



ALL MY
SECRETS

A Gilded Age Novel

LYNN
AUSTIN

PRAISE FOR LYNN AUSTIN

“Lynn Austin, one of my favorite authors, skillfully weaves together the stories and secrets of three generations of women in this Gilded Age novel filled with forgiveness, love, and the enduring value of legacy.”

JULIE KLASSEN, bestselling author of *The Sisters of Sea View*

“*All My Secrets* is an enchanting story about the power and complexities of family. In this historical saga, Lynn Austin masterfully weaves together romance, turmoil, beautiful prose, and some lovely surprises. I enjoyed stepping into New York’s gilded society with her and slowly peeling back the golden veneer.”

MELANIE DOBSON, award-winning author of *The Wings of Poppy Pendleton*

“A transformative novel about the complexities of family, the intrigue of long-held secrets, the great love it takes to confess and to offer and receive forgiveness. Lynn Austin has woven *All My Secrets* with mystery, hope, and the overwhelming wonder of God’s grace in creating a path to liberty when all doors seem closed. A compassionate story, beautifully told.”

CATHY GOHLKE, Christy Hall of Fame author of *Ladies of the Lake*

“A glittering tale of choices, consequences, and new beginnings. Every chapter drew me in further to a world of extravagant wealth and unspeakable poverty, and into a society that brims with both waste and purpose. The dichotomies of Gilded Age New York City are laid bare by three generations of women, each shaped by their culture and seeking to shape their culture in turn. *All My Secrets* is a sumptuous novel, rich in character and spiritual depth. I heartily enjoyed every page.”

JOCELYN GREEN, Christy Award-winning author of *The Metropolitan Affair*

“This is vintage Lynn Austin. The true master of inspirational fiction returns to a narrative device she owns: the multi-generational saga. Deftly intertwining legacies of faith, doubt, and love, Austin advocates for women’s voices within their numerous unique callings in a way far more powerful than any other living writer I know. Austin is one of our great character-driven storytellers.”

RACHEL McMILLAN, author of *Operation Scarlet*

“A masterful, heartwarming, and heartbreaking historical novel, *Long Way Home* contains reminders of human beings’ ability to do great evil—and their duty to do great good.”

FOREWORD REVIEWS

“[A] lovely stand-alone Christmas tale. . . . While fans of *If I Were You* will be eager to read the next chapter of Audrey’s and Eve’s lives, this charming book will also be a delight for inspirational readers looking for a feel-good Christmas story.”

PUBLISHERS WEEKLY, starred review of *The Wish Book Christmas*

“Austin’s latest novel has endearing characters with flaws that allow growth. . . . There’s no putting down this nostalgic, appealing read.”

LIBRARY JOURNAL on *The Wish Book Christmas*

“Austin shines in this excellent tale of three women who struggle to survive WWII in the Netherlands. . . . As the three women work to evade and break the Nazi grip on the Netherlands, Austin skillfully portrays the dangers they face as they struggle to survive. This is a must-read for fans of WWII inspirations.”

PUBLISHERS WEEKLY on *Chasing Shadows*

“Austin has written a powerful tale of domestic heroism and faith, with all three women questioning and then turning to God for strength.”

BOOKLIST on *Chasing Shadows*

“As always, Austin has penned a moving, intricate, and lovely work of Christian fiction that is excellently researched with an underlying message of hope. Highly recommended.”

HISTORICAL NOVEL SOCIETY on *Chasing Shadows*

“If you enjoy historical novels set during World War II, you will not want to miss the very moving portrayal of this time period, *Chasing Shadows* by Lynn Austin. This novel gives a vivid look into the lives of those who endured German occupation of the Netherlands. . . . It shows the importance of faith during difficult times. It also emphasizes the importance of doing the right things, even when those things are not easy to do.”

FRESH FICTION

“Austin transports readers into the lives of her characters, plunging them in the middle of a brutal war and giving them a unique take on the traditional World War II tale. Readers won’t be able to turn the pages fast enough to find out how Eve and Audrey met and what could have gone so terribly wrong.”

LIBRARY JOURNAL, starred review of *If I Were You*

“[A] tantalizing domestic drama. . . . Its message familiar and its world nostalgic and fragile, *If I Were You* looks for answers in changing identities and finds that it’s priceless to remain true to oneself.”

