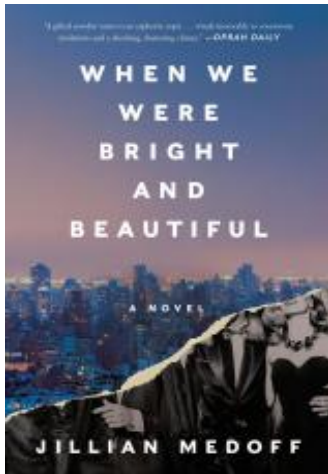


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# When We Were Bright and Beautiful

by Jillian Medoff

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## About the Book

The acclaimed, bestselling author of **THIS COULD HURT** returns with her biggest, boldest novel yet --- an electrifying, twisty and deeply emotional family drama, set on Manhattan's glittering Upper East Side, that explores the dark side of love, the limits of loyalty and the high cost of truth.

*You can have everything, and still not have enough.*

Cassie Quinn may only be 23, but she knows a few things. One: money can't buy happiness, but it's certainly better to have it. Two: family matters most. Three: her younger brother, Billy, is not a rapist.

When Billy, a junior at Princeton, is arrested for assaulting his ex-girlfriend, Cassie races home to Manhattan to join forces with her big brother, Nate, and their parents, Lawrence and Eleanor. The Quinns scramble to hire the best legal minds money can buy, but Billy fits the all-too-familiar sex-offender profile --- white, athletic and privileged --- that makes headlines and sways juries.

Meanwhile, Cassie struggles to understand why Billy's ex, Diana, would go this far, even if the breakup was painful. And she knows how the end of first love can destroy someone: Her own years-long affair with a powerful, charismatic man left her shattered, and she's only recently regained her footing.

As reporters converge outside their Upper East Side landmark building, the Quinns gird themselves for a media-saturated trial, and Cassie vows she'll do whatever it takes to save Billy. But what if that means exposing her own darkest secrets to the world?

Lightning-paced and psychologically astute as it rockets toward an explosive ending, **WHEN WE WERE BRIGHT AND BEAUTIFUL** is a dazzling novel that asks: Who will pay the price when the truth is revealed?

## Discussion Guide

1. What was your reaction to the first line of the novel: "This is Billy's story, but if I were the one telling it, I'd start with Nate's call"? As you read further, did your understanding of Cassie's statement change?
2. How would you characterize Cassie's relationship with her brothers, Billy and Nate? Do you have siblings, and if so, how would you react to the news that one of them had committed an act of violence?
3. How did Cassie being an outsider of sorts to the Quinn family bear on her relationship with them and perceptions of them?
4. Cassie says, "Money is a noose that binds parents and children together in ways you can't anticipate." What does she mean? How does having money (or, conversely, not having money) complicate relationships among family members? Between lovers?
5. Is Cassie a reliable narrator? If not, what might her unreliability stem from?
6. Do you think it's possible to heal from traumas that take place in childhood and early adulthood? What steps might one need to take?
7. Did your initial reaction to Detective Haggerty change as you learned more about him? What about the Quinns' lawyer, Peter DeFiore? Is he morally clear-cut or ambiguous? If he felt Billy were guilty, would it be moral of him to represent him?
8. Cassie uses the phrase "I knew, and I didn't know" a few times over the course of the novel. What do you make of this phrase? Can you know something on a subconscious level but not know it consciously?
9. Is Eleanor's apology toward the end of the book merited? Do you think she is being sincere?
10. What is the significance of the last paragraph of the book for you? Do you think Cassie's telling of this story will change as she gets older?

## Author Bio

Jillian Medoff is the author of the national bestseller *I COULDN'T LOVE YOU MORE*, as well as the novels *WHEN WE WERE BRIGHT AND BEAUTIFUL*, *THIS COULD HURT*, *GOOD GIRLS GONE BAD* and *HUNGER POINT*. A former fellow at MacDowell, Blue Mountain Center, VCCA, and Fundación Valparaíso, she has an MFA from NYU. In addition to writing fiction, Jillian has a long career in management consulting and is currently a Senior Consultant at the Segal Group, where she advises clients on all aspects of the employee experience.

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# **When We Were Bright and Beautiful**

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