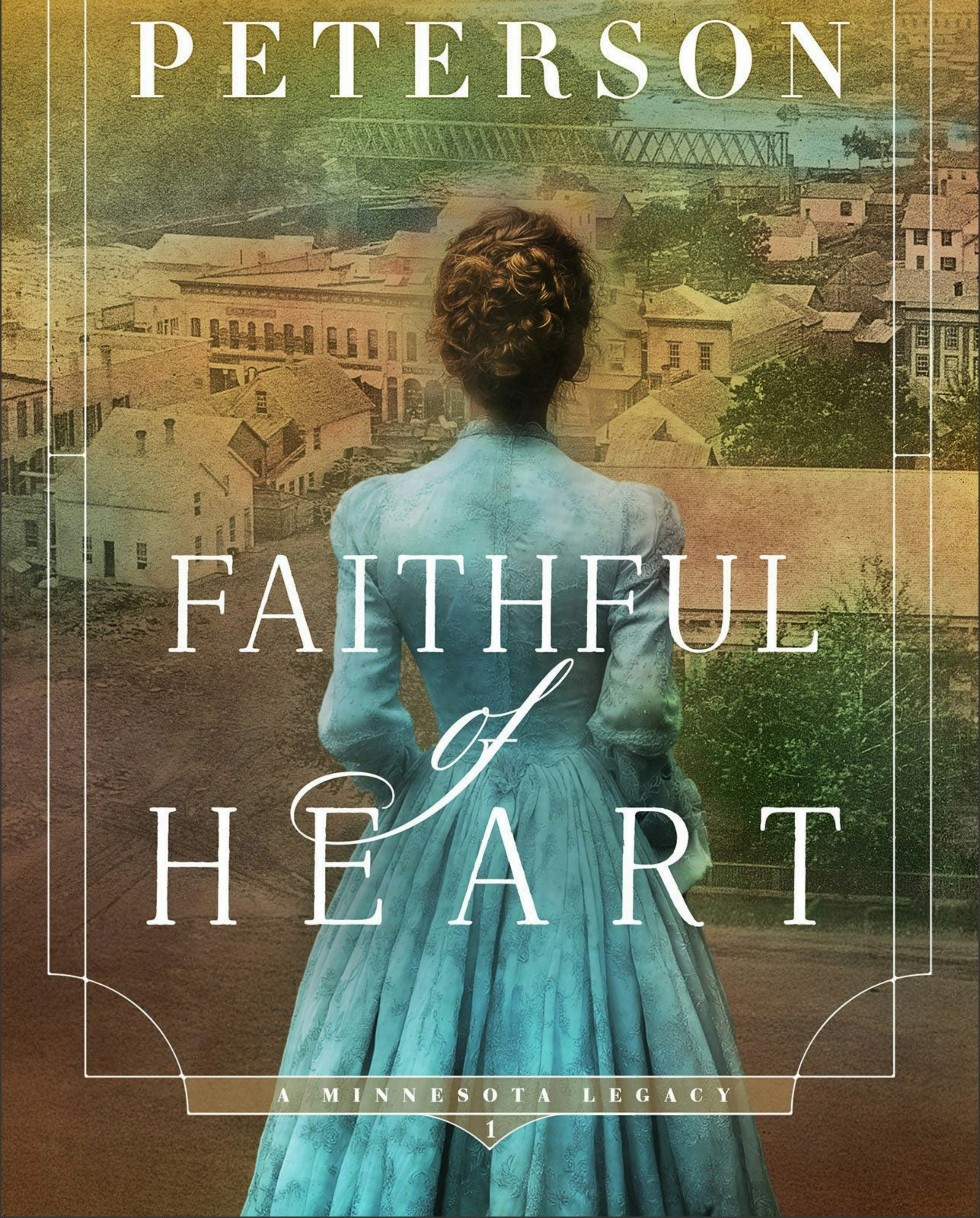
TRACIE PETERSON



FAITHFUL HEART

A MINNESOTA LEGACY

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FAITHFUL of HEART

TRACIE PETERSON

BETHANY HOUSE
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PROLOGUE

August 1866
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

"It is important to remember that your gifts will be used to change the lives of those who cannot do so for themselves. Their numbers are high, especially since the war has left a great many women widowed and children orphaned. Remember, no matter your donation, it will be a blessing," the speaker declared to thunderous applause.

