

CHASING
SHADOWS

a novel

LYNN
AUSTIN

Praise for Lynn Austin

“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

“Solid research . . . and detailed descriptions certainly make *If I Were You* a rich and enchanting historical reading experience. Fans of historical fiction and writers such as Jennifer Robson will certainly relish the wonderful story of faith and friendship.”

FRESH FICTION

“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. All while providing encouragement in your faith as you watch the main characters’ courage during an extremely difficult time in modern history. 5 out of 5 stars.”

ECLA LIBRARIES

“A lovely story, so beautifully told, and with a really good Christian message. . . . I cannot recommend *If I Were You* strongly enough.”

CHRISTIAN NOVEL REVIEW

“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 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*

“*If I Were You* is an immersive experience, not only into the dangers and deprivations of wartime England, but into the psychological complexities of characters desperate to survive. . . . 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*

“Lynn Austin’s *If I Were You* is a powerful story of heart-wrenching loss, our desperate need to be understood, to forgive and be forgiven, and the loving sacrifice found in true friendship. A compelling read, beautifully written, celebrating the strength of faith and the power of sisterhood.”

CATHY GOHLKE, Christy Award-winning author of *The Medallion* and *Night Bird Calling*

“A master at inviting readers onto a journey and sweeping them away with her elegant prose, Lynn Austin once again transports readers back in time to England. *If I Were You* is a beautiful story about courage, relentless love, and the transforming power of forgiveness.”

MELANIE DOBSON, award-winning author of *Memories of Glass* and *The Curator’s Daughter*

“Lynn Austin’s tradition of masterful historical fiction continues in *If I Were You*, an impeccably researched look into the lives of two remarkable women. Her unparalleled skill at evoking the past . . . will appeal to fans of Ariel Lawhon and Lisa Wingate. While longtime fans will appreciate this introspective tale from a writer who deeply feels the nuances of human nature, those uninitiated will immediately recognize why her talented pen has led her to near-legendary status in the realm of inspirational fiction. An unforgettable read.”

RACHEL McMILLAN, author of *The London Restoration*

“Lynn Austin knows how to create conflict with her characters. *Par excellence*. Her latest novel is no exception. *If I Were You* tells the story of a *Downton Abbey*-like friendship between Audrey, from the nobility, and Eve, a servant at Audrey’s manor house. . . . Bold and brilliant and clever, *If I Were You* will delight Lynn’s multitude of fans and garner many new ones.”

ELIZABETH MUSSER, author of *When I Close My Eyes*

Also by Lynn Austin

- | | |
|--|---------------------------------|
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| <i>Sightings: Discovering God's
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| <i>Legacy of Mercy</i> | <i>All She Ever Wanted</i> |
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CHASING SHADOWS

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Chasing Shadows

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PROLOGUE

THE NETHERLANDS

MAY 1945

Every sound in the coal-black night seemed magnified as Lena lay awake in bed, waiting. She heard the quiet rustlings of the shadow people as they crept through the darkness downstairs in her farmhouse. The creak of the barn door and whisper of hay as they moved through her barn on this moonless night. The shadow people were also waiting. Did they hate it as much as she did?

The war had taught Lena de Vries to do many things. Hard, impossible things. She had learned to be courageous, propelled by fear and faith. She'd learned to face death, gripping the Savior's hand. But waiting was the hardest lesson of all. Every minute seemed like an hour. Every hour stretched endlessly. The sun stood still in the sky during the day, then took its time dawning after each endless night—like this one. She would find herself hoping against all reason that her husband, Pieter, was alive and would come home and she could hold him in her arms. Or hoping that her daughter Ans and son, Wim, were still alive and would

return. She knew that if one of them walked through her door, her joy would swallow up the long months of waiting. If they ever did return.

The past seven days had been the longest week in all of Lena's forty-five years. Spring should be a time of rebirth and hope, but tonight her imagination partnered with fear, squeezing her heart dry, extinguishing hope. She released her breath with a sigh and rolled over in bed, whispering a quiet prayer for Pieter and Ans and Wim. And for all the shadow people who waited in the darkness with her.

