

# Where'd You Go, Bernadette: A Novel Study Guide

## Where'd You Go, Bernadette: A Novel by Maria Semple

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## Plot Summary

"Where'd You Go Bernadette" is a novel by author Maria Semple. The story follows the main character, Bee Branch, as she pieces together emails, letters and other documents to try to find her mother, Bernadette Fox, who has gone missing. Bee Branch is the daughter of an executive at Microsoft and her mother is a former award-winning architect. Although her mother seems strange and crazy to the other private school mothers and her father's employees, Bee knows that her mother has always been there for her, and that Bernadette simply walks to the beat of her own drum.

When Bernadette escapes in the middle of her intervention, nobody knows what happened to Bernadette or where she went. After her father ends up impregnating his administrative assistant, Soo-Lin Lee-Segal, word comes from the credit card company that Bernadette made charges aboard the ship the family was supposed to take for their trip to Antarctica. Soo-Lin and Elgin, Bee's father, meet the ship in port in South America, but Bernadette manages to escape again and doesn't emerge from the ship with the rest of the passengers.

After Bee doesn't thrive while away at boarding school, Elgin agrees to use their tickets to Antarctica. Elgin sees it as a way for Bee to have closure about her mom. Bee sees it as a way to act as an amateur detective to find her mom. Bee, with the help of her father, tracks her mother down and they all agree to make the changes necessary for them to live a happy and healthy life together.



## **Monday, November 15 and Tuesday, November 16**

### **Monday, November 15 and Tuesday, November 16 Summary**

Bee Branch is having dinner with her parents. They are praising her for getting such good grades and accolades from her teacher on her recent progress report from eighth grade. Bee reminds her parents that if she got perfect grades from Galer Street school, she could have any present she wants. She proposes a trip to Antarctica, which her parents end up agreeing to.

Bernadette Fox, Bee's mother, sends an email to her virtual assistant in India, Manjula Kapoor. Bernadette tells Manjula about Bee getting all A's and asking for a trip to Antarctica. Bernadette hires Manjula to book the travel. Bernadette also shares with Manjula her fear of traveling out of the house in general, and on a cruise ship filled with a bunch of annoying people.

### **Monday, November 15 and Tuesday, November 16 Analysis**

Bernadette eludes to the fact she is agoraphobic, which is a fear of leaving the house. Additionally, she asks Manjula to take her salary from Bernadette's personal account so her husband doesn't see the charge on their credit card. This implies that Bernadette is keeping secrets from her husband. These secrets could be what lead Bernadette to go missing.



# Wednesday, November 17 and Thursday, November 18

## Wednesday, November 17 and Thursday, November 18 Summary

Ollie-O, a consultant brought in to work with the Galer Street School Parents Association, writes a letter to the parents. He's telling the parents that Galer Street is a second choice school for parents and that they have to pull together to raise money for the school to move locations. He's also enclosed a list of what he calls "Mercedes Parents" to see if existing parents know any of them. These are the parents with money they want to invite to a luncheon to raise money for the school and get these parents to apply to Galer Street.

Audrey Griffin, who is hosting the Galer Street PBA luncheon at her home writes a letter to the man who removed the blackberry vines from her yard. She's writing him to say the vines are back three weeks later. She's asking him to come remove the vines in preparation for the luncheon she's hosting on December 11.

The blackberry specialist writes back to Audrey. He tells her it is her neighbors' blackberry vines that are growing under Audrey's fence that are the problem. He gives her the options for getting rid of them—a trench, an expensive machine to eradicate the neighbor's vines or renting pigs to eat the vines. He also offers to talk to the neighbors for her, but mentions it doesn't look as if anyone lives there.

Soo-Lin Lee-Segal writes to Audrey. She says she sat next to Elgin Branch on the bus. She says they thought his wife Bernadette Fox was the weird one, but it turns out that Elgin is weird, too. Soo-Lin says she Googled Bernadette and can't find any information on her, as if she doesn't exist. Soo-Lin also mentions that Microsoft, where she and Elgin work, might be doing another round of layoffs. If not, she'll help cover the costs for the prospective parent luncheon.

Audrey writes back to Tom, telling him that someone lives in the neighbor's house. Audrey's neighbor is Bee's family. Audrey says she'll raise the subject of the blackberry bushes.

Bernadette emails Manjula with the signed contract for her work. She also provides Manjula with the trip details. She adds they need to find somewhere for Ice Cream, the dog to go. Then, Bernadette says she has to go pick up Bee from school.



## Wednesday, November 17 and Thursday, November 18 Analysis

The author is placing the events in place that lead up to Bernadette's disappearance. These could be clues as to why Bernadette goes missing. Or, it could just be laying out the items that Bernadette had to deal with in the days leading up to her disappearance.

Soo-Lin indicates that all of the parents at Galer Street think Bernadette Fox is strange. It is likely that nobody knows that she is agoraphobic, or that if they do, they simply think she is strange because of her fear to leave the house. Soo-Lin saying that she cannot find any information on Bernadette on the Internet can indicate that Bernadette created her identity when she married Elgin. Someone uncovering her true identity can be what causes Bernadette to go missing.

Apparently, Bernadette does leave the house. She appears to only do it when she has to do it. Additionally, she doesn't like it when she does, which is why she seems anti-social to the other parents.



# Friday, November 19, Monday, November 22 and Tuesday, November 23

## Friday, November 19, Monday, November 22 and Tuesday, November 23 Summary

Miss Goodyear, the head of Galer Street, sends home a note in the weekend packets. She reminds the parents the two ways for them to pick up their children. She does this because Bernadette ran over Audrey's foot with her car when Bernadette walked up to Bernadette's car in the driveway of the school.

Audrey gives Bee an invoice for her medical bills to give to Bernadette. Soo-Lin and Audrey email each other about the incident. Miss Goodyear has to send home a note in the Monday packets clarifying who it was that ran over Audrey's foot since she used Audrey's name in the Friday packet. Bee explains about the incident in the car. She says that her mom didn't run over anyone's foot because her mom's car is so small that if they had run over a foot, they would have known it. Bee says that her mother said that with her big sunglasses on, Audrey couldn't tell if Bernadette saw her or not so she just drove off when the lady directing traffic told Bernadette to move forward.

Bernadette sends Manjula the medical invoice from Audrey to be paid. Bernadette refers to Audrey and the other mothers at the school as gnats. She says they've been provoking her for the last nine years but now that Bee is graduating, she doesn't want to cause a stink. She also gives Manjula further duties on booking and preparing for their trip to Antarctica.

Manjula writes back to Bernadette to say she'll take care of the packing list.

Bernadette writes Manjula telling her about their life before they moved to Seattle. Bernadette mentions living in LA. She also mentions that there was an incident that caused her to move from LA to Seattle. She also talks about their experience in purchasing the house where they live now.

Manjula writes back to confirm the shipment of the items. Bernadette writes Manjula back for her to make them reservations for Thanksgiving.

Bee talks about her mother's system for catching the leaks in the house when it's raining. Bee and Bernadette talk about Bee going off to boarding school as Bernadette tries to get the spaghetti pots under the leaks. Bernadette jokes that she's already rented a house near the campus and gotten a job so that she'll still be able to see Bee's face every day.

Elgin asks Bee if she wants to go to the zoo today and then come back to watch the Seahawk's Game. It's Thanksgiving and Bernadette announces they are going to





Daniel's Broiler, which she didn't know they ended up there because that's the only place Manjula can get them reservations. Bee and all of the kids at school think it's very cool that they got to eat Thanksgiving dinner there.

## **Friday, November 19, Monday, November 22 and Tuesday, November 23 Analysis**

Audrey mentions Bernadette wearing a scarf and sunglasses when picking up Bee. Audrey also says that Bernadette never gets out of her car. This implicates Bernadette is agoraphobic but that the parents don't know it.

