

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER

When *the* Soul Mends

A NOVEL



Cindy
Woodsmall

AUTHOR OF *When the Heart Cries* AND *When the Morning Comes*

SISTERS OF THE QUILT, BOOK THREE

Praise for
When the Soul Mends

“A skillfully written story of forgiveness and redemption. Woodsmall’s authentic characters illustrate beautifully how wounded souls can indeed be mended.”

—SUSAN MEISSNER, author of *The Shape of Mercy*

“A heartwarming tale of love and forgiveness, Cindy Woodsmall’s novel *When the Soul Mends* offers believable characters and a page-turning plot in an Amish setting so real I could almost smell fresh-baked cinnamon rolls and hear the *clip-clop* of horses’ hoofs. For a book that pulls you in from start to finish, this is a must-read!”

—DIANN HUNT, author of *For Better or for Worse*

“Like the stitches on a well-loved quilt, love and faith hold together Cindy Woodsmall’s *When the Soul Mends*, the brilliantly written third story in the Sisters of the Quilt series. With deft plotting and characters that seem to jump off the page, this novel offers the timeless truth that forgiveness is the balm that heals all wounds and is a blanket for the soul.”

—KATHLEEN Y’BARBO, author of *Beloved Castaway*

Praise for
the Sisters of the Quilt series

“Woodsmall’s fantastic second book in the Sisters of the Quilt series continues the story of Hannah Lapp. Keep the tissues nearby—Hannah’s tale will tug hard at the heartstrings. Readers will find themselves cheering Hannah on through her ordeals and hating to put the book down.”

—*Romantic Times*

“Cindy Woodsmall writes real—real people, real conflicts, real emotions. When you open her book, you enter her world and live the story with the characters.”

—KIM VOGEL SAWYER, author of *Where Willows Grow*
and *Waiting for Summer’s Return*

“*When the Morning Comes* is a fine rendering of struggle and joy that resonates long after the last words are read.”

—JANE KIRKPATRICK, award-winning author of the Change
and Cherish series, including *A Tendering in the Storm*

“Reaching deep into the heart of the reader, Cindy Woodsmall pens a beautifully lyrical story in her debut novel *When the Heart Cries*.”

—TAMERA ALEXANDER, best-selling author of *Rekindled*

“What a vibrant, strong, emotional story! *When the Heart Cries* will grip you and not let go, I promise. Highly recommended!”

—GAYLE ROPER, author of *Allah’s Fire* and
the Seaside Seasons series

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— A NOVEL —

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SISTERS OF THE QUILT, BOOK THREE



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To my husband

*I could fill a thousand books with words of love
and still not have shared but a small portion
of who you are to me.*

SISTERS OF THE QUILT SERIES

Main Characters from Books 1 and 2: *When the Heart Cries* and *When the Morning Comes*

Hannah Lapp—age twenty, Old Order Amish. Two and a half years ago, at seventeen, she left her family home in Owl's Perch, Pennsylvania, in disgrace, and she established a new life in Winding Creek, Ohio, with her shunned aunt Zabeth. She had been secretly engaged to Paul Waddell for several months.

Zeb and Ruth Lapp—Hannah's Old Order Amish parents. In addition to Hannah, they have six other children: Luke, age twenty-four; Levi, age twenty-two; Sarah, age eighteen; Esther, age fourteen; Samuel, age nine; Rebecca, age six.

Luke Lapp—Old Order Amish. He is Hannah's eldest brother and one-time close friend, but he struggled to believe the truth about his sister's tragedy. He is married to Mary Yoder.

Mary Yoder Lapp—age twenty, Old Order Amish. Mary is Hannah's best friend and is married to Hannah's brother Luke. Mary's parents are Becky and John Yoder, and she has nine brothers.

Sarah Lapp—Old Order Amish. She is a troubled person and generated rumors about her sister Hannah that contributed to Hannah's disgrace.

Zabeth Bender—Hannah's aunt who took her in and helped her navigate the Englisher world until she passed away the summer after Hannah turned twenty.

