

GRACE  
and the  
PREACHER

Kim Vogel  
A NOVEL  
Sawyer

Praise for  
*Kim Vogel Sawyer*

“Kim Vogel Sawyer paints characters with exquisite detail emotionally and physically, then sets them in a story that transports the reader into a world equally as appealing as the people who live there. A captivating read, leaving you wanting more.”

—LAURINE SNELLING, author of *To Everything a Season*,  
*Wake the Dawn*, and *Heaven Sent Rain*

“The Great Depression was an era that required much grit and a great will to survive. Kim Vogel Sawyer has captured that spirit with characters full of determination, rich in heart, and strong in a sense of compassion. *Room for Hope* is not merely a nice novel or a touching story. It is a story of our heritage, a story of what it takes to live a life of mercy and love for the least of these. It is a story of reliance on God during the darkest of days. It is a look into our past to see that, truly, we are not all that different from our grandparents. It is our story.”

—SUSIE FINKBEINER, author of *A Cup of Dust: A Novel of the  
Dust Bowl*

“*When Mercy Rains* is a beautiful testimony to the power of forgiveness. With three generations of characters to fall in love with, Kim Vogel Sawyer’s new novel kept me turning pages—and discovering surprises—to the very end. I especially enjoyed the Kansas setting and the restoration of a homestead that was a beautiful reflection of the restoration of hearts and minds.”

—Deborah Raney, author of *The Face of the Earth* and the  
Chicory Inn Novels series

“A compelling cast of authentic characters, heart-wrenching mistakes and responses, and love, redemption, and restoration make *When Mercy Rains* by Kim Vogel Sawyer a must-read masterpiece.”

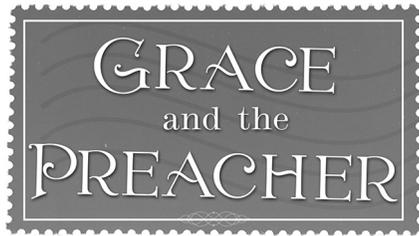
—MONA HODGSON, author of The Sinclair Sisters of Cripple  
Creek series, *The Quilted Heart* omnibus, and *Prairie Song*

“Quite simply, I loved this story from page one until the end. Kim has created a story that lovingly depicts the people, land, and culture of Appalachia. *Guide Me Home* is a tale of love and hope and faith that will hold your heart long after you reach the end.”

—LAURIE ALICE EAKES, author of *The Mountain Midwife*,  
2016 Rita Finalist

“Kim Vogel Sawyer’s historical novels always delve deep into the characters’ hearts. *Room for Hope* is a beautiful story with an unusual twist. Yes, I cried . . . A definite page-turner, this story kept my attention to the very end.”

—SUSAN PAGE DAVIS, author of *Captive Trail* and  
*The Outlaw Takes a Bride*



GRACE  
and the  
PREACHER

**BOOKS BY KIM VOGEL SAWYER**

*Echoes of Mercy*

*Just As I Am*

*The Grace That Leads Us Home*

*Guide Me Home*

*Room for Hope*

*Through the Deep Waters*

*What Once Was Lost*

*When Grace Sings*

*When Love Returns*

*When Mercy Rains*

GRACE  
and the  
PREACHER

Kim Vogel  
A NOVEL  
Sawyer



WATERBROOK

## GRACE AND THE PREACHER

All Scripture quotations are taken from the King James Version.

The characters and events in this book are fictional, and any resemblance to actual persons or events is coincidental.

Trade Paperback ISBN 978-0-307-73141-8

eBook ISBN 978-0-307-73142-5

Copyright © 2017 by Kim Vogel Sawyer

Cover design and photography by Kelly L. Howard

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying and recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher.

Published in the United States by WaterBrook, an imprint of the Crown Publishing Group, a division of Penguin Random House LLC, New York.

WATERBROOK® and its deer colophon are registered trademarks of Penguin Random House LLC.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Sawyer, Kim Vogel, author.

Title: Grace and the preacher : a novel / by Kim Vogel Sawyer.

Description: First Edition. | Colorado Springs, Colorado : WaterBrook, 2017.

Identifiers: LCCN 2016045564 (print) | LCCN 2016053437 (ebook) | ISBN 9780307731418 (paperback) | ISBN 9780307731425 (ebook) | ISBN 9780307731425 (electronic)

Subjects: | BISAC: FICTION / Christian / Historical. | FICTION / Christian / Romance. | FICTION / Romance / Historical. | GSAFD: Christian fiction. | Love stories.

Classification: LCC PS3619.A97 G73 2017 (print) | LCC PS3619.A97 (ebook) | DDC 813/.6—dc23

LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2016045564>

Printed in the United States of America

2017—First Edition

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

*For my cousins  
Larry, Gerald, Lyle, and Allen,  
who fortunately never asked me to rob a train.*

Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a  
new creature: old things are passed away;  
behold, all things are become new.

— 2 CORINTHIANS 5:17

*Cooperville, Missouri*  
*March 1882*

*Theophil Garrison*

Hey, Theo, didja hear the news?" Theophil Garrison paused with the pitchfork tines buried in the mound of hay and sent a sideways look at the barber's son. The skinny youth nicknamed Red nearly danced in place on the packed-dirt floor of the livery stable, and an eager grin split his pimply face. The news must be powerful exciting to get Red so wound up. Theo could use a little excitement.

Angling himself to face the boy, he held the pitchfork handle like a walking stick. "Don't reckon I did. What is it?"

"They're comin' home."

But not that much excitement. Chills attacked Theo from the inside out. Cotton filled his mouth. His muscles went quivery, and he lost his grip on the pitchfork. It fell against the stall wall, bounced, then slid onto the pile of straw. He unstuck his tongue from the roof of his mouth and barked a nervous laugh. "You're makin' up stories. My cousins got a twelve-year sentence for that attempted robbery. They've only been gone ten." He knew, because he'd served the same number of years laboring as hard as four men to atone for robbing his aunt and uncle of their sons.

"State shortened things up 'cause of their good behavior." The boy sniggered. "I guess it is kinda hard to believe."

Knowing Claight, Earl, and Wilton the way he did, it was impossible to believe.

“But it’s true. I swear it on my mama’s grave.”

Red’s mother wasn’t even dead. Theo scowled at the boy. “You’re foolin’ with me.”

“Am not! I was standin’ right next to my pa when Sappington came runnin’ across the street from the telegraph office an’ read the wire message to your uncle.”

