

IN A WAR-TORN LAND, ONE GIRL'S DARING ESCAPE  
UNCOVERS A PATH OF DIVINE HOPE, HEALING, AND HOME.

# Good Road to Follow

HEATHER TEKAVEC



# Good Road to Follow

Heather M. Tekavec

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents either are the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously, and any resemblance to actual persons living or dead, business establishments, events, or locales, is entirely coincidental.

**Good Road to Follow COPYRIGHT 2026 by Heather M. Tekavec**

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be used or reproduced in any manner whatsoever, including but not limited to being used to train AI, without written permission of the author or Pelican Ventures, LLC except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles or reviews. eBook editions are licensed for your personal enjoyment only. eBooks may not be re-sold, copied or given to other people. If you would like to share an eBook edition, please purchase an additional copy for each person you share it with. Contact Information: [titleadmin@pelicanbookgroup.com](mailto:titleadmin@pelicanbookgroup.com)

All scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version<sup>(R)</sup>. NIV<sup>(R)</sup>. Copyright 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.<sup>TM</sup> Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide. [www.zondervan.com](http://www.zondervan.com)

Scripture quotations, marked KJV are taken from the King James translation, public domain. Scripture quotations marked DR, are taken from the Douay Rheims translation, public domain.

Scripture texts marked NAB are taken from the *New American Bible, revised edition* Copyright 2010, 1991, 1986, 1970 Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, Washington, D.C. and are used by permission of the copyright owner. All Rights Reserved. No part of the New American Bible may be reproduced in any form without permission in writing from the copyright owner.

Cover Art by *Nicola Martinez*

Watershed Books, a division of Pelican Ventures, LLC

[www.pelicanbookgroup.com](http://www.pelicanbookgroup.com) PO Box 1738 \*Aztec, NM \* 87410

Watershed Books praise and splash logo is a trademark of Pelican Ventures, LLC

Publishing History: First Watershed Edition, 2025

Electronic Edition ISBN 978-1-5223-0544-6

**Published in the United States of America**



## PROLOGUE

"But Ma...you need me to work the farm! You know you can't do it alone." Abigail darted glances back and forth between the two stern women deciding her fate in the small farmhouse kitchen.

Aunt Alice crossed her bony arms impatiently, and Ma shook her head. There was no sadness, only hard creases etched into her ever-angry face. "I ain't keepin' this old farm," she said, wrinkling her nose in distaste as she passed a wary glance over to the window.

"But Ma!"

"Your Pa's not returning," Ma insisted. She didn't even seem sad about it. "War's been done a year now. He'd be back by now if he were comin'."

How could her ma care so little after so many years? Her papa had been a good man. Better than her ma would ever be. How could she not hope even a little for his return? How could she get rid of the farm he loved so much?

"Musta got himself killed by now, I expect," Aunt Alice said, puckering her pointy face into a grimace as she made the symbol of the cross over her chest. "Poor dear brother-in-law, rest his soul."

"Ah, you never liked him," Ma muttered, swatting

at her sister's phony gesture of respect. "And we ain't Catholic," she added.

Aunt Alice shrugged, but she didn't deny what Ma said. Didn't even pretend to.

Abigail stood a bit taller, despite her wobbling knees, and grasped the corner of the old wood table her papa had hewn himself while she had held his tools. "Pa always wanted me to be independent. He taught me good. I'll keep the farm. I'll keep it myself. You won't have to worry about a thing."

"Girl...your pa never taught you anything useful at all. Just wanted you to be independent of me, that's all. Gettin' his self killed is the most useful thing he ever did for you. Now you can go live with Aunt Alice and Uncle Samuel and have a fine life in their big house. Better than your pa ever gave you."

Ma stood and picked up her coffee mug, swirling it a little as though her mind was already somewhere else and the matter settled. She kept glancing at the door.

"We'll do our best," Aunt Alice mumbled in a tired tone as she picked imaginary bits of lint off her fine brocade gown. Nobody believed her.

"But I don't want to go."

"Don't be disrespectful." Ma slammed her mug back down on the table, her annoyance now grown to anger.

"Disrespectful like you? You ain't showing Papa an ounce of respect at all!"

Ma faced her straight on, hands perched forcefully on her hips. "You'll go, and you'll be grateful. Your

bags are by the door. Now git.”

Ma turned her face away. Not even a hug.

