FOREWORD REVIEWS THE INDIE WE LOVE.

Spiritual

Beneath the Night Tree
Nicole Baart
Tyndale House
978-1-4143-2323-7
(January 31, 2011)

Clandestine interludes and secret babies fill the pages of fiction and grace countless lives. Though the reality of an unplanned pregnancy cannot be easily romanticized, gifted writers have at times depicted its complicated ramifications with sensitivity. And while getting pregnant in a parking lot may not be the best way to start a life, spontaneous actions sometimes bring positive results, as they do in *Beneath the Night Tree*.

Nicole Baart aptly captures the heart and mind of an impulsive young woman who embarks on single motherhood. In a nontraditional family that's miraculously functional, Julia Desmit is raising her son and younger brother under the same roof along with her grandmother. Engaged to Michael Vermeer, a lover she perceives as the "man of her dreams," she's happy and looking forward to the future. Then an unanticipated email from her son's biological dad changes her plans and throws off her equilibrium. Julia hasn't seen Parker in years, but she answers his question honestly when he asks whether he fathered her child, and from the moment she agrees to let him meet his son, she never sees her world in the same light.

Beneath the Night Tree is a poignant glimpse of a woman's past merging with her future. Filled with poetic symbolism and lush description, Baart's work vividly portrays an individual at a crossroads, faced with circumstances that force her to examine her deepest motivations.

Through Julia, the author allows the reader to experience familial ties from a safe perspective, obliquely posing the most elemental questions, such as what constitutes family and what defines love. Obvious answers may turn out to be nothing more than assumptions. Baart deserves high marks for provoking these thoughts rather than basing her story on written-in-stone, trite perceptions. Spiritual, without being off-putting, this novel depicts the heroine's process of discovery and healing.

Nicole Baart is a native of a small town in Iowa and the author of four novels. In 2007 she published *After the Leaves Fall*. The sequel to that release, *Summer Snow*, was a Christy

Award finalist. *Beneath the Night Tree* is the conclusion to the three-book series. *The Moment Between* was her first title.

Baart has the guts to examine what many won't contemplate—convention and the social norm. Her work combines down-to-earth elements of daily living with abstract concepts meant to be considered on a broad scale. Nothing about this book is clichéd and her characters may surprise those who think they know the outcome; for just as in real life, it's the unforeseen events that often bring unexpected results.

Julia Ann Charpentier