

OUT OF AFRICA - BOOK 6



OUT OF

Control



MICHELE POLLOCK DALTON



OUT OF

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For everyone who needs to begin again.

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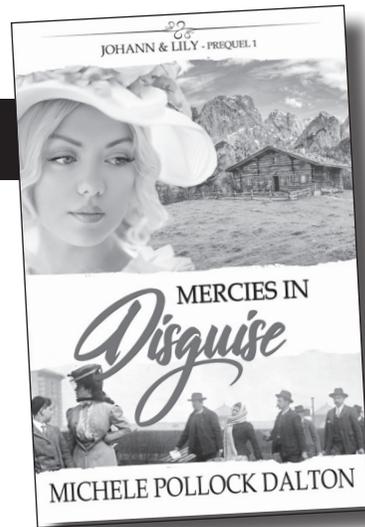
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MERCIES IN *Disguise*



Johann Brandtstadter returns home a weary man, tired of the bloodshed and horror that war brings. When he finds a dear childhood friend grown into young womanhood, he cannot help but claim her for his own.

At the turn of the twentieth century, life is changing and not necessarily for the better. Can Johann and his young bride find a safe place to call home despite the tension and mayhem of a world on the brink of war?

Mercies in Disguise is a prequel to the OUT OF AFRICA series and follows the journey of Johann and Lily Brandtstadter from their German Fatherland to the shores of America.



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I look forward to sharing Johann & Lily's story with you!

Out of Africa



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AUTHOR'S NOTE

Dear Friend,

Thank you for joining me in these pages. It is my sincere hope that you find a good dose of love, laughter, and promise inside.

If you have read the previous books in this series, then you know that *this is not your typical Christian romance* novel. Some scenes depict the complexities of marital love and a healthy sexual relationship within the bounds of marriage. While these passages may be more provocative than you are used to seeing in Christian fiction, they exist to tell the fantastic story of human love as it was meant to be under God's fabulous design. In contrast, you will also find the distorted view of sexuality that is so prevalent in our culture today. I will not leave these views unchallenged, in fact, you will discover the story of redemption bleeding through in Genesis and Billy's story. More than that, I hope to demonstrate that God's plan for our pleasure is so much greater than anything we can invent or misconstrue with our warped minds.

This is not a "G Rated" storyline. You will find scenes and themes in this story that are graphic. The individuals and gamut of personalities represented inside of this fictional universe face the same difficulties as their flesh and blood counterparts. And, I do not shy away from tackling difficult situations. Instead, it is my fervent desire to infuse the reality of God's unchanging mercy and grace to everyone who seeks Him.

Without my mother's insight, many portions of this series would have been lackluster. So, I want to give a heartfelt acknowledgment to her for her continuing assistance in making this writing adventure possible. Thanks, Mom! Love you more!

Keep the Son Shining!

Michele



CAST OF CHARACTERS

John William "Billy" Brandt III: Illegitimate son of Johann William Brandt Jr. Recently connected with his grandmother, Lily Brandt, and his siblings. A long-haul trucker working for Maude Baumgartner and residing in Vacaville, California.

Dr. Catherine Kavanagh Brandt: A pediatrician, currently working as a private physician to Maude Baumgartner. Married to John Brandt. Residing in Long Beach, California.

John Brandt: A fireman/paramedic for the Los Angeles County Fire Department. Married to Catherine Kavanagh Brandt. Residing in Long Beach, California.

Lily "Lil" Brandt: Matriarch of the Brandt clan. Grandmother to John, Ronnie, Sandy, and Suess. Working for the Phillips family in Sonoma, California.

Susannah "Suess" Brandt: Youngest daughter of Winona Brandt; sibling to John, Ronnie, and Sandy. Working for the Phillips family in Sonoma, California.

Winona "Noni" Brandt: Rental manager for the Baumgartner properties in Sonoma, California. Estranged from her husband, Billy Brandt Jr. Dating Shaughnessy Forsythe. Mother of John, Ronnie, Sandy, and Suess.

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Aaron (Cassidy) Bakker: Thirteen-year-old son of Maggie Thompson from a previous relationship.

Andrew (Cassidy) Bakker: Fifteen-year-old son of Maggie Thompson from a previous relationship.

