

Praise for When Love Returns

"When Love Returns is a finely interlaced story of first choices, second chances, and a healing heirloom of truth. Kim Vogel Sawyer balances the uncertainty of the past with assurance of a redeemed future in a message that will gracefully infuse hope into the real-life stories of her readers."

—OLIVIA NEWPORT, author of Amish Turns of Time historical fiction series

"I love Kim Vogel Sawyer's stories and the way they always live up to the promise of 'gentle stories of hope.' Her characters draw me in, hold me captive, and leave me with a renewed sense of hope and a stronger faith than I started with."

—DEBORAH RANEY, author of *The Face of the Earth* and the Chicory Inn Novels

Praise for Kim Vogel Sawyer

"Kim Vogel Sawyer paints characters with exquisite detail emotionally and physically, then sets them in a story that transports the reader into a world equally as appealing as the people who live there. A captivating read, leaving you wanting more."

—LAURAINE SNELLING, author of *To Everything a Season* in the Song of Blessing series, *Wake the Dawn*, and *Heaven Sent Rain*

"With a compelling style, Kim Vogel Sawyer weaves a story of love, compassion, forgiveness, and redemption and a family determined to discover and accept the truth. This novel captivates and challenges—a wonderful read."

—JUDITH MILLER, best-selling author of the Home to Amana Series

"Kim Vogel Sawyer is a superior writer, showing the reader the inner workings of a family steeped in rigid rules and a powerful regard for family pride. Forgiveness may be out of reach for a family jaded by derision. Sawyer is able to tie all the pieces of their lives together and keep readers interested in a possibility of another story about adoption and loss."

-RT: Reviews, When Mercy Rains

"Kim Vogel Sawyer has crafted an affecting, emotion-packed novel about two damaged souls whose faith and courage ultimately come shining through. With its vividly rendered settings and well-rounded characters, this lovely story is sure to please Ms. Sawyer's many fans."

—DOROTHY LOVE, author of Carolina Gold

"Kim Vogel Sawyer's heartfelt writing and careful attention to detail make her one of the industry's favorites."

—LORI COPELAND, author of *The Healer's Touch*

When Love Returns

BOOKS BY KIM VOGEL SAWYER

What Once Was Lost

The Grace That Leads Us Home

Echoes of Mercy

Just As I Am

Through the Deep Waters

THE ZIMMERMAN RESTORATION TRILOGY

When Mercy Rains

When Grace Sings

When Love Returns



Kim Vogel Sawyer

The Zimmerman Restoration Trilogy, Book 3



WHEN LOVE RETURNS PUBLISHED BY WATERBROOK PRESS 12265 Oracle Boulevard, Suite 200 Colorado Springs, Colorado 80921

Scripture quotations or paraphrases are taken from the King James Version and the Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by Biblica Inc.™ Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide. www.zondervan.com.

The characters and events in this book are fictional, and any resemblance to actual persons or events is coincidental.

Trade Paperback ISBN 978-0-307-73135-7 eBook ISBN 978-0-307-73136-4

Copyright © 2015 by Kim Vogel Sawyer

Cover design and photography by Kelly L. Howard

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying and recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher.

Published in the United States by WaterBrook Multnomah, an imprint of the Crown Publishing Group, a division of Penguin Random House LLC, New York.

WATERBROOK and its deer colophon are registered trademarks of Penguin Random House LLC.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data Sawyer, Kim Vogel.

When love returns: a novel / Kim Vogel Sawyer. — First edition. pages; cm. — (The Zimmerman Restoration trilogy; 3)

ISBN 978-0-307-73135-7 (alk. paper) — ISBN 978-0-307-73136-4 (electronic) 1. Mennonites — Fiction, I. Title.

PS3619.A97W434 2015 813'.6—dc23

2015010453

Printed in the United States of America 2015—First Edition

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

For the parents who love "someone else's" child as their own; and for the parents who—out of love allowed someone else to raise their child.









