



BRIDES of SEATTLE,
BOOK TWO



REFINING
FIRE

TRACIE
PETERSON



BETHANYHOUSE

a division of Baker Publishing Group
Minneapolis, Minnesota

Tracie Peterson, *Refining Fire*
Bethany House, a division of Baker Publishing Group, © 2015. Used by permission.
(Unpublished manuscript—copyright protected Baker Publishing Group)

© 2015 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

Peterson, Tracie.

Refining fire / Tracie Peterson.

pages ; cm.— (Brides of seattle ; book 2)

Summary: “In 1889 Seattle, Washington, Militine and Thane meet while serving the local poor. Though both carry a dark history and a sense of haunting pain, they begin to grow closer and wonder whether God can build something new and beautiful from the debris of the past”—Provided by publisher.

ISBN 978-0-7642-1303-8 (cloth : alk. paper)

ISBN 978-0-7642-1062-4 (pbk.)

ISBN 978-0-7642-1304-5 (large-print pbk.)

1. Man-woman relationships—Fiction. 2. Seattle (Wash.)—Social life and customs—19th century—Fiction. I. Title.

PS3566.E7717R44 2015

813'.54—dc23

2014048264

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

This is a work of historical reconstruction; the appearances of certain historical figures are therefore inevitable. All other characters, however, are products of the author’s imagination, and any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, is coincidental.

Cover design by LOOK Design Studio

Cover photography by Aimee Christensen

15 16 17 18 19 20 21 7 6 5 4 3 2 1



To Greg Lange at the King County
Archives in Seattle, Washington

Thank you for all your help with the history of King
County and Seattle. Your patience and willingness to dig
up obscure historical detail are greatly appreciated.



I



SEATTLE, WASHINGTON TERRITORY
JANUARY 1889

There was no easy way to move a dead body. Militine Scott had this on the best authority.

Abrianna Cunningham cocked her head to the side. “I suppose we could just leave him right here.” She gazed down at the man on the floor and tapped a finger to her chin. Apparently the matter was not easily resolved in her mind.

“I don’t see why we couldn’t just drag him off.” Militine moved to the head of the body while her dearest friend in all the world walked around him squinting her eyes.

Abrianna knelt again. “Yes, that could be the irony of it all. For all his heroics and the gratitude of his peers, to just drag him off for burial would leave the audience with a sense of longing.” She took hold of the man’s lifeless arm. Picked it up and dropped it back to the floor. “You play the murder victim so well, Wade.”

The dead man came to life and sat up. “Honestly, Abrianna, I don’t see why you need a dead body in the play anyway.”

She planted her hands on her hips. “Of course you don’t. You aren’t the playwright—you’re a wainwright.” She giggled. “Goodness, but I’m becoming poetic. Do you suppose that’s how other poets started? I could just imagine Keats or Lord Byron having a regular conversation and suddenly words and rhyme would just flow from their lips.”

Militine couldn’t help but smile at the way Abrianna’s mind worked. She’d never known anyone to complicate a simple matter as quickly as Abrianna. “I think, however, Wade is right. We could just reference the dead body. That way we wouldn’t have to figure out how to move him.”

Wade jumped up and dusted off his clothes. “When is this play to be performed?”

The floor had seized Abrianna’s attention again. No doubt she was still trying to decide about the body’s placement. “It was supposed to be next Saturday, but at this rate we’ll never have it ready.”

“We could just recite poetry, as we usually do.” Militine had no great fondness for the monthly receptions held at the Madison Bridal School. The entire point of the gathering was to introduce men to the young ladies of the school, and she had no interest in that. Which begged the question as to why she remained in residence. Better still—why she had ever come.

Most women she knew, which had been very few, having been raised in a trading post in Canada, had longed for marriage and children. Militine, however, longed for peace of mind. Something she wasn’t sure she’d ever find. How she longed to be more like Abrianna. Happy-go-lucky, full of life and trust. Trust was definitely something Militine lacked.

Her friend looked rather confused for a moment and then nodded. “Perhaps you are right. We shall simply put it off until I feel confident about where the body should be.”

