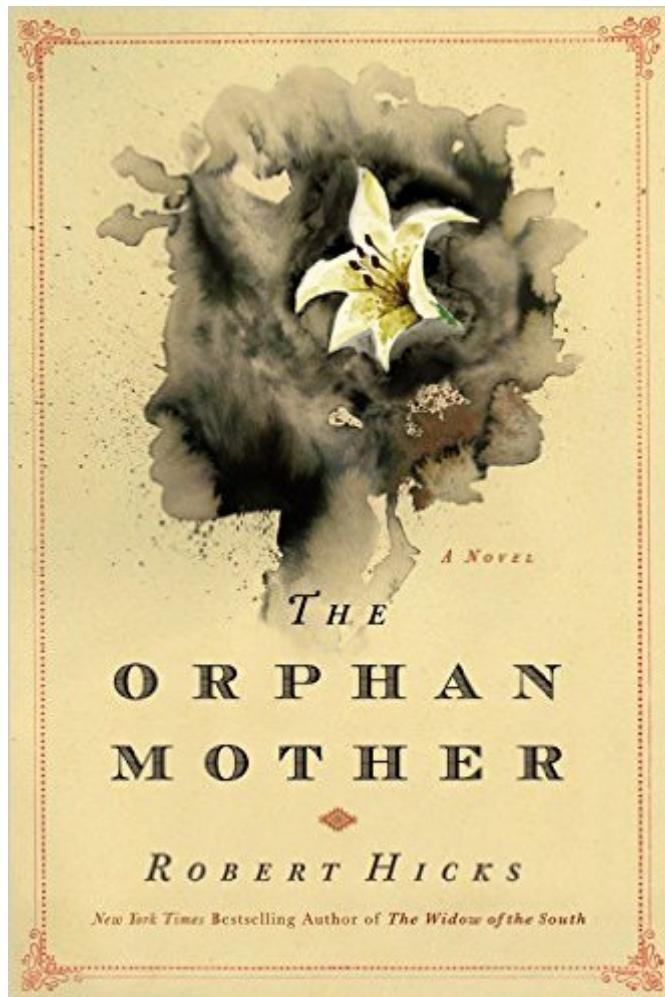


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The Orphan Mother: A Novel



Synopsis

An epic account of one remarkable woman's quest for justice from the New York Times bestselling author of *The Widow of the South* and *A Separate Country*. In the years following the Civil War, Mariah Reddick, former slave to Carrie McGavock--the "Widow of the South"--has quietly built a new life for herself as a midwife to the women of Franklin, Tennessee. But when her ambitious, politically minded grown son, Theopolis, is murdered, Mariah--no stranger to loss--finds her world once more breaking apart. How could this happen? Who wanted him dead? Mariah's journey to uncover the truth leads her to unexpected people--including George Tole, a recent arrival to town, fleeing a difficult past of his own--and forces her to confront the truths of her own past. Brimming with the vivid prose and historical research that has won Robert Hicks recognition as a "master storyteller" (San Francisco Chronicle).

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Ten years ago, Robert Hicks brought the story of a largely unheard of Civil War battle and the legacy of the Carrie McGavock and her legacy of tending to the remains of fallen soldiers. It was a story of heartbreak told by a natural storyteller. *A Separate Country* was another tragic story about a Confederate General and life after the Civil War. But now we've returned to Tennessee for more tragedy after the murder of a son of a McGavock former slave named Mariah Reddick. What I like about Hicks' books and *The Orphan Mother* is his writing style. There's an element of Faulkner in the way that Hicks tells a story, with pleasant detours and telling stories within the narrative while driving the plot. There is a lot of historical research, which is arguably Hicks' strength. I felt like I was

in Tennessee with the descriptions of the places, even down to feeling like I was stuck in the heat and humidity. But more importantly, I felt like I got to know and really feel for Mariah - a woman who has suffered a tragic life, saw a brief moment of daylight, and had that taken away from her. The Orphan Mother is another tragic novel from Hicks, but the wait for it has been long worth it. It was wonderful to immerse myself in a tragic world that was scary yet optimistic and be led into a wonderful mystery.

The two main characters in "The Orphan Mother," are former slaves who are living in Tennessee after the end of the Civil War. But although they've escaped their chains and can walk about as free, they still find themselves dealing with the matter of being bound by intangibles, such as revenge, sorrow, fear and rage, after a riot at a town election, which leads to the death of a young promising black politician, as well as injuring and killing many others. Mariah Reddick is a midwife who has birthed many of their town's citizens and is accorded a certain measure of respect as a result. Her former mistress since childhood, "Widow of the South," Carrie McGovick (the protagonist of an earlier book) is still dependent on her, and the two women are gingerly negotiating the new relationship between them. Mariah's son, Theopolis, is a cobbler with political aspirations, which scare his mother, although she is also proud of him. George Tole, born a free man in New York State, has had a long career as a sharpshooter, the only thing he believes he is good at (although he is also a skilled artist). When the town magistrate, Elijah Dixon recruits Tole for a job of "disposing" of a rival, Tole reluctantly tries to carry out his assignment, but things don't go as planned. After the tragedy, Tole vows to help Mariah find whoever is responsible, but then decides to take matters of justice into his own hands. Can the two ultimately find the truth and with it, peace of mind? Pros: Strong, complex characters, including the "Widow of the South," who turns out to be more multi-dimensional than I expected from the first few chapters. The author is a skilled writer and excels at portraying the atmosphere and setting of the South post-Civil War. However, I did find that one part of a character's manner of seeking justice to be almost too easy. (Without going too much into it, most people just don't disappear without anyone caring or noticing.) Otherwise, I enjoyed the book and had no problem rooting for Mariah and Tole.. The publisher's note suggests turning to read the Author's Note before the book itself, but I would respectfully disagree, at least if you know absolutely nothing about the author. If you can, go into the narrative fresh and without any preconceived ideas about whether or not the author is "qualified" to write such a book. Although, I would recommend reading it afterwards.

The Orphan Mother is a beautiful novel about a very difficult topic. Life just after the Civil War could not have been easy for anyone, let alone a former slave. This feisty and proud ex-slave, Mariah Reddick, is our main character. She has worked hard her whole life in the service of Carrie, the well known (from a previous novel by Mr. Hicks) Widow of the South. Now she works as a mid-wife, helping to birth the babies of both white and blacks in her community. She has a son, an idealistic young man who wants to challenge the status quo. A tragedy occurs that rocks Mariah's world forever and changes how she views herself and the world around her. It is an event that challenges her to her very core, and with the help of Carrie and a man named Tole, she treads very difficult waters and walks down paths previously unknown to her. This is a novel of finding your strength in unimaginable circumstances. Both Tole and Mariah find their views of their lives and themselves put to the test. While as I said, the topic isn't an easy one, this is well worth the read. If you are looking for light hearted, this isn't it. This is a serious book about a serious topic. You will come to care for these people and you will easily become part of their story, living it alongside them. This is not a slow read, it's nicely paced and well thought out. I really enjoyed this book and think you will, too.

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