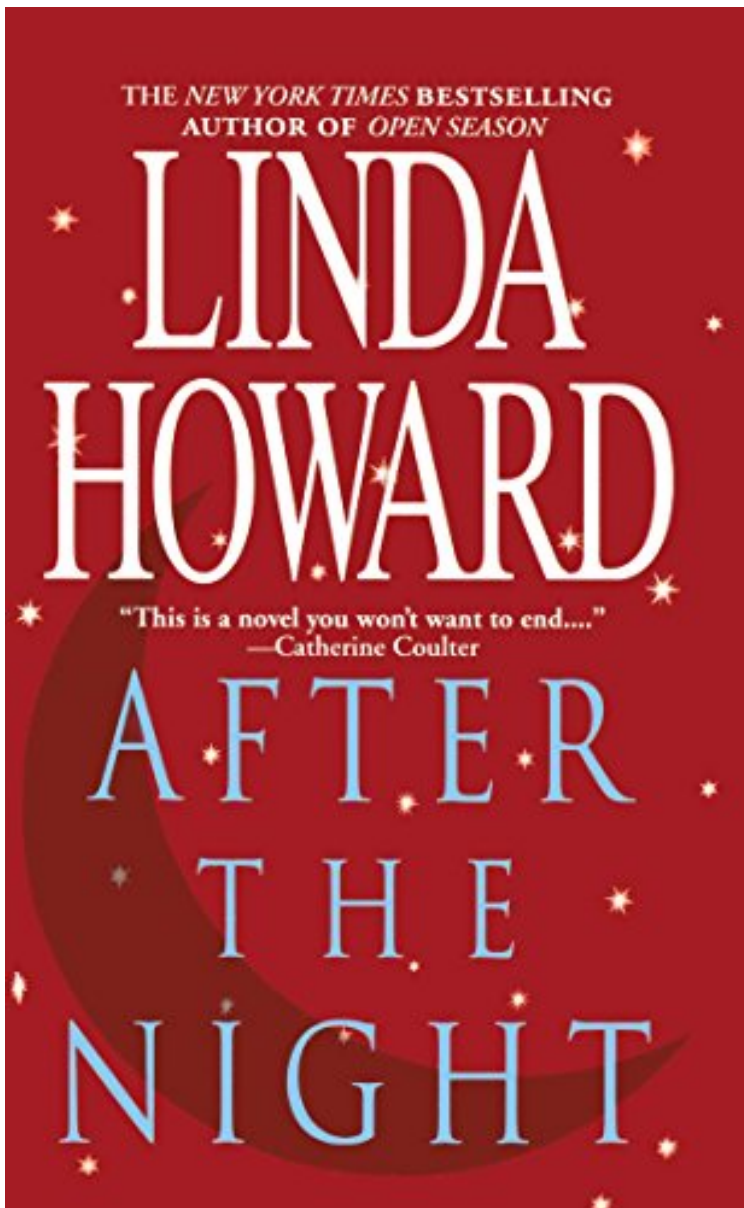


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After The Night (English Edition)



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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurFAITH DEVLIN: A poor, outcast child in Prescott, Louisiana, she'd always adored the town's golden boy from afar. But he called her white trash that sultry Southern night when his rich, respected father disappeared, along with her pretty Mom. Now Faith wanted to hate Gray Rouillard...not to feel a powerful surge of desire. But she couldn't quench her passion, any more than she could hide the truth about the past she had waited so long to unravel.GRAY ROUILLARD: Even when he raised hell, he did it with style. Reckless, charming, and backed by Rouillard money, Gray controlled the town of Prescott -- and Devlin was a name he never wanted to hear again. But when he gazed at Faith Devlin, all he saw was a swirl

of tangled sheets and her silken flesh beneath him. To care for her was impossible, unthinkable...because Gray Rouillard planned to use all his power to ruin her.ExtraitChapter 1It was a good day for dreaming. It was late in the afternoon, the sun throwing long shadows when it could manage to break through the thick woods, but for the most part the translucent golden light was tangled in the tops of the trees, leaving the forest floor mysteriously shadowed. The hot, humid summer air was redolent with the pink sweetness of honeysuckle nectar, all mingled with the rich, brown odor of the earth and rotting vegetation as well as the crisp green scent of the leaves. Odors had color for Faith Devlin, and since she'd been a little girl she had entertained herself by coloring the smells around her. Most of the colors were obvious, drawn from the way something looked. Of course the earth smelled brown; of course that fresh, tangy scent of leaves would be green in her mind. Grapefruit smelled bright yellow; she'd never eaten one, but once had picked up one in the grocery store and hesitantly sniffed its skin, and the scent had exploded on her taste buds, sour and sweet all at the same time. The smell of things was easy to color in her mind; the color scent of people was more difficult, because people were never just one thing, but different colors mixed together. Colors didn't mean the same in people smells that they did in thing smells. Her mother, Renee, had a dark, spicy red scent, with a few swirls of black and yellow, but the spicy red almost crowded out all the other colors. Yellow was good in things, but not in people; neither was green, or at least some shades of it. Her father, Amos, was a sickening mixture of green, purple, yellow, and black. That one was real easy, because from a very early age she had associated him with vomit. Drink and puke, drink and puke, that's all Pa did. Well, and pee. He peed a lot. The best smell in the world, Faith thought as she meandered through the woods, staring up at the captured sunlight and holding her secret happiness cradled deep in her chest, was Gray Rouillard. Faith lived for the glimpses of him she got in town, and if she was close enough to hear the deep, dark rumble of his voice, she trembled with joy. Today she'd gotten close enough to smell him, and he had actually touched her! She was still giddy from the experience. She had gone into the drugstore in Prescott with Jodie, her older sister, because Jodie had stolen a couple of bucks from Renee's purse and wanted to buy some fingernail polish. Jodie's smell was orange and yellow, a pale imitation of Renee's scent. They had been coming out of the drugstore, the precious hot pink polish carefully tucked into Jodie's bra so Renee wouldn't see it. Jodie had been wearing a bra for almost three years now, and she was only thirteen, a fact she used to taunt Faith whenever she thought about it, because Faith was eleven and still didn't have any boobs. Lately Faith's flat, childish little nipples had begun to swell, though, and she was in an agony of embarrassment that someone would notice them. She had been intensely conscious of them poking out under the thin, purple LSU T-shirt she wore, but when they almost collided with Gray on the sidewalk as he was going into the drugstore and they were coming out, Faith forgot about the flimsiness of her shirt. "Nice shirt," Gray