

Presumption of Guilt Study Guide

Presumption of Guilt by Terri Blackstock

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Contents

Presumption of Guilt Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Plot Summary.....	4
Chapters 1 and 2.....	5
Chapters 3 and 4.....	6
Chapters 5 and 6.....	7
Chapters 7 and 8.....	8
Chapters 9 and 10.....	9
Chapters 11 and 12.....	10
Chapters 13 and 14.....	11
Chapters 15 and 16.....	12
Chapters 17 and 18.....	13
Chapters 19 and 20.....	14
Chapters 21 and 22.....	15
Chapters 23 and 24.....	16
Chapters 25 and 26.....	17
Chapters 27 and 28.....	18
Chapters 29 and 30.....	19
Chapters 31 and 32.....	20
Chapters 33 and 34.....	21
Chapters 35 and 36.....	22
Chapters 37 and 38.....	23
Chapters 39 and 40.....	24
Chapters 41 and 42.....	25
Chapters 43 and 44.....	26



[Chapters 45 and 46.....](#) 27

[Chapters 47 and 48.....](#) 28

[Chapters 49 and 50.....](#) 29

[Chapters 51 and 52.....](#) 30

[Chapters 53 and 54.....](#) 31

[Chapters 55 and 56.....](#) 32

[Chapters 57 and 58.....](#) 33

[Chapters 59 and 60.....](#) 34

[Chapters 61 and 62.....](#) 35

[Chapters 63 and 64.....](#) 36

[Chapters 65 and 66.....](#) 37

[Chapters 67 and 68.....](#) 38

[Chapters 69 and 70.....](#) 39

[Chapters 71 and 72.....](#) 40

[Chapters 73 and 74.....](#) 41

[Chapter 75.....](#) 42

[Characters.....](#) 43

[Objects/Places.....](#) 46

[Themes.....](#) 48

[Style.....](#) 49

[Quotes.....](#) 51

[Topics for Discussion.....](#) 55



Plot Summary

Presumption of Guilt is a novel by author Terri Blackstock. The story follows a journalist, Beth Wright as she investigates the St. Clair Children's Home for an article she is writing. Beth believes that the man who runs the home, Bill Brandon, is using the children that live at the home to run a crime ring. She plans on exposing Brandon and all of his evil deeds when her story publishes.

After interviewing Bill's sister, Marlene, Bill tries to run Beth off the road. In the meantime, Bill sends Jimmy, a ten-year-old boy from the home to break into Beth's house and steal any papers, tapes or information Beth has on the home. Beth ends up finding Jimmy hiding in her attic and tries to protect him while she gets her story published. Jimmy, however, is intent on getting his sister Lisa out of the home because Bill threatens to harm the siblings for the sins of their other siblings.

As the novel and the story unfolds, Nick, who is a social worker, helps Beth. The two also fall in love at the same time. Through arson, bombings, and high-speed car chases, the police with Nick and Beth finally arrest Bill Brandon. The rest of his ring, consisting of high officials such as judges and the social worker that is Nick's boss, are also convicted.



Chapters 1 and 2

Chapters 1 and 2 Summary

Beth Wright is driving in her car. Someone, who she thinks is Bill Brandon, is following her and trying to run her off the road. She thinks it is Bill Brandon because she has been interviewing his sister Marlene about the St. Clair Children's Home for a story she is doing. As the car following her bumps her, Beth calls 9-1-1 on the phone. Then she tries to call Nick Hutchins, who she is supposed to meet and her own house to check her messages. When she calls her house, a boy answers instead of her machine picking up. She checks the number and it is the right number, but when she redials, nobody, not even the machine answers. She starts to head to the hidden house she rents in the woods, hoping Bill doesn't know where it is yet.

Bill's car phone rings. A boy tells him that he's still in her house. He also tells Bill he can't find anything. Finally, the boy tells her that she called the house and he answered thinking it was Bill. Bill calls the boy an idiot and tells him he lost her. Bill hears sirens and pulls off the hide. He tells the boy he'll pick him up at a station and hangs up.

Chapters 1 and 2 Analysis

The inference is the Beth is a reporter, journalist or author. She is conducting some kind of investigation on the St. Clair Children's Home. Bill must somehow be connected with the home because the woman Beth has been speaking with is Marlene, Bill's sister. It suggests that something illegal is occurring in the home and Bill wants to prevent the story from leaking to the public.

Bill sent the boy to Beth's house to find out what information she has on what is going on at the children's home. This verifies that Bill does in fact know where Beth live. It also insinuates that Beth is in danger. Bill might try to kill Beth to keep the story from breaking.



Chapters 3 and 4

Chapters 3 and 4 Summary

The 10-year-old boy inside Beth's house is Jimmy Westin. Bill sent him there to find some papers and tapes. When Jimmy hears a car pull into the driveway, he hides upstairs in the attic. Jimmy takes a step but the floor creaks so he stops. He takes a flashlight out of his backpack and sees there is a window he can use to escape. He feels as if all the heat in Florida is in the attic with him. He takes another step and the floor doesn't creak, but when he gets to the window, it is stuck shut. He thinks about how he has to get back to the home so that Lisa doesn't take the brunt of his punishment. He hears Beth's puppy and hopes the puppy doesn't lead her to the attic. He hears Beth go to her desk and wonders how he could be so stupid as to forget to turn the answering machine back on.

Nick is stuffing the duffel bags of two boys' clothes in the trunk of his car. He's picking up the children to take them into state custody because their parents are being arrested for dealing crack cocaine. When he gets to his office, his boss, Sheila, is there with a three-month-old infant taken away from her parents for abuse. Sheila suggests Nick take the boys to the SCCH, which is the St. Clair Children's Home. In his mind, Nick refuses to take the boys there because of what he knows about the home now. He gets Sheila to agree to let him find a place for all three kids tonight rather than to take the boys to the home automatically. Sheila agrees, but that if Nick doesn't find a place for the boys, she'll take them to St. Clair herself. Nick gets an elderly couple just approved for foster care today to agree to take all three of the children.

Chapters 3 and 4 Analysis

Bill is using Jimmy, who is a boy that lives at St. Clair, to find papers and tapes Beth is keeping. The inference is that Lisa is Jimmy's sister, so if Jimmy doesn't come back or perform his duties right, Bill will beat or somehow punish Lisa to hurt Jimmy. Jimmy thinks about the detention center he might end up in if he gets caught, which reveals that Bill has been threatening Jimmy and telling him how horrible living in the detention is.

Nick works for the state of Florida as a child protective care worker. He is somehow involved with Beth, so he knows the secret about the St. Clair Children's Home that Beth knows. This knowledge is affecting how Nick does his job because he no longer wants to place children in the home's care.



Chapters 5 and 6

Chapters 5 and 6 Summary

As the puppy scratches on the attic door, Beth stands over her answering machine wondering how it got turned off and who answered her phone when she called earlier. She grabs her pistol when she hears a car pull up, but it turns out to be Nick. Beth met Nick a few days earlier when she interviewed him about the children's home. Although she barely knows him, she trusts him and feels safe with him.

She tells Nick the interview with Marlene went well and that she taped it. She says Marlene confirmed Bill is using boys from the home in his burglary ring. Marlene also says Bill has some of the police and government officials on his payroll. Nick questions Marlene's authenticity, but Beth assures him she seemed genuine and frightened.

Beth tells Nick about the person following her. She tells him that she'll have the story out within a week. She suggests he start using the list of the boys he knows are in the home to start finding them new homes. Beth confirms that she is writing a story for the newspaper and her age. She also tells Nick about someone, presumably Bill, that followed her. He offers to stay the night with her but she sends him home.

As Nick pulls out of Beth's gravel driveway, he has an uneasy feeling. He starts thinking about how he met Beth when she interviewed him for her story. Prior to Beth coming to him, Nick suspected something was going on at the home, but couldn't prove anything. Teachers of the boys were reporting boys falling asleep in class. A mother of one of the boys reported a beating by Bill Brandon when she had visitation with her son. Some of the boys from the home were arrested for burglary. When Beth tells Nick about Bill using the boys in a burglary ring, all of the pieces fall in place for Nick.

Nick drives to the police department. He asks the two cops that arrested the parents selling dope tonight to patrol Beth's house.

Chapters 5 and 6 Analysis

Beth's feelings for Nick foreshadow the two starting a romantic relationship. Marlene mentioning Bill hides the stolen goods in a warehouse and has officials he pays off so he doesn't get in trouble foreshadows Beth seeking out the place and the people. This, of course, presumably leads to additional dangerous situations for Beth and for Nick.

The two cops tease Nick about his intention with the girl he is asking them to watch over. They insinuate that he must have romantic feelings for her because normally he doesn't have enough time in his life for women. Additionally, they foreshadow a serious commitment or even marriage between the two when Nick says she's different from the other women he knows.