Indianapolis, Indiana Cynthia Allgood

om, it's perfect! I love it!"

Cynthia braced herself as her daughter launched off the floor and into her arms. The cell phone box Darcy clutched narrowly missed a collision with the side of Cynthia's head, but she didn't mind. She laughed and returned the embrace with just as much enthusiasm as it was given. "You're welcome, but remember the stipulations we discussed. No—"

Darcy jolted upright and lifted her palm as if making a pledge. "'No texting during class, no calls or texts after bedtime, and only approved-by-Mom-and-Dad contacts.' Did I get 'em right?"

"One more," Glenn interjected, pulling Darcy's attention from her mother to her father. "'No exceeding the allowed minutes, or the penalties will come from my allowance.'"

"Ohhh . . ." Darcy whisked a grin from Cynthia to Glenn. Her eyes—as beautifully blue as her daddy's—sparkled with mischief. "Daddy just said my penalties will come out of his allowance. I like that idea!"

Glenn bopped the top of Darcy's head, his hand descending lightly on her tousled brown tresses. "Nice try, buckaroo, but no dice."

Darcy affected a pretend pout that lasted all of three seconds before she sank back into her spot beside the Christmas tree and broke into laughter. Both Glenn and Cynthia joined in, but their son, Barrett, sat still and unsmiling. Glenn poked him on the shoulder. "What's with you?"

"Just waiting for you to stop horsing around so I can open my last present. It's my turn, you know."

Every Christmas since the kids were old enough to understand the concept of taking turns, they'd opened their packages one at a time in birth order—first Glenn, then Cynthia, then Darcy, and finally Barrett. Glenn held out his hand in invitation. "Go ahead."

Barrett bent over the package, giving them a view of his wavy sandy-blond hair. He resembled a miniature of his father, and Cynthia's heart swelled with affection as she watched her son meticulously pick at the strips of tape holding the red-and-green plaid paper in place, his face a study of concentration.

Such opposites, these two wonderful children. Darcy dove on her packages—biggest one first—and, like a terrier trying to uncover a bone, sent scraps of paper flying. But Barrett arranged his gifts smallest to largest and worked his way up, carefully removing and then setting aside the nearly intact sheets of wrapping paper. While Darcy was impulsive and mercurial, Barrett had always been philosophical and structured.

Was her first child more like Darcy or Barrett, or was she completely different from both? The familiar ache of regret began to build in her chest.

Glenn eased his arm around Cynthia and drew her snug to his side. Grateful for the distraction from her depressing thoughts, she tipped her cheek against his shoulder and watched her son unwrap the super-sized Lego set she'd located at a thrift store. Even though secondhand, none of the pieces were missing, and the box was still in good shape. After setting up the cell phone service for Darcy—a necessity now that the kids came home to an empty house every day after school—their Christmas budget had been limited. Finding the set at a reasonable price was like finding buried treasure, and she knew Barrett would love it. He amazed her with his ability to create complex buildings, vehicles, and spacecraft from the tiny interlocking blocks.

Barrett slipped the paper off the box. His eyes widened and his mouth dropped open. In an uncharacteristic display, he snatched up the box and hugged it to his chest for a moment before laying it across his knees. He traced the different possible projects printed on the box with his finger. "Oh, man, am I gonna have fun with this. It's the most awesome present ever, Mom and Dad. Thank you!"

Darcy, cradling her pink cell phone beneath her chin, wrinkled her nose. "I'm afraid you're wrong, Batwit. My phone is the most awesome present ever."

Barrett curled his arms protectively around his gift. "You kidding? This is a lot better than a dumb phone, Barfy."

Glenn dislodged Cynthia to lean forward and cup his hands over the kids' shoulders. "Here now, none of that."

"But, Dad." Darcy turned a look of pure innocence on her father. "Batwit would think I didn't like him anymore if I didn't pick on him."

Barrett rolled his eyes. "Yeah, right."

