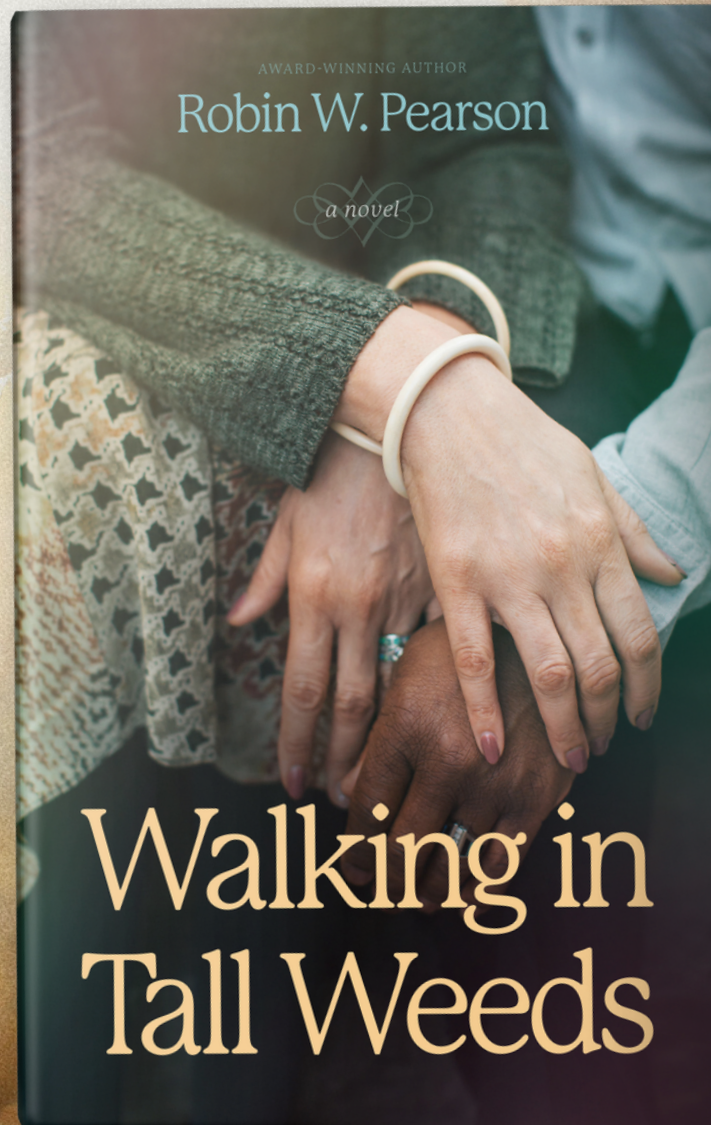


# Book Club Kit



"A brave and deep journey through the tall weeds of a family's old pain, nagging fears, and challenging choices."

Patricia Raybon, award-winning author  
of *All That Is Secret*



# About Robin W. Pearson



Award-winning author Robin W. Pearson's writing sprouts from her Southern roots. While sitting in her grandmothers' kitchens, she learned what happens if you sweep someone's feet, how to make corn bread taste like pound cake, and the all-purpose uses of Vaseline. She also learned about the power of God and how His grace led her grandmothers to care for their large families after their husbands were long gone, a grace that has endured through the generations. Robin's family's faith and superstitions, life lessons, and life's longings inspired her to write about God's love for us and how this love affects our relationships with others. In her Christy Award-winning debut novel, *A Long Time Comin'*, Robin weaves a family drama rich in Southern flavor that a starred review from *Publishers Weekly* called "enjoyable and uncomfortable, but also funny and persistent in the way that only family can be." Her second novel, *'Til I Want No More*, also earned a starred review from *Publishers Weekly*, which said, "Pearson's excellent characters and plotting capture the complexity and beauty of family, the difficulty of rectifying mistakes, and the healing that comes from honesty."

While her family history gave her the stories to tell, her professional experiences gave her the skills to tell them effectively. Armed with her degree from Wake Forest University, she has corrected grammar up and down the East Coast in her career as an editor and writer that started with Houghton Mifflin Company more than twenty-five years ago. Since then she has freelanced with magazines, parenting journals, textbooks, and homeschooling resources.

