

THE
MEMORY
WEAVER

A NOVEL



JANE
KIRKPATRICK


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Jane Kirkpatrick, *The Memory Weaver*
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Scripture used in this book, whether quoted or paraphrased by the characters, is taken from the King James Version of the Bible.

This book is a work of historical fiction based closely on real people and events. Details that cannot be historically verified are purely products of the author's imagination.

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Dedicated to Jerry,
with whom I've shared a lifetime of memories



The difference between false memories and true ones is the same as for jewels: it is always the false ones that look the most real, the most brilliant.

Salvador Dali

The past beats inside me like a second heart.

John Danville in *The Sea*

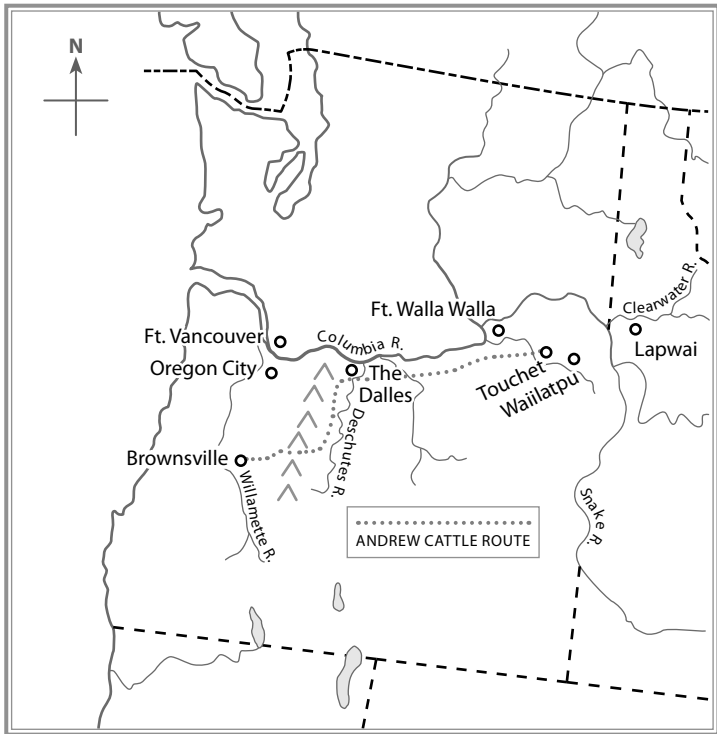
Cast of Characters

Eliza Hart Spalding	the mother, early missionary to the Nimiípuu/Nez Perce People
Henry Spalding	husband of Eliza, father of Eliza Spalding Warren
Eliza Spalding Warren	the daughter, keeper of her mother's story
Henry Hart Spalding	Eliza the daughter's brother
Martha Jane Spalding	younger sister
Amelia "Millie" Spalding	sister and youngest of Spalding siblings
Andrew Warren	husband of Eliza
America Jane Warren	children of Eliza and Andrew Warren
Martha Elizabeth "Lizzie" Warren	
Amelia "Minnie" Warren	
James Henry Warren	
Rachel Jane Smith	Boston teacher and second wife of Henry Spalding
Nancy Osborne	Brownsville resident, friend of Eliza
Matilda Sager	young friend of Eliza, survivor of Whitman tragedy
Lorinda Bewley	young friend, survivor of Whitman tragedy

The Memory Weaver

Timothy	early Nimípuu/Nez Perce convert of Spaldings
O'Donnell brothers	drovers with Andrew Warren
John Brown	son of owner of Brown and Blakely's store
Bill Wigle	Brownsville businessman
Matilda	Nimípuu/Nez Perce friend of Eliza Spalding, the mother
Tashe	Eliza the child's Nimípuu horse
Nellie	Eliza Spalding's Brownsville horse
Maka	Eliza Spalding Warren's horse
*Yaka	the Warren family dog
*Abby	the Warren cattle dog

*fully imagined characters



Prologue

1847

ALONG THE CLEARWATER RIVER
OREGON TERRITORY

The woman rode sidesaddle, holding the leather reins like long ribbons in her sturdy hand.

“Mama, Mama, wait!”

The woman turned, looked out beneath her bonnet as her daughter ran forward, carrying a late-blooming iris in her nine-year-old hand. The girl’s Nimípuu horse with freckles across its rump followed behind the child.

“Why, I rode right past it, didn’t I, Eliza?” The woman inhaled the flower’s scent as the child handed the blue iris up to her.

“I notice things.”

“Yes, you do.” It was good to see the child’s smile light up her usually serious face. “But I notice that you are not on Tashe’s back. I dare not dismount from this sidesaddle to help you get back up.”

“I can mount all by myself.”

“Can you?”

“I’ll show you. Come, Tashe.”