Anthony (Cassidy) Bakker: Fourteen-year-old son of Maggie Thompson from a previous relationship.

Amanda Lynn "Mandie" Thompson: Five-year-old daughter of Maggie and Jay Thompson. Currently living with their paternal grandparents, Bear and Irene Thompson, in Vacaville, California.

Bernard "Bear" Thompson: A dairy farmer from Vacaville, California. Married to Irene Thompson; father to Jay (deceased) and James Thompson; and, grandfather to Mandie, Cassie, and Rosie Thompson.

Cassandra Sue "Cassie" Thompson: Three-year-old daughter of Maggie and Jay Thompson. Currently living with their paternal grandparents, Bear and Irene Thompson, in Vacaville, California.

Irene Thompson: Married to Bernard "Bear" Thompson; mother to Jay (deceased) and James Thompson; and, grandmother to Mandie, Cassie, and Rosie Thompson. Currently living on the family farm near Vacaville, California and raising her granddaughters.

James Thompson: Married to Sandy (Brandt) Thompson. Father of Jameson "Jamie", Jonathan "Jon-Jon", and Jay. Farming near Vacaville, California. The youngest son of Bear and Irene Thompson.

Margaret "Maggie" Thompson: Farming near Vacaville, California. Widow of Jay Thompson; mother of Andrew, Anthony, and Aaron Bakker in addition to Mandie, Cassie, and Rosie Thompson. Birthmother of Larry and Mary-Cate Phillips. Daughter of Lester and Dorthea Bakker.

Sandra "Sandy" (Brandt) Thompson: Married to James Thompson. Mother to newborn triplets Jameson "Jamie", Jonathan "Jon-Jon", and Jay. Middle daughter of Winona Brandt; sibling to John, Ronnie, and Sues.

Rosalee Ann "Rosie" Thompson: One-year-old daughter of Maggie and Jay Thompson. Currently living with their paternal grandparents, Bear and Irene Thompson, in Vacaville, California.

* * * * *

Dave Baldwin: Fireman/paramedic with the Los Angeles County Fire Department. Partner of John Brandt.

Captain Charles "Chuck" Harris: Captain at Fire Station 07 - "A" Shift - with the Los Angeles County Fire Department.

James "Jimmy" Jackson: Firefighter at Fire Station 07 - "A" Shift - with the Los Angeles County Fire Department.

Augustus "Gus" Reid: Firefighter at Fire Station 07 - "A" Shift - with the Los Angeles County Fire Department. Station comedian/clown.

Gabriel "Gabe" Vaccarello: Engineer at Fire Station 07 - "A" Shift - with the Los Angeles County Fire Department.

* * * * *

Maude Baumgartner: Wealthy widow employing Dr. Catherine Brandt. Currently living in Los Angeles, California with her housekeeper/caretaker, Agatha Norris.

Genesis Roberts: Exotic Dancer working with Maggie Thompson at a gentleman's club in Sacramento, California.

Shaughnessy Forsythe: Attorney handling Maude Baumgartner's legal matters. A resident of Sonoma, California. Dating Winona Brandt.

Evan Graham: Sixteen-year-old brother of Ben Graham. Currently living with Maggie Thompson and her sons on their farm near Vacaville, California.

Heather Kavanagh: Catherine's younger sister. Working for Mavis and Lloyd Phillips at their bed and breakfast in Sonoma, California.

Lloyd & Mavis Phillips: Owners of Phillips Antique Emporium and the Bygone Days Inn in Sonoma, California. Adoptive parents of Larry and Mary-Cate.

Jerry & Gloria Thomas: Pastoral couple of Valley Community Church in Sonoma, California. Parents of Troy, Travis, Tarah, and Tabitha.

Clarence & Callie Simm: Part of the household staff at Maude's Los Angeles estate. Clarence functions as the driver and Callie as the housekeeper. Parents of two teenage boys - Nate and Denver.



CHAPTER 4

Sunday, August 14, 1977

Billy listened to the boys in horrified silence. It wasn't his habit to eavesdrop; but, since their mother had returned home, a sort of wild and rebellious vibe had overtaken the oldest three boys.

"Please Evan. Gen is my friend," Aaron pleaded.

"You already forget how much trouble we got into for takin' the truck over to the Thompson place, right?" Anthony grumbled.

