



JUDITH BORDILL

# A CANDLE FOR LYDIA





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*'My grandmother forfeited her right to privacy by asking me here, by demanding I take on family responsibilities. If she really wants me to become her heiress, well then she'll have to trust me, let me know the full story.'*

*Max dropped my wrist like a hot coal, stuck his hands in his pockets and eyed me coldly. He said, very softly, 'Blackmail, Charlotte?'*

*A silence taut as a stretched elastic band twanged between us. 'I'm sorry, Max,' I told him defiantly, at last, 'but I'm going to do my damndest to find out whatever I can.'*

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FOR LYDIA**  
**Judith Bordill**

A Sapphire Romance

**A CANDLE FOR LYDIA**  
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# 1

**I**t was after eleven, the echoing late-night Boston streets were wet with rain, and I ran with the devil at my heels. A headlong escape from that rich, stifling house on Beacon Hill. Uncaring that no sensible young woman went alone at night, bait for muggers, kerb-crawlers, rapists. An easy target under the street lights in my white raincoat and red headscarf, the soft summer rain stinging my hot cheeks like midwinter sleet, blurring the lamps into golden dandelion clocks . . . lamps that were gaslit still carefully preserving the past, like the tall elegant houses and the brick sidewalks, and the whole structure of my grandmother's society.

I ran on, down the hill, propelled by the need to get away from it all at any cost. My grandmother had just told me she was going to leave me her immense fortune, and I was angrier than I had ever been in my life.

A stitch in my side and the furious honking of a car—an automobile—wide as a London bus, telling me I had ignored a red 'Don't walk' sign, forced me to a stumbling half-run, half-walk. The common, the public gardens and down-town Boston left behind, I was at last in the waterfront area where Colin had his con-

verted warehouse apartment. Colin, stocky, tough and dependable, my fellow Britisher. The only refuge I had, the only one without his own axe to grind. My footsteps rang in the dark echoing spaces, and as I searched the illuminated name plates outside the door, the beam of the lighthouse in the harbour swept the silent street.

I hadn't visited his apartment before, and Colin was plainly taken aback when he opened the door to see me there, panting and dishevelled.

'Charlotte! Well, well, well! Come away in.'

His soft Scottish voice welcomed, and his smile warmed me as he took my coat and ushered me into his living-room, his arm round my shoulders. Only then did it occur to me I might be intruding. Wagnerian music filled the lamplit room; a whisky decanter, a glass and a book were on a low table by his chair. Everything spoke of a busy man relaxing after a hard day. Colin, like Max, his superior at the hospital, was a dedicated and obsessional worker, often staying on late, working into the small hours on a case. For a moment I felt guilty at invading this well-earned privacy, but he gave no sign of thinking any such thing. Indeed, he took one glance at my face as we came in from the lobby, and without saying anything else pulled a chair forward into the circle of lamplight, pressed me into it and poured me a generous whisky. I waved it away, shaking my head, but he would take no denial.

'Go on. There's some fresh coffee nearly ready in the kitchen, but drink this first. Doctor's orders.'

He curled my fingers round the glass and went through into the next room. Within minutes, he was back with the coffee tray, putting it on a low table before crossing to take the record off.

‘Please don’t—not on my account, Colin.’

‘Too loud anyway,’ he answered, taciturn and sparing of speech as always, and changed the disc for an old Joni Mitchell I hadn’t heard for years, the volume low. ‘Drink up your dram,’ he insisted quietly. Coming back to his chair opposite mine, he rested his elbows on his knees, rolling his own glass between his palms.

Obediently, I sipped my drink. I *had* needed it, more than I would have admitted; my teeth chattered against the rim of the heavy glass as I took a hasty gulp, but soon I began to feel calmer and leaned back in my chair. ‘Colin—’

‘No need to talk just yet, if you don’t want. Give yourself a minute or two.’

He too leaned back, and I was grateful for the respite, for his unquestioning acceptance of my presence, because now I was beginning to realise just how difficult it was going to be to say what I had intended. In my usual reckless way, I had rushed out of the house without pause for thought...

The music slid softly, mournfully on, and the room I’d never seen before began to make its impression on me. He did himself well, Dr. Colin Macintosh, I noticed with a jolt of surprise. The armchairs were grey suede, my feet sank into thick, noiseless tan carpets, one or two good modern reproductions faced me on the matt-finished off-white walls, and some small bronze sculptures stood here and there. There was an expensive hi-fi system and a well-stocked drinks table.

So what? Doctors were better paid over here than in Britain. And as one of the team of which Max was second-in-command, working on a rare form of cancer at one of the most famous hospitals in the world, he was bound to be receiving substantial monetary re-



wards as well as the more nebulous, if ultimately more worthwhile, ones of satisfaction and fulfilment. It wasn't however, the money which had evidently been expended on this flat which surprised me—rather that the liking for such luxury was the last thing I would have expected from this austere, red-haired Scottish Highlander.

Perhaps these things came to matter to a man living alone. Perhaps he felt the need for such comforts.

Almost simultaneous with the thought, the narrow bar of light shining beneath the door from the hallway into the low-lit room disappeared; then, soft as it was, I heard the click of the front door being closed. Colin must have seen and heard too, but he chose not to remark on it. So someone had been there when I arrived... someone he didn't want me to meet. A woman? Maybe. Colin was an attractive man, and his engagement to Harmony broken he wasn't the sort to hang around, mooning after her for ever.

I lifted my head and looked across at him. He was staring into space, almost as if he'd forgotten me, a man with something else on his mind, his chin square and stubborn. And it came to me then that even he might not be quite as detached from the subject of my grandmother's will as I had reckoned... supposing, for instance, that Harmony could be persuaded to change her mind.

They were going to hate me for it, all of them: Rowena and Sebastian, maybe Harmony, even Max. And I? Money of that quantity sprang from too much that I couldn't quite accept, too much that was tied up with power and privilege. Neither did I want the responsibility it entailed, nor the certainty that it would change my life, would inescapably tie me here, to America. But most of all, I disliked the thought that

I was being manipulated, for some devious reason of her own, by Isabella. Was it because she knew it would put the cat right in amongst the pigeons that she had decided on this course of action, sent for me from England? From what I had already learned of my grandmother, I was willing to stake my fare home that this was so.

Six weeks ago I hadn't known of her existence, but when I first faced her, in that hot room with the fine white carved panelling, the washed silken Chinese carpets and the cut-glass bowls of hothouse orchids, I would have known her anywhere. For the black hair, still only threaded with silver though she must have been approaching eighty, the cameo profile, the pale matt skin, were the features I saw every day when I looked into my mirror. Even the eyes, hers unfaded still, having lost none of their sapphire-blue depth. I could only pray that time would not etch those harsh lines of pride, stubbornness and self-will on my face as it had on hers.

'So you are Lydia's daughter,' she stated, a small woman sitting facing me in an upright Colonial chair, her back straight as a ramrod. Standing, she was no taller than I was myself.

'Yes.'

'And you have only just discovered you are my granddaughter—at twenty-seven?'

'As I wrote and told you, only when I found your letter amongst my mother's papers. After she died.'

Even now I found it difficult to think about the letter without shock. That my mother could have had this streak of vindictive cruelty in her was something I wouldn't believe. Not that! And yet... what had I really, deep down, known of her? Enough at least, I

maintained, to know that she had never been one to bear a grudge, had indeed been almost too ready to excuse others and forgive. There had to be another explanation for the airmail letter I had found, unopened, 'Return to Sender' written large and black across it, implacable. The name on the flap of the envelope was Mrs. Ralph Stonor of Boston, Massachusetts, U.S.A. The firmness of my mother's handwriting across the envelope and the date of the postmark showed that it had been received long before her illness took hold, though not before she had been aware she was suffering from it.

The disease had been merciful only in that it was swift. Not too swift to prevent her making arrangements and preparations, however. In her quiet, persistent way she had demanded to be told the truth, faced it with courage, and, typically, her affairs had been left in immaculate order. I refused to believe she had simply forgotten the letter.

It lay there on top of the insurance policies, the deeds for the small stone house where we lived at the foot of the Pennines, and her modest will, leaving everything to me. The will of Lydia Haigh, née Stonor, American citizen, widow of Thomas Haigh, British schoolmaster.

No one died of a broken heart, they said, but I knew they did. I knew the rapid acceleration of my mother's illness was helped by the fact that she had refused to fight it when it made itself known only months after my father had collapsed with the massive coronary that had claimed his life.

'And you sit right there and tell me, Charlotte,' Isabella Stonor said in her clear, carrying voice, it's proper-Bostonian accent broadening the 'a' in my name, 'that not once did she ever speak of me?'



She had never spoken of any of her American relatives, nor of the place where she had been brought up. She might as well have arrived in England, newly-minted at twenty-two, dropped from the skies.

'Why?' I had demanded of my father as I began to grow up and become curious about my origins. 'Why won't she talk about her family?'

'Charlotte, don't ask me. Your mother is essentially a very private person. There are things about her past life she doesn't like to talk about, things that upset her. And that I won't have.' Indeed he would not, he would never upset her himself, nor allow anyone else to do so. 'Maybe she'll tell you herself when you get older.'

Nothing would make him say any more, and she never had told me. I had to be content with half a background, Yorkshire grandparents who had both died early, and my only other relative my maiden aunt Elizabeth, Father's sister. But it was always there beneath the surface, that demanding urge to know: who was my mother? What had she left behind her in America? Why had she never gone back? And always present, too, that deep longing, whenever I, an only child, saw large families together, to be part of one.

'It's true,' I answered Isabella. 'I knew nothing of any of you.'

She stared at me without the slightest trace of emotion on her face. Those eyes, so deep blue yet cold as marbles, met mine with an impenetrable look. And strangely, I felt utterly certain that she had found the hard facts as painful to accept as I did myself, that she still found them so, even though the situation had been going on for...how long? Before I was born? How many other letters had my mother returned, unopened? I felt an unexpected stab of pity for the old



woman opposite. We were both caught up in the web of someone else's past, my grandmother and I. But Isabella had the advantage over me. She must have been aware of the reasons for it, the beginnings of it all.

'What made you write to me?' she asked at length, pouring us both a second cup of tea, brewed the English way, in a pot—not a teabag floating on the cup, its string dangling messily over the edge—and drunk out of delicate English Spode china.

'It was the least I could do, to let you know she had died. I found out about you when I opened your letter. I'm sure she meant me to open it, otherwise she wouldn't have left it there as she did. I couldn't understand why she had at first, then I began to think maybe she hadn't been able to forgive what had happened in the past—'

'She, forgive?' Isabella's voice cracked on harshness. '*She* was the one who ran away and never came back!'

'I'm sorry. Perhaps it was herself she couldn't forgive.'

*'I'm such a coward, Charlotte, even now,' she had whispered, over and over again, as she bore her suffering with unbelievable courage.*

I shut my mind to that remembered pain. 'Whatever it was, I think—I'm certain—it was her way of asking me to do what she couldn't bring herself to do.'

I heard a sharp intake of breath, and Isabella's eyes closed for a brief moment. Then she lifted her cup and took a sip of tea. She was ashy pale, but her hand was rock steady; the teaspoon in her saucer hadn't given so much as a tinkle against the china cup.

'It was her own choice. She ran away, she left all this . . . ' Her thin white hands with their old woman's

liver spots and her heavy rings made a gesture eloquent enough to include all the wealth and substance, the solidity and permanence of a powerful Stonor background. 'My daughter ran away and married a man who could give her nothing, nothing! She disgraced the Family.'

I sprang up, my anger scarcely controlled, my moment of pity for her vanished. 'If you've brought me over here to insult my father, then you've wasted your time and your airline ticket. He loved my mother deeply. They were happier together than any two people I've ever known.'

Happy indeed, self-sufficient, a magic, exclusive circle of two...

'Married to a schoolteacher?'

Her contempt dismissed as irrelevant the notion that happiness could or should enter into the business of marriage. For her, marriage was, incredibly, still a matter of finding a 'suitable' young man for one's daughter. That my father had been a good man, loved by everyone, counted as nothing. Or that he had been an excellent schoolmaster. He had loved teaching, leading young minds to stretch themselves in the right direction, and pupils he had taught thirty years before had come to his funeral, spoken of him with love. It had been his enthusiasm and dedication that had made me, too, take up teaching as a career. If I hadn't found it so wonderful, the fault lay in me, not my father.

'I think my coming here has been a mistake,' I said. 'There doesn't seem to be anything we can say to each other.'

Why indeed had she sent for me to come at all? She seemed bent only on widening the gulf of misunderstanding between us.

'Sit down, Charlotte.'

Automatically, I obeyed the cool, clear command that brooked no disobedience. 'I want no talk of going home, yet. I want you to promise me you will stay—a little while longer, at any rate.'

'No, I can't promise that.'

I met her challenge with equal stubbornness. Antagonism flashed across the space between us, and Isabella gripped the arms of her chair until her knuckles showed white and sharp. 'You are Lydia's daughter, sure enough! Just like her, selfish and wilful! Perhaps it would be better if you did go home.'

I took a deep breath, holding on to my temper. 'I think it would. Other considerations apart, I have a job to go back to.'

I had been lucky that my position in the history department of Ellerman Hall Comprehensive had been held open for me while I nursed my mother. A supply teacher had been brought in to stay until the end of term, for which I had to thank Graham Taylor, my department head. Poor old Graham... I liked him, and would always be grateful to him, but his anxious, devoted brown eyes and his eager-to-please manner reminded me too much of our old spaniel to inspire the faintest excitement in me. So because I couldn't encourage his hopes that one day I would allow our friendship to become more than that, I mustn't accept anything more from him. 'I have to be back in England when term starts,' I said with as much firmness as I could manage.

'Ah yes, your—career.' Isabella's eyebrows lifted. Her dry inflection gave my career as much importance as selling raffle tickets.

It was partly the recollection that she'd gone to some trouble to find out her daughter's whereabouts in England, partly the memory of that letter she'd

written—on the surface a flat, formal request for my mother's signature on a document relating to some family property, but in which I had fancied I had caught the merest hint of remorse, even pleading—that stopped me walking out there and then. Instead, I stayed. I would not make promises I had no intention of keeping, but neither would I run away. I had just found out something surprising about myself. It wasn't only my grandmother's looks I had inherited. Just as much as the autocratic old woman before me, I too had the capacity to fight.

'All right then. For a week or two, I'll stay. But one thing I must know. Why did my mother leave home?'

Isabella's lips, however, remained firmly shut. She either would not, or could not, tell me.

'Come back, Charlotte.'

The record had ended without my noticing, and Colin was eyeing me expectantly. He must be burned up with curiosity, wondering why I'd come running to him at nearly midnight, obviously in some distress. And he'd every right to feel entitled to an explanation, which I knew now I couldn't give. He poured coffee, handed me a cup.

'Something happened tonight. It upset me rather. I wanted to ask your advice...'

'But?'

'But now I've had time to think it over.' I despised myself now for giving in to the impulse to run and place the burden on someone else's shoulders, even shoulders as broad as Colin's. Besides, caution, usually foreign to my nature, had stepped in, warning me that this latest thing, which had passed between myself and my grandmother not an hour ago, had better stay



between the two of us, since I wasn't going to accept her money, not on any terms, much less the conditions she imposed. 'Colin, I'm sorry, but it's best after all if I didn't talk about it, not yet.'

'Up to you, of course.' He shrugged, giving me one of his deep, penetrating Highland looks. 'Though it's never a good idea to keep a thing bottled up, wouldn't you say?'

'It's not a question of that. Look, I know I'm being maddening, but it really would be better to let it ride at present. I know I should have thought of that before I came bothering you, only I was a bit rattled...'

He raised a wry, ginger eyebrow at such obvious understatement. 'Mad at you? Don't be daft, girl!'

The telephone rang, stridently, making us both jump. Quickly, Colin crossed the room. 'Hello? Oh, Max.' His voice took on a guarded coolness; he became at once more formal, work-orientated. I always had the impression, without any foundation on which to base my assumptions, that they didn't like each other. Colin, nothing if not ambitious, would never do anything to prejudice his chances in that direction, however, and he was always extra polite to Max. 'Charlotte?' he repeated. 'Yes, she's here—what?' He listened for several minutes, whilst I absently fiddled with the bits and pieces on the table near me, my ears pricked at the mention of my name. 'I see. No, no, of course she isn't...'

I found my fist clenched round what I held, something which dug sharply into my palm. When I opened my hand, I was looking at one of a pair of earrings of some violet-coloured polished stone set in filigree silver, which had been placed on the table as if the wearer had found them uncomfortable, slipped them off and forgotten them...