Judith Ashton Stanford was among those in the approving audience. She clapped and rose to her feet. The long, hot afternoon of lectures had come to an end, and she was rather anxious to return home.

"I was quite impressed with the speakers," the bearded man standing next to her said almost like they'd been in previous conversation. He was a handsome man with a hint of mischief in his smile. His dark eyes searched her face as if for answers to some unspoken question. "I'm Dr. Roman Turner."

"Judith Stanford." She extended her gloved hand. "I agree, the speakers were wonderful. I've long desired to help the poor in whatever way possible."

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Her passion for widows and orphans had come about partly due to her own situation. She and her husband, Alden Stanford, had married June third in 1862, and the next day Judith had waved with the other wives and daughters as their men marched off to fight for the North. She had never seen him again. He perished in the war during the Battle of Gettysburg in July 1863.

At twenty-two, Judith had been naïve about the risks. Now twenty-six, she felt as though she'd gained far more knowledge than she ever wanted. Losing her husband was one of many losses. Her brother died in the war as well, and her mother and father died in a riverboat accident the very next year. Her entire life had been altered.

Had it not been for her charity work and taking over her father's steamboat service, Judith might have despaired. Other women certainly had. Every day she learned of widows who had given up, sinking deeper into their loneliness and seemingly impossible circumstances.

"There's so much to be done. I am from Minnesota, and we are dealing with a growing number of widows and orphans there too," Dr. Turner said.

"We have so many due to the war that it has become the focus of several charities."

"I can well imagine. I served on the battlefield as a surgeon and saw many a good man breathe his last."

Judith had seen so many families devastated by the loss. Sorrow alone was enough to cause hopelessness, but add poverty to this and they were helpless to fight back. Rarely did a woman have any means of supporting herself. Losing their men left women with an immediate financial void that was difficult, if not impossible, to overcome. Families did what they could to watch out for one another, and good men sent home money from their pay. But as the fighting war dragged on, the needs

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of those women and their children mounted, and battlefront postal services were often not available.

Judith and her mother had gotten involved in helping as a means of healing from their own personal losses. There were multiple agencies striving to create assistance for the widows and orphans of war. Judith and her mother had also seen the need to help those whose husbands and fathers were still living, still fighting. They had created a charity to provide food and clothes for these families. Even after her mother died, Judith continued the good work, urging local churches to care for their own as a service unto God.

"I find that helping those less fortunate has done much to bless me." Judith's collar seemed to tighten as the heat in the room grew more unbearable. "Women are at a great disadvantage to earn their own living, even more so while taking care of a family. If we do not show compassion on them, I feel they will never be able to make their way to thriving, rather than merely surviving."

"You speak quite eloquently. We have some wonderful folks in Minneapolis but could certainly use someone with your beauty and grace to stir their hearts to action."

"We need women like Judith to stir the hearts of people everywhere, Dr. Turner." This came from an older woman Judith had known for many years. Harriet Silverman was a formidable fund raiser with all sorts of creative ideas for bettering the plight of the poor. "I am doing what I can to convince her to take on larger roles in our various charities. She has impressed me with her attention to detail."

"You are too kind." Judith smiled at the older woman. Mrs. Silverman had been working quite feverishly to entice her to join a committee overseeing housing for widows with children.

"Mrs. Silverman, I was encouraged by your speech. Thank you for inviting me," Dr. Turner said. "There is a definite need to better the living conditions of the poor. Getting the stray

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animals off the streets alone will greatly improve health conditions amongst the people."

"I've said as much for years, Dr. Turner. And I will continue to advocate cleanliness. However, it is difficult to choose soap over soup when your child is hungry."