“Now, what about those cookies you promised me?” Wade looked past both young ladies toward the hall.

“They’re in the kitchen.” Abrianna pointed. “You know the way.”

“Indeed I do.” He gave Militine a wink. “I believe I could get there with my eyes closed.”

“No doubt.”

“He’s always willing to help for cookies. If only the entire world were satisfied as easily. I mean, just imagine the wars that would be avoided. For example, had President Lincoln offered the Southern states large quantities of cookies, perhaps the Civil War could have been avoided altogether. After all, mothers have been resolving battles for years with the promise of cookies.”

Abrianna headed for the door and paused to once again return to their original discussion. “I suppose we could memorize Scripture. That always seems soothing, and I’m certain it pleases the Lord.”

Militine didn’t really care if it pleased God or not. They hadn’t exactly been on speaking terms since heinous nightmares had taken over her sleep.

Walking to the window, Militine hoped to say something that would take Abrianna’s mind off of God. She pulled back the curtain and looked out on the dismal day. “I hope it’s not going to snow again today.”

At one time she had thought God to be a loving Father, but over the last few months a hardness had wrapped itself around her heart. If God did care so much—if He was loving—then why had she been given such a terrible life? “I think I’ll go rest. We’ve had a grueling day, what with all that quilting we did earlier, and besides, I’m chilled.” She let the curtain fall back in place.

Stopping at the door, Abrianna gave a sigh loud enough to be heard downtown.

Militine closed her eyes and counted to ten. Waiting for what

was sure to come, she sank onto the settee and crossed her arms. For whatever reason, her friend felt it necessary to worry and fret over her spiritual life. It wasn't that she didn't appreciate Abrianna's concern for her immortal soul, it was that Militine wasn't at all convinced that people *had* souls.

Father never had a soul. If he did, it certainly was in hell by now. If he was dead.

Abrianna returned and eased onto the cushions beside Militine as if approaching a wild animal.

"Militine, I know we've discussed this before, but you really mustn't turn your back on God. I thought there for a while you were coming around. I remember you saying that you thought God was a loving Father who would see all of His children safe and happy. What happened?"

Life had happened. The past and all its haunting nightmares had turned a part of her heart to stone. The sermons she'd heard about God and what He could do and what He didn't do had come together to breed bitterness. Surely an omnipotent God, a truly loving God, wouldn't allow evil people to thrive and have their way.

She didn't expect Abrianna to understand, nor did she feel that she had to explain. Militine's past wasn't something she needed to describe to anyone. Fate had allowed her to stay here at the Madison Bridal School. And in time, no doubt fate would rearrange her life again and she'd live elsewhere.

"Not everyone thinks like you do, Abrianna. Some people struggle to accept that there really is a God. Others are wounded by Him so much that they are either terrified or go out of their way to avoid Him."

"And which are you?" Abrianna looked at her innocently, but the question nevertheless stirred ire in Militine.

"That's a very personal question." If it hadn't been so cold and damp outside, Militine might have jumped up then and

there and gone for a walk in the garden. She found the solitude of the flowers and shrubs to be most soothing. But it was January and nothing was blooming. In fact, snow had come in the night and now the entire world was shrouded in white. But one glance at Abrianna reminded Militine that her friend was being just that—a friend. In an effort to soften her words, she patted Abrianna’s knee. “I suppose I’ve simply had a change of heart.”

“I thought we were friends. Goodness, we’ve told each other all of our deepest secrets.”

“No we haven’t.” Militine’s statement was matter-of-fact. Abrianna had relayed a great many secret wishes and desires—about the death of her mother and adoption as a toddler by the old ladies who ran the bridal school. Abrianna had even let Militine in on her clandestine trips to help the poor and needy in the less desired parts of town. In turn, Militine had shared very little.

And she had no intention of sharing anything more.

But at the shocked look on Abrianna’s face, Militine worried that she’d hurt her friend’s feelings. And friends weren’t exactly plentiful in her life. “Some of my secrets need to remain hidden. They are ugly and painful, and I wouldn’t burden anyone, much less my dearest friend, with such things.”

