

# **Black and Blue Study Guide**

## **Black and Blue by Anna Quindlen**

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# Plot Summary

Black and Blue is a novel by the Pulitzer Prize winning journalist, Anna Quindlen. In this novel, Frannie Benedetto has suffered horrible abuse by her police officer husband for nearly twenty years. Finally, Frannie comes to the conclusion that her husband will not stop beating her until she is dead. Frannie takes a chance and runs away with her son, becoming someone completely different. However, cops have resources other people do not and it is only a matter of time before her husband finds her. Black and Blue is a novel of transformation, of one woman finding the courage to not only leave a dangerous relationship, but taking the risk of losing everything to become someone new.

Frannie Benedetto married Bobby Benedetto despite the violence he perpetrated against her almost from the moment their relationship began. Frannie was in love and she believed love would make everything okay. However, the day Bobby breaks her nose, Frannie knows he will not stop until she is dead. Frannie uses her connections at the hospital where she works as a nurse to make arrangements to disappear.

Frannie is taken under the wing of a network of generous people who use their time and resources to help abused women leave their boyfriends or husbands. Frannie and her son, Robert, are driven out of New York and given a new name and a place to live. They have left behind a respectable life, a middle class home just a block from the bay, friends, family, and love for a small duplex and new name. Frannie does the best she can to make life easy for her young son, but every day his anger and confusion grows, creating a situation in which Frannie, who is now known as Beth Crenshaw, finds herself afraid for his future.

On the first day of school, Beth Crenshaw follows her unhappy son to school and meets another mother, Cindy Roerbacker. Beth and Cindy become good friends, sharing coffee and muffins most mornings while their children are at school. Beth also becomes friendly with Mike Riordan, the vice principal who has taken a special interest in Robert. Eventually Beth also gets a new job as a home health aid, helping sick people with some of the more difficult tasks associated with living at home.

Beth finds herself falling in love with big, kind Mike as she settles into her new life. Beth still misses her family and friends back in Brooklyn, but being away from her abusive husband and using a new name has given Beth a courage that leaves her feeling almost untouchable. In fact, Beth refuses to move again after her face is in the newspapers after an accident at a carnival, as she is tired of running and being afraid.

At the same time, Beth's son, Robert, is struggling with the lies and the truths that his mother has been telling him his whole life. Robert misses his father and cannot imagine he would ever do anything to hurt his mother. One night Robert calls home and speaks to his father. Beth, knowing this could be the one thing that could lead Bobby to them, continues to refuse to leave again. Instead, Beth turns to Mike with the truth.



Several weeks later, Bobby breaks into Beth's house in the middle of the night. They argue and Bobby chokes Beth into unconsciousness. When Beth wakes, Bobby is gone and so is Robert. Beth searches for Robert for months, but Bobby has disappeared and nothing anyone can do. Eventually Beth goes back to her life, marrying Mike and having another child. However, Beth continues to think of Robert and pray for his safety.



# Pages 3-22

## Pages 3-22 Summary

Frannie Benedetto is a middle-aged nurse who has been married to her first love for nearly twenty years. Bobby has been violent toward Frannie since the early days of their courtship and she has recently decided she needs to escape before he kills her.

Frannie Benedetto reflects on her husband and his infectious charm. Bobby is a police officer who once testified in a famous case in which he encouraged Frannie to see. Frannie recalls how the accused told the court that a cop kept hounding him until finally he broke. Frannie knows this was Bobby and she knows how it feels because he often did the same to her. Frannie reflects on the first time Bobby hit her, in the early days of their courtship, over some misunderstood fit of jealousy. Frannie could not wear a sundress for a week, but she dismissed the violence as a singular incident that would not likely happen again.

Frannie is sitting on a bench in the waiting room of Thirtieth Street Station in Philadelphia, having escaped her home that morning after her husband went to work. Frannie has been told to wait here by a woman she once met at the hospital where she was a nurse, a woman who came to offer help to abused women who came in for medical care. Robert, Frannie's ten-year-old son keeps asking what is happening, where they are going, but Frannie does not know what to tell him. Frannie just sits quietly, waiting as she has been told. It is because of Robert that Frannie is here. It is the look on his face a week or so back when he came home from school to find Frannie in the kitchen with a broken nose and multiple bruises on her face. Bobby had never hit her face before. Now the old excuse, that she'd had an accident, will no longer work.

Robert plays his video game while they wait. Frannie looks around the station, remembering all the instructions Patty Bancroft had given to her. No planes, they can be too easily traced. No questions, no names. Patty Bancroft promised if Frannie followed her rules, Bobby will never find her. Frannie feels the pain of her face and the blood between her legs, and hopes Patty is right. A woman comes to the coffee kiosk and tells Frannie she has dropped her tickets. Frannie begins to argue, then realizes this is the moment when she learns who she is going to be. There are train and bus tickets, a driver's license and social security number. Elizabeth and Robert Crenshaw. At least she had won that one battle, the battle to allow Robert to keep his name.

Frannie runs the name over and over in her mind, deciding she will call herself Beth. A new start, a woman who is not formed by Bobby Benedetto and his fists. Frannie Benedetto was a good cop's wife, quiet and a little anti-social, but good. Accident prone. Beth Crenshaw will be different, strong and confident.



## Pages 3-22 Analysis

This first section of the novel introduces the main character, Fran Benedetto/Beth Crenshaw. Fran is a young wife who has been married since she was barely an adult, living with a man who is not only a respected cop, but an abuser. Fran thinks back on her marriage, on the many beatings she suffered that she lied to her young son about, of the bruises and the soreness that she explained away as her own clumsiness. With those lies came guilt, as though Fran caused her own injuries in some way. It is this guilt that is now taking her away from her home and her family, everything she has ever known, to both protect herself from the eventual beating that will result in her death and the lies that are forming the man her son will one day be.

Fran Benedetto is a frightened woman, a woman who has been beaten so often that she now has none of the self reliance and strength she might have once had. However, Fran will disappear in as Beth Crenshaw is born. Fran sees this as a chance to become a new person, to break free of the pain and overshadowing presence of her husband to shine in the sun on her own. Fran's reasons for leaving her husband are clear in this chapter. Fran is afraid, not only for herself, but for her son as well. However, the reader is not clear at this point if this fear is equally measured or if it tips the scales one way or the other.



# Pages 23-56

## Pages 23-56 Summary

Beth and Robert travel all day and night before finally arriving at their new home. Lake Plata is a small, dusty town, and the duplex could sit in their old living room with space left over. However, they are both too tired to care. Robert goes upstairs and falls asleep immediately. The duplex reminds Beth of all the places Frannie lived as a child, the small apartments they would leave every few months for reasons Frannie never understood.

Robert befriends a young boy next door, Bennie Castro. Both Robert and Beth like the entire, large Castro family and Beth is relieved that Robert has a friend to make the transition to their new life easier. Shortly after their arrival, Robert comes to Beth and announces that he knows this is not a vacation. Beth does her best to explain things to Robert without causing any more confusion than the child is already laboring under. Unfortunately, telling Robert the truth now, after so many lies, only makes the truth look like lies. After a few weeks, it seems Robert is beginning to accept their new life. Beth, however, finds acceptance a little longer in coming. Despite everything, Beth misses her old life, her family and friends. Beth begins to wonder how her life might have been different if she had never met Bobby, but she finds she cannot regret her life because without Bobby there would be no Robert.

