

CONNECTIONS

The Threads Between *Iris and Mo* and *Before I Go*

Iris and Mo and *Before I Go* are intricately linked, much like the Celtic art Frank Happy describes in *Iris and Mo*. You may have missed a few of those links, so I've prepared a list of connections, and while I believe I've found most of them, I'm sure there's a few that have escaped me. So, if you find other connections, please contact me and they'll be added to the list with credit to you!

Here we Go!

- This is obvious, but I'm mentioning it anyway. The last chapter of *Before I Go* is identical to chapter three of *Iris and Mo*, with the exception it's told from Frank's point of view instead of Iris's.
- The Victorian. It's not clear in *Iris and Mo* how Frank ended up in Eastport, but we find the full story in *Before I Go*. We also find out how he came to live in the Victorian and how he came to own the cottage next door.
- White pines. Frank planted the white pines bordering the Victorian and the cottage as a remembrance of Claire's father, Ted.
- The cottage fireplace. The floor-to-ceiling fireplace was added on Claire's suggestion.
- Mary. We finally find out who she is—Claire's mother! Which explains why she has been a bit less than friendly to Ben in the first two novels.
- And speaking of Ben, who knew that he and Frank met before *Iris and Mo*! Neither man remembered, which is understandable considering it was about fifteen years between the incident on the dock and when they would have met again. Frank only heard Ben's name twice that day, and since he was more concerned about the blood spouting from his nose and getting back home to make sure his family was okay, it's not a wonder he didn't remember Ben.

- Frank's garden. Iris admired the various plants and garden sculptures in Frank's backyard. We know now that he planted that garden as he searched for his wedding ring.
- The orchid house. There was a reason Iris felt as if she'd entered a "most solemn and holy place". Frank constructed this greenhouse as a tribute to the children he lost, both the literal children and the family he had hoped to have. It was also a way to remember the wishes his mother had for him.
- At Iris's housewarming party, Ben says he "came close once" to getting married. Of course, he was referring to Claire.
- The Lord of the Rings. The first time this is mentioned is in *Iris and Mo* when Iris and Frank are going to the Machias Wild Blueberry Festival. The two have a discussion about the novel and Frank says he believes Samwise Gamgee is the hero of the story. We find out in *Before I Go* that initially, Frank held most people's opinion that Frodo was the hero. After his mother gifted him with the book on his high school graduation day and explained her wish for him to be a Samwise Gamgee, he took her wish to heart. Now we know why Frank was so moved by Iris's gift of the book at Christmas.
- Frank discusses his work history with Iris at the Machias blueberry festival. We see it lived out in *Before I Go*.
- The Earring. Iris found a teardrop diamond earring in her storage space. We find out in *Before I Go* that Frank gifted Claire a pair of earrings on their twenty-fifth wedding anniversary, and we find out why they were tear shaped.
- The apology. After the earring incident, Frank apologizes to Iris. We find out how Frank met Claire, that they had a son, David, and that Frank and he had a falling out. We see this lived out in *Before I Go* and find out why Frank and David are estranged.
- We also find out about Claire's death, the significance of the rent Frank charges, and why he chose to care for the orchids on Sundays.
- Just as there was purpose in the orchid that Frank gifted to Claire, there was purpose in the one he gifted to Iris.
- The first mention of Frank's mother was over Thanksgiving dinner at Iris's when Charlotte mentioned going to a little tea shop in Eastport when she was a child, The Happy Place. We find out the full story of The Happy Place in *Before I Go*. Frank

alludes to the fire, but doesn't give any details. Neither does Charlotte, although she mentions that the incident was "tragic".

