

A close-up photograph of two hands holding each other. The hand on the left is wearing a light beige, textured knit sleeve and a matching lace-trimmed cuff. The hand on the right is wearing a dark blue, ribbed knit sleeve and a bright orange, ribbed knit glove. The background is a soft, out-of-focus snowy landscape with white snow and blurred greenery.

*the
Shadow
of Your
Smile*

Susan May
WARREN

❧ a deep haven novel ❧

Praise for *My Foolish Heart* and other Deep Haven novels

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PUBLISHERS WEEKLY

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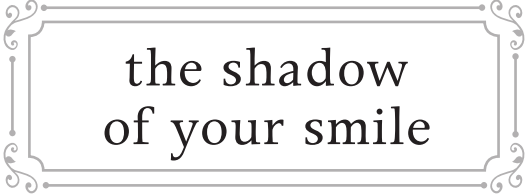
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ROMANTIC TIMES

A decorative rectangular frame with ornate, symmetrical scrollwork at each corner and small circular accents at the midpoints of the top and bottom edges. The frame is composed of two parallel lines.

the shadow
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For Your glory, Lord

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1

NOELLE LONGED FOR the redemption that came with a fresh snow. The way it blanketed the northern woods of Minnesota with lacy grace, frosted the shaggy limbs of the white pine, turned the grimy dirt roads and highways to ribbons of pristine, unblemished white. The crisp bite of a shiny morning after a blizzard had the power to woo a new spirit to life inside Mrs. Eli Hueston, mother and wife of the former Deep Haven sheriff, when she stood on the deck of her woodsy home, steam from a cup of coffee swirling into the chilled air.

In moments like those, she almost believed that everything could be made new.

But this snow offered no such redemption. This snow, a mixture of sleet and flake, bulleted Noelle's windshield, crusts of ice

piling in the corners, turning her wiper blades to razors. This snow transformed the highway into a lethal slick of black ice as she crawled along the shore of Lake Superior to her tiny north shore hamlet.

Eli would surely discover her transgressions now.

Noelle turned her wipers on high to sweep the sleet faster, cranked the defrost to full. She should have scraped her windshield better before leaving Eric's office, but she'd checked her watch, calculated her route home, and bargained on her car heating faster than the storm.

Again, she'd opted for survival mode.

But that's what this trip was about, wasn't it? Surviving?

Or maybe it was about living again.

The road from this stretch of northern Minnesota into the northeast corner of the state appeared eerily vacant, the storm turning the late afternoon to pewter gray. She had switched her lights to dim, the brights only making the snow appear three-dimensional as it buffeted her. Deer lurked under the cover of black pine, poplar, and birch trees that walled either side of the road, ready to throw themselves into traffic.

In this weather, a touch of her brakes might spin her right into the ditch.

Maybe she should have spent the night in Duluth, but then she'd certainly have explaining to do.

In the cup holder of her ancient Yukon, her phone buzzed. Noelle fumbled with the earpiece, glancing at the road, then back to the phone. Lee. She finally wedged the earpiece in, clicked the button.

"Lee? Are you still there?"

The voice, splotchy with the poor reception, cut through the rhythm of the wiper blades, the pummeling of the sleet. "Noelle,

where are you? You missed yoga this morning. And Sharron said she's covering your visitation at the care center."

Not yet. She couldn't tell Lee just yet.

It would be a big enough scandal when the news did surface. She hoped to hold it in for at least five more months. Just until Kirby's graduation. Then she could exhale.

They'd all exhale, probably. Especially Eli. She wasn't deceiving herself—he would be as relieved as she with her decision.

"I had to run to Duluth." True enough.

"Today? There's a winter storm advisory. Didn't you listen to the weather report this morning?"

She could picture Lee, always beautiful with her long auburn hair, a trim body that needed no yoga, probably sitting in her immaculate home, staring through the window at the lake as it pounded the rocks outside her house.

Her lonely house. Noelle admired Lee for her strength, but Lee had filled her life with so many activities since that horrible day that being snowbound could curl her into the fetal position if it weren't for the telephone and her son, Derek, classmate of Kirby.

If they had a snow day tomorrow, Kirby would dig out the snow machine and spend the day carving trails in the woods. How they used to relish the rare snow days of the north. One year—Kirby had been about ten—he and Kyle and Kelsey had spent the day building a snow cave . . .

The memories could rise like knives to skewer her, carve her breath from her lungs. *Focus on the future.*

"I heard we might have snow, but I had an appointment." Also true. Noelle lifted her foot from the gas as she rounded a curve.

"Oh no, it's not . . ." Lee said, worry in her tone.

