

PREVIEW: *Selected scenes
from the novel*

*"This story's
heart-wrenching
conflict had me
glued to the page."*

FRANCINE
RIVERS



How
the Light
Gets In

JOLINA PETERSHEIM

This is an extended preview of

How the Light Gets In

By Jolina Petersheim

Available wherever books are sold
March 5, 2019

Advance praise for *How the Light Gets In*

“*How the Light Gets In* is infused with hope and threaded with love, a story that asks the big questions: what makes us whole, and how do we find our worth? With the provocative biblical story of Ruth as inspiration, Petersheim brings alive modern-day characters struggling with both marriage and motherhood. Sometimes we use the words *forgiveness*, *redemption*, and *love* without understanding their depths, but Petersheim digs deep to portray the cost and worth of these values. A novel both penetrating and surprising—don’t miss it!”

PATTI CALLAHAN HENRY, *New York Times* bestselling author of
The Bookshop at Water’s End

“I love how Jolina Petersheim translates timeless truths into can’t-put-down fiction. This story’s heart-wrenching conflict had me glued to the page.”

FRANCINE RIVERS, *New York Times* bestselling author of
The Masterpiece

“Compellingly woven by Jolina Petersheim’s capable pen, *How the Light Gets In* follows a trail of grief toward healing, leading to an impossible choice—what is best when every path will hurt someone? A mother’s love and a mother’s duty war with a woman’s need to feel loved and whole in a story that will stay with you long after you close the final page and leave you pondering: *Which path would I take?*”

LISA WINGATE, *New York Times* bestselling author of
Before We Were Yours

“Jolina Petersheim writes so vividly that you taste the morning coffee and smell the peat from the cranberry bog. More than this, you will feel the ache deep inside Ruth as she wrestles with the desire for something just out of her grasp. With surprising twists and powerful themes, this story will sink into your soul and give you hope.”

CHRIS FABRY, bestselling author of *Under a Cloudless Sky*

“Jolina Petersheim’s *How the Light Gets In* chronicles one woman’s experience with motherhood, a fractured marriage, piercing grief, and glimpses of new hope. The setting—a cranberry farm in a Wisconsin Mennonite community—was a new one for me, and I was pulled into its stark and rugged beauty. Petersheim’s gentle retelling of the story of Ruth will both stir and settle the hearts of her readers.”

LAUREN K. DENTON, bestselling author of *The Hideaway*

“An insightful and poignant modern-day retelling of the book of Ruth, *How the Light Gets In* will work its way into readers’ minds and stay there long after the last page. Jolina Petersheim draws the story of widowhood, finding family, and rewriting one’s own life story with great grace and gentle tenderness, once again proving herself to be a standout voice in Christian fiction.”

KRISTY WOODSON HARVEY, bestselling author of *Slightly South of Simple*

“Jolina Petersheim’s Ruth Neufeld is a heroine I’ll never forget—for her courage and love and forgiveness. Faced with an impossible choice, Ruth’s decision makes me believe in what it means to live out our highest selves.”

BREN MCCLAIN, award-winning author of the Okra Pick *One Good Mama Bone*

“As Jolina Petersheim explored the heartache of loss, the covenant of marriage, and the hope of new beginnings, I was challenged to consider whether I could have been obedient to the Lord in the same difficult circumstances. The journey to the final page was both impactful and thought-provoking. Expertly written, unpredictable, and powerful!”

BECKY WADE, award-winning author of *Falling For You*

“Petersheim delivers another intriguing story of love and healing. Add *How the Light Gets In* to your must-read list.”

RACHEL HAUCK, *New York Times* bestselling author of *The Wedding Dress*

“A compelling story of love, loss, faith, and rediscovery—and of what truly matters when faced with life’s most difficult twists and turns.”

TAMERA ALEXANDER, bestselling author of *With This Pledge*

“In this creative retelling of the story of Ruth, Petersheim carried me along in her capable hands lovingly, gently, and then as if with glorious fireworks, she applied twists, turns, and surprises that would have O. Henry nodding in appreciation. What an exquisite and meaningful read for anyone who’s experienced the ups, downs, and unknowns of God’s will for our lives.”

NICOLE SEITZ, author of *The Cagemaker* and coeditor of *Our Prince of Scribes: Writers Remember Pat Conroy*

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*To my three daughters—Miss A, Miss M, and Miss E.
May you always see how the light gets in.*



FROM CHAPTER 1



THE CASKETS WERE CLOSED, OF COURSE. No flowers adorned them. No flowers were even in the church, but cool morning light fell through the windows, warming the hardwood floor and pews. The Physicians International staff member who had called to break the news to Ruth had promised there'd been no suffering. From this, Ruth inferred there'd not been much of her husband's body left to collect.

Later news articles confirmed the bombing the hospital had endured. Women and children had died; her husband and father-in-law were among the staff members killed. Ruth spent days afterward googling the bombing until her mother deemed she was obsessing over something that couldn't be changed. It infuriated Ruth at the time, but now she saw the wisdom of her mother's decision to turn off the Wi-Fi for ten hours each day, though the doling out of "wisdom" could have been accomplished with more tact.

Presently, seven weeks later, two-year-old Vivienne had no clue her father's cremated remains were scattered in a plain pine box at the front of the church. She had no clue he had even died. But her six-year-old sister, Sofie, was old enough to understand. When Ruth sat on the packed sand beside her and told her the news, Sofie hadn't cried, or even acted like she'd heard, but took a small piece of driftwood and threw it into the ocean, which the dog, Zeus, had run into the surf to fetch. However, since then, Sofie hadn't laughed, played, or spoken in more than toneless monosyllables, and those were all to basic questions—"Are you hungry? Thirsty? Do you need a nap?"—that Ruth had asked and to which Sofie had begrudgingly replied.

Because of this, Ruth wasn't about to let Sofie just sit there, stripping her cuticles off with her teeth while her brown eyes studied everything, as if trying to understand why her father's death so closely resembled her Irish grandpa's: everyone wearing black in a strange church where few congregants cried but most looked like they wanted to. Ruth, trying to distract her, dug into the tote she'd packed with the pretzels, cookies, and snack mixes they'd accumulated during yesterday's endless flights. She'd also packed Pull-Ups and wipes, a coloring book and crayons, and a change of clothes in case the upheaval of the past few days (not to mention weeks and months) caused toddler Vi to forget she was potty-trained.

Ruth could never have anticipated needing a diaper bag at her husband's funeral, and yet there were many things about her thirty years she could never have anticipated.

