



*Tomorrow
About This
Time*

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Chapter I

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THE letter lay on the top of the pile of mail on the old mahogany desk, a square envelope of thick parchment with high, dashing handwriting and faint, subtle fragrance.

The man saw it the instant he entered the room. It gave him a sick dull thrust like an unexpected blow in the pit of his stomach. He had come back to the home of his childhood after hard years to rest, and here was this!

It was from his former wife, Lilla, and no word from her in all the twelve years since their divorce had ever brought anything but disgust and annoyance.

He half turned toward the door with an impulse of retreat but thought better of it and stalked over to the desk, tearing open the envelope roughly as if to have the worst over quickly. It began abruptly, as Lilla would. He could see the white jeweled fingers flying across the page, the half-flippant fling of the pen. Somehow the very tilt of the letters as she had formed them contrived to give the taunting inflection of her voice as he read.

Well, Pat, the time is up, and as the court decreed I am sending you your daughter. I hope you haven't forgotten, for it would be rather awkward for the poor thing. I'm going to be married in a few days now and wouldn't know what to do with her. She's fourteen and has your stubbornness, but she's not so bad if you let her have her own way in everything. Don't worry, she's the kind that marries young, and she'll probably take herself off your hands soon. I wish you well of your task. - Lilla

He sat back in the old mahogany chair and steadied his arms on the chair arms. The paper was shaking in his fingers. Something inside of him began to tremble. He had a feeling that it was his soul that was shaking. Like quicksilver

along his veins the weakness ran, like quicksands his strength slid away from beneath his groping feet. He had not known that a man in his prime could be so puny, so helpless. Why, all the little particles of his flesh were quivering! His lips were trembling like an old person's. He was like a frail ship being tossed in the trough of great waves. He could not right himself nor get any hold on his self-control. He could not seem to think what it all meant. He tried to read it over again and found the words dancing before his eyes with strange, grotesque amusement at his horror, like the look in Lilla's eyes when she knew she had hit one hard in a sensitive spot. His daughter!

He had not seen her since she was two years old, and had taken very little notice of her then. His mind had been too much filled with horror and disappointment to notice the well-suppressed infant who spent her days in a nursery at the top of the house when she was not out in the park with her nurse. A memory of ribbons and frills, pink-and-whiteness, and a stolid stare from a pair of alien eyes that were all too much like Lilla's to make any appeal to his fatherhood—that was his child, all he could recall of her. Even her name, he remembered bitterly, had been a matter of contention. *Athalie*, the name of a heathen queen! That had been her mother's whim. She said it was euphonious. Athalie Greeves! And she had enjoyed his horror and distaste. And now this child with the heathen name was coming home to him!

He had looked on her as an infant still. He had not realized in the big, sharp experiences of the life he was living that the years were flying by. It could not be fourteen years! He had heard the judge's decree that the child was to remain with her mother until she reached the age of fourteen years, and was then to pass to the guardianship of her father, but he had thought he would not be living when that came to pass. He had felt that his life was over. He had only to work hard enough and fill every moment with

something absorbing, and he would wear out early. But here he was, a young man yet, with honors upon him, and new vistas opening up in his intellectual life in spite of the blighted years behind him; and here was this child of his folly, suddenly grown up and flung upon him, as if his mistakes would not let him go but were determined to drag him back and claim him for their own!

He bowed his head upon his arms and groaned aloud.

Patterson Greeves, brilliant scholar, noted bacteriologist, honored in France for his feats of bravery and his noted discoveries along the line of his chosen profession, which had made it possible to save many lives during the war; late of Siberia where he had spent the time after the signing of the armistice doing reconstruction work and making more noteworthy discoveries in science; had at last come back to his childhood home after many years, hoping to find the rest and quiet he needed in which to write the book for which the scientific world was clamoring, and this had met him on the very doorstep as it were and flung him back into the horror of the tragedy of his younger days.

In his senior year of college, Patterson Greeves had fallen in love with Alice Jarvis, the lovely daughter of the Presbyterian minister in the little college town where he had spent the years of his collegiate work.

Eagerly putting aside the protests of her father and mother, for he was very much in love, and obtaining his failing uncle's reluctant consent, he had married Alice as soon as he graduated, and accepted a flattering offer to teach biology in his alma mater.

They lived with his wife's mother and father, because that was the condition on which the consent for the marriage had been given, for Alice was barely eighteen.