Beth quickly discovers that her life has been arranged for her without any effort on her part. Robert has been enrolled in school, but Beth has no clue where they might have gotten his school records from. A letter comes in the mail telling Beth what she needs to buy her son for the first day of school. Before taking him to school that first day, Beth makes Robert practice writing his new name and reminds him of their new history. Instead of being from Brooklyn like Fran and Robert Benedetto, Beth and Robert Crenshaw are from Delaware. Beth has just divorced an accountant, not a cop. Beth worries Robert will not be able to keep all this straight, but he reminds her that kids do not care about stuff like that.

The first day of school, Robert rides the bus with Bennie. Beth walks to the school, arriving in time to watch her son go inside with the rest of the children. Another mother is watching the school too. She explains that her daughter is frightened and she promised to wait outside for fifteen minutes. This mother is Cindy Roerbacker, a beautiful blond who sells cosmetics and speaks like she just walked off the farm the day before. Cindy seems to understand Beth's fears, even if she does not know what they are and how deeply rooted in the past they are, and she asks her home for coffee. Beth has not had many close female friends, only Winnie, a nurse she worked with in Brooklyn. Beth misses Winnie and is reminded of her as she speaks with Cindy. Cindy offers Beth a bunch of furniture she has from her mother-in-law's house. At first Beth refuses the gift, but later takes her up on it in hopes of cheering up her small duplex.



## Pages 23-56 Analysis

Frannie Benedetto becomes Beth Crenshaw, divorced mother from Delaware. It is a difficult transition, one filled with fear of discovery and the loss of all her family and friends. Beth has too much time on her hands, sitting around the tiny duplex they have been giving that reminds her of Frannie's childhood, moving from one sad apartment to the next. On the first day of school, however, Beth makes a friend. Frannie never had many friends, but there was a co-worker she cared deeply for; therefore, she feels lost without this person to confide in. Cindy seems to fill this vacant spot, leaving the reader wondering how long it will be before Beth finds herself confiding things she probably should not to her new friend.

Robert does not understand why his mother has yanked him away from his family and friends, especially the father he so deeply adores. Robert is not aware of the beatings his father committed against his own mother, only aware that his mother had many accidents over the years. Robert believed his mother's lies and now that she wants him to believe the truth, he is not sure he can. Robert loves his father, he looks up to him and believes he can do no wrong. To be stolen away from his father with no warning and told that his father is an abuser is a lot for a small child to accept. However, Robert seems to be accepting it. At least, he does not talk about it. However, this silent acceptance should be taken with a grain of salt by the reader as the plot continues to develop.





# Pages 57-90

## Pages 57-90 Summary

Beth redecorates her tiny duplex with some curtains, blankets, and furniture from Cindy's basement. Beth even spends a little money to paint the living room. Robert is hardly impressed, but Beth feels a little more at home. Robert tells Beth very little about his days at school, but he does tell her about a boy in his class who makes fun of Bennie because he is from Cuba. Beth explains that prejudice against people who are different is wrong. Then Beth tells Robert about meeting Cindy Roerbacker, mentioning that she has a pool that she has invited Robert to go swimming in.

Patty Bancroft calls that night from a pay phone somewhere. Patty tells Beth that she has arranged a job for her as a home health worker. As Beth talks to Patty and receives her own phone number after nearly a month of living in this duplex, she thinks about secrets. Patty's network survives on secrets. Frannie once survived on secrets as well. No one ever knew the truth about her long list of injuries except Bobby, and Bobby always claimed she exaggerated. Once there was a newspaper article about three patients from Frannie's hospital. All three had been treated for domestic abuse injuries, all three had left their abusers, and all three had died. It was then that Frannie began thinking seriously about leaving.

The first time Frannie met Patty Bancroft she had come to the hospital to explain about her services and to encourage the emergency room workers to hand out her card. Patty gave a card to Frannie, intending for her to give it to a patient. It was about this same time that Bobby broke Frannie's collar bone over a discussion of his buddy's eating habits. Sometime after that Bobby threw Frannie into a counter and raped her on the kitchen floor for accepting a phone call from a male co-worker. Patty Bancroft brings Beth back to the present by reminding her that Bobby is looking for her and she should be careful.

Beth's first patient with the home health agency is a thirty-year-old woman with cerebral palsy. Beth buys her groceries and learns her personal history from an account the woman has written out with her computer. Another patient is Melvin, a dialysis patient awaiting a kidney transplant. Beth does not have a car, so she has to walk to all these locations. When Beth takes on a third patient, she is forced to leave Robert with the Castros. The new patient is an elderly man who had a stroke just a few weeks after he and his wife retired to Lake Plata. Mrs. Levitt is a kind but lonely lady who often talks Beth's ear off as she checks on his husband. Beth likes her immediately. Mrs. Levitt's story reminds Beth of the cop's wives that Frannie used to see at parties. They were like a little group, these women who did not work and who spent their lives trying to make their men happy before the day they would retire and move to Florida. Frannie used to wonder if Bobby would stop beating her if she quit her job and stayed home like these women. Beth knows better. Beth remembers also, however, that it was not always bad



between Frannie and Bobby. There were times of happiness, moments of love and respect. It was simply that those moments became rare toward the end.

## Pages 57-90 Analysis

Beth begins to settle into her new life, decorating in hopes of making it more of a home. Robert is not impressed, but Beth is proud of her efforts. Beth is relieved when Patty Bancroft calls and tells her she has a job. Beth has had too much time on her hands and she needs to work to keep her mind occupied. At the same time, the reader gets to know more about this mysterious woman who helped Frannie Benedetto escape her abusive husband. Patty Bancroft is a wealthy woman who claims to have once been abused by her wealthy husband. For this reason, Patty has created this highly secret network to help abused women escape their situations. Patty is doing a good service for these women, helping them create a whole new life for themselves. However, Beth is not afraid to point out that in her own way, Patty is just as controlling as all those abusive men.

Beth begins her new job and enjoys her patients. The wife of one in particular makes a large impact on Beth. Mrs. Irving is a Jewish woman who retired to Lake Plata with her husband three weeks before he had a stroke. This has left Mrs. Irving alone with no friends nearby, a situation that is similar to the one Beth finds herself in. Mrs. Irving reminds Beth of the cop wives she knew in Brooklyn and their judgmental ways, while at the same time they all seemed to be harboring the same secrets Beth was hiding. Beth is beginning to get some distance from her situation, to see things she might not have seen before. It is a perspective that is making it easier for Beth to find the good in Frannie's life, a good that helps her see that her past was not all in vain. As for Mrs. Irving, her impact on Beth suggests that they might become good friends as the plot continues to develop.



