

WHAT READERS ARE SAYING:

What a beautiful novel. Cynthia's heart shone in every line. I smiled and cried as though I were part of the Gallagher family. Will and Lydia's story gripped my heart, taking permanent root. Their struggles challenged me to take a deeper look inside of myself. Thoroughly moving, authentic, and deeply engaging. A triumph of joy over sorrow.

— CANDACE WEST, AWARD-WINNING
AUTHOR OF THE VALLEY CREEK
REDEMPTION SERIES

When life deals us unexpected blows, and we don't see God's blessings or hear His voice, our faith can falter. *Beyond Shattered Dreams* reminds us that He's always working, turning tragedy into beauty if we will trust Him. Out of loss and pain can come abundance we've never imagined. In this well-written, introspective third installment of her *Wounded Hearts* series, Cynthia Roemer reminds us of the promise of restoration, the deep joys of family, and the gift of unexpected love. Superbly done!

— DENISE WEIMER, AUTHOR OF *WHEN
HOPE SANK* OF BARBOUR'S DAY TO
REMEMBER SERIES AND THE SCOUTS OF
THE GEORGIA FRONTIER SERIES

Roemer possesses such a rich, authentic historical voice, and *Beyond Shattered Dreams* is another beautifully written exploration of love and loss against the backdrop of the Civil War. Readers will be captivated by the emotional depth of the characters and the gripping plot that unfolds. This compelling story of love's redeeming power is sure to resonate with readers long after they turn the last page.

— MISTY M. BELLER, USA TODAY
BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF THE BROTHERS
OF SAPPHIRE RANCH SERIES

BEYOND
Shattered
DREAMS

Wounded Hearts • Book Three

Award-winning Author
CYNTHIA ROEMER



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*To my family,
Marvin, Glenn, Megan, and Evan.
You are what I treasure most in this life.
True gifts from the Lord.*

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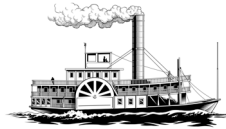
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Beyond Shattered Dreams is a work of fiction. Where real people, events, establishments, organizations, or locales appear, they are used fictitiously. All other elements of the novel are drawn from the author's imagination.

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*“And ye shall seek Me and find Me,
when ye shall search for me with all your heart.”
(Jeremiah 29:13)*



Mississippi River near Memphis, Tennessee
April 27, 1865, 1:50 a.m.

Will Everett smacked a hand to his neck, ending the annoying buzz of a mosquito. He huffed. Between the biting insects and the mob of fidgety soldiers vying for a spot, how was a man to get any sleep?

Not to mention having no bed to lie on.

He snugged his uniform collar higher and scratched his neck. Already, an itchy welt was forming below his ear. One of many bites since last evening's sendoff from Vicksburg. He'd been eager to leave Camp Fisk and board the *Sultana* but hadn't expected such a hoard of passengers. The notion of remaining aboard the frenzied, overcrowded steamboat all the way to Indiana turned his stomach.

Yet, he'd not complain. So long as the vessel carried him home to his family.

Heavy clouds overhead shielded the moon and stars from view, leaving the night eerily black. A nearby soldier stirred awake, his sleep no doubt hindered by the awkward conditions.

Sitting taller, he glanced at Will. “Still black as pitch, I see. You got the time, fella?”

With a yawn, Will reached into his trousers and pulled out his brass pocket watch, a gift from his folks when he’d turned eighteen. He ran his thumb over the watch’s smooth casing. He’d gone to great lengths to keep it hidden from the Rebs during his imprisonment. So much had happened in the nearly two years since he’d left home. His family would likely not recognize him with his scruffy beard and gaunt frame. Even now, weeks after eating something besides scanty prison rations, his uniform sagged on his malnourished body like a boy who’d donned his father’s breeches.

The war and prison life had scarred him in more ways than physically. He’d witnessed appalling images no person should.

Popping the watch open, Will strained to see the thin hands in the dim light. He kept his voice low to not disturb those fortunate enough to sleep. “Just shy of two a.m.”

His companion scrubbed a hand down his face. “Arr. This night seems endless. I’ve known better conditions in a Confederate prison camp.”

“That may be, but this steamboat is ferrying us home.”

“You’ve a point there, soldier.” With that, the private settled back in his spot.

As Will slipped the treasured watch back into his pocket, a spray of fine mist dampened his cheek. He pulled his kepi down over his face and leaned his head against the stair rail. For lack of a better place, he’d settled on the *Sultana*’s stair landing between the steamboat’s boiler and hurricane decks in an attempt to catch a few winks of sleep. Yet, the boat’s noisy boiler engines and rough sway over the swollen Mississippi made rest near impossible.

A year of battle, followed by nine months of wasting away in a congested, disease-ridden prison, had taken its toll on the lot of them. A good number of his regiment hadn’t survived. This mosquito-infested steamboat teeming with rank, unwashed

soldiers was little improvement, but at least something better was on the way.

A weak smile tugged at one corner of his mouth. Nothing could faze him now that home was within reach. He could almost taste his mom's fried chicken and fresh apple pie. He subconsciously licked his lips, the very thought of the delicacies causing his deprived stomach to rumble.

A deafening blast erupted from the rear of the boat, followed by a flash of brilliant light. A surge of pain tore through the side of Will's head as his body catapulted into the air like a stone from a slingshot. For a brief moment, his world fell to silent darkness. He startled awake as his body smacked against frigid water and plunged beneath. Dark murkiness engulfed him. Unable to tell up from down, he held his breath and struggled to regain his bearings. Panicked, he batted his arms and kicked his legs, praying he would reach the surface before his lungs filled.

A moment later, he emerged, gasping for air. He fought to keep his head above water, the engorged river lobbing him along like driftwood. What had happened? How had he ended up stranded in midstream in the dead of night? His mind whirled, too foggy to recall anything outside of landing in the murky water.

Bright light pulled his attention upstream, and he struggled to see past blurred, water-streaked vision. A wave of nausea coursed through him at the sight of a wrecked steamboat, its back half engulfed in flames. With shrill cries, soldiers plunged from its decks. Countless others thrashed along in the water, clamoring for debris, while those less fortunate floated lifelessly on the current.

Fatigue tore at Will's limbs as he latched onto a large slab of wood drifting past. Breathless, he heaved himself onto it, pain throbbing in the side of his head. He shivered, colder out of the water than in. Drowsiness tugged at him as he drifted farther from the wrecked boat. Merciless cries beckoned around him in

the darkness. He closed his eyes, his mind cluttered and confused. A lost feeling engulfed him. None of this made sense.

He shivered. So cold.

His heartbeat slowed as if his very life were being snuffed out. Had he survived the blast only to freeze to death or drown in the river?

His heart sank. *Lord, have mercy.*