FOREWORD REVIEWS

“Lynn is a masterful storyteller. The characters become people you feel like you know and you truly care about. The plot has unexpected turns and keeps you riveted.”

ECLA LIBRARIES on *If I Were You*

“Lynn Austin is a master at exploring the depths of human relationships. Set against the backdrop of war and its aftermath, *If I Were You* is a beautifully woven page-turner.”

SUSAN MEISSNER, bestselling author of *Secrets of a Charmed Life* and *The Last Year of the War*

“I have long enjoyed Lynn Austin’s novels, but *If I Were You* resonates above all others. Austin weaves the plot and characters together with sheer perfection, and the ending—oh, pure delight to a reader’s heart!”

TAMERA ALEXANDER, bestselling author of *With This Pledge* and *A Note Yet Unsung*

“*If I Were You* is a page-turning, nail-biting, heart-stopping gem of a story. Once again, Lynn Austin has done her homework. Each detail rings true, pulling us into Audrey’s and Eve’s differing worlds of privilege and poverty, while we watch their friendship and their faith in God struggle to survive. I loved traveling along on their journey, with all its unexpected twists and turns, and sighed with satisfaction when I reached the final page. *So good.*”

LIZ CURTIS HIGGS, *New York Times* bestselling author of *Mine Is the Night*

“Lynn Austin has long been one of my favorite authors. With an intriguing premise and excellent writing, *If I Were You* is sure to garner accolades and appeal to fans of novels like *The Alice Network* and *The Nightingale*.”

JULIE KLASSEN, author of *The Bridge to Belle Island*

“With her signature attention to detail and unvarnished portrayal of the human heart, Lynn Austin weaves a tale of redemption that bears witness to Christ’s power to make all things new.”

SHARON GARLOUGH BROWN, author of the Sensible Shoes series and *Shades of Light*, on *If I Were You*

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ALSO BY LYNN AUSTIN

Long Way Home
The Wish Book Christmas
Chasing Shadows
If I Were You
*Sightings: Discovering God's
Presence in Our Everyday Moments*
Legacy of Mercy
Where We Belong
Waves of Mercy
On This Foundation
Keepers of the Covenant
Return to Me
*Pilgrimage: My Journey to a
Deeper Faith in the Land Where
Jesus Walked*
All Things New
Wonderland Creek
While We're Far Apart

Though Waters Roar
Until We Reach Home
A Proper Pursuit
A Woman's Place
All She Ever Wanted
Among the Gods
Faith of My Fathers
The Strength of His Hand
Song of Redemption
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Candle in the Darkness
A Light to My Path
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Hidden Places
Wings of Refuge
Eve's Daughters
Fly Away

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All My Secrets is a work of fiction. Where real people, events, establishments, organizations, or locales appear, they are used fictitiously. All other elements of the novel are drawn from the author's imagination.

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For Peggy Hach
my sister and friend

1



NEW YORK CITY
JULY 1898

Adelaide

Adelaide Stanhope sat at her father's graveside, as still and upright as the surrounding tombstones. The enormous Stanhope obelisk loomed over the family cemetery plot where her great-grandfather, grandfather, and now her father had been laid to rest. Grandmother Junietta Stanhope's hand, gloved in black lace, lay limp and fragile in her own as the service droned on. Adelaide grasped so few of the clergyman's words that they might well have been in another language—*eternity . . . dust . . . life . . . rest.*

Father was dead.

He was dead, and everything in Adelaide's tightly scripted, well-mannered world had been upended, tossed about, and left to flounder like a luxurious steamship, helpless in the grip of a storm.

The scent of roses and lilies, piled on her father's coffin and heaped all around it, drifted to her on the breeze. The heady fragrance seemed misplaced. It usually accompanied one of Mother's grand dinner parties

or balls, filling their New York City mansion or summer home in Newport with their perfume. Adelaide closed her eyes, picturing Father in his tuxedo and starched white shirtfront, Mother reigning beside him in a dazzling gown and ropes of pearls as they greeted guests in their vast flower-filled foyer. It was a picture she had always taken for granted, imagining that nothing in her life would ever change. What would life be like now, without Father?