“But what if Papa comes back? What if he comes lookin’ for us...needin’ us? What if—”

“Come now,” Aunt Alice said sternly. “You best be learning to keep quiet and respect your elders right here and now. Your uncle will expect it. Hopefully, you can learn some manners and respect from your dear cousins.” She opened the front door.

And that was all.

Aunt Alice nodded stiffly to the traveling salesman just coming up their steps. It was the third time this week that he had come by. He smiled smugly, but this time, he wasn’t cartin’ anything to sell.

# CHAPTER 1

## GO THIS WAY

“Please, mister.” Abigail gritted her teeth and smiled pretty, trying to feign as much respect as she could muster. It was that phony sort of respect she had learned from her cousins this past year, but this shopkeeper looked fool enough to haul it in. “I got this marble collection and two hair clips for tradin’. The jewels ain’t real, but they still shine like ice.” She shifted her tattered brown carpetbag into her other arm so she could hold the items out for his inspection. She had seen the traveling salesman do it a hundred times for her ma, and it always worked. Ma had bought everything. “These oughta be worth something in your store,” Abigail added, licking her dry, cracked lips. They stung when she smiled too big, but she tried not to wince under the sting.

At least the hair clips were worth something. Cousin Ermine had told her so a thousand times. Every time she reminded Abigail not to touch them, she told her how dear they were, as though Abigail wasn’t clever enough to remember such a thing on her own. Ermine said Abigail would go to jail if she touched them. She never explained what would happen if Abigail actually took them and ran away with them in

her carpetbag.

The hair clips suddenly felt prickly in her hand, and Abigail shivered at the thought of living behind iron bars. Facing Cousin Ermine would be worse though. She was certain of that. And at least in jail, she'd be fed something.

The shopkeeper shifted uncomfortably. "Look," he mumbled stone-faced, "it's enough trouble trying to sell my own wares these days. I don't need your rubbish too." He looked past her and wiped the already-tidy counter with a dusting cloth, refusing to catch her gaze, clearly hoping it would be enough to send her on her way.

"But there's a little girl just outside"—Abigail turned and pointed—"there with her fancy ma. I'm bettin' she'd love them."

"Girls outside are no good to me. Unless they're in my store, they ain't my customers."

"Maybe if you were to buy them, she might come in to see them? I could tell her you have them."

"Why don't you sell them to her yourself if you're so smart?"

Abigail swallowed. She had already tried that. Her throat felt scratchy and dry as she looked longingly at the barrels of shiny red and green apples and the sugar sacks that lined the shelf behind his counter. This general store reminded her of the one back home. She could smell the aroma of pipe tobacco, just like her papa always used to buy on the days when her ma didn't come with them. Their old shopkeeper, Mr. McCleary, knew better than to offer it to papa when

Ma was along. He knew better than to suggest candy for Abigail too. But when Ma wasn't there, he filled her apron pockets. She didn't dare hope for such a treasure from this man, though. She didn't dare hope for much at all. Suddenly, she remembered her father's favorite words. "You might fail if you try, but you'll definitely fail if you don't."

She shook off the memories and took a deep breath. "Just one apple, mister?" she pleaded. "I also have..." she jostled around in her bag, "a wooden trinket box and a silver picture frame." She held them closer. "Genuine costly silver, I think. It's got a picture of my papa before the war, but I can take that out. I don't aim to give that away to anyone. No offense intended."

The man scowled at the faded picture and pushed her hand away from his face. The frame and Abigail's handful of marbles scattered at her feet, tumbling off in all directions before settling into the cracks and crevices of the wood floor.

"What'd ya do that for?" she asked with a sneer and bit her lip. Disrespect wouldn't get her anything but welts and bruises, she knew that for certain. It was one of the few things that Uncle Samuel had taught her in the last year at his home.

Looking away, she bent to pick up her things and gulped back all the hateful words pushing to the surface and aching to spill out.

The shopkeeper's round, pink jowls peered over the counter. "Now you better get yourself out of here," he mumbled. "I don't want any respectable folk

thinking I'm uncharitable to little orphan children."

Abigail stood proudly, trying to look taller than her true five-feet-three inches. She couldn't pretend any longer. "I am not an orphan," she insisted and then looked squarely into his shameful eyes. "And you *are* uncharitable. And your store smells like the inside of a moldy cellar full of rotten yams."