A wonderful, holy, happy time it was, during which heaven seemed to come down to earth and surround them, and the faith of his childhood appeared to be fulfilled

through this ideal kind of living, with an exalted belief in all things eternal. Then had fallen the blow!

Sweet Alice, exquisite, perfect in all he had ever dreamed a wife could be, without a moment's warning, slipped away into the Eternal, leaving a tiny flower of a child behind, but leaving his world dark—forever dark—without hope or God—so he felt.

He had been too stunned to take hold of life, but the sudden death of his uncle, Standish Silver, who had been more than a father to him, called him to action, and he was forced to go back to his childhood home at Silver Sands to settle up the estate, which had all been left to him.

While he was still at Silver Sands his father-in-law had written to ask if he would let them adopt the little girl as their own in place of the daughter whom they had lost. Of course he would always be welcomed as a son, but the grandfather felt he could not risk letting his wife keep the child and grow to love it tenderly if there was danger of its being torn away from them in three or four years and put under the care of a stepmother. The letter had been very gentle, but very firm, quite sensible and convincing. The young father accepted the offer without protest. In his stunned condition he did not care. He had scarcely got to know his child. He shrank from the little morsel of humanity because she seemed to his shocked senses to have been the cause of her mother's death. It was like pressing a sore wound and opening it again. Also he loved his wife's father and mother tenderly and felt that in a measure it was due them that he should make up in every way he could for the daughter they had lost.

So he gave his consent and the papers were signed.

Business matters held him longer than he had expected, but for a time he fully expected to return to his father-in-law's house. A chance call, however, to a much better position in the East, which would make it possible for him to pursue interesting studies in Columbia University and fill his

thoughts to the fuller exclusion of his pain, finally swayed him. He accepted the new life somewhat indifferently, almost stolidly, and went his way out of the life of his little child of whom he could not bear even to hear much.

From time to time he had sent generous gifts of money, but he had never gone back, because as the years passed he shrank even more from the scene where he had been so happy.

He had absorbed himself in his studies fiercely until his health began to suffer, and then some of his old college friends who lived in New York got hold of him and insisted that he should go out with them. Before he realized it, he was plunged into a carefree, reckless company of people who appeared to be living for the moment and having a great time out of it. It seemed to satisfy something fierce in him that had been roused by the death of Alice, and he found himself going more and more with them. For one thing, he found common ground among them in that they had cast aside the old beliefs in holy things. It gave him a sort of fierce pleasure to feel that he had identified himself with those who defied God and the Bible and went their willful way. He could not forgive God, if there was a God, for having taken away his wife, and he wanted to pay Him back by unbelief.

They were brilliant men and women, many of those with whom he had come to companion, and they kept his heart busy with their lightness and mirth, so that gradually his sorrow wore away, and he was able to shut the door upon it and take up a kind of contentment in life.

And then he met Lilla!

From the first his judgment had not approved of her. She seemed a desecration to Alice, and he stayed away deliberately from many places where he knew she was to be. But Lilla was a strong personality, as clever in her way as he, and she found that she could use Patterson Greeves to climb to social realms from which her own reckless acts

had shut her out. Moreover, Patterson Greeves was attractive, with his scholarly face, his fine physique, his brilliant wit, flashing through a premature sternness that only served to make him the more distinguished. When Lilla found that he not only belonged to a fine old family dating back to Revolutionary times but had a goodly fortune in his own right, she literally laid aside every weight, and for a time, almost "the sin which doth so easily beset," and wove a net for his unsuspecting feet.

Then, all unawares, the lonely, weary, rebellious man walked into the pleasant net. He read with her for hours at a time and found himself enjoying her quaint comments, her quick wit, her little tendernesses. He suddenly realized that his first prejudice had vanished, and he was really enjoying himself in her society.

Lilla was clever. She knew her man from the start. She played to his weaknesses, she fostered his fancies, and she finally broke down one day and told him her troubles. Then somehow he found himself comforting her. From that day on matters moved rapidly. Lilla managed to make him think he was really in love with her. He wondered if perhaps after all the sun was going to shine again for him; and he put the past under lock and key and began to smile again.

He and Lilla were married soon and set up a house in New York, but almost from the start he began to be undeceived. The evenings of reading together suddenly began to openly bore her. Lilla had no notion of settling down to a domestic life. Her husband was only one of many on whom she lavished her smiles, and as soon as she had him safely she began to show her true nature: selfish, untrue, disloyal, mercenary, ambitious.

