

A photograph of a woman from behind, wearing a white surgical cap and a white apron over a dark blue top. She is holding a baby on her shoulder. The baby is looking towards the camera with its hands near its mouth. The background is a soft, out-of-focus indoor setting.

the
MIDWIFE

"Outstanding...

fresh and inspirational...

[with] well-drawn characters and good,

old-fashioned storytelling."

LIBRARY JOURNAL,

starred review of The Outcast

**JOLINA
PETERSHEIM**

Advance Praise for *The Midwife*

“Jolina Petersheim’s lyrical storytelling absolutely sings—but it’s her quick-paced plot, complex characters, and insights into the Plain world that made it impossible for me to put *The Midwife* down.”

LESLIE GOULD

Bestselling author of *The Amish Midwife*

“Masterfully told . . . riveting . . . with enough twists and turns to surprise any reader. I promise this story will make you think, pull at your heartstrings, and keep you turning pages until the end.”

SALOMA MILLER FURLONG

Author of *Bonnet Strings: An Amish Woman’s Ties to Two Worlds*

“The bonds of motherhood and choices made ripple across generations in this powerful story that challenges the reader to examine modern-day ethics in light of eternal truths. A story of hope and restoration, *The Midwife* is a tale to be savored.”

CARLA STEWART

Award-winning author of *The Hatmaker’s Heart*

“*The Midwife* is a stunning narrative that explores maternal attachment in all its forms and God’s all-encompassing care and plan. Ms. Petersheim colors outside the lines with her unique writing style, and I have once again fallen in love with her work.”

KELLIE COATES GILBERT

Author of *A Woman of Fortune*

“In *The Midwife*, Jolina Petersheim’s thoughtful storytelling illustrates how God’s love can woo us from pain and hiding into the abundant life He has created.”

DENISE HILDRETH JONES

Author of *Secrets Over Sweet Tea*

“*The Midwife* reads like a story that’s been unearthed instead of imagined. Decades of pain and rejection are peeled away slowly, deftly. Jolina Petersheim weaves a brilliant story that lets us absorb the years and grow with her characters. By the time they’re ready to consider the risk of holding out and the cost of letting go, so are we.”

SHELLIE RUSHING TOMLINSON

Belle of All Things Southern and author of *Heart Wide Open*

“English and Mennonite worlds collide in this poetically written story, layered with intrigue, mystery, and redemption. With a large cast of characters, readers are sure to find a version of themselves and the gift of hope in the pages of *The Midwife*.”

ELIZABETH BYLER YOUNTS

Author of *Promise to Return*



Praise for *The Outcast*

“Petersheim makes an outstanding debut with this fresh and inspirational retelling of Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter*. Well-drawn characters and good, old-fashioned storytelling combine in an excellent choice for Nancy Mehl’s readers.”

LIBRARY JOURNAL, STARRED REVIEW

“Petersheim’s emotional story leaves readers intrigued by the purity of Rachel’s strong will, resilience, and loyalty.”

PUBLISHERS WEEKLY

“Like Hawthorne, Petersheim clearly dramatizes the weight of sin, but she deviates from the original by leaving room for repentance.”

WORLD MAGAZINE, CHOSEN AS A “NOTABLE BOOK”

“From its opening lines, *The Outcast* wowed me in every way. Quickly paced, beautifully written, flawlessly executed, I could not put this book down.”

KATHERINE SCOTT JONES for SHE READS

“The story line runs smoothly throughout, with twists that readers will enjoy. The author’s Plain background shines in this moving novel.”

ROMANTIC TIMES

“A powerful and poignant story that transcends genre stereotypes and is not easily forgotten. The caliber of Jolina’s prose defies her debut author status, and I’m eager to read more.”

RELZ REVIEWZ

“You are going to love this book. Be ready to enter an amazing new world, but make sure you have a box of Kleenex for this journey.”

A NOVEL REVIEW

“A must-read that will draw you into a secretive world of sin and senselessness and leave you with the hope of one set free.”

JULIE CANTRELL

New York Times bestselling author of *Into the Free*

“Don’t miss this vivid, lyrical journey into a mysterious world that many view from the outside, but few understand as intimately as Jolina Petersheim—a talented new author to watch!”

