

*Light  
in the  
Evening  
Time*

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LAJOYCE MARTIN

# Light in the Evening Time

by LaJoyce Martin

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## CHAPTER ONE

# *The Revelation*

“Don’t leave me, Ma! I’ll have nowhere to go!”

Even as her desperation forged the words, Cathy realized their uselessness. The only link with her past was descending the steps to a beckoning grave.

“Go . . . to . . . your . . . father . . .” The syllables staggered out through thin, blue lips. It was Cathy’s first sight of the skeleton Catherine Willis had hidden in the closet more than fourteen years earlier.

“I have a *father*?”

“Yes.”

Some secret, dark and off limits to questioning, had kept the girl from any knowledge of the circumstances that surrounded her birth. She didn’t even know her father’s name.

“But, Ma, you never told me—”

“Your . . . mother died. I’m your . . . grandmother.”

Catherine’s breathing slowed, and her eyes slid shut. Cathy thought she was gone. With no further information, how would she ever know who she was? And how should she find a man she had just learned existed?

Catherine Willis was a fighter. She had fought against

everything all her life: the loss of both parents, a young and fleeting marriage, a disease that left her scarred, and poverty. Added to this was her only daughter's determination to wed Ed Dillingham, a penniless woodcutter. She fought the union blindly and without rules—and succeeded only in alienating her son-in-law from herself.

It wasn't fair that her own beautiful Lia, for whom she held such high hopes as an artist, should be saddled with an insensitive lout of a husband. Catherine said so, and Ed Dillingham invited her out of their lives. That's why she wasn't there when her granddaughter was born.

Now, as Catherine lay dying, her past came into crisp focus in one brief flashback. Five years of silent stubbornness had kept a gaping chasm between her and her disfavored son-in-law. Neither was willing to go around it by the path of forgiveness. When it came to the showdown, Lia's full allegiance went to Ed, a factor that Catherine should have anticipated but didn't. The letters that Catherine wrote to her daughter were all returned unopened.

When Lia lay in a coma, though, Ed had softened and sent word for Catherine to come. When she arrived at Cranfills Gap, he was hardly civil to her, giving her no details of Lia's misfortune. These she learned from a neighbor who introduced herself as Mabel, an overdressed woman with two fussy children clinging to her skirts.

"I've been most anxious for you to get here," the impatient lady said, warning the oldest child, a boy, to "sit down and clam up." "I'm afraid we're in for a long spell."

"What happened to Lia?" demanded Catherine.

"Ed and I figure that she tried to get up to fix the baby some onion tea and fainted. She hit her head on the iron

stove and has not awakened since. Some rally and some don't, the doctor said."

Fearing that the noisy children would bother Lia and her newborn, Catherine insisted that Mabel take her children home at once and not return unless she could come alone and quietly.

The woman started to say more, but Catherine put her finger to her lips and ushered her to the door.

Catherine tried to hold Lia's soul in the land of the living, but all her efforts were futile. When Lia died, Catherine folded her daughter's arms across her chest, put a penny on each of her eyelids, and fled in the night with her tiny granddaughter. She resolved to fight every agency, law—or the devil himself—to keep the baby. The child was all she had left of Lia . . . of *anything*.

If her conscience pricked her over kidnapping the child, no one knew it. She convinced herself that, left with Ed Dillingham, the child would not have survived anyhow.

Catherine moved to a remote area and made no further contact with Ed. She changed the baby's name from Edna to Cathy, gave the baby her own maiden name, and closed the door on the past.

"*Where?* Where is my father, and how shall I find him?" Cathy's beseeching words braided together fear, helplessness, and a plea. She had a father somewhere, and the thought so stretched her mind that it could not return to its original proportions. "Oh, Ma! Ma!" Panic tore at her throat. "Please talk to me!"

Catherine's eyelids fluttered. "Ed . . . Dillingham. Ticket . . . purse." The words were barely audible. Then with one long, shuddering breath, she was gone, taking the fourteen years of silence with her.