

Advance Praise for *Beyond All Measure*

“Beautifully written and with descriptions so rich I’m still certain I caught a whiff of magnolia blossoms as I read. *Beyond All Measure* is pure Southern delight! Dorothy Love weaves a stirring romance that’s both gloriously detailed with Tennessee history and that uplifts and inspires the heart.”

—TAMERA ALEXANDER, BEST-SELLING AUTHOR OF
THE INHERITANCE AND *WITHIN MY HEART*

“Soft as a breeze from the Old South and as gentle as the haze hovering over the Great Smokies, the gifted flow of Dorothy Love’s pen casts a spell of love, hate and hope in post-Civil War Tennessee. With rich, fluid prose, characters who breathe onto the page and a wealth of historical imagery, *Beyond All Measure* will steal both your heart and your sleep well beyond the last page.”

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“As refreshing as a Tennessee mountain breeze! Dorothy Love delights in this charming tale of forgiveness and trust. The perfect porch-sitting, lemonade-sipping read.”

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“Dorothy Love captures all the romance, charm and uncertainties of the postbellum South, delighting readers with her endearing characters, historical details and vivid writing style.”

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A LADY LIKE SARAH AND *A SUITOR FOR JENNY*

“A superb story with marvelous characters and a love story that touches the heart.”

—JOAN WOLF, AWARD-WINNING AUTHOR OF
THE ROAD TO AVALON AND *THE RELUCTANT QUEEN*

BEYOND ALL MEASURE

DOROTHY LOVE



THOMAS NELSON
Since 1798

NASHVILLE DALLAS MEXICO CITY RIO DE JANEIRO

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Summary: "Unless she can trust God's love to cast out her fears, Ada may lose the heart of a good man. Ada Wentworth, a young Bostonian, journeys to Hickory Ridge, Tennessee, in the years following the Civil War. Alone and nearly penniless following a broken engagement, Ada accepts a position as a lady's companion to the elderly Lillian Willis, a pillar of the community and aunt to the local lumber mill owner, Wyatt Caldwell. Ada intends to use her millinery skills to establish a hat shop and secure her future. Haunted by unanswered questions from her life in Boston, Ada is most drawn to two townsmen: Wyatt, a Texan with big plans of his own, and Sophie, a mulatto girl who resides at the Hickory Ridge orphanage. Ada's friendship with Sophie attracts the attention of a group of locals seeking to displace the residents of Two Creeks, a "colored" settlement on the edge of town. As tensions rise, Ada is threatened but refuses to abandon her plan to help the girl. When Lillian dies, Ada is left without employment or a place to call home. And since Wyatt's primary purpose for staying in Hickory Ridge was to watch over his aunt, he can now pursue his dream of owning Longhorns in his home state of Texas. With their feelings for each other growing, Ada must decide whether she can trust God with her future and Wyatt with her heart"— Provided by publisher.

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*For the brave and faithful women of the South,
past and present—heroines all*

*He Whose heart is kind beyond all measure
Gives unto each day what He deems best—
Lovingly, its part of pain and pleasure,
Mingling toil with peace and rest.*

CAROLINA SANDELL BERG, "DAY BY DAY" (c. 1865)



ONE

HICKORY RIDGE, TENNESSEE

June 1871

Holding tightly to her worn travel satchel, Ada Wentworth stepped through a cloud of billowing steam and scanned the rain-slicked railway platform, looking for the woman who had promised to meet her. Smartly-dressed travelers folded their black umbrellas and pushed through a knot of farm wives, mill workers, and station peddlers hawking candy and magazines. A line of buggies and wagons waited in the heat, the placid horses swishing their tails against a cloud of flies. A group of schoolboys jostled Ada roughly as they passed, their languid, high-pitched accents falling strangely on her ear.

She pulled her handkerchief from her cuff and blotted her face, her gaze traveling from one person to the next. People aplenty, but no red-haired woman carrying a white parasol.

She skirted a mound of baggage and wound her way toward the agent's office, trying to quell her growing apprehension. She'd known Hickory Ridge wouldn't be anything like New England, but this bustling village rimmed with fog-shrouded mountains was unlike any place she'd ever been.

