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CLARION REVIEW ★★★★★ HISTORICAL

Journey to Oxford: A Love Story

Barnard McEntire
B & C Books (Oct 17, 2012)
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As the United States expanded in the 1800s, Native Americans lost their customs and culture, as well as their lives, to disease and warfare. Set during that tumultuous period, Barnard McEntire's *Journey to Oxford: A Love Story* is the story of Nathaniel Briggs, a gifted apprentice doctor with more knowledge than the average degree-holding physician, and his forbidden relationship with Secawa, a Native American teenager who remains loyally at his side.

Destined for Oxford University in England, where he had already been accepted, Briggs's goals are expansive and selfless. Though opposed and criticized by his more experienced American peers for his controversial methods and groundbreaking discoveries, Briggs refuses to accept outdated procedures that he knows have led to countless fatalities. Outspoken and determined, Briggs struggles for respect while working with the injured and sick in the volatile American West. An abolitionist battling bigotry and abuse, he flees with a slave after his family dies of cholera, his mother is murdered, and his fortune is lost to thieves.

The book opens long after his beloved Secawa has died giving birth to their child, as Briggs relates their timeless love affair to their now adult son. Though he later married another woman, Secawa's tombstone is an earthly reminder of the passion they shared. In Secawa's words, "When we die, our spirit still lives. No. I do not fear death. I fear the emptiness when you leave."

Poignant and gentle, McEntire's storytelling is masterful. His writing is straightforward and touching, descriptive without ornate affectation. "It grew cold that night. So, despite her timidity, Secawa nestled against Nat to keep warm. He stayed still so as not to frighten her. He emerged from the tipi the next morning to find the first rays of the sun dancing off a thin mantle of snow on the trees and grass."

Romantic without a syrupy sweet coating, the story depicts a realistic setting in an honest light that shines on the good and the bad in this volatile time. Vibrant characters come to life in a situation we can only imagine in our contemporary world of advanced medicine and high technology.

The book's eye-catching cover depicts a beautiful Native American maiden set against a sunset that casts its ethereal glow across an open field. For a debut work, *Journey to Oxford* is exceptional. McEntire's polished style is further inspired by real characters and events. This novel will appeal to American history buffs and fans of the romance genre.

JULIA ANN CHARPENTIER (December 19, 2012)

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