

HEART OF THE FRONTIER • 2



*Beloved Hope*



TRACIE  
PETERSON



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Tracie Peterson, *Beloved Hope*  
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To Calvin Braaksma—  
You are an amazing attorney  
with a great sense of humor and heart for God.  
Thank you for being you!

# Chapter 1

OREGON CITY, OREGON

MAY 1850

**Y**ou can't be serious." Hope Flanagan looked at the man who sat opposite her at her sister and brother-in-law's kitchen table. "You expect me to testify in the Cayuse trial."

Only weeks before, the five Cayuse men deemed responsible for the Whitman Massacre had been turned over to the army and were now in Oregon City to stand trial. Hope twisted her skirt in her hands, thankful the table hid her actions.

For the last two and a half years, she had worked to forget that awful day in November when the Cayuse attacked the Whitman Mission. Then, in a single moment, this man brought it all back to her. She remembered the kitchen at the mission on that day. Sitting beside John Sager, the boy she'd hoped to marry. She had thought life perfect. She'd never wanted to come west to Oregon, but when she fell in love, everything changed.

It changed again when Tomahas and Telokite—two Cayuse chiefs—showed up at the mission house.

There had been trouble with the Cayuse for weeks. Measles had followed the white settlers into Oregon Country, and many of the Cayuse had died. The chiefs blamed the whites in general at first, but when Marcus Whitman—a doctor—failed to save their sick while seeming to revive his white patients, the Cayuse were convinced he was killing them on purpose.

The Cayuse were angry that day. They demanded help, demanded medicine. But all the while they had planned to kill Whitman. Hope trembled, remembering the murderous look in Tomahas's eyes. Even prior to the attack, his people called Tomahas "the Murderer," and rightly so. His temper was short and his actions swift.

Hope remembered John tensing beside her. He'd been working with twine and put it to one side in a very slow, casual manner. When Telokite and Tomahas began their attack, John reached for his pistol, and Tomahas shot him. Hope had fallen to the floor with John and cradled him as he died. His blood had soaked her dress as she pleaded with him to live.

"Miss Flanagan, I know this is difficult."

The attorney's voice brought Hope back to the present. She fixed him with a look that made him grimace. He knew nothing of what had happened except what he'd been told.

As if reading her mind, he quickly focused on his empty coffee cup. "I mean to say that I've been told what you and the others went through. I understand that it won't be easy to come forward and testify."

"And that's why I won't do it."

He looked up and shook his head. "But you must. Witnesses are vital in this trial. Generally speaking, Indian massacres do

not have survivors. You were there, and you have vital information to offer.”

Grace, Hope’s older sister, brought the coffeepot and poured the man another cup. “Mr. Holbrook, a great many women and children survived the massacre. Why must Hope testify?”

“As I understand it, your sister was in the kitchen when the Indians entered and began their attack. She witnessed Marcus Whitman’s murder. Few can say the same. We need her testimony to ensure the guilty verdict.”

Grace was unimpressed. “Why should there be any question of their guilt? You’ve known the identities of the men since we arrived in Oregon City. The victims saw those responsible cut down the men at the mission. They witnessed it firsthand, and their testimony has never wavered. Furthermore, as I understand it, Telokite and Tomahas have boasted of their deeds. They take full credit for ridding their people of Dr. Whitman.”

“Yes, they did, but that isn’t the case now. They deny any participation. They’re entering a plea of not guilty and are hoping for a complete acquittal.”

Hope studied the stranger. Amory Holbrook had been appointed by the president to be the United States Attorney for the Oregon Territory. He would prosecute the Cayuse. He was young—perhaps too young for the job he held. Hope had her doubts about his abilities. She didn’t like him but couldn’t exactly say why. It might only be what he represented. On the other hand, she found the beard that edged his jawline and barely covered the end of his chin annoying. He was otherwise clean-shaven. It was a look Hope had never cared for.

“Miss Flanagan, I know this is difficult—”

He’d said it again. Hope gritted her teeth and tightened her hold on her skirt. She could barely force out her words. “You know nothing. You weren’t there, and you can’t possibly

understand, no matter how many people tell you the story or give you the ugly details. You will never know what your request is costing me.”

“Of course, you’re right, and I did not mean to imply a first-hand knowledge of events. However, I do understand that the event described to me by other witnesses was a heinous, unforgivable act of indecency, and I want to see those men hang for what they did.”

Hope drew in a deep breath to calm her spirit. “So do I.”

“The trial will hopefully conclude in that. However, some feel a goodwill gesture might be called for.”

