A person wearing a wide-brimmed hat and a winter jacket is walking through a snowy forest path. The path is covered in snow and has tracks from a sled or skis. The trees are evergreens, heavily laden with snow. The sky is overcast and grey, suggesting a winter day. The overall mood is quiet and serene.

T H E
D I V I D E
JOLINA PETERSHEIM
a novel

PRAISE FOR *THE ALLIANCE*
and other novels by Jolina Petersheim

The Alliance

“Petersheim has written a novel of hope forged in unlikely circumstances and a romance sparked in the cold of despair. Readers of faith who have questioned their place in the world, who wonder what they might become if society’s bounds no longer held them, will be enthralled.”

BOOKLIST

“This unusual dystopian work mixes hope and faith with fear and cynicism . . . [in an] astute meditation on the intersection between belief systems and the politics of aggression.”

PUBLISHERS WEEKLY

“[With its] intriguing plot, riveting storytelling, character depth, [and] twists and turns, this . . . drama will leave readers eager for the sequel.”

CBA RETAILERS + RESOURCES

“A riveting and thoroughly entertaining read from beginning to end, *The Alliance* is unreservedly recommended and certain to be an enduringly popular addition to community library general fiction collections.”

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SARAH MCCOY, *New York Times* bestselling author of *The Mapmaker’s Children* and *The Baker’s Daughter*

“*The Alliance* is a gripping story that shows how cultural differences drop away in the face of life-altering circumstance and only the most deeply held truths survive. I raced to the end and wanted more. Can’t wait for the conclusion of this series!”

FRANCINE RIVERS, *New York Times* bestselling author of
Redeeming Love and *A Voice in the Wind*

“Through her authentic, sympathetic characters, Jolina Petersheim conveys hope and redemption in impossible situations. Readers will not want to leave the world portrayed in *The Alliance*, even as it falls apart around them.”

ERIKA ROBUCK, author of *The House of Hawthorne*

“An absorbing and thought-provoking ‘what if?’ drama that takes a compassionate look at what divides and ultimately unites us.”

MARYANNE O’HARA, author of *Cascade*

“Beautifully written and unique, *The Alliance* examines the conflict between our humanity and our need to protect that which we hold dear. A book that begs to be savored on many levels.”

LISA WINGATE, national bestselling author of *The Sea Keeper’s Daughters*

“I’ve just discovered rising star Jolina Petersheim, and I’m hooked! *The Alliance* was a mesmerizing peek at what might happen if everything we thought we believed was suddenly tested. I can’t wait for the next installment!”

COLLEEN COBLE, author of *Mermaid Moon* and the Hope Beach series

“Captivating. Intriguing. A story that takes us beyond what we believe. This well-written tale marks Jolina Petersheim as a poignant storyteller.”

RACHEL HAUCK, *USA Today* bestselling author of *The Wedding Chapel*

“*The Alliance* is a cut above. Lovely prose and a fascinating concept make this unique novel a sure winner. Petersheim just gets better and better.”

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The Midwife

“This powerful story of redemption, forgiveness, and the power of Christ over sin challenges readers to consider modern attitudes in light of eternal truths.”

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ROMANTIC TIMES

“An emotional work that is sure to draw in parents and non-parents alike with an extraordinary story full of troubled characters.”

LIFEISSTORY.COM

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."

