

*A Dream for Tomorrow*

MELODY  
CARLSON



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

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## **A DREAM FOR TOMORROW**

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List of Primary Characters

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**THE DAWSON PARTY**

Elizabeth Anne Martin

JT (12) and Ruth Anne (8)

Asa and Clara Dawson, *Elizabeth's parents*

Matthew and Jess Dawson, *Elizabeth's brother and sister-in-law*

Brady, *Elizabeth's farmhand and a freed slave*

**IN OREGON COUNTRY**

John and Malinda Martin, *Elizabeth's brother-in-law and his wife*

Todd, Emily (13), Bart (12), and Suzannah (9)

**WAGON TRAIN LEADERS**

Captain Brownlee, *wagon master*

Eli Kincaid, *scout*

**FELLOW TRAVELERS**

William Bramford, *a widowed lawyer from Boston*

Jeremiah (18), Belinda (17), and Amelia (16)

Hugh and Lavinia Prescott, *friends of William Bramford, also from Boston*

Julius (19), Evelyn (16), and Augustus (13)

Bert and Florence Flanders

Mahala (18), Ezra (16), Hannah (13), Walter (11), and Tillie (8)

Horace and Jane Taylor

Henry and Gertrude Muller and their four children

Ruby Morris (*Jess Dawson's aunt*) and her friend Doris

Paddy and Fiona McIntire

Dr. Nash

Abner Stone and his son Robert





## Chapter One



**Mid-June 1857**

For the third time in one morning, the wagon train came to a complete halt. With reins held tightly in one hand, Elizabeth used her teeth to tug one of her leather driving gloves up higher before she firmly pulled her wagon's brake handle. Listening to the creak of wood grinding against wood and the squeak of the straining harnesses, she was thankful that her father had insisted on giving her wagon and team a complete inspection earlier in the morning. He'd urged everyone in their unit to do the same, but the Mullers had not taken his suggestion to heart. Consequently they'd had the first breakdown of the day. As councilman of their unit, Father had not been pleased.

Shading her eyes from the sunshine with her prairie bonnet, Elizabeth peered upward at the intensely blue sky. Maybe it was the elevation or the time of year, but she couldn't remember when she'd seen sky this shade of blue. The position of the sun indicated that it was nearly noon, but she suspected they'd only traveled a mile or two, maybe less. Although she was relieved to give her weary team another chance to

rest, she couldn't help but feel concerned about the travel time they were losing.

Elizabeth understood these delays were due to overly burdened teams and mechanical breakdowns. The stress of driving heavily laden wagons up this rugged trail was taking its toll on many of her fellow travelers. As a result, a number of bulky items had been abandoned alongside the trail in the past few days. Most had been large pieces of furniture, and some appeared to be family heirlooms. But no material goods were valuable enough to threaten the lives of people and livestock. And seeing the Taylors' wagon up ahead and the worn-looking team, she figured Reverend Taylor and his wife would soon be forced to leave their beloved piano behind as well. The way Mrs. Taylor clung to that instrument mystified Elizabeth. It was out of tune and was obviously putting a severe strain on their mule team. To risk injuring an animal for a piano made no sense.

Captain Brownlee had warned all the units that ascending the treacherous South Pass would be slow going this week. He'd strongly cautioned a number of wagons to lighten their loads before beginning their ascent. Some had heeded his advice. Lavinia Prescott even left behind the solid cherry bedroom furniture she had brought all the way from Boston. Others, like the Mullers and the Taylors, had not listened.

Several days back, Eli Kincaid, the wagon train scout and Elizabeth's good friend, had shared the welcome news that they were nearly in Oregon Country and were more than halfway to their final destination. "Of course, the hardest part is yet to come," he had said lightly.

"So I've heard," she admitted. "But at least the landscape is beautiful."

He nodded, looking up toward the foothills. "Beautiful...and treacherous."

