

A NOVELIZATION BY

CHRIS FABRY



THE FORGE

BASED ON THE MOTION PICTURE BY
THE KENDRICK BROTHERS

CREATORS OF WAR ROOM, OVERCOMER & COURAGEOUS

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Part 1

THE WOUND

CHAPTER 1



Cynthia

Trouble never travels alone and usually arrives when you're expecting somebody else. It's predictable, like bad weather. And if you find something good happening in your life, watch out for dark clouds.

Now, if you live like this, and I often do, seeing the worst coming around the corner instead of something good, you'll always be looking over your shoulder, waiting for the other shoe to drop.

When I was little, I overheard my grandmother say, "That Cynthia looks for weevils in her cotton candy."

All the struggle and worry and fretting and thinking the worst never seems to get me where I want to be, but I can't help going for the ride. I suppose it's how I cope with life. I'm constantly thinking bad things are just around the corner. No matter how good life might be, I drive with one foot on the brake.

Hope is a four-letter word I have a hard time spelling in my

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soul. And I suppose I'm living in a rut that began five years ago. It was a rut I began digging long before that.

Elizabeth, my twin sister, had gone through a rut of her own with her husband, Tony. I don't want to go into it, but Tony had gotten into trouble—well, I said I wasn't going to go into it. Things had turned around for them eventually, so I thought maybe that might happen to me.

Instead, the wheels came off the *I do* I said to my husband, Darren, because his *I do* had become *I don't care anymore*. I reached out to Elizabeth for help, which is not the easiest thing for me to do. I don't go running to others willy-nilly with my problems. I just need you to understand that.

Elizabeth tried to help, and she did to a point. But even if you have somebody who will walk through a dark valley with you, life can still hit you in the face with a brick.

Which brings me back to my husband.

The signs had been there all along, even when we were dating. I kick myself now for not seeing it (which is a double wound—a brick to the face and I kick myself years later—what's up with that? I've got bruises on my bruises).

I won't go into all I didn't see about Darren. That would take way too long. When I met Darren (I will not say that his middle name was Trouble, but I've often wondered), he was sweet as talcum and smooth as cow butter. He gave me compliments. He told me how pretty I was, seemed amazed at my intelligence and vocabulary, and he would look at me with a twinkle in his eye, like he saw something deep inside me. And that smile of his? It could melt an iceberg. There didn't seem to be anything he wouldn't do to win my heart.

I should have seen what others saw (I'm talking about Elizabeth), but there are things you can't hear or see when you're under the spell of what you think is love. It's like that blind man

by the side of the road in the Bible. When he finally made it to Jesus, the Lord asked what he wanted and the man said, "Rabbi, I want to see." I wish I had prayed that. But I didn't want to see. I wanted to stay blind because it felt too good keeping my eyes closed to the signs on the dashboard of my heart. I just slapped some duct tape over the flashing lights on the spaceship headed for planet Darren.

I can still see him, down on one knee in the middle of a crowded restaurant. He put a sparkling ring on my finger and my first thought was, what did he pawn? He didn't have a job, which was another truth I pushed aside.

When I said yes, the people around us applauded and Darren beamed. The waiter brought complimentary desserts, which was nice. It would have been nicer if Darren had offered to pay for dinner, but as I said he was out of work and I was flying high and couldn't wait to tell everybody. I didn't, of course, because the people who cared about me could see the road ahead and that the bridge was out.

Elizabeth's husband, Tony, called Darren a bum. I heard that secondhand from my niece, Danielle. I had to drag it out of her by telling her over and over it was okay for her to tell me. But I wasn't surprised. By then I knew Tony was upset that Elizabeth was lending me money to help with rent and a car payment, so he had a right to be upset. But calling somebody a bum sounded too harsh. It was like saying Darren was never going to change.