It was true. Hunger was a nagging need.

The older woman tapped Judith on the arm. "If you'll excuse me." Mrs. Silverman was distracted by a couple of wealthy-looking men and left Judith and Roman to continue their conversation.

"You mentioned Minneapolis. Is that where you live?" Judith asked, wishing the temperatures would abate.

"For the last few years, yes. Prior to that, my family was in Maryland."

"And the war sent you west?" She drew her fan and began to use it.

"Not at all. My father inherited property in Minnesota. I remained in Baltimore to finish my education and training, but before I could return to my family, the war broke out, and doctors were very needed in the army."

"I can well imagine. The numbers of wounded must have been difficult to deal with. My own husband was lost at Gettysburg."

"I'm sorry to hear that." His expression changed to one of concern. "I thought I heard it mentioned that you had lost your parents recently."

She continued to wave the fan. "Two years ago. My father owned a steamboat service on the river, transporting goods and people. They were on a trip, and the boiler blew up. Their cabin was just above, and they were killed instantly."

"Was it sabotage?"

"No. At least, those who investigated said there were no indications of such. My father had expressed concerns about the boiler days before the accident. He thought he'd dealt with

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the problem, but obviously he was mistaken." She reattached the fan's cord to a button on her waistband. The lacy piece hadn't helped cool her at all and, in fact, waving it about had only served to make her hotter.

"Your losses have been great. My father also passed away during the war."

"In battle?" she asked.

He shook his head. "It's a long story, but he died in Minnesota." Dr. Turner glanced past her into the crowd behind them. "It was one of those senseless and unnecessary things."

"I'm so sorry." She couldn't help but notice something about his expression that suggested his grief was still strong, but she didn't feel the situation warranted the intimacy of her questioning him.

"I realize it's quite forward of me, but I wonder if you might consider having dinner with me tonight? Mrs. Silverman has known me for years and can vouch for my character."

The idea of attending supper with the dashing doctor enticed Judith, though she probably shouldn't even consider accepting an invitation from a stranger. Before she could answer, Mrs. Silverman put an end to any romantic notions.

"Judith! Judith!" Mrs. Silverman called, motioning her to come.

"If you'll excuse me, I believe I'm needed elsewhere. It was a pleasure to meet you, Dr. Turner."

"For me as well, and if you come to Minneapolis, please be certain to look me up."

She nodded and gave him a smile. "I'd like that."

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Roman watched the young woman move through the throng of people. She was as graceful as a swan swimming among the reeds. He found himself mesmerized for a long while. She was beautiful, there was certainly no doubt about that. Her

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voluminous brown hair had been carefully pinned into place, held by ebony lacquered combs. Her gown, although trimmed in black, was not that of mourning. The dark green suited her complexion, and the lightweight material was sensible for an extremely warm day.

But there was something more to her—something that attracted him in a way he'd not felt before. Judith Stanford had a heart for the very things he did. She cared about those around her who were suffering and in need, and she put others first.

His mother and sister were always after him to find a wife and settle down, but until this moment, he'd never met a woman with whom he could imagine himself married. Judith Stanford, however, was easily a match for the bride he had imagined. She was soft-spoken, yet firm in her opinions and confident in doing the right thing. Just the fact that she was here spending her free time listening to lectures on helping the destitute spoke volumes about her character.

But even as he thought these things, Roman chided himself. He didn't really know anything about Judith Stanford other than the information Mrs. Silverman had shared in their brief conversation earlier. Certainly not enough to think favorably toward a lifetime together. No doubt it was just the heat.

Sweat trickled down the side of his neck. The temperatures were almost unbearable, and Roman felt he'd had more than enough of crowds and lectures. He made his way toward the back of the room where the exit doors would lead him outside into the hopefully cool night air. As he drew near to where Judith stood listening to Mrs. Silverman, he sensed there might be a problem. Judith seemed strangely silent, almost distracted.

As he came abreast of her and the others, Judith turned. The look on her face was one he'd seen on the battlefield just before men lost consciousness. Reaching out, he caught her as she fainted.

