



## The Reluctant Midwife

*Patricia Harman*

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## **The Reluctant Midwife** Patricia Harman

The USA Today bestselling author of *The Midwife of Hope River* returns with a heartfelt sequel, a novel teeming with life and full of humor and warmth, one that celebrates the human spirit

The Great Depression has hit West Virginia hard. Men are out of work; women struggle to feed hungry children. Luckily, Nurse Becky Myers has returned to care for them. While she can handle most situations, Becky is still uneasy helping women deliver their babies. For these mothers-to-be, she relies on an experienced midwife, her dear friend Patience Murphy.

Though she is happy to be back in Hope River, time and experience have tempered Becky's cheerfulness-as tragedy has destroyed the vibrant spirit of her former employer Dr Isaac Blum, who has accompanied her. Patience too has changed. Married and expecting a baby herself, she is relying on Becky to keep the mothers of Hope River safe.

But becoming a midwife and ushering precious new life into the world is not Becky's only challenge. Her skills and courage will be tested when a calamitous forest fire blazes through a Civilian Conservation Corps camp. And she must find a way to bring Isaac back to life and rediscover the hope they both need to go on.

Full of humor and compassion, *The Reluctant Midwife* is a moving tribute to the power of optimism and love to overcome the most trying circumstances and times, and is sure to please fans of the poignant *Call the Midwife* series.

## **The Reluctant Midwife Details**

Date : Published March 3rd 2015 by William Morrow Paperbacks

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Author : Patricia Harman

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## From Reader Review The Reluctant Midwife for online ebook

### Susan says

Another excellent book by Patricia Harman!

Returning to Union County with Dr. Blum in tow, Becky Meyers the one time Health Nurse of Liberty, WV. Dr. Blum has become catatonic after a tragedy in his life, they come to live in his house after not receiving any help from his family. After finding the house is sold, Becky stays at Patience Murphy's old house and tries to get a job. Set during the depression, 1934, it is very hard to do so. With the help of her old friend Patience, Becky becomes the reluctant Midwife of Hope River.

Though the 1st book tells of Patience's story, the 2nd is told of Becky's story. A midwife and a nurse in the CCC camp. A must read sequel.

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### Melinda says

When I agreed to review this book, I realized that I should probably read the first book, *The Midwife of Hope River*, first. I'm normally one of those readers who just can't jump into a series mid-stream and starting with *The Reluctant Midwife* just didn't sit well with me.

So, before I go any further with this review, I do feel I should address the "sequel" aspect of this book. Yes, *The Reluctant Midwife* is the second book in the series and, in many ways, it feels like a second book. However, the two books are very different. The first installment addresses several issues of the time and delves deeply into midwifery. This book, however, addresses far fewer issues--it mostly focuses on the Great Depression--and deals more with general nursing than with midwifery.

Speaking for myself, I'm glad I read *The Midwife of Hope River* first. However, I don't think that is absolutely necessary. If someone were to read only *The Reluctant Midwife*, they would recognize that there was a previous book that fleshed out some of the supporting characters, but not reading *The Midwife of Hope River* would not affect the actual story of *The Reluctant Midwife*. While I wouldn't go so far as to call this book a standalone, I would say that its plot does not depend on the preceding book.

Okay, now that I have that out of the way....

This was a comfortable read for me. Harman again does an admirable job of recreating Depression-era Appalachia. I think it is probably easy for modern readers to think of the Great Depression as something a little bit worse than the recent recession, but Harman makes it perfectly clear how hard that part of our history truly was. At the same time, because she doesn't focus on too many aspects of the Depression, this is one of the historical fiction novels that readers who don't normally read historical fiction might like.

In this installment of the Hope River series (I'm not sure if Harman is planning any other novels, but we'll just call it a series for right now), Harman has created a tight story--the plot is centered entirely on Becky Myers, a once professionally and financially comfortable nurse who now finds herself penniless and in charge of her former employer, who has suffered some sort of mental break and is in an almost unresponsive state. I didn't always like Becky, but I always admired her. Yes, she had her periods of self-pity and what some may consider ugliness, but who wouldn't in her position?

