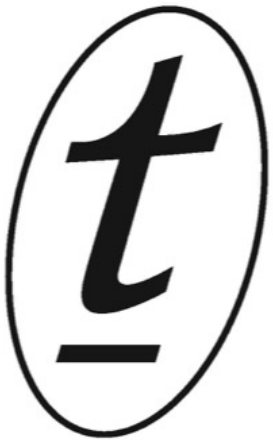
KEVIN WILSON

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF
NOTHING TO SEE HERE

RUN FOR THE HILLS

A NOVEL



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About the Book

A road trip across America brings a family together, in this raucous and moving new novel from the bestselling author of *Nothing to See Here*.

Ever since her dad left them twenty years ago, it's just been Madeline Hill and her mother on their Tennessee farm. It's mostly okay. Maybe sometimes a bit lonely. Then one day a stranger pulls up in a rental car and informs Madeline that he's her half brother, Reuben, abandoned by their dad thirty years ago. Reuben has hired a detective to track down their father, along with a string of other half siblings. And he wants Mad to join him on a cross-country road trip to find them all.

As Mad and Rube and eventually the others share stories of their father, they realise he behaved quite differently in all of his lives, and begin to question what he was looking for each time. What kind of man will they find? Who are they to one another? And how will these new relationships change Mad's previously solitary life on the farm? Infused with deadpan wit and enormous heart, Run for the Hills is a family saga like no other–a novel about a family forged in unlikely circumstances, united by hope in an unknown future.

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TEXT PUBLISHING MELBOURNE AUSTRALIA

FOR KRISTEN, MY SISTER

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RUN FOR THE HILLS

PROLOGUE

COALFIELD, TENNESSEE, 1982

Mad stood beside her father, close enough that nothing he did would escape her attention. On the farm, if you wanted to know anything, you had to be watching all the time. She walked with him along the stalks of sorghum as he clipped the grain heads off the crop and dropped the bundles of seeds into the basket she was carrying.

"We'll give those to the chickens," he told her, "and they'll love it."

"Could we eat it?" she asked him. She wanted to eat everything.

"It wouldn't be that great, but, yeah, we could," he said.

She thought about it. "I guess I'll give it to the chickens."

He then stripped the stalks of leaves and clipped the bottoms, until he had an armful of the sorghum stalks. This was new to both of them, but her dad wanted to test it out for the farm. He'd seen some Mennonites in the next county run their sorghum mill, and he liked that it was pretty resistant to drought and didn't need much care and would be a good ground-cover crop. Mad liked corn better, the sound it made as you brushed by the tall stalks, and she loved corn bread, but she knew, or her parents had taught her, that you had to be open to change, because you never knew what the weather would bring, what the earth would allow. It was not something she cared for, relying on anyone else, hoping she got what she wanted.

Back with the chickens, Mad threw the grain heads like grenades toward the birds, and she delighted in the way they hopped away from the impact

before running back to inspect the offering. “They like it,” she told her father, who nodded.

“Sorghum is good chicken feed,” he said.

At the shed, she watched as her father fed the stalks through the secondhand cane press he had recently bought, the stalks flattening out and splintering, dry as a bone on either end, and Mad collected those, too, wondering what her dad would do with them later.

After a while, they had nearly a gallon of juice, which greatly pleased her father and underwhelmed Mad, who was always disappointed that the labor involved, all the waiting and cultivating, never quite added up to be what she hoped. The juice was bright green like celery, and he poured it into a big pot to let it settle before they began to reduce it and make syrup.

“What is it gonna taste like?” she asked him, and he told her that she’d had sorghum syrup before, in the apple cakes an older woman sold at the market, but Mad said she wanted to know what *their* sorghum would taste like.

“Like the sun, kind of?” her dad offered. “I’m not a poet, Mad.”

“Sweet?” she asked. “A sweet sunny day?”

“And bitter,” he offered. “Sweet and bitter is best, and we’ll pour it on biscuits and corn bread.”

“But it’s going to be a while, isn’t it?” she asked, already knowing the answer. Her father nodded. “Longer than you’d like, but shorter than you’d think.”

Once the cooking started, it would require constant stirring to get it to the right consistency, so Mad and her father sat on the front porch and she leaned against him. Her mother was in town to pick up some groceries and visit a friend who was sick, so the two of them listened to the sound that swirled around them in the valley. She felt most at peace when all three of them were together, but she did cherish these moments with her father, who was harder for her to fully understand. Her mom was open and kind and had an abundance of joy, but her father seemed to always be thinking, the gears in his brain forever turning, and it fascinated Mad. She wondered how much of what was in his head was dedicated to her, and it was nice when it was just

the two of them and she could see him consider her as she was, regard her as someone who deserved his attention. It was fall, the air cooling, and bird calls echoed across the trees through the valley.

"One day," her father suddenly said, "you'll be making syrup with your own kids."

"*You'll* be making syrup with my kids," she told him. "And I'll be in bed and you'll bring me pancakes with sorghum."

"Oh, okay, that works, too," he said. It was quiet between them and then her father said, "I don't know why I said that. Don't feel like you have to do anything for me or think about the future. Just enjoy this, okay, Mad?"

"I am enjoying this," she said. She didn't consider the future that much. She would get older, and her life would change, and she got bored thinking about it. She was more interested in right now, finding the exact moment where things changed or you finally understood that they were important. She liked the present. The past wasn't that far away and the future seemed undefined, so she sat with her father and focused on this moment, the chickens clucking, scratching at the ground, and the steady breathing of her and her father.

"It's time to make the syrup," he finally said, and she followed him back into the kitchen, where they would look at the thermometer, stirring the sorghum, watching as it took on a darker hue, little by little, bubbling and steaming, until it was perfect. Her father would dip a spoon into the syrup and let her taste it, and she could not wait for that moment, when she got to experience the singular thing that she had made. It would be so sweet.

CHAPTER ONE

Strange people often came to the farm, but they tended to be late risers, so Mad knew the first few hours would be easy. Starting at 7:00 a.m. every Saturday, the Running Knob Hollow Farm's roadside stand welcomed their weekly regulars, people who lined up for the kind of food that Mad and her mom, Rachel, grew and gathered and made and sourced. Since they'd been featured in magazines like *Bon Appétit* and *Southern Living*, the organic eggs sold out in less than an hour, as well as the week's offering of produce and fruit. The cheeses, which were her mother's domain, a few varieties that people swore by, would go next. By 10:00, the people who arrived at the farm had to make do with whatever was left, talking themselves into the possibility that, even though they'd hoped to have a dozen eggs and some escarole, maybe they actually wanted half of a lamb. Did they want half a lamb? Mad could usually talk them into it, these people slightly dazed by the sunlight, possibly hungover from the night before. It all happened without having to think much about it, money changing hands, people talking, a little community. But by 11:00, with only an hour before closing? That's when weird things happened.

Mad swept the floor, took stock of what was left, rearranged some garlic bulbs. "I've been very lonely, Carl," she said to herself, one of the last sentences in Willa Cather's *O Pioneers!*, a line that always occurred to her when she was the slightest bit tired or inconvenienced.