Bless her for remembering. The last few years had turned their

friendship stiff, but Lee had tried all the same. Noelle should remember that.

“I got an all clear from the biopsy—the report came in the mail a couple weeks ago.” Noelle should have mentioned it to Lee, but she’d been so busy preparing for today. In a way, the clean report had only confirmed for her that it was time. “But I had some follow-up to do.” Like figuring out how she got here, a forty-six-year-old woman who longed to start her life over.

“Are you going to be okay?”

Yes. She had to believe it. *Yes*. “I’m fine. Did you say they called a winter storm advisory?”

“Yes, although I’m sure the basketball team will stay for practice in hopes their game won’t be snowed out tomorrow.”

Noelle made a face. Perfect. Sometimes her family’s devotion to small-town sports could make her bang her head against the dashboard.

Still, if it weren’t for Kirby and his athletics, she might have lost herself completely.

“I hate Kirby driving home in this storm in that decrepit Neon. I told Eli to change his tires out for winter treads, but . . .” If she’d been home, she would have put on the four-wheel drive in her SUV and trekked to the school.

She hated to ask, but that’s what fellow sports moms did for each other. “If Kirby lands in the ditch, can you pick him up?”

“Where’s Eli?”

The obvious question, of course. And in earlier years, the answer might have been easier. In town. At the station. Or in his cruiser.

But since he’d retired a few months back, who really knew? “He said he was going up to the lake, fishing. I expected to be back before he returned but—”

“Absolutely, Noelle. Don’t worry about a thing. I’ll make sure Kirby isn’t left alone.”

“Thanks, Lee. How’s Emma?” Noelle managed to ask without a hiccup in her voice, although a burr filled her throat. Someday, perhaps, she could ask without the pain.

“She’s fine. Still playing her music in the Twin Cities. I think she has a gig this weekend.”

She *thought*? Sometimes Noelle hated Lee for how easy it all came for her.

Noelle heard the sound of the dishwasher being unloaded, plates scraping together. Lee probably only had to load it once a week nowadays.

Maybe Noelle should have invited Lee to go with her. But she had to do this alone.

Would do it alone. After all, who else did Noelle have who might understand what it felt like to look in the mirror and not recognize the woman she’d become? Lee had survived, even become stronger after that terrible day. She couldn’t possibly understand what it felt like to want to leave it all behind.

To want to forget.

Not that Noelle wanted to erase the last twenty years of her life. Just parts of it.

Heart-wrenching, horrible, breath-stealing parts.

But not even God could heal the wounds and put their family, her marriage, back together again.

“I’ll be home soon.” Ahead, Noelle spied the lights of the next town shining out of the grayness. “I’m going to stop and get some coffee. If Eli shows up looking for me . . . just tell him I’m on my way home.”

Silence, then, “He doesn’t know you went to Duluth?”

Noelle tapped her brakes as the speed limit decreased. “I meant to tell him, but . . .”

No, actually, she hadn’t, and she could nearly hear her pastor in her head. *A lie of omission is still a lie.*

But was it a lie if they never talked about *anything*? If she and Eli had been reduced to two barely compatible roommates? He’d been sleeping in the den for more than a year now. It had somehow ceased to matter if she informed him what she was doing.

Ever again.

“Be safe,” Lee said, her voice sounding distant, even odd.

But it could be the storm, the pitch of her tires as Noelle slowed to pull into the Mocha Moose coffee shop along the highway. She could use something to keep her awake for the rest of the two-hour drive.

“Thanks, Lee,” she said, but her friend had already clicked off. Probably she’d simply lost the signal—it happened too often up here in moose country. She parked, grabbed her purse, and trekked across the lot. She shouldn’t have worn her three-inch dress boots. But she hadn’t been thinking of the storm when she’d dressed this morning.

She’d been trying to find a pair of suit pants that didn’t pinch at the waist, didn’t appear to be from the eighties—the last time she’d interviewed for anything that mattered. She’d been trying to remember how to fix her blonde shoulder-length hair into anything but a swept-up ponytail, and rehearsing her answers.

Why do I deserve enrollment in the Duluth Art Institute?

She had some feeble replies, none that seemed overly compelling. Eric Hansen had seemed nice enough about her responses, however. Said he’d contact her.

She stamped her way into the coffee shop, the warmth fogging

her sunglasses. She pushed them on top of her head and walked to the counter. A cheery gas fire crackled in the hearth, leather chairs for reading propped before it. A chalkboard along the back listed the specials.

“Just in time. We’re about to close,” the girl behind the register said.

