



A NOVEL

The
LEGACY
of
LONGDALE
MANOR

CARRIE TURANSKY

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of
LONGDALE
MANOR

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To my husband, Scott,
who has always supported me in my writing,
and who makes each day brighter
as we walk through this life together.

I'm blessed and grateful for you and your love.

“For this is what the Sovereign LORD says: I myself will search for my sheep and look after them. As a shepherd looks after his scattered flock when he is with them, so will I look after my sheep. I will rescue them from all the places where they were scattered on a day of clouds and darkness. . . . I will search for the lost and bring back the strays. I will bind up the injured and strengthen the weak.”

Ezekiel 34:11–12, 16 NIV

One

2012

London, England

The lift door slid open, and Gwen Morris stepped into the third-floor offices of Hill and Morris, one of the most prestigious art and antique auction houses in London. She still felt a thrill each time she walked down the dark paneled hallway toward her new office and took in the beautiful paintings, jewelry, and antiques on display.

The receptionist looked up as Gwen approached. The young woman's eyes widened, and she quickly looked down at her desk and shuffled some papers.

Gwen's steps slowed. "Good morning, MaryAnn."

"Morning." MaryAnn slowly lifted her eyes to meet Gwen's. "Your grandfather—I mean, Mr. Morris—would like you to come to his office right away."

A prickle of unease traveled through Gwen, but she quickly dismissed it. He probably wanted to discuss some new acquisitions, or perhaps give her feedback on her first month as junior specialist for art history and antiques.

"Thank you." She started down the hall and glanced through Charlene's open office doorway. As the older woman met her

gaze, her expression hardened, and she turned toward the windows. That was odd. Charlene usually offered a “Good morning,” or at least a nod as Gwen passed.

She continued down the hall and received chilly looks from three other colleagues. What was going on? Certainly, the weather was gloomy, and they all had a heavy workload, but she couldn’t imagine why everyone seemed to be in such a dark mood this morning.

She approached her grandfather’s outer office, and Mrs. Huntington, her grandfather’s fiftyish administrative assistant, lifted her head, her face impassive. “Mr. Morris said you are to go right in.”

Gwen’s stomach tensed. This did not bode well. She straightened her shoulders, stepped into her grandfather’s office, and closed the door.

Her grandfather looked up, his gray eyes cool and assessing. He sat behind his large wooden desk, with his back to the tall windows behind him. Dark gray clouds draped the buildings on the opposite side of St. James Street, and rivulets raced down the glass in a dizzy dance. The downpour outside seemed a perfect reflection of her grandfather’s shadowed expression.

He nodded to the chair in front of his desk. “Have a seat, Gwen.”

A shiver raced down her back as she lowered herself into the chair. She should ask what was wrong, but she couldn’t seem to force out the words.

“We have a situation . . . a very serious situation, I might add.” His gray eyebrows drew down into a deep V. “One of the Impressionist paintings we auctioned last Saturday”—he glanced at his computer—“*Avenue of the Allies*, which you listed as a copy of Childe Hassam’s painting by the same name . . .”

Gwen nodded, remembering the painting clearly. Hassam was an American Impressionist who painted in Britain and

France as well as the US. His work was copied by many artists in the late 1800s and early 1900s.

He focused on her again. “It was an original.”

A shock wave jolted Gwen, and she sucked in a sharp breath.

“The buyer is thrilled to have purchased an original Hassam at one-tenth of its true value,” her grandfather continued. “But the seller, Ivan Saunders, is irate. He’s threatening a lawsuit and promising to spread the story of our incompetence far and wide.”

She stared at her grandfather and tried to swallow, but her throat seemed blocked by a huge boulder. How could she have made such a terrible mistake?

Her thoughts raced back to the last week of February, when she’d started in her new position. After one year as an intern, stepping into the role of junior specialist had been a huge transition. That same week, she’d gone through a painful breakup with her boyfriend, Oliver St. Charles. She’d lost hours of sleep over that heartache, and her mind had been in a fog. Was that why she’d failed to realize she was evaluating an original Hassam?

“Well, Gwen, what do you have to say for yourself?”

“I . . . I don’t know what happened. I checked the painting’s provenance. Then I compared it to other paintings by Hassam, looking at the style and brushstroke, the color choice, and size of the work. They all seemed so different from his other paintings, and there was no signature, so I assumed—”

“His signature was revealed when the frame was removed. It’s been verified as the original.” Her grandfather steepled his fingers, his serious gaze drilling into her. “Why didn’t you remove the frame and look for the signature?”