“Mr. Sappington knows telegrams’re supposed to be private.”

Red shrugged. “He only read it ’cause your uncle told him to. You know ol’ man Boyd can’t read a word hisself.”

His neck felt stiff, his head heavy, but Theo managed a jerky nod. “Yeah. Yeah, I know.” Nobody in Theo’s family could read except him. He wouldn’t be able to, either, if Granny Iva hadn’t sent him off to school when he was young. Uncle Smithers called Theo a sissy if he even cracked the cover of a book. Of course, Uncle Smithers called Theo a sissy—and worse—for other reasons, too.

“So your uncle told Sappington to read the telegram out loud right there in the barber shop. Every fella in the place heard it.”

Which meant by evening every living soul in Cooperville would know that the Boyd brothers were on their way home from the state penitentiary. Theo gnawed his lip. Had the officials already let his cousins out? Jefferson City was a hundred miles away, but if the prison warden gave them train tickets to Springfield, they could cover that distance in half a day. Then an hour stage ride from Springfield, and—

“Think they’ve forgot how you let the law catch ’em, Theo?”

The last thing Claight said before the deputies took him, Earl, and Wilton away roared through Theo’s memory. *“Just wait ’til we get out, boy. You’ll pay for this. You’ll pay.”*

They hadn’t forgotten. Theo snatched up the pitchfork and jammed it into the straw. “Thanks for tellin’ me about my cousins, but I got work to do, Red. You get on outta here now.”

The boy smirked. “You might wanna get outta here, too.”

Theo ignored the taunt and continued forking clean hay into the stall. When all the stalls were fresh and ready, he headed to the attached corral to collect the horses. As he grabbed the cheek strap for a tall, speckled gelding, another memory attacked.

*“You got the easy part, Theophil.”* Earl never shortened up Theo’s name, and he had a way of making *Theophil* sound like a curse word. *“All you gotta do is sneak the horses from the livery an’ make sure they’re waitin’ under the trestle.”*

Theo might’ve been only fifteen, but he understood that “sneak” really meant “steal,” something Granny Iva had taught him was wrong. He said so, and Earl gave him a clop on the side of the head that made his ears ring. *“We gotta have horses to make our getaway after robbin’ that train, so you just bring ‘em, you hear me, Theophil?”*

Theo had heard, had even nodded in agreement, but he hadn’t done it. And his cousins paid for his deceit with ten years of their lives.

He released the gelding into the first stall with a pat on its neck and hurried back to the corral for another horse. Red’s parting comment—*“You might wanna get outta here, too”*—nipped in the back of Theo’s mind. Red was young, prone to talking without thinking, but this time his words had merit.

When the stagecoach rolled into town and Claight, Earl, and Wilton set foot on Cooperville’s Main Street, Theo intended to be far, far away.



## *Fairland, Kansas*

### *Grace Cristler*

Even before the murky cloud stirred by the stagecoach’s wheels and horses’ hooves on the dirt road had begun to settle, Grace Cristler stepped from the little stone-block post office and onto the boardwalk. With a lace handkerchief pressed over her nose and mouth, she blinked rapidly and made her way

through the billowing swirl of dust particles to the battered conveyance's side.

"Afternoon, Miss Cristler." The driver grinned down at her, his teeth a slash of yellowish-white against his overgrown beard and grime-smearred face. "Watchin' for me, were ya?"

She lowered the handkerchief. "Why, of course. Everyone in town anticipates your once-a-week delivery of the mail, Mr. Lunger." Every Friday at one o'clock, as dependable as Uncle Philemon's key-wound mantel clock, the man pulled the stagecoach to a stop outside the post office. She often wondered how he managed to keep such a precise schedule given the poor road conditions and ever-changing Kansas weather. But not once during the three years she'd served as the town's postmistress had he disappointed her with a late arrival.

Lunger chuckled. He reached beneath the bench seat and pulled out a worn leather pouch stamped with the name Fairland, Kansas, USA. "I don't reckon you come runnin', though, 'cause you're all excited about other folks' mail." The man had the audacity to wink. "You're hopin' for another letter."

Oh, such a brash thing to say! She frowned.

"When's your preacher due, Miss Cristler?"

*Her* preacher? She pursed her lips tight and gave him her sternest look.

He laughed. "Sometime next month, ain't it?"

Grace hoped the dust was still thick enough to hide the flush surely staining her face at the man's impudent comments. She loved the close-knit community that had been her home since she was very young, but did everyone—including the United States mail carrier!—have to be privy to her personal affairs?

"*My uncle* expects Reverend Dille by the end of April." She waved the handkerchief, pretending to swish dust but actually fanning her warm cheeks. "The *entire congregation* is very eager to make his acquaintance."

Mr. Lunger laughed, his thick beard bobbing against his bandanna. He yanked off his shabby hat and used it to slap his thigh twice, raising another

small cloud of dust. “All right, all right, I can take a hint. You ain’t already smitten with the new preacher.” He settled the hat back in place and winked again. “Least not more’n anyone else in town is. That make you feel better?”

“Let me empty this bag and replace the contents with our outgoing mail. Please wait.”

His laughter chased her back into the post office. Her fingers trembled as she made the transfer, and it took all of her self-control not to search through the stack of envelopes for one addressed to her from Reverend Rufus Dille of Bowling Green, Missouri.

With the bag in hand, she hurried out to the stagecoach. “Here you are, Mr. Lunger. Drive safely now. I’ll see you next week.”

Humor still twinkled in his eyes, but he kept his smirking lips closed and gave her a nod in reply. He brought the reins down on the horses’ rumps, and the beasts strained forward.

Grace hurried inside the building and snapped the door closed to avoid a second coating of dust for the day. She rounded the counter, her skirts swirling with her rapid strides, and reached for the pile of letters. Was there one from Reverend Dille? From . . . Rufus? Her heart pat-pattered just thinking of his given name. Of course there should be a letter. For the past twelve weeks, his missives had been as dependable as Mr. Lunger’s deliveries. She skimmed through the stack, seeking his bold, masculine script.

Mr. Lunger’s taunt about her running to retrieve her own personal mail raised a wave of guilt. Wasn’t she the town’s postmistress, voted to the position by ballot? If she put her own wants above theirs, she would disappoint and betray the people who’d appointed her. By three o’clock folks would start arriving, asking her to check their boxes. She had a beholden duty to put their mail where it could be found.

