

CHAPTER 1

Who Am I?

"Morning, Mama." Diana twirled a strand of her long, blonde hair around her finger and waited outside the kitchen. Socks, Diana's tabby cat, purred and circled her legs.

Her mother's silence permeated the room, but the aroma of freshly brewed coffee beckoned Diana. She edged into the tiny kitchen where she poured a cup and then leaned against the counter. Her mother poured batter into a hot skillet where four runny pancakes puddled and merged to create one warped circle.

"Damn." Roberta jabbed the concoction with a metal flipper and tried to separate the one into four. She tossed the utensil into the sink. Pancake batter spotted the tile backsplash and window.

"Mama, I can cut my pancakes. Don't worry about how they look."

"Maybe you don't care, but I do." Roberta found a bent cigarette from the overflowing junk drawer and then tucked it into her pocket to smoke after breakfast.

Roberta and Diana ate without speaking. Only the sound of clinking silverware and the *tch, tch, tch* of the wall clock broke the silence.

Socks nibbled her breakfast, lapped water, and hopped onto the window ledge to watch chickadees flutter from tree to tree, birdfeeder to birdfeeder. Diana wished her seventeenth birthday would be as carefree as Socks and her bird friends, but suspected otherwise.

She got up to put her dishes into the sink, and turned at the sound of Roberta's plate scraping across the tabletop. Her mother leaned back, lit the cigarette, and gave Diana a familiar look. Despite their tumultuous relationship, Roberta had a way of catching her off guard. She stiffened her back before she sat.

Diana put her elbows on the table. "What's the matter?"

Her mother shook the match, tossed it onto the plate, inhaled deeply, and blew a thick stream of smoke from the corner of her mouth. She flipped her long, black braid over her left shoulder. "I'm wondering if you still plan on visiting your dad at the end of the school year."

Diana clenched her jaw. When she turned ten, her nana had given her a diary in which she faithfully chronicled daily musings and hopes and dreams for her future. She'd eventually set up a grading system for arguments with her mother. This one promised to rank right at the top. "Yes. Why wouldn't I?"

"I thought you should report to Charlie's Deli for the summer. He must be looking forward to you working full time."

"Charlie knows my plans to visit Dad and he's holding my job until the end of June."

Roberta took another puff on her cigarette and then quickly exhaled. "I don't know if I want you spending a whole month with Glenn. I may need you here."

Diana knew the argument would escalate, but she didn't care. "What for?"

"The extra money would help. My job's coming to an end at the auction house."

Diana held back a scream that built in the back of her throat. *Not today, not now.* "Sorry, Mama, but I made these plans a long time ago. Dad expects me and he's arranged for vacation time."

"There you go, being selfish. If you could be more helpful around here, things would go better for both of us."

Diana stood and gripped the back of the chair, which she needed for support. "I help out plenty. I give you twenty-five percent of what I earn, I clean the house, and help out in the yard, go to school and work—"

"Get off your high horse, young lady." Roberta held her coffee cup with both hands and leaned forward. "And anyway, I don't know what the big deal is. The man you call Dad isn't who you think he is."

Diana sucked in her stomach and prepared for the final blow. Remnants of previous quarrels clung to her shoulders like a heavy blanket. *What is she saying? Wait, listen, don't cave, and don't cry.*

"He isn't your father. He didn't even adopt you. Glenn is only your stepdad." Roberta slipped in a smile.

"No, it's not true." Diana's arms collapsed and she slumped over the back of the chair. "You're lying," she said to the floor.

"Afraid not. It's a long story." Roberta leaned back and crossed her legs. "Your *real* dad left us high and dry in Portland before you were born. He was trouble from the get-go. Could be dead or in jail. Who knows?" She flicked a piece of burning ash, and part of it landed on her sweatshirt. Roberta brushed it off, but not before it burned a small hole in the sleeve.

Diana looked up and brushed her hair out of her eyes. "You *think* my biological father's in jail or dead. You have no idea where he is? Why tell me now? Today, on my birthday."

"Whoa, slow down. Glenn and I meant to tell you, but time got away from us, and after we divorced, he was out of the picture most of the time. It seemed right not to say anything, but it's time you know the truth. You're seventeen, almost an adult." Roberta crushed the cigarette on her plate, smeared it around in leftover syrup. It smelled like burnt sugar.

I can't listen to this anymore. Diana burst into tears. Through her sobs, she said, "So you didn't talk to Dad about this first. *You* decided to drop the bomb. You don't care how *I* feel." She shoved her chair aside and was ready to bolt upstairs.

"Hold on a minute, young lady, be more respectful of your mother."

"Respect? Respect? How about my feelings?" Diana clenched and unclenched her hands.

"It isn't the end of the world. You see Glenn a couple times a year. You have friends and a life. Grow up!" Roberta crossed the room, pulled out the junk drawer, and rummaged around for another cigarette.

"You're right. I *do* have a life and plans, lots of them." Dizzy and feeling out of control, Diana grabbed a paper towel, wiped her face, and stormed upstairs. Socks followed her and slipped into her room before she slammed the bedroom door. She threw herself onto the bed, buried her face in the pillow, and cried until her head throbbed. Socks curled up and brushed her pink nose against her ear.