Soo-Lin mentioned not finding Bernadette on Google, except for an architect in California. Unbeknownst to Soo-Lin, this is the said Bernadette Fox that now lives next door to Audrey and has Bee in school with their children. Something happened to Bernadette in LA that caused them to move to Seattle and caused her to become agoraphobic.



# Monday, November 29 and Wednesday, December 1

## Monday, November 29 and Wednesday, December 1 Summary

Tom writes Audrey to pay her bill or he has to start lien proceedings. Audrey writes back saying her husband who works in the DA's office says they can take him to small claims court. She promises to pay the bill once Tom provides an estimate for removing the neighbor's vines.

Tom writes back saying they definitely need to rent the expensive machine, the Hillside Thrasher. He says they can't start until May and they need access to the property to provide an estimate.

Audrey writes back saying that May is not acceptable. She demands they get rid of the vines by December 11. She says she can give Tom access to the neighbor's yard while Bernadette is at school picking up her daughter.

Bee shares an excerpt from her school report on the Drake Passage.

Bernadette writes to Manjula. She says she's terrified of crossing the Drake Passage, which is one of the most turbulent bodies of water.

Bruce Jessup writes a letter from Dean of Admissions at Choate writes Bee to offer Bee acceptance to the boarding school. A separate letter goes to Bee's parents suggesting Bee skip the ninth grade and go into the tenth grade.

Bernadette writes Manjula to tell her that Bee got into Choate. She asks Manjula to pay the tuition out of their joint account. When Bernadette picks up Bee, Bernadette tells Bee Ice Cream is stuck in Bernadette's closet. Bee says it's because their house is so old that the house settles onto the door and it won't open. Primarily, this is because the house is an old church they converted into a house.

Bee mentions that Bernadette fixed up houses before Bee was born. Bee climbs on a ladder and through the window while Bernadette kicks in the closet door to free Ice Cream and Bee from the closet. Bernadette hands Bee her Choate envelope and says congratulations. They go to the Microsoft building to visit Bee's father. they bring takeout dinner to celebrate Bee's acceptance.

Elgin writes a letter back to Choate. He says they're opposed of Bee skipping a grade. He says she was born with a heart defect and had numerous surgeries to correct it. bee started school on time, but she still had to struggle to catch up, even though she is extremely intelligent and managed to get ahead of the other kids in her class.



Bee says she is not sick. She has a genetic heart condition. It caused her to have six surgeries, but the last one was when she was five. She's been fine ever since. She says her parents still make a big deal about it, even making her have a cardiogram every year for no reason. Bee says the only thing wrong with her now is she's short, doesn't have boobs and has asthma.

## **Monday, November 29 and Wednesday, December 1 Analysis**

Because Bernadette is so afraid of people and leaving her house, she befriends Manjula and tells Manjula everything. In essence, this equates to Bernadette paying for her friendships because she is paying Manjula for the work she does, including reading Bernadette's rambling emails that include personal and business information.

Additionally, Bee and her parents' perspectives on his illness differ. Her parents seem to still be very overprotective of her. Bee thinks she is perfectly fine. The truth likely sits somewhere in between. Ironically, even though her parents are so overprotective and concerned about her health, they are sending her off to boarding school. On the other hand, both of Bee's parents attended boarding school so it is in line with the family tradition.



# Thursday, December 2, Monday, December 6 and Tuesday, December 7

## Thursday, December 2, Monday, December 6 and Tuesday, December 7 Summary

Soo-Lin writes to Audrey. She's talking about the major downsizing at Microsoft. Soo-Lin says her whole team was rified, but she got assigned to a special assignment, promoted and transferred to Studio C. she probably isn't going to make it to the luncheon, but she can definitely help pay.

Ollie-O writes they have 60 RSVPs for the prospective parent luncheon.

Audrey responds to Soo-Lin with congratulations and acceptance to help pay for the luncheon. She talks about her plans for the luncheon. She mentions shipping a sick child off to boarding school.

Bee says she ran into Audrey Griffin at the hall in school. Audrey asks whose idea it was to send her off to boarding school. Bee says it was her idea. Audrey says she would never send Kyle to boarding school and Bee says she must love Kyle more than her parents love her. Bee skips back down the hall back to class.

Manjula writes to Bernadette about her research on motion sickness medicine for Bernadette to take for their trip to Antarctica. Bernadette writes Manjula back to call in the prescription for her.

Audrey writes Tom to confirm their meeting to go into the neighbor's yard. She assures Tom nobody will be there so not to worry.

Bee runs into the school nurse, Mrs. Webb, in the hall while Bee is coughing. Bee's cough always makes the nurse nervous. Bernadette's mom has to pick her up early. Bee is waiting on the front steps for her mom when Bernadette drives up. During a conversation with her mom, Bernadette says something that makes Bee think that her mom doesn't like to go to school, so she doesn't pretend Bernadette does.

After they get home, Bee sees Audrey, a man and her mom standing in the yard talking. Bernadette catches Audrey and Tom in the yard. Bernadette agrees to hire Tom to take care of her blackberry bushes. Bernadette advises Audrey to crawl back through the hole she came in through because they are done now.

Bernadette writes Manjula to contact Tom to hire him to abate the blackberry bushes. Manjula writes again to have a sign made for the property to tell people to stay off the property. She wants a line included about Galer Street gnats being putting in gnat jail. Manjula writes back to confirm the dimensions of the sign because the one Bernadette



wants is so large. Bernadette writes back to confirm the size is correct. Manjula confirms the sign is in production and that the prescription is filled, but Bernadette must pick it up rather than have it delivered.

## **Thursday, December 2, Monday, December 6 and Tuesday, December 7 Analysis**

Since Bee is going home early, this throws off the timeline when Bernadette is home and not home. This foreshadows Bernadette catching Audrey Griffin and Tom in her yard assessing the blackberry vines. Bee seems to be aware of her mother's fear of leaving the house. The employers at Microsoft compare Elgin to Mr. Rogers because Elgin removes his shoes when he gets to work and spends the day in his socks, even when he gives web presentations in front of famous people.



# Friday, December 10 and Saturday, December 11

## Friday, December 10 and Saturday, December 11 Summary

Bernadette writes to Manjula saying that she's heading to the pharmacy while Tom is using a noisy machine to get rid of the blackberries. She also says the fishing vest arrived, so she can carry all of her belongings on the trip.

Soo-Lin writes to Audrey to tell her the new admin position is to the Samantha 2 Team, heading by Elgin Branch. She's very excited because Elgin is like a rock star at Microsoft. She says she approached Elgin to introduce herself. Audrey writes back telling Soo-Lin she's proud of everything she's accomplished since the divorce.

Audrey says the machine is ripping out Bernadette's vines. She also says she got called into school because they found Audrey's vicodin prescription bottle in Kyle's locker. Audrey defends Kyle to get him out of trouble.

Bernadette writes to Manjula about her parking problems when she went to the pharmacy. She also talks about her interaction with the pharmacist about the prescription seasickness medication. The pharmacist mentions that a portion of the medication is anti-psychotic medication used in the former Soviet Union, including the severe side effects. The pharmacist says Bernadette's doctor wrote new prescriptions for a seasickness patch and some anti-anxiety medication instead. Bernadette mentions to Manjula that she had anti-anxiety medication but that she was thinking of overdoing herself at one point so moved them from the bottle to a plastic baggie.

Elgin finds Bernadette asleep on the couch in the pharmacy. He asks her what she's doing there and why she's wearing a fishing jacket. He's concerned about her. He says he wants to go to dinner tonight, just the two of them.

Bee says her mom is quiet when she picks her up at school. Bee says because they didn't talk much she couldn't have known that her mom was traumatized.