Outside the station agent's office, she paused to get her bearings. A steady stream of travelers flowed around her like water around a stone. She swallowed the hard lump forming in her throat. What on earth had she done?

"Purty little town, Hickory Ridge, ain't it?" The salesman who had slept away the entire morning's journey leaning against her shoulder grinned at her, exposing a mouthful of rotted and tobacco-stained teeth. "Hotter'n blazes, though. Rain didn't do a bit of good if you ask me."

Ada moved farther down the platform and brushed the cinders from her traveling dress. The salesman followed, his battered sample case banging against his knee. He tipped his hat, a brown felt bowler that had seen better days. "Name's Cyrus McNeal, ma'am. From the Southern Medicinal Supply Company. Any type of curative, preventative, or tonic you may require, I'm yer man."

Opening his case, he produced two small brown vials. "Would you like some free samples? One's fer yer stummick ailments, and t'other calms yer nerves."

"Thank you. No."

"Suit yerself. There's more'n two hours before my train to Nashville. I figger to have me a good hot meal at Miss Hattie's. You care to join me?"

The station agent, a lanky man with a thick walrus mustache and graying hair parted in the middle, made his way to her side. "Is this here feller botherin' you, Miss?"

The salesman dropped his samples into his pocket. "I was just leaving."

Ada nodded to the agent as the salesman disappeared into the crowd. "Thank you. That tiresome man made a nuisance of himself all the way from Knoxville."

He gestured toward the far end of the platform. "That your trunk?"

“Yes.” She suppressed a long sigh. Twenty-six years old, and all her worldly possessions fit into one moldering trunk. Given half a chance, the auctioneer would have taken it too. As it was, she had nothing, not even a proper mourning dress. But mourning clothes were of no consequence here at the edge of the livable world.

The agent wiped his forehead with a wrinkled blue handkerchief. “Is someone supposed to meet you?”

“Miss Hannah Fields. She wrote that she’d carry a white parasol so I could recognize her. I don’t suppose you know her.”

“Hickory Ridge is growin’ these days, but I pretty much know everybody around here. Miss Hannah should be along directly. That is, if Old Starch and Vinegar hasn’t thought up somethin’ else for her to do.”

“Starch and vinegar?”

“Mrs. Willis. The woman Miss Hannah works for. Folks call her Starch and Vinegar, but not to her face, o’ course.” He grinned. “No ma’am. Not to her face.”

A piercing whistle sounded. The engine heaved, belching smoke and cinders, and lumbered down the tracks. Another shower of sparks rained down. Ada brushed the ashes off her skirt. Now she regretted having worn her best dress for travel, but she needed this job desperately. First impressions were important.

Her stomach rumbled. Although there had been plenty of good food aboard the train, it had come at a price. Mindful of her swiftly dwindling resources, Ada had made do with bowls of luke-warm soup and cups of bitter hot chocolate as the train lumbered southward, taking her farther away from all that was familiar. She couldn’t remember when she’d last enjoyed a full, hot meal. Hungry and dazed with summer heat, she swayed on her feet.

“Careful, ma’am!” The agent took her arm and led her to a wooden bench on the shady side of the platform. “You just sit tight, and I’ll get you some water.”

Ada sank heavily onto the bench. Last evening, as Miss Fields's letter had instructed, she had sent a wire giving the woman her arrival time. Where in blazes *was* she? Ada blotted her face again and fought a wave of panic. Suppose the offer of employment had been withdrawn? It had taken most of her cash just to make the long trip to Hickory Ridge. There wasn't nearly enough for a return ticket.

Not that returning home was an option. Ada's heart squeezed with sadness. She tucked away her handkerchief and blinked back sudden tears.

The agent returned with a glass of water, and she drank it gratefully.

"Better?" he asked.

"Yes. Much better. Thank you."

He consulted his pocket watch. "I should get back to the office. You're welcome to wait inside if you've a mind to, but the truth is, it's cooler out here. I'm sure Miss Hannah will be along before too much longer."