The horse followed like an obedient dog as the child made her way down the bank of the Clearwater River. At what she decided was the perfect spot, the girl stopped the horse, ordered the mare to “Stay,” then scrambled back up the bank, the horse below her. The mare switched her tail but waited.

“Watch, Mama.” Certain she had her mother’s full attention, the child leaned over to grab tufts of the horse’s mane, inhaled a deep breath, then leapt like a frog, landing astride, her dress covering the blanket on the horse’s back. She reached for the reins, then sat up straight as an arrow.

“Oh, that’s wonderful.” Her mother clapped her gloved hands. “You’re so smart, Eliza.”

“I am.” The satisfied smile revealed two front teeth almost grown in.

“We must ride more often in the morning like this, so I can witness how wise you are, how much you’ve grown into a young lady.”

“Just you and me, Mama, and none of the rest.”

“Yes, just the two of us.”

It was a promise the woman wished she’d kept, but events intervened as they always do. Still, the girl would remember that last solo ride with her mother: the sweep of the landscape, the scent of the flower and the horses, the sound of the Clearwater River chattering on its way to the faraway sea, and her mother’s approving smile. She would weave those memories into what happened later, trying to make sense of those threads, praying they would support rather than threaten her own life as a woman, mother, and wife.

A decorative flourish consisting of several overlapping, flowing, light gray lines that create a sense of movement and elegance. The lines swirl and curve around the central text.

Part One



In the Beginning

My earliest memory is of laughter inside a waterfall of words. I'm in a half-barrel that once held flour. Tree rounds act as wheels. My bare feet tease the knots of rope bored through the barrel's end; my dress covers my legs stuck straight out. My hands grip the smooth sides of the half-barrel. A Nez Perce boy, with shiny hair as black as a moonless night, tows the rope over his shoulder, pulling me in my makeshift wagon across the rutted ground in front of our cabin-school-church. I lay my head back, close my eyes, feel the sun on my face, let my child belly jiggle over the rutted earth, laughter joined to theirs. Ecstasy.

A sudden jolt. The wagon stops. Eyes pop open. Before us stands my father, hands on hips, elbows out, eyes black as turned earth. Absent our laughter I can hear my mother's distant voice speaking to her Nez Perce students inside the school, then Nez Perce voices repeating as a song: English. Nez Perce. English. Nez Perce. I let the words wash over me, as comforting as a quilt.

I found no such comfort many years later at the grave-digging of my mother. I was thirteen. I didn't know then that the healing of old wounds comes not from pushing tragic memories away but from remembering them, filtering them through love, to transform their distinctive brand of pain. That frigid January day in 1851 I wanted to forget my mother's dying and so much more. Then laughter interrupted my sorrow as the chink, chink of the shovel hit dirt. Laughter—that made me wonder about my first memory. Perhaps it wasn't true that I was comforted by Nez Perce words mixed in with my mother's those years before. Maybe I didn't even hear what I thought I did. Emotions wrap around memory. We don't recall the detail in our stories; we remember the experience.

Deep in the pit, pieces of ice floated in shadowed puddles. I had slipped out of a grieving house in Brownsville, Oregon Territory, leaving my brother and two sisters behind, with my father holding his head in his hands. I ought to have stayed at our cabin for my sisters and brother, comforted as an older sister should, been a shoulder to let them cry on. We all ached from the loss. But I'd had enough of tears.

The laughter came from one of the grave diggers. He stopped when I approached. A light rain pattered against his felt hat, dotting the brim. I took his sudden silence when he saw me as respect while Mr. Osborne, the father of my one and only friend Nancy, continued to dig. I hadn't minded the sound of laughter.

Mr. Osborne looked up in the silence. He introduced us. "Andrew Warren, meet Eliza Spalding."

Mr. Warren's eyebrows lifted. "But I thought—"

"Same name as her mama, Eliza Spalding, who we're working for here." Mr. Osborne nodded at the grave hole they dug for my mother.

Mr. Warren's smile when he gazed at me from the pit was a

clear drink of refreshing water that, when I swallowed, soothed a throat parched from tears. I noticed his shirt had a scorch mark against the white of his collar and wondered if his mama ironed it for him or if he did it himself.

“Wishing it wasn’t so, Miss Spalding. A mother’s love can’t be replaced, only remembered.”

“Thank you, sir.”

“No need to call him sir. Not much older than you, he is.” Mr. Osborne winked.

Andrew Warren seemed much older and wiser, his observation of my loss and memory wrapped together a profundity to me at such a vulnerable time. His brown eyes looked through me, and when he removed his hat to wipe his brow of sweat, a shock of dark hair covered his left eye. He had a clear complexion, his face free of whiskers, revealing a young man who chewed on his lip. I’d learn later he was nineteen.