Soo-Lin writes to Audrey to tell her about the lunch she had with Elgin and Pablo, another member of the team. When they get off the shuttle to go to the restaurant, they find Bernadette Fox asleep on the couch in the window of a compound pharmacy. Elgin goes into the pharmacy and comes back out. He tells Soo-Lin to change his reservation to fly out tonight.

Jacob Raymond writes to Paul Jelinek, an architect. Jacob says when he was observing the public library building in Seattle he saw Bernadette Fox. Jacob says he's writing because he promised to tell Paul if he sighted her. He talks about Bernadette



winning an architecture award before she became a recluse. He tried to get a picture with her, but he says her eyes looked so vacant, as if something was wrong with her.

Bee talks about her parents going to dinner without her. she also mentions her father is leaving for D.C. for a presentation at Walter Reed. She says that she and her mom have a plan for when her dad is out of town for her friend Kennedy to spend the night.

Cliff Mass writes a blog post. He's talking about a rain storm hitting Seattle.

Ollie-O writes to the luncheon committee. He mentions the rainy weather for the day of the luncheon. He provides the agenda for the luncheon.

Soo-Lin writes to Audrey to wish her good luck on the luncheon today.

Ollie-O writes to the committee again talking about the huge sign Bernadette had erected. He says Audrey's husband is working on it as a legal matter.

Helen Derwood writes to Galer Street Kindergarten parents and copies the Galer Street all list. She's writing about the incident that occurred today at the luncheon when she was an escort for the Kindergarten children. The children are performing inside the house when a ruckus breaks out in the back yard where the caterers are setting up for the luncheon. The windows in the room break and mud rushes in through the broken windows. Bernadette's sign also winds up in the house.

In addition to being a Kindergarten parent, Helen Derwood is also a PTSD expert. She talks to the parents about PTSD in correlation with the "trauma" the Kindergarteners' experience at the Griffin home.

Bee talks about how freakish the weather was that morning. The ferry service is even suspended. The line of cars to get on the ferry is long because a pipe flooded in the ferry terminal on the other side. Bee and her mom jam to the Beatles' Abbey Road album. Bee is taken by the fact that her mom knows all the worlds, and while Bernadette is singing, Bee says it seems as if her mom has hope.

Bernadette gets a little sentimental when she talks about watching the performance Bee is choreographing for the first graders at school. Bee is playing her flute. When they arrive home, a muddy, screaming and crying Audrey Griffin greets them. Audrey explains what happened. Bernadette offers to pay for everything. Audrey ends up accusing Bernadette of being paranoid. Bernadette apologizes again for the sign and then ends the discussion.

Audrey won't let it go, however. When Audrey brings Bee up in the conversation, Bernadette really gets angry. Bee comes to her mother's defense when Audrey mentions Bee's boarding school. Bee ends slapping Audrey in the face and defends her mother against all of the other mothers. Bee also lashes out about Kyle being a delinquent and Audrey's husband being a drunk. Bee admits she is scared because she knew that everything is going to be different from now on. Bee says Bernadette was the same after that.



Bernadette writes Manjula to say she can't go to Antarctica.

Elgin writes to a shrink saying he was referred by a friend whose husband was struggling with depression. He says his wife is very sick. He provides background on how they met when she was an architect working on a building for the company where Elgin worked. They marry. Elgin says Bernadette was the driving engine in them moving to Seattle.

When they first marry, Bernadette has a series of miscarriages. Bee was premature and Bernadette throws herself into caring for Bee. In the meantime, they are dealing with the renovation of the home. Once Bee started kindergarten, Bernadette shies away from continuing the renovation on the home. She no longer had any interest in architecture, but instead starts tunneling her energy toward ranting about Seattle. Elgin describes finding Bernadette asleep on the pharmacy couch claiming she was waiting for an anti-psychotic medication. When Bernadette finds out that Soo-Lin is Elgin's new admin, she says now the gnats are going to turn him against her.

They talk about the medicine and Bernadette's anxiety. She mentions that she thinks there is a man that has been following her for the past four days.

## **Friday, December 10 and Saturday, December 11 Analysis**

Bernadette has had suicidal tendencies in the past. This can be an indication that she's missing because she did something to harm herself. Elgin's concern over Bernadette suggests that he thinks her behavior is inappropriate and possibly pointing to a problem that she has had in the past. His request for dinner with just the two of them is to tell her something bad.

It seems as if there was a mudslide from all of the rain. It caused the mud to slide down the hill and into the Griffin home. Bernadette's sign is swept away by the mudslide, which also causes the sign to land in the Griffin house with all of the mud.

Bee is painting a picture of her mother's mood prior to her disappearance. Bernadette's sentimentality can be because she knows she is getting ready to leave, or has a premonition that something is going to happen to her. Audrey is crying as she describes all of the damage to her home, yard and belongings. Bernadette and Audrey continue to argue about whose fault it is.

Elgin thinks Bernadette is paranoid and going crazy. It suggests that Elgin has Bernadette committed to a psychiatric hospital, but doesn't tell Bee that that's where her mother is.





# Saturday, December 11

## Saturday, December 11 Summary

A press release goes out to celebrate the anniversary Bernadette Fox's twenty-mile house. The foundation celebrating the house is running a contest for the building of a new house. The only stipulation is the same as Bernadette's was for the original twenty-mile house—that all of the supplies come from within twenty miles of where the home is.

Paul, the professor, writes back to Jacob. He sends an article about Bernadette Fox—the most influential architect people have never heard of. The professor says they should respect Bernadette's wishes to be left alone. The article points out all of Bernadette's accomplishments, including receiving the McArthur Grant at the age of thirty-two, of being the pioneer of the green movement, and for building a house that no longer stands. The furniture she built is part of a museum exhibit and Bernadette was one of the first successful women architects in a male-dominated field.

The article is interviews with various people in Bernadette's past. After marrying Elgin, they buy a former manufacturing plant that Bernadette spends the next two days transforming into a home for them to live. In 1991, Bernadette and Elgin move into the old factory. That's when Bernadette commits to building a house with materials that can only be sourced from within a twenty-mile radius—the so called twenty-mile house.

Bernadette ends up getting into a skirmish with the neighbor that shares a driveway with the lot where she's working on the twenty-mile house. Bernadette rants and raves about it when the owner, Mills-Murray, plants trees along the driveway that make it look like the entrance of a Ritz-Carlton. Bernadette pays Mills-Murray back by having cars towed parked on the easement of the property when Mills-Grant is throwing a party.

After Bernadette finishes the twenty-mile house is when she wins the award. Jellinek was one of Bernadette's professors of architecture. Jellinek takes his architecture students to see the twenty-mile house. One day when he takes his class there, he finds a bulldozer knocking the house down. When Bernadette returns Jellinek's call, she realizes that Mills-Murray is the one that bought the twenty-mile house and then had it demolished. The only evidence that exists of the award-winning house is the photographs the real estate agent, Judy Tully, took when she put the home on the market for Bernadette and Elgin.

## Saturday, December 11 Analysis

It sounds as if Bernadette has always been eccentric. People seem to take her eccentricity as craziness instead of Bernadette just being different. She also seems as if she is a green architect before it was cool to be green. When she transforms the manufacturing plant into a house, she won't allow the builders to throw anything away. She finds a way to turn everything in the old plant into something else. For example,

she clues together all of the old catalogs and then the contractor takes a chainsaw to it to make the living room furniture.

The articles seem to provide the details as to why Bernadette got out of architecture and never build another house again. It seems as if she never recovered from Mills-Murray knocking down the award-winning twenty-mile house that Bernadette poured her heart and soul into creating.



# Monday, December 13

## Monday, December 13 Summary

Bernadette writes to Paul Jellinek from Seattle. She's telling him about Seattle and how much she hates it there. She's writing him about his idea to run a contest based on the twenty-mile house. She asks why he loves her so much. She says she always intended on returning to architecture, but then Elgin became so important at Microsoft that they had to stay in Seattle rather than allowing her to return to LA. She rambles on and on about all of the reasons she dislikes Seattle.

