



GUIDE ME HOME

Kim Vogel
A NOVEL
Sawyer

Praise for
Guide Me Home

“Quite simply, I loved this story from page one until the end. Rebekah Hardin is truly one of Kim Vogel Sawyer’s most lovable heroines. Kim has created a story that lovingly depicts the people, land, and culture of Appalachia. *Guide Me Home* is a tale of love and hope and faith that will hold your heart long after you reach the end.”

—LAURIE ALICE EAKES, author of *The Mountain Midwife*, 2016
Rita Finalist

“Kim Vogel Sawyer’s characters light up the pages in this deeply moving story of misplaced guilt, ambition, and dreams. I found myself quickly turning pages to find out how Devlin and Reb would resolve their differences in class and culture. And Kim didn’t disappoint. As I read the last page, I felt as if I too had been guided home.”

—PAM HILLMAN, author of *Stealing Jake*

“Just when I thought Kim Vogel Sawyer’s novels couldn’t get any better, *Guide Me Home* fell into my lap, and I was once again amazed by her marvelous resourcefulness. I’ve read several of Kim’s books, so I can say with honesty that this is one of her finest. It is a poignant story of faith, family, and endearing romance. If you are a fan of historical romance rich with descriptive detail, you will love *Guide Me Home*.”

—SHARLENE MACLAREN, author of the *Tennessee Dreams* series
and the *River of Hope* series

“Kim Vogel Sawyer has expertly crafted a novel that’s rich in both God’s truths and American history. I thoroughly enjoyed this dynamic story. It’s been wonderfully researched and delves into the concept of watching our words and the consequences that can unfold when we don’t. But Kim doesn’t leave readers there, suffering in guilt. Through compelling characters, she illustrates God’s infinite grace and love’s healing powers. Readers will not be disappointed!”

—ANDREA BOESHAAR, author of the acclaimed Shenandoah
Valley Saga

GUIDE ME HOME

A decorative flourish consisting of symmetrical, swirling lines that extend from the base of the word 'ME' towards the words 'GUIDE' and 'HOME'.

BOOKS BY KIM VOGEL SAWYER

Echoes of Mercy

Just As I Am

The Grace That Leads Us Home

Room for Hope

Through the Deep Waters

What Once Was Lost

When Grace Sings

When Love Returns

When Mercy Rains

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WATERBROOK
P R E S S

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GUIDE ME HOME

All Scripture quotations are taken from the King James Version.

The characters and events in this book are fictional, and any resemblance to actual persons or events is coincidental.

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*In memory of my grandparents,
Henry and Elizabeth Klaassen Voth and Lillian Miller Vogel,
with thanks for giving my parents a legacy of faith.*



For thou art my lamp, O LORD:
and the LORD will lighten my darkness.

2 SAMUEL 22:29

ONE

Good Spring, Kentucky
Mid-April 1907

Rebekah Hardin

Rebekah awakened to birdsong, the most perfect way in the world to start a new day. She smiled as she stretched, rolled over, and poked her feet from beneath the soft, old patchwork quilt that always made her think of Jacob's coat of many colors.

On the other side of the bed, Cissy stirred and groaned. "Aw, Bek, can'tcha ever lay still 'til Mama hollers? You always wake everybody up before we're ready. An' it's Saturday. Don't even gotta get up for school."

The rustle of dried corn shucks and murmurs carried from the other two beds crowded in the drafty room, proving she—or maybe Cissy—had disturbed her youngest sisters, too. Rebekah sent an apologetic look across their bleary-eyed faces, although with the shutters latched up tight, she doubted they would recognize her remorse in the still-deep shadows.

"Shh," she crooned. "Drop on back to sleep." She sat still as a mouse until all six tousled heads returned to the pillows and six pairs of eyes slid shut. Then she tiptoed across the unstained pine floorboards through thin ribbons of light sneaking between cracks where chinking had crumbled. The planked door's rusty hinges squeaked, earning another low growl from Cissy, but Rebekah ignored the complaint. Cissy was always grumpy in the morning.

She crossed the threshold into the main room of her family's century-old cabin and settled the door in its frame. Mama, never one to laze in the morning, was already at the fireplace, stirring last night's coals to life.

Rebekah aimed a hopeful smile at her mother. "Morning, Mama."

She didn't look up. "Fetch me some wood."

Rebekah stifled a sigh. "Yes'm." Mama's morning crankiness was harder to bear than Cissy's. Rebekah lifted the crossbar to the back door and stepped off the flat rock serving as a stoop onto the dewy grass. She left the door standing wide to let the sweet spring breeze fill the house. Now that winter was past, maybe Mama's spirits would lift. Rebekah missed her mother's smile and the musical, girlish giggle that invited everyone to join in.

