

HEART OF THE FRONTIER • 3



*Cherished Mercy*



TRACIE  
PETERSON



BETHANYHOUSE

*a division of Baker Publishing Group*  
Minneapolis, Minnesota

Tracie Peterson, *Cherished Mercy*  
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Published by Bethany House Publishers  
11400 Hampshire Avenue South  
Bloomington, Minnesota 55438  
www.bethanyhouse.com

Bethany House Publishers is a division of  
Baker Publishing Group, Grand Rapids, Michigan

Printed in the United States of America

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Peterson, Tracie, author.

Title: Cherished mercy / Tracie Peterson.

Description: Minneapolis, Minnesota : Bethany House, a division of Baker Publishing Group, [2017] | Series: Heart of the frontier ; 3

Identifiers: LCCN 2017012333 | ISBN 9780764213441 (hardcover : acid-free paper) | ISBN 9780764213298 (softcover) | ISBN 9780764213458 (large-print softcover)

Subjects: LCSH: Frontier and pioneer life—Fiction. | GSAFD: Christian fiction. | Love stories.

Classification: LCC PS3566.E7717 C44 2017 | DDC 813/.54—dc23

LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2017012333>

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.

Cover design by LOOK Design Studio

Cover photography by Aimee Christenson

17 18 19 20 21 22 23      7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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*In memory of Phillip DeShazer*

I was joyfully there when you came into the world  
and sadly was there when you departed.

You were an amazing young man,  
and I know you will be missed by so many.

I look forward to seeing you again one day, sweet nephew.



Chapter  
1

OCTOBER 1855  
OREGON CITY, OREGON TERRITORY

Push, Hope. You have to push,” Grace commanded. Mercy Flanagan wiped her sister’s forehead as she labored to give birth to her baby. After ten hours of intense pain, Hope had clearly weakened.

Looking to their eldest sister, Grace, Mercy grimaced. “I thought you said second babies come faster.” Hope had given birth two years earlier without a lengthy labor, and they had all presumed she would do the same again.

“They usually do, but the one thing you must remember about babies is that no two births are ever identical. They are as different as the babies being born.” Grace turned her attention back to Hope and the unborn child. “Your baby is almost here. Now give me a big push. Bear down with all your strength.”

“I haven’t . . . got any . . . strength . . . left,” Hope replied, falling back against the pillow.

“Mercy, when I tell you, I want you to help Hope sit up.

Support her shoulders and push her forward.” Hope grimaced and cried out. Grace nodded at Mercy. “Now.”

It wasn’t easy, but Mercy managed to slip in behind Hope and raise her up at the same time.

“Push, Hope. The baby is coming now.”

Mercy felt Hope tense as she did her best to obey. Grace took hold of the baby’s head as it emerged and then rotated the baby as the shoulders emerged. After that, the infant slid easily from Hope’s body.

“It’s another boy,” Mercy whispered against Hope’s ear.

“A boy? Truly? Sean will have a little brother.”

“This farm is going to be overrun with children if you and Grace keep having babies,” Mercy teased. Already she was aunt to Grace’s two children, Gabe and Nancy, and there would be a third in the spring. Now Hope had brought another boy to join her two-year-old son, Sean.

Grace cut the cord, then lifted the baby by his heels and smacked him on the bottom. He started to cry almost immediately.

Mercy smiled and brushed back Hope’s damp hair. “He’s got a great set of lungs.”

“That he does,” Grace agreed. “Mercy, I want you to care for him. Hope, you’re not quite done yet, as you well know.”

Birth was hard work, but so too the aftermath. Mercy had been present at the delivery of all but one of her sisters’ babies and would no doubt help in Grace’s third in March. She came from a long line of women who practiced healing arts and midwifery. Mercy had never thought herself all that interested in learning such a craft, but over the past few years, she had found it more and more appealing, and Grace had patiently taught her all she could.

Mercy took the towel-wrapped infant from Grace even as Hope called out. “I want to see him.”

The baby cried even louder—if that was possible. “Let me make him presentable first.”

“He’s more than fine just the way he is,” Hope replied. “Please.”

Without waiting for Grace’s approval, Mercy took him to Hope. There was no hesitation as Hope reached for him. She pulled him close and pushed back the towel to examine every inch of him.

“He’s beautiful,” she said, a sob breaking from her throat.

“He is,” Grace agreed, “but you have to let Mercy tend to him. There are things that must be done to ensure his health.”

Taking the baby in her arms, Mercy smiled down at her nephew. “What are you going to call him?”

“Edward, after Uncle Edward,” Hope murmured. “And Flanagan for our maiden name. Edward Flanagan Kenner.”

