

# WHAT COMES MY WAY



TRACIE  
PETERSON

# WHAT COMES MY WAY



TRACIE  
PETERSON



BETHANYHOUSE

*a division of Baker Publishing Group*  
Minneapolis, Minnesota

© 2019 by Peterson Ink, Inc.

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

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—for example, electronic, photocopy, recording—without the prior written permission of the publisher. The only exception is brief quotations in printed reviews.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Peterson, Tracie, author.

Title: What comes my way / Tracie Peterson.

Description: Bloomington, Minnesota : Bethany House, a division of Baker  
Publishing Group, [2019] | Series: Brookstone brides ; 3

Identifiers: LCCN 2019019801 | ISBN 9780764219047 (trade paper) | ISBN  
9780764233395 (cloth) | ISBN 9780764233494 (large print) | ISBN  
9781493420445 (e-book)

Subjects: | GSAFD: Christian fiction. | Love stories.

Classification: LCC PS3566.E7717 W46 2019 | DDC 813/.54—dc23

LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2019019801>

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

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, incidents, and dialogues are products of the author's imagination and are not to be construed as real. Any resemblance to actual events or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

Cover design by Jennifer Parker

Cover photography by Mike Habermann Photography, LLC

19 20 21 22 23 24 25      7 6 5 4 3 2 1



Come one, come all to the Brookstone Wild West Extravaganza—the only wild west show to give you all-female performers of extraordinary bravery and beauty! Women whose talent and proficiency will amaze and delight people of every age!



# ONE

**MARCH 1902**

**LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA**

“Robert! What in the world are you doing here?” Ella Fleming asked, stepping back from her hotel room door as she tightened the belt on her dressing gown.

“Looking for you,” her brother replied. “I went to the train station and found the Brookstone cars, but they said you were all staying at this hotel.”

Ella laughed and swept her arm toward the room. “Isn’t it wonderful? It was a surprise treat from Henry Adler. He has all sorts of meetings here in Los Angeles and wanted us to stay in comfort and style. Plus, I think he wanted to be able to hold meetings in his room. Please come in.”

Stepping back, Ella waited for Robert to enter, but he hesitated. Turning to his left, he motioned to someone. Ella watched as a heavily veiled woman in black bombazine entered the room ahead of Robert. The woman was petite and clad in black from head to toe. She was obviously in deep mourning. Even her gloves were black.

Ella tried to hide her shock, but as soon as Robert closed her suite door, he hurried to explain.

“I know you’ll find this quite the surprise.” He reached out to pull back the woman’s veil.

Ella’s eyes widened as her former maid’s face was revealed. “Mara?”

The black woman nodded, her brown eyes wide. “It’s me, Miss Ella.”

Ella embraced her friend. “I can hardly believe this. I’ve missed you so much.” She looked over Mara’s shoulder at Robert. “To what do I owe this pleasure?”

“It may be pleasure to you, but it’s been a grave matter for Mara. Sit down and I’ll explain.” Robert motioned toward the sitting area of Ella’s suite.

She sat on the settee and waited for Mara to join her. “Tell me everything.”

Robert pulled a cushioned wingback chair closer. “I’m not sure where to begin. Father approached me two weeks ago. He’s deeply troubled about something. Personally, I’ve heard rumors, and I think Jefferson Spiby is forcing Father to do things he doesn’t want to do. That’s why Mara is here.”

Ella looked at her former maid and dear friend while Robert continued.

“You see, Jefferson has been insisting that Father let Mara work for him. Mara has no desire to do so, but that hasn’t stopped Jefferson from pressing for it. Father came to me and told me he feels helpless to fight Jefferson. Apparently Jefferson holds something over our father, and he’s had to yield to Spiby’s will more and more. Now, I know this topic isn’t for the gentler sex, but you must know the truth of it. Jefferson wants Mara for his mistress.”

A gasp escaped Ella’s lips. “He’s a monster. How can he even live with himself?”

Mara looked at the carpet as if she bore some guilt in Jefferson’s shameful behavior.

“Because he’s evil,” Robert declared. “The things I’ve heard about him are . . . well, I would never repeat them. Father asked me to figure out a way to keep Mara from his grasp, and this is what came to mind. Do you suppose Mara could go on tour with you—perhaps be your personal maid?”

“Of course. I’m sure I can get the others to agree. I’ll talk to Lizzy right away. She’s coming to get me in an hour. We’re going to tea with some people who would like to photograph us for a book.”

“I thought Miss Brookstone married and gave up performing,” Robert said, shaking his head. “What made her change her mind?”

“She didn’t. I mean, well . . . it’s a long story. Lizzy did marry. She’s Mrs. Wesley DeShazer now. She’s not performing, but her uncle was quite ill last year, and she’s hoping to keep him in better shape. Lizzy’s mother begged her to come on the tour for one more year and keep an eye on him. She and Wes both came as a favor to Rebecca Brookstone.”

“I see. Do you think she’ll accept Mara’s being here?”

“I have no reason to think she’ll refuse her. Lizzy is all too familiar with Jefferson’s cruelty and my own fear of him.”

Jefferson, Ella’s former fiancé, had once appeared at the Brookstone ranch with her father to try to force Ella to return to their Kentucky home. And then there was the other matter. Ella had heard Jefferson confess to being responsible for the death of the Brookstone Extravaganza’s former wrangler August Reichert. His sister Mary, the show’s sharpshooter, was still trying to seek justice for her brother. Unfortunately, Jefferson was much too powerful, and the authorities in Kentucky refused to prosecute him.

“Then, I’ll leave Mara in your care,” Robert said. “Her bags are downstairs. I’ll have a bellboy bring them up. It worked out

well to bring Mara here, as I was planning to come anyway to deliver some horses. I'll be in San Francisco in two days, and I understand the show will be there as well."

"Yes. We have three performances there. Saturday and Sunday evening and a matinee on Sunday."

Robert nodded. "Good. I'll catch up with you there and make sure it was acceptable for Mara to stay on. For now, however, I have to hurry, or I'll be late to my meeting."

He got up, and Ella and Mara rose as well.

"Thank you, Mr. Robert, for savin' me," Mara said in a hushed voice.

"It was my pleasure, Mara." He turned to Ella and hugged her close. "I don't know what all is going on, but as you mentioned, there is a terrible secret at Fleming Farm. A secret big enough to implicate the entire county and its officials. I intend to get to the bottom of it, and I believe Father holds many of the answers. Given his current state of mind and obvious distress, I think perhaps he'll be more inclined to confide in me."

Ella pulled back. "I hope so, but I hope too that you won't put yourself in any danger. Your family needs you, and so do I."

Robert smiled. "Never fear. I'll be on the lookout for trouble."

And then he was gone as quickly as he'd come.

Ella turned to Mara and shook her head. "I never expected to see you—not in a million years."

"I's mighty glad to be here."

Ella smiled and gave the black woman another hug. "I've missed you so much. You've always been my dearest friend and confidante, and now I have you back. This life on the road is sometimes wearying, but I think you'll enjoy seeing so many things and places. It's amazing when you think of all the miles we cover."

"I's just thankful to be safe. There wasn't gonna be no safety for me back at the farm."

Ella frowned. "Why do you say that? Father surely would never have let Jefferson take you."

"Your father couldn't stop that man. He had his way with me more times than I care to remember."

"What?" Ella knew her expression bore her disgust. "Jefferson . . . he forced himself on you?"

Mara looked away and nodded. "I's ashamed to say so, but it's true."

"Did you tell my father?"

"No. A black woman speakin' out against a white man?" She shook her head. "Nobody in that county would be listenin' to anything I had to say. 'Specially with Mr. Spiby involved."

"Oh, Mara, I'm so sorry."