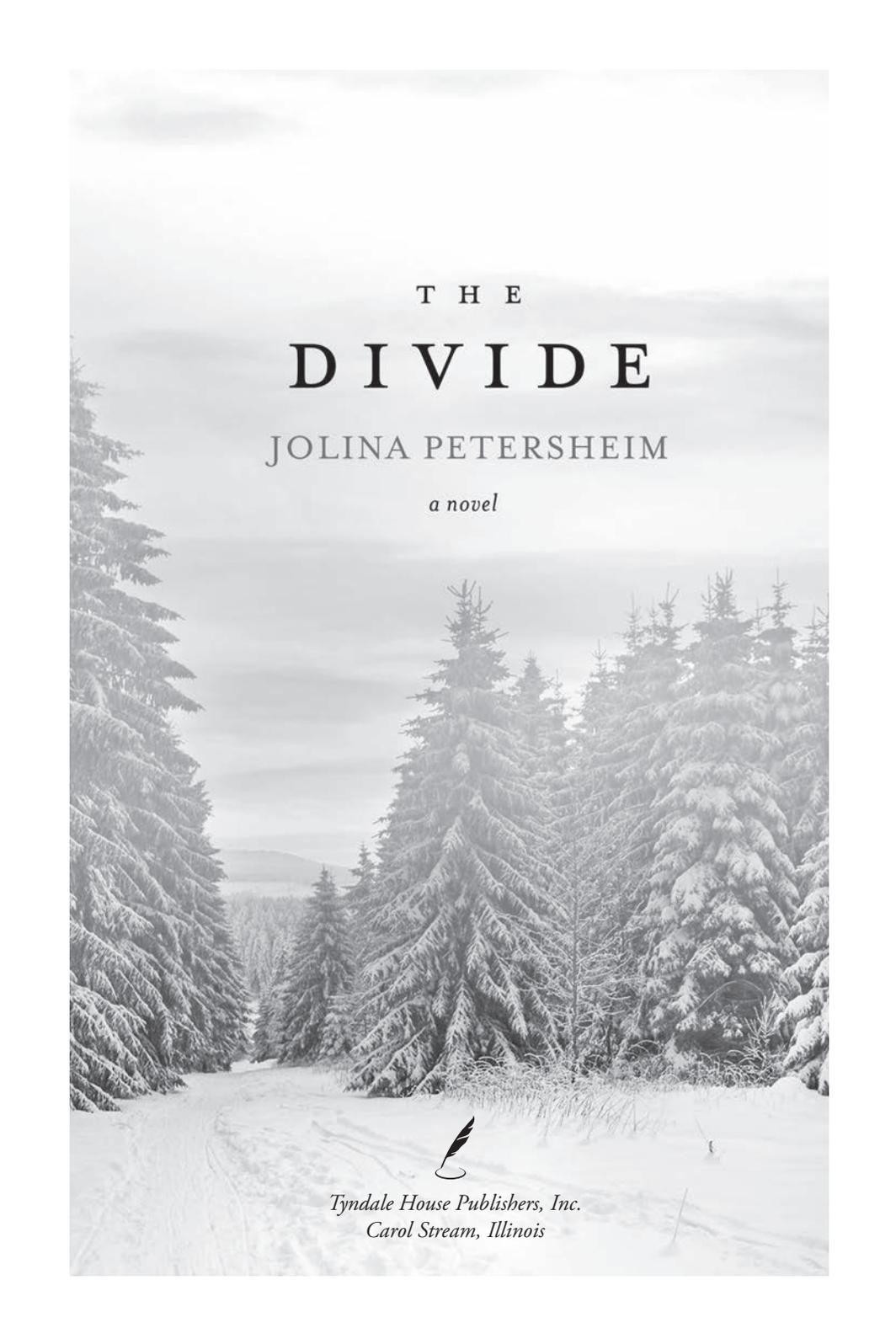
SHE READS

"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 black and white photograph of a snowy forest path lined with evergreen trees. The path is covered in snow and has tracks from a vehicle or sled. The trees are densely packed and their branches are heavily laden with snow. The sky is overcast and grey.

T H E
D I V I D E
JOLINA PETERSHEIM
a novel



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The Divide

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CHAPTER

1

Moses

SEPTEMBER

YOU NEVER KNOW how hard something's going to be until it's too late to change your mind. As I watch Leora ride away on the back of Jabil's horse—her loose, dark hair snapping like a pennant—I have to fight the urge to go after her. But I know, for her sake and for the sake of her Mennonite community, I have to remain.

It's a good thing I do. About ten minutes later, part of the perimeter collapses with a movement as graceful and altering as an ice cliff sliding into the sea. Hot coals shower the ground. Smoke rises. I crouch behind the scaffolding, preparing to defend the property as long as I can so the families have enough time to escape into the mountains.

