

# WOUNDED HEARTS



WOUNDED  
A NOVEL HEARTS

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Unless otherwise noted, all Scriptures are taken from the *King James Version* of the Bible.

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# CHAPTER 1

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1860

RIVERTON VALLEY SAT in southwestern Missouri, bordering Arkansas and Oklahoma. It was one of those beautiful summer mornings when people felt glad to be alive. Hattie Wilson tried to keep her mind on the day's chores ahead of her as she hung the morning wash on the clothesline.

Still pretty at forty, Hattie normally had a youthful zest and bounce about her, but today she felt tired and powerless to shake uneasy feelings. Hattie's roughened hands were all that portrayed her as a hard-working woman. She noticed how they shook as she hung the last piece of laundry.

She always worried when Martin was gone all night delivering his "eggs", as he called them. For years, fellow Missourians had argued and disagreed over slavery, but now talk of war became more real as each day passed by. Hattie tried not to think about the bands of outlaws that roamed the countryside, looting and killing people who voiced their opinions against slavery. Unwelcome thoughts invaded her mind as to what would happen if they caught Martin.

She heard a noise behind her and whirled. A stranger on a horse thirty feet away was near the water trough.

“Mind if I water my horse, ma’am?” He asked.

Hattie stared at him without speaking. He was big, ugly, and dirty. His coal-black eyes bore into her as his horse dipped its mouth into the water.

He repeated the question as he scanned the property.

“No, go ahead and help yourself.” Hattie fidgeted with her apron. “Are you just ridin’ through? Don’t look like you belong to these parts.”

Unbridled fury flashed across his face. “Whaddya mean by that? Don’t I look good enough to belong to these parts?”

“Pardon me. That’s not how I meant it. I just ...”

“Where’s your man at? You got one?”

“Yes, I have one. He went into Riverton. Should be back any minute.”

“Must not be too smart.” He smirked.

“Why do you say that?”

He scratched his beard. “Because leavin’ a pretty woman like you out here all by herself could cause most anythin’ to happen.”

Out of the corner of her eye, Hattie noticed her son, Reese and his Collie were watching from the barn doorway. She mustered her courage. “I think your horse has drank enough now, mister. You best be on your way.”

The man reined his horse around. “Yeah, I’ll do just that.”

The Collie growled, and Reese held onto his collar as the unwelcome guest passed the barn. He halted and stared down at the Collie. “That dog sounds like he could get kinda mean.”

Tall and muscular for fifteen, Reese stood his ground. “That’s right. Biscuit can get real mean sometimes.”

“Yep, I bet he can.” The man turned and gave Hattie a long stare before he rode off.

An hour later Martin arrived home. No sooner had he climbed off his wagon and stretched his back than Hattie and Reese were there to greet him. Hattie gave him a big hug. “I’m so glad you’re home. Did everything go okay?”

“The delivery went just fine.”

“How far do you take the slaves before someone else gets ‘em, Pa?” Reese asked.

“Son, I’ve always told you to refer to those folks as ‘eggs’.” And the less you know about where I take ‘em, the safer it is for you and your ma.”

“I might have some bad news,” Hattie said. “A man came by just a little while ago. He was real mean lookin’.” Her chin quivered. “He acted like he knows somethin’, Martin. Do you think he could?”

Martin dismissed the suggestion with a wave of his hand. “There ain’t much chance of that. I’ve been too careful. You’re worryin’ yourself for nothin’. But if it will make you feel better, I won’t make anymore deliveries until we’re sure it’s safe.”

Hattie took a shuddering breath. “That will ease my mind. I’m sorry, I’m just scared.”

“It’s only normal to be scared and cautious, but in the end all we can do is trust in the Lord. We know what we’re doin’ is right. Slavery is wrong.”

“Everyone’s sayin’ there’s a war comin’ because of it,” Reese said. “Do you believe that’s true?”

Martin nodded. “I’m afraid it might come to that, and that will be a sad day. Americans killin’ Americans. Worse yet, brothers killin’ brothers.”

“Which way do you think Missouri will go, Pa?”

“Hard to tell. Missourians are pretty well divided. For instance, Governor Jackson’s for slavery, but most of his cabinet is against it. But whatever happens, I want you to promise me you won’t join up. I don’t want you to ever have to kill another man.”

Reese nodded. “I promise, Pa.”

Hattie gave Martin a quick kiss. “I feel better now. I’m gonna go fix you men somethin’ to eat. You comin’ in?”

“Not yet.” Martin shook his head. “I gotta take care of the horses first.”

“And I’m gonna finish tossin’ the hay in the barn loft before I eat,” Reese said.



After Martin unhitched the horses and fed them, he ambled to the road and looked up and down it. He pulled on his moustache as he always did when he was worried. His lack of appetite and constant knots in his stomach was causing him to lose too much weight. A well-meaning friend recently told him that he was working too hard. His dark-brown hair was graying too fast, and the lines in his face made him look much older than a man of forty-three. Martin knew the real reason for his health problems. His involvement in the Underground Railroad for the last two years was taking its toll.

