



The Quilted Heart



BENDING
TOWARD THE SUN

MONA HODGSON

Praise for
Bending Toward the Sun

“Mona Hodgson’s *Bending Toward the Sun* captures Saint Charles following the Civil War so well. Quaid returns home—a man changed by the war. Emilie is a delight—a young woman pursuing her education, who knows her own mind. And even though the war has changed so many things, this story reminds us that some things, like love, never change.”

—DORRIS KEEVEN-FRANKE, archivist, Saint Charles County Historical Society

“Mona Hodgson has written a warm, tender tale of family loyalties and forbidden love. When Emilie’s father objects to her seeing the handsome McFarland boy, recently returned from war, the couple struggles to do the right thing. But they are about to discover that God has another plan. Filled with charming characters and godly themes, this heartwarming story is pure delight.”

—MARGARET BROWNLEY, *New York Times* best-selling author of A Rocky Creek Romance Series and the Brides of Last Chance Ranch Series

“With believable characters, an historic setting, and a gripping love story, Mona Hodgson gives the reader an uplifting account of a time when our country was recovering from a dark period and looking forward to a brighter future.”

—MARTHA ROGERS, author of the Winds Across the Prairie Series and the best-selling *Christmas at Holly Hill*

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The Quilted Heart

Novella Two

Mona Hodgson



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Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the
issues of life.

Proverbs 4:23

*Dedicated to my hubby, Bob Hodgson
The man whose heroic qualities inform and inspire all of the leading men in my stories*

One

September 30, 1865

Emilie stood in one of her favorite places—Mrs. Brantenberg’s kitchen. Anywhere on the farm was, really. But this airy room, with the big window looking out on the back acres, plenty of cupboards and workspace, and two well-stocked sideboards, made cooking and baking a delight. Even better, today was the day she and *PaPa* came to the farm to help with the apple harvest. She and her friend Maren were hard at work preparing the feast for those picking in the orchard.

Emilie sprinkled the cinnamon-perfumed topping on the soft apple wedges, then slid her skillet apple crisp into the oven. Brushing a strand of brown hair behind her ear, she looked at Maren, who stood with her hands in the dish tub. “Have you set a date for the wedding?”

“Rutherford and I have spoken with Mrs. Brantenberg about February.” Her blue eyes sparkling at the mere mention of Rutherford’s name, Maren pulled a cook pot into the dishwasher.

“That’s only four months away. Will you be ready?”

“I’m ready now.”

“You are?” Surprised by her friend’s tranquil response, Emilie slid a cooled loaf of Mrs. Brantenberg’s honey-wheat bread into a sack. “You don’t want a special dress or cake or feast? Where will you have the ceremony? How many guests? It seems there would be myriad details to look after.”

“I didn’t say everything *else* was ready.” Pink tinged Maren’s cheeks. “I meant that I’m ready to be Rutherford’s wife.”

“Oh.” A different set of details altogether occupied Maren’s thoughts. Warmth rushed up Emilie’s neck. She obviously had much to learn about that kind of love.

“Now that I’m living in town, I miss seeing him every day. Before I met Rutherford, I wouldn’t have believed it possible to love so deeply.” Drying her hands on her apron, Maren met Emilie’s gaze. “What about you?”

“Me?”

“Yes.” Maren sighed. “You don’t want love in your life?”

“I have love in my life.” Emilie tucked a second loaf of bread into the sack and carried it to the crate. “My father loves me and I love him.”

“A father’s love is not at all the same.”

She didn’t doubt that. But as full as her life was with PaPa, the store, and now college, there was no time or energy left to even entertain the thought of such foolishness. One man in her life was enough to keep her busy. “Maren Jensen, you have become a hopeless romantic.”

“Perhaps. But don’t be too surprised if you discover that romance can be contagious.”

Not for her. Having her father and the store to take care of had made her immune to romantic notions. And that was best.

Maren glanced out the window, and Emilie followed her gaze. Mrs. Brantenberg's wagon bumped up the road from the orchard.

"I know you're extra busy with your college classes these days." Maren added a butter crock to one of the crates. "Is there more I can do for you at the store?"

"It's been wonderful having you there the past few weeks, almost like having a sister. But soon you and Rutherford will marry, and he'll want you here on the farm. Not working in town."

A shadow crossed Maren's face. "If he decides to stay in Saint Charles."

"If? I thought—"

"He received a letter from a childhood friend, a Mr. Garrett Cowlshaw, who is coming to lead the caravan of wagons west in the spring."

"Oh." Emilie had heard about the caravan, of course, but... "You think Rutherford will want to join him? Take you and Gabi and Mrs. Brantenberg on the trail?"

"He has not said as much, but I would not be surprised."

"My father and the Rengler brothers were talking about the caravan." Emilie pulled the cast-iron skillet from the oven, inhaling the sweet scent of baked apples. "He seemed drawn to the idea and asked me what I thought."

Maren tucked a strand of blond hair into her coiled braid. "I had my fill of traveling, coming from Denmark only four years ago. I'm content in Saint Charles. On the farm. How do you feel about leaving town and the store?"

"Leaving my classes behind is a temptation, but I feel no compulsion to go west."