Chapters 7 and 8

Chapters 7 and 8 Summary

As Beth is transcribing the tapes from her interview with Marlene, she hears creaking above her head. She grabs her gun and calls 9-1-1. She reports someone in her house. A cop tells Danks, which is one of the cops Nick spoke to, that the lady of the house they are patrolling just called to report an intruder.

Bill is at the gas station waiting for Jimmy. When the boy doesn't show, Bill heads toward Beth's house. On the way, he sees a cop car with its siren on heading that way. Bill assumes Beth called the cops because she caught Jimmy. He decides to head to the home so he can be there when the cops call there.

Jimmy hears the siren and someone knocking on the door. He uses the noise downstairs to cover him while he runs to a Christmas tree box and hides in it while putting the tree on top. When the cops search the attic, they don't find anything. When Beth says she wasn't expecting two detectives to show up, they confess Nick asked them to watch out for her. They say they saw the dents in her car and try to get her to file a complaint. She says she will when the story breaks in a few days. She does tell the detectives who she thinks was following her though.

Chapters 7 and 8 Analysis

Now the cops know who Beth thinks is following her. This could be a good thing or this could be a bad thing. It could be good if it helps to put Bill in the spotlight and have the cops watch his actions more closely. It could be bad if the cops and officials Bill has working for him find out because now they know where Beth lives and can make her life more difficult than it has been since she started investigating the story. This could even create the leeway Bill needs to kill Beth and get rid of her and the story for good.



Chapters 9 and 10

Chapters 9 and 10 Summary

Marlene is in bed trying to fall asleep and thinking about everything she told Beth. Marlene knows her newfound faith requires her to confess her part and Bill's part. She is worried that it will also lead to Marlene's prosecution unless she can get immunity for testifying against Bill. Bill appears in Marlene's doorway. He asks her what she told Beth and then he pulls a gun on her.

Lisa Westin, Jimmy's sister, is awake in her bed at the children's home. She's been waiting for Jimmy to return. She sees Bill's car pull up and him go into his cottage. She remembers the night their mother didn't come home and they became wards of the state. Jimmy promised Lisa he would never leave her. She sneaks into the room where Jimmy's bed is to see if he packed his stuff. One of the boys wakes up and sees her going through the box of things Jimmy keeps under his bed and threatens to tell. She takes the snapshots of her and Jimmy from a few years before and goes back to bed.

Jimmy wakes up the next morning still in the Christmas tree box. He hears the TV downstairs and knows he can't escape yet.

Chapters 9 and 10 Analysis

Marlene is struggling with good and evil. She knows she played a part in Bill's evil in the past but she is trying to do what is right now that she has found religion. Beth, alone and putting herself through college, is symbolic of the kids that grow up in the children's home. The insinuation is that Beth is just as much of an orphan as they are, even though she is an adult now. As Bill pulls the gun on Marlene, it foreshadows him shooting and killing her. Marlene's death will be the start of the additional clues Beth needs to link the crimes to Bill and stop his tyranny.

Jimmy getting stuck in the attic is making his sister believe that Jimmy has abandoned her like their mother did years earlier. It also foreshadows that Beth will find Jimmy in her attic. She'll be able to get the boy to talk and provide her with the additional evidence she needs against Bill. Additionally, Beth will be able to save Jimmy and his sister.



Chapters 11 and 12

Chapters 11 and 12 Summary

As Beth continues to work, she catches a news story about Marlene Brandon being shot and killed during a burglary of her home. Beth calls her editor at the paper insisting that Bill killed his sister and that Marlene Brandon was the woman she interviewed last night. Beth hears the creaking coming from the attic again. She tells her editor she's going to check it out and if she doesn't come back in a few minutes to call the police. Beth goes to the attic, checks the Christmas tree box, but finds it empty under the tree. She goes back to the phone and convinces her editor to have someone cover the Marlene Brandon story and let her know what they find out. Two cops from Tampa show up at her door wanting to question her about Marlene Brandon.

The police say they found out from Marlene's pastor that Beth was the last person to see Marlene alive. Beth suggests they speak to her brother. They say they did and his employees alibi him being home. She tells the cops about being followed, but not that she thinks it was Bill. She provides some truthful information to the cops but not the entire truth. She tells them about Nick being at her house and the cops as her alibi.

Chapters 11 and 12 Analysis

Jimmy decided to escape even though Beth might hear him. Not only is she trying to piece the puzzle together to break the story on Bill and the children's home, but now she is also concerned with keeping up with the story on Marlene's death. The employees at the home seem to be backing Bill up, even if they are lying, saying that he was home all night when he was not. Jimmy getting stuck at Beth's house suggests that Bill will punish Jimmy for everything that happened. Eventually, Bill's beatings might lead Jimmy or one of the boys to turn against him.



Chapters 13 and 14

Chapters 13 and 14 Summary

Jimmy is still in the attic. He had climbed out of the box when he heard Beth coming. He balled up and hid behind another box until she left. He heard the doorbell and voices. He looked out the window and saw the Tampa police car. He wonders if they've connected him to the Tampa burglaries and he wonders what Lisa is thinking.

After the cops leave, Beth is outside walking the puppy. She sees something popping up and down from the attic window. She goes in with her gun and finds Jimmy. He says he got lost and crawled in there the previous night. He asks to use her bathroom while she tries to call his mother. When she hears him trying to escape through the bathroom window she opens the door and sees him trying to climb out. This is when she realizes the boy dressed all in black is from the children's home. She starts to question him and convince him that everything Bill tells him is a lie. She calls Nick to get him to come over and help.

Beth tries to find out what Bill told Jimmy about her while she feeds him breakfast. She questions if Bill knows where she lives why he didn't come out there the night before. Jimmy says Bill might have been scared she'd called the police. Nick arrives.

After Nick hears Jimmy's story, he is excited because he thinks Jimmy is the witness he and Beth need to stop Bill. Jimmy argues that they are going to separate the kids, especially the brothers and sisters if they tell. He says he's worried about his sister. Beth says Jimmy can stay at her house while Nick makes a visit to the home. Jimmy asks Nick to tell Lisa he's fine and didn't leave her but Nick says it isn't a good idea right now.

Chapters 13 and 14 Analysis

Jimmy has suffered a lot of pain and loss in his life. This makes him wary of trusting Nick and Beth. His mistrust along with his need to get to his sister might cause Jimmy to run away from Beth and back to the home. When Bill gets a hold of Jimmy, he could really injure Jimmy or even kill the boy. It especially endangers Jimmy's life because if Bill can get rid of Jimmy then he gets rid of the witness Beth and Nick have to take Bill down and send Bill to prison.

Chapters 15 and 16

Chapters 15 and 16 Summary

Bill calls the kids that are part of the burglary ring into the meeting room adjacent to his office. He tells them Jimmy was arrested and that he's going to serve adult time. He says Jimmy won't talk to protect his sister. Bill also tells them he plans to put Lisa to work in Jimmy's place to keep her quiet.

Beth is upstairs working, but she can see Jimmy watching TV downstairs. He sneaks to the phone. Stella, the housemother for the girls' area answers. When he asks for Lisa in a disguised voice, Stella recognizes him. He hangs up and thinks that Lisa must think he abandoned her like everyone else in their lives has.

Chapters 15 and 16 Analysis

Bill continues to try to brainwash the children. Even though they don't understand what Bill means sometimes, his authority forces them to know that if they step out of line that they will pay the price. Stella will likely tell Bill that Jimmy called. Bill will figure out Jimmy is calling from Beth's house and then go after Jimmy and Beth at the house.



Chapters 17 and 18

Chapters 17 and 18 Summary

Nick is inspecting the children's home with Bill. When Nick asks if all of the children are here, Bill says there are some at the library and some at swimming lessons. Stella pulls Bill aside and tells him about Jimmy's call. Bill goes to his office and checks the Caller I.D. in his closet and sees Jimmy called from Beth's house. Bill finds Lisa and tells her he needs to train her to take Jimmy's place saying that Jimmy is probably never coming back.

Bill rigs a cigar box as a bomb and wraps it like a package. He plans to overnight it to Beth's house and use Lisa to drop it in the slot at the post office. When Nick stops Bill from driving away with the girl, Bill gets Stella to drive her instead.

Chapters 17 and 18 Analysis

It seems as if Stella knows what Bill is doing with the children. She questions whether or not Lisa is too young to be one of his children. Bill lying to Nick about none of the children being missing will come back to bite Bill. Since Nick knows that Jimmy is missing, he can confront Bill with the information. Bill will have a hard time explaining how he didn't notice Jimmy was gone or why he didn't report the boy missing from the home.

Chapters 19 and 20

Chapters 19 and 20 Summary

Beth finishes her story and sends it to her editor, Phil. He calls to say that he wants more quotes for the story than from a juvenile delinquent and a dead woman—Jimmy and Marlene. Beth asks if she gets him two more quotes if he promises to print the story in Saturday's edition. Phil promises. Beth thinks that in order to get what Phil wants that she's going to have to open doors she doesn't want to open. She calls her attorney and asks her to come to the house to meet with her.