She opened her eyes again and glanced at her grandmother's face, clouded by a veil of black netting. She sat stoically unbowed as if carved from wax, like the figures Adelaide had seen in Madame Tussaud's museum in London last year. For a parent to lose a child at any age was a tragedy, but Father was Grandmother Junietta's only child, her only son. For as far back as Adelaide could remember, her grandmother had seemed tireless, ageless, committed to the charitable foundation she presided over—a man's job, really, but Grandmother seldom played by society's rules. Adelaide had been close to her as a child, before growing into a young woman and taking her place in the privileged society life she now enjoyed.

Adelaide's own eyes were dry as well, not only because a proper lady never mourned in public, but because her father, Arthur Benton Stanhope III, was a distant figure to her, a towering statue on a pedestal, a giant in New York's business world who had spent most of Adelaide's life in offices and business meetings before his unexpected death. As his third and final child, she knew she had been a disappointment to him from the day of her birth. A third daughter. Not the son he had hoped for. Now he was gone, suddenly and unexpectedly, having died alone in their New York mansion while she and Mother summered at their home in Newport, Rhode Island. Adelaide still felt numb from the shock of his death and the hurried train journey home. Nothing seemed real except the feathery weight of her grandmother's hand in hers and the blistering sun above their heads. The scant shade of the funeral canopy offered little relief from it.

The minister closed his book with an "amen." A sigh escaped before Adelaide could capture it, and she glanced around discreetly, hoping no

one had heard. They hadn't. She'd grown accustomed to being ignored while her two older sisters had lived at home, but with Ernestine and Cordelia successfully married, nineteen-year-old Adelaide would be the focus of Mother's attention and matchmaking ambitions next. Adelaide had dreamed of a Cinderella wedding, but now Father wouldn't be there to escort her down the aisle.

She stood when her mother and sister did. Cordelia and her husband had arrived from their home in Boston last evening. There hadn't been enough time for Ernestine, married to a British earl, to travel from her home in London. Adelaide helped her grandmother to her feet with the others. "Are you all right, Mimi Junie?" she whispered, using the affectionate name from her girlhood.

"Yes, child." Grandmother gripped Adelaide's arm with one hand and her intricately carved cane in the other. The cane seemed part of her, an extra limb, and she was seldom without it. She rarely used it as a walking stick though, brandishing it like a weapon to make a point or flourishing it like a maestro waving a baton. But today she leaned upon it as she and Adelaide shuffled forward to drop more roses onto the smothered coffin. Before moving on, Grandmother paused to stare at a floral arrangement with a ribboned banner that read *Beloved Son*. "My son . . ." she murmured. "My son." It would have been a blessing if she hadn't comprehended her loss, but Grandmother's mind was still sharp.

"Yes, Mimi Junie," Adelaide replied. "You've lost your son and I've lost my father. I'm so very sorry. Come, our carriage is waiting."

Grandmother didn't move. She looked up from the flowers and scanned the crowd of black-cloaked mourners as if searching for someone. "I wish my other son could be here," she murmured.

Adelaide's skin prickled. "Who do you mean, Mimi?"

"My other son . . ." Her hand fluttered as if trying to stir a pot of dusty memories and draw out a name. "You know . . ."

Adelaide swallowed. "You don't have another son, Mimi. Only my father. He was your only child." Grandmother stared at Adelaide for a long moment, then shook her head.

“No, he wasn’t.” She shielded her eyes from the sun and gazed into the distance for another long moment as if searching for him before finally allowing Adelaide to lead her to the waiting carriage. Grandmother was obviously confused. She didn’t really have a secret son—did she?

Adelaide shook her head, quickly discarding the outrageous idea, not only because it was an affront to Grandmother’s character, but because such a scandal never would have remained hidden in their tightly knit social world. Fear of family disgrace kept Adelaide, her sisters, and all their peers virtuous.

The carriage swayed as Mimi’s driver, Henry, closed the door and climbed onto his seat. They rode in dignified silence. Yet Mimi Junie’s puzzling words left Adelaide shaken. Had she lost a son through miscarriage or stillbirth or an early death? Wouldn’t there be a marker in the family cemetery plot if she had? And she surely would have mentioned such a tragedy before today, wouldn’t she? The questions nibbled into Adelaide’s thoughts as she stood with Grandmother, Mother, and Cordelia in their mansion’s enormous dining room for the funeral luncheon, accepting condolences from streams of people. After a long, wearying hour, Grandmother turned to her.