I found the plot to move at a nice clip, which should appeal to many readers. I will admit that I found the end to be a bit predictable, but that didn't make it any less satisfying for me. Instead, it seemed more natural than

predictable.

While I would still recommend *The Midwife of Hope River*, I do think that this book--due to the fact that it is more streamlined than its predecessor--might be more appealing for some readers. Whether you read this book on its own or as part of the Hope River series, I think it would be well worth your time.

*I was given a copy of this book in return for an honest review. I received no other compensation for this post.*

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### **Maureen Timerman says**

This is a book that once you turn the first page, you will not be able to put down. We are transported the 1930's in American, and back to West Virginia, the Great Depression. West Virginia is at 80% unemployment, and nurse Becky Meyers finds herself homeless and also the caretaker of her former boss Dr. Isaac Blum.

I felt myself walking in Becky's shoes, looking at the bread lines, and having feelings of doubt as a baby is about to come into the world. I was holding to tooth brush as we brushed Dr. Blum's teeth. I had a lot of admiration for this woman, and what a hard lot in life she had been given, but she rolled with the punches, and came out a winner.

We also walk in Dr. Blum's shoes, and sometimes, we wish we didn't, such pain he kept locked up in his silence. What a blessing Hestor is to him, and even if he is stoic he seems to respond silently to help.

I feel blessed to have never lived during the Great Depression, but the author has painted a picture of that time that will linger a long time with you. This is a book not to be missed!

I received this book through Edelweiss and William Morrow Paperbacks, and was not required to give a positive review.

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### **Marianne Hetzer Hawn says**

After reading *The Midwife of Hope River*, I was eager to revisit the simple, honest folks of Liberty, WV. Like my everlasting love for Montgomery's *Anne of Green Gables*, my appreciation for Patricia Harman's work stems from her desire to portray a place and time honestly -- with optimism rather than pessimism. Folks are not perfect (some are not even decent) and terrible things sometimes happen, but hope prevails.

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### **Anna says**

What fabulous sequel to the "The Midwife of Hope River". Nurse Becky Meyers, and the doctor she served, Dr. Isaac Blum, return to Hope River to settle into Dr. Blum's family home, only to discover it's been sold to settle back taxes. Dr. Blum has become catatonic, and Becky hopes the peace of the countryside will restore his spirits. But with no place to call home, Becky seeks out Patience Hester. But the Hester homestead has been abandoned. Fortunately, Patience and her husband David have only moved to the other side of the mountain. David accepts Dr. Blum as a helper for his veterinary practice, and slowly Dr. Blum shows glimpses of healing. A great friendship develops between the two couples. Desperate for work Becky takes the position of camp nurse at the CCC camp. There she cares for the men, coming to admire many for the dedication to their service and the heroic actions taken in the midst of great danger. The depiction of the hardships of the 1930s are vivid. The descriptions of the beauty of the mountains, and the people who inhabit

them make you feel a part of the community. At times gritty, and not always happy-ever-after, the novel is a tribute to perseverance and the true meaning of community and being a good neighbor.

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## **Shelleyrae at Book'd Out says**

The Reluctant Midwife is a heartwarming and engaging novel by Patricia Harman, set in the same location and era as her fiction debut, The Midwife of Hope River.

Penniless, homeless and the sole carer of her inexplicably catatonic ex-employer, Dr Isaac Blum, nurse Becky Myers is in desperate straits by the time she arrives in Hope River, rural West Virginia. It is the 1930's, times are tough for everyone, and with few options, Becky is forced to figure out a way to support herself and Blum.

Harman effortlessly evokes the era in which The Reluctant Midwife is set. The focus is on the challenges of the Great Depression, in rural areas unemployment rose to around 80% leaving hundreds of thousands of people struggling to survive.

