

Car Trouble

Harper Perennial

By Robert Rorke

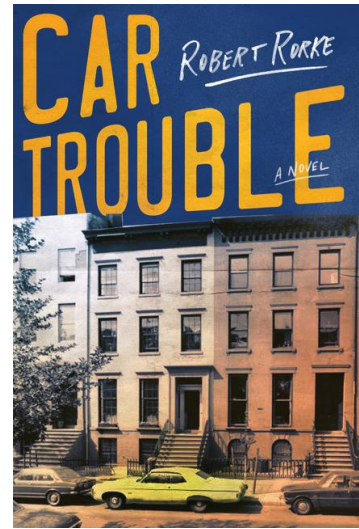
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Introduction

From a bright new talent, a witty, moving, and inspirational coming-of-age debut novel set in 1970s Brooklyn about a teenager and his abusive father whose obsession with broken down vintage cars careens wildly out of control.

“Such a pleasure to read.... This is a coming of age story, but it is also so much more than that.”

— Dominic Smith, bestselling author of *The Last Painting of Sara de Vos*



Nicky Flynn is coming-of-age in 1970s Brooklyn, riding into his sophomore year at St. Michaels, the last hurrah of the Diocesan school system. A budding young actor, Nicky is at once sensitive, resilient, exasperated, and keenly observant—especially when it comes to his father, Patrick. Undeniably enigmatic, and coasting on vanity, charm, and desperation, “Himself” as Nicky calls his father, is given to picking up old car junkers, for cheap at NYPD auctions—each sputtering, tail-finned treasure subsidized by poker games.

To Patrick, these chrome glamour tanks are his obsessions, repairable reminders of the past when he was young, and everything seemed new and gleaming and possible—before he had a family. For Nicky, each one is a milestone. Whether it’s a harrowing joy ride or a driving lesson, they’re unforgettable markers on his path toward an unpredictable future. But as Patrick’s compulsions slide into alcoholism and abuse, Nicky, his mother, and sisters brace themselves for an inevitable sharp turn in their addled lives.

Narrated with humor and a rueful awareness, *Car Trouble* is an exhilarating novel about acceptance, regret, compassion, and finding your authentic adult self amid the rubble and rumble of growing up.

Questions for Discussion

1. The ways in which Nicky and his father clash are pretty clear. In what ways do you think they are more alike than different?
2. Sometimes Nicky calls his father “Himself,” other times he refers to him as “Dad” or “Patrick.” Why do you think there are these distinctions?
3. Have you ever faced a situation like the one in which Nicky gets up in the middle of the night to tend to his bleeding father in the bathroom? How do you think you would respond?

4. How does the novel change or influence the way you think about your childhood and your home?
5. What role does Nicky's teacher, Brian, play in Nicky's life? Who are the teachers in literature or in your own life who have had that kind of impact on you?
6. Did you expect Nicky's mother to stay with Himself? Were you surprised by the ending?
7. Car Trouble is much about the loss of innocence. What moments in the book crystalize that notion for you?