



WHEN

'SMALL-TOWN CRIME FICTION AT ITS
SHOCKING BEST' **ASHLEY KALAGIAN BLUNT**

ONE

'THE TWISTS AND SURPRISES COME
FAST AND DEADLY' **CANDICE FOX**

OF US

'BOLD AND COMPELLING'
MARK BRANDT

HURTS

MONICA VUU

Reading Group Notes



ABOUT THE BOOK

Port Brighton hates outsiders. The small coastal town has its own ways of dealing with the evil, the foolish, the misled, and it holds tightly to them. But the seams start to split after two deaths occur on the same tragic night: a baby abandoned at the foot of a lighthouse, and a drunken teenager drowned in the storming sea.

Livvy is an insider. She keeps a watchful eye on what's happening in town while looking out for her troubled older brother. What has broken inside him – and why?

Marie is an outsider. She's escaped Port Brighton and started a new life, but she can't forget the night at the lighthouse – it changed her family forever.

As gossip fuels rumours and tensions erode trust, the bonds that keep Port Brighton together begin to fray, threatening to expose the truth about more than just the two deaths . . .

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Monica Vuu was born in Langley, British Columbia. She has a background in Cognitive Systems. After graduating she worked with Emirates airlines and lived in Dubai for a couple of years, where she met her Australian partner, who managed to convince her to make the big move to Tasmania in 2019. *When One of Us Hurts* is her first novel and was inspired by the remoteness of rural Tasmania.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

**** WARNING: MAJOR PLOT SPOILERS ****

1. In the novel, people and events are very much not what they first appear to be.
What were your first impressions of Livvy and Marie, and how did they change over the course of the story?
2. Why do you think the author has given this story to Marie and Livvy to narrate?
What does each narrator reveal, and what does she obscure, about the events that unfolded?
3. Johnny is a character we only ever see through the eyes of his sister and his mother.
What do you think Johnny might say if he were telling this story?
4. Marie's story takes place seven years after Livvy's, but often moves between the past and the present through memory and flashback. What effect did this shifting of time have on your understanding of the story and characters?
5. Through its unreliable narrators, the novel raises interesting questions about the nature of truth and reality, and the idea of self-deception. For example, did Johnny really love cinnamon buns and *The Birds*, or hot chocolate and *Forrest Gump*? Are both narrators purposefully lying to themselves and the reader, or do they really believe their version of the story?
6. On page 202 we learn that Johnny has been keeping Livvy's secret, and all his guilty-looking behaviour following the Fish Festival takes on a new meaning.
Can you think of other examples where a character's actions or words are revealed to have different meanings as new information comes to light?
7. Were there any moments in the book that shocked you, or disgusted you?
Why do you think the author chose to include them?
8. Why do you think the people of Port Brighton make such a strong distinction between locals and Outsiders? What do the people of the town value? And what about their physical or social environment might contribute to this?
9. The reporter calls the town 'a bogan's paradise', and we learn that there are a lot of dark secrets here, including drugs, sex and murder. What do you make of Port Brighton?
Does it feel like a realistic representation of a small town?

10. Except for Audrey and Sebastian's family, are there any 'normal' characters in Port Brighton? Do you think these wealthy, bright and well-adjusted young adults had any chance of happiness in Port Brighton? Were they right to want to take Johnny away?
11. Discuss any symbols and motifs you noticed in the novel. What they might represent, and how do they add to the story and atmosphere? For example, the crows of Port Brighton; Rum-Runners Lighthouse; Hitchcock movies; the 'one, two, three, four, five' nursery rhyme; and insects and worms.
12. Livvy is essentially an orphan, as her parents are both dead. How does Livvy feel about her parents? How does this impact her relationship to Johnny, Fran and the town? Do you think these are healthy relationships?
13. What did you make of Livvy's relationship with her brother, Johnny? Does Livvy truly love her brother? Do you think she is capable of love?
14. How much is Livvy responsible for her actions, and how much can be attributed to her circumstances growing up? How do you see the relationship between 'nature' and 'nurture' playing out in Livvy's character? What kind of adult might she have grown up to be?
15. Marie has had a challenging life in many ways, especially when it comes to romantic relationships (Gary, Ben and Howard). In what ways can you see the impact of this on her character? How, if at all, does it affect your empathy for her?
16. Marie feels she was a bad mother to Johnny, and that she could have prevented his death if she had done things differently. Do you think she was a bad mother? How do you think Johnny felt about his mother?
17. Right after we learn that Livvy killed Sebastian, Marie talks about wishing she had killed Livvy. After finishing the book, how do you feel about Marie's sentiment?
18. Do you think the sentence Marie received was fair punishment? Why or why not? Do you think she is ready to leave Lacey House?
19. What do you think about Marie's relationships with her fellow residents at Lacey House? How are Ethel, Billy, Ursula, Nina and Alex part of Marie's healing and recovery?
20. At the end of the book, Marie is released from Lacey House and speaks to her brother Robbie, and her nephew Johnny. Do you see this as a hopeful ending? What do you think the future holds for Marie?
21. What do you think were the strongest motivating factors for Livvy, Marie and Ethel's actions? Is there any overlap (for example, love, loyalty or desperation)?