

HEART OF THE FRONTIER • 1



Treasured Grace



TRACIE
PETERSON



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Scripture quotations are from the King James Version of the Bible.

This is a work of historical reconstruction; the appearances of certain historical figures are therefore inevitable. All other characters, however, are products of the author's imagination, and any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, is coincidental.

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Dedicated to . . .

The rangers of the U.S. National Park Service at the Whitman Mission. In particular, to Roger Amerman and Stephanie Martin, who faithfully answered my questions and directed me to all sorts of wonderful resource materials. Thank you for your patience in answering my many questions. My job is made so much easier because of knowledgeable people like you.



Note to Reader

The Whitman Mission massacre is a well-known piece of history that forever changed the western frontier. Certain liberties were taken with that history to include fictional characters; however, a great amount of time and research went into keeping the history as accurate as possible. As I researched the various first-person accounts, it was obvious that each person remembered something a little different from the others. The knowledgeable reader may find discrepancies, but great care was given to share the factual account.

In my research I also found that there were often multiple spellings for the names of various mission people, as well as the Native Americans involved. For the purposes of continuity, I sought advice from historians and chose one spelling. The same is true for the Nez Perce words that have been sprinkled throughout the story. I hope you enjoy.

Tracie

Chapter
1

OREGON TRAIL
LATE OCTOBER 1847

So what do you plan to do now that he's dead?" Grace Flanagan Martindale thought of the trailside grave where her husband, the Right Reverend T.S. Martindale, had been buried. The simple burial site, not even two hundred yards away, was nothing like the pompous, pretentious man it held. There wasn't even a proper marker, and that alone would no doubt have the man turning in fits of outrage.

"I don't know." Grace looked at the woman who had become her friend on their travels west. "I honestly don't." She shrugged. "But then I wasn't at all sure what I was going to do when we reached Oregon City either."

Eletta Browning grew thoughtful. At twenty-five years old, the petite, sandy-haired woman had been a wealth of information regarding the trail. She and her husband had read countless letters and articles created for missionaries regarding Oregon Country.

“We’re supposed to make the Whitman Mission by Friday,” Eletta finally said. “As I understand it, Dr. Whitman and his wife often take in travelers from the wagon trains. At least for the winter. You could probably stay with them.”

“Yes, the wagon master mentioned it.”

“We’ve become friends through correspondence, so Isaac will no doubt put in a good word for you and your sisters.”

Grace cast a glance outside the tent opening. Her sisters were speaking to their friends in hushed whispers. Their brother-in-law hadn’t been the only one buried that day, and the spirit of the camp remained sober at the nearness of death. However, Grace knew her sisters were relieved that the Right Reverend had passed on to his glory. No doubt he was even now instructing God as to how heaven should be run.

“I suppose it might be wise to stay if the Whitmans will have us.” Grace considered the few choices available to her. “I know the girls are exhausted. Mercy, especially. She’s nothing but skin and bones, and she was already so small for her age.”

“It’s been a hard trip. We’ve all had our share of problems. I might have lost my dear Isaac to cholera had it not been for you.” Eletta choked on the words and then regained control of her emotions. “Mr. Browning and I are most grateful for your healing skills. There’s nothing we wouldn’t do for you and your sisters.”

Grace smiled. She had been trained in the healing arts since she was a young girl. Like her mother and grandmother before her, healing seemed to come naturally to Grace—unlike her sisters, Hope and Mercy, who had no end of confusion when it came to gathering wild plants and roots to make medicines.

“I’d like to think I could offer my skills in whatever community I make my home, but since Dr. Whitman is a certified doctor, he might find my abilities primitive.” She sighed. “If I could just locate Uncle Edward, I know I would feel better.

We sent him a letter early last spring before coming west. I'm hopeful he received it, but we heard nothing from him before leaving. Of course, I didn't really expect to. It takes months and sometimes years to get letters back and forth. The men headed west with the letters might even have been killed on the trail."

"Most of the wagon train will go on to Oregon City, Grace. I'm sure someone would take a message to him. Mr. Grierson, perhaps? Then your uncle might come for you and the girls before the winter is over."

"Maybe." Her uncle had written Mama a year ago, begging her to join him in Oregon City. He told her it would be a wonderful new start and she might even find love again. Grace knew her widowed mother would never love another man. She had been completely devoted to Sean Flanagan. And even though he was a hard-fighting, stubborn Irishman, Nancy Flanagan loved him with a passion that Grace could only envy.

A shadow crossed the opening of the tent, and Nigel Grierson called to her. "Mrs. Martindale, I wonder if we might speak."