The revelation did not come all at once. Even after their child was born he still had hope of winning her to a simpler, more practical manner of life. But he found that the child was, in her eyes, only a hindrance to her ambitions and that he was not even that; and when Lilla filled his house with

men and women of another world than his, whose tastes and ways were utterly distasteful to him, he began to absent himself more and more from home. This had been made possible by the growing demand for his services as lecturer and adviser in the world of science. So it came about that whenever he received an invitation of this sort he accepted it, until sometimes he would be away lecturing in universities for weeks at a time, or touring the West.

Little Athalie had never meant anything to him but a reproach. Somehow her round, blank stare had always sent his thoughts back to the first little one whom he had given away; and he felt a reproach in spite of the fact that he always reasoned it out within himself that he had done well in so doing.

So, at war with himself, he had grown more and more morose, living to himself whenever he was at home, scarcely ever even a figurehead in his own house at the functions that his wife delighted to give to her own frivolous set. As he grew to understand the true character of his second wife, his mind reverted to his old bitterness against a God—if there was a God—who had thrust this hard fate upon him.

So, bitterly and haughtily, he had lifted his proud head and taken the blows of life without comfort. And now he had come home.

He had arrived in the late afternoon and found the town of Silver Sands much as he left it years ago. There was a new thrifty little stucco station in place of the grimy one of clapboards of the old days, but the old barns and blacksmith shop were there just as he left them, a trifle more weather-beaten and dilapidated but doing a thriving business in automobile tires and truck repairs.

The old stone church where as a child he went to Sunday school and sat beside Aunt Lavinia in the dim pew afterward, with Uncle Standish next to the aisle, and squirmed or slept through a long service, looked just the

same, except that the ivy on the tower grew thicker and higher. The graveyard sloping down the hill behind, the Baptist church across the corner—redbrick with aspen trees in front and chalk marks where the children played hopscotch during the week on the brick walk up to the steps—were unchanged. A little farther on he could see the redbrick schoolhouse where he went to school glimmering through the trees, and the old bare playground where he used to play baseball. Here he had somehow bluffed his way into high school and finally prepared for college. He had heard rumors of a new high school up in the new part of town, but the old part where he had lived his young life seemed almost unchanged.

He had gone into the old house expecting to find the chill of the long-closed place about it, but the door had swung open, and the old servant, Joe Quinn, with his wife Molly, the cook, had stood smiling at the end of the hall a little wrinkled and gray, rounder as to form, more bent; and there in the parlor door quite ceremoniously had stood Anne Truesdale, an Englishwoman whom his aunt Lavinia had befriended when her husband died and who had been housekeeper since his aunt's death. Her hair was white, and she had lost her rosy cheeks, but her eyes were bright and her thin form as erect as ever in its black silk and thin white cuffs and collar. She put out a ceremonious hand to welcome the boy she used to chide, with a deference to his years and station that showed her reverence for him.

“Well, Master Pat,” she said, using the old name he had not heard for years. “So yer come again. Welcome home! It's right glad we are to see ye!”

For the moment it almost seemed as if he were a boy again, coming home for vacation.

He went up to his room and found it unchanged with the years. He spent a happy moment glancing over the old pictures of high school teams that were framed on his walls. Then he came down to the dining room and sat at the wide

table alone eating a supper as similar to those of his childhood as the same cook could make it: stewed chicken with little biscuits, currant jelly from the bushes in the garden, prune jam and cherry delight from the trees he had helped to plant, mashed potatoes as smooth as cream, peas that were incredibly sweet, little white onions smothered in cream, cherry pie that would melt in your mouth for flakiness, and coffee like ambrosia.

Shades of the starving Russians! Was he dreaming? Where was Siberia? Had the war ever been? Was he perhaps a boy again?

But no! Those empty places across the table! That ivy-covered church down the street surrounded by its white gravestones showing in the dusk! A world of horror in France between! Other gravestones, too, and an empty sinful world! Ah! No, he was not a boy again!

He opened the door of the dear old library half expecting to see the kindly face of his Uncle Standish sitting at the desk, and instead there was the letter!

He had come home for rest and peace, and this had met him! He seemed to hear Lilla's mocking laugh ringing clearly through the distant halls as if her spirit had lingered to watch over her letter and enjoy its reception. It was like Lilla to prepare the setting of a musical comedy for anything she had to do. Why couldn't she have written to ask him what he wanted her to do about the child?

