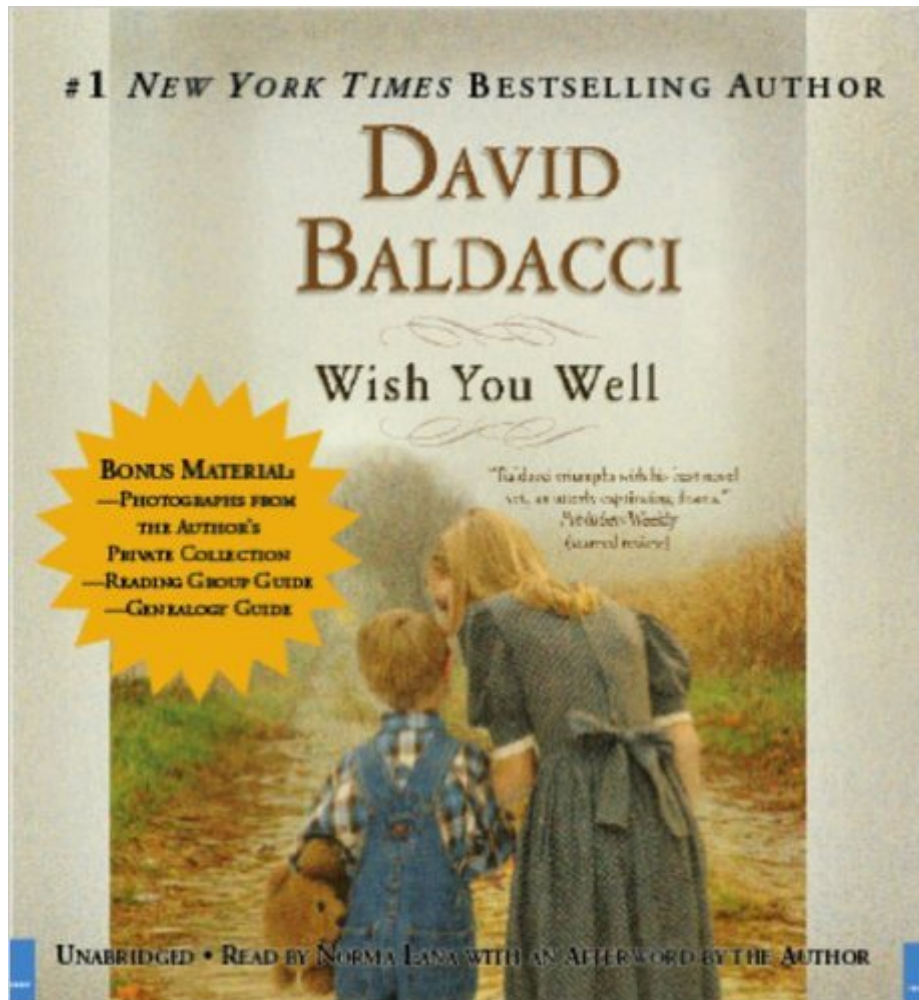


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Wish You Well



Synopsis

David Baldacci has made a name for himself crafting big, burly legal thrillers with larger-than-life plots. However, *Wish You Well*, set in his native Virginia, is a tale of hope and wonder and "something of a miracle" just itching to happen. This shift from contentious urbanites to homespun hill families may come as a surprise to some of Baldacci's fans--but they can rest assured: the author's sense of pacing and exuberant prose have made the leap as well. The year is 1940. After a car accident kills 12-year-old Lou's and 7-year-old Oz's father and leaves their mother Amanda in a catatonic trance, the children find themselves sent from New York City to their great-grandmother Louisa's farm in Virginia. Louisa's hardscrabble existence comes as a profound shock to precocious Lou and her shy brother. Still struggling to absorb their abandonment, they enter gamely into a life that tests them at every turn--and offers unimaginable rewards. For Lou, who dreams of following in her father's literary footsteps, the misty, craggy Appalachians and the equally rugged individuals who make the mountains their home quickly become invested with an almost mythic significance: They took metal cups from nails on the wall and dipped them in the water, and then sat outside and drank. Louisa picked up the green leaves of a mountain spurge growing next to the springhouse, which revealed beautiful purple blossoms completely hidden underneath. "One of God's little secrets," she explained. Lou sat there, cup cradled between her dimpled knees, watching and listening to her great-grandmother in the pleasant shade... Baldacci switches deftly between lovingly detailed character description (an area in which his debt to Laura Ingalls Wilder and Harper Lee seems evident) and patient development of the novel's central plot. If that plot is a trifle transparent--no one will be surprised by Amanda's miraculous recovery or by the children's eventual battle with the nefarious forces of industry in an attempt to save their great-grandmother's farm--neither reader nor character is the worse for it. After all, nostalgia is about remembering things one already knows.

--Kelly Flynn

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Having read a number of David Baldacci's books, most of which are well written, engrossing thrillers, this one is quite different. It is not a thriller but, rather, a beautifully written, human drama, most of which takes place in the mountains of Virginia. In this unabridged, audiobook edition, the richness of the drama and the beauty of the writing is brought to life by the wonderful narration of Norma Lana, who manages to convey the down home sense of feeling that is palpable in the book. This is a coming of age story. It is the story of the Cardinal family, as seen through the young eyes of twelve year old Louisa Mae Cardinal, known as Lou, a precocious twelve year old, whose father is a highly acclaimed writer of note with great literary distinction but little commercial success. She lives with her beloved father, her mother, and her younger brother, Oz, in New York City. The year is 1940. The family is on the brink of moving to California, when tragedy strikes, and the lives of Lou, Oz, and their mother are forever changed. Lou, Oz, and their now catatonic mother go to live with their paternal great-grandmother, Louisa, for whom Lou is named. This no nonsense, strong willed, loving matriarch lives high up in the the Appalachian mountains of Virginia, where Lou's father grew up, and that is where Lou and Oz will now grow up. They are strangers in a strange land, big city children now living on a farm without electricity, running water, or central heat. It is there that Lou comes of age and, together with her brother, Oz, has many new experiences. They are experiences that provide rights of passage and life lessons in friendship, loyalty, loss, and redemption. She gets a large dose of the good, the bad, and the ugly in life.

"Sentimentality in the First Degree!" This accusation leveled by Gene Kelly's character at Spencer Tracy in the classic "Inherit the Wind" came to mind as I read this novel by David Baldacci, a departure for one of our preeminent authors of the legal-suspense genre. While it is at times a warm and touching read, based upon Baldacci's family background in rural Virginia, it also leaves much to be desired in that it shamelessly veers into sentimentality, cliched characters and plot developments. Set in 1940, toward the end of the great depression and the eve of World WarII, "WishYou Well" follows the fortunes of 12 year-old Louisa Mae Cardinal, and her 7 year-old brother, Oscar(Oz), children of New York City, who, due to an automobile accident that claims the life of their

father, an author, and leaves their mother comatose, are sent to live with their paternal grandmother in the mountains of Virginia. It is a hard-scrabble existence our young heroine and hero must adjust to, among people who labor from before dawn to sunset, surviving by the sweat of their proverbial brows at arduous farm chores. However, under the guiding hand of their stern, strong-willed, but loving family matriarch, a humble but noble country lawyer, a loyal black farm hand, and a Huck Finn-esque playmate, our young protagonists fare just fine, while learning valuable life lessons, and successfully passing several of youths' traditional rites of passage. Young Louisa, an aspiring writer also grapples with, and eventually comes to terms with her ambivalent feelings toward her deceased father, and her mother, whose vegetative state Louisa perceives as a form of abandonment.

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