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Notes from the Heart Healer

By Douglas Barr

Okay. We are so late, Charlie!
George is gonna kill us for sure this time.
Okay, come on, baby.
Let's go, let's get out.
George, I'm so sorry,
but you know Charlie's been colicky,
and he woke up at, like,
and, of course,
I didn't have anything to give him,
and on top of that,
the drug store was closed,
- so I had to drive all the way to...
- Just save it, okay, Violet?
You're looking awful.
Well, I feel awful.
Okay, just listen to me...
No, no, no, don't start up with that.
There's nothing you can say that I haven't
heard at least a million times before.
I've done what I can to help you out here,
you being a single mom and all, but...
I know, George, and I
appreciate everything...
Just let me finish, okay?
The bottom line is...
Who's that?
Your replacement.
George, I need this job...
I need someone that I can count on
to show up, maybe even on time
every once in a while.
Look, I've given you
a lot of chances here, Violet.
But I got a business to run, okay?
I know you do.
But I don't have any savings,
and between formula, and diapers,
and medicine, I can't...
I've already advanced
you two weeks' salary.
The best I can do is just
forget you even owe me.
Appreciate that.
Yeah.

Well, would it be okay, you think,
if I stay in the back room?
Just till I get something else?
Back room comes with the job.
You know that, Violet.
The new girl, she...
She's got her stuff in the car,
and she wants to move in
at the end of her shift, so...
Violet...
it's gas money.
Help you and Charlie get on up the road.
Have a great day.
- Hi!
- Dot!
How are you?
Perfect, now that you're here.
You know, I had forgotten
how pretty Constant Harbor is.
A little less so in the middle of winter.
I have to admit, I was surprised when
you decided to stay on
after your mom passed away.
I mean, I thought you would have
sold her little shop
and gone back to your
fancy Seattle law firm.
Practicing law here's the
same as in the city,
except the egos and the settlements
are quite a bit smaller.
Oh, my goodness.
- We are all ready to go, aren't we?
- Yup.
And I got to tell you how much I appreciate
you ending your book tour
with a signing in my little shop.
Come on, now. Any excuse to come visit you.
We've hardly even spoken to each other
since the wedding.
Yeah, which was...
What, a year already?
A year today.
And you're spending your first anniversary

with me instead of your hubby?
Well, you are my college roommate,
but I have to tell you,
if King were not stuck
covering a tournament on the East Coast...
Say no more.
As long as we get to catch up.
Which will have to wait. We gotta go.
- Go?
- To the radio station.
A celebrity like you
comes into town, and...
Well, you've got to suffer an interview
with the local literary critic.
Don't worry.
Lester is a pussycat,
and the good news is,
he had to buy your book to review it.
- Come, come, come, my dear darling one.
- You silly thing.
I thought I could manage, Zach.
I really did.
But now I don't know what I'm gonna do.
Need a hand moving your stuff out, Violet?
No, we're okay, George, thanks.
Okay, yeah, Charlie.
And our very special guest
today is relationship columnist
and best-selling author Peyton MacGruder.
Welcome to Book Faire, Peyton.
Thank you, Lester. It's nice to be here.
You've been writing an advice column,
"The Heart Healer,"
for a newspaper in North Carolina.
That's right.
And now you have edited your columns
into a sort of "best of" compendium?
Inspired by my husband.
King Danville,
the Pulitzer Prize-winning sports writer.
Yes, he convinced me that
people beyond my regular subscribers
might find them interesting.
Well, you've been on

best-seller lists all over the country,
so, I guess King was right.
Yes, I guess he was, much to my surprise.
Although, don't tell him I admitted that.
No, you don't!
No, you don't! Don't you take
that child out of his car seat!
Burt's gonna be home any second now.
You know how he gets
around bawling babies.
Yeah, nice to see you, too, Ma.
Night shifts and crying kids don't mix.
You can understand that.
I understand all right, about Burt's moods,
more than you want to know.
Don't you start, Violet.
Burt ain't much, but he's all I got.
I got nothing and I still don't envy you.
What is it you came for, Violet?
Well, I thought you might like
to see your grandson, is all.
You can't con me, girl.
Don't even try.
I got fired this morning.
I'm surprised the old geezer
kept you around as long as he did.
Look, I think
I'm coming down with something.
Charlie's still really colicky
and he won't sleep.
I got no place to live,
and less than \$30 to my name,
and a baby to feed.
Maybe it's time to face facts.
Give Charlie to someone
who can care for him.
- Mommy, please...
- I don't have any money to give.
If I did, I would, which is why
you came by here in the first place,
'cause I'm a sucker.
Now, you get into that truck
and you get out of here
before Burt gets back

and we both end up homeless.
We only have a few minutes left, Peyton,
to talk about your column on
making tough decisions
under impossible circumstances.
So, let me ask you...
What was I thinking, Charlie?
Asking her for help.
Has there been a time in your own life
when circumstances left you unable to cope?
Yes.
And how did you react to the situation?
I relied on the advice of a loved one.
And if you hadn't had
that person's guidance?
My life would have definitely
taken a different path.
But then again, we have all had doors
slammed in our faces, haven't we?
Sometimes over and over again.
Amen to that!
When we meet someone
who's suffering through the dark days,
the right thing to do is to
make yourself available, to listen,
to counsel, to support,
and maybe just hold a hand.
God knows, Charlie,
we could use all of the above.
But if you would like to
meet Peyton MacGruder in person,
she will be signing copies of her new book
Notes From the Heart Healer,
this afternoon, at The Constant Bookworm,
in Constant Harbor, Washington.
Thank you so much.
What do you think, Charlie?
God trying to get our attention?
- Sorry about that.
- What?
Well, I saw your face
when Lester started getting personal.
And I know exactly which difficult
situation you were thinking about.