The first man steps through, his figure a blur in the choking haze. I adjust my rifle, trying to find the man in the scope. I'm not fast enough. Another man runs in, and another. The fourth one pauses for only a second, but that second costs him his life. I shoot a few more times, and then I stop to reload, pressing rounds into the chamber one by one, but my fingers are shaking. I look up to see a man leveling a gun at me. My body braces for impact, which is ludicrous. You can't brace yourself for something like that. I take a shot in the stomach and fall to my knees. I try to

get to my feet but stumble until I'm sitting back in the dirt. I support my upper body by bracing my left arm on the ground and using my right arm to hold my abdomen.

There's so much adrenaline coursing through me that I don't feel pain. Instead, staring down at the wound, I feel only disappointment. The community's lives are resting in my hands because their pacifist ideals won't allow them to fight back against the gang, even to protect their families, and now I am not sure what will become of them. This thought brings with it the first wave of debilitating pain and nausea. I should be grateful Leora left with Jabil, for even without raising a weapon, he could probably do a better job of protecting her than I. But I can't help wishing I could relive these past hard weeks, starting when I crashed in her meadow to the moment—just an hour ago—when we kissed in front of the burning perimeter, the community's last line of defense, which somehow helped put Leora's and my own defenses into place.

I hope Jabil makes her happy. I hope he loves her the way I would, if our world weren't so messed up. But it is. I let the pain sweep me under. Oblivion is easier than reality.

Sal

Believing Moses good as dead, the gang rushes past him.

I have been hiding in the shadows of Field to Table, waiting on the off chance that Moses might need me. And now he does. I study him a moment, aware that he will die out

there if I don't help him, and yet aware I might die if I do. I think of my son, Colton, on his way up the mountain, and realize there's no point keeping myself safe for him if I never use my life to do any good. Taking a breath, I duck low and dart past Field to Table, the lane, and the blanket of coals where the fallen perimeter once stood. Moses is lying on the ground, the front of his shirt soaked with blood. My first thought is that he *is* actually dead, and then I see movement as his body involuntarily strains for air.

The gang seems so intent on finding things of value, and being the first to wreck the next house, they do not notice us behind them. I understand they are going to pillage and probably burn the rest of the community to the ground, and I suppose I should care. But I don't. I don't care about anything but getting Moses out of here alive. I drag him by his boots under the scaffolding and press the side of my face to his mouth. His ragged breath fills the curl of my ear. He opens his eyes. Though he appears disoriented, I can tell he comprehends what's happening. I lift Moses up as gently as possible and feel behind his back. There's a wet spot about the size of my hand. I don't know as much about healing as I claimed when I got that deacon to let me stay at Mt. Hebron, but I *do* know it's good the bullet appears to have gone straight through.

I shrug off my parka and my warm shirt. Shivering in my tank top, I use the shirt to stanch the blood. The gang works their way closer. Only seconds before they see us. I grab Moses again by the boots, and it takes every ounce of

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my strength to drag him over to the store and get him inside. His head bumps against the separation where the double doors lock into place, but I figure he won't mind a headache as much as he would mind whatever the gang will do to him if they discover he's alive after picking off some of their men.

I take a break, breathing hard, and check Moses's wound. He is bleeding out, but I have no other choice: he can't stay in the entrance. Hooking my hands behind his armpits, I continue dragging him past the store's emptied cooler section to the narrow hall. There are two doors, positioned side by side. The first leads to a unisex bathroom with no mirror above the pedestal sink; the second leads to the mechanical room. I push this door wider and drag Moses into it. Inside, I notice a large furnace along the back wall. Behind it is just enough space. I move him there and hurriedly back up to make sure he can't be seen from any side. Dust furs the vents of the furnace, and dead moths appear like bits of shiny paper on the floor. Though my eyes take in these details, I don't really see anything. I slip in behind Moses and hold him like an overgrown child. I try to keep the life in his body, even though blood drips warm down my hand.

An hour seems to pass, but I have no idea how long it's actually been. Spasms jerk the muscles of my back, and my tailbone feels bruised from my position between Moses and the wall. He drifts in and out of consciousness. His breathing is steady, but so's the blood flow from the gunshot wound. We have to get out of here, but there's nowhere to go. Why don't they come?