“The frame was beautiful. I thought it might possibly be worth more than the painting, and I didn’t want to damage it. And the fact that there was no visible signature made it seem most likely it was a copy.”

“Did you check the catalogue raisonné?”

“Yes. It said the original was part of a private collection owned by . . . someone. I don’t remember the name, but it wasn’t Ivan Saunders.”

“If you had any question, you should have spoken to Charlene, or run your findings past others who have more experience before you catalogued it.”

The burning sensation in her stomach rose, singeing her throat. “Charlene was unwell that week and not in the office.”

He gave a brief nod. “Charlene and a few others are looking at the pieces you’ve evaluated since then. Nothing else glaring has come up, but that doesn’t excuse the mistake you made with the Hassam.”

Gwen lowered her chin, wishing she could melt into the floor. She had seriously disappointed her grandfather. Worse than that, she’d confirmed what she’d always suspected: She wasn’t good enough. She wasn’t ready. She might never be. This position had only been given to her because she was Lionel Morris’s granddaughter. And now that she’d made this colossal error, she faced losing the position she’d worked so hard to attain.

She looked across at her grandfather, pain and regret squeezing her heart. “You’re right. There’s no excuse. I should’ve done more research and consulted with others, rather than trying to handle it on my own.”

“I imagine you were trying to prove yourself, but I’m afraid that was a very costly error in judgment. You’ve tarnished your reputation in the art community and with your colleagues at Hill and Morris.”

He didn’t add *and with me*, but she could feel the weight of those silent words. “I’m sorry.” Her voice came out a rough whisper.

“This is a very difficult way to start your career.”

That went without saying. “What will happen now . . . about the painting?”

“I’ve spoken to our legal department.”

Gwen’s heart clenched. Oliver worked in the legal department. Now he had even more reasons to be glad he’d broken up with her. Everyone at Hill and Morris would consider her a foolish upstart who’d proven she didn’t deserve the position she’d been given.

“They’ll work out a settlement with Ivan Saunders,” her grandfather continued, “but it will be costly and not soon forgotten by anyone.”

Gwen acknowledged his words with a slow nod. How could she have let this happen? Was it her pride or lack of experience that had taken her down that path . . . or both?

She looked up and met her grandfather’s gaze. “What can I do? How can I make this up to you?”

He tapped his index fingers together for a few seconds as he studied the rain-washed windows to his left. “I have an old friend, Lilly Benderly. She wants to sell some of the art and antiques in her home, Longdale Manor, near Keswick. She can’t afford our usual fees, but there’s the possibility of a future investment there, and I’d like to help her.” He shifted his gaze back to Gwen. “I want you to go to Longdale, evaluate the pieces she’s interested in selling, and make the arrangements to have them shipped to London and prepared for auction.”

Hope surged in her chest. “Of course. I’d be glad to go.” She had no idea where Keswick was located, but she didn’t want to admit that to her grandfather. She’d look it up later. “Did she say how many pieces she wants evaluated?”

“No, she didn’t. But this will give you time away from London until the storm blows over. I think that is the best way to avoid embarrassment.”

His embarrassment, or hers? She closed her eyes and suppressed a sigh. Why hadn’t she been more careful? Couldn’t she do anything right? She pushed those questions down, opened

her eyes, and focused on her grandfather again. “When did you want me to go?”

“As soon as we can make the arrangements.”

Gwen nodded, but questions swirled in her mind. What type of art and antiques did her grandfather’s friend want to sell? If she handled this project well, could she regain her grandfather’s trust?

“Take your time, and be sure you evaluate each piece correctly,” he said. “Lilly is a recent widow, and a bit eccentric. But I want her to receive the best sale price possible. Can you do that, Gwen?”

She gave a firm nod. “I’ll do my best and run all my work by you and Charlene.”

“Good. Mrs. Huntington will give you Lilly Benderly’s contact information. Let her know you’re coming. Stay in Keswick as long as needed to do a thorough job.” He paused and looked toward the door, indicating the meeting was over.

She rose on wobbly legs, then willed strength into them and faced her grandfather. “I know my mistake has put you in a difficult position. I’m truly sorry for that. It won’t happen again. I promise.”

His stern expression softened. “We all make mistakes, Gwen. It’s what we learn from those mistakes and how we recover that’s important. I hope you’ll take this lesson to heart.”

His gentle words sent new courage flowing through her. “Yes, sir. I will.”

“You’ve been given a great opportunity at Hill and Morris. I hope you’ll do all you can to make the most of it.”



