



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*

All My Secrets



ALSO BY LYNN AUSTIN

<i>Long Way Home</i>	<i>Though Waters Roar</i>
<i>The Wish Book Christmas</i>	<i>Until We Reach Home</i>
<i>Chasing Shadows</i>	<i>A Proper Pursuit</i>
<i>If I Were You</i>	<i>A Woman's Place</i>
<i>Sightings: Discovering God's Presence in Our Everyday Moments</i>	<i>All She Ever Wanted</i>
<i>Legacy of Mercy</i>	<i>Among the Gods</i>
<i>Where We Belong</i>	<i>Faith of My Fathers</i>
<i>Waves of Mercy</i>	<i>The Strength of His Hand</i>
<i>On This Foundation</i>	<i>Song of Redemption</i>
<i>Keepers of the Covenant</i>	<i>Gods and Kings</i>
<i>Return to Me</i>	<i>Candle in the Darkness</i>
<i>Pilgrimage: My Journey to a Deeper Faith in the Land Where Jesus Walked</i>	<i>A Light to My Path</i>
<i>All Things New</i>	<i>Fire by Night</i>
<i>Wonderland Creek</i>	<i>Hidden Places</i>
<i>While We're Far Apart</i>	<i>Wings of Refuge</i>
	<i>Eve's Daughters</i>
	<i>Fly Away</i>



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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.

2



SEPTEMBER 1898

Junietta

Junietta stared at the wrinkled, gray-haired stranger in the mirror, barely recognizing her. In her mind, she didn't resemble that elderly woman but was the same woman she'd been at fifty, even forty years old, able to accomplish anything she put her mind to. It was her traitorous body that was the problem. She heard a soft knock on her bedroom door, and one of the servants entered. "Madame Stanhope, your family's lawyers have arrived. They're waiting in Mr. Stanhope's study."

"Thank you, Hattie. You're a dear."

She made her way carefully down the endless marble stairs so she wouldn't arrive out of breath. Her ankles were not too swollen today. And her heart was behaving itself, keeping a slow rhythmic pace, which was surprising, considering the heartbreaking wound it had suffered. She could hear the somber mumble of men's voices from outside the study and entered to greet the two lawyers. Mr. Wilson, the older one,

wore outdated muttonchop whiskers and tiny spectacles. He was seated behind the desk, shuffling through a stack of papers, but he rose and bowed slightly to greet her.

“Good afternoon, Madame Stanhope. Please accept my condolences, once again, on your terrible loss.” He gestured to the other lawyer, a much younger man with wide shoulders and thick ebony hair, who was busily arranging chairs in front of the desk for Junietta, Sylvia, and Adelaide. “This is my colleague, Howard Forsythe.”

Junietta knew precisely who he was but pretended not to. “How do you do, Mr. Forsythe?”

“I’m honored to meet you, Madame Stanhope.” She detected a smile in his blue eyes as he greeted her, and his friendliness pleased her. Lawyers were usually dour, and the reading of A.B.’s will certainly called for solemnity, but it pleased her that young Howard Forsythe didn’t take himself too seriously.

Adelaide arrived next, and Junietta’s heart swelled with love for her youngest granddaughter. The poor dear looked so detached, so austere, and she wondered what had happened to the gentle girl who would come into her bedroom suite asking a thousand questions. Junietta had neglected her these past few years, becoming so busy with her own work that she’d allowed Adelaide to slip away. Junietta had to remedy that. She wouldn’t let her become like all the other Stanhopes.

“Put my chair closer to that window,” she directed, brandishing her cane. Young Mr. Forsythe hurried to obey. “And kindly open those curtains and raise the sash to let in some air and sunlight. I told my late husband countless times that this room was too dark and gloomy, but he never cared much for my opinion. Well, it’s clear that I was right and he was dead wrong, don’t you agree, young man?” She smiled at Mr. Forsythe, who had managed to pull back the maroon velvet curtains, emitting a beam of dusty sunshine. He smiled in return before seeming to catch himself.

“It would seem so, Madame Stanhope,” he replied in a properly somber tone. He turned back to the window, straining to open it, tugging

almost comically until it finally inched open with a ragged scrape. Warm air drifted into the stuffy room, smelling faintly of fallen leaves. Mr. Forsythe smoothed his waistcoat back into place and wiped his brow.

“Thank you, dear boy.” She patted his arm, then took her seat. “Of course, if you have dark, nefarious business to conduct, then I suppose you need a grim-looking lair in which to conduct it.”

Mr. Wilson looked up sharply from his papers, shocked perhaps by the word *nefarious*. Shocking people with her bluntness was nothing new for Junietta. She’d spent her lifetime doing it. But judging by Mr. Forsythe’s barely suppressed smile, he found her humorous.

“My son didn’t do anything to change this dreary room when he took over his father’s skullduggery,” she continued, “but perhaps the room’s next inhabitant will. Adelaide, dear,” she said, poking Addy’s arm with the tip of her cane, “put your suitors to the test when you choose one for your husband. Bring them in here and ask what their plans are for this hideout or whatever one chooses to call it. Then marry the man who throws open the windows and lets in air and sunlight. Better yet, marry the man who floods your life with air and sunlight. Promise me that much, won’t you dear?” She gave her arm a second poke.

Addy rubbed the spot, her cheeks flushing pink, but before she could reply, Sylvia glided into the room with a rustle of black taffeta. Even in mourning, Sylvia Grace Stanhope was a beautiful woman, moving with the bearing and dignity of a queen wearing an invisible crown on her fair, fashionably upswept hair. Mr. Forsythe stopped admiring the intricately carved wooden ceiling and snapped to attention. Mr. Wilson quickly rose and hurried from behind the desk to guide her to her chair. “Good afternoon, Mrs. Stanhope. May I say, once again, how sorry I am for your loss. Your husband was a fine man and will be missed by all.”

Sylvia returned his greeting with a slight nod. She had always kept herself at a distance, and Junietta barely knew her daughter-in-law. What would become of Sylvia now, without her husband? Junietta believed that Sylvia and Adelaide could both fly freely on their own if they could

find the courage to escape from their gilded cages. All the more reason for Junietta not to give in to her illness or to her own grief.

“Shall we begin?” the older lawyer asked after Sylvia was seated. Again, she replied with a slight nod. “Mr. Stanhope’s last will and testament is quite long and detailed,” he said, gesturing to the inch-high ream of paper in front of him. “The relevant parties have already heard a formal reading of the business matters pertaining to Mr. Stanhope’s will. According to his wishes, however, the private family details and bequests were absent from that reading. I would be happy to read the will in its entirety if you’d like, or I can simply explain the paragraphs which apply to the three of you.” He looked up at them, his bristly eyebrows raised in question.

“We’ll settle for the abridged version,” Junietta replied. “None of us needs to hear all that fluff and blather.”

“Very well.” He pushed the pile to one side and cleared his throat as he lifted a single sheet from the top. “The original founder of all the Stanhope enterprises and investments, Arthur Benton Stanhope I, crafted his will in such a way that control of the company’s holdings and the bulk of the family wealth could be inherited only by his male heirs.”

Junietta thumped her cane on the parquet floor. “He was a bully! My father-in-law was a mean, greedy man who took great delight in ruining people’s lives!”

“I . . . um . . . I wouldn’t know about that,” Mr. Wilson said. “It was before my time. Anyway, the founder’s estate passed to his oldest son, Arthur Benton Stanhope II, when he died. That would be your husband,” he said, gesturing to Junietta.

“Yes, and dear Artie did whatever his father told him to do, legal or otherwise.”

Mr. Wilson’s eyes widened slightly behind his tiny spectacles. He cleared his throat. “And when he passed, the founder’s grandson, Arthur Benton Stanhope III, inherited the estate.”

“Everyone called my son A.B.,” she said. “It’s less confusing.”

“His current will must conform to the founder’s original constraints,

however. And since Arthur III did not have a brother or a male heir, control of all the Stanhope businesses, all of its many assets, and the accumulated family wealth and investments will now be inherited in their entirety by the founder's last remaining son, Roger Charles Stanhope."

"Roger! That weaselly old man? He's the least deserving of all the Stanhopes! Why, he'll gamble away the family fortune before Christmas!"

"Well . . . um . . . again, I wouldn't know about that." Mr. Wilson cleared his throat a second time as he looked down at the page.

"Are we to be at the mercy of fools? Can't something be done about this?"

"I'm afraid not. The deceased's inheritance will now be passed to his uncle, Roger Charles Stanhope, and eventually to his son, Randall David Stanhope."

"No," Junietta murmured. Her hands had begun to tremble. The mention of the name David had reminded her of how this unjust inheritance scheme had come to be written—and of the terrible part she had played in it. At the time, the guilt she'd felt had led her to start the Stanhope Charitable Foundation. Her heart began a clumsy, jiggy dance as she struggled to catch her breath. The thought of all her hard work now falling into Roger Stanhope's hands made her sick with dread. "Is . . . is any mention made in the will of our family's charitable foundation?"