“I’ve had enough, Adelaide. Would you kindly help me to my room?” Dark clouds were erasing the brilliant summer sky, and thunder rumbled in the distance as Adelaide helped Mimi Junie to her bedroom suite and to her chair by the window.

But before leaving, Adelaide crouched in front of her. She needed to know. “Mimi Junie, at the funeral you mentioned another son.”

“Did I?” She stared into her lap, idly pulling off her lace gloves.

“Yes. And it was the first time I’ve ever heard of him. Can you tell me more about him?”

Grandmother dropped the gloves and gathered Adelaide’s hands in hers, holding them with surprising strength. She met Adelaide’s gaze, her faded eyes bright and brimming with love. “You’re named after me, Adelaide Junietta Stanhope.”

“Yes, I—”

“What plans are they making for you?”

“What do you mean?”

“Have they chosen a husband for you? Decided your future?”

The change in topics confused her, but she answered dutifully. “Mother thought there were several promising gentlemen in Newport, but with Father gone so suddenly, we’ll have to observe a period of mourning before—”

“It’s your life, not your mother’s. Do you have the courage it takes to break free from the mold that society will try to cast for you? You don’t have to do things their way, you know.”

“I-I don’t understand.”

“Your father’s death means that everything is going to change for you and your mother. And for me too, undoubtedly. As we start all over again, we’ll have a chance to make a new life for ourselves and decide how we want to live from now on. Change can be difficult, but it can also be very good for us.”

Adelaide’s heart picked up speed. “I don’t want anything to change. I want to live the way I always have.”

“Nevertheless, change is coming, you can be sure of that. But that means you’re free to make new choices. To love a man of your own choosing and discover the joy of being loved in return. But it will require courage.”

Adelaide couldn’t reply. Might Mimi’s questions have something to do with her mysterious lost son after all? But no, her beloved Mimi Junie, the upright, formidable grande dame of New York society, would never live a secret, scandalous life, much less urge her granddaughter to live one.

Would she?

There was a soft knock on the door, and a maid entered with a tea tray. The silver teapot was small, and the tray held only one cup and saucer. “Your mother would like you to return to your guests downstairs, Miss Adelaide,” the maid said. There would be no more questions or revelations today.

Grandmother squeezed Adelaide’s hands tightly before releasing them. “Give me a kiss before you go, Addy dear,” she said.

Adelaide did as she was told. She always did as she was told.

Junietta

She would have liked for Adelaide to stay a bit longer. The girl had always been Junietta's favorite among her three granddaughters. That is, if grandmothers were allowed to admit such a thing. She had spent more time with Addy as a child than with Cordelia and Ernestine, who often ran off and left their little sister behind. She'd been a shy girl, sensitive and serious, who'd loved to listen to Junietta tell stories. Bible stories had been her favorites. There was one particular Bible story that had been on Junietta's mind all day—the one where Jesus happened upon a funeral in which a widow was burying her only son. The Lord had taken pity on the grieving woman and raised her son back to life. What Junietta wouldn't give to have her son alive again.

It wasn't supposed to happen this way. Children were supposed to bury their parents, not the other way around. Junietta stared at the silver tray and teapot, her arms too heavy with sorrow to lift the pot and pour tea into the fragile cup. Grief, weighty and suffocating, immobilized her body while her mind refused to stop shuffling through a lifetime of memories and regrets and what-ifs.

Her son was dead. Where had the time gone? His life had passed so swiftly, the days piling up into months and multiplying into years. She could picture A.B. at age nine or ten, curly-haired and bright-eyed and endlessly curious. He'd loved to take things apart to see how they worked, then he would beg her to help him reassemble them again. A music box. The cook's coffee mill. A pair of binoculars. And one time, his grandfather's magic lantern. But when A.B. turned sixteen, she had lost him to his father's and grandfather's influence. Now she'd lost him forever.

Junietta finally lifted the teapot, but her hand shook as she tried to pour, splashing tea everywhere but in the cup. This wasn't the first time in her life she'd experienced this debilitating shock and loss. Back then, she had found the strength, somehow, to go on with her life until time finally sanded off grief's painful edges. She would have to move forward this time, too. Her charitable foundation was much too important to

leave to chance. In fact, it was the last thing she had spoken to A.B. about before he died.