had said, amusement dancing in his dark eyes, and patted her on the shoulder. Gray was home for the summer from college. He played football for LSU, a starting linebacker in his freshman year. He was nineteen, six foot three and still growing, and weighed a hard-packed two hundred thirty pounds. Faith knew because she'd read all that in the sports page of the local newspaper. She knew he ran a 4.6 forty, and had great lateral speed, whatever that was. She also knew that he was beautiful, not in a pretty way, but in the same wild, powerful way that his father's prize stallion, Maximillian, was beautiful. His French Creole ancestry was obvious in his dark coloring, and in the clear, strong bones of his face. His thick black hair hung down to his shoulders, making him look like a medieval warrior accidentally set down in the present time. Faith read every romance about medieval knights and their fair ladies that she could get her hands on, so she knew a knight when she saw one. Her shoulder had tingled where Gray touched it, and her swelling nipples throbbed, making her blush and duck her head. Her senses were whirling dizzily with his scent, a rich, indefinable blend that she couldn't describe, warm and musky, with an even deeper red than Renee's, full of tantalizing colors in deep, luxurious hues. Jodie thrust out her round breasts, covered by a sleeveless, hot pink blouse. She had left the top two buttons undone. "What about my shirt?" she asked, pouting a little to make her lips stick out more too, as she had seen Renee do thousands of times. "Wrong color," Gray had said, his voice going hard and contempt leaking into the tone. Faith knew why. It was because Renee was sleeping with his father, Guy. She'd heard the way others talked about Renee, knew what "whore" meant. He had brushed past them then, pushing open the door and disappearing into the drugstore. Jodie stared after him for a few seconds, then turned her greedy eyes on Faith. "Let me have your shirt," she said. "It's too little for you," Faith replied, and was fiercely glad that it was. Gray had liked her shirt, had touched it, and she wasn't about to give it up. Jodie had scowled at the obvious truth. Faith was small and skinny, but even her narrow shoulders strained at the seams of the two-year-old T-shirt. "I'll get my own," she'd declared. She would, too, Faith thought now as she gazed

dreamily up at the flickering patterns made by the sun in the trees. But Jodie wouldn't have the one Gray had touched; Faith had taken it off as soon as she'd gotten home, carefully folded it, and hidden it under her mattress. The only way anyone would find it there would be if they stripped the bed to wash the sheets, and since Faith was the only one who did that, the shirt would be safe, and she could sleep on it every night. Gray. The violence of her emotions scared her, but she couldn't control them. All she had to do was see him and her heart would begin pounding so hard in her skinny chest that it hurt her ribs, and she felt hot and shivery all at the same time. Gray was like a god in the small town of Prescott, Louisiana; he was wild as a buck, she'd heard people say, but he was backed by the Rouillard money, and even as a young boy he'd had a hard, reckless charm that made feminine hearts flutter. The Rouillards had spawned their share of rascals and renegades, and Gray had early shown the potential to be the wildest of the lot. But he was a Rouillard, and even when he raised hell, he did it with style. For all that, he'd never been unkind to Faith, the way some of the people in town had. His sister, Monica, had once spat in their direction when Faith and Jodie had met her on the sidewalk. Faith was glad that Monica was in New Orleans at some fancy private girls' school, and wasn't home very often even during the summer, because she was visiting with friends. On the other hand, Faith's heart had bled for months when Gray had gone off to LSU; Baton Rouge wasn't that far away, but during football season he didn't get much time off, and came home only on the holidays. Whenever she knew he was home, Faith tried to hang around town where she might catch a glimpse of him, strolling with the indolent grace of a big cat, so tall and strong and dangerously exciting. Now that it was summer, he spent a lot of time at the lake, which was one of the