

Before We Were Yours: A Novel

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Before We Were Yours is a book about a family who was torn apart by a cruel woman and a cruel system. The book alternates between the past story of a happy family living on a shanty boat on the Mississippi River and the present-day story of Avery, a politician's daughter who is being groomed for political office. It is historical fiction and tells the story of the fictional family of Briny, Queenie and their children Rill, Fern, Camellia, Lark and Gabion set against the very real Georgia Tann, who was a very real and evil child trafficker. Georgia Tann ran the Tennessee Children's Home Society and with a group of corrupt partners stole children away from their poor parents and placed them with wealthy couples. She charged exorbitant fees for adoptions and the Tennessee Children's Home was riddled with abuse and corruption. When Queenie is rushed to the hospital with childbirth complications, corrupt police officers kidnap Rill, Fern, Camellia, Lark and Gabion and hand them over to Georgia Tann. The kids are brought to the Tennessee Children's Home and given new names. Rill becomes May; Fern becomes Beth; Camellia becomes Iris; Lark becomes Bonnie, and Gabion becomes Robby. The children are separated and placed into homes one by one while Rill, being the oldest at 12 tries desperately to keep them together and get them home. Meanwhile in present day, Avery Stafford encounters a mysterious photograph of a woman who looks uncannily like her grandmother. Avery is trying to solve a mystery involving her grandmother and discovers that she was part of an entirely different family in a different life.

I found the book very entertaining. It was part mystery, part drama. While Avery is researching her grandmother's past, the book delivers a look at family bonds and what family truly means. It especially explores the unbreakable bonds of sisterhood. It has important themes of discrimination of the poor, child abuse and corruption. I felt the book was a heartwarming story of love, betrayal, memories and staying true to your heart.

Before We Were Yours has mature themes such as child abuse, hunger, discrimination and devastating loss. The book is based on one of America's most notorious real-life scandals, where Georgia Tann kidnapped and sold poor children to wealthy families. I believe it is only appropriate for older teenagers because of the mature topics discussed throughout the book.

Recommended Titles:

The Orphan's Tale by Pam Jenoff

The Alice Network by Kate Quinn

The Women in the Castle by Jessica Shattuck

We Were the Lucky Ones by Georgia Hunter