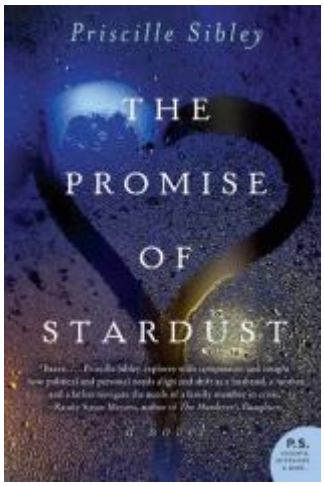
The Promise of Stardust

by Priscille Sibley



About the Book

Matt Beaulieu was two years old the first time he held Elle McClure in his arms, 17 when he first kissed her under a sky filled with shooting stars, and 33 when he convinced her to marry him. Now in their late 30s, the deeply devoted couple has everything --- except the baby they've always wanted.

When an accident leaves Elle brain dead, Matt is devastated. Though he cannot bear the thought of life without her, he knows Elle was afraid of only one thing --- a slow death. And so, Matt resolves to take her off life support.

But Matt changes his mind when they discover Elle's pregnant. While there are no certainties, the baby might survive if Elle remains on life support. Matt's mother, Linney, disagrees with his decision. She loves Elle, too, and insists that Elle would never want to be kept alive on machines. Linney is prepared to fight her son in court --- armed with Elle's living will.

Divided by the love they share, Matt and Linney will be pitted against each other, fighting for what they believe is right, and what they think Elle would have wanted resulting in a controversial legal battle that will ultimately go beyond one family...and one single life.

Discussion Guide

1. As a neurosurgeon, Matt immediately realizes that Elle's brain damage is severe. Why do you think he lets Phil operate? Do you think he betrays Elle by letting Phil do so? What about when Matt decides to keep his wife on life support?

2. Do you think Linney is overstepping her bounds when she opposes Matt's decision to keep Elle on life support? How much of Linney's behavior do you think is motivated by her experience as a nurse? Or by guilt over her decision not to intervene when Alice was dying/ suffering?

3. As teenagers, Matt and Elle find themselves about to have a baby. What do you think would have happened if Matt had approached his parents for help? Why doesn't Matt's dad, Dennis, do anything when he finds out Elle is pregnant? How do you think Hank would have reacted? Do you think Matt could have gone to one of his older brothers?

4. When Elle miscarries the first time, she says a name is important because it is the only thing they will ever be able to give the baby. Do you think it's important to give a name to grief?

5. Matt wants to keep the court case private, but it becomes a media circus. How much influence does the

media have on events like this? How much should they have? Is their involvement an expression of freedom of speech or is it an invasion of privacy?

6. Matt keeps talking to Elle while she's in the hospital, even though he knows she can't hear him. Why do you think he does that?

7. Elle says women are stronger because they can discuss their sadness and men feel as though they have to mask their pain and insecurities. Do you think that's true?

8. Matt describes Adam as a controlling prick, but at another point Matt describes himself as a controlling spouse with a medical degree. Why would Elle choose two men who, on the surface, are quite different from each other? Or are they more similar than Matt believes?

9. Do you think Elle or Linney actually hastened Alice's death? Do you think Matt would have actually gone to the authorities with Elle's diary? Would you have given Alice an extra "dose" to relieve her suffering?

10. Matt tried desperately to resuscitate his and Elle's stillborn son. How do you think that loss affected Matt? Elle? And, as a doctor, was Matt's "failure" to save the baby a deeper loss for him?

11. Matt does not hold Christopher in high esteem. What do you think the origin of Matt's animosity is? Do you think Christopher is aware of Matt's feelings about him? Was Elle?

12. Why do you think Elle never gave Matt her medical power of attorney? Have you made an advanced directive? Who would you designate to make those decisions for you?

13. At the end of the story, Matt sees a fleeting figure in the trees and for a moment he thinks it is Elle. In the aftermath of loss, have you ever briefly forgotten that your loved one is gone? Do you believe some part of them stays with you forever?

14. In some states, pregnancy invalidates a woman's advanced directive. Are you familiar with the laws in your state? Would you want to be kept on life support if you were pregnant?

Author Bio

Priscille Sibley is a neonatal intensive care nurse who lives in New Jersey with her husband and three teenaged sons. Her short fiction has appeared in *MiPoesias* and her poetry in *The Shine Journal*. She is a member of Backspace Writer's Forum and Liberty State Fiction Writers. THE PROMISE OF STARDUST is her first novel.

Critical Praise

"In this brave novel, THE PROMISE OF STARDUST, a family making choices about death with dignity finds themselves in uncomfortable opposition. Author Priscille Sibley explores with compassion and insight, how political and personal needs align and shift as a husband, a mother, and a father navigate the needs of a family member in crisis."
— Randy Susan Meyers, author of THE MURDERER'S DAUGHTERS

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