For several weeks he had the strange feeling something bad was about to happen. But he kept shaking it off as just being his jumpy nerves. A close call he’d had in Kansas two months earlier came to his mind. *Kansas was different, that didn’t involve my family, just me.*

He contemplated whether to tell Hattie her suspicions about the stranger might be right. But if he was wrong, he would only upset her and Reese for nothing. If he was right, though, what would he do? He wondered if he could kill a man that tried to harm his family. Martin hoped that moment would never come. He decided to cut some firewood to work off his anxiety. That always seemed to help.



Reese was hot and sweaty in the barn loft, but he loved the challenge of hard work. He promised himself he wouldn't stop for a drink of water until he'd finished. As he paused to wipe sweat from his eyes, he heard the sudden drum of hoof beats, followed by angry voices and a gunshot. He heard Biscuit yelp and his father cry out in anger.

He peeked through a crack between two boards. His father stood beside the woodpile. The stranger he'd seen earlier and eight horsemen had their pistols pointed at Martin. Biscuit lay on the ground at his feet as if dead.

Still mounted, the stranger spoke. "Reckon you know why we're here, Wilson. It's one thing when you abolitionists run your mouths against slavery, but it's quite another when you start helpin' those darkies slip into Kansas. That's stealin', and a God-fearin' man like you should know better than that." The stranger winked at one of his cohorts. "Ain't that right, Hank?"

Hank nodded. "That's right Boss. He should know better."

Martin glanced at the dead dog, then yanked the axe from a block of wood and stepped toward them. "The law is the only one that has anything to say about what I might be doin', so get off my property right now."

"Ah, Mr. Wilson, you're wrong about a lot of things today," the stranger said. Without warning he fired two shots into Martin's chest.

Martin dropped the axe, grabbed his chest, and fell to the ground. Hattie came out of the house screaming, she ran toward her husband. Hank and another man quickly dismounted and grabbed her.

Reese knew he had to do something and do it quick. With the pitchfork in hand, he scurried down the ladder. By the time he was outside, all the men had dismounted. They didn't see Reese come from behind as he rushed between them and rammed the pitchfork into Hank's leg. Hank screamed and let loose of his mother.

Reese yanked the fork out to stab the other man. But a rifle stock slammed into the side of his head. Blackness swarmed into his vision. He fell beside the woodpile.

"Please don't hurt my son anymore!" Hattie pleaded through sobs. "He was only tryin' to protect me."

"What do we do with her, Boss?" The other man still holding Hattie asked.

The stranger walked over to Hattie and glared into her eyes. "I'm gonna make you wish you'd been more respectful to me today, Miss Uppity." He grabbed her and forced her toward the barn.

Hattie didn't scream, plead, or resist, knowing there was nothing she could do to prevent herself from being shamed.

One of the men shouted, "Lets get what we want outta the house and burn it down!"



When the stranger came out of the barn some of his men were strapping stolen goods onto their horses. Others were torching the house, but he was not interested in what his men were doing at that moment. Not wanting to be noticed he slipped around the corner of the barn and waited. He knew it would come. And it did. A shadowy figure appeared in front of him.

"You did well today, Otis," it said in a raspy voice. "I am very pleased with you. But do not kill the boy."

"Why not?" Otis asked, with a quizzical look.

"Because I have better use for him later on. For now do something to him that will poison his mind and heart."

"I have an idea that might do just that."

"I'm sure you do," the shadowy figure said. "Now do it."

When Otis rejoined his men, the house was ablaze. He looked at the unconscious Reese and spat on the ground before picking up Martin's axe.

"We better get outta here!" A man with a patch over his right eye yelled.

"I'll tell you when it's time to get outta here," Otis said. "Grab that boy and hold his arm across a wood block. I noticed he's a lefty. If he lives, he'll never use that hand to fork anyone again."



Charlie Underwood was a rangy, tough man in his late forties. He was on his way to the Wilsons' place with a wagonload of timber, when he saw smoke billowing from the burning house. He wasted no time in getting there.

When Charlie turned Reese over and saw his severed hand, he ran into the barn and grabbed a bucket of feed oats. He packed the oats into Reese's bleeding arm, then wrapped and rewrapped the wound until the bleeding stopped. He'd just unloaded the timber and put Reese into the wagon, when Reese slowly started coming to.

"Where are we goin'?" Reese cried. "I can't leave. They shot Pa, and I gotta stop 'em from hurtin' Ma."

Charlie shook his head. "We can't help your folks, Reese. It's too late."

"No? Why are you sayin' that?"

"I'm sorry, Reese, but all we can do now is save you. And I gotta get you to Doc Barnes to do that."