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ANNA QUINDLEN

A novel by the author of *One True Thing*



"BEAUTIFULLY PACED...
KEEPS THE READER
ANXIOUSLY TURNING THE PAGES."

—THE NEW YORK TIMES BOOK REVIEW

BLACK AND BLUE

Praise for
Black and Blue

“A compelling and suspenseful story that goes straight to the gut.”

—*St. Louis Post-Dispatch*

“[*Black and Blue*] is good enough to become to domestic violence what *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* was to slavery.”

—*Time*

“A sad and important story, convincingly told ... *Black and Blue* is enormously readable.... Like her columns, Quindlen’s novels are written with intelligence, clarity and heartrending directness.”

—*Newsday*

“In her third novel, Pulitzer Prize–winning journalist Anna Quindlen demonstrates the same winning qualities that inform her journalism: close observation, well-reasoned argument and appealing economy of language. This portrait of a battered woman is intimate and illuminating and, as is true of most anything Quindlen writes, well worth the read.”

—*People*

“A gut wrencher ... another stunner.”

—*The Denver Post*

“[A] smoothly written, nicely structured, engaging work ... There is not a badly written sentence in 300 pages. The scenes are deftly drawn.”

—*The Boston Globe*

“Eminently readable ... Quindlen knows how to build a story.”

—*The Philadelphia Inquirer*

“Quindlen sheds light on a tough issue.... *Black and Blue* builds its power slowly, through Fran’s particular strength and clear-eyed analysis of her life and decisions.”

—*Dayton Daily News*

“Quindlen has written her best novel yet in this unerringly constructed and paced, emotionally accurate tale of domestic abuse. [She] establishes suspense from the first sentence and never falters. Quindlen is wise and humane. Her understanding of the complex anatomy of marital relationships, of the often painful bond of maternal love and

of the capacity to survive tragedy and carry on, invest this moving novel with the clarion ring of truth.”

—*Publishers Weekly*

“A refreshing, wise and truth-telling novel about life and marriage ... Quindlen writes about women as they really are—neither helpless victims nor angry polemicists, but intelligent human beings struggling to do what’s right for those they love and for themselves. A book to read and savor.”

—*Kirkus Reviews*

“Skillfully told, suspenseful ... filled with strong characters.”

—*BookPage*

“Quindlen’s prose is precise and unrelenting.”

—*Booklist*

“[A] tale of passion and violence ... With *Black and Blue*, Quindlen unravels the mysteries of loyalty and lies, faith and fear, rage and regret.”

—*New Brunswick Home News Tribune*

ALSO BY ANNA QUINDLEN

Good Dog. Stay.

Rise and Shine

Being Perfect

Loud and Clear

Blessings

A Short Guide to a Happy Life

How Reading Changed My Life

One True Thing

Object Lessons

Living Out Loud

Thinking Out Loud

BOOKS FOR CHILDREN

Happily Ever After

The Tree That Came to Stay

BLACK
and
BLUE

A NOVEL

Anna
Quindlen



RANDOM HOUSE TRADE PAPERBACKS

NEW YORK

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*For Quin Krovatin
From one writer to another,
with admiration and enormous love.*

he first time my husband hit me I was nineteen years old. One sentence and I'm lost. One sentence and I can hear his voice in my head, that butterscotch-syrup voice that made goose bumps rise on my arms when I was young, that turned all of my skin warm and alive with a sibilant S, the drawling vowels, its shocking fricatives. It always sounded like a whisper, the way he talked, the intimacy of it, the way the words seemed to go into your guts, your head, your heart. "Geez, Bob," one of the guys would say, "you should have been a radio announcer. You should have done those voice-over things for commercials." It was like a genie, wafting purple and smoky from the lamp, Bobby's voice, or perfume when you took the glass stopper out of the bottle.

I remember going to court once when Bobby was a witness in a case. It was eleven, maybe twelve years ago, before Robert was born, before my collarbone was broken, and my nose, which hasn't healed quite right because I set it myself, looking in the bathroom mirror in the middle of the night, petals of adhesive tape fringing the frame. Bobby wanted me to come to court when he was testifying because it was a famous case at the time, although one famous case succeeds another in New York City the way one pinky-gold sunset over the sludge of the Hudson River fades and blooms, brand-new each night. A fifteen-year-old boy from Brooklyn was accused of raping a Dominican nun at knifepoint and then asking her to pray for him. His attorney said it was a lie, that the kid had had no idea that the woman in the aqua double-knit pants and the striped blouse was a nun, that the sex was consensual, though the nun was sixty-two and paste-waxing a floor in a shelter at the time. They took paste wax from the knees of the kid's pants, brought in the paste-wax manufacturer to do a chemical comparison.

