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Cash, Wiley. A Land More Kind than Home

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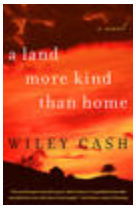

Nine-year-old Jess Hall was watching though a crack in the wall when the members of his mother's church, the River Road Church of Christ, attempted to heal Jess's mute older brother, nicknamed Stump. The church members, accustomed to snake-handling and speaking in tongues under the guidance of their horribly scarred pastor Carson Chambliss, used a laying-on-of-hands that half-crushed the boy until Jess called out his mother's name in fear. So when his mother takes Stump back to the church for a special evening service and Stump winds up dead, Jess knows how it happened, and knows who he blames—himself. When he cried out, everyone thought it was Stump, proof the healing was working. If he'd told the truth, would his brother be dead? But Jess is the only one blaming himself; Sheriff Barefield, who investigates the crime, and elderly midwife and healer Adelaide Lyle, who watches the church's children on Sundays to keep them away from the snakes, both blame Carson Chambliss, a preacher as evil and manipulative as they come. So does Jess's father, who has turned to drink in his grief. When shocking revelations about Carson Chambliss come to the fore, the situation becomes explosive.

Narrated in turns by Jess, Barefield, and Adelaide, this darkly Southern gothic tale of religious frenzy, small-town life, and the power of belief is evocative and compelling.

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