



★ **Unnatural Ends**

Christopher Huang

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In Christopher Huang's moody mystery novel *Unnatural Ends*, an Englishman is murdered. In a stunning act of prescience, he stipulated in his will that his estate should belong to whomever of his three adoptees solved the case.

Alan is an archaeologist; Roger is an engineer; Caroline is a journalist. They were raised in Linwood Hall, and return to it in 1921 for Sir Lawrence's funeral. They're expected to investigate the death, despite a detective's reservations, and their intertwined impressions and sharp deductions are devoted to finding out whether the crime was rooted in the past, and whether or not there was more to the will.

The Linwoods' austere, towering estate, which is falling to ruin, is an astute parallel to the harm wrought by Sir Lawrence, whose magisterial, unyielding presence influenced his family and the village. Meanwhile, memories bolster each of the siblings' beliefs that they were the favored one to inherit the estate, for reasons that are tailored to their personalities. Sir Lawrence's admonitions, too, fill them with urgency.

The result is a keen examination of how family legacies are reinterpreted by their members, and a stylish adaptation of classic mysteries. The characters' mannerisms and conversations pair with historical flourishes, including references to aviation, the first World War, and Hiram Bingham in Machu Picchu; the result is delightful and immersive.

Huang is savvy about revealing the Linwoods' secrets in increments. Suspense builds as the investigation gathers around potential culprits, and potent notions of patriarchal sins and the past's ongoing ripple effects enrich and complicate the siblings' understanding of their present. The book's surprising deflections all ravel toward a theatrical finish.

Unnatural Ends enters the spellbinding, gorse-filled Yorkshire countryside with provocative inquiries into people's origins, and the experiences that bind them.

KAREN RIGBY (January / February 2022)

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