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KAREN
KINGSBURY

SOMEONE
LIKE YOU

A Novel

ATRIA BOOKS

New York London Toronto Sydney New Delhi

Dedicated to my husband, Donald, and our beautiful family. The journey of life is breathtaking surrounded by each of you. And every minute together is time borrowed from eternity. I love you more than words. And to God, Almighty, who has—for now—blessed me with these.

1



Like a tumor in her chest, for twenty-two years Brooke Baxter West had carried the lie.

Every morning she woke to the reality of it. She lived and loved around it and tried not to think about the way it pressed against her heart and soul and how it sometimes took her breath. But the bombshell that was her very life had never felt more ominous, never consumed her the way it did today.

Here in Amon G. Carter Stadium at her daughter Maddie's graduation from Texas Christian University.

Brooke slid a little closer to her husband, Peter. He was on her side, at least that. She put her arm around their younger daughter, Hayley. Brooke's dad and stepmom were here, too—John and Elaine Baxter. Also Maddie's longtime boyfriend, Connor Flanigan.

All six of them sat in the stands together, thrilled that the day had finally come. Brooke glanced at Connor, at the anticipation in his expression and the way his eyes locked onto the place midfield where Maddie sat with her class. The boy had loved Maddie for years. He'd already talked to Peter. The engagement was coming. Probably as soon as they returned to Bloomington. Maybe even at the party the extended family was throwing for Maddie.

A party happening tomorrow night.

She drew a deep breath and leaned into Peter's shoulder. Graduates were still streaming into the stadium, still filling the seats while a marching band played from the bleachers across the field. The ceremony wouldn't begin for another ten minutes at least. "Can you believe it?" Brooke turned to her husband. "When did she grow up?" Brooke found their daughter amidst the sea of

students on the field. Tan high heels and a white sundress beneath her navy gown.

“One day at a time.” Peter shaded his eyes and looked at the field. “Every morning moved her closer to this day. Diapers and pigtails, homework and prom dates. All of it went way too fast.” Peter took Brooke’s hand and sat a little straighter. His smile barely lifted the corners of his mouth. “I’m proud of her. All she’s accomplished.”

He was right. Better to think about Maddie’s success than Brooke’s own weighty lie. Maddie had started her college career as a dancer. Back then all she talked about was Broadway and the New York City Ballet. But midway through her sophomore year she found a different passion.

Working with animals.

On breaks from school, Maddie had volunteered at the Humane Society and spent twenty hours a week at a local veterinarian’s office. Last summer she interned at the Indianapolis Zoo in the animal husbandry division and now she was waiting for a call from her supervisor about a more long-term position.

“I like the stripes.” Brooke’s dad grinned at her from two seats down. “She’s easy to spot.”

“That she is.” Brooke smiled down at their daughter, her cap decked in black-and-white zebra stripes. “She should hear about the position by the end of the week.”

Hayley nodded. “Maddie is a zoo worker. I know it ... I already talked to Jesus.”

Of course she had. Brooke patted Hayley’s hand. “You’re such a good sister, Hayley.”

She smiled. “I try.”

For a long moment Brooke studied her other daughter. Hayley was only a few years younger than Maddie, a pretty blonde with special needs because of a near-drowning accident when she was only three. Hayley had a job at the local market with a group of friends who shared her limitations. She also had a boyfriend. But still Brooke wondered.

Was Hayley’s accident a punishment from God? His way of repaying Brooke for the lie that at the time of Hayley’s accident was still taking root? Brooke

dismissed the thought, the way she always did. The idea was ridiculous. Of course God hadn't punished Brooke and Peter by allowing harm to come to Hayley.

Right?

Brooke drew a quick breath. She and Peter should've said something by now. It was that simple. They had planned to tell Maddie before she started kindergarten and again the day after her tenth birthday. But there never seemed to be a right moment. Time passed and the summer before high school became the perfect time to sit her down and tell her the news.

But again the talk never happened.

Now Maddie was graduating from college and still she didn't know the truth. Brooke pressed her free hand to her stomach. She and Peter were doctors. They ran a pediatric clinic near downtown Bloomington. She better than most people knew the toll stress could take on a person.

Carrying a lie like this one could cause an actual tumor. Science had proven that.

The stadium was filling up. Brooke met Peter's eyes again. He wasn't thinking about the lie. Not today, in the midst of such a highlight. The falsehood wasn't on his mind at all, at least it didn't seem like it. Peter's expression grew softer. "I blink and I can see us again, holding her for the first time that day at the hospital."

"Mmmm." Brooke nodded. Labor with Maddie had taken twenty hours. But holding her that first time made her forget every minute of it. She angled her face, her eyes still locked on his. "Forever in my heart."

Brooke stared off. No matter what came out of her mouth, times like this—milestones and major moments—she could barely think about anything but the lie. These moments were totally different for Peter. He seemed to focus on anything but the truth. And Brooke never wanted to ruin the mood. But how could she talk about the truth with Maddie if she couldn't first discuss it with Peter?

Every now and then they would both be on the same page. Brushing their teeth, getting ready for bed, and the topic would come up. When were they

going to tell her? How were they going to break the news? Together they would agree on the following weekend or the next Christmas break.

But when those times came, the last thing they wanted was to ruin Maddie's happiness.

Brooke let the years roll back. It was on a day like this that the whole thing had started. Brooke's brother Luke had been about to graduate from Indiana University and Brooke was sitting with Peter and her family when Chad Daniels, a fellow doctor and friend, approached them.