"First of all, your brother's name is Barrett. You learned to say it correctly by the time you were three, so please make use of its proper pronunciation. Second, there are better ways of showing affection than name-calling—and that applies to both of you, as does my third point. This is Christmas." Glenn glanced at Cynthia, and his expression softened. "A time for peace and goodwill among men. Let's practice it, huh?"

Warmth flooded Cynthia's frame. How she loved Glenn. She would never have imagined marrying such a good-hearted, strong, yet tender man. After a childhood of upheaval and disappointments, her life with Glenn was more than she'd ever hoped for. God had certainly blessed her. A loving husband, two wonderful children, a comfortable home in a safe neighborhood . . . Sometimes she thought the dysfunctional family and seedy apartment of her past was only a dream. Until she remembered—

She jumped up. "Now that we've finished opening our gifts, I'll get breakfast started." She rubbed her palms together. "Cream cheese–pumpkin pancakes with chocolate chips, right, guys?"

Glenn caught her hand. "No."

She paused, confused. "No pancakes?" They'd had the same breakfast on Christmas morning since she and Glenn married a little over fifteen years ago.

She loved creating happy traditions for her children to remember. She swallowed a lump of disappointment. "What do you want then?"

He drew her back down on the sofa. Excitement glittered in his eyes. "I want you to open your last present."

Darcy and Barrett exchanged secretive looks, their lips twitching with suppressed grins. What had the loves of her life plotted? She released a light laugh and gestured to the small pile at the end of the sofa—new potholders woven from colorful cotton strings from Barrett, a six-pack of animal-print socks from Darcy, and a department store necklace with a silver-plated, filigreed heart pendant from Glenn. "But I already opened my presents, and they're perfect. I don't need anything else."

"Yes, you do." Glenn's expression turned serious. "There's one thing you've needed for as long as I've known you, and I think I finally found a way to give it to you."

Apprehension tiptoed up Cynthia's spine. Was he referencing . . . She shook her head. No, he wouldn't do that to her. Not in front of Darcy and Barrett. Not on Christmas, the one day she'd always worked so hard to make perfect for her family to cover up the painful, disappointing, alcohol-drenched Christmases of fighting and heartbreak she'd known as a child. She beseeched him with her eyes, willing him to keep the secret between the two of them, where it belonged.

As if in one accord, Darcy and Barrett moved from their spots on the floor and perched on the edge of the couch, Darcy next to Cynthia, and Barrett next to Glenn. Darcy put her hand on Cynthia's knee, and Barrett rested his cheek against Glenn's bicep. They both looked up at their father with open, expectant faces. Their trust, their innocence, ate a hole in Cynthia's stomach. Tears threatened, and she battled nausea.

Don't say it, Glenn. Please don't say it.

Glenn slipped an envelope from his shirt pocket and pressed it into Cynthia's hands. "Inside this envelope is the receipt for a retainer to a private investigator who specializes in reuniting parents with children given up for adoption."

Cynthia clenched her fist around the envelope and crunched her eyes tight. She gritted her teeth to hold in the moan of agony building deep inside her soul. Behind her closed lids she envisioned the tiny baby girl she'd spent the past two decades trying to forget. But the wailing infant with a shock of black hair and a wrinkled, red face remained embedded in her memory, the image even more painful than the awful scenes she carried of Christmas mornings.

"Oh, Glenn ..."

A gentle hand cupped her cheek. "Look at me, Cyn."

She jerked free of Glenn's touch, keeping her eyes shut. Darcy's hand tightened on her knee, and a soft whimper sounded next to Cynthia's ear. Her daughter was upset. Mother instinct overrode personal discomfort. Instinctively she opened her eyes and her arms, then pulled Darcy into her embrace. With Darcy locked in her arms the way she'd never held—would never hold—her first daughter, she shot a warning glare at Glenn and mouthed, *Not now*.

But Glenn, a tender smile curving his lips, gave a gentle nod. "Yes, now."