Stella drives Lisa to the post office. While Lisa is trying to put the heavy box into the regular mail slot, the postman directs her to the slot for Express Mail. When the box doesn't fit, the postman takes it in the back for Lisa. Stella asks Lisa if she put it in the slot and if she talked to anyone. Lisa lies about both.

Chapters 19 and 20 Analysis

The implication is that Beth was once an orphan and possibly a juvenile delinquent. The inference is that Beth might be a former St. Clair child, but she doesn't want to divulge this information and her own past. When the post office scans the package, it should pick up that it is an electronic device—a bomb. This might prevent the bomb from being delivered to Beth's house and save Beth and Jimmy's lives.



Chapters 21 and 22

Chapters 21 and 22 Summary

Beth meets with her attorney, Lynda. She asks Lynda about the children being prosecuted. Lynda says under the extenuating circumstances, she doubts a judge would sentence children as young as Jimmy. Beth asks about former children that are now adults and if they could be prosecuted. Lynda says it's possible. Lynda and her husband Jake agree to take Jimmy so Beth can work and finish the article.

Beth calls Maria, an adult now that was a child at the home. Maria has two-year-old twins now and is married. Beth tells Maria it is Beth Sullivan, which was Beth's name before she changed it. She tells Maria she wants to talk to her about Bill and gets Maria to meet her in the park. When Beth and Maria meet, she tells Maria about the story to try to get a quote from her. When Maria finds out Marlene is dead from talking to Beth, she gets up to leave, fearing for her own safety and the safety of her children. It turns out that Maria is Beth's former roommate from the St. Clair's home. Maria tells Beth that they have the same story so she says to use her own quote.

Lynda and Jake rent a plane to take Jimmy flying. Jake is a pilot. When Lynda tries to convince Jimmy to trust Beth and the others working on the Bill situation, Jimmy says that his mother once told him to trust her. Lynda and Jake decide to leave Jimmy alone and just take him on his first time in a plane.

Chapters 21 and 22 Analysis

Beth is asking about prosecution because she is one of the kids that lived at St. Clair, worked for Bill and is now an adult. Maria confirms that Beth was an orphan living in St. Clair. She also infers that this is where Beth got the story idea to expose Bill in the first place. Additionally, Maria accuses Beth of waiting for the statute of limitations to expire so that when she exposes Bill Beth won't get in trouble for the crimes she committed while living in the home.

Even though Jimmy is only 10, he has already suffered so much. His suffering has led him not to trust what people say, ironically, he does trust what Bill says. Jimmy believes that Bill will get him back and make him and Lisa suffer for Jimmy messing up.



Chapters 23 and 24

Chapters 23 and 24 Summary

Nick is at his desk trying to figure out a loophole to get Lisa out of the home. he pulls Jimmy and Lisa's file. When he sees the picture, he realizes the girl that drove off in the truck with Stella is Lisa. he grabs his keys to drive back to the home to make sure Lisa is safe.

Nick uses the story of a lost Mont Blanc pen to return to the home. he spots Stella and Lisa on the playground. He briefly looks Lisa over and talks to her, even though Bill says her name is Susan. She looks unharmed for the moment so he goes to leave. As Nick is leaving, he notices the two boys he left in the foster home the night before are at the home. Bill confirms that Sheila Axelrod dropped them off.

Nick returns to his office and confronts Sheila. She blows him off. Nick studies Jimmy and Lisa's file. He decides to try to find their mother.

Chapters 23 and 24 Analysis

It seems as if Nick's boss, Sheila, is working with Bill. She might be taking bribes from Bill for each child she places in his care at the home. this is why she keeps insisting that Nick take children there, and why she picked up the boys from a perfectly good foster home to move them to St. Clair. Nick confirms that Jimmy and Lisa's mother went on a drug binge, abandoning the then four and seven year old alone at home. if Nick is able to find their mother and prove her competent, Nick might be able to use her as a loophole for getting Lisa out of the children's home and into a safe place,



Chapters 25 and 26

Chapters 25 and 26 Summary

Beth spends hours writing her own story. She calls to tell Phil she has another source, but that the source is anonymous. Phil agrees to read the story and let her know if he's going to print it. Nick finds Tracy Westin in a filthy and rundown apartment building. Tracy weighs about 80 pounds and she is lying on a mattress in the corner of her apartment. She is burning up with a fever and Nick picks her up to take her to a hospital.

Chapters 25 and 26 Analysis

Beth is going to have to admit to Phil that she is the anonymous source in order to get him to publish the story. It's the only way Beth can save all of those kids. Nick finding Tracy in her condition foreshadows him getting her the help she needs to take her kids back.



Chapters 27 and 28

Chapters 27 and 28 Summary

Phil agrees to print the story. Beth convinces him she has to take the story to cops tonight even though the story might break before they print it. Phil agrees. Beth catches the two detectives Nick sent to her house. She gives them the story and tells them where Jimmy is. They agree to get a warrant from the presiding judge in town and follow her to Lynda and Jake's house.

Nick hands Tracy over to the emergency room doctors and nurses. The doctor tells him Tracy doesn't have any drugs in her bloodstream. She has a bad case of double pneumonia. The doctor says if Nick hadn't brought her in when he did, Tracy probably would have died in the night. Nick checks his messages and receives one from Beth saying the paper is printing her story and she's taking the story to the police.

Chapters 27 and 28 Analysis

The two detectives are in on the scam with Bill. It seems like they are pacifying Beth so that they can get to Jimmy and silence him. The judge they mention getting a warrant from is likely in the crime ring as well. Ironically, Beth going to the police will put them all in jeopardy rather than save them from further harm. Since Nick receives Beth's message, he might be able to save her from her plight prior to anything happening to her.



Chapters 29 and 30

Chapters 29 and 30 Summary

After talking to Jimmy, Tony and Larry, the two detectives are in the judge's chambers. The judge refuses to issue them a warrant with the small amount of evidence they have. The judge leaves for a meeting and the two detectives plan to go get the additional evidence they need.

Bill hangs up the phone with a source telling him that Beth's paper is printing the story tomorrow. He pulls the blueprint out for the offices of the St. Clair News. He calls Stella and tells her to send the tem over, including Lisa Westin. Bill tells the kids that the paper is going to print a story exposing them as thieves unless they stop it. In fear of going to jail, the kids huddle around the blueprint so Bill can tell them the plan.

Chapters 29 and 30 Analysis

While it is looking less likely that the detectives are working with Bill Brandon, it seems as if the judge is working with Bill Brandon. After the detectives part ways with the judge, Bill receives a call from a source telling him about the story. Additionally, Bill has access to the blueprints of several buildings in town, including the news offices.



Chapters 31 and 32

Chapters 31 and 32 Summary

Beth and Nick are in the ICU waiting room waiting to visit Tracy. They start to tell each other a little about their lives growing up. Beth compares herself to Tracy, in that Beth wouldn't have any family or friends waiting in the waiting room to see her if she were sick either. Nick seems to come from a family where they were close and ate dinner together every night. They both go in to visit Tracy after the doctor pulls some strings, since they are not immediate family. Beth and Nick end up kissing before they part ways.

Bill drops the group of kids off in the St. Clair News parking lot. Bill made a phone call earlier in the day to one of his officials. Bill arranged for the official to make a visit to the building and leave some windows unlocked for the kids to enter. Once the kids are in the building, they order Lisa to be the one to destroy the newspaper printing machines because she is the smallest. As the kids scramble back into the van, Lisa looks out the window just in time to see the building on fire and the employees fleeing from the building.

Chapters 31 and 32 Analysis

Beth and Nick from different worlds. Part of the reason Nick wants to help people that are disadvantaged is because he has had so many advantages in his life. Subconsciously, this is one of the reasons he is drawn to Beth. Even though Nick doesn't know that Beth was an orphan and disadvantaged, Nick unconsciously detects the disadvantages Beth has suffered in her life.

Beth and Tracy lead parallel and perpendicular lives. While the two women have a lot in common, Tracy succumbed to her disadvantages while Beth fought against the adversity in her life. Tracy chose to numb her pain with drugs, while Beth chose to work hard and is obtaining her college degree so that she overcome all of the diversity in her life.



Chapters 33 and 34

Chapters 33 and 34 Summary

The post office truck is loading the box Lisa brought to the post office earlier. The box is addressed to Beth Wright from Marlene Brandon.

Beth wakes up early at Lynda's house, where she stayed the night before. She's out walking the puppy, Dodger, when Jake jogs up. He tells her that he finds out today if he can get his pilot's license back. She says he's waiting for the newspaper delivery boy to deliver the paper. Jake says he usually sees him when he's jogging but that he must be running late today. Beth gets in her car to hunt down a paper while Jake is in the shower. On her drive, she calls the police station to verify Bill Brandon was arrested but finds out he wasn't. She calls the circulation desk of the newspaper to make sure the paper got out and the number is temporarily disconnected. She drives to the newspaper office and sees it is burned to the ground. She convinces the police officer there to get in touch with Millsaps and Danks. She tells him she thinks Bill burned down the newspaper building to keep the story from breaking. He verifies that two employees were also killed in the process. She waits for the detectives to arrive on the scene.