- Christmas Eve. Iris teases Frank when he shows up to the Christmas Eve service. He tells her he never misses a Christmas or Easter. In *Before I Go* we find out he promised Claire he would attend those two services with her.
- Christmas morning. Iris goes to Frank's home to give him a gift. She notices a manger scene on the mantle. We find out in *Before I Go* that Frank's mother purchased the set the first year they moved to Eastport. Frank continues to display it in her memory.
- Frank is there when Iris gets the news of her son's death. After calling Emma to ask her to come, he utters the same prayer he uttered when caring for Claire— "God, help me."
- Hornbeam trees. Frank tells the story of his first encounter with hornbeam trees as he encourages Iris after Birch's death. Frank's encounter happens when he leaves Claire for three weeks to do a study in *Before I Go*.
- Frank has the same reaction to Iris's tragedy as he did to Claire's death. He blames God. He asks Iris, "Where was God when this was happening to you?", but he really was searching for an answer about Claire's death.
- The song Iris sang in Frank's hospital room as she prayed for him to wake from his coma is the same song Mary and Ted sang to David when he was born, "Jesus Loves Me".
- While in the hospital, Frank relates the story of why he and David were estranged. We see the argument in *Before I Go*.
- When talking to Frank about reconciling with David, Iris says, "Do you want the last words you've spoken to your son to be angry ones?" Claire gave a similar challenge to Frank about his relationship with his brother, Will.
- When David brings his wife Violet to Frank's for the weekend, he gives Frank the news he's been waiting to hear—Violet is pregnant. Frank and Mary have been hoping for this for several years.
- The ring. Frank destroys part of his garden after Iris uncovers Frank's wedding ring in the spot Mo has been digging since first arriving in Eastport. Frank tells Iris the story of how his ring ended up in the garden. This is a pivotal moment for both

novels. In *Iris and Mo*, we find out part of the history between Claire, Ben, and Frank and we see this in more detail in *Before I Go*. Most significantly, in *Before I Go*, Frank tells Claire that a ring won't go on his finger until he's found the one he lost. In *Iris and Mo*, the ring has been found, so Frank is able to consider another ring for his finger, this one from Iris.

- The birch tree. Frank planted a birch tree for Iris to remember her son, just as he planted the pines for Claire and Mary to remember Ted.
- Mo. Mo has been working behind-the-scenes in Frank and Iris's story. He announced his presence when he first dug in Frank's garden, basically telling him (and you), "Pay attention. I'm about to change your life." Finding the earring was a step in providing closure for Frank and a way to build a relationship with Iris (though heated at first). The last step of finding Frank's wedding ring brought Frank to the place where he was ready for the final step, moving on from his grief. Many people have wondered (and gotten angry with me) about Mo's death. Mo died as a sacrifice for Frank and Iris. They both needed one final push to bring them together, and Mo's death was that push. It prompted Frank to ask the questions that had been plaguing him since he was a child—why do bad things happen to good people? And it gave Iris the opportunity to steer him in the right direction. Eventually, Frank would ask "the right question", reconciling himself to God, David, and making room in his heart for Iris.
- Frankly, David. One of my favorite scenes, when David tells his father of the conversation he had with Claire before she died over what she wanted for her husband. We get to hear Claire's own words as she asked her son to deliver this message in *Before I Go*.
- So, why didn't Mary tell Frank where Iris was on the day Iris was to marry Ben? A couple of reasons. First, at the time of writing *Iris and Mo*, I didn't know Mary was Claire's mother! I wondered about this woman for two novels, then it finally came to me in *Before I Go*—she was Claire's mom! That's the main reason there's no reference. However, Mary is not one to interfere, and I believe she liked Iris too, and knew Frank should be with her, but she also knew it had to be Frank's decision. So, like a good mother-in-law, she stayed out of it.

- When Frank approaches Iris at the courthouse, during their conversation, he thinks to himself that Iris is an honest woman, “blunt, but honest.” That sentiment is echoed by Ted about Mary in *Before I Go*. Frank admired their marriage, so it’s no wonder he was drawn to Iris when he saw a similar characteristic in her.
- In *Before I Go*, at the courthouse, Frank echoes “God, I love this woman,” a statement he made about Claire.
- One more echo – when Iris asks Frank if they can get a cat, he responds, “We can get whatever you want.” This is a theme for Frank. He’s willing to do whatever he can for the women he loves.
- Frank moves into the cottage. Why didn’t Iris move into the Victorian? Two reasons: First, Frank would never ask Iris to leave Mo and Birch’s tree or the place where Iris felt at home for the first time in her life. Secondly, the Victorian represented Frank’s life with Claire. The last chapter of his story with Claire was written, and now it was time to write a new book, as Iris does when she opens her laptop and types, “That looks like about ten miles of bad road, let’s take it!” (Plus, it gives an opportunity for someone new to move next door! Stay tuned.)