A person wearing a patterned shirt is holding a large glass jar that is glowing from within. The background is dark with some light spots.

How
SWEET
the
SOUND

a novel

AMY K. SORRELLS

PRAISE FOR
HOW SWEET THE SOUND

“This book will turn your emotions inside out and grip your heart with a clawed fist before pouring acid—and then balm—over the wounds. You have been warned. Now, by all means, go buy this unusually edgy and entirely moving inspirational novel and read it for yourself.”

SERENA CHASE, *USA Today*

“Debut inspirational novelist Sorrells opens her story powerfully. . . . Sorrells will likely move many readers of faith, and she’s worth watching.”

PUBLISHERS WEEKLY

“You could read *How Sweet the Sound* because you love a well-told story, but Amy Sorrells delivers so much more. Here the depths of pain mankind can inflict meet the unfailing grace that waits to heal all who’ll come.”

SHELLIE RUSHING TOMLINSON, *Belle of All Things Southern* and author of *Heart Wide Open*

“With poetic prose, lyrical descriptions, and sensory details that bring the reader deep into every scene, Amy K. Sorrells has delivered a lush, modern telling of the age-old story of Tamar. But that’s not all. With a full cast of colorful characters and juxtaposed first-person narratives woven through, this story dives into the Gulf Coast culture of pecan orchards and debutante balls, exposing layers of family secrets and sins. In the end comes redemption, grace, forgiveness, and faith, but not without a few scars carried by those who manage to survive the wrath of hardened hearts. Bravo!”

JULIE CANTRELL, *New York Times* bestselling author of *Into the Free* and *When Mountains Move*

“*How Sweet the Sound* is one of those books you want to savor slowly, like sips of sweet tea on a hot Southern day. Aching beautiful prose married with honest, raw redemption makes this book a perfect selection for your next book club.”

MARY DEMUTH, author of *The Muir House*

“Meeting these characters and stepping into their worlds forever changed the contour of my heart. Sorrells’s words effortlessly rise from the page with a cadence that is remarkably brave and wildly beautiful.”

TONI BIRDSONG, author of *More Than a Bucket List*

“Filled with brokenness and redemption, grit and grace, *How Sweet the Sound* is a heartrending coming-of-age debut about God’s ability to heal the hurting and restore the damaged. Sorrells deftly reminds us that no matter how dark the night, hope is never lost. Not if we have eyes to see.”

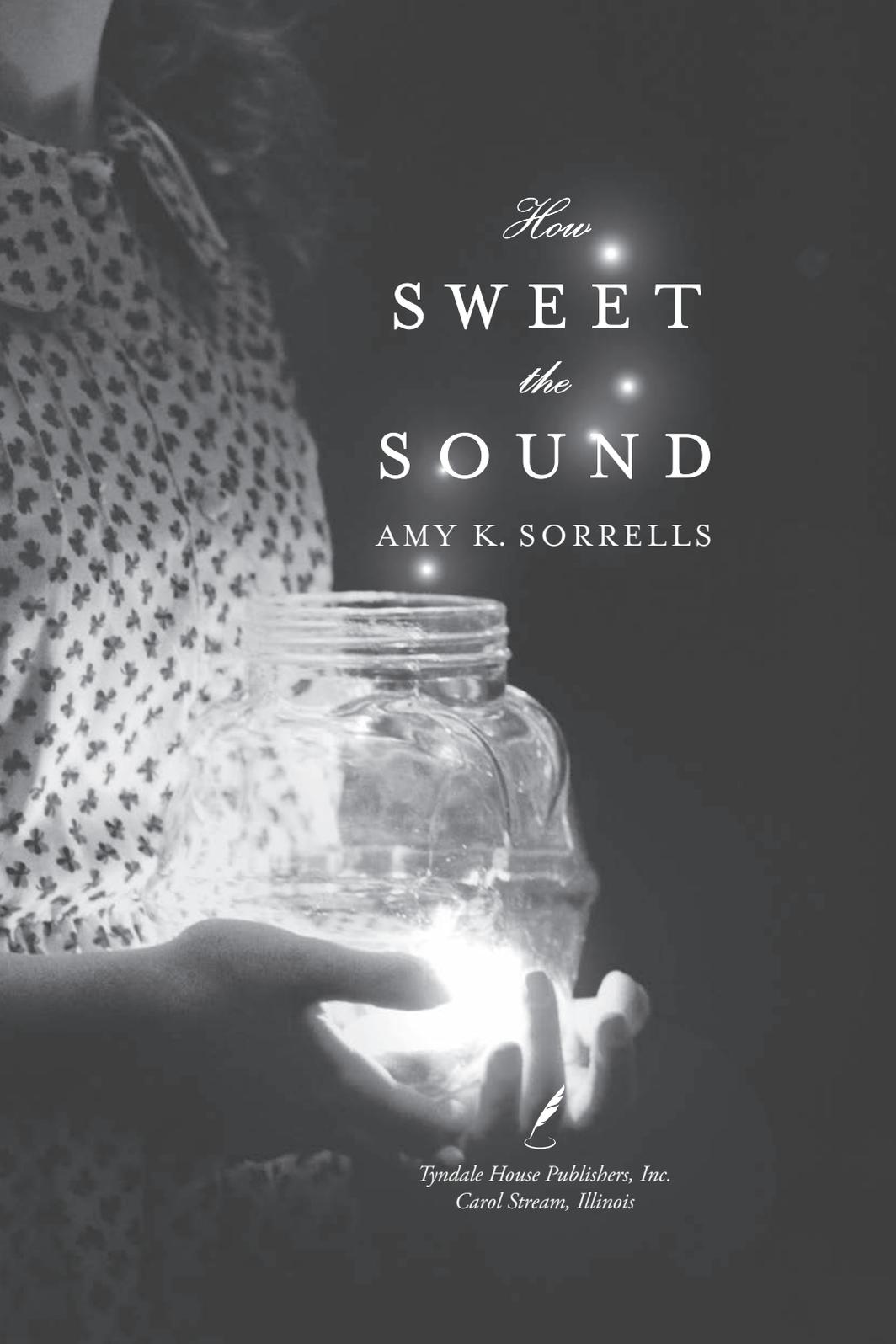
KATIE GANSHERT, author of *Wildflowers from Winter* and *Wishing on Willows*

