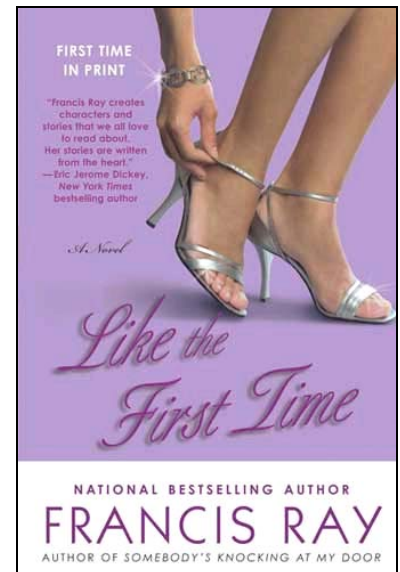


READING GROUP GUIDE

Like the First Time by Francis Ray

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Introduction to *Like the First Time*

THE GOOD SISTER. Claire Bennet has lost her job for the second time in as many years due to downsizing. She doesn't know what she's going to do since her checking account has almost been stripped bare and her older brother is always a day late and a dollar short. With no man in her life, her parents' home is all she has and she's going to lose that unless she can think of something quick.

THE GOOD LOVER. Fashionable and trendy Brooke Dunlap has also been downsized, but she's not worried because she expects her wealthy boyfriend to propose any day now. Unfortunately, Randolph Peterson III has other plans and dumps her. Now Brooke is left devastated with no engagement ring, a pile of bills and a Jag that's in the shop.

THE GOOD WIFE. Lorraine Averhart lost one of her dearest friends to cancer only months before and with that friendship, their dream of opening their own florist shop. But when Lorraine sees the wonderful candles, soaps and bath gels Claire has created, she pushes them to go into business together. With Brooke's savvy about what women want, Claire's products and Lorraine's money, they're sure to be a hit. They've got nothing to lose, so why not?

But Lorraine's marriage comes under terrible strain as the business takes off and a new temptation appears on the horizon; Claire becomes involved with one of the most powerful men in town; and Brooke is forced to reevaluate what matters most: a fat bank account or love and belonging somewhere she can call home?

Praise for *Like the First Time*

"Four and a half stars. Ray pens another winner."

- *Romantic Times* Book Club Top Pick (May 2004)

"*Like the First Time* is an unforgettable tale of lost love, and even better, second chances."

- Kimberla Lawson Roby, national bestselling author

"Ray. . . excels at weaving several threads of narrative into a cohesive whole, making her subsidiary characters as compelling as the major players."

- *Dallas Morning News*

Reading Group Guide Questions

1. Initially, Claire thought her parents had been wrong in teaching her that a college education would ensure success, but she eventually saw that her education helped her unexpected business venture. What other things did they teach her that helped her just as much or more? Do you think some lessons your parents taught you are outdated?
2. Have you ever been faced with a life-changing "leap of faith" the way Claire, Brooke, and Lorraine were? If so, did you go for it? Which of the three women had the most to lose? To gain?
3. Claire was the "good daughter," but Derek was definitely a selfish user. When you love someone, it is very difficult to determine when you cross the line from loving and supporting to enabling. What signs should Claire have seen and heeded? Would you have acted any differently in her circumstances?
4. Brooke's philosophy early in the book was that you could just as easily fall in love with a rich man as a poor man. Did thinking that make her a bad person? Do you agree with her?
5. Lorraine was the perfect executive wife and mother who finally decided she wanted to have a life for herself. Was there anything she could have done to help Hamilton accept her decision? When is it all right to give in to your husband on some issues and when is it not? Give examples.
6. Three women had a profound effect on the men in the story that in turn influenced their relationships with Claire, Brooke, and Lorraine. Gray by Jana's betrayal, John by his wife's death, and Hamilton by his amoral mother. Emotional baggage has sabotaged many relationships. Why do you think Gray and Claire, John and Brooke, and Hamilton and Lorraine survived?
7. Brooke and John thought they were in lust, not love. How can you tell the difference?
8. Should women use withholding sex as a way of teaching their husbands a lesson as Lorraine did? If problems can't be resolved before going to bed should the discord stop at the bedroom door?

About the Author

Francis Ray is a native Texan who lives in Dallas with her husband and daughter. She is the author of sixteen novels and five novellas.