She held his gaze as the man's face turned a deeper red and wrinkled like an overripe bell pepper.

He started sputtering, the words "urchin" and "filthy" spewing from his fat lips until heavy footsteps thumping up to the open door halted his anger.

"Well! Uh...good afternoon, Mr. Winston." He straightened and cleared his groggy throat, turning fully away from Abigail as though she didn't exist. He stuffed his ragged dusting cloth clumsily into his apron pocket.

Abigail took a fleeting glance at Mr. Winston. If she had appeared ragged and beneath the shopkeeper's notice before, she must look like sludge compared to Mr. Winston's fine hat and coat.

She quickly picked up the one last marble that had rolled across the floor, watching Mr. Winston as she did. Cousin Ermine once told her about a rich man who had married a young orphan girl. In the end, the girl had taken his money and left to become a dancer on the stage, but the fact was, he did marry her in the first place. Perhaps it could happen to her too. Perhaps someday she may even take Mr. Winston's money and run, as well. But for now, she only needed a little, and he probably had enough just in the pockets of his fancy

black coat with the real silver buttons.

Abigail jiggled her bag so that the clips and marbles clinked against one another then cleared her throat conspicuously. She tried to look a little older than seventeen years and a little taller. Nobody ever believed she was nearly a grown-up. The shopkeeper turned and glared, but the gentleman was too busy admiring cigars and fine gloves to even glance in her direction. She sauntered over to the next counter, as graceful and refined as any city lady, and pretended to look at the calico fabrics.

"Don't touch that!" The shopkeeper ran and pulled the bolts of fabric away from her. "Your hands are filthy. Now get on out! You got no more business here."

This time, the gentleman looked up, but there was no compassion in his dark eyes. "Street urchin!" The shopkeeper cursed.

Abigail's fists tightened. Then she opened them wide, shoved them angrily into his face, and sneered, "My hands are cleaner than your own fat, stingy ones."

The gentleman raised his eyebrows, lifted his nose in repulsion, and turned back to his cigars.

*Well, I wouldn't marry your ugly old sour face anyway.* Abigail glared fiery darts in Mr. Winston's direction. *Not for all the money in the world.* She wished it were the truth, but there was no telling what she might do anymore if given half a chance.

Head high, Abigail trudged across the creaky planks of the wood floor and stepped outside.

The sun blazed full force. It was well past noon,

and she hadn't even had breakfast yet. In fact, she hadn't eaten anything since she'd finished the mushy, bruised apple yesterday afternoon. She rubbed her burning belly and wiped a wispy strand of hair from her eyes. There was a time she would never have considered taking a mushy brown apple in trade for a silver spoon, but that was a few weeks ago. Sleeping under strangers' steps and eating out of garbage piles had changed her view on things. Abigail dropped on the top step in front of the store, pulling her bag and her ugly worn-out boy's boots in close under her heavy brown skirt. There was no sense smoothing the wrinkles out the way she was taught. Even the wrinkles had wrinkles and where there were no wrinkles, it was only because there were thick, ugly patches. She should have taken one of Ermine's old dresses. Ermine wouldn't have missed it among her full wardrobe. Abigail kicked a dried chunk of mud off the edge of the step and watched the buggies criss-cross in front of her, their drivers in too much of a hurry to notice her staring.

In a town this busy, it shouldn't be so hard to find a new life or at least a short-term job. And she'd have to find it soon before some well-meanin' do-gooder sent her back to her aunt and uncle. She'd throw herself under the wheel of one of those buggies before she would go back there.

She touched the flaming red scar on her forearm. Better to die by a tragic accident than by the hand of your very own kin. Someone once said if you died in a tragic accident, you got into heaven no matter what,

and that, Abigail was certain, was the only way she would ever get there. According to Uncle Samuel, the preacher, she was too wicked to ever get God's notice otherwise.

She squeezed her bag full of stolen items between her knees. It wasn't so much that she wanted to get to heaven; she didn't want to spend eternity with God, anyway. But she wasn't sure that she wanted to go to hell either. Abigail frowned. It seemed the only thing to do was stay alive, but that was getting harder every day.

Abigail flicked a spider off her knee. The best idea yet, she thought with a weary smile, would be to throw Uncle Samuel and Aunt Alice under the buggy wheels. That would solve half her problems. Although that might get them into heaven, too, which would be too bad for all the good unsuspecting folks that were up there. They didn't deserve to spend eternity with Uncle Samuel and Aunt Alice.