Sleep was impossible. She hadn't slept soundly since the Nazis invaded five years ago. She rose from her bed, careful not to awaken her daughters Maaïke and Bep, asleep in the bed beside her where Pieter should be. Lena kept her girls close to her side these days. She pulled on a sweater over her nightgown and felt her way downstairs, familiar with every narrow step on the steep, angled stairs. She halted at the bottom. A shadow moved around her kitchen as if searching for something. Her heart leaped.

"Pieter?" she whispered.

The shadow turned. It was Wolf, her contact with the Dutch Resistance. She didn't know his real name. It was safer that way. "Did I wake you?" he whispered. "I'm sorry. I was looking for a pencil. I wanted to leave you a note."

"Do you have news of my husband?"

"No. But I do have good news. Allied troops are in Holland. Canadian tanks have liberated many of our cities. Here's the latest newspaper." He pulled the flimsy underground newsheet from his pocket and handed it to Lena. She glanced at it, then instinctively rolled it up so it would fit inside her bicycle frame. She would hide it there from the Nazis when she delivered it to her cousin in the village.

"But the Allies haven't come this far yet?" she asked.

"Soon. I came to tell you and the others that it won't be long. Maybe even tomorrow."

Two more shadows slipped into the kitchen as Lena and Wolf talked. They left their hiding places only at night and disappeared before dawn. How they must long to feel the sun on their faces again.

“This isn’t another false alarm like last fall, is it?” one of the shadows whispered. Lena remembered “Mad Tuesday,” when rumors of liberation had swept the country. There had been panic among the Nazis and rejoicing among the Dutch people. Many Nazi occupiers and their collaborators had fled east. When it proved to be a false alarm, they returned. Hope withered.

“This time it’s true,” Wolf said. “I saw the Canadian tanks myself.”

Lena closed her eyes for a moment. Would the waiting truly be over?

“How will we know when it’s safe to come out?” the other shadow asked.

“They’ll ring the church bells in town. I have to go,” Wolf said, backing toward the door. “I need to tell the others.”

“Wait,” Lena said. “Are you hungry? Have you eaten?” Wolf was shadow-thin. The deep hollows on the planes of his face made him appear skeletal in the darkness. Thousands of people who were trapped in the cities were dying of starvation every day. Cities like Leiden, where Lena’s daughter Ans lived.

“You already have so many mouths to feed,” Wolf said.

“Then one more won’t make a difference.” She opened the warming oven above the stove and pulled out a baked potato, wrapped in a cloth to keep it warm, and pushed it into his hands. “I only wish I had more to offer you.” The potato was small and shriveled, one of the last few from her depleted root cellar. “Thank you for coming, Wolf. I’ll spread the news.” He had given Lena hope. And hope would make waiting harder still.

She sat down at the kitchen table with the shadow people after Wolf left, talking about the war and reading the underground newspaper to them while they each ate a potato and some boiled cabbage. She knew only their false names—Max and his wife, Ina—and that they were Jewish. Max forged false ID cards for the Resistance during the night, down in Lena’s root cellar.

When it was light enough to see, Lena helped them crawl back into their hiding place behind the piano in her front room. Pieter had boarded

up the door to a closet on the other side of the wall as if it had never been there, then built a secret door in the lower panel of their upright piano. The bass keys no longer worked, but the rest of the keys did. Few people knew about the secret place, not even Lena's two younger daughters, or that Max and Ina had lived there for more than a year.

After she'd dressed, Lena put the rest of the baked potatoes and a rind of bread she'd been saving in a basket and carried it through the door that led from the kitchen into the barn. She never knew how many shadows were hiding in her barn or how long they would stay. More hid at the very top of the old windmill that pumped water for their fields. The Resistance would position the windmill blades to signal when it was safe for the shadow people to hide on her farm. Again, it was better for Lena not to know too much. She simply cooked whatever food she had and brought it to them, asking the Lord to multiply it like the loaves and fishes.

Several men of various ages crept out of their hiding places in the barn as Lena sang the hymn that served as a signal. She read Wolf's newspaper to them as they ate. Four of the shadows were in their late teens—her son Wim's age. Others looked like *onderduikers*, ordinary husbands and fathers who'd been forced to "dive under" to avoid being sent to German slave-labor camps. Or they might be railroad workers who'd been ordered by the exiled Dutch government to go on strike to hinder the Nazis. The slender young man with wire-rimmed glasses and ebony hair was undoubtedly Jewish.

"What's the first thing you want to do once the Allies arrive and Holland is free?" she asked.

"Go home" was their unanimous reply. The shadow men talked about things they missed and the food they were hungry for as they finished their bread and potatoes. "I heard that the Allies give out cigarettes," one of them said. "I'd give anything for a smoke."

At dawn, one of the shadows offered to milk Lena's cows for her. "I grew up on a farm in Friesland," he said. "Milking reminds me of home." He stroked the cow's shoulder as if greeting an old friend before

straddling the milking stool. “Shall I let them out to graze when I’m finished?” he asked.

“No, they have to stay inside the barn again today. Shrapnel from a stray Nazi rocket killed three cows in a neighboring village.”

“Someone might steal them for food too,” another shadow said.

“Yes, there is that.”

Lena’s daughters drank some of the still-warm milk for breakfast. They looked thin and shadowlike too. Wim and Ans had been plump and rosy-cheeked at that age. Before the war. When life was gentle and good. When food was plentiful. “I think we’ll take the rest of the milk into town this morning,” she told the girls, “and trade it for something.”

Bep bounced with excitement at the prospect of a trip into the village. At four years old, she was full of life and energy. “May I wear a bow in my hair?” she asked.

“It isn’t Sunday,” Maaïke replied.

“I know, but may I, Mama?”

“Yes, why not?” Lena brushed Bep’s long, dark hair after breakfast and tied a bright bow in it. It fell naturally into thick curls. “Do you want one, too?” she asked Maaïke. She shook her head. At eleven years old she was no longer interested in girlish bows. Lena braided Maaïke’s straw-blond hair—the same color as her own—into a thick braid that fell nearly to her waist. When it was time to go, Lena fetched her broken-down bicycle from the barn. In peacetime her bicycle would be considered a piece of junk—and it was—but at least the Nazis would deem it not worth confiscating. She lifted Bep onto the handlebars, and Maaïke climbed onto the board Pieter had attached to the rear fender. Lena tied the two containers of milk beneath her sweater and apron and set off on the three-mile trip into the village.

The pastures between her farm and the town looked tired and pale this morning, like an invalid who’d lain in bed too long. More fenceposts were missing, and several more trees had disappeared, chopped down for fuel this past winter. They were calling that long, endless season the Hunger Winter. With the railroad workers on strike, food had become

so scarce in the cities that starving people had staggered out to Lena's farm from Leiden and Den Haag to beg for food. Her little nation would have much rebuilding to do once the war finally ended. But Lena suspected that the hardest task would be repairing the discord and mistrust among neighbors and even within families. For the past five years, no one had known whom they could trust or who might sell their secrets to the Nazis to feed their starving children. She and Pieter knew when they agreed to hide Jews and *onderduikers* that if they were discovered, they'd be arrested and imprisoned.

Lena was nearly to town when she heard the glorious cacophony of church bells ringing in the distance. She slowed to a halt as joy leaped in her heart. "Listen, girls! Do you hear the bells?"

"But it isn't Sunday, Mama," Bep said.

"I know. It means the Netherlands is free! We're free!" She'd spoken the words but could barely comprehend that they were true.

"Does that mean the Nazis will go away now?" Maaïke asked.

"Yes, they'll be gone for good. The Netherlands will be free again!" She couldn't imagine it. Lena wondered if Maaïke even remembered a time when Nazi soldiers on roaring motorcycles weren't a common sight. She'd been six years old when they'd invaded the Netherlands. Little Bep had never known freedom at all.

Lena picked up her pace as she pedaled the last mile into town. The village square and the street in front of her father's church were packed with people as if it were Easter Sunday. The church bells clamored so loudly they could probably be heard all the way out to the farm. Lena's friends and neighbors were laughing and embracing each other, their faces streaming with tears. Her cousin Truus pushed through the crowd and hugged Lena tightly, the milk cans clanking as the women rocked in place. "Isn't it wonderful, Lena? We're free! The Nazis are gone at last!"

"And look at all these people who must have been hidden," Lena said when Truus released her again. Crowded among the people she knew were strangers Lena had never seen before. Their milk-white skin and

haunted faces told her they were shadow people. “I had no idea so many of them were hiding right here in the village!”

“And do you notice who isn’t here?” her cousin asked. “The filthy collaborators have all fled.”

“What a relief.” Lena wondered if they would face justice for what they’d done. They had much to account for. Lena had known these villagers all her life, had worshiped beside them in church every Sunday, and she knew that the war had brought tragedy into every life, every home. She watched them cheering and hugging each other and asking, “Is it really over? Are they finally gone?” One of the church elders burst into song, and everyone joined in singing the words to the psalm:

“O God, our help in ages past, our hope for years to come,
Our shelter from the stormy blast, and our eternal home.”

Lena gripped Bep’s hand and wiped tears as she sang. If only Pieter and Papa were here to see this. She needed to hurry home and tell her own shadow people the good news. Max and Ina could come out from behind the piano. The *onderduikers* could go home to their families. Maybe Pieter and Ans and Wim were on their way home right now.

She traded the milk for some cheese and a loaf of bread. “You can carry these for me on the way home,” she told her daughters. “There’s no need to hide them anymore.” Joy and hope warmed her like spring sunshine as she pedaled. The fields looked greener now than they had on the way into town.

“You can come out! It’s safe!” she called as she parked her bicycle in the barn. “The Netherlands is free!”

“You’re sure?” a voice called.

“Very sure! Quick! Run up to the windmill and tell the others.” Lena’s daughters hovered close to her as shadows emerged from every corner of the barn. Maaïke and Bep would have no idea who these men were. Lena laughed at the girls’ astonished expressions and motioned for them to follow her to the kitchen, then into the front room. She bent

down and rapped on the lower panel of the piano. “It’s safe to come out! The Netherlands is free! We’re free!” The girls watched, amazed, as the panel opened and Max and Ina emerged. Lena flung the front door wide for them and said, “Look! It’s a glorious day! You can go outside at last!” They moved as if in a dream as they joined the other shadow people outside in the barnyard. Like the villagers, they gazed around in wonder, laughing and rejoicing. Ina dropped to her knees, her face hidden in her hands as she wept. Across the yard, several men stood on the windmill’s upper deck, cheering and lifting their faces to the sun. Lena waved to them from her front door. Maaïke stood beside her.

“Who are all these people, Mama? What are they doing here?”

“They were hiding from the Nazis. Your papa said they could stay here with us, where it’s safe. But they don’t need to hide anymore.” She looked around for Bep and saw her crouching down to peek beneath the piano.

“Look, Maaïke!” Bep said. “There’s a little room inside the piano, with blankets and a bookshelf and everything. Come and see!”

As Maaïke went over to take a peek, Lena lifted the studio photograph of her family from the top of the piano. It had been taken in 1939 during a trip to Leiden, a year before the Nazi invasion, before any of them ever imagined the war would come to Holland. Lena’s oldest daughter, Ans, had been eighteen—so beautiful with her pale-blonde hair and slender frame. Her bold smile and confident stance revealed her strong will. Wim stood beside his sister, already as tall as she was, his fair hair bleached nearly white by the sun. Before the invasion he’d been a curious eleven-year-old who loved to swim in the canals and tease his sisters. The war had forced Wim to become a man before his time. Five-year-old Maaïke nestled on Lena’s lap, her surprise baby, born when Lena was thirty-four. Lena had convinced her father to pose with them for the portrait, too. Tall and dignified, with a fringe of white hair and a trim white beard and goatee, he stood behind Wim and Ans, every inch the stern pastor. Papa’s gray eyes looked pinched behind his wire-rimmed glasses as if he was in pain or had stared at the sun too long. He’d still

been grieving the loss of Lena's mother, who'd died a few months earlier. Pieter, the love of Lena's life, stood behind her with his hands resting on her shoulders. How she loved his strong, calloused, sun-browned hands. Would she ever take them in hers again? Out of the six people in the photograph, only Lena and Maaïke were safe at home.

Jesus had told His followers, "Anyone who loves their father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves their son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. Whoever does not take up their cross and follow me is not worthy of me." It was a hard, hard truth, put to the test by the fires of war.

Lena felt a tug on her skirt. Bep looked up at her with a worried expression. "Is Papa going to come home now?" she asked.

"And Wim and Ans, too?" Maaïke added.

Lena didn't reply. She didn't know. A tendril of fear sprouted and curled around her heart, and she knew if she allowed it to grow, it would strangle her faith. She used to believe that the enemy of faith was doubt, but she'd learned that faith's destroyer was fear. "*Let your fear drive you into the arms of God,*" her father had said.

"Well, we will hope and pray that they do come home," Lena replied.

"I miss Opa," Maaïke said. She was studying the photograph, too.

Lena stroked her daughter's fair hair and thick braid. "So do I."

"Are you crying, Mama?" Bep asked.

Lena brushed away her tears. "Sometimes we cry because we're happy."

"I'm happy, too." Bep wrapped her thin arms around Lena's legs and hugged her tightly. This child was so dear to Lena's heart. She couldn't love Bep more if she had come from her own womb.

But she hadn't.

And now with the liberation, the truth would also come out of hiding, like the shadow people.



CHAPTER 1

SIX YEARS EARLIER, JUNE 1939

Lena didn't want to lose her temper, but her daughter had her close to the edge again. "You simply can't take a train by yourself to a strange city and live there, Ans. It's ridiculous!"

"But I'm tired of being stuck here in this nothing town where everyone knows your business. I can't stand it a minute longer!" Ans was washing dishes, slamming them onto the drainboard to emphasize each word.

"Maybe if you and a group of your friends—"

"They're all happy living here! Rietje and Corrie have *boyfriends*." She said the word as if it disgusted her. "I'd rather be a spinster than marry one of the boys from around here. I would end up being his servant, cooking and cleaning and milking his cows and having countless babies."

Lena stopped wiping the table and faced her daughter. "Is that what you think my life is like? Do you think I'm a servant with no life of my own? That I do nothing but work and have babies?"

"You wanted this life. I don't! I'm tired of smelling manure with every breath I take. Tired of eating in a kitchen that's four feet from the barn."

And tired of church. That was part of her dissatisfaction, too. Lena knew Ans would start complaining about the church next. And she did.

“The church is nothing but a bunch of dull rituals. Do people even believe the words they say and sing every week? The rules the church makes us follow are so old-fashioned! Like the law that says, ‘Obey your husband.’ The world is a modern place, and—”

“I love your father. It’s no hardship at all to work alongside him and do the things that make him happy.” Lena couldn’t imagine anything better than living with the open fields around her, breathing the aroma of freshly mown hay, and cherishing the seasonal rhythms of land and home. She gave the table a final swipe and tossed the rag into the sink.

“Well, I feel trapped here,” Ans said. “I want to live in Leiden.”

They never should have traveled there by train that day when they’d had their photograph taken. Ans had loved the city. Lena had hated it. It was too noisy and busy, with cars and bicycles and trains racing past. Lena had felt lost and disoriented among the twisting streets and winding rivers and canals. The houses crowded together like kernels of corn on a cob with no open spaces between them. Ans had declared the city beautiful. She had been restless to return ever since.

“You can’t keep me here. I’m almost nineteen!”

Lena turned away to avoid saying something she would regret. And so that Ans wouldn’t see her tears. She walked through the door to the barn, then outside to where Pieter was repairing a bicycle tire. “I could hear you fighting with Ans again,” he said.

“She insults me and our way of life, Pieter. I don’t know how to get through to her.”

Pieter removed his cap and wiped his forehead on his sleeve. “You can’t, Lena. She’s been strong-willed and determined to get her own way since the day she was born, remember?”

Oh yes. Lena remembered. Ans had never been a quiet, contented child like Wim or Maaïke. “She’s so stubborn!” Lena said. “Why won’t she listen to reason?”

“Her stubbornness might be her greatest asset one day.”

“Or it might bring her to ruin.”

Pieter pulled his cap over his sweaty hair again. “Ans spent the past year watching her grandmother slowly die. Let her go, Lena. Trying to hold on to her is like holding on to sand. The tighter you grip, the faster it slips through your fingers.”

Impossible. Lena was the glue that held the farm and the family together. Everything would fall apart if she let go. She moved forward into Pieter’s arms, loving his strength and solidity, a tree with deep roots and strong limbs. Lena had married him when she was eighteen—Ans’s age—and had never regretted it for a single moment. “What about her soul, Pieter? She’s rejecting the church and everything we’ve taught her.”

“I don’t know what to tell you,” he said with a sigh. “Talk to your father. See what he has to say.”

She kissed him and left him to his work, walking slowly back toward the house. She had work to do as well, but she was too worried to concentrate on any of it. She looked for Maaïke and Wim and found them crouched in the tall grass by the edge of the canal, their blond heads bent together as they examined a frog or a bug or some such treasure. “I’m going into the village,” she called to them. “Want to come?”

They wanted to stay home and play, so Lena rode her bicycle into town by herself. She found her father sitting at his kitchen table in the manse, writing a letter. He laid down his pen and sat back in his chair as she greeted him. “Well, this is a pleasant surprise, Engelena Everdina. What brings you here?”

He always smiled when he used her full name. He seemed softer since Mama died, as if grief and pain had filed away some of his sharpness and certainty. He was more patient with his parishioners, more understanding of their faults.

He gestured to an empty chair at the table and listened as Lena told him about her escalating arguments with Ans and her daughter’s comments about the church. Ans had lived here in the manse during her last months in secondary school, taking care of her grandmother until she’d died. Grief still etched a deep cavern in Lena’s soul that she hadn’t

climbed out of yet. She would be sucked back into the darkness when she least expected it by the sight of an empty place at the table or a basket of abandoned knitting. Lena couldn't lose her daughter, too.

Her father paused a moment before replying, removing his wire-rimmed glasses and polishing them with a corner of his sweater. "Ans's faith has to become her own, Lena. She can't inherit yours or mine, no matter how much we may wish it. She has to find God through what she sees and experiences with Him."

His advice surprised Lena. "But . . . what if she doesn't come back to the church? What if she keeps turning away from it—and from us?"

"Ans belongs to God, not to us. He will be faithful to pursue her. The Bible says no one can snatch her from the Father's hand." He seemed certain of it.

"What about her reputation—and yours? People are already asking why she doesn't come to church with us anymore."

"You don't owe anyone an explanation."

His words should have reassured Lena, but they didn't. She couldn't help feeling that her daughter's rebellion was her fault. "Ans wants to leave home all by herself and move to Leiden. I must have done something wrong as a mother to make her feel that way."

Her father gave a gentle laugh, shaking his head. "No, Engelen. Don't blame yourself. Adam and Eve had a perfect parent, yet they rebelled."

"What should I do?"

"If you love her—and I know you do—you have to let her go."

Tears filled Lena's eyes. "Just let her go? All alone? She has no plans at all for the future except to leave home and live in Leiden."

"God created Ans the way He did for a reason. He can use her strong will and independent spirit. Maybe this isn't rebellion as much as it is the need to become herself."

"She's just a child, Papa." Lena's throat tightened as she swallowed a lump of sorrow—or maybe fear. "She's naive about the ways of the world beyond our farm and village."

He stood and walked around the table to rest his hand on her shoulder. “Listen, I’ll talk with one of my colleagues at the Pieterskerk in Leiden. I’ll see if he knows of a position for Ans with a family from his congregation. Maybe living away from home for a while will help her figure out her next step.”

It wasn’t the answer Lena wanted to hear. She had to stop her bicycle and sink down beneath a tree on the way home, her vision blinded by tears. Lena had imagined a different future for her beautiful firstborn child. Yes, she knew her children would eventually grow up and leave home, but she had always pictured them living nearby, with armfuls of her grandchildren. They would sit in church together every week and eat Sunday dinner at her farmhouse table. Ans might even marry a preacher like her grandfather and live in the manse beside the church. Never had Lena imagined setting her daughter loose in a university city like Leiden. In letting Ans go, Lena would have to let go of all her dreams for her.

A tractor coughed as it rumbled across a distant field scribing tidy rows. A colony of ants busied themselves in their hill beneath her feet. Lena found order and safety and purpose in the rhythms of nature. She could see no purpose in Ans’s flight from home.

“If you love her . . .” Oh, how she loved her daughter! Ans, her firstborn, special to her in so many ways. She possessed an outward beauty that frightened Lena because Ans didn’t know the power of it yet. Lena clasped her hands into fists as if longing to hold tightly to her.

“If you love her, let her go.” She had to entrust her daughter to God. Lena knew her faith wasn’t strong enough to do that. She lowered her head as her tears fell and asked God to teach her how to let go.

A Note from the Author

Chasing Shadows was not an easy novel to write. My goal in writing each of my books is to proclaim God's love and bring hope to readers. Telling the story of life in the Netherlands during World War II meant that I had to take readers to some very dark places. I pray that in doing so, I also showed how faithfully Jesus walks beside us through those dark valleys.

I have grown to dearly love the Netherlands and its people after visiting several times on book tours, and I've always wanted to make it the setting for one of my books. I had a little knowledge of how much the Dutch people suffered during the war after reading two autobiographies years ago—*The Hiding Place* by Corrie ten Boom and *Things We Couldn't Say* by Diet Eman. I can't begin to put into words the profound effect these books and these two women had on my faith. Both Corrie and Diet were Christians—living normal lives, falling in love, and making plans for the future—until the surprise Nazi invasion of their neutral nation on May 10, 1940. Both women's faith in God proved strong and dynamic when put to the test. Their lives challenged me to question the vitality of my own faith if I were to be tested in such an overwhelming way.

Many of the incidents in this story are based on true accounts of courageous Dutch Christians who lived through the Nazi occupation. Ernst Lubbers is based on the real-life musician Max Ehrlich, a popular actor

and theater director who staged musical productions while imprisoned in Westerbork. He died in Auschwitz in 1944.

In reading historical accounts of the Dutch experience, I was surprised and amazed to hear secular historians give credit to the church and to people of faith for withstanding the darkness. The Nazis considered the Dutch their Aryan brothers and hoped to incorporate them into the Reich. But Dutch Christians answered to God above all and refused to give in to the Nazis' evil demands—even at the cost of their lives.

I pray that we'll never have to endure what Christians in the Netherlands did. But it's my hope that *Chasing Shadows* will lead readers to take a closer look at their own faith, as I did after reading *The Hiding Place* years ago. I remember wanting a faith like Corrie and her family had and like Diet Eman and her fiancé had. I pray that this novel will inspire you to pursue a closer walk with God and lead to a commitment to serve His Kingdom with whatever gifts He has given you.

God bless you all!

Lynn