Ruth opened the zipper compartment and pulled out her

iPhone. Switching it to silent, she pressed the YouTube app so Sofie could watch *Paw Patrol*. But then she remembered: her phone was not picking up a signal. Cell phone service was spotty in this Mennonite community in Wisconsin. There was barely running water. Late last night, after the girls finally settled enough to sleep, Ruth had stood under the farmhouse's lime-encrusted showerhead, eager for another cathartic cry—the shower was the only place she felt safe enough to let herself feel—and discovered that the water came out as a lukewarm drizzle. It could never muffle her sobs, so she held them in until her chest hurt.

Ruth pressed the photos app and passed the phone to Sofie, allowing her to scroll through the pictures until the funeral wrapped up. Mabel glanced over as her granddaughter's tiny index finger expertly slid over the pictures and tapped the play button to watch the short video clips interspersed throughout. Ruth wasn't sure if her mother-in-law approved, but Ruth didn't really care if she did. Ruth did not want to bury her husband in Wisconsin. Therefore, she already resented the land and the extended family, who were so plentiful she didn't feel her single voice carried any weight. She wanted Chandler buried in Ireland, where she and her girls could visit him each day. And yet, was her parents' old stone house truly her home?

The surprisingly young bishop read from the Psalms: *“Der Herr ist meine Stärke und mein Schild; auf ihn hofft mein Herz, und mir ist geholfen.”*

The funeral service was being conducted in both German and English. Ruth suspected that the latter translation was mainly for her benefit, since she was among the few

non-Mennonites in attendance. But there was no need. The only way Ruth was going to survive the next few hours—and days, for that matter—was by blocking it all out. Otherwise, her shield of self-preservation would crack, and she doubted she could get herself back together if it did.

Ruth glanced down at her Fitbit and saw two hours had passed since she'd come into the church with her children. Her tights itched, and her eyelids felt heavy, which filled her with guilt.

How could she be fighting sleep at her husband's funeral? But she knew this fight stemmed from acute exhaustion, and from the fact there'd been few times over the past six months she'd allowed herself to sit still, because stillness meant something wasn't getting done, and focusing on getting something done kept her from having too much time to think.

And then, piercing the droning quiet, Ruth heard her dead husband's voice: an audible apparition. "Hey there, girly girls," he said. "I hope you're being good for your mama. It's a hot day—" Ruth was so stunned, she was unable to correlate that Chandler's voice was not in her head but coming from her phone. Mouth dry, she glanced at her daughter's lap. The screen framed Chandler's familiar face. Ruth reached for it, and Sofie looked up—eyes flashing—and wrenched the phone back. All the while, the simple, now otherworldly, message continued to play: "I'm looking forward to seeing you again. It won't be long now."

Ruth finally got the phone away and Sofie screamed, "*No!*" The sound reverberated off the church's whitewashed

walls, echoing just as the a cappella hymn “The City of Light” had earlier as she and her daughters filed past the caskets.

Ruth’s cheeks burned with humiliation and grief.

In the center of her lap, just as it had been in her daughter’s, was Chandler’s face: his dark beard, his dark skin, his dark eyes, so that he blended in with both the Colombian and Afghani cultures. His coloring was clearly passed down through Mabel, who looked more Native American than Mennonite, most of whom, Ruth knew, were German or Swiss.

I miss you, Ruth thought, and the realization surprised her as much as hearing her dead husband’s voice coming from her phone.

How could she miss a man who’d been parted from her for so long? For, yes, absence did make the heart grow fonder, but then, after a while, that shield of self-preservation grew thicker, and the heart forsook fondness for survival and all-consuming love for getting by. Ruth felt that she hadn’t truly missed her dead husband in four of their five years of marriage. And sometimes, when she’d missed Chandler the most, he’d been sitting in the same room.



SIX YEARS EARLIER

JUNE 7, 2012

Dear Chandler,

I received your letter today and immediately wanted to hop on a plane and adopt Sofie myself, but my parents are adamant that I am neither mature enough nor

financially stable enough to consider it. Have you ever moved back in with your parents after living on your own (or at least in a dorm) for many years? It is not easy, and since I am their only child—granted, like Abraham and Sarah, when they least expected it—I find they are even more protective of me.

I have rebelled against this protection all my life, which is partly why, after college, I was so drawn to Children’s Haven. Bogotá’s crime rate alone about made my parents drop dead from fright. They jointly declared, “Ruth! Don’t be so obtuse. You’ll be kidnapped within a fortnight!” (And, yes, my English professor parents still use words like obtuse and fortnight.)

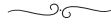
But then, to my surprise, I found that Colombia was beautiful: the mountains’ temperate coolness; the clean lines of uniformed children—the ribbons in the girls’ hair, the stark-white kneesocks beneath their pleated skirts—as they crossed the sunlit courtyard to the classrooms; the sense of well-being I felt as I understood I was making a difference in orphans’ lives.

I will never forget the day the staff took a trip to Guatavita, and how I suddenly had the impulse to purchase the red silk shawl I’d seen at one of the vendors’ booths. The rest of you were loading up in the bus, but I turned and quickly cut back through the crowd with pesos jangling in the knit bag banging against my hip, and little did I know that you took off after me.

What a sight we must’ve made, as you wove through the chaos, looking so much like them, while I, obviously,

did not. I was purchasing the shawl from the woman with the wrinkled, apple-doll face when I looked up and saw you, standing there with your hands on your knees as you tried to catch your breath. I do apologize for taking off like that, but it was worth it, at least on my end. I have loved that red silk shawl ever since.

*Fondly yours,
Ruth*



Elam awoke before the sun and walked out of his house into the fields. The smell of peat from the cranberry bog rose around him. He thought about all the leaves that had fallen off the ring of silver birches and sifted down through the bog's layers of sand. The sedimentary nature reminded him of the funeral last week, and that he only had half his life left to leave his mark before he too fell like a leaf to the ground. But Elam wasn't melancholy today. In fact, he was far from it. He loved the beginning of harvest season, when his usually predictable—and, if truth be told, rather mundane—existence transformed into an adrenaline-fueled race against the clock.

The fog rolled in across the land like an opaque carpet. This subtle transition was Elam's favorite part of morning, when everything was quiet and there was nothing for him to say or do. Elam walked along the edge of the bog, checking on the ripe red fruit hidden like treasure beneath the plants. He knelt and cupped a few in his hand. Moisture from the dew beaded on his maimed finger. Cranberries, such tiny things, had taken up the better part of his thirty-nine years.