Gwen lifted her suitcase onto the bed in her small London flat, pulled the zipper around, and flipped open the top. Her hand stilled, and she looked out her bedroom window as the

painful events of the morning replayed through her mind. She'd let her grandfather down in the worst way and made a costly mistake that was going to follow her for years to come.

She blinked and tried to shake off the dazed, disappointed feeling coursing through her. This was not the end of her career. It couldn't be. Somehow, she would find a way to rebuild. She crossed to the dresser and took a shirt from the top drawer.

The front door opened, and footsteps sounded on the wooden floor. Lindsey Winters, her roommate, looked in from the hallway. "Gwen, what are you doing home?" Her gaze darted to the suitcase on the bed. "What's going on?"

Gwen sighed. "It's a long story. You might want to sit down."

Lindsey lowered herself into the chair next to Gwen's bed. "What happened?"

Gwen sank down on her bed. "I made a huge mistake evaluating a painting, and my grandfather is sending me away until the dust settles."

"What kind of mistake?"

Gwen poured out the story, her eyes burning as she repeated what she'd done and the response of her grandfather and co-workers.

"Oh, Gwen, I'm so sorry. It's no wonder you're upset. But he didn't sack you. He's giving you a chance to show him you can do the work." That was just like Lindsey, always looking for the positive side in any hard situation.

Gwen gave a reluctant nod. Lindsey was right. Her grandfather had offered her the opportunity to redeem herself and prove she was worthy of her position at Hill and Morris.

"Where's he sending you?"

"He wants me to evaluate some pieces for an old friend who lives in Keswick, wherever that is."

Lindsey's eyes lit up. "That's in the Lake District."

A distant memory stirred Gwen's mind at those words. "The Lake District?"

“Yes, up north. Oh, it’s so lovely this time of year.” Lindsey smiled. “Mum and Dad took me to Windermere on holiday when I was sixteen. That’s not far from Keswick. We went hiking in the hills. They call them *fells* up there. And we took a boat ride across Lake Windermere and visited Beatrix Potter’s Hill Top Farm.”

The Lake District . . . Gwen rose and crossed to her closet. Her mum had mentioned painting in the Lake District when she was younger. She reached up to the top shelf, pulled out a large round hatbox, and carried it back to her bed.

“What’s in there?” Lindsey asked as Gwen lifted the lid.

“Everything that was in my mum’s desk.” She glanced at the papers and photographs that nearly filled the box, and her throat tightened. “It’s hard to believe she’s been gone almost two years.”

“I’m sorry, Gwen.” Lindsey’s voice softened. “I wish I’d known your mum. From what you’ve told me, she sounds like a very special person.”

“She was. I still miss her every day.” Gwen blew out a breath and pushed the first few papers aside. “I think my parents met in the Lake District.”

“Really?” Lindsey scooted closer. “I’ve never heard you say much about your father.”

Gwen’s throat tightened, and she tried to force down the jumbled feelings coursing through her. “That’s because I’ve never met him. He left my mum before I was born.”

Lindsey’s eyes widened. “Oh, Gwen. I didn’t know.”

“It was a long time ago.” She tried to sound as though it didn’t bother her, but that wasn’t the truth. She’d asked Mum about her father several times. But Mum only gave brief replies that left Gwen with more questions than answers. Finally, when she was eighteen, she’d begged to know why her father hadn’t been a part of their lives. Did he even know she existed? And if he did know, why didn’t he care he had a daughter?

Mum said she had her reasons and made Gwen promise she would not go searching for him on her own. Mum said she would explain more when Gwen graduated from university, so Gwen had reluctantly agreed. But Mum had died in a terrible car accident only three weeks before Gwen's graduation, taking the story with her to her grave.

Gwen lifted a stack of photos and sorted through them. A few seconds later, she found the one she'd been looking for. A young couple stood arm in arm on the shore of a lake with high hills in the background. Her mother looked as though she was in her early twenties. Her long brown hair cascaded over her shoulders, and her bright blue eyes shone with a hopeful light. The tall man standing beside her looked ruggedly handsome, with light brown hair, deep-set gray eyes, and a strong, square chin. Gwen guessed he was also in his twenties, but older than Mum. His arms were muscular and suntanned, and he held what looked like a tall wooden stick that curved at the top and had a carved head.

Lindsey leaned closer. "Is that your parents?"

"Yes." Her voice quavered as she stared at the father she'd never met.

Lindsey tipped her head. "It looks like there's something written on the back of the photo."

Gwen turned it over and read, *Jessica and Landon on our wedding day, 10 June 1985, Keswick*. She blinked and stared at the words. Her parents were married in Keswick.