Yup, I guess you do.
Anyhow, you did a nice job of avoiding
the subject of your father's lousy advice.
I just adored the chapter on,
"Loving the Person in the Mirror. "
it made me think about myself
in a whole new way.
Well then, you are the reason
I wrote this book.
Thank you.
- Hi.
- Hi!
I heard you on the radio today.
I liked what you had to say.
Thanks.
And your book sounds real good, too.
Well, thank you.
So, are you from around here?
No.
Okay, what's your name?
It's Violet.
Violet.
Is everything okay, Violet?
Did you mean it, what
you said on the radio,
about helping people through rough times?
Yes.
Peyton!
Sorry to interrupt,
but a fan of yours has arrived,
and he's dying to say hello.
King! Oh, my gosh.
Wait just a minute, okay?
Oh, my gosh!
What a surprise.
I thought you were on the East Coast.
I canceled.
I couldn't bear to be away from you,
not today.
Thank you.
Maybe we'd better be a little more discreet.
Somebody here might tell your husband.
Trust me, this smart aleck is my husband,
King Danville.

And today is our first anniversary,
and his being here is a
total surprise to me.
I'll bet that your co-conspirator
in keeping everything a secret
is my sneaky friend... Where is she?
Happy anniversary...
Happy anniversary to you!
Congrats, guys.
- Thank you.
- Thank you.
Thank you.
Yes.
Hey, let's cut that cake
and get it passed out, right?
And buy the book.
That's why we're here.
That's why we're here.
I can't believe you're here.
Ms. MacGruder seemed real nice, Charlie.
I mean, I know I only met her for a second.
Hardly even exchanged a word, really.
Sometimes, you can just tell, you know?
I bet she would have helped us
if her husband hadn't shown up.
If it weren't for bad luck, we wouldn't
have any luck at all, huh, Charlie?
That's gonna change soon,
'cause it's gotta.
That's the last of your formula,
and we used the last of
our money to buy it.
Mama...
I know, baby. It makes me want to cry, too.
Hush, little baby, don't say a word.
Mama's gonna buy you a mockingbird.
And if that mockingbird don't sing...
I can't believe that they
call this a cottage.
It's so perfect. How did you ever find it?
Dot helped me out with that.
And the champagne? How did you...
Dot had it sent over.
And what exactly do you intend

to contribute to the festivities?

Well, let me think.

There's this.

Anything else?

Well, there's dinner.

I plan to contribute that, too.

In fact, I'll tell you what.

While I run to the store,
why don't you pamper yourself,
and when I get back, I will cook you
the best meal you have ever had.

Before...

Before what?

Before my last contribution,
which I'm going to need your help with.

And that would be?

Fireworks.

I'm sorry.

It's just not gonna work out this time.

Thank you. Thank you for coming out.

- Three of these, and...

- That's nice.

How about that? No?

- No, I'm sorry.

- Thanks for your time.

Hey, appreciate it.

She's as fast as she is pretty.

Just like my former wife.

- Harry Barders.

- King Danville.

- How you doing?

- Good.

You in the market for a boat, King?

- Is she for sale?

- Yup.

Proceeds to be split between my wife
and the guy she ran off with.

Ouch. Sounds like a sad story.

Sad and sordid,

but it could have a happy ending
for you, though.

I'll make you a heck of a deal.

There you go. Specs are on the back.

If you like what you read, come on back, and

we'll let you take it out and kick the tires.

Thanks.

I'll do that.

Hang on, baby.

Wow.

Do you buff up nice, or what?

I try my best,

but I fear I have competition
for your affection.

She does have her charms,

but they're nothing compared to yours.

Then why is she taped to the refrigerator?

Because she is for sale.

And?

And I thought she might be

fun for us to sail into our retirement.

Retirement?

Well, not right now, you know,
down the pike.

Yeah, like, 15 or 20 years down.

Well, it'll give us plenty of time
to hone our yachting skills.

Okay, I'm glad you're

so concerned about our future.

But wouldn't it be more exciting
to concentrate on the present?

Yes.

Yeah, I'm coming! I'm coming already!

Hello?

Hello?

Hello?

Violet?

Violet, if you're on the other end
of this line, you say something.

Violet!

Happy anniversary, honey.

Thank you, King, for
making this so special,
and for being so special.

And for your uncommonly good timing.

You cooked, I'll clean.

Your dad must be happy about
you getting accepted.

Yeah. I'll be the first one in the family

to go to college.

What are you doing, Vi?

I'm pregnant, Zach.

Are you mad?

Mad?

No.

I love you, Violet.

I want to marry you, have lots of babies,
just like we talked about.

We talked about it after
you finished college.

I'll still go, just not right away.

Well, what about money?

I mean, having a baby can't be cheap,
and we don't have, like,
insurance or anything.

Hey, you worry about having our baby.

I'll worry about paying for it.

Things are gonna turn out just
fine, Violet. You'll see.

They haven't, though, have they, Charlie?

Things haven't turned out fine at all.

God, please let Peyton MacGruder
be true to her words.

Dearest reader,

it's unfair that life-changing decisions
must often be made when we're young
and our well of wisdom is still shallow.
I was asked this morning how I have made
such critical choices when at my weakest,
emotionally and physically.

Sadly, the answer is, "Not well. "

I can only suggest that,
no matter how difficult,
we must strive to tap
what some call intuition
and others call revelation,
and by doing so, take responsibility
no matter how things turn out.

Be brave like your daddy was, Charlie.

I'll get myself together
and come back for you.

King? King, you'd better
come out here right now!

