



# Where the Sweet Bird Sings

*Ella Joy Olsen*

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## **Where the Sweet Bird Sings** Ella Joy Olsen

In this provocative new novel, the author of *Root, Petal, Thorn* offers a powerful story of resilience, hope, and the secrets that, no matter how deeply hidden, can shape and ultimately unite a family. What connects us to one another? Is it shared history? Is it ancestry? Is it blood? Or is it love?

People respond to tragedy in different ways. Some try to move on. Some don't move at all. A year after her young son's death due to a rare genetic disease, Emma Hazelton is still frozen by grief, unable and unwilling to consider her husband Noah's suggestion that they try to have another child.

As the future Emma once imagined crumbles, her family's past comes into sharp relief. Searching for the roots of her son's disease, Emma tries to fit together the pieces in her genealogical puzzle. Hidden within an old wedding photograph of her great-grandparents is an unusual truth Emma never guessed at—a window into all the ways that love can be surprising, generous, and fiercely brave . . . and a discovery that may help her find her own way forward at last.

Praise for **WHERE THE SWEET BIRD SINGS**:

"In *Where the Sweet Bird Sings*, Ella Joy Olsen explores loss, grief, and family secrets. And shows us that although DNA may explain a great deal about the relationships between mothers and sons, sisters and brothers, grandchildren and grandparents, it is love, not genetics, that makes a family." Julie Lawson Timmer, author of *Five Days Left* and *Untethered*

"This beautifully written story takes a fresh look at grief, as a young mother searches for her identity and finds answers, solace, and healing in her family's past. A must read for lovers of book club fiction!" Barbara Claypole White, bestselling author of *The Perfect Son* and *Echoes of Family*

"With heart and skill, Ella Joy Olsen has created characters whose lives and stories will resonate with readers. *Where the Sweet Bird Sings* is a compelling story that will captivate lovers of vulnerable, bold fiction." Marybeth Whalen, author of *The Things We Wish Were True*, *When We Were Worthy* and co-founder of *She Reads*.

"Filled with secrets spanning several generations, **WHERE THE SWEET BIRD SINGS** is an exploration into the what it means to be a family and how lies threaten the bonds between the people who are supposed to know each other best. Olsen's gorgeous prose draws you in from the first page and as the mystery unravels, you'll find yourself turning the pages faster and faster. A heartwarming read of love, letting go, and ultimately, finding yourself." - Jamie Raintree, Author of *Perfectly Undone*

Praise for **ROOT, PETAL, THORN**

*Root, Petal, Thorn* mixes history and genealogy into a believable novel. - RT Book Reviews 4.5 Stars Top Pick


"Exploring the residents of one house gives Olsen a way to explore the layers of lived experience that eventually turn into what we know as history. [It is] provocative in the way it explodes and expands the category of historical fiction." *The Salt Lake Tribune*

Five women. Five complicated lives. One house where they all live over a period of one hundred years. In this story, the walls talk. Wonderful, compelling saga! Cathy Lamb, author of My Very Best Friend and The Language of Sisters

### Where the Sweet Bird Sings Details

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## From Reader Review Where the Sweet Bird Sings for online ebook

### Mareli Thalwitzer says

This review was first published on: <http://marelithalkink.blogspot.co.za/...>

"You asked why a person would lie? I'll tell you. It's because you can't bear the weight of the enormous mess you've made, because you pray things will work out for the best, or they'll change given enough time. At first, it's avoidance of pain, but the truth drifts away, the distance between reality and the original lie are so far removed from one another, the situation can't be bridged with words. Soon, the lie is the truth. The lie dictates how things are in reality."

I've requested this book from Netgalley and Kensington Books at the beginning of this year when I went through a similar heartache as Emma. I hoped that this book would help me to deal with my own sorrow and pain. That it did. What a beautiful written book!

Emma's emotions and thoughts were captured very realistically. Her inner struggle and despair were heartfelt. She was a strong leading character, maybe a bit too strong as a couple of the other characters came across as part of a puppeteer show. Especially the "historical" characters. Loved the plot and story of her genealogical heritage and the way that Emma went about to uncover her family history had a strong ring of truth.

Although it kept my attention and I desperately wanted to uncover the truth alongside Emma, it just never became real. Alternating story-lines might have captured it. The truth about Emma's grandfather was a lovely and heartbreaking story and it ones again proofed just how strong a family can be.

"There are many things that connect one person to another. It could be shared history. Or biology. It could be blood. Or it could be love."

I haven't read the companion to Where the sweet bird sings, Root, Petal, Thorn, but I will try to get my hands on it. Although the two novels are not a sequel, I do believe it might be to the reader's advantage to read both of these.