He went back inside. Restless with nerves, Ada rose and walked to the far end of the platform, which afforded a better view of the town. The streets rang with the clatter of horses' hooves, the rattle of harnesses, and the faint tinkling of shop-door bells. Along one side of the street stood the mercantile, and next to it a bank with gold lettering on the windows. Farther down was a newspaper office and a dentist's office. A haberdashery, a barbershop, and a bookshop occupied the opposite side of the street, next to the Hickory Ridge Inn. Behind the newspaper office sat the Verandah Hotel for Ladies, a faded blue building with drooping shutters and a weathered sign that hung unevenly from a rusty chain. In the distance, the tree-clad mountains stood like sentinels against the rain-washed sky.

Of course Hickory Ridge can't compete with Chattanooga or Knoxville, Hannah had written, but for a small town we're quite progressive.

Ada watched two women in old-fashioned poke bonnets emerge from the mercantile, their arms laden with packages. A progressive town was precisely what she needed to secure her future. Not that she planned to stay forever in Hickory Ridge. But the employment notice in the *Boston Herald* had seemed the perfect solution to her immediate dilemma. A chance to start over in a town where no one knew the first thing about her while she set her plan in motion.

It had seemed simple enough. Now she was much less certain that she'd made the right decision. It was one thing to make a plan and quite another to put it into action.

A buckboard rattled down the street and came to a stop near the elevated platform. The driver, a man in rough clothes, boots, and a wide-brimmed hat, smiled up at her. Backlit by the sun, he appeared muscular and broad shouldered. "Miss Wentworth? Ada Wentworth?"

"Yes."

"I'm Wyatt Caldwell. I'm here to drive you out to Miss Lillian's place."

"But I thought Miss Fields was coming for me."

He smiled, crinkling the lines around his eyes. "Yes ma'am, that was the plan." He scanned the now-deserted platform. "I assume that trunk is yours?"

"Yes." Ada took a deep breath to steady her nerves. Where was Hannah Fields? Had Old Starch and Vinegar dismissed her without any warning? Another wave of anxiety rippled through her. If that happened to *her*, where would she go? Her resources were nearly depleted. Letters to her mother's Southern cousins had gone unanswered, leaving her with few options apart from the clattering, stifling textile mills of Lowell, Massachusetts—or, even worse, a life as a mail-order bride, brought west to cook and clean and bear children for a man she'd never met.

Her escort, his face shadowed by a battered Stetson, jumped lightly to the ground. Shoving aside a stack of wooden planks and a couple of gleaming saw blades, he hoisted Ada's trunk into the back of the wagon.

"Ma'am, are you ready? Miss Lillian's place is a good seven miles down this road. We ought to get going."

Ada sized him up. He appeared trustworthy, but experience had shown her that people weren't always what they seemed. "Thank you, but I'll wait for Miss Fields."

"Then you're going to be waiting for quite a while. Hannah Fields up and left town last night without so much as a by-your-leave." He smiled. "I'm afraid you're stuck with me."

He offered his hand to help her onto the buckboard seat and climbed up beside her. "I apologize for the undignified conveyance. I didn't know until an hour ago that you were expected today. There wasn't time to fetch my rig." He handed her a parasol and a bundle wrapped in a red-checked tea towel. "I brought you some of Miss Hattie's fried chicken. I figured you'd be hungry."

"Thank you. I am famished!" Leaving the parasol on the seat between them, Ada unwrapped the chicken, bit into a drumstick, and chewed with relish.

Her Boston aunt, rest her soul, would be horrified at such undignified behavior. She could almost hear Kate's chiding voice. "*That's why you've never made a suitable match, Ada. You're too forthright. Too lacking in the feminine graces.*"

Well, she had made a perfect match once, but now she was alone in the world. She would do as she pleased. As the buckboard gathered speed, she devoured the second piece of chicken, polished the apple on the sleeve of her jacket, and took a bite, enjoying the satisfying and decidedly unladylike crunch.

"You *are* hungry!" Wyatt said. "Hollow all the way to your toes."

Ada blushed and then chided herself for caring what he thought. "That's all right," he added. "I like a woman with an appetite." Ada took another bite.

"So, you came out here from Boston." His friendly demeanor seemed to have cooled a little. Not surprising in a Southern town, so soon after the war—and from his voice, Mr. Caldwell was obviously a Southerner.

Oh well. She lifted her chin a little. She could only hope to do her job and eventually win over the townsfolk.

They passed the ladies' hotel. Two white-haired women sat on the porch. Wyatt nodded to them and touched the brim of his hat as they passed. The buckboard rattled onto a narrow rutted road that led upward into the foothills.