King!

Hey!

That's my truck!

"Please help me by
taking care of Charlie. "

That's it? That's all the note said?

And you didn't see anybody, or hear a car?

Nope. Whoever left the baby
had already taken off
by the time I opened the door.

Thanks.

Well,

Child Services can't get
anyone down here till next week,
so if there's absolutely nobody
who can offer temporary foster care,
I should take the kid down to Port Townsend
and leave him with the pediatric clinic.

All alone, you mean?

Well, they've got nurses
who'll keep an eye on him.

Yeah, I know that, but you know...

I can talk to Judge Gregor
and see if she might appoint you guys
as interim caregivers.

Us?

No. No, no. I was thinking, you know,
maybe you could take him and...

You've got to be kidding.

I don't know anything about babies.

Well, you know as much as I do.

Someone else raised my kid, remember?

I think we should do it.

Look, obviously,

whoever left him here chose us.

He's a baby, not a May Day basket.

You don't just select a house at random
and hope the people inside like kids.

Got a point.

I mean, it's more than likely
they chose you folks for a reason.

Come on, honey. It'll be fun.

It's just for a couple days.

Fun for you, maybe.

I do have a column to write.
How can you find
a more perfect lead line than,
"What would you do if somebody
left a baby on your doorstep?"
She's right. Your editor will love it.
Look, let me call the office,
see if I can't wangle
a few days off for both of us.
Great! Now that that's settled...
Dot, wait I minute, I didn't say that...
I will stop by the judge's house
on my way home, okay?
- Dot...
- It's okay.
Now, if you get any more visitors
in the night, you let me know.
If not, we'll talk again tomorrow.
It's the right thing to do, hon.
Look. Hey! Even Charlie here agrees.
Yup, in fact, he is so happy to be invited,
he brought you a special hostess gift.
You shouldn't be out here, girl.
It's dangerous!
I know.
My daughter would never forgive me
if I left you out here alone.
Where you trying to get to?
As far away as you're willing to take me.
All right, then. Climb on up here.
Okay, he was dropped off in a car seat,
which means that
whoever left him must
have a vehicle, right?
It would also mean whoever left him
could be a million miles away by now.
- Yeah.
- Here, take that.
Should've packed a Hazmat suit.
Wow, is that, like, normal?
I think so.
Okay, here we go.
Yeah, okay, I'm gonna let you
take care of business here,

and I'll go see if I can find something to fill the bottle.
Don't worry, champ, she'll get used to it.
- Here you go.
- You want to give it to him?
No.
You sure?
Yup, I'm sure.
You okay?
Want to talk about it?
I can't stop thinking about the baby's mother, about what she might be feeling right now. You know, it didn't matter that I was full of anti-depressants when I gave my baby away. I still carry that pain in my heart. I think when most people see a baby, they feel joy. All I feel is shame. I thought enough time had passed. I'm so sorry. I'm such an idiot to insist that we take the baby.
- I'm gonna call the Sheriff.
- No. Don't.
Maybe if I could find the mother... Finding the mother is the Sheriff's job. It's his job to arrest her, King. But if I make it my job to help her, then maybe, somehow, at the same time, I can help myself. Come here.
Miss?
Where are we?
About 60 miles up the coast from where you started. It's as far as I'm going. They got a woman's shelter here. Maybe fix you up with a shower and some dry clothes. I won't forget your kindness. Take care, miss.
Hey, there!

I heard there was a shelter?

No...

King.

Come on, King.

She couldn't drop off
a kid with a volume control? Geez.

Okay. Nothing personal, pal.

And that's just how I'm gonna keep it,
right, cowboy?

Woman on the floor!

Pretty good stuff, huh?

I thought you might like that.

Well, aren't we the picture of domesticity?

What's all this?

My neighbor had seven children
before she got her tubes tied.

Last one is finally out of diapers.

So long as we don't return it,
she is more than happy to give us
all the baby junk we could use.

Although you seem to be doing all right
without it.

Who knew you'd be such a natural anyway?

Me.

- Nothing. Coffee?

- Sure.

You started to say something?

It's the reason I was so reluctant
to take Charlie in last night.

You want to decipher that?

You remember when Gil died,
how messed up I was?

Yeah. Married only a couple of years.

Pregnant.

Future wiped out by a stupid car crash.

I might've considered suicide, too.

I did more than consider it, Dot.

I know.

And when Christine was born,

I was in no condition to care for her.

No, you weren't.

But it turned out all right, though.

Her adoptive parents did one heck of a job.

Yeah, they did.

And, thanks to a miracle,
she's back in my life now.
But?
But
I didn't get to be her mother.
I mean, not like this.
Not when she needed me the most.
I can't tell you how deeply I regret that.
And that's why I have
to find this child's mom,
so she doesn't end up like me.
And before you fall in love with that baby.
No, no, no.
Not gonna let that one happen,
no matter how adorable you are!
Charlie's just on a banana high right now.
Trust me, when he comes down,
he's gonna want his real mom.
Hey, how much confidence
do you have in your Sheriff?
I don't expect the folks at CSI
to set their next spin-off
here in Constant Harbor.
Do you think that he would have
looked around for local girls
who might be in trouble?
I doubt it.
He's got his plate pretty full with
this weekend's Crab Festival.
I can lend you my car,
if you want to go and talk to
Pastor Newton at the Baptist church.
He's who Carl would have asked.
Maybe I'll do that.
How desolate would you have to be,
dear reader,
to leave a child you bore
with a total stranger?
And if you were that stranger,
having found an infant on your doorstep,
what are your obligations
to care for the child?
To find the baby's parents?
To understand what motivated

such desperation?

