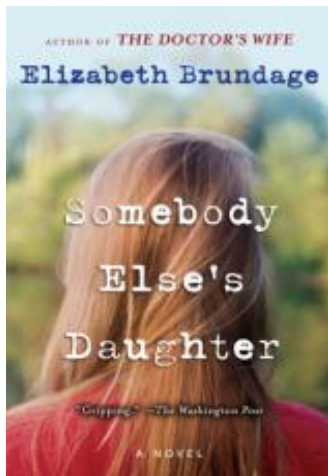


# Somebody Else's Daughter

by Elizabeth Brundage

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## About the Book

In the Berkshire mountains of Massachusetts a group of families is connected through the prestigious Pioneer prep school. Into this community enters Nate Gallagher, a teacher and struggling writer haunted by the daughter he gave up for adoption years ago. The girl, Willa --- now a teenager and one of Nate's students --- lives with her adoptive parents, Joe and Candace Golding, who have nurtured her with their affection and prosperity. When Willa wins a community service internship and begins working at a local women's shelter, her friendship with a troubled prostitute, Pearl, raises questions about her own biological past. Despite her parent's love and care, Willa can't shake her feelings of confusion and abandonment, and Joe and Candace are too preoccupied with their crumbling marriage to realize her unhappiness. Joe has other secrets, among them his profession --- he makes pornographic films --- and his affair with Claire Squire, a feminist artist who recently returned to the area. Joe and Claire stand on opposite sides of the issues of feminism, sex, and art, but they gain strength from each other's differences.

If Joe and Claire are healed by sex, then Pioneer's headmaster Jack Heath and his wife Maggie are destroyed by it. Jack's charming exterior hides the twisted mind of a sexual predator who fantasizes about his students. Meanwhile, keeping her husband's pathological past well hidden takes its toll on Maggie.

**Somebody Else's Daughter** is filled with pairs of characters who mirror each other, forcing them to confront the darker side of their psyches and question their own identities. Nate and Joe, Willa's biological and adoptive fathers, both fall in love with Claire. Joe and Jack are both fathers of teenage girls, each with his own secrets to keep. Willa and Pearl are both orphaned girls, yet one has been given a caring home and the other turns to prostitution. And Candace and Maggie are faithful wives who protect their husbands.

The characters become more entwined as first scandal and then tragedy strikes. As the story draws to its gripping conclusion, each character must make a decision that defines who they are. **Somebody Else's Daughter** is a suspenseful tale and a tightly woven psychological drama that examines, as Joe Golding observes, how "in a matter of seconds,

based on the fickle inclinations of fate, your life could change forever.?

## Discussion Guide

1. Many of the book's characters mirror each other --- Jack vs. Joe as unfaithful husbands; Joe and Claire, who both use sex as a commodity; Pearl and Willa, the orphaned daughters; Maggie and Candace, the wronged wives. Why does the author choose to use this device? What do we learn about the characters by comparing and contrasting their similarities and differences?
2. Joe defends his work in pornography saying he is simply making a living. How do you feel about pornography? Is his position defensible?
3. Why is Maggie so cowed by Jack? Why does she continue to help him cover up his crimes? Is she a victim of circumstance or of her own actions?
4. A feminist theme runs throughout the book. How do you feel about the author's depictions of feminism? Do today's young women need or care about equality of the sexes? Is feminism still relevant in today's society?
5. The book's title could refer to any or all of the book's female characters. Why do you think the author chose this title?
6. During Candace's meeting with Nate, she refers to Willa's biological parents as indigents. He responds, "We're told certain things, information that pushes us into tidy categories, but they're just words. We're rarely told the whole story and the story is always changing." Considering Candace's checkered past, is it fair of her to stereotype him?
7. Claire is drawn to Nate and Joe, two very different men, who are, respectively, Willa's biological and adoptive fathers. Why did the author choose to connect the men via both Claire and Willa?
8. Jack is clearly the story's villain, yet the author attempts to explain his actions by revealing details about his traumatic childhood. Do these passages make you feel sympathetic toward him?
9. How do you feel about the book's conclusion?

## Author Bio

Elizabeth Brundage is the author of five novels, including *ALL THINGS CEASE TO APPEAR*, which was a *WSJ* best mystery of 2016, and was the basis for the Netflix film *Things Heard and Seen*. She is a graduate of the Iowa Writers' Workshop where she received a James Michener Award, and attended the American Film Institute in Los Angeles. Her writing has appeared in *The New York Times Book Review*, *Witness*, *New Letters*, *Greensboro Review* and elsewhere. She has taught at several colleges and universities and lives with her family in Albany, New York.

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