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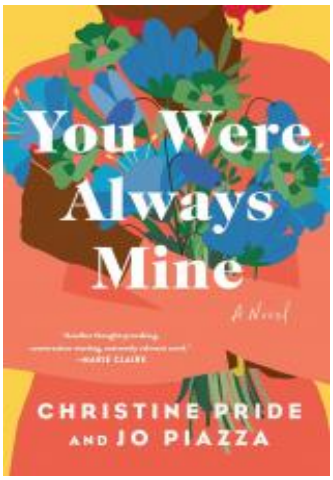
You Were Always Mine

by Christine Pride and Jo Piazza



About the Book

The acclaimed authors of the ?emotional literary roller coaster? (*The Washington Post*) and "Good Morning America" Book Club pick WE ARE NOT LIKE THEM return with this moving and provocative novel about a Black woman who finds an abandoned white baby, sending her on a collision course with her past, her family and a birth mother who doesn?t want to be found.

Cinnamon Haynes has fought hard for a life she never thought was possible --- a good man by her side, a steady job as a career counselor at a local community college, and a cozy house in a quaint little beach town. It may not look like much, but it?s more than she ever dreamed of or what her difficult childhood promised. Her life?s mantra is to be good, quiet, grateful. Until something shifts, and Cinnamon is suddenly haunted by a terrifying question: ?Is this all there is??

Daisy Dunlap has had her own share of problems in her 19 years on earth --- she also has her own big dreams for a life that?s barely begun. Her hopes for her future are threatened when she gets unexpectedly pregnant. Desperate, broke and alone, she hides this development from everyone close to her and then makes a drastic decision with devastating consequences.

Daisy isn?t the only one with something to hide. When Cinnamon finds an abandoned baby in a park and takes the blonde-haired, blue-eyed newborn into her home, the ripple effects of this decision risk exposing the truth about Cinnamon?s own past, which she has gone to great pains to portray as idyllic to everyone...even herself.

As Cinnamon struggles to contain old demons, navigate the fault lines that erupt in her marriage, and deal with the shocking judgments from friends and strangers alike about why a woman like her has a baby like this, her one goal is to do right by the child she grows more attached to with each passing day. It?s the exact same conviction that drives Daisy as she tries to outrun her heartache and reckon with her choices.

These two women, unlikely friends and kindred spirits, must face down their secrets and trauma and unite for the sake of the baby they both love in their own unique way when Daisy?s grandparents, who would rather die than see one of their own raised by a Black woman, threaten to take custody.

Once again, these authors bring their ?empathetic, riveting and authentic? (Laura Dave, *New York Times* bestselling author) storytelling to an unforgettable novel that revolves around provocative and timely questions about race, class and motherhood. Is being a mother a right, an obligation or a privilege? Who gets to be a mother? And to whom? And what are we willing to sacrifice for the sake of marriage, friendship and our dreams?

Discussion Guide

1. In the beginning of the novel (page 30), Mother?s Day brings up a flurry of emotions for Cinnamon and Daisy. Daisy?s mother died when she was young, and Cinnamon?s mother abandoned her as a baby, leaving them both to grieve a similar loss under different circumstances. How do you think these losses affect their individual views of motherhood?

2. Do you feel Cinnamon?s experience of being abandoned as a baby and spending her childhood in the foster care system was a major factor in why she chose to bring Bluebell into her home rather than involving the authorities right away? Why or why not?

3. In addition to themes of motherhood, YOU WERE ALWAYS MINE has many frank conversations about race. In chapter four, Cinnamon recounts a personal experience being in foster care when a white woman took her to the local art museum to see a collection of 19th-century photographs of Black caretakers. Cinnamon has flashbacks of one photograph she saw that day of a young Black child caring for an infant white baby. Why do you think after all these years Cinnamon is remembering this photograph, and how do the feelings it brings up influence her thinking about the possibility of raising Bluebell?

4. Along those lines, Cinnamon?s husband, Jayson, says that it would be impossible for him as a Black man to raise a white little girl, to even take her to the park. How do you think his fears impact Cinnamon?s decision-making about both Bluebell and their marriage?

5. Throughout the novel, readers experience every step of Cinnamon caring for Bluebell in real time, whereas we mostly hear from Daisy through a series of letters, recounting her reasons for leaving Bluebell, her journey, and her reflections about her past and future. Do Cinnamon and Daisy?s alternating voices highlight any important similarities or differences about their experiences and decisions during the novel? Did you relate to one character in particular?

6. In Cinnamon and Lucia?s quest to track down Daisy, the pair of friends learn of unsettling information about Daisy?s grandfather having ties to a white supremacist group (page 122). How do you think this might initially impact Cinnamon?s feelings toward Daisy? Bluebell?

7. Much of this story focuses on the characters grappling with, revisiting and coming to terms with their pasts. Why do you think Cinnamon decided to keep her time in foster care a secret from those closest to her, especially Jayson?

8. Daisy grew up never knowing her mother or father, just like Cinnamon. Do you think this influenced the connection the two women made?

9. Daisy was raised in an openly racist household, having never known anyone who wasn?t white for a majority of her life. Daisy?s friendship with Cinnamon is one she recognized would anger her grandfather, but she kept this grim satisfaction to herself (pages 173?174). Do you think that factored into her decision to leave Bluebell with Cinnamon one way or another?

10. How does Lucia?s open judgment impact Cinnamon and her decision to temporarily care for Bluebell? Is Lucia right to share her opinion on Cinnamon?s choices? Why or why not?

11. Do you believe Cinnamon should have consulted Jayson before agreeing to foster Bluebell? What if he?d refused? Should she then have left Bluebell to the foster system?

12. Cinnamon?s experience with family, outside of her grandma Thelma, was very traumatic. She experienced abandonment, unstable living conditions, and felt disposed of by family members who agreed to care for her in place of her birth parents. When Celia tries to re-enter Cinnamon?s life, she is forced to work through her past. What do you think Cinnamon should have done? Did Aunt Celia deserve forgiveness?

13. One of the important themes of this book is the idea of chosen family, and Cinnamon finds that in her first best friend, Lucia. How does this friendship affect Cinnamon? When Lucia says, ?I?ve got you? (page 203), how do you think these three simple words make Cinnamon feel? Supported? Relieved? What might this mean to Cinnamon in the long term?

14. Is Jayson?s response to learning about Cinnamon?s time in foster care and homelessness warranted? Does the fact that she kept so much from him make Cinnamon a stranger, or were you sympathetic to her reasoning? Why or why not?

15. Knowing what she knows about them, what do you think Cinnamon was feeling when Taylor informed her that Daisy?s grandparents were coming forward to claim the baby? Is reunification the right solution given the history? Was Cinnamon wrong to knowingly lie to Taylor at CPS? Can you understand her motivations?

Author Bio

Christine Pride is a writer, editor and longtime publishing veteran. She?s held editorial posts at many different trade imprints, including Doubleday, Broadway, Crown, Hyperion and Simon & Schuster. As an editor, Christine has published many bestselling and critically acclaimed novels and memoirs. In addition to writing novels, she does select editorial work, proposal/content development, and teaching and coaching.

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