"I agree. Unless the man I love decides to go."

Emilie pulled tin cups from the shelf. PaPa wouldn't insist on going, would he?

They had the three crates loaded when Mrs. Brantenberg walked through the kitchen door and stopped at the worktable.

Maren smiled at the older woman. "Emilie and I have all the food prepared and ready to go."

"Good. Many hands make the work short." Mrs. Brantenberg lifted a crate off the worktable and walked to the door. "Our pickers are hungry enough to eat tree bark if we don't feed them right quick."

The two young women set the remaining crates in the back of the wagon and climbed onto the seat behind Mrs. Brantenberg.

"Rutherford and George are already working the press." Mrs. Brantenberg lifted the reins from the floorboard.

"We'll have fresh apple cider with our meal." As the wagon jerked forward, Emilie looked ahead to the tables set up left of the orchard. It appeared that her father was seated there. Hopefully he hadn't done too much and worn himself out.

"Emilie and I were discussing the wedding," Maren said. "She thinks the notion of love and romance is all a bit silly."

"The wedding plans, or the way you and Rutherford are distracted beyond all reason?"

Emilie giggled. "Both." As the wagon rolled to a stop, she watched neighbors and friends fill a constellation of baskets with apples.

"Who will haul the baskets to the dock?" Maren said. "Will Rutherford do that?"

“He arranged for McFarland Freight to do the hauling again this year.”

No doubt it would be the elder Mr. McFarland, or Brady, his oldest son, doing the pickup. They’d been delivering freight from the steamboats and barges to the store.

But it was the youngest McFarland boy Emilie was curious about. From all the talk at the checkerboard, she knew Quaid had returned, but she hadn’t so much as caught a glimpse of him in town. The last time they’d seen each other was Christmas in ’61. The memory of Quaid slipping several of Mrs. Brantenberg’s *zimtsterne* into his coat pocket made her smile. That was after he’d already enjoyed a few of the cinnamon stars. Not long afterward, he joined the Union Army and marched off to war.

The reins lay slack in Quaid’s hand as he guided the freight wagon up Salt River Road. Red and golden leaves fluttered on the tangle of trees that characterized the river valley. If there were words strong enough to describe how right it felt to be away from the city, they’d escaped him.

Ever since he’d returned from the war, he’d been cooped up under his mother’s watchful eye. He knew why she’d clung to him. Scores of mothers didn’t have the opportunity to welcome their sons home. But when his father mentioned this job, Quaid pled his case until he broke free.

Smoke curled above one of several chimneys on the plantation house. He pulled up on the reins and slowed the two horses, guiding them beyond the rose bushes that lined the long path to the columned front porch. The freight wagon rumbled up Brantenberg lane past the cluster of brick and wood buildings. Widow Brantenberg’s palatial house was set in the center with its milk cellar, granary, and the smokehouse. All German farmers here had one.

Quaid’s Irish ancestors, however, could do without a smokehouse, but wouldn’t own land without a hops garden for the making of a little stout.

He passed the hog pens, grazing cows, and wheat and oat fields. The orchard came into view, and so did about two dozen people, including a few scampering children. A couple of buckboards were parked in front of the rows of trees.

Rutherford Wainwright waved his kepi from the cider press and pointed Quaid toward an assembly of baskets—the freight he’d come to haul into town. Quaid returned his friend’s wave, then stopped beside the baskets and hopped down from the wagon. Apple cider scented the cool air.

“Quaid.” Rutherford shook his hand. “Good to see you.”

“Thanks, me friend. It’s by the grace of God that I’m able to be seen by anyone.”

“You finished the new cupboard?”

“I did.” Quaid wrapped the reins over a low branch. “Then me mother said the family had outgrown the meager number of porch chairs and wanted two more.”

“No wonder I haven’t seen your hide but once since you come home.”

“Plenty of rockers now for you and your intended to come and sit in the shade of our roof for a spell.”

“We might just do that. Especially if I catch wind there’s a pot of your mother’s stew on the stove.” Rutherford pressed his cap over his brown woolly hair. “You and I were two fortunate ones to be able to return.”

“We were.” They’d fought in the war together and seen hundreds of men face to the sky. A young woman waved from one of the tables.

Rutherford returned her wave, his smile as wide as the Missouri. “There’s my intended now.” He motioned for her to join them.

But it was the young woman beside her that captured Quaid’s attention. Emilie Heinrich? Couldn’t be her. Since when was she so tall and...shapely?

“Mr. McFarland, permit me to present to you Miss Maren Jensen.” Rutherford turned to Miss Jensen. “Corporal Quaid McFarland and I served in the same regiment.” His glance came back to Quaid. “Miss Jensen and I will wed in February.”

Miss Jensen bowed with measured dignity. “I am pleased to make your acquaintance, Corporal McFarland.”

Quaid offered a proper nod. “The pleasure is mine, Miss Jensen.” He turned his attention to the woman seated next to her, whose cocoa-brown eyes shined like polished stones.

“I trust you remember Miss Heinrich from the—”

“Yes. I do.” As a girl with pigtails. “It’s a pleasure to see you again.”