Elizabeth looked past her sturdy pair of mules to the glistening black backs of her Percheron horses, Bella and Beau. So far this team combination had worked well together. However, crossing the prairie had been relatively easy. Elizabeth hoped that with the flat plains and weeks of travel behind them, the animals would be accustomed to each other and continue to pull their weight. She also hoped that she hadn't been mistaken not to go with oxen teams like the rest of her family.

“What stopped us this time, Mama?” Ruth poked her head out from the covered part of the wagon. “Another breakdown?”

“I’m not sure. I hope it’s not Grandpa or Uncle Matthew.” Elizabeth peered up the trail to where Brady and JT were walking back toward them. She had offered to take the morning shift of driving the wagon. Brady and JT would take over in the afternoon. JT removed his hat and waved it high as if to signal that all was well.

“It’s someone up in unit four,” JT explained to her as he paused by Beau, stroking the horse’s glistening black flank.

“Your ma and pa and brother and his new bride are all jus’ fine,” Brady told her. “No problems there.”

“But the Mullers’ team is looking poorly,” JT said quietly. “Grandpa is talking to them right now. I heard him telling Mrs. Muller that if they didn’t unload some things, he didn’t want to see her or her children riding in the wagon.”

“Oh, dear.” Elizabeth shook her head. Gertie Muller was a big woman, and she did not enjoy walking along the trail. “Hopefully they’ll lighten their load before it’s too late.”

“What’ll they do if’n their team gives up the ghost?” Brady asked Elizabeth with concern.

“I honestly don’t know, Brady.” She sighed. “I suppose we’d all have to take them in or try to replace their animals with some of our extra livestock.”

“That don’t seem fair, Ma.” JT scowled. “Would you really let the Mullers use one of our cows to pull their wagon?”

She pressed her lips tightly together. The truth of the matter was that she would resent this as much as her son would. But she was the grown-up here, so she’d have to hide her emotions. “I reckon it’d be our Christian duty, JT. It’s not as if we could just leave the Mullers all behind, could we?”

“As contrary as they’ve been toward us?” JT looked unconvinced. “I don’t see why not.”

Elizabeth forced a smile for the sake of her children. “Jesus said we need to love even our enemies, son. Besides, don’t you think Gertie needs friends as much as anyone else?”

JT's brow creased as if he was considering this. "You want us to take over driving for you?" He brightened as if the prospects of driving were better than walking.

"Don't you think we'll be stopping for dinner soon?" she asked.

"Grandpa said we're not supposed to stop for another mile."

The idea of stretching her legs was appealing. She glanced back at Ruth. "What do you say? Want to walk now?"

Ruth nodded. "I think Flax wants to walk too."

Elizabeth handed the reins to Brady and JT, relieved to get down from the firm wagon seat, and she and Ruth and their energetic yellow dog made their way up the trail. They soon reached her parents' wagon, but only her mother was with it, and her head was bowed as if she were praying.

"Everything all right?" Elizabeth called up.

Clara blinked in surprise. "Oh, Elizabeth, you caught me unawares."

"Were you sleeping, Grandma?" Ruth giggled.

"I reckon I was." Clara gave them a sheepish, tired smile.

"How are you doing?" Elizabeth asked.

Clara's smile strengthened. "I'm a little worn out but no more than the rest of the travelers. Your father is checking on our unit...trying to talk some sense into certain emigrants."

"Like the Mullers," Ruth offered.

"Ruth." Elizabeth gave her daughter a warning look. "Remember your manners."

Clara pointed to a large wooden dresser alongside the road with vines growing over it. "Look at the poor old thing. It appears to have been sitting there for some time."

"Do you think there's anything in it?" Ruth asked curiously.

"I'm sure others have already gone through it," Clara told her.

"But you go ahead and have a peek if you like," Elizabeth said as she climbed up in the wagon to sit next to her mother. Then as Ruth and Flax hurried over to investigate the old dresser, Elizabeth turned to peer at her mother, looking into her eyes. "You look extra tired today. Is everything all right? Have you been sleeping well?"