With a little luck and hard work, Becky finds a way to eke out a living as the Depression ravages the country. Though initially forced to rely on the generosity of friends and neighbours, she delivers groceries, reluctantly assists the local midwife Patience Murphy, and becomes a part time staff nurse at a nearby Civilian Conservation Corps camp.

Characterisation is a real strength of Harman's writing. Becky is not a saint, she can be uptight and prideful, she is often frustrated by Blum's non responsiveness and resents having to work as a midwife when the whole notion of childbirth horrifies her, however it is difficult to fault her drive to better her circumstances. I really enjoyed the way her hard edges softened over the course of the novel.

Readers familiar with The Midwife of Hope River may remember Dr Blum as an arrogant and cold man. His unexplained catonia was precipitated by the death of his wife, and he is now a pitiful man but his silence also hides a secret.

I loved reconnecting with Patience Murphy, Hope River's sole midwife, now married to the 'new' vet, Daniel Hester and the mother of a young son, but even more minor characters, like Nico and Captain Wolfe are well drawn and believable.

The Reluctant Midwife is a captivating story of hardship, loss, friendship, and hope. Though its not necessary to have read The Midwife of Hope River to enjoy The Reluctant Midwife, I would recommend it, simply because it too is a wonderful story.

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## **Carole says**

4.5 stars. I so enjoyed the characters and setting of this book! Nurse Becky is caring for her former employer, Isaac Blum who has been silent since the death of his wife. They find themselves homeless & jobless, so they return to Hope River. There Becky finds a home, and her friend Patience. It is a story of overcoming barriers, friendship, and finding hope. I loved it, and can't wait for her next novel. I also read The Midwife of Hope River, and recommend both for a good read!

## Theresa says

"The Reluctant Midwife" by Patricia Harman, is a sequel to "The Midwife of Hope River" (which I have not yet read, but that did not affect my reading of this book).

Becky Myers is now taking care of Isaac Blum, the physician whom she assisted in both surgery and outpatient practice. Dr. Blum has suffered a catatonic seizure after the tragic accidental death of his wife. His brother lost patience with Isaac's mute state and cut him off completely, so, with no one else to care for him, Becky takes on his care. However, due to Dr. Blum's loss of his practice and home, they are in deep financial arrears. Throughout the book, Becky is faced with the challenge of providing a living for them both while making sure that Isaac Blum is not left to wander off on his own.

This book brought home to me how deep the Depression years were and the difficulties that faced so many. Set in the mountains of Appalachia, with a nation-wide unemployment rate of twenty percent (that rate is going to climb throughout the book), this particular WV county had a eighty percent unemployment rate (unbelievable!)

*"I wake just as the sun is peeking over the mountains, thinking about President Roosevelt's fireside chat last night. The Hesters had us over to dinner and just like old times we sat around the radio listening, along with all the other worried Americans. In his quiet, reassuring way, Roosevelt talked about the Public Works Project, about getting people off the dole, about a new program called Social Security. Most important, he gives us hope that these dark days will not last forever."*

Isaac Blum comes out of his catatonic state long enough to suggest (in a one-word sentence), that they turn to Patience Murphy for help.

*"The midwife of Hope River, Patience Murphy, was one of my only friends when I lived in Liberty four years ago. You'd think there be others, but for a single professional woman in a small mountain town, there weren't many options...."*

*Maybe Patience will allow us to stay with her for a few days. I'd be grateful even to sleep in her barn."*

Patience (now married to a veterinarian, Daniel Hester), helps Becky and Isaac find a place to live and, although she would rather set a broken bone or suture a wound, Becky finds herself assisting Patience in deliveries. When Patience herself has a medical emergency, Dr. Blum and Becky move into the Hester's home to help care for her and their five year old son.

The book has some medical details that might be difficult to read (depending upon the reader's stomach tolerance), but for me, I didn't they them overly graphic. Knowing that this book is about childbirth, there are difficulties that arise that are quite simply, realistically portrayed.