Abigail scanned the passing faces just as she always did in every town she passed through. Fancy ladies in red satin and black lace lingered lazily around the saloons, while proper ladies in long skirts and laced bonnets towed tidy children from shop to shop. Some of the young girls looked at her as they passed. They used to smile a few weeks back when Abigail's clothes and hair still looked respectable, but not much anymore. Now they looked embarrassed for her, and their mamas with the pinched smiles were usually quick to pull them along. But it wasn't the women or children that Abigail watched most faithfully, it was

the men.

They were all pretty much alike, with blue and brown trousers and hats. Some dressed in bits of old soldier uniforms. Some had beards and mustaches, others didn't, but most of them wore the tired look of farmers, or the disillusioned look of miners returned from the gold rush. She hadn't given up the hope of seeing her papa among them. There was still a chance he was alive and looking for her, but she could feel her hope slowly shrinking like the creek during drought, and she worried that if the creek didn't get some water soon, it was in danger of drying up completely.

Abigail sighed and glanced again at the newspaper shop across the street. They said it would cost her a dollar to put in a message.

"I'm just lookin' for my pa," she had explained. "I don't need to say much. Just a few words saying where I am in case he reads it. He reads lots of newspapers," she added, hoping that might impress them enough to give her a corner of their paper. They still wanted their dollar.

There must be a way for a girl to make money in this town. There must be some kind of work she could do. She looked again at the women outside the saloon. They looked happy enough, and with such pretty clothes they must have lots of money. They probably had enough to put messages in every paper in the North. Maybe being a saloon girl wasn't such a bad idea. It seemed like as good a place as any to make money. Abigail watched a little longer, wondering who would be best to ask about getting a job there.

She didn't realize how long she was staring until a voice startled her from behind.

"You can't be that hungry if you're just gonna sit around all day."

Startled, Abigail twisted on the step to face the bold voice.

"I am hungry," she retorted feebly as she took in the sight of the young man that had spoken. He leaned against the storefront, balancing on one leg. Abigail eyed him cautiously, embarrassed to be staring, but unable not to. The right pant leg of his ragged Yankee uniform was pinned up underneath his knee, where the rest of his second leg should have been, and he looked as scruffy and hungry as she did. Still, there was something in his face—something safe, kind even—that took away the initial shock.

"How long have you been begging?" he asked.

"I ain't begging. I'm barterin'."

He chuckled. "Not with marbles and hair clips, you aren't."

"It's all I got left. You got a better idea?"

The young man examined her from head to toe while chewing thoughtfully on a small twig. Finally, he pushed away from the wall and hopped to the step where she sat. He dropped his crutch to the ground beneath the step.

"Sure do," he said, still grinning as he moved to sit beside her.

Abigail edged away a little, almost regretting that she had asked, but a little curious still. He shaded his eyes and looked up into the sun, then over at the

saloon girls who watched him back. He didn't say anymore.

Impatiently, Abigail finally prodded. "Well...you gonna tell me?"

He tilted his head to look at her and wrinkled his brows. "How old are you?"

Abigail shifted farther away. "Seventeen, but what does that matter? I can do whatever any grown-up can."

The man laughed out loud, and Abigail grimaced. "You ain't acting much like a Yankee soldier," she snapped.

"How's a Yankee soldier supposed to act?" His eyes twinkled.

"Nicer."

"Where did you hear such a thing?"

"My pa. He was one. He was a good one too."

"Was?"

"Got killed, they reckon." She tightened her lips and held her chin firm to keep them both from quivering. "If he's dead, and I mean *if*..." she looked sideways to make certain he understood the "if," "then he probably died saving someone else's life. That's my guess. He was good. And nicer," she added with another sideways glance to make sure the young man got that point too.

"You don't think he's dead?"

Abigail shrugged. "I think they woulda told us if he was dead. They keep track of that sort of thing, don't they?"

He shrugged too, and Abigail stared suspiciously.

If he truly was a soldier, he ought to know that sort of thing.

"All I know," she continued, "is he woulda come for me if he could. But that don't necessarily mean he's dead. I aim to find him once I've got enough money."

The soldier nodded his understanding.

Abigail was impressed that he didn't try to argue with her. Everyone else always argued with her, as if they were doing her some favor by assuring her that her papa was no longer alive.