reasons for Faith's afternoon expedition through the woods. The lake was a private one, over two thousand acres, and totally contained by Rouillard land. It was long and irregularly shaped, with several curves in it; broad and fairly shallow in some places, narrow and deep in others. The big, white Rouillard mansion was to the east of it, the Devlin shack on the west, but neither was actually on the lakeshore. The only house on the lake was the Rouillard summerhouse, a white, one-story house with two bedrooms, a kitchen, a living room, and a screened-in porch that totally encircled it. Down from the summerhouse was a boathouse and a pier, and a brick barbecue pit had been built there. Sometimes, during the summer, Gray and his friends would gather there for a rowdy afternoon of swimming and boating, and Faith would slip along the edge of the woods so she could watch him to her heart's content. Maybe he'd be there today, she thought, aching with the sweet yearning that filled her every time she thought about him.

It would be wonderful to see him twice in one day. She was barefoot, and her threadbare shorts left her skinny legs unprotected from scratches and snakes, but Faith was as at home in the woods as the other shy creatures; she wasn't worried about the snakes, and disregarded the scratches. Her long, dark red hair tended to hang untidily in her eyes and annoy her, so she had pulled it back and secured it with a rubber band. She slipped like a wraith through the trees, her big cat eyes dreamy as she pictured Gray in her mind. Maybe he'd be there; maybe one day he'd see her hiding in the bushes, or peeking out from behind a tree, and he'd hold his hand out to her and say, "Why don't you come out from there and have some fun with us?" She lost herself in the delicious daydream of being part of that group of laughing, roughhousing, suntanned kids, of being one of those curvy girls in a brief bikini. Even before she got to the edge of the clearing where the summerhouse was, she could see the silver gleam of Gray's Corvette parked in front of it, and her heart began the familiar violent pounding. He was here! She slid cautiously behind the shelter of a big tree trunk, but after a moment she realized that she couldn't hear anything. There were no splashing sounds, no yells or shrieks or giggles. Maybe he was fishing from the pier, or maybe he'd taken the boat out. Faith moved closer, angling for a view of the pier, but the wooden length was empty. He wasn't there. Disappointment filled her. If he'd taken the boat out, there was no telling how long he'd be gone, and she couldn't stay there waiting for him. She had stolen this time for herself, but she had to get back soon and start cooking supper, and take care of Scottie. She was turning to go when a muted sound reached her ears and she stopped, head cocked to try to locate it. She left the edge of the woods and took a few steps into the clearing, closer to the house, and now she could hear a murmur of voices, too low and indistinct for her to understand. Instantly her heart swelled again; he was here, after all. But he was inside the house; it would be difficult to catch a glimpse of him from the woods. If she went closer, though, she could hear him, and that was all she required. Faith had the knack of small, wild things for silence. Her bare feet didn't make a sound as she crept closer to the house, trying to stay out of a direct line to any of the windows. The murmur of voices seemed to be coming from the back of the house, where the bedrooms were located. She reached the porch and squatted by the steps, her head cocked again as she tried to catch the words, but she couldn't quite understand them. It was Gray's voice, though; the deep tones were unmistakable, at least to her. Then she heard a gasp, and a kind of moan,

in a much lighter voice. Irresistibly drawn by curiosity and the lodestone of Gray's voice, Faith eased out of her squatting position and cautiously tugged at the handle of the screen door. It was unlatched. She eased it open barely enough for a cat to slip through, and wriggled her own lithe, skinny body inside, then just as silently let the door close. Going down on hands and knees, she crawled across the plank porch to the open window of one of the bedrooms, from which the voices seemed to be coming. She heard another gasp.