She stamped her foot against the floorboard. “I must do my job.” She picked up the entire stack, balanced it against her rib cage, and marched to the wood cubbies built behind the counter along the north wall. Midday sunshine streamed through the uncovered window and highlighted the face of each

envelope as she sorted through the stack. She flicked the envelopes into their boxes, so familiar with the routine she didn't even need to look at the numbers stamped on the little brass plates to ascertain the envelopes found their rightful locations.

She'd nearly reached the end of the stack when familiar handwriting leaped from the front of an envelope and sent her heart spinning in wild somersaults. Her hands stilled, and a smile pulled at her mouth. She drew several shallow breaths, a giggle of delight building in her throat. With slow, measured steps she moved to the counter and placed the envelope, faceup, in the middle of the darkly stained surface.

Keeping her gaze fixed on her name—Miss Grace Cristler—written in black ink on creamy paper, she forced her feet back to the cubbies, where she finished sorting the remainder of the postcards and letters, this time more slowly and with shaking hands.

Finally she slid the last envelope into its place, and she skipped to the counter and scooped the letter from Rufus against her thudding heart. The scent of spicy cloves, an aroma she'd come to associate with the man, rose from the crisp rectangle. She pulled in a slow, deep breath, savoring the essence, before she lowered the envelope, this time facedown, to the work surface once more and reached for the silver-plated opener stored in a little basket beneath the counter.

As she slipped the tip of the opener beneath the edge of the envelope flap, the post office door swung open and the town's milliner, Opal Perry, breezed into the building. Grace tossed the opener and envelope into the basket and aimed a smile at the older woman.

"Good afternoon, Mrs. Perry. Have you come for your mail?"

Mrs. Perry's gray eyebrows rose. "Can you think of some other reason for me to visit the post office?"

Women often visited the dressmaker's shop, the mercantile, and even the millinery shop to collect pieces of town gossip, but Grace never indulged in

such activity. She released a nervous laugh. "I suppose not. Let me check your box."

"I'm actually more interested in a package. From Chicago. I ordered several spools of silk ribbon, all in pastel hues."

"Then I'm sorry to disappoint you." Grace removed a picture postcard and two envelopes from the Perrys' cubby and gave them to the milliner. "Mr. Lunger didn't bring any packages at all this week."

Mrs. Perry made a sour face and tapped the mail against the wood countertop. "I was so hoping to place my Easter bonnets on the sale shelf this week."

Grace offered the woman a sympathetic look. "Maybe you can buy some ribbon here in town. Mr. Benton carries ribbon in the general merchandise store."

"He sells ribbon for men's ties."

"Isn't the ribbon silk, though?" Her uncle's ties were silk, and he'd purchased most of them from the merchant next door to the post office.

"Yes, the ribbon is silk, but it's meant for men's ties. It's black." She flipped her wrist in a dismissive gesture. "What woman wants black ribbon on an Easter bonnet? Or any spring bonnet, for that matter?" The milliner sniffed. "How am I to decorate my spring hats without pastel silk ribbons?"

Grace gave Mrs. Perry's wrinkled hand a pat. "Surely the ribbons will arrive next week. You'll have them in plenty of time to finish the bonnets for Easter."

"Well, you be certain to come in and pick out a pretty bonnet, dear." She flicked a look across the unadorned bodice of Grace's brown dress. "I also sell lovely collars, hand-tatted by my nieces from Boston. If you buy a bonnet, I'll let you choose a tatted collar free of charge. You'll want to wear something feminine and eye catching when your preacher takes the pulpit for the first time, won't you?"

Grace yanked her hand back. "Mrs. Perry . . ."

A sly smile curved the woman's lips. "Oh, come now, Miss Cristler. Don't

be coy with me. Your uncle told the congregation that the new preacher is young and single. He'll need a helpmate. Everyone knows you'd make the perfect preacher's wife, having been raised by a clergyman and serving as his assistant since his wife's passing during that dreadful flu epidemic. Is it three or four years now?"

"Five." Grace didn't rue a single year of assisting in her uncle's ministry, either. Her aunt and uncle had been so good, taking her in when her parents died. She owed them a debt of gratitude and service.

"Yes, five. And a true blessing you've been to your dear uncle. But to appeal to a younger man, you need a softer hairstyle." Mrs. Perry shook her head, clicking her tongue on her teeth. "Must you comb your lovely locks down so snugly?"

Grace smoothed her fingertips from her temple to the tightly wound bun at the nape of her neck. It took a great deal of effort to tame her thick, wavy hair into a bun, and she'd always been proud of her ability to fashion the style without the help of a mother or an aunt or a sister. Until now.

"The color of your hair, as rich red-brown as a maple leaf in fall, is so eye catching. With a softer hairstyle and a little rouge coloring your cheeks, you'd come close to being pretty."

Close? Grace's face heated.

"Not that pretty is necessary for a preacher's wife. Your dear aunt, rest her soul, was a plain woman. But to my way of thinking, ministers are men first and servants of the Lord second."

To Grace's way of thinking, Mrs. Perry had it backward, and she started to say so.

"So donning a less, er, austere frock and setting off your face with a ruffled bonnet all covered with flowers and lace would appeal to the man. Then, when you've captured his attention, you can let him see all the wonderful qualities that would make you a fine wife for a preacher."

Surely he already knew her qualities. By now he knew everything of importance about her, thanks to the weekly letters she'd written to him. If

Rufus's responses were any indication, he approved of her. But would he find her appearance displeasing when he set eyes on her for the first time?

The woman reached across the counter and delivered a pat on Grace's cheek. "You be sure to come see me next week after my shipment of ribbons has arrived. We'll find the perfect bonnet to help you capture your preacher's heart." She scooped up her letters and departed.

Grace sagged against the counter. Finally! Now maybe she could read her letter. She needed the assurance of his interest after listening to—

The door banged open again, and two youngsters raced in, clamoring for their pa's mail. For the next hour Grace assisted one towns person after another until more than a third of the cubbies were empty. The regulator clock on the wall chimed five, and Grace locked the door behind young Mrs. Morehead. The rest of the mail could wait until tomorrow when folks did their Saturday shopping. For now, she had her own mail to read.