His anger rose. Lilla should not make a laughingstock of him in any such way. He glanced at the date of the letter and angrily reached for the telephone.

"Give me Western Union!" he demanded sternly, and dictated his telegram crisply:

"On no account send the child here. Will make immediate arrangements for her elsewhere. Letter follows by first mail. P.S.G."

He hung up the receiver with a click of relief as if he had averted some terrible calamity and sank wearily back in his chair, beads of perspiration standing out on his forehead. It was almost as if he had had a personal encounter with Lilla. Any crossing of swords between them had always left him with a sense of defeat.

He tried to rally and busy himself with the other letters. Two from his publishers demanding copy at once; an invitation from an exclusive scientific society to speak before their next national convention; a call from a western college to occupy the chair of sciences; a proposition from a lecture bureau to place his name on their list in a course of brilliant speakers. He threw them down aimlessly and took up the last letter without glancing at the address. They all seemed so trivial. What was fame to an empty life?

Then he brought back his wandering gaze and read: "Dear Father—"

He started. Not for several years had he read a letter beginning that way. Athalie had never written to him. He had not expected it. She was Lilla's child.

But this was from Alice's child. The writing was so exactly like her girl-mother's that it gave his heart a wrench to look at it. Well, it had not mattered. She did not belong to him—never had. He had given her away. He had always felt her childish little letters full of stilted gratitude, for the gifts he sent were merely perfunctory. Why should she care for him? She could not remember him. He had been rather relieved than otherwise because he had a troubled feeling that they entailed more than a mere check at Christmas and birthdays. And now after several years' silence she had written again! Strange that both his children should have been suddenly thrust upon his notice on this same day! He read on:

I suppose you received the word I sent while you were abroad that Grandfather died of influenza last November right in the midst of his work. Grandmother has been

slipping away ever since, though she tried to rally for my sake. But two weeks ago she left me, and now I am alone. I sent a letter to your foreign address, but I saw in the papers today that you had landed and were going to Silver Sands, and a great longing has come over me to see my father once before I go to work. I am not going to be a burden to you. Grandfather had saved enough to keep

me comfortably even if I did nothing, but I have also secured a good position with a very good salary for a beginner, and I shall be able to care for myself, I think, without at present touching the money that was left me.

Grandmother said something a few days before she died that has given me courage to write this letter. I have always felt, and especially since you married again, that you did not want me or you would not have given me to Grandmother, and of course I don't want to intrude upon you, although I've always been very proud of you and have read everything I could find in the papers about you. But one day two weeks ago Grandmother said: "Silver"—they always called me Silver, you know, because they wanted to keep the Alice for Mother—"Silver, I've been thinking that perhaps your father might need you now. After I'm gone perhaps you'd better go and see."

So, Father, I'm coming! I hope you won't mind—
Patterson Greeves suddenly dropped the letter and buried his face in his hands with a groan that was half anguish, half anger, at a Fate that had suddenly decided to make him a puppet in the comedy of life. He was like one under mortal anguish. He kicked the heavy desk chair savagely back from under him and strode to the window like a caged animal. Staring out with unseeing eyes at the calm dusk of the evening sky across the meadow, he tried to realize that this was really himself, Patterson Greeves, to whom all this incredible thing was happening. Horrible! Impossible!

He sensed that somewhere deep in his soul was a large engulfing contempt for himself. This was no attitude, of

course, for a father to have toward his children. But then they had never really been his children in the strict sense of the word, and nothing had ever been right in his life. Why should *he* try to be? It was all God's fault, if there was a God—taking Alice away! None of these unnatural things would ever have happened if Alice had lived! And now God was trying to force him back to the blackness of his ruined life again after he had in a measure gained a certain hard kind of peace.

He flung his head up defiantly toward the evening sky, as if he would vow that God should make nothing from him by treating him so. He was master of his fate no matter how "charged with punishments the scroll." God! To dare to be a God and yet to treat him so!

Chapter II

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THE old Silver place stood back from the street just far enough for privacy and not far enough to seem exclusive.

The General Silver who built it in Revolutionary times had been a democratic soul, and his sons who had followed him were of like mind. The last grandson, Standish Silver, now sleeping in the quiet churchyard just below the bend of the hill, was the friend and counselor of everyone in the village, his home the rendezvous and refuge alike of all classes. Perhaps it was the habit of the house through the long years that had given it that genial attitude, widespread and welcoming as it stood among its trees and old-fashioned shrubs, with the same dignity and gentleness of bearing it had worn in the days when its owners were living within, as if it had a character to maintain in the name of the family, though all its immediate members were gone.