She admits that she has never stopped obsessing over Mills-Murray demolishing her house. Bernadette also admits to blaming herself for all of her miscarriages. She tells Jellinek about how Bee was sick when she was born—when Bernadette was finally able to conceive a baby. She also says she saw a therapist in Seattle but that it didn't take long for her to tear him apart, which ended her sessions. Bernadette vowed to God that she would never build again if God saved Bee's life. It worked so Bernadette never built again.

She tells Jellinek how nobody in Seattle likes her. She tells him about her virtual friendship with Manjula. She goes to tell him about the dispute with the neighbor. She also admits that she goes days without showering because she just doesn't have the time.

Bernadette says when she saw that Kyle Griffin wrote something about her being the only parent that doesn't volunteer for school activities, Bernadette signs up to chaperone a school trip to Microsoft. Bernadette says this trip is what started Audrey's hate for her when Kyle gets in trouble on the trip under Bernadette's care. Bernadette says she's become feral like a pet rabbit she once had that was left to starve by the maid while she and her family were away on a trip.

## Monday, December 13 Analysis

Ironically, Bernadette talks about how paranoid the Microsoft employees are about releasing information on the programs they are developing. She says they don't even trust their own wives. Bernadette feels as if she is an artist that could never overcome failure. Bernadette is leaving subtle clues in her letter to Jellinek that she's depressed. For example, not showing for days is a sign of depression.



# Tuesday, December 14 and Wednesday, December 15

## Tuesday, December 14 and Wednesday, December 15 Summary

Paul writes back to Bernadette telling her that she must create or she'll become a menace to society.

Audrey writes the Griffin family Christmas letter, which includes the mud incident. Soo-Lin responds to the Christmas letter saying she's been worried about her since the mudslide. Soo-Lin describes an incident where Elgin yelled at some of the marketing ladies. Soo-Lin tells him they're all working on the same team, which silenced Elgin. Soo-Lin says it's one point for them.

Audrey writes Soo-Lin back admitting their stay at the Westin hotel is not as nice as she portrayed in her Christmas letter. She describes what it's like to live in the hotel. She also says Goodyear is trying to summon her and her husband in for another problem with Kyle.

Soo-Lin writes Audrey back about Elgin asking her to have lunch with him. They get sandwiches and ride bicycles available to the team to a church courtyard where they can eat their lunch. Elgin hints to some problems he's having with Bernadette. During the discussion, Soo-Lin reveals what happened with the sign and Audrey's house because Elgin doesn't know anything about it.

Audrey writes back to Soo-Lin saying she doesn't believe that Elgin doesn't know anything about his wife's path of destruction. She says her and her husband believe he's just trying to create a defense for when they sue them. Audrey writes to Gwen Goodyear to see if Elgin was on the list for all of the emails that went out about the luncheon disaster.

Bee and Bernadette take Kennedy out to dinner to the Space Needle restaurant for her birthday. Bernadette pulls out a card that they place on the revolving portion of the restaurant so that as the card goes around, the other people in the restaurant write birthday wishes on the card. When the card comes back around, it will be full of birthday wishes for Kennedy. Elgin shows up at dinner. This is when Bee says she knows that her dad found out about the mudslide.



## **Tuesday, December 14 and Wednesday, December 15 Analysis**

Soo-Lin assumes that Elgin is an emotionally abused husband. As is the case with many creative people, Bernadette is a little quirky. Outsiders mistake Bernadette's quirkiness as craziness. Elgin believes that Bernadette knew the blackberry bushes were the only thing holding up the hill and that she had them removed on purpose. Bernadette says she had them removed according to the correct specifications, but he chalks it off as just another reason he thinks Bernadette is going crazy.

Bernadette believes that Soo-Lin is poisoning Elgin's mind against Bernadette.



# Thursday, December 16

## Thursday, December 16 Summary

Gwen Goodyear writes to Audrey, who confirms Elgin and Bernadette have opted out all of the email lists. She also requests for them to set up a meeting to talk about Kyle.

Soo-Lin writes to Audrey saying that she has Elgin all wrong. She mentions Elgin comes from a prominent family and that he attended boarding school. She says he is also anxious about the three weeks he'll be away from work during their trip to Antarctica.

Ms. Goodyear sends a letter by messenger to the Westin saying they have evidence that Kyle is selling prescription drugs at Galer Street. She reiterates that she needs to speak to Audrey and Warren immediately. Audrey writes back making it look as if Goodyear is trying to implicate Kyle in a drug ring.

Audrey writes to Soo-Lin berating Soo-Lin for defending Elgin, who is tormenting Audrey. Soo-Lin writes Audrey back defending Elgin and listing out his accomplishment at Microsoft. Audrey responds to Soo-Lin saying she doesn't care. Soo-Lin responds again explaining to Audrey how brilliant Elgin is.

A transcript of Elgin's TED talk is included. A blogger writes a series of posts about the TED talk. This is where Elgin introduces the concept of Samantha 2 to the attendees. Samantha 2 is going to Walter Reed to help the wounded veterans live productive lives.

Audrey writes to Soo-Lin saying she's had enough. The doctor writes back to Elgin about his inquiry. He tells Elgin about how he can legally have Bernadette evaluated and committed if she won't do it on her own. He also warns Elgin about the chaos that an involuntary commitment can cause.

Elgin and Soo-Lin IM each other during a staff meeting. She's asking if Elgin is okay. He says he's distracted by what's going on at home. Soo-Lin tries to boost Elgin's esteem.

## Thursday, December 16 Analysis

Audrey is in utter denial. She thinks her son is an angel. She's always making excuses for his behavior that makes it look as if it is everyone else's fault, except Kyle's, for Kyle's behavior. Soo-Lin is starting to see who the real Elgin is. The friendship between Soo-Lin and Audrey is quickly deteriorating.

It seems as if Elgin is going to use the law to have Bernadette involuntarily admitted to the psychiatric hospital.



# Friday, December 17, Monday, December 20 and Tuesday, December 21

## Friday, December 17, Monday, December 20 and Tuesday, December 21 Summary

Bernadette writes to Manjula to say she plans to have her wisdom teeth the day before the trips. She plans to claim it was an emergency and she is forbidden from crying. She asks Manjula to schedule the surgery on December 23 for anytime after ten.

Elgin receives an email from the FBI, Marcus Strand, about schemes and identity fraud about a charge for the virtual assistant company. The FBI agent says the company doesn't exist but is a cover for a Russian crime ring. He says they intercepted an email from Manjula to Bernadette asking for power of attorney while they are away on their vacation. He says there were hundreds of emails between Bernadette and Manjula over the past three months. He sets up a meeting with Elgin to handle the situation. He also mentions they intercepted an email from Bernadette to Paul Jellinek. The agent urges Elgin to familiarize himself with the information prior to their meeting.

A police report is included at the Westin hotel against Audrey Griffin for assault. It starts when Audrey makes a noise complaint. The noisemakers turn out to be Kyle and the hooligans Audrey has witnessed in the hotel.

Audrey writes to Soo-Lin saying she's decided to take her up on her offer for them to stay with Soo-Lin.

Elgin writes to Soo-Lin about the meeting she just attended with him and the FBI agent. Soo-Lin writes a handwritten note to Elgin. She says she's honored he trusts her. She says they shouldn't correspond electronically anymore about Bernadette. Handwritten note from Elgin to Soo-Lin saying the doctor is coming by the following day to talk about committing Bernadette.

Soo-Lin writes to Audrey saying that an emergency at work makes it not a good time to stay with them. She apologizes but she says she has the woman that takes care of Lincoln staying in the guest room. Audrey says she called Maura, the woman staying in the guest room, to say Soo-Lin won't need her.