She studied her father's image, considering the possibilities. Did he still live in or near Keswick? The thought of meeting him after all these years sent a shiver down her back. She'd promised her mum she wouldn't search for him, but that was before her mum died. Surely her mum's death released her from that promise.

But doubts rose and clouded her thoughts. Something very painful must have happened to make her mum keep that part

of her life a secret. Was she ready to learn the truth about her father and discover why he'd never been a part of their lives?

She'd always longed to know her father and sense that true father-daughter connection. This was her chance. It would take courage to begin her search. But if she did find him, would he welcome her into his life, or would he break her heart as he'd broken Mum's?



David Bradford gripped the sides of the old folding ladder and climbed toward the top. He pushed open Longdale's attic door, and cool musty air rushed out, along with an odd scent he couldn't name. Squinting into the darkness, he pointed his torch toward the eaves and scanned the dusty timbers. Something moved, and he gripped the ladder.

"What do you see?" his grandmother called from the bottom of the ladder.

David scrolled the beam of light over the squirming black mass between the wooden eaves and suppressed a shudder. "I'm afraid you've got bats, Nana."

"Bats! Good heavens!" His grandmother tugged on his pant leg. "Come down at once! Bats carry rabies."

David doubted the bats in Longdale's attic had the disease, but he'd rather not personally test that theory. Gritting his teeth, he backed down the steps. Bats! One more problem to add to the growing list of things he needed to address before they could move ahead with his plan to convert Longdale into a luxury hotel.

"This is dreadful!" His grandmother looked up, her soft gray eyes filled with worry. "We have to be rid of them."

"It won't be easy, Nana." He stepped down beside her and raised the ladder into the ceiling. "Bats are protected. It's against the law to disturb their roosts."

Her silver eyebrows rose. “Protected?” Her stunned expression quickly changed to steely resolve. “They must go! I won’t stand for an attic full of bats!”

David kept his voice even, hoping to calm her. “We might be able to get permission to move them. If not, we’ll probably have to enclose the area so they can continue living there undisturbed.”

“We can’t open Longdale to paying guests with bats roosting in the attic!”

He laid his hand on her shoulder. This kind of upsetting news wasn’t good for her heart. “Don’t worry, Nana. I’ll make some calls and take care of it.” He guided her down the hallway, away from the soft rustling sounds coming from the attic.

She looked back at him. “Oh, you are a dear. I’m so glad you’ve come. Arthur always took care of things like this, but now that he’s gone . . .” Her voice choked off, and she shook her head. “I need some tea. Let’s go down to the kitchen.”

He agreed, and they took the back servants’ stairs down two flights to the bottom level and followed the long, arched hallway to Longdale’s cavernous kitchen.

Mrs. Galloway, or Mrs. G., as his grandmother liked to call her, stood by the stove, stirring a pot of something that smelled delicious. He sniffed again and determined it must be chicken soup.

Mrs. G. greeted them with pink cheeks and a cheery smile. Then she noticed his grandmother’s worried look, and her smile melted away.

“We’re in need of some tea.” Nana crossed to the large worktable in the center of the kitchen. “David has discovered what’s making those strange noises in the attic.”

Mrs. G. turned from filling the electric teakettle. “What is it?”

“Bats!” Nana’s chin quivered. “We’ve been invaded by a colony of bloodsucking creatures!”

Mrs. G.’s hand flew to cover her heart. “Saints above! They can’t get out of the attic, can they?”

“No,” David quickly replied. “I’m sure they won’t bother us. I faced a similar situation last summer when we converted an estate in Berkshire into a spa.” He didn’t add it had taken more than a month to get permission to remove the bats, and it had cost several hundred pounds to remedy the problem. His grandmother’s income didn’t match the needs of maintaining the estate, and he didn’t want to add to her financial worries. He’d figure this out. He had to if he was going to help her save Longdale.

A bell buzzed behind him. He turned toward the bell board to see where the summon originated. “Someone is at the front door.”

“Nancy is cleaning upstairs,” Mrs. G. said. “She’ll answer it for you.”

David turned to his grandmother. “Are you expecting someone?”

She blinked a few times, then her eyes widened. “I am. We better go up.”

He held back a chuckle. His grandmother’s memory was not as sharp as it used to be.

His grandmother started toward the kitchen doorway, then looked back. “Mrs. G., will you please bring our tea up to the library, along with some cinnamon biscuits and an extra cup for our guest?”

Mrs. G. nodded. “I’ll be up as soon as it’s ready.”

David followed his grandmother up the stone stairs. “Who’s joining us for tea?”

“Gwen Morris. She’s the granddaughter of an old friend from London.”