He would need to wait at least another month if he were dry harvesting it all like he had last year—walking the picker through the fields and laboriously gathering the pounds of fruit to sell to local grocery stores and markets. But Driftless Valley Farm's new contract with Ocean Spray allowed for wet harvesting. The cranberries didn't have to be perfect because they were going to be turned into juice, jelly, and sauce. In two days, Elam would pump water from the lakes and channels into the fields until the water rose a foot. His father had crafted the bogs to absorb the flood without being ruined, but each harvest Elam marveled that the delicate plants survived.

Elam and Tim were supposed to meet at the pumphouse at eight. Elam glanced at the flat band of horizon and gauged he had an hour until it was truly light. Elam walked back across the field, his prematurely silver hair brushing his shirt collar. A light shone through the kitchen windows. He moved toward it, his empty coffee mug dangling from his hand. He went up the front steps and saw Ruth sitting at the table, staring out at the predawn dark.

Elam paused, his right boot on the porch step's third riser, unsure if he should just stay outside until either Mabel awoke or it was time to meet Tim. But the kerosene light magnified the weary slant of Ruth's shoulders, as the shadows magnified the shadows beneath her eyes.

Just as Elam couldn't stay silent, even though he hated what it took for him to speak, he also could not stand outside while a family member appeared so forlorn.

Elam's heart pounded and mouth went dry as he entered

his own house. He felt so out of place, having someone else invading his privacy, and yet he told himself Ruth must feel even worse. She didn't look up. He stood at the entrance, gripping the coffee cup, and suddenly looked down at the floor, remembering how Ruth had cleaned it on her hands and knees after supper last night. Setting the mug on the buffet table, he knelt to untie his boots.

The sound of the ceramic striking the tin covering the cabinet—where Elam's dead mother, Marta, had once rolled out her pies—seemed to rouse Ruth.

"Good morning," she said. Her voice sounded hoarse.

Elam nodded. "Good morning."

He peeled off his boots, picked up his mug, and padded in socked feet across the kitchen. Marta was probably turning in her grave to see Ruth's huge white dog snoring beneath her table. But Ruth's six-year-old, Sofie, wouldn't enter the house unless the dog entered too and, for hours, had kept her arm wrapped around the dog's shaggy mane and glared at Elam beneath her bangs, as if challenging him to take away her living, breathing security blanket.

So he obviously had not suggested the dog should stay in the barn.

Refilling his coffee, Elam glanced at the stove and saw a plate of fried potatoes and eggs. The brown eggshells were cracked and piled beside the cast-iron skillet. The tin salt and pepper shakers were still out; some of the granules had spilled across the butcher-block countertop.

Ruth said, "Sorry. I was in the middle of cleaning up, but . . . I got a call."

“No problem,” Elam said gently. “I . . . I’m glad you’re making yourself at home.”

“There’s enough for you, too, if you want it.”

Elam paused. “What about your girls?”

She smiled slightly. “They don’t like eggs.”

He looked back at her. There was nothing on the table except for her phone. Ruth’s head leaned forward, her wavy hair parted over her shoulders, so he could easily see the round nodules of her spine. She was too thin. “Have you eaten?” he asked.

Ruth shook her head. “You go ahead.”

It didn’t seem right, though, for Elam to sit across from such a sad person while eating the food she had prepared. He took two plates out of the cupboard and set them on the counter. He used the flipper to scoop the eggs and potatoes and set a portion on each plate. He carried the plates over to the table, and as he did, he debated on where to sit. To sit across from Ruth seemed too intimate. To sit at the far end of the table seemed too withdrawn. Most people wouldn’t think twice about where to sit, but most people were not Elam Albrecht, who overthought everything when it came to social interaction. After a moment, he chose to sit on the opposite side of the table, but one chair over so Ruth wouldn’t have to look at him with those disconcerting eyes. His foot brushed the dog. Moving his chair back, he slid one of the plates over to her.

Ruth looked up at him, as if surprised. “Thanks,” she said.

He didn’t say anything, just briefly bowed his head for grace and began shoveling in the food. He’d forgotten his

coffee on the countertop but wasn't about to retrieve it because he didn't want to repeat the awkward squeezing of his large-boned body between the table and the wall. He'd never sat on this side of the table and so had never noticed there was not much space.

The dog snored. The faucet dripped. Elam's heart pounded. He'd sat at this table his entire life but had no idea what to do with his hands. He gripped the fork. "You . . . you . . ."

Ruth glanced over, and then away in deference when she noticed Elam's face growing red as he waited for the words to come. It wasn't a stutter that affected him. Sometimes Elam thought it'd be easier if it were. That way, the person listening would know more words were on the way and could patiently wait while he got them out. But his words seemed to get hung up somewhere between his brain and his mouth. When he was a boy, Miss Romaine—the middle-aged librarian who became his clandestine piano teacher—had said his voice box was merely locked, and music would be the key to get the words out. But Elam hadn't been out to the cabin for a long time, and he'd nearly forgotten how to speak through those smooth, black-and-white keys.

"You had a call?" There. He'd said it. Effortless.

But Ruth's mouth tightened, and he feared he'd overstepped his bounds. A few seconds passed. She shook her head and said, "Yes. I had a call. My mother called." She stared down at the plate of untouched food and exhaled heavily. "She has a buyer for Greystones."

Elam finished chewing. He poised his fork over another

bite. When Ruth did not continue, he swallowed and asked, “What’s Greystones?”

“My parents named their house after the city where I grew up, Greystones, because it’s made of gray stone. Real creative, right?” She stabbed her fork in the egg. “My mom didn’t even tell me she was putting it up for sale. I should’ve known, though,” she said. “She was boxing up my father’s things soon after he died.”

“Where will your mother . . . ?”

“Live? I’m not sure. She’ll probably buy a small house in town. I know it makes sense. She’s seventy-five, and Greystones takes work. But I always thought I could go home again.”

Elam looked across at her. Sometimes he dreamed about leaving his “family home.” There were benefits to familiarity, he knew, and yet he often found he was discontent with having neither experienced life nor taken risks, as his cousin had done. He didn’t want to die in the same place he was born. “Could you and your girls move in with her?”

Ruth laughed. There was no humor in it. “My mom’s not the grandma type. My girls are too much for her. We lived with her for six months before coming here. It did not go well.”

“But you still want to move back?”

Ruth stared at her freckled hands. She twirled the loose wedding band on her finger, and the emerald reflected square prisms on the wall. “I don’t know what I’m going to do, honestly. My home is no longer in Ireland, and my home’s never been here.”