Elgin writes to the dean of admission at Choate. He says he's changed his mind and wants to allow Bee to skip a grade. He also asks for them to take Bee on early admission for January. Elgin writes to his brother, Van, asking him to come to Seattle and stay for a couple of days because of an emergency. Emails go back and forth between the brothers because Van says he can't come but Elgin insists its' an emergency and he has to come.



When Elgin says he needs Van to stay with Bee because Bernadette is sick and Elgin needs to get her help, Van agrees.

The doctor writes a request to bill for an off-island appointment. He describes the correspondence between himself and Elgin. He mentions that Elgin recently contacted him again to have Bernadette involuntarily committed. Elgin also claims Elgin has proof as to why she should be committed. The doctor is requesting to bill Elgin for the doctor to fly to Elgin's office to meet him and then start treating Bernadette.

Audrey and Soo-Lin write back and forth about when she's coming home and dinner plans.

Bee, Elgin and Bernadette are having dinner on Tuesday. This is when Elgin says Van is arriving the following day. Elgin says he thought Van can dog sit while they are away.

## **Friday, December 17, Monday, December 20 and Tuesday, December 21 Analysis**

Even when the police are involved, and Kyle and his friends are caught red-handed, Audrey still finds a way to turn around the details of the situation to detract guilt away from Kyle. Even though Audrey isn't admitting it, they've been kicked out of the hotel. Even though they've been fighting, Audrey is making it seem as if nothing is wrong so that they can stay with Soo-Lin.

Elgin is going to use the FBI information as added proof that Bernadette is sick and needs help.





# Wednesday, December 22

## Wednesday, December 22 Summary

The doctor writes a report about her trip to Microsoft. She talks about the FBI file he was given about Bernadette Fox. The information on Bernadette also reveals all of the problems she's had, including running over Audrey's foot, installing the billboard sign, etc. The doctor tells Elgin that he believes the determining stress factor, which is the trip to Antarctica, is what caused Bernadette's psychotic break. She also urges Elgin to get his wife outpatient help.

Elgin picks Bee up from school to pick Van up at the airport. Bee gets Elgin to agree to allow her to spend the night at Kennedy's house.

The doctor writes a report about their preparation for treating Bernadette.

Bee watches the Rockettes with Kennedy and the church youth group. Bee is so moved by the performance of one of the singers that she decides she wants to tell her father not to send her off to Choate. She feels so alone and so loved at the same time. The next morning, Kennedy's mother wakes the girls up and says they're going to be late to school. Bee arrives for the first grade performance Bee is choreographing and playing her flute. This is when Bee sees her mom standing in the door of the auditorium. When Bee looks up again, her mom is gone, and it's the last time Bee sees her.

## Wednesday, December 22 Analysis

Out of context, the information on Bernadette makes it seem as if she is crazy. Elgin doesn't want to upset and burden Bee with her mother's problems. This is why he doesn't tell Bee of having Bernadette committed ahead of time. It's also why he doesn't seem to tell her about it after the fact either. It seems as if he simply tells Bee he doesn't know where her mother is.



# Friday, December 24

## Friday, December 24 Summary

Dr. Janelle Kurtz is writing to the board to resign because of the tragic circumstances of Bernadette Fox's intervention. The doctor writes the intervention is to take place at her dental appointment. The dentist is aware of the intervention. When the doctor arrives at the Branch home to pick up Mr. Branch, there is a police car among the other cars in the driveway.

The FBI tells Elgin Manjula stole all of Elgin's American Airlines' miles. The miles were used to buy a one-way ticket from Russia to Seattle. Manjula confirmed in an email that Bernadette would be alone in the home. Bernadette arrives asking Elgin who all of these people are. They decide to conduct the intervention now since Bernadette walks in on them when she's supposed to be at the dentist.

First, they tell Bernadette about Manjula not existing and about the crime ring. When the intervention starts, Bernadette demands Soo-Lin be removed, but Elgin says Soo-Lin can stay. Bernadette says she had changed her mind about going. She locks herself in the bathroom. Elgin starts to believe that Bernadette had changed her mind.

When Bernadette doesn't answer when they're banging on the bathroom door, the FBI agent knocks the door down. The bathroom is empty. They search the basement, but don't find her. Elgin is injured when blackberry vines growing in the basement poke him in the eye. they rush him to the eye clinic.

## Friday, December 24 Analysis

Bernadette does something to harm herself at the intervention. This is what the doctor is referencing in her resignation letter. The inference is that Manjula has something to do with Bernadette's disappearance or the harm that comes to Bernadette.



## **Saturday, January 15, Sunday, January 16 and Tuesday, January 18**

### **Saturday, January 15, Sunday, January 16 and Tuesday, January 18 Summary**

Elgin writes a letter to Bee at Choate saying he still hasn't heard from her mom. He fills her in on what's been happening in Seattle. Soo-Lin sends a fax to Audrey, who is in Utah. Soo-Lin fills her in on what's been happening in Seattle. The Russians were apprehended before reaching Bernadette's house, so they don't think that's what happened to Bernadette.

Soo-Lin says Elgin had surgery on his corneas, so he and Bee didn't end up going to Antarctica. She says Bee insisted she still go on to Choate. Soo-Lin says she's taking care of Ice Cream and Elgin is staying in a hotel even though she invited him to move in. Elgin tells Soo-Lin to find a new home and that he'll pay for it. Soo-Lin says Lincoln got accepted into Lakeside and that she quit Microsoft.

Audrey sends a fax back. She congratulates Soo-Lin on her new happiness. She says he's found happiness too. She says Kyle is in a wilderness program for kids with drug and behavioral problems. Audrey has embraced that Kyle is a drug addict and she is even attending meetings that specialize in parents that have kids who are drug addicts.

Soo-Lin emails Audrey from an Internet café in South America. She says they found Bernadette when a charge on the credit card shows a charge in Antarctica. The travel agent confirms that Bernadette went on the trip without them. The ship is scheduled to dock in South America, so they are there to meet the ship. Soo-Lin also admits that she's pregnant with Elgin's child. Now she's worried what will happen to her now that Bernadette is back.

Elgin receives a letter from Choate suggesting Bee come home from school. he describes various acts of odd behavior. The final straw was the fact that Bee is writing a book that strings together various documents about her mother's disappearance, such as FBI files, emails between all of the parties involved, and other documents. He thinks Bee should be at home with her family during a traumatic time like this.

### **Saturday, January 15, Sunday, January 16 and Tuesday, January 18 Analysis**

There is foreshadowing that Soo-Lin and Elgin start a romantic relationship. Soo-Lin implies this information in her fax to Audrey. Audrey seems to have gone through a transformation. She's embracing her new life and has a much more positive outlook,

including saying that she's sorry Bernadette is missing and that she's sure she will turn up soon.

The Choate administrator writing Elgin wraps together why they novel changes from one piece of correspondence to another, and then Bee chimes in with a narrative. It is because the novel has been Bee stringing together all of the information she was able to obtain to tell her mother's story.



# Wednesday, January 19 and Thursday, January 20

## Wednesday, January 19 and Thursday, January 20 Summary

Soo-Lin writes to Audrey to give her a more level-headed account of what's happening. She says when Elgin found out Bernadette was fine, he was furious. As the passengers file off the ship, they don't see Bernadette. The ship captain tells Elgin that they can't find his wife. The pursers hands Elgin Bernadette's passport, which is all they have left. They even try to search the ship, but that can't be done either.

When they are about to leave, the purser runs after to them with a pad of paper that was on Bernadette's cabin desk. It's in a lab being tested. They return to Seattle to find a bunch of voice mails from the headmaster of Choate.