CARRIE TURANSKY



SHINE  
*like the*  
DAWN

*a novel*

Praise for  
*Shine Like the Dawn*

“*Shine Like the Dawn* is a shining gem of a story. Turansky creates characters that are vibrant along with a sweet romance that elicits a satisfying sigh. Intrigue, secrets, and dangerous conflicts make the plot riveting until the very end.”

—JODY HEDLUND, author of *Luther and Katharina*,  
ECPA Book of the Year

“Reading a Carrie Turansky novel is the next best thing to taking a trip to England, with the added luxury of stepping back in time. *Shine Like the Dawn* is an Edwardian gem, layering rich spiritual truths with love, loss, secrets, and forgiveness, always showcasing God’s abundant restoration. This hope-infused story is as lovely as the cover!”

—LAURA FRANTZ, author of *A Moonbow Night*

“From the first compelling page to the last heart-lifting moment, *Shine Like the Dawn* drew me in, made me smile then cry—all while keeping me on the edge of my seat. Turansky’s latest English historical romance, rich in mystery and intrigue, brings to life warm and memorable characters nestled between a charming Edwardian village and its local grand estate. Uplifting and highly recommended.”

—CATHY GOHLKE, Christy-award winning author  
of *Secrets She Kept* and *Saving Amelie*

“With her trademark heart and attention to historical detail, Carrie Turansky paints a picture of loss, inner torment, and—ultimately—healing. Set against a backdrop of Edwardian England, *Shine Like the Dawn* is aptly named because it shows the illumination that floods the soul when forgiveness replaces bitterness and a hurting heart finds its way back to the Maker of Light. A moving, life-impacting, engrossing story.”

—KIM VOGEL SAWYER, best-selling author of *Guide Me Home*

“Enter a world of innovations, mysterious manor houses, sweet romances, and whispers of suspense, all wrapped within a novel that gives off Elizabeth Gaskell’s *North and South* vibes. In typical sweeping style, Carrie Turansky takes us on a journey to another time and place with added intrigue to keep us wondering to the very end—a story worth adding to your reading list.”

—PEPPER D. BASHAM, award-winning author  
of the Penned in Time series and *A Twist of Faith*

“In this charming novel—filled with mystery, surprise, romance, and courage—Carrie Turansky skillfully transports us to Edwardian England. Readers will root for our heroine as she faces the shocking loss which dominates her life and reaches toward a future filled with faith, hope, and perhaps . . . love. Captivating.”

—SANDRA BYRD, author of *A Lady in Disguise*

“With a vivid setting in beautiful but tumultuous Edwardian England, Carrie Turansky masterfully tells a tale of family, love, trust, and betrayal. A charming story for every lover of historical romance!”

—ROSEANNA M. WHITE, best-selling author  
of the Ladies of the Manor series

“Lovers of English drama set during any era will certainly enjoy Carrie Turansky’s latest novel! With a mix of themes from both *Downton Abbey* and *North and South*, *Shine Like the Dawn* will intrigue and enthrall readers until the very last page!”

—DAWN CRANDALL, award-winning author  
of *The Hesitant Heiress* and *The Cautious Maiden*

SHINE  
*Like the*  
DAWN

BOOKS BY CARRIE TURANSKY

NOVELS

*A Refuge at Highland Hall*  
*The Daughter of Highland Hall*  
*The Governess of Highland Hall*  
*Snowflake Sweethearts*  
*A Man to Trust*  
*Seeking His Love*  
*Along Came Love*  
*Surrendered Hearts*

NOVELLAS

*Moonlight Over Manhattan*  
*Mountain Christmas Brides*  
*Where Two Hearts Meet*  
*Christmas Mail-Order Brides*  
*Kiss the Bride*  
*A Blue and Gray Christmas*  
*A Big Apple Christmas*  
*Wedded Bliss?*

SHINE  
*Like the*  
DAWN

*a novel*

CARRIE TURANSKY



MULTNOMAH

SHINE LIKE THE DAWN

Scripture quotations and paraphrases are taken from the King James Version and the Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica Inc.® Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

The characters and events in this book are fictional, and any resemblance to actual persons or events is coincidental.

Trade Paperback ISBN 978-1-60142-940-7

eBook ISBN 978-1-60142-941-4

Copyright © 2017 by Carrie Turansky

Cover design and photography by Mike Heath, Magnus Creative

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying and recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher.

Published in the United States by Multnomah, an imprint of the Crown Publishing Group, a division of Penguin Random House LLC, New York.

MULTNOMAH® and its mountain colophon are registered trademarks of Penguin Random House LLC.

The Cataloging-in-Publication Data is on file with the Library of Congress.

Printed in the United States of America

2017—First Edition

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

*This book is dedicated to my heart-sister, Judy Conroy,  
for her faithful friendship, powerful prayers,  
and endless encouragement.*

Commit your way to the LORD;  
trust in him and he will do this:  
He will make your righteous reward shine like the dawn,  
your vindication like the noonday sun.

PSALM 37:5-6



# PROLOGUE

*August 22, 1899*

Sunlight blinked off the rippling surface of Tumbledon Lake and into Margaret Lounsbury's eyes. She squinted and adjusted the brim of her straw hat to shade her view, then took hold of the oar on her side of the sixteen-foot rowboat.

"Are you ready?" Her father, Daniel Lounsbury, dipped his oar into the water and looked across at Maggie. Pleasant lines fanned out from the corners of his dark-brown eyes. A reddish-brown beard covered the lower half of his tanned face, but it couldn't hide his smile.

"Yes!" She returned his smile and lowered her oar for the first stroke.

"The sun's bright today, especially out on the water." Her father looked across the lake to the rocky shore and lush woodlands beyond. Five years earlier, he and his team had dammed a section of the Debdon Burn, filling the small valley with water and creating this beautiful lake in the northernmost section of the estate. It was just one of his many accomplishments as lead landscape architect for Sir William Harcourt of Morningside Manor.

"Do you have a special spot in mind for our picnic?" Maggie's mother, Abigail Lounsbury, sat in the rear of the boat with Maggie's younger sister, Violet, on her lap.

"I found a lovely little glen surrounded by birch trees." Father turned and grinned at Maggie's older sister, Olivia, seated up front. "It will be the perfect place to celebrate your birthday. It looks like a fairy forest."

Olivia's eyes sparkled. "I can't wait to see it."

Maggie's heart lifted, and she pulled her oar through the water, matching her father's strong strokes. With the warm sunshine on her shoulders and her family around her, she couldn't imagine a happier day.