She appeared so fragile, sitting there at his table with the first light—streaming through the yellowed curtain—patterning

her face. Looking at her, Elam hated that she and her children should go through the grief he knew too well. Last Christmas, he'd sat at this same kitchen table while eating his staple supper of steak and eggs, and stared at the family picture Chandler had inserted into his annual support letter. He'd envied his first cousin for having a beautiful wife and daughters while he had almost no one. Now Chandler was dead; his wife and daughters were abandoned and nearly destitute, if it was true what Mabel had confided to him.

Elam didn't consider himself fluent in many ways, especially when it came to conveying matters of the heart, but he wished he could say more. He *yearned* for the ability to say more, such as that Chandler had loved Ruth deeply. But she must know that Elam and Chandler hadn't spoken very often in these ensuing years, and he didn't want to give her platitudes when she must've been receiving them in abundance from well-meaning people who didn't know how to handle grief. But he knew how to handle grief. Grief was best borne in silence.

Elam got up, worked his body around the table, chairs, and wall, and fetched a mug from the cupboard. The coffee-pot was still warm. He brought a mug over to Ruth and went to the kerosene-powered fridge to retrieve a small container of French vanilla half-and-half. He sniffed it to make sure it was okay. His sister, Laurie, had purchased the creamer for him some time back. Horrified by the "masculine state" of his pantry and fridge, she had hired a driver to take her to town to supply him with what she considered necessities of life. Personally, he never cared for doctored coffee. He set the cream beside Ruth and then fetched the small pottery

container of sugar with a wooden spoon. He worried he was turning into Laurie: trying to assuage life's woes with hot drinks and food. But then Ruth looked up—tears polishing her eyes—and smiled. “Thank you, Elam,” she said. “You’re kind.”

FROM CHAPTER 2



ONE HOUR LATER, Ruth's rental car took a left at the intersection where another gravel road bisected the long farm lane that wound past the barns and the lake. Laurie and Tim's house looked like a miniature version of the farmhouse Elam owned. Ruth parked along the side of the road so she could make an easy exit—and a hasty one, too, if needed. The yard appeared filled with as many horses and buggies as had been at the funeral. Ruth wondered if the house could contain all the women who were surely inside, since the church had been overflowing that day. Strange, how her mind chose to remember such irrelevant details but couldn't recall the faces of the people who'd come up to her after the service to share a boyhood memory of Chandler—playing kick the can with his Mennonite peers; standing in cow pies to keep his bare feet warm one winter; building elaborate tunnels in the hayloft with Elam; telling one farmer there was a wild animal in

his barn when a cow had just gotten her head stuck in the slats of a trough. All these memories, which Ruth had never heard, made her feel further removed from her husband, for it seemed he'd lived an entire lifetime before they wed.

Ruth stood in the middle of Laurie's yard and considered leaving, but what would she tell Mabel? Beside her, the water pumping rod moved up and down above the cement base as, overhead, the windmill's rusted fans creaked. Chickens pecked and scratched at the overlapping gullies the wagon wheels had made. An old farm dog—a beagle of some kind—sprawled in the sunshine in front of the barn. The panorama was so iconic that Ruth momentarily forgot her insecurity and could picture the setting in black-and-white.

When no one answered her knock, Ruth entered the breezeway. The floor was littered with a hastily corralled menagerie of children's shoes and coats. There were also women's shoes, all black and close to uniform, causing Ruth's calf-high brown leather boots to stand out. She hoped this was not a sign of how she would also stand out from the women who wore them.

Ruth entered Laurie's kitchen and breathed the autumnal scent of cooking apples, cinnamon, and smoke. A long table took up most of the space. The floor was refinished pine, with a runner of scuffs marking the area that received the most traffic. Along the back wall, between two windows, steam curled as lids danced atop massive kettles sitting on the wood-stove. An assembly line of Plain women chattered while washing Golden Delicious and Red Delicious apples at the sink, slicing and coring the apples, and if necessary, cutting away

rotten or wormy parts. More women dumped these apples into pots and stirred them with metal spoons. Laurie—the only one Ruth recognized, though the others had attended the funeral—stood at the table, rolling out crust.

Laurie looked up as Ruth approached, and her freckled face opened in a grin. Wiping her floured hands on her apron, she crossed the room and embraced Ruth, as if she hadn't just seen her. Still touching Ruth's arm, Laurie asked, "So, where would you like to help?"

But the din had quietened. Ruth glanced around at the women, who quickly resumed their chatter and work like a culinary battalion with apron strings crisscrossing their backs.

Laurie murmured, "Why don't you just stay here with me, then?" She took an apron off the hook beside the sink and passed it to Ruth. Over the past few months, Ruth had lost so much weight, she could wrap the ties twice around her waist and knot them in front.

Ruth washed her hands in the closet-sized bathroom and then came back to stare at the contents of the bowl. Laurie hadn't given Ruth instructions and so clearly assumed Ruth knew how to make pie crust. She didn't. Scones were the most complicated item Cathleen had taught her to bake. So Ruth watched Laurie cut the cold butter into the flour mixture and begin working the dough into balls with her fingers. Ruth replicated this and found the domestic action soothing. She wondered how long it'd been since she'd done much of anything in the kitchen besides breakfast. When you lost someone, it seemed everyone wanted to make sure you stayed fed.

Laurie asked, breaking into Ruth's thoughts, "Has Elam said two words to you yet?"

Ruth glanced over at Laurie, who had sprinkled flour across the table and begun flattening the dough, so Ruth sprinkled flour across the table and began flattening hers. "We talked a little the other morning. Why?" She stared back down at the bowl. "Doesn't he usually?"

"Usually?" Laurie laughed. "No. My big brother's about the shyest guy you'll ever meet. But—" Laurie paused to straighten the rolling pin—"I don't think I'm just being partial when I say he's also one of the kindest. Almost the entire community's employed by the Driftless Valley Farm, to the point the community's now named after it. Nobody thinks to call us River Bend Mennonites anymore. But I rarely see the responsibility stress him. Then again, Elam's not the easiest to read."

Ruth didn't know Elam or Laurie well enough to reply to this admission, so she focused on using her own rolling pin to evenly flatten the dough.

"What are your plans after . . ." But Laurie didn't finish. Ruth looked and saw Laurie's face had flared bright red. "Forgive me," she whispered. "Sometimes I forget why you are here."

Ruth said, "It's okay." And though the question was, the situation wasn't.

In truth, Ruth had no idea what she was going to do now that she wasn't living for free in Bethel House or receiving \$2,000 a month from Children's Haven or Physicians International, depending which nonprofit organization currently employed her husband. Chandler's public service had

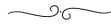
qualified for student loan forgiveness, saving them half a million dollars in medical school debt. But regardless of how conservatively they lived, \$24,000 a year had left little room for savings. Whatever they *had* saved was long gone.