At the heart of it all abides her love of God and the family He's given her. It's her focus as a wife and homeschooling mother of seven. It's what she writes about on her blog, *Mommy, Concentrated*, where she shares her adventures in faith, family, and freelancing. And it's the source and subject of her fiction—in her novels, in the new characters currently living and breathing on her computer screen, and in the stories waiting to be told about her belief in Jesus Christ and the experiences at her own kitchen sink.

Follow Robin at [robinwpearson.com](http://robinwpearson.com).



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## A Note from Robin W. Pearson

**Mark Twain said, "Truth is stranger than fiction," which is why I planted seeds of truth all along the road leading to the fictional town of Hickory Grove, North Carolina. My husband and our children, our parents, their parents, and so on have paved the way for this novel, and my characters to "walk out" their very real stories of love and loss. While current events and our not- so-distant past could make us bitter, I believe our faith in the one true God should make us all better.**





## Recipe: Mac's Cheese

*A note from Paulette Baldwin (courtesy of Robin W. Pearson): Cooking has become a family affair for us. McKinley—or Mac, which my son answers to these days—has given up boxed macaroni, what I raised him on. He's come up with his own recipe, thanks to some quality time in the kitchen with his daddy. I have to admit, this creamy stovetop macaroni and cheese is something good.*

### Ingredients

16-ounce box of elbow macaroni  
2 tablespoons salt  
2 large eggs, well beaten  
1½ cans evaporated milk (about 20 ounces), divided  
1 teaspoon hot sauce  
¼ teaspoon pepper  
1 teaspoon dry mustard  
¼ cup butter (half a stick), cubed  
2½ cups grated cheese (we use a mixture of sharp cheddar, mozzarella, and Monterey Jack)  
½ cup (4 ounces) Velveeta cheese, cubed

### Directions

Heat a large pot of water to boiling. Add macaroni and salt; don't overcook. While the pasta boils, mix together eggs, half the evaporated milk, hot sauce, pepper, and dry mustard. When your pasta is tender, drain it and return it to the pot. Drop in the butter, then slowly pour in the egg mixture and half the cheese. Once it starts making a squishy noise as you stir it, add the rest of the milk and cheese and stir until creamy. Serve immediately. If you want any for yourself, don't tell Mac you cooked some!

*Recipe courtesy of Robin W. Pearson*





# Recipe: Drop Biscuits

A note and recipe from Paulette Baldwin (courtesy of Robin W. Pearson): *It's true I couldn't cook to save my life, but learning how has helped me save my marriage. Fred and I have been working together in the kitchen, and I'm starting to consider his fancy new range our fancy new range. My latest lesson? Perfecting my drop biscuits, something even this newbie can manage. Then he showed me how to combine them with sausage gravy. Talk about a marriage made in heaven!*

## Ingredients:

- 2 cups all-purpose flour
- 1 tablespoon baking powder
- 1 teaspoon kosher salt
- ¼ cup shredded Cheddar Jack cheese
- ¾ cup buttermilk
- ½ cup salted butter (1 stick), chilled and cut into small pieces
- Melted butter, optional

## Directions:

Preheat the oven to 450 degrees and grease a large cast-iron skillet. Mix together your dry ingredients, then cut in the cold butter. According to Fred, using a fork is just as good as a pastry cutter if you know what you're doing. (So I use a pastry cutter.) Once it looks like coarse meal—or like tiny peas—sprinkle in your cheese before gently stirring in the buttermilk. Your batter is supposed to be thick and a little lumpy, so don't overmix like I did when I first tried this. If it's too dry, add a bit more buttermilk, but no more than a tablespoon or two. Finally, drop large spoonfuls of batter into the skillet. You want your biscuits close, but not touching just yet. They'll rise best when they're huddled together, just like Fred and me. Bake them for 20 minutes and brush them with melted butter if you like.

*Recipe courtesy of Robin W. Pearson*





# Recipe: Sausage Gravy

## Ingredients:

1 pound Jimmy Dean pork sage sausage  
¼ cup onion, finely chopped  
¼ cup butter (half a stick)  
¼ cup all-purpose flour  
3 cups milk  
Salt, pepper, and Season-All seasoned salt

## Directions:

As your biscuits bake, cook your sausage in another large skillet, crumbling it as it browns. Once it's done, add the butter and let it melt. Then mix in the flour, stirring well until the mixture is nice and golden. Continue to stir as you slowly pour in the milk. Some people sauté the onions with the sausage or in the leftover fat, but Fred taught me to sprinkle in the raw onions at this stage; they'll cook and flavor the gravy as it simmers. Season to taste and continue to cook and stir for about 10 minutes.