He'd surprised her by returning home to New York early from their summer home in Newport. "There's something important at work that I need to attend to," he'd told Junietta. She'd taken the opportunity of their time alone together at breakfast one morning to tell him about the symptoms she'd been experiencing: the racing heart, the fatigue so deep that hours of sleep couldn't erase it, ankles that swelled grotesquely and made wearing shoes impossible, her shortness of breath, her lightheadedness.

He'd been instantly alarmed. "I'll send for the doctor!"

"I've already seen the doctor, dear. Several, in fact. They all say the same thing. There's no cure for an aging heart that's wearing itself out."

"Then you must rest. Get out of this stifling city and spend some time by the sea. Why not come to Newport with me when I go back, and let the fresh salt air revive you?"

"Newport is the last place I would go to get rest! I get dizzy just thinking about the endless rounds of social events that spin like a carousel that's out of control. And the bland drivel that masquerades as conversation would bore me to death long before my heart was ready to give out. No, I want nothing to do with Newport."

She saw his love and concern in his worried expression. "Listen, Mother—"

"No, Son, please listen to me. I didn't tell you about my heart so you would fuss over me and try to mollycoddle me. It's the charitable foundation that I'm worried about." She had founded it nearly fifty years ago and had run it ever since, raising and distributing millions of dollars to help the poor. She'd dedicated her life to her work. But she knew she couldn't run it on her own anymore. "You know how much it means to me, A.B., but I need to step back from it now. Will you help me find someone I can train as my replacement? Someone who'll care about it as much as I do?"

"Isn't there someone on your current staff who could take over?"

“I’ve given it a lot of thought, and while they’re all good at what they do, there’s no one who seems just right for the position.”

“I see. Yes, of course I’ll help. I promise I’ll find someone. But in the meantime, you must promise me that you’ll follow the doctors’ orders and do exactly what they say. That means following directions for once in your life.” He’d smiled when he’d said it and kissed her goodbye. Junietta hadn’t promised him any such thing, of course.

It was the last time she’d seen her son alive. A day later, he had returned home from work in the early afternoon, complaining of a fierce headache. By the next morning he was dead. She had never imagined that he would be leaving this world before she did.

She thought again of Adelaide. With A.B. gone, Addy was all that Junietta had left. She had never been close to her daughter-in-law, Sylvia, whose interests rarely coincided with her own. And Junietta had been unable to have any influence on her older granddaughters, Cordelia and Ernestine, who’d been married off to a Boston Brahmin and an English nobleman. God alone knew what their marriages were like, how inane and purposeless their lives had become. But she still might have a chance to rescue Adelaide. If she could find the strength. If her aging body granted her enough time. She had to convince her beloved granddaughter not to settle for a life of mindless conformity, squandering the few swift years God might give to her.

Junietta took off her shoes and propped her feet on the hassock as the doctors had instructed. Then she reached for her Bible and opened it to her favorite psalm, though she knew the words by heart. They would be her prayer, for Adelaide and for the foundation. *“Teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom . . . establish thou the work of our hands upon us; yea, the work of our hands, establish thou it.”*

❧ Sylvia ❧

The relief Sylvia felt when the last guest departed was enormous. The servants would attend to the remains of the funeral luncheon, and Sylvia

could finally be alone. As she left the cavernous dining room to go upstairs, her daughters Cordelia and Adelaide clung to her, offering to go up with her, to stay with her. “That isn’t necessary,” she assured them. “I’m fine.” It occurred to her as she gently freed herself from them that they might need comfort and consolation from her, rather than her needing theirs, but she had neither to give. She couldn’t keep up the calm pretense of courage any longer, nor could she allow her daughters to see her break down. She assured them she would be fine and closed her door.

Sylvia’s bedroom felt warmer than the downstairs rooms, dim and womb-like with the shades drawn against the summer sun. Her lady’s maid helped her change out of her funeral clothes, then asked if she needed anything else. “Nothing, thank you. I’ll ring if I do.” She stood in the center of her room after the girl left and looked around. Everything was in its place, every surface dusted and polished, the bed linens and rugs immaculate and unwrinkled. It looked exactly as it always did, as if nothing in her life had changed, and she had the dizzying urge to tear off the bedspread, throw the pillows onto the floor, dump out the dresser drawers, and knock all the pictures askew so the pristine room would match the uproar in her heart. Her shock was wearing off now that the necessary steps for the funeral were completed. She was starting to comprehend the enormity of her loss.

A.B. can’t be gone. He can’t be! She’d silently repeated the refrain on the endless train journey from Newport. But he was gone. Sylvia was alone. She would be from now on.

She went to the door leading to A.B.’s adjoining bedroom suite and peered inside. It still held his familiar scent. The clothes he’d always worn still hung in his wardrobe. The things he’d carried in his pockets lay on his dresser top, along with his gold watch and chain. But Sylvia couldn’t bear to go inside his room. It was too soon. She closed the door again and sank down at her dressing table.

She hadn’t had a chance to say goodbye to him. When he’d decided to return to New York, Sylvia had stayed in Newport, reveling in the

parties, the sailing excursions, and the golden glow of summer by the sea. She'd been a little annoyed with him when he'd said he was leaving, because it meant she'd be without an escort at the Vanderbilts' summer ball. Now she would be without him forever. It was one thing to hold her head high and remain brave through the memorial service, the funeral, and the luncheon afterward. Sylvia wasn't sure she could continue the act for the rest of her life. She looked at her reflection in the dressing table's mirror. How was it possible that she was a widow at age forty-six?

"I should have come back to New York with him," she whispered aloud. She'd repeated those words countless times in the past few days. "*There was nothing you could have done,*" the doctor had said when she'd repeated them to him. His reassurances hadn't consoled her. She should have been at her husband's side when he'd died.

Sylvia stood and began to pace from the dressing table to the window and back again. She had no one to turn to in her time of sorrow. Her society friends were rivals more than confidantes, and Sylvia couldn't trust that her spilled secrets wouldn't leak into gossip. She'd always been distant from her bustling, self-assured mother-in-law, even though they'd lived beneath the same enormous roof all these years. Ernestine and Cordelia had married and moved away, leaving only Adelaide, a girl whose shy temperament was so different from Sylvia's. She would need to remain strong for Adelaide's sake.

She paused in her pacing and picked up the ivory fan she had used at the funeral. Sylvia had feared that the funeral would never end. It had unleashed an avalanche of memories reminding her of all the funerals she had endured, all the loved ones she had lost. She hadn't been prepared to bury her husband so soon—but then she hadn't been prepared to bury any of the others either.

What came next?

Sylvia didn't know. The family lawyer had assured her he would return to help her settle the estate. Maybe he would know what came next, aside from a year of mourning. A year of living in the shadows as she recovered from her grief while life went on around her. She felt

angry with A.B. for suddenly leaving her. She'd lived comfortably under his protection, never giving a thought about money, enjoying status and power in New York society because of him. But all that was now threatened. The thought terrified her.

The dreadful changes she'd experienced as a child and again as a young woman had been out of her control. This time, she would make sure that she remained in control and that nothing would change. She'd built a good life with her husband, a life she loved. For Adelaide's sake, for her own sake, and as a memorial to A.B., she would make sure everything continued as before.

She crossed to her bed and lifted the photograph of A.B. that she kept on her nightstand. It shamed her to recall that she hadn't loved him when they'd married. For all these years, she'd kept the real reason why she had married him a secret. Yet over the years, her respect for him had slowly transformed into affection, then love. Had she told him lately that she loved him? Had she said those words when they were in Newport? Before he returned to New York? It pained Sylvia that she couldn't remember. How had she allowed days or weeks or even months to pass without saying those precious words?

Sylvia had struggled all day not to give in to the pain and loss she felt, not to let her daughters or the servants or anyone else see her weeping. Jealous rivals had nicknamed her the Ice Queen because of her pale beauty and fair hair, her cool, aloof demeanor. She had perfected that icy role because experience had taught her that it was better to stay distant and cold than to be vulnerable and risk pain. But grief now raged like a fire inside her, thawing the ice. Tonight, Sylvia Grace Stanhope's heart was breaking. She covered her face as a tide of painful memories welled up. She allowed them, at last, to overflow in tears.