Ella Joy Olsen has a beautiful writing style and there were a number of beautiful truths captured between the pages of Where the sweet bird sings. I will carry these words of comfort and providers of hope with me for a long time.

A big thank you to Netgalley and Kensington Books for the opportunity to read and review this novel and to Ella Joy Olsen for her lovely words.

"It's not what happened to you years ago, it's what you do from this point forward. The next step is more important than dwelling on past mistakes".

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### Susan Peterson says

Where the Sweet Bird Sings takes us on a heartfelt journey with Emma, as she deals with grief, a shattered marriage, and long-hidden family secrets; she must find a way to reconcile her past before she can see her way clear to the present and the future. Still grieving the devastating loss of her son, Emma's grandpa Joe's funeral becomes a catalyst for Emma to find out who she is, what she wants. While sorting through items at her grandfather's house, Emma is shocked and perplexed to discover that her past, her family, her ancestors, were not who she always believed them to be. This book is so beautifully and delicately written, stirring my

emotions as I turned each page. There were times that my heart was in my throat as Emma navigates her way forward, with twists and turns along the way as she makes her choices, some of them regretful. This passage from the book is so eloquent, so profound; "Because here's the thing: There are many things that connect one person to another. It could be shared history. Or biology. It could be blood. Or it could be love."

This book is a companion to Ella Olsen's first book, *Root Petal Thorn*...although not a sequel, it adds wonderful layers and a richness to characters who live in both books.

Many thanks to the author for providing me a copy of this book.

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### **Jennifer ~ TarHeelReader says**

There are a couple reading topics I'm picky about due to my work and personal experience. One of those topics is grief, and this book centered around the grief of the main character, Emma, who suffered two big losses one year apart. I felt that the author did a good job portraying Emma's inner turmoil.

The biggest lesson with grief is we all need to learn not to judge where someone is in her grief. It's a personal experience, and as such, it affects us all differently. Through her losses, Emma finds her way to forgiveness.

I read *Root, Petal, Thorn* earlier this year, also by Olsen, and while *Where the Sweet Bird Sings* is not a sequel, there is an added richness when you read RPT first.

Thanks to the author and Suzy Approved Book Reviews for the complimentary copy. This was my unsolicited review.

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### **Shalini says**

This story had such a great plot that I was excited enough to leave all work to read this. But alas and very woefully, I have to admit that this book did not hold my attention. It took me 4 days to finish reading.

I tried to like the main character, Emma, I tried to understand her. I do know that the death of a child is excruciating, and I wouldn't want this tragedy to befall any woman on this earth.

A year after her child's death, Emma still hasn't grieved fully, and her process of dealing with the grief and understanding herself takes her away from her marriage to Noah. Both Emma and Noah are carriers for genetic disease Canavan disease, prevalent amongst the Jewish population. And unfortunately, her child, Joey, had the disease and didn't thrive past his toddler hood.

Death of a child makes or breaks the relationship/marriage, and that is the basis of this book by Ella Joy Olsen. She has written a mother's pain seeped in tears and soul breaking agony. Not a single minute passes by when a mother does not feel the loss, not a second bypasses her, when she is tormented by the image of her child and the longing to hold him in her arms, once more. Ella Joy Olsen has painted the picture of such a mother so beautifully that it appears like a canvas of pain amongst the land of living.

But the story loses its plot down the pages, a book which should have kept me stuck by its side, loses me frequently.

Emma, a year after the death of her child, has to deal with the death of her beloved grandfather. While sorting through his things, she comes across a photo of her great-grandfather's marriage where there is a lookalike of Emma.

Who is that lady? Where did she go? Why is her name absent from all documents? Who is Emma descended from?

These questions form an excellent premise for the plot, but the story goes all over the place with pages of description, with feelings which appear asynchronous at times, and a narration which does not maintain the

interest, the curiosity which the questions demand.

The identity of the woman in the photo should have been the main story, in fact, it is pushed way down to the last few pages. The main character, Emma, comes across as an escapist, always hiding behind excuses. She is unsure about everything, and I don't find her dealing with any part of life strongly or with determination. Procrastination seems to be her middle name. And that's why, probably, I procrastinated reading this book, read 2 in between. She also has some weird ideas of cheating on her husband just to conceive a healthy child. But this can be just me, grief can make people go crazy.

Some things have to be faced head-on, hating confrontations is no excuse if she is on the path of truth. The rest of the characters prop her up well. The husband, Noah, appeared to be the most sane of them all, and the author has brought about his frustration with her, onto the pages clearly.

On the whole, a pleasant read with unwanted paragraphs skipped, to get to the finish line.

I received an ARC from NetGalley and publisher, Kensington and this is my honest and unbiased opinion.