"I'm sure I sleep better than most." Clara shook her head. "When I



think about some of the mothers, like our friend Flo, sleeping with all three of her girls in the back of one crowded wagon...well, I can't help but feel a mite selfish."

"Well, if you're that worried, you could always invite a couple of the Flanders girls to come over and sleep with you and Father." Elizabeth laughed. "For that matter, I'm sure Ruth would willingly join you."

Clara chuckled.

"Do you want to walk with Ruthie and me a spell?"

Clara pursed her lips and then shook her head. "No thank you, I think I'll stay here with Asa until we stop for dinner."

Elizabeth reached over and squeezed her mother's hand. "Go ahead and grab a few more winks while you can get them," she said as she climbed down.

She continued up to Matthew and Jess' wagon, which was just one ahead of her parents'. She still felt a little awkward around them. She supposed it wasn't easy being newlyweds on a wagon train, where privacy was hard to come by.

"Hello there, Jess," she called out when she saw that her new sister-in-law was the only one seated in the wagon. "Is Matthew off helping his fellow travelers?"

Jess nodded and smiled. "It seems only fair after our recent breakdown."

Elizabeth climbed up to sit next to her. "It makes me glad we're traveling in a big group. More hands to help out when someone is in need." She had watched the men working together to replace Matthew's broken wagon wheel the day before. Not only did it look extremely difficult, it had appeared dangerous as well. It was one thing to make wagon repairs on flat ground but something else altogether to do it on a hillside. Still feeling like a protective big sister, she was relieved that Matthew hadn't been forced to deal with it on his own.

"I think we should be good from here on out," Jess told her. "It helped to move some of the load into your father's wagon."

"Yes, now that our food supplies are diminishing, it was time to redistribute some of the weight."

"And with Soda Pass only a day or two ahead..." Jess pulled out a

book with a map, pointing out where they were on the trail. “And with an elevation of seven thousand feet, we need to take it as easy as we can on the animals.” She stuck the book back under the seat. “Which is why I’m going to get out and walk after Matthew returns.”

“Maybe you can walk with Ruth and me later.” Elizabeth hopped back down. “In the meantime I want to go see who broke down up there.”

“Yes, I’ll be curious to hear about it too.”

“Find anything in the dresser?” Elizabeth called out as Ruth and Flax came over.

“Nothing but dust.”

She grasped her daughter’s hand, quickening the pace. “Well, let’s go see what’s wrong up ahead. We’ll find out what’s holding us up.”

They discovered the trouble about ten wagons up. The Spencers in unit four appeared to have broken an axle. Not only that, but unless she was mistaken, Elizabeth thought they had team trouble as well. She knew enough about livestock to recognize a mule was seriously injured. With his big boxy head hanging straight down and one hoof lifted off the ground, the poor animal was clearly suffering.

“It’s a shame,” Belinda Bramford said as she and her sister came over to Elizabeth and Ruth. “We’ve been watching for a while, and it’s not good at all.”

“They’re going to have to put the mule down,” Amelia informed them.

“Mr. Spencer is getting his gun,” Belinda said quietly.

“They’re going to *shoot* him?” Ruth asked with wide eyes.

“Look at that front left leg,” Elizabeth told her daughter. “You can see it’s broken. He must have fallen when the axle broke.”

“But can’t it be fixed?” Ruth asked.

“Oh, Ruth...” Elizabeth sadly shook her head. “You’re a farm girl. You know the answer to that. There’s no way that poor animal can go on. The only kind thing to do is to put it down.”

Ruth turned to face her mother, covering her eyes with her hands. “I don’t want to watch it.”

“No,” Elizabeth told her. “Nor do I.”

“Me neither,” said Amelia.

“Let’s keep walking,” Elizabeth told them.

So now with the two teen girls joining them, they hastened on ahead. But they’d only gone about fifty yards before they heard the gunshot. Ruth’s grasp tightened on Elizabeth’s hand, but she said nothing. Her head hung down as they walked up the rutted wagon trail. Because of their fast pace, they soon caught up with the slow-moving wagons. Naturally, there were questions regarding the gunshot. Fortunately the Bramford girls didn’t mind sharing the sad news. Meanwhile, Elizabeth and Ruth continued walking.