There were many newer houses in Silver Sands that boasted modern architecture and in their ornate and pretentious decorations made claim to be the finest houses in town, but still the old Silver place held its own with dignity and gentle grace, as if it had no need for pretension. Like a strong, handsome old man of high birth, it lifted its distinguished head among all the others of the place. There was something classic about its simple lines, its lofty columns reaching to the roof, its ample windows with wide-drawn snowy curtains giving of old a glimpse of companionable firelight blazing on a generous hearth. It had a homelike, friendly look that drew the eye of a visitor as home draws the soul. It had always been kept in perfect repair, and the well-made bricks of which it was built had been painted every year a clear cream-white, always white with myrtle-green blinds, so that old age had only mellowed

it and made the color a part of the material. It had the air of well-preserved age, like an old, old person with beautiful white hair who still cared to keep himself fine and distinguished.

About its feet the myrtle crept, with blue starry blossoms in summer, and lush beds of lilies-of-the-valley, generation after generation of them, clustering, occupied the spaces between the front walk and the end verandas, giving forth their delicate fragrance even as far as the dusty street. A tall wall of old lilacs made a background behind the verandas at each end. A gnarled wisteria draped a pergola at one end while a rich blooming trumpet vine flared at the other, miraculously preserved from the devastation of painters each year. A row of rare peonies bordered the walk down to the box hedge in front, and the grass was fine and velvety, broken here and there by maples, a couple of lacy hemlock trees, and the soft blending plumes of the smoke bush. In the backyard there were roses and honeysuckle, snowballs and bridal wreath, bittersweet vines, mountain-ash trees, and a quaint corner with walks and borders where sweet williams, Johnny-jump-ups, Canterbury bells, and phlox still held sway, with heliotrope, mignonette, and clove pinks cloying the air with their sweetness, and in their midst an old-fashioned sundial marking the marching of the quiet hours. Almost hidden in the rose vines was a rustic arbor of retreat, where one might go to read and be undisturbed except by the birds who dared to nest above it and sing their lullabies unafraid. One would scarcely have dreamed that there was left a spot so sweet, so quaint, so true and peaceful in the rushing world.

Across the road a meadow stretched far down to misty vapors rising from the little stream, whose sand, of a peculiar fine and white variety, suitable for use in manufacturing fine grades of sandpaper, had given to the Silver family its prosperity and helped to give a name to the place started by the first old family—"Silver Sands."

The meadow was rimmed with trees, and here and there a group of them broke the smoothness of its green, but for the most part the view was kept open, down across its rippling smoothness of close-cropped grass in summer, or glistening whiteness of deep-laid snow in winter, open down to the gleaming “river” as they sometimes dignified the little stream. And one looked back to the owners of that strip of land with gratitude that they had done this thing for the house and for all who should sojourn there, to give this wide stretch of beauty untouched, with room for souls who had vision to grow.

Down beyond the meadow, off to the right, camouflaged now and again by a random tree or a cropping of rocks, huddled the heterogeneous group of buildings that had come to be known as Frogtown. It was really originally called “the Flats” of Silver Sands, but since the factories had gone up—the iron foundry, the glassworks, the silk mill—and like mushrooms, a swarm of little “overnight houses” filled with a motley population, it had somehow grown into the name of Frogtown, and one felt that if the original Silver, who had owned the land and planned the view across the long misty meadow, could have looked ahead far enough he would have planted a row of tall elms or maples like a wall to shut *in* his view as well as out. For Frogtown in winter lifted stark, grim chimneys of redbrick and belched forth volumes of soft black smoke, which, when it got into the picture, was enough to spoil any view.

But in summer the kindly trees had spread more and more to shut out the ugliness of the dirty little tenements and stark red chimneys, and the tall grass reached up and blended the town till one could almost forget it was there. Especially at evening, one could look out from the windows of the dignified old Silver mansion and see the river winding smoothly like a silver ribbon just beyond the stretch of misty green without a thought of dirty laborers, blazing furnaces,

flaring pots of molten glass and metal. It was like a vision of Peaceful Valley in its still natural beauty.