"Gray," said the other voice, a girl's voice, strained and shaking. "Shhh, shhh," Gray murmured, the sound low and barely reaching Faith. He said something else, but the words didn't make any sense to her. They slid past her ears without triggering any understanding. Then he said, "Mon chre," and the tumblers clicked into place. He was speaking French, she realized, and as soon as she did so, the words became clear, as if it had taken that small understanding for the sounds to find the needed rhythm in her brain. Though the Devlins were neither Cajun nor Creole, Faith understood most of what he was saying. The majority of the people in the parish spoke and understood French, in varying degrees. It sounded as if he were trying to coax a seared dog to him, Faith thought. His voice was warm and crooning, the words scattered with reassurances and endearments. When the girl spoke again, her voice was still strained, but now there was a drugged undertone to it. Curious, Faith eased to the side and carefully moved her head so that one eye peeked around the frame of the open window. What she saw froze her to the spot. Gray and the girl were both naked on the bed, which was positioned with the headboard under the window on the adjoining wall. Neither of them was likely to see her, which was a stroke of fortune, because Faith couldn't have moved then even if they had both looked straight at her. Gray was lying with his back to her, his left arm positioned under the girl's tousled blond head. He was leaning over her in a way that made Faith catch her breath, for there was something both protective and predatory in him. He was kissing her, long kisses that left the room in silence except for their deep sighs, and his right arm -- it looked as if -- he was -- he shifted his position, and Faith could clearly see that his right hand was between the girl's naked thighs, right there on her kitty cat. Faith felt dizzy, and she realized that her chest hurt from holding her breath. Carefully she let it out, and rested her cheek against the white wood. She knew what they were doing. She was eleven, and she wasn't a little girl anymore even if her breasts hadn't started to grow yet. Several years ago she had heard Renee and Pa carrying on in their bedroom, and her oldest brother, Russ, had leeringly and graphically explained what was going on. She had seen dogs doing it, too, and heard cats screeching while they did it. The girl cried out, and Faith peeked again. Gray was on top of her now, still gently murmuring in French, cajoling, soothing. He told her how pretty she was, how much he wanted her, how hot and delicious she was. And as he talked, he was adjusting his position, reaching between their bodies with his right hand while he remained propped on his left arm.