Mercy nodded. “Hello, Edward.” She frowned. “That seems like much too formal a name for a baby. I’m going to call him Eddie.”

“Lance will like that. He has a good friend named Eddie.”

The baby began to calm. He looked up at Mercy with eyes the color of sapphires—eyes like his mother’s. “Come, Eddie, let’s clean you up.”

“Uncle Edward will be touched you chose to call him that,” Grace said.

“Well, we named the first one Sean Howard after both our fathers, so I thought it only right. Uncle Edward did so much to help us after we came to Oregon City,” Hope replied.

Mercy nodded and began to wash the baby. “Indeed he did.” Eddie didn’t care for the procedure at all and began to kick up a storm. “Gracious, I think he’s going to have your temperament, Hope.” She glanced over her shoulder with a smile, then turned her attention back to the infant. “I will soon be done, Master Kenner, and then you will feel so cozy with warm clothes and a blanket.”

Mercy continued her tender care, using generous portions of vinegar water, as she had done with other newborns. Her mother and grandmother had been firm believers in the multiple curative powers of vinegar, and it was something they had handed down to their daughters.

Once she had Eddie properly bathed, Mercy put an herbal salve on the stub of umbilical cord, then secured a band around it. After this she diapered and dressed him.

“There you are, little man,” she said, lifting him carefully. She wrapped a blanket around him, lest the damp autumn air cause him to catch a chill. The baby calmed and looked up at her, his blue eyes open fully. “You really are quite handsome.” She took him to Hope and lowered him into his mother’s arms. “He’s finally ready to be with you.”

“And I’m finished as well,” Grace declared. “So you may invite Lance to come meet his new son.” She rose and began collecting the bloody towels and afterbirth pan.

Mercy smiled. She loved bringing in the father almost as much as caring for the newborns. She left her sisters and went downstairs to find Lance. It wasn’t hard to locate him. He sat with Sean on the floor of the living room, playing with wooden blocks. At the sight of Mercy, however, he jumped to his feet.

“Is she all right? Is the baby all right?”

“They’re both fine.” Mercy gave his arm a pat. “You may go see her now, and your new son.”

Lance grinned. “Another boy?” He looked down at little Sean, who was doing his best to stack one block atop three others. “You hear that, Sean? You have a baby brother.”

“Brudder,” Sean repeated, but his mind was clearly on his task.

“Go on now. I’ll stay with Sean.” Mercy didn’t have to tell him twice. Lance all but ran from the room. No doubt he’d take the stairs two at a time.

She knelt down beside the handsome little boy and brushed back his brown curls. “Would you like to eat?” Her own stomach felt empty, and she knew it was well past lunchtime.

Sean abandoned his blocks and threw himself into Mercy’s arms. “Eat now, please.”

She laughed and got to her feet, shifting Sean to her hip. “Well, since you are so polite, I think we can arrange that. Let’s see what your mama has in the kitchen.”

Lance and Hope had continued to live on the Armistead Farm, as it was called. The house and outbuildings surrounding it belonged to Grace and Alex, but both were keen to keep their family close. After marrying, Hope and Lance had taken up residence in the small log house where they had all lived before Grace and Alex built their larger farmhouse. Mercy had always been grateful that Alex cared for her and Hope as if they were his own sisters. It had saved both of them from having to seek out husbands before they were ready. Far too often Mercy had seen her friends marry young, and not always happily. Her former best friend, Beth Cranston, had married the preacher’s son, Toby Masterson, at the tender age of fifteen. This had happened after Mercy refused him. Toby had begged Mercy to marry him so that he could claim additional acreage in the Donation Land Claim Act. Mercy had turned him down, and in that one move, lost her two dearest friends. It hadn’t been easy to bear.

“But that was five years ago,” she reminded herself.

Sean grabbed her dress collar and began pulling it toward his mouth. Mercy laughed and pried it away from him. “Dresses aren’t for eating, Sean.”

Balancing him on her hip, Mercy found the bread and butter. There would no doubt be jam as well. The sisters had canned over two hundred pints of apple, berry, and pear jams and jellies that summer. Opening the cupboard, she found an open jar of apple jam.

“Here we go. This ought to be good for a start.” She put the food on the table and went back to retrieve a knife.

“I want some bread,” Sean declared.

“I know you do.” Mercy settled herself at the table with Sean on her lap. “That’s why I’m making this piece just for you.” She paused to give him a quick peck on the cheek, then went back to her task.

Once the bread was properly slathered in butter and jam, Mercy cut it into quarters and handed one to Sean.

“What do you say?”

“Fank you.”

She chuckled. “Close enough.”

Sean quickly devoured his piece of bread and held his hand out for more. “Pease.”