She knew what he wanted. Eletta knew it too. Grace bit her lower lip and then exited the tent. She didn't bother to acknowledge his offered hand to help her. Straightening, she relaxed her jaw and waited for him to say something.

The tall, blond man gave her a sad smile. "Thank you for agreeing to speak to me in your time of mourning."

Grace nodded. "What can I do for you, Mr. Grierson?" She glanced over to where her sisters had been only moments before. Apparently when they saw Grierson, they had hightailed it out of there.

"Well . . . you know that . . . my Abigail died two weeks ago."

"Yes." Grace had no desire to make this any easier on him, but neither did she want to waste her time. She knew what he was going to say and decided to say it first. "So now that

my husband is dead, you believe we should join our fortunes together and marry.”

He looked sheepish and glanced away. “Yes. You see, Mrs. Martindale, I know from our long months on the trail that you are an industrious woman, just as my Abigail was. She and I admired you very much for your patience and skills, not only with people but the livestock as well. I believe we have a great deal in common. I hope to start a dairy farm eventually, and you have a small flock of sheep. It seems together we could make a proper go of it.” He cleared his throat and seemed to struggle for what he wanted to say next. “And . . . well . . . while I don’t like to speak ill of the dead, we both know that your deceased husband was hardly cut out for such a life. On more than one occasion I know he spoke with great disdain regarding his sheep.”

“Yes. However, the sheep were never his to consider. They belong to me.”

“But when a woman marries, her property belongs to her husband.”

“Be that as it may, my husband hardly has need of sheep now, and what meager possessions we held are mine.” She could see that her tone had made clear her irritation. She turned to go, but Nigel took hold of her arm in a bold move.

“Please, Mrs. Martindale . . . Grace.” He spoke her name with great hesitation.

Grace fixed him with a look that caused his immediate release of her arm. “I cannot marry you, Mr. Grierson. I have no desire to give myself over to another loveless marriage. Good day.”

She walked toward the wagon the Right Reverend had purchased shortly before their trip west. Purchased with money from the sale of her parents’ house. It was loaded to the hilt—mostly with his prized possessions of theological texts and clothes. He had also demanded to bring several pieces of fur-

niture, including an ornate pulpit and a large feather tick upon which he could sleep at night. He was one of the few travelers who insisted on sleeping in the protective covering of his wagon. Every night when they set up camp, Grace and her sisters had been required to empty the wagon of several crates in order to make room for the Right Reverend to sleep. It was ludicrous, given all of the other work required, but Grace went along with his demands despite knowing her husband was the talk of the train.

Now all of that belonged to her. At least Grace presumed it did, as the Right Reverend had no family. She looked into the back of the packed wagon. There had barely been enough room for Grace and her sisters to add a few trunks. Not that they'd had much to take with them. When Mama had died, Grace knew she would have to sell their small farm in order to survive. She had tried time and again since her father's death to convince her mother to put the property up for sale, but her mother had refused. She and Grace's father had purchased the Missouri farm when they'd first come west. They owned it free and clear, and it was the only thing of import to Mama. It didn't seem to matter that it was in need of constant repair or that the taxes increased every year. Selling the property had given Grace the money they needed to go west and to buy her sheep.

"Grace." The whispered voice was that of her seventeen-year-old sister Hope. "Did you get rid of him?" She peered from around the far side of the wagon.

"Yes." Grace rolled her eyes. "He is without a conscience, to be sure. Who ever heard of approaching a widow on the day of her husband's burial?"

Hope joined Grace at the rear of the wagon. "Conscience isn't important on the frontier. I've had a dozen proposals since we started this trip."

Glancing at her sister's womanly figure, Grace could see why

the men had been attracted to her. Hope was by far the prettiest of the three Flanagan girls. She always had been, even though they all looked very similar with their dark brown hair. Each sister, however, had a variation on their mother's and father's eyes. Grace had green eyes like her father, and Hope's eyes were blue just as Mama's had been. Mercy, the youngest, combined the two for an unusual turquoise shade.

But Hope was the beauty of the family. The interest of young men had been on the increase since she'd turned sixteen, and as a flirt, Hope enjoyed the part she played. To Hope, the world was filled with admirers, and she was only too happy to be the focus of their attention.

"Mrs. Martindale?" The questioning voice was that of Mr. Holt, the wagon master, who was walking toward their wagon.

Grace offered him a smile. "What can I do for you?"