"Anthony is right," Andrew admitted, much to his younger brother's dismay. "As much as I'd like to check on Genesis, you know there'll be a whole lot of extra chores in our future if we try hightailing it into the city."

"Aw, nuts!" Evan exclaimed when he spotted Billy on the other side of the truck. "You won't say nothin', will ya, Billy?"

"Until one of you has a driver's license, that truck stays parked," the older man firmly admonished. Sending Evan and Anthony back into the church to round up their sisters, Billy faced off with Aaron. "What's this about your mom's friend?"

The two remaining boys sent furtive looks at each other.

"Well?" Billy prompted, his drawl more obvious than ever.

"She got hurt while she's in jail; and, Aaron wants to take his Bible storybook to her so she won't feel so bad," Andrew muttered.

"Gen always came to visit me," Aaron added. "She'd read to me whenever I wasn't feeling good."

"But, your mother doesn't want you there?" Billy asked, trying to get a handle on the situation. That made sense. He wouldn't let his children visit a jail.

"Don't know if it's that," Andrew commented. "Maggie's been going to see her every day since her . . . accident. But Genesis doesn't want visitors."

"Then I guess there's no use in all your plotting and planning, is there?" Billy pointed out.

"She would see me, Mr. Brandt. I know she would!" Aaron proclaimed. "I don't want her to think no one loves her anymore. She's so sad . . ."

Rubbing his chin in contemplation, Billy considered the sensitive boy wobbling tiredly on his prosthetic legs. "You get your mom's permission; and, I'll take you into the city to visit your friend," he relented. His mind had been on the vivacious woman for several weeks; and, Billy couldn't figure out quite why. Maybe this crazy need to pray for the forward redhead wasn't so inconceivable after all.

* * * * *

Stifling a giggle, Catherine turned back toward the men - her lemonade pitcher at the ready. John's co-worker, Gus, had brought him a Dodgers baseball hat; and, her husband was pleased as punch.

"Thought it would improve your looks," Gus jested with a grin.

"Best be careful there, Reid," Gabe warned. "I'm sure Cat has a broom around here somewhere!"

"Aw, she wouldn't hurt a fly," Gus mumbled back. "At least not since I helped take care of her and the 'lil bit."

"'Lil bit?" Catherine questioned, thinking it an odd nickname for her husband.

John's best friend, Dave, turned away from the grill and waved a hand at the firehouse comedian. "Shut up big mouth! You'll ruin the surprise!"

For his part, John ignored the chaos of his co-workers and focused on the way his wife moved among the men. Even Dave seemed to be warming up to his dainty little woman. Being with his buddies soothed

his fears about returning to work; and, Catherine's open acceptance of his rough and tumble friends was just another reason that he loved her. "Baby, don't let Dave cook! We'll be eating cinders for lunch," he playfully admonished.

"Hey!" Dave protested. "I'm still a better cook than you!"

"Everyone calm down!" Catherine called when all six men started razzing each other about their lack of culinary skills. "I'll take care of the chicken. I just need to know who wants barbecue sauce and who doesn't."

"Might as well barbecue the whole bunch," John yelled over the din.

When the men suddenly disappeared after dinner, Catherine looked around in confusion. "They left without dessert?" she asked incredulously.

John tried shrugging his shoulders before tugging his wife down on his lap. With the bulky upper body cast in the way, there was no use trying to get closer to each other; but, he still liked the way her bottom pressed into his lap. "Ready to call it a night?" he whispered into her ear.

"Down boy," she teased when the clamoring men returned with a big box carried between them.

"Ta-da!" the men yelled in unison as they lifted a white wicker bassinet from the packaging. Their cry echoed around the courtyard for a few moments before an uncomfortable silence descended.

In a flurry, Catherine rushed up the stairs to their second-story apartment and left the group of men gaping in astonishment.

Clamoring to his feet, John followed as quickly as possible. "Sorry guys," he mumbled over his shoulder on his way past.

"Hey!" Gus called. "We can get something different if you want."

Captain Harris rubbed his neck in embarrassment. "You sure about all this?" he demanded of Gabe and Gus.

"She was making maternity clothes," Gus explained.

"And a layette," Gabe confirmed. "But . . ."