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"Oh dear! Oh my!" Mrs. Silverman waved her gloved hands in exclamation. "What has happened!"

"I believe the heat has overcome the poor woman," one of the men declared.

Roman lifted Judith into his arms. "Let's get her outside. The open air will be better. Mrs. Silverman, please find us a way through the crowd."

Outside the air was cooler, but heavy with humidity. Roman stood holding Judith in his arms and wondering what he should do next.

"I believe there is a marble bench to the side, just over there." Mrs. Silverman pointed.

Roman caught sight of the bench and nodded. He crossed the portico and wondered whether to seat Judith on the bench or continue holding her. She was light enough he could have held her forever, or so he told himself, but propriety was important. He gently lowered her to the bench and, while still holding on to her, grabbed the fan attached to her waistband. He didn't see how it was fastened and gave a hard yank. The button holding it danced across the stone floor.

Roman opened the fan while balancing Judith and began to use it quite vigorously. "If someone could get her a glass of water, that would help," he said, not even bothering to look up.

She started to rally as he continued to fan her face. When she opened her eyes and met his gaze, she smiled. Roman was certain she had no idea of where she was. He smiled back.

Then at once, his nearness seemed to alarm her. She jerked and sat up straight, pulling herself out of Roman's arms with surprising strength.

"Oh goodness. What happened?"

"You fainted, my dear," Mrs. Silverman announced. "The heat was positively abominable. Thank God for Dr. Turner. He just happened to be passing by and caught you as you fell."

Judith looked into Roman's eyes. For a moment, he lost the

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ability to reason. He had never met a woman who so completely captured his thoughts. He'd long prayed for a wife, but could it really be this easy? Could she be the one?

"Thank you for helping me, Dr. Turner." She reached over and took the fan.

"I'm afraid I pulled rather hard and sent a button flying across the way." He motioned with his head but refused to look away from the glance that kept him spellbound.

She smiled. "It's of no concern, given the service you rendered me." She fanned herself a few times. "It's usually not so hot in the evening, but the room seemed quite confining."

"Yes, there were simply too many people in one small space," Mrs. Silverman agreed. "I will call for my carriage and see you safely home."

Roman thought to offer that himself but knew it would be inappropriate. However, accompanying them would be completely fitting.

"I could go with you," he offered.

"Nonsense. I have my driver and two footmen. We'll be just fine, Dr. Turner. Please return to the fund raiser. I know it is important for you to meet with several of our larger donors."

The wonder of the moment ended with that. He straightened and stood. "I hope you'll be feeling better soon, Mrs. Stanford."

"Again, thank you for your help." She drew in a deep breath. "I am much revived and quite myself again."

Roman smiled and gave a bow. He certainly wasn't exactly himself. The encounter had left him more than a little shaken. Something important had happened, but exactly what, he couldn't say.

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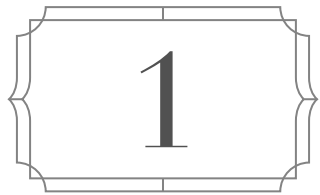

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May 1870
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Comfortably seated in her home office, Judith perused the list her secretary Helen had just given her. "There are just so many needy souls in the world."

In the four years that had passed since Harriet Silverman had begged her to come on board a committee to help poor widows, Judith had immersed herself in concerns for the destitute. With Harriet's help, she had mastered the ability to influence those around her, and she was known for her fund-raising parties and speeches. Most every women's group in the Philadelphia area had hosted her to speak on more than one occasion. Church ladies' groups were especially fond of bringing Judith to their special events, where she could offer them insight and encouragement, as well as suggestions for how best to benefit the less fortunate in Philadelphia.

"As you can see by the names put together from the area churches, the number of widows and orphans continues to

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grow. The churches that offer food goods tell me that they are nearly depleted. Their donations have been quite minimal."