There are many stories of delivering babies with various challenges of the times and limits of the medical field, and later on, administering first aid in an all-men's Civilian Conservation camp. Interspersed with the medical scenes are vignettes of what is happening in Becky's own life and the lives of her neighbors and friends, Patience and Daniel Hester.

How Becky manages to hold down a difficult job, help Patience through her medical challenges, and keep Dr. Blum going makes for an interesting read! One thing that kept me going was wanting to know if Dr. Blum would ever recover. I was quickly caught up in the lives of the characters and reading about the

challenges of the Depression years.

I enjoyed reading "The Reluctant Midwife"!

*"Dark night and the wind slams into our little house from the west. I've been awake in bed for hours, my mind skittering from one worry to another. It's not like we're starving. We get tomatoes, carrots, new potatoes, and greens from the garden. Daniel brings us eggs and milk twice a week in exchange for Isaac's help with the vet work, and the fish have been a great addition to our diet, but we have so little cash money for kerosene, gasoline, sugar, corn meal, and beans. I am really worried about what we will do this winter."*

My thanks to the publisher and the Library Thing Early Reviews Program in providing this (very interesting) copy for my review! "The Reluctant Midwife" comes out in March 2015.

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### **Margaret says**

An amazing book that again reminds me that I have been born in the wrong era. Okay I know that times were difficult "way back" but whenever crises develop in my household or community, I become alive and ready. I like the sense of community and back to the roots mentality that this book exhibited and it was down right charming, something I wish that modern society never lost. I read a lot of genre but coming back to this kind of book feels like going home. Patricia Harman weaves a story that keeps a person interested and you learn something about midwives and the era.

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### **Vivian says**

Becky Myers is used to hard work and a life filled with disappointment. She grew up with privilege as the daughter of a local physician in Vermont. She married a doctor before the Great War and continued to live in New England. Sadly, her husband was never quite the same after his return from the war and committed suicide shortly after his return home. Determined to start over, Becky received additional medical training and eventually settled in West Virginia as a nurse with the public health department. She then left West Virginia and moved to Virginia to become the nurse in the practice of a local physician. When that physician becomes catatonic and she has nowhere else to go, she and Dr. Blum return to Hope River, West Virginia. Becky thought that Virginia had been hit hard by the depression, but West Virginia and its residents are struggling. For the first time in her life, Becky is dependent upon the kindness of strangers to ensure she and Dr. Blum won't starve. The one thing that Hope River needs is another midwife, since Becky's friend Patience is unable to meet the demands of the county. Unfortunately midwifery is the last thing that Becky feels comfortable providing, but she soon realizes that she either provides this service or starves.

First, let me say if you haven't read The Midwife of Hope River then you need to read it as soon as possible. Is it possible to understand the action in The Reluctant Midwife without reading The Midwife of Hope River first? Yes it is, but simply trust me on this one and read The Midwife of Hope River first. Now that I have that out of the way, the second, and by far the most important thing is that I loved both of these books. I don't mean these books are nice, even though they are, or just that they are well written, and again they are . . . I mean that Ms. Harman has the ability to craft stories with characters that are so vivid and colorful that you'll want to know more about them.

The action in both books is portrayed realistically and without any sugarcoating. Life in the early 1930s was hard for a large number of people across the United States. Unemployment was high and social services were

all but unheard of in many areas. Even with the harsh, hardscrabble life for most of the people portrayed in both books, there is always an underlying sense of tenacity and hope. Becky gets to witness this first hand and quickly comes to realize that even though she and her former boss, Dr. Blum, may be experiencing difficulties, they are also blessed. Ms. Harman reintroduces the reader to many characters from *The Midwife of Hope River*, namely the midwife Patience, her husband the veterinarian Daniel Hester, their son Danny, the pharmacist and his wife, the grocer and his wife, the colored pastor and his wife, and more. The reader is also introduced to new characters like Captain Wolfe from the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) camp, a few mafia men from Pennsylvania, the young worker-turned-medic from the CCC camp, and more. First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt even makes a cameo appearance. There is suffering and death interspersed with joyous tales of survival and life.