"Yes, Boston." Ada wiped apple juice from the corner of her mouth. "The land of steady habits, as they say."

He nodded. "Miss Lillian will appreciate that. She's a stickler for order."

She took another crunchy bite.

"Your letter said you were born there?"

"Yes. I lived there off and on for most of my life." A wave of bitter recrimination and regret nearly brought her to tears. Determined not to dwell on the life that was lost to her, she concentrated on the play of sunlight in the rain puddles beside the road and on the soothing sound of his voice as he pointed out clumps of wild honeysuckle, their pale blossoms shimmering like ghosts.

"You're sure a long way from home," he observed. "Hannah placed the ad in the *Boston Herald* as a last resort. She was surprised to actually receive an application from so far away."

Ada chewed slowly. "My father and my aunt died in March, and I need to make a new start. This position as lady's companion to Mrs. Willis seemed suitable." She turned toward him, her skirts rustling against the rough wood of the seat. "Tell me, Mr. Caldwell,

do you know anything about the rest of the household staff? The cook and so on?"

"The—" He threw back his head and laughed. The horse snorted as if he, too, found her words amusing.

Something snapped inside her. "Stop this wagon!"

"Beg your pardon?"

"I said stop this wagon, Mr. Caldwell, or so help me, I will jump."

"Oh, I'm sorry." He surveyed the empty road. "The closest out-house is down the road a ways, at the Spencer place. But the woods are—"

"I am not in need of the out—the ladies' facilities."

"Then what—"

"I have no intention of spending the next several hours, or however long this dreadful journey takes, riding next to a man who laughs at me."

"You're right. I apologize."

"Too late." She stood and braced herself against the movement of the buckboard.

"Whoa!" He pulled on the reins. The horse stopped and tossed his head, rattling the harness. "Just how do you intend on getting out to Mrs. Willis's place, if I may ask?"

"I'll walk."

"All that way?"

Without another word she dangled her legs over the side of the wagon and dropped to the ground, wincing as her feet made contact with the dirt road. Squaring her shoulders, she marched ahead of the wagon.



Wyatt slowed the buckboard and studied her as she set out along the road, her feathered traveling hat perilously askew, her arms swinging. A prettier woman he'd never seen, but she sure was prickly.

Miss Ada Wentworth had the fairest skin he'd ever laid eyes on. Dark-brown hair that lay in shiny waves beneath her hat. Wide gray eyes fringed with thick, dark lashes. A generous mouth that would be even lovelier if she'd smile more. But, as she was in mourning, he really couldn't fault her for that. She was wrapped in a neat package, he couldn't help noticing—small and compact, with hills and valleys in all the proper locations.

He guided the buckboard around a deep rut in the road, reining in the horse to avoid getting ahead of Ada. She was nearly perfect, from his point of view—if only she weren't a Boston blue blood. He'd checked out her references and discovered that she was from an old New England family. A family with connections and power.

A family that represented everything he detested.

She slipped and then regained her footing. He fought the urge to scoop her up and set her back into the buckboard. She might be a Yankee born and bred, and she was acting tough as nails, but she couldn't mask the hurt and vulnerability beneath her brave facade.

He flicked the reins and pulled up alongside her. "I didn't mean to offend you, ma'am. Honestly. It was your question about the staff and the cook that hit my funny bone."

She kept her eyes on the ribbon of road in front of them. She'd begun to limp and was trying hard not to show it. Wyatt glanced at the delicate spooled heels of her thin leather shoes. He didn't know the first thing about ladies' footwear, but any fool could see that those shoes were meant for city streets, not seven-mile hikes over a rutted country road.

"You sure don't sound like a regular Bostonian." He raised his voice to be heard over the creaking of the wagon wheels. "I kinda like the way you talk, if you don't mind my saying so."

Ada walked on.

"Miss Wentworth?"

She stopped, arms akimbo, and stared up at him. “What is it, Mr. Caldwell?”

“My lumber mill is just over that next hill. It will be embarrassing if I have to drive past there with a pretty woman walking alongside the wagon. My men won’t ever let me live that down. I sure would be obliged if you’d reconsider and come on back up here. I promise to be on my best behavior.”