Judith nodded. "Oh, Helen, it is a sorrowful sight to see. I visited one of the orphanages yesterday, as you know. There must have been at least twenty infants at that location alone. The staff are overworked, and the funds to support those precious lives are at a minimum. I must find a way to send more money."

The nearly forty-year-old assistant nodded. Helen was a plain-looking woman with brown hair and eyes. She was short and of petite frame, but to Judith there was nothing small about Helen Jessop. The woman worked just as tirelessly as Judith and shared her employer's deepest concerns.

Judith put the list aside. "I'll simply have to host a party to get more donations."

Helen reached into her pocket for the leather-bound journal she kept ever at the ready. "What type of party would you like to give?"

"Well, the weather has been quite nice, and the garden is starting to bloom in full. I suppose we could plan a garden party with the provision to host indoors if the weather turns bad. Or even a riverboat excursion. You know how the well-to-do seem to enjoy that diversion."

"There are benefits to both," Helen assured.

"Well, we can decide that later today."

Helen jotted notes in a furious fashion. Without looking up, she posed additional questions. "Shall we invite from the red list or the blue? Or shall we include both?"

"Both, I think. I haven't been pressing any one of them since the Christmas season. It's time for them to step up and do their part."

Judith got to her feet and went to the large window that looked out on the upper-class neighborhood. The house she lived in was not overly grand, but the area surrounding her was,

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and her neighbors were affluent and more than capable of donating to the cause. Elsewhere in the city, the very rich were more than aware of the growing problems in their community. But, while knowledgeable about the situation, they were rather slow at times in coming to the aid of their poorer brothers and sisters. Like a church minister, Judith would simply have to bring to light the fact that they had been blessed and needed to bless others.

A carriage pulled up to the curb of her property, immediately capturing her attention. Judith tried to place the rather handsome man who stepped down. For a moment, her thoughts went back to the dashing young man who'd caught her after she'd fainted years earlier at a fund raiser. Dr. Roman Turner had drifted around in her dreams and thoughts ever since. She'd never had the opportunity to visit Minneapolis, but she had considered it several times, especially when she thought of once again meeting the distinguished doctor.

The man at the carriage conversed with the driver for a moment and then proceeded up her walkway. It wasn't Dr. Turner.

"I believe I have company," she said, turning away from the window.

Helen looked up. "I shall see who it is. Are you receiving?"

"Of course." She smoothed down the overskirt of her bustled blue gown. "Show him in. He may come bearing gifts." Judith came to stand at the edge of her desk. She had no idea who the well-dressed man was, but perhaps he represented a new donor. She could only hope.

She listened as Helen greeted the man. Helen had been such an asset to her work. They'd first met at church shortly after Judith's parents had died. The requirements of dealing with her parents' business had been almost too much in the wake of her grief, and Helen had volunteered to help Judith put things in order. She had been a godsend.

"Mr. Norbert Black is calling," Helen announced, pausing at the door. She gave Judith the man's card.

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Judith read that he was an attorney from Minneapolis, Minnesota. There were only two things she knew for sure about Minneapolis. First, it was where the elusive Dr. Turner lived. Second, it was the home of her estranged grandfather, someone she'd never met.

The handsome black-haired man stepped into the room, with a twinkle in his eyes and a smile on his lips. Judith sized him up, determined to guess why he'd come. It was something of a game to her. Seeing him take charge of the moment and extend his hand in greeting, she couldn't help but like him.

"Mr. Black, I'm Judith Stanford. How may I be of service?"

He shook her hand. "It's a pleasure to finally meet you. As you probably noted from my card, I am an attorney. I have but one client, by choice, I assure you," he quickly added. "I work for your grandfather, James Ashton Sr."

Judith wasn't quite sure how to take the news, but she was quite certain that she would never have guessed these details on her own.

"Please sit down." She motioned to the same leather chair Helen had recently vacated. Moving behind her desk, Judith reclaimed her seat and waited.

Mr. Black hesitated, as if studying the situation. Judith had watched people all her life—a helpful habit in soliciting donations for her charities. She could read people very well and always knew when they were ready to move forward. Mr. Black was showing all the signs of a man trying to choose between two paths.