“A goodwill gesture?” Grace asked.

Holbrook nodded. “There has been talk that pardoning the Indians would show the various tribes that the white man understands their plight and concerns and forgives what happened because of them. However, I do not adhere to that thought. It would be one thing if they had committed a single murder. Perhaps even multiple murders might be overlooked, but what they did in taking helpless women and children hostage is unforgivable. I believe we need to send a much stronger message to these Indian nations. In hanging those guilty of murdering Dr. Whitman and the others, we put it in clear, unquestionable terms: ‘If you continue to harm the settlers, we will prosecute you and punish you to the full extent of the law.’” He paused for a moment. “The entire United States is watching to see how we deal with the Cayuse. And not only the whites, but the Indians as well. They are waiting to see if we pardon the murderers. Mark my words, it will spell disaster if we do.”

Hope had never once considered that anyone would think it reasonable to pardon murderers. The very idea of Tomahas—the Cayuse who had killed the man she loved, taken her virtue,

and left her to bear his unwanted child—walking the streets as a free man left her sick inside.

“So you see, we need witnesses such as yourself to tell your story of what happened on the day of the massacre, as well as what happened to you during captivity, and how those events affect you even today. If the facts are unknown—if the victims fail to speak out and give a detailed account of what happened, they’ll have no one but themselves to blame if those savages are freed.”

Silence hung over the kitchen. Hope knew she had little choice. She couldn’t let the Cayuse get away with what they had done. She owed that much to Johnny.

“Very well. I will testify.”

Holbrook nodded. “Thank you. I’ll need you to come by my office, and we’ll take down a detailed account of what happened, since you weren’t one of the women who helped us get the grand jury indictment.” He got to his feet and gave Grace a nod. “Thank you for your hospitality.”

Grace exchanged a glance with Hope. “You’re welcome, but I have a question to ask. Will you also need my youngest sister to testify? She’s not yet fifteen. She was only twelve when the attack took place.”

He looked at his notes. “Mercy Flanagan, correct?”

“Yes.”

“I don’t believe we’ll need her testimony, Mrs. Armistead. She was in the school at the onset of the attack, as was Eliza Spaulding. We have Miss Spaulding’s deposition. She acted as interpreter for the Cayuse during the days of captivity, so she had a clearer understanding of what the Cayuse intended. There should be no reason for your young sister to have to testify.”

Hope saw the relief in Grace’s expression. They had talked about the possibility ever since the Cayuse had been caught and



the victims started being interviewed. Mercy was extremely tenderhearted, and they both feared testifying would be too hard on her.

Mercy was also of a mind that as true Christians, they should forgive the Indians and move on. It was a mentality Hope could not understand. After all, Mercy had witnessed the horrors of the massacre as well, although she might not have understood all that happened to the women. Mercy was small for her age, and the Cayuse had considered her a child. Hope had tried to shield her from the worst of it, but even so, Mercy had to remember how terrifying it had been. John Sager's brother Frank had been shot down right in front of them. Each day they had lived with the threat of being murdered. When they closed their eyes at night, none of them could be sure of ever opening them again. No one could be sheltered from that.

Grace saw Holbrook out while Hope returned to the fireplace in the front room and sat down at her spinning wheel. Spinning was a soothing task that restored peace to her soul. She picked up the wool roving and gave a gentle tug to draft out the fibers.

"I'm sorry about that," Grace said, coming into the room. "I told Holbrook that if it was at all possible to exclude you, he should do so."

"Thank you." Hope didn't look up, instead starting the wheel spinning.

Grace pulled up a footstool and sat across from Hope. "Will you tell them about Faith?"

Hope thought for a moment of the half-Cayuse baby she'd given birth to—a baby born out of an act of violence. It seemed so long ago, and yet it hadn't even been two years. She and Grace had done everything in their power to keep the secret between themselves and Eletta and Isaac Browning—the couple who'd

taken the baby to raise as their own. Eletta and her husband were missionary friends of Grace. They had all met on the journey west to Oregon Country. Other than the Brownings, Hope knew that Grace had told her husband, Alex, but had otherwise remained silent on the matter. Not even Mercy knew about the child.

Hope shook her head. “I don’t think so. It would serve no purpose. I doubt anyone here knows the real reason I went to California with Eletta and Isaac.” She let the yarn she’d twisted earlier catch into the fibers of the roving.

“No, I shouldn’t think so.” Grace watched the yarn wind onto the bobbin. “Hope, I’m sorry you have to go through this. It’s not fair.”