Serve with your biscuits!

*Recipe courtesy of Robin W. Pearson*





# Discussion Questions

**To start the book group conversation about *Walking in Tall Weeds*, read through these questions with your book club.**

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- 1.) Paulette tells Fred that only God knows what we need to hold on to and what we should set free. What are each of the characters holding on to? How successful are they at letting go? Is there anything in your life you're holding on to or something you've been able to let go of?
- 2.) McKinley feels that even though his parents "knew him first," they don't "know him best." Can you relate to this sentiment? What factors might play into parents not knowing their children best? Who knows you best?
- 3.) You may be familiar with Proverbs 27:17: "As iron sharpens iron, so a friend sharpens a friend." How does this play out in Paulette's friendship with Andria and Belinda? How about McKinley and Monroe?
- 4.) Fred struggles to reconcile the injustice his grandfather experienced with his own present reality. What kind of emotional or spiritual legacy did you receive from your parents or grandparents? What parts of it do you want to pass on, and what parts do you want to change?
- 5.) Fred wants to honor both his family of origin and the family he is building with his wife. What makes this hard for him?
- 6.) Julia's husband is the only person in the book who somehow sees the good in her, despite her prickly exterior. Is this an accurate representation of the idea that love is blind? Have you seen this dynamic in anyone you know? What are its benefits and drawbacks?
- 7.) Paulette and Fred each accuse the other of not making their marriage the priority it should have been—and eventually they realize they're both guilty of this. Why is it easier to see our weaknesses reflected in someone else than to see them in ourselves?

Continued on next page



**8.)** The Baldwin family's church, like many, struggles to find the right balance between welcoming new people and new styles of worship and holding on to beloved traditions. Should a church change and adapt to fit the times? Why or why not? What's important to you when it comes to choosing a church? Do you prefer a more traditional service or a contemporary one?

**9.)** Paulette tells her son, "Every marriage waxes and wanes, McKinley. Your dad's and mine, it's no different." Is there truth in this? Have you seen evidence in your own marriage or in relationships you've observed? What are some of the high and low seasons of a marriage?

**10.)** Paulette wonders what a parent's relationship with an adult child is supposed to feel like. How did your relationship with your parents change when you became an adult? Are the changes good or bad or some of each?

**11.)** After Paulette's accident, Fred finally speaks up for himself and his family to his aunt. Is it too little, too late? Or is it never too late to start to be more honest in our relationships?

**12.)** The story touches on interracial marriage, which was illegal in many parts of the US until the 1967 Supreme Court case *Loving v. Virginia*. Paulette observes, "I've learned you can't legislate love or forgiveness. . . . I remember the stares I got when I walked beside my dad, and his skin was lighter than yours. People whisperin' and wonderin' how I came to be." In what ways have things improved since Paulette's childhood in the 1960s? What more still needs to change?

**13.)** What had to die in the Baldwins' lives so their marriage and family could live? Consider your own thoughts, attitudes, and ways of communication. Is there anything old that needs to be renewed by the Holy Spirit? (See Ephesians 4:22-24.)

**My discussion questions:**

**Jot down some questions you had about the story here.**

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## Q&A with Robin W. Pearson

**This is your third book. What was your writing process for *Walking in Tall Weeds* like compared to your previous novels?**

*Our family slogged through our own tall, prickly weeds during the writing of this novel as we dealt with issues related to illness, caregiving of elderly parents, strained family interactions, and homeschooling decisions. Yet managing those situations also inspired the story and the telling of it.*

*When you compare my first two novels with my latest release, you'll see the former take place over a series of months, but *Walking in Tall Weeds* invites readers to enjoy a weeklong "visit" with the Baldwins. While much happened in that family's life before the opening line, a history that sets up their story, they confronted life-changing events in those seven or eight days. As I developed the plot and those characters over that period of time, I had to constantly ask myself, "Is this crucial? Believable? Logical? Relatable?" to ensure that I didn't rush the whats, hows, and whys or sacrifice the whos.*