"Helen, would you please ask Mrs. Meachem to arrange tea?"

"Of course." The secretary left the room to speak to the cook, leaving Judith alone with Mr. Black.

"Please sit, Mr. Black, and tell me why you've come today. You seem rather at a loss for words."

He took a seat and gave her another broad smile. "I'm just

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rather taken aback. I had no idea you were so young and beautiful."

"What a bold thing to say." His words put Judith on guard. She'd had men attempt to speak words of admiration and love before.

"I know, and I apologize. You have taken me by surprise. I beg forgiveness."

"Surprise hardly entitles you to be intimate where intimacy is not called for." Judith knew she'd taken a degree of severity that perhaps wasn't merited, so she smiled. "Let us start anew. Why don't you tell me why you have journeyed here from Minnesota?"

Mr. Black leaned back in the chair and nodded. "Thank you for being so gracious. I am here at the direction of your grandfather."

"Well, that's quite a shock. I didn't even know if the man was still alive. You see, he long ago cut us out of his family."

"I am familiar with the circumstances."

She frowned. "Then you know that my grandfather removed himself from the company and correspondence of his son many years ago. Cut him off without a dime and left him to his own survival. Therefore, I have very little interest in whatever my grandfather might want to say."

"And Mr. Ashton told me that I might expect this type of reaction from you." He smiled. "But you seem like such a generous soul. I've heard about your good works here in Philadelphia. I made it my task to investigate the things that you were involved with. Your charity work speaks of the tenderness you hold for the less fortunate in your community."

"My mother had a heart for such ministries. I merely followed in her footsteps."

"Still, it reveals a kindness and compassion that might surely allow you to consider what your grandfather is requesting of you."

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"He's requesting something?" She chuckled. "And here I thought perhaps he was extending an apology. I should have known better."

"He would like for you to come and visit him."

Judith shifted her weight as her bustle bit into her skin. "I have no desire to visit him. He made it clear that we were nothing to him."

"He's old and approaching the end of his life," Mr. Black countered. "The mistakes of his youth are no doubt haunting him."

"So he admits he made a mistake in separating himself from his family?"

It was Mr. Black's turn to shift. "He hasn't said as much, but I do believe that is his thought on the matter."

Helen gave a light knock and wheeled in the tea cart. She rolled it to a point near Judith and waited for instruction.

"You may go, Helen. I'll pour."

The woman exited the room without a word as Judith rose to prepare the tea. Mr. Black also stood. "Do you care for cream or sugar, Mr. Black?"

"Nothing, thank you."

She handed him the cup and saucer, then extended a small plate of cookies. "Would you care for further refreshment?"

He chose one and balanced it on the side of the saucer.

Judith poured cream into her cup and then tea. She added sugar, then took up a spoon and gave the contents a delicate swirl as she took her seat. Mr. Black did likewise. It was all done with the greatest formality, and yet it seemed oddly casual.

"I know that my grandfather is old. However, I feel the time has passed for us. I'm thirty years old and have never known the man, nor his affections. I see no reason to strike up an acquaintance now."

"He's quite wealthy, as you might know. Furthermore, he is

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intent on knowing you and determining if you are worthy of inheriting his vast fortune."

Judith shook her head. "I do not want his money. He left my father to struggle on his own when he was but twenty-one. And while he was a man full grown, he would have benefited from fatherly kindness and love. He received neither. You may not know the full story, but let me enlighten you.

"My parents met soon after Father graduated college and found himself drawn to riverboats. My mother's father was a riverboat captain and hired my father as a roustabout who handled deck chores. James Ashton Sr. was greatly displeased. He saw nothing of value in hard labor.

"My mother was but sixteen and already working hard to cook and clean on the same boat. They fell in love rather quickly, and when my father proposed marriage, there was a great celebration amongst the workers and my mother's father. He could see how clearly in love they were and wanted only happiness for his daughter. Mr. Ashton wanted happiness only for himself. He forbade my father from marrying her."