“Grandma said we have to go a mile before we break for dinner,” Elizabeth told Ruth. “Maybe we can get far enough ahead to go off the trail a bit to look for wildflowers or strawberries or gather firewood.” She knew Ruth still felt confused and saddened over the injured mule and its untimely demise. And although it would be easy to sweep this under the rug and speak about something else, Elizabeth decided to use it as a teaching moment, and she silently prayed that God would help her.





## Chapter Two



Elizabeth led Ruth away from the main trail. Still holding her daughter's hand, she picked their way through a clearing in a forested section, even breaking off some small branches the way Eli had shown her to do just in case she forgot the way she'd come, which didn't seem likely.

"I understand how upset you feel about seeing that mule," she began. "And knowing he had to be put down like that." She paused by a tall evergreen. "And I remember how I felt the first time I saw a horse put down. I was about the same age as you."

"What happened?" Ruth looked up with sad brown eyes.

"Well, you know how your grandpa loves a good fast horse, don't you?"

"Yes." Ruth nodded with interest and perhaps a tiny bit of pride. "I remember back home in Kentucky... Grandpa had some of the finest horses thereabouts. Everybody used to say so."

Elizabeth couldn't help but smile. "And Grandpa would agree with you on that account."

“So what happened?” Ruth asked.

“When I was a girl, your grandpa had a beautiful gray stallion named Storm. That horse was Grandpa’s pride and joy, and Storm was valuable too. He had been siring some very fine foals for a couple of years by then. As I recall, Storm was about eight years old that summer—I can remember because he was almost the exact same age as me. Storm wasn’t just beautiful, he was fast too. And he had won the Fourth of July race three years in a row. So naturally, Grandpa entered him that last summer too.”

Elizabeth paused to pick up some branches near a dead tree, bundling them together and tucking them under her arm for kindling to use later. Ruth did likewise, making a smaller bundle.

“So what happened?” Ruth asked again as they continued strolling.

“Grandpa decided to let my Uncle Jake ride Storm that Fourth of July.”

“*Old* Uncle Jake?” Ruth looked confused.

“Well, he wasn’t old back then. And Uncle Jake had been begging and begging to ride Storm in the big race. And since he was Grandma’s favorite brother, Grandpa finally gave in.”

“What happened?” Ruth asked curiously. “Did Storm win the race?”

“He would have won. He had a solid lead, and the race was nearly over with. But then Uncle Jake decided to show off, and he veered Storm slightly off course. Everyone knew Storm was a good jumper, but Uncle Jake took Storm over a fence that wasn’t even part of the race.” She shook her head to remember what happened next. “Storm took the jump, but he must have been tired, and he caught his hind leg halfway over. He stumbled and broke a front leg. Uncle Jake suffered some too because the fall injured his back.”

“And Storm?” Ruth looked worried.

“Poor beautiful Storm had to be put down. And sadly, your Grandpa had to be the one to do it...” She sighed sadly. “I was with him, and I had to watch.” Elizabeth felt the old lump in her throat just to remember how crushed she’d been to see the big handsome stallion reduced to a quivering heap. “It was the hardest thing I’d ever seen. I loved that beautiful horse too. Seeing him like that...well, it was just devastating.”

“Oh, Mama!” Ruth gasped. “That’s horrible. Did Grandpa want to shoot Uncle Jake too?”

“Yes, it was horrible, and you can bet your grandpa was upset. Your grandma used to say it was a clear-cut case of pride coming before the fall. Uncle Jake’s pride...Storm’s fall. But on the way home that day, Grandpa talked to me, and I learned another important lesson. A lesson I’m still learning. And a lesson you’ll continue to learn as well.”

“What’s that?”

Elizabeth paused from walking and looked down into her daughter’s concerned brown eyes. “I learned that death is a part of life, Ruth. It’s something that happens to everyone and everything...eventually. There is no escaping it. Death is part of God’s plan for this world. We live our life here on earth as best we can, but we know that someday God will say it’s time to go.”

