

# TRACIE PETERSON

LOVE on the SANTA FE

## *Under the Starry Skies*



LOVE ON THE SANTA FE

*Under*  
*the*  
*Starry Skies*

TRACIE  
PETERSON



BETHANYHOUSE

*a division of Baker Publishing Group*  
Minneapolis, Minnesota

Under the Starry Skies • Tracie Peterson  
Bethany House, a division of Baker Publishing Group • 2022 used by permission

© 2022 by Peterson Ink, Inc.

Published by Bethany House Publishers  
11400 Hampshire Avenue South  
Minneapolis, Minnesota 55438  
www.bethanyhouse.com

Bethany House Publishers is a division of  
Baker Publishing Group, Grand Rapids, Michigan

Printed in the United States of America

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

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Peterson, Tracie, author.

Title: Under the starry skies / Tracie Peterson.

Description: Minneapolis, Minnesota : Bethany House Publishers, a division of  
Baker Publishing Group, [2022] | Series: Love on the Santa Fe

Identifiers: LCCN 2022012421 | ISBN 9780764237355 (trade paper) | ISBN  
9780764237362 (cloth) | ISBN 9780764237379 (large print) | ISBN 9781493439119  
(ebook)

Subjects: LCGFT: Novels.

Classification: LCC PS3566.E7717 U533 2022 | DDC 813/.54—dc23/eng/20220317

LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2022012421>

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 Christenson

Baker Publishing Group publications use paper produced from sustainable forestry practices and post-consumer waste whenever possible.

22 23 24 25 26 27 28      7 6 5 4 3 2 1

# 1



## **SAN MARCIAL, NEW MEXICO AUGUST 1916**

**H**ello, Mama.” Cassie Barton sat down and smiled. “I couldn’t keep myself from coming today. I miss you so much.” She leaned forward and placed a small bouquet of flowers on her mother’s grave. She glanced to the left and sobered. “I miss you too, Papa.”

It had only been a few months since her father departed the earth, and she hadn’t quite gotten used to his absence, whereas Mama had been gone for seven years.

“It still feels like yesterday, though.” Cassie tried to keep tears from her eyes. How she missed them both. They had been the very center of her world.

“It’s going to be another hot day,” she said, not really caring. “Sometimes I wish I could be with you. Nothing is the same since you went away. I can’t help but think of you both all the time. When we sang ‘A Shelter in the Time of Storm’ at church, I remembered how it was one of your favorites, Mama. Especially the line, ‘The Lord’s our rock, in Him we hide, a shelter in the time of storm; secure whatever ill betide, a shelter in the time of storm.’”

“I remember your strong alto voice.” Her smile returned. “And Papa, you would just mouth the words because you couldn’t carry a tune. It always made me giggle because everyone around us knew the truth, yet you sang on in silence.”

She arranged the flowers between the two graves and got to her feet. “I have so much to do, or I would just sit here with you all day.” She paused and glanced heavenward. “I know you’re not here, but it somehow comforts me to find you in different places. Every time I’m near a train engine, I think of you, Papa. And when I cook something, I can almost hear you instructing me as you used to do, Mama. You will both be with me always. No matter where I am, I will feel you near.”

She wiped tears from her eyes and drew in a deep breath. They were in a better place. But she was alone. Completely alone in this world, despite having a younger sister. A sister who wanted nothing to do with her.

Cassie headed down the hill from the cemetery and past the Mexican grocery store in the Old Town of San Marcial. Why was she still here? Why did she stay?

“God, help me, please. I don’t know where I belong.”



“Well, Miss Cassie, what’s it to be today?” Mr. Brewster asked from behind the mercantile counter.

“I need thread,” she said, looking at her list. “Four white, two black, and two navy.”

The older man gathered the items and placed them in front of her. “Anything else?”

“Have the scissors I ordered come in yet?” She looked up, hoping he’d reply in the affirmative.