Again, Ella hugged her friend. They had been in each other's company since Mara's mother had wet-nursed Ella as a baby. They'd grown up together, and even though Mara was older, she and Ella had been the best of friends. How it hurt to imagine her friend suffering at the hands of that evil man.

Ella started at a knock on the suite door. She pushed Mara toward the bedroom. "Go. Hide."

Once Mara was out of sight, Ella went to the door. "Who is it?"

"Bellman. I've brought the lady's bags."

"Just a moment."

Ella went to get a dime from her purse and drew out her small pistol as well. She hid the gun in the folds of her skirt and went to open the door. A uniformed bellman stood on the other side with two small bags.

"Set them just inside," Ella instructed.

He left the bags and quickly went to the exit. He turned at the door. "If you need anything else . . ."

Ella extended the coin. "Thank you."

“No, that’s quite all right, ma’am. The gentleman already paid me.” He tipped his cap and disappeared down the hall.

Ella closed and locked the door behind her. She let out a long breath and replaced her gun in her purse. “It’s all right. You can come out now.”

Mara had completely shed the mourning hat and veil as well as the black gloves she’d worn. With everything she’d had on, no one could have known her skin was dark.

“There’s plenty of room in this suite, although just one bed.” Ella chuckled. “It won’t be the first time we’ve shared a bed. I remember all those times when we were afraid of a storm, or a cold snap made us seek each other for warmth.”

“Mama said she always knew where I’d be if I wasn’t in my cot,” Mara said, grinning.

Ella had grown up with all the extravagance a wealthy Southern horse breeder could offer his daughter. As a child, Mara had been her constant companion, and she had continued working for the Flemings as an adult. Ella had no idea what she’d been paid, but hopefully she could make as much or more working for the Brookstones.

“We need a plan,” Ella said, tapping her finger against her chin. “I’m going to ask Lizzy to give you a job. How much was Father paying you?”

Mara looked confused. “Paying me?”

“Money. How much money did you make working for my father?”

“Room and board was my pay. Some clothes too.”

Ella frowned. “You weren’t paid a wage?”

The black woman shook her head. “We had regular duties and hours, and the pay was our keep.”

“Well, that hardly seems fair, but I suppose if you had to pay rent and buy food, clothes, and other supplies, it would have all

figured out the same.” She went to the dressing table and began to run a brush through her long blond hair. “I need to finish getting ready. When Lizzy shows up, I’ll explain everything to her and see about getting you a paying job.”

Mara came to where Ella sat and took the brush from her hands. “Sure good to see you again, Miss Ella.”

“Just Ella. Friends don’t call each other by titles.” Ella looked up and smiled. “I have missed you.”

“Missed you too.”

Mara dressed Ella’s hair as she had so often done over the years. When she finished pinning curls into place, Mara gave Ella the hand mirror. Ella cocked her head first one way and then another and nodded.

“It’s perfect. Much better than I could have done for myself.” She got up and undid the buttons of the dressing gown. “I’ll just finish getting ready. Why don’t you relax in the sitting room? There’s some fresh fruit in a bowl if you’re hungry.”

“Mr. Robert done fed me. Had them bring breakfast to my room so nobody could see me.” Mara’s voice took on a sort of awe. “I had me a right fine room too. Not near as beautiful as this here one, but pert near. Never seen nothin’ like it. White folks surely know how to live.”

Ella nodded and stepped behind the dressing screen. “I’m glad Robert treated you well. I don’t understand what is going on at the farm, but I’m glad Robert is on our side.”

“Me too. Folks ain’t doin’ so well, and there’s trouble brewin’,” Mara countered.

Ella frowned and pulled on her powder blue skirt. She smoothed it down over her undergarments, then reached for her blouse. “We’ve known that something bad was going on there for a long time now. That’s why I left. I wasn’t about to be married off to Jefferson in some prearranged barter, sold

off to the man who could do the family the most good. It's ridiculous in the 1900s that a girl should even have to concern herself with such things."

She stepped out from behind the screen, still buttoning her blouse. "I could never bear the idea of slavery in any form. I remember your mama talking about the horrible days when slaves were whipped merely for daring to speak back to their masters."

Mara bit her lip. She looked for all the world as if she'd like to reply to Ella's comment but couldn't.

Ella shook her head. "You know you can say whatever you like. I've never wanted there to be any secrets between us."

"There's some things what's not good to speak of. I think we be better off to just drop the matter." Mara helped Ella tuck in her blouse and secure her skirt.

"You don't have to wait on me, Mara."

"I like helpin' you. You've always been good to me."

"We're friends, first and foremost. Do you understand?" Ella reached out to still Mara's hands. "I don't ever want you to think otherwise."

"I know that. But I got to earn my keep, and maybe Mr. Brookstone will be wantin' me to be your maid." Mara gave her a smile. "A job with you beats out a whole lot of other things I can think of."

"Well, I can understand that. I've had a few jobs these last months that I'd rather not have done."

She thought of the days when Jason Adler was helping run the show. As the son of Henry Adler, he felt it important to give his father as big of a profit as possible. Henry Adler's investment was what had kept the show going, as Ella understood it. Still, when she was required to clean up after her own horse, Ella thought Jason had gone too far. Of course, he was gone now. Disappeared into thin air after trying to force Lizzy to run off with him.

Ella sighed. "We can discuss all of this later. I just want you to remember that we're friends. I'll keep your secrets, just as you've kept mine. Feel free to talk about whatever is troubling you, whenever you like." She went to where she'd hung her matching peplum jacket. The powder blue coat was trimmed in darker blue cording and silver buttons. It was one of her favorite outfits.

"Well, as your friend, I want to help. What can I do?" Mara asked, looking around the room.

"Very well. There's a dark blue hat with light blue feathers in a hat box in the bathroom. Would you get it for me while I find my gloves? I thought I left them on the dressing table, but now they're not there."

She searched for the gloves and finally located them on the pillow of her unmade bed. "Oh, I remember now. I had to mend one of them," she said, holding them up.

"You want me to help you with the hat?" Mara asked, holding up the large creation.

Ella giggled. "It's almost big enough for the both of us, isn't it?"

Mara smiled and nodded. "Yes'm, sure is. I ain't never seen a bonnet this big."

"That's part of the reason I bought it. I think it's magnificent. And it matches perfectly with this suit." Ella sat down at the dressing table. "We'll tilt it just to the right and let the brim ride up on the left. I like it best that way, and it really brings color to my eyes."

"Your eyes already blue enough," Mara said, helping place the hat as Ella suggested.

"That's perfect," Ella declared, reaching for two long hat pins. "Now I'll fix it in place and be off. I know Lizzy will be wondering why I'm making her wait. I think, however, she's going to be so excited to know you've joined us."

“Will I have to keep hiding behind that veil?” Mara asked.

Ella grew thoughtful. “I don’t know. Let me talk to Lizzy and Mary. They always have the best counsel. Maybe once Lizzy knows, we can talk to her uncle Oliver. He runs the show along with an Englishman named Henry Adler. Oliver is a very nice man, and there are always dozens of jobs to do on the show. I’m sure someone as talented as you will be useful.”

“I sure hope so.” Mara frowned and shook her head. “I can’t be goin’ back to Fleming Farm.”

Ella nodded. “I’m afraid that’s true for us both.”



“And then they removed the veil, and lo and behold, it was Mara,” Ella told Lizzy and Mary over tea at the hotel after their meeting with the photographers.

Lizzy shook her head. “Mara from the farm? Your maid?”

“Yes, exactly.” Ella sipped from a china cup.

“What in the world was your brother doing with her?” Mary asked.

