

RESOURCE LINKS

KILBOURNE, Christina
They Called Me Red
Lobster Press, 2008.
191 p. Gr. 9 and up.
978-1-897073-88-9. Pbk.
\$10.95

(Reviewed from advance reading copy)

Kilbourne opens her latest novel with this quote from the United States Department of State (June 2007): "Each year more than two million children are exploited in the global commercial sex trade". This is the story of 13 year old Devon living with his single father and the drastic turn his life takes after Lily, single mother from Vietnam, comes into their lives.

Devon does not like or trust Lily but his father is in love with her and Lily eventually moves into their apartment, bringing her two teenage sons over from Vietnam. Gradually Devon's father becomes ill with an undiagnosed and incurable liver ailment. As his condition worsens, Lily convinces him to seek treatment from her uncle, a traditional doctor in Vietnam and the three leave for an extended stay. Once in Vietnam, as his condition deteriorates rapidly, Devon becomes very suspicious of Lily and the special teas she constantly gives her father. Devon's father dies in Vietnam and Lily, using trickery and drugs, sells Devon to a brothel in Cambodia and returns to the U.S.

Devon is imprisoned in the brothel with three Vietnamese boys and six girls and, because of his red hair, fetches a high price. Badly beaten and frightened he can find no means of escape. Eventually he and the others are rescued by Vietnamese undercover police. Devon returns to live with a foster family in his hometown and begins a long and painful recovery process.

This is a powerful story, realistic and dramatic, with just enough tension to keep the pages turning. The reader is drawn into Devon's grief, fear and confusion. Upon his return to the U.S. we feel Devon's shame and anger as he adjusts to life without his father. In the end Devon makes a positive recovery and chooses happiness over letting the past ruin his life.

This novel is highly recommended. Christina Kilbourne writes on a topic that receives little attention in Y.A. literature. Although she spares the reader the gruesome details of Devon's abuse, I would save this novel for a mature reader.

Thematic Links: Sex Trade; Child Abuse; Human Trafficking

Linda Irvine

This excerpt has been copied from a fall 2008 issue of Resource Links.