Chapters 33 and 34 Analysis

Bill chose to address the bomb to Beth from his sister. This was most likely to entice Beth to open the box, thinking it is more information for Beth to use against Bill. This, of course, is what will cause the bomb to detonate. The problem is that the postal worker that drives the truck is delaying his departure to wait for the newspaper delivery. This foreshadows the bomb detonating earlier than planned and killing or harming the wrong person or people.

Bill Brandon goes to extremes, such as blowing up a building, to keep his secrets a secret. Beth might be able to provide some special insight to the detectives when they arrive on the scene. She might be able to share insider information as a former one of Bill's kids to provide the detectives with enough evidence to finally issue a warrant for Bill Brandon's arrest.



Chapters 35 and 36

Chapters 35 and 36 Summary

Jimmy wakes up at Lynda's house. He realizes today is the day that the story breaks and he can reunite with Lisa. He goes into the living room, where Lynda and Jake are waiting the news story on the burning building. When Jimmy finds out what building it is, he starts yelling how Bill is behind it and that Bill will never get caught. He returns to the room where he was sleeping and slams the door.

The phone rings in the cottage where Lisa lives at the same time Stella yells to keep Lisa from falling asleep into her cereal bowl. Jimmy decides to email his best friend Brad to get a message to Lisa. He asks Lynda to use her computer. He signs on and emails a message to Brad. Then, Lynda comes to get him for breakfast.

Brad gets Jimmy's email and calls Lisa in to read it. Lisa convinces Brad to type a reply message for her. Bill sees what is happening from the monitors he uses to watch every place at the home. When the kids leave, Bill goes to the computer room, pulls up and reads Brad's email. Bill finds the email from Jimmy and the response to Jimmy. Since the response email hasn't gone out yet, Bill changes the email to try to get Jimmy to come to the home.

Bill calls Brad and Lisa into his office. He beats Brad and throws Lisa in solitary confinement.

Chapters 35 and 36 Analysis

The hang up caller is presumed to be Jimmy trying to get in touch with Lisa. Jimmy intends on running away from Lynda and Jake to break Lisa out of the home. This could foreshadow Bill catching Jimmy and killing Jimmy to keep him quiet.

Bill is using Lisa as a way to lure Jimmy back to the home. Bill tells Jimmy, as Brad, that he'll leave Stella's window open for Jimmy to get in and retrieve Lisa. Bill intends in catching and killing Jimmy so he can't tell anyone all of the evidence Jimmy has on Bill and his thieving.



Chapters 37 and 38

Chapters 37 and 38 Summary

When Nick hears about the building fire, he tries to reach Beth. When he can't, he finds her at the crime scene. She tells him they found kids' footprints and fingerprints where they entered and left the building. She says the two detectives are on their way to get a warrant to arrest Bill because they couldn't get one the night before. Nick follows Beth home so she can get a copy of the article so they can get it printed. The mail truck pulls in just as they are about to leave. Beth starts to open the package when she sees it's from Marlene. As the bomb explodes, Beth thinks that Bill will win and she'll never get to tell her story.

When Beth wakes, she's lying on the ground outside. Nick is pressing on her chest to stop the bleeding and tells her to hold on because the ambulance is on the way. When Beth asks for Dodger, the look on Nick's face tells her the puppy is dead from the bomb.

Nick is in the waiting room when Lynda, Jake and Jimmy come in. He tells them Beth is in surgery. The doctor comes out and says she's going to be fine and that she's in recovery. Nick explains that Dodger saved Beth's life because the puppy knocked the package out of Beth's lap. When Jimmy asks for Dodger, Nick tells him he's dead. Lynda tells Nick the detectives were denied a warrant again by the judge so they are on their way to Beth's house to collect more evidence in hopes of getting a warrant.

Beth wakes up in her hospital room. She feels the same way she felt when she was working a robbery one time for Bill and ran into a sliding glass door. Bill wouldn't take her to the hospital, but instead pulled the shards of glass out himself and applied alcohol, while keeping Beth in a solitary room at SCCH.

When Nick comes in, Beth says she has to get out of the hospital. She needs to get the story printed so that Bill will stop trying to kill her. When Nick insists she has to stay there, she insists he gather everyone because she has something to tell them all.

Chapters 37 and 38 Analysis

The judge is definitely in cahoots with Bill Brandon. It seems this is why he keeps denying the detectives a warrant, even though they keep collecting evidence that points to Bill's involvement in the crimes.

Beth compares herself to Esther. She is making a biblical reference because Esther saved children and that is what Beth believes she is meant to do as well—save the children of the home. Beth decides she has to tell everyone the truth about her past, which is why she asks Nick to gather everyone together.



Chapters 39 and 40

Chapters 39 and 40 Summary

When Phil and everyone gathers in Beth's room, she confesses that she is the anonymous source from the story. Jimmy answers some questions from the detectives. Phil says he'll take a copy of the story to print in the St. Pete Times and Beth can dictate the changes she wants to make to him over the phone. The detectives say they have enough to arrest Bill now and if the judge won't issue a warrant that they'll go to the prosecutor. Beth worries that Nick won't love her anymore now that he knows the truth. He assures her that she's courageous and that he'll be back soon.

Jimmy answers all of the questions at the police station. Jake invites Jimmy to go with him for the testing to get his pilot license back while Nick goes to the home and Lynda to the office. Jake gets his license back and takes Jimmy up on a celebratory flight. Jake asks Jimmy about his parents. Jimmy says they're both dad, even though Jake knows this isn't true.

Chapters 39 and 40 Analysis

With all of the pieces falling into place, Bill Brandon might finally land in jail. Not only will the scandal expose Bill Brandon, but it might just bring down some of the major officials in town as well. There is no way Bill could get away with all of the things he does without some powerful people behind him.



Chapters 41 and 42

Chapters 41 and 42 Summary

When Jake and Jimmy get back to the hospital, they tell Jimmy there's someone in the hospital he might want to see. He doesn't recognize his mother until Nick says her name. Jimmy starts to back out of the room and says he doesn't want to see her. Tracy gets upset and starts crying.

Tony and Larry are in the judge's office trying to get him to issue a warrant on the new evidence. The judge says he'll look it over tonight and give them his decision tomorrow. Tony starts yelling at the judge and the judge threatens to throw him out of his office. Larry tries to appeal to the judge. When they leave, they decide to talk to the captain to go over the judge's head because the judge is either senile or dirty.

When they tell the captain everything, he tells one of them to follow the judge and one to follow Bill Brandon. He wants to make sure they have all of their evidence straight before trying to bring down a judge.

Chapters 41 and 42 Analysis

Nick's plan to reunite Jimmy with his mother backfires. Instead of making Tracy and Jimmy happy, both of them get upset instead. The judge denying to issue a warrant again concludes that he is in business with Bill Brandon. While the detectives will be on surveillance for the judge and the home, it foreshadows Brandon giving them the slip long enough to try to harm Beth, Jimmy and possibly others.



Chapters 43 and 44

Chapters 43 and 44 Summary

Jake takes Jimmy to the beach so they can talk. Jimmy says he doesn't want to talk but Jake asks if Jimmy will listen. Jake explains that he was a lost soul, like Jimmy's mother, before he met Lynda. Jake explains that God put Lynda in his life to help him. Jimmy says he doesn't know if he believes in God. Jake says that's fine because whether Jimmy believes in God or not, he is watching over him, Lisa and everyone else.

Beth makes her way upstairs to Tracy's room, where Beth finds Tracy crying. Beth tells her about the bomb and Tracy tells Beth about Nick bringing Jimmy to see her. Tracy says she wishes she would have died instead of Nick saving her so that she wouldn't have to deal with the pain now. Beth tries to convince Tracy that God allowed her to live for a reason.

Chapters 43 and 44 Analysis

Because Beth is abandoned, she is gaining some insight from Tracy's point of view. Tracy tells her how she felt when left her children alone to go out and get drugs. Tracy also explains that she didn't even care when she got back and saw the kids were gone because she didn't want to come down from her high. She says she wants to see Jimmy and Lisa now, but she feels bad about the past. All of this makes Beth wonder if her own mother had the same feelings.



Chapters 45 and 46

Chapters 45 and 46 Summary

When Jake and Jimmy get back to Lynda's house, they find out they won't be able to arrest Bill until tomorrow. Jimmy gets upset, but then asks to use Lynda's computer so he can check to see if he has any email. He finds the email that Bill wrote from Brad saying Bill beat Lisa really bad and that he'll leave Stella's window open so Jimmy can get in. Jimmy leaves Lynda's house. He plans to get Beth's gun from her house and then go to SCCH.

When Nick gets back to Beth's hospital room, he says he wants to hear about her mother. She admits her mom was an alcoholic and her father left. The state took her away from her mom and then he mom died a few years ago. They talk about God forgiving Tracy for what she did and Beth for what she did. Nick assures Tracy that God gives Nick's life the same value that he does Beth's, Tracy's and everyone else's.