He’d never heard his grandmother mention someone by that name. “Is she in the area on holiday?”

“No, dear. She works at Hill and Morris.”

His steps stalled. “The auction house?”

“Yes. Her grandfather, Lionel Morris, has been a dear friend for many years.”

He stared at his grandmother. “*The Lionel Morris of Hill and Morris?*”

“Yes, dear. That’s what I said. His granddaughter is going to look at the paintings and antiques and help us decide what to prepare for auction.”

He grinned and shook his head. Lilly Benderly was always full of surprises. He’d mentioned the idea of selling some of the paintings and furnishings a few days ago, as that seemed like a logical way to raise the funds needed for the repairs and renovations. At the time, she hadn’t seemed in favor of the idea. He supposed she’d changed her mind and forgotten to tell him. He followed her into the large entrance hall.

Nancy, the middle-aged woman who helped with cleaning twice a week, stood by the front door, blocking his view of the woman waiting there. Nancy turned to his grandmother. “This is Miss Gwen Morris to see you, ma’am.” She stepped aside.

“Welcome to Longdale.” Nana crossed toward her with an outstretched hand and warm smile. “I’m Lilly Benderly.”

Gwen returned his grandmother’s greeting and smile, and David did a double take. She was young and attractive, with long golden-brown hair that fell over her shoulders in soft waves. Her eyes were an unusual shade of blue green, like the lake on a summer day. She wore a fashionable green wool coat and brown leather boots and . . . she towed a rolling suitcase.

Had his grandmother invited her to stay at Longdale?

“I’m pleased to meet you.” Gwen lifted her gaze, taking in the dark woodwork and elaborately carved staircase and mantel over the marble fireplace. “Longdale is a beautiful home.”

“Thank you. We’re very fond of it.” She motioned toward David. “This is my grandson, David Bradford. He’s the one I told you about.”

He shot his grandmother a questioning glance. What had she told her?

Gwen looked his way and held out her hand. "It's good to meet you, Mr. Bradford. I'm looking forward to assisting you and Mrs. Benderly."

He took her hand. It was soft and warm, matching the look in her eyes.

"There's no need to be formal." His grandmother looked from Gwen to David. "You must call us Lilly and David."

Gwen nodded. "Thank you. Please, call me Gwen."

David studied her. She couldn't be more than twenty-five, and she looked more like an actress or model than an art and antique appraiser. Why had Lionel Morris sent her instead of someone older and more experienced? "What is your position at Hill and Morris?"

"I'm a junior specialist for art history and antiques."

"A junior specialist . . . as opposed to a senior specialist?"

She lifted her chin and met his challenge with a steady look. "Yes. I have an undergraduate degree in art history and a master's in art business. I finished a one-year internship at Hill and Morris in February. That's when I started my current position."

His grandmother sent him a puzzled look. "David, there's no need to question Gwen's credentials. She traveled all the way from London to help us. We want her to know how much we appreciate her coming."

Chastised, he nodded. "You're right." He turned to Gwen. "We're glad you're here. No offense meant."

"None taken." But her cheeks glowed bright pink, and her words sounded a bit forced. She turned back to his grandmother. "I appreciate your invitation to stay at Longdale, but if that's not convenient, I'd be glad to find accommodations in Keswick."

His grandmother shook her head. "Oh no. You must stay

with us. What would your grandfather think if I sent you off alone?”

Gwen sent David a quick glance before she looked back at his grandmother. “If you’re sure it’s all right. It would make my job easier.”

“We’re positive, aren’t we, David?” His grandmother turned to him with a lifted brow.

“Yes, of course. It makes sense for you to stay here. We have plenty of room.”

His grandmother gave an approving smile. “Good. Now that’s settled, let’s go into the library. Tea is on the way, and we can have a chat.”

Gwen sent an uncertain glance toward her suitcase.

David stepped forward. “I’ll take that for you.” Without waiting for her reply, he rolled it over to the bottom of the staircase, then he followed Gwen and his grandmother into the library.

He watched Gwen as she took a seat next to his grandmother. Her earlier prickly response to his questions had faded. She seemed more relaxed now, smiling and nodding as his grandmother regaled her with the history of Longdale.

His chest tightened as he watched his grandmother’s delighted expression. She loved every beam and window of this crumbling old house. If he was going to save it for her, he would need to build an alliance with Gwen Morris.

But did she have enough experience to appraise his grandmother’s treasures for their true value? And even if she did, would the sale provide the funds needed to take care of the repairs and renovations, or would he and his grandmother lose the home that had been in the family for generations—the home that one day should be his?

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