“Like when Pa and Uncle Peter died from the cholera?”

Elizabeth nodded sadly. “Yes. Like that.”

“I don’t want you to ever die, Mama.” Ruth looked like she was about to cry.

Now Elizabeth wrapped her free arm around Ruth, pulling her close. “I don’t plan on dying anytime soon. And I feel like you do—I don’t want anyone in our family to die either. And I honestly don’t think that’s going to happen for a long, long time. But it’s entirely possible that some people on this wagon train might die before we’re done. And I can’t pretend that it won’t happen. Just like we saw that mule today ending his life, it’s possible that could happen to some of our fellow travelers too. And if it does happen, we just have to trust God, Ruth. We have to believe that God is our heavenly Father and that he knows exactly what he’s doing. We also need to remember that God is preparing a place for us...for after we die.”

“You mean in heaven?”

“Yes. If we believe what the Bible says, we will live with God forever after we die...in heaven.”

“With Pa and Uncle Peter...and that poor old mule too?”

Elizabeth wasn’t sure what to say about the mule, but she simply nodded. “So death on earth isn’t really the end, Ruth. It’s just God’s

way of moving us to the next place. And that's why we don't have to feel afraid when someone dies."

"I thought Jess was going to die when she fell in the river that day," Ruth said solemnly. "But she didn't."

"No, she didn't." Elizabeth smiled. "It wasn't Jess' time to go, and God knew that."

"Because God must have known that Uncle Matthew needed her to be his wife."

Elizabeth laughed. "Yes, I'm sure that must have been why." Now she looked back in the direction of the wagon train, realizing that they'd wandered a little farther than she intended. "We better get back to the group," she said, taking Ruth's hand.

"Because of the Indians?"

Elizabeth shrugged. "I'm not that worried about Indians, Ruth. According to Eli, they're honoring their peace treaty through these parts. But rules are rules, and the captain would probably say we were too far away."

"What would *Eli* say?" Ruth asked.

Something about Ruth's tone made Elizabeth turn to study her eight-year-old daughter. "I don't know, Ruth. What do you think Eli would say?"

"He'd probably say..." Ruth lowered her voice as if she were a man. "He'd say, 'Let me walk you two pretty ladies back to the train.'"

Elizabeth couldn't help but laugh. "You think so, do you?"

Ruth nodded. "You know what else I think, Mama?"

"I have no idea what all goes through that funny head of yours."

"I think Eli likes you."

"Well, I think Eli likes you too." Elizabeth didn't care for the direction this conversation had taken. "In fact, I think Eli likes everyone on this wagon train. It's his job to help take care of us and keep us safe. Kind of like how a shepherd takes care of the sheep."

"I think Eli likes you more than he likes all the other people on the wagon train," Ruth persisted.

They walked together quietly until they were finally close enough to hear the rumbling of the wagon train. It sounded like the back section



was finally moving again as well. Elizabeth didn't want to think of what had become of that injured mule, but she knew that many of the emigrants were low on provisions, and some of them weren't opposed to eating roasted mule.

Elizabeth glanced at Ruth to see that her daughter was still peering curiously up at her, and she realized that this was another topic she shouldn't be sweeping under the rug. She paused by a fallen log, switching her bundle of branches to the other arm. "And what makes you think that?" she asked. "Why would you say Eli likes me more than the other people on the train?"

"I saw how Eli looked at you at Uncle Matthew and Jess' wedding... and when you two were dancing together."

"Really? And how was that?" Elizabeth gazed back toward the trail, purposely avoiding Ruth's intense stare.

"Eli was looking at you...looking at you...like you hung the moon." Ruth giggled.

Elizabeth was too stunned to respond coherently. "*Wh—what?*"

"That's what Tumbleweed Tillie said that Mahala said when she saw you and Eli dancing at the wedding." Tumbleweed Tillie was Ruth's best friend and Mahala Flanders was Tillie's big sister. And Elizabeth could imagine them saying something like this.