Drained, she turned over to stare at the ceiling marked with remnants of stickers and glow-in-the-dark stars stuck up there years before. *How can I face Dad? He won't know that I know. Mama's been mean and spiteful before, but never like this. I can't stand another minute of living in this house.*

She rolled over and looked out the window. Her blue and white curtains ruffled in the breeze. Socks sat on the ledge presumably to watch birds in the maple tree.

As her cell phone rang, Diana wiped her nose on the sheet before she answered, "Hello?...Oh hi, Cassie...Yeah, I'll be ready at noon...Sick? No, I have a little cold...Okay, see you then."

Diana's plans to meet three friends at Boise's Towne Square Mall had slipped her mind. They'd have lunch and catch a movie to celebrate her birthday.

Diana sat on the edge of the bed, reluctant to get up. *I still have my friends, but I don't know who my dad is, so who am I, really?* She grabbed fresh clothes and then headed to the bathroom. In the shower she let warm water splash on her swollen face and aching shoulders. She washed her hair and tried to scrub away the confusion and hurt of her mother's cruel birthday surprise.

Diana dressed, arranged her long hair into a French braid, and fumed over her mother's attempt to ruin her month-long visit to Naperville to see her dad. "I'm not changing my plans," she said. "No way!"

She had a lot to think about in the meantime—her birthday, school, finals, and hanging with her friends before she left for Naperville.



After her outburst, Roberta paced the living room. She couldn't control her habit of lashing out. Diana's beauty, youth, and rosy future reminded her of *her* poor choices, which had sent her life on a rocky path.

Roberta heard the shower stop and knew Diana would be downstairs any minute. She found her car keys, grabbed her purse, and left in a rush. As tough as she appeared, she felt a twinge of guilt.



"Diana, I was a little harsh yesterday. It means a lot for you to see Glenn, doesn't it?"

Diana looked up from the Sunday paper and without visible emotion said, "Yes, it does."

"Let's not argue anymore. I saved up some money and bought you a birthday gift. I should have given it to you yesterday. Forget about our argument. Just a minute."

Roberta returned to the kitchen with a small square box and handed it to Diana.

Diana took the box wrapped in glossy blue paper and a thin silver ribbon. "This is so beautiful I hate to open it. And you remembered blue is my *favorite* color."

"Always has been, sweetie."

Diana opened the package and tilted the velvet lid open to see an antique silver locket with a delicate filigree chain. She lifted it out and draped the chain over her fingers. She turned the oval-shaped locket over to see an elegantly engraved rose.

"Oh, Mama, I love it. Thank you!"

"I knew you'd like it. It's similar to one Nana gave me a long time ago. Mine was special and this one might be too. If you're the right person, that is."

Diana put the locket around her neck before she patted it with her hand. "Mama, I feel so bad about yesterday."

"I shouldn't have ruined your birthday."

"I'll wear this forever. It's perfect." Diana hugged her mother and kissed her cheek.



Diana landed at O'Hare Airport, disembarked, and searched the crowd. Glenn's height and dark hair would make him stand out. She hoisted her backpack over her shoulder and struggled with the pet carrier housing Socks. She wove around families, fussy children, and other tired travelers.

"Hey, kiddo."

Diana sprinted toward her dad's waving hand where she dropped her bags and then fell into his arms.

After their hug, Glenn held her at arm's length for a few seconds. She averted his look and bent down for her backpack. He picked up the box, carrying an agitated Socks, who mewed through the air vents.

"Dad, it's so good to see you." She wiped away the tears on her face. Wordlessly, he offered his handkerchief and then put his arm around her shoulder. With her dad's presence, Diana's tension melted away.



Glenn merged into traffic. "Okay, kiddo, you can't fool me. *Something* is bothering you."

"No, everything's good. I'm just tired." She looked out the window, sniffed, and wiped a tear from her cheek.

"Nice try. Do you want to talk now or should we have a bite to eat first?"

"Eat. I'm hungry."

"Okay, let's go to Olive Garden. Still one of your favorites?"

She nodded.



The steaming pasta filled one cavity, but reminded Diana of another. Mealtimes weren't pleasant. She and Roberta seldom ate out together, and when they shared the kitchen table, their conversations were strained. Diana wanted to talk, but she was grateful for the noise, glad any empty slots in the conversation were filled with the clatter and chatter of the restaurant. *How can I start?*

Glenn watched her twirl her pasta without lifting it off the plate. "Hon, are you ready to talk?"

Diana looked up. "Yes. I meant to tell you when you called on my birthday and then I was finishing up the school year. Anyway, I didn't know what to say."

"What did you want to say?"

Diana's response was interrupted when *Happy Birthday* broke out at the table of eight next to them. The birthday girl acted embarrassed. When Diana turned to her father, her lip quivered. "Mama ruined my birthday."

He leaned forward. "How?"

"First, she tried to talk me out of coming, but I told her no way."