But it was most mysterious just after the sun had set, and the “trailing clouds of glory” left behind were lying in lovely tatters across a field of jade, above the pearly shadows where the river pulsed in dusk, and a single star stood out like a living thing and winked to show the night alive.

For the last fifteen years, since the death of Standish Silver, few had looked at this particular view from the angle of the Silver house for the reason that there had seldom during that period been anyone occupying the house except the three old servants, who lived in the back part and went “front” only to clean and air it. They cared little for views. For this reason it was all the more wonderful that the house had kept its atmosphere of home and its air of alert friendliness, its miracle of distinction from all other houses of the town.

But on this night, after all the years, the old house seemed to smile with content as the evening settled down upon it and nestled among its shrubbery with an air of satisfaction. Back in the inner rooms soft lights began to glow under quiet shades, and there seemed a warmth and life about the place as if it had awoke because the owner had come home.

As Patterson Greeves stood at the window surrounded by this sweetness of the night, this peace of home, his raging soul could not help but feel the calm of it all, the balm, the beauty. The sweet air stole in upon his troubled senses, and his soul cried out for comfort. Why couldn't they have left him in peace to get what inspiration there was in this quiet old spot for the hard work that he had before him?

The spell of the meadow came upon him, the mist stealing up from the river in wreaths till he felt the blue eyes of the violets from their hiding places as if they were greeting him, sensed the folded wings of a butterfly poised

for the night on a dandelion, began to gather up and single out and identify all the delicate smells and sounds and stirrings in the meadow that he used to know so long ago. Even without going he seemed to know where a big flat stone could be lifted up to show the scurrying sow bugs surprised from early sleep. His anger began to slip from him, his bitterness of soul to be forgotten. A desire stirred in him to steal out and find the particular tree toad that was chirping above his mates and to watch him. He drank in the night with its clear jade sky, littered with tatters of pink and gold. He answered the wink of the single star, his old friend from boyhood, and then he remembered!

Out there was the meadow and the mist and the silver sand in the starlight, but off down the street in the quiet churchyard were two graves! Out the other way was a dead schoolhouse where other boys played ball and bluffed their way through lessons. He was not a boy. He had no part in this old village life. He had been a fool to come. His life was dead. He had thought he could come to this old refuge for inspiration to write a book that would add to the world's store of wisdom and then pass on—out—Where? How different it all was from what he had dreamed in those happy boyhood days!

Even the old church with its faith in God, in love, in humanity and life, in death and resurrection! What were they now but dead fallacies? Poor Aunt Lavinia with her beautiful trust! How hard she strove to teach him lies! Poor Uncle Standish, clean, kind, loving, severe, but fatherly and Christian—always *Christian!* How far he had gone from all that now! It seemed as different—the life he had been living since Alice died—as a windswept, arid desert of sand in the pitch-dark would be from this living, dusky, mysterious, pulsing meadow under the quiet evening sky. And yet—! Well, he *believed* in the meadow of course, because he *knew* it, had lived with the bugs and butterflies and bits of growing things. If he had only read about it or been taught

of it he might perhaps think the earth all arid. He had a passing wish that he might again believe in the old faith that seemed to his world-weary heart like an old couch where one might lie at peace and really rest. But of course that was out of the question. He had eaten of the tree of knowledge, and he could not go back into Eden. Poor credulous Uncle Standish, poor Aunt Lavinia! Strong and fine and good but woefully ignorant and gullible! How little they knew of life! How pleasant to have been like them! And yet, they stagnated in the old town, walking in grooves their forbearers had carved for them, thinking the thoughts that had been taught them. That was not life.

Well, why not? He had seen life. And what had it given him? Dust and ashes! A bitter taste! Responsibilities that galled! Hindrances and disappointments! Two daughters whom he did not know! An empty heart and a jaded soul! Ah! Why live?

Into the middle of his bitter thoughts a crimson stain flared into the luminous gray of the evening sky as if it had been spilled by an impish hand, and almost simultaneously out from the old bell tower in the public square there rang a clang that had never in the years gone by failed to bring his entire being to instant attention. The red flared higher, and down behind the tall chimneys beside the silver beach a little siren set up a shriek that almost drowned out the hurried imperious clang of the firebell. Another instant and the cry went up from young throats down the street, where the voices of play had echoed only a second ago, and following the sound came the gong of the fire engine, the pulsing of the engine motor, the shouts of men, the chime of boys' voices, hurried, excited, dying away in a breath as the hastily formed procession tore away and was lost in the distance, leaving the tree toads to heal over the torn air.