# Pages 91-132

## Pages 91-132 Summary

Beth takes Robert to the supermarket to buy the ingredients for a home cooked meal, a meal Frannie learned at the hands of her mother-in-law at the insistence of Bobby. As they walk through the store, Robert asks to go look at the comic books. Beth is hesitant, still afraid someone might recognize them or Bobby might appear from behind a wall somewhere, but she agrees. Beth continues to shop, thinking about Bobby and his temper that she has seen in Robert. Beth wonders about Bobby's relationship with his own father. Bobby's dad died shortly after Frannie and Bobby married. Bobby never talked about him, leaving Frannie convinced they were more alike than Bobby liked to admit. This makes Beth worry that Robert is more like his father than she would like.

Beth runs into Mike Riordan, the athletic teacher and vice principal at Robert's school. Mike suggests to Beth that Robert join the soccer team, suggesting it might give Robert an outlet for his anger. Then Mike asks Beth about buying chicken, making her wonder if he is making a pass at her. Beth politely brushes him off and goes in search of Robert. However, Beth cannot find her son. Beth begins to panic. Mike runs into her again and offers to help. Within a few minutes, Mike is able to establish that the manager threw Robert out of the store because he was not with an adult. Beth rushes outside and finds Robert crying, alone on the pavement. Robert is frightened and humiliated, insisting that he no longer wants to live here.

Beth is frightened and she begins to second guess her decision to leave Bobby. Robert begins having nightmares. Over time, the nightmares stop and Robert begins pulling away, insisting he is too old for the books his mother wants to read to him and the nickname she has called him since infancy. Beth continues to follow Robert's bus to school, meeting with Cindy out in the parking lot. On the days Cindy cannot take Beth home for coffee, she begins to run. At first Beth ran through her neighborhood, but becomes frightened of a stranger who seems to take interest in her. Instead, Beth begins running at the track at the school. After a time, Mike begins to join her. Beth enjoys Mike's company and feels safe in his company. It reminds Beth of a friendship she shared with a doctor at the hospital where Frannie was a nurse.

At the same time, Mike begins asking Beth to go along on soccer games to help watch the kids. During these trips, Beth and Mike have the opportunity to get to know each other better. Beth likes the gentle way Mike has with the kids and soon finds herself thinking of him as Mike, rather as Mr. Riordan. About this same time, Robert begins to get into fights at school. Mike suggests he see a counselor to help with his temper, but Beth refuses, afraid Robert would tell the counselor the truth and lead Bobby to them.



## Pages 91-132 Analysis

Robert is thrown out of a supermarket, causing him to feel out of control and angry with the world. This brings on nightmares and a deep sense of homesickness that Beth can do nothing to soothe for her child. Robert's unhappiness manifests itself in anger, causing trouble at school. Mike wants Robert to visit with the school counselor, but Beth outright refuses, afraid this will lead to the school officials learning the truth about their situation. Beth is still deeply afraid Bobby will find them.

However, even as Beth worries about Bobby finding them, she begins to feel at home in her new identity and her new life. Beth grows closer to Cindy and begins to befriend Mike Riordan. Beth and Mike run together in the mornings and Mike asks Beth to help out with soccer trips. Beth feels safe with Mike and likes the gentleness he shows with the children. Mike is nothing like Bobby, not the charming bad boy Frannie had been attracted to. However, Mike makes Beth feel safe, as though she can really hide safely from Bobby for the rest of her life. It is a sense of safety that could be dangerous for Beth, especially since her son is consumed with the exact opposite set of emotions.



# Pages 133-163

## Pages 133-163 Summary

Beth Crenshaw celebrates her birthday nearly two weeks after Frannie Benedetto's birthday. Cindy takes Beth to have her hair and nails done. As they sit in the salon, they overhear an argument between a bride and her mother, both relating to the situation. Cindy then teases Beth about Mike Riordan. Cindy suggests that Mike has a crush on Beth, but Beth shrugs off the idea, not quite ready to even consider a relationship with a man. Back at Cindy's house, Cindy offers to do Beth's makeup. As they work, Beth asks Cindy why she feels the need to always do her makeup. Cindy explains that she grew up on a farm and had nightmares of always having dirt embedded in her skin. In return, Beth tells Cindy how she raised her baby sister and gave up opportunities to make a better life for herself in order to allow her sister to have everything she wanted. In telling this story, Beth refers to herself as Frannie, a mistake Cindy calls her out on. Beth covers by saying that Frannie was a nickname.

Beth and Robert plan to have Thanksgiving dinner with Cindy and her family, but learn at the last minute that Cindy's father-in-law suffered a stroke and they have to make an emergency trip to visit him. Beth assures Cindy that she and Robert will spend the day with their neighbors, the Castros, but the Castros are in Orlando visiting cousins. Beth tells Robert she will take him to a restaurant for dinner. The idea reminds Beth of a time when Frannie was supposed to have Thanksgiving with Bobby and his mother, allowing her family to leave her home alone while they went to spend the holiday with relatives, but then Bobby cancelled because his mother could not handle the idea of having a stranger in their home on Thanksgiving Day.

Beth and Robert go to a local dinner and have a traditional meal. Robert asks questions about Bobby and Beth answers them honestly, remembering how brave he had been. What Beth does not tell Robert, however, are the private moments after those great memories in which Bobby beat or belittled Frannie. As Beth tells Robert how much she once loved his father, Robert makes the statement that Bobby often hit her. It is the first time Robert has ever said this. Robert wonders aloud if Bobby did this because of things Frannie did wrong. Beth tries to explain it in a way that lays the blame on Bobby without making him a monster, but it is a difficult thing to do.

After dinner, Beth and Robert go to the Levitt home to bring Mrs. Levitt dinner. Later they paste sports photos from magazines on Robert's closet door. Finally, when Robert goes to bed, Beth finds herself thinking about Grace. It was always a tradition of Grace and Frannie's to talk about the cast of characters Grace, a college professor, would have in her home for dinner. Beth cannot resist temptation and for a short time slips back into the past and calls her sister. Frannie and Grace talk for a long time. Grace tells Frannie how Bobby has been to her home several times looking for his wife and child. Frannie asks if Bobby hurt her, but Grace lies and says he did not. However, Frannie can hear the fear and hurt in her little sister's voice. Grace apologizes for never



seeing the abuse until it was too late, but Frannie refuses to accept her apology, insisting that it was no one's fault but her own. Finally, Frannie asks Grace to tell her Thanksgiving story as she always had in the past.

## Pages 133-163 Analysis

Cindy and Beth have grown closer. Cindy takes Beth out to have her hair done, and reveals how convinced she is that Mike has a crush on Beth. This opens a door for Beth that she is not quite ready to open, a relationship with a man. In fact, Beth gives the impression that she is never going to be ready to trust a man enough to enter a new relationship. At the same time, Beth and Cindy get to know each other a little better by revealing some secrets that drive each woman. Cindy admits to not wanting to live on the dirty farm where she was raised, or to live a life like her mother's. At the same time, Beth reveals how she made choices to not further her education in favor of allowing her sister all the opportunities she could have had and refused. This reveals to both Cindy and the reader that Frannie blames herself for ending up the wife of an abusive cop. Beth also accidentally refers to herself as Frannie, allowing Cindy some insight into her enigmatic new friend and perhaps allowing her to opportunity to guess why Beth seems so uncomfortable in her own skin.