It was fascinating to read about Becky's transformation from this somewhat formal and privileged woman to one that becomes more relaxed, slightly more informal, and willing to do anything necessary to survive. Becky's change begins when she becomes the caretaker of her former boss, Dr. Blum. Her change continues as she becomes more relaxed and self-assured with her midwifery skills, and is completed when she eventually becomes the nurse and sole medical personnel at the CCC camp. Obviously I can't tell you everything about the book because then you won't need to read it. There are stories within stories in both *The Midwife of Hope River* and *The Reluctant Midwife*. Ms. Harman provides the reader with insight into the primary characters, Patience and Becky, by giving glimpses into their pasts as well as their present lives. Did I enjoy reading these books? Yes! I read both cover-to-cover with minimal interruptions or breaks. If you enjoy reading historical fiction, you'll definitely want to read these books. If you think you don't like historical fiction, trust me and read these books. I can only hope that there will be more stories from Hope River in the future.

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## Lauren says

I'm always very, very hesitant when a book's description boasts that fans of Whatever Book or This Show will love it—kind of like when a book's description says a mixture of This Popular Book and That Popular Book. What can I say? I'm a skeptic.

I'm a huge *Call the Midwife* fan. (Hint: it's on Netflix, folks!). So when I read the description for *The Reluctant Midwife*, I laughed. Just because it says 'midwife' in the title doesn't mean it's going to satisfy my need while I wait for the next season to show up on Netflix, I thought.

Well, kudos to whomever included that in the description, because it definitely hit the spot.

Disclaimer: I did not read the first book in the Hope River series. I wanted to see how this particular book fared by itself. I'm pleased to say that if you would rather just read this one, you don't need to read the first to understand what is going on. That being said, I can definitely see how reading the first one would help the reader understand various characters' backgrounds. I plan on going back and reading the first.

Speaking of characters, I loved them. Betsy is an incredibly real protagonist, who has very real, raw emotions while dealing with Dr. Blum (who, in the wake of his wife's death, has become catatonic), her new impoverished situation, and figuring out who she wants to be. She experiences plenty of anger, gratitude, happiness, and frustration to make her a very relatable character.

Patience, the midwife, is incredibly sweet and loving, and she's the primary reason I'll be reading the first book (she's the star of that one). Her husband is cool, her son is adorable...I loved them. Even minor

characters, like the grocer or the woman on the outskirts of town who Becky delivers groceries to, are important and multi-dimensional.

I found the labor scenes simultaneously horrifying and page-turning. Whether the baby was blue, the mother was shrieking, or the midwives had to do something to keep mother or baby alive, I was transfixed. Naturally, I picture Becky as Jenny Lee aka Jessica Raine (but with an American accent, of course). The imagery is vivid—you can almost hear the grunts, moans, and pain of the women involved.

I did have one gripe: it was very long, with quite a few dull parts in between. Those bits are slow and hard to read. I suppose that's how life is, though. It's not always exciting. The book definitely read more like a diary than a novel. Rather than the entries being split up by date, they were broken into small subheads.

Overall, I loved this book and would definitely recommend it to those who are interested in historical fiction based in the 20's and/or midwifery. I rated it a 4/5 on Goodreads.

I received this book from TLC Book Tours and the publisher in exchange for an honest review.

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## Terri says

Review also found at <http://kristineandterri.blogspot.ca/2...>

**\*\*I received a copy of this book from the publisher William Morrow via Edelweiss in exchange for an honest review. The book has just been published\*\***

This is the second novel in the Hope River series following *The Midwife of Hope River* and I had not read the first one. I carefully researched before requesting this to ensure that I could read it as a stand alone and I was correct. That being said for those who have read the first story the character of Patience is still a key character in this story so those who want more of her will get it with this book.