“Life has never been fair.” Hope stopped pedaling the wheel. “It wasn’t fair that Johnny died. It wasn’t fair that innocent lives were taken. It’s not fair that those guilty of the murders still walk the earth and claim innocence. If it were left up to me, they’d already be dead. Without a trial.”

“I can understand that. I have to admit I feel the same. I want to have a charitable heart, but toward those men . . .” Grace fell silent.

“I don’t think anyone will rest easy until they’re dead. I know I won’t.”

In truth, Hope wasn’t sure she’d ever feel safe in this wild territory, despite the new regiment of soldiers that had come the year before.

At her sister’s movement, Hope glanced up. She could tell Grace was preparing to leave. “Are you going shopping after you take Alex his lunch?”

“Yes. Is there something you need?” Grace pulled on her sunbonnet.

“Mrs. Reynolds offered me some of their beets from last fall.

She said they were dried out and she was going to feed them to the pigs, but I told her I'd like some for dyeing my yarn."

"I'm taking her some vinegar anyway. I'll check with her and see if she has them ready. I might stay in town long enough to give Mercy a ride home from school so she doesn't have to wait around for Alex or walk."

"That's fine. I don't mind being here alone."

And she truly didn't. Ever since the massacre, Hope had done everything in her power to avoid people. When John McLoughlin, the man who had once been factor of Fort Vancouver, had offered to sell Alex and Grace this property three miles from town, Hope had been excited. The previous owner had come to the area five years earlier. He had done a great deal with the land, and it already had a log house and a small barn for animals. His focus had been on raising horses, and he had fenced off a large section of open pasture. A difficult feat by any standard. This, along with some smaller pens and additional acreage, made it the perfect place to raise sheep.

Hope had never seen a more beautiful setting. A large creek ran through the land to empty below the bluff into the Willamette River, so water was always available for their needs. There was also prime forest that in time would be cleared away for various building projects, including a grand new house that Alex and Grace had planned and more fencing. Already a large number of felled logs were stacked and ready for use.

The farm stretched out over one hundred and forty acres all told, well away from prying eyes. It assured that Hope wouldn't have to see anyone if she didn't want to. For the last year, the only time she'd gone to town was for church functions, and she only did that to keep from shaming Grace with questions from the other parishioners.

Grace admonished her to make friends, but Hope wanted no

friends. She didn't want to care about anyone—not as she had before the massacre. It hurt too much to lose them.

“I'll be home in time to start supper, so if you would make sure the stove is hot, I'd really appreciate it,” Grace said, opening the door. She didn't wait for Hope's affirmation.

Hope followed her sister outside and waited until Grace had mounted her horse and headed toward the road that would take her into town. Everything was so lush and green. The trees were flowering. Come fall there would be apples aplenty.

At times like this, when everyone else was gone, Hope pretended she lived alone without any cares in the world. She would sit and sew, or spin yarn, or tend to their small herd of sheep. There was such peace out here away from town. It was as if the rest of the world had forgotten about her—passed her by without so much as a thought. And that was exactly how Hope preferred it.

And should anyone come to cause problems or take advantage of her, Hope had her own revolver. If Indians or anyone else tried to do her harm, she would simply shoot them dead. Never again would she be anyone's victim.



Grace made her way to the sawmill that her husband and uncle, Edward Marsh, co-owned. Alex had given up his life of trapping to take on logging and milling instead. He routinely commented that the latter required muscles he hadn't used in trapping. Often when he returned after a particularly grueling day, Grace would rub him down with some of her herbal oil. At first he had protested, not caring for the scents, but he eventually admitted the remedy went a long way toward easing his misery.

Thoughts of Alex always made her smile. When they had first met, he thought her snobbish and bigoted, and she thought

him arrogant and brash. Grace had never anticipated falling in love with the rugged trapper.

Spying her uncle atop the roof of the mill, Grace called out, “Hello, Uncle Edward. How goes the rebuilding?”

The mill sat on the Willamette River, as did several other mills. Unfortunately, heavy rains had caused flooding a few months back, and many of the mills were damaged or destroyed. The Marsh Mill was no exception. Her uncle and Alex had been working feverishly to get things back in order, but it was slow going.

“Well, hello there!” her uncle called down from the roof.

“I thought I’d stop by to bring Alex lunch, since I had to come into town. It looks like you’re making good progress.”

“We’re working steadily. Alex and I think we can probably start up again in a couple weeks.” He came to the edge of the roof. “There’s still plenty to be done, but if we don’t start cutting lumber again, we won’t make any money. We’ll have to wait until delivery of the circular saw I ordered to really get up and running, but for now, we’ll use the up-and-down method. At least that way we’ll be back in business.”