Chapters 45 and 46 Analysis

Jimmy plans on shooting and killing Bill Brandon. Jimmy believes that the adults are not doing what needs to be done so he plans to take action for himself. Beth is struggling with her faith. She is also struggling with how people that do good deeds and those that don't are the same to God.



Chapters 47 and 48

Chapters 47 and 48 Summary

Tracy scoots to the end of her hospital bed. She pulls out the IVs and the oxygen mask off her face. She decides she's going to go up to a higher floor and throw herself out of the window. The problem is that she doesn't have the strength to walk. When the nurse finds Tracy, she orders her back in bed and puts the IV back in and the oxygen mask back on her face.

Larry calls Tony from where he's watching Bill Brandon. Larry says Bill walked out and to a storehouse, where the green van Jimmy told them about is parked. Tony sees the judge coming out of the courthouse. Tony follows the judge who makes a phone call from a pay phone at a gas station. Tony has a police officer trace the call and call him back. When the cop returns the call, he tells Tony the call was made to a cell phone registered to SCCH.

Judge Wyatt then drives to a warehouse. The judge goes in the building, turns on a light, turns off the light and comes back out. He drives to meet Bill Brandon. Larry and Tony talk on the phone and decide to find out where Beth is going when she is released from the hospital.

Chapters 47 and 48 Analysis

It's ironic that now that Tracy finally has the courage to end her life she doesn't have the strength to do it. Tony and Larry just confirmed why they cannot get their warrant to arrest Bill Brandon—because the judge and Brandon are working together. The two detectives assume that the judge is filling Bill in on the details that the police have on the case. They also predict that Bill is now going after Beth Wright to kill her and stop her from providing any evidence against him.



Chapters 49 and 50

Chapters 49 and 50 Summary

After an hour of discussing everything at the kitchen table, Lynda realizes Jimmy is missing. Jake calls the police station but Tony and Larry are out. He leaves a message. They call Beth to let her know and she insists they report it to the police so Bill doesn't find Jimmy first. Beth tells Nick. They go to Tracy's room and tell her what's going on in case Jimmy shows up to see her. They all seem to agree that the last place Jimmy would go is back to the home.

Two hours later, Jimmy finally finds Beth's house. He isn't prepared to find the house gone and a mess. He thought it would be more like a cartoon explosion. He looks thorough what's left of the house and decides that it must be in Beth's car, which is probably at the hospital. Jimmy heads toward the hospital. He steals a coat hanger from the hospital to break into the car. He finds the gun in the glove compartment and shoves it in his pants.

Chapters 49 and 50 Analysis

Ironically, the last place they think Jimmy will go is precisely where he is heading. Jimmy intends on using the gun to kill Bill. It is after he kills Bill that he thinks he'll be able to save Lisa and get her out of the home. Since Bill is expecting Jimmy, Bill will likely catch Jimmy off guard.

Chapters 51 and 52

Chapters 51 and 52 Summary

Bill is having a party at the home. He's invited reporters. The children are starting to turn in Bill. Brad, who probably has broken ribs from he beating says he hopes the cops come so Bill can get what he deserves. Tony and Larry watch as the party unfolds. They think it's a PR stunt for Bill to make himself look like a saint in front of the cameras. They still haven't found Jimmy.

Chapters 51 and 52 Analysis

The judge has tipped Bill off. Bill knows the cops are trying to arrest him. The party is to make Bill look good in the eyes of the public so if he's arrested, he can claim outrage and surprise.



Chapters 53 and 54

Chapters 53 and 54 Summary

Jimmy sees Larry in the cop car outside the home. He also sees the party going on. He slips into through Stella's window to hide until Lisa comes back. Jake arrives home after not being able to find Jimmy. He and Lynda find the email that Jimmy has up on the screen showing that he was conversing with a boy from the children's home. Lynda calls the detective, Tony, to let them know Jimmy is going back to the home.

Chapters 53 and 54 Analysis

The pieces of the puzzle are falling into place. Jimmy is walking into a dangerous trap and situation. It foreshadows a domino effect, where people are injured and people die. All of this starts with Jimmy walking into the home and getting caught by Bill. Once this happens, an unfortunate series of events are bound to happen.



Chapters 55 and 56

Chapters 55 and 56 Summary

Jimmy waits for the kids to fall asleep. He wakes Lisa who gasps and wakes another girl in the process. Jimmy tells the other girl to be quiet and shows her that he has a gun. As he tries to take Lisa out of the cottage, he sees that Bill and Stella are talking. The two adults are blocking the only way out. Tony calls Larry to let him know that Jake and Lynda think Jimmy is heading to the children's home.

Chapters 55 and 56 Analysis

Because Jimmy is a kid, he isn't thinking about the consequences of his actions. While he is putting his own life in danger, he is also putting a lot of other people's lives in danger with his actions. Adults, like Lynda, Jake, Beth and Nick all want to come to Jimmy's rescue. When they find out what Jimmy is planning, they might end up putting themselves in danger's way by trying to go after Jimmy. Since Larry is the cop positioned outside of the home, it also foreshadows him getting into a gun fight that lands him shot and injured or dead.



Chapters 57 and 58

Chapters 57 and 58 Summary

Brad comes into the room and sees Jimmy trying to take Lisa out with the gun. Brad begs for Jimmy to take him too. Jimmy notices that Brad winces in pain when Jimmy pushes him away. Through their conversation, the boys figure out that Bill is the one that sent Jimmy the email telling him to come to the home. Bill enters the room and tells Jimmy that he doesn't know how to use a gun. Bill also says that Jimmy won't shoot him. Jimmy cocks and fires the gun.

As Beth is checking out of the hospital, Lynda and Jake tell Beth and Nick that they think Jimmy is going back to the home. When Beth gets to her car, she goes for the gun in her glove compartment. When she realizes it is missing, she also realizes that Jimmy has it. She tells Nick. Nick get Lynda and Jake's attention in their car and tells them Jimmy has Beth's gun.

Chapters 57 and 58 Analysis

It seems as if Jimmy cocks the gun and shoots at Bill. Someone is going to get shot with the gun that Jimmy has. Since he doesn't know how to properly use it, there is some foreshadowing that Jimmy will end up killing the wrong person or people. Bill might even be able to turn the gun around on Jimmy, injuring or killing him, and all of the others so that they won't testify against him.



Chapters 59 and 60

Chapters 59 and 60 Summary

Nick runs back into the hospital. He goes to Tracy's room and fills her in on what's going on. After Nick leaves, Tracy struggles to get dressed. She slowly makes it the parking lot, where she asks an elderly couple to give her a ride home. When she gets to her building, she starts her car and starts to drive towards the children's home.

Back at the home, Jimmy is telling Bill that he told him he could shoot the gun. Bill orders all of the children out of the room. Bill tries to convince Jimmy to give him the gun. Bill also tells him that he's hosting a news conference tomorrow and that he's going to tell them all of the bad things the children have done. Bill orders Stella to get his Buick and tells her that he's leaving and they're on their own.

Chapters 59 and 60 Analysis

Tracy is finally putting her children's safety ahead of her own safety. Tracy driving to the children's home in an attempt to save Jimmy and Lisa foreshadows Tracy dying in order to protect her children. Bill is going to take the children hostage so that he can get away.



Chapters 61 and 62

Chapters 61 and 62 Summary

Lynda and Jake take Beth home with them. They get her settled into the guest bedroom. Beth sneaks out of her room, through the backyard and into her car. When Beth enters the compound of the children's home, she finds a bunch of crying children. The children tell her that Bill is going to kill Jimmy and the others that are inside the room with Bill. Beth instructs the children to hide in the rec room and not to come out until she tells them to come out. Then, Beth calls out to Bill, telling him that she's there.

Outside in his car, Larry hears the gunshot Jimmy fired and then sees Beth heading into the building. Larry tells all of this to Tony on the phone. Larry tells Tony to call for backup and that he's going in.

Chapters 61 and 62 Analysis

Now that Beth is heading to the home, she is going to end up putting herself in danger. Bill might take her hostage or kill her. Now, Larry is adding himself to the mix. Soon, all of the characters are going to be in the same area, which means that all of them will be in danger.



Chapters 63 and 64

Chapters 63 and 64 Summary

Bill now has the gun in his hand. When he steps into the hall to greet Beth, he points it at her. Beth begs Bill to let the kids go. Bill says he is taking Beth and the children hostage so he can get away without the police killing him.

As Bill is ushering them all to his car, Larry steps in, points his gun at Bill and tells him to freeze. Bill promptly shoots Larry and Larry falls to the ground. Bill makes Beth drive. Bill says they're going to drive far and then he'll find a bridge to them all over so he can continue on his own.

Tracy is pulling up to home as she sees the Buick shoot out. Tracy sees Jimmy in the backseat. She also sees a little girl and wonders if it is Lisa. Tracy quickly makes a U-turn and steps on the accelerator to catch up with the car that's speeding away. She manages to turn her car in front of the Buick. Tracy loses control of her vehicle as the Buick plows into Tracy's car. Before she blacks out, Tracy realizes she is being thrown from the car.