The breeze picked up and blew a strand of Maggie's hair across her cheek.

"It looks like rain is coming our way." Her mother nodded to the west, a slight crease in her brow. She adjusted her hold on Violet.

Heavy, gray clouds rose above the trees beyond the shoreline, though the rest of the sky remained mostly clear.

Father lifted his gaze and studied the clouds for a few seconds. "I'm sure we've no cause for concern." His confident tone eased Maggie's mind. There was no one who knew more about plants, animals, and the weather than her father. If he didn't believe a storm would threaten their afternoon picnic, there was no need to worry.

A graceful white egret rose out of the grass on the far side of the lake and flew across the water toward them. Violet squirmed on her mother's lap with a gleeful shriek. She looked as though she would climb over the side of the boat any moment if Mother didn't keep a tight hold on her.

Father chuckled. "It seems Violet would like to go swimming."

Olivia turned toward them. "There's not much Violet doesn't like, except perhaps cooked carrots and going down for a nap."

Maggie smiled. Olivia was right about that. Violet had started resisting her naps a few months after she celebrated her first birthday, and she'd never been fond of carrots.

"No swimming today," her mother replied in a serious tone, but Maggie could see the glow of good humor in her eyes.

"Keep up, Maggie," Father called, stroking his oar through the deep water.

She focused on rowing again and picked up her pace to match Father's. As they reached the center of the lake, Maggie heard an odd sloshing sound and looked down. Water slapped against the side of her shoe. She pulled in a sharp breath and lifted her foot. "Father, look!"

He followed her gaze, and his eyes flashed wide. He jerked his oar from the water and scanned the hull of the boat.

Mother straightened. "What is it, Daniel?"

"We seem to have sprung a leak." His voice remained calm, but the muscles in his jaw grew taut.

"What?" Olivia shot a startled glance at Maggie.

Mother wrapped her arms more tightly around Violet. “How large a leak?”

“I don’t know.” Father frowned as he continued to search the floor of the boat, then he grabbed his dripping oar again. “Come on, Maggie, we’ve got to get back to shore.”

Maggie’s hand trembled as she reached for her oar.

Olivia rose, rocking the boat side to side. “Aren’t we closer to the other shore?”

“Olivia, sit down!” Father’s sharp tone startled them all. Olivia sank onto the bench, and Father plunged his oar into the water.

Maggie’s heartbeat pounded in her ears as she strained to keep up with Father’s rapid pace. But even if she could match his deep, steady strokes, would they make it back to the dock before water filled their boat?

What if they couldn’t?

She was a strong swimmer. Father had taught her that skill when she was only seven. She could make it. But Mother and Olivia had never wanted to learn how to swim, and Violet was too young.

Maggie clenched her jaw and pulled the oar through the water, her arms burning from the strain, but their swift pace across the lake only seemed to bring more water into the boat. It splashed around Maggie’s ankles and the hem of her dark blue skirt.

“Daniel, it’s too far! We’ll never make it!” Mother’s frantic voice sent tremors racing down Maggie’s legs.

“Pull, Maggie!” Father grunted and heaved his oar around again.

Maggie gripped her oar and darted a glance toward the shore. Panic climbed up her throat, stealing her breath. They were only halfway there. Mother was right. Water sloshed up Maggie’s leg and soaked her skirt. Soon lake water would pour over the side and the boat would go down.

“Father!” Olivia scooted forward as far as she could, but there was no escaping the rising water lapping at her legs.

Violet grabbed her mother’s neck and broke into pitiful cries.

Father’s gaze darted from one family member to the next. “We’ll have to swim. Maggie, you take Violet. I’ll help your mother and Olivia.”

Fear froze Maggie. She blinked and tried to focus on the distant shore. It

was at least half a mile, maybe more. If Violet would calm down, she might be able to swim with her sister, but how could Father help Mother and Olivia?

Father pulled Violet from Mother's arms.

"No, Daniel!" Mother reached for her youngest daughter. Her face had gone pale, and her eyes shimmered with tears.

"Be calm, Abigail. Maggie will take care of Violet." He passed Violet to Maggie.

Her hands shook as she grabbed her squirming sister, but she held on tight.

"We're counting on you, Maggie." Love and fierce determination radiated from his eyes. "Safeguard your sister. Don't turn back for any reason."

Maggie swallowed hard. "Yes, Father." She blinked her burning eyes, wanting to say she loved him and she would do her best, but there was no time.

"Go on now." He helped her over the side of the boat and into the cold water.

Kicking to stay afloat, she rolled over onto her back and pulled Violet onto her chest. Slipping her arms under Violet's, she pushed off from the side of the boat.

The shock of the cold water and the weight of her skirt and blouse pulled her down, but she thrust herself through the water, holding tight to Violet and kicking as hard as she could.

*Oh God, have mercy on us! Save my family!*

Tears and lake water flooded her eyes, blocking her view of her family and the boat. Water rushed past her ears, but it couldn't block out her mother's fearful cries, her father's shouts, or her sister's heartrending calls for help. But she pushed on, her promise to her father giving her strength.

Violet whimpered and tossed her head from side to side, then she lay back on Maggie's chest, stunned by the cold water and frightening events.

Maggie swam on, listening for her father's confident call or his strokes in the water behind her. But all she heard was her own heavy breathing and the splashing water as she kicked her way closer to shore.

Finally, her feet touched the muddy bottom, and she dragged herself and Violet out of the water. Her legs trembled and water poured from her clothes,

pulling her down. But she forced herself to stay standing. Turning, she wiped her face and scanned the water.

Nothing broke the rippling surface of the lake. No boat. Not one member of her beloved family. Numb with dread, she blinked and stared across the quiet lake.

Where were they? How could they all just disappear?

Violet cried and clung to Maggie's leg through her soggy skirt. A gust of wind sent a cold shiver through Maggie, and her teeth chattered hard.

Clouds scuttled across the sky, blocking the sun and casting a gray shadow over the scene. Heavy raindrops splattered on the ground, and then the heavens opened and rain poured down on her head and shoulders. Still, Maggie stood, staring across the lake.

Her father had been wrong. A storm had come. A more terrible storm than she could've ever imagined.

Maggie searched the lake once more, straining to hear the voices of those she loved, but the only sound was the cry of the egret as it rose from the water's edge and flew across the lake toward the eastern shore.

She sank down on the muddy shore and pulled Violet into her arms while rainwater and tears ran down their faces.



*Four Years Later*

*April 1903*

Maggie turned the hat block and examined the broad-brimmed, yellow straw hat. Red silk roses circled the crown, with little blue cornflowers sprinkled in between. It looked perfect. She could imagine wearing it to a garden party or afternoon tea in London.

She released a soft sigh and sat back on her stool. Not that she would be going to London to attend events like those any time soon or wearing this lovely hat.

“I like the color combination and the choice of flowers, but you’ll need to add several ostrich feathers if you want to please Mrs. Huntington.” Grandmother Hayes looked across at Maggie from behind the long glass display case on the opposite side of the millinery shop. Her silver-rimmed spectacles rested halfway down her nose, and her rosy cheeks creased as she sent Maggie a knowing smile.

Maggie clicked her tongue and looked back at the hat. “I suppose you’re right.” She didn’t like flamboyant designs with piles of feathers and gobs of ribbons, but that seemed to be what most women wanted, especially those on their way to London for the season.

Maggie took two yellow ostrich feathers from the box on the shelf, then reached for her needle and thread. Grandmother had owned this shop for almost twenty-five years, ever since she’d become a widow and needed to provide for herself. She knew everything there was to know about pleasing her customers, and she’d taught Maggie how to fashion the most stylish hats in Northumberland.

But arthritis had stiffened Grandmother's hands in the last few years, and now Maggie did most of the intricate work. Grandmother still made a few hats, oversaw the shop, and guided Maggie with design suggestions.

Maggie smiled, tenderness for her grandmother warming her heart. What would she and Violet have done without Grandmother Hayes? She had taken them in when no other relative could be bothered.

"Can we have buns with our tea today?" Maggie's six-year-old sister rested her chin in her hand and sent Maggie an imploring puppy-dog look. She sat on a stool behind the opposite counter, next to Grandmother.

Maggie pressed her lips together and looked down at the hat in her hands. Violet was a dear, but she had a sweet tooth that never seemed to be satisfied.

Her little sister clasped her hands below her chin. "Please, Maggie. I love buns, and we haven't had any in such a long time." Just last week they'd bought buns from Mrs. Fenwick's Teashop. But to a six-year-old she supposed a week qualified as a long time. "You said you would think about it." Violet smiled and batted her long, dark eyelashes at Maggie.

Maggie stifled a groan. She hated to say no to her sister, but if they spent those shillings on tea treats, it would mean cutting back somewhere else.

When Maggie didn't answer, Violet's face brightened. "You wouldn't have to stop working. I could get them. I'm old enough."

The teashop was directly across the street. Violet loved to be trusted with the coins and allowed to make the purchase and bring back the buns in a paper sack.

"Please, Maggie." Violet's plaintive voice pulled at Maggie's heart.

There were so many times she had to say no. Perhaps she could find some way to stretch the budget just a bit more. "All right. I suppose we can buy some buns today. Bring me the canister."

Violet hopped off her stool, grinning like she'd won the grand prize in a footrace, and hurried past the curtain that separated the front room of the shop from their tiny private sitting room and kitchen in the back. The only other rooms in the building were a small bedroom upstairs that Maggie shared with Violet and another small bedroom behind the kitchen for Grandmother.

The bell over the front door jingled. Maggie looked up as Mrs. Eugenia Huntington and her eighteen-year-old daughter, Elyse, walked in. Both women were dressed in stylish walking suits and wore large, elaborate hats.

Grandmother stood. "Good afternoon, Mrs. Huntington, Miss Elyse."

Mrs. Huntington returned the greeting, and Elyse nodded to Grandmother and Maggie. Elyse was preparing for her first season in London. Maggie had heard through one of her friends that Mrs. Huntington had ordered enough evening gowns and day dresses for Elyse to fill several trunks. And then, of course, there were all the hats, gloves, parasols, and shoes to go with them.

A pang shot through Maggie's heart. She would have traveled south, more than three hundred miles, to London and taken part in the season if her parents were still living. She might even have received a marriage proposal by now. Her late father had been a well-respected landscape architect and acquainted with many fine families in London and all around the country.

But the deaths of her parents and sister had changed everything.

The only future she could imagine now was one tied to the millinery shop, where she would spend her days designing hats she would never wear to help provide for her grandmother and sister.

Grandmother came around the end of the counter. "Maggie is just finishing one of the hats for Miss Elyse, but I believe the others you ordered are ready."

"Yes, these two are finished." Maggie reached up and took a wide-brimmed lavender hat from the shelf and placed it on the glass countertop. Then she reached for a cream-colored hat with pink roses circling the crown and set it next to the other.

"Oh, they're lovely." Elyse beamed as she crossed the shop toward Maggie.

Mrs. Huntington followed, but her brow creased as she regarded the hats. "I'm afraid they're both too plain." She nodded toward the lavender hat. "This one needs more flowers and ribbons, perhaps even some netting and lace."

Elyse turned to Mrs. Huntington. "But Mother, I think—"

The older woman lifted her finger and silenced her daughter. "Your hats must be unique and draw attention so you will stand out from the crowd."

Maggie clamped her lips together, struggling to hold back her reply. Adding more adornments would draw attention, but it would make the hat look overdone and gaudy. Perhaps she could convince Mrs. Huntington to change her mind once she saw how lovely the hat looked on Elyse. “Why don’t we try it on to test the fit?”

Mrs. Huntington’s frown remained in place, but she gave a slight nod. Her daughter unpinned her hat and stepped forward. Maggie placed the lavender hat on the young woman’s head. They all turned toward the mirror on the countertop and examined Elyse’s reflection.

Grandmother adjusted the angle of the hat, tipping it a bit more to the side. “The color certainly highlights her blue eyes and flatters her skin tone.”

Mrs. Huntington studied the hat. “It definitely needs more flowers and ribbons. And perhaps a trailing vine off the side. We want it to look impressive from every angle.”

Maggie rolled her eyes behind Mrs. Huntington’s back. There was hardly room to add any more flowers, and a trailing vine would look ridiculous. She was just about to say so when Grandmother sent her a warning look.

Maggie stifled a sigh. How many times had her grandmother told her she must listen to the customer’s wishes and find a way to please her?

She reached under the counter for her basket of silk roses. “Perhaps we could add a few more flowers on the side.” She chose three smaller roses and tucked them in with the rest of the bouquet covering the crown of the hat.