“With a sweet face like yours, how can I refuse?” Mercy handed him another quarter.

“Where is everybody?” Alex called from the front of the house.

“Sean and I are in the kitchen, having some bread and jam.” Mercy heard the patter of feet running across the room and knew she’d soon have two more mouths to feed.

“Mercy!” nearly five-year-old Gabe declared. He barreled into her and wrapped his arms around her. Luckily it wasn’t the side on which she held Sean. Even so, the younger boy wasn’t happy at having his eating interrupted and gave Gabe a sticky-fingered push.

“Go away!” he commanded.

Gabe raised his head and stuck out his tongue. Sean countered by imitating his cousin. Mercy shook her head while Alex laughed.

“Do you see those naughty boys, Nancy?” he asked his daughter.

The beautiful little girl shook her head, making her long dark hair sway against her back. “No.”

This only made Alex laugh harder. “She likes saying *no*. I remember when Gabe went through that for a time.”

Mercy laughed. “I imagine all children do. Is it all right if I give them some bread and jam?”

“Of course.” Alex put Nancy on one of the chairs while Gabe climbed up on his own. “So do we have a new arrival finally?”

“Yes. Another boy. They’ve named him after Uncle Edward, but I’m calling him Eddie. Edward sounds far too stuffy.” She fixed two more pieces of bread and cut them in fours as she had with Sean’s.

“That ought to please Edward and Lance.” Alex helped Nancy with her bread while Gabe stuffed an entire quarter into his mouth at once.

Seeing this, Sean tried to follow suit, but Mercy was ready for him. “No, you don’t. Gabe’s mouth is bigger than yours. Stop trying to copy him.”

“As for you,” Alex said, fixing Gabe with a disapproving look, “no more stuffing big pieces of food in your mouth. Be a gentleman. Take a bite and swallow before you take another.”

“Can I chew it?” Gabe asked quite seriously.

Mercy put her hand to her mouth to contain her laughter while Alex rolled his eyes. “Of course you can. I want you to chew it before you swallow it.”

Gabe smiled and went back to his bread. From his smug expression, Mercy wasn’t entirely sure the question had been innocent.

“I didn’t know you were here,” Grace said, coming into the kitchen.

Alex turned from the table and pulled her into his arms. “How are you two doing?” He put his hand to her slightly rounded abdomen.

“We’re very tired. I need a hot bath and a nap.”

“We could all use a nap,” Alex said, kissing her forehead. “These hooligans have been up since five.”

“Good thing it’s a Sunday. We may have missed services, but we won’t miss an afternoon of rest.” Grace yawned.

“I apologize for not giving them something more appropriate to eat.” Mercy got to her feet and placed Sean on the chair so he could finish eating.

“It’s not a problem,” Grace said. “I have stew at home for all of us. It only needs to be heated.”

“I’ve already put it on the stove,” Alex interjected. “I figured as long as it was taking to deliver this baby, you’d need some sustenance.”

Grace smiled. “That was very thoughtful.” She turned to Mercy. “Why don’t you bring Sean, and we’ll all eat at our house?”

“That sounds good. I’m hoping for a nap myself.”

Grace nodded. “Alex, would you mind going upstairs and letting Lance and Hope know that Sean is with us? Oh, and tell Lance I’ll fix them a tray if he wants to come get it.”

Alex placed another kiss on her forehead as Grace yawned again. “I just hope you can stay awake long enough to eat.” He started to go upstairs, then paused. “I nearly forgot.” He pulled a letter out of his coat pocket. “Jed Drury brought this letter. Said he picked it up on Friday with his own mail and thought to bring it over, but then forgot until today. When he saw we weren’t at church, he decided to stop by the farm on his way home.”

“Who’s it from?” Grace asked, taking the missive in hand. “Oh, it’s from Eletta. I’m so glad. I haven’t heard from her in so long. I was beginning to worry.” She ripped open the letter then began to read. “Oh my! She’s expecting a baby! Isaac must be beyond joyful.” She continued to read and began to frown.

“What’s wrong?” Mercy asked.

“She’s been very ill. Her condition doesn’t agree with her, and she’s been unable to keep food down. She thought it would

pass after the first few months, but she's still suffering and only able to eat or drink a tiny bit."

"When is the baby due?" Alex asked.

