ReadingGroupGuides
The online community for reading groups

Before the Fall

by Noah Hawley



About the Book

From the Emmy, PEN, Peabody, Critics' Choice and Golden Globe Award-winning creator of the TV show "Fargo" comes *the* thriller of the year.

On a foggy summer night, 11 people --- 10 privileged, one down-on-his-luck painter --- depart Martha's Vineyard on a private jet headed for New York. Sixteen minutes later, the unthinkable happens: the plane plunges into the ocean. The only survivors are Scott Burroughs --- the painter --- and a four-year-old boy, who is now the last remaining member of an immensely wealthy and powerful media mogul's family.

With chapters weaving between the aftermath of the crash and the backstories of the passengers and crew members --- including a Wall Street titan and his wife, a Texan-born party boy just in from London, a young woman questioning her path in life, and a career pilot --- the mystery surrounding the tragedy heightens. As the passengers' intrigues unravel, odd coincidences point to a conspiracy. Was it merely by dumb chance that so many influential people perished? Or was something far more sinister at work? Events soon threaten to spiral out of control in an escalating storm of media outrage and accusations. And while Scott struggles to cope with fame that borders on notoriety, the authorities scramble to salvage the truth from the wreckage.

Amid pulse-quickening suspense, the fragile relationship between Scott and the young boy glows at the heart of this stunning novel, raising questions of fate, human nature and the inextricable ties that bind us together.

Discussion Guide

1. Every person on the plane has experienced sadness or difficulties in the past. Do you think that, universally, everyone has his/her own sad story, or is this a unique trait of this particular set of characters?

2. What different meanings could the title BEFORE THE FALL signify?

3. *?True horror, you see, comes not from the savagery of the unexpected, but from the corruption of everyday objects, spaces?* (363). Do you agree? Do you see this idea reflected elsewhere in the book?

4. In what ways is this novel a traditional thriller? In what ways does it bend the conventions of the thriller genre?

5. The 24-hour news cycle is ubiquitous in our culture. How is this phenomenon portrayed in BEFORE THE FALL, and how does it make you rethink what we see on television every day?

6. BEFORE THE FALL alternates between the present day --- the investigation into the plane crash and Scott?s experience --- and flashbacks to each passenger?s life. As you read more of the flashbacks, how does your understanding of the past inform or change your understanding of the present day narrative?

7. *?He [Scott] too is striving for truth. Or maybe he alone?*(356). Much of the book revolves around a quest for the truth. What truths are debated or searched for during the course of this book? Do you believe that truth is objective? Do you agree with Bill Cunningham that *?people have a right to know?* the truth (388)?

8. Noah Hawley is well-known for his work in film and television. In what scenes do you see this reflected in the book?

9. *?Everyone has their path. The choices they?ve made. How any two people end up in the same place at the same time is a mystery?* (1). Much of the plot hinges on chance encounters or small decisions. What are some seemingly unimportant choices characters make that turn out to be pivotal? Do you see this sort of kismet in real life?

10. How is the concept of heroism explored throughout the book? What separates heroes from other people? How does an ordinary person become a hero?

11. After the plane crash, Scott meets many different people --- JJ, Eleanor, Doug, Layla, Gus, Bill --- who want different things from him. How do these characters affect Scott and his personal journey?

12. In many ways, Scott has been a passive observer rather than an active participant in life. In what ways does the crash change how he relates to the world around him and his sense of self?

Author Bio

Award?winning author Noah Hawley is one of the most accomplished auteurs and versatile storytellers working in television, film and literature. Over the course of his more than 20-year career, Hawley's work as a novelist, screenwriter, series creator, showrunner and director has garnered acclaim --- winning an Emmy®, Golden Globe®, PEN, Critics? Choice and Peabody Award. As a bestselling author, Hawley has published six novels: A CONSPIRACY OF TALL MEN, OTHER PEOPLE'S WEDDINGS, THE PUNCH, THE GOOD FATHER, BEFORE THE FALL and ANTHEM.

Before the Fall

by Noah Hawley

Publication Date: June 6, 2017
Genres: Fiction, Suspense, Thriller
Paperback: 416 pages
Publisher: Grand Central Publishing
ISBN-10: 1455561797
ISBN-13: 9781455561797