LISA WINGATE

National bestselling author of *The Prayer Box*

“Surprising and satisfying, this epic first novel of love and betrayal, forgiveness and redemption will resonate with people from every corner of life.”

RIVER JORDAN

National bestselling author of *Praying for Strangers*

“From the first word until the last, *The Outcast* captivates and charms, reminding us that forgiveness and love are two of life’s greatest gifts. A brilliant must-read debut novel.”

RENEA WINCHESTER

Author of *In the Garden with Billy: Lessons about Life, Love & Tomatoes*

“*The Outcast* is an insightful look at the complexities of living in community while living out one’s faith.”

KAREN SPEARS ZACHARIAS

Author of *Will Jesus Buy Me a Doublewide? 'cause I need more room for my plasma TV*

“[This] riveting portrait of life behind this curious and oftentimes mysterious world captivated me from the first word and left me breathless for more.”

LISA PATTON

Bestselling author of *Whistlin’ Dixie in a Nor’easter*

“I have to say I’ve never been a fan of the Amish fiction genre. I’m still not. But Jolina Petersheim’s *The Outcast* was the only Amish fiction book I’ve ever read from cover to cover.”

IRA WAGLER

USA Today & New York Times bestselling author of *Growing Up Amish*

“A story of hypocrisy and redemption in a secretive community that will keep the reader turning the pages.”

MICHAEL MORRIS

Award-winning author of *Man in the Blue Moon*

the
MIDWIFE
JOLINA PETERSHEIM



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The Midwife

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The Midwife is a work of fiction. Where real people, events, establishments, organizations, or locales appear, they are used fictitiously. All other elements of the novel are drawn from the author's imagination.

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PROLOGUE

I saw you that day we came to Tennessee to take your daughter—and their daughter—back. The Fitzpatricks carried the child out to the rental car and placed her like a bundled heirloom in my arms. She was half-asleep and fragrant from her nap, and she yawned and cuddled right against my chest as if she had always been there. Thom and Meredith went back inside to gather the rest of her things, and that's when you crossed the yard and looked at the car—and it seemed that you were looking right at me.

I could feel your eyes boring through the tinted glass and seeing the woman who had abandoned you holding tight to your child. I wanted to go to you. I hope you know this. I wanted to ask your forgiveness, but I was still too afraid. I could barely recognize you beneath your Plain clothes, and I could see in your bearing that you were stronger than before.

What if you hated me? You had every right. It was better not to know.

So I remained silent. I remained a coward. I locked the doors and kissed the child's warm forehead. I pressed my back against the seat and breathed. I watched you walk up those porch steps like a lamb to the slaughter. Inside the house, I knew, you would learn that you would never see your daughter again. . . .

part
ONE



1

Beth, 1995

Nine minutes after the chapel bells heralded the first academic session, Dr. Thomas Fitzpatrick came into the department. His glasses were snow-spotted and the toggles of his peacoat off by one. Keeping my fingertips on the keyboard, I watched him walk the length of carpet down to his office. Then I looked at the computer screen. *Winslow, Beth (1995)*, it read. *Solomon's Choice: Finding an Ethical Solution for Remorseful Surrogates. Master's Thesis, Simms University*. My heart beat double-time with the computer cursor's pulse. From the cabinet, I took Thom's favorite cup and saucer, poured water from the kettle on the hot plate,

dolloped the PG Tips with cream, and carried it down the hall.

I pushed the door open farther and stood in the entrance, waiting. Located near the radiator, Thom's office was humid. It smelled of thawing wool and frostbitten winter. Gold-embossed collector's editions from Gray's well-known *Anatomy of the Human Body* to the rare *A Discourse upon Some Late Improvements of the Means for Preserving the Health of Mariners* were stacked in teetering heaps throughout the room. From experience, I knew they were organized in a labyrinth only Thom could traverse.

Wall-to-wall shelves were bookended with souvenirs from Meredith's and his trips overseas: an urn filled with pottery shards gathered from shores whose waters harbored a flooded Grecian city; a child-sized drum, its top stretched taut with buckskin; an aboriginal mask whose mouth gaped into a yawn. Despite these variegated treasures, the books were the only things Thom was particular about. The only things he did not want touched.

