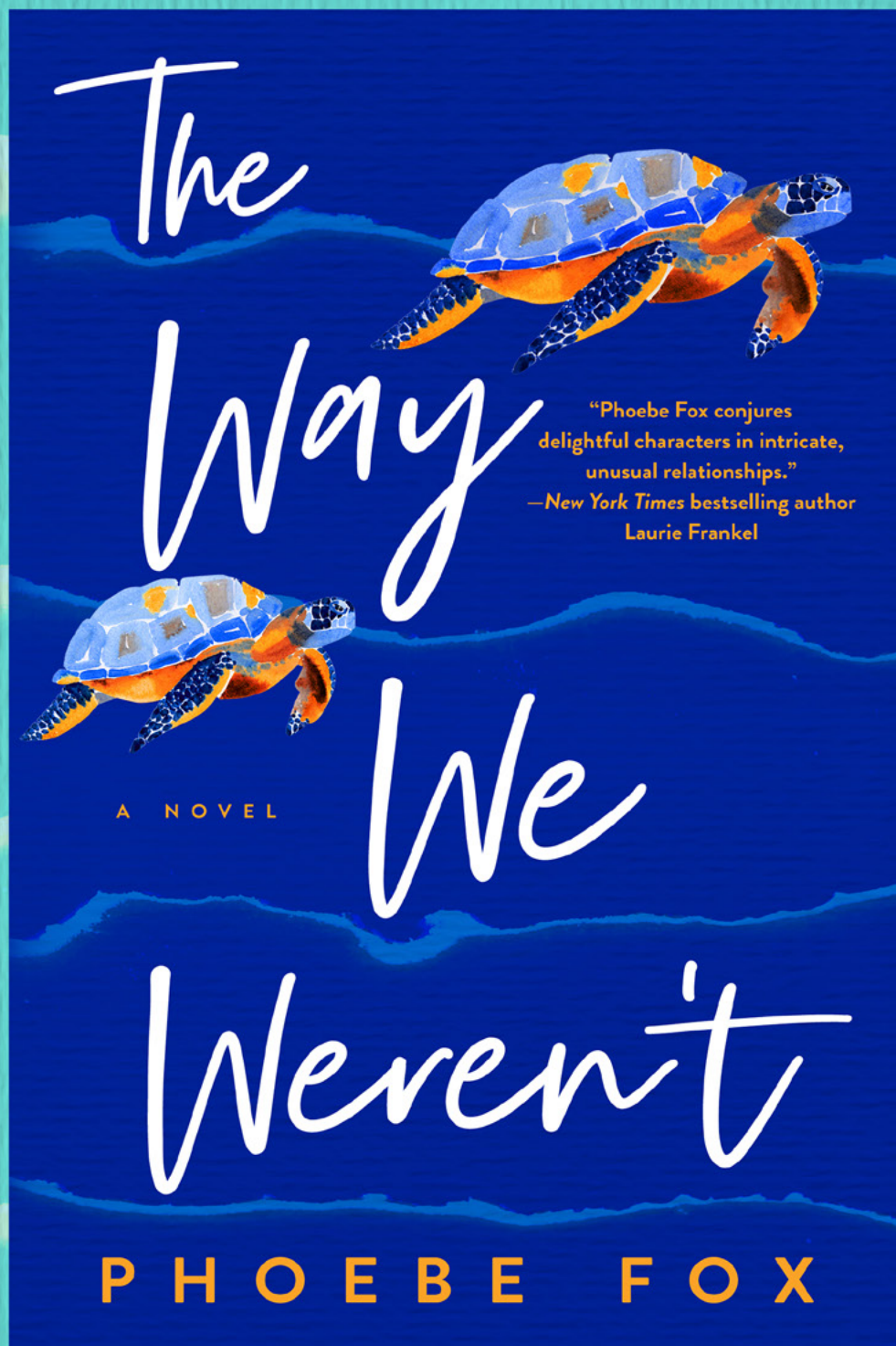


Book club kit



The

Way

We

Weren't

A NOVEL

"Phoebe Fox conjures
delightful characters in intricate,
unusual relationships."
—New York Times bestselling author
Laurie Frankel



PHOEBE FOX

Dear Reader,

Growing up, I had a bit of a black-and-white view about adult life:

You planned to get married or you didn't, you wanted kids or you didn't, you wound up happy-after-after or you didn't.