Chapters 63 and 64 Analysis

Bill plans on using them all as human shields so he can run away from the law without the police killing him. Tracy is acting as a martyr. She is willing to lose her own life in order to save the lives of her children. She is finally acting like a mother, although know it will be too late.



Chapters 65 and 66

Chapters 65 and 66 Summary

After the crash, Jimmy looks up and sees his mother's lifeless body lying on the pavement. When Jimmy reaches Tracy, she tells Jimmy to get Lisa and run. When Jimmy asks Tracy why she did it, she tells him it's because she loves him. Jimmy runs back, gets Lisa and Brad, and they take off running into the woods. When Bill wakes up, he pushes Beth off of him. He drives away as Beth asks if he's just going to leave Tracy lying there. Jimmy gets them through the woods and plans to go to a payphone so that he can call Jake. Lisa sees that Jimmy is crying. When she asks him why, he says he's just thinking about the lady and the cop.

Jimmy calls Lynda's house. He tells Jake about Beth, Larry and Tracy. On the way to pick up Jimmy, Lisa and Brad, Lynda calls Nick to tell him everything. Lynda sees Tracy lying on the pavement as she pulls up to site where the wreck occurred.

Chapters 65 and 66 Analysis

Tracy has made the ultimate sacrifice for her children. She has sacrificed her own life so that they can save their own lives. Jimmy doesn't want to tell Lisa that the woman on the pavement is their mother. Lisa thinks their mother is already dead. Jimmy doesn't want to upset Lisa by telling her that their mother was alive but now she's dead. Now that Nick knows Beth snuck out of Lynda's house and that Bill has her, Nick is going to come after Beth. This means that Nick will be in the melee as well, putting his own life at risk to try to save Beth, Jimmy and Lisa.



Chapters 67 and 68

Chapters 67 and 68 Summary

Tony hears the report on an officer down at SCCH. Lynda calls Tony's cell and tells him about Larry. She also fills him in on Beth, Jimmy and Lisa. Tony puts in a bulletin for the Buick. He talks with the prosecutor and they get a warrant to search the warehouse. They find thousands of dollars worth of stolen goods there. Nick arrives as they are putting Larry into the ambulance. Larry is alive but unconscious. Tony calls. Nick fills him in on Larry. Tony tells Nick that Sheila and her husband were part of the crime ring with Bill. Nick wants to go after Beth, but Tony convinces Nick to let the cops do their jobs.

Bill continues to drive with Beth in the car. He drives up to some industrial buildings, drags Beth into one of the m and orders the man inside out. He says they'll wait for the cops to contact him so he can negotiate with them to get a plane and fly out of the country. The phone rings and Bill says he wants a plane and pilot.

Tony tries to find information on Larry from the nurse at the hospital. She says she can't give information over the phone. Nick calls Tony and Tony tells him that Bill has Beth hostage and that Bill is demanding a plane. Nick says he is heading toward where Tony is now and he begs Tony not to let Bill take Beth out of the country.

Chapters 67 and 68 Analysis

Bill demanding a plane and pilot gives the police some edge. They will be able to use a plane and pilot that either works for the police or is on their side. With the right person flying the plane, the police will be able to take down Bill and save Beth's life.



Chapters 69 and 70

Chapters 69 and 70 Summary

Nick crouches beside Tony's police car with Tony. Tony calls Bill on the phone to tell him he has the plane and pilot. The police escort Bill and Beth to the airport, where they board the private plane waiting for them.

Jake is the pilot flying the plane. He radios into the control tower for permission to take off. Jake tries to engage Bill in conversation about flying them to Cozumel, but Bill tells him to shut up and fly the plane. Jake doesn't know if Beth recognizes him or not. Jake makes eye contact with Beth in the mirror and hopes she's thinking what he's thinking. Jake swerves the plan so that Bill drops the gun. The gun flies out of Beth's reach. She finally reaches the gun and points it at Bill.

Jake cautions Beth against firing the gun in the plane because it could cause them to crash. Jake turns the plane around and they head back to the airport. When they land, the cops surround the plane and take Bill into custody. Beth is bleeding because she has popped a few stitches so Nick says he's taking her back to the hospital.

Chapters 69 and 70 Analysis

The things Nick has been saying to Tony and to Beth suggests that he intends on marrying Beth. It foreshadows Beth and Nick marrying and then possibly adopting some of the children from the home. Most likely, they will try to adopt Jimmy and Lisa.



Chapters 71 and 72

Chapters 71 and 72 Summary

Tony pushes his way into the hospital where they are attending to Larry. The nurse threatens to call security. Tony says he's the police, Larry is his partner and he's going back there. Tony finds Larry's wife in the doorway of Larry's room. She says he's alive, but that the bullet came close to his heart. She assures Tony that Larry is going to be okay.

Tony goes in to see Larry. He tells him he'll tell him everything when Larry is feeling better. When Tony leaves, he has a sudden urge to see his long-term girlfriend, Sharon. Tony gets to his car and drives to Sharon's house.

When Beth wakes up in her hospital bed, Nick is asleep in the chair beside her. He tells her that Phil got her story published in the St. Petersburg Times. Nick also tells her that the prosecutor is not planning on charging the kids that were involved with the crime ring, or the kids that were involved but are now adults. Nick also tells Beth that he wants to apply to take over the home. He asks her to be his wife.

Chapters 71 and 72 Analysis

Nick and Beth will get married. Together, they will work to operate SCCH. For the first time in a long time, the home will be safe, secure and a reputable place for the children to live.



Chapters 73 and 74

Chapters 73 and 74 Summary

Two weeks later, Lynda and Lisa are at the beach. They are building sandcastles in the sand. Lisa is wearing her first bathing suit, which Lynda bought for her. Jimmy and Jake are supposed to meet them soon. A plane flies over the beach and it is a skywriting plane, which writes, "Marry Me, Lynda." Lisa screams that she has to say yes as Jake calls Lynda's cell phone. Lynda says yes.

Lynda and Jake take Lisa and Jimmy back to SCCH. Nick is temporarily running the home now. Lynda and Jake are sitting in the front porch swing when Jake suggests they adopt Lisa and Jimmy. Lynda agrees and they call to let Nick know of their plans.

Chapters 73 and 74 Analysis

Lynda and Jake are going to get married. It seems as if Lynda has already taken on the role of a mother to Lisa and Jimmy, and Jake has taken on a fatherly role with the children. This suggests that Lynda and Jake will be the ones that adopt Lisa and Jimmy, while Nick and Beth run SCCH.



Chapter 75

Chapter 75 Summary

Six months later, the kids from the home are waiting on the ground while Jake takes them up in the plane for rides. Lisa and Jimmy have been adopted by Jake and Lynda. Nick and Beth are married.

Chapter 75 Analysis

The wrongs in the novel have been righted. The children's home is now being run in an ethical and religious manner. Lisa and Jimmy now know what it's like to have a real family. Beth has also found out what it's like to love someone and be loved for the first time in her life.



Characters

Beth Wright

Beth Wright is a twenty-four year old journalist for a local paper in St. Clair, Florida. Beth is also a college student finishing up her degree. Beth is conducting interviews to put together a story on Bill Brandon and his criminal activity in running the St. Clair Children's Home (SCCH).

It turns out that Beth is a former orphan that lived at SCCH until she turned eighteen. When Beth was living at the home, she was one of the children that Bill Brandon used in his crime ring. This is why Beth knows so much about Brandon and what he is doing, and why she is working to expose him. Beth was taken away from her alcoholic mother after her father left them. Beth's mother has since died, so Beth struggles with the fact that she never had anyone that cared for and loved her.

Marlene Brandon

Marlene Brandon is Bill Brandon's sister. Until recently, Marlene helped Bill run the children's home. Because of this, she was involved with Bill's crime ring and knows details about what Bill is doing. Marlene knows Beth from the time Beth spent living in the home.

Marlene grants Beth an interview for her story. Marlene has found God, so she is trying to turn all of the wrongs she has committed in life to rights. It is after Beth leaves Marlene's house that Bill Brandon starts following Beth and tries to run her off the road.

Marlene is murdered by Bill. Bill breaks into Marlene's house and shoots her. Bill stages the scene to look like a robbery to throw the police off. Beth, however, always believes Bill is responsible for Marlene's death.

Bill Brandon

Bill Brandon is the man that runs the St. Clair Children's Home. Bill is using chosen children from the home to run a crime ring. Bill has the children break into buildings and steal merchandise. Bill then stores the merchandise in a secret warehouse.

In addition to using the children, Bill also has some officials on his payroll. One of them is a judge, which helps to prevent Bill from getting arrested at various points throughout the novel. Bill is also working with Nick's boss, Sheila and her husband.