Thom had shed his coat. Beneath it, he wore the tweed blazer with the stamped brown buttons and worn leather patches on the elbows that always made him too hot during his animated lectures. His yellow scarf hung from the back of his swivel chair and coiled up on the floor. A cup and saucer with cream skimming the surface of yesterday's tea sat like a paperweight on the notes scattered across his desk. Thom's desk, the rolltop slid back, was centered beneath a rectangle window that was flush with the ground outside the basement offices and whose ledge was piled almost to

the top with snow. This allowed just enough natural light to reveal the floating dust that permeated the air in the ancient brick building.

“Dr. Fitzpatrick?”

Thom’s head came up. His fountain pen paused on a note that, even after a year as his graduate assistant, I still could not decipher. Swiveling his chair to face me, he blinked, his great mind awakening from some cerebral dream. “Hello, Miss Beth,” he said. His British accent was distinct, even after twenty years in the States.

Crossing the room, I set the saucer beside the one I had brought yesterday and took one step back. Then I looked at the pennies glinting in my polished loafers and said, “I just came to tell you that . . .” I paused. “The second beta test doubled to 437. We still need an ultrasound to confirm the heartbeat. But it looks like you and Meredith . . .” The words faltered behind my smile. “You and Meredith are going to have a baby.”

“A baby?” Thom stared at me a moment—apparently captivated by the news we had so long anticipated—and then squinted at the calendar above his desk. I could see the date, circled in red, when my twenty-two-year-old uterus had received one grade A and two grade B fertilized embryos belonging to Thom and Meredith. “That’s wonderful. What are you—” he calculated the days by tapping his fingertips on his thumb—“fifteen days post transfer?”

I nodded.

“It will be around September, then?”

“Yes.” I swallowed. “Mid-September.”

He said, “Meredith and I were married in September.” I had a hard time envisioning the woman, who had participated in the IVF with an air of martyrdom, as a younger, blushing bride. He continued, “You have any idea what it is?”

Even after the procedures that let me stand in my professor’s office with his child tucked inside my womb, the intimacy of our conversation felt wrong. He needed to be having this discussion with his wife, Meredith, who was already back at work, despite the surgery that had reset the reproductive schedule of the affluent Fitzpatrick lives.

“No idea,” I lied, when I already sensed a girl. “How’re you going to tell Meredith?”

“Not sure.” He sighed. “Take her out for dinner?” Thom was silent, contemplating this. Then he picked his glasses up and hooked them behind his ears. “A baby,” he repeated with that same whispered awe. The tortoiseshell frames pushed up on his cheeks as he smiled. “How’re you feeling?”

I ducked my head. “Really, Dr. Fitzpat—” My cheeks flushed. “Thom, I mean.” I dared to look up now that his glasses were in place; a barrier between us, transparent though it was. “I’m fine. I’ve done this before.”

“I forget sometimes,” he admitted. “But promise you’ll let me know if you’re feeling any nausea, and we’ll cut back on your hours or divide your work load with Suzanne.”

I nodded and broke eye contact. I did not want Thom to see my confusion surrounding the dynamics of our relationship, which was quickly becoming so hard to define. I pointed to the fresh cup of tea I’d set beside his desk.

He took an obligatory sip and dabbed the side of

his mouth with the back of his hand. "Perfect," he said.
"Thank you."

Tears needled my eyes. Hair brushing hot cheeks, I collected yesterday's cup and saucer and left his office without letting the painted knob catch. Taking a seat at my desk, I stared at the computer screen and typed:

This year, over four hundred babies were born to surrogate mothers within the United States, and many of these children will never be held by those who carried them. Although many options exist for the creation of a family, such as foster care and adoption—

Breathing hard, I held Delete until the page went blank, turned off the computer, and cradled my face in my hands.

This is a business transaction, I told myself.

That is all.



As I sat across from Thom and Meredith Fitzpatrick, I had to wonder how they had come to this place. Not to the restaurant with its mahogany tables and menu whose only entry I could pronounce was *hors d'oeuvres*, but how they'd come to be married that fall day a few years after my birth. Albeit unversed in the psychology of marital relationships, as I'd never been married myself, I at least knew the rule that opposites attract. Perhaps Thom had once been as drawn to Meredith's domineering personality as she'd

been to his passive one. Yet I had never seen a couple who seemed so far apart, and here I was six weeks pregnant with a child who would make them a family.

“You won’t drink, will you?” asked Meredith, watching me over her glass of wine that probably cost more than I spent on a week’s worth of groceries.