Martin Palmer—turning twenty-nine as the book opens. He's an Englisher raised by Zabeth Bender after his mother died. He and Hannah became friends and a support for each other soon after she arrived in Ohio. He's fallen in love with her and has asked her to marry him.

Faye Palmer—Martin's thirty-five-year-old sister and a drug addict. She ran off, leaving her children, Kevin and Lissa, with Martin and Hannah.

Kevin Palmer—Martin's seven-year-old nephew.

Lissa Palmer—Martin's six-year-old niece.

Paul Waddell—age twenty-four, a Plain Mennonite. As a college senior, he dreamed of marrying Hannah and using his social-work degree to help families. Then he discovered his fiancée's secret.

Katie [Gram] Waddell—Paul's Plain Mennonite grandmother. She lives a mile from the Lapp home and had Hannah working as a helper until her attack. Paul lived at Gram's during his summer breaks.

Dorcas Miller—age twenty-four, a Plain Mennonite. She is friends with Paul and his family and attended the same Plain Mennonite high school as Paul.

Carol—Paul's older sister and a friend of Dorcas's. Carol's husband is William, and they have two young sons and a baby girl.

Matthew Esh—age twenty-four, Old Order Amish, and a loyal friend to Hannah. He had been in love with Elle Leggett. His parents are Naomi and Raymond Esh, and he has two brothers: David, age fifteen, who died in a fire a few days prior to the start of this book, and Peter, age thirteen.

Elle Leggett—age twenty-five, not confirmed into the Amish church. She was born to Englisher parents, but Elle's mother died, and her father abandoned her when she was a child. Abigail and Hezekiah (Kiah) Zook—a childless, Old Order Amish couple—took her in and raised her Plain.

Dr. Jeffrey Lehman—an older gentleman who is Hannah's mentor and friend. He runs the Amish birthing center where Hannah works.

Chapter 1

Hannah's car faded into the distance of the paved horizon. The cold concrete chilling Martin's bare feet and the lukewarm cup of coffee in his hand confirmed that this was no way to begin a Saturday morning. Watching the place where Hannah's vehicle had disappeared, Kevin and Lissa slowly stopped waving. For the first time since Hannah had landed in Ohio—two and a half years ago and not yet eighteen—she was on her way back to her Pennsylvania home and the Old Order Amish family she'd left behind. Maybe he should have insisted on going with her.

Lissa tugged at the hem of his T-shirt. "She packed a lot of stuff."

His niece's big brown eyes reflected fears she didn't know how to voice at five years old. Martin tried to catch Kevin's eye to see how he was doing, but he stared at the ground. Hannah really hadn't packed very much, but this had to feel like a replay of when their mother ran off months ago. When Faye had packed a lot of things into her car, she dropped Kevin and Lissa off with Hannah while Martin was at work, and never returned.

Martin suppressed a sigh, tossed the brown liquid from his cup onto the green grass, and held out his hand to Lissa. "She'll be back, guys."

Lissa slid her hand into his. "Promise?"

"Yes. Absolutely." Martin gave her hand a gentle squeeze. "Her sister called to say that a good friend of Hannah's had an accident and is in the hospital. She'll probably be back in time for her classes on Monday. Wednesday at the latest."

Kevin shoved his hands deep into his pockets. “I didn’t know she had a sister.”

Martin shrugged, unwilling to say too much about Hannah’s past. “She hasn’t been to see her family or friends in Pennsylvania for years.” With the coffee cup dangling from his fingers, he put his hand on Kevin’s shoulder. “Now they need her for a bit.” He headed for the house, leading the children.

Earlier this morning, while Hannah called possible hospitals her friend might have been taken to, Martin found an Ohio-Pennsylvania map. Once she knew the name and address of the hospital, they studied the map together while he highlighted the route she’d need to take. He didn’t know which caused her the most nervousness: her injured friend, having to see her family again, or driving in unfamiliar territory, but right now he wished he’d pushed a little harder to go with her.