The lawyer was an old guy with a storefront in a bad neighborhood, I remember, and the kid's mother had scraped together the money to hire him because Legal Aid had sent a black

court-appointed and she was convinced that her son needed a white lawyer to win his case. Half-blind, hungover, dandruff on the shoulders of his gray suit like a dusting of snow, the kid's attorney was stupid enough to call the kid as a witness and to ask why he had confessed to a crime he hadn't committed.

"There was this cop in the room," the boy said, real low, his broad forehead tipped toward the microphone, his fingers playing idly with his bottom lip, so that his words were a little muffled. "He don't ask none of the questions. He just kept hassling me, man. Like he just keeps saying, 'Tell us what you did, Tyrone. Tell us what you did.' It was like he hypnotized me, man. He just kept saying it over and over. I couldn't get away from him."

The jury believed that Tyrone Biggs had done the rape, and so did everybody else in New York who read the tabloids, watched the news. So did the judge, who gave him the maximum, eight to fifteen years, and called him "a boil on the body of humanity." But I knew that while Tyrone was lying about the rape he was telling the truth about that police officer, because I lived with that voice every day, had been hypnotized by it myself. I knew what it could do, how it could sound. It went down into your soul, like a confessor, like a seducer, saying, "Tell me. Tell me." Frannie, Frannie, Fran, he'd croon, whisper, sing. Sometimes Bobby even made me believe that I was guilty of something, that I was sleeping with every doctor at the hospital, that I made him slip and bang his bad knee. That I made him beat me up, that it was me who made the fist, angled the foot, brought down a hand hard. Hard.

The first time he hit me I was nineteen.

I can hear his voice now, so persuasive, so low and yet somehow so strong, making me understand once again that I'm all wrong. Frannie, Frannie, Fran, he says. That's how he begins. Frannie, Frannie, Fran. The first time I wasn't your husband yet. You were already twenty, because it was the weekend after we went to City Island for your birthday. And I didn't hit you. You know I didn't hit you. You see, Fran, this is what you do. You twist things. You always twist things.

I can hear him in my head. And I know he's right. He didn't hit me, that first time. He just held onto my upper arm so tight that the mark of his fingertips was like a tattoo, a black sun with four small moons revolving around it.

It was summer, and I couldn't wear a sundress for a week, or take off my clothes when my sister, Grace, was in the room we shared, the one that looked out over the air shaft to the Tarnowski's apartment on the other side. He had done it because I danced with Dee Stemple's brother and then laughed when he challenged me on it. He held me there, he said, so that I couldn't get away, because if I got away it would be the end of him, he loved me that much. The next night he pushed back the sleeve of my blouse and kissed each mark, and his tears wet the spots as though to wash the black white again, as white as the rest of my white, white skin, as though his tears would do what absolution did for venial sins, wash them clean. "Oh, Jesus," he whispered, "I am so goddamned sorry." And I cried, too. When I cried in those days it was always for his pain, not for mine.

As rich and persuasive as Bobby Benedetto's voice, that was how full and palpable was his sorrow and regret. And how huge was his rage. It was like a twister cloud; it rose suddenly from nothing into a moving thing that blew the roof off, black and strong. I smell beer, I smell bourbon, I smell sweat, I smell my own fear, ranker and stronger than all three.

I smell it now in the vast waiting room of Thirtieth Street Station in Philadelphia. There are long wooden benches and my son, Robert, and I have huddled together into the corner of one of them. Across from us slumps a man in the moth-eaten motley of the homeless, who smells of beer and vomit like so many I've seen in the waiting room at the hospital, cooking up symptoms from bad feet to blindness to get a bed for the night, an institutional breakfast on a tray. The benches in Thirtieth Street Station are solid, plain, utilitarian, like the pews in St. Stanislaus. The Church of the Holy Pollack, Bobby called St. Stannie's, but he still wanted us to be married there, where he'd been baptized, where his father had been