“But that’s what friends are for,” Abrianna countered. “Think of Jesus with his friends Mary and Martha. Their brother Lazarus had died and—”

Militine held up her hand. “Please. No more, Abrianna. I’m trying to be patient, but my head is starting to pound.”

“You’re just feeling frustrated,” Abrianna said, patting her hand. “And frustration is something I know very well.” She flipped back a mass of unruly cinnamon-colored curls. “My hair alone is a trial to me. Most women I know have beautiful straight hair. Just look at your own dark hair. It’s lovely and straight. I will never know why the Lord thought to burden

me with such a mess, and with freckles, but we all must bear our crosses.”

“Oh, for goodness’ sake, Abrianna. Do you honestly think that curly hair and freckles constitute a cross to bear? You’ve lived such a sheltered and easy life that you have no idea of real need and trial, if that is your opinion.”

Abrianna’s mouth dropped open. For a moment she genuinely seemed silenced, but Militine knew it wouldn’t last. Warding off further protest, Militine got to her feet. “I don’t want to argue with you, Abrianna. Neither do I want to be hounded about issues of such a deeply personal nature.”

“But I thought you wanted my honesty. I specifically recall your saying the other day that you—”

“Let it go, Abrianna. I do want honesty between us. That’s why I’m going to be honest with you. If this constant talk about God is required for our friendship, then I will have to release you from further obligation.”

Just let me get out of here without saying anything more. For once, please just keep your thoughts to yourself. Militine reached the door. Just a few more steps and she would be able to put the matter behind her.

“Do you truly want to go to hell?”

There it was. The one question Abrianna imposed on a regular basis. It was also a question that Militine could not answer, because she wasn’t sure there was a hell . . . except for this life.

Militine turned, determined once and for all to put aside the issue of God. “Abrianna, I most seriously appeal to your good nature. Let this subject go. You once told me that a relationship with the Almighty was a thing of a personal nature. If that is so, then please allow me to figure it out for myself. It’s bad enough I have to attend church every Sunday and listen to boring sermons about how much God cares for each of the sparrows.”

“It’s not just the sparrows,” Abrianna interjected. The volume of her declaration rose. “Goodness, Militine, did you doze off? Pastor Klinge went on to say that if God cares for each sparrow, He surely cares even more for you and me. And while I do believe we have far more seagulls than sparrows, the point is still that nothing is overlooked by God.”

“Say nothing more!” Militine held up her hand, and Abrianna got up from the settee. “Nothing. I don’t want to discuss this again. I’ve tried to be tolerant. I’ve tried to be interested, but now I demand you leave me be!”



Brisk footfalls echoed in the hallway.

Abrianna braced herself. She knew those footsteps all too well.

Aunt Miriam entered the room with a grim expression. “What in the world is all this yelling about?”

Abrianna frowned. Militine had already raced out of the room, leaving Abrianna alone to answer.

The older woman gave Abrianna a look that could not be misunderstood. She expected an answer and expected it now.

“I was trying to share God’s love with Militine, but she wanted nothing to do with it. I’m afraid I’m to blame for the loud voices. I was rather . . . well . . . pushy.”

“You? I can’t imagine.” There was a tender teasing in her aunt’s voice that did nothing to reassure Abrianna. “Nevertheless, sharing God’s love is seldom done in a screaming fashion.”

“I don’t want her to go to hell. It is my dearest wish that no one suffer the fires of hell, and especially not Militine. She’s become a dear friend. I cherish her as much as I cherish any of my friends, including Lenore. Now that Lenore is married I suppose I lean on Militine’s friendship more than ever.” She

paused only long enough for a quick breath. “Do you think that’s wrong?”

“I think it’s wrong to badger a person about salvation. You know that the good Lord has the ability to bring His sheep into the fold.”

“Yes, but He also told us to go into all the world and preach the gospel.” Abrianna put her hand to her heart. “I do long to serve Him in that capacity, but how can I do so when I can’t even win converts here at home? When Militine first came here, she told me that she believed in God’s goodness, but now I can tell she thinks Him cruel.”

Aunt Miriam smiled and took hold of her arm. “Come sit, child.”