As with so many of us, as I matured my view of the world became more realistic and more nuanced, not binary (so little in nature is), but rather painted in endless shades of gray.

I learned that our choices, our wishes—our happiness—are fungible, a constant continuum as we grow and evolve throughout the course of our lives and are changed by our experiences.

I never felt a strong pull to get married until I met the person I wanted to spend my life with when I was thirty-nine years old...and then I did. Yet I've always marveled at friends who met their spouses early in life and are still together.

How could that be possible? I wasn't at all the same person closing in on my forties as I was at twenty, or even thirty. My husband and I joke that if we'd met when we were younger we probably would never have been drawn to each other—we both needed to grow to the place where we were "ready" for each other.

When you meet in your younger years, I always wondered of those lifelong couples, what if you and your partner—your family—grow in separate directions from your youthful worldview when you'd chosen to join your lives?

This was the inspiration for me to write Marcie Malone, who met Will, the love of her life, in her sophomore year of high school and has spent more than twenty predominantly happy years with him...until a positive pregnancy test long after both have contentedly settled into childlessness sets them spinning in different directions and sends their marriage into crisis.

Herman Flint, the closed-off, angry older man who finds Marcie passed out on the beach in front of the house he's lived in the entire seventy-odd years of his life, grew out of my wondering what might happen in a relationship at that same kind of critical juncture when neither person is willing to give an inch.



What these two disparate souls have in common is facing that fork in the road with the person they love most where one chooses one path and the other takes the other. In Flint's case, when he and his daughter faced a situation similar to Marcie and Will's with his daughter's underage pregnancy, neither would be budged and their paths diverged.

Marcie is still standing at that fork, poised to choose between her life with Will and a life without him.

In all of my books I always seem to come back to the same themes: family and forgiveness. Our relationships with those who are closest to us, who mean the most, also have the potential to hurt us the most deeply.

Despite his stubborn insistence on his own views, Flint has suffered enormously for them in the absence of his daughter, whom he raised alone and loved fiercely. A lifetime of inflexibility has twisted and hardened him into a man bitter at the world, and in full retreat from it.

Yet something about Marcie draws him out little by little, and these two people who seem like such an unlikely pair wind up holding the key for each other to find the way forward...and let go of the past.

There are no clear answers for either of them—who was right, who was wrong, which path was the one they should have chosen. But that's life. We don't get to know the "right" choices—we just have to make the best choices we know how at the moment we have to make them, wherever we are in our personal evolution.

And then we have to forgive ourselves and each other...over and over and over again...and keep moving forward, whatever our path.

I loved spending time with these two characters in the tiny beach town far past its prime where their paths connect, and I hope you do too.