"Not specifically in this will. But since the foundation is in the Stanhope name, it would be logical for Roger Stanhope to administrate it."

"Over my dead body!" Junietta whacked her cane against the side of the desk as if beating a drum, causing a hollow boom that made Mr. Wilson jump. "That foundation is the only good thing that was ever done in the Stanhope name. My late husband helped to endow it, then gave the operation of it to me. My son was a great supporter of all my charitable efforts and served on the board of directors. Do whatever you need to do, Mr. Wilson, but make sure the Stanhope Foundation remains independent and does *not* fall into Roger's hands!"

"We will look into it."

“Thank you. And let me know as soon as possible what I can do to ensure that it doesn’t.” She gave the side of the desk another boom with her cane for emphasis and sat back in her chair again, praying that her physical distress and weakness didn’t show. Junietta cared little about losing the family wealth, but her foundation was everything to her, and she would fight for it.

Mr. Wilson straightened his glasses and his papers. “To continue, the bulk of the Stanhope wealth is tied up with the company and, I’m sorry to say, cannot be inherited by the three of you.” He seemed to be bracing for another blow from Junietta’s cane, but she refrained as his words slowly sank in. The enormous Stanhope fortune was no longer theirs. “However, Mr. Stanhope’s will does provide his wife, Sylvia Grace Stanhope, and unmarried daughter, Adelaide Junietta Stanhope, with trust funds, much like the trust that his father provided for you,” he said, addressing Junietta. “These trust funds could have benefitted from a few more years’ time so the investments had a chance to grow and mature, but Mr. Stanhope couldn’t have foreseen his untimely demise at the age of forty-six. With careful management, however, the dividends should provide a modest income on which to live in the coming years.”

A modest income? Sylvia’s financial situation was even worse than Junietta could have imagined. She couldn’t refrain this time and banged the desk again. “Mr. Wilson! The future you’re portraying is even darker than this room! Can’t you and all those other clever lawyers find a way to stave off our imminent destitution?”

“Er . . . I’m afraid not.” He drew another breath and hurried to finish. “As for Mr. Stanhope’s property—as you’re probably aware, the deceased’s grandfather is the original owner of the summer home in Newport, Rhode Island, and so I’m sorry to say that the deed to that mansion will also pass to Roger C. Stanhope.”

“What about this home?” Sylvia interrupted.

“Roger can’t put us out of this home, dear,” Junietta told her. “It belonged to my husband and was deeded to our son when Art died. This house has nothing to do with Roger.”

“Yes, you’re quite right, Madame Stanhope. I was getting to that. Your son deeded ownership of this mansion, all his personal property, and his yacht, the *Merriweather*, to his wife, Sylvia Grace Stanhope.”

“Then why do I sense more bad news coming?” Junietta demanded.

“I’m simply explaining the main points of the will at the moment. I’ll be happy to discuss the finer details at a later date, after you’ve had time to assess the future and—”

“Don’t patronize us, Mr. Wilson! We want the cold hard truth, and we want it now. Should we be taking in washing to make ends meet? Delivering newspapers? Turning the west wing into a boardinghouse?”

“No, no, no. Of course not. But you may not realize yet what enormous costs are involved with keeping the *Merriweather* afloat, for instance. Or in maintaining a home of this size. Since there are only three of you living here—and Miss Stanhope will likely be wed within the next few years—you may want to consider a smaller home in order to reduce the number of servants and control expenses, in which case, we will be happy to help you make arrangements to sell—”

Boom went her cane on the side of the desk. “Is the income enough to live on or not, Mr. Wilson?”

“I’m afraid that some judicious pruning and careful management may be necessary—”

“And no more lavish parties?” she asked. The lawyer didn’t reply.

Junietta glanced at her daughter-in-law, who had absorbed the news of her losses in stoic silence. Sylvia and her society friends were renowned for their extravagance when it came to entertaining, each competing with the next to produce bigger and more elaborate parties with mountains of exotic food, wagonloads of flowers, and elaborate decorations. They also strove to outshine each other in their expensive, diamond-bedecked ball gowns and dripping jewels, traveling to Paris each season to purchase the latest fashions. Sylvia’s fame as a hostess was her life, her identity. She thrived on her unsurpassed reputation, and invitations to her events were prized among New York’s high society. What could ever replace her role as hostess? Yet if Sylvia saw her world crumbling, she showed no sign of it. Her chin was still lifted high, her eyes dry.

“Our law firm will be happy to field all of your questions and manage all of your concerns in the coming months,” Mr. Wilson finally said. “One of my colleagues will be at your disposal to help you navigate these legal and financial changes as the estate is settled, and to handle issues such as the sale of Mr. Stanhope’s yacht and this mansion, when the time comes.”

“I would like to ask that you assign Mr. Forsythe to help us,” Junietta said, “since he already knows all the details of our losses.” He blushed slightly as everyone turned to him, and let go of the plush velvet curtain that he had been fingering. He had been standing guard beside the window as if awaiting Junietta’s further orders—or perhaps he was trying to stay out of the range of her cane. She thought she detected a hint of sympathy for their plight in his clear blue eyes. But even if he possessed first-rate legal and financial expertise, he couldn’t possibly understand the elaborate inner workings of New York society or comprehend the family’s social losses.

“Certainly, if you wish,” Mr. Wilson said. “Now, unless you have further questions, we won’t take up any more of your time.”

Junietta thumped her cane on the floor. “Well, if we’re paying an hourly fee for your services, then perhaps you should be on your way. And quickly.”

“No, no, I assure you that isn’t the case. I’ll leave a summary of the will here for you to read at your leisure, but our law firm is at your disposal until the estate is settled.”

“Thank you for coming,” Sylvia said, rising to her feet. “May I speak with you in private for just one moment?”

“Certainly.”

Junietta took the hint and left the study with Adelaide. Her heart continued to cavort and race and skip like a crazed goat, and she remembered the doctor’s warning to get plenty of rest and avoid unnecessary strain and anxiety. But her charitable foundation! Junietta couldn’t let Roger Stanhope get his hands on it. It was her life’s work! If Junietta’s heart was going to give out, then she needed to make sure the foundation was in capable hands before it did.

 Sylvia 

Gone. The millions of dollars the Stanhopes had amassed. Everything her husband had worked for. Gone. For the second time in her life, Sylvia was about to lose everything, and she could not let that happen. She needed to take control of the reins herself.

“How can I help you?” Mr. Wilson asked after Adelaide and Junietta had left the study. Sylvia took her time, choosing her words carefully in order to keep her emotions steady, and to avoid sounding needy and weak. Sylvia Grace Stanhope would not beg.

“I’m sure you must realize that my husband took care of all our family’s financial concerns. He provided us with a generous living allowance, of course, and I felt free to ask for more beyond that. But the daily bookkeeping that kept our household running was handled by people in his office. I would like all of those accounts to be handed over to me, right away.”

“Yes, of course. Your personal finances will need to be severed from the company’s finances.”

“And I would appreciate some assistance in learning to navigate those personal accounts from now on.”

“I can set you up with a reputable accountant to do your bookkeeping.”

“No, thank you. I would like to learn to manage it myself, Mr. Wilson.” He looked surprised. And dubious. But she could not trust anyone with the truth of her financial losses. The gossip would destroy her. And it would ruin Adelaide’s life. Sylvia had no idea if she truly was capable of handling the necessary accounts, but she was determined to learn whatever she needed to in order to take control of their future herself.

“As you wish, Mrs. Stanhope. Mr. Forsythe will secure the accounting ledgers right away and go over them with you.”

“Thank you.” After she’d escorted the two lawyers to the door, Sylvia wanted nothing more than to go to her room so she could fall apart, alone. But Adelaide was waiting for her, and she followed Sylvia upstairs to her bedroom suite as if she didn’t want to let her mother out of her sight. Addy

probably longed to hear reassurances that nothing would change, that their world wouldn't fall apart, that they would find a way to avoid social and financial ruin. But how could Sylvia do that when her own world had been knocked off its axis? She paused beside the second-floor railing for a moment, stalling for time as she corralled her emotions, running her hand along the polished wood. She gazed down at the vast marble foyer, remembering how she would stand down there beside her husband to greet their guests whenever she threw a party or a ball. Her daughters used to sneak out to this balcony and peek through the balustrades as laughter and music transformed their beautiful mansion into a fairy-tale castle. It would have been Adelaide's turn next to shine as the belle of the ball, but now she might never have that chance. The thought devastated Sylvia.