**Where did your idea for this novel come from?**

*My faith and my family always inspire my brand of fiction. My husband and I met in college and married soon after we graduated. We brought lots of personal history into our relationship, yet we're constantly discovering something new that stretches our perception of and love for each other—things about ourselves, our pasts, and our children. Our entire family has been learning what to hold on to and what to let go of, exciting and painful lessons. These changing personal dynamics birthed the relationship between my characters, Frederick and Paulette Baldwin, and with their only child, McKinley, and enabled me to tell their complicated story.*

**Continued on next page**

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**How did your faith shape the themes of this book?**

*Love, forgiveness, marriage and family, walking in truth. These tenets of my Christian faith serve as both the foundation and the framework of Walking in Tall Weeds. The way God loves and sees us should affect how we love, see, and relate to each other, no matter what we look like, where we come from, or where we worship.*

**What was the most challenging part about writing *Walking in Tall Weeds*?**

*Every time I opened my laptop to work on Walking in Tall Weeds, I entreated God, "More of You, less of me." This is hard! We're human, and our personal history—our biases, culture, background, and suffering—affects how we view the world, make decisions, and relate to each other. But our love for Jesus Christ and His love for us should change our perspective. Frederick, Paulette, and McKinley must decide whether to walk out their faith or walk away from it, a choice we make more often than we realize in countless ways.*

**What do you hope readers walk away with after reading this book?**

*I try to give readers a mirror they can use to accurately view themselves and their relationships. Long after they close Walking in Tall Weeds, I hope they feel challenged to examine their heart and motivations and ask themselves hard questions such as "How do I love people who don't think or look like me? Have I chosen bitterness over forgiveness? Can others tell who and what I believe by what I say and do?" I hope readers walk away feeling inspired to share this book because they connected to these characters and their story.*

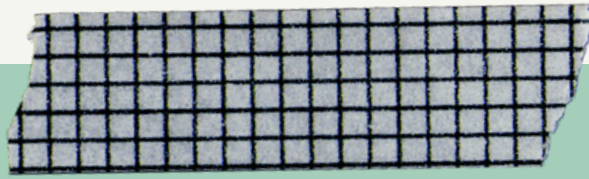
"Robin W. Pearson has a gift for capturing the complexity and nuances of family relationships."

**Sarah Loudin Thomas, award-winning author of *The Right Kind of Fool***

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## 5 Lessons to Learn about the Burden of Secrets from *Walking in Tall Weeds*

Your home. A safe place, where you're held close by those people who know and love you best. Yet Frederick's heart carried the broken pieces of his grandfather's ramshackle cabin his entire life. Later, the Baldwins' stately Victorian felt like just a conglomeration of walls, windows, shingles, and furniture. While it housed them, it didn't truly protect them. They had to stop running long enough to lay down their burdens before they could find true shelter. Here are five ways we can hurt ourselves and others when we carry the burden of secrets.

### **Choosing lies over love**

Frederick's dishonesty drove him from the house, keeping him at the office and away from his wife, because he couldn't face Paulette, McKinley, or himself. The very thing he was trying to preserve—his family—he nearly destroyed with his lies.

### **Choosing ourselves over others**

Fred hid his true motivation for his subterfuge: his own pride and bitterness. He told his family and himself that he was trying to help them and honor his grandfather, but Fred thought he deserved justice. He kept his family's homestead as a personal monument to his pain.

### **Choosing fear over faith**

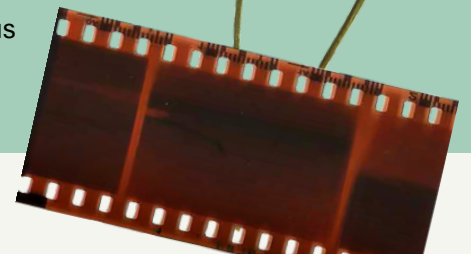
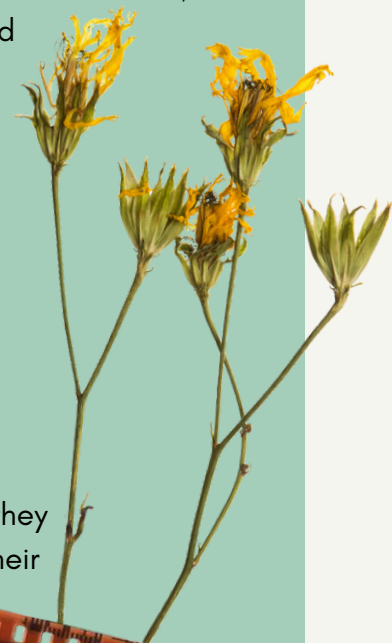
McKinley knew the truth about his father, yet he ran to Philadelphia without revealing the truth to his mother or confronting Frederick. He didn't feel comfortable in his family's home. Later, he worried more about what others thought than about what was right, and he hid his love for Emmeline.