"But what?" the captain demanded.

"They lost a baby in April. Maybe it happened again," Dave stammered, remembering the pain in John's eyes when he'd explained the accident that had caused his wife's miscarriage.

Broad shoulders, used to back-breaking work and heavy loads, stooped under the news. "You guys get this out of here. I'll go see if I can

make it right," Chuck Harris commanded as he waved his crew away. "Can I come in?" he called through the screen door when he reached their apartment.

John appeared out of the dusky interior and stepped outside. "Catherine needs a few minutes. We'll be down with the pie and coffee in a little bit," he answered, his voice tight with suppressed emotion.

"We should have double-checked with you guys first, I guess," the captain acknowledged, uncertain of how to proceed.

"No. It would have been a terrific surprise if the circumstances were different."

"We tried to take care of her for you while you were out of commission," Captain Harris mumbled. "Guess we didn't do enough."

Quizzically, John looked at his superior. "Ah, I'm not sure what you think needed doing; but, if you don't mind, I'll be taking care of it myself."

"We should have made her eat more or something," Chuck rumbled in his deep bass voice.

"Cap, there's nothing you guys can do to make any difference in all this. We just have to wait and see."

"Sure! Of course. You're both still young. Lots more chances," the captain agreed.

Peeking through the screen, Catherine softly interjected, "I don't know how the baby rumor got started; but, I do apologize for ruining your fun with the gift. It is a very generous present. I hope it won't be any trouble to return it."

"You never mind about that," Chuck answered, waiving away the woman's regret. "And, I think the guys will agree that you should keep the bassinette. You might not need it today; but, maybe nine months from now . . ." he playfully suggested.

Even with the door between them, John felt Catherine stiffen behind him. He pre-empted her disagreement with a loud, "Thanks, 'Cap. I'll make room for it in our bedroom." As the man turned and began to descend the staircase to the courtyard, John questioned, "So do you have any idea where the rumor started, 'Cap? I kinda figured I missed the announcement while I was out since everyone at the hospital knew; but,

Catherine has no idea where it all started."

Chuck rubbed his chin. "Reid called one night while he was babysitting you two; and, he wanted to know what a pregnant woman should eat. Not sure where he heard it from . . . hey, Gus! Grab some of that picnic stuff and come up here," the captain called down.

Within moments, the five burly firemen were scaling the stairs, loaded down with all the dishes and leftovers from the cookout. "This is all of it," Jimmy Jackson advised as they marched into the apartment.

Catherine quietly directed the clean-up operations. It felt as if all eyes were on her as she began to serve the coffee and Turtle brownie pie.

"We're sorry for upsetting you, hon," Gabe commented when the fragile woman handed him a plate. A rousing chorus of apologies from the other men bounced around the crowded living room.

Patting the giant blonde man on the shoulder, Catherine managed a weak smile for him before moving on with two more plates. She left the men to gab while she finished straightening up the kitchen; and, then she hid there even after everything was spic' and span.

The uproarious laughter fell silent a few times; but, for the most part, it seemed like everyone was enjoying the impromptu picnic. "Hey, baby. Come sing for these clowns. They don't believe me," John called

"Not on your life, mister," Catherine grumbled. "You want music, load up the record player," she grouched good-naturedly, happy to hear the laughter in her husband's voice.

"Come on, little doc," Gus hollered from the living room. "Jimmy's gonna get John's old guitar. Let see if you can carry a tune in a bucket."

Catherine peeked around the corner and found six pairs of eyes watching for her appearance. "Let Jimmy play; he doesn't need me to ruin his riff," she demurred, settling on the arm of John's recliner.

"Don't be shy, chica," Jimmy coerced, strumming through several songs.

Softly, Catherine began to hum when the talented guitarist hit upon one she knew. "Let me be there in your morning, let me be there in your night,"¹ she quietly sang as the lyrics of the Tanya Tucker song rolled through her head.

"Play it again, Jimmy," Gabe encouraged before fixing his gaze on

the tiny woman balancing on the chair arm next to him. "Louder, hon."

Catherine sent her long curls flying away from her face as she shook her head.