“And you.” Emilie held his gaze with a confidence he didn’t recall. “The last time I saw you, you were...skinny as a pole.”

Her face suddenly flushed pink. Had she just realized she’d been staring?

“The man has done some growin’ up since then. Saved my hide at least once.”

Rutherford glanced toward the food-laden tables, then at Quaid. “We smoked a pig and we’re fixin’ to sit down to a feast. Please join us.”

Quaid was hungry, but it was his curiosity about Emilie Heinrich that compelled him to say yes.

Emilie had satisfied her hunger with generous helpings of pork and potato salad, red cabbage slaw, and apple crisp. Rutherford had read from the Scriptures and thanked God for the bounty of the harvest. Mrs. Brantenberg recited a poem, and then she and her granddaughter, Gabi, delivered three proverbs in German and English.

Emilie always enjoyed harvest days and the feast that followed. But today’s celebration... She couldn’t remember when she’d sung loud enough to hear herself and laughed hard enough to have tears stream her face. And it was all thanks to Mr. Quaid McFarland.

She remembered him as an ornery kid full of vinegar around his friends. But he’d changed.

After the meal, Rutherford seated himself with his zither on a bench at one end of the tables, next to a balding neighbor who had brought his mandolin. With very little coaxing from Rutherford, Quaid had pulled a harmonica from his coat pocket and joined them for a stirring round of patriotic songs and a few hymns.

Judging from the fervor with which Quaid played his harmonica, she’d say he, too, was enjoying himself. On the last note, Maren started stacking plates, and Emilie reached under the table for a crate.

“Been too long since I’ve had that much fun.” The familiar Irish lilt drew her gaze to the bronzed face of the man now standing beside her.

She moistened her suddenly dry lips. “Yes.” She didn’t remember his eyes being such an intense shade of green. Bright like emeralds. “When did you take up the harmonica? You’re quite accomplished.”

His smile having faded, he lifted the stack of plates into the crate. “It belonged to a buddy o’ mine. In the war. Didn’t have need of it anymore.”

Breathing a prayer of thanksgiving for Quaid’s safe return, Emilie added empty bowls to the crate. “You haven’t been in the store, and since I hadn’t seen you, I worried—”

“I’m fine. Thank you.” Quaid reached across the table for the empty steins and goblets. “’Twas me mother.”

“Was she ill?”

“Some folks may call it an illness.” He glanced at his tatty boots. “With all the desperate reports coming from the battlefields, she feared the worst for me. Feared she’d never see me again. When she did, she wailed like a steamboat coming into dock and hasn’t wanted to let me from her sight.”

“And today? Your mother was ready to let you go?”

He darted a glance toward the road as if she may have followed him. “Me mother ran out of room to place any more furniture. She had to let me put me saw and hammer down.”

“You build furniture?”

“Of sorts. I like to work with wood. As a boy, I made a box for me sisters’ dolls and a footstool for me mother. Right before I left for the war, I made a desk for me father’s office and promised me mother I’d make her a cupboard when I returned.”

A man of his word. “I had no idea you were so talented.”

“You’ve changed some yourself. No longer the girl whose pigtails I used to tug.” He smiled. “Grown up and become a handsome lass.”

Heat rushed into her ears. “I’m attending college.”

His eyes widened. He looked as surprised by her odd response as she was.

“Lindenwood, not far from the store.”

“At fourteen you were already smarter than most of us in town. Going for more sophistication, are you?”

“I gave up on sophistication the day I tripped in those fancy heeled shoes and spilled the sack of dried beans. We still find those beans.” She smiled.

A grin widened Quaid’s eyes. “I was in the store that day. Your father paid me fifteen cents to help clean up. They’d scattered clear to the back door.”

Emilie set a folded tablecloth on top of the crate. “I’m taking college classes because it’s what my father wants.”

“Ah. What we won’t do for our parents.”

She nodded, unable to keep from smiling around this new Quaid McFarland.

“You’re not working at the store anymore?”

“I am. On Tuesdays, Fridays, and Saturdays. That allows for my classwork. I try to come here on Thursdays for Mrs. Brantenberg’s quilting circle.”

They quieted, watching Rutherford walk toward them.

“I apologize for the interruption, Miss Emilie, but the sun is starting its descent.” He turned toward Quaid, an eyebrow cocked. “You about ready to load your wagon?”

“Yes, of course.” When Rutherford started toward the baskets, Quaid faced her, his green eyes commanding her attention. “It was indeed a pleasure to see you again, Miss Emilie.”

“And you.” She moistened her lips.

“Perhaps I’ll see you at the store. Or at Lindenwood on a Monday or Wednesday. We make deliveries there too.”

“I’d like that.” Emilie felt herself blushing. But it didn’t stop her from watching Quaid heave the baskets of apples onto the wagon as if they were feather pillows. He’d become a broad-shouldered man. An intriguing man.

“Emilie.”

She turned to see her father walking toward her, looking as if he’d downed a glass of vinegar.



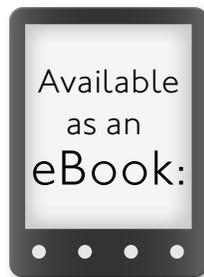
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