The answer arrives soon enough, with the sound of glass shattering at the front of the building. My heart in my throat, I visualize the gang's movements—trashing their way from the cash registers, to the café, to us . . . down the hall. The overlap of footsteps and voices. Light from a torch passing by the crack beneath the door. The bathroom door opens next to us. I hold Moses tighter, his body now limp against me, and hope against hope that he won't make a sound.

The door to the mechanical room opens, the rubber seal scraping along the uneven cement. Shadows cast by the torch loom across the wall as a man steps inside. I tremble as he yanks open an old metal cabinet that hangs near the entrance. After a minute of searching, he slams the cabinet doors shut. The torchlight grows brighter, and the sound of the crackling pine louder than before. Not even daring to breathe, I remain frozen as I clench Moses against me. Suddenly, as if satisfied there's nothing of use to him in this room, the man turns and leaves.

The entire store building grows quiet. Slowly, I try to change position and listen. Moses stirs. I hold him for a little longer and then whisper, "I think they're gone." Tears of relief and sadness burn my eyes. My first words since I gave my son away.



Moses can no longer stand, he is so weak from the blood he lost while walking ten miles from the burned community to

town. His spine is curled forward, his folded arms braced on his knees. I look back through the warehouse's right window and almost jump out of my skin. A pair of dark eyes are staring at me, the facial features appearing distorted through the fractured glass. The eyes narrow. Shuffled steps precede the clatter of rotating bolts and locks. The right door opens. A sun-battered head sticks out, draped with a tangled mane of silver hair. I turn and point at Moses, as if *I* am the one who refuses to speak and not my grandmother, Papina, who uses silence to communicate her grief. She raises an eyebrow and twists her lips, the combination creating a fault line of wrinkles.

"It was dark," I explain. "Moses was in the wrong place at the wrong time."

Papina turns her eyes from me and looks at the man in question. She taps her bare foot, and then she waves a rangy arm—jangling with bracelets—toward the warehouse.

I nod my thanks and walk back to Moses. "My grandmother will look at you."

He doesn't respond. I go down a step and gently tilt back his head. The skin of his face, not covered by his beard, is ruddy, and the V of his T-shirt outlined with sweat. I crouch and put an arm around his shoulders, forcing him to his feet. He wobbles upward, like a drunk. The trip to Liberty obviously battered him further, but if I had left him at Field to Table, he would've died. He could *still* die. But at least he has a chance now that he's here.

Papina, standing at the top of the steps, shakes her head

and descends when she sees Moses can no longer walk on his own. I turn his body, and she tries to support him by wrapping her arm around his hip. Together, we work our way up the crumbling flight. Once we reach the landing, my grandmother goes inside. I stay close behind Moses in case he collapses. He hauls his feet over the threshold and leans against the wall.

Needless to say, the old T-shirt factory's locks can't keep people out. Even before the EMP, the factory was a playground for teenagers wanting to cut their teeth on petty crime. Refugees—scrawny and interchangeable in their androgynous wardrobes of grime—are now sprawled on mats scattered here and there across the concrete floor. Papina brings over one of these mats, plops it on the tile, and motions for Moses to sit. He can't see her because his face is lifted to the ceiling, the cords of his neck shimmering and taut. I step over the mat and take his elbow. He jolts and glances at me, fever in his eyes. I grab another mat. Placing them side by side, I take off my parka, drape it over the pallet, and help him sit down.

He stays still for an instant, and then draws up his legs. My grandmother comes out of the room to the right and sits beside Moses, her layers of skirts sweeping up the dust. She peels his arms from around his shins and puts a hand on his chest, forcing his torso down until he is lying on his back. She lifts his T-shirt and examines the skin around the stitches I made, using the needle and thread from a cheap sewing kit I found under a shelf at Field to Table.

Less than a day has passed since I sewed him up, and yet I can already see how the stitches are cinched and oozing, that thin tributaries of red are spreading from the unruly, spider-black stripe. I wonder if I killed him with infection in my botched attempt to heal. Cursing, I move from behind my grandmother and walk to the other side. She passes me a flask from one of the bottomless pockets of her skirts. I take it and look at her, awaiting my orders. Papina points to Moses's stomach and mimes pouring liquor over the wound. I don't know why she doesn't do it herself, but I unscrew the cap and obey her instruction. Moses slurps his breath in through his teeth, and then peeks at what I am pouring over the stitches. He reaches for the flask. I attempt to pass it, but Papina frowns and intercepts me. Screwing on the cap, she slips it into her pocket. Apparently her generosity has limits.