I shook my head, clearing my throat to reply, “No, ma’am,” as anything else would sound rude to someone accustomed to subservience.

Thom’s laughter was too brittle to cover his frustration. “Come on, Meredith. She’s already been through the screening process.”

“You’re exercising? Eating properly?” she continued, ignoring him.

Beneath the table, I placed a hand against my unsettled stomach. “Yes,” I replied.

Meredith leaned back as the waiter slid onto the table salmon ribboned across a bed of lettuce. “And you’re able to juggle pregnancy and graduate school?” She flicked open a napkin and draped it over her lap.

I said, “Yes,” and smiled at the waiter, who set before me a long wooden paddle with a browned artisan loaf and a small bowl of walnut pesto. Though it was meant as an appetizer, it was the only meal my stipend could afford. The Fitzpatricks had offered to pay for my meal, but I declined their offer out of pride. I didn’t want the division line between us to become nebulous with favors. “I haven’t had any morning sickness,” I continued. “And I didn’t with my previous pregnancy. So . . . I should be fine.” I hated

how inadequate I felt. Not like someone capable of safely bearing the Fitzpatrick's child.

"Yes. About that . . ." Meredith set down her fork.

"Why didn't you want to keep the child?"

The ease with which she asked me, a complete stranger who happened to be incubating her offspring, such a personal question sucked the breath from my lungs. Closing my eyes, my mind reeled with the image of that precious baby in my arms, who had looked around the delivery room with the same remarkable, two-toned irises as his father. I recalled the blue cap I'd knitted during freshman biology peeking above the striped blanket. The petals of his tiny pink hand reaching out to twine the stem of my smallest finger. How the Mennonite midwife, Deborah Brubaker, had allowed me to nurse him as a wrenchingly beautiful gift to me.

After I'd signed the release forms that allowed the adoptive parents to pick my child up and take him away, Deborah had come into my hospital room and switched off the television. I had turned it to a morning talk show discussing the second anniversary of *In re Baby M*—the infamous custody battle that resulted in America's first court ruling in favor of surrogacy. Surrogate mother Mary Beth Whitehead had been granted visitation rights to the child she had carried for William and Elizabeth Stern, known as "Baby M." Whitehead had birthed the child and relinquished her as contracted, but twenty-four hours later, Whitehead demanded that she be given back by threatening suicide. Once the Sterns returned the child, Whitehead

had fled New Jersey, taking the newborn with her. The Sterns had tied up the Whiteheads' bank accounts and issued a warrant to arrest Mary Beth and her husband.

From my rapt expression while watching the talk show, Deborah must have sensed the case was giving my eighteen-year-old heart foolish hope that, though my son's adoption was closed, if I simply demanded he be given back as Whitehead had done, one day I could hold him again. Deborah had silenced my protests when the television screen faded to black and dropped the remote into the pocket of her scrubs. Then she'd crossed the room and held my forehead with one cool hand. At this foreign, maternal touch, I'd recoiled and buried my face in the hospital pillow. Deborah, as if sensing the deeper hurt beneath my loss, began to sing Pennsylvania Dutch lullabies until my angry sobbing and the contractions shrinking my vacant womb had ceased.

Thom's steak knife clattered to his plate. I opened my eyes, drawn back to the present. "My word, Meredith," he said from between his teeth. "This dinner's to celebrate the pregnancy, not spring an interrogation."

Meredith faced her husband. He stared back, unflinching beneath the wielded scalpel of her gaze. I then realized that Thomas Fitzpatrick might not be as passive as I thought. I wondered what else about him might not be as I'd thought. Wearing a black suit coat accented with brass cuff links and his unruly hair slicked with gel, he looked as refined and wealthy as his wife, not the prototypical absent-minded professor with perpetually smudged spectacles and tea-splotched notes layering his desk.

“I just want her to understand how serious this is,” said Meredith.

I sat there stunned, wondering how she could say that—how she could ask me these things—when we had both endured the clinical and psychological screenings. When we had both received injections for the synchronization of our cycles, gone through the ovarian and endometrial stimulation, the monitoring, the egg retrieval and transfer. The entirety of the in vitro fertilization procedure had been invasive if not painful, and I was just at the beginning with thirty-four more weeks to go.