"Gal!"

She paused at the edge of the stoop, shivering in her nightgown. But not because of the chill morning air.

"Close that door. You'll let flies in."

It was too early for flies and Rebekah knew it. But she closed the door anyway. Mama must not be ready yet to cast off her winter doldrums. Rebekah turned her pleading gaze to the pink sky visible above the towering trees.

Please, God, bring Mama her joy again soon.

As always, talking to the One who'd created all the beauty coming to life in the forest around her family's simple cabin restored Rebekah's happy mood. She hop-skipped across the cool, damp grass on bare feet to the woodshed tucked at the edge of the clustered pine and aspen trees. When she emerged only minutes later, the pink sky had faded to a blue as pale as a robin's egg. Mama would wake the children soon. She'd better hurry with the firewood.

She balanced the armload of wood against her chest and stepped onto the stoop. The dry, weathered bark bit into her flesh through the thin fabric of her nightgown. Eager to dump the wood into the box beside their stone fireplace, she carefully extended one hand toward the pull string. But before she tugged, a voice from inside the cabin froze her in place.

"Nell, I'm worn out with you. This mopin' has gotta stop."

Chills exploded across Rebekah's scalp and traveled down her spine. Never had she heard Daddy speak so harshly to Mama. Daddy was the kindest, most patient person she knew. She stood quivering, afraid to enter the room lest he bark sharp words at her for interrupting.

"Don't you think I want to stop, Festus?" Mama's words choked out. "I'm

weary of feelin' sad inside. I tell myself every day it's plumb foolish to pine so over our boy. Four babies I've buried in them woods behind our house. Each of 'em left a gnawin' ache inside o' me, but I overcame it 'cause they nary took a breath nor tasted life, just went straight to Jesus's arms. I could bear them goin' away from me 'cause the Lord giveth an' He taketh, an' He knows best. But Andy . . ."

Her mother's anguished, strangled sob tore a ragged hole in Rebekah's soul. Sympathetic tears flooded her eyes, making the grain in the wood door blur.

"I suckled that boy at my breast. I watched him grow. For fifteen years he was ours, Festus, makin' us laugh an' makin' us worry an' lettin' us dream o' the man he'd be someday. 'Twas two years ago today we buried all our dreams for him when we put his body in the ground."

Mama's voice became muffled, and Rebekah knew Daddy had pulled her against his shoulder the way he always did when one of his gals needed comfort. Even so, she made out every one of her mother's pain-filled words.

"If he had a decent headstone—somethin' carved with his name an' the dates of his time here on earth—then maybe I could put him to rest. But only a wood cross? Two sticks bound with twine? It'll rot and fall away an' nobody'll know a boy named Andy once tormented his sisters an' brought his mama bouquets of star chickweed an' claimed he'd be just like his daddy when he grew up. I want him to have more, Festus. He needs more."

"I'd give him more if I could, darlin'." Daddy sounded old. Defeated. "Soon as I scrape up twenty-six dollars that don't need spent on somethin' else—"

Rebekah groaned. They'd never have twenty-six dollars at one time that didn't need spending elsewhere.

"—I'll go to Bowlin' Green an' get him a fine marker with his name, the record of every day he lived, an' even a verse carved in pretty writin'."

"A . . . a verse? Can I choose it?" Mama sounded so hopeful Rebekah found herself holding her breath in anticipation of Daddy's answer.

"Any verse you want, Nell. I promise."

Rebekah's bare toes ached from the cold seeping from the stone beneath

her feet. Her arms ached with the weight of the logs. But mostly her heart ached for the loss her mama couldn't overcome. She closed her eyes against the deep sting of remorse. *Oh, dear God, I didn't mean it. If it's true that You giveth and taketh, like Mama said, You could've given Andy life that day.* She gulped, sending an accusatory look skyward. *Why'd You take him away from Mama? You should've taken me instead.*

The door snapped open, and Daddy nearly plowed straight into her. He stopped short, his brows low and mouth set in a tight line. "Gal, what're you doin'? Get in here an' bring your mama that firewood. The house has a chill."

Rebekah had a chill, too, caused by Daddy's frosty treatment. "I'm sorry, Daddy."

He stepped aside long enough to let her pass. Then he stormed out, leaving the door open behind him. Rebekah didn't need to watch to know he was heading to the woods. To the little clearing where a twig fence encircled the graves of those in her family who'd gone before—Granny and Granddad Hardin, Uncle Fenway, Uncle Birch, Aunt Sal, all the babies who left Mama's body already empty of life. And Andy.

