

## Promises of the Heart

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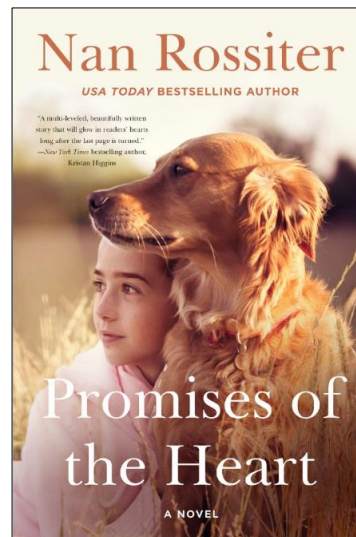
### Introduction

*Can the course that they've set for the future handle a slight detour...?*

Macey and Ben Samuelson have much to be thankful for: great friends, a beautiful—if high-maintenance—Victorian house on idyllic Tybee Island, and a rock-solid marriage. The only thing missing is what they want the most. After her fifth miscarriage in six years, Macey worries that the family they've always dreamed of might be out of reach. Her sister suggests adoption, but Macey and Ben aren't interested in pursuing that path...until a three-legged Golden Retriever named Keeper wags his way into their home and their hearts.

Harper Wheaton just got kicked out of another foster home and it won't be the last if she keeps losing her temper. She's not sure why she gets mad; maybe because no family seems to want a nine-year-old girl with a heart condition. She loves her social worker, Cora, but knows that staying with her forever isn't an option. Will she ever find a family to call her own?

As a physician's assistant, Macey meets lots of kids. Harper Wheaton's a tough one, but Macey knows the little girl has already struggled more than most. It gets Macey and Ben to thinking about all the children who need homes. Then Harper goes missing, and one thing is suddenly crystal clear: life is complicated—but love doesn't have to be.



### Questions for Discussion

1. At the beginning of the book, Macey's heart seems set against adoption. What reasons does she give? Do you agree with her thinking? Why or why not?
2. Through Harper's experience, we get a glimpse of the foster care system. Does this justify Macey's wariness about becoming a foster parent?
3. How do Ben's and Macey's personalities differ? Do you agree with the adage that opposites attract?
4. Harper has been bounced from one foster home to another, and, as a result, she has an attitude that makes her difficult to place. Around Cora, though, she acts differently. What changes do you notice in her personality with Cora? Why do you think she's willing to open up?

5. Harper and Macey both struggle with not being able to control the things that are happening in their lives. What are some of these events and how do they cope?
6. Why does Harper run away? What does she learn from this experience and why does she decide to return to Cora's?
7. Macey and Maeve are as close as two sisters can be, but like any sisters, they have their differences. In what way(s) do these two differ?
8. Although Grandy passed away when Macey was a young girl, she plays a significant role in Macey's life and in the book. In what way(s) does she influence Macey and how does she affect Macey's decisions? What does Grandy's voice represent for Macey? Reflecting on your own life, do you have a loved one—living or dead—whose voice you carry with you? What role does their voice play in your life, and why do you think that is?
9. Ben's unwillingness to take chances is often a bone of contention. What are some examples of this and in what ways does he change? What thoughts/events trigger these changes?
10. Much like Ben, Harper is very cautious, but she slowly opens up to the Samuelsons. What key moments lead up to her ultimately taking a chance on being adopted? How do the changes she goes through complement Ben's?
11. Harper is like Macey in many ways. In fact, Ben says that if they'd had a biological daughter she'd be just like Harper. What does he mean?
12. What role does Keeper play in the story? Do you think Harper would have adjusted to her new home without him? Why do you think Harper loves animals so much?
13. Faith and giving are two central themes in the book. In what ways do characters give and how are they blessed in return?
14. The book begins and ends with the image of a candle in the window. What does the candle symbolize? How is Ben's original explanation of the tradition of keeping a single candle in a window realized?
15. Have you ever felt nudged by an angel to step out of your comfort zone to do something positive? Did you? Why or why not? Do you regret your decision?