To help mitigate the problems that led to
an act as misguided as child abandonment?

These and many more questions
are on my mind of late,

and they are not entirely hypothetical,
as last night, I discovered a baby,
left, like Moses,
on the steps of my cottage.

Yeah, bub, I'm talking about you.

Looks good on you.

Drool?

Motherhood.

Yeah, Charlie here is
a guest star in our reality show,
he's not a regular,
and don't you let me forget that, okay?
Doesn't mean we can't enjoy the little guy
while he's here, though, right?

I heard Dot earlier.

Did she have any news
on who Charlie belongs to?

I think that finding the baby's mother is
on the Sheriff's back burner.

I still can't help wondering, "Why us?"

Yeah. Me, too.

You know, maybe it was a fan thing.

Come on.

No, really.

I mean, maybe somebody read your book
and thought you were
the kind of person that would,
you know...

Peyton?

Can you watch our boy for a while?

I have a couple errands I want to run.

Sure.

Well, sleeping beauty awakens.

Where am I?

At our humble clinic.

You passed out.

Seems you've got pneumonia.

I don't have insurance. I can't pay.

Don't worry about it.

We'll figure something out.
I'm Tilly Minor. And you are?
Ramona.
Ramona Eastmore.
Okay, Ramona.
Rest up.
I'll be back in a while,
and if you feel up to it, you can tell me
what brought you to our shelter.
This fell out of your jacket.
I thought he might be important to you,
so I cleaned him up a bit.
Five foot two, maybe.
Dark hair.
Pretty, but sallow. Tired eyes.
And she told me her name was Violet.
No bells are ringing. Sorry.
And you're sure that no local girls...
Constant Harbor's a small community,
Ms. MacGruder.
I know all the babies in the area.
I baptized half of them.
None are at risk, at
least not at the moment.
Our sister church over in Ruckston
runs a woman's shelter.
It's a long shot,
but you might give them a call.
Thank you.
Ruckston Women's Shelter. Hello?
Hello?
Well, what do you think?
I think he's gonna love it.
What?
I'm surprised, is all,
at how into the whole fatherhood thing
you seem to be.
Yeah. I wasn't around that much
when David was Charlie's age,
or any age, for that matter.
As you know, I mean, that's the main reason
his mom and I got divorced,
and the reason that he and I have had
such a rough time communicating.

I guess having Charlie around has
made me regret some decisions
I've made along the way as well.
After what I did,
do you think I deserve another chance?
It's well known
that God is very generous with chances.
Is that something you'd consider?
What, you mean, adopting a baby?
Or keeping Charlie,
if his mother never shows up.
I didn't realize that you...
Look, I'm thinking about the AARP,
not the PTA.
At this stage of the game, we're supposed
to be thinking about that, not this.
Who says what we're supposed to
be doing with our lives if not us?
I don't know, it just seems like
it's a sign, you know,
that maybe we should...
What? Start all over?
Maybe, yeah.
With diapers, pre-school, play-dates?
Why not?
I just never thought
I'd be having this conversation with you.
But now that you are?
I'm gonna get some air.
- Great day for sailing.
- Can say that again.
Can I help you?
This truck looks like
it might belong to a friend of mine.
A pretty young woman. Is it in for repairs?
Nope. This one's an impound.
Illegally parked on the edge of town.
Besides repairs, we do towing for the city.
She's just out of gas, though,
so I expect someone will
come looking for her sooner or later.
Sheriff know it's here?
Yeah, one of his deputies called us to
come pick it up, so, yeah, I guess so.

Who's it registered to?

I didn't look.

You mind if I do? 'Cause

if it's my friend's,

I can just give her a call,

tell her it's here.

Yeah, help yourself.

Hey, Steve! Phone's for you!

- Excuse me.

- Line one.

"Violet Johnson. "

I'm not sure you should be
looking through that stuff.

You're right, sorry.

The truck belong to your friend?

No. Afraid not, but thanks
for letting me look.

Yeah, sure.

I was starting to get worried.

I can tell.

Where's Charlie?

Woke up after you left. Sucked down
another bottle and went back to dreamland.

I found a baby monitor in the stuff

Dot brought,

so we should be covered till he wakes up.

Probably gonna stay up all night.

Probably.

Look, Peyton.

I'm sorry.

You know better than anybody, sensitivity's
never really been my strong suit.

But have you asked yourself

why you think we should keep this baby?

I mean, if the opportunity presents itself?

Of course I have.

Look, my heart is breaking

for Charlie's mother,

but at the same time, I'm trying to
untangle how Charlie's breath on my face
makes me feel.

And, you know, it seems like

you're falling in love with him, too,

but you won't even talk about

starting a family.
Starting a family again.
Again, but this time,
the two of us, together.
Okay, nice work, everybody.
Just please make sure
that all the participants
fill in the liability form, okay?
This one here.
Looks like you've got your hands full.
Yeah, and it's not just the parade.
I'm in charge of picking
this year's Crab Queen.
Can I nominate my boss?
Well, I don't know, is she under 16?
Not for many years.
- You want a cup of coffee?
- Sure.
- So?
- So?
You come to volunteer?
No, I came to pick your brain.
Well, a meager harvest, but help yourself.
What will happen if they find the mother,
from a legal standpoint?
Well, it could go several ways.
Depending on?
Depending on why the mother
abandoned the child in the first place,
her mental and physical state,
a whole host of possibly
mitigating circumstances.
I mean, once she's picked up,
she'll be questioned first
by law enforcement,
and then a family court judge
will try to determine
the best possible option for Charlie.
Including returning him to the woman
who left him on my doorstep?
As a rule,
the court tries to keep a family intact.
I mean, completely severing
the biological bond