Warmly,

Phoebe

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Questions for Discussion

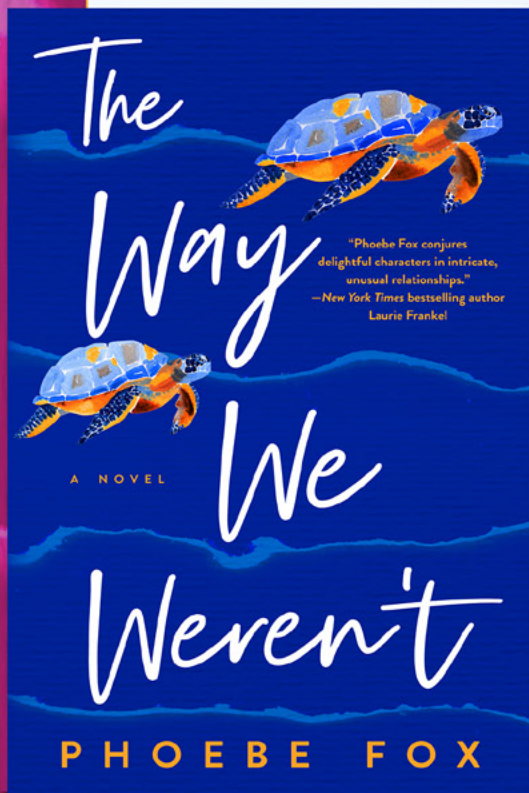
1. Marcie has a seemingly strong marriage, a good job, and deep roots in her community—yet she walks away from all of it one day, unsure where she’s going or why. Have you ever felt the urge to just leave everything behind, and if so, what was it like to consider it?
2. What do you think of Marcie’s choice to distance herself from problems she wasn’t ready to face in her marriage? How did that decision illuminate other choices she’d made in her life?
3. Flint is prickly, hard, and short with Marcie from the moment he meets her. Why do you think Marcie isn’t more put off by him, and why do you think she agrees to stay with him?
4. Flint has kept himself isolated from the world for many years—yet something makes him take Marcie in. Why do you think he helps her despite his inclination to ignore her when he sees her passed out on the beach?
5. Marcie seems haunted by her mother’s advice and her philosophy on life, even though she disagrees with it. Why do you think it’s stuck with her for so long? Was her mother right on any level?
6. Did finding out what happened with Jessie change your opinion of Flint? If so, in what way?
7. Flint clearly loved his daughter immensely—yet he stood by his position on her pregnancy despite knowing it might push her away. Should parents intervene in their children’s choices if they know their child is making a grave mistake that



may lead to unhappiness? Have you ever done so with a loved one, or stopped yourself from doing so?

8. The beach is where people go, as Marcie says, to let their hair grow long and their memory grow short. Why is it the place she's drawn to in her moment of crisis? Do you have a place that offers you solace and comfort?
9. Why do you think Darla and the regulars at Tequila Mockingbird come to mean so much to Marcie in a very short time? Have you ever felt an unexpected connection with strangers? What made you feel that way?
10. Why do you think the turtle nest becomes so important to both Marcie and Flint?
11. Marcie and Will have faced the possibility of parenthood twice—and both times have come down on opposite sides of the coin about it. Their views have shifted in the more than twenty intervening years, though, with each gravitating toward a point of view different from the one they once held. Have your views about a major life decision—like whether you wanted to have children—evolved over the course of your life? If so, what shifted them?
12. What do you think of the way Marcie and Will resolve their situation by the end of the book? Did you agree with their choice? What do you think their future together will look like?
13. Both Marcie and Flint faced a fork in the road in their relationships, and made different choices. Have you ever had a similar situation in your own life? How did you decide which path to choose?





Praise for *The Way We Weren't*

"An insightful and compelling read of the courage to change horses in midstream to reach the shore of new beginnings."

—Leila Meacham, *New York Times* bestselling author of *Dragonfly*

"So deeply satisfying on every level that it will continue to resonate with you long after you turn the page on one of the most exquisitely perfect endings you are likely to encounter in some time."

—Sarah Bird, author of *Daughter of a Daughter of a Queen*

"Fox's sharp storytelling will endear Marcie and Herman to readers. . . . It's a simple story, but the author gets it just right."—*Publishers Weekly*

"This standout novel from Fox is a study in contrasts: tragic yet heartwarming, suspenseful yet comforting."—*Booklist* (starred review)

Also by Phoebe Fox

"Sunny, warm, and bright."

—Laurie Frankel, *New York Times* bestselling author of *Goodbye for Now* and *This Is How It Always Is*

"A rare, feel-good novel."

—Karin Gillespie, author of *Love Literary Style*

"Grace and colorful Aunt Millie are characters that will steal your heart away."

—Bette Lee Crosby, author of *A Million Little Lies*

