



A MOTHER'S GOODBYE

Reading Group Guide

Discussion Questions

1. Are you sympathetic toward Heather and her situation at the beginning of the story? Do you feel adoption was her best choice? Why do you think she chose Grace as the adoptive mother?
2. Whom do you empathize with more, Heather or Grace? Why?
3. What are the difficulties and challenges in the women's relationship throughout the story? How do they both change? What do you think they could have done differently to make things easier between them?
4. Do you think Heather was justified in reconsidering the terms of the adoption, and making it open? What about Grace's reaction?
5. How do both Heather and Grace show their love for Isaac? What is different about it?
6. How are Heather's three daughters and her husband, Kevin, affected by the choices she makes—first to give Isaac up for adoption, and then to make the adoption open? Do you think Heather is aware of how her actions have affected her family?
7. How does Grace's cancer diagnosis change the women's relationship? Would you call them friends by the end of the story? Why or why not?
8. Do you think Heather was right in not taking Isaac back in the end?
9. How do you see Stella's role in the story?
10. What would you do in this situation if you were Heather? If you were Grace?

A Conversation with Kate Hewitt

What was the inspiration for this story? Do you have any experience of adoption yourself?

I have always been fascinated with the increasingly complicated dynamics surrounding motherhood, especially regarding issues of adoption, surrogacy, and fertility. The lines delineating families have become blurred, for better or worse, and I enjoy exploring the gray area that results, and seeing how it affects women in particular. While I personally don't have any experience with adoption, I have friends who have either adopted or been adopted, and I spoke with them as I was writing the story, because it is always so important to me to get the emotions right. If anything, my own experience is probably closer to Heather's. Although I have not been in as desperate a situation as she is, I do know what it is like to have a lot of kids and not so much money!

Grace and Heather are opposites in many ways. Do you think this is the result of their very different socioeconomic situations or is there more to it?

I certainly think their socioeconomic situations have affected, and in Heather's case limited, their choices and personalities, as they would anyone's. I think there is more to it than that, though—Grace has been shaped by the death of her mother, and the love of her father, while Heather has been by her family's love and needs. I think so much plays into who we are and who we become—our families, our communities, our opportunities and limitations—and while Grace and Heather are very different, it was important to me that they were both strong in their own ways, even as they learned through moments of weakness.

Can you say what happens to Heather and her family after the end of the book? Does she see Isaac again, and do they continue to have a relationship?

I tend not to think too much about what happens to my characters after the story ends; in some way I want to give them the privacy to live their own lives! As I was writing the end of the story for Heather, it felt important to me that *she* didn't know whether she would see him again, and she had made peace with that. However, I will say I like to think that she would have seen him, and that they would have continued to have a relationship of some kind.

Grace and Heather form an unlikely friendship in the crucible of Grace's illness. Do you think there is any other way they could have become friends?

Honestly, I don't think they could have become friends in any other way, and that is an important element of their story. I believe it often must take extremely challenging and difficult circumstances to bring certain people together, and that is part of the blessing that can emerge out of suffering and grief.

Both Heather and Grace face pressures of different kinds. Which woman do you think has the more challenging circumstances?

At the start of the story, Heather certainly seems like the one who is really struggling, with her financial hardships, the strained relationship with her husband, Kevin, and of course her unexpected pregnancy. Yet Grace struggles on her own with immense loneliness, which is brought into stark clarity when she is diagnosed with cancer. I think both women's lives are equally challenging in very different ways, and I think that is part of what I wanted to explore. Everyone struggles, to one degree or another, and we need to empathize rather than criticize or condemn.

What is a typical writing day for you?

As I write this, we are entering our fourth month of lockdown, and so it feels like there is no typical day for anything! However, normally I get my youngest two children to school, walk the dogs, and then sit down with a cup of coffee and try to write for two or three hours. My goal has always been three thousand words a day, which is one chapter. Then the next day, I'll polish that chapter before writing any more. When I'm writing a book, the story tends to consume me, so I need to write pretty quickly because that level of intensity just isn't sustainable!