"She did, did she?" Elizabeth tried not to act too shocked at Mahala's observations and comments. But she knew that eighteen-year-old Mahala was just one of the older girls who had enjoyed flirting with the handsome trail scout. Perhaps even more so since Matthew and Jess got married. In fact, Elizabeth felt certain that the recent wedding had stirred up plenty of romantic daydreams. Or maybe it was the month of June or the moonlit nights, or perhaps it was simply the clean mountain air.

But Elizabeth had noticed how the girls had become overly aware of the various eligible bachelors on this train. And even the girls still in their teens seemed unconcerned that Eli was nearly twice their age. Even the more sensible Bostonian city girls, Belinda and Amelia Bramford and Evelyn Prescott, seemed to pause whenever Eli passed by on his horse. She'd observed how they preened and smiled, sweetly calling

out greetings. Maybe it was Eli's fringed buckskins and knee-high moccasins that attracted them. Or maybe it was his fine-looking Appaloosa. But more than likely it was Eli himself... his clear blue eyes and rugged good looks and easy smile and—

"Mama?" Ruth tugged on Elizabeth's arm.

"What?" Elizabeth blinked in embarrassment.

"Didn't you hear me talking to you just now?"

"I'm sorry." Elizabeth felt her cheeks growing warm. "I guess I was thinking about something else."

"I was asking you a question."

"What was your question?"

"Do you like Eli too?"

"Oh, well... of course I like Eli. He's been a good friend to our whole family and—"

"No, no. I don't mean like *that*, Mama. I mean do you *like* Eli the way Uncle Matthew likes Jess?" Ruth looked up with intense interest. "Would you ever marry Eli?"

Elizabeth glanced over to the wagons moving nearby. She spotted her brother's wagon and knew it wouldn't be long until her own wagon passed. Naturally, no one could hear this conversation over here, but it was a bit unsettling just the same.

"Why would you ask that?" Elizabeth questioned.

"Because Tumbleweed Tillie heard her mama saying she thought you and Eli should get married."

"Oh, Ruth." Elizabeth shook her head with disappointment. "You shouldn't repeat things like that. Don't you know that's just a hop, skip, and jump away from gossiping?"

Ruth's eyes grew wide with worry and she pressed her lips tightly together.

"I'll tell you what, darling." Elizabeth lowered her voice as if disclosing a deep dark secret. "If I ever think there's the slightest chance of something like you just mentioned happening, you and JT will be the very first ones to know about it."

"Really?"

"I give you my word on it."

Ruth smiled in relief. “Now, don’t you forget that promise, Mama. JT and me will be the first to know if you’re going to get married.”

“Don’t worry, I won’t forget!” Elizabeth threw back her head and laughed. “And don’t worry, I have no intention of getting married—at all!”

Of course, as they continued to walk, Elizabeth could think of nothing but Eli now. And the truth was, even if she did feel attracted to Eli, she could not for the life of her imagine marrying him ever. Or anyone else for that matter. James had been gone for nearly four years, but she’d only given up her widow’s weeds six months ago. And she knew she could never let go of her memories of him.

Certainly, it was one thing to enjoy the company of a man or to dance at a family celebration—and both these activities still felt a bit foreign to her—but it was something else entirely to entertain the idea of marriage. It was inconceivable. Besides—and this thought was surprisingly reassuring—she felt relatively certain that Eli had no intention of marrying her or anyone. If she’d ever met a confirmed bachelor before, Eli seemed to fit the title perfectly.

In their conversations, which had been few and brief, Eli had always made it clear that he loved his outdoor job and independent lifestyle. Nothing pleased him more than sleeping under the stars and cooking over an open fire. He loved hunting and fishing, and after dwelling with the Indians for a few years, he was perfectly comfortable living off the land in a very rustic sort of way. Indeed, Eli Kincaid was what Elizabeth would call an independent soul. And she had no intention of tying him down or saddling him with two children.