Thom said, “Her name’s Beth.”

“Okay, then. I want *Beth* to understand how serious this is.”

The harsh undertones in the way Meredith said my name drew me up short. I shivered, although she had reserved a table for us near the fire. I said, “I’ll take good care of your child.”

Her blue eyes ricocheted away from her husband and back to me. In them I read uncertainty, doubt, jealousy, and I found myself questioning what kind of mother she would make. But I wouldn’t let myself stop to think any further. I couldn’t. This was a business transaction, I reminded myself; that was all. With the money from their check, I could pursue my PhD in bioethics and say good-bye to Thomas Fitzpatrick and to the child of his that I had birthed.

Meredith picked her fork up and set it down again. Leaving her napkin draped across the seat, she stood and picked up her purse. “Excuse me,” she said.

Thom and I watched his wife stride across the restaurant in a pair of heels that glinted beneath her dress pants. He said, still watching her, “It’s not your fault, Beth.”

I looked down at the table. “Your wife’s protective. I think—I think that would be normal in a situation like this.”

Across the restaurant, crystal rang in a toast.

“Hey—” Thom reached across the table to touch the radial artery on the inside of my wrist. It thrummed to life. I could picture the warm blood rushing up through the vessels in my arm and pouring into my heart. “I hope you know what this means to me. To us.”

A year and a half since my graduate assistantship had assigned me to Thomas Fitzpatrick—the quiet, unobtrusive man with an Opie Taylor cowlick and a surprisingly boyish grin. A year and a half since I had become the grader of his multiple-choice tests. The one who rinsed his delicate tea-cups and located his slides on the Law of the Three Ps and refilled his Montblanc fountain pens with fresh ink. And this—*this*—was the first time he showed me any affection.

For the length of time it took another ember to fall, I sat motionless and savored the feel of his fingertips grazing my skin. I withdrew my hand, curling it in my lap as if it had been struck. “You’re welcome,” I said. I had never been one for words.

Thom’s wife returned, her lips pinched and her purse tucked beneath her arm. His smile faded. He slid out of the seat to stand beside her. In heels, Meredith Fitzpatrick was a head taller than he was. It was amazing that after all the

time I'd sat in Boswell Auditorium and watched him give lectures on Nigel Cameron's article "Embryos and Ethics" and Kenneth Alpern's *The Ethics of Reproductive Technology*, I'd never once realized that Thomas Fitzpatrick was not larger than life, but a rather short, middle-aged man.

"It was nice to see you," Meredith said.

I said, "You too." Her smile made me question the sincerity of her words.

"I'll see you on Tuesday, then?" Thom asked me.

"Something for . . . ?" said Meredith.

"Not for the baby," Thom replied. "For her thesis."

Meredith said nothing else. Thom retrieved her coat from the maître d' and held it by the shoulders while she slid it over her arms, the silk lining slipping easily over her white cashmere sweater. Thom leaned over to give me a rather awkward side hug. Meredith shook my hand. By the lines bracketing the bright slash of her mouth, I knew she would despise me for prolonging an unbearable evening if I asked them to drive me to my car.

So I sat on one of the velvet benches flanking the restaurant's entrance, as if I were simply waiting for the valet to bring my car around. I smiled as Thom opened the front door for Meredith. The foyer filled with a blast of cold. Outside, the balding valet with the earmuffs reached into the pocket of his parka and dangled car keys in front of Thom. Loneliness and sadness engulfed me. I watched the Fitzpatricks drive away, their headlights barely penetrating the sleet propelled by gale-force winds.

Sure that they'd gone, I exited the restaurant. The

huddled valets in their black dress slacks, black shoes, and downy parkas reminded me of emperor penguins awaiting the passage of winter. The valet with earmuffs nodded; the others barely glanced my way. I hunched my shoulders around my neck and, in my thin loafers, retraced the two blocks to La Trattoria. The checkered awning was bent with the weight of snow. An unlit neon sign claimed that twenty-four hours a day pizza was sold by pie or slice. The sign on the door said *Closed*.

With numb fingers, I pried open the frozen driver's-side door of my car. As the windows defrosted, I grabbed a cassette tape, got out, and scraped a circle in the icy windshield. Clambering back into the driver's seat, I sat on my hands and then blew on them. I'd just started to grow warm when the personal risk of this business transaction hit me. I began to shake so hard, my teeth clattered. I held my knees together to keep my legs from trembling. Out of all the mistakes I had made, signing on as the Fitzpatrick's gestational surrogate could turn out to be the worst.