Glenn nodded. "That's my girl."

Diana shifted in her seat. "Then she told me the worst thing ever." Her stomach turned over. "She said you aren't my real father, and she doesn't know where he is. Daddy, she acted like it was no big deal." She dabbed her eyes with the cloth napkin.

Glenn's brown eyes turned darker. He frowned, his jaw stiffened. "I see Roberta is cruel as ever. She was wrong to ruin your birthday. Do you want to talk at home or now?"

"Now."

Glenn leaned back. "When I met your mother in Boise, you were six months old. She'd recently moved from Portland, was single, and you both needed someone to love you and provide a decent home. I was attracted to her, but I fell in love with you at first sight. So the rest was easy."

Glenn wiped his eyes with his large hands and swallowed down a rising sob. It was so unlike her dad to be emotional. The waitress came by to refill their drinks, which halted their conversation. "Thank you," he said. "After a few years, things got worse between us, and I didn't want you to grow up around constant turmoil and quarrelling parents. It was affecting you, and I thought it'd be better if we separated to let things settle down. Big mistake. Roberta wouldn't talk, wouldn't agree to counseling. Then she got a lawyer and that was the end of it. We divorced, and I've regretted it ever since."

Diana hesitated to unload her feelings in public, but there was no better time. "I've always wondered why you're olive-skinned and husky, and Mom is so tall with brown eyes and black hair, then how could I end up a short, blue-eyed blonde? We never matched."

"Oh, hon—"

Diana interrupted. "After you left, I was sure it was because of me. I thought I'd done something to make you mad."

"Never. You were my life. You still are."

"May I still call you 'Dad'?"

"Don't even ask." He held her hands and his eyes welled over. "I will always be your father. Blood or not, it doesn't change who I am or who you are."

Diana smiled for the first time in days. "Thanks, Dad."

SAMPLE CHAPTER OF BETWEEN HEARTBEATS – BY DONELLE KNUDSEN

Synopsis: Can life change between heartbeats? Diana joyfully awakens on her seventeenth birthday. But at breakfast, during a heated argument with her mother, she is told that the man she has loved as her father - is not. And so, Diana begins a journey where she learns shocking truths hidden just beneath the surface. She discovers family is more than shared DNA and finds who will help her when it appears all hope is gone. Is this a young woman's quest to find her roots or is it something more? Will it enable her to discover love and the power of forgiveness?

LINK TO BUY: <https://www.amazon.com/Between-Heartbeats-1-Donelle-Knudsen/dp/1533238081/>

Reviews: [5.0 out of 5 stars](#)[Donelle Knudsen has created an intriguing story of love of all kinds](#)

By [Kandi J Wyatt](#) on March 14, 2016

[Format: Kindle Edition](#)[|Verified Purchase](#)

Between Heartbeats is a young adult story of exploration and mystery. Diana is a senior in high school when her mom drops a bombshell on her on her seventeenth birthday. Finding out that who she thought was her dad isn't, causes Diana turmoil and winds her into the middle of a mystery. As Diana tries to find the truth about her birth father, she uncovers a tangle of events that happened seventeen years ago. Donelle Knudsen has created an intriguing story of love of all kinds, from Diana and her boyfriend, to Diana and her parents. She looks at various issues in an objective way with a mother's heart. I would encourage teens on up to read Between Heartbeats.

[5.0 out of 5 stars](#)[Page Turner](#)

By [Diana Langner](#) on February 14, 2016

[Format: Kindle Edition](#)

I enjoyed reading the novel Between Heartbeats. The use of different narrators and short chapters kept the story running smoothly and kept me turning the pages: What mean trick will Diana's so-called mother, Roberta, pull next? What happened to Diana's boyfriend, Kevin, who disappeared out of the blue? Would Diana find out if Roberta isn't her true mother? Will Diana find her birth parents? The book gives a realistic picture of an infant's kidnapping. Would like to read more... reviewed by Diana L.

[5.0 out of 5 stars](#)[I loved the book](#)

By [Amazon Customer](#) on February 1, 2016

[Format: Paperback](#)[|Verified Purchase](#)

I loved the book, The story was refreshing and kept me turning pages. I am anxious to hear more from Donelle. Shari

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Donelle Knudsen was born in Portland, Oregon, but has lived in Eastern Washington since 1988. She has written short stories, poetry, and memoirs, and owes her love of books and the craft of writing to her late father, who was never too busy to read to her or make visits to the library every Saturday. She earned a B.S. in Arts & Letters from Portland State University, graduated with High Honors, and is a six-time finalist and award winner in the Pacific Northwest Writers

Association's and Oregon Writers Colony's literary contests. Her first book, "Through the Tunnel of Love, A Mother's and Daughter's Journey with Anorexia" was published in 2011. "Between Heartbeats" is her first novel. "Heartbeat Interrupted," the second novel in the Heartbeat Series, will be available on Amazon the fall of 2017. Donelle Knudsen is a wife, a mother, and grandmother of five.

Website: <http://donellemknudsen.weebly.com>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/DonelleMKnudsen>