“Fraid not, Miss Cassie.” He shook his head. “Not sure why it’s taking so long.”

Cassie nodded. “I don’t suppose it can be helped.” She looked

back at her list. “Oh, I need a package of needles—the regular sewing needles. I also need a good leather needle.”

Mr. Brewster quickly collected the items. “How about fabric?”

“Not today. Most of my work has been mending rather than making.” She glanced around the store. “I will need a few things for the kitchen, however.”

“Of course. What’d you have in mind?” They moved in unison toward the opposite side of the store, Mr. Brewster on his side of the counter and Cassie on hers.

“I’d like two cans of peaches, some baking powder, and some peppermint oil.” She tucked the list in her pocket.

“We got some new saltwater taffy in just yesterday. Came all the way from San Francisco.” He grinned, reached for a piece, and handed it to Cassie. “Here, try a sample.” He knew all about her sweet tooth.

“If you insist.” She unwrapped the wax paper and popped the taffy in her mouth. Immediately, she tasted cherry. “Mmm.” It was all she could manage to say, as the taffy seemed to grow larger as she chewed. It was quite delicious.

“It’s not too expensive either. Would you like me to put together a bag for you? There’s a choice of cherry, lemon, peppermint, and licorice.”

She swallowed the taffy. “Licorice? Truly? How odd to make licorice taffy when there are sticks of licorice to be had.”

“I suppose enough folks must like the flavor.”

She nodded. “Well, give me a small bag of the cherry and lemon.”

Mr. Brewster seemed almost gleeful at her decision. “I told myself when it arrived that you’d probably be the first one to buy some, and now here you are.”

“Yes, well, I should probably curtail my spending and get home to my work. I have plenty of sewing that needs my attention.”

“But it’s past work hours, Miss Cassie. You shouldn’t work so hard. I know what with your pa gone you have an extra burden to see to yourself, but you know folks in this town care about you. You need never go hungry. Besides, you ought to be going out with some handsome fella. You need a husband, Miss Cassie.”

People were always trying to get her hitched to someone, especially now that her father was gone. “Thank you, Mr. Brewster. I appreciate your kind words. I’m doing just fine, however. I like staying busy. I don’t miss Papa quite as much that way.” She paused for a moment, hesitant to continue. “As for a husband . . . well, I’m not sure God has that in mind for me. But if He does, I’m sure He’ll send the right fella my way.”

“Of course. Still, there are a lot of Santa Fe fellas here in town who are reliable and single. I’m thinkin’ God might surely have one picked out for you.”

Cassie let the matter drop. She pushed back an errant strand of blond hair and waited for the older man to figure out what she owed.

Mr. Brewster finished gathering her things and made a tally on his receipt book. “I’ll just put this on your account.”

“That’s fine. I’ll settle up with you next week.” She started putting her purchases in her basket. “By the way, how’s Lydia doing? I saw she wasn’t in church last week and heard she had taken a summer cold.”

“She did, but she’s doing better. You know how it goes with a cold. A good seven days, and you’ll generally feel like a new man—or in her case, woman. I reckon by Sunday she’ll be back in church, playing the organ and singing at the top of her lungs.”

Cassie chuckled. “Your wife has a beautiful voice, and I’m not the only one who missed it last week. Tell her I’m praying for her full recovery.”

He nodded. “I will, Miss Cassie. I will.”

Heading for the door with her new purchases, Cassie had to

quickly step aside when two young boys burst through the open door. They paused momentarily at the sight of her.

“Hi, Miss Cassie,” the first one said. The second quickly joined in. They tipped their caps at her, then sailed on by. “Mr. Brewster! Mr. Brewster!” they yelled in unison.

“Let me guess. You’re here about the new baseball cards I got in,” the man said. The boys gave enthusiastic nods.

Cassie smiled. They were so excited. She stepped out of the store and started down the boardwalk.

“Hey, Miss Cassie,” another little boy called, jumping up from the sandy dirt road onto the boardwalk.