Noelle scanned the board. Oh, why not? “A white chocolate mocha with extra whip.” She dug into her purse. “And can I have those little chocolate chip sprinkles?”

The perky cashier, a blonde probably fresh out of high school, grinned at her. “Celebrating?”

Perhaps she was. The restart to her life, the road to something she could live with. Noelle nodded as she paid, then walked to the next counter to wait for her drink.

When the mocha arrived, she added a cozy to the cup, then took a sip, emboldening herself for the storm outside. The chocolate warmth seeped into the empty crannies inside, fortified her, if only for a second.

She could do this. With or—and this was more likely—without Eli.

She’d come to accept that, at least mostly. If only she could go back in time, figure out when it had started to unravel, maybe they’d still have a marriage worth saving.

One last stop in the facilities and then she’d head for home. She ducked into the ladies’ room, and that’s when she heard the noises. Shouts, raised voices. She cracked open the door and froze.

Standing in front of the counter were two men wearing ski masks—or one she’d call a boy because his stature didn’t resemble the broad-shouldered girth of the other man. The larger held a gun on the cashier. Noelle recognized a 9mm Glock.

The skinny one handed over a paper bag. "Fill it up, then get on the floor."

Really? A coffee shop holdup?

Still, petty thieves lurked in the north woods too. Look at what had happened in Deep Haven.

Well, no one was going to die today.

Noelle's heart slammed against her ribs as she fumbled in her purse for her cell phone. Shoot, she'd left it in the car, in the cup holder.

But there was the door, two steps away . . .

She took a breath, then flung open the restroom door and raced for the exit.

"Hey!"

One of them turned, and she might have heard a shot as she leaped onto the sidewalk, diving for her car.

A hand caught her arm, yanked her back. "Where do you think you're going?" She clawed at his ski mask even as he dragged her back into the coffee shop.

Inside, he slapped her hard, her jaw ringing. Brown eyes, a tattoo on his hand in the webbing of his thumb.

The cashier was on the floor behind the counter, crying. She had a welt across her cheek, open and bleeding. The boy stood over her, scraggly blond hair peeking out from his ski mask. He looked at Noelle, and she chilled at the pale blue-gray of his eyes.

The larger man now grabbed her by the neck, pushed her face into the floor. "Open the safe or we'll kill her," he growled to the employee.

The girl whimpered as she crawled to an office in the back.

Please, God, I don't want to die on the floor of a coffee shop.

Or a convenience store. The thought nearly choked her. Her family couldn't go through that again.

"We got it," the boy said.

"Good. Now shoot her." He held out his Glock to the boy.

The boy stared at it. Shook his head. "I can't."

The bigger man stifled a curse word. Then he disappeared into the back.

Oh, oh, please, no—

Noelle jerked as a shot rang out.

The boy met her eyes, his own wide.

She felt it inside then. Instinct, maybe. A voice.

Run.

Run!

She sprang up, leaping for the door. Shouting chased her, but she fled down the sidewalk for the road.

There—headlights! A semi plowing through the blizzard.

"Help! Help!" She scrambled into the road, waving her hands above her head. "Stop!"

That's when her boots betrayed her. They slipped on the black ice, her foot flinging out in front of her. The jolt jerked her other foot free. Her body launched into the air.

Her scream joined the screech of the semi.

Noelle slammed into the pavement, pain exploding through her.

Then, darkness.

A Note from the Author

EVER LOOK BACK on your life and think, *What happened?* I know I do. Where is the woman who wanted to work in a New York ad agency? Where is the runner, the outdoor enthusiast, the girl who wanted to own a ranch in Colorado? (I clearly had mixed goals!) Oh, wait, she married this cute guy who wooed her from the back of his motorcycle and whisked her off to be a missionary in Russia. Then she had these four kids. And then she started writing books (and spending a lot of time in her office rather than outside!). I'm not complaining—I love my life. But looking back, twenty-two years ago I couldn't have imagined being where I am today.

What if you could reset your life? Would you do the same things? And what parts of your life would you keep . . . or cut out? These were the questions that hounded me as I began to write *The Shadow of Your Smile*. I read an article about a man who had fallen and lost his memory of the past twenty-five years, and from his story I launched my own exploration into the what-ifs of starting over. It also happened to be my daughter's senior year of high school, and watching her prepare to be on her own, while exciting, also strummed sorrow in my heart. I will miss her. I let

my imagination wander into dark places a bit and wondered how, if anything should happen to her, I might go on without her. I've met women who have lost their children, and their wounds are deep and abiding. I myself have lost four children to miscarriage. That dark place of grief made me wonder—would it be better to start over, or would the joy of the memories be worth the pain?

Maybe our grief comes not from the loss of a child, but from a different loss, a regret, a mistake . . . anything that has wounded us so deeply we long to erase it all. But we can't erase it, so what do we do?

That question drove me to Psalm 13: "How long must I struggle with anguish in my soul, with sorrow in my heart every day? . . . But I trust in your unfailing love. I will rejoice because you have rescued me. I will sing to the Lord because he is good to me."

What does it mean to have the Lord be good to us—especially with our open wounds? I think the answer lies in this passage also: because of God's unfailing love for us, because He has rescued us from death, we have hope.

One of my favorite verses is Romans 15:13: "I pray that God, the source of hope, will fill you completely with joy and peace because you trust in him. Then you will overflow with confident hope through the power of the Holy Spirit." Our job is to trust. God's job is to overflow us with joy.

That's hard to imagine when we're sitting in dark places. I know—I've been there. If you've read any of my other books, you'll find some of my stories in the author's notes. But even in those dark places, I think hope is found in something Noelle discovered: "Maybe the key to going forward with her life was simply being grateful for it." Being grateful for all we have, grateful for all we

will have, grateful for the unfailing love of God—this is the foundation of hope.

Psalm 16 says, “Apart from you, I have no good thing.” This is the one thing I hope to never forget. This is the one thing that I take with me into the future. I have God. I have good things.

I hope you’ve been encouraged by the power of love through Noelle and Eli’s story. There are new beginnings even for “worn-out” marriages. There is hope because of God’s unfailing love.

In His grace,
Susan May Warren

About the Author

SUSAN MAY WARREN is the RITA Award–winning author of more than thirty novels whose compelling plots and unforgettable characters have won acclaim with readers and reviewers alike. She served with her husband and four children as a missionary in Russia for eight years before she and her family returned home to the States. She now writes full-time as her husband runs a lodge on Lake Superior in northern Minnesota, where many of her books are set. She and her family enjoy hiking, canoeing, and being involved in their local church.

Susan holds a BA in mass communications from the University of Minnesota. Several of her critically acclaimed novels have been chosen as Top Picks by *Romantic Times* and won the RWA's Inspirational Reader's Choice contest and the American Christian Fiction Writers Book of the Year award. Four of her books have been Christy Award finalists. In addition to her writing, Susan loves to teach and speak at women's events about God's amazing grace in our lives.


For exciting updates on her new releases, previous books, and more, visit her website at www.susanmaywarren.com.

Discussion Questions

1. At the beginning of the story, we see Noelle Hueston heading home on snowy roads after doing something she doesn't want her husband to know about. What is it and why does she keep it from him? Have you ever kept a secret like this from someone you love? Why, and how did it affect your relationship?
2. We first meet Eli Hueston as he's fishing in his ice house. What does he believe about his marriage as the story opens? What factors have contributed to this situation? Have you ever been in a place where you felt like Eli does?
3. Noelle wakes up from her accident having lost her memory of the past twenty-five years. When she sees Eli, what does she think about him? What is her reaction to the fact that he is her husband and that she has children? What would you have done if you found yourself in her situation?
4. When Noelle returns home, she discovers that her life has turned out differently than she expected. What dreams did you have as a younger person that turned out vastly different? What dreams came true?

5. Eli can't believe his wife has forgotten him—and their family—and makes a radical decision to keep information from her. What information does he hide? Why? Given his situation, do you agree or disagree with this decision?
6. When Noelle returns home, she begins to “sense” her daughter without knowing it. What are some examples of this? Do you think it's possible for a parent to truly forget his or her child?
7. Why doesn't Emma want to live in Deep Haven? Have you ever been afraid or reluctant to return somewhere? Where and why?
8. Kyle Hueston started out with dreams of being a sports star but changed his plans to become a cop like his father. Why does he want to be a small-town cop, and what are some of the challenges Eli talks to him about? Do you agree with his concerns?
9. Why does Eli spend so much time with Lee? Do you think they crossed lines they shouldn't have even before the surprising moment in the art studio? Do you believe what they did constituted an affair? Why or why not?
10. Do you think Emma should have told Kyle about what she knew about Lee and Eli? What would you have done in her situation?
11. After the blowup at the basketball game, what does Lee finally realize about how she's handled her grief? What part did she play in her relationship with Eli? How do you think things will change for Lee after her conversation with Liza?

12. What realization does Eli have that allows him to rekindle his marriage? Likewise, what realization prompts Noelle to try to make their marriage work?
13. Have you ever longed to forget something in your past? Would you be willing to forget *everything* in order to forget that one thing?
14. How have you seen God come to your rescue despite difficult circumstances you have faced?



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