Bill is determined to stop Beth from printing the story about him. He is continuously looking for ways to get Beth out of the picture, such as mailing a bomb to her house and taking her hostage so he can get out of the country. One of Bill's traits is that he



misquotes verses out of the bible to help brainwash the children into doing what he wants them to do.

Jimmy Westin

Jimmy Westin is a 10-year-old boy. He lives at SCCH and is part of Bill's crime ring. He has red hair and freckles. Jimmy is also very adept with computers, which is why Bill sends Jimmy into Beth's house to steal any information she has for her story. Jimmy ends up getting stuck in Beth's attic, unable to escape, and this is where Beth eventually finds him.

When she finds out who Jimmy is, Beth insists that he stay with her so she can protect him from Bill. Jimmy insists that he has to get back to the home to save his sister, Lisa. Jimmy ends up reuniting briefly with his biological mother, who then sacrifices her own life to save Jimmy and Lisa's lives.

Jimmy also plays a pivotal role in supplying the police with information about Bill's operation. Ultimately, Jimmy is adopted by Lynda and Jake.

Lisa Westin

Lisa Westin is a seven-year-old girl that lives at SCCH. Jimmy is her older brother. When Jimmy doesn't come back from Beth's house, Bill enlists Lisa as Jimmy's replacement in the crime ring. Lisa is the one that Bill gets to deliver the bomb package to the post office for delivery to Beth's house. Eventually, Jake and Lynda adopt Lisa when they adopt Jimmy.

Nick Hutchins

Nick Hutchins is a social worker. He is about Beth's age. The two meet when Beth interviews him about her story on the home. Nick suspects there is something going on at the home, but when he meets Beth, he learns more. He purposely tries not to place children in SCCH after he learns what really might be going on there.

Ultimately, Nick falls in love with and marries Beth. Nick also applies to operate the home after Bill is arrested.

Tony Danks

Tony Danks is one of the detectives that Nick knows. He is also one of the detectives Nick turns to when he thinks Beth needs protection from Bill Brandon. Tony and his partner, Larry, continuously try to get a warrant to arrest Bill, but the judge keeps denying their request. Tony is the officer that talks to Bill about the plane when Bill has Beth hostage.



Larry Millsaps

Larry Millsaps is Tony Danks partner. He is also one of the detectives Nick turns to when he thinks Beth needs protection from Bill Brandon. Larry and Tony continuously try to get a warrant to arrest Bill, but the judge keeps denying their request. Larry is the one that gets shot by Bill Brandon when Larry tries to stop Bill from taking Beth and the children as hostages when they leave SCCH.

Tracy Westin

Tracy Westin is a recovered drug addict. She is also Jimmy and Lisa's mother. when Nick finds Tracy in her rundown apartment, Tracy is on the brink of death. Nick takes Tracy to the hospital. When Tracy finds out that Jimmy and Lisa are in danger, she escapes from the hospital. Tracy purposely drives her car in front of Bill's car to stop him from taking Jimmy and Lisa hostage. Tracy dies from the injuries from the accident because she is thrown from her moving car during the collision.

Stella

Stella is the cottage worker that runs the girl's cottage at SCCH. She knows what Bill is up to, but she protects Bill rather than turn him in. Stella drives Lisa to the post office to drop off the bomb package to Beth.

Lynda

Lynda is an attorney Beth knows. Beth asks Lynda about prosecuting children, and adults that were former children, as part of the crime ring at the home. Lynda ends up getting involved when she takes Jimmy from Beth so that Jimmy is safe while Beth finishes her story.

Jake

Jake is Lynda's boyfriend. He's a former pilot. He lost his license after he crashed a plane he and Lynda were flying in. Jake ends up forming a special bond with Jimmy.

Jake pilots the plane that is supposed to take Bill and Beth to Cozumel. Jake also gets his license back, ends up asking Lynda to marry him and adopting Lisa and Jimmy with Lynda.



Objects/Places

St. Clair, Florida

St. Clair, Florida is a small town near St. Petersburg and Tampa. It is also the town that is the primary setting for the novel. St. Clair is also where the children's home is located.

St. Clair Children's Home

The St. Clair Children's Home (SCCH) is an orphanage or state home in the novel. It is the home that Beth formerly lived when she taken away from her mother by the state. It is also where Jimmy and Lisa Westin live. It is the home that Beth is investigating and writing a story about for her paper so that she can get Bill Brandon arrested.

Jimmy's Shoebox

Jimmy keeps a shoebox under his bed at the children's home. The box contains all of his important belongings. Inside the box are his baseball cards and some pictures of him and Lisa.

Gun

Beth has a gun at her house for protection. She almost shoots Jimmy with it when he is hiding in her attic. Later, Jimmy steals the gun from Beth's car to go after Bill and break Lisa out of the home. Bill ends up getting the gun away from Jimmy and uses Beth's own gun to take Beth hostage.

Beth's House

Beth's house is a small rented house. The house is located deep in the woods because she doesn't want Bill or anyone else to find her. This is the house that Jimmy breaks into to take information on Bill, but ends up having to hide out in the attic instead. When Bill mails Beth the package, the bomb ends up blowing up the house and killing Beth's puppy, Dodger, in the process.

Newspaper Building

Bill has the children break into the newspaper building. He has Lisa set the presses on fire so that they cannot print Beth's story about him. The building ends up in flames and kills two of the workers.



Warehouse

The warehouse is where Bill stores the stolen goods. It is a secret location that nobody knows about and the cops can't seem to find. Eventually, the detectives tailing the judge and Bill locate the warehouse. One they get a warrant, the cops search the warehouse and find all of the evidence they need to arrest Bill and the other adults involved in the ring.

Van

Bill uses a van as part of the crime ring. Bill hides the van in a warehouse type building. This is the van he transports the children to and from the crime scenes. When the detectives locate the van, they know they are getting closer to getting a warrant to arrest Bill.

Buick

The Buick is Bills' car. Bill has Stella pull it out of the garage when Bill takes Beth and the children hostage. This is the car that Tracy collides with and that Bill uses to drive on to the airport with Beth to board the plane.

Hospital

The hospital is where Nick takes Tracy when he finds her close to death. It is the same hospital where they take Beth to treat her for her injuries from the bomb explosion. Nick attempts to reunite Jimmy with Tracy in her hospital room, but Jimmy gets upset and storms out. Additionally, this is the same hospital that Tracy sneaks out of to intercept Bill and save Lisa and Jimmy.



Themes

Good versus Evil

The primary plot throughout the entire novel is that of good versus evil. Biblical symbolism can be found throughout the book. Each of the characters experiences an inner struggle with good versus evil.

Beth struggles with the good and evil from the acts she performed for Bill Brandon when she was a kid at the home. Jimmy struggles with good and evil because Bill has brainwashed Jimmy into thinking that the crimes Jimmy is performing are wrong, but only if the police find out. He convinces Jimmy that if Jimmy does what he tells him that his sister Lisa will be safe, but that if Jimmy doesn't obey Bill then Lisa will be in trouble.

Tracy believes that she is evil. She is convinced that she has been a terrible mother and that she has ruined Jimmy and Lisa's lives. Tracy overcomes her thoughts and sacrifices her own life to save her children.

Coming of Age

One of the primary themes that run throughout the novel is growing up and coming of age, even against adversity, such as losing both parents and having to live in a state home. Jimmy struggles with the fact that his coming of age includes having to grow up faster than his peers because he has become a ward of the state, and feels like the primary caretaker of his younger sister, Lisa, in the absence of their parents.

Beth too is dealing with her own coming of age. As a former resident of SCCH, she was also a ward of the state and part of Bill's crime ring. Now that she fully understands right from wrong, her coming of age involves stopping Bill Brandon and his criminal acts to redeem herself from the part she played.

Family

Family is the central theme throughout the entire novel. This is because the storyline is about the lives of the various children that have become wards of the state because of their family situation. While every family has their trials and tribulations, these families have extenuating circumstances that land these children in SCCH. In the end, surrogate families are formed through relationships, bonds, and adoptions. In the end though, they are a family and they will get through it together, one way or the other.



Style

Point of View

The novel is written in the third-person point of view, from the perspective of author. The novel swings back and forth between the present and the past. The present represents the time after Beth is an adult and left SCCH. The past represents the time during which Beth was living at SCCH.

The point of view of this novel is intimate, allowing a reader to connect closely with each of the characters. The book written in this manner allows the reader to get inside the head, thoughts and inner struggles that each of the characters are experiencing as it pertains to the plot. The reader cares what happens to each of the characters. The point of view also allows the author to inject her own opinions into the narration and to expand on the events taking place around the other characters and the occurrences taking place.

Setting

The novel is set primarily in the town of St. Clair, Florida during the 20th or 21st century. The novel covers a six-month period, during which Beth is investigating the home and trying to put Bill Brandon in jail. Finally, it wraps up the turnout for each of the characters after Bill is put in prison, along with his cohorts. The main characters are involved in exposing Bill Brandon's criminal activities and putting him in jail.