"I'm sure you can stay for as long as you like," Laurie said, quietly, perhaps conscious of the other women whose work had again stilled so they might overhear.

"I couldn't impose on Elam's hospitality."

Laurie made a dismissive sound. "Nonsense. You'd be doing him a favor. He's always shorthanded when harvest season rolls around; I'm sure he could hire you for a few weeks."

"I—I don't think I'm staying that long." But Ruth's voice wasn't filled with conviction like when she'd told Mabel this after the funeral. She blinked back tears. Now was no time to cry. She quickly looked down at the crust, buttered one of the pie pans in the stack, and draped the dough over it, trimming off the excess with a knife the way Laurie had done. Where was Ruth's place in the world? Who were her people? For so long, she'd felt like a single mother, and yet she'd had no idea the vulnerability of walking this journey alone.



AUGUST 20, 2012

Dear Ruth,

My last letter began with an apology, and it seems this letter's following suit. I am sorry that I proposed. Or, if I am not entirely sorry, I am at least sorry that it shocked you. If it makes you feel any better, it also

shocked me. You were just standing there, with the sun on your hair, and I was standing next to you, fully aware that we were soon going to be continents apart. You asked me, afterward, how I could love you when I barely know you, but sometimes you can love someone without even knowing who they are.

It happened, for me, even before you almost got kidnapped at Guatavita; it happened the first week you came to Bethel House.

I came back from the clinic around midnight. I unlocked the door and saw the basket lamp above the kitchen table was on, throwing a crisscross pattern on the walls. I didn't see you until I came closer. Your back was to me, your hair twisted into a messy bun stabbed with a ballpoint pen. The table was covered with papers and a yellow sleeve of candy, but you were just sitting there, your profile turned toward the window.

I asked, "What's wrong?" and you jumped about a foot.

You turned, hand to your chest, and saw me at the door. We'd already been introduced, but we'd not really had the chance to talk. You said, "I can't stand not being able to go outside."

Now, having seen where you were raised, I understand why those low ceilings and darkened streets made you claustrophobic.

I said, "I might have a solution. But first, I've got to eat." I paused. "Have you eaten?"

You shook your head and grinned. "Just chocolate."

So I finished warming up a pot of leftover rice and beans and divided a ripe avocado between the two bowls. I asked you to follow me, and though you looked wary, you did so without question. You must've really been desperate.

Balancing our supper, I led you up the dark cement stairs, past the women's section, and then the men's. We were sneaking around like teenagers, and maybe that illicit feeling was partly why we enjoyed it. We were weary of juggling the responsibilities of adults. I led you to the trapdoor leading to the roof, and I passed you the steaming plates until I had propped the door and worked my lanky body outside. You came out, then, and we sat on the blanket one of the other staff members had forgotten. We ate our humble meal with our fingers because I'd forgotten to bring forks. You told me you wanted to become a writer, and I told you I wanted to become a doctor, and you laughed because I was still in my doctor scrubs. But then I grew serious and admitted that sometimes I became overwhelmed by the number of my patients, those sick, orphaned babies who were all in my care. I admitted that reality was proving far more complicated than the dream, and though I loved being a doctor, I didn't know if I was making the kind of difference I had envisioned when I was young. You touched my hand, then held it, and I looked at you as, somewhere in the city, a confused rooster crowed.

HOW THE LIGHT GETS IN—PREVIEW

I barely knew you, Ruth, but I knew I was beginning to fall for you. So I hope you can see that, though my proposal may seem sudden, my love for you is sincere.

*Yours,
Chandler*

FROM CHAPTER 3



THE BARN DOORS WERE SLID OPEN because the lantern was not giving off enough light for Elam to work. Elam usually didn't notice when it became bad for things to remain the same—to the point his sister, Laurie, had to notify him when it was time to buy new clothes or boots—but using outdated equipment was another story. Decades of successful crops had allowed Driftless Valley Farm to grow, but the farm's demands had grown with this success. Therefore, Elam managed two hundred acres with the same equipment his grandfather had used to manage fifty. To say this was an inconvenience was an understatement. So far, Elam and his men had been able to get by, but each year, and with each additional bed, the challenge became more intense.

“Elam?”

At the sound of his name, Elam looked up and viewed Ruth's silhouette framed by the moonlit fields behind her. His chest hitched. He steadied himself by gripping one of

the harvester's rusted tines. He was unsettled each time he saw her, and though he was often unsettled when he had to talk to someone who wasn't immediate family, he knew this was different. Sometimes, he could talk to Ruth with an ease he hadn't experienced with anyone but his sister, and yet that ease dissipated when she caught him off guard, like now.

"Ru . . . uth?" He set down his oiled rag and moved the lantern to the worktable.

"Sorry to bother you," she said.

"You . . . you're no bother."

Ruth rubbed her arms like she was cold. "Laurie told me you might need a few extra hands for the harvest." She paused. "Is that true?"

Picking up the rag, Elam resumed oiling the tines. Was that true? Laurie knew he had long ago settled the details of the cranberry harvest, and yet he sensed it took a lot out of Ruth to ask. Plus, how could he turn away his cousin's widow? He would just make it work.

"Ye . . . yes," he said. "We're shorthanded this year. Do you think you can help?"

Ruth said, "Only if you'll deduct room and board from my wages."

When Aunt Mabel had asked if she and her daughter-in-law and two young grandchildren could stay at his house after the funeral, Elam's only misgiving was that he was not the hosting type. Laurie had convinced him it would be fine and had deep-cleaned his house and purchased a few items to spruce up the place, which hadn't received a woman's touch since their mother died.

Though this had helped, Laurie was not the one who lived here. When it came down to it, Elam was the one who had to make his guests feel welcome. And now that guest wanted to repay him for his poor hospitality. Up in heaven, his mother must be shaking her head.

“Ruth, you are . . . are family,” he said. “My home is your home.”

Ruth looked down, her hair falling forward, so he could see the curls were tighter at the nape of her neck. “Thank you for that,” she said.

“You’re welcome.” He focused on oiling the same tine. “The harvest starts tomorrow and lasts for about . . . three days. I’ll see if I can find a pair of waders to fit you.”

“Great. I’m looking forward to it.”

He smiled in reply to hers and pushed up the brim of his straw hat to watch her walk out of the barn. She turned at the door, and he was embarrassed until he realized she couldn’t see him in the dark.