He thought about the gifts he and Hannah had exchanged last night. He’d given her an honorary mother’s ring and had slid it onto the ring finger of her left hand. She hadn’t agreed yet to marry him, saying his proposal a few weeks back had been brazen and romance-free, which it had. But when he took her to Hawaii over Christmas, he’d find the most romantic way possible to propose.

A smile he couldn’t stop seemed to spread across the morning.

Martin opened the front door. “How about some Cracklin’ Pops cereal and cartoons?”



The muscles across Hannah’s shoulders ached. With the toll roads and service plazas of the Ohio and Pennsylvania Turnpikes behind her, she pulled into the parking lot of the hospital and found a space for her car.

Her frazzled nerves complained, but she was here now—whatever *here* held in store. Trying desperately to remember who she’d become over the last couple of years, not who she’d once been, she stopped at

the information desk and waited for the woman to end her phone conversation.

Her sister Sarah had managed to get hold of her phone number and had called last night to tell her about Matthew being hurt in a fire. Hannah promised to come—a pledge she now regretted. In some ways it'd been a lifetime since she'd last faced her Amish community, yet the quaking of her insides said it'd been only yesterday.

The gray-haired woman hung up the phone. "Can I help you?"

"Yes, I need the room numbers for Matthew and David Esh."

The woman typed on the keyboard and studied the screen. She frowned and typed in more info. "We have a Matthew Esh, but there's not a David Esh listed." She jotted down the room number on a small piece of paper. "It's possible he's already been released or perhaps was taken to a different hospital."

"Maybe so. I'll ask Matthew." Hannah took the paper from her. "Thank you."

She went to the elevator, trying to mentally prepare to face Matthew's visitors—people she knew, people she was related to, those who'd accused her of wrong doing before they washed their hands of her. Nonetheless, she'd come home.

Here. Not home. She corrected herself and felt a morsel of comfort in the thought. These people didn't own her and had no power to control her, not anymore. She stepped off the elevator and headed toward Matthew's room. Odd, but the place appeared empty of any Amish. She gave a sideways glance into the waiting room as she passed it. There were no Plain folk in there either.

Stopping outside the room, Hannah said a silent prayer.

Ready or not, she pressed the palms of her hands against the door and eased it open.

A man lay in the bed, but she couldn't see his face for the bandages across his eyes. He turned his head toward the door.

"Hello?" His voice echoed through the room.

“Matthew?”

His forehead wrinkled above the bandages, and he clenched his jaw. “Just go home...or wherever it is you’re livin’ these days. I got no more use for you.”

She froze. If this is what awaited her from Matthew, one of her few friends, what would the community be like? But maybe the man wasn’t Matthew. His body was larger, shoulders thicker and rounded with muscle. His voice was raspy and deeper than she remembered. And Matthew would have visitors, wouldn’t he?

“Matthew?”

He shifted in the bed, angling his head.

“It...it’s Hannah.”

Only the soft buzzing sound of electronics could be heard as she waited for his response. Wondering a thousand things—whether the eye damage was permanent, why he didn’t have a marriage beard, and where everyone was—she moved closer to the bed.

Finally he reached his hand toward her. “Hannah Lapp, at last back from the unknown world.”

Ignoring his unsettling tone, she put her fingers around his outstretched hand and squeezed. “How are you?”

The stiltedness of their words said that a lot more than two and a half years had passed between them.

He shrugged and then winced, reminding her of the pain he must be in. “I’ve lost David...and every part of my business. How do ya expect me to be?”

David is dead?

The news twisted her insides, making her fight to respond. “I’m so sorry, Matthew.”

He eased his hand away from hers. “I’m grateful you came all this way, but I’m too tired to talk right now.”

“Sure. I understand. Where is everyone?”

The door swooshed open, and a nurse walked in. “I’m sorry, miss.

He's not to have visitors." She held up a laminated, printed sign that said No Visitors Allowed. "It'd slipped off his door."

That explained why he didn't have friends or relatives here, but he didn't appear to be in bad enough shape for a doctor to give that order. Hannah studied the nurse, but she just shook her head without saying more. The only reason he wouldn't be *allowed* to have visitors was because he'd requested that of the staff. And clearly he didn't want to make an exception for her.