He did not attend the burial or at least I didn’t see him. My eyes and heart were focused elsewhere, and my hands were occupied with my siblings—Martha, four, but a year older than Baby Amelia, and Henry, named for my father, eleven—as we listened to one of my father’s preacher colleagues read the Scriptures. It was his intent to give us comfort and to try to capture my mother’s story at the grave site. Her amazing story. He failed, in my opinion. But who could capture the fleeting life of a woman who gave her all to the Nez Perce people, Indians who later sent us away.

I saw Mr. Warren next that same spring. Muck still marked the Territorial Road, but rhododendron with their red and yellow hues edged the dark fir forests. My mother never lived to see spring in this new town my father had moved us to.

That May morning I walked to Kirk’s Ferry with Nancy Osborne to pick up needles and thread at Brown and Blakely’s

store. I could have asked my father to bring needles home since that's where he worked as a postmaster, but in truth, I loved the walk with my friend. Nancy understood my quirky ways, my wanting to stop and inhale blossom fragrance or seeking tiny trillium that peeked through the dense forest shade. I had to point out deer hooves that had crossed our path and sent her eyes upward at an owl gazing down at us from a fir. It took forever to walk to the store, I stopped us so often.

Out of nowhere, Mr. Warren appeared, sitting astride a horse, wearing brogans, heavy duck pants with shiny pocket brads, a white collarless shirt, a sweat-stained hat. His hands rested on the pommel, reins loose, as though he waited for me and had not a care in the world.

"Like a ride into town, little lady?" Andrew's soft drawl warmed like honey on a johnnycake. I couldn't let him know of such thoughts, though. But neither was I one to be coy nor play those games I'd seen other girls tease at with boys.

"I prefer my own two feet." I looked up at his sable eyes shaded by his hat. "And I already have a companion. Miss Osborne, meet Mr. Andrew Warren."

"So you remember me?" He sat a little straighter on his horse. "Well, I am memorable."

"For such things as you may not wish to be remembered for. Free-speaking to young girls could be a caddish act." I stifled back a grin of my own.

"Hmmm. Well, my horse could use a rest. Any objection to my walkin' beside you precious ladies?"

"The road belongs to everyone."

Nancy giggled as the May warmth gathered around us, puffy white clouds like cottonwood fluffs drifted across the sky. The pleasant weather gave me strength enough to deal with my father should he learn of my walking down the road with any

young man. My mother could have tempered him. But she wasn't there.

His horse clomped along the dirt path and stopped us once or twice to tear at grass. Mr. Warren—I thought of him then and later, too, in that formal way—talked to us about a model of a revolver he hoped to buy one day, “a cap and ball firearm Samuel Colt called a Ranger, but they changed the name, call it Navy.”

“You like guns, then, Mr. Warren?” Nancy asked the question. She'd turned eleven but was wise beyond her years. Tragedy does that to us.

“I like the feel of them, their smooth barrels and the weight in my hands. I'm partial to the smell of gunpowder too. I plan to defend as needed against any old Indian uprisin's that might come my way.”

“There's a certain alacrity in your voice, Mr. Warren.”

“Don't know the meaning of that word, Miss Spalding.” He frowned. I admired his ability to express his lack of knowledge.

“Eagerness,” I said. “Or maybe enthusiasm might be a better word.”

“Ah, that alacrity—that's how you spoke it?”

I nodded.

“That alacrity would arrive on the horse named coincidence, my coming upon you girls walking and letting me join your path.”

“I don't believe in coincidences.” Then I sermonized as though I knew all there was to know. “I believe the Lord sets our path and whatever befalls us has some meaning and purpose.” My mother believed that, and at that moment I was certain of it as well, even if I couldn't explain what happened, what sort of purpose the Lord could have for all those grievous deaths at the Whitmans'; all the pain and suffering that hollowed us still.

“Then I thank the Lord.” Andrew didn't seem the least fazed

to have been “taught” twice in the same number of minutes nor did he seem to mind the certainty with which I spoke about God and life.

I told him we were digging bulbs and he offered to help, holding the gritty tubers in his wide hands. He had stubby fingers, not long like my father’s. Nancy and I pressed a deer antler into the ground beside the blooms to loosen and pull them up, just as we’d seen the Nez Perce and Cayuse women do in spring. We were a little late for gathering the camas or other eating roots, but the iris was what I wanted to plant at the grave. My hands in the warm earth brought my mother to mind. But then, everything reminded me of her.

Mr. Warren’s horse trailed behind, didn’t seem to need to have a rein held. I commented.

“A well-schooled horse is one of man’s finest accomplishments. Do you like horses, Miss Spalding?”

“I do. I miss Tashe, the mare I had at Lapwai.”

“An Indian pony, was it?”

“Nez Perce. Spotted hindquarters like freckles on a pale white face. She, too, followed behind without reins held when I walked.”

We had that in common then, the value of a well-trained horse. Relationships have been built on smaller foundations.