“I’m grateful, Elam,” she said. “For all you’ve done.”

He nodded. “You’re welcome, Ruth.”

This time, the words flowed.



AUGUST 27, 2012

Dearest Chandler,

There is no need to apologize. You have done nothing wrong. I guess I just always envisioned my life progressing in a certain manner, and here we’re discussing marriage

without even knowing if we're in love. I know you think you're in love, but I am afraid you might be in love with the idea of me, rather than who I really am.

I can be mean, Chandler, and selfish.

I am an only child, and though I was not spoiled with material possessions—or even attention—I am not accustomed to sharing my space or time. This will probably sound like I'm trying to push you away, but I am not. I just do not take marriage lightly.

Marriage is not a decision you make on impulse or because that person looks good or makes you feel good at the time. Marriage joins two souls on an ever-changing journey. I thought—when I was growing up and knew better than the adults in my life—that my parents should just get divorced. But I didn't understand that they were committed to loving each other, and that commitment included loving their best and their worst selves. We are all chameleons, Chandler; changing—for good or for bad—as our environments change, and I don't want you to be disappointed when life happens around us, and I evolve to accommodate it.

If you read this and still want me, I will come back to Children's Haven . . . and to you; if you read this, and you want nothing else to do with me, I will understand.

*Fondly,
Ruth*

FROM CHAPTER 5



RUTH STOOD AT THE WINDOW and watched Elam as he doused himself by the well pump. She no longer believed people were good for the sake of being good. They were good because they had ulterior motives: the hippie Peace Corps volunteer who just wanted to defer his student loans; the college-age “missions team” who flew down over spring break to repaint the girls’ floor of the orphanage and instead acted like they were indeed on spring break: pairing off with each other, smoking in the alley behind Bethel House, blasting music at all hours, so that the baby, Vi, cried. Only half the floor got painted before they had to leave, and the old and new paint combination was such an eyesore, Chandler offered to paint the rest, so that Pepto-Bismol pink seemed wedged beneath his nails for years. And then there was the youngish doctor who wanted to patch lives back together overseas because that was easier than to watch his own life

unraveling. Yes, Ruth had been skeptical about humanity long before she found herself a penniless widow with two small children underfoot.

When she came here, to Driftless Valley Community, two weeks ago, she was too shell-shocked to maintain her guard. Now, though, she wondered if her mother-in-law had been adamant about having the funeral in Wisconsin because she had her own ulterior motives.

Ruth seethed. How could her mother-in-law be so insensitive? And yet Ruth had to admit that Elam had nothing to do with Mabel's plan. That had been apparent when she came into the kitchen and saw him standing there: his large limbs ungainly and cumbersome, as if they had grown in the past hour, and he no longer knew how to maintain his own space. His soft eyes had cut up to hers after she read the note for herself. She saw his face redden, so his already ruddy complexion became accentuated with two darker-red strips. A man who blushed.

For some reason, his innocence infuriated her. Elam was almost ten years her senior, whereas there had only been seven years between her and Chandler, but Elam seemed a decade younger, at least. She knew he had lost his mom as a teenager and seemed rather lonely; however, these were the only glitches on his life's plodding timeline.

But maybe the plodding timeline itself was an additional glitch.

Chandler would've believed that, at any rate.

Chandler had never been content just living a normal life. He wanted *adventure*, which he said in such a way that Ruth

knew it was meant to be italicized. But after they adopted Sofie, and Ruth got pregnant, her appetite for adventure waned. Chandler's appetite, if anything, only grew as domesticity clamped down, and at times she wondered if he would show up at Bethel House with a moped and an earring: an early midlife crisis because he'd found—with more than a little disappointment—that, italicized or not, any grand adventure became routine over time.

Ruth pulled the curtain back a little more. The light from the downstairs window played across Elam's torso as he tow-eled off while facing the yard. He was built so differently from her husband: broad shoulders, muscular back and arms, whereas Chandler was lean as a runner. This comparison made Ruth feel guilty, as if she were being unfaithful in her mind, but then she remembered her vows to Chandler lasted until "death do you part."

With his death, she was freed from such constraints. The realization didn't bring the comfort she would've anticipated when she and Chandler were at their worst, and the only way she thought she could escape from such a lifeless marriage was to have one of them die.

How had the two of them transformed from lovers to rivals, who—even in bed—stayed on opposite sides? How had they lost each other, and themselves, in just a few years while their parents had been married for forty-plus years before their spouses died? Ruth didn't pretend to have the answers, and considering how things had ended between her and Chandler, she probably would never learn. Ruth let the curtain drop. She didn't even know she was crying until she

touched the dampness on her cheeks. Wiping her face on her shirt, she went downstairs.

Elam walked in the front door, catching the screen so it wouldn't slam behind him.

As if he didn't want to disturb her.

"Hi," she said.

He looked at her. His silver hair curled over his shoulders, longer since it was wet. "Hi." His smile appeared self-conscious, but then Ruth really didn't know him well enough to decipher what kind of smile that was. "Should we . . . eat?" he asked.

Ruth nodded and walked in front of him into the kitchen. Most of the candles had burned down to warm puddles of wax pooled around the fake gold stands. Elam went over to the oven and grabbed a mitt from the right-hand drawer. He slid it on and opened the oven door. Ruth was surprised to see the pie wasn't burned to a crisp, considering the time it had taken her to clean up, but Elam must've had the forethought to turn the oven off.

"Smells delicious," Ruth said.

Elam nodded. "It's going to be . . . hard, going back to eggs . . . once Mabel leaves."

Ruth appreciated the safer topic. "Oh?" Her eyebrows rose. "Is that going to be soon?"

Elam walked back across the kitchen to fetch the china plates. It made his breath catch, to see his mother's English tea rose design, though he had no idea that's what kind of rose it was. He just knew the plates were pretty and delicate, like she had been. The china set hadn't been taken

from the cupboard since her death. Their family wasn't fine china-eating kind of people. It went to show how his mother had softened the edges of their stark and demanding life.

"I don't know," Elam said, scooping a steaming wedge of chicken and vegetables onto each of their plates. "Aunt Mabel hasn't . . . talked about it." Pieces of crust fell from the server and scattered across the top of the stove. He still felt clumsy in the kitchen, even after so many years on his own. For some reason, he felt even clumsier when Ruth was standing on the opposite side of the counter, arms folded, watching him juggle plates and a server and a quilted oven mitt, covered in buttercups. "That enough?" he said.