“Is Alex inside?”

“Yes. I have him hard at work restructuring the housing for the blade. Don’t distract him for too long.”

“A man has to eat.” She smiled. “In fact, I have enough food here to feed you as well.”

“No, but thanks. One of us has to keep working. Besides, I just got back from eating at home.”

She laughed. “And there I was starting to feel sorry for you.”

Grace made her way inside and found Alex at the top of a ladder. Hammer in hand, he pounded nails into the side of a wooden structure, completely oblivious to her presence. For a moment she just watched him work. He had shed his coat

and rolled up the sleeves of his shirt, and never had she thought him more handsome.

She smiled and called out to him. "I've brought you something to eat." She went to a small table nearby and began to take things out of her cloth sack. "I hope you're hungry."

Alex put the hammer aside and wiped the sweat from his brow. "I'm famished." He slid down the sides of the ladder, making Grace gasp.

"You should be more careful. You could break your neck."

He ignored her protest and pulled her into his arms for a long kiss.

Grace could have stayed there forever, but she had far too much to accomplish. Pushing him back, she grinned. "You won't get proper nourishment that way."

"You'd be surprised." He gave her a look of mischievous amusement. "How is it possible that you grow more beautiful each day? I can hardly believe you're mine."

"Well, I am. You're stuck with me. Now, come on. I have some bread, cheese, and ham, as well as some cookies. Oh, and apple cider." She went back to the sack and finished producing the food, including a small jug.

Alex picked up a piece of ham. "What have you been doing with your day?"

"Plenty. Amory Holbrook rode out to the house."

Alex raised a brow. "To talk to Hope?"

Grace frowned. "Yes. He insists her testimony is needed at the trial. He said since she was actually in the kitchen and witnessed the attack on Dr. Whitman firsthand, it is her duty to tell what she saw."

"That couldn't have been easy." He picked up the cheese. "Is Hope going to do it?"

"She says she will. She didn't want to, but Holbrook mentioned

the possibility of the Cayuse going free without proper witness identification. Apparently there has been talk about letting them off as a goodwill gesture to win over the Indians and secure peace.”

“The governor doesn’t feel that way. I heard him just yesterday declaring that he will see them hanged. He says the only way to get the Indians in line is to use force. It’s not looking good for anyone of native blood. My guess is that the government will do what they did back east and start rounding up the tribes and putting them on sanctioned land with military guards to ensure they stay there.”

She pulled up a stool and sat. “I know you have many friends who are native. I feel so conflicted when it comes to figuring out solutions.”

He focused on the food for a moment, and Grace wondered if he would say anything at all. She knew he loved his friend Sam Two Moons and the other Nez Perce who had taken him in as if he were one of them. Alex even had good friends among the Cayuse.

“I worry about Sam and his family,” he finally replied. “His band moved north, but I don’t know if they remained there. They might well have joined up with one of the other bands to consolidate their strength. I haven’t heard anything about them in over a year.”

“I hope they’re safe.”

Grace didn’t know much about the Nez Perce, but Sam had been a good friend to her. When the massacre at the Whitman Mission took place, she had been at another mission some seventy-five miles away. The news had sent her hurrying back to Weyiletpa, as the Indians called Whitman’s mission area. Sam and Alex had urged her not to go, knowing she might well be killed or taken hostage with the others, but she had slipped

away from them in the night. They caught up with her before she reached the mission, and only after Sam threatened to tie her up did she agree to let him go on alone. He risked his life for her and her sisters, knowing that the hostile mood of the Cayuse might cause them to overlook their ongoing friendship with the Nez Perce.

“I worry about Hope.” Grace’s statement seemed to take Alex by surprise.

“What?”

She shook her head. “I worry about Hope having to testify. I worry that the strain will be too much. She’s only just started to let down her guard. This trial may ruin all the progress she’s made.”

“She’s made of stronger stuff than you give her credit for. She made it through the attack and the shame she felt. She bore a child that she wished dead. And she came back here when she might have gone anywhere to start a life unknown. Hope will get through this just fine. She won’t like it—none of us will—but once it’s settled, I believe she and the other women will feel this nightmare is finally over.”

Grace hadn’t considered it that way. The death of Telokite and Tomahas might well set Hope free.

“You are a very great and wise man, Alex Armistead.”

He shrugged and gave her a lopsided grin. “I know.”

She laughed. “And so humble.”