"I thought I'd make a suggestion, if you don't mind." He pointed to the back of the wagon. "Your oxen have suffered a great deal from that load. If you aren't attached to that heavy furniture, I'd suggest getting rid of it."

Grace nodded. "I think that's a marvelous idea. The pulpit alone weighs more than Hope and Mercy combined. I believe that would make a perfect marker for the Right Reverend's grave. Then there's that heavy walnut table. That can easily be discarded."

Holt smiled. "I'll get a couple of fellas to help, and we'll unload it."

"Thank you. I believe my sister and I will check on our flock."

Holt tipped his hat and left while Grace moved toward the area where her sheep were grazing.

"Smelly animals," Hope said, turning up her nose.

"You may be grateful for those smelly animals one day when we have a flock big enough to prosper us."

“I wondered where you went,” twelve-year-old Mercy said, coming to join them. “I heard Mr. Holt say he and some other fellas are going to unload our wagon.”

“Yes, we’re lightening the load.” Grace noted her youngest sister’s long brown braids. Styling her hair that way made her look younger still. “You can ride tomorrow, if you like. I know you’re tired.”

“Mr. Holt said we needed to make up for lost time tomorrow. He wants to start as soon as there’s any light at all and keep going until it’s dark.”

“I hate traveling,” Hope said, blowing out a heavy sigh. “Everything is always dirty, and my shoes are completely worn out.”

“Well, I managed to take the Right Reverend’s boots off of him before we wrapped him in the burial sheet.” Grace glanced around and lowered her voice even more. “I think they’re just a wee bit big for you, Hope, although he didn’t have feet anywhere near as large as most men. They should suffice. And you may ride the Right Reverend’s horse. He’s a very gentle mount with the right person handling the reins.” The Right Reverend had never been able to sit the horse without some sort of trouble, but Grace and her sisters had learned to ride as children. Da had been a masterful horseman and saw to it that his daughters knew their way around horseflesh as well.

Hope wrinkled her nose but didn’t refuse either gift. Grace knew she would wear the boots and ride the gelding and be grateful, because the road was much rockier than it had been coming across the prairies.

“I know it’s not very nice,” Mercy said, looking at the ground, “but I’m glad he’s dead. He was mean, and I didn’t like the way he treated you. Or us.” She looked up at Grace. “Do you suppose God will be mad at me for saying that?”

“You’re just telling the truth,” Hope said. “I’m glad he’s gone too. He was so bossy. I figure he thought he owned the three of us; he treated us like slaves.”

“I can’t lie and say that I’m not just as glad to be rid of him myself,” Grace admitted. “But now we’re back to trying to figure out how to take care of ourselves in the future. Most all of our money was tied up in this trip west.”

“Won’t Uncle Edward take care of us?” Mercy asked.

“We have to be able to find him first.” Grace shook her head. “There’s no telling if he’s even still alive.”

Hope frowned. “Then what are we going to do?”

“I’ve been giving that some thought. The train is splitting, with most of the wagons going on to Oregon City. Those with sick or who need a rest are heading for the Whitman Mission. Dr. and Mrs. Whitman are used to taking in folks from the wagon train and often let them stay for the winter. I figure we can help out with the chores.”

Hope’s expression took on a look of protest, but before she could open her mouth, Grace continued.

“Mercy can attend their little school. We’ll send a letter to Uncle Edward with the wagon train folks who are going on to Oregon City.”

“Why not just go on to Oregon City with them?” Hope asked. “Seems to me we’ve come this far, we might as well go the rest of the way.”

“I thought about that, but honestly I don’t think we have it in us. We’re all three tired, and our oxen are nearly done in, thanks to the Right Reverend’s overburdening them. Not only that, but the sick also need my help.”

Hope shrugged. “I wish we’d just go on with the others to Oregon City. But I haven’t had much say in this trip.”

Grace turned to face the setting sun, ignoring Hope’s comment. “Looks like we’d better get back. Mrs. Browning has

invited us to share supper with them tonight, so we don't have to worry about fixing anything. However, I still need to boil some water for tomorrow's drinking water."

"That's so silly. Mr. Holt said he has never seen nothing like boiling water to drink unless it had coffee added to it," Mercy said. "He told me it was just a lot of extra work."

"Well, consider this," Grace said, motioning for her sisters to follow her back to their tent. "The Right Reverend didn't drink the boiled water or take vinegar daily as we do, and he died of cholera. The other folks who died from cholera also didn't boil their water. Our granny always said that boiling water was the best way to keep from getting sick."