Audrey writes back telling Soo-Lin not to worry. Soo-Lin writes Audrey to say that Elgin withdrew Bee from Choate. Soo-Lin says that Bee has totally changed, that she is filled with hatred. Elgin even moved back into the house with Bee. Bee refuses to sleep under the same roof with him, so Elgin is staying in a Streamline trailer. Soo-Lin tells Audrey that Bee wrote a book about emails between Audrey and Soo-Lin, FBI reports, etc. Soo-Lin says the only one that could have access to the emails is Kyle and suggests Audrey confront him at his next session.

Elgin receives a letter from the company that owns the ship. He includes a report of the daily ship life, credit card charges, bills, and interview information on Bernadette's activities while onboard. The captain's report is also enclosed. It is a detail of Bernadette's activity.

The lab writes to Elgin saying the pad reveals that a three-page letter was written signed Love, Mom. There are phrases, such as Audrey Griffin is the devil, in the note.

Audrey writes her husband. She admits to finding the FBI file information in Soo-Lin's bag. She tells her husband about the crime ring and the handwritten notes between Soo-Lin and Elgin about Elgin considering sending Bernadette to Madrona Hills. Audrey admits to faking Bernadette running over her foot and removing the blackberries as she had asked her to do. This is the evidence that is sending Bernadette away.

Audrey photocopies the information and returns the originals to Soo-Lin's bag. Audrey says she fills in the details with her own documentation to paint the true story, instead of the partial truth. Audrey admits getting Kyle's help in getting into Soo-Lin's emails. Then, Audrey gets Kyle to get into Elgin's computer too.



Audrey goes to Bernadette's house. She finds the ladder Bee used to climb in the window to save Ice Cream. Audrey saves Bernadette from the intervention and Audrey takes her back to her house to read the dossier Audrey put together. After Bernadette reads it, she asks Audrey to make sure Bee gets the dossier.

Warren writes Audrey back saying he's proud of her, but that there is no word from Bernadette.

Soo-Lin writes Audrey. She writes a narrative about how their romantic relationship developed. Soo-Lin admits that she fell in the love with Elgin first. She realizes now that she has to give herself some reality checks on what actually happened, which is that Soo-Lin was already in love with Elgin, but Elgin was dealing with everything about Bernadette. Soo-Lin runs into Elgin when she's dropping off a package for him at the front desk of the hotel where Van is staying. She ends up going to dinner with Elgin and Van.

Soo-Lin and Elgin have sex that night up in the hotel. This is the night she got pregnant. She admits it is the one and only time they've had sex. The next day was Bernadette's intervention.

## **Wednesday, January 19 and Thursday, January 20 Analysis**

Soo-Lin tries to explain away her previous panic to her pregnancy hormones. In reality, she is only calmer now because Bernadette didn't get off the ship. Bee is already traumatized by her mother's disappearance. When she finds out about the baby and that they couldn't find Bernadette on the ship, Bee is likely to go over the edge.

Bernadette was able to disappear again. Ironically, Elgin has always been the calm one. Bernadette's disappearing act, and then reappearing act, has caused Elgin to go a little crazy. Now, he's acting a little erratic.

The ship owner suggests that Bernadette was drunk on the day she disappeared. He also adds that the seas were turbulent and that the passengers were advised not to go on deck. The ship owner suggests that in her drunken state, Bernadette went overboard. The captain's report says that there are no photographs or videos of Bernadette while onboard. This suggests that it can be Bernadette, but it might not be Bernadette that was on the ship. The lab results suggest that it was Bernadette that wrote the letter to Bee.

Audrey feels guilty that Bernadette is being sent to a psychiatric hospital because of her.



# Wednesday, February 2

## Wednesday, February 2 Summary

Soo-Lin goes to her support group and then goes home for family dinner night with her and her kids. She says Elgin resisted these dinners at first, but now he enjoys them because Bernadette never cooked, but always ordered takeout. Bee rushes in with the letter from the ship and the captain's report saying he wishes her mother is dead. Bee lashes out at Elgin and Soo-Lin.

That night, Elgin tells Soo-Lin he promised to take Bee to Antarctica. They leave the next day. They arrive in Santiago early the next morning. They go through immigration off the flight. They take a bus to a hotel where they'll stay until it's time to board the ship. Bee describes receiving the envelope full of information about her mom. Bee says she feels better about being at Choate once she started writing her book.

Elgin and Bee board the ship to set sail to Antarctica. Bee is upset to find that the captain of the ship is not the same one that was captain when her mother was onboard. Bee questions some of the other staff members on the ship about her mother. When they say she killed herself, Bee gets angry with them and stomps off.

Bee pulls out the captain's report and starts to follow her mother's footsteps. As Bee starts out though she gets seasick. A cleaning woman on the ship gives Bee a bottle of water and some seasickness pills. She helps Bee back to her cabin. When she wakes up fourteen hours later, the ship is crossing the Drake Passage, so the boat is in very turbulent waters.

Bee finds the gift shop lady. While talking to her, she watches as she rubs a cream on her wrists. Bee confirms it is the same cream her mom was trying to get from the compound pharmacist. Bee asks the woman to find out what her mother bought for \$400 in the gift shop. Bee returns to her room and then her dad shows up with the gift shop lady, questioning Bee about her asking for a copy of her mother's receipt.

Bee and Elgin talk about Bee wanting to find her mother. Elgin says he thinks Bernadette died from an accident, not suicide. Bee insists that he wants Bernadette to be dead because he's cheating on her. Elgin insists she could not survive in the cold in the Antarctica. Bee insists her mother would never do anything that might jeopardize Bernadette seeing Bee again.

When they are struggling outside on the deck, the papers in Bee's file fly overboard. They arrive in Antarctica. They spend days there. Bee spends most of her time in the ship library while Elgin is out on excursions.

When Bee finds out the next port is a former military installation that now has a town and a post office, she gets excited. While her dad is out kayaking, she takes the excursion boat into Port Lockroy. Bee starts questioning the two ladies at the Port



Lockroy gift shop because she thinks her mom might have stayed to live here. When she finds out it's just the two gift shop ladies that live there, Bee starts crying and can't stop. Someone summons Elgin.

Elgin and Bee make up now that Bee realizes her father's side of the whole thing. He also ends up admitting to her that Soo-Lin is pregnant. Elgin also tells Bee that Samantha 2 is cancelled and his division is being folded into the games branch of Microsoft.

Bee starts going on the excursions, including being the assistant to the man on the ship in charge of counting baby penguins. She even invites Vivian and Iris, the two women from the gift shop at Port Lockroy, on board the ship. At two in the morning, Bee is still playing Risk with Iris and Vivian when they arrive at Palmer Station. Elgin shows up saying that he's been thinking that it's possible that Bernadette's ID didn't scan or that Bernadette didn't scan out when she left the ship so they don't know where Bernadette really got off the ship.

It also turns out that the specialty drink on Bernadette's bill is the signature drink, the Pink Penguins, of Palmer Station. Since the scientists come on board the ship for drinks while it's there, it's possible that Bernadette left the ship when the scientists left. However, when Bee checks the maps for the route of her mother's ship, she finds that the ship didn't go anywhere near Palmer Station.

Elgin and Bee end up taking one of the zodiacs and leave the ship without scanning out. When they get to land, Bee gets off the zodiac and Elgin gives Bee something to give to Bernadette. While she's searching the building, she slips on a spaghetti pot with a Galer Street School t-shirt in it. Bernadette walks up behind Bee and the two embrace each other.

## Wednesday, February 2 Analysis

Soo-Lin has been painting a picture that makes it seem as if they are romantically involved. The truth is that the baby is the product of a one-night stand. Elgin is using the trip to Antarctica to try to get close to Bee again, so that she won't be so mad at him.

Bernadette's disappearance has totally changed Bee. She is full of hate. Her innocence is lost. She's also turned into an amateur detective trying to find out what happened to her mother. Bee blames Elgin for everything. She believes her mother is completely innocent of any wrongdoing.