Moses gives my grandmother a sidelong glance. She pulls his shirt up higher and palpates the area around his wound. Pulling the shirt down, she shrugs.

I explain, "Looks like the wound's infected. I shouldn't have sewed you up."

Moses tries propping himself on his elbows. He grimaces and lies back down. Somewhere in the warehouse, a refugee hollers, and then abruptly goes silent, like a radio switching off. We all three turn toward the sound. Papina rises to check it out.

I turn back to Moses. It feels awkward, being just the two of us again, which is strange, considering that—for hours—I put pressure on his bullet wound to keep him alive.

I ask, “You remember anything?”

He swallows before speaking. “I remember the perimeter falling and the gang coming in.” A pause as he gathers his thoughts. “And I remember getting shot, but I don’t remember much after that. I have no idea if the community made it up the mountain in time.”

“I’m sure they’re okay.” I touch his arm. “I’m sure Leora’s okay too. You did a brave thing, Moses.” He doesn’t respond, just keeps his eyes closed, so it’s easy for me to say, “I know how you’re feeling right now, being separated from someone you love. I gave my son, Colton, to Leora because I knew he’d have a better life with her than he would here, with me.”

Moses finally opens his eyes and looks over, the blue of his irises swimming with either fever or fatigue. “I never said I loved her.”

I think to myself, *You don’t have to.*



The refugees are nightly drawn from foraging in the streets back to the warehouse, like chickens returning to their coop. Papina holds out her hands as each files through and accepts whatever pilfered item she deems valuable enough to cover room and board: canned food, jewelry, bullets, toiletry items. I scoot across the floor, closer to Moses, which is laughable. He can offer me no protection as he thrashes in his sleep, his cheeks stained with fever. I would feed him ice, but ice is now such an impossible concept, it seems more like a dream.

Most of these refugees tramp upstairs, where the worst of the lot stay. A few others remain on the main floor, with Moses and me. I can tell they are new to the warehouse and its occupants by the worry flaring in their eyes as they squint toward the candlelit corners of the room, perhaps searching for a recognizable face. I, in fact, recognize two of the five refugees. The first is a twentysomething woman with straw-blonde hair who used to work at Burt's Grocery. The second was a lifeguard at Liberty's public pool.

Neither of them seem to recognize me, even though the guy—Travis, I think—dropped out of high school the same year I did. Despite my long dark hair and distinct Kutenai features, for years I've perfected the ability to blend in with any crowd, since becoming a hodgepodge of everyone around me is far less painful than getting picked on for standing out.

My cousin Alex files through next. My grandmother grins and embraces him, making no attempt to hide the fact he's her favorite grandchild, just as Uncle Mike is Papina's favorite son. I get to my feet. Alex glances up as I stride toward him.

"Hey, hey, Sal," he croons. "Where've you been hiding?"

"None of your business." My tone is flat. I've never cared for Alex's overblown display of charm and affection, especially when I know he likes me as much—or as little—as I like him.

"Ah." He raises his eyebrows. "But it soon *will* be my business."

“What’re you talking about?”

Alex and I move to the side as more refugees come streaming in.

“Dad got me a job,” he says.

“Really?” I can’t fake any excitement.

“Yeah, the government’s hiring some people to take a census of the ones who’re left.”

I roll my eyes. “There *is* no government.”

“That’s what you think.”

My cousin has this driving need to one-up me, so I take every word that comes out of his mouth with a grain of salt. “Then give me some kinda proof.”

Alex reaches into the back pocket of his jeans for a battered leather wallet. In the credit card section, he thumbs out an identification card and passes it to me. Laminated with contact paper, the card appears very similar to a license, except the numbers and words have all been written out by hand. Even the picture of him—an uncanny likeness—is just a sketch. I look up at him and am annoyed by the smug look on his face.

“So what?” I say. “You could’ve paid to have this made.”