"Okay." She slid her hand into his once more, wishing she could at least know more about the condition of his eyes. But he seemed in no mood for questions. "I'll come back when you're feeling better."

"There's no sense in that. I'm goin' home tomorrow. But...David's funeral is Monday." His voice cracked, and he took a ragged breath. "If you're still here, we could meet up afterward while *Mamm* and everyone is distracted with the gatherin' at the house."

The words Matthew didn't say weighed heavily. He didn't want her going into the community to see anyone. He wanted to meet her alone, in secret.

Unable to respond, she grappled with the space separating them. She'd expected distance from her *Daed* and *Mamm*, the church leaders, and even Gram, but she hadn't for one second thought Matthew would sidestep her. He'd understood, even disobeyed the bishop to help her. Built the coffin for her baby, dug the grave, and said the prayer. Taken her to the train station, bought her a ticket, and stayed with her until time for the train to depart the next day. Did he now regret that he'd stuck by her?

Unwilling to push for a specific plan, Hannah gave his hand a final squeeze before pulling away. "Sure. I...I'll catch up with you then."

Desperate to clear her mind, Hannah hurried out of the hospital and into her car. She pulled out of the hospital parking lot and drove—to where, she didn't know. Old feelings of loneliness washed over her, but she kept driving, as if she could outrun the sting.

By the time her emotions began to settle, she had no idea where she was. Glancing in the rearview mirror, she pulled her car onto the shoulder of the road. Fields of yet-uncut hay seemed to go on forever as cars whizzed past. Unsure of the county or town she was in, she grabbed the map off the seat beside her and searched for her location. Nothing looked familiar. Realizing the stupid thing was upside down, she flipped it around.

At this moment all she wanted was to be at home with Martin, but the next few days had to be walked through first. She'd given Sarah her word. Even as that thought crossed her mind, she wondered if there was more to it. If maybe some deeply hidden part of her wanted to be here. Desperate to hear Martin's voice, to feel like she did when with him, she took her cell phone out of her purse.

"Hey, sweetheart, where are you?"

A sense of belonging washed over her the moment she heard his voice. "I was hoping you could tell me."

He laughed. "Are you serious?"

"Yeah, sort of."

"Do you know the name of the road you're on?"

"No. All I know is I want to be there, not here." In spite of her effort to sound upbeat, she came across as pathetic and didn't want to imagine what Martin must be thinking about now.

"Look at the directions I printed out, and tell me what point you got to before you became lost."

"I turned left out of your driveway."

His low chuckle was reassuring. "Very cute."

Determined to show Martin she could handle this, she studied the map. "Yeah, you've told me that before, only then you could see me." She angled the map sideways. "Wait. I got it. I know where I am." She pressed her fingertip against the map and followed the line before realizing she was wrong. "Lost without you."

"Metaphorically, I love the sound of that, but you should have let

me take you there. You've never driven anywhere outside a twenty-five mile radius of Winding Creek."

"You're not helping."

"It's a little hard to help from here with no"—he mockingly cleared his throat—"POB to work from."

She heard the familiar beeps of his laptop starting up. "POB...ah, engineering lingo."

"Yep. Point of beginning. I'm logging onto Google maps right now and will try the satellite visual. Tell me about your surroundings."

"Oh yeah, that's a great plan. I'm surrounded by cow pastures and no houses. Found the right spot yet? There's a Holstein watching me."

"On Google maps, no. The right spot for you? Yes, it's right here in Ohio with us."

She heard the rustle of fabric. "Did you go back to bed after I left?"

"I ate breakfast and watched cartoons with Lissa and Kevin. But then Laura arrived, so I let the nanny do her job while I took a nice long nap, until you became a damsel in distress. The Mary Jane to my Peter Parker."

"What? Damsel in distress," she muttered. "So what does that make you when you don't know the difference between a skillet and a pot?"