Mrs. Huntington surveyed the design with lifted eyebrows. “That’s better, and now the ribbons.”

Maggie reached for a spool of green velvet ribbon. “This color would be a good contrast to the flowers.” She looped a few pieces around the roses and stood back.

“That’s a good choice.” Grandmother reached up and tucked the ribbon in at the back.

Mrs. Huntington sighed. “There’s no time to start over. We leave for London tomorrow morning. I suppose it will have to do.”

Heat flushed Maggie’s cheeks. There was nothing wrong with the hat! It was just as fine as any she would find at the shops in London. Maggie and her

grandmother subscribed to several catalogs to make sure their designs kept pace with the latest fashions.

Grandmother stepped forward, blocking Mrs. Huntington's view of Maggie. "Let's try on the other." She placed the cream-colored hat on Elyse, while Maggie stood back with her arms crossed.

Elyse turned her head from left to right, examining herself in the mirror. "I like the way the brim is lifted on the side, with the flowers placed underneath."

Mrs. Huntington stepped to the left, inspecting the view from that angle. "Perhaps some more netting and feathers would make it look fuller."

Grandmother lifted her silver eyebrows and glanced at Maggie.

Maggie set her jaw and reached for the basket of netting from the shelf behind the counter. She might not agree with Mrs. Huntington, but she couldn't ignore her suggestions.

Grandmother took some cream netting from the basket and wove a piece in with the flowers. "We can gather this over the crown and add a few more feathers to give it a bit more height."

Mrs. Huntington nodded. "Yes. That's what it needs."

Violet had been waiting patiently during the whole exchange, but now she tugged on Maggie's sleeve and held up the canister.

"Excuse me a moment." Maggie turned away from the women, popped the lid off the canister, and took out two coins. Bending down, she whispered in Violet's ear. "Be careful when you cross the street, and wait your turn nicely in the shop."

Violet returned an eager nod. "I will." Then she hurried out the door, setting the bell to jingling.

Maggie watched Violet through the window. Her sister stopped and looked both ways, then dashed across the street and into Fenwick's Teashop. Maggie turned back to their customers.

"Maggie is just about finished with the third hat." Grandmother held out the yellow straw hat with the red roses and little blue cornflowers.

"Oh, that's very pretty." The young woman's eyes sparkled as she gazed at the hat.

Maggie rose up on her toes with a pleased smile. At least Elyse Huntington had good taste and knew a lovely hat when she saw one.

Mrs. Huntington wrinkled her nose. “No, Elyse can’t wear that. It’s much too informal for the London season.”

Maggie pulled in a sharp breath. She might not have been to London recently, but she’d seen photographs and advertisements for hats very similar to this one in magazines published there.

Grandmother pushed her spectacles up her nose and looked back and forth between Mrs. Huntington and her daughter. “Surely Miss Elyse will be attending garden parties or boating events, and this hat would certainly be appropriate for—”

The older woman shook her head and pushed the hat away. “It looks like a hat worn by a shopgirl or the village schoolmarm.”

Fire flashed through Maggie. “There is nothing wrong with—”

A motorcar horn blasted outside on the street.

A child’s scream pierced the air.

Maggie’s heart lurched, and she spun toward the door.



Nathaniel Harcourt peered out the soot-dusted window as the train slowed and approached the village station.

The conductor walked down the aisle. “Heatherton. This stop is Heatherton.”

The brakes screeched, steam hissed into the air, and the train jerked to a stop. Nate rose from his seat, took his hat and small leather bag from the overhead rack, and started down the aisle. The four-hour trip from London had given him plenty of time to consider the next stage of his journey, but it had done little to ease his apprehension about returning to Morningside.

He stepped down from the train and scanned the platform. Men, women, and children dressed in traveling clothes disembarked behind him, while several others waited to board the train and travel north to Scotland. For a

moment he considered climbing back aboard and continuing the journey, but his stepmother's letter had made it clear. His father was seriously ill, and he should not delay.

The train hissed again, and a steamy cloud puffed out around him. He gripped the handle of his bag and stared across the platform.

A porter approached. "Do you need help with your luggage, sir?"

"Yes, thank you." They made their way to the baggage car, where Nate claimed his trunk and the porter hauled it onto a waiting cart.

"Would you keep my trunk here at the station until I send someone to retrieve it?"

"Yes, sir." The porter quickly tied a ticket to the leather handle, then tore the ticket in half and gave the bottom piece to Nate.

He thanked the porter, passed him a few coins, and then started down the street, intent on finding a horse so he could make the final four-mile journey home to Morningside.

Home . . . His chest tightened, and he focused on those walking past, trying to push aside his conflicting thoughts.

It had been four years since he'd left Morningside, crossed the huge iron bridge spanning the deep ravine with the gardens and stream below, then boarded the train in Heatherton to travel south and accept his naval commission.

He'd been determined to distance himself from his family and his painful past, and that was what he'd done. But today he would travel that same road in the opposite direction to keep his promise to the Almighty and try to make amends.

Was there still time . . . or was it too late?

Could he restore his relationship with his father, or would his father's unexpected illness steal away that opportunity? And what about his stepmother and half sister, Clara? Could he bridge the gap that had always kept them so far apart?

There was only one way to find out. He must finish this last leg of his journey and face his family.

He scanned the village street, and his tension eased a bit. Heatherton

looked much the same as it had the day he'd left. Small shops lined both sides of the street, and at the end he saw the sign for the Red Lion Inn. Mr. Hastings kept a stable behind the inn, and with any luck Nate would find a horse he could hire there.

He walked past the small village hospital and glanced at the arched doorway into the side garden. Was Dr. Albert Hadley still taking care of the medical needs of those in the village and surrounding area? He'd always appreciated the doctor's calm, caring manner and practical wisdom. Nate walked on past Saint Peter's Church, with its tall spire, quiet churchyard, and neatly trimmed cemetery.

The roar of an engine sounded behind him. He grabbed his hat and jumped out of the way as a speeding motorcar raced past.

The driver looked over his shoulder with a broad grin and waved to Nate.

The fool! He ought to slow down and look where he's going before he kills himself or someone else. Nate darted a glance down the street, and his breath hitched in his chest.

A little girl, who looked no more than five or six, stepped into the street, carrying a small parcel.

A surge of energy shot through Nate. "Look out!"

The girl's eyes widened, but rather than turning back, she dashed ahead, directly into the path of the speeding motorcar. The driver blasted his horn, jammed on his brakes, and swerved to the left.