She lifted her chin for courage and strode into her bedroom suite, sitting down on the brocade settee and gesturing for Addy to sit beside her. Neither of them spoke for several minutes as Adelaide curled up beside her like a child. "Why does everything have to change?" she murmured at last. "Does this mean we can never go back to Newport?"

Sylvia traced gentle circles on Addy's back without replying. Their beautiful mansion on the sea, her family's refuge from the stifling city each season—gone. They had always looked forward to the cool Atlantic seacoast and the familiar round of summer balls and lawn parties and sailing excursions. But the loss of that mansion was just the beginning of their many losses. Sylvia felt irrationally angry with her husband for dying so abruptly and leaving them at the mercy of his uncle Roger. There was no love lost between his family and theirs, only years of resentment, suspicion, and jealousy. Sylvia agreed with Junietta's description of him as a weaselly old man. He had a habit of standing too close when talking to women and was notorious for pinching the maids on their bottoms. His son, Randall, was a shadowy figure whose various money-making schemes never amounted to much. She'd often heard A.B. refer to him as the family disgrace. It seemed outrageous that those two men would inherit everything.

"If only I'd been a son instead of a daughter," Addy said. "Father must have been so disappointed when I was born."

"He loved you, Adelaide. And he knew it wasn't your fault. Nor mine."

"Will we really have to sell this house like Mr. Wilson said?"

"Of course not." She made Addy sit up and face her. "But we'll need to be very smart, Adelaide. And very shrewd. I'm determined to salvage this mess that your great-grandfather's will created. I won't stand by and watch you lose everything. Especially this home. It's rightfully yours, and we're going to hang on to it and to the life that we have here. I'm going to make sure that you marry well. Very well. Nothing needs to change for you."

"But will my trust fund be enough to entice a suitor?"

"You have so much more to offer than money, Adelaide. Your beauty, your charm—and this mansion. Any suitor who sees this magnificent place will naturally want to become the master of it. It's the envy of everyone in the city, and will belong to you and your husband after you marry."

Adelaide nodded and tried to smile, but her tears continued to fall. Sylvia knew that Randall Stanhope's daughter, Cicely Stanhope, would quickly rise as Addy's greatest rival in attracting an eligible husband, now that her grandfather had inherited the family fortune. But Sylvia wouldn't worry about Cicely just yet. "I thought we would have more time for you to court and marry, but we'll need to work fast and start entertaining eligible suitors before news of our misfortune leaks out."

"How can we entertain guests? Aren't we supposed to be in mourning?"

Sylvia's mind raced to find a solution. "We can get around that if we act discreetly and invite people to call on us a few at a time. I'll start gleaning information about eligible suitors. But don't trust anyone, Adelaide. And don't reveal anything. Remember, your friends are your competitors."

"How will I meet suitors during the summer season without our home in Newport?"

Sylvia felt disheartened momentarily, but she bravely recovered. "I'll ask the lawyers to see what they can do about demanding our fair share of time there. Or maybe we won't need the Newport mansion at all.

We can do all our entertaining on the *Merriweather*. We'll make yacht parties the newest summer trend."

"But Mr. Wilson said that the yacht is very expensive, and—"

"Listen, Adelaide." She took Addy's face in her hands, silencing her protests. "I'm going to fight for us. You don't need to worry about anything that Mr. Wilson said. I'll fight for what's rightfully ours. Fight to keep the way of life your father always provided for us. If you trust me and do as I say, you'll have a secure future ahead of you." She kissed Addy's forehead and released her. "Now, go and get some rest so you'll look beautiful, even wearing ghastly gray. I'll start planning our next steps."

❧ Adelaide ❧

Mother didn't come down for the evening meal, but Grandmother did. The family dining room was a smaller version of the enormous formal dining room that could seat one hundred guests, but it was still a beautifully appointed room with damask drapes, a crystal chandelier, a ceiling of carved English oak, and an arsenal of silver serving pieces lined up on the sideboard. Adelaide was already seated at the dining table when Mimi Junie entered. "What a disastrous day!" she said as she dropped into her seat. "Such devastating news!"

"Mimi Junie, the servants," Adelaide whispered.

"They'll need to hear the truth sooner or later. After all, they might be looking for new employment soon." She unfurled her dinner napkin and spread it on her lap as the servants brought out platters of roast beef, potatoes, buttery rolls, and green beans. Addy chose only tiny portions, her stomach still in rebellion from the worrisome news.

"Things aren't really that bad, are they?" she asked with a nervous laugh. "Mother says she's going to fight for what's rightfully ours."

"Addy, dear. Your mother lost all her social status along with her husband and his millions. Don't be surprised if she no longer receives invitations to parties and balls."

"But Mother has so many friends—"

“An unmarried woman as beautiful as your mother is a threat to them. Now that Alva Vanderbilt and Charlotte Astor have made divorce acceptable, what’s to stop Sylvia from stealing one of her friends’ husbands away from them?”

Addy remembered Mother’s fierce determination. Yet while she’d talked about finding Addy a suitor, she’d said nothing about remarrying herself.

“As for this house,” Grandmother continued, “good riddance. There are ghosts everywhere. Some in this very room!”

“Mimi Junie, you sound a little deranged when you talk like that. Besides, I can’t imagine living anywhere else but here.”

“That’s because you’ve been held prisoner here all these years.”

“I’m not a prisoner—”

“Listen. What Mr. Muttonchops told us today was the best possible news for you. You’re free now! You can go anywhere and be anything you want to be. This is our chance to look closely at our lives and decide what’s important and what isn’t. We can dream new dreams, look for new goals, pursue new adventures. You no longer have to live a life of mindless indulgence, conforming to a dull, unimaginative society.”

“But Mother says that nothing is going to change and—”

“Your mother has lived her life, and it was a good one. She had wealth, privilege, prestige. She raised her three daughters and bolstered A.B.’s career. But now he’s gone, and that life is over for her. It was the same for me when my husband died and I turned everything over to Sylvia.”

“Mother isn’t going to give up any of it, Mimi. She says if we work together, we can—”

“Get whatever *she* wants? Maybe that’s true, but what do *you* want, Adelaide?”

“I-I want to help her. I don’t want her to lose everything.”

“That’s very nice of you,” she said in a tone that said otherwise. “But do you really want the burden of this place and all its secrets pressing down on your shoulders?”

“I don’t know. I guess so. It’s the only life I know.”

Mimi wadded up her napkin and threw it at her. “Wake up, child!

Don't be such a mouse! You are a unique creation. A one-of-a-kind masterpiece with your whole life ahead of you. Think for yourself, for once!"

Addy looked away as tears filled her eyes. She had felt so reassured after talking with Mother, but now Mimi Junie was confusing her. "Don't I have an obligation to honor my mother?"

"That depends. What, exactly, is Sylvia asking you to do? Marry a wealthy man, I suppose?"

"Well—"

"Do you really want to marry a man you don't love and spend the next fifty or sixty years with him, just so you and your mother can live in this monstrous house and throw lavish parties and buy expensive ball gowns?" Addy didn't reply as she refolded Mimi's napkin into smaller and smaller squares. "Why not attend a nice women's college like Vassar or Bryn Mawr, and discover what your own interests are and what you're good at doing? More and more women are doing that nowadays. Or you could find a worthy man who loves you for yourself, not your money, and live happily ever after without all of this . . . this . . . pomposity!" She gestured to the row of silver serving pieces. "You could be free from everyone's expectations."

Addy shook her head to erase the picture her eccentric grandmother was painting. She had family obligations. Her mother knew what was best for her. "I need to help Mother," she said firmly.

"No, you don't. Believe me, she's quite capable of helping herself. She's a beautiful widow, still young enough to remarry. Let her secure her own future. But don't let her convince you to give up who you are."

"This *is* who I am, Mimi Junie. I'm a Stanhope. I'm my father's daughter."

Grandmother pushed back her chair and stood. "Come with me, Adelaide. I want to show you something."

"What? Now? We've just begun to eat. Can't it wait until after dinner?"

"No. This is too important." She waved her cane at the startled

servant and said, “Jane, kindly put our plates on a tray and bring everything to my room, would you dear?” She prodded Adelaide with the tip of her cane until she stood up, then used it like a shepherd’s staff to herd her out of the dining room and up the stairs. Once they reached her bedroom suite, Mimi Junie rummaged through the cedar chest in her dressing room and brought out a watercolor in a simple wooden frame. “Look at this,” she said, handing it to Adelaide. It was an exquisitely painted woodland scene with mossy rocks and delicate wildflowers and trees that seemed to rustle in the breeze. A soft-eyed rabbit, a tiny mouse, and a spotted frog lay hidden among the ferns and leaves and grass. The artist had painted a world of lush beauty and life that seemed to beckon to Adelaide to enter.

“It’s enchanting! Where did it come from?”

“Look at the signature.”