The setting of this novel works well with the plot. At first, the reader is not aware that Beth is a former resident of SCCH and a former member of Bill's crime ring. However, as events unfold, the crime ring is a constant part of the plot, the lives of the characters and even the outcome of the novel.

Language and Meaning

The language of this novel is relatively simple and easy to read. The language is from the 20th or 21st century, which is when the novel is set. The language is descriptive enough that it helps to explain the situations and is detailed enough for the reader to truly understand.

Structure

The novel is divided into 75 chapters. The length of each chapter ranges from one page to 20 pages long. The chapters tell the story primarily in exposition and with some dialogue. The narrator injects her own voice and thoughts throughout the book, providing her opinions and feelings of the events unfolding in the novel.

The novel contains one main plot and several subplots. The main plot is the struggle of human beings in choosing between good and evil. One subplot is the coming of age of each of the characters. Another subplot is the relationships that form in family.



Quotes

"There's someone after me! He's trying to kill me" (Chapter 1, p. 10).

"But I can't find any of the papers or tapes" (Chapter 2, p. 13).

"I have to go" (Chapter 3, p. 15).

"I found someone to take all three, Sheila. Grace and Vernon Miller. She's even excited about it" (Chapter 4, p. 24).

"Sheila, my boss, says we don't have enough evidence to start relocating the children" (Chapter 5, p. 28).

"All right. No guarantees though" (Chapter 6, p. 37).

"That address you gave us to patrol? We just got a call from the lady who lives there. Says someone's in her house" (Chapter 7, p. 39).

"If you give us a name and he has complementary dents in his car, that'll be proof enough" (Chapter 8, p. 44).

"What are you going to do, Bill? Kill all of us" (Chapter 9, p. 48).

"I was looking for something that is mine. He was keeping it for me" (Chapter 10, p. 51).

"The woman I interviewed last night was murdered" (Chapter 11, p. 53).

"Yes. Ms. Brandon's pastor indicated that she and her brother were on the outs" (Chapter 12, p. 58).

"Not over the phone. I want him to see you in person" (Chapter 13, p. 66).

"He's just what we need. A witness from the inside" (Chapter 14, p. 68).

"If HRS comes snooping around, act like he just left the cottage, or the playground, or wherever you are" (Chapter 15, p. 73).

"Jimmy, is that you? Where in blue blazes are you" (Chapter 16, p. 76).

"Are all the kids on the premises right now" (Chapter 17, p. 77).

"Is Lisa going to be one of your regulars now" (Chapter 18, p. 82).

"I need some legal advice, and I need it quickly" (Chapter 19, p. 86).

"Boy, this is heavy. Whatcha got in here, anyway" (Chapter 20, p. 88).



"You don't need me. We have the same story" (Chapter 21, p. 95).

"My mom said that to me once. To trust her" (Chapter 22, p. 99).

"The little girl in the picture was the same one Bill had put into the car to take to the birthday party" (Chapter 23, p. 100).

"Yeah, well, I lost my halo a long time ago" (Chapter 24, p. 106).

"Don't give me a byline. I don't care. Just print it" (Chapter 25, p. 109).

"Help me" (Chapter 26, p. 112).

"This is worth going straight to the top" (Chapter 27, p. 116).

"She may not pull through" (Chapter 28, p. 118).

"I can't give you a warrant for Bill Brandon's arrest" (Chapter 29, p. 120).

"He's told them everything he knows about our operation" (Chapter 30, p. 123).

"The feelings are important, yes, but love is a verb, not a noun" (Chapter 31, p. 127).

"Send Lisa. She's the littlest. They won't see her" (Chapter 32, p. 138).

"Hey, Alice, has the paper come yet" (Chapter 33, p. 141).

"We suspect arson, but we're still investigating" (Chapter 34, p. 146).

"He's just gonna keep doing what he does, and now I've blown it and I can't go back, and Lisa's trapped there" (Chapter 35, p. 150).

"I've got a message for you from Jimmy" (Chapter 36, p. 153).

"But this was an overnight package. How could Marlene have mailed it yesterday? She was dead the night before" (Chapter 37, p. 161).

"Then make Phil come to me. And call Lynda, and Larry Millsaps and Tony Danks at the St. Clair Police Department" (Chapter 38, p. 168).

"...I was the anonymous witness who grew up at SCCH" (Chapter 39, p. 170).

"You'll keep me and Lisa together, won't you" (Chapter 40, p. 175).

"God doesn't love me. Why would he love me" (Chapter 41, p. 182).

"I'll spend some time looking over these charges tonight. I'll take all of it under advisement and get back to you tomorrow" (Chapter 42, p. 183).



"What about when you realized the home wasn't what it seemed" (Chapter 43, p. 188).

"I abandoned my kids. I was a lousy mother. I shouldn't even been able to have kids" (Chapter 44, p. 193).

"It means that it may be tomorrow before they're able to arrest Bill" (Chapter 45, p. 195).

"I want to know everything about you" (Chapter 46, p. 199).

"Where were you going, honey" (Chapter 47, p. 205).

"Larry, I've been following the Lexus" (Chapter 48, p. 209).

"He's run away. He's gone" (Chapter 49, p. 211).

"The gun lay there on its side, filling him with bittersweet relief" (Chapter 50, p. 218).

"I heard Stella say he was expecting someone" (Chapter 51, p. 220).

"At least the kids are safe while the cameras are there" (Chapter 52, p. 223).

"Has the judge moved" (Chapter 53, p. 227).

"We've figured out where Jimmy is" (Chapter 54, p. 229).

"Bill, you'll never get to him without getting caught" (Chapter 55, p. 233).

"Lynda and Jake think Jimmy's heading over there" (Chapter 56, p. 234).

"You don't know how to use a gun, Jimmy, And even if you did, you wouldn't" (Chapter 57, p. 236).

"We think he went back to the home to try to get Lisa out" (Chapter 58, p. 238).

"Certainly we can give you a ride" (Chapter 59, p. 241).

"After I get the stuff in the warehouse shipped and collect what's due me, then I'm going on a long vacation" (Chapter 60, p. 245).

"Bill's gonna kill them" (Chapter 61, p. 249).

"Beth. She's heading onto the compound—too far away from me to stop. Her car's out front here. Looks like she's heading for a group of children" (Chapter 62, p. 250).

"I'll take all of you along for insurance" (Chapter 63, p. 251).

"Her car had none, nothing to hold her in, and the last thing she was aware of before she lost consciousness was the sensation of being thrown out of the car and into the night air" (Chapter 64, p. 255).



"Because I...love you" (Chapter 65, p. 256).

"No, she snuck out to go to the home to rescue the children. But apparently it backfired, and he's got her now" (Chapter 66, p. 260).

"Nick, listen - we just learned that Sheila Axelrod is involved" (Chapter 67, p. 262).

"If I have to drag your dead body with me, you're going. Like I said, you're my ticket, and I'm not letting you go" (Chapter 68, p. 264).

"I'm getting on that plane and out of here, and if anybody tries to stop me, Beth will be history" (Chapter 69, p. 268).

"Radio in and tell them I've got him. Tell them to come get him" (Chapter 70, p. 273).

"Course I'm gonna be all right. Takes more than a bullet to stop Larry Millsaps" (Chapter 71, p. 276).

"You're not too young to be my wife" (Chapter 72, p. 280).

"It's Jake, Lisa. He's asking me to marry him" (Chapter 73, p. 283).

"It's about children" (Chapter 74, p. 284).

"Me, Mommy! I wanna go" (Chapter 75, p. 285).



Topics for Discussion

Who is the true Beth Wright? Why has she chosen to write a story to expose Bill Brandon? Why doesn't she want to tell the police about what Bill Brandon is doing? Do you believe Beth waited for the statute of limitations to run out on her crimes so that she wouldn't get in trouble? What do you think happens to Beth once she marries Nick?

Discuss the relationship between Jimmy and Lisa. Are they brother and sister, or something else? Does Jimmy think he is more like Lisa's parent than her brother? Why does Jimmy feel the need to protect Lisa? How does Jimmy feel about Lisa? How does Lisa feel about Jimmy? How do Jimmy's feelings change after Tracy sacrifices her life to save Jimmy and Lisa? What does Jimmy do about it? What happens to Jimmy?

Who is Nick Hutchins? Why does he choose to be a social worker? Why do you think Nick tries to help Beth with her story? What role does Nick play in proving Bill is guilty?

Why doesn't Tracy try to get her kids back after she gets off drugs? What makes Tracy realize that she has to do something to help her children? Why do you think Tracy causes the car accident?

Discuss Bill's reign over the children at SCCH. What impact does Bill have on the characters of the novel? How does it motivate them and how does it derail their lives?

What do you think happens to Jimmy and Lisa once they are adopted by Lynda and Jake? Do you think Jimmy ever tells Lisa what their mother did to save them? How do you think Lisa processes this information?

Do you think the police arrest the others involved in the crime ring such as the adults, besides Bill Brandon? Do you think the police ever link Marlene's murder with Bill Brandon? What do you think Bill's sentence in prison is?