As is my tendency I am going to try to not discuss the plot but more of my thoughts on how the book made me feel. The highlight for me was the backdrop of when the story took place. Deep in the middle of the great depression I was fascinated with how people were struggling and surviving on little to no resources. The story spoke of the government programs in place to try to help with the unemployment rate and how communities attempted to help their own and how people would do almost anything to be able to put food on their table. This appealed to me even more than Becky's story.

I also had a strange fascination with Blum. The question ever lingering as to if he will ever snap out of his inner prison. What were his feelings for Becky? He was probably my favorite character which is kind of funny as he had very few words to say. The dynamic between Blum and Becky was an interesting one. It is almost like in his wordlessness that he was carefree temperament to Becky's uptight personality.

Now this story is titled *The Reluctant Midwife* so you know there will be some birthing scenes. As someone who has only ever had fur babies I did find them a little disturbing. I don't know why but everything about child birth has always made me feel a little light headed so I did struggle with the passages that described it. Others may not. Also if I had to add a little critique I would say that a lot of the scenes were descriptively the same. I got a little sick of reading "mmmmmmmmmm" every time a mother had a contraction. There are other words/description to describe the pain.

Ultimately this was a very interesting story. As previously mentioned the era in which it took place was what

captured my attention the most. I do think I will go back to read the first story as the character of Patience was an interesting one and I can see how her story could be a great read

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### **Elizabeth of Silver's Reviews says**

Babies, folks helping each other, and a difficult, but wonderful era.

Patience and Becky knew each other from years before and became reacquainted when Becky moved back to town with Dr. Blum who is now disabled.

Patience is a midwife, and Becky is a nurse. Both women deliver babies together and share what they have food wise and material wise to make ends meet and to make it through the difficult times of The Depression. You will follow Patience, Becky, Dr. Blum, Patience's husband, and all of the other delightful town folks through their days.?

THE RELUCTANT MIDWIFE is one of those books you won't want to put down because the characters are so wholesome and because the story is so homey and heartwarming. Patience and Becky are characters you would want for a friend.

ENJOY if you read THE RELUCTANT MIDWIFE....any women's fiction fan will be hooked. You will want to crawl into the pages of the book, to be one of the characters, and to share in their lives.

THE MIDWIFE OF HOPE RIVER is recommended before reading THE RELUCTANT MIDWIFE, but I am having no trouble? with following the storyline even though I didn't read the first in the series. It is a marvelous read. 5/5

This book was given to me free of charge and without compensation by the publisher in return for an honest review.?

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### **Cathy Daniel says**

Excellent book! The ending made me teary.

"From devastation comes new life"

\* there is an emergency c-section that I had to skip that lasted a couple of pages. Some of the births are too detailed also. I wish that was left out but I'm very much a queasy person when it comes to this stuff. It may not bother anybody else.

However, I still loved this book and the gentle wisdom in it.

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### **Melinda says**

Harman successfully sketches the harshness of the 1930's. The Great Depression at the center as well as a tragic wildfire. Despite the desperation, the lack of food and work, in some instances homelessness, people pull together and hold out a helping hand and/or open their doors. Neighbor looking after and supporting their fellow neighbor. Inspiring and uplifting of the sense of community in the face of difficult trials as

struggles were shared together.

Becky isn't easy to like, in fact she's downright cold and aloof. I wasn't sure if she would grow, as the story continues, the reader is given glimpses of hope. A skilled nurse but her bedside manner clearly lacking – her frustration with Blum infuriated me at times. She possesses a kind heart, however, you find yourself straining to see the goodness. Yes Becky has had her share of heartache but my goodness she is so pessimistic. She's on the edge of giving up hope, after a while it becomes increasingly frustrating. Patience is Becky's polar opposite, amazing given her incredibly painful past, yet she is optimistic, warm, approachable and unlike Becky she enjoys midwifery. Two differing women with their perspectives under a lens.

A solid story during a trying time in history, midwifery along with its challenges and triumphs probed.

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