Obedient to her wishes, Abrianna took her seat once again on the settee. The older woman joined her, never once letting go.

“Abrianna, it is not our job to win converts. It is our job to show people the love of God and share the truth of the gospel. You can hardly do that hitting them over the head with the cross.”

“But that wasn’t my heart. I only wanted Militine to take serious the fires of hell.”

“I’m certain that in time God will allow Militine the knowledge she needs to make her own choices. God only desires that you see to your own soul and pray for others. He wants you to seek Him and know Him for yourself. Then, by this knowledge you must live a life that reflects His mercy.”

“I wasn’t very merciful,” Abrianna admitted. “I suppose once again I allowed my enthusiasm to get the better of me. Honestly, I don’t know why God gave me such a passion for the gospel if He didn’t expect me to get excited about it. Do you know that Pastor Klinge said the end of all time is quickly approaching? He believes God will soon come back to judge

us all. What if I didn't do all that I could to see that everyone heard the gospel message?"

Aunt Miriam showed unexpected patience. "Abrianna, do you suppose God would allow even one person to die without having a chance to hear the gospel message? He wouldn't be a very fair or loving God if He only allowed for some to hear the message but then required all to respond to it. I cannot believe our Father in heaven would play such a trick on His children.

"I believe, however, that He has a plan for all of us—not just for Militine or the other girls here at the school. You know that I want each of the young ladies here to have a strong faith in the Almighty. I take them to church every Sunday, rain or shine, as you know. I do what I can to live a godly example before them, and I pray for each one. Perhaps you could spend more time in prayer and less in badgering."

A heavy sigh escaped. Abrianna sat back, nodding. "You are right to correct me, Aunt Miriam. I haven't been at all charitable. I do try. Honestly, I do." She lifted her gaze to the ornate ceiling. "I suppose I am one of the worst of God's messengers, but my heart is truly fixed on Him."

"I believe that, Abrianna. I think Militine knows that, as well. Give her some time. Be a living witness of Jesus, not just a vocal one. Let her choose for herself." Aunt Miriam gave her hand a quick pat and then got to her feet. "And I want you two to make up. I won't have you letting the sun go down on your anger. I'll call Militine to join us."

"Yes, ma'am."

When Militine returned with Aunt Miriam, she looked none too happy. Abrianna bolstered her courage. If she was ever going to be a godly woman who shared the gospel and helped the lost, then she would have to get over worrying about how to apologize and just do it.

"I'm sorry, Militine." She got to her feet quickly and extended

her hands toward her friend. “I was wrong to allow my enthusiasm to overrule my good sense. Your friendship is most dear to me, and I do not wish to act in such a way to suggest otherwise. Please say that you’ll forgive me.”

Militine hesitated for a moment and then clasped Abrianna’s hands. “I do. I’m sorry, too.”

“I forgive you.” Abrianna pulled Militine close, but she remained stiff and did not return Abrianna’s hug. “I never meant to hurt you.” The embrace lasted only a moment, but it was long enough to realize Militine was still guarding herself.

Aunt Miriam gave them a smile. “It is never right to argue about God, girls. He loves you both and desires that you come to Him willingly. He only wants the best for you.”

“Well, I don’t think God is the best for everyone.”

Abrianna was surprised to hear Militine say such a thing in front of her aunt. She looked to Aunt Miriam for confirmation of this being the most scandalous thing a person could say, but the older woman only nodded.

“That is a decision that you must make for yourself.” Aunt Miriam did the unthinkable and excused herself to oversee supper.

A protest rose in Abrianna’s throat, but Militine spoke before she could make her thoughts clear. “Aren’t you going to tell me how awful I am to think that way? Aren’t you going to try to force me to read the Bible and see where I will die for all eternity without accepting Jesus as my Savior?”

It was exactly what Abrianna had hoped her aunt would do, although it was a shock to hear Militine state it so unequivocally.

Aunt Miriam paused in the archway. “Child, Jesus came for all the world to be saved, but He already knew that many would reject Him. Even so, I cannot call to mind a single time when Jesus shared the love of His Father with someone and demanded they accept it. Even when a rich young man came

to Him and asked what he needed to do to be saved, Jesus told him to sell all he had and follow Him. When the man walked away unwilling . . . Jesus let him go.”