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### **Carol Boyer says**

When I find a book that taps deep within my emotions, resonating in me similar memories of love, loss, grief, heritage, and age old secrets, my heart lives in it till the last page and beyond. I felt so excited to have been given an advanced copy of this extraordinary and beautiful book by the author, and I knew I would love it as much as her book *Rose, Petal, Thorn*. The loss of their child brings excruciating heartbreak to Emma and Noah, and each grieves differently, and the rift they experience is palpable. The passages of history, the research for answers is a journey that is brilliantly written and genetic questions are sought that weigh heavily on hope that can bring healing for the future. The events that play out kept me wondering, and guessing as I went through many emotions that brought tears, heart stopping moments and I hurt for Emma, yet cheered her on in her fiercely brave drive to find the key to who she is, and who she will become. I was totally absorbed in wonderful descriptive details of keepsakes found in letters, closets, and keepsakes of long ago that add such richness to this evocative story. I loved this book, and Ella Olsen is an author I recommend highly, she is not to be missed, and deserves more than 5 stars.

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### **Letty says**

Loved this book! I loved everything about it. That cover, the characters, and the story itself even though it is emotional and heartbreaking, it is so well-written that I could feel Emma's anguish and grief coming through the pages. Grief of losing her infant son from a rare genetic disease and then exactly one year later losing her beloved grandfather and discovering family secrets that leaves her confused and has her searching for answers about those secrets. She loves her husband Noah but can she stay with him? Can they risk having another child together and possibly losing that child to that same genetic disease? Having recently taken my own DNA test and researching (with my husband's help) my family history, I was fascinated with the DNA and family research part of the book. I cheered Emma on, hoping she'd find the answers she was looking while researching her grandfather's, and her, history, and hoping she and Noah would be able to work things out about their future together. This is such a beautiful story about loss, family and forgiveness. I consider it a must-read and should not be missed!!

Thank you to Ella Olsen, Kensington Publishing and NetGalley for the opportunity to read an advance copy of this book in exchange for my honest review. All opinions are my own.

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## **Martie Nees Record says**

Pub. Date: August 29, 2017

Publisher: Kensington Books

Why do I always fall into the same trap? This is a novel about a young married couple who live in Salt Lake City (the location alone should be a spoiler) who lose a child by a rare genetic disease. The parents did not know that they were carriers. So my maternal instincts seem to go through my fingers and before I know it, I click “yes” agreeing to read and review. Well, there are many heartbreaking stories of child loss out there, and in fairness, this one had its moments. I think the author’s problem was trying to combine past and present mysteries into the plot. Yet, reflecting, I probably would have been okay with that. I guess my problem was that I felt that the writing was preaching forgiveness to the point of nausea. But, that is me, and I bet I have blog buddies that I admire who will eat this one up.

Find all my reviews at <https://books6259.wordpress.com/>

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## **Barbara White says**

I was fortunate enough to read an advanced copy of this gorgeous book. What a beautifully written, thought-provoking story about moving beyond the heartbreak of losing a child to search for answers and healing in the past.

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## **Deborah Blanchard says**

This is a richly woven story of loss, grief and finding oneself among it all. This book is a perfect tapestry of how we all deal with grief differently. How we move on from the grief is different for each and every one of us. You don't get over loss, you get through it. Emma and Noah have lost their son from a rare genetic disease and it has left Emma lost. Losing a child has to be the worst thing in the world. My Mom would know, as she lost two children. I don't know if I would survive such a loss. The characters come to life off of the pages and I felt every emotion that they felt. The loss, the pain and the love. There were many layers to this story. Emma is searching her ancestry after losing her Grampa a year after her son. There are lies to contend with. It is a story rich with emotion. It is extremely well written and the flow is exceptional. I was engrossed in the story and the multi layers as it unfolded, were mesmerizing to me. This story will tug at your heartstrings and you may weep, I did. It is sad, while also uplifting. We can rise from the ashes of grief and loss. I highly recommend this book. I could simply go on and on about how great of a book this is. You must read this one.

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## **Jennifer C says**

I loved this book. I couldn't put it down. Emma's experiences mirror a lot I have gone through and I can empathize with her journey. This is written by someone who has been exposed to these kinds of events as they are very true to what happens in reality. The truth in Emma's feelings and actions drew me in.

Not only was the personal events that were going on in Emma's life similar to mine, I love reading journeys to the past - I love researching where we came from and found that part very fascinating and I was putting pieces of the puzzle together in my mind as I went along with her research.

I couldn't put this one down and I now want to read Ivy's story. I was disappointed when we didn't have time to hear it in the book but super excited to realize Ms Olsen's first book will satisfy my curiosity.