Frannie and Robert spend a quiet Thanksgiving together after Cindy and her family are called out of town on an emergency. This time alone allows Robert to ask multiple questions about their current situation, including exploring the abuse that took place in his childhood home and was then covered with lies. The reader and Frannie both realize that Robert understands what is going on, but he is having trouble associating the father he adores with the man who abused and hurt his mother. This suggests that Robert will continue to be confused about this situation and wonder if his mother has not continued to lie to him to make him dislike his own father.

Finally, Frannie calls her sister in New York out of a sense of loneliness. Rather than go to a pay phone like Patty Bancroft does each time she calls Frannie, Frannie calls from her home. The connection is emotionally satisfying to both women and reveals to the reader what lengths Bobby will go to to find his wife and son. However, this revelation also leaves the reader wondering if Bobby, as a cop, will not find some way to discover this call and use it to trace Frannie's whereabouts.



# Pages 164-190

## Pages 164-190 Summary

Beth is having trouble sleeping and Cindy notices. This leads to a discussion not only about dating and sex, but about Beth's past. Only it is not Beth's past, but Frannie's that is discussed, with a few of the details changed. Cindy tells Beth about her own past as well, talking about how her mother was also an Avon salesperson in their small farming community. Cindy talks about how important it was to her to marry a man who would take her off the farm and how her current husband's plan to create his own pool company was one of the main reasons she married him. This makes Beth think about her own marriage, her home. It was the house that Beth believes Frannie had so much trouble leaving. Frannie had never had a home of her own. As a child, Frannie's family would move every year or so. However, marriage to Bobby gave Frannie a respectable home in a good neighborhood, a home she decorated herself, a place that was a huge part of who she was.

Frannie recalls the days after Bobby broke her nose. Frannie finally left him, taking Robert and running to her sister's apartment. However, Bobby found them immediately and used his badge to get past the security guard. It was a wake-up call, a realization that Frannie could never leave Bobby on her own without him using his power as a cop to track her down. It was then Frannie knew she would have to ask Patty Bancroft for help. Frannie went home, but she began making plans. Now Beth wonders if she left because of Bobby, because she knew without a doubt that night that he would one day kill her and there was nothing she could do. On the other hand, Beth wonders if it was the look on Robert's face during that ride home, the blankness in his eyes despite the fact that the truth was staring him in the face. Too many lies had been told.

Beth and Robert have Christmas dinner with the Roerbackers. Arriving at the Roerbacker home and finding Cindy's parents there reminds Beth of Christmases when her name was Fran. They always had Christmas Eve at her mother-in-law's, but Christmas was all about family. Robert seems to remember this too, because he is unhappy about everything to do with this Christmas. Beth helps Cindy in the kitchen and witnesses the tension in the relationship between Cindy and her mother. Beth also learns that Mike has been invited to join them for dinner, making her think Cindy is attempting to play matchmaker. Dinner is a tense affair as Cindy's father continuously insists that Cindy cannot cook even as he eats seconds and thirds.

After dinner, Mike drives Beth and Robert home. Robert is in a much better mood, happy with the time he spent with Cindy's two young children. Beth talks with Mike about the rude behavior of Cindy's parents toward their only child. Mike tells Beth how Cindy once had a twin. The girl was killed when she went out to call her father for dinner and he ran over her with the tractor. Back at Beth and Robert's, Beth gives Mike a jacket to wear when they run. Mike accepts the gift, but seems puzzled by it. Beth puts Robert to bed. Alone in the kitchen, Beth wants to call Grace, but she does not. Beth has



already been warned against these phone calls after Patty Bancroft found the Thanksgiving call on the phone bill. Instead, Beth calls Mrs. Levitt and wishes her a Merry Christmas. Beth then calls Cindy before going to bed herself. The following morning, Mike brings over his gifts for Beth and Robert. It turns out Mike bought the same running jacket for Beth.

## Pages 164-190 Analysis

The reader finally learns some of the details associated with the reasons why Frannie left her husband and became Beth Crenshaw. Frannie suffered a terrible beating, a broken nose and various injuries to her face. Bobby never hit his wife in the face before, making this attack even more frightening. When Frannie makes an attempt to walk away, she suddenly realizes that as a cop, her husband has the power to find her no matter where she goes. Frannie also knows that if she leaves Bobby, he might let her go but he will never allow her to take Robert. All this is most likely information Frannie has known for years, but what really makes an impact on Frannie is the look in her ten-year-old son's face. Frannie can see the lies and the truth becoming jumbled in her son's mind, leaving him confused and angry. Frannie knows she has to leave for her son if for no other reason.

Christmas comes and Beth watches as Cindy's parents treat her with hostility and disrespect. It is then that Beth learns of Cindy's sister and her death at a young age. Suddenly Beth becomes aware that other people have problems like hers, like Frannie's, and realizes perhaps why Cindy has been so drawn to her. At the same time, Beth's relationship with Mike seems to take a new turn when they buy each other the same gift for Christmas. Perhaps Mike is the safe haven Frannie was looking for when she left Bobby, and maybe he is the type of man Beth needs in her life, despite her fears of committing to a man.





# Pages 191-220

## Pages 191-220 Summary

As time passes, Beth finds herself less apprehensive even as she continues to watch for surprises around each corner. At the end of the soccer season, Mike takes the kids on a trip to a carnival with Cindy, Beth, Mr. Castro, and Mr. Illing as chaperones. It is chaos from the moment they arrive, but Beth finds herself relaxing all the rules Bobby always made about these sort of amusements and enjoying the happiness she sees in the children. However, as the children are moving from ride to ride, a car on the Ferris wheel breaks loose. Beth rushes to the aid of the two children injured in the fall, working quickly to ascertain the situation and provide CPR with Mike's help. Mr. Illing videotapes the whole episode, but Beth does not realize this until late that night when she sees herself on the evening news. Beth is frightened by this, but her first concern is Robert, who suddenly breaks into sobs. Back home, the phone is ringing, causing some fear in Beth. However, it is only Mrs. Levitt.

Three days later, Patty Bancroft calls and tells Beth to prepare to be moved. The idea of taking on a new identity and moving away from the life she has created as Beth Crenshaw causes Beth to balk. Beth insists the media attention was not enough to tip Bobby off. Not only does Beth refuse to leave, but she asks Patty Bancroft to allow her to begin paying her own rent and her own phone bills. Beth wants to be on her own, convinced that Bobby will find her no matter where or who she is; therefore, she wants to make a stand here where she has good friends to support her. Patty Bancroft thinks Beth is insane and insists that she is being stupid. Beth accuses Patty of trying to control her life the same way her abusive husband did.

Beth and Mike begin seeing more of one another, a situation that makes Robert hostile toward Mike. Mike takes them to the beach to try to soothe things over with Robert, but it only turns into a day of hostilities and reminds Beth of trips to the beach with Bobby when she was known as Frannie. A short time later, Beth and Mike begin going out on formal dates, visiting restaurants around the area. After one of these dates, Mike takes Beth to his home. They attempt to make love, but Beth suddenly reverts to Frannie, to the woman who was raped multiple times by her abusive husband. Mike asks Beth to tell him what is happening, what she is thinking, but she refuses, unable to tell him the truth and keep her child safe.

## Pages 191-220 Analysis

Frannie is a trained nurse; therefore, when Beth sees two children injured, she instinctively rushes to help them. This causes Beth to be hailed a hero on television, compromising her ability to remain safe as Beth Crenshaw. However, Beth is happy in her life, happy with Mike and in her friendship with Cindy. Beth refuses to leave when Patty Bancroft insists it is the only way to keep her safe. Beth has taken the safety of



herself and her son in her own hands despite the warnings Patty Bancroft gives her. Patty Bancroft has worked with many abused women and knows the patterns, knows the lengths men will go to to find their family members. However, Beth refuses to listen to her because she feels as though Patty is trying to control her life the same way Bobby did. Beth's decisions seems dangerous to the reader and could possibly foreshadow a confrontation between her and Bobby that will not end well. At the same time, Beth is growing closer to Mike, allowing him to court her. Their first sexual experience is not a good one, but the reader suspects this will not change Beth's mind about remaining in Florida. This is simply an example of the horror Bobby put Frannie through in their marriage.



# Pages 221-249

## Pages 221-249 Summary

Robert has a sleepover, so Beth keeps to herself in the bedroom most of the night. It is the first sleepover Robert has ever had because of the tensions and the possibility of violence in his childhood home. As Beth lies in bed reading, she hears someone at the living room windows. It turns out to be some girls, come to tease the boys with water balloons. Beth chases them off. The next morning, the boys go to an all-day basketball camp. Beth plans to go back to bed, but Mrs. Levitt calls. Mr. Levitt died during the night and Mrs. Levitt needs Beth's help. Mrs. Levitt has been with the dead body so long, however, that her grief is spent and she has Beth bring her some food. As they wait for the funeral home to come, Mrs. Levitt tells Beth how she met her husband when his American military squad liberated her concentration camp. During her time at the concentration camp, Mrs. Levitt suffered horrible medical experiments, so she was never able to give her husband children. However, they had a happy marriage for more than forty years.

Beth becomes upset when she learns that Robert must do a family tree for his class. Beth complains to Mike, but he promises her it will all turn out okay. That same week Beth takes Robert with her to visit Mrs. Levitt, who has now become one of her patients because of high blood pressure. On the television, they learn that several police officers in New York were killed. Beth lies to Mrs. Levitt, telling her they have friends in the police department there, as they anxiously wait to learn the names of the victims. Both Beth and Robert are relieved when they learn Bobby is not among the dead. That week, Robert creates a family tree that is as close to the truth as possible, only with a few names changed. Beth is happy with Robert's sudden apparent understanding of their situation.

Robert comes home one afternoon with a black eye. Beth learns that Robert got into a fight when a boy called Bennie names because of his nationality and his mother's inability to speak English. The fight began verbally in class and escalated to violence at the bus stop. Beth explains to Robert why some people think badly of people who are different. However, this explanation causes Robert to remember hearing his father make fun of the same people and confuses him with the idea that his father could be the same sort of bigot as this school bully. Robert goes into his bedroom and falls asleep, sleeping through bed time. Beth goes to bed only to be awoken a few hours later by voices downstairs. Beth goes into the kitchen and finds Robert on the phone with his father. Beth hangs the phone up and sends Robert back to bed. The following day, Beth goes to Mike and tells him the truth about Frannie and her past.



## Pages 221-249 Analysis

Mr. Levitt dies and Beth learns the story of his courtship with his wife, Mrs. Levitt. Beth thinks about how Mrs. Levitt suffered in the concentration camp and how her suffering is not a secret. Beth compares Mrs. Levitt's experiences with her own and suddenly feels somehow ashamed of the secrets she has kept and the victim status she has lived with in secret all these years. The story seems to give Beth strength, to make her more determined than ever to not be a victim.

Robert gets into a fight in school over bigoted comments from one student against Bennie. This leaves Robert confused, unsure what is bigotry and what his father meant when he made similar statements. Robert becomes frustrated and he argues with his mother over her awkward attempts to explain. Later, Robert calls his father. Beth is frightened by this, convinced this call will be the one to bring Bobby to them. However, instead of leaving, Beth turns to Mike Riordan. This act suggests to the reader that Beth knows she is about to be found, but her feelings for Mike are so deep that she refuses to walk away from him, but instead trusts him to protect her from Bobby.



## Pages 250-293

### Pages 250-293 Summary

Cindy is expecting twins, so Beth and Mike are throwing her a baby shower. On the way they talk about Robert, whom Beth has been concerned for in the two weeks since his call to Bobby. Beth is also concerned about her sister, Grace. Beth has called her multiple times in the last few weeks, but Grace never answers. Beth worries about her friends and her patients, too. Cindy's pregnancy reminds Beth of the week before Frannie left Bobby. Frannie was pregnant and she had an abortion, aware that she could not handle a pregnancy and run away at the same time. Beth tells this to Mike on the drive home after the highly successful baby shower. However, Mike tells Beth that if she is trying to scare him away, it is not going to work.

In the middle of the night, home alone because Robert is camping with the Castros, Beth smells smoke. Beth goes downstairs and finds Bobby sitting on the couch. Bobby got into the house through a window that was not properly secured. They talk for a few minutes. Bobby tells Beth, who has reverted into the past and become Frannie again, how he found her with a caller ID machine. Bobby then accuses Frannie of abandoning him even though she was the only woman he ever loved. Frannie tells Bobby she always loved him, too. Bobby attacks her, choking her with his bare hands.

Beth has a daughter now, a two year old who is precocious and has flaming red hair like a woman named Fran Benedetto once had. Mike found Frannie on the floor that day, bruised and unconscious, but alive. Robert was gone, however. Beth will never know if Robert saw his mother collapsed on the floor, if he believes her to be dead. All she knows is that Robert came home from his camping trip and ran home only to disappear. Beth thinks about Robert all the time. Beth searched for him at first, even confronting Bobby Benedetto's mother, but Bobby and Robert have disappeared. Time passed. Beth reconnected with Frannie Benedetto's family, but chose to continue living as Beth Crenshaw. In time, Beth and Mike reconnected and married, conceiving their daughter in the first weeks of their marriage. Beth has a new life now, a good life, but she will never forget her son. Beth prays Robert had enough time with her to see the truth, to become a man different from his father. However, if he grows up to be just like Bobby, Beth knows she will love him anyway, that she will pity her son, not any woman he might beat. Just like Ann Benedetto, Beth knows Robert is her boy and nothing can change how she feels about him.

### Pages 250-293 Analysis

Mike and Beth appear to be making progress with one another until Bobby suddenly shows up. The reader knows that Beth has expected this moment from the very beginning, but the sudden violence of Bobby's appearance is something of a shock to

the reader. It is also a shock when Bobby disappears with Robert, but he leaves Beth alive.

Beth moves on with her life, creating a family with Mike that is the warm, happy family she had always wanted when she was Frannie Benedetto. However, Beth lives with the guilt that she forced this situation, that she left Bobby and created a situation in which he was able to steal her little boy away. Beth wanted to protect Robert. Instead, Beth left Robert to the mercy of his abusive father. Beth once said it was only for Robert that she could find the strength to leave Bobby. However, Beth has found a life for herself that is everything she has always wanted. In the end, it was about Beth.



# Characters

## Elizabeth 'Beth' Crenshaw

Beth Crenshaw is the first person narrator of the story. Beth is a woman who reinvented herself in middle age, starting over in a small Florida town after living her entire life in New York City and its boroughs. Beth was once a nurse, but now she is a nursing assistant, going to people's homes to care for the ill who can live alone but need the occasional bit of help. Beth enjoys her work, although it is less challenging than what it was before. Beth refuses to look back, she instead focuses on the future. Beth is afraid, but she knows that she is strong enough to keep herself safe.

Beth has a son, Robert, for whom she builds her life. Beth wants her son to have a chance to have a normal life. Beth worries about the anger she sees in her son, but she hopes he will work it out in their new, safe life. However, Beth falls in love with a good man who does not excite her like her ex-husband, but who makes her feel safe. Beth makes the choice to stop running in order to be near this new man, this man she trusts. This decision proves to be a near fatal one, but Beth holds on and survives. Beth makes a new life for herself, shedding her past and forgetting the scared woman she was once.

## Frances Ann Flynn Benedetto

Frances Ann Flynn Benedetto is the woman Beth Crenshaw once was. Frannie is a young woman who raised her own sister because of the medical disability her father suffered and the multiple jobs her mother had to keep in order to provide for the family. Frannie makes sacrifices, giving up dreams of college and a life outside of her small world in order to help her sister's dreams come true. Frannie marries the first man she ever loved, a magnetic man who charms everyone he meets and who makes Frannie feel like the only woman in the world.

Even before they are married, Frannie suffers abuse at the hands of her love, Bobby Benedetto. Frannie marries him and finds happiness for a while. However, Bobby's abuse only escalates over time. Frannie gives birth to a son and decides she cannot leave her husband for the child's sake. There is also the house and family, an entire life that Frannie is afraid to walk away from. However, Bobby's abuse escalates to the point where Frannie realizes he will one day kill her. Frannie finally finds the courage to walk away, taking her small son with her, and becoming Beth Crenshaw.

## Robert Benedetto Crenshaw

Robert Benedetto is Frannie and Bobby's ten-year-old son. Robert has lived with violence in his home his entire life. Frannie and Bobby never fight in front of Robert, but Frannie knows that Robert can hear the noise of their fights in the night. In the mornings, Robert sees the bruises on his mother's body and accepts her lies that these



bruises were caused by accidents and falls. However, when Bobby breaks Frannie's nose, she can no longer convince the child that these are only accidents.

When Frannie runs from Bobby, she takes Robert with her. Robert is confused and unhappy in his new life. Robert does not know what is the truth and what is only more lies. When time passes and it becomes clear that he will never see his father again, Robert begins to become even more confused. One night Robert calls his father and listens to his lies, to his father denying ever hitting Frannie. This call causes Bobby to be able to find his family and to steal Robert away.

## **Bobby Benedetto**

Bobby Benedetto is a police officer in Brooklyn, New York. Bobby has loved Frannie Flynn since they were both teenagers. Bobby married Frannie and tries to make a good life with her. However, Bobby has a temper and he is deeply jealous. Whenever Frannie looks at another man or speaks to another man, Bobby uses it as an excuse to beat her. When Bobby has a bad day, he beats his wife. When Bobby is unhappy, tired, or angry, he beats his wife. In time, Frannie can no longer put up with the abuse and leaves Bobby. Bobby uses all his resources in the police department to find his wife and steal back his son, the only thing he ever truly cared for.

## **Grace Flynn**

Grace Flynn is Frannie Benedetto's sister. Grace is several years younger than Frannie, so it was Frannie's responsibility to take care of Grace when they were children. Due to many of the sacrifices Frannie made, Grace is able to get a college education and become a college professor. When Frannie runs away from Bobby, Bobby turns to Grace in hopes of finding his wife. Grace, who knew nothing of the abuse until she saw Frannie's broken nose, refuses to help Bobby find her. Bobby threatens Grace, possibly even beating her, but Grace continues to refuse to help him find Frannie. Grace feels as though it is her responsibility to help her sister after missing all the signs of abuse in the past. In the end, Beth and Grace reconnect, but Beth remains in Florida at a distance from her old life.

## **Mike Riordan**

Mike Riordan is the gym teacher and vice principal of the school in Lake Plata where Robert attends. Mike is a large man, but he is kind and gentle. Mike helps Robert out, encouraging him to join the sports teams as a way of working out his anger. Over time, Mike and Beth become friendly and eventually lovers. However, Beth cannot allow herself to be intimate with Mike because of the abuse suffered at Bobby's hands. In the end, Beth tells Mike the truth about her past, but she pushes him away, afraid to trust again. Mike waits and eventually they marry, having a child of their own together. Mike becomes the lover and partner Frannie always wanted Bobby to be, and the man Beth finds herself wondering if she deserves.





## Cindy Roerbacker

Cindy is a southern daughter of a farmer and his wife. When Cindy was a child, her sister was killed in a farming accident and Cindy has lived with the guilt that it should have been her. Cindy's parents also seem to feel this way because they treat their daughter with cruel indifference and frequent criticism. Cindy befriends Beth when they meet at their children's school. Cindy sees the pain in Beth and her friendship somehow helps Beth deal with everything she has lost and been forced to leave behind in her previous life.

## Patty Bancroft

Patty Bancroft is a woman who runs a secret organization whose main goal is to help women escape from the men who abuse them. Patty Bancroft claims to have been abused brutally once as a young woman, but Beth Crenshaw finds this difficult to believe. In fact, Beth finds herself convinced that Patty Bancroft is an abuser in her own way, hiding behind the charity she provides for women in need. If not for Patty Bancroft, Beth Crenshaw might never have come into existence. However, Patty Bancroft wants to control Beth Crenshaw, to force her to move on when she is happy and to keep her from contacting people in her former life. For these reasons, Beth Crenshaw cuts Patty Bancroft out of her life and tries to survive on her own, losing her son in the process.

## Bennie Castro

Bennie Castro is the young son of a large Cuban family who live in the same apartment complex as Beth Crenshaw and her son, Robert. Bennie becomes good friends with Robert, helping him get past the difficult aspects of beginning a new life in a new place. However, friendship with Bennie causes Robert some moral confusion when he hears people making fun of Bennie because of his racial persuasion. Robert recalls his father making fun of Cubans just like the boy at school. When Beth cannot clearly satisfy Robert's questions, Robert calls home to speak with his father. This phone call allows Bobby to find his wife and child.

## Ann Benedetto

Ann Benedetto is Bobby Benedetto's mother. Ann is very unpleasant to Bobby's wife, unwilling to accept that she must share her only child with another woman. Over the years, Frannie lives with being second best to Ann in Bobby's eyes. Once, Frannie asks Ann if she was ever beaten by her husband. Although Ann does not answer the question, Frannie can see the truth in her reaction. This truth is also apparent in Ann's refusal to believe that Bobby has done nothing wrong even after he leaves Beth Crenshaw for dead and disappears with his son. It is a reaction that is ironically similar to the one Beth has at the thought of her own son growing up to be a wife beater.



## Objects/Places

### Broken Nose

It is when Bobby breaks Frannie's nose during a fight that Frannie decides it is time to leave her husband before he kills her.

### Family Pictures

Frannie Benedetto mails all the family pictures to her sister, Grace, before she leaves New York in order to prevent her husband from using them to find her and her son.

### Yankees Season Calendar

Beth Crenshaw wonders if it would make people suspicious if she hung a Yankees Season Calendar in her son's room like the one he had at home in Brooklyn.

### One Fish, Two Fish, Red Fish, Blue Fish

When Robert was little, Frannie would read him the book *One Fish, Two Fish, Red Fish, Blue Fish* by Dr. Seuss. When Beth and Robert befriend the Roerbacker family, Robert continues the tradition by reading the book to the Roerbacker's young son.

### Phone Bill

Beth Crenshaw calls Grace Flynn on Thanksgiving in a moment of weakness, causing Ms. Bancroft to chastise her for placing herself in danger of being found by Bobby Benedetto when she sees the phone bill.

### Caller ID

Bobby finds Frannie and Robert when Robert calls his father. Bobby has a caller ID box, a relatively new technology at the time, that gives him the number from which Robert called. As a cop, Bobby uses his connections to locate Frannie and Robert with this phone number.

### Furniture

Cindy Roerbacker gives Beth Crenshaw cast off furniture from her mother-in-law's house to furnish her small duplex.



## **Bus and Train**

Frannie and Robert Benedetto take a train and then a bus to Florida when Frannie attempts to escape from her husband, Bobby.

## **Benedetto House**

In New York, Frannie Benedetto had a middle-class house in Brooklyn, just a few blocks from the bay.

## **St. Stannie's**

Frannie and Bobby were married in St. Stanislaus Church in Brooklyn. Bobby calls it St. Stannie's and this is how Frannie has always thought of it.

## **Poinsettia Way**

Beth and Robert Crenshaw live in a small duplex on Poinsettia Way in Lake Plata, Florida.

## **Lake Plata, Florida**

Frannie and her son, Robert, run away from her abusive husband to a small town in Florida called Lake Plata.



# Themes

## Domestic Abuse

Frannie Benedetto is married to the man of her dreams. Young and idealistic, Frannie fell in love with the first man who showed her any affection, confusing moments of violence with passion. However, after they wed and Bobby's abuse became more frequent, Frannie began to make excuses. Frannie believed it was her fault, believed that if she behaved a little better or worked harder to be the perfect wife, the beatings would stop. Frannie is a smart woman, however, and she eventually came to the conclusion it would never stop no matter how good she was.

Frannie begins making casual plans to leave. At first she felt she had to wait until her son was a little older. Frannie then believed she could not leave during the holidays or before summer vacation. Frannie is scared, afraid that being on her own will force her to leave behind all she has and all she has worked for. Frannie is also afraid her husband, a cop, will find her. Therefore, Frannie stays and she suffers through rapes and beatings that take place randomly and frequently. As a nurse, Frannie sees women in the ER who have been beaten and she finds herself feeling like a hypocrite, unable to counsel them when she will not follow her own advice.

One night, Bobby breaks Frannie's nose and leaves her face badly beaten. Frannie cannot go to work for fear someone will know what has happened to her. At the same time, Frannie realizes that Bobby's violence is only escalating and eventually he will kill her. Frannie turns to a woman who came to the hospital to offer her services to domestic abuse victims, escaping from her husband to protect her little boy. Unfortunately, the violence follows Frannie and her son is taken away. This leaves Frannie wondering if she was not selfish in leaving her husband and causing the situation that allowed her husband to disappear with their son.

## Parental Roles

Bobby and Frannie Benedetto are good parents. Both want what is best for their young son. However, Bobby is an abusive husband, leaving Frannie desperate to protect her son from becoming a man just like his father. Frannie runs away with Robert, changes her name, and convinces her son that his father hurt her, a situation she had to escape from. Unfortunately, the son never saw his father hurt his mother and he believed her when she said it was an accident every time she showed up with bruises. Robert becomes confused, unsure why his mother would not allow him to see his father. Robert calls his father, allowing Bobby the means by which to locate his family and kidnap his son.

Bobby believes he is a good father. Bobby loves Robert and protects him from harm as any good father should do. However, Bobby beats his wife and he speaks cruelly of



people from different cultures, such as Cubans and Mexicans who get in trouble with the law. This teaches Robert how to be cruel just like his father. When Frannie takes Robert away, she teaches him to accept all people, to be kind. Frannie wants her son to grow up to feel safe, to be a good person. However, Frannie quickly discovers that she cannot undo the lies and hatred that were such a big part of Robert's life for the first ten years of his life.

After Robert disappears with Bobby, Frannie often thinks about the things she has done and wonders if she made the right choices. Frannie knows that Robert will most likely end up like his father, but Frannie admits to herself that is not the woman Robert would harm she would have the most pity for, but for her son. Frannie aches for the pain that has become her son's life in his father's care and the future he will have to face. Frannie knows she left Bobby too late for Robert and that she did not fight hard enough to protect her son. However, Frannie has a new child, a little girl, and this is a second chance she hopes can rectify some of the mistakes she made in the past.

## Honesty

Robert is ten years old and he adores his father. However, Robert is aware that his mother often has bruises that her excuses of an accident do not always explain. Robert hears his parents arguing, sees the bruises, and tries to understand what he knows are lies his parents tell him. Suddenly Robert's mother takes him from the only home he has ever known and tells him that his father is cruel, that he broke his mother's nose. After all the lies, Robert is not sure he can believe his mother's stories.

Robert begins to question everything around him. Robert expresses his confusion in anger, getting into a fist fight with a boy from school. Frannie becomes concerned that Robert needs help, that he cannot work out the confusion of his childhood alone. However, she cannot get him help as long as she is running from the man who created this unfortunate situation. Therefore, Frannie continues to lie to her child when necessary and confusing him with the truth. Robert turns to the only person he believes he can trust, his father. However, this turn causes Bobby to locate his family and to steal Robert away, placing him back into the violent household his mother has tried to help him escape. It is honesty after all the lies that caused Frannie's downfall, making honesty a theme of the novel.

# Style

## Point of View

The novel is written in the first person point of view. The narrator is Beth Crenshaw, a woman who was once known as Frannie Benedetto, an abused woman who ran from her husband in an attempt to find a safe and honest home for her son, Robert. It is important that the reader distinguish between the two separate women, Beth Crenshaw and Frannie Benedetto. Beth stops referring to herself as Frannie after she leaves Brooklyn, at first because a new name is important to her safety, but later because she has become a different person, a woman who is strong and independent, a woman who will no longer allow herself to be a victim.

The point of view of this novel is important because the novel is written in a diary type of format, a format that shows the reader how personal this story is and how important it is for the writer to tell it. If the author had chosen a different point of view, the intimacy of the novel would be lost and the private thoughts of the main character would not have the same impact as they do in this point of view and this format. The character grows and changes as the novel's plot develops, showing the reader how Frannie Benedetto became Beth Crenshaw, a transformation that is the most important aspect of this character driven story.