between a mother and her baby
is rarely the best outcome.
And if they never find the mother?
Then Family Services will take the child,
and he'll go into foster care
and then into the adoption pool.
How long does that take?
Before you can adopt Charlie?
Is that what you're asking?
Really?
Several months at best.
I mean, bureaucracy is dense when it
comes to kids, but if you're patient...
It could happen?
Is King on board with this?
I don't even know if I'm on board with it.
Look, I empathize with the mother,
for obvious reasons,
- but I also want to protect Charlie.
- Peyton.
Peyton, you do not have to adopt Charlie
to protect him.
As for Charlie's mother, well,
you can't really help her,
unless you know where she is.
Well, look at you.
What a difference a little rest makes.
The doctor says I'll be good to go
in another day or so.
And then what?
I'm not sure yet.
And I hate to ask this,
after everything you've already done,
but you don't know of any work
around here, do you?
I can handle almost anything
from waiting tables to pumping gas.
I might be able to scare something up.
Let's get you healthy first,
and then we'll worry about a job.
Ramona?
Have you heard of a woman about your age
named Violet?
Never. Why?

I just got a call from a pastor
in Constant Harbor.

The description sounded like you.

Really?

I've been running the
shelter for a long time,
heard a lot of stories.

The ones with the happy endings,
the heroines figure out
that help and trust go hand in hand.

We'll just give it a test.

- Hey!

- Hey.

A regular eating machine, isn't he?

Yeah, we might have to invest in a cow.

- There you go.

- For some, it's eat, pray, love,
and for Charlie it's
eat, poop, sleep, right?

I think somebody needs a diaper change.

- Yeah? Okay, here.

- No, no. No, I can do it. I can do it.

Come on, sweetie.

Let's go. Let's go.

King? I just talked to Dot,
and she said that

if the mother never showed up,
that we would have a chance,
you know, if we want to adopt Charlie.

You know, I didn't realize until now that
if I hadn't given up my own baby,
she was the thing

that would have healed my despair,
and Charlie's being here
has just reawakened a longing in me.

I need to be a mother, King,
in every sense of the word.

And I can either join you
in your journey, or...

Or what?

Hello. My name is Tilly Minor,
and I'm calling from the women's shelter
over in Ruckston.

Pastor Newton gave me your number.

This is Peyton MacGruder.
Hi. I was just leaving a message.
Yeah, I know, sorry.
I couldn't get to the phone.
Well, as I was saying,
Pastor Newton gave me your number.
I'm calling about the girl
that you're looking for, Violet?
Is she there at your shelter?
Maybe.
Maybe?
There's a young woman here...
Well, at our clinic, actually.
She says her name is Ramona Eastmore,
but I don't...
I think she's making that up.
She fits the description
that you gave the pastor to a tee.
He also told me about the baby
that you're caring for.
How's he doing?
Fine.
You said that she's in your clinic?
That's right.
For drugs and alcohol,
like that kind of clinic?
No. When she arrived
here, she was very ill.
Collapsed in my arms, in fact.
How is she now?
Improved.
Ms. MacGruder, this girl needs help.
That's why she's come to us.
Can I assume that you have
her best interests at heart?
Yes.
Then I can ask her to meet with you
if you'd like.
I don't know if she will, but...
Ms. MacGruder?
Can I call you back, like, maybe tomorrow?
Yeah. I guess. Sure.
Thanks.
Who's Pastor Newton?

He's a local minister.
I met with him about finding Charlie's mom.
I thought you'd decided to leave that
to the Sheriff.
I haven't decided anything.
I'm just trying to sort out
what's best for Charlie.

Dearest readers,
having, I believe,
discovered the identity of Charlie's mom
leaves me with a dilemma.
Most mothers can't comprehend
the act of giving up their child.
Yet having done so myself,
I have deep empathy for the pain
this young woman must be suffering.

At the same time,
I don't know if I can find the strength,
for the second time in my life,
to give away a baby I've come to adore.
When two women claimed to be
the mother of an infant,
the Biblical King Solomon
called for a sword.
"Divide the child in two, " he said,
"and give half to each... "
When the sword was raised,
the child's true mother said,
"Give her the child, but
by no means slay it... "
In his wisdom, Solomon knew
the one who loved the child most
would give it up rather than see it hurt.
Can the child's birth mother be that woman?
Can I?
I am so glad you called
back, Ms. MacGruder.
Peyton.
As I said to you on the phone,
I spoke with Ramona,
and she agreed to meet with you.
Where's the woman who was in this room?
Insisted on being discharged
early this morning.

Good. You are so good.

Okay, boys, listen up.

One of you run down to the park for me,
will you?

And make sure the American Legion float is
ready to roll after the last marching band.

Okay? Got it?

All right, away you go, quick as you can.

Thank you!

- Hey, Dot!

- Hey, boys!

Hey, Charlie.

You taking good care of King?

I'm easy.

I'm a sucker for balloons and bands.

So where's your beautiful
wife this morning?

- I thought you might know.

- What do you mean?

She was gone when we got up.

I found a note saying
she had something she had to do.

- Well, that's definitive.

- Yeah.

I think she might have a lead
on Charlie's mother.

What makes you say that?

She got a phone call last night,
something about a minister?

- Pastor Newton?

- Yeah. Newton.

Well, that's interesting.

Interesting.

This little guy's got her tied in knots.

She wants to help the mother,
but she also wants to keep Charlie.

I know. I talked to Peyton yesterday
about adopting him.

Yes, and you told her it would be possible,
which puts me in a very difficult...

King! King, behind you!

Hey!

Peyton! Wait!

Meet me at the cottage!