Cynthia tightened her grip on Darcy. She whispered, "The kids—"

Darcy wriggled. "Mom, we know about the baby you gave away."

Cynthia's arms turned to boiled noodles, and her spine went limp. She released her daughter and flopped against the back of the couch. "Y-you do?"

Darcy pushed her tangled hair behind her ears and nodded.

"How?"

Barrett said, "Dad told us."

Fury roared through Cynthia's chest. He had no right to share something meant to remain between the two of them. But in her stunned, weakened state, she couldn't find the ability to sit up and berate him. Then a swell of shame rose and conquered the anger. How long had her children known? She forced a simple question. "When?"

Darcy touched Cynthia's arm. "Three weeks ago."

Three weeks . . . He must have told them near her baby girl's twentieth birthday. Fresh pain stabbed, the thrust so intense it seared her insides. She felt laid bare in a public arena, and everything within her wanted to run away and

hide. But Darcy's hand on her arm, Barrett's open gaze pinned on her face, Glenn's arm along the back of the sofa with his fingers draped on her shoulder, even the bright-colored bulbs blinking their cheerful beat on the limbs of the Christmas tree became shackles.

Cynthia hooded her eyes with her hand and ducked her head. "I can't believe this."

"Mom?" Darcy pulled Cynthia's hand down and tilted her head a bit to meet her mother's gaze. "She's our sister. Why didn't you ever tell us about her?"

Tears swam in Cynthia's eyes, distorting her vision. She didn't dare look either Darcy or Barrett full in the face or she'd turn into a puddle. A mother should be strong, should be a good example. But now they knew just how weak and foolish she was. How could they ever respect her again? "I . . . I . . ." She gulped. Her dry throat burned. She shot a glare at Glenn before lowering her head again. She ground out, "I didn't want you to ever know how imperfect I am."

"But we already know you're not perfect."

Barrett's blithe comment gave Cynthia a jolt.

Darcy leaned past Cynthia and whacked her brother on the arm. "Batwit, don't say that!"

"Why?"

Her son's genuine confusion coaxed her out of hiding to deliver a touch of comfort. She formed a feeble smile. "It's okay, Barrett."

"I know it is." Resolve creased his boyish face. "Remember the story in the Bible when a man came up to Jesus and called Him 'good teacher,' and Jesus told him nobody's good except for God? Well, you're not God. Neither am I. Or Dad. Or Barf—I mean, Darcy." He gestured as he spoke, his hands jabbing the air as if determined to prove his point. "And then there's that verse in Romans we had to memorize for Sunday school—you know, 'All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.' That means moms and dads as much as kids."

Glenn caught Barrett in the bend of his elbow and gave the boy's head an affectionate knuckle rub. "You're getting pretty smart on us, buckaroo."

Barrett tipped his head and grinned at his father. "Thanks." He wiggled out of Glenn's grip and offered his mother a sheepish look. "Our name might be Allgood, but we aren't all good. We can't be, 'cause like I said, we're not God."

Cynthia blinked rapidly against the fresh tears filling her eyes. How she wanted to be all good for her children, different from her own mother, whose imperfections and badness had darkened her childhood and pushed her down pathways of poor choices that left her riddled with regrets. "I know I'm not God, Barrett, but I want to be . . . someone you can admire." Her last words emerged on a ragged whisper.

At once both children dove at her. Even Barrett, who'd nearly abandoned giving hugs since his eleventh birthday two months ago, claiming the practice was "babyish." Their arms wrapped around her, holding her tight. Their heads pressed into the curve of her neck, their warm breath offering comfort. She curled her arms around their frames and clung while prayers of both gratitude and pleading spilled from her heart.

Glenn placed his palm on her back, adding the warmth of his presence to the group embrace. "Cyn, I think what the kids are trying to tell you is that something from when you were a teenager doesn't have to define who you are today. You're their mother and they love you. Am I right, buckaroos?"