The soldier finally stretched out a hand for her to shake.

"The name's Billy Yank," he said.

This time Abigail was the one to laugh. "That's not a name," she told him, cautiously taking his hand and shaking it gingerly. "That's what they call all Yankee soldiers. It's like a nickname."

"Well, that's what I am—or was."

"So was my pa, but he still had his own name. You gotta have your own name. Like Thomas or Jed or Charles."

The man continued to stare at her, still chewing his twig and wrinkling his forehead as if trying to decide whether she really knew what she was talking about.

"Don't you got a real name?" she finally asked when the silence started to make her squirm.

The young man spit out a splinter of wood and shrugged. "Don't rightly know. That's what the nurses called me."

"Well, what did your ma call you?"

"I don't remember?"

“War wasn’t that long.”

“I don’t remember that either. I don’t remember anything from before the hospital, except that a body’s supposed to have two legs, and I didn’t. Nothing else mattered much. I didn’t hang around to ask a lot of questions.”

This time Abigail stared, trying to gauge his seriousness. He didn’t look like a liar, least not the type that her papa warned her about three years ago at the county fair. They usually had fancy clothes and twisty mustaches, and they spoke real loud about amazing and stupendous new products. They waved their hands around a lot and spoke mostly to the women and smiled bigger than they needed to. Abigail always thought they looked sly and greasy, but this soldier—this Billy Yank—didn’t look that way.

He wasn’t exactly smiling. He was smirking mostly, but his face had a pleasant look, anyway. His hair was too long, and his beard too scruffy, as though he wasn’t quite old enough to grow one, but was trying anyway. Yet he was handsome just the same. Abigail felt sorry for whatever girl he was courting before he forgot who he was. That girl was probably still waiting for him to come home.

“Couldn’t the army find out who you are? Put your picture up somewhere? Somebody ought to recognize you.”

Billy shrugged again. “They said I was found nearly dead by a farmer. Must have dragged myself to his property. By the time they got me healed up, whoever I had been with was long gone. And they

likely thought I was too. Dead, that is. Nobody will be looking for me."

"But there must be a way."

"I'm finding my own way. And I don't mind it much. How do I even know I want my old life back?"

"That part I understand," Abigail mumbled.

"Anyway," Billy Yank stood, brushing off both the dust and the somber mood, "if you want food, you have to do it like the hobos."

Abigail cocked her head skeptically. "And how do they do it?"

"You know how to make an X?"

"Sure. I finished sixth grade."

"Sixth grade! Fantastic. You must know how to make a circle then, too?" He grinned slyly.

Abigail shot him a withering glare as Billy tried to hide his grin. "Then you just need to look for a gatepost with an X in a circle. That means the people inside will feed you. Easy as that. Hobos mark the spots for the other hobos that might come along after them."

"I don't think my papa would want me going into strangers' homes and begging for their food without offering anything in return."

"Thought you said your papa was dead?"

"I said *'if.'*"

"Right."

"Besides," she added, "it still matters what he thinks."

"Right again. But the thing is, you don't eat for nothing. You do odd jobs. Or," he winked, "offer them

your hairclips.”

Abigail wrinkled her nose. “I was thinking about getting work over there instead.” She motioned towards the saloon. That seemed easier somehow. And more fun.

Billy threw his head back and laughed uproariously. “You think your papa would like that any better?”

“Sure. Why not? He always said a person ought to do a good day’s work if they be expectin’ a good evening’s meal.”

“Well, if you plan on impressing your papa when you find him, I don’t think that’s the place to do it. Besides, that’s not a day’s work. It’s mostly done in the night.”

Abigail scowled and shaded her eyes as she watched the saloon girls across the street a moment longer. She had a funny feeling he might be right. Her papa never let her wear clothes even half that tight or fancy, but they were so pretty. She bit her lip.

“Your choice, I reckon.” Billy stood and picked up his wooden crutch. “Well, good luck, girl,” he said. “Whatever you decide.”

“Wait!”

She hadn’t meant to yell it. She didn’t want to sound desperate, but it was the first real conversation she had had in weeks. She wasn’t ready to see him go yet. “My name’s Abigail,” she offered quickly.

“Then good luck, Abby.”

Something squeezed Abigail’s insides until they felt as if they would squeeze right out her throat;