She sipped her tea and then continued. "Of course, my father's love for her was greater than anything he felt for my cold and indifferent grandfather. They married, and Mr. Ashton cut all ties with the only son he had. So you see, I have no interest in turning back time to assuage his conscience. You may tell him for me, the only thing he now needs is the Lord. Let him cultivate a relationship with God Almighty before he faces Him in death."

She fixed Mr. Black with a look that had been known to whither lesser men. The attorney quickly considered his teacup. For a long moment, neither said anything at all.

Judith hoped that would be the end of it. She had much to accomplish in planning her garden party, and Mr. Black was of no benefit to her needs.

"I can understand," he finally said, "that your father was

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grieved by his father's rejection of the woman he loved and his plans for the future. However, that is in the past. If you are a Christian woman, as I have heard you are, then might I suggest that forgiveness is called for. After all, you and your grandfather have never had opportunity to speak or share your interests."

"I do not hold anything against the man, and I certainly do not wish for God to judge him harshly." Judith sipped her tea and gave a shrug. "I simply have no interest in him whatsoever. He has never been a part of my life, and I see no reason that he should be so now."

"He has no heir."

"And that was his choice, Mr. Black. Just as it's my choice to remain here in Philadelphia."

Black glanced around as if worried that he might be overheard. "He's very wealthy. His money could help your charities considerably. To inherit his wealth would allow you to be quite generous."

Judith didn't want to consider that, even for a moment. She knew Mr. Black was no doubt right in suggesting such things, but she likened it to Satan tempting Christ in the desert. She would stand her ground with Scripture.

"Matthew six, verses nineteen through twenty-one admonishes us, 'Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.' My treasures are in heaven, Mr. Black, not this earth."

"But you work to make a better life for those less fortunate. To do so, you need the money that wealthier men might give."

"That is true, but I will entrust the Lord to lay it upon the hearts of those men, rather than go chasing after my grandfather's approval for an inheritance."

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She stood. "Now, Mr. Black, if there is nothing more, I have a full schedule and have already yielded enough of my valuable time to this matter. I must bid you farewell."

The man jumped to his feet and extended his empty cup. "I had hoped we might be able to further discuss the matter. Perhaps I could be allowed to call on you tomorrow? I must admit that after meeting you, I am intrigued to know you better."

"As I said, my schedule is quite full, Mr. Black. Thank you for coming."

As if knowing that her mistress was ready to dismiss the man, Helen appeared. "Right this way, Mr. Black. I have your hat." She gave it a little shake toward him, as if enticing a dog with a bone.

Judith took his cup and saucer and offered a brief hint of a smile. "Good day, Mr. Black."

He looked as if he might say something, then gave a nod and bowed. Helen hurried him from the room and out the front door. Judith went to the window and watched him reboard his carriage. He was a very pleasant sort of fellow and quite nice in his appearance. Perhaps one might even call him extraordinarily attractive.

She frowned, though, thinking of the reason he had come. She'd had no idea her grandfather was still living, much less that he was considering her as an heir.

Her father had never truly spoken against him, but he'd made it clear that their values in life were quite different. When her father had gone away to further his education, he had fallen into the company of Christian men who mentored and guided him to accept Jesus as his Savior. In turn, he had led her mother, his soon-to-be father-in-law, and eventually Judith to Jesus.

As Judith remembered, Father had told her that her grandfather had no use for another to be God when he considered himself qualified for the role. And while he hadn't lied about

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the treatment he'd received from the man, Father had never been given to cruel comments or condemnation. Instead, he held great pity for his father and made it clear to Judith that he prayed daily for his salvation and that she should as well.

And she had.

But she had no desire for there to be anything more between them. And while it would be nice to have vast amounts of money at her disposal, she wasn't about to sell her soul to the man who had so deeply wounded her parents.

No, it wasn't an issue of forgiveness. It was a matter of keeping evil at bay. The Bible admonished Christians in the fourth chapter of James to "Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you."

Surely the same was true for those who served him.

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