It was true. Abrianna knew the story well. It vexed her to admit that perhaps she had caused more harm than good. It was clear that Militine was not nearly so offended by Aunt Miriam’s words as she had been with Abrianna’s.

“I won’t demand you listen to me nor will I argue the points of what I believe to be true in God’s Word,” Aunt Miriam concluded, “but I will pray for you.”

The two young women stood in silence for some time after Aunt Miriam’s departure. Militine seemed to be considering what the older woman had said, while Abrianna was dealing with her conscience. Would matters of spirit and heart ever be simple?



Thane Patton marched his checker piece all over the board, cleaning Wade’s meager showing off the board. “I think that’s enough for tonight, don’t you?”

Wade leaned back in his chair. “I suppose it better be, or I’ll owe you my entire stash of cookies. Thank goodness Miss Poisie thought to send me home with extra.”

Laughing, Thane picked up another of the oatmeal cookies and popped the entire thing into his mouth. The buttery sweetness met with his approval. He washed the cookie down with the last of his coffee. However, cookies didn’t fix the fact that he was unhappy with his job of mending boats for Davidson Taylor. Nor did it give him the raise that Mr. Taylor had refused.

“So have you decided what you’re going to do?”

Thane looked up from his cup and met Wade’s gaze. “I suppose I’ll just go on working as I always have. I don’t expect Mr. Taylor to understand my need for a raise. He doesn’t care that I intend to do more with my life than just mend boats.”

“Maybe they will hire you into a paid position at the fire department. After all, you did say they were doing more of that these days.”

“Yes, but you have to know someone to get those jobs. I might one day find a sponsor to help me get one of the lower positions, but that will still take time. This city has so much to do regarding fire safety, and it has little money to spare. The City Council has its hands full trying to figure out how to get a better water flow throughout the city.”

Thane pushed his hand back through his wavy red hair. He’d lived in Seattle for ten years and in all that time had worked for Mr. Taylor, learning to repair small sea craft. His real interest had changed, however, when one of the customers convinced him to become a volunteer fireman. There was something about working in that capacity that made him feel alive—worthwhile. Almost like the past would never matter, even if the truth were told.

Wade returned from pouring them both more coffee. “I read that the pressure isn’t enough to reach all of downtown. Sounds like a major problem waiting to happen.”

The protests had been many, and Thane had been known to raise his own concerns. “The wooden mains are too small and feed too many hydrants. That makes the water pressure unreliable. If there is more than one fire at a time, there is never enough water.” He got up and pulled on his coat. “You’d think being a harbor town would resolve all issues for extinguishing fires, but when the tide is out, there are very few streets from which the pumps can reach any substantial amount of water. It makes working as a volunteer fireman quite a questionable adventure.” He drank the lukewarm coffee in one gulp.

“I can see that.” Wade wrapped Thane’s winnings in a section of newspaper and handed the package over. “I’m just glad we have men like you on the force.”

Thane tucked the cookies under his coat. “Well, they won’t have me or anyone else for long if the council doesn’t figure out how to resolve some of these issues.”

He left Wade’s and started back to his small apartment not far from the docks. The cold air nipped at his bearded face. Maybe it was time to leave Seattle. Maybe go south. He’d heard great things about Portland and even San Francisco. The latter would surely always need another fireman.

He noticed a couple of old men hunkered over a small fire. They were wearing ragged clothes, and from the look of it hadn’t bothered to groom themselves in some time. Was that all that Thane had in store for his future? What about family? Surely there were happy ones out there somewhere.

“Hey, fella, got some change for a pint? Need a bottle to help ward off the cold,” one of the men said as he passed.

Thane handed him the only change he had. “Better to get a meal, friend.”

The old man smiled a mostly toothless grin. “Gin goes down easier. Thank ya kindly.”

Thane shrugged. It was the old man’s business what he did with the money . . . and with his life. Just as it was up to Thane to decide his own future. Unfortunately, the past weighed heavy against him, and he did well just to survive the present.