"A typical male who just happens to be..." He paused. "Come on, work with me here, phone girl. Who just happens to be..."

"Charming and intelligent." She mimicked his clearing of the throat. "According to him."

He laughed. A loud crash echoed through her cell. Lissa screamed, and Hannah's breath caught.

A bang, as if his door had been shoved open and hit the wall, filtered through the receiver. "Uncle Martin, Laura said you better come see this. Lissa might need stitches."

"Phone girl, I'll need to call you back in a few. Okay?"

The next sound she heard was the complete silence of a cell-phone disconnection. Wondering what she was doing here rather than being

there to help Martin, she closed her phone. At sixty-two, Laura was a skilled nanny, but Hannah wanted to be the one with him going through whatever the day brought.

Looking at the map one last time, she thought about calling Dr. Lehman. He was more than just her boss, and he regularly visited relatives in Lancaster, some forty miles southeast of here, so he might be able to help her. But rather than chance disturbing him, she decided to continue driving until she found a landmark she recognized. She pulled back onto the road. After a solid hour and many times of turning around, she found the road that led to Owl's Perch. Martin hadn't called her back, and she hadn't been able to reach him. His voice mail picked up immediately, which meant his phone was turned off. Whatever was going on, she bet his Saturday was tough, nanny's help or not.

The oddest sensation slid up her back as she drove alongside the Susquehanna River. She'd been in this very spot three years ago, heading for Hershey Medical Center because Luke and Mary had been taken there by helicopter after their accident. She remembered the days that followed, months of hiding her rape from everyone but her parents and hoping against hope that she wouldn't lose Paul.

"Brilliant, Hannah, you were afraid of losing a jerk." She mumbled the words, then turned the radio up louder, trying to drown out the whispers of resentment against him. The familiar territory had to be the reason for the fresh edge of offense that cut against her insides. In all the time she'd known Paul, he'd lived on a college campus not far from here, except for the summers, when he stayed with his Gram. She'd only seen this area twice before, once on the way to the hospital to see Luke and Mary and again about two weeks later on the way back home, but in each instance she'd been keenly aware that she was in Paul's stomping grounds. At the time she felt connected to him, hopeful they could overcome the obstacles that stood between them and getting married.

Silly, childish dreams.

Needing a stronger diversion than worship songs, she pushed the

radio button, jumping through the stations until she found a familiar song by Rascal Flatts, "I'm Moving On." She cranked up the sound full blast and sang along, assuring her anxieties that she would survive the oddity of being here as well as the misery of not being with Lissa throughout whatever ordeal she faced.

The waters of the Susquehanna weren't brown and frothy this time. The river looked crystal clear as the afternoon sun rode across the ripples. In less than an hour she'd be in Owl's Perch, and as badly as she wanted to arrive, she didn't want to face her father. What was she going to say to him?

A dozen songs later, that question was still on her mind as she drove into her parents' driveway. Her mouth dry and palms sweaty, she got out of her car. The cool September breeze played with her dress and loose strands of her pinned-up hair, but there wasn't anyone in sight, and the wood doors on the house were shut. Without any sounds of voices or movement coming through the screened windows, she was pretty confident no one was home. She knocked loudly anyway. It was rare for everyone to be gone if it wasn't a church day.

When no one answered, she made a complete circle, taking in the old place, its chicken coop, barns, lean-to, and smokehouse. A sense of nostalgia reverberated through her as she absorbed the homestead where she'd been born and her mother before her. The tops of the huge oaks rustled. She walked to the hand pump, pushed and pulled the handle until water poured forth, and filled a tin cup. Taking a sip of the cool water, Hannah sensed an odd connectedness to her ancestors. A great-grandfather on her mother's side had dug this well, and springs that fed it had been sustaining her family for generations.