“Hello, Emmett. How was school today?”

“Long. I hate going back to school. I wanted summer to last forever.”

“Well, I’m sorry class had to start so soon.” She shifted her basket to her left arm, then reached out to ruffle the boy’s wavy blond hair. “Are you going to see Mr. Brewster about baseball cards?”

“Nah, my pa says baseball cards are a waste of time.” He looked down and kicked at the boardwalk.

“I’m sorry to hear that.” Cassie took pity on him. “How does he feel about saltwater taffy?”

The boy’s head snapped up. “I don’t know. He didn’t say.”

“Well then, maybe he won’t mind if I share a piece with you.” She reached into the sack of taffy. “You must promise that you won’t let this ruin your dinner.”

“I promise.”

She handed him a piece of candy and smiled. “Better not tell any of the other children where you got this. I’ve only got a few.”

He nodded. “I won’t.” He popped the candy in his mouth, and his eyes widened in delight. “This . . . is really . . . good,” he said, trying to master the taffy and his words all at once.

“Well, you run along and chew it slow. It’ll last a long time if you just keep chewing on it.”

He gave another nod and turned his head in the opposite direction. Cassie noted the way he'd thrown back his shoulders. There was a strut to his walk that suggested he was king of the roost. Taffy had a way of making a boy feel like a king.

She laughed. It was a good way to finish off a Friday. She headed down the boardwalk toward home. Fridays used to be a lot more interesting when Papa was alive. Not long before his death, he earned the right to take Saturdays off. Sometimes he might have to cover for someone, but most of the time he was able to be home Saturday and Sunday, which meant Friday night was something of a celebration.

Cassie always tried to have one of his favorite meals ready and waiting. How she missed their pleasant evenings and discussions of all that he'd seen during the week. She loved Papa's stories of driving the train back and forth from San Marcial to El Paso and Albuquerque on the Horny Toad line. It was nicknamed that because of all the horned toads that made their way onto the rails. A lot of them got killed by the trains, but most seemed to sense the danger and stayed back when the big steam engines came roaring through. Her father had told her about seeing so many horned toads that the ground beyond the tracks seemed to move like water. She had always wished she could see that.

She sighed. Now Papa was gone. It had been only five months. The raid of Pancho Villa on Columbus, New Mexico, had coincided with her father's train derailment, and most folks at the Santa Fe Railway believed Villa's men had something to do with the destruction of the rails that caused the accident. Papa and his young fireman, Archie Sullivan, had both been killed, and the town mourned right along with Cassie. Wesley Barton—Bart to his friends—was beloved by the townspeople. Many of the men volunteered to ride out against Villa and his revolutionaries, who were causing problems all along the border.

Thankfully, the army had pledged to stop the insurgent.

Black Jack Pershing, the general in command, assured New Mexicans that he would capture and deal with Villa. So far that hadn't happened, and folks were worried at the growing number of incidents being attributed to Villa. Especially after it was said that Pershing sent a telegram to Washington that read, *Villa is everywhere, but Villa is nowhere.*

"Why, Cassie Barton, are you so lost in your thoughts that you aren't even going to say hello?"

Cassie glanced up and found Myrtle Tyler, her pastor's wife, staring at her. "Oh, Myrtle, I am sorry. I'm afraid I was lost in thoughts of my father and all the problems along the border."

Myrtle patted her arm. "That's quite all right, my dear. I didn't truly take offense." She smiled and glanced into the basket. "I see you've been busy."

"Yes, I've been shopping and delivering mended clothes." Cassie smiled at the older woman. "How about you? It's rumored you have busied yourself baking twelve dozen cookies for the church picnic."

"It's no rumor. If I never make another cookie, it would suit me just fine, but I know how those things get devoured."

"That's what we get for having so many men working in our town."