Agony writhed through her middle. The babes never lived. Granny and Granddad and her aunt and uncles enjoyed good, long lives. But Andy? He had no place inside that fence under the cold ground.

"Gimme some good kindlin' pieces." Mama swiped her eyes with her faded calico apron and held her hand toward Rebekah. "These coals're about to die clean away."

Rebekah dropped the full load into the firebox, then picked out the two skinniest chunks. Mama laid them in an X over the blinking coals and, on her hands and knees, gently blew until a tiny lick of flame rose up and tickled the underside of one log. Within minutes a dozen tongues danced around the logs, growing into a blaze. Mama layered in more wood, one piece at a time. Soon the fire snapped and writhed. Rebekah watched, mesmerized by the warmth and light emerging from a glowing coal, a pair of sticks, and Mama's breath.

Mama sat back on her heels, sighed, and gave Rebekah a weary look. "Get the young uns up. All o' you get dressed. Breakfast'll be on soon enough, an' then we can set to the chores. Heap to be done now that spring time's arrivin'."

Rebekah had lost her appetite for their customary cornmeal mush flavored with the molasses Daddy rendered every winter, but she hurried to the room she shared with her sisters and did as her mother bade.

Their dresses from yesterday lay at the foot of their beds, waiting another day's wearing. Rebekah dressed quickly and then said, "C'mere, Little Nellie." The littlest Hardin scooted off the bed and scuffed across the floor, still yawning. She stood complacently and allowed Rebekah to manipulate her limbs as if she were a large rag doll.

Twelve-year-old Della scrambled into her blue-checked dress, topped it with a feed-sack apron still bearing a faded round stamp advertising Superior Egg Pellets, and offered to help five-year-old Trudy with her buttons. Trudy poked out her tummy and linked her hands behind her back, giving Della easy access.

Cissy reached over and grabbed Della's wrist. "She's never gonna learn to dress herself if you keep doin' it for her. Heavens to Betsy, she'll be startin' school next term. You gonna write her name on the papers an' do her cipherin' for her, too?"

Trudy's lower lip puckered. Plump tears quivered on her thick lashes.

Rebekah glanced up from tying the strings on Little Nellie's apron. "Leave them be, Cissy."

Cissy huffed, but she flounced to the other side of the bed and tossed a mint-green dress over her tattered pantaloons. Della shot Rebekah a thank-you smile and continued fastening the buttons on Trudy's well-patched frock. Eleven-year-old Jessie and eight-year-old Tabitha began squabbling over their lone hairbrush, and Rebekah ended the disagreement by taking it for her own use. Both girls fussed until Cissy snapped at them to stop or she'd bang their heads together. They scurried to the far side of the room, away from her. Rebekah ran the brush through her long, thick hair, chuckling to herself.

The morning routine was familiar, comfortable despite the frenzied bustling of seven people in a small space. She'd had the chance to leave last year when Calvin Adwell asked her to marry up with him. She almost said yes, too, because at twenty years old she was fast gaining old-maid status among the folks of Good Spring. Even among her family, if Cissy was considered a

reliable source. After thinking it over, though, she'd said no. Not because she disliked Cal. He was a nice enough fellow, handsome enough to not make her squirm. But if she was going to spend her life with somebody, she wanted more than nice enough and handsome enough. She wanted what she'd always seen between her mama and daddy—sparks that never needed somebody puffing at them to make them flare up again, sparks that didn't die even when hardships came along.

"Ain't you done brushin' yet, Bek?" Cissy's fretful voice cut into Rebekah's reflections. "Gimme that thing or none of us are gettin' outta here anytime soon."

Rebekah handed her sister the hairbrush. She gathered her heavy hair into her hands and twisted the strands into one thick braid. As usual, it ended off center and fell across her left shoulder. She tied the end with a piece of string and then aimed a stern frown on the oldest of her younger sisters. "Cissy, I'm gonna help Mama put breakfast on the table. Get everybody's hair braided, then hurry on out. Don't leave us waiting on you. It's chore day." Cissy was prone to drift away in daydreams, but Mama wasn't up to Cissy's thoughtlessness today—not the way she was hurting over Andy.

"I know, I know." Cissy glared at her image in the cracked mirror hanging from a nail in the wall and smacked the brush through her tangled lengths. "Just once, though, couldn't we do somethin' fun on a Saturday instead o' doin' chores? Couldn't we hitch up the mule an' drive over to Sutherland Pass, maybe choose some fabric for a new dress or ribbons for our hair?"

Trudy crowded near, looking up at Cissy with shining eyes. "Or striped candy sticks."

"Candy," Little Nellie echoed, wonder blooming on her cherubic face.