Nate took off running toward the girl, but the car rammed into her, and a heartrending scream tore from her throat. She flew up into the air and landed a few feet away in the middle of the street.

Nate dropped down beside her before the driver had even climbed out of his motorcar. She writhed on the ground, crying. He shot off an urgent prayer as he looked her over. She had not lost consciousness, and he saw no blood. Those were good signs. He laid his hand on her shoulder. "Everything is going to be all right. Try to stay calm."

The little girl squeezed her eyes shut, sobbing and rocking back and forth as she held her leg.

Villagers ran from the shops and gathered around.

“What happened?”

“Isn’t that Mrs. Hayes’s granddaughter?”

“Someone run for the doctor.”

“Let me through!” A young woman pushed past the others. “Violet!” She knelt beside the girl and leaned in close, her back to him.

“My leg!” Tears flowed from the little girl’s eyes.

“What happened?” The young woman looked up at the crowd.

The driver of the motorcar stepped forward, tweed cap in his hand. “I’m sorry, miss. I tried to stop. But I didn’t see her until it was too late.”

“How could you be so careless?” She turned and shifted her fiery gaze to Nate. “We have to move my sister . . .” She blinked and stared at him.

For the first time Nate looked the young woman full in the face, and a shockwave rolled through him. “Maggie?”

Hurt filled her eyes, and she turned away. “We need to move her out of the street.” She looked around at the other villagers, ignoring him.

“I’ll help you.” Nate reached for the little girl.

Maggie’s hand shot out to stop him.

But no one else stepped forward, so he gently scooped Violet off the ground. She cried out as he lifted her.

“What is it, darling?” Maggie leaned in close again, her face lined with agony that matched her sister’s.

“My leg hurts.” A fresh round of tears cascaded down the little girl’s flushed face.

Nate gritted his teeth and looked away. During his naval career, he’d seen many men wounded in battle and transported hundreds of prisoners during the South African Boer War, but seeing his childhood friend and her young sister in this painful situation struck him in a completely different way.

“Step aside.” Dr. Hadley moved through the crowd toward them. “What happened here?”

“Violet was hit by that man in his motorcar.” Maggie pointed to the guilty driver, and the man lowered his head.

“Let’s take her to the hospital.” The doctor looked up at Nate, and his eyebrows rose. “Nathaniel Harcourt?”

“Yes, sir.”

“I didn’t realize you had returned.”

“I’ve just arrived on the train from London. I haven’t even been to Morningside yet.”

The doctor gave a firm nod. “It’s good you’ve come. Your father will be glad to see you. But let’s take this young lady to the hospital.” He set off, clearing a path through the crowd. “Make way, please.”

Nate followed the doctor, carrying Violet. Maggie walked beside him, her eyes fixed on the doctor’s back, her posture rigid. It made sense that she would be upset about Violet’s injuries, but why was she angry with him? He wasn’t responsible for the accident. He glanced her way. “I didn’t know you’d returned to Heatherton.”

She arched one eyebrow. “We’ve lived here for the last four years.”

Surprise rippled through him. How could that be? He’d searched for her after the boating accident, but he’d not been able to find her. “They told me you’d gone to Scotland to live with relatives.”

“Your parents sent us to my great-aunt Beatrice in Edinburgh, but she had no desire to care for us. A few weeks later, she sent us back to Heatherton to stay with Grandmother Hayes. We’ve been here ever since.”

So Maggie had been in Scotland, but his stepmother had told him she was in Glasgow, not Edinburgh. The address she’d given him had turned out to be a butcher shop, and the proprietor said he’d never heard of Margaret Lounsbury.

After that ill-fated trip to Scotland, Nate returned to Morningside and confronted his father and stepmother, demanding to know what had happened to Maggie and Violet. But they both claimed they knew nothing more about where the girls had gone.

He looked back at Maggie. “So you live here now with your grandmother?” That thought lifted his spirits, but the feeling quickly deflated as he observed her cool, impassive expression. Why did she seem so distant? It was almost as if she thought he was somehow responsible for today’s pain and problems.

The doctor pushed open the side door to the hospital and ushered them

inside. It took a moment for Nate's eyes to adjust from the bright sunlit street to the dim doctor's office.

"Bring her in here." The doctor walked into the next room and motioned toward the examination table.

Nate gently placed Violet on the table and stepped back. Maggie moved closer and took her sister's hand. The little girl's tears had slowed, and she looked around the room with a curious expression. Her eyes were blue but much lighter than Maggie's smoky blue-gray eyes. Still, he could see the family resemblance in the shape of Violet's nose and mouth.

The doctor turned to him. "Thank you, Nathaniel. I appreciate your help."

Nate shot a questioning look at Maggie.

For a brief moment he saw the uncertainty in her eyes, or was it hope that he would stay? She quickly masked her emotions and looked away.

"I'll wait in the office," he said. "I'd like to hear how Violet is doing before I go."

"Very well." The doctor turned back to his patient.

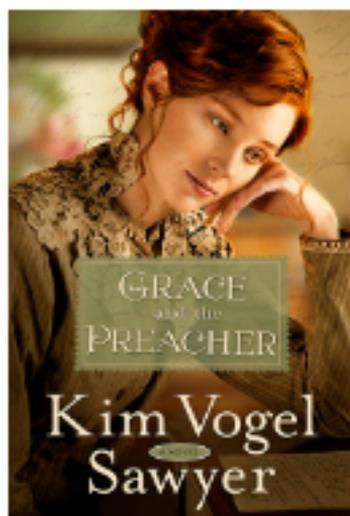
Maggie's gaze softened, but she shifted her focus to her sister.

Nate walked into the adjoining office and crossed to the window. Leaning on the windowsill, he looked out at the street. Three children ran past, and a cart pulled by a strong bay drove on toward the center of the village.

How long would it take the doctor to do his examination and discover the extent of Violet's injuries? He glanced at his watch. It was just after four. There were still a few hours of daylight, plenty of time for him to find a horse and make his way to Morningside.

But even if it took longer than expected, he wasn't leaving until he knew Violet was going to be all right. Waiting for word from the doctor would ease his mind and give him a chance to show Maggie that, though they'd been separated for more than four years, she could still count on his help and friendship.

Continue reading these titles.  
Order your copies today.



Buy Now



**WATERBROOK**



Buy Now



**MULTNOMAH**