Both of them nodded, their hair tickling Cynthia's cheeks. She gently set them aside. She'd dropped the envelope, but she reached for it again and smoothed it across her thigh to erase the wrinkles. Despite her efforts the creases remained, a stark reminder of the permanent imprint she wore on her soul. She swallowed. "I love you guys, too." She glanced at Glenn. She wanted to be mad at him for telling her secret, but there was such hopefulness in his eyes. He'd only wanted to please her. She sighed. "And I love you."

His endearing, eye-crinkling smile lit his face. "That's good to know." He caught hold of Barrett and heaved him off the couch. Giggling, Darcy hopped up, too. "You two take your loot to your rooms and then set the table for Mom—help her out with Christmas breakfast, okay?"

"Sure, Dad." The pair scurried to obey.

As soon as the children departed, Glenn pulled Cynthia into his embrace. His stubble pricked her forehead, and the envelope received a few more wrinkles from being pressed between them, but she chose not to pull away. She needed the security his strong arms offered. He whispered against her hair, "Have I upset you?"

He had, but she wouldn't spoil Christmas Day with harsh words or accusations. Determined to bury the ugly memories parading through her mind, she burrowed into his chest. They'd rolled out of bed and scuffed into the living room to open gifts at the crack of dawn, neither bothering to shower before tugging on yesterday's rumpled clothes from the top of the hamper. He smelled of sleep and leftover aftershave and the onions she'd fried to go with last night's liver—one of Glenn's favorites even though Darcy and Barrett made horrible faces when she put the dish on the table. An odd potpourri but somehow right and pleasant.

"Cyn?" His hands caught her shoulders and pulled her from her nestling spot. "I have to warn you . . . The investigator wouldn't guarantee he'll find her or, if he does, that she'll want to meet you. Some adoptees have no desire to reconnect with their birth parents—he told me so. So if you don't want to risk it, I can cancel the investigation."

Cynthia's chest ached with the effort of breathing. Desire to see her daughter, to apologize for leaving her the way she had, to assure herself the helpless baby had been well cared for all these years twisted her heart into knots.

"You won't hurt my feelings if you reject the gift."

She raised one eyebrow.

"Honest."

She sighed and melted against him again. She pulled in his familiar scent, drawing comfort from it. "I do want to know, Glenn. I want to know she's all right."

"I know you do."

"But I'm afraid."

"I know that, too."

Her cheek resting against his firm chest, she fingered the envelope. "If . . . if I say no, don't look for her, do you get your money back?"

"Some. Not all. He required a nonrefundable deposit to reserve his services."

Even though not a hint of worry entered his tone, she knew their finances well enough to realize this gift was a sacrifice. Glenn's job as a high school science teacher paid more in satisfaction than in dollars, and her part-time library position, secured two months ago after years of being a stay-at-home mom, only brought in enough to cover the monthly payment on Darcy's new braces. They couldn't afford to throw away money.

"You don't have to tell me now." Glenn kissed the top of her head and then crushed her close. "Think about it. Pray about it. But, Cyn?" He caught her chin and raised her face. "I really think there's a part of you that will always feel incomplete until you know for sure where she is. I love you, and I want you to be totally whole. Not for me or for the kids but for you. Do you understand?"

How could she have even considered being angry at him? A sob formed, and she sniffed hard to hold it back. "You're so . . . so good to me. Thank you. I love you, Glenn."

He leaned in and delivered a sweet kiss. When he straightened, he stayed close, his forehead touching hers. "Does that mean yes, tell him to find her?"

Cynthia closed her eyes and sucked in a shuddering breath. She hadn't seen her baby girl in twenty years and twenty-two days. Her arms ached with emptiness and her heart twined with desire, but a deep-rooted fear rose up to strangle her. If the investigator found her daughter and she refused a meeting, Cynthia might never recover. She'd faced so many rejections in her life. Could she risk suffering yet another one?



Want to keep reading? You've got options:

Purchase a copy direct from the publisher or from your favorite retailer:



Download a copy for your eReader and keep reading right away:



