

## Trusting Grace

**Maggie Brendan**

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*Brendan smartly uses the West and the aftermath of the Civil War in this charming romance and interesting piece of historical fiction.*

Corinthians claims love is gentle, kind, and patient, but sometimes, getting to that love can be brutal, cruel, and capricious. In *Trusting Grace*, by Maggie Brendan, the romance develops in post-Civil War Montana territory, where eking out a living alone is half the battle for any single person. Brendan develops her vibrant characters slowly as they tentatively build a relationship in spite of their own fears and loss.

Unexpectedly widowed, Robert Frasier didn't learn of the existence of his deceased wife's children until her sister deposited them on his doorstep. Unable to provide for them, Robert hits the road with the new family, looking for work and trying to adjust to his new situation. Meanwhile, Grace Bidwell is struggling to keep her farm together after the death of her husband and the sudden illness of her beloved father. Robert takes a job as a handyman at Grace's farm, and the two begin a tentative friendship, both attracted, both unnerved by their past experiences.

Brendan takes time with these characters, building them into people very much a part of the setting that defines them. The vagaries acted upon farms, the sudden catastrophic illnesses—so much can be taken away so quickly in this era. This forces people to decide quickly whether or not to trust someone—from the hired hand to the oily new lawyer in town trying to court Grace. Brendan also uses her cast of characters—Robert's three adopted children, Grace's father and best friend—to mimic the close support of family and friends so necessary in the territories.

Though a Christian romance, the Christian element enters into the novel more in terms of behavior and the occasional heartfelt prayer as opposed to overt talk of religion. Grace eagerly embraces Robert's children and makes a home for them; Robert works to be a worthy stepfather. Though the couple share some romantic kisses, the novel focuses on the evolution of the couple and the children into a family.

Brendan smartly uses the West and the aftermath of the Civil War to ground her characters and their conflict and in so doing, writes not only a charming romance, but an interesting piece of historical fiction.

CAMILLE-YVETTE WELSCH (Religion 2017)

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