"An' gumdrops!" Tabitha added. The trio of little girls licked their lips as if tasting the sweet treats.

"Yeah." Cissy turned her glare on Rebekah. "We didn't even get candy in our Christmas stockings this year. Just nuts an' some ol' wrinkly apples." She thrust the hairbrush into Della's hands. "Just once couldn't we have somethin' special?"

Rebekah pinched a strand of Cissy's hair, which was two shades lighter

than that of the other Hardin sisters, between her fingers and gave a gentle tug. "Special costs money, Cissy. Extra money is rare. Daddy and Mama would love to treat us to something special, but times being what they are, they can't. So we have to be patient and understanding."

Cissy jerked free. She folded her arms over her chest and pursed her full lips into a pout. "Ain't fair, Bek. Why can't we be like them families that go to the hotel an' pay to climb down inside Mammoth Cave?"

Rebekah cringed. How could Cissy forget the pain that cave had caused their family? She started to command her sister to never mention Mammoth Cave again, but Cissy hurried on.

"Those folks seem to have money to do whatever they please." She slapped at a patch sewn to the skirt of her faded dress. "You wouldn't see none o' the girls from those families wearin' worn-out hand-me-downs an' tyin' their braids with old shoelaces."

Her tawny-brown eyes pensive, Tabitha caught Rebekah's hand and swung it. "You reckon those girls do chores all day on Saturday, Bek?"

Cissy was planting seeds of rebellion in the little girls' heads. Rebekah needed to snatch them out before they took root. "Chores are part of everybody's life, Tabby. Otherwise nothing would get done."

Cissy snorted. "Betcha they all have maids an' such to do their work." She tossed her thick ponytail over her shoulder. "I'm tellin' you right now, I ain't gonna spend my life pickin' hornworms off tobacco leaves. I'm gonna have money—lots of it. An' I'm gonna wear store-bought dresses an' let my maid scrub the floor an' cook my meals."

The younger girls gazed at Cissy in open-mouthed fascination. Rebekah stepped between them and Cissy and snapped out a snide question. "And just where are you planning to get all this money, Miss High-and-Mighty?"

A wicked gleam entered Cissy's eyes. "There's ways. But I ain't gonna tell you what they are." She flounced out of the room.

Jessie put her fists on her hips and cocked her head. "What's she talkin' about, Bek?"

Rebekah shook her head at the eleven-year-old. "Never you mind. Cissy's always full of ideas that don't come to much." She sent a frown across the

assembly of freckled faces. “Tabitha, why haven’t you put on an apron? Get one from the trunk. Trudy, come here and I’ll braid your hair. Della, put that brush to use on Little Nellie’s tangled mess. If we don’t get to the table soon, Mama’s gonna throw our breakfast out the back door to the chickens.”

To her relief, her sisters obeyed without argument. While she plaited Trudy’s fine, soft hair, she pondered Cissy’s declaration, “There’s ways.” Rebekah had found one way—selling the mushrooms that sprouted at the mouth of the cave on their property to the cook at the Mammoth Cave Hotel. He paid her five cents a pound for the white mushrooms. Daddy was always happy to drop the coins into the old coffee tin that held their savings, no matter how paltry the amount. Maybe there were other ways she could bring home money from some of the rich guests who stayed at the cave’s hotel and paid to tour the cave’s dozens of tunnels.

The bedroom door burst open. Cissy scowled into the room. “You gals comin’ or not? Mama’s about to have a conniption fit.”

Rebekah waved her arms the way a mother hen flapped her wings and herded her little sisters out the door. “Come on now, let’s go.”

Daddy, wearing familiar striped overalls and a homespun blue cotton shirt with the sleeves rolled above his elbows, already waited in the chair at the head of their Granddaddy-built plank table. Cissy, Della, and Jessie clambered onto the bench on his left, and Rebekah slid in with Little Nellie, Trudy, and Tabitha on Daddy’s right. Mama thumped the kettle, its bottom blackened from hanging over the fire, onto the table and then sagged into the remaining chair. Everyone joined hands and Daddy asked a blessing on the meal.

At Daddy’s “amen,” Mama jammed a wooden spoon into the kettle. “Hand me your bowls. It’s comin’ up on eight o’clock already. Mornin’ll be gone before we know.”

While Rebekah ate, a plan formulated in her head. After breakfast she’d take Daddy aside and ask him about talking to the cave owner about some sort of job beyond selling mushrooms. Her heart gave a hopeful flutter. If she snagged a job—a decent, good-paying job—she could maybe buy the headstone Mama wanted so badly for Andy. Then maybe, just maybe, their smiling, humming, ever-peaceful mama would come back to them.

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