Violet, wait!
Please. Don't freak out. Don't...
I want to help you.
No, you don't. I heard them talking,
your husband and that woman,
about adopting Charlie, and you can't!
You can't take my baby!
- Listen to me...
- Let me go!
No, listen to me! I don't know
why you left your baby with me,
but if anyone understands
what you're going through, it's me.
And it doesn't matter what you overheard,
you've got to trust me.
I mean, at least enough to explain to me
what you were thinking
when you left Charlie on my doorstep.
Violet, look,
either you can explain it to me,
or you can explain it to the Sheriff.
It's your choice.
Now, why don't you start at the beginning?
Here you go, Violet.
Why did you leave your baby?
Because I wasn't thinking straight,
and 'cause I thought you'd help us.
I'd like to help you,
but I also want to do
what's best for Charlie.
Except you think what's best for him
is for you to be his mom.
But I love him more than life itself,
and nothing you do or say will change that!
Then why did you leave him?
I left him because I love him.
Peyton! Dot's on her way, and...
Yeah.
Look...
I was sick, okay?
Out of my head with fever.
Out of work, out of money.
Why us?
Well, I heard you on the radio,

and I went down to the bookstore
thinking that you could help me,
you know, give me some advice.
Help me figure out what to do.
And then you came in, and...
And I just left you standing there.
But it was stupid of me to think
that you could help us.
I mean, why would you?
You don't even know me.
How did Charlie end up on our porch?
I saw you in town later.
I followed you here.
What about family?
Couldn't you have called somebody?
I don't have family,
at least that I can count on.
The baby's father, what about him?
- He's gone.
- Gone?
Dead.
Let me guess, the prodigal mother.
Dot, this is Violet Johnson.
Violet, this is my friend, Dot Grey.
She owns the bookshop where we met.
She's also an attorney.
Okay, wait, I don't need a lawyer.
I just want Charlie back
so we can get on with our lives.
Violet, it's not that simple.
Why not? I made a mistake,
- thinking I was doing the right thing...
- You abandoned your child.
- No, I did not! Not really.
- Yes, you did,
in the eyes of the law, anyway.
But we don't have to tell anybody, do we?
I mean, there's got to be some way
I can prove to you...
I'm sorry, Violet, but you're gonna
have to prove it to a judge.
As an officer of the court,
I had to call the Sheriff.
What?

This her?

Okay, this is a mistake.

- I only meant to leave him for a few days.

- Come on.

- No. Please don't take him.

- Come on. Let him go.

There we go. There you go, baby.

It's okay. It's all right.

So what's your name, miss?

It's Violet, Violet Johnson.

Miss Johnson, I'm gonna have to ask you to put your hands behind your back.

I'm gonna take you outside and a female deputy is gonna search you.

Then I'll read your Miranda rights and then I'm gonna

transport you off to jail.

Goodbye, Charlie. I'm so sorry.

I'll follow along and see what more I can find out.

- Yeah.

- Mama.

It's okay.

No.

- How is she?

- Well, she's pretty shaken up.

Agreed to let me sit in on the initial interview with the Sheriff, to make sure she didn't say anything that could hurt her case.

So what's her story?

Well, she was sick, verified by Tilly Minor in Ruckston. She lost her job as a waitress, no place to live, no savings, couldn't find work without child care, couldn't afford child care till she got a job.

- Catch-22.

- Yeah. Not uncommon in this economy.

Yeah, but no less difficult, especially when you're a kid.

What is she, 20?

Nineteen.

- Family?

- Mother.

Lives inland a bit, a
place called Green Lake.

On Prospect Point Road. Violet's
truck is registered to that address.

Her truck?

The Sheriff had it towed.

Never put two and two together.

Well, I won't tell him

that you add better than he does.

Is there any chance that she'll see me?

I doubt that.

Violet is convinced that you want Charlie.

Is she wrong?

I...

I want what's best for everyone,
especially Charlie.

So what about bail?

I'm on my way to see the judge right now,
and already late.

I get her out, she can stay with me,
but she's gonna want to see the baby.

Unlikely a judge is gonna
allow it, unless...

What?

You're willing to supervise the visits.

What do you say?

It might give you a chance
to get to know the girl a little bit more,
see what she's about.

Okay. If the judge is willing, so am I.

Okay.

- Thanks.

- You're welcome. Bye.

What were you thinking?

If you didn't tell anyone where the girl
was, that we could just hang on to Charlie?

- I mean, criminy, Peyton.

- You're right.

I do want another child.

And the fact that you're not interested
is something that,
someday, we're gonna have to deal with,

but no matter what, I'm not gonna
just give the baby back to her
until I know everything there is to know
about Violet Johnson.
I care about that little boy,
more than I ever thought was possible,
and nothing is gonna stop me
from keeping him safe!
I want to thank you, for, you know,
making this happen.
Thank Dot, not me.
Well, she told me
that you had to agree to the visits,
and, you know,
I appreciate that you were willing.
I nearly forgot.
Hey, come here, baby.
Thought you might need these.
Where did you...
Your truck is parked
behind the auto parts store,
and the Sheriff said it would be okay
if I picked up your stuff.
Appreciate that.
I couldn't help but notice...
Your husband?
We never got married.
We were engaged.
Had a date set and all, even rented a hall.
You know, I was married,
before King, I mean,
when I wasn't that much older than you.
He died in a car accident.
Sorry.
And I was pregnant at the time.
Really?
And then, after the baby was born,
I was too messed up to care for her,
for a lot of reasons.
I gave her away.
You know, I didn't want to keep Charlie
the night that you left him with us,
because I was afraid of what,
in fact, happened.