Ella continued her story while Lizzy glanced across the room to where Wes and Chris were deep in conversation with Uncle Oliver. Los Angeles didn’t sit well with Wes, especially after the photographers had revealed their true desires to hire some of the stunt riders away from the show. They even wanted Lizzy to perform for them, reminding her and the others that she was the top trick rider in the country. Wes had immediately pointed out that she was retired. He didn’t want Lizzy performing at all—not for any reason—and the fact that Uncle Oliver had suggested that perhaps they could revisit the issue after the show’s current season only put Wes in a fouler mood.

Lizzy actually felt sorry for him rather than angry. He had only agreed to come on tour for another year because Lizzy’s mother

had begged him. Even Lizzy wasn't that excited to go. Her heart was on the ranch in Montana—the ranch her grandfather, father, and uncle had built together. She hadn't realized just how important that place was to her until her father had died while on tour with the show. After that, the wild west show had lost its appeal for Lizzy. Not only that, but she'd also suffered a lot the year before and had hoped to put it all behind her.

Yet here she was again, facing the grueling schedule and constant work. Well, it wasn't quite the same—she wasn't performing this time around. Wes had put his foot down about that. Now that they were married, he didn't want her risking her life trick riding. A part of her wanted to protest, but she was getting older, and the performances took a lot out of her. Besides, she and Wes hoped to have a family soon, and she didn't want to risk any unborn child just to get a few cheers from an arena full of strangers.

Still . . . she missed the unity she felt with her horses. She missed the challenge. And she really did miss the applause.

“Lizzy, I don't think you're even listening to me,” Ella protested.

A sigh escaped Lizzy. “I'm so sorry. I'm afraid my mind has been on so many things. We've barely started this tour and already there are problems to deal with. And of course the people we met today mostly lied about their intent.”

“Mostly?” Mary, the show's star sharpshooter, said with a raised brow. “They completely lied about what they wanted. They wanted to create an entertainment in the city that features trick riding every night. Given the outrageous amounts of money they're offering, I'm afraid one or two of the girls will be enticed to stay behind.”

“You don't really think they'd leave Brookstone's, do you?” Ella asked. “I know I never would. This has become my family.”

“As I recall, it was Lizzy they wanted most,” Mary said with a shrug. “I thought Wes would pop a vein.”

Lizzy thought of her husband’s dismay. “I did too. But I told them no and so did Uncle Oliver. But they offered a lot more than the show can pay. Not to mention the other benefits like a place to live and a personal assistant. Goodness, there are times I wish I had a personal assistant.”

“The girls who would consider leaving must not understand the delicate balance of the show,” Ella said, shaking her head. “We have a very specific act planned out. Maybe we should talk to them and explain.”

“That was my thought exactly,” Mary said, reaching for a small sandwich. “I think we should remind them of the contract they signed and how important it is that they keep their word. Like your daddy always said, ‘The show must go on.’”

Lizzy was glad they felt just as she did on the matter. “In the meantime, we will of course hire Mara on to help. I have enough authority to see to that. She can work in the laundry and sewing room. I’m sure our new head seamstress can use an extra hand. She seems a bit . . . overwhelmed.”

“You don’t like Amanda much, do you?” Mary asked.

Lizzy hadn’t meant to be so obvious. Frankly the seamstress was much too familiar with Uncle Oliver. Not only that, but she always seemed to find ways to get out of her work. “I don’t know her well enough to like or dislike her. She’s definitely no Agnes.”

At the reference to their former seamstress, who had retired after last year’s tour, the other two nodded.

“Nobody is as good as Agnes,” Mary declared. “I was more than sorry to hear of Brigitte’s illness. Especially after all that time Agnes put into training her. It’s a shame she wasn’t able to join the tour this year.”

“Well, she’ll always have a place with the show if she wants

one. Meanwhile, I'm waiting to see if Miss Moore proves herself," Lizzy said in a curt manner to stress that the topic wasn't open for discussion.

Wes was making his way over to the table.

"I see the boys are finished with their conversation. Why don't we adjourn to your room, Ella?" Lizzy suggested. "Then I can talk to Mara about the days to come. I'm sure we can keep her busy and safe."