

Shelter

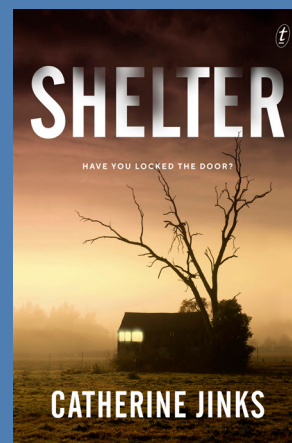


Catherine Jinks

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PRAISE FOR CATHERINE JINKS AND *SHELTER*

'Catherine Jinks's latest work is a tense thriller that explores gaslighting, the different kinds of abuse people inflict upon one another and the way this abuse can ripple through generations...*Shelter* is an engrossing read that calls to be finished in one sitting.'
Books+Publishing

'Highly readable, richly characterised, beautifully written...The tension ratchets up and never dissipates.'
Australian Book Review on SHEPHERD

ABOUT CATHERINE JINKS

Catherine Jinks' books for adults, young adults and children have been published in a dozen countries and have won numerous awards, including a Victorian Premier's Literary Award and the CBCA Book of the Year Award (four times). She lives in the Blue Mountains.

A READER'S INTRODUCTION TO *SHELTER*

Shelter is a spine-tingling psychological thriller that sheds light on the cycle of domestic violence and the struggles faced by those trying to escape, from one of Australia's best writers of suspense.

Meg lives alone: a little place in the bush outside town. A perfect place to hide. That's one of the reasons she offers to shelter Nerine, who's escaping a violent ex. The other is that Meg knows what it's like to live with an abusive partner.

Nerine is jumpy and her two little girls are frightened. It tells Meg all she needs to know where they've come from, and she's not all that surprised when Nerine asks her to get hold of a gun. But she knows it's unnecessary. They're safe now.

Then she starts to wonder about some little things. A disturbed flyscreen. A tune playing on her windchimes. Has Nerine's ex tracked them down? Has Meg's husband turned up to torment her some more?

By the time she finds out, it'll be too late to do anything but run for her life.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Meg explains to Nerine that she named her property the Bolt Hole because 'when I first came here [...] I felt like I was crawling into a burrow.' (p. 8) Discuss the concept of home in relation to survivors of domestic violence.
2. Discuss the ways in which victims of domestic violence are failed by the legal system. How is this explored in *Shelter*? Meg's lawyer, David, warns her that 'legislation favours the lame duck' (p. 35). What does he mean by this? Do you agree?
3. The network of women that help Nerine—including Jill, Meg, and Meg's contact, Renee, don't necessarily see themselves as lawbreakers. On the contrary, they are women whose own experiences of domestic violence have made them aware of the limitations and failings of the law, and the need to protect others like them. Do you agree with the ethics of their actions? Can you imagine a legal system that doesn't require these kind of underground networks? What are the implications of a network like this in relation to the current justice system?
4. Meg's daughter, Emily, is a largely absent character in the novel, only appearing in the story second-hand via Meg or her ex, Keith. Do you trust that either of their representations of Emily is entirely accurate? How do you interpret her actions (to leave

home, to move to England and, finally, to sever contact with both parents)? Is she being too harsh?

5. Do you believe that Nerine was ever a victim of domestic violence, or does she manipulate the network of women who help her by making them believe that she is 'one of [them]' (p. 7)? How do you feel about the choice to cast her as the villain of the novel?
6. 'I'd failed Emily,' says Meg. 'I wasn't going to fail those girls.' (p. 20). Could Meg have done anything differently as a mother? Would it have changed things? How much are Meg's motivations in the book shaped by a desire to save, not Nerine, but her daughters? Does she succeed?
7. Why does the mother capture the collective imagination of our culture so much? Why are we so quick to jump on the narrative of the 'bad mother', and what is the paternal equivalent of this stereotype? How does the theme of motherhood in this novel compare to other narratives about mothers?
8. 'But when her head swung around, and she stared up at me, I was startled by the look on her face. It wasn't wretched. It wasn't remorseful. It was defiant. Resolute. Full of grim determination.' (p. 312) What makes Ana tell the truth in this instance when she has feared her mother for the rest of the novel?
9. What does the title of the novel, *Shelter*, mean to its characters? How do their experiences in the book change and shape their experience of what shelter might mean?
10. In the final chapter of the novel, Meg describes the various reasons her friends turned away from her. Did she deserve this rejection? Do you agree, as Meg believes Tearle thinks, that she is a liar, a criminal, and a lowlife (p. 316)? Is she responsible for Bulwell becoming the centre of so much negative attention, or the bad things that have happened? And, if not, who is?