"She also said boiling it made the water too hot for the fairies to touch and taint," Hope added. "Granny said a lot of things that were mostly superstitious Irish nonsense. You said so yourself."

"It's true that she had her superstitions, but along with the ridiculous claims, Granny had great wisdom." Grace could still hear her swear that she owed her eighty-some years of life to boiled water and vinegar. Both of which Grace's mother had sworn by and which Grace held just as valuable. If only those things could have sustained her mother from a broken heart.

"Come on, I need you to fetch water while I get the fire going." She heard her sisters mutter as they collected the buckets, but they offered no further protest, to her relief.

Grace had begun to put together fuel for the fire when the voice of a woman sounded behind her. "I want to thank you, Mrs. Martindale, for all you did for my Jimmy. He's feelin' a lot better. Even ate tonight."

Grace straightened and smiled. "I'm so glad, Mrs. Piedmont. Just keep doing what I told you, and he should be fine."

The middle-aged woman nodded. "I'm worried about my

Anna-Beth. She's feelin' a mite poorly, and I wondered if you could take a look at her?"

The wagon train was without a doctor, and Grace had been kept busy stitching up wounds, tending rashes, and overseeing the epidemics of cholera, dysentery, and the ague. It was good to be of use to people, and Grace knew that healing was her true calling in life.

"Of course," she told Mrs. Piedmont. "Let me get my fire going and the water on, and I'll be right over."



Hope grinned at the young man who'd just stolen a kiss. "Robbie Taylor, you are the most forward boy I've ever made the acquaintance of."

The sandy-headed boy gave her a lopsided smile. "I'm not a boy, Miss Hope. I'm a man full grown. Why else would I be sparkin' you?"

"Why, indeed," she murmured, batting her eyelashes.

Her coyness only served to encourage him to risk another kiss. This time, however, Hope pushed him away.

"I'm not easily had, Mr. Taylor. If you mean to court me properly, then you'll have to speak to my sister. However, you should know that at least five other fellas have gone ahead of you to ask for my hand."

Robbie's smile faded. "But, Miss Hope, you know I love you. I'm gonna get one of those big tracts of land and farm it. We'll put up a house, and you can plant a garden."

Hope wrinkled her nose. "I don't like planting and harvestin' gardens. It makes my hands get all dirty and rough. This horrible journey has already been so hard on my hands, and I wear my gloves almost all the time." She sighed and raised her hands as if to offer proof.

Robbie took hold of her hands and drew them to his lips. "It

don't matter what your hands look like. You're still the prettiest girl west of the Mississippi."

"Just west of the Mississippi?" She pulled her hands away and shook her head. "Honestly, Robbie Taylor, I don't know why I put up with your sweet talk. Now leave me be. I need to fetch water. I can't have Mercy doing it all by herself."

"Well, at least let me do that for you," he said, giving her such a lovesick expression that Hope couldn't help but giggle.

"Very well. The bucket is over yonder." She pointed, and without offering further comment, Robbie crossed to the wagon and took up the bucket. He headed for the river, leaving Hope to smile to herself.

It was always easy once they were stopped for the day to get one of the boys to do her bidding. She liked the way they all clamored for her attention. God had given her a pretty face and a fine figure to attract a good husband. It was surely up to her to use them to her advantage.



Grace made her way to the Piedmonts' wagon, passing several of the other families along the way. Most were gathered around their own shared fires and offered her condolences as she passed.

If they knew how little I'm grieving, they'd think me heartless. Of course, if they knew that my marriage was only arranged so that the Right Reverend T.S. Martindale could be placed on the mission field and that our marriage was never consummated, they might better understand.

She had been only too willing to refrain from sharing a marriage bed with the Right Reverend. He had declared that in answering God's call he needed neither wife nor children. However, the mission board had insisted that it was not good for man to be alone and they required their ministers to be married. Only then did the Right Reverend agree to be wed, and when Grace

was able to present herself—and the money from the sale of her mother’s farm—he thought her the perfect woman. However, he had no intention of becoming a true husband or father. He made that clear to Grace on their first night alone, much to her gladness. To be a widowed virgin might make others raise a brow in confusion, but to Grace it was a blessing for which she thanked God.

“She’s over here, Mrs. Martindale,” Mrs. Piedmont called from the back of the family’s wagon. “She’s been coughing and sniffing for quite a while, but I was so busy with Jimmy that I didn’t give it much thought. I figured it was just a cold, but now she’s chilling and her face is flushed. She says she hurts all over.”

Grace made her way to where the seven-year-old lay curled in a ball, shivering. “Mrs. Piedmont, we’ll need a lantern. Would you please bring one so that I can examine her better?”