Bee gets excited about Port Lockroy because she assumes that her mother wrote the letter to her and mailed it while she was in port. When Bee doesn't find her mom at Port Lockroy, she comes to terms with the fact that her mother is gone. It is also a turning point for the relationship between Bee and Elgin. Bee starts to realize that it's not all her father's fault and that he's all she has left.



Bee's hope is renewed that she can find Bernadette when the ship reaches Palmer Station.



# Monday, February 21 and Friday January 7

## Monday, February 21 and Friday January 7 Summary

Bee is back at school at Galer Street. Bee receives the letter Bernadette had written her that she hadn't received before heading out on the Antarctica trip. Mr. Levy, one of Bee's teachers, reads Bee's book. He gives her feedback and offers to allow her to work on it as a special project to make up for the classes she missed while gone.

Bee reads the letter she received from her mom. In the letter, Bernadette tells Bee that Audrey Griffin isn't the devil, but is the person responsible for saving her from the intervention. Bernadette describes the rest of her journey to Antarctica. One day, when Bernadette is kayaking, she meets one of the scientists, Becky. This is when Bernadette realizes people can live here.

Bernadette ends up convincing the scientists to allow her to stay and work for them for free. Bernadette tells Bee in the letter not to hate her father. Bernadette also tells Bee they're moving out of Straight Street, their house. She says that maybe they can sell it to Galer Street for a dollar as their new campus. Bernadette also declares that bee isn't going to boarding school.

## Monday, February 21 and Friday January 7 Analysis

Bernadette feels like she needs to get away from everything in order to get her head clear. For the first time in her life, Bernadette learns how to live in the moment. Bernadette comes to realize that all of the things she thought were so terrible about Galer Street and Seattle were actually the best things that ever happened to her.



# Characters

## Bee Branch

Bee Branch is a fifteen-year-old girl. She is the daughter of Bernadette Fox and Elgin Branch. Bee is an only child.

When Bee was born, she had a heart problem. She underwent numerous surgeries as a baby. The final surgery was able to correct the problem and she never had additional heart problems after that.

Bee attend a private school, Galer Street. She is a straight A student. In addition to her studies, Bee also plays the flute. It's Bee's idea to go to Antarctica on a family trip as a graduation present for Bee moving on from Galer Street to her boarding school, Choate.

## Bernadette Fox

Bernadette Fox is Bee Branch's mother. Bernadette is married to Elgin Branch. Bernadette is a very eccentric woman. She also has a touch of agoraphobia, so Bernadette doesn't like to leave her house and she doesn't like to interact with other people.

Prior to moving to Seattle, Bernadette was a famous architect. She even won an award for building a twenty-mile house. With this project, Bernadette only used supplies she could obtain within twenty miles from the location of the home.

The other mother at Galer Street think Bernadette is crazy. In reality, Bernadette is simply misunderstood. By the end of the novel, Bernadette sees her way of doing things is not the best option and vows to change her life.

## Elgin Branch

Elgin Branch is Bee's father and Bernadette's husband. He is an executive at Microsoft and is always very busy with work. Elgin learns to become more involved with Bee after Bernadette leaves. Elgin likes biking in his spare time and he is known at work for walking around the office without his shoes on.

## Audrey Griffin

Audrey Griffin is Kyle's mother, who is a student that attends Galer Street with Bee. Audrey is also the Branch's neighbor. Audrey hates Bernadette and one day at school, Bernadette accidentally runs over Audrey's foot. In the end, Audrey ends up helping Bernadette escape from Bernadette's intervention.



## **Soo-Lin Lee-Segal**

Soo-Lin Lee-Segal is another mother of a Galer Street student. She also works as an administrative assistant at Microsoft. When Microsoft starts a reorganization, Soo-Lin starts working with Elgin as the administrative assistant for Elgin's team and the special project they are working on. Soo-Lin has an affair with Elgin and gets pregnant. Soo-Lin is also one of Audrey's best friends.

## **Gwen Goodyear**

Gwen Goodyear is the head of the Galer Street school. Gwen sends out a memo to the parents to remind them not to walk in the driveway of the school after Bernadette runs over Audrey's foot. Gwen also sends out a memo clarifying that it was Bernadette that ran over Audrey's foot, after Audrey complains that the first memo only contained Audrey's name.

## **Mrs. Webb**

Mrs. Webb is the school nurse at Galer Street. Mrs. Webb is always worried about Bee's health. Even if Bee just has a cough or a runny nose, Mrs. Webb calls Bernadette to pick up Bee from school.

## **Niles Mills-Murray**

Niles Mills-Murray is the owner of the neighboring property of the twenty-mile house. Niles gets into an argument with Bernadette. He ends up secretly buying the twenty-mile house and then knocks the house down.

## **Van Branch**

Van Branch is Elgin's brother. Van lives in Hawaii. Van works as a professional house caretaker, likes to smoke pot, and is a very free spirit. He comes to town to help take care of Bee so that Elgin can get help for Bernadette.

## **Kennedy**

Kennedy is Bee's best friend. Kennedy celebrates her fifteenth birthday with Bee and Bernadette in the rotating restaurant in Seattle. Bee and Bernadette often do things with Kennedy without telling Elgin.



# Objects/Places

## Seattle, Washington

Seattle, Washington is the primary setting in the novel. It is where the main characters, live, work and go to school. Seattle is where Bernadette and Elgin move to from California.

## Galer Street

Galer Street is a private school. It's the school Bee has attended her whole entire. Now, that bee is graduating from the ninth grade, which is the last grade at Galer Street, she's going to attend boarding school.

## Choate

Choate is the boarding school Bernadette attended. It's also the boarding school Bee applies to and is accepted to attend. When Bernadette first goes missing, Bee enrolls in Choate. The Choate administrator ends up sending Bee home from Choate because Bee is having a hard time adjusting to life at Choate.

## Sign

Bernadette buys a custom sign to place in her yard. The intention of the sign is to keep people, especially Galer mothers, off her property. When Seattle experiences a heavy rain storm, the sign is taken out by a mudslide, which sends the sign crashing into Audrey Griffin's home.

## Twenty-Mile House

The twenty-mile house is one of Bernadette's architectural projects. Bernadette ends up winning an award for the home. When Bernadette design and builds the home, she only uses supplies she can obtain from within twenty miles of the home.

## Madrona Hill

Madrona Hill is a mental hospital. It is the hospital Elgin contacts when he thinks Bernadette requires mental help. The doctor from Madrona Hill goes to Seattle to administer Bernadette's intervention.



## HH Allegra

The HH Allegra is a cruise ship. It's the ship Bee, Bernadette, and Elgin are supposed to take for their Antarctica trip. Bernadette ends up boarding and going missing from the HH Allegra. Later, Bee and Elgin also board the ship, on a different voyage, to complete their Antarctica trip.

## Large Envelope

Bee receives a large envelope while she's at Chaote. The envelope doesn't contain a return address. Inside, Bee finds all of the correspondence and file information about her mother and Bernadette's disappearance. This is the information Bee uses to write her book and to investigate Bernadette's disappearance.

## Port Lockroy

Port Lockroy is a small town where the HH Allegra stops. Only two women live in Port Lockroy. Bee thinks Bernadette might have disembarked and started living in Port Lockroy. Bee is disappointed when she finds out that her mother is not there.

## Palmer Station

Palmer Station is an island in Antarctica where research scientists live. When the HH Allegra docks off Palmer Station, the scientists boat over to the cruise ship to have drinks with the crew and the guest onboard. This is also the island where Bee finds Bernadette living.



# Themes

## Relationships

One of the primary themes running throughout the novel is relationships. The two primary relationships the novel tackles are the relationships of a family and friendships. The novel lightly touches upon romantic relationships as well.

Friendship is one of the primary types of relationships the novel tackles. Bee is only able to make one true friend, which is Kennedy. Many of the other students at Galer Street are not friends with Bee because their mothers think that Bernadette is strange. Additionally, Bernadette is not able to form friendships at all. All of the other mothers think she is weird and crazy because Bernadette hardly ever leaves the house, and she never volunteers for any of the school activities.