Rhoda, 2014

Perching the basket on my hip, I scale the porch steps and enter the kitchen, letting the screen door slam. I dump the pole beans in the sink and set the basket on the countertop. Keeping my back to Alice, I start snapping.

Her hands, which have been slicing flattened dough

into squares, grow still. “People need to know we’re out here, Rhoda.”

“They already do, or they wouldn’t have sent that journalist.”

“They don’t give real journalists these kinds of stories.”

“If she’s not a real journalist,” I say, “then why’d you bother talking to her?”

“I had to. Something’s gotta change.”

The beans are so dehydrated from the sun, I have to score my thumbnail into the flesh to sever the ends. But nothing can be wasted. Not anymore. “We’re fine.”

“You keep saying that, but pregnant girls can’t live on pot pie and green beans alone.”

I toss a bean into the bowl and grip the edge of the countertop. Stress coils around me until every ligament in my body feels like a bowstring. “I *know* what they need.”

“Of course you do.” Alice walks over and places a hot, floured hand on my arm. It is all I can do not to swat it away. “The Lord knows you took good care of me and Uriah,” she says. “But times—they were different then. We had more food. We had more help. And your job was just to take care of us girls, not manage a farm at the same time.”

I stare down at the old stone bowl I’ve painstakingly filled with shriveled beans and resist the impulse to knock it to the floor.

Almost eighteen years ago, while helping maneuver a posterior baby down the birth canal, former head midwife Fannie Graber suffered a slipped disk, a painful graze

of nerves against bone that forced her into early retirement and forced me into her position at the tender age of twenty-four. Ever since that night when I found myself doing what I never thought I would, I've been caught between my desire to make Hopen Haus a success—by begging the Old Order Mennonite church to let us have electricity and state-of-the-art equipment—and my desire to keep Hopen Haus as archaic as possible so that my previous life and the secrets pervading it can remain sheltered from the outside world.

But now that a majority of the Dry Hollow Community has left—seeking promises of better jobs and more land—I still find myself crouching behind a list of rules no bishop is here to enforce. Perhaps we should have gone with the community as they wished, yet I couldn't. And although the invitation remains open, I still can't. Hopen Haus, which translates to Hope House in English, is not my life. It is the place where my life ended. And so, haunted by memories made stronger by the location where they were formed, I cannot leave.

Alice does not understand this. She does not understand why we did not leave when most of the community did. She does not understand why I demand that our lives and the lives of the girls who come here remain Plain—though we enforce no dress code beyond modesty—nor does she understand my hesitance to ask the townspeople for help.

I should not expect her to.

Two months after my daughter's birth, I helped birth Alice Rippentoe's illegitimate son, Uriah, a long-limbed

creature whose dark complexion and stormy disposition contrast the Hebrew meaning of his name—“my light is Jehovah.”

If Hopen Haus draws publicity and a real journalist digs deeply enough that the skeletons in my life are revealed, it will not dramatically affect Uriah’s life. But me? This life, ushering other mothers’ children into the world while never having a child to call my own . . . this is the only life I’ve got.



Returning to her pubic bone tattooed with Aquarius, I inch my way back up the center of Star’s stomach a centimeter at a time. My three fingers dip in the hollow where her uterus drops off and her abdominal cavity begins. This is the fourth time I’ve measured twenty-two weeks. According to her chart, she’s supposed to be twenty-five.

“Everything okay?”

I nod, as I am unable to trust my tongue. If Star wants somebody to hold her hand through the next fifteen weeks, she needs to get Alice or Charlotte to do her checkups, not me. Each time I’ve examined Star, she’s reeked of cigarettes. Yet when I informed her about the effects of nicotine on an unborn child—increased risk of stillbirth, premature delivery, calcified placenta, low birth weight—she’s stared right into my eyes and denied having an addiction.

The other stains on her teeth contradict her words.