In the lower corner were the initials *SGW*. Mother’s initials. Her maiden name had been Woodruff. “This can’t be Mother’s work. She doesn’t paint.”

“You’re right. She doesn’t. And yet she once created that. Beauty flowed from your mother’s heart and her hands, back when she was free to be herself.” The painting was warm and alive, the very opposite of Addy’s cool, aloof mother. She couldn’t reconcile the two. And yet she thought of Mother’s elaborate parties, the stunning tableaux and scenes she created to dazzle her guests, and realized they must spring from the same imagination that had created this painting.

Grandmother poked Addy’s shoulder. “Somewhere in this house, hidden away in a dusty trunk, is a series of delightful children’s books that your mother once wrote and illustrated. A dozen of them. Maybe more. Charming stories. Worthy of publication.”

“Why would she hide them away?”

“Because her marvelous creations would be beneath the dignity of Mrs. Arthur Benton Stanhope the third.”

“Did Father know about them?”

“I doubt it. If A.B. had seen them, he probably would have

encouraged her to continue painting. I came across them by accident years ago, and she let me keep that one. My point is, Sylvia sacrificed something she loved and that was so much a part of who she was in order to live this vacuous life. That's why she can't bear to lose it now."

"But you lived the same way, Mimi. In this same house."

"I didn't have a choice. She did. And so do you."

"Well, I owe it to Mother to help her keep our home and everything she loves."

"No, dear girl. She owes it to you to set you free."

Grandmother had spoken about freedom after Father's funeral, after her mysterious words about a second son. Were there more secrets Addy didn't know about? She tried to give back the painting, but Mimi held up her hands, refusing. "Keep it. Show it to your mother. See what she says."

"That would be cruel, I think."

"Suit yourself. But keep it anyway. Let it remind you of what you stand to lose."

The servants arrived in Mimi's room with two dinner trays, but Addy was no longer hungry. She picked at her food, wishing she knew what she was supposed to do and who she was supposed to listen to.

"I have been fighting my father-in-law, the first Arthur B. Stanhope, all my life," Mimi said. "And it looks as though I'll have to continue fighting him. It's too late for me to try to save anyone else from his greed and selfishness, but maybe I can still save you, Adelaide. You're the last Stanhope, and I'm going to do everything I can to keep you from becoming another one of his victims."

Addy carried her mother's painting back to her room when they finished eating. She had never imagined that Mother had lived a different life from this one. She and Mimi both had secrets, it seemed. Addy couldn't bear to think about the unknown, especially her own unknown future. She opened her wardrobe and stuffed the painting deep inside it.

3



OCTOBER 1898

Adelaide

The silk chiffon ball gown was as ethereal as fairy wings. Adelaide stood before her dressing-room mirror, holding the gossamer creation in front of her, longing to wear it to Ellen Madison's autumn ball tonight. She twirled from side to side, enjoying the fabric's swishing whispers. The pale blue color would look lovely on her, and with her chestnut hair swept up gracefully on her head, the low neckline would show off her slender neck and shoulders to perfection. She had looked forward to the ball when the invitation had arrived three months ago, seeing all her friends, dancing until dawn. Everyone was home from Newport or Long Island or wherever they had gone to flee the hot summer months, and the next round of society events had begun. But the dress would have to remain in her wardrobe until the mourning period for her father ended—at least six months for Adelaide, a year for her mother. By then, she would be six months older and inching

toward spinsterhood, while her friends and rivals danced and flirted with all the eligible men.

The three months that Adelaide had already spent in mourning had been endlessly lonely. It was considered in poor taste to attend her usual club meetings and social activities, which meant long hours of solitude with nothing to do. Without guests to fill their sprawling mansion with laughter and gossip, the vast echoing rooms served no purpose. It was as if Addy's life had stopped along with her father's. But as Mother had promised, nothing had changed—for now. Aside from being in mourning, Adelaide had continued living in their vast mansion just as before.

"Kindly hang this up for me," she said, handing over the gown to her maid. "And do be careful. I hope to wear it someday." But not tonight. She appraised her appearance in the mirror a final time, smoothing imaginary wrinkles from her boring cloud-gray mourning dress. She had received a note from her mother on her breakfast tray, asking to meet in the morning room at eleven o'clock. The mansion was so vast that she and Mother often dispatched the servants in order to bring notes to each other.

Before the maid closed her wardrobe door, Addy spotted the painting she had stuffed inside and pulled it out to study it again. She noticed tiny beetles, crickets, and ladybugs cleverly hidden among the leaves and could almost smell the damp earth of the forest floor and feel the cushiony green moss. Why had Mother stashed away a painting she had every right to be proud of? Adelaide considered taking it downstairs to ask her, but in the end, she simply propped it against the mirror on her dressing table, waiting for a better time.

She took the back stairs to Mother's morning room, avoiding the marble staircase in the echoing front foyer, which always reminded her of a museum. For the past month, Addy had often thought of Mimi Junie's words as she'd struggled to fall asleep: "*Do you really want to marry a man you don't love and spend the next fifty or sixty years with him?*" Everyone knew that Consuelo Vanderbilt's mother had forced her to give up the man she loved in order to marry a British duke. Consuelo had been eighteen at the time, a year younger than Addy was now.

Adelaide knew almost nothing about love. She had observed her parents together, as well as her sisters with their husbands, and detected very little affection between any of them, let alone love or passion. Couples in their social class were rarely demonstrative. But what if Addy could fall in love as Consuelo had, and be allowed to marry a man who loved her in return?

No. The idea was outrageous, the chance of it happening in her present circumstances, nearly impossible. Mother had emphasized the need to hurry, to court and marry a wealthy man before news of the will leaked out, and she and Mother fell from favor in society. She wished again that she had been a son instead of a daughter. She could have inherited everything, and nothing would change.

The morning room was one of Adelaide's favorites out of the nearly seventy-five rooms in the mansion. It was filled with sunshine from an east-facing window that overlooked the garden, now bright with fall foliage. It was a cozy room even in the winter, with comfortable chairs facing the fireplace. The papered walls and painted ceiling were in soothing pastel colors that reminded Addy of summer dresses and lawn parties in Newport. "Good morning, Mother," she said, kissing her cheek. She looked beautiful and her fair hair smelled of roses. Adelaide had been in awe of her mother's beauty and poise her entire life.

"We need to talk about the dinner I plan to hold," Mother said after the maid poured coffee for Adelaide. "I wanted to explain—" They were interrupted by a loud thump as Mimi Junie pushed the door open with her cane.

"I've been looking all over for you two. Aren't I invited to be part of your scheming?"

"I don't know what you mean by *scheming*." Mother's tone was cool and calm. "We're simply talking about—"

"Ever since the will was read, you've been scheming to hang on to this house and all that goes with it. And you're planning to make poor Adelaide play a major role in that."

"We're all in this together, Junietta," Mother said. "Our husbands are

gone, Adelaide's father is gone, and we have to make shrewd decisions from now on if we hope to survive."

"Then why not let me help? After all, I've managed to run my own life quite nicely for nearly seventy years—not to mention a charitable foundation that oversees millions of dollars."

The polite friction between the two women was nothing new. Addy had observed it all her life. For the most part, Mimi Junie remained in the background, adding color and spark at times, but she was rarely assertive. Adelaide had never seen her take control the way she had the day Father's will was read, speaking her mind and asking the lawyers questions. Mother had been the driving force in Addy's life and in her sisters' lives, calculating every move in order to see them successfully married and well provided for.

"Thank you, Junietta. We could use your experience." Mother gestured for Mimi to sit down with them and ordered the servant to bring another cup for her. "I'm sure you don't welcome these drastic changes any more than Adelaide and I do."

"Well, you can't prevent change. It's part of life. This cane was once an acorn, then a tree, then a stick of lumber," she said, waving it in the air. "Now it serves an entirely new role, propping up an elderly lady. Its usefulness came at the cost of a great deal of chopping and cutting and sanding, and we always abhor those painful processes, don't we?"

"We're people, not trees," Mother said. She took a sip of her coffee and returned the cup to its saucer before continuing. "Since you know so many people and have ties to all the important families, we could use your help in discerning the best suitors for Adelaide. The Stanhope name is highly respected and—"

"Ha!" Mimi Junie laughed. "*Feared* might be more appropriate than *respected*. It's lucky for the Stanhopes that ghosts can't talk. And that our skeletons have remained safely stashed away in our closets."

Mother gave a prim smile in response to Mimi Junie's colorful imagery. She had always been the more practical of the two women. In fact, Addy wouldn't have guessed that Mother had any imagination at all if

she hadn't seen the watercolor for herself. "I've written to your sisters," she continued, addressing Addy, "and asked them to comb through their contacts and connections for families with eligible suitors. But letters take so long to get anywhere, and a family based here in New York is preferable to either Boston or London. We'll need to act quickly, before word leaks out about the will."

"And before 'Roving Roger' or his ridiculous son, Randall, bankrupts the Stanhope empire," Mimi added.

Mother continued, unruffled. "Adelaide's marriage will allow her to keep this house and her life here in New York."

"So this house is to be part of Adelaide's bridal dowry?" Mimi asked. "Where will it end, Sylvia? And how?" She turned to Adelaide, wagging her finger in warning. "Don't let yourself be bartered and sold like a rug in a bazaar. You deserve better."

Addy could tell by the pink spots marring Mother's alabaster complexion that she was losing patience. "I want the very best for Adelaide, just as you do, Junietta. And this is how it's always been done among our social class. Why are you challenging me?"

"We're talking about Adelaide's future. Your youngest daughter. Doesn't she deserve a better life than we had? As I told Addy, when changes come, they give us a chance to take a closer look at our lives and get a fresh start, keeping what's important and setting new priorities."

"I was very content with my life before my husband died."

"That's a curious choice of words, isn't it? *Content*. Why not *happy*? Why not *fulfilled*? Is that the most you want for yourself and Adelaide—contentment?"

"You're twisting my words."

"My hope for Addy is that she discovers who she is. And I believe she's so much more than a bargaining chip that will allow us to continue with the way of life that *we've* chosen. Why not let her choose for herself? Why not help her escape the mold you and I were forced to fill? Don't let her uniqueness be diminished into conformity, the way yours and mine were."

“I’m sorry if your life was a disappointment, but—”

“Why not let Addy marry for love instead of for wealth and social position?”

“You know that’s not how it works for women in society. Love is the stuff of foolish romantic novels and silly poems. One can’t survive on love. One needs food and clothing and a roof over one’s head.”

“Does one really need a house with a dozen bedrooms? And a dining room that will seat one hundred guests?”

“You’re well aware that our husbands expected us to entertain important people. It was the role we played in the family business.”

“But that’s the point, Sylvia. The family business no longer belongs to us—or to Adelaide. We can reshape our lives any way we choose. If it turns out that we need to sell this house—good riddance! Mr. Wilson seems to think we could live on our inheritance if we’re prudent.”

Addy saw Mother’s composure slipping. Her voice rose a notch. “I don’t want Adelaide to be left out of everything important in New York society and sit in a cramped house all alone while Randall Stanhope’s daughter takes *her* rightful place! After everything A.B. and I have worked to achieve for our family? I won’t stand for it! It’s especially unfair for Adelaide to be forced to change. She was born a Stanhope. This life is hers by rights.”

“Is that what *you* want, Adelaide?”

Both women turned to her. She couldn’t reply, unused to being asked her opinion.

“See?” Mimi said. “The poor lamb can’t even think for herself. She wanders through life like a puppet on a string, doing whatever she’s told, anxious to please you, never having a thought or an opinion of her own. Why not let her explore some alternatives instead of deciding her future for her?”

“There isn’t time! Word about her father’s will is certain to leak out, and Randall’s wife will rush in to take our place in society, pushing her daughter, Cicely, forward—”

“Cicely also deserves the right to choose for herself.”

"I'm sorry, but I don't have time for this." Mother stood. "We'll talk about the dinner party another time, Adelaide. Besides, the lawyer is coming this afternoon, and I have to get ready for him."

Mother gathered up her things to leave, but Mimi Junie raised her cane like a barrier, blocking her way. "Sit down, Sylvia. You have plenty of time. This is important, and you know it."

She sat, but Adelaide detected anger in her stiff posture and cold expression. The two women rarely interacted, living separate lives in their separate suites except for mealtimes and social events. Adelaide hated to see them arguing, hated that she was in the middle of their tug-of-war.

"Please don't argue over me," she said quietly.

Mimi reached for her hand. "I'm speaking up for you, Addy, because your future is too important for me to remain silent. I should have been more involved in your life these past few years than I have been. Your sisters' lives too. I got caught up with my foundation, which is important—its future is important. But not as important as your future. This is your chance to escape."

"That's carrying it a bit too far, Junietta. She isn't a prisoner."

"Isn't she? You and I each had a taste of a different life before we married into this family. Isn't it time we told Addy the truth about our pasts?"

The pink spots on Mother's cheeks deepened to red. "I don't know what you're talking about."

"Oh, come now. Does Ferncliff Manor on the Hudson stir any memories? Or any regrets?"

"Why are you doing this, Junietta? And why now, when our lives have been disrupted enough by A.B.'s untimely death?"

"I can't think of a better time. When you reach the end of the road, it's always wise to look back to where you've come from before deciding which way to turn next. Shall I spill my secrets first, Sylvia, or would you like to? Shouldn't Addy have the benefit of learning from our experiences? I've kept many things about my past a secret, mostly out of guilt

and shame. But I'm willing to share everything with the two of you if it will help you make wise decisions going forward."

"I'm not in the mood to play your games."

"Very well, I'll go first. And you'd better stay," she said, blocking Mother's path with her cane again. "I'll be unearthing secrets that you've never heard before."

"I should think it would be better to leave them buried."

"There's no longer any reason to hide them. All three Arthur Benton Stanhopes are gone—first, second, and third."

Addy moved to the edge of her seat, wondering if Mimi was going to talk about the other son she'd mentioned at the funeral.

"You've grown up with my stories, Addy," Mimi continued. "You already know that my father was a Van Buren and my mother was a De Witt. They were from the old line of Dutch families called the Knickerbockers, who trace their ancestors to the founders of New York—or New Amsterdam, as it was originally called. The Van Burens have owned land here since 1631 and were among this nation's founding fathers. We're related to Martin Van Buren, who was the president of the United States when I was a girl. Oh, how proud we all were to be Van Burens! Mama's family, the De Witts, are kin to Mary De Witt, mother of DeWitt Clinton. He was a senator, mayor, and then governor of New York. He ran for president before I was born but lost, sad to say."

Adelaide had, indeed, heard this recitation before, but she nodded politely.

"The Schermerhorns are another old Knickerbocker family. Lady Caroline Astor is a Schermerhorn." Mimi leaned closer to Addy as if to make sure she was listening. "Any Johnny-come-lately millionaire who wanted to be socially accepted in New York would try to marry a Knickerbocker. John Jacob Astor, a crude German immigrant and butcher's son, came to America with barely a penny to his name. When he died fifty years ago, he was the richest man in America. But his family didn't gain respectability until Caroline Schermerhorn married his grandson, William Astor. It was the same with your great-grandfather,

Arthur Benton Stanhope I. He wanted his son to marry me because I was a Knickerbocker.”

Addy had never heard this part of the story and was paying close attention now.

Mimi sat back in her chair again and smiled. “By the way, not many people know that Arthur’s real name wasn’t Arthur Benton Stanhope at all. It was Gustav Steinhaus . . .”

4



NEW YORK CITY
JUNE 1849

Junietta

“Remember who you are, Junietta.”

How I hated those words! I knew that if I looked over my shoulder as I hurried out of the house, Mama’s stern warning would be accompanied by one of her equally stern stares. And if I didn’t close the door quickly enough, I also knew which words I would hear next: *“You’re a Van Buren and a De Witt. Do not bring shame to those good names.”*

I walked swiftly until our family home was out of sight, then slowed my steps to enjoy the sweet spring morning. My great-aunt Agatha wouldn’t notice if I was a few minutes late. She was a spinster who lived alone with her two servants in the De Witt family home, a short walk from ours. I had been given the role of her lady’s companion. Visiting her had begun as a dreaded chore two years ago when I was sixteen, but had now become a welcome chance to escape the tedium of my home life. I had grown up

in our moderately well-to-do home without a role to play. I was a useless extra daughter, the middle of three girls. My papa, who had filled a variety of political roles throughout my childhood, had become a New York State senator by the time of that fateful spring morning. He contented himself with grooming my two older brothers, William and John, for a future in politics, hoping that one of the Van Buren sons would achieve the fame and position that our relative Martin Van Buren had. Papa was either a hopeful optimist or a foolish dreamer, because I couldn't see how either of my dull, unimaginative brothers could possibly achieve anything worthwhile. William, who was five years my senior, never read anything more challenging than the daily newspaper. And John, three years my senior, couldn't add a column of numbers if someone held a gun to his head. What he'd been up to at Yale University, I couldn't imagine.

My sister Marietta, one year older than me, had chosen "being pretty" as her life's goal—another lost cause, in my opinion—and wouldn't dirty her delicate little fingers with any charitable duties, such as visiting Aunt Agatha. The baby of our family, my sister Chloe, had come along ten years and several infant deaths and miscarriages after me. She was far too busy being petted and spoiled by Mama and our two servants to even think about growing up. And so, as the nonessential extra sister, the task of visiting Aunt Agatha fell to me.

I had despised the job at first, sitting in stifling, overstuffed parlors as Aunt Agatha visited her arthritic friends, most of whom were so deaf they had to shout at each other over tea and canasta. In the afternoons, I would help with her correspondence and read aloud to her until she began to snore as loudly as her nasty little lapdog, Tibbles. But as time went on, I discovered two advantages to my otherwise boring assignment. The first was her library, which had once belonged to her father and grandfather. It contained a treasure trove of books on history, literature, plant life, geography, and even medicine, all of which I devoured hungrily. The second bonus was that reading aloud to Aunt Agatha invariably put her to sleep, giving me time to do whatever I pleased. At first, I used the time to explore her library, but as time passed and so did

most of her friends, Aunt Agatha rarely ventured outside her home. The poor old dear dozed off so often and so soundly that I took advantage of her naps to sneak out the back door and explore the city. Her two servants were easily bribed to ignore my excursions and even made excuses for my disappearances if need be.

I loved the bustling, bumbling commercial district with its jumble of horses and wagons that would snarl into tangled, shrieking traffic jams. I explored the unseemly, overcrowded parts of town where feral pigs ate garbage in the streets, street vendors hawked their wares, and immigrants added colorful music and the cadence of exotic languages. Of course, Papa's daughters were never allowed into those areas of the city. Our servants purchased most of our daily necessities, and our dress-makers brought samples of cloth and lace and ribbons to our home so we wouldn't soil the hems of our gowns with the filth of the street. I even ventured as far as the city docks, where tall-masted sailing ships and passengers and goods from all over the globe landed in America. I had discovered a world of excitement outside my staid New York City neighborhood, and I longed to see all of it.

But even I wasn't fool enough to explore the city on that idyllic June morning in 1849. A plague of cholera, which had begun last winter, had now become a deadly epidemic. I had been a baby during New York's first wave of cholera in 1832, when thousands of people perished. They said the murderous affliction had originated in India, then spread to Great Britain, Canada, and eventually the United States. Now it was striking a second time. Experts said the scourge was caused by foul, stagnant air, and I knew how ponderous and fetid the air was in the city's working-class neighborhoods. I intended to order the servants to open all of Aunt Agatha's windows to the spring breezes as soon as I arrived at her house, and air out her blankets and featherbeds. But as I took a shortcut through the back lane and was passing my aunt's carriage house, the distinct sound of a baby's cry stopped me in my tracks. I stood for a moment, listening. There was no mistake. A small baby was definitely inside my aunt's stables, crying.

I wondered if it was a foundling. Desperate parents, unable to care for their children, would sometimes leave them on the doorstep of a wealthy home, hoping the owners would take pity. Orphanages were filled with such abandoned babies. I had inched closer to peek through the window when a voice behind me startled me.

“Good morning, Miss. Are you needing something?”

I jumped, then whirled around to face a young man in his early twenties wearing well-worn clothing. It took me a moment to recall that he was the new handyman and carriage driver that my uncle had hired last week to replace Aunt Agatha’s aging one. I couldn’t recall the man’s name, but that hardly mattered at the moment.

“There’s a baby inside the carriage house,” I said. “I heard it crying.”

He removed his cap, not in deference to a lady, which was proper, but to run his fingers through his hair. It was thick and curly and the color of mahogany. “Nay, Miss. I think you must be mistaken. ’Tis the cry of a bird you must be hearing.”

I had learned from my brothers the futility of arguing with a man who was being stupidly contrary. I simply walked around to the side door and went inside. The cries had stopped, but I continued walking through the stables to where I thought the sound had come from. The new driver seemed to be making an unusual amount of noise as he followed me, stomping his feet as if his boots were coated with snow and talking nonsense about barn owls and cooing doves. I knew what I had heard. And sure enough, crouched in the back of an empty stall was a very frightened young woman with an infant clutched to her breast. “There’s your mourning dove, Mister . . . ?”

“Galloway. Neal Galloway. Forgive me for doubting you, Miss De Witt.”

“My name is Van Buren. Miss De Witt is my great-aunt and your employer.”

“Right, then. I’ll see to the lass and babe, Miss Van Buren. You don’t need to trouble yourself any further.”

I ignored him and stepped closer to the young woman. “What’s your name?” I asked. She didn’t reply. Instead, she looked up at Mr. Galloway

as if for instructions. I knew then that he wasn't surprised in the least to find a mother and child hiding in the carriage house. "Do they belong to you, Mr. Galloway?" I asked, turning to him.

"Not in the way that you mean, Miss. The babe is me niece, and the lass is me brother Gavin's wife."

"What are they doing in my aunt's carriage house?"

He scratched his head and settled the cap back on his head as if stalling for time. "Are ye familiar with the story of how the Christ child started His life in a stable because there was nae any room for Him? And how He later fled the city when Herod's soldiers came after Him?"

"You don't expect me to believe this is another holy visitation, do you?"

"Nay," he said, laughing. "It's the 'no room' part of the story that I'm comparing this to. And the danger. The air is thick with cholera where Gavin and Meara are living. I only wanted to spare them and the wee babe."

"By moving them into our horse stall?"

"Aye. It's a step up for them, you see. And it's only until the air clears." There was something about his lilting brogue and the smile in his voice and in his hazel eyes that made it hard to be angry with Mr. Galloway. He had bucketsful of charm. And none of the dour Knickerbocker men of my acquaintance had even one ounce of charm. Even so, it was presumptuous of him to move his family into our stable a mere week after he'd been hired.

"And how long were you expecting this . . . arrangement . . . to last?"

He shrugged his broad shoulders. "Until the air clears. And the dying stops. That is, if it's fine by you."

"It's a little late to be asking my permission, isn't it?"

"Aye. I see your point." Mr. Galloway grinned and my breath caught in my throat. He was easily the most attractive man I had ever seen in my life. The young men in my world were all tightly buttoned from head to toe in stiff collars, starched shirts, vests, cutaway coats, frock coats, and gloves until not an inch of skin showed except on their faces, even on warm June days like this one. But Mr. Galloway—oh, my! Ruddy hair and tanned skin peeked from where his top two shirt buttons were

undone. His sleeves were rolled up to reveal more tanned skin and ruddy hair. He had arm muscles that I'd seen only on marble statues. I knew I shouldn't stare, but I couldn't help myself. I wanted to be angry with him, but I couldn't manage that either.

"I'll look the other way until the epidemic ends," I said, conscious of the irony of my words and my weak-kneed inability to take my eyes off Mr. Galloway. "But if my uncle, Mrs. De Witt's son, catches you, I will deny any knowledge of this arrangement."

"Agreed. God bless you for your kindness, Miss Van Buren." I wanted him to call me Junietta. I wanted to hear my name roll musically from his tongue. But of course, it would be wildly inappropriate for him to do so.

I searched our attic when I returned home, looking for the trunk of baby clothing that had been worn by all the infants in our family. I smuggled the layette to Meara and baby Regan in a basket so no one would see it. I salvaged leftover food that Aunt Agatha had only picked at, and brought it to Meara. She let me hold tiny Regan in my arms and inhale her milky sweetness.

As the weather warmed, I saw more of Mr. Galloway in two respects. First, I saw more of his tanned skin and sculpted muscles whenever he removed his shirt to pitch hay into the loft or repair the roof or tend the garden. And second, I saw more and more of him in my day-to-day life as we became friends. The cholera plague had put an end to my explorations around town, so I had plenty of extra time on my hands. Aunt Agatha's cook and housekeeper, long bored with the tedium of an elderly woman's routine and also enamored with Mr. Galloway's endless charm, quickly embraced the novelty of having a mother and babe in our carriage house and befriended all three of them as well.

On one particularly fine day a week or so after Meara and Regan arrived, I brought a picnic lunch outside for Mr. Galloway and his sister-in-law, and we sat in the shade outside the carriage house to eat it. "This is ever so kind of you, Miss Van Buren, thank you," he said as he bit into his sandwich.

"You are ever so welcome, Mr. Galloway," I replied, mocking his formality. He grinned.

“I wish you would call me by my given name, Miss Van Buren. It’s Neal. Mr. Galloway was me father.”

“All right—Neal.” I longed to have him call me Junietta but still didn’t dare. “Am I right in thinking your accent is Scottish?”

“Aye. I crossed over to America with me brother two years ago, looking to make our way. Our farm wasn’t prospering anymore, and there was no work to be found anywhere, so when our dad passed on, we decided to come here. Our mum was gone years before.”

“And did you come over with Neal and Gavin too?” I asked Meara.

She shook her head. “I met Gavin not long after he arrived. I was doing cleaning and such in the rooming house where he stayed.”

“Me brother fell hard for Meara, and that’s the truth,” Neal said, laughing. “After working at the docks unloading ships all day, Meara is a sweet sight for him to come home to. I’m happy for the both of them.”

“Why aren’t you working at the docks with him? Surely it pays better wages than my uncle does.”

He studied me for a moment as if deciding something, then rose to his feet.

“Come with me, Miss. I’ll show you another secret that I’ve been hiding from ye.” My heart pounded foolishly as I rose and followed him into the carriage house. I don’t know what I expected to find, but it wasn’t a pretty little oak side table with gently tapering legs. I didn’t understand what I was seeing at first and wondered if he had stolen it. Then I saw the tools spread out on the workbench and the wood shavings scattered across the floor. The air smelled of sawdust and turpentine.

“You made this table?” I asked stupidly.

“Aye. I love working with me hands. Always have. I’m thinking if I can make enough furniture and the like in my spare time, I can get a start on owning me own carpenter shop someday. Didn’t our Lord and Savior get His start as a carpenter?” I stared, openmouthed at his impertinence. Then he winked, and I couldn’t help laughing.

“Well, you do lovely work, Neal, if this is an example.”

“Thank you.”

“And if you decide to follow our Lord and Savior’s example and walk

on water, I hope I'm there to see it." His jovial laughter followed me out of the workshop.

As the spring days lengthened, I came up with the idea of taking Aunt Agatha out for a carriage ride every day. I told her and myself that it was in the interest of getting fresh air to ward off the plague, but the truth was, I enjoyed being in the company of her cheerful carriage driver. "I haven't seen much of these finer areas of town," Neal told me. "I feared I'd be taken for a vagrant or a thief if I strolled these streets without a purpose." He was as intrigued by the way we lived as I had been by the docks and poorer areas of the city.

"Would you look at that, Miss?" he would say, pointing out things that I took for granted and causing me to see my world through his eyes. He slowed to watch a group of pedestrians on the wooden walkway and said, "The dresses you fine ladies wear are as colorful and bright as a flower garden, aren't they now?" Sometimes he would bring the carriage to a halt, just to take it all in. And he did that very thing one day when we came to the row of new shops on Park Row that John Jacob Astor had just built. The building was five stories tall and the size of a city block, with shops that sold everything from boots and books to silks and stationery. "Would you look at that fine place? I think that's where I'll have me furniture shop someday." Having seen his skills as a carpenter and knowing his determination and charm, I had no trouble believing that he would.

Neal burst into song as he drove home, singing a ballad about bonny lasses and fair skies above the Scottish Highlands. He had a fine voice, but I had never had a singing carriage driver before, and I worried how Aunt Agatha would react. Even though she was growing deaf, she couldn't have missed hearing him.

"Was that him singing? The driver?" she asked in her creaky voice when he finished.

"Yes. His name is Galloway, Aunt Agatha." I held my breath.

"Well, tell him to sing another song. A little louder this time."

5



SEPTEMBER 1849

Junietta

Fortunately for me—and terribly unfortunately for Aunt Agatha—she became so frail and unsteady on her feet by September that she needed someone to stay with her throughout the night. I surprised my mother by volunteering. “That’s kind of you, Junie,” she said, “but you would be giving up so much. Wouldn’t you rather spend more time with your friends?”

“Aunt Agatha has become very dear to me,” I replied. And so had her handyman.

“But wouldn’t you like to attend events with Marietta more often, where there are young gentlemen to meet?”

“If I’m going to meet any gentlemen, it won’t be in Marietta’s company. She isn’t happy unless every man in the room falls madly in love with her. And they always do. None of them even notice me.”

“You’re every bit as pretty as she is, Junie.”

I didn’t believe her. She was my mother, and mothers always said

things like that. If I stayed overnight with Aunt Agatha, I could sneak outside to the carriage house after dark and talk with Neal and read books to him while he worked on his furniture by lantern light. The smell of raw wood and lamp oil would forever remind me of him. The epidemic had eased, so Meara and her baby had returned to their apartment by then. Aside from Aunt Agatha's horses, we were alone.

I knew I was falling in love with Neal Galloway. And I suspected by the tender looks he gave me that he loved me too. But he made no move to declare his love, always careful to keep a respectful distance between us.

"Will you do something for me, Neal?" I asked one evening. I had closed the book I'd been reading to him with a snap that had made him look up.

"And what would that be?"

"Call me by my given name, Junietta."

"Ah, but that wouldn't be appropriate, Miss Van Buren. You're my employer, aren't you now?"

"No, I'm your employer's niece."

"Tis the same thing." He had laughter in his voice and a sparkle in his eyes that told me he was toying with me. I slid off my stool and stood in front of him.

"Say it, Neal. Say, 'Junietta, my dear, how are you this evening?'"

"But I can see perfectly well that you're fine, Miss Van Buren." He grinned at me, then looked away to continue carving the new cane he was making for Aunt Agatha. Hers had splintered, so he was fashioning a beautiful new one for her with a lion's-head handle and carved vines and flowers spiraling down the shaft.

"Neal Galloway!" I said, stamping my foot. "As your employer, I order you to say my given name. It's Junietta."

"Aye, I know your name, Miss Van Buren, and if I may be so bold to say, your name is as beautiful as you are." He was still looking down, not at me. My heart galloped like a stampeding horse.

"Stop teasing and say it!" I reached out and covered his hands with mine, stilling them. Our hands had touched before whenever he'd helped

me from the carriage, but I'd always worn gloves as a proper lady should. The moment I felt his warm, wood-roughened ones beneath mine, I understood why it was forbidden to touch each other barehanded. A sensation that I'd never experienced before shivered through me like liquid fire in my veins. I longed to hold him close, to feel his strong arms around me, his bearded cheek against my face.

He looked up at me and I stopped breathing.

"Junietta," he whispered.

I was undone, even before he took my face in his hands and kissed me. I had never been kissed before. It was the most wonderful, thrilling sensation I had ever known, and the liquid fire burned hotter. Neal Galloway's firm lips were pressed against mine, and I never wanted the kiss to end. But it did.

"I love you, Junietta," he whispered.

"And I love you." I could barely speak. I had no breath. "Please, Neal. Please kiss me again." He did, and this time his arms came around me, and mine surrounded him. It felt even more wonderful than I had imagined to be held in his arms. I felt his warmth, his strength, and my own fragility. But then he stopped suddenly and gently unloosed my arms, pulling away from me. "What's wrong?" I asked.

"Nothing. Everything." He backed away and picked up the cane again as if he might have to use it to hold me back.

"I don't understand."

"You surely know that we can never be together. There's a wide river between us that I can never cross. What happened just now—it shouldn't have. Forgive me, Miss Van Buren."

"Don't you dare call me that! You said you loved me!"

"Aye, and it was the truth. But I need to ask you to leave now, for both of our sakes." He still had the cane in one hand, and he picked up the lantern with the other. "I'll light your way to the door, Miss."

I was shaken and furious and trembling from head to toe. But I marched to the carriage house door and slammed it behind me in Neal's face.

I sat in my room in the dark, weeping as I gazed out at the carriage house where lantern light shone dimly through the window. Neal Galloway loved me, and I loved him. There had to be a way to build a bridge across the river that he believed was separating us. I would lay every plank myself, if necessary. And if he couldn't cross to my side, then I would cross to his. I didn't care if I had to live in a shoddy tenement or carriage house for the rest of my life, at least I would be with the man I loved. I planned and plotted and dreamed until my tears had dried and the light in the carriage house finally went out. I climbed into bed but I didn't sleep.

"Aunt Agatha and I would like a carriage ride this afternoon," I told Neal the next day. "Take us to the north side of Manhattan, if you please, into the countryside." I'd planned the ride for the time she usually took a long afternoon nap. And sure enough, by the time we'd left the city behind and reached farmland, the warm fall air and gentle motion of the carriage on the dirt road had lulled her to sleep. "You can stop for a moment, Neal."

"I was wondering when you would say that," he said. "If we drive much further, the horses will be needing to swim."

I smiled. He always made me smile. "Please turn around and look at me, Neal." He did, and his eyes looked as red-rimmed and swollen as mine. "That river you mentioned last night. The one that stands between us. There has to be a way to cross it. A bridge or a ferry. I'll even learn how to swim if I have to. I love you, Neal. And you said last night that you loved me too. Was it true? Do you love me?"

He nodded, as if his heart was too full to speak. His eyes glistened with tears.

"Then look around, Neal!" I gestured to the farmland on either side of the road. "You wouldn't have to live in my world, and I wouldn't have to live in yours. We could start a new life together in a place like this. We could get land out west in the territories—everyone is moving west these days. They'll need furniture when they get there, won't they?"

He almost smiled, then grew serious again. "Your parents will never let you marry me, Junietta, and I can't say that I blame them."

“Then we’ll run away!” He slowly shook his head. “Why not?” His stupid Scottish stubbornness frustrated me.

“Two reasons, lass. I won’t steal a daughter from her family without their permission. It wouldn’t be right. The Good Book says we’re to honor our father and mother so that it may go well with ye. How could it ever go well with us if I stole you away?”

I huffed, unable to argue with his reply. “And the second reason?”

“Because you deserve so much more than what I can provide for you. The frontier life is not for you, Junietta. I won’t degrade the woman I love by making her scrub and scrape for all her days. I’ve seen the way your people live, haven’t I? With fine houses and servants to cook and clean and drive their carriages for them. Your aunt’s servants live better than you would if you married me.”

“But you’ll have your own furniture shop someday, and—”

“Don’t be arguing with me about it. I won’t hear it.” His words were spoken firmly yet gently. He studied the grove of apple trees beside the road for a moment. I could smell the sweet, fermenting aroma of the fallen ones scattered on the ground and hear bees buzzing around them. “But you aren’t the only person who has been looking for a way to ford the river, Junietta. If I were a wealthy man—well now, that would be a different story. Then your father couldn’t say no to me.”

“How do you intend to become wealthy?”

“I’ll earn it. By hard work and the sweat of me brow. People leave everything behind and come to America because it’s possible to go from rags to riches, as they say. Anyone can do it.”

I thought of John Jacob Astor, who had died last year. He had arrived as a penniless immigrant and became the richest man in America. But it had taken him a lifetime. How long would I have to wait? “Neal, you put so much care and attention into each piece of furniture you make that it would take years to earn enough money to impress Papa. I want to be with you now!”

“I won’t be building furniture, Junietta. They’ve found gold in California, haven’t they? I’m going to go there and make my fortune, then come back for ye.”

“No! That’s much too dangerous! I don’t want to be separated from you for even a day, let alone all the years it will take for you to find gold.”

“I hate the thought of being apart too, but—”

“Then take me with you!”

“From what I hear, the gold fields are no place for a woman.”

“They’re no place for you either! Neal, listen to me!” I was almost shouting as I tried to make this stubborn man listen to reason. Aunt Agatha stirred and awakened beside me. She looked around, blinking her eyes as if she might still be dreaming.

“Junie, dear? Where are we?”

Neal jumped down from the driver’s seat and began the process of turning the horses and carriage around on the narrow dirt road. “We’re on the north side of Manhattan Island, Auntie,” I said. “I thought you’d like to see the countryside. We’re heading back home now.”

Neal had made up his mind, and all my begging and pleading in the following weeks did nothing to make him change it. Gold fever was spreading as fast as the cholera plague, and he had a fiery case of it. So did his brother, Gavin, who had a friend waiting in San Francisco to partner with the two brothers. The three men planned to stake their claim together. Neal and Gavin would set sail as soon as they’d saved enough money for the ship’s passage, leaving me, Meara, and baby Regan behind to wait.

“There are two ways we can get to California,” he explained a few days later as I watched him saw a plank of lumber into pieces. “We can sail around Cape Horn at the tip of South America, then all the way up the coast of both continents to California. Or we can sail as far as Panama, then go overland through the jungle to the Pacific. The second way saves time and seems much shorter, but I’m told there are natives in those jungles, and strange fevers and wild creatures. There’s also the chance of being stranded in that jungle if your guide turns out to be a crook who steals all your money and abandons you there.”

“Is there any chance at all that I can talk you out of this foolishness?”

“Nay, love. Me mind’s made up.” He leaned over to where I was

sitting and kissed me. Neal no longer kept me at arm's length now that he finally had hope of marrying me. He didn't hesitate at all to hold me and kiss me and tell me how much he loved me as we talked about our plans for the future. But at the end of every evening, he would always pry my arms away and say, "Ye better leave now, love, while I still have me wits about me."

The newspapers were calling it a gold *rush* because everyone was in a hurry to get to California and make their fortune. The urgent need for ships was so great that decrepit old sailing vessels were being dragged out of dry dock and put to use. That was true of a salvaged ship called the *Heiress*, which Neal and Gavin booked passage on. The fare was half the price of other ships because the skipper was young and had never captained a ship before. He planned to scuttle the *Heiress* in California like so many others were doing and go prospecting for gold himself.

"Gavin's friend says the harbor in San Francisco is packed with abandoned ships," Neal told me. "You can almost walk from one to the next like stepping stones. Gavin and I won't even be getting our boots wet."

We stayed awake the night before he left, knowing that neither of us would sleep. We held each other and talked about what our life would be like in the future. I begged him one last time not to go, but he assured me that he had every intention of returning to me as a very rich man. He talked of the diamonds and jewels he would dress me in, and the palace he would build for me. "You foolish man! Don't you know I don't want any of those things? I only want you!" I loved him. Oh, how I loved him!

I took a streetcar to the docks with him at dawn to watch his ship set sail. He had tried to talk me out of coming to see him off but quickly learned how stubborn I could be. "All right, then," he decided with a curt nod. "There's something I need to show you before I go." He took me to the one-room tenement apartment where Meara and Regan would live with Meara's parents and two younger sisters while Gavin was away. Her family had already left for work, even at this early hour, and Meara and Gavin were sharing a tearful farewell.

It was the apartment that Neal wanted me to see, a dark, cramped,

airless room that was both kitchen and sleeping quarters. There was no running water, no toilet. Thin, ragged blankets covered the lumpy beds. It smelled of woodsmoke from the cast-iron stove, and of unwashed clothing and sweat. A pile of new woolen coats covered the splintery table—piecework, Neal told me. As Meara cared for Regan, she would sew on buttons for one penny apiece. The single window faced a narrow alley and another tenement ten feet away. That and an oil lamp provided her only light as she worked.

“Now do ye believe me, Junietta, when I tell you how much I love ye? Meara has never known anything different, but you have. Leaving you is the hardest thing I will ever do, but I’m determined to provide more than this for you when I come home.”

I had hoped that Neal would change his mind at the last minute when he’d be unable to say goodbye and part with me for what would probably be at least a year. But I was still standing alone on the pier long after the *Heiress* disappeared from sight.

I received two letters from Neal as he sailed south and his ship stopped for supplies. He promised to write again after they’d sailed around the tip of Cape Horn, but there were no more letters. When one month turned to two and Neal should have arrived in California, I took a streetcar to see Meara, wandering through the maze of stinking streets and pitiful slums until I finally found her tenement. She hadn’t heard from Gavin either. “But I did receive this, and I’m worried sick.” She handed me a letter from Gavin’s friend in San Francisco, asking if Gavin’s plans had changed or if he’d been delayed, because the *Heiress* hadn’t arrived. The dread I felt was indescribable.

I moved through the days and weeks and months, wondering where Neal was, murmuring useless prayers for his safety, trying everything I could think of to take my mind off him. Nothing worked. The newspapers printed fanciful stories describing life in the California gold fields and the perils would-be miners were experiencing in their quest for riches. Men were making—and sometimes losing—fortunes. And Neal was still missing.

Then the horrible day came when an article in the newspaper told of the fearsome storms that ships sometimes encountered as they sailed around the tip of Cape Horn. One lucky survivor told how he'd spotted three other ships battling the waves alongside his. The storm had tossed them around like corks throughout the night until he despaired of losing his life. In the morning, his battered ship was still afloat, but the other three had all sunk. Pieces of broken wreckage covered the churning waves all around him. Bloating bodies floated on the water. Only five survivors were found floating in the wreckage and were pulled onboard, all of them sailors, not passengers. The names of their sunken ships were the *Atlas*, the *Sea Quest*, and the *Heiress*.

I began to scream and couldn't stop. Aunt Agatha's servants came running to see what had happened. I was too incoherent with grief to explain. They gave me a dose of Aunt Agatha's laudanum and put me to bed.

For a long time, I refused to believe it. Neal would have survived. He had to survive! I couldn't function, unable to eat or sleep for days. When the shock began to fade, anger replaced it. I didn't care about jewels and diamonds and mansions; I wanted Neal Galloway—the man I loved! I roamed through the carriage house, willing him to be there, seeing him everywhere. I loved him, but he was gone.

When I could no longer deny the truth or expect a miracle, I went to see Meara and read the newspaper article to her. We grieved and mourned together as we faced the horrible truth that the *Heiress* had been lost. We would never see Neal or Gavin again.

I wanted to die and be with him. I imagined him saying, "Don't ye know what the Good Book says, love? There are bonny, grand mansions in heaven. We will be living in one together someday. I'll be waiting there for ye." I longed to die right now, but I wouldn't be allowed into heaven to be with Neal if I ended my own life.

I could no longer stay at Aunt Agatha's house where everything reminded me of Neal. My uncle hired a nurse to take care of her, along with a new carriage driver. I moved back to my parents' house. Neal was dead, and as much as I hated the thought, I had to go on living.

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