"Can we talk?" Chad had been Peter's friend since medical school. He and his father ran a fertility clinic in town. That day Chad had looked serious. So Brooke and Peter excused themselves from the group and moved with Chad a few rows back to an empty section in the stadium. When it was just the three of them, Chad pressed on. "My father has a colleague who has gained ownership of three frozen embryos. Siblings. He thought ... you might be interested."

Back then, Brooke and Peter had been trying for years to have a baby. Their families would've been shocked to know they couldn't get pregnant. With their busy careers everyone just assumed Brooke and Peter weren't ready for babies yet. Their struggle with having a child was something they hadn't told anyone except Chad and his father.

And so they had met a few times with Chad in the weeks leading up to Luke's graduation. The plan was to take the least invasive steps at first, and if they still had no baby, to move toward in vitro fertilization. But there was a problem. Peter's numbers made even that a remote possibility.

Brooke could still remember the way her heart had skipped a beat when Chad began the quiet conversation that day. Frozen embryos? Neither of them had considered such a thing. Peter spoke first. "You mean, taking someone else's frozen embryos and ..."

"Implant them in Brooke." Chad had never seemed more serious. "It's only been done a handful of times, but with a relatively high success rate."

That day, in the most surreal conversation Brooke could remember before or since, Chad explained that a couple in Portland, Oregon, had successfully delivered a baby through IVF. But the birth was complicated, so the couple decided they were finished having children. But there was a problem.

Three frozen embryos remained.

Tiny little souls on ice, ones that the couple wouldn't dream of having washed down a medical office sink. "As you know, embryos are very small children." Chad had looked intently at them. "That's what I believe, anyway." He paused. "My dad told me to see if you were interested. Before he found another couple."

"Has the Portland couple signed a release form?" Peter leaned over his knees and stared at Chad. "Is there even paperwork for this kind of thing?"

Chad nodded. "It's new, but yes. The Portland couple has officially terminated their rights to the embryos and signed them over to a doctor in Oregon. That was five years ago. The babies have been in a deep freeze canister since then."

"And they're still viable?" Peter had looked doubtful. "Embryos on ice that long?"

"All research suggests they are." Chad had shrugged. "A few weeks ago that doctor met my dad at a conference. He'd sort of forgotten about the three embryos until he and my dad talked. He found out my father and I work with infertility." Chad took a breath. "He signed over the embryos to our clinic so we could find a willing couple."

"How would that work with us?" Peter shook his head. "The babies already belong to your clinic."

"It's temporary. We would sign rights to you and Brooke ... if you're interested." Chad took a breath. "It's a transfer of property, technically. You would sign paperwork at implantation." His expression had darkened. "There is one thing. The Portland couple wants complete secrecy surrounding this."

Understandably the pair had known how rare embryo adoption was and that the media might turn the situation into a circus. "You two would have permission to tell your child or children, of course. And any close family members. But otherwise you'd have to keep the details to yourself. Any baby you might have from the embryos would not have permission to find his or her biological parents, and the biological parents have committed to never look for any children that might come from this."

Secrecy had seemed like a small concession at the time. Peter and Brooke promised to talk about the possibility and get back to Chad. But in the end there was nothing to talk about. If Brooke took the appropriate hormones, and if she allowed Chad's father—Dr. Daniels—to surgically implant the three embryos, she could be pregnant in a matter of months.

Which was exactly what happened.

Dr. Daniels implanted all three frozen embryos into Brooke's uterus and before Brooke and Peter had time to explain the situation to their families, she was expecting. Not three babies, but one. One precious child.

After that, with everyone they knew congratulating Brooke and Peter on the pregnancy, it had seemed awkward to talk about how the baby got there. No one had ever heard of embryo adoption. Why worry their families? And in an attempt to honor the other couple's wishes, Brooke and Peter made a decision. Better to keep the details to themselves. That way they wouldn't be in danger of violating the contract.

Besides, it was easy to believe the baby really was Brooke's. The child had grown inside her, after all. When the tiny infant kicked, Brooke felt her little feet, and week by week she watched her belly grow. What could be more real than that?

When they found out the baby was a girl, they chose the most obvious name.

Madison. Gift of God. Which was the only way to describe how Brooke had gone from infertility to motherhood so quickly.

They were always going to tell Maddie, really they were. But most days it was easier to go along with the lie, pretend Maddie was their own flesh and blood. Maddie looked like them, after all. And Brooke even had the stretch marks to prove it.

Two years later, Hayley was a surprise. A natural pregnancy. Dr. Daniels told them that sometimes after an embryo adoption, a woman's body is able to get pregnant. For Brooke and Peter their second baby was simply a miracle. Another gift from God.

But somehow Brooke and Peter fell away from God. Too busy, too academic. They had the children they wanted so God fell by the wayside. Not until after

Hayley fell into the swimming pool at a birthday party did Brooke and Peter run back to the faith they'd started with.

And even then they didn't tell Maddie the truth.

The memories faded as the familiar refrains of "Pomp and Circumstance" filled the stadium. Brooke stared at Maddie again. She would tell Connor yes if he asked her tomorrow. So Maddie was about to get married. Which meant she would likely have babies of her own one day. And then she would *have* to know the truth.

Please don't hate me, baby girl. God, please help her not to hate me.

Now these twenty-two years later, Brooke had no idea how she and Peter would break the news to Maddie. How could she tell her daughter, the one she gave birth to, that she had biological parents in Oregon? That she wasn't a part of the Baxter family or the West family, like she'd always thought.

And that everything she's ever believed about her life was not the truth, but a lie.

A terrible, cancerous, all-consuming lie.