The quiet peacefulness moved through her, making her realize how much she'd once cherished parts of the Plain life. She hadn't expected this, and for the first time in a long time, she wished she understood herself better. Spotting the garden, she walked up the small hill to the edge of it. The last of the corn had been harvested weeks ago, and now

all that remained were the cut-off brown stalks. The pea plants had been pulled up for the season. The cold-weather plants—broccoli, cauliflower, and cabbage—were thriving. She'd loved gardening from the first time her Daed had placed seeds in the palms of her hands and helped her plant them. Daed and she had come to the garden every day, watching, weeding, and watering. In the end those seeds produced enough food for her family to eat well all year long. Suddenly missing who her Daed and she had once been, her eyes misted. How much easier it would be to sort through her feelings if she understood the magnitude of emotions that came out of nowhere and took her to places she didn't know existed. Perhaps in that one thing, she and Sarah weren't so very different. Her sister seemed to respond immediately to the emotions that marched through her, and Hannah stood against them, but either way they left a mark.

Her mind returned to the strange conversation she'd had with Sarah—the jumbled words and thoughts that circled with no destination. She needed to find out what was going on with her. Deciding to go see Luke and Mary for answers, she went to her car. She backed out of the driveway and headed down the familiar dirt road she used to walk regularly when going to Gram's. The hairs on her arms stood on end as the paved road turned into a gravel one, the one where the attack had taken place. She locked her car doors and turned the music up to blaring, trying not to think about it. A few minutes later she pulled into Luke's driveway.

Getting out of the car, she noticed that his shop didn't appear to be open. The windows, blinds, and doors were closed. It seemed like he'd have the place open on a Saturday. She knocked loudly before trying the door.

When it opened, she stepped inside. The shadowy place didn't look anything like a usable shop. It looked like a storage room for buggy parts, not leather goods. Waiting at the foot of the stairs that led to the second-floor apartment, Hannah called, "Luke? Mary?"

The door at the top of the steps creaked open, and a half-dressed young man stepped out. "They don't live here. Never have. We rent the place."

He might be Amish, but she couldn't tell for sure since he only had on a sleeveless T-shirt and pants.

He descended a few steps.

Hannah backed up. "I'm sorry for interrupting you."

"No interruption at all."

Luke and Mary never lived in the home above the harness shop, both of which were built by the community just for them? Unwilling to ask any questions, Hannah went to her car.

Opening the door to the vehicle, she spotted Katie Waddell's white clapboard home amid fenced pasturelands. The once-worn footpath from here to Gram's was thick with grass. Hannah closed the door to her car. Maybe it was time to push beyond her fears. She headed for the old farmhouse. Except for a few fences that needed mending, the place looked good. Her heart pounded something fierce as she crossed Gram's screened porch to the back door.

"Look at me, Hannah." As if catapulted back in time, she could hear Paul's voice and feel the soft rumble of his words against her soul. *"I've been aching to talk to you before I return to college. There are some things I just can't write in a letter."*

She shuddered, trying to dismiss the memory and ignore the feelings that washed over her as she knocked on the door. No one answered. She peered through the gape in the curtains that hung over the glass part of the door and knocked louder. After several minutes she gave up, left the porch, and moved to the side yard, thinking Gram might be in the garden. But one look at the garden said no one had been in it for quite a while. Paul's old rattletrap of a truck sat under a pavilion near the garden, the hood up and the engine dangling above by a thick chain.

Eeriness crawled over her skin as if she were trapped in one of those *Twilight Zone* episodes Martin had told her about. Whatever was going

on, life seemed to have changed for everyone else as much as it had for her. She headed for her car. It was time to find the hotel near Harrisburg where Martin had made reservations for her and settle in for the night. She could have stayed at a hotel closer to her community, but according to Martin, the one he'd chosen was nicer: very safe, with breakfast included, and a business center in case she needed Internet access. Unfortunately she'd be stuck there all day tomorrow since it was a church day. Visits by estranged Amish may not be tolerated any day, but especially on a Sunday. And Matthew had made it clear she needed to wait until after the funeral to be seen by the community as a whole and by his family in particular. If that's how strongly Matthew felt, her father would magnify that sentiment a thousandfold.

Regardless of what it took, she'd get through the next few days with her dignity intact. They'd trampled her spirit once. She'd not give them another chance.