“Well, I didn’t,” he snaps. “I’m getting a uniform, gun, and everything. I even get paid a percentage for every person I turn in.”

“What are they going to pay you in?” I sneer. “Dollars?”

Alex’s dark eyes flare. “You’d better show me some respect.”

“Or what, you’re going to count me in your ‘census?’”

“You have *no* idea what this is all about, do you?”

I cross my arms. “Obviously not.”

Alex leans close. I can smell his black-market cigarette breath. “They’re doing the census so they can figure out where to place the camps.”

“What camps?”

My cousin smiles, satisfied by my interest. “Work camps.” He pauses for effect. “Refugees are going to be used to clear land, plow, and plant in exchange for some of the food they grow. And they’ll do it, too, since everybody who’s left is starving.”

“I still don’t believe you. There’s no way any government’s organized enough to set something like that up. If they were, they would’ve already done it.”

Shrugging, Alex slips his identification card back into his wallet. “You’ll find out.”



The tall, middle-aged man ducks under the doorway. He doesn’t look around the candlelit warehouse like the others, just shambles across the room with his back still stooped, as if the ceiling is the same height as the door. As he approaches my grandmother, she nods and accepts the pieces of silver he’s holding out. I despise her in that moment—healer, poisoner, thief—almost as much as I despise the man: Leora’s dad, Luke, who has the same shameless scruples as she. Luke has no business being here, where nothing good takes place. Especially not when his orphaned family—and my son—are trying to survive in the mountains.

For the second time in one night, I rise from my pallet beside Moses, where my parka, bearing his bloodstains, serves as my pillow. Luke turns toward me as I draw close. He appears startled, his gaze widening as I search his face, trying to see if there's still life in his eyes or if addiction has snuffed it out, like it snuffed out my dad's.

"I'm Sal," I say. "I saw you a few times when you were working for my uncle."

He nods cautiously, as if trying to anticipate what I want.

"I know your family," I continue. "They took me in."

Luke glances over at my grandmother, who's returned to her room to deposit his coins. He rams his fist into his pocket to hide his trembling hand. "How are they?" he says.

I raise my eyebrow. "I was about to ask you the same thing."

"Look." He spreads his hands. "Leora told me I can't come home until I get better."

"Don't think you got much chance at getting better by being here."

"I'm here because I have something for your uncle."

"What?"

"Me." He sighs. "Figure if I turn myself in, they'll leave my family alone."

"So you're going back to drug running?"

"Just until I can pay off my debt."

"What if you get addicted again? You know you won't be able to handle it."

He shrugs. "I got no other options. Gotta take the risk."

I don't have any other options for him either, so I go and

THE DIVIDE

lie down in the corner on my pallet as Moses mumbles in his sleep. The thick plaster walls are bloated with mildew. A starling swoops in and out of the holes in the ceiling's ragged trellis, searching for an opening only to hit another wall. I try to ignore this bird, which reminds me a little too much of myself. I instead focus on the alternating mix of shadow and light as, upstairs, the refugees get settled in.

Lying here, I try to picture Colton, his cheeks flushed with the warmth of the fire I imagine him sleeping next to, since it makes it easier for me to be in a place that is dry and warm if he is dry and warm too. I try to picture Leora singing softly in the background. One of those incoherent community hymns, I'm sure.

Most of all, I try not to feel guilty—knowing Colton might be sleeping near a fire, but there is surely no roof over his head, if the community made it to the mountains like they planned. But I had to give him up if he was to survive, and for the first time, I understand that maybe my own mom didn't leave me and my dad at that apartment because she didn't want us. Maybe she left us because—like Luke, like me—she also felt she didn't have another choice.

A NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR

Thank you, precious readers, for taking the time to read this series. Each story I have had the privilege to craft becomes so personal to me by its completion, and this is certainly the case with *The Alliance* and *The Divide*. Leora, Moses, and Jabil feel as real to me as family, as do their struggles and triumphs, and I have learned so much from them over these past three years. I pray that you have learned as well, and that the themes presented will provide you with some food for thought. If you would ever like to discuss, please let me know. You can contact me through my website, www.jolinapetersheim.com. I love hearing from my readers!