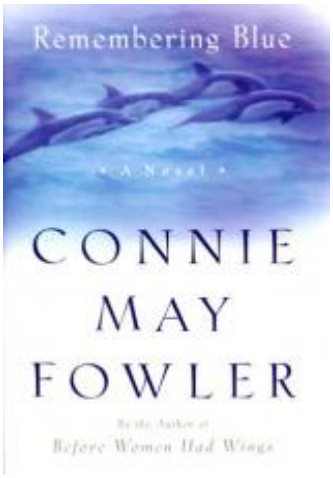
Remembering Blue

by Connie May Fowler



About the Book

"For twenty-two years, I existed as that murky shadow at the far edge of your peripheral vision, a faint reminder that there are those among the living who are exceptional at no level."

Matilda Fiona O'Rourke, or Mattie as she is known, is the sympathetic and wholly believable character at the heart of **Remembering Blue**. She is acutely perceptive and endowed with a good deal of self-knowledge. Despite this, Mattie is unaware that she is an intelligent, passionate, and resilient young woman. But not for long.

Enter Nick Blue, the man who becomes Mattie's husband and who meets his fateful death not long after that. But this is not a tragedy about how a man died and a woman's heart was broken. Instead, it is a story of how two people lived together fully. **Remembering Blue** is a love story, simple and true, that shows the heights to which even the "average" human spirit can soar.

Connie May Fowler's narrator, Mattie Blue, is special. Her reminiscences fix us to the page by showing the capabilities of the human spirit to overcome the vicissitudes of life and transform itself into something better, something stronger, and ironically, something it has been all along. The distant, inward-looking Mattie, whose solitary life seems to hold little hope for the future, is barely recognizable by the story's end. Mattie's slow emergence from the shadows of her past and into the light of new possibilities proves, finally, to be the best way of remembering Blue.

"Freedom through carpentry, that was my new motto."

Is her mother's death the catalyst? Because of it, Mattie packs up and moves. Or is the catalyst Nick Blue, love of her life? Or is it her developing interest in nature, family, carpentry, college, or gardening? The more complicated truth, and one that gives this novel welcome weight, is that it's all of these things. Mattie overcomes being abandoned by her father and mistreated by her mother, whose death leaves a legacy of mixed emotions, in a way that will have us nodding in

recognition at the course of healing and life, and at the realization that there is no one way to transcend trouble.

Nick and Mattie move to his home on the island of Lethe, where she meets his large and loving family: his mother, Lillian, the matriarch of this Greek-American family of fishermen and women; his brother, Demetrius; his cousin, Beth; his nephew, Lucas; and his grandfather, Charon, who is connected at a primal level to the sea. Mattie's evolution in the embrace of a boisterous new family and awash in a hauntingly beautiful setting is glorious, though tinted with the tragedy that we know from page one is on the way. For Mattie tells her story as a recent widow, following the death of her vital, loving husband and best friend, Nick. To assuage her grief and understand it, Mattie describes how it all happened--not just the death, but the wealth of life surrounding the loss.

"A family member. That is what I had become, among other things."

Mattie not only becomes a member of the Blue clan, but also a storyteller, a memory keeper, a weaver of myth and legend, and a witness to family history and love. Fowler's ingenious use of the memoir form to tell the story of Mattie and Nick gives it the intimacy of a diary, one written with a keen sense for detail and drama, for truth and beauty.

For Mattie, the process of telling her story, of writing this memoir of love and marriage, becomes a way to use memory as a salve, as a balm, and as a tool to dig through her grief and get to a place where she'll live fully again. For those of us who read her story, it might just be instruction on how we can do the same.

Discussion Guide

1. Why did the author choose to tell us in the very first paragraph that Mattie is a widow? How would the story have been different if she had told it in real time, instead of as a remembrance? How does her choice heighten the drama?

2. Talk about the mothers and the fathers in this novel. The ones who disappear. The ones who stay. Can you see a pattern? Is disappearing ever a valid choice for a parent?

3. Books save Mattie's life at different points in the novel. Talk about these points and about how books are important to Mattie. From what you have seen of life, do people who have experienced books as escape or as savior become more ferocious readers than people who have experienced books as entertainment?

4. In a sense, Nick and Mattie are in opposite evolutionary cycles. He is going back to what legend says he was. She is moving forward to become the fully integrated person she has it in her to be. Talk about the place where they meet, this moment in time when their cycles intersect.

5. One of the limits of first-person point of view is that the narrator is not usually reliable. How does the author work around this? Discuss some of the other point-of-view choices the author makes. For instance, when she has Mattie shape-shift into Lillian and into Nick, telling their stories from an intimate, close angle. Or when Mattie shifts to a distant third-person point of view to describe her own wedding.

6. Talk about the importance of myth and legend (Lethe, Proteus, the Sirens, Delphinus, Poseidon) in this novel.

7. Discuss the role and importance of nature in this novel.

8. For all of his humor, vitality, and pragmatism, Nick has a sadness about him from the start. Talk about instances where he displays this side of himself and how it informs his coming death.

9. Mattie tells Nick when they are in Tallahassee, "If you left Lethe because you were scared of dying at sea, that's one thing. But if you left because you believed the legend just a tiny, tiny bit? Well, that's a whole different reason for leaving" (page 63). Talk about the distinction she makes.

10. Mattie gets to Lethe and begins making a life for herself, with Nick, and on her own. She makes friends, she establishes comforting routines, and she takes on physical and intellectual challenges. Discuss the difference between this and when she was in Tallahassee on her own and went from studio apartment to convenience store and back again. Why does she blossom on Lethe?

11. Discuss Rhea and Charon Blue's relationship and Mattie's connection with Charon.

12. Mattie dreams of dolphins; Captain Johnny dreams of ships. Talk about the importance of specific dreams in this novel.

13. Talk about Mattie's reaction to her mother's death and then to her father's. She won't accept her father's or her mother's money (in the form of the house). And yet, she places the photo of her family alongside those of the Blue family. How do all these conflicting emotions and actions fit together? How are they justified?

14. Talk about the hurricane and the buildup to it. At this point in the novel, we're expecting Nick's death at any moment. How does our expectation add to the intensity of the hurricane? How does the hurricane add to the intensity of Nick's death?

15. Mattie imagines two versions of Nick's death, but discards one. Talk about how the author prepares us to accept one scenario over the other by having Mattie posit reasonable theories for unknowable events earlier in the novel.

16. Would the novel have been as satisfying if Nick's body been found? Or did his body have to remain in the sea to make this story read true?

17. Do you think Mattie will stay on Lethe? Raise her child there? Remarry eventually?

Author Bio

Connie May Fowler is an essayist, screenwriter, and novelist. Her previous books include **Sugar Rage**, **River of Hidden Dreams**, and most recently**Remembering Blue**. Her 1996 novel, **Before Women Had Wings**, won the Southern Book Critics Circle Award and was made into a successful "Oprah Winfrey Presents" TV movie. **Remembering Blue** won the Chautauqua South Award for Fiction. She and her husband are cofounders of the Connie May Fowler Women with Wings Foundation, a nonprofit organization dedicated to aiding women and children in need. She lives in Florida.

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Critical Praise

"If writing is a gift, then Connie May Fowler must have been bestowed with the gifts of ten muses. "

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