She nodded and took the plate. Together, they went back to the table. He quickly sat down, allowing Ruth to dictate her proximity. She took the end. As far away from him as possible. Shaking out a napkin, Elam draped it across his lap. He picked up a fork and started eating. He was ravenous, but, considering the fine china and candlesticks, didn't want to shovel it in like he usually did. Ruth, on the other hand, took massive bites. No doubt, after all that work, she was as ravenous as he. The guttering candle spoke into the silence. Elam didn't want to look at Ruth, in case that made her uncomfortable, but he was aware of her like he'd never been aware of anyone in his life. Damp hair framed her bare face. Her skin was luminous, her lashes nearly white without the mascara she typically used.

"Thank you for . . . all you did . . . today," he managed.

Ruth looked up from her plate and a wave of hair slid over

one eye. Brushing it away, she smiled. “No problem. It was enjoyable, actually. Good for me to stay occupied.”

“You’ll have another . . . opportunity. We’re starting the dry beds . . . tomorrow,” he said.

“Which do you prefer?”

“Dry.” He took a sip of water. “But wet harvest is . . . faster. If the berries are used for sauce and juice, which most . . . are, wet makes more sense. The dry berries are perfect for the . . . the local markets.” He paused and used his fork to gesture to the cranberry bread and cranberry crisp on the counter. “I see Aunt Mabel’s already making use of . . . the harvest.”

“Do you like it?”

“Cranberry bread?”

She smiled. “No, your job.”

He took another bite of pie. “For the most part. There are good days and . . . bad, like any occupation.” He glanced up. “You caught me on a bad day, when I was fixing the . . . pump.”

“I would’ve never known you were having a bad day.”

Elam poked at a green bean. “I’m not very good at showing . . . emotion.”

“I’m not either,” she admitted. “The people around here probably wonder why I’m helping you with the cranberry harvest when my husband just died.”

“I don’t think they . . . wonder that,” he said. “Besides—” he paused, smiling—“Germans are known more for their . . . work ethic than for their demonstrative behavior.”

“Well,” Ruth said, “we Irish *are* known for our ‘demonstrative behavior,’ as you call it. But it seems to have skipped

my genes.” She looked down, frowning slightly, and broke off a piece of crust. “Actually, that’s not really true. I used to be very demonstrative, if that’s the right word. My mom often complained that I wore my heart on my sleeve. But I guess, as I grew older, I learned how to hide it.”

“Are you glad you . . . did?”

Ruth looked at Elam and he wondered what she was thinking. “Honestly, I’m not sure I really like who I am at the moment.”

Elam looked back down at his plate. “For what it’s . . . worth,” he said, “I do.”



JUNE 2, 2016

Chandler,

I know you didn't hear me tonight, when I told you how empty I am, or you would not be sleeping. I could feel you dismissing me even as I stood before you, holding the shampoo bottle, with the front of my pajama shirt damp with the milk my body had let down as the baby cried and you and I screamed. Is screamed the right word? I'm never sure what to call it when we fight.

I am the one who raises my voice, and you always remind me not to yell in the same imperious tone you use with Sofie. You are no longer a safe place, Chandler—a vessel I can pour my thoughts into—“I am not even thirty, Chandler, and I'm as used up, as empty as

this!”—so I am writing them down here because I don’t want you to read them, and you would never dream of reading my journal. I would like to believe this is because you respect my privacy, but it’s really because you’re not interested enough in my thoughts to take the time to read them.

How have I become so cynical? So needy? How have we so quickly grown apart? Did it start in the earliest days of our marriage as we struggled to become an instant family of three? There were times when I felt this wall building between us: each sharp word, a brick; each time we did not take the time to connect, the mortar that held those bricks together. Days would pass like that, but I would wait them out, knowing that eventually a breakthrough would come. But now the breakthroughs are fewer and farther apart, and that wall between us is growing higher—word by word, brick by brick.

If I had been kinder to you—if I had hugged you more, from behind, as you brushed your teeth at the sink, my face against your warm back, my eyes still swollen with sleep—would it have made a difference? If I had cooked more meals, so you would’ve come home from the clinic and seen me there—in my apron and pearls with your children all fresh-scrubbed and smiling, Sofie sitting at the table with folded hands—would you want to come home more? Would your home be more of a solace than that sterile clinic full of children whose needs also can never be met? If I had never turned you away, would you now return to me? I don’t know, and so

JOLINA PETERSHEIM

here I sit in our bed, wishing I could do things over, but too angry to begin.

I want us back, Chandler. I want the us back, who we were back then, but a part of me realizes we cannot go back. To go back would be to give up our girls and the life we've made together. So I suppose I wish I could go back to what we were while maintaining what we have.

And what we have is great—I know this, deep down. I just miss you. I miss you, and I miss the love that we shared in the beginning. I miss you, and you're sleeping right here.

Your Ruth

FROM CHAPTER 7



SPLASHES AND SQUEALS nearly drowned the sound of Mabel reading the now-censored *Eloise Wilkin Stories* to the girls as they played in the bathtub. In the kitchen, Ruth cleared the table. Elam plugged the sink, squirted dish soap into the rising water, and used one large paddle hand to work up some suds. Ruth came over with a stack of plates, set them on the counter on his left-hand side. He didn't say anything; he didn't even quietly hum like he usually did when he was cleaning in the wake of Mabel's latest kitchen upheaval. Ruth didn't say anything either.

Four hours ago, he'd touched her hand.

Next, Ruth brought over the tray crowded with mason jars of varying levels of water. Elam couldn't stand it anymore. He turned to her, lifted out his foamy hands to take the tray. She stared at the center of his chest. There was about a foot between them. Chandler had been the same height.

Elam wondered if Ruth thought of this when she stood next to him. Or in front of him, like now. But it wasn't fair to any of them to think this way.

"Are you okay?" Elam asked.

To Elam's surprise, and perhaps Ruth's, her fierce determination not to cry wasn't enough. "No," she said, wiping her eyes. "I'm not okay. I don't know how to help my daughter."

Elam took the jars and upended them in the sink, where they were sucked down into the warm, soapy pool. He looked at Ruth and saw the sorrow rewriting the laugh lines around her mouth. He wanted to make her laugh again, but he wasn't sure that was his place, or that Ruth would let him close enough to try. It was a miracle she'd allowed him close that once.

So, instead of making her laugh, Elam pulled open the drawer beneath the sink. He took out a clean dishtowel and handed it to Ruth. She smiled and dabbed beneath her eyes. "You're such a good man, Elam," she said. "Really. It's just that I—I don't know what I'm doing."

Elam smiled gently, took back the dishcloth she was holding out. He folded it and folded it until the soft cotton became a hard little square. "You don't need to know," he said. "I just want to get to know you. To be your . . . friend."