In the end, Audrey and Bernadette end up forming a friendship—a type of bond. When Audrey realizes that she has misjudged Bernadette, Audrey becomes Bernadette's ally. Audrey pieces together the pieces of the puzzle to prove that Bernadette is not crazy. Audrey even helps Bernadette escape from the intervention and Audrey is the one that sends the envelope of information to Bee, so that Bee knows the truth.

Audrey and Soo-Lin also have a convenient type of friendship throughout the novel. The two women often gossip and confide in one another. On some level, their friendship also appears to be superficial because it is easy for Audrey and Soo-Lin to get mad at each other, and even turn their backs on each other. When one of the women needs something from the other, however, they are easy to work toward being friends once again.

The novel lightly touches upon romantic relationships. First, it reveals how Elgin and Bernadette met and fell in love originally. As Bernadette appears to spiral out of control, the novel also touches upon how Elgin gets fed up with Bernadette and tries to have her committed to a psychiatric hospital. At this time, Elgin also engages in a one-time sexual encounter with Soo-Lin. This one night stand leads to Soo-Lin getting pregnant.

## 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 having an eccentric mother and going away to boarding school. Bee struggles with the fact that her coming of age includes having to deal with her mother disappearing.

Bee tries to take on adult responsibilities, but realizes that she needs her father's help. Even Bernadette faces her own coming of age obstacles. She realizes that the crazy ways she has been living her life, and have been forcing Bee and Elgin to live, are not the right ways. She vows to make a change in their lifestyle upon returning to Seattle.



## Family

Family is the central theme throughout the entire novel. This is because the storyline is about the lives of this particular family—the Branch family. While every family has their trials and tribulations, Bee's family has its own family dynamics that are the same and that are different from those of other families. In the end though, they are a family and they will get through it together, one way or the other.

Additionally, Bee learns to form a better relationship with her father. While Bee has primarily depended on her mother her whole life, Bee learns that her father is there for her as well.



# Style

## Point of View

The novel is written from different points of view because of the way it is told. Primarily, the story is told with emails, letters, faxes, and other forms of correspondence between the characters. In between the correspondence, Bee Branch tells the story and clarifies points of the correspondence from a first person point of view. The point of view of this novel is intimate, allowing a reader to connect closely with each of the characters in the book. The book is written in this manner, allowing the reader to get inside the heads, thoughts, and inner struggles of each character. 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 takes place in Seattle, Washington and Antarctica during the 21st century. The main characters are involved in the daily life of living in the aftermath of Bernadette's disappearance.

The setting of this novel works well with the plot. At first, the reader is not aware that the main character, Bernadette, runs away from home to get away from her husband, who is trying to commit her in a mental facility. However, as events unfold, the search for Bernadette 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 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 different dates and different pieces of correspondence between the characters in the novel. Each section ranges from one page to 15 pages long. The sections 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 narrator switches back and forth between the past and the present.



The novel contains one main plot and several subplots. The main plot is that of human relationships—family and friendships. One subplot is the coming of age of the characters, primarily Bee Branch. Another subplot is family.



## Quotes

"That's a yes."

Monday, November 15, p. 9

"Of the million reasons I don't want to go to Antarctica, the main one is that it will require me to leave the house."

Tuesday, November 16, p. 10

"But when I looked her up, nothing appeared."

Wednesday, November 17, p. 17

"Their daughter, Bee, is in Kyle's class at Galer Street."

Thursday, November 18, p. 18

"I hear Bernadette tried to run you over at pickup!"

Friday, November 19, p. 20

"This is to clarify that Bernadette Fox, Bee Branch's mother, was driving the vehicle that drove over the other parent's foot."

Monday, November 22, p. 21

"Attached please find a scan of an emergency room bill I supposes I should pay."

Tuesday, November 23, p. 23

"Please write an estimate for removing my neighbor's blackberries."

Monday, November 29, p. 33

"For an estimate, we'd need to gain access to the neighbor's property."

Wednesday, December 1, p. 34

"Did you hear? Shipping a sick kid off to boarding school! Why am I not surprised?"

Thursday, December 2, p. 47

"I didn't know you were choreographing a dance for the first graders. That's a huge deal, Bee."

Monday, December 6, p. 51



"The sign has been ordered and will be erected the same day Tom completes the abatement work."

Tuesday, December 7, p. 54

"Our new admin! Man, we've been dying around here without you. How about you join us for lunch?"

Friday, December 10, p. 57

"Haldol is an antipsychotic."

Saturday, December 11, p. 61

"In case you were wondering: Bernadette is walking around Seattle in the middle of winter wearing a fishing vest."

Monday, December 13, p. 70

"I'm sure you had your hands full this weekend, but you must remember, we're all working toward the same goal."

Tuesday, December 14, p. 140

"But we write a check each year, on top of tuition. Isn't that participation enough?"

Wednesday, December 15, p. 145

"In March, we ship Samantha 2 to Walter Reed hospital."

Thursday, December 16, p. 165

"You know how I said I was going to come up with a way to get out of going to Antarctica?"

Friday, December 17, p. 168

"Yesterday "Manjula" asked for a power of attorney while your family is away in Antarctica."

Monday, December 20, p. 169

"You do things your way."

Tuesday, December 21, p. 188



"One for Bernadette."  
Wednesday, December 22, p. 193

"Elgie, who are all these people?"  
Friday, December. 24, p. 203

"You know that Bernadette disappeared from a drug intervention at her house."  
Friday, January 14, p. 218

"That's very upsetting news about Bernadette. I know she'll turn up."  
Saturday, January 15, p. 221

"They found her!"  
Sunday, January 16, p. 222

"My concern is Bee."  
Tuesday, January 18, p. 224

"We can't find your wife."  
Wednesday, January 19, p. 227

"That is very unsettling news about Bernadette."  
Thursday, January 20, p. 231

"Let's go to my house."  
Tuesday, January 25, p. 242

"Sex was awkward."  
Friday, January 28, p. 248

"You're sorry about the baby!"  
Wednesday, February 2, p. 251

"I went to my locked and gave him the book I wrote at Choate."  
Monday, February 21, p. 311

"The Runaway Bunny stays."  
Friday, January 7, p. 326

## Topics for Discussion

Who is the true Bernadette Fox? Why do you think she wants to turn an old church school into her home in Seattle? Why do you think Bernadette acts so eccentric? What do you think happens to Bernadette when she returns to Seattle?

Discuss the relationship between Bee and Bernadette. Why do you think Bee thinks her mom is so great? Why do you think Bernadette doesn't contact Bee before running away? Is there true competition in their relationship? How does Bee feel about Bernadette? How does Bernadette feel about Bee? How do Bee's feelings change after Bernadette runs away?

Discuss the relationship between Audrey and Soo-Lin. Are they best friends, foes, or something else? Is there true competition in their relationship? How does Audrey feel about Soo-Lin? How does Soo-Lin feel about Audrey? How do Audrey's feelings change? How do Soo-Lin's feelings change?

Discuss the relationship between Audrey and Bernadette. Are they foes or something else? Is there true competition in their relationship? Why do you think Audrey ends up helping Bernadette? Do you think their relationship changes when Bernadette returns to Seattle?

Who is the true Soo-Lin? Why do you think she seduces Elgin? What do you think happens when Soo-Lin has the baby? Do you think Soo-Lin and Bernadette have a different relationship going forward?

Who is Elgin Branch? Is he a tortured genius or just a successful businessman, father and husband? Why do you think he has an affair with Soo-Lin? What role does Bee play in helping Elgin change his life?

Discuss Bee's search for her mother. What impact does it have on the characters of the novel? How does it motivate them and how does it derail their lives?