We chatted about the early feel of summer. I wiped sweat where my bonnet met my forehead, finished our digging.

“I can lend a hand planting these.”

“They’re for my mother’s grave.”

“I’ve been watching you since that sad time.” His volunteering this made my skin tingle.

“I’m not sure I like the idea of a man watching a mere girl.” I kept my eyes forward, caught Nancy’s look, her eyebrows raised in question.

“You aren’t no girl. You’re an old soul. I saw that from the

beginning. You weren't no whimpering mess like some girls hit with harsh living."

"You seem certain of your insights, Mr. Warren."

"Ain't sure of much, but I see courage when it walks beside me."

That day his claiming he saw courage in me proved a comfort and comfort was what I needed more than truth.



It became a habit, his meeting me weekly, closer to the schoolhouse than might have been wise. I knew my father would object. My father objected to everything after my mother's death. Yet there was a thrill to wondering what my father would do if he caught us. How strange to think I wanted the tingling of danger but I remember that I did—until a day when my father met me at the door, my brother standing behind him. I could tell by his set jaw and narrowed eyes that he was angry.

"You will not cavort with that man!"

"Who—"

"Don't play naïve with me. That Warren."

"I merely walk to town and he walks beside me, Father. We're rarely alone. Nancy joins us. And Henry watches too, as you know by his . . . tattling."

"Don't blame others for your transgressions." He raised his hand but did not strike me. He never did strike his own children, though he had been severe in punishment of the Nez Perce children. He used harsh measures with my brother too, more so since my mother's death. He once put a wooden laundry pin on Henry's nose, forcing him to wear it all day at school in humiliation for some perceived lack in my brother's character that day. Had my mother been alive she would have stopped him. She did not believe in shame. And speaking of shame, I did not act to protect my brother either.

My father continued his diatribe, ending with, “The man is too old, too loose in his direction, Eliza. Your mother had high hopes for you, as do I. You’ll continue your education. And we have work to do together, you and me. Work interrupted by, well . . . you know.” His voice had softened. “You must stay away from Mr. Warren. Or any young man. You are too young and I can’t afford to lose you too.”

He stomped outside, leaving me and my brother staring at each other. I’d gotten off with a switch of my father’s tongue instead of a willow stick. Yet his words haunted. *Or any young man?* What future had my father planned for me?

We’d left the mission at Lapwai in a hurry. Forest Grove, where most of the missionaries landed in the Willamette Valley, was a settled place. My father helped start a school there and my mother taught in it. It was a good place for recovering from all that had happened. Then the trial happened and Mother became ill and not long after we moved to Brownsville. I had traveled with my father, making sure he ate before his hours of preaching as he started new churches in Albany and beyond. I saddled the horses we rode, listening to the stories of hardships told by new immigrants and older settlers alike. If my mother was up to a journey, then we all went and I tended my siblings and took on the task of making certain my mother ate as well. After her death, I became my father’s sole preaching companion. I wondered if that’s how he saw my future.

I glared at Henry Hart for tattling about Mr. Warren, surprised at the intensity of my upset. I slammed my purchased lye on the table with a bit more force than necessary. Soap had to be made. My father earned little money being the postmaster, teaching, and preaching, so I made soap, did the laundry, stitched patches on my father’s and Henry’s pants, let out the hems on Martha’s and Amelia’s little dresses.

“Thanks, brother.”

“I only want to protect you. Father says Mr. Warren is not a nice man.”

“I can take care of myself. I’ve done it often enough.”

His mouth turned downward in a frown. “I only said you had man company going to town. I didn’t think Father would mind, not really.”

“Anything that isn’t his idea he objects to.” Henry nodded, stared at the floor. “It doesn’t matter, Henry. Mr. Warren merely likes to give his horse a rest and so he walks. Father will get used to it, if it continues.”

“I could walk with you.” He rubbed at a cut on his finger.

“You could.” I lifted his chin. “But if Papa thinks Mr. Warren is a poor influence, then he’d punish you as well for associating with him. I need to look out for you too. You and Martha and Amelia.”

“We look out for each other.”

“We do.”

I smiled then, and later when Henry Hart came to me with apology wildflowers in his eleven-year-old hand, I accepted them and hugged him. It’s what my mother would have done.

He lingered for a time, but as he saw I held no grudge against him, he left to chop the wood we’d fire and turn to ash for making soap.

As I worked preparing supper for the five of us, my mind did wander onto Mr. Warren. His hair was the color of good earth, eyes the same as otter fur. Charming is the word that came to mind, beguiling, with just the slightest hint that what he presented might not be all there was to see. Was I drawn to the mystery of him? Or was testing destiny with Andrew Warren the distraction I longed for, pushing out the losses that had moved into my thirteen-year-old heart and threatened to stay?