“Of course.” The woman scurried away and quickly returned with the needed light.

“Hold it close so I can give her a good examination,” Grace instructed while carefully moving the child’s head from side to side. “I heard you aren’t feeling very good, Anna-Beth.”

Grace could feel that the girl’s fever was high. Her face was flushed, and from the sound of her cough her lungs were very congested. Closer inspection of the child’s face gave Grace a start. Without bothering to check her throat or eyes, Grace unbuttoned the child’s nightgown. The rash she found on the girl’s chest made her diagnosis certain. Another epidemic was sure to follow.

“It’s measles,” Grace said, turning to the girl’s mother.

Mrs. Piedmont’s expression changed from worry to horror. “No. Not measles.”

Grace buttoned the child’s nightgown, then patted her on the head. “You rest a minute, Anna-Beth. I need to make you

some medicine and talk to your mama about how to make you feel better.” She led Mrs. Piedmont from the wagon.

“I never thought it might be measles. What are we gonna do?”

“Well, first off, we need to quarantine your wagon and your other children. They’ve both been exposed, but it’s possible they won’t take the measles.” Grace knew, however, that the chances were slim to none. Once measles made its way into the camp, it would be hard to force its exit until everyone who’d never had the disease managed to catch it.

Mrs. Piedmont drew her fist to her mouth as if to prevent herself from crying out. She was near to tears.

“I’ve dealt with measles a hundred times before this,” Grace said. “Try not to worry. My remedies are good to help. Now, I presume you and Mr. Piedmont have had the measles.” The woman nodded. Grace smiled. “Good. Then you won’t be at risk in tending Anna-Beth. What about the other children?”

Mrs. Piedmont lowered her hand. “Jimmy’s had it.”

“He probably won’t take it again. The baby most likely won’t take it because you’re nursing her.” Grace paused a moment to think. “You’re good friends with the Culverts, aren’t you?”

Mrs. Piedmont nodded. “Came west together. We’ve been friends since we were children.”

“Good. I’ll check with Mrs. Culvert, but I believe her children have all had the measles. If so, Jimmy and the baby can stay with them while you care for Anna-Beth.”

After instructing Mrs. Piedmont to get some water boiling, Grace went about her duties, checking first with the Culverts and then retrieving some herbs and vinegar from her stores. Once she had completed instructing Mrs. Piedmont, Grace knew she’d have to inform Mr. Holt. Thankfully, the Piedmonts were already positioned at the back of the train with the other sick folks. It was most likely too late to hope that the disease

wouldn't spread, but they would do whatever they could to try to hold it at bay.

Only one thought continued to trouble Grace. Mercy had watched over Anna-Beth and the Piedmonts' baby during Jimmy's sickest hours in order to free up Mrs. Piedmont to care for him.

"And she's never had the measles," Grace murmured to herself.



Alexander Armistead scratched his chin and focused on the cards in his hands. He had nothing better than a pair of sevens, and given the confidence with which his old friend was raising the stakes, Alex felt it was best to fold.

"I give up. You're just too good for me tonight." He threw the cards down.

Gabriel Larquette laughed and lowered his cards to reveal he had nothing better than a pair of threes. "You give up too easy, my friend." He collected the cards and the pot.

"Well, I'll be. You always do have all the luck." Alex leaned closer to their small fire and checked the roasting rabbit. "This is ready. Where'd Sam get off to?"

"Went to see about those last three traps. He'll be here soon enough." Gabriel put the cards in his leather knapsack.

"Gabe, do you ever regret your life out here in the wilderness?" Alex asked, giving the rabbit another turn.

"Why do you ask?"

"You said you've been doing this for nearly forty years, and I just wondered if you ever wish you'd done something else."

The older man shrugged. "Can't say I would have wanted to do anything else. You remember how I lived in Montreal?"

Alex nodded. "You said you hated the city."

"I did and I do." Gabe shook his head. "Can't breathe in

the city. My pa felt the same way, but my mother was a proper French woman who enjoyed her pretty dishes and silk clothes. She died when I was twelve, and after that I left school to trap full-time with my father. I've never regretted anything at all, except her death . . . and others'."

"Death has a way of making you regret a great deal." Alex felt the old melancholy settling on him.

"Seems to me we've had this conversation before," Gabe said with a shrug. "I've told you over and over how you can be rid of your regrets and sorrows."

Alex had heard it a million times. "By trusting in God? Seems my folks told me the same, but they're still dead . . . and it's all my fault."