"Told ya she couldn't do it," Gus chided, his eyes twinkling with mischief. Crossing his hands over his chest, he let one eyebrow touch his hairline. "Ain't that right? That's why you don't mind Johnny's caterwauling - it's all the two of you can manage," he teased, dodging away from Dave's incoming fist.

Narrowing her eyes and wrinkling her nose in mock contempt, Catherine crooked her fingers at Jimmy and held out her hands for the guitar. As she strummed the instrument experimentally, she challenged the comedian, "You think you can do better?"

"I know I can," Gus Reid declared confidently. "Give it whatever you got, little doc."

Catherine coaxed the rocking chords of Johnny & June's "Jackson" out of the banged up guitar and provoked the man into echoing her "We got married in a fever . . ."²

Gus squinched his eyes closed and concentrated for a minute. "Don't think I know that one. You'll have to ask one of the hayseeds. Hey!" he yelped when Dave's fist connected with his shoulder.

"Coward," Catherine teased as she strummed through a couple of chords to transition into the song that had been playing through her mind for weeks. "Like a bridge over troubled waters, I will lay me down,"³ she sang when she got to the chorus.

"No holding out," Gus grinned when Catherine held the guitar back out to Jimmy. Childishly, the woman stuck her tongue out at the insistent man and returned the instrument.

"Don't be shy, sweetheart," John wheedled. "I'll have Dave gag Gus."

With a resigned sigh, Catherine reclaimed the battered guitar and moved to sit cross-legged near John's feet. "I haven't played since I volunteered in the children's ward of the state institution, so please don't expect much, she grumbled before beginning. "When you're weary, feeling small . . ."³ Catherine was surprised when Captain Harris joined in on the chorus - his deep voice sweeping in and out - wrapping around her voice with a compelling harmony.

"Guess we know who to enter in the talent contest at the Firemen's Picnic next year," John prompted when the last notes died away.

"What other songs do you know?" Jimmy asked, stretching out to snag the guitar.

"Just play; and, we'll see what everyone can pick out," Gabe suggested.

The evening passed in a flash of friendship and fun; but, when Catherine wandered into the bedroom that night, she was distressed to find the bassinet waiting. "We can't keep that," she struggled to say as she crawled under the covers.

"Baby, we might not need it right now; but, the 'Cap is right. We'll need it eventually."

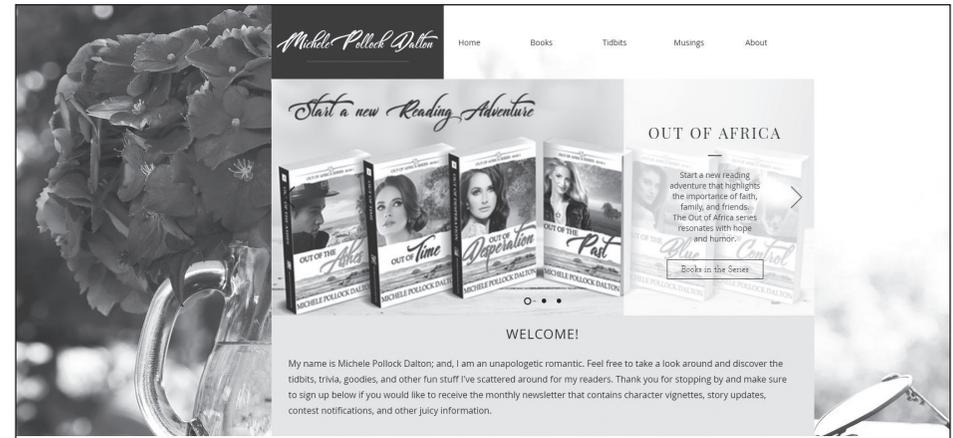
"We don't know that for sure," Catherine whispered, gnawing at her bottom lip.

"I know it," John reassured. "I've known it since the day I spotted you in the courtyard Margaret Catherine Brandt; and, I'm not going to let you forget it. In fact, I think I like the name Alisa - Alisa Catherine Brandt," he stated.

"You are a stubborn man," Catherine grumbled; but, she took a great deal of hope from her husband's absolute certainty that they would one day be parents. As her thoughts rolled away into a sleepy haze, Catherine could almost imagine a tiny bundle of joy fast asleep in the pretty white wicker bed. "Alisa," she whispered on a sigh.

*** END OF SAMPLE ***

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