I fell in love with him.
Would I take Charlie?
Gladly.
But would I take him away from you? Never.
As long as you can convince me
that you can give him
the care that he deserves.
How can I do that?
After everything that's happened?
You can start by telling me about...
Zach. Zach Weston.
How'd you meet?
High school.
He was like this big, funny, brainiac jock
that everybody liked,
and I was this bed-head hair,
dyed black to match my fingernails,
outsider geek that nobody
paid attention to.
Except, apparently, Zach.
Go to college, get jobs, get married,
that was the plan.
Till I got pregnant,
and everything turned upside down.
How old were you?
Seventeen. Zach had just turned 18.
Old enough to know better.
How did your family react?
There's no dad in my family album.
My mom called me a...
Let's just say she wasn't supportive
and leave it at that.
And what about Zach's family?
Zach's mother's dead, and his father...
Zach joined the service
so we'd have insurance for the baby.
Everything would've been fine
except he got killed.
"A training accident, " they said.
After that,
I thought I could make it on my own.
And I did, until I got sick.
Anyway, I'm better now,
and I can take care of my baby just fine,

and I'll find work somehow.

We'll be fine.

And I'm begging you, Ms. MacGruder, please, please, don't stand in the way of that happening.

Hi.

Hi.

How are you guys doing?

Fine, especially Charlie.

Yeah, he seems to have liked his lunch so much that he's decided to wear it.

I'll go get a wash rag.

Here. Hey.

- How much of that did you hear?

- Most of it.

Do you think her story's for real?

That's what I intend to find out.

Why don't you pull up a chair and tell me more

about the trouble Violet's got herself into.

I'm afraid your daughter's been arrested for child abandonment.

You mean she just left him?

Like in a grocery store or something?

'Cause that doesn't make any sense.

I mean, Violet loves that baby.

When was the last time you talked to her?

Not long ago.

Came by here looking for a handout, like usual.

Said she'd gotten fired again.

I told her that if she couldn't care for the kid,

she ought to give him

to somebody who could,

but I didn't mean that she should, you know, dump him or anything.

Did you know the child's father?

Never brought him around.

Got himself killed, apparently, serving in the military.

They was never actually married,

so she don't get no benefits.
At least that's what the boy's father said
when I asked.
The boy's father?
That's who the man said he was, anyway.
Called here twice looking for Violet.
I wouldn't have told him where she was
even if I'd known,
rude as he was.
Rockland?
About an hour's drive from here,
on the coast.
Said he builds boats.
So tell me again what you've got to do
with all this?
I am the person
with whom Violet left her baby.
No kidding?
And what, now you don't want him no more?
Thank you, Mrs. Johnson.
You've been really informative.
Wow. What do you think?
Should we buy her?
Sail the world, you and me and Peyton?
What do you think? Should we do that?
Should we buy this baby?
Hey, King!
- Hey!
- How are you?
Hey.
- How you doing?
- Good.
I see you brought a shipmate
with you this time.
Yeah, Harry, this is Charlie.
Charlie, this is Harry.
- Hey, Charlie.
- How you doing?
You guys want something to drink?
Well, Charlie here just polished
off a bottle, but I wouldn't mind.
- Come on board.
- Great.
What do you say, bud? Come on.

That your little guy?
Thanks. No, just watching
him for a couple days, is all.
You have kids?
One of my many regrets, no, I do not.
If you could, at this stage of the game,
would you?
You mean, assuming my wife
wasn't kicking me out on my heister?
Yeah, in a nanosecond.
Really?
You wouldn't mind being the oldest dad
on the playground?
The only person I compete with is myself.
Besides, my timing's my timing, right?
It's not anybody else's business.
Who wouldn't want to spend
the second half of their life
teaching a young sailor like Charlie here
how to navigate the world
better than you ever did?
Right, Charlie? There he is.
Mr. Weston?
Mr. Weston?
Mr. Weston!
Hi.
I'm Peyton MacGruder.
I'm sorry, I tried to call, but...
Yeah, I got your message.
Can we talk for a few minutes?
I'm kind of in the middle of something.
I'll be quick.
I'm here about Violet Johnson.
Why you and not her?
She...
She what?
She doesn't know that I'm here.
Look, I don't know what you're playing at,
but I don't want any part of it.
I don't eat. I don't sleep.
All I do is work
and think about what might have been.
You talk to Violet,
tell her to find the spine

to come see me herself.
Hey.
Hey. What'd you learn?
Violet's having a pretty rough go of it.
You know, I always dreamt of finding
the kind of innocent love that would be,
I don't know, kind of
like a riot in my heart.
I never thought I would feel
that kind of love again.
And then Charlie came into our lives.
And opened up my heart to
so many possibilities.
I love you, you know?
Thank God for that.
Otherwise, why would you put up with me?
There's an ordinance against doing
that sort of thing on public property.
So what happened?
Went fairly well for a preliminary hearing.
The judge was nice enough,
but kind of formal.
Asked a lot of questions.
There you go.
He seemed to understand I left Charlie
'cause I was desperate.
Definitely knew
I was gonna come back for him, but...
The judge wants to know
that it won't happen again,
that Charlie will be safe with Violet,
before she can consider
returning him to her custody.
How can you show her that?
Got to find a way before
next week's hearing.
Otherwise...
I don't get it. If Violet had anybody
she could turn to for support,
she wouldn't have left Charlie with us.
What does the judge expect her to do
now that she didn't do before?
Her job is to protect Charlie,
not try to solve Violet's problems for her.