This was a wonderful story and I recommend it those who enjoy reading about the emotional journey of a woman who is a wife, mother, daughter and trying to find herself.

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### **Ceillie Simkiss says**

DNF @ 46 percent because I hated everyone and everything about it.

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### **Bam says**

\*3.5 to 4 stars.

This lovely and touching story is told from the first-person point of view of Emma Hazelton, a young married woman living in Salt Lake City, Utah. The Hazeltons lost their infant son the year before from Canavan disease, which turned out to be a genetic disorder that both parents unwittingly carried in their DNA.

Now her husband Noah wants to move on with their lives, perhaps have another child, but Emma is still immobilized by her grief and sadness. And the odds of another baby being born with the same genetic disorder are high, 1 in 4. Can they risk that and possibly go through this same pain? Or is it time to release Noah to find love and have a family with another woman?

More grief comes to Emma and her family with the death of her beloved grandfather, Joseph Barlow. Emma and her mother face the daunting task of going through his papers in preparation to sell his home and perhaps this will take her mind off her troubles.

Emma finds the wedding picture of her great-grandparents but the year on the back seems wrong: her grandfather Joseph was born in 1913 but the notation on the back of the photo says 1916. And there's another woman off to the side who is holding a child, a woman who looks remarkably like Emma--who can she be?

Most of the rest of the story is an interesting quest into ancestry looking for answers. What better place to start than The Mormon Family History Library right there in Salt Lake City. Along the way Emma gains knowledge but also wisdom: "There are many things that connect one person to another. It could be shared history. Or biology. It could be blood. Or it could be love."

As I began reading, I didn't think this was my kind of story; I don't really care for suffering such deep pain and emotional grief vicariously. (Please God, let me learn my lessons through joy rather than sorrow.) But I hung in there and in the last half of the book, I found her search for answers in her family's past quite fascinating. If you've ever done any digging on Ancestry.com, you'll probably enjoy this book as well.

I'll definitely look forward to reading more from this author. Her characters seemed well-drawn and

authentic. I also enjoyed revisiting Salt Lake City--such a beautiful city!

Thanks to NetGalley, the author and publisher for providing me with an arc of this book for an honest review.

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### **Sue says**

This is a beautiful well written book about grief and love and family. It looks at a family's response to tragedy and whether they can move beyond it and go back to their lives.

Emma and Noah have lost a child who had a rare genetic disorder. Noah is ready to move on and try to have another child by using extensive testing procedures. Emma is unable to move on and when her beloved grandfather dies on the one year anniversary of their child's death, her grief is compounded. She feels that she and Noah can never try to take the chance of having another child and since he deserves to have a family, she leaves him despite the fact that she loves him. While she is living with her mother, she is cleaning out her grandfather's house and finds pictures that make her think that there is a mystery in her family past that may explain where the gene came from that caused her child's disease and she is determined to find out the story behind where the disease came from. My heart ached for Emma as she tried to accept the death of her child and learn to move ahead in her life. It seemed for so long that for every step forward, she took two back but I was cheering her on for her entire journey,

This is a beautiful well written novel about coping with grief and learning that family may not be made up of DNA but of love and shared history.

Thank you to the author for a copy of this book to read and review.

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### **Nancy says**

Emma & Noah are trying to deal with the loss of their son from a genetic disease a year ago. At the same time Emma has just buried her beloved grandfather. Her life is in such limbo and her husband is wanting to try to move on. They love each other but he wants to try to have more children and take a chance all will be ok. Emma can't think past where she is now. In helping her mother clean out her grandfather's house and looking at his obit she realizes he had secrets that she never knew. She starts to look at his past and goes to the SLC LDS Family History Center to see what she can learn. Noah has an accident and is in a medical coma for a couple of days. When he starts to get well he tells Emma they have to move on from their limbo or separate. What do you think happens? Great book and interesting things she learns about herself and her history.

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### **Theresa Alan says**

Emma is reeling from the death of her son a year earlier and the death of her beloved grandfather at the beginning of this story.

Grieving a child would obviously devastate anyone, but it's worse for Emma because she and her husband

carry a gene that means they'd have a one in four chance of having another child with the same mind-and-body crippling disease Joey had. To move forward, Emma looks back, trying to figure out her family's history. As she does so, she unravels numerous family secrets in her efforts to figure out who she is today.

In her search, the questions remain: Should she let her husband go so he can be with a woman who can assure him biological children? Can she forgive him? Herself? Her own flawed biological relatives?

This is a beautifully told story of loss and digging deep within to find a way forward.

Thanks to NetGalley for an opportunity to review an advance copy of this book.

For more reviews, please visit: <http://theresaalan.net/blog/>

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