## Setting

The novel begins in Brooklyn, New York, where Frannie Benedetto made her life with her husband, Bobby. In Brooklyn, Frannie worked as a nurse and she had a nice, middle-class home near the bay. However, when Frannie runs away from her husband because of his abuse, she finds herself in Lake Plata, Florida. Lake Plata is several hours from the beach, a small town that is hot and dusty, as different from Brooklyn as a person can get. In Lake Plata, Beth Crenshaw and her son have a small duplex that is a quarter of the size of the house they once lived in in Brooklyn. This new home is a shock to both Beth and her son, but they make it a home with the few belongings they were allowed to bring.

The settings in this novel contrast with each other, showing the reader everything Frannie has given up to protect herself and her son from her husband, Bobby. This contrast makes the second setting, Lake Plata, appear to be the less desired setting. However, as the plot develops, the reader learns that the physical setting of Lake Plata is better than the comparative middle-class luxury of Brooklyn because there is no violence, no lies, and no fear in Lake Plata for Frannie and her son. Lake Plata is a safe haven for a woman who is the victim of domestic violence, changing the perception of the reader of these settings. In this way, the settings compliment the plot and its themes.



## Language and Meaning

The language of the novel is simple English. The novel contains few foreign phrases and the rare technical word that a reader might or might not comprehend. Most of the language in the novel is simple enough for the youngest reader to understand. The dialogue often reflects the education of the characters. Frannie/Beth is moderately educated, filling her dialogue with proper grammar and only the occasional example of slang. Grace's language is a little more formal because Grace has a more formal education, but Cindy's language tends to include more slang because she is less formally educated and grew up in the south where language tends to favor clichés and slang.

The language of the novel illustrates the backgrounds of the characters fairly well. The characters differ in the amount of education and regional backgrounds, but the author manages to show these differences in her characters fairly well. The language is simple, direct, and it contains few words or phrases that might confuse a potential reader. The language both supports the characters and tells a direct, if somewhat complicated story, making it the perfect choice for this novel and this plot.

## Structure

The novel is divided into multiple chapters, but these chapters do not have a name or a number to distinguish them from one another. The overall format of the novel is something like a diary in which someone is telling themselves or perspective readers about the events in her life. This format promotes something of an authorial voice as the writer makes comments on these events and their impact on her life then and now. This format is supported by a writing style dependent on exposition with only a few examples of direct dialogue shared through the memory of the main character with her reader.

The novel begins after Beth Crenshaw has abandoned her husband and sought refuge in a tiny town in Florida. However, the writer takes the reader back to her life in Brooklyn, New York where she lived with her abusive husband and little boy. The author moves back and forth through time in this novel, telling only portions of the main character's past as it becomes relevant in the storyline. The novel includes one main plot with several supporting subplots. Each of these plots comes to a conclusion at the end of the novel, even though some portions of the story remain unresolved.



## Quotes

"The first time my husband hit me I was nineteen years old." p. 3

"But Beth Crenshaw I would create myself, without reference to Bobby." p. 18

"Maybe that was why I'd avoided mirrors for the past couple of years, because it was so strange to me to see the look on my face, alert and oddly empty all at the same time, like the face of a blind person moving around a dangerous corridor, her arms outstretched." p. 35

"Maybe when you were a kid you were so unsure of yourself that every school year was a time of reinvention; maybe only adults were stupid enough to think they knew exactly who they were."  
p. 47

"Direct conversation had never been the way to engage Robert; I had always had to wait through the silences for his words to swim up at me." p. 59

"All dead, all three of them, even though they left, even though they tried to break away. They were the ones who wound up broken." p. 73

"Just her and Irving, forty-eight years and counting." p. 90

"It was like those times years ago when I went to police funerals with Bobby, and felt, as the sound of Taps floated over the cemetery, as though I was rehearsing the agony of losing him."  
p. 109

"We had a good time, the rest of that desultory day. I know, because I read about it later in Robert's composition, which made it seem real to me, so real that I put the composition in my bedside drawer after it came home from school." p. 157

"I was less fearful, but not foolhardy." p. 191

"The beach was Bobby to me." p. 211

"Everyone says that, that I did the right thing, that I shouldn't look back, that I had no choice. Maybe they're right. I still don't know." p. 293





## Topics for Discussion

Who is Frances Flynn Benedetto? Why did she marry Bobby Benedetto? Did Frannie ever love Bobby? Why did Frannie not recognize the signs of domestic abuse the first time Bobby left bruises on her arm? Why did Frannie not leave Bobby in the early years of their marriage before the birth of her son? Why did Frannie remain with Bobby for so long after the birth of her child? Was Frannie in any way responsible for the abuse Bobby perpetrated against her? Explain.

Who is Beth Crenshaw? Where did this name come from? For what purpose did she take the name Beth? Why does Beth continue to use this name even after her husband has disappeared with her child? Why does Beth continue to dye her hair? What does Beth represent for Frannie Benedetto?

Who is Mike Riordan? Why is Beth hesitant to trust Mike? Why does Beth have a hard time the first time she is intimate with Mike? Why does Beth refuse to tell Mike the truth about her ex-husband? What causes Beth to finally trust Mike? How long does Mike wait for Beth to accept his affection for her? Why? Why does Mike try to help find Robert after he disappears? Is he successful?

Who is Gracie? Why does Beth call her on Thanksgiving? Why is Beth warned to never call Gracie again? Who threatens Gracie when she refuses to tell where Beth has gone? Why? What does Gracie do about it? How does Gracie feel she let Beth down? Did she? Should Gracie have known sooner what was happening in the Benedetto household? Why did she not know? How did Frannie hide the truth from everyone? Did this really work as well as Frannie thought it did? Explain.

Who is Robert Benedetto/Crenshaw? Why does Robert not question his mother about the frequent accidents that leave her bruised? Does Robert really believe his mother experienced accidents in these incidences? What does Frannie believe Robert hears in the middle of the night? How does Beth believe these noises have caused Robert to become an angry child? What is Beth afraid Robert will do when he is an adult and married to a wife of his own? Will Beth hold these actions against Robert? Why or why not?

Who is Bobby? Why does Bobby beat his wife? Was Bobby abused as a child? Did Bobby experience his father beating his mother? How does the reader know this? Does Bobby love Frannie? Does Bobby want Frannie to come back to him? Why does Bobby hunt Beth and Robert? Why does Bobby leave Beth alive? Did he mean to kill her? Where has Bobby gone with Robert? For what reason? Is Robert's life in danger? How does the reader know this?

Compare and contrast Frannie and Ann Benedetto. Why does Ann dislike Frannie? Why does Ann not see the abuse that is taking place between Frannie and Bobby? Why does Ann refuse to believe that her son would ever do anything of that kind to Frannie? Was Ann abused by her husband? How did this cause her to feel the way she does



about Frannie? Compare Ann's opinion of Frannie with Frannie's insistence that she would not blame her son for abusing his wife. Why would an abused woman feel pity for a son who grows up to be abusive toward his own wife? How does this attitude perpetuate the violence?