despite the novel being a dystopia, the language used by the women's jailers, and the flashbacks to horrific online comments about the women, feels eerily similar to vicious victim-blaming commentary we encounter regularly. The novel appears to serve as a warning to a complacent world willing to treat women this way.

As the tension builds in the novel, each of the characters deals with the situation in a different way, including the jailers. She presents a range of responses to trauma, some quite surprising. Soon after their arrival, one of the imprisoned women tells the others that they are in a reality TV show, which she soon confesses to having lied about. It can feel at times, though, as though the women's hideous plight has been set up as entertainment. We see the way friendships or alliances are made, as well as the discoveries, realisations and changes that take place for each of the characters. In this ongoing isolation and imprisonment, many are forced to face previously unimaginable truths about their previous lives and loved ones. Alongside their individual struggles, we wait to learn more about the mysterious Hardings International, the corporate entity behind the women's imprisonment.

Wood's descriptions of the land and animals are evocative and mesmerising, and essential to the novel. The imagery, especially the poignant and compelling use of the natural world, ties into the fate of the women. Wood achieves the ideal balance of plot and poetry, in which the reader is desperate to find out what happens next but also doesn't want to miss a word.

Rating: 5 stars out of 5

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By Charlotte Wood

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What the stars mean?

- **Five stars:** Exceptional, unforgettable, a must see
 - **Four and a half stars:** Excellent, definitely worth seeing
 - **Four stars:** Accomplished and engrossing but not the best of its kind
 - **Three and a half stars:** Good, clever, well made, but not brilliant
 - **Three stars:** Solid, enjoyable, but unremarkable or flawed
 - **Two and half stars:** Neither good nor bad, just adequate
 - **Two stars:** Not without its moments, but ultimately unsuccessful
 - **One star:** Awful, to be avoided
 - **Zero stars:** Genuinely dreadful, bad on every level
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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Roz Bellamy is a Melbourne-based writer, reviewer and editor, with a passion for the arts and travel.