So? There must be something we can do.
I talked to Pastor Newton
about subsidized daycare.
He'll look into it. He isn't hopeful.
We're in a rural area.
There's only one center in the vicinity
and it's got a long wait list.
Peyton told me about Violet's mother.
She sounds like a piece of work.
And apparently,
Charlie's grandfather on the other side,
he won't even talk to Peyton.
So what do we do?
I went to see your mother today.
You what?
I needed to find out for myself
why you couldn't come up with a better
option than just leaving Charlie with us.
Look, I guess I should have told you
before I went up there, but...
it's okay, I understand.
She did tell me that she tried to
encourage you to give up the baby.
Can you imagine?
Yeah, I can.
My father did more than encourage.
He actually arranged for
my baby's adoption.
How could you forgive him for that?
It took a very long time
before he reached out to me,
and when he did, I realized that,
misguided as he was, he thought he was
doing what was best for me and my baby.
And that one decision
cost him his grandchild
and his daughter.
- That's a big price to pay.
- Yeah. It really is.
So I also went to see Hugh Weston.
Yeah, he's not the most
sociable guy, is he?
He's okay.
Violet, if that were true,

why wouldn't you go to him when
you found yourself in need, instead of us?
He blames me.
Blames you?
When Zach's mom died,
Zach became his dad's reason to live.
He was his Scout Master,
his Little League coach.
He took a night class in algebra
so he could tutor Zach.
And when Zach got a scholarship to State,
his dad threw a big party in the backyard,
and he cried like a baby
when he toasted his son.
Zach was everything to him.
And, what, you didn't fit the dream?
I did. He liked me fine.
He treated me like family,
just until I got pregnant.
Surely he knows that it takes two.
Of course, but...
But what?
Well, Zach didn't want to burden his dad.
He didn't have any money, not really,
and of course, neither did we.
Zach said we'd created the situation
and we would deal with it.
By joining the Army?
Well, I was still only 17,
so we couldn't get married
till after my birthday,
which was right before Zach's first leave.
Once we did, though,
I would get spousal benefits,
health insurance, prenatal care,
parenting classes, the works.
"It was a no-brainer. "
That's what he said.
And what did his father say?
Have you lost your mind?
It makes sense.
To risk your life
in some godforsaken war zone
just 'cause you knocked up your girlfriend?

That makes sense to you?
I'm gonna marry Violet and take care
of her, like you took care of Mom.
It's my responsibility
and I intend to live up to it.
That's what you taught me.
That's what I'm gonna do.
Whether I agree or not?
It's my decision and it's been made.
The enlistment papers are already signed.
Come on, Violet, we're out of here.
I'm sorry.
Anything happens to my boy, it's on you.
I hope you can live with that.
I hope we both can!
Violet,
are you sure that he still feels that way?
But you haven't asked him, have you?
Well, I haven't been brave enough.
So he's never even met Charlie?
No.
We know love flows and ebbs, dear readers,
and flows again.
We know anger turns to resentment,
or guilt, or forgiveness.
But how can we guess in which directions
another's emotional tides may have turned?
How can we summon the courage to revisit
the painful moments of our pasts,
if we cannot predict the effect of time
on the human heart?
A column?
More like a diary entry.
I can't really print
most of what I've been typing lately.
Thank you.
King?
I think I know how Violet can convince
the judge to let her keep her baby.
I just have to help Violet
to find the strength to do her part.
- Look, I thought I told you last time...
- Please. Please.
Hi.

Look, Mr. Weston,
when I was Violet's age,
I had a falling out with my dad.
I wish that I had her strength,
and I went to him to make amends.
I didn't.
And because of that, we didn't come
back together again for years.
Violet needs you in her life.
Her baby needs you in his life,
and as presumptuous as this may sound,
I'm betting that you need
both of them in yours.
She's here to offer you a chance
to choose understanding over anger,
forgiveness over resentment.
I don't resent Violet.
I resented God
and blamed him for taking my son.
I've been working hard to try
and understand why he'd do that to me.
To us.
For months now,
I've been trying to find you, Violet,
tell you how sorry I am for my words.
For blaming you for something
that wasn't your fault.
For not offering to share our grief.
I let Zach down.
I let you down. I let myself down.
If you can find it in
yourself to forgive me,
I'd give anything to meet my grandson.
How often, dear readers,
are we misled by the fear
that broken hearts cannot be mended,
that tortured relations cannot be repaired,
that gestures of love
will not be reciprocated?
The woman who left her child with me
has been joyfully and permanently
reunited with her little boy.
A family court judge has determined that
the temporary abandonment of her infant

was done under extenuating circumstances,
in an ill-considered effort
to protect the child.
Having moved in with the child's granddad,
our young friend has
been able to find work.
And all three, mother,
child and grandparent,
have begun rebuilding their lives together.
Who's that? It's Mom!

Here you go.

What lessons, then, can we glean
from this potentially tragic story
with a thankfully happy ending?

Sure is quiet around here.

I liked it better the way it was.

Me, too.

You know, not all kids
are as lucky as Charlie, King.
Maybe we should try to change that
for one kid who needs somebody
to love them.

- One?

- One!

To start with.

Time to go. Are you ready?

- Just a couple minutes.

- Okay.

The heart, my friends,
is a remarkable organ.
It generally ignores our
carefully laid plans
in favor of unexpected
opportunities for love.

Hey.

- Hello.

- Don't you look spiffy.

Did you get all gussied up
to wish us bon voyage?

Nope, I got gussied up to go on a
sailboat ride with my friend, Harry.

Thanks to King here.

Come give me some sugar.

Have fun.

The lesson, then, is a simple one,
dear readers.

We inspire one another,
not by the things we say,
but by the things we do.
And believing that,
we can be assured goodness
will be passed on
in ways we don't always expect,
when we open our hearts
to the most helpless among us.