Star dusts off the seat of her jeans and, as she leaves the room, pats five-year-old Luca Cullum’s head, who’s been

outside the door, whining like a puppy. Though I've spoken to his mother, Terese, about his frequent interruptions, Luca still comes in without asking and hops up on the sanded slab serving as our examination table. Swinging his legs back and forth, he reaches over and slips the silver top off the largest glass jar. He shakes his dirty-blond mop to the side and attempts to use what he must believe is a giant Q-tip to clean out his ears.

I roll my eyes at his lack of manners and file Star's folder under *S*, since she won't tell us her last name. "Need something, Luca? I've got some work to do."

"Yeah'um." Luca claps the lid back on the glass cylinder. I wince, sure that he's cracked it. "There's news people outside," he says.

"News people?" Sliding hands beneath Luca's armpits, I lower him to the floor and unfurl a sheet over the table in preparation for the next appointment. "Luca. Really."

"I ain't lying." He whips out his cotton swab and points it to the window. "Go look."

I raise an eyebrow but walk over to the window and peel back the curtain Charlotte sewed to ensure the girls' privacy. My jaw drops. A long black van scrawled with the silver words "Channel 2 News" is parked at a cockeyed angle in front of the east steps. A man in a collared shirt and khakis holds a microphone before Charlotte's quivering mouth. Another man dressed in a T-shirt and jeans snaps pictures of Alice.

Dropping the curtain, I turn to Luca, who just smiles. "See," he says. "Told ya there was."

A NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR

I have always heard that the most heartfelt novels are those drawn from personal experience. My daughter was twelve weeks old when I began writing *The Midwife*. Staring at her perfect, delicate fingers wrapped around one of my own, I struggled with the need to protect her in our fallen world. I believed that overcoming fear with faith—by placing my trust in my daughter’s Creator rather than in my abilities as her mother—was the real-life experience that I would have to learn, and therefore apply to my main character, Rhoda Mummau, as well.

Little did I know that, fifteen months later, my own faith would be tested as one of my worst fears came true: I miscarried a child. But I do not care for that term, *miscarried*. I was more than just a carrier, a means to an end. For those ten weeks of my too-short pregnancy, I became a mother of two. My firstborn, toddler-age daughter . . . and, I believe, a boy—my son. I imagined tall, bookend children with their father’s straight-across grin and sparkling hazel

eyes. Instead, on a black, drizzling night, my husband and I found ourselves burying our secondborn next to a cedar-rail fence.

The days after were hard—and yet, even in death, life goes on: laundry needed folding, diapers needed changing, tomatoes needed gathering from the garden before the incoming frost. I took long walks with my daughter and spread petals from the rosebush across my son's grave. After a harvest celebration, I kissed my infant nephew's cheek good-bye, and then continued cleaning up the detritus of our evening meal when suddenly I had to go lie down, realizing that kissing my nephew was the closest to kissing my son that I would ever come on earth.

My publisher kindly granted an extension on my editing deadline for *The Midwife*. But writing, for me, has often been more of a catharsis than a job. Therefore, in the mornings, I peeled back the covers, went out to the living room, and turned on the computer. As I stared through the French doors at the ember sun rising over the valley, I could suddenly see the midwife Rhoda's loss through another grieving mother's eyes. I wept with her as I reread scenes that my own fingers had typed, but that now felt like something God had devised as he portended my loss and knew that this story would bring healing to my own soul.

One week after we lost our baby, I was standing in church when the worship team began reading passages from the Bible. A few recited promises that I had long ago memorized at the urging of my parents or my teachers.

And then one man started reading from Lamentations, a book I had read but that had never spoken to me before: “I remember my affliction and my wandering; the bitterness and the gall. I well remember them, and my soul is downcast within me. Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope: Because of the Lord’s great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. I say to myself, ‘The Lord is my portion; therefore I will wait for him.’” (Lamentations 3:19-24, NIV)

Hearing those words, I closed my eyes and felt the warmth of the sun slanting through the kaleidoscope of stained-glass windows. Tears began streaming down my face, unchecked. It may sound strange, but I knew those verses weren’t only meant for me, but for the midwife Rhoda, as well, who feels as real to me as anyone I have ever known. Then I realized that those verses weren’t only meant for us grieving mothers; they were also meant for my readers who have suffered loss. And haven’t we *all* suffered loss, in one form or another?

And so I pray that the midwife’s story will remind you—even in your darkest nights and most broken places—that whenever you call to mind the Lord’s great love, you will find healing and hope.