Ruth looked up at him. "I could sure use a friend these days," she said.



Chandler had no idea the remains belonging to an Afghan soldier named Shahid Khan were buried in Wisconsin, and

that Chandler John Neufeld Senior and Junior were legally declared dead. He had no idea he was in an intensive care unit in Kabul, Afghanistan, or that he'd made the four-hour trip by ambulance, which was like riding on a rickety buckboard. Instead, his mind drifted as morphine moved like blood through the parched tributaries of his veins. Chandler was back in the airport in Bogotá, where he'd last seen his wife and daughters. It was early morning, and the flower vendors were setting up their roadside stands. Chandler parked the battered van he'd borrowed from the director, Janice, and helped Ruth and the girls inside.

Dew clung to the vendors' tissue-wrapped blossoms, and the cloying scent of roses filled the air. Chandler looked at one bouquet as he passed, remembering how he used to buy from another vendor near the orphanage when he and Ruth were dating. But when Ruth noticed him reaching for his wallet, she said, "Don't. My hands are already full."

His hand dropped. Ruth scraped Sofie's hair into a ponytail. Fine curls were cropping up around the child's face from the light rain that had christened them on their way inside. Chandler helped roll the suitcases up to the check-in station, and then stood back with the girls while Ruth printed off their boarding passes. The airport was crowded for four in the morning: an elderly man, dapper in a pressed suit, held the hand of a little girl in a frothy dress the same green as the bouquets' tissue paper. A teenager openly cried while hugging an older woman with waist-length hair. Two hikers in tired, earth-toned clothes carried backpacks they would surely try to cram into overhead bins.

Everyone did indeed revolve around the still point of his family.

Staring down at his beautiful daughters, and then over at his beautiful wife, he questioned his choice to remain in Colombia while they went to Ireland on their own. Maybe he could fly over in a few days, once he got things settled at the orphanage and his luggage packed for Afghanistan, but then Ruth returned with the three boarding passes. She looked at him, and her eyes were blank of emotion, which revealed the depth of emotion taking place within.

“Say good-bye to your daddy,” she said, swinging Vi up on her hip. “We need to go.”

Tension radiated between them, but Chandler didn’t know how to address what needed addressing, and Ruth seemed beyond conversation as it was. Instead, they hovered around each other, each of them rooted to a child, who clung to their legs.

Chandler touched Ruth’s back. “Let me know when you get there,” he said.

She nodded and looked at the gate. Vi reached for him. He took her from Ruth and hugged her tight. She clasped his neck with her hot, dimpled hands. Chandler’s eyes welled. Clearing his throat, he kissed Vi and passed her back to Ruth.

Sofie immediately pressed herself against his legs. “Come with, Dada,” she said.

“Baby, you know I can’t.”

She looked up at him then—big brown eyes brimming—and he felt like the worst father in the world. How could he be out of his children’s lives for six months? How could he

leave his wife to deal with all that was ahead of her? Ruth, no doubt, was asking herself these same questions, and he hated that she felt abandoned by him while he was still standing right here. And yet, she knew his dreams before she married him; she even encouraged him to obtain them.

But all of that changed once they had children.

Afterward, *Ruth* changed. Her need for adventure was replaced with her need for a nest; her need for spontaneity replaced with her need for stability. Chandler perfectly matched her former self, but the motherhood version did not so easily match him, and he felt this; she felt this; Chandler was sure the children felt this too, for even if Ruth and Chandler did not openly fight, the strain between them was palpable, even to a five-year-old and a toddler.

Chandler had already hugged and kissed his daughters, and therefore the last person he had to say good-bye to was her. Ruth. He looked at his wife and suddenly had a vision of the first time he saw her at the orphanage. He was crossing the stone courtyard when he heard children's voices, harmonizing with the bells marking the half hour. It was a song he'd never heard, sung in a language he could not understand. He walked toward the room and saw Ruth, standing at the front of the classroom while waving a piece of chalk like a conductor's wand. She had long, wavy hair and freckled skin. She wore a peasant top with a shin-length blue skirt and ballet flats. Chandler was not the type to notice a woman's appearance, much less her clothes, but he found this woman intriguing. She noticed him standing in the doorway and smiled.

It was a warm smile that forced the recipient to smile in

return. He was no exception. A few of the children noticed him there as well and stopped singing to look. But he was a fixed junction on the unsteady track of their lives, and therefore he was beneath the rapt attention they paid the new teacher. Still, Chandler didn't want to disturb the class more than he had, so he stepped backward, out of the cool classroom doorway, and before he'd finished crossing the courtyard to his office, he chided himself for not checking to see if there was a ring on her hand.

Chandler compared that woman to the one standing before him in the airport. Five years of sleep deprivation, for Sofie still had night terrors, showed in the pallor of Ruth's skin and in the dark circles ringing her eyes. He wanted to tell her he was sorry he wasn't the man she needed him to be, and that life seemed difficult for her of late. But he didn't want her to view this confession as a final effort for intimacy, and he wasn't sure how it would be received. Therefore, he just leaned forward and kissed her. The kiss was perfunctory and landed near her mouth rather than on it. It seemed they'd been kissing each other like this for years. Where was the passion of yesterday? The few weeks after they were married, but before they adopted Sofie, that they could send each other walking swiftly back to Bethel House with just one look?

"I love you, Ruth," he said, his voice a whisper near her ear.

She turned her head away from him, and he could see the sheen of tears in her eyes. "Love you, too," she said. "Just come back to us, okay?"

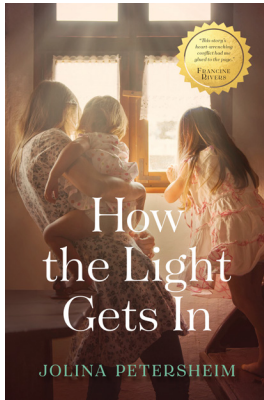
Lying now in the hospital bed in Kabul, he wondered

if this request was for more than just his physical return to their family, but for his emotional return as well. He knew Ruth was not the only one who'd changed with the years. He told himself he was an excellent father to his girls, and he was, when he could be there, but he was no longer an excellent husband. They had drifted apart, and he could not pinpoint exactly why or when that drifting had happened. All he knew was that his first glimpse of Ruth in the classroom, teaching orphaned children a Gaelic nursery rhyme, was one of the images he was going to conjure forth to help him recover. And then he was going to return to his children and his wife.

We hope you enjoyed your extended preview of

How the Light Gets In

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