"The same month as ours—March." She read aloud, "*I know that you and Hope are both busy with your own children, but I wonder if Mercy might come and help me. I know you will worry because of the Rogue River troubles, but I assure you our people in the immediate area are not up in arms.*"

Mercy knew that the Rogue River Indians were at war with the whites. Having lived through captivity at the Whitman Mission in November of '47, she was apprehensive about putting herself in harm's way again. The Whitman Massacre had resulted in most of the men being murdered and over fifty women and children being held hostage for a month. Mercy and Hope had been among their number. The women had been treated abominably by the Cayuse Indian men. Hope had managed to protect Mercy from being molested. Mercy had been twelve years old, and other girls that age had been abused, but given her petite stature, Mercy looked much younger and was thus saved from harm. At least for the most part.

She still had to live through the nightmare of having people she cared about cut down and violently murdered. She lived through the wailing and sorrow of the women and children who were held captive alongside her. She had come through the entire affair scarred, but not defeated. Her mainstays had been Hope and God. She had studied the Bible and prayed so much during that time that her spiritual life had grown by leaps and bounds.

"*. . . and as I said, the fault is mostly on the part of the white men.*"

Mercy realized she'd missed part of the letter. "I'm afraid I wasn't paying attention. What is the fault of the white men?"

Grace looked up from the letter. "Eletta says there have been

many attacks along the Rogue River. Some of the worst were far inland, over the mountains from where they live. She said that the militia has adopted a plan of extermination. They intend to kill every Indian who puts up any kind of fight.”

“I don’t understand. A fight about what?”

“About being removed from the region and sent to live on a reserved area of land elsewhere. The government apparently is rounding up the various tribes and forcing them to relocate to a place southwest of here along the coast.”

“What else does she say?” Mercy motioned to the letter. “Go ahead and read. I’m paying attention.”

Grace nodded. “*There is a terrible spirit of hatred here for the Indian people, but I wouldn’t ask Mercy to come if I feared her to be in danger. Being white, she won’t be harmed by those who are bent on murder. The native people are mostly taking to the hills and mountains and doing their best to avoid being captured or killed. Our people here at the mission have been peaceful throughout the time we’ve been here, so the government has not worried themselves yet with their removal. However, sadly, I know that this will be the order of things. If Mercy can come, please try to arrange for her to be in Port Orford by the first of November. Isaac has plans to be there at that time, and he can bring her back to our mission. He will be there for a week, and if she doesn’t come in that time, then we will know she was unable to join us.*”

“That’s all she has to say,” Grace said, lowering the letter, “besides a few words about their mission work.” She looked at Mercy. “I can’t possibly ask you to do this, and frankly I’m surprised that Eletta would. She knows what you went through. All I can figure is that she must be very sick.”

Even with the memory of the massacre in the back of her mind, Mercy felt a strange peace about the matter. She had been fervently fasting and praying that God would show her

what she was supposed to do with her life. She felt certain this was His calling.

“I don’t think it sounds wise to put Mercy in the middle of a war,” Alex said, looking grim.

“Nor do I.” Grace fixed her with a look. “I don’t want you to go. That’s very far away, and I would be frantic with worry.”

“I want more bread and jam, please,” Gabe requested.

Mercy didn’t look away from her sister’s gaze. “I’m going to pray about it.”

“Do you seriously think God would want you to go?” Alex asked. He went to where Nancy was teetering on the edge of her chair and helped her down.

“As you both know, I’ve been praying night and day for God’s direction for my life. I admit this wouldn’t be my first choice, but I also feel strangely drawn—perhaps called—to this purpose.”

“But the dangers are clearly there,” Grace countered. “You know very well how violent it can be.”

Mercy nodded. “I do.” She heaved a sigh. “But if God is calling me to go, then I can hardly worry about that. We both know that faith isn’t faith unless it’s tested. In spite of what happened at the Whitman Mission, I don’t hold the Indians any grudge. God calls us to forgiveness. You’ve said as much to me on more than one occasion.”

“Yes, but . . .” Grace fell silent and looked up at Alex.

“I think Mercy’s right. We need to pray about it.” He sounded less than convinced. “I’ll go let Lance know about lunch and meet you at the house.” He headed out of the kitchen with a frown on his face.

Mercy helped Sean from his chair. She took his hand and then held out her free hand to Nancy. “Come on. I’ll walk with you back to the house, but you have to help me by holding my hand.”

The children were happy to comply, and even Gabe followed

her. “It’s too bad God only gave us two hands,” he told her. “If we had three, then you could hold my hand too.”

Mercy laughed. “Well, at the rate of nieces and nephews being born in this family, I would need at least half a dozen hands, and that would just be silly.”

“Spiders got eight legs,” Gabe offered. “Papa showed me that.”

Mercy paused as she reached Grace, who stood frowning. “Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself.” She quoted Matthew six, verse thirty-four, as Grace had often done.

Grace’s frown only deepened. “As I recall, there’s more to that passage.”

Mercy nodded and gave a sigh. “Yes. ‘Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.’”