Tony was right. Darren drank and played games all day and I'd come home dog-tired to a messy house. I'd get on his case and the next day I'd come home and there he'd be. I complained and nagged and told him if he liked games so much he could sleep on that couch. Then we'd start the cycle. He'd get an interview, get the job, talk about how he was going to one day own

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the company. A few days later he'd be on the couch telling me his boss was a jerk. It was always somebody else's fault.

Which brings me to a bright spot in our marriage: Isaiah. That child was a shining light, wind in my sails, silver lining in the clouds. I could be having the worst day of my life and I'd see that smile and it changed everything.

I honestly thought becoming a father would kickstart Darren's sense of responsibility. He'd land a job and stay employed and would take Isaiah fishing and play ball in the park. But as Isaiah grew, that dream died and it tore my heart out for my son. Isaiah longed for a father who would take an interest in him. I saw it in his eyes.

Isaiah was fourteen when the world as we knew it came to an end. And the world as we knew it was me burning the candle at each end and in the middle all at the same time. I was working at a salon and had some faithful customers who always asked for me, which caused some friction with my coworkers. I was also doing a little side work for friends and family at my house.

I had thought about starting my own salon for years, but I was scared. What if I failed? What if I spent a lot of money on equipment and rent and nobody showed up? How do I make payroll and pay the right taxes? The questions and the "what abouts" paralyzed me.

I was meeting with my sister about every week by then and she was sharing more about the changes she and Tony had been through. She had been studying the Bible and found a deeper relationship with God and thought that might be something I would be interested in. I told her I was worried that it would be like when we were kids—even though we were twins, I always got the feeling that she knew all the answers. I felt stupid compared to her. But there was something different about her reaction this time. She said she was learning some hard

things about herself and that studying together would be a help to her as well.

Elizabeth, Tony, and Danielle came over one Saturday afternoon. Darren heard about it and said he had something to do, but I knew he just didn't want to see Tony.

I did Danielle's hair and then Elizabeth sat down and we started talking. I hadn't shared much with her about my salon idea, but that day I just opened up. And to my surprise, given our history of competing and arguing, Elizabeth didn't shoot me down or tell me ten reasons why I ought to forget it. She told me she believed in me and that my business would fly if I took the chance.

Then, Tony sat down. He had been tossing the football with Isaiah in the front yard. I cut his hair close the way he likes it and I held up a mirror and he turned his head this way and that and looked straight at me with those piercing eyes.

"Cynthia, you have a gift," he said. "This is exactly what I wanted. If you want to open your own salon, we're behind you."

You could have knocked me over with a hairnet.

Then he put some money in my hand. I put it in a drawer but he told me to look at it. What I saw made my jaw drop. It was way more than I would ever charge for a dozen haircuts. I tried to give it back. He said that was a start to my salon fund.

When they left, I went to my room and had myself a good cry. It had been so long since I'd felt encouragement, especially from a man. It was exactly what I needed.

Elizabeth is a real estate agent, and even though she sells homes, I asked her to look into the business market. A friend of hers told her what had happened at a salon on Heartwood Street, about a mile from my house. It was a small shop but they had a good list of clients. The owner had dreamed of doing hair on the set of a movie. She finally got her chance and on the first day of

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filming, she didn't show up on the set. She had passed away in her sleep of a heart condition no one knew she had.

I won't go into everything that happened, but the day I signed the lease was the most exhilarating, scary day of my life. Within two weeks, I had to hire two more stylists just to keep up. Tammy and Keisha have been with me ever since.

I was so busy with the salon, I didn't have time to focus on Darren. We limped along in our marriage and I'll be honest, I was jealous of what Elizabeth and Tony had. He had turned things around in his life, or maybe I should say he turned his life over to God and let God turn things around. I couldn't understand why God would answer my sister's prayers and work in her life and not lift a finger in mine. Sometimes it feels like God wears earplugs when I pour out my heart.

Then, Isaiah had a freshman basketball game and Darren offered to drive him. I thought that was a good sign. I had no idea the trouble ahead.