It took Patterson Greeves only an instant to come to life and answer that call that clanged on after the firemen had gone on their way. He stayed not for hat or coat. He flung

open the front door, swung wide the white gate, took one step on the road, and vaulted the fence into the meadow. Down through the dear old mysterious meadow he bounded, finding the way as if he were a boy again, his eye on the crimson flare in the sky. Once he struck his foot against a boulder and fell full length, his head swimming, stars vibrating before his eyes, and for an instant he lay still, feeling the cool of the close-cropped grass in his face, the faint mingle of violet and mint wafting gently like an enchantment over him, and an impulse to lie still seized him, to give up the mad race and just stay here quietly. Then the siren screeched out again, and his senses whirled into line. Footsteps were coming *thud, thud* across the sod. He struggled halfway up and a strong young arm braced against him and set him on his feet:

“C’mon!” breathed the boy tersely. “It’s *some fire!*”

“Where is it?” puffed the scientist, endeavoring to keep pace with the lithe young bounds.

“Pickle factory!” murmured the youth, taking a little stream with a single leap. “There goes the hook ‘n’ ladder! We’ll beat ‘em to it. Job Trotter cert’nly takes his time. I’ll bet a hat the minister was running the engine. He certainly can make that little old engine go! Here we are! Down this alley an’ turn to yer right—!”

They came suddenly upon the great spectacle of leaping flames ascending to heaven, making the golden markings of the late-departed sun seem dim and far away as if one drew near to the edge of the pit.

The crude framework of the hastily built factory was already writhing in its death throes. The firemen stood out against the brightness like shining black beetles in their wet rubber coats and helmets. The faces of the crowd lit up fearfully with rugged, tense lines and deep shadows. Even the children seemed old and sad in the lurid light. One little toddler fell down and was almost crushed beneath the feet of the crowd as a detachment of firemen turned with their

hose to run to another spot farther up the street where fire had just broken out. The air was dense with shouts and curses. Women screamed, and men hurried out of the ramshackle houses bearing bits of furniture. Just a fire. Just an ordinary fire. Thousands of them happening all over the land every day. Nothing in it at all compared to the terror of the war. Yet there was a tang in the air, a stir in the pulses that made Patterson thrill like a boy to the excitement of it. He wondered at himself as he dived to pick up the fallen child and found his young companion had been more agile. The toddler was restored to her mother before her first outcry had fully left her lips.

“Good work, Blink!” commended a fireman with face blackened beyond recognition and a form draped in a dripping coat.

“That’s the minister!” breathed the boy in Patterson Greeves’s ear and darted off to pounce upon a young bully who was struggling with his baby sister for possession of some household treasures.

Then, as quickly as it had begun, the fire was gone, the homeless families parceled out among their neighbors, the bits of furniture safely disposed of for the night, and the firemen getting ready to depart.

“Ain’t you goin’ to drive her back?” the boy asked the tall figure standing beside him.

Patterson Greeves warmed to the voice that replied:

“No, son, I’m going back across the fields with you if you don’t mind. I want to get quiet under the stars before I sleep, after all this crash.”

They tramped through the field together, the three, and there was an air of congeniality from the start as of long friendship. The boy was quiet and grave as if bringing his intelligence up to the honored standard of his friend, and the new man was accepted as naturally as the grass they walked upon or a new star in the sky. There was no introduction. They just began. They were talking about the

rotten condition of the homes that had just burned and the rottener condition of the men's minds who were the workers in the industries in Frogtown. The minister said it was the natural outcome of conditions after the war, and it was going to be worse before it was better, but it was going to be better before a fatal climax came, and the scientist put in a word about conditions abroad.

When they had crossed the final fence and stood in the village street once more, Patterson Greeves waved his hand toward the house and said: "You're coming in for a cup of coffee with me," and his tone included the boy cordially.

They went in quite as naturally as if they had been doing it often, and the minister as he laid aside his rubber coat and helmet remarked with a genial smile: "I thought it must be you when I first saw you at the Flats. They told me you were coming home. I'm glad I lost no time in making your acquaintance!"

Blink stuffed his old grimy cap in his hip pocket and glowed with pride as he watched the two men shake hands with the real hearty handclasp that denotes liking on both sides.

The old servants joyfully responded to the call for coffee and speedily brought a fine old silver tray with delicate Sèvres cups and rare silver service, plates of hastily made sandwiches—pink