### **Choosing pain over healing**

Instead of learning from his history, Fred held on to the pain of it. He didn't discuss it or trust God to rectify matters; he internalized his resentment and let it fester. Paulette's childhood spent wandering from one home to the next birthed in her a fear of rejection that pervaded her relationships. She took cover in her insecurities, not in her family's love.

### **Choosing death over life**

Their secrecy was killing them. Frederick and Paulette had to decide whether they would choose life—the one Jesus promised they would find in Him, as well as their life together. McKinley nearly destroyed his engagement as well as his lifelong friendship with Monroe by hiding the truth.



## 5 Lessons to Learn from the Relationships in *Walking in Tall Weeds*



Everything Paulette knew about gardening could fit in a small flower pot. And based on the tension in her family, it wasn't the greens in her backyard that needed tending. In her mind, "They could all use a few earthworms to process and repurpose all that was unhealthy."

But it took more than earthworms. The Baldwins' roots anchored them firmly to the woods on their family's land—and to old wounds that wouldn't heal. How could they grow in the "hopes, believes, and endures all things kinda love" that McKinley talked about? Look to 1 Corinthians 13:6-7.

### **Love rejoices in the truth.**

Frederick kept what he was doing from Paulette. She buried her insecurities and her past. McKinley ran from what he knew about his father and concealed his new relationship. These dishonest seeds sprouted like weeds, choking the life out of the family's love for each other. Love is based on truth. It builds trust. None of them could celebrate old or new relationships until they confessed.

### **Love persists.**

Paulette didn't just marry Frederick thirty-five years ago; she "married" his entire family. Juju didn't make life easy for her, yet Paulette honored Fred's aunt, despite the way she was treated—in Paulette's own home, no less. Love doesn't turn tail and run in the face of hardship; it holds on.

### **Love keeps the faith.**

Jesus is the source of all love because He is love. It was Fred's and Etta's belief in God that kept them clinging when everything in them whispered, "Let go." They worshiped together, raised their son in the church, and relied on God's faithfulness to forgive in order to heal. In the end, they also believed in their God-given love for each other.

### **Love abounds in hope.**

Without hope, McKinley never would have considered a relationship with Emmeline; he knew God promised him a hope and a future (Jeremiah 29:11). McKinley kept his eyes looking forward, not back to the past, giving him the resolve to encourage Emmie—and himself—and to stand up to Fred, Etta, and his great-aunt Juju.

