



# The Last Midwife

Sandra Dallas

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## READING GROUP GUIDE

### About the book:

It is 1880 and Gracy Brookens is the only midwife in a small Colorado mining town where she has delivered hundreds, maybe thousands, of babies in her lifetime. The women of Swandyke trust and depend on Gracy, and most couldn't imagine getting through pregnancy and labor without her by their sides.

But everything changes when a baby is found dead...and the evidence points to Gracy as the murderer. She didn't commit the crime, but clearing her name isn't so easy when her innocence is not quite as simple, either. She knows things, and that's dangerous. Invited into her neighbors' homes during their most intimate and vulnerable times, she can't help what she sees and hears. A woman sometimes says things in the birthing bed, when life and death seem suspended within the same moment. Gracy has always tucked those revelations away, even the confessions that have cast shadows on her heart. With her friends taking sides and a trial looming, Gracy must decide whether it's worth risking everything to prove her innocence. And she knows that her years of discretion may simply demand too high a price now...especially since she's been keeping more than a few dark secrets of her own. With Sandra Dallas's incomparable gift for creating a sense of time and place and characters that capture your heart, *The Last Midwife* tells the story of family, community, and the secrets that can destroy and unite them.

### Discussion Questions

- 1) "Gracy was one of them, and she wasn't." What does this statement on page 112 mean? What are specific instances when we see the way in which it is true, and how does it make navigating through the community both easier and harder for Gracy?
- 2) What was your reaction to John's offer to help Gracy flee, and to her decision not to take him up on it? What would you have done if you were in her position? Similarly, how did you react to Gracy's refusal to let Josie be called to the stand or examined during the trial?
- 3) What role does setting play in this novel? How would the story have been different if it had been set in another part of the country?



- 4) Throughout the story Gracy tells of lessons about life that she learned from Nabby. What are some of the things she learned from Nabby, and how do they help her deal with her present situations as an adult?
- 5) In this novel we see the depiction of how the justice system worked in a small mining town in the 1800's. How did you react to the prosecuting attorney's tactics during the hearing and during the trial? Did you think the judge was fair? Did you agree with all the decisions Ted Coombs made as Gracy's attorney?
- 6) This novel is full of vibrant secondary characters and their stories. Was there a character that made an especially strong impression on you, positive or negative? Did you have a favorite?
- 7) How does Daniel explain the different ways that he loved Jennie and Gracy? How did you react to his explanation?
- 8) On page 114, Lucy's mother-in-law says to Gracy, "Myself, I think it's better to have a love so great it breaks your heart than a little one that brings no pleasure." Do you agree with this? Do you think that, by the end of the novel, Gracy would agree with this statement after all her years with Daniel?
- 9) Do you think Esther's death was really an accident?
- 10) Were you shocked by the outcome of the trial and the revelation at the end of the novel? Did the conclusion meet your expectations? If not, what did you expect to happen?

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