"Single men," Myrtle amended. "Cassie, you need to find a husband. At thirty-two, you're a very attractive woman and can still bear children. Now that your father is gone, you need a man to protect and provide for you."

"I know. This isn't the first time I've heard you tell this tale. Nor are you the only one encouraging it."

"Well, goodness, it's true. Your younger sister is married with children. You should be as well."

"I remained single to take care of Papa," Cassie reminded her.

"But he's gone," Myrtle said, softening her tone. "And we miss him greatly, but he wouldn't want you to be alone. Why

don't you let me talk to John and see if we can figure out who might be a good match?" She chuckled. "As if you didn't know my choice. Brandon DuBarko was like a son to your father. I think the two of you would be fine together."

"Except that he's never shown the slightest indication that he's interested in me that way," Cassie replied. Myrtle opened her mouth to speak, but Cassie continued. "You can do as you like, but just remember that it doesn't mean things will work out. This is 1916, and folks marry for love. If I can't love a fella, I can't marry him. Even if I do love him but he doesn't love me, I *won't* marry him."

Myrtle chuckled and gave a nod. "I'm as much a romantic as can be. I completely agree that marriage should be between two people who mutually love and respect each other. What's life without love?"

Cassie knew the answer to that. It was lonely. It was facing every day without someone at your side. Someone there in the evening to talk to, someone to turn to when you were afraid.

"Well, my dear, I must be going. John and I are expected to dine with the Mackies this evening."

"I hope it's a wonderful time." Cassie embraced her friend.

"Don't forget what I said, Cassie. A husband would fill all the empty places."

"I'm sure he would."

Cassie watched as Myrtle headed down the boardwalk, then stepped into the street to cross. She was the dearest friend Cassie had, even if the woman was old enough to be her mother.

Cassie reached the boot repair shop and made her way inside, still contemplating all that Myrtle had said. Goodness but people were bound and determined to complicate her life.

Careful so as not to upset the entire contents of her basket, she maneuvered the stack of shirts from beneath her mercantile purchases. At the sound of his bell, Mr. White appeared, ready for business. He smiled when he saw Cassie.

“Well, Miss Barton, this is a surprise.”

“I have your mended shirts, Mr. White. Good as new.” She placed the stack on the counter.

“That’s wonderful. I’m sure you did a perfect job.”

“Well, you’re welcome to inspect them before you pay.”

He shook his head. “You have my confidence, Miss Barton. Like your father, I know I can take you at your word.”

“Indeed you can.”

“How much do I owe you?”

“They were in pretty bad shape. Two dollars and forty-two cents,” she replied, hoping he wouldn’t be offended.

“Money well spent. I would have spent a lot more if I had to buy them new.”

He reached into his till and pulled out two dollars, then fished for some change. “Can I give you a two-cent stamp?”

Cassie nodded. “That’s fine.”

He counted out two dollars and four dimes, then added the two-cent stamp. “There you are. All legal tender.”

Cassie gathered it up and put it in her coin purse. “I need to write my sister a letter, so the stamp will come in handy.”

“Thanks a lot, Miss Barton. I’m sure we’ll do business again soon. I seem to have a terrible way of things when it comes to tearing up my clothes.”

She smiled and headed for the door. “I’m sure to be around,” she called over her shoulder.

Cassie hadn’t taken two steps out the door when a crowd of young men engulfed her. She lost her balance almost immediately amid the boisterous group of Mexican railroad workers. One of the boys tried to steady her, but it was too late. She went sidewise off the boardwalk, fighting for all she was worth to hold on to her basket and still catch herself as she landed on the hard-packed road.

The minute her hand hit the ground, she knew it was a terrible mistake. Pain shot up her left arm. She reached for her

left hand with her right, noting that her basket had flown from her arm during the fall.

“*Lo siento mucho,*” one of the boys declared, apologizing.

Cassie tried to answer, but the wind had been knocked out of her. The pain in her hand increased. She couldn’t catch her breath. Things were looking worse and worse.