















turned back to the letter case and Eliza moved her stool closer. “It is more important to us that you learn from the Nez Perce than that you turn a fine seam or study watercolors—at least for now.”

Eliza thought about that. So that was why Mama and Papa allowed her to spend so much time with Timothy and Matilda in the Nez Perce village and play with her friend Noah.

“Do you know how many white settlers can speak Nez Perce?” He didn’t wait for her answer. “Precious few. But you not only speak the language, you’ve helped me fashion a written language so we can give our friends the Bible in their own language.”

Eliza breathed in deeply through her nose. Maybe what looked like wildness was being the good missionary her father always said they must be.

Her father continued to set type.

“Would it help if I read the passage to you while you set the type?”

“It would. I could go much faster. Then I’ll just have to double-check our spelling and punctuation when I’m finished. I’m redoing Genesis since we refined some of the spelling. Start at 1:1.”

She picked up his paper and started to read slowly. “*Uyít-pa Akamkiniku-m pa-háni-a uág uétas-na, kauá kuníg pa-háni-a úikala-na petú-na úilákz-zíkiú uéutukt.*”

“Good. I have that correct. Now continue.”

Eliza read the passage until he finished the form. He then



took the paper she had been reading and checked each word against the type he had set. “There,” he said, “we’re ready to go.”

She watched him put the form on the bed of the press and ink the type. He put the paper between the two frames—her father called them the frisket and the tympan—and rolled the bed into place. She loved to see the paper press against the type, knowing the words would print on the paper. Papa took the paper off and hung it on a wire to dry while he repeated the process to print page after page.

In the beginning, God created the heaven and the earth. This was a lesson the Nez Perce already knew. They knew about the Creator long before the white trappers had come. And they knew about the Bible before her parents had ever decided to come to the Oregon territory. She loved that story.

As her father worked the press she wandered out into the yard. It was a beautiful, cool fall morning. The last of the leaves on the trees still showed color. When the sun shone, like today, the color took one’s breath away.

Several Nez Perce stood outside the makeshift gristmill with grain or sacks of flour. Timothy stood in the middle of the men. She ran toward him. Timothy was one of the first believers at the mission. He stood tall even among the Nez Perce. His hair was mostly black, tied back in a thong of rawhide. The gray color along his temples was the sign of an elder—a respected one. Even since before she was born, Timothy had been one of her family’s closest friends. He helped her father learn the language and encouraged his people to come to the mission.

As she drew near, she heard Timothy speaking with another man. She knew it was impolite to interrupt, so she stood waiting nearby. She could hear most of the conversation. It was about the Cayuse over at *Wai-i-lat-pu*—the Whitman mission. She'd been there many times.

When her parents came west, there was another missionary couple with them, the Whitmans. They settled near Fort Walla Walla on the Oregon Trail to work among the Cayuse. Mama and Papa continued on and set up their mission near Lapwai, the home of the Nez Perce. Secretly, Eliza was glad. She loved the Nez Perce people. From the earliest time—some say the days of the Spaniards—they had been horse breeders and were respected by most of the tribes. Their horses were the best. Papa always said he'd take a Nez Perce pony over an eastern Thoroughbred any day.

She sighed just thinking about their horses.

Eliza loved horses. Noah had a pony and sometimes he let her ride. But she longed for a pony of her own. She even had a name picked out—*Ayi*—if she ever got a pony. Every time she asked Papa about it, he'd answer, "In due time, Eliza. In due time." If only he'd say "in six months," or in "one year," she could count off the days, but "in due time"? What did that mean? Sometimes she pretended he'd said dew time. When she woke up to dew on the ground, like this morning, she'd think, maybe today is the day *Ayi* will come. But so far, the dew never brought *Ayi*.

She watched the men talking. Timothy mostly listened. She couldn't hear it all but she heard enough to worry her. The

short man talked of jealousy and unrest. He said the Cayuse were concerned about the growing numbers of white settlers that crossed through their land on the Oregon Trail. Because the settlers stopped at the Whitman Mission, they believed the mission was bringing the people to take over Cayuse land.

Timothy said little but he promised the man that he'd speak to Eliza's father about it.

When Timothy turned and saw her, a smile broke on his worried face. "Little one, have you come to say *Tats Meywi* to Timothy?"

"*Tats Meywi, Piimx*. Good morning. Are you grinding wheat today?" She and Henry called Timothy *Piimx*—uncle—out of respect.

"Yes. Last grain before snows come."

"Timothy," she hesitated. Should she mention the conversation she'd overheard? "Are the Cayuse angry with us?"

"Not you, little one. Much change in the land. I talk with your father."

Eliza wished she could listen in. She didn't know why everyone couldn't just get along. Whenever people argued, it made her stomach hurt. But surely Timothy and her father could work this out.

"You see Noah today?" Timothy asked.

"He hasn't come."

"You ride back to village with me. Special day. Henry, too."

It was a special day—her birthday. Today she was nine years old.

She ran to ask her mother. As she entered the house, Mrs. Willard seemed to be taking leave so Eliza moved to her corner of the house and pulled on stockings and her sturdy boots. Even though it was November, she often still wore her moccasins around the mission grounds. The dirt was packed too tight for grass to grow so she didn't have to worry about hidden snakes, and she rarely stayed in one place long enough for her feet to get cold. But if she were going to the Nez Perce village, she'd need her shoes and stockings.

Her brother, Henry, had been minding Martha Jane. She had only been walking for about six months but she could get into everything. Henry was almost seven years old and there was nothing he liked better than playing with the baby. He and Eliza took turns watching her while Mama taught Indian School or entertained visitors, but Henry was happiest when it was his turn. He would put a stocking over his hand and play puppets with Martha for hours.

This morning he'd worn the baby out. She slept on a pile of quilts in the corner.

Eliza whispered, "Timothy will take us to the village if Mama lets us go."

Henry didn't need convincing. He sat down and pulled on his stockings and boots as well. "What are we going to do?"

"I don't know. Let's see what Noah is doing."

Mama came in after seeing Mrs. Willard off. "What are you two planning?" she asked with a smile.

"Timothy is over at the gristmill but he said he'd take us to

the village when he's ready to leave. Can we go?"

"I cannot see any reason for you not to go, especially since I have something special to do this afternoon."

Before Eliza could ask about this special task, her mother continued. "Your father is going to the village to meet with some of the men later this afternoon, so he will bring you back home." Her mother turned to get her sewing basket. "Will you take this floss to Matilda?" She handed Eliza a card with a sunny yellow thread wound 'round.

Eliza took the thread and tucked it deep into the pocket of her apron.

"Now have a little food before you go." She cut slices of bread off the loaf she baked the day before and spread some of her berry preserves on them. She poured two cups of fresh milk to go with the bread.

While they sat at the table to eat, Mama left to take food out to Papa so he didn't have to stop working. On days like these when noonday dinner was quick, they often had their warm meal at suppertime.

As Eliza rushed through the small meal, her mind flitted in different directions. Should she be worried about angry Cayuse or about the settlers thinking her wild or about the special task her mother needed to do?

It was her birthday. She'd think about secrets. The rest could wait for another day.