### **Love endures.**

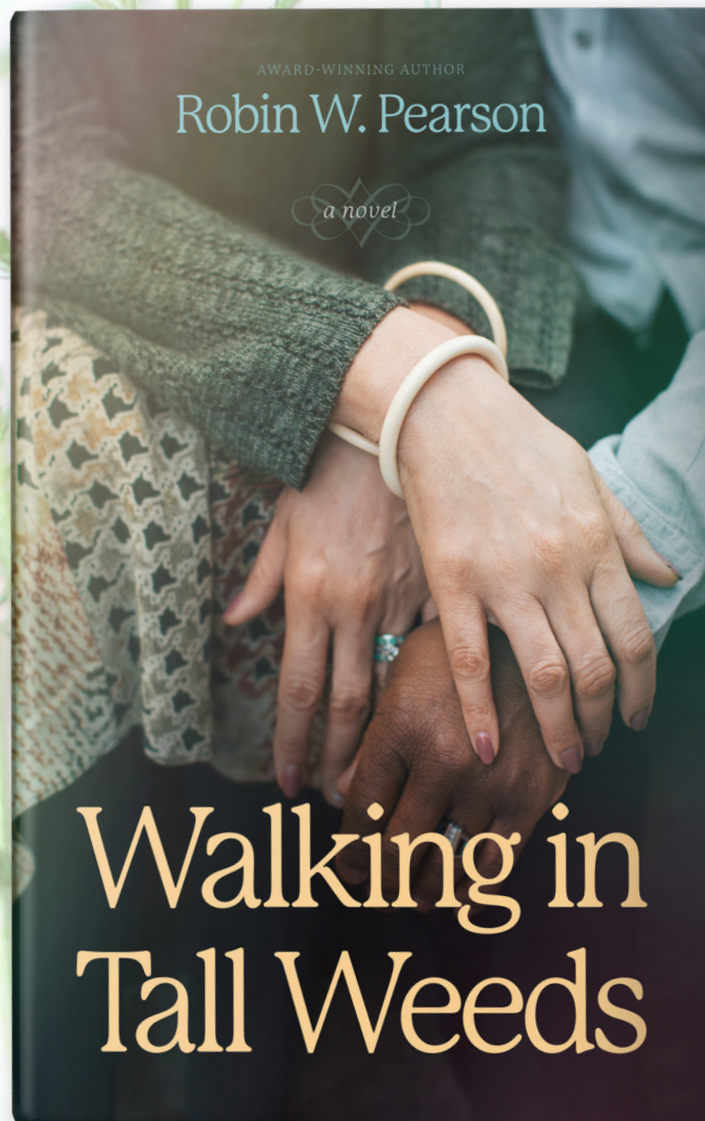
Frederick inherited more than an old house and a few acres of land; he also took on his grandfather's pain. Yet love conquers all, including hatred, because Jesus is love, and He is eternal.



Article by Robin W. Pearson



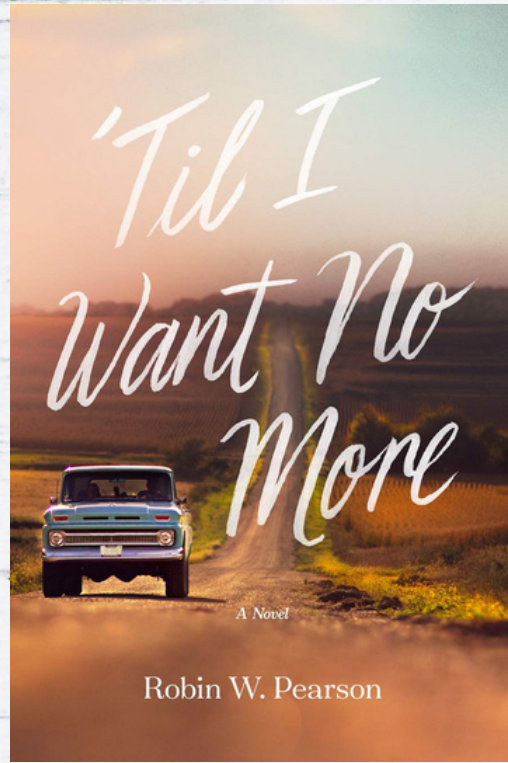
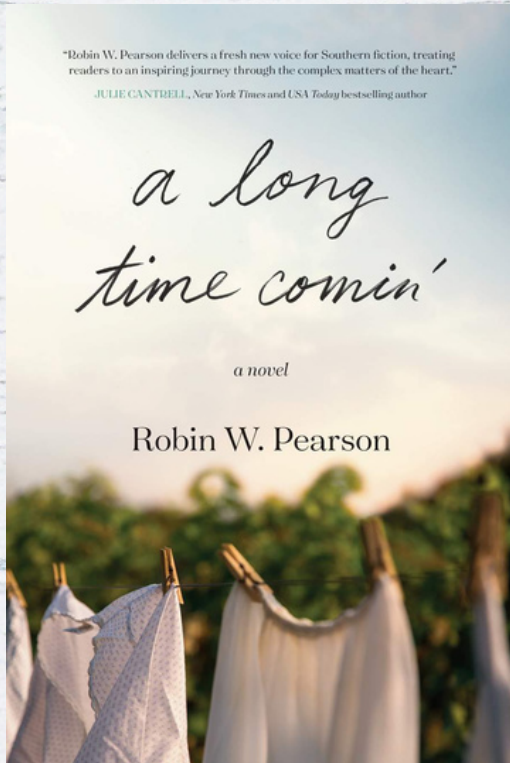
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