“A stirring tale of loss and redemption. Amy Sorrells will break your heart and piece it back twice its size.”

BILLY COFFEY, author of *When Mockingbirds Sing*

“A daring and enchanted story, Amy K. Sorrells’s *How Sweet the Sound* beckons readers to a land of pecan groves, bay breezes, and graveyard secrets rising up like the dead on Judgment Day.”

KAREN SPEARS ZACHARIAS, author of *Mother of Rain*



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*Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.
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*Marine experts say that the jubilee is caused by an
upward movement of oxygen-poor bottom water
forcing bottom-type fish and crustaceans ashore.*

AUBURN UNIVERSITY MARINE EXTENSION
AND RESEARCH CENTER



Behold and see

*What a great heap of grief lay hid in me,
And how the red wild sparkles dimly burn
Through the ashen greyness. . . .*

SONNETS FROM THE PORTUGUESE, V
E. B. BROWNING



*She carries within her a tree of silence
born from seeds of pain sown long ago.
Its roots are now thick as a man's arm.
To tear them out would collapse her,
her body's posture built on the scaffolding
of things as they should not have been.
So she walks as if retreating, leaning back
not in fear but at a slight angle where
the sun and dark have finally found rest.*

JOHN BLASE

To the silent ones



LATE
1979



Kay koule tronpe soley men li pa tronpe lapli.

“A leaking roof may fool sunny weather, but cannot fool the rain.”

Chapter 1

ANNISTON

I thought I'd lived through everything by the time I was thirteen.

Hurricane Frederic nearly wiped the southern part of Alabama off the map that fall, and half of our family's pecan orchards along with it. Daddy said we were lucky—that the Miller pecan farm down the road lost everything. The Puss 'n' Boots Cat Food factory supplied our whole town of Bay Spring with ice and water for nearly a week until the power and phones came back on along the coast of Mobile Bay. Anyone who could hold a hammer or start up a chain saw spent weeks cutting up all the uprooted trees and azaleas, pounding down new shingles, and cleaning up all that God, in His infinite fury, blew through our land. Like most folks who lived along the coast, we'd find a way to build back up—if we weren't fooled into thinking the passing calm of the eye meant the storm was over.

If I'd only known this about Hurricane Frederic—that the drudging months leading up to Thanksgiving would be the only peace we'd see for some time. Weren't no weathermen or prophets with megaphones standing on top of the Piggly Wiggly Saturday mornings to shout warnings of storms and second comings to us.

The only warning was the twitch of my grandmother's eye.



“Happy Thanksgiving!” Mama, Daddy, and I said in unison.

Princella pulled the front door open to let us in, kissing us each coolly on the cheek as we passed. Her graying hair was twisted into a tight, smooth bun on top of her head, and a purple suede pantsuit hung on her too-thin frame.

“Thank you. Oralee, Ernestine will help y'all take that food on to the kitchen.”

“How are you, Mother?” Daddy had grouched around the house all morning as we readied ourselves to go to the big house.

“Why, I'm fine. Thank you, Rey. Your father is in his den.” Princella nodded toward the book-lined room to the left of the foyer.

I followed Daddy. Though I loved peeling potatoes and painting butter on yeast rolls as they came steaming out of the oven, I didn't feel like being around Princella, who preferred I call her by her proper name, saying she felt too young to be called *Grandma*. I couldn't figure her out. Then again, who could? Mama called her an enigma. I called her old and bitter.

The thick, wide shoulders of my granddaddy, Vaughn, filled every inch of the leather chair behind his desk. Wire-rimmed spectacles sat on the tip of his nose, and he rubbed his neatly

trimmed mustache as he concentrated on the thick ledger open in front of him. As soon as he saw Daddy, he got up and threw his arms around him hard, patting him on the back. “Good to see you, Rey.”

“You too, Daddy.”

“And how’s Miss Anniston today?”

“Fine, sir.” The sun caught on the silver bevels of a sword sitting on Vaughn’s big wood desk, sending shards of light dancing across the walls and ceiling.

“Wow, I haven’t seen that in a long time.” Daddy gently picked up the sword and let his fingers glide along the blade, down to the tip and back again. Carvings of horses and soldiers wrapped around the thick handle.

“My granddaddy gave me that sword. Belonged to his granddaddy, Gabriel Harlan, from before the war.” Vaughn picked up the case, the name *Harlan* inscribed deep into the worn, cracked leather. “I intended to wait until later, but I might as well give it to you now.”

Surprise spread across Daddy’s face, ruddy from all the days working outside in the orchards, but softened by the kindness in his eyes, which were heavy with the love I saw when he read to me each night, even still, before bedtime. “I always thought this belonged to Cole next.”

Vaughn stood up and peered out the window overlooking the orchards. “Granddaddy helped Gabriel plant most of these. Helped him plant the trees, babying them until they pulled in a crop. While they waited for the trees to yield enough to live off of, Gabriel oystered and fished and worked for lumber companies, making an honest living and providing for everyone—including the freed slaves—who lived on this land. One of

only a few abolitionists back then, he paid his black workers a fair wage, sometimes choosing them over white workers who needed a job, and at the expense of ridicule and putting his family in danger. He retired from the Confederate Army before the war, so he never fought in it. Granddaddy told stories about how Gabriel wouldn't have fought in that war if he'd died refusing, because he hated slavery so." He turned to face Daddy. "He stood up for what was right and for the weak. Raised me to do the same. And that's how I believe I've raised you."

"Daddy—"

Vaughn held his hand up, and to my surprise, a tear rolled down the side of his face as he kept talking. "Been thinking a lot about this family lately, how I done you and your sister, Comfort, a disservice over the years by feeling sorry for Cole. Listening to your mother when she said I was too harsh with him, when harsh was what he needed. I felt sorry for him, I suppose, not having his real daddy around. I never listened to you or your sister, or anyone for that matter, who voiced concern about his choices and actions. And now I see those actions have taken a toll on all of you, and I'm sorry for that. I brought him in and raised him as my own—and I would do it again—but you and Comfort . . . You're my flesh and blood."

He took the sword from Daddy's hands and slid it into the leather case. "When my daddy gave Gabriel's sword to me, he said it stood for peace, not war. That it should be given to the firstborn son, a son raised to believe in freedom. Someone who will fight injustice with courage and truth."

Quiet fell over the room, except for the ticktock of the grandfather clock in the hallway.

"Take it, Son. Will you?"

“What’s going on in here?” Princella’s unexpected voice struck us like a whip across our bare backs. “What are you doing, Vaughn? That’s Cole’s sword.”

Vaughn walked right up close to Princella until he stood about an inch from her face. “Something I shoulda done a long time ago.”

“Hey, everybody!”

My aunt, Comfort, and her longtime boyfriend, Solly, burst through the study door, giggling like a couple of kids my age. But their faces fell when they saw Princella and Vaughn standing there in obvious disagreement.

“I’m—I’m sorry. Were we interrupting?”

Princella turned sharp and stomped out of the room.

“Sorry, Solly. You’re fine,” Vaughn said. “Please come in.”

“Welcome to the festivities,” Daddy simpered.

“Comfort!” I ran and hugged her despite the tension I felt in the air.

“Hey, darlin’,” Comfort said in a tempered voice, hugging me back. Despite my affection for T-shirts, boy shorts, and flip-flops, her outfit, as usual, was to die for. Beneath a striped, fringed poncho, she wore flared white trousers, a bright-orange halter top, and orange plastic platform shoes that matched. Her hair was done up in a high bun tied with a matching orange-and-white scarf that trailed down her back.

“What about me? Don’t I get a hug from my girl?” Solly, a burly fellow with curly dark hair that fell over his ears and glasses, caught Daddy’s eye as he yanked me into a bear hug. He looked handsome as ever, dressed in what appeared to be a brand-new pair of jeans, a plaid button-down Western shirt, a black cowboy hat, and black boots.

HOW SWEET THE SOUND

Thank goodness they came when they did. If Princella wanted to be in a snit, fine. But with Comfort and Solly there to brighten the mood, maybe she wouldn't ruin the whole of Thanksgiving Day.