Because of the angle, Faith couldn't see what he was doing, but she knew anyway. With a shock, she recognized the girl. Lindsey Partain; her father was a lawyer in Prescott. "Gray!" Lindsey cried, her voice tight with strain. "My God! I can't --" Gray's muscular buttocks tightened, and the girl arched beneath him, crying out again. But she was clinging to him, and the cry was one of intense pleasure. Her long legs lifted, one twining around his hip, the other hooking around his leg. He began moving slowly, his muscled young body rippling with power. The scene was raw and disturbing, but there was also a beauty to it that kept Faith riveted. Gray was so big and strong, his darkly tanned body graceful and intensely masculine, while Lindsey was slim and shapely, delicately feminine in his grasp. He seemed to be taking such care of her, and she was enjoying it so much, her slim hands clinging to his back, her head arched back and her hips lifting in time with his slow rhythm. Faith stared at them, her eyes burning. She wasn't jealous. Gray was so far above her, and she was so young, that she had never thought of him in a romantic, possessive sense. Gray was the shining center of her universe, to be worshiped from afar, and she was giddily happy with the occasional glimpse of him. Today, when he had actually spoken to her, and touched her shirt, had been paradise. She couldn't imagine herself in Lindsey's place, lying naked in his arms, or even imagine what it felt like. Gray's movements were getting faster, and the girl was crying out again as she strained up to him, her teeth clenched as if she were in pain, but instinctively Faith knew that she wasn't. Gray was hammering at her now, his own head thrown back, long black hair damp at the temples and the ends sticking to his sweaty shoulders. He tensed and shuddered, and a raw, deep sound burst from his throat. Faith's heart was hammering, and her greenish cat eyes were huge as she ducked away from the window, slipping through the screen door and off the porch as silently as she had arrived. So that was what it was like. She had actually seen Gray doing it. Without his clothes, he was even more beautiful than she had imagined. He hadn't made disgusting snorting pig noises the way Pa did, whenever he was sober enough to talk Renee into the bedroom, which wasn't very often for the past couple of years. If Gray's father, Guy, was as beautiful doing it

as Gray was, Faith thought fiercely, she didn't blame Renee for choosing him over Pa. She gained the safety of the woods and slipped silently through the trees. It was late, and she'd likely get a belting from Pa when she got home, for not being there to start his supper and look after Scottie, the way she was supposed to do, but it would be worth it. She had seen Gray. Exhausted, elated, shaking and breathing hard in the aftermath of orgasm, Gray lifted his head from the curve of Lindsey's neck and shoulder. She was still gasping herself, her eyes closed. He had spent the better part of the afternoon seducing her, but it had been worth the effort. That long, slow buildup had made the sex even better than he'd expected. A flash of color, a tiny movement in his peripheral vision, caught his attention and he turned his head toward the open window and the woods beyond the porch. He caught only a glimpse of a small, frail figure topped by dark red hair, but that was enough for him to identify the youngest Devlin girl. What was the kid doing wandering around the woods this far from their shack? Gray didn't say anything to Lindsey, because she would panic if she thought someone might have seen her sneaking into the summerhouse with him, even if that someone was just one of the trashy Devlins. She was engaged to Dewayne Mouton, and she wouldn't take kindly to anything screwing that up, even her own screwing. The Moutons weren't as rich as the Rouillards -- no one in this part of Louisiana was -- but Lindsey knew she could handle Dewayne in a way she could never hope to do with Gray. Gray was the bigger catch, but he wouldn't be a very comfortable husband, and Lindsey was shrewd enough to know she didn't have a chance with him anyway. "What is it?" she murmured now, stroking his shoulder. "Nothing." He turned his head and kissed her, hard, then disengaged their bodies and sat up on the edge of the bed. "I just noticed how late it is." Lindsey took a look out the window at the lengthening shadows, and sat up with a squeal. "My God, I'm supposed to have dinner with the Moutons tonight! I'll never be able to get ready on time!" She scrambled from the bed and began grabbing up her scattered articles of clothing. Gray dressed in a more leisurely fashion, but his mind was still on the Devlin kid. Had she seen them, and if she had, would she say anything? She was a strange little kid, shyer than her older sister, who was already showing signs of being as big a slut as their mother. But the younger one had wise old eyes in that thin kid's face, eyes that reminded him of a cat's eyes, hazel green with flecks of gold in them so that sometimes they were green and sometimes looked yellowish. He got the feeling that she didn't miss much. She would know that her mother was his father's piece on the side, that the Devlins lived rent-free in that shack so Renee would be handy whenever Guy Rouillard wanted her. The kid wouldn't risk getting on the bad side of any Rouillard. Poor little skinny kid, with the fey eyes. She'd been born into trash and wouldn't have the chance to ever get out of it, assuming she even wanted to. Amos Devlin was a mean drunk, and the two older boys, Russ and Nicky, were lazy, thieving bullies, as mean as their father and showing signs of turning into drunks as well. Her mother, Renee, liked the booze too, but she hadn't let it get the upper hand on her the way it had on Amos. She was lush and beautiful, despite having borne five children, with the dark red hair that only her youngest daughter had inherited, as well as the green eyes and creamy, delicate skin. Renee wasn't mean, like Amos, but she wasn't much of a mother to those kids, either. All Renee cared about was getting screwed. The joke in the parish was that her heels were so round, she had been used as the pattern for Weebles. Unlike Weebles, however, Renee would stay down, as long as there was a man ready to crawl on top of her. She exuded sex, raunchy sex, drawing men to her like dogs to a bitch in heat. Jodie, the oldest girl, was pure jailbait, already on the lookout for any hard cock she could get. She had Renee's singlemindedness when it came to sex, and he very much doubted that she was still a virgin, though she was only in junior high. She kept offering it to him, but Gray wasn't the least bit tempted. He'd rather screw a snake than Jodie Devlin. The youngest Devlin boy was retarded. Gray had only seen him once or twice, and each time he had been clinging to the youngest girl's legs -- what was her name, damn it? Something he'd thought a minute ago had reminded him of it. Fay? Fay with the fey eyes? No, it was something else, but like that -- Faith. That was it. Funny name for a Devlin, since neither Amos nor Renee was the least bit religious. With a family like that, the kid was doomed. In another couple of years, she'd be following in her mother's and sister's footsteps, because she wouldn't know any better. And even if she did know better, all the boys would come sniffing around her anyway, just because her name was Devlin, and she wouldn't hold out for long. The whole parish knew that his father was screwing Renee, had been for years. As much as Gray loved his mother, he figured he couldn't blame Guy for going elsewhere; God knows, his mother didn't. Noelle was the least physical person Gray had ever seen. At thirty-nine, she was still as cool and lovely as a Madonna, unfailingly composed and remote. She didn't like to be touched, even by her children. The wonder was that she'd even had children. Of course Guy wasn't faithful, had never been, much to Noelle's relief. Guy Rouillard was hot-blooded and lusty, and he'd found his way into a lot of beds before settling, more or less,

on Renee Devlin. But Guy was always gently courteous and protective with Noelle, and Gray knew he would never leave her, especially not for a cheap slut like Renee. The only person upset by the arrangement, apparently, was his sister, Monica. Starved by Noelle's emotional distance, Monica doted on her father, and was fiercely jealous of Renee, both on behalf of her mother and because Guy spent so much time with Renee. It was a lot calmer around the house now that Monica had gone away to school and become involved with her friends there. "Gray, hurry," Lindsey begged frantically. He shoved his arms into his shirtsleeves, but disdained to button the garment, leaving it hanging open. "I'm ready." He kissed her, and patted her butt. "Don't get your feathers ruffled, chrie. All you have to do is change clothes. The rest of you looks beautiful just as you are." She smiled, pleased by the compliment, and calmed down. "When can we do this again?" she asked as they left the summerhouse. Gray laughed aloud. It had taken him most of the summer to get into her pants, but now she didn't want to waste any more time. Perversely, now that he'd had her, much of his ruthless determination had faded. "I don't know," he said lazily. "I have to report back to school soon, for football practice." To her credit, she didn't pout. Instead she tossed her head so the wind lifted her hair as the Corvette streaked down the private road toward the highway, and smiled at him. "Any time." She was a year older than he was, and had her own share of confidence. The Corvette skidded into the highway, the tires grabbing asphalt. Lindsey laughed as Gray handled the powerful car with ease. "I'll have you home in five minutes," he promised. He didn't want anything to interfere with her engagement to Dewayne, either. He thought of skinny little Faith Devlin, and wondered if she'd made it safely home. She shouldn't be wandering around alone in the woods like that. She could get hurt, or lost. Worse, though this was private land, the lake drew the local high school boys like a magnet, and Gray had no illusions about teenage boys when they were in a pack. If they ran across Faith, they might not stop to think about how young she was, only that she was a Devlin. Little Red wouldn't have a chance against the wolves. Someone needed to keep a closer eye on the kid. Copyright 1995 by Linda Howington Presentation de l'diteur FAITH DEVLIN: A poor, outcast child in Prescott, Louisiana, she'd always adored the town's golden boy from afar. But he called her white trash that sultry Southern night when his rich, respected father disappeared, along with her pretty Mom. Now Faith wanted to hate Gray Rouillard...not to feel a powerful surge of desire. But she couldn't quench her passion, any more than she could hide the truth about the past she had waited so long to unravel. GRAY ROUILLARD: Even when he raised hell, he did it with style. Reckless, charming, and backed by Rouillard money, Gray controlled the town of Prescott -- and Devlin was a name he never wanted to hear again. But when he gazed at Faith Devlin, all he saw was a swirl of tangled sheets and her silken flesh beneath him. To care for her was impossible, unthinkable...because Gray Rouillard planned to use all his power to ruin her.