

# **The Deep End of the Ocean Study Guide**

**The Deep End of the Ocean by Jacquelyn Mitchard**

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## Plot Summary

This novel by Jacquelyn Mitchard is a wonderfully-told story about a family that endures the worst imaginable crisis—losing a young child. However bleak the outlook may be in such a bad situation, the state of mind of little "Ben's" mother may be even bleaker. A woman who loves her children but is somewhat inattentive, she is thrown into a state of shock and struck dumb by her guilt and devastation when her toddler disappears in the lobby of a hotel.

The woman, Beth Kerry, is an emotionally-reserved woman of Irish descent. She is married to Pat Cappadora, who comes from a tight-knit, loving Italian family. Pat's family is as grief stricken as little Ben's parents and, while Pat is able to express his grief and accept support, Beth's guilt and sorrow-induced anxiety forces her to withdraw even more than usual, and for a very long time. She becomes lost in a vacuum of emotional pain and is no longer involved in family or the rest of the world, but is bitter and angry, barely noticing her growing children.

Little Ben, whose older brother Vincent feels responsible for his loss, also has a baby sister, Kerry. Vincent is particularly damaged from this incident due to his mother's tendency to withhold her love out of a twisted loyalty to his missing brother. Also, his fear that it was his fault and the possibility later that he is recognizing his brother in the neighborhood, contributes to Vincent's confusion and pain. Vincent is extremely intelligent and is a math wizard, but all of his energies tend toward high-risk behaviors due to his inner turmoil.

When a neighbor boy comes to the door looking for work mowing lawns, Beth recognizes him as Ben. What should be a joyous time turns difficult when the Cappadoras realize that Ben has had a different life and does not really know them, nor does he want to live with them. He is close to the man who raised him, and goes back to what he perceives as home. Vincent blames himself for Ben's decision to go and comes dangerously close to self-destruction. Ben admits that he remembers a moment from his early childhood with Vincent that makes him realize he really was part of the Cappadora family.

However, without Ben, the Cappadora family finally begins to fall apart and Beth considers leaving home. Before she does, Ben returns to the Cappadora household late one night with his suitcase. He and Vincent bond as they play basketball. Vincent tells Ben it was his fault Ben got taken when he was three. The two finally go to bed, and Vincent knows that the morning will bring whatever it will, but he will keep watch.



# Chapters 1 and 2

## Chapters 1 and 2 Summary

### Chapter 1

Beth tells her husband she only likes their baby, as she prepares to take their three children along on a trip to Chicago for her high school reunion. Beth deliberately tries to torture her husband, Pat, who manages a family restaurant named Cappadora's. Vincent, the eldest, is unhappy and distanced from his mother. Younger brother Ben in contrast, is an affable, undemanding three year old. The marriage between Pat and Beth is strained, at best, and Beth is apparently not enjoying her roles as wife and mother. Pat is not invited on this trip.

Beth looks forward to getting drunk with her old friends from her high school, called Immaculata, particularly her best childhood friend Ellen and her first love Nick. She is in a childish mood, and has brought her husband's young cousin, Jill, along to watch the children.

Beth is a successful photographer. As she mingles in the hotel lobby with old friends, she learns Cecil Lockhart, an old rival and successful actress, now sports dyed white hair. Beth tells Vincent to take care of Ben while she pays for her room at the desk. However, when she goes to round up her kids she realizes Ben is missing. Everyone begins to look for Ben, but he is gone.

### Chapter 2

The reality that Ben is gone sinks in slowly for Beth, who is too weak to walk. The police arrive and set up a command center, the Illinois Emergency Network is contacted and Beth is shocked at how grave the situation has turned. Now drinking heavily, Beth meets Candy Bliss, the chief detective, who feels Ben is no longer in the hotel. Vincent says Ben had gone to find Ellen because he needed to use the bathroom. Pat arrives at the hotel and demands to see the basement. He shows Vincent some badly-needed affection, and Beth imagines that Ben will communicate with her psychically. Beth vomits in front of the elevators.

## Chapters 1 and 2 Analysis

Mitchard paints a picture of a woman who is quite self-absorbed, and whose concerns for others, even her family, do not come first. She is careless and sloppy. A photographer, she is successful professionally, but in her immediate family causes tension and is unable to show her children or her husband much affection due to a basic insecurity. Her enthusiasm and immaturity about seeing her high school friends and old boyfriend imply that she has not grown up. Pat, on the other hand, is tied in with his family professionally and personally, and is a very kind and patient man. Pat is much



more organized and orderly than Beth, who imagines the trait is genetic in his Italian family. He smokes, probably due to stress, and tolerates this woman who intentionally makes mean remarks, neglects her kids and acts like a spoiled child. However, her strength and her facade drain from her completely when she realizes she has lost her son.

In chapter 2 we experience the horrifying process of realizing a child has gone missing. Beth tries to grasp the reality that this has become a criminal investigation, and that hours are passing with no clues or resolution. Her state of shock is obvious through her clipped answers and her realization that having Ben's fingerprints might be helpful. Her state of stunned helplessness contrasts with Pat's, when he is immediately wanting to do something and get his family involved.



# Chapters 3 and 4

## Chapters 3 and 4 Summary

### Chapter 3

Pat's mother takes charge of taking care of the children. Italian caterers, the Cappadora family brings a tray of dessert for the police, and Beth's Irish father stays in the hotel lobby as police and press mingle about. A major search for Ben is now on, with helicopters and individuals in cars.

Overcome with terror, Beth begins to scream for Ben. A doctor anesthetizes her. When she awakens in a bed with Pat asleep nearby, Beth goes to the lobby, and then out of the hotel, and walks to her old high school. She thinks about Ben's fear of water and of "the deep end of the ocean." Ben thought you could go there, but you could never come back because the footprints would be washed away. Beth lies on the school bleachers and cries. Detective Candy Bliss arrives with one of Ben's shoes in a plastic bag.

### Chapter 4

A neatly tied small shoe found in the hotel lobby is proof that little Ben has not wandered off but has been kidnapped. Beth learns the possibility of a family kidnapping must be eliminated. Beth gets another shot from the doctor. Ellen wants Beth to talk to someone from the press. Ellen tells Beth about people who call to confess to a crime they did not commit.

A local news anchor tries to get an exclusive interview with Beth and Pat, hoping they will present an appeal for Ben's return that will demonstrate their pain and angst. However, Beth can only say that she does not expect someone who could do such a thing will return Ben, but asks the public to be watchful for him and to hurt whomever he is with, if necessary.

## Chapters 3 and 4 Analysis

Clearly, Pat's side of the family is more stable and efficient. They are devastated, but are able to take charge of the situation and do what is necessary and what Beth and Pat are not able to do. Beth's father, however, has a habit of looking elsewhere for help, showing the same lack of confidence we see in Beth.

Beth is in a state of surreal terror over Ben's disappearance and occasionally cannot contain it. Her subdued responses and wild outbursts illustrate the deep state of shock she is in, but when she finally must face the press, it is her rage that surfaces. It is interesting that Candy needs to ask Pat to "touch her" for their televised interview, and even then, Pat puts his arm behind Beth but does not touch her.



# Chapters 5 and 6

## Chapters 5 and 6 Summary

### Chapter 5

Pat and Beth leave the hotel to stay with his parents and their children. Beth becomes extremely withdrawn, barely hearing or seeing what is around her. Friends bring food to the Cappadora home and Wayne Thunder, Beth's friend, comes twice. Charley Rufalo visits the house, and provides Beth with a certain amount of comfort as he subtly assures her that the mafia has found no criminal involvement in Ben's disappearance. Beth's brother Bick arrives and they learn that Ben's shoe was found in the newsstand. When Vincent comes into the room where Beth is sleeping under sedation, she begins to scream, thinking he is Ben. Teresa, or "Tree," Pat's sister, abruptly announces she is pregnant at an awkward moment. Beth takes up smoking cigarettes.

Beth and Pat undergo lie detector tests, and visit a headquarters that friends have set up to organize the search for Ben. Cecil Lockhart has sent her regards; she would like to help but her mother is ill. Cecil has a little boy around Ben's age. Laurie, Beth's close friend, has organized maps and materials for the search and plans to leaflet the area with help of volunteers. Beth tries to pray to the Virgin, but tells Candy she does not believe in God. Candy encourages her to hold on, either to some faith or to her.

### Chapter 6

Laurie is very actively helping with the search for Ben, even trying to get the case on television. A tip comes in about a little boy seen in Minneapolis, and Beth overhears Candy arguing that it would be worth pursuing, since people are beginning to give up on finding Ben. Candy decides to call the FBI. Beth actually laughs over something Candy has said, and Candy admits to Beth she is gay.

Confessors send misleading and strange "evidence" to the police department, claiming responsibility or that Ben is now in a Christian home, and other bizarre claims.

Candy and Beth visit a psychic, Loretta, whom Beth considers to be a nut based on her appearance and lifestyle. Loretta claims she has never been wrong, and she "sees" Ben dreaming in a polished wooden box with a lid on it.

## Chapters 5 and 6 Analysis

Beth is, as would be expected, beyond desperation by this time, finding neither "stimulus nor peace." She is trying to deal with all the people and details, but is in such a tortured state that she finally retreats to her childhood Catholicism for comfort, but finds nothing there either. Candy, the detective, is proving to be a solid and reliable friend to her. The outpouring of community touches and moves Pat, but Beth is too





distraught to appreciate it yet, and feels that the press in the yard seem like they are at an outdoor music concert, and the leaflet volunteers resemble a pep rally. A revealing moment is when Beth sees Laurie and "the others" and thinks that the reunion is now happening, and now she will be able to "act."

Chapter 6 covers some interesting ground. The search is losing steam and the police are losing interest in Ben's case. Candy admits to her insecurities about being gay. The FBI becomes involved. Candy explains to Beth how important it is to have tender moments, and to laugh because these are not going to push Ben any farther away. In Beth's mind, Loretta has "confirmed" that Ben is dead.



# Chapters 7 and 8

## Chapters 7 and 8 Summary

### Chapter 7

Beth and Candy meet for dinner and drinks. Candy does not want Beth to assume Loretta meant Ben is dead. Candy tells of her early years as an officer and the prejudices she has endured. During dinner they learn from a state patrol that a body has been found and needs to be identified. Beth arrives home to face throngs of media people and cameras. Beth chooses to ride to the morgue with her brother instead of Pat. They wait while Bick, Beth's brother, goes to look at the child's body. Bick returns and assures them the dead child is not Ben.

### Chapter 8

Beth arrives at her home and dreads going in. She has become familiar with living at Rosie's, familiar with the camped-out reporters, and spending hours in Candy's office while Candy works. There she feels closest to finding Ben and is able to be herself. Candy tries to convince Beth that there is no tradeoff involved with resuming her life.

Candy shares that she has a close friend whom she has considered marrying in order to have a child. She convinces Beth to go home and be a mother to her other two children, although Beth does not want to be anyone's mother if not Ben's. Beth and Pat finally have intimate relations, although Beth does so from a distance. As she is preparing to leave, Ellen arrives and bames herself for all that has happened.

Finally home, Beth sits in the car until Vincent comes to her and clings, calling her mama, like Ben used to. She finds herself resisting her feelings for him, feeling that if she gives Vincent love she will be cheating on Ben.

## Chapters 7 and 8 Analysis

One of the most difficult things about this kind of loss may be the dashed hopes when a body or clue is found and the family's hopes for closure are high. The media in this story are not even as obnoxious as they might be in real life, but Beth has grown numb to their intrusive hammering.

In Chapter 8, going into her home is a difficult proposition for Beth. Her husband and children want nothing more than to start some kind of normal life, but she is too broken. Her older son, Vincent, who is dealing with his own guilt, wants his mother's approval, love and forgiveness and even begins to call her "mama," like Ben did. However, Beth is afraid to give her love to him, thinking that it would be unfair to Ben. Thus, Vincent is diminished in several ways. Although one can sympathize with her grief, once again

Beth is so focused on her own feelings that she cannot give her children what they need.



# Chapters 9 and 10

## Chapters 9 and 10 Summary

### Chapter 9

Beth has taken to sleeping long hours and is barely taking care of herself, giving the children only cursory attention. She wonders about her sanity, and wants to be "checked out" mentally in order to keep her footing. Beth sees Vincent in Ben's bed and screams, thinking it is Ben. Her friend Laurie finally insists that Beth get up, and takes them both to Compassionate Circle meetings of parents who have lost children. Beth endures the sad stories of others, and finally asks how any of them got to the point they are at. Pat has to get up and leave, overwhelmed by the stories of suffering. However, Beth is finally able to go into her sons' room and look at the sleeping Vincent, who has obviously been fearful lately of "bad guys." She recalls being unsure whether she would love Ben as much as she loved Vincent, and how Ben was the one she never needed to worry about. She whispers to Vincent that she loves him.

### Chapter 10

Vincent is missing his brother and decides to ask Santa to bring Ben for Christmas, hoping that his mother will be normal again if Ben returns. Vincent had gotten lots of attention in Chicago, and had even gotten a piece of bulletproof fabric from Candy, which his grandmother sewed into his Batman shirt. All that kindness made him wonder if Ben was dead and it was being hidden from him.

Now, back at home, he is having trouble sleeping, missing Ben and now afraid of the dark. His biggest fear is that the kidnappers who took Ben might come for him next. He is pretty much on his own at this young age, unaware of what time it is and whether he should be in school. He goes to his friend Alex's house after school until Jill comes because he never knows what state his mother will be in when he gets home. Visits from Laurie are helpful and Jill nurtures him when she is there. His dad gets Stacey, the restaurant cashier, to babysit some nights. Vincent tries to help with Kerry, whose needs are also being neglected. Vincent now answers the phone because his parents get upset over the crank calls, and one in particular talks sick religion to Vincent. Vincent begins to know when the phone rings what kind of call is coming in.

Christmas comes and the Cappadora family comes to Madison. Nobody has put up a Christmas tree, but Beth puts on real clothes for the event, and a friend of Pat's brings a tree. Beth goes into a rage about presents for Ben, saying that no one will accept that this is over. Teresa argues that the family wants to keep hope, and that Beth does not own every choice about Ben. Vincent interrupts to tell Beth that Santa might bring Ben for Christmas.



The next morning Vincent listens to what his toy tape recorder has picked up—a conversation about Beth getting professional help, which makes Vincent hopeful because he cannot do the everyday things his mom would normally be doing. He thinks about normal things they could do that might make Beth appreciate that she still has two children.

## Chapters 9 and 10 Analysis

Beth is in a deep state of depression and is unable to take care of herself or her children, either logistically or emotionally. She is apparently unaware or does not care that Vincent is struggling with his own demons. Laurie is still working on Ben's case, in addition to bringing food and support to Beth and the children. Listening to other horror stories of lost children, Beth is finally able to go into Ben's room and tell Vincent she loves him, but only because he is asleep.

A rather long chapter 10 represents a breaking point for everyone in the family. Vincent, on whom the chapter is focused, is still just a little boy who is now afraid of the dark, thinks he has ESP, and still hopes Santa will bring his brother back. He is not only being neglected, but is burdened with very adult, dramatic tasks, such as taking crank calls and trying to change his sister's diapers, in addition to his own fears about the kidnapping.

Teresa, whom the family calls Tree, is Pat's sister who is almost ready to give birth. Beth makes it clear she does not care about the baby, about Tree or anything but her own sorrow. At this point in the story, Beth has become quite unlikeable, even though we should be feeling sympathy for her. What is making the story even more intriguing than the kidnapping is the psychological dynamics among family members—the Cappadoras, who will not give up hope, Vincent, who is struggling in every way, Pat, whose own pain is not much acknowledged, and Beth, who wants to give up on life.



# Chapters 11 an 12

## Chapters 11 an 12 Summary

### Chapter 11

Laurie, Tree and some friends have given an interview to People magazine. It contains photos and a feature article, but Beth does not read it. She decides she will never leave the house again and despises the sympathy mail. She tolerates sitting with Vincent, but only really looks forward to night time. She throws away her old photos and things that remind her of her former life.

Candy is in town for a psychological profiling seminar. She wants to take Beth shopping, since she is wearing strange old clothes. Candy asks Vincent to keep her badge safe while she is gone. She takes Beth to the mall where they buy lots of clothes, which Beth has not worn, even two months later.

Laurie asks Beth to do a photo shoot at Beth's home of a pregnant bride whose families need her conditon masked for wedding photos. Beth accepts the job, and shoots them as she would a still life, paying attention to shadows and light. The photos come out well. She begins to get more work at her home, as well as outside. She starts wearing her good clothes and begins to have what appears to be a normal life.

### Chapter 12

Vincent overhears his parents talking about sex, his father's desire to have another child and the possibility of Pat starting a new restaurant in Chicago. When she tries to explain how precarious she is, Pat calls Beth a martyr, and she reminds him he is a big hero. Pat breaks and tells her that he, and everyone else, does blame her for what happened, and if she had taken one minute to care for her kids this would not have happened. She says she hates him, and Vincent runs up and covers Kerry's face until she cannot breathe. Pat is taking Vincent for the day, but Vincent first goes back in the house to re-set all the alarms.

Vincent hears his father crying to Rosie, talking about Beth and his own desperation. Angelo shares his past with Vincent, and helps him understand a parent's love for children through Italian opera, (while embuing him with prejudice against the Japanese). He allows Vincent to understand his father's sadness in a different way, and Vincent relates the opera singer's sadness to his own sadness about the loss of his mother's love.

## Chapters 11 an 12 Analysis

After much coaxing and prodding, Beth's patient friends finally get her doing something other than lying in bed. She has been a great photographer in the past and now, looking



through different eyes, she is even more able to concentrate on the objective aspects of her photography. Outwardly it appears Beth has taken a step toward health.

In Chapter 12, after much patience and supportiveness, Pat finally cuts loose and tells Beth what he really thinks. Although he is still grief-stricken, she does not really care since she is too wrapped up in her own pain. It is almost a relief moment in the story to have Beth hear that people do blame her—not because it will help her to know it, but because she is so frustratingly irresponsible. Of course, in the middle of all of this, little Vincent is being damaged immeasurably and no one has considered what the loss of Ben has done to him. Mitchard punctures through many layers of grief with this family, as they get down to their inner selves and try to struggle through this disaster. Beth is the only one who has dug in her heels and will not begin the healing process. How this is affecting everyone around her is not a concern of hers, nor are their feelings. In her devastation, she has become the bad guy in the story.

Vincent's determination to set the household alarms for odd times is touching; he only wants his mother to pay attention to him or notice him.



# Chapters 13 and 14

## Chapters 13 and 14 Summary

### Chapter 13

Vincent, now almost twelve, is playing with his neighbor Alex, cooking up ideas for a neighborhood communication system using wire. The boys are still young enough to play make-believe games. Kerry comes out with ammonia to pour on bugs. Vincent takes it away from her; their mother is on the phone. Vincent offers to get her soap and water for her project. Alex tells Vincent that his mother says Vincent is bossy because his mother pays no attention to him.

Beth, who almost never speaks to her children, is animated in a telephone call, and shares with Vincent that Candy is going to get married. She wants Vincent to stay home alone, and for Kerry to go with Laurie so she can take photos for Candy's wedding. Vincent would love to be Candy's kid. Beth knows little about Vincent, like that he won every spelling bee in school until he had to spell "withdrawal."

Vincent gets to witness an argument in the restaurant kitchen among family employees, which he enjoys. However, after taking a phone call from Beth, Pat keels over with an apparent heart attack. Vincent calls 911.

### Chapter 14

Pat's heart attack is a warning about stress. Beth and Vincent are with him in the hospital, and Beth tells him Ben's other shoe was found at the hotel where her class reunion is being held in an entirely different location. Elle had not told Beth about the rescheduled reunion; Beth did not get to Candy's wedding reception to take photos. Beth says perhaps the shoe is a message to comfort them. Beth is disheveled and does not smell right to Vincent. Vincent is hiding something he has not told anyone, and is afraid if his father is too ill to come home he will end up alone with his mother, whose hands are rough. Beth seems so afraid for Pat and promises him she will do anything he wants. Vincent has suspected his mother has been trying to kill his father, and that maybe all this caring is an act. Sadly, he is also afraid his mother will kill him if she knows what he is hiding.

## Chapters 13 and 14 Analysis

Vincent's life is no less confusing at this age. He is trying to play like a normal kid, but is forced to be vigilant over his sister because his mother pays no attention to either of them. He is happy to get to stay with his father while Beth goes to Candy's wedding, and is a hero for saving his father's life. The Cappadoras' neighbors have carried much of the burden of this family, with Alex being Vincent's only friend. They are very aware of how neglected the Cappadora children are, and have even said so within Alex's hearing.





In Chapter 14, Beth is unexplainably loving toward Pat and does not look or smell like herself, which is creepy to Vincent. Beth now has to lie to Pat about where she was during Candy's wedding and she is obviously feeling very guilty.

The story takes a new twist, since we do not know now whether Vincent had more involvement in Ben's disappearance, or whether someone who knows Beth well is responsible for her lost child. Now that the shoe has shown up at a different reunion of the same people, the possibilities have opened up considerably. However, Vincent's suspicion that Beth will kill him if she finds out his secret makes it seem that there must have been more to the story than what he told his parents and police.



# Chapters 15 and 16

## Chapters 15 and 16 Summary

### Chapter 15

Pat and his dad buy an old, dank warehouse and have it renovated as the "Wedding in the Old Neighborhood," their new restaurant. The place is elegant and antique, like an old Italian villa, complete with statuary, art, balconies and mosaic. Jill, who has left the Cappdora home, married in a lovely late night ceremony at the family restaurant, which inspired the idea for the new restaurant. Beth thought she would avoid ever having to move to Chicago, but after Pat's heart attack, her resistance dissolves.

The story goes back in time to the weekend when Beth is in town to shoot Candy's wedding and has lunch with Ellen and Nick Palladino. Nick loves Beth in high school and regrets never having made love to her, so they do so in a room at the hotel where they lunch. Candy, already married, finds Beth and they learn of the second shoe being found on the podium of the 20th reunion of Beth's high school class. Her cheating on Pat makes her renew her love for him. In Chicago where they now live, a new effort is revived to find Ben, although Beth has no hope for any new developments. An age projection drawing has been published. Being evaluated for ADD, Vincent is failing in school, preoccupied with his own interests in sports.

### Chapter 16

Vincent, who now goes by the name "Reese," is discussing in detail with his psychiatrist the explosion he created in a manhole. His parents think he is crazy. The name Reese is an offshoot of "resale," which is what kids call him due to his name being Vincent Paul. Reese notes that everyone likes his dad, but people do not like his mother, who looks like a skinny witch. During this interview, Reese is concerned about the games he is missing; he apparently is now taking bets on games.

Reese overhears his father telling the doctor about Ben's disappearance, and explaining what he knows about Reese's recent crime, which could have been deadly if it had happened in the daytime. Reese is obviously extremely bright, but his interests are in playing odds and mathematical probabilities. His dad, very concerned for Reese's future, informs the doctor that Reese is also a bookie and, although his behavior is frightening, both men are obviously impressed.

## Chapters 15 and 16 Analysis

Beth has jolted herself out of at least some of her apathy through the guilt she feels over cheating on Pat and especially the fear she experiences over his illness. She moves to Chicago and re-devotes herself to him, but is still emotionally withdrawn. The theme-restaurant is like the dream of a child and obviously is costing a huge amount of money,



but Beth knows if Pat is worried about something, everything is fine. She is now affectionately calling him "Paddy." Much of the chapter is Beth remembering the fateful weekend. Interestingly, in their conversations over lunch, a memory of Cecil Lockhart is discussed.

There is not much said at this time about the transition the family has undergone with their move to Chicago, but this will be exposed by Vincent's developing criminal behavior. Beth thinks of Pat as her children's only surviving parent, reconfirming the consistent thread throughout the story that Beth is just not a good mother, and especially not since Ben's disappearance.

In Chapter 16, Vincent, who is now "Reese," is something of a child genius, although he cares nothing for the subjects taught in school. He is engaging in dangerous behaviors, the explosion being spectacular. However, nothing he has done has been able to attract his mother's attention in the past, so he keeps trying. He is a good boy, but very troubled.



# Chapters 17 and 18

## Chapters 17 and 18 Summary

### Chapter 17

Reese does not mind seeing Dr. Kilgore, who is a real doctor. Reese is concerned about his heart palpitations and does not want his father to know. When he mentions he has been going to see a younger kid play street hockey, Reese's heart acts up again and Dr. Kilgore tells him he is having a panic attack. He teaches him how to breathe out of it. Reese describes a fight with some kids who suggest his growth is stunted. Kilgore surprises Reese by demonstrating how pressure on a point behind the ear can bring down a large man, and lends him a book about it. Kilgore says he is a short guy, too.

### Chapter 18

A large family session takes place with Dr. Kilgore, each family member's personality becoming evident immediately. Beth says Vincent has been difficult since Ben died; others say Ben did not die. Rosie feels Beth has lost her heart and faith; Beth feels God left her. In private, Reese says he cannot have a paper route because once a paperboy was kidnapped. He listens to opera all night, and confesses to a running dream of being in a crowd of people unable to hear what they are saying and running after someone. With difficulty, he finally tells Tom that he is running after Ben, who is going out the door of the hotel. He also sees a skinny old lady walking behind Ben, opening the door. He finally tells Tom that it is part of his dream because it really happened.

## Chapters 17 and 18 Analysis

Reese is beginning to trust Tom Kilgore because Tom is understanding his problems and not reacting to them in ways Reese would expect. Tom is working diligently to try to get to the bottom of Reese's anger because he knows there is something traumatic that is stuck inside him. The fact that the doctor admits he is a small guy, too, and knows what to do about it is empowering to Reese. Reese has clearly taken on the persona of a tough guy and is looking for more and more serious trouble. Perhaps watching a particular kid playing street hockey is foreshadowing something, but at this point we do not know.

In Chapter 18, the family is still too lost in their own disagreements and grief to remember that they are there to help Vincent, but their interactions have informed the doctor of what Vincent is up against. His tough love and deliberate agitating of Vincent goes a long way in helping him to spit out the truth that has been upsetting him for so long. It is a very vulnerable moment for Vincent, and grasping the doctor's hand is a source of shame for him later.



## Part Two - Chapters 19 and 20

### Part Two - Chapters 19 and 20 Summary

#### Chapter 19

As Beth is trying to brush Kerry's knotted hair and Kerry is screaming, someone is knocking at the door. The visitor is a large kid who knows Kerry from school, and who is hoping to get work mowing yards. When Beth is able to see him she seems to go into shock, but pulls herself together and asks the kid to mow her lawn. The boy leaves to get his equipment; Kerry says the boy's name is Sam-something. Beth nervously gets her cameras ready, forgetting about Kerry's messy hair. She waits for the boy and when he comes back, she shoots 36 photos of him. When the boy leaves, Vincent arrives home. He has been crying, but Beth does not notice. Beth asks him to go get pizza, get Kerry from her friend's house and put on a video for her. She goes into her darkroom and develops her photos of the lawn mowing boy.

#### Chapter 20

Beth hugs her deeply and wonders how 9-year old Kerry managed to have some confidence with so little attention as a child. Kerry recognizes that Beth suddenly is not sick any longer. This particular night, Beth is unable to lose herself in English novels in which characters are emotionally removed.

When Pat arrives, she shows him the pictures. Pat cries and is astonished that this kid has lived two blocks from them, and that Kerry has been in school with him for four years. They realize all the possibilities of what Ben may have been going through for nine years and that he will not remember them. Beth notes that he did not seem like an abused kid. They are both full of fear and hope, and make love on the porch. Beth stays outside and thinks about how to arrange an exhibit catalog of celestial oil paintings, as she stares at a street light two blocks away.

### Part Two - Chapters 19 and 20 Analysis

This chapter allows the reality of Ben to dawn on the reader slowly. Beth's behavior has been so erratic that her recognition of Ben could be just another drama. However, when she sees his "eyes that still looked almost lashless," we assume he must be Ben. We now see Beth as suddenly very strong-minded and engaged, taking care of business, planning her next moves.

In Chapter 20, even young Kerry sees that Beth has popped through her craziness, and Beth takes a fresh look at Kerry, whom she has been ignoring at some level for years. Beth is now aware of all the time she has spent disengaged and absent from her family and her life. She is calm and composed, as she waits for morning and for confirmation that her son is alive.



# Chapters 21 and 22

## Chapters 21 and 22 Summary

### Chapter 21

Beth wakes up on the porch and comes in to see Pat handling the morning normally. Beth holds Vincent before he leaves and tells him she loves him, but he does not look at her. When he leaves she sees that one of the photos she took is on his chair. She feels badly for letting him go to school and keeping this important development from him. Beth feels her dead self re-animating. Candy arrives, and becomes tearful looking at the photos, recalling how much time and energy she has spent trying to find Ben and return him to his parents.

In her detective mode, Candy tells them to sit tight. She returns and says that, although they want a subpoena, she has looked at the school yearbooks. The boy has been in this school since kindergarten under the name of Sam Karras, and is an only child.

### Chapter 22

The Parkside police chief Bastokovic arrives and tells them that the boy is in protective custody. When Vincent comes home to a houseful of police, his mother finds out that he may have known this was Ben for a long time, but he was not sure. He says he tried to tell Tom, but was not sure that Tom got it, and he was not sure he got it himself. He did not say anything to his mother because she would not have listened or heard him and, although the boy looked like Ben, he was never sure. Rising above her anger and realizing he has been through a lot too, she begs Vincent to forgive her, but he is cold and in his "Reese" mode, withdrawn and aloof.

Candy and the Chief drive to the suspect's house, and Beth runs behind them, determined to be there. They arrest George Karras, an aging small man who is confused and thinks they have the wrong family. Pat also arrives and curses Karras, who has no idea what they are talking about. When Beth sees a photo on the mantle, she realizes it is Cecil Lockhart, who is George Karras' wife.

## Chapters 21 and 22 Analysis

This is an exciting chapter. Beth feels her ice wall melting. She is suddenly appreciating her kids, and they have an exciting day ahead, knowing they are about to find out the truth about Ben. They are afraid, but this is a dream coming true. She realizes that Vincent has seen the photos and wishes she had kept him from school.

In Chapter 22, it is shocking that Vincent may have known Ben was two blocks away for four years, and it is unclear why he had not mentioned it to his father, even if he was unable to talk to his mother. Perhaps he did not trust his own judgment, but we know

now that he was watching the neighbor kids play soccer because he recognized Ben, or at least felt the boy resembled Ben. The revelation went over Tom Kilgore's head, as it may have gone over the reader's head.



# Chapters 23 and 24

## Chapters 23 and 24 Summary

### Chapter 23

Candy is in deep remorse for missing the clues about Ben, despite the family's assurances of forgiveness. Cecil has been mentally ill for years and George Karras thinks he has legally adopted her child, Sam. She realizes that officers saw Ben when they interviewed Cecil and that the FBI already had her fingerprints, but no one made the connection for nine years. The reunion with Ben is strange, since he does not know his real parents and sees George Karras as his father. But it is the best day of Pat's life, and they begin to adjust to calling him "Sam." Cecil is catatonic and unable to speak to police or judges, despite their attempts to make her recall her past.

George, who is heartbroken, tries to help put the pieces together for the Cappadoras, but he loves the beautiful Cecil, and loves her son just as much. When Cecelia deteriorated, George still had his son, Sam, his little all-star. Cecelia is formally charged with everything the law will allow, but everyone knows it is just for completion, since she is lost to herself and her life, and will simply return to the institution.

### Chapter 24

Reese and Ben go outside while their parents meet with a social worker. Reese talks to him about how the family is all in counseling, and tries to explain his mother's emotional absence. He suggests that he might be a car thief, and tries to be a tough guy with Ben. However, they decide to play a game of basketball, since Ben is on a traveling city league and is tall and big for his age. Ben is obviously the superior player, and Reese changes the game to challenge him. They assign names of pros to themselves, and play hard, both getting hurt in the process. Pat runs out and scolds Reese for hurting Ben. Both parents are being protective of Ben, especially when it comes to Vincent's interactions with him.

Sam spends the night at the Cappadora's house, and Vincent notices how his mother keeps touching Sam, how his father is going to games with him. Reese is having trouble sleeping; his music tapes are not working. Reese has been sleeping on Ben's red stuffed bunny for all these years, and finally pulls it out to see what shape it is in. He hears young Ben/Sam tossing and talking in his sleep. He leaves the bunny next to the boy's bed. Ben seems to be struggling with something in his sleep, and Reese waits until he can clearly see Ben's face.

## Chapters 23 and 24 Analysis

Candy, who has obviously put her heart into finding Ben for years, is in a state of rage and disgust at herself, the police and the FBI over missing Cecil's clues. Candy's



bravado and confidence seems to have wilted over her personal and professional failure.

George Karras might be the more sympathetic character at this point in the story. The Cappadoras, even with all of the challenges attached, at least have their son back. However, George is having his only son taken away from him in shocking circumstances and is trying to help Sam's real family understand Sam's life.

In Chapter 24, Reese, now the full-blown tough guy, is occasionally perceived by his parents as a threat to the beloved Ben who has finally returned to the Cappadoras. This situation intensifies his own anger. However, after playing ball with Ben and remembering him as a child, one of the sweetest scenes of the story takes place. Reese goes to Sam's room and sits for three hours, while Sam sleeps, taking the old red bunny to his brother's bedside, and waits until he can reassure himself that Ben is really there. The author uses a certain vagueness about Reese's interactions with his brother, which reflect Reese's feigned offhandedness about the whole thing. However, this scene reminds us that Vincent/Reese really does care for his little brother.



# Chapters 25 and 26

## Chapters 25 and 26 Summary

### Chapter 25

Reese has two weeks of school left and is writing a thesis on multiple personalities while trying to avoid the publicity and recognition about Ben's homecoming. Reese did not mention seeing Ben earlier because he felt the idea that the neighborhood kid was Ben was too far-fetched. Tom Kilgore tries to help Reese uncover his feelings about Ben's return. Reese considers joining the basketball team at school; he and Sam have been practicing and playing in the driveway. Reese is becoming very serious about improving his game. Reese recalls being upset when Sam did not recognize him. Sam has good manners and is germ-conscious, unlike the other Cappadoras. The school coach, Teeter, tries to encourage Reese about playing basketball, but tells him he has a huge chip on his shoulder with no heart to back it up and calls him a runt, informing him he will not be treated as a special case. He insults Reese and leaves, turning the gym light off, leaving Reese in the dark.

### Chapter 26

Sam is an energetic kid from morning until night, but Beth sees his anxiety and his distance, since he has been raised in a household much different from the Cappadoras. Angelo tells Ben that his likeness is included in the art at the restaurant.

Family members and friends re-meet Ben, and marvel at his return, thanking him. Barbara Kelliher's visit makes Beth cry, since Barbara unselfishly devoted so much time to search for Ben.

A special mass is arranged to honor Ben and is clogged with the press. The attendants are all people Beth knows. The priest acknowledges the families' pain and all the scrutiny they have endured, and acknowledges Ben with his new name of Sam Karras. The service is televised and when it begins, Beth turns around and sees George Karras at the back of the church. She leaves her seat and goes to him, extends her hand, and brings him up to be with the family, much to Ben's joy.

## Chapters 25 and 26 Analysis

Reese's hard shell is slowly melting as he allows himself to enjoy playing ball and think a lot about his long lost brother. He does not feel competitive about his brother's athletic capability but is inspired by it. He has established himself as a difficult person, so his coach treats him accordingly. Ironically, he assumes that he is a spoiled kid who has gotten too much attention. He wishes he did not have to carry everything he had ever done or thought "like a load of bricks on his back," meaning that he is changing and growing, but his past behaviors are haunting him.



In Chapter 26, these first weeks with Ben are tenuous and strained, in addition to being joyful for the families. Ben is now from a different family and has different habits and customs. He seems like a well-raised, average, good kid, but not many kids receive the kind of attention he is getting. Nonetheless, the story is certainly not about Ben's experience, but that of his birth-family's. The gesture Beth makes toward George Karras is touching and appropriate, and illustrates that she understands that Ben loves George and has become entwined with him.



# Chapters 27 and 28

## Chapters 27 and 28 Summary

### Chapter 27

Pat tries to encourage Reese about going out for the team, but does not know about the interchange with the coach. There is a big lunch after mass at the family restaurant which Reese refers to as a "manger scene." The Italian uncles outside the church may be talking tough about George Karras; George decides not to attend the luncheon.

Reese enjoys the maternal attention he is getting from pretty girls at school, but attends the festivities on this day reluctantly.

He watches Sam's reaction to the elaborately decorated restaurant, including seeing his own face painted on the wall. Sam and Reese have a glass of champagne. The family makes a grand entrance and is greeted with sentimental music and a long round of applause. The hired brides and grooms dance, then the crowd dance the Italian tarantella. Sam teaches his mother, father and grandparents how to dance the Greek miserlu. The scene is touching but Reese feels sorry for Ben, and goes to see if he can get another glass of champagne.

### Chapter 28

In the courtroom Beth is curious to see the now obese Cecil in her orange jail clothes. Cecil's attorney feels that there is no possible way she can understand the charges against her, since Cecil is catatonic and completely unresponsive. Cecil has a long history of mental illness and her state has not changed for four years. The only witness on Cecil's behalf is her mother, whom Beth recognizes from childhood. Sarah is apologetic about her daughter, and sees Sam as her grandson. Her own family has not known Cecil any better than Beth, and other witnesses are deceased or unable to attend. Sarah says Cecil's former husband leaves her and she has a miscarriage, which is why she steals Ben, but this is the first time the attorneys hear of a miscarriage. Sarah is never sure whether it is true. When the Lockharts meet Sam, Cecil tells them she and her former husband get together again only long enough to have a baby and that the father takes custody for a time. She prohibits Sarah from calling the alleged father, who is ill with MS. Sarah assures Beth he was well cared for and loved. She says Cecil and George Karras are legally divorced to divest him of financial responsibility for her illness. Candy Bliss and the attorney wonder whether Sarah really knew about Ben, and is protecting her daughter.

Beth and Candy leave for Minneapolis to talk to the old woman who reports spotting Ben and an old woman in the mall years ago. They find out that the police never interview Cecil's landlord in Minneapolis. After finding the grave of Cecil's premature



one-week old child, Beth remembers that Cecil's hair is white the day of the reunion, and that she might have been mistaken for an old lady.

During the trip, the two women discuss the children's relationships with Ben, sex and marriage, Candy trying to get pregnant and their views of romanticism.

## Chapters 27 and 28 Analysis

Reese tries to get out of going to the showy luncheon, but even he is moved by Ben's re-entry into the family. Reese seems to be embarrassed for Ben, because he would not have enjoyed this kind of scrutiny, but Ben does not seem to mind. No one, except occasionally his father, seems to remember that the Cappadoras have another son. Reese is actually enjoying this more than he wants to admit to himself.

In Chapter 28, Candy is still trying to get to the bottom of Ben's kidnapping and is thinking that perhaps Sarah knew of Cecil's doings and just did not tell anyone. They go to Minneapolis to check out Sarah's story about Cecil's miscarriage and find out that it is true, even though Sarah, herself, is never sure if what Cecil tells her is true. Miscarriages can trigger abductions and, in this case, they learn that Cecil has her premature baby for a week before he dies.

In their friendly discussions in this chapter, we learn that Candy is not so repelled by heterosexual sex with her husband, that lesbian feminism is boring, and that she probably knows about Beth's short affair with Nick.



# Chapter 29

## Chapter 29 Summary

Chapter 15

Pat and Sam argue about where Sam will spend the fourth of July holiday. Pat insists he go with the family, and Reese suggests maybe Sam wants to see the house where he lived when he was little. Beth knows Sam needs some time to adjust. Sam is feeling that the Cappadoras do not care about George and Sam's former life. Pat reminds him that they are a family and they are going together. Beth decides to take two cars so she and Sam can spend some alone time together in Peshtigo.

The night of the fourth, the Cappadora family goes in Laurie and Rick's boat onto the lake, and Sam does loosen up a little and enjoys himself. When they leave, Sam goes with Beth toward Lake Michigan. Sam sings with her and tells her his mother sang; Beth remembers Cecil's beautiful voice and tells Sam she used to be jealous of her. Sam asks if Cecil was mentally ill back when she knew her, and assures Beth he thought Cecil was his real mom. He has obviously thought his mother became mentally ill because of him.

They head for the Peshtigo cemetery to photograph graves of people lost in a great fire on the same day as the Chicago fire. Beth remembers lying on graves she photographed in the past, feeling that if she personally absorbed enough pain, destruction might skip over her and her children.

Sam shoots photos of graves and they meet Will Holt, who is a caretaker, who explains some of the graves as they walk along. Holt tells them his college age son committed suicide. Ben thinks that it is worse to be taken into another family and disliked by Vincent than to be dead.

Ben assures Beth he was hugged a lot as a child. She recalls the day when she shows Ben his baby clothes. Ben vaguely remembers the smell of the cedar, and begins to cry, apologizing to Beth, assuring her that his "parents" were not bad people, and that his mom was just sick and did not mean to be.

With the memory of that moment and this day with Ben, driving along at night and knowing Pat will not understand, Beth decides to make a phone call.

## Chapter 29 Analysis

This chapter opens up the pain that Ben is enduring as a displaced child who has been ripped from the only family he has known and claimed by a group of strangers he does not remember. He is lonely for his old life, just like the Cappadoras have been lonely for him all these years. Beth, who is being quite honest and reasonable with Ben, is



realizing that although she now has her child, she does not really have him back. His heart is still with the Karras family and he is very sad.. Beth obviously wants to call Nick because Pat is so cut and dried about this. Pat feels Ben will adjust and, regardless, this is his family and he will follow the rules. Pat is not as sensitive to Ben's hurt feelings and, for a change, Beth is more tuned in to their child than Pat. What could have been a lovely visit with her long lost son, singing, talking and taking photos together, has taken on a different tone and the reality of Ben's pain has become very clear.



# Chapters 30 and 31

## Chapters 30 and 31 Summary

### Chapter 30

Beth realizes that she is now well paid because her name is famous. Her photos of children walking away are ones she has always done, and do not hold the poignancy that the magazine editors think. She considers again the fortune involved in submitting an actual photo of Ben, but again rejects the idea. She calls Nick and asks him to meet her for lunch. They discuss her refusal to accept big money from the media. She tells him about Sam eroding with grief, his grades falling, his sports suffering, missing George. Like Pat, Nick thinks Sam will adjust. They drive out to a field and kiss; Beth questions Nick's other extramarital exploits, and he admits to being bored in his marriage. He is vain. Beth, again, realizes she loves Pat. She goes home and they make love. Beth falls to sleep, and the next thing she hears is Pat shouting that Ben is gone.

### Chapter 31

It is five in the morning, Ben is gone and Pat has just gotten home. She wonders if he has been seeing one of the waitresses, but he says he was with Joey and a couple employees Pat and Beth suddenly realize Ben could have been kidnapped again. The doorbell rings and it is George with Sam. Sam climbed out his window and went home in the night, and not for the first time. Reese has gone to bring him home, and this time George has brought him. Sam cries and says he wants to go home and that legally, he can. George is upset because he has never seen Sam so sad; they all realize it might not get better.

Beth, who is formerly not accustomed to doing much cooking, makes breakfast, feeling like she is doing something motherly. They all sit down together for breakfast.

Pat and Beth try to discuss Sam's predicament. Pat tells Beth she has made a career of being unhappy, thriving on her suffering, but he has always been determined to be happy. He flatly will not share Ben with George, but Beth wants what is best for Ben. Pat thinks Beth just wants another nine-year drama.

Pat thinks in terms of where things are broken; Beth always knew she would fail the kids in little ways, but that they would understand she was as good as she could be. Beth realizes Ben went to the deep end of the ocean and came back as Sam Karras, a child raised in a completely different lifestyle whose upbringing has made him a wonderful person.

She acknowledges her sloppy parenting. She knows she has let Vincent down, but the difference between their childhoods and their kids' is that there is an awareness of being wanted.





Beth knows that if Sam is allowed to go home to George, it will be her decision alone.

## Chapters 30 and 31 Analysis

Beth is floundering in her attempts to win Ben's affection, and is desperate enough, again, to turn to Nick. She feels Nick loves her, but in this chapter, she sees him more for what he is—a rather shallow man whose immaturity and vanity allows him to treat his wife disrespectfully. Beth had thought that it was just her that he was swept away with outside his marriage, but now realizes she is not the only one. Once again, Beth appreciates Pat for who he is and, out of a sense of relief, goes home to him.

In Chapter 31, it is becoming more obvious that Ben/Sam is not going to heal quickly from being yanked from whom he perceives to be his father, George. George Karras is now suffering something similar to what the Cappadoras underwent when they lost Ben. Beth is very clear at this point about what is important to her, which is the happiness of her son. She is no longer wallowing in her grief, but is being more objective about what Ben needs. Now Pat is looking like the emotionally weaker of the two, as he is struggling to imagine letting Ben go again.

Beth's confidence in her parenting lies only in the fact that she has known that her kids are aware that she loves them. She acknowledges her weaknesses in this area, but feels they have a basic sense of stability because they know they are wanted.



# Chapters 32 and 33

## Chapters 32 and 33 Summary

### Chapter 32

Now at Tom's office, Reese says he did not join the family when Ben left for George's, and that you have to be a masochist to live in his family's soap opera. He pretends not to care that Sam left, but does feel it is a blow to his parents. He says he has to work on his grades and may not try for basketball, and lies to Tom about his lack of sleep. He admits he feels his mom hates him. Kerry takes lots of lessons; his dad spends most of his time at the restaurant. He feels Beth blames him for Sam returning to George's.

Tom works hard on Reese and gets him to admit that he let go of Ben's hand in the hotel, and told him to get lost, a memory which has become clearer since Ben came home. Tom shares that when his own baby brother died of SIDS, he mistakenly blamed himself for the death and withdrew from his mother for years. Reese leaves Tom's office with a terrible headache. He sees Coach Teeter's car in the school parking lot and stashes his bike.

### Chapter 33

Reese is in a jail cell, feeling repulsed by the germs and smells, wanting to be clean and have his toothbrush. He hears Candy talking to his parents through the plastic window, explaining how Vincent thinks everything is his fault. Pat tells Candy to try being a mother to Vincent; Reese apparently drank brandy with his friend Schaffer, stole the coach's car and hit a tree. Unable to tell his mother how miserable he is about being in jail, he just says his head aches. Reese wants to see Tom. His accident has been all over the news.

Sam tries to tell Reese that he wants to be friends; Reese angrily tells Sam he is not his brother, and wonders what Sam wants from him. Sam shares with him that he remembered the smell of being in the cedar chest playing hide and seek when they were little. He remembers not being scared because he knew his brother would find him. Reese wants to stop remembering, feeling like he wants to die. Sam wants to know if this memory was real, and wants to know what he used to call Reese. Reese tells him he can still call him Vincent.

## Chapters 32 and 33 Analysis

Reese's emotional pain has come to a head. With his confessions to Tom finally having surfaced, his misery leads him to his most destructive actions yet. His ego is so hurt by the coach, that he cannot pass up the opportunity to hurt him back by stealing his car. Basketball represents a link to his brother has not yet really developed, and the coach threatens him with failure. Reese is fairly certain that his mother does hate him because



he has a lot of evidence, but his own hatred for himself is what is threatening his well being.

Chapter 33 represents a breaking point in the lives of the Cappadoras and Ben. Ben's admission that he does remember the cedar chest and remembers trusting Vincent is a vote of confidence that seems to increase Reese's guilt and shame. Vincent, who has had trouble admitting how devastated he was over Ben's loss, is perhaps going to break down and admit that he loves his brother very much and needs him. The fact that Ben would come to visit in him jail illustrates Ben's vague remembrance of his love for his brother, as well. Since there has been nothing to bridge the gap between Ben and his family, this might be the beginning of healing. Reese has been pretty awful to Sam, but in this moment, they are Ben and Vincent again.

It is also interesting to note that in jail, Reese is feeling germ-phobic, the same way his younger brother does.



# Chapters 34 and 35

## Chapters 34 and 35 Summary

### Chapter 34

Candy, not having conceived a child, has divorced her husband, Chris, but they have stayed friends. When Sam goes back to George's, Pat begins to sleep downstairs. The court hearing to let Sam go back to George is tense, and custody will be reconsidered in three months. Sam is permitted weekly visits with the Cappadoras. Kerry is grief-stricken; the relatives are sad, Candy is disgusted. The media learns of it a week later.

Pat and Beth have become estranged. Beth considers going back to Madison for her master's degree, and Pat seems not to care. However, Pat assures her she will not take the children from home, particularly Vincent. Beth loves this about Pat and wonders if their marriage has been just a mutual safety for them.

Beth has a dream about Vincent as a little boy, wonders if she could get Vincent back as he was when he was small, when he loved and depended on her. Candy, who is preparing for singlehood, pays a visit. Beth says Vincent is going to coach fifth-graders in basketball. He is grounded, and his boom box has been confiscated; he has not seen Sam again. Candy says Vincent loves Beth the most. Beth is defensive about people thinking she did not love Vincent, even though she did not tell him or show him. Beth says she is moving to Madison; Candy realizes both Pat and Beth are "played out," and she holds Beth. Beth is sorry Candy did not get her baby, saying Candy would have been a wonderful mother. Candy replies that Beth would be one, too.

### Chapter 35

Vincent hears Sam outside playing basketball late at night. Sam challenges him to a quiet game. He is wearing Vincent's shirt. They play ball, making quips and jokes. Vincent feels Sam has grown three inches in a month; Sam plays with skill and vigor. Sam says he has come back to stay, and George knows and understands. He has his suitcase, and came at night to avoid a scene and the press. Reese tells Sam that he is the one who let go of his hand at the hotel.

The two share the cold pizza when they are sure Beth is back in bed. The boys have fun together and Reese gives Sam his bed for the night. Vincent says he "won't rest until the encampment is secured." Although Beth's bags are packed and by the front door, it is not clear whether she is going or not. Reese knows that they will have to wait to see what the morning brings, and sleeps on the couch, since his father has returned to Beth's bed upstairs.



## Chapters 34 and 35 Analysis

The Cappadora family threatens to finally break apart, as Beth contemplates leaving home. Pat's strength about the children reminds Beth what a good man he is. Beth's dream about Vincent may also be giving her some hope for the family, but the reader does not know. The family has been through so much that their separation seems to be an inevitable ending.

Sam's return, in Chapter 35, is a surprise. He wants very much to have a brother and is fond of Vincent, and vice versa, although the circumstances have made it impossible for them to give form to those thoughts until now. Their basketball game, in which their competition is only in good fun, is a bonding force for both of them. The fact that Sam is as strong as Vincent, although younger, is noteworthy. It turns out that these two have become a force. Beth and Pat will do whatever they will, but the two boys are aware that things could change and they are ready now to stand together and guard the family. This is a very heartwarming end to a disturbing and fascinating story.



# Characters

## Beth Kerry Cappadora

A complex personality, Beth is at once both attractive and sloppy. Although she is a talented photographer, her self-esteem is very low and her defense mechanism is to come off as hard-core and careless. A noted photographer, she is not an attentive mother, even though she loves and adores her children. She assumes that her kids know that she loves and wants them, and does not go too far out of her way to nurture them. She is not a very organized person and, especially in the beginning of the story, is very self-focused on her career and her self. She loves her husband, Pat, and really does love her children, but she habitually has some kind of drama going on and does not appear to know how to just live day to day without unhappiness. She takes medication to sleep and, after her son is kidnapped, spends most of her time in bed, assuming someone will take care of her children. She spends years in a state of guilt, anger and self-sympathy, while her husband makes up his mind to have a happy life, despite their tragedies. She cheats on Pat with an old high school boyfriend, and her depression makes her want to disappear.

Beth's father, Bill Kerry, is somewhat distant and not particularly affectionate toward his grandchildren, although he clearly cares about them. His behavior sheds some light on Beth's behaviors, and together they are a stark contrast to the warm, loving and nurturing Cappadora family. Beth all but ignores her older son, Vincent, whose pain and guilt begins to consume him destructively. She loves him, but has no idea how to reach him, and does not try, living in a world of her own.

As her story progresses, Beth's objective view of her children becomes the more sensible one. She realizes that her young son needs to return to the family he has been yanked from, and his happiness, rather than her own, becomes her primary concern. She grows up, to an extent, in this story

## Vincent

Vincent is seven years old on the day that his little brother disappears. His mother, overwhelmed with excitement at seeing old friends, turns her back on the boys and asks Vincent to watch his baby brother, Ben. Vincent lets go of his brother's hand and tells him to get lost. He suffers throughout his childhood, blaming himself for Ben's kidnapping and hoping for his mother's forgiveness. Growing up, he is neglected by his mother and even the neighbors help to take care of him. Vincent is a brilliant kid, and has incredible potential. He is gifted with math skills and is clever far beyond his years. However, he begins to indulge in dangerous behaviors in an attempt to be recognized and shown some love by his mother, who tends to ignore him.



Vincent is not a large person, and although he likes athletics, his lack of confidence keeps him from really succeeding in sports. Unhappy with who he is, and dressed sloppily at school, he allows his name to change to "Reese," a form of "resale," about which he has been teased. The new name becomes part of his protective device, since his guilt and emotional pain grow stronger over the years, as the family learns to exist without Ben. When Ben returns, and then decides to go back to the father who has raised him, Vincent blames himself for this, too, because, as his mother treats him, he has treated Ben with coldness and indifference. In therapy, Reese finally breaks down and tells his counselor that he thinks the kidnapping was his fault, and Sam's leaving his home is his fault, as well.

His little brother tries to reach out to him during his two-day jail stint. Since he has stolen a car and crashed it, Vincent is grounded and his music taken from him. His behavior seems to improve with this attention to discipline shown by his parents. Ben, whose adopted name is Sam, returns to the Cappadora house late one night. Vincent shares his secret with Ben, about letting him go, and they bond, finally, as brothers. At the end of the story, the reader feels Vincent will be alright, now that he has shared his issues and has re-found his brother.

## Pat Cappadora

Pat Cappadora is from a large Italian family, whose bonds are unshakeable. He is deeply involved in the family restaurant business and never gives up on being successful. He is the more loving of the two parents, and tries to be patient with his wife, Beth, who does not naturally possess a lot of motherly qualities. He is devoted to his children and the loss of his three-year old, Ben, devastates him. Pat accepts the emotional support of his family, and gets through the loss of Ben with some sense of dignity. He endures the emotional absence of his wife for a long time, and is fairly patient with her self-indulgent ways, only one time accusing her of being to blame for the loss of their son.

When twelve year old Ben, or Sam, returns to his home, Pat does not see the logic in allowing Ben to return to the father he has known. He feels that Ben is his child and should stay with the family, regardless of his difficulty in adjusting. However, in this case, Beth is the logical one and insists on letting Ben choose where to live. He gives in, but very unhappily. He is a good father and wants to be involved with his kids. After Ben leaves and Vincent has gotten in trouble, Pat realizes he absolutely needs to keep Vincent with him and help him struggle through these years.

Pat is a very honest, reliable type of person, and it is this that Beth appreciates about him. He is a hard-working man who is devoted to his family, and who is able to appreciate his blessings.



## Ben Cappadora/Sam Karras

Little three-year old Ben is a precocious, adorable child who is happy, healthy and curious. After he disappears in the hotel lobby, we do not meet Ben again until he is twelve, and his name is now Sam Karras. Sam is a very good boy, raised by George Karras with manners, spirituality, a sense of responsibility and a kind heart. What Ben has gotten from George Karras over the years is the love and nurturing that is absent in the Cappadora family. When he adjusts to the shock of finding out who he really is, he realizes he was happier with George Karras and, although he is concerned about the feelings of the Cappadoras, he chooses to return to George. Ben is a very well-adjusted person, and especially in contrast to his brother, Vincent, whose maladjustment primarily involves the loss of Ben. However, what Ben does not have with George is a brother, and he has a vague memory of trusting his brother at a very early age.

Ben/Sam is a very large kid for his age, but is coordinated and athletic. He plays ball with a team in an older age level, and is quite confident and talented. He seems to have none of the insecurities that Vincent has, and is sensitive to the feelings of others.

## Kerry Cappadora

A baby in arms when her brother is kidnapped, Kerry always has a cheerful face in spite of the half-baked parenting of her mother and a father who is gone much of the time. Her sunny disposition is open and sweet. She plays a lot across the street with her friend, Blythe, whose mother takes up much of the burden of raising Kerry when the Cappadoras are struggling. One could say Kerry is a neglected child like her brother Vince, however, Kerry seems to have more confidence in herself. She may be more like Ben and Pat—a little more light-hearted and happy. Since she is a small baby when Ben is kidnapped, Kerry has only known how her family is without him. She seems to keep herself happy, dressing up and playing in her own little world. Kerry cries when Ben decides to leave and wonders why Ben does not like her. She is an easy child, with a disposition similar to Ben's.

## Candy Bliss

Candy is a private detective who, from the beginning, becomes very involved in the effort to find Ben Cappadora. As she works on this case, she becomes very close to Beth Cappadora, and seems to have an understanding of her that eludes most people. Candy is a professional cop with a good head on her shoulders. She is the voice of reason for Beth when she becomes too depressed to function. She forces Beth to go shopping for new clothes, and visits her often, keeping her apprised of the investigation.

Candy is extremely attractive, and is a lesbian who would love more than anything to have a child. She marries an old friend who would like to be a father, but their efforts fail and they divorce amicably. She and Beth share at a rather intimate level the ups and downs of their lives, and Beth feels Candy has guessed about her affair with Nick.





However, when Beth does not show up to take wedding pictures at Candy's wedding, Candy seems to understand.

Candy has been a strong supporter of the Cappadora family, but when Ben shows up, having lived a couple blocks away for years, Candy is very hard on herself and cannot forgive herself for not finding him earlier. Candy is later promoted to Chief of Police.

## **Cecil Lockhart and George Karras**

Cecil Lockhart is the one person in Beth Kerry Cappadora's high school class who has attained a similar level of fame and recognition. Beth has become a noted photographer, but Cecil is an actress who has been on television and theater. As a girl she is beautiful and delicate, and very talented. At the class reunion when Ben disappears, Cecil is there with very white hair. It is only later that we learn that Cecil took Ben from the hotel lobby, and left his tiny shoes as some kind of twisted message to those who are looking for him—once when he disappears, and again at the next class reunion five years later. By the time Ben is found, Cecil is completely catatonic and unreachable. She is not held responsible for her actions because she cannot even communicate. Candy and Beth learn that prior to kidnapping Ben, Cecil had lost a one week old baby.

George Karras is a nice Greek man who falls in love with the beautiful Cecil, flattered that she would even give him a second look. He raises Ben like his own son, loving him and teaching him the ways of his Greek Orthodox religion. When the truth is revealed about Ben's background, George is brave but he is devastated. He has always seen "Sam" as his son and, like the Cappadoras, cannot bear the thought of losing him. However, George is a reasonable and humble man, and is very grateful when the Cappadoras invite him into their fold and do not blame or judge him in any way. George tries to support Ben in returning to his birth family, but also is more than eager to have him back. He is a good man, and walks Sam to the Cappadoras late at night when Sam has decided to live there permanently.

## **Rosie and Angelo Cappadora and Bill Kerry**

Rosie and Angelo Cappadora are old-school Italian Americans. Rosie stays fairly quiet about her opinions and is there to serve and nurture the family. Angelo, an emotional man, is the king of the family and the owner of restaurants. They have raised a very close-knit family who sticks together through tragedy. They are both sensitive and wonderful grandparents and have had a positive influence on Vincent. Their family, although somewhat emotional, is loving and warm. Angelo spends quality time with Vincent, talking about his relatives and opera and Rosie makes sure the children are fed and in bed at a reasonable hour.

Bill Kerry, Beth's father, is a nice man who is concerned about the family, but is aloof and somewhat removed from people in general. His emotional distance may explain why Beth Kerry is emotionally absent from her family. It is also telling that Beth feels the



difference between herself and her kids is that she assumes her kids know they were wanted. Bill is something of a minor character in the story, but his demeanor and attitude is important to understanding Beth. Beth feels Bill acts confused about things so someone else will clear them up. We know Bill is an alcoholic because his features have been "blurred by years of gin gimlets."

## **Tom Kilgore**

Tom is one of the people whom Vincent, even with his sarcastic and defensive nature, can talk to. Tom does not pull any punches with Reese but he is kind to him, as well. He suspects that Reese blames himself for Ben's kidnapping, but waits until Reese can say it himself. He is very clear that he is making money from Reese's dad, and in several ways, assures Reese that he can squander all the time he wants on trying to get to the bottom of his problems. However, honestly, Tom is prodding and gently poking Vincent to get him to see his own truths. Tom is an excellent counselor, who gets a full picture of the families with one family session. He is responsible for getting Vincent to finally break down and speak about what has been bothering him for so many years.

## **Nick Palladino**

A successful man whose first love was Beth Kerry, Nick seems like a pretty wonderful guy. Beth introduces him to his wife, Trisha, even though she and Nick are still somewhat in love with one another. Beth has decided to marry Pat, so they never know how things might turn out for them. Nick has said that he would do anything for Beth, especially after Ben disappears. Beth feels comfortable with Nick, and seeks his companionship when she is at a very low point. The encounter is one Beth remembers fondly, but when she seeks to re-experience it, she realizes that she is not the only person he has had sex with outside of his marriage, and that she cannot be that special to him, since this is something he seems to do regularly, even though he is satisfied in his marriage.

## **Jill (Jillie)**

Jill is a teenager who is a cousin of Pat Cappadora's. She helps Beth with the children and serves as a sort of nanny to them. She is with them when Ben disappears at the hotel. Later, she is with the family often in the afternoons and provides a great deal of comfort and care for Vincent, who is virtually ignored by his mother.

## **Charlie Ruffalo - 74**

Charlie Ruffalo is an Italian friend of the Cappadora family who is probably a mobster. He is smooth, wealthy and well-groomed. After Ben disappears, he assures the family that there has been no organized crime involved in the kidnapping.



## **Loretta Quail**

Loretta is a psychic Candy and Beth visit for information on Ben. She says she has never been wrong. In a trance state, sees Ben dreaming on lacey fabric in a polished wooden box with a curved lid. We later come to understand that Ben has an early memory of hiding in the family cedar chest until Vincent finds him.

## **Bick, Paul, Vic, Tree (Teresa), Joey, Monica**

These are siblings and their spouses of Beth and Pat Cappadora

Bick is actually named Benjamin, and is Beth's younger brother. Ben is named after Bick.

Paul is Beth's older brother.

Tree is Teresa, Pat Cappadora's sister; Joey is her husband.

Monica is Pat's unmarried sister.

## **Penny**

Penny is the facilitator for the Compassionate Circle. Her four year old, Casey, is shot in the back of the head by his father. Penny has found some health and stability and tries to help other parents whose children were victimized. Beh looks at her in awe, as she seems to be functional, and Penny helps her with some ideas about how to move on.

## **Alex**

Alex is a friend to Vincent and lives next door in Madison. They play together regularly and Vincent spends so much time at Alex's house that his mother jokes that she will be adopting Vincent soon.

## **Ellen, Jimmy Daugherty, Laurie Elwell, Wayne Thunder,**

Ellen is Beth's best friend from high school. She meets Ellen at the hotel and is planning to attend the class reunion with her when Ben disappears. Beth and Ellen are close and Ellen is a great support for her.

Laurie Elwell has been Beth's best friend since college. She is very organized, and takes over the paperwork in the search for Ben. She convinces Beth to attend the Compassionate Circle meetings



Wayne Thunder is a Native American gay man who is a close friend and spends Thanksgivings with Beth.

Trisha Palladino is Nick's wife and is introduced to him by Beth when they are young.

## **Uncle Augie**

Uncle Augie is Pat Cappadora's uncle. He owns Cappadora's, a restaurant, in Madison. Pat works with him there because he wants to get into the business. Augie has something of a temper that shows up when he is working.

## **Barbara Kelliher**

Barbara Kelliher is a high school friend, a cheerleader, who takes on the search for Ben unceasingly after his disappearance. When Ben returns, Beth holds Barbara and cries.

## **.Jimmy Daugherty**

Jimmy Daugherty is a high school friend of Beth's, who is now a cop in Chicago. He organizes the initial search for Ben.



# Objects/Places

## Chicago

Beth and Pat Cappadora grow up in Chicago. The Immaculata High School is there, and Beth is in Chicago for a class reunion with her friends when Ben was kidnapped. Chicago is where the Cappadora family lives, as well. Beth and Pat and their family have been living in Madison, however, Pat's dream is to move to Chicago and open a restaurant with his father, which he does. When they find that Ben has been living only two blocks from them for four years, it is in Chicago.

## Madison

Madison is where the Cappadoras live in the beginning of the story. This is home for them until they move to Chicago to live nearer to Pat's family and open the new restaurant. Toward the end of the story, when Beth is deciding whether to leave and get her master's degree, she is contemplating a return to Madison.

## Bunny

When little Ben is discovered by Vincent hiding in the cedar chest, he gets out and does a bunny dance down the stairs. Late, after Ben has disappeared, Vincent takes Ben's red stuffed bunny and puts it under his own mattress, sleeping on the lump from then on. When Ben returns home as a adolescent, Vincent pulls the bunny out and puts it near Ben's bed.

## Cedar Chest

The one memory that Ben has from his early childhood in the Cappadora household is of hiding in the family cedar chest among the baby linens, and the lid shutting on him. He tells Vincent later that he is not afraid because he knows Vincent will find him.

When the psychic woman "sees" Ben in a trance, she sees him among lacy things in a polished curved wooden box. Beth assumes it is a coffin, but the reader knows it is the cedar chest incident.

## Reunions

Beth is headed for her twentieth class reunion of her high school class when her son is kidnapped from the lobby of the hotel where she is checking in. This is where the search begins for Ben. Five years later, another reunion is organized to which Beth is not invited. However, on the podium, the second small tennis belonging to Ben is found.



## Wedding in the Neighborhood

When Pat Cappadora finally makes his dream come true, he opens a theme restaurant with his father in an old warehouse. The restaurant is called Wedding in the Old Neighborhood, and is elaborately decorated to resemble an old neighborhood in Italy. The hired help are dressed as brides and grooms, and patrons plan their own weddings to take place in the restaurant. Partially because it is stunning and the food is good, and partially because of the publicity around the Cappadora family, the restaurant is a huge success.

## Photography

Beth Cappadora is a respected photographer whose photos are widely published. She does all kinds of commercial photography. Her first jobs after a long depression when Ben is gone involve photographing wedding couples who are expecting a child, and finding ways to camouflage the pregnancy. Beth realizes that she has the fundamental, basic knowledge of light and balance, which allows her to continue to take photos even when her heart feels dead. Some of her widely published photos are of children walking away, most of which are, ironically, taken before Ben disappears.

## Baby Shoes

The only clue that is found when Ben disappears from the hotel is one of his new little red tennis shoes, perfectly tied and left in the lobby. This is a hint that he has been kidnapped and not, perhaps, just murdered. Five years later, the other shoe appears at the twenty-fifth reunion of the same high school class at a different hotel, purposely placed on the podium. Ben's shoes have little plastic beads with the letter "B" on them that secure the laces. It is not clear why they are left there, but we know later that Cecil Lockhart, a member of this high school class, is the one who took him.

## Neighborhood

The idea of a neighborhood comes up several times in this story. During the early years of Ben's disappearance, Vincent spends a lot of time at his neighbors' homes, where he is cared for and watched over. His sister, Kerry, later does the same thing. The restaurant that is called Wedding in the Old Neighborhood is intended to provide the feel of a village-type neighborhood in Italy. The most ironic aspect of the neighborhood is when the Cappadoras find out that Ben has been living two streets over from them for four years, right in the same neighborhood, attending the same schools as the Cappadora kids.



## Basketball

Vincent loves basketball and, for his size, is quite good. However, the coach at school points out that Vincent has a huge chip on his shoulder and a bad attitude, and humiliates him. Vincent decides that he cannot go out for the team even though he wants to, but he is very upset about it and steals the coach's car out of spite.

Later, when his brother Ben returns, Vincent finds out that they have a love for basketball in common and, in fact, Ben is extremely good at it. Ben is on a traveling team with older kids, and has a natural instinct for the game. Ben and Vincent bond by playing together, and actually become friends in the process. When Ben finally returns home for good late at night, he and Vincent play basketball together. In a sense, they seal their friendship, teasing each other and challenging one another.

## Mental Illness

We know that Cecil Lockhart has a severe mental illness that makes her kidnap a child and eventually become completely catatonic. However, there are other forms of mental illness taking place in this story that are not so readily identified as such. Beth Cappadora can certainly be said to be mentally ill, perhaps even prior to losing her child. She is disorganized and careless with her children, quite focused on herself, and confused about her choices. After Ben disappears, Beth becomes severely depressed, withdrawn and addicted to sleeping pills. She is unable to live her life in a state of reality because it is too painful for her, and she spends much of her time in bed, not caring for her children or husband. She is emotionally distant by nature, and her treatment of others illustrates her general mental and emotional pain. Her healing begins after Ben returns.

## Media

From the first day at the Tremont Hotel, the Cappadoras are dealing with the presence of media. His kidnapping is national news. There are reporters with cameras camped out on the front lawns of Rosie and Angelo's home, there are photographers snapping their photos and people constantly wanting to interview them. Major magazines do spreads about them, and their faces, especially Ben's, are recognizable by almost everyone. Even young Sam knows that when he returns to the Cappadoras, he needs to do so at night so there will not be press people trying to capture a story or photo. Candy and others want Beth to go into magazine and newspaper publicity to help cast a wider net in the search for Ben. The picture of him on the poster has become an everyday entity for Beth. What is interesting is that this is what Beth used to do as a media photographer, and she comes to see these people in a different light..



## **Immaculata**

Beth and Pat attend Immaculata High School in Chicago. It is Beth's twentieth high school reunion that she is planning to attend when Ben is taken. Later, the high school basement room is turned into a headquarters in which to coordinate the search for Ben.

## **Tremont Hotel**

The hotel lobby where Ben disappears is the Tremont in Chicago. This is where the class reunion is going to take place before the kidnapping. The hotel virtually turns into a circus as it fills with officers, detectives and the press after Ben goes missing. Beth cannot drive by the hotel for many years afterward.

## **Compassionate Circle**

This is a support group for parents who have lost children to kidnapping or murder. Beth is reluctant to go, but it seems to help her when she realizes that others have gone through the pain of losing their children, often in horrific ways.

## **Prank Calls and Confessors**

After Ben's story is broadcast over national news and print, the Cappadoras receive phone calls from people claiming to have kidnapped Ben or to have done other things to him. Some people call to blame the family for not being good enough Christians, and others just want to say sick things to the family about Ben. One in particular likes to talk to Vincent and to threaten him.

## **Avalanche**

The avalanche is what Beth fears in terms of her psychological health. She withdraws and fakes living so that she does not fall into the avalanche that she perceives will swallow her if she lets go of her anger and withdrawal.

## **FBI**

Candy Bliss feels the FBI have no investigative qualities but are simply the holders of a large database of information which they hoard. They show up to claim a solved case when there are cameras present, but their stated purpose is to support local jurisdictions who are working on federal offenses. It turns out that the FBI does have a set of fingerprints of Cecil Lockhart, but does not share the information with the Chicago police when they are questioning the reunion attendees about the kidnapping.





## People Magazine

This national publication does a full feature article with Ben's photo and splashy headlines with an 800 number to call if Ben is spotted. The magazine talks Beth's friend, Laurie, into cooperating with them, making the story of little Ben's disappearance go worldwide.

## Baby House

In their older house in Madison, a built-in box is in the stair well that is originally built, probably, for a telephone. Little Kerry uses it for a baby house, but Vincent, at nine, is small enough to crawl into the box, too. While hiding in the box he is able to overhear a terrible argument between his parents. It is this argument that prompts him to try to smother his sister, and to reset all the alarms in the house.



# Themes

## Dangers of Mental Illness

Cecil Lockhart's condition starts out as depression after the loss of her child. However, it goes untreated and eventually Cecil loses control of her sanity and her morals. She becomes out of touch with reality. A strange hint of this is when someone at the reunion comments that she looks like Gloria Swanson, that her hair is purposely white now. Although she has had a fairly notable career, Cecil cannot maintain her sanity when the only thing she really wants is the baby who could not survive more than a week. To take someone else's child is an act of insanity which, in Cecil's case, gradually becomes worse. Cecil even dyes Ben's hair brown so that no one will recognize him and, according to Sam, is a good mother, so, although she is able to function for a while under these circumstances, her twisted and sad mind finally drives her to non-functioning catatonia.

The emotional illness experienced by Beth after Ben's disappearance is affecting everyone around her, even her children. Vincent's response to his parents' fight is to put a pillow over his little sister's face. We do not know what he was feeling at that moment, but we do know he was desperate for things to change somehow and felt that he had no control to make anything different. Mental illness in a family can cause mental illness for other family members.

## Unrecognized Victims of Crime

One thrust of this story is that there are many victims of a crime like kidnapping that we may not consider. Ben, the kidnapped child, may have been the most unscathed of the Cappadora family. The effects on his mother cause a ripple of illness that affects the entire family. Vincent, who grapples with his mother's pain all his life, is affected emotionally and turns to self-destructive behavior. Pat, who suffers his own grief over their loss, also is forced to suffer from the grief and withdrawal of Beth. The Cappadora family, who is also grieving, has to watch the destruction of Pat and Beth's family and the neglect of their children, and eventually, because Beth has given up, the other siblings stop speaking to her.

On the other hand, little Ben, who may have been confused at first, has a pretty wonderful life with his "mother," Cecil, and his very kind and devoted father, George. He comes out of the situation a healthy, polite, stable and confident child, while the Cappadoras are like battle-scarred veterans. Ben has been encouraged to develop his skills and interests, while the other Cappadora children have been left to their own devices. Ben's suffering is delayed and pertains to being torn between two families who both want and love him.



## Adaptability of Children

A three year old is kidnapped—stolen from his mother. Within a few short minutes, little Ben is with a woman he does not know. He takes a trip with her and undoubtedly hears his new guardian explaining to her own mother that Ben is her child. His hair is dyed and he is given a new name. He never sees his brother, mother, father or baby sister again. He is relocated to a new town, new home, new mother and new stepfather.

However, when we see Ben again at twelve years old, he is an incredibly well-adjusted boy who is considerate of others, willing to do what he is asked to do, confident about his talents and interests and healthy, inside and out. It becomes clear that Ben considers the Karras house to be his true home, and George Karras and Cecil Lockhart his real parents. We do not get to understand the transition Ben may have undergone when he was three, but nine years later he is unscathed and in better shape, perhaps, than the family who lost him. He is a good student and great athlete. Although Sam's mother is not mentally well, he obviously has the influence of his father, George, who is a solid, good-natured man, friendly and cheerful.

In a similar way, young Vincent adapts to his circumstances. His mother ignores him, so he goes out of his way to do things that will get her attention. He, too, is talented and bright, but Vincent adapts to depression and sorrow in the household and, thus, turns his talents towards negative activities. As he gets older, it becomes harder for him to be so affected by his mother's disposition.

When Ben/Sam is twelve and tries to rejoin his birth family, he finds it impossible to adapt. However, after some time passes and he is able to work some things out, he returns to their home, ostensibly to adapt to a new life with them.

## Victims Who Victimize

Beth Cappadora is not the best mother to begin with in terms of caring for and nurturing her children. However, when she loses one of her three children, she becomes so devastated, frightened and depressed, that she puts her other two children at risk. There are examples, like Kerry at four years old carrying a bucket of ammonia outside, her diapers going unchanged, wearing the same clothes for days at a time and rarely having the knots brushed out of her hair. Vincent is the most affected, since Beth stops showing him any affection whatsoever and, for the most part, leaves him on his own at a very young age. In her grief, Beth feels that she will be cheating on her lost child if she shows love to his brother. Vincent indulges in all sorts of dangerous behaviors as his mother sleeps and isolates herself. He is forced to take a certain degree of responsibility for his younger sister, just so that she is safe. Before he can even tell time, Vincent has to guess when to get up and get himself off to school. He goes to school with no breakfast, when he makes it at all. The more subtle damage from her neglect is that the neighbor has to paint Vincent's face for Halloween because he has no costume.



The kidnapping, as it turns out, is really no one's fault, but the Cappadora children pay a huge price for it at the hands of their mother, and Vincent is never reassured that it was not his fault, or that he is forgiven for letting go of Ben's hand. In addition, Pat Cappadora loses the companionship of his wife, who is not able to treat him well because she is in so much pain.



# Style

## Point of View

The author holds an omniscient view of the story and the characters, offering insights into the thoughts, minds and actions through dialogue and narrative. Mitchard tells this story in third person and looks into the feelings and thoughts of her characters carefully. Much is revealed through narrating the inner thoughts of the characters. Since this story is an emotional journey for the reader, telling it without those insights would not be as effective. Primarily told through exposition, the story is focused on two main characters, Vincent and Beth Cappadora, neither of whom is the actual kidnap victim. In addition, we learn about their characters through the exposition of other characters, such as knowing that the neighbor has to paint Vincent's face for Halloween because his mother totally neglects to get him prepared for the holiday. We learn that Kerry's hair is almost never brushed, and she spends most of her time at the neighbors, which helps us understand that Beth ignores her children and stays in her own world. We are able to see into the mind of Vincent just enough to gather what is going on for him and why he is so hurt and angry. Although there is revealing dialogue throughout the story, the plot is not what drives it, but the developmental processes experienced by the characters, which can only be told from the author's point of view.

## Setting

The story is set in two different cities—Chicago, Illinois and Madison, Wisconsin. Much of the earlier part of the story takes place in Chicago where, in a large, busy hotel, Beth Cappadora loses her child. She is visiting Chicago for her twentieth high school class reunion and is surrounded by many old friends. She leaves the hotel but stays for quite some time in her in-laws' home in Chicago, which is the somewhat elegant home of older Italian immigrants. This home has a formal dining room and extra guest bedrooms, as well as a verandah, and is the family home for Rosie and Angelo Cappadora's visiting children and grandchildren.

We know that the Cappadora house in Madison where Beth and Pat are living with their three children is an older structure, because of the built-in telephone nook where Vincent and Kerry play and the attic where Ben hides in a cedar chest. The home is in a neighborhood. Later, the Cappadoras move to Chicago where Pat opens a restaurant with his father.

The Wedding in the Neighborhood restaurant is developed within an old warehouse building, and is renovated and decorated like a street in an Italian village, complete with mosaics, elaborate paintings, balconies and wedding-themed decor. There is a deliberately festive atmosphere in the restaurant and, it is here that a huge celebration takes place when Ben is found.



The Cappadora home in Chicago to which Pat and Beth move is somewhat nondescript, although there is something of a pall in the internal atmosphere. This home, too, is in a suburban neighborhood where we learn that long-lost Ben has been living two blocks away for four years. The school is close enough that Vince can ride his bike, and the Cappadoras have a basketball hoop enclosed within their yard. With the exception of the new restaurant, most of the settings in the story could be anywhere in the US, which is a reminder that this could happen to anyone.

## Language and Meaning

Mitchard's narrative is very modern and flowing, a traditional style of writing that does not distract from the experience of the story. Her sentence structure is sound and logical, and she uses symbols, music titles and brand names that people of this decade are familiar with. Again, it is the commonness of everyday life that makes the story believable—Beth is hurried and disorganized with three kids and a career, living in the suburbs, and Pat works long hours at the family restaurant.

There is occasional mild dialectical variety, such as the language used by the family's mafia friend, and the fun language used by Beth's black, gay friend, that differentiate them, but it is not so extreme that it would not be believable. Tom Kilgore uses counselor jargon to a certain extent, but not in an obnoxious way at all. The story covers a period of nine years wherein Vincent's language becomes coarser and more profane. There is also sexual talk between Pat and Beth, and between Beth and Candy, that is frank and earnest.

Each character's language helps us understand the character better. For example, Grandma Rosie is reserved, organized and logical, as well as loving, patient and quite old-fashioned. This comes through in her responses to the counselor. Grandpa Bill is aloof and somewhat weak in character, as demonstrated in his greetings to the children and his tendency to question everything, rather than jump in and help.

## Structure

This 434-page novel is divided into a seven page prologue, and thirty-five chapters of uneven length. Some chapter headings contain a name of a character, and some include a date, but most are simply numbered, and there is no table of contents. The prologue of the story finds Beth, ten years later, finally looking at photos that were taken the morning of the day of the kidnapping. There is something of a summary of what she has been through since that day, but no real hint as to the circumstances under which she is finally able to look at the photos.

The plot of the novel is surprising in several ways. The disappearance of the baby brings about a huge rush of emotions, changes, characters and plot thickeners. However, the underlying plot is what happens to the mother, Beth and the brother, Vincent. Their emotional states over the nine years and their coping methods are explored, as well as each plot change that takes place. At the same time, the plot's



tension builds because it takes nine years before anyone learns what really happened to the child. There are leads and hints and at least one small body to be identified, but Ben's disappearance becomes even more of a mystery. The masterful touch of his small red tennis shoes showing up—one of them five years later, stumps the reader, as well as the characters in the story.

One would think, then, that the return of Ben to his family would end the story on an upbeat note. However, it turns out that, probably because of dynamics the Cappadora family has developed after losing him, Ben chooses to go back to the man he thought was his father. This is when Beth turns a corner and realizes that Ben's happiness is more important than their grief.

Then, surprisingly, Ben returns to his birth family and begins to form a long-needed bond with his brother.

Altogether, the story is written masterfully, as it flows along, occasionally providing some kind of memory or backflash.



## Quotes

Holding Ben in one arm, Wayne told Ellen and Beth conspiratorially, "I saw Cecil Lockhart. She looks just like Gloria Swanson now. She has white hair — on purpose." The antique flicker of annoyance Beth still felt at the mention of Cecil Lockhart's name took her by surprise. She realized that she had been hoping that Cecil—the swanlike, gray-eyed girl who grew up next door to Ellen, the chief and constant rival to Beth for Ellen's best friendship—would skip this occasion. Cecil (whose real name was Cecilia) was, Beth judged, the only of the Immaculata graduates from her year to have made more of herself as a creative soul than Beth had. And it rankled.

(Ch. 1, p. 23)

Italians were good at this sort of thing. In a jam, Irish would tremble and supplicate theatrically; but Italians knew what mattered in this world: that everyone needed food and shelter, that an army ran on its stomach, that children had to be bathed and put to bed. Except at funerals, then they indulged hysteria at a time when it availed them least, Italians did what needed doing.

(Ch. 2, p. 47)

"I don't want to go in the deep end of the ocean," Ben told her. Sharks are there. Do I have to go?"

"No, no, Benbo," Beth had said, scooping him up, unsure whether she should just stomp out there and dip him, get it over with. She didn't want her boy to grow up timid, shy of this, of that. "Don't be afraid. I would be with you. Mama would never let the ocean snatch you away. I would hold you tightest and tightest, wouldn't I?"

"You know what?" Ben told her then, buying time. You can go to the deep end. You can go there. You just start walking until it goes over your head and then you keep on walking on the bottom. But then if you want to go back, that's too hard because the water just rubs all the, all the..."

"What, Ben?"

"All the feet marks away. You can't ever turn around and go back. You can't find it."

(Ch. 3, p. 60)

"Maybe its faith that really takes the courage. The belief in things unseen."

"Sounds like you were raised Catholic," Beth said.

"Well, I was raised Jewish," Candy told her, standing up. "And there are plenty of comparisons. Guilt. Misogyny. You name it." She reached out her hand and touched the Virgin's marble fingertips. "But some other stuff, too. Like you move the house to take care of someone. You sacrifice everything for a child—and of course you remind the child of that for as long as you live." Candy looked up at the serene face of the Madonna. "She was a Jewish mother, Beth, you know? And if anyone would help you now, maybe it would be a Jewish mother."

(Ch. 5, p. 81)

What she did know was that some sort of reckoning, some sort of relinquishment, would precede stepping up onto the verge of that life. And though she didn't know when the





step would have to be taken, she did not want to take it without Candy there beside her. If she did, oh, it would be worse than dying, worse than remembering the day Ben had called her "my beauteous grape" — the day she had come to believe that Ben was not just good and lovely but stuffed with poetry —  
(Ch. 8, p. 109)

What? What was it? Why couldn't she reach for her wild child and pour into him all the baby-clear affection she had felt for Ben? It wasn't Vincent's fault that Ben had never gotten old enough to sully the purity of that baby love. It would be easy, one of the right motions.

But if she did that, what would Ben have been? A sort of delayed miscarriage? No, thought Beth. No. There was no one to punish, no possibility of atonement. Only survival, through a silent celibacy of the heart. Any solace at all would be a signal to the universe that a mother could get along with one child more or less.

Oh, Ben, thought Beth, letting the door of her own house close behind her with a thud. I almost cheated on you.

(Ch. 8, p. 118)

Most of the time, though, his mother didn't put him to bed or wake him up. She put the baby in bed and said, "Night-night, Kerry," and then he would just stand there in the hall, for so long, with her hand on the knob of baby Kerry's door.

Vincent would get his pajamas on and come back out there. Then he would brush his teeth and come back out there. After a while, he would go and get in bed. He didn't know if it was his bedtime, because he couldn't tell time on the upstairs clocks, only the one on the VCR that had actual numbers. A few times he didn't get up in time for school, either, but when he told his teacher that his mother forgot to wake him up, they said it was okay, they wouldn't mark him tardy. After a while, a couple of times, he didn't go even when he knew it was time, when he could see other kids going to school on the street. He just watched TV until his mother came down with the baby.

(Ch. 10, pp. 132-133)

After a while of doing normal things again, she would start to realize that even if Ben was gone right now, she still had even more kids than she'd lost. She had double the number of kids she'd lost.

And he was pretty sure he and Kerry together made up for one Ben. Maybe even one and a half.

(Ch. 10, p. 144)

That night during the rush, Uncle Augie was in a take-no-prisoners mood, yelling at everybody, right up to the chef, Enzo, who even Augie's was normally cared of. "People are starving out there, Enzo!" he yelled. "People want to starve, they can go to Ethiopia, they don't have to sit in my dining room!"

Finally, Enzo pointed the end of his biggest knife at Uncle Augie and said, "You say one more thing and I'm going to stick this up your fat nose, Augusto. You crazy old sonofabitch. You never hire anybody else who got the IQ of my mailbox and maybe somebody would get to eat after all!" Vincent's dad had to break them up. Vincent loved



it when this happened, even though his dad didn't. He hated fights.  
(Ch. 13, p. 179)

"I mean, I'm sorry, Mr. Cappadora. Pat. What I should be saying is that this is definitely dangerous, oppositional behavior, in a sense, risk-taking, to the point of self-endangerment. Of course it is." Vincent strained to hear the shrink. He had gotten up, was moving away, out of earshot. Vincent leaned forward a fraction of an inch, and the guy said, "But thirty feet in the air? Boom?"  
Reese heard his dad laugh, softly, very softly. "Did he tell you he's a bookie?"  
"Get out of here!"  
(Ch. 16, p. 214)

"But I can't stand it! Everyone keeps pretending he's going to come back. I think that's half of what makes Vincent crazy. It makes me crazy. I don't care, Pat. I came here and why waste the money? I'm going to say this. I'm sick of it. 'Never give up hope.' 'Pray, pray pray.' Well, why don't we give up hope? And just let whatever happens happen?"  
"Because you can't just bury him, Beth. You want to just bury him before we even know. I know why you feel that way but..."  
I'm here, thought Reese. I'm here.  
(Ch. 18, p. 230)

"No, no. The little lady. The little skinny old lady."  
"What's she doing?"  
"She's walking behind Ben. She's following Ben. She's ... opening the door for him."  
"Reese," said Tom gently, so soft sitting down next to him on the edge of the sofa. "do you think this really happened? Or is this part of the dream?"  
"I think it's part of the dream," said Reese, "because it really happened."  
(Ch. 18, p. 235)

Reese woke up in the dark. His father must have turned out the light. Turning, he felt under his back the familiar lump. Over the years, Reese had occasionally tried to figure out what the constant body pressure was morphing Ben's red bunny into looking exactly like. He thought sometimes it looked like a tadpole now, except for the one remaining ear. Easing up, careful not to press his groaning bladder, Reese pulled it out from under the bottom sheet. One eye. A humped, fat shape, in places its red plush worn nearly transparent pink. Embryo, thought Reese now. That's it. Igor, the Embryo.  
(Ch. 24, pp. 291-292)

The circumstances in their house were so different, Beth sometimes felt they were all strangers brought together to act in a play without rehearsal.  
(Ch. 26, p. 303)

She got up, eyes turning speculatively to follow her, and walked quietly to the back of the church and extended her hand, which George, gulping in humiliation and relief, took. She led him back, toward the first pew, and it was only as she neared the family, the last few feet, that she dared to look up—and it was Sam's face she saw, turned on her and



George, with a look she had never seen on it before. It was, she later guessed, joy.  
(Ch. 26, pp. 30-309)

"When I was at home my dad and I talked, and he said we should make a list of what wouldn't be so bad about going back. And one of the things I put on the list was that it might be fun to have brothers and sisters."

"And?"

"And then...I mean, Kerry's great, but he looks at me like ... Jesus, you see how he looks at me!"

"Sam, I don't think he looks at you any differently from the way he looks at all of us. He's ...he's had a hard time."

"But it wasn't my fault! That's what I keep telling you guys!"

(Ch. 29, pp. 356-357)

But it happened then. Ben lifted the lacy gown Rosie had so lovingly embroidered up to his nose, inhaling its sweet, hamster-cage scent.

"What's that smell?" he asked.

"Cedar. It's supposed to preserve clothes and keep moths away. Lots of closets are lined with it. Didn't you ever smell it before?"

"No," Sam said firmly. "It could be ... maybe it was that my yaya had a trunk like this. I think so. She brought it from Greece. Maybe. I played with it when I was a kid." But his face didn't register confidence. "At least, I think so."

And then Beth had noticed, with growing excitement, that tears were welling in his eyes.  
(Ch. 29, p. 358)

"Yeah, there's been enough. I mean, I'm sick of this whole thing."

"What whole thing?" Pat asked quietly.

"This whole thing." Tears gathered in the corners of Sam's eyes, and slowly, beautifully spilled from the fan shaped ends of his long lashes. "I'm sick of this. I want to go home. I want my dad. I can go to court and get you to give me to my dad. I read it at school. "

(Ch. 31, p. 377)

"Why don't you talk to Tom? Why don't you? I have."

"And he said?"

"He said Reese is what they call a symptom bearer. He lives out everybody else's pain with the stuff he does. And now, with Sam gone, how do you think he feels?"

"I have no idea," Beth said wearily, and then, "You know what? I think Pat and I separating."

Candy tossed the remains of her drink out into the bushes and slammed down the glass. "Good Christ, Beth, why?" Beth shrugged. "Isn't enough enough?"

(Ch. 34, p. 424)

It seems kind of crummy to come along and kick you out of your bed."

"No, really," Reese insisted. "I'll take the first watch, okay?"

Sam smiled. "Okay."

"I'll walk the perimeter." said Reese, as Sam got up, rummaged in his suitcase, and



extracted his toothbrush. Always the good kid.

"Look for suspicious activity." Sam whispered back.

"Right-o, sir, and have a good sleep. I won't rest until the encampment is secured," said Reese.

"Well done."

(Ch. 35, p. 434)



## Topics for Discussion

How common is kidnapping in our culture? If your younger brother disappeared, would you assume the worst? Why, or why not? What are the three common reasons for kidnapping, as stated in the story? Might there be others?

Was Beth's disorganized lifestyle to blame for Ben's loss? Was Vincent to blame? Is Ben to blame for not screaming out? Could Pat be blamed for sending his wife off with three children to a party in a big city? Is Cecil to blame?

Discuss the contrast between Beth's relationship with her father and brother, and the relationship among the Cappadoras. In what ways are they similar? In what ways are they different? Does religion play a role in either, or both?

Rosie and Angelo Cappadora's characters are intense. Are these loveable people? Why, or why not? What kind of grandparents are they? Are they judgmental? Helpful? What do they contribute to Pat and Beth's life?

Discuss the meaning of little Ben's statement about going to the deep end of the ocean. In what ways does it prove to be ironic? What might be symbolic of a "footprint" for Ben in the story?

Discuss how Mitchard uses natural phenomenon, such as the avalanche and the ocean, to express a more profound meaning. Are there other instances of this in the story?

Who is this story about? Is it about the kidnapped child, Ben? If not, who? Explain your answers in detail.

During her period of grief, Beth finally agrees to take a job photographing a young couple in her home. Why does Beth agree to this? What is the goal of the couples' parents? How does this fit with Beth's state of mind?

How significant is the fact that Beth is a photographer? Does it make sense that she would choose this career? How does her career choice contrast with Pat's?

In what ways (if any) does Beth Cappadora change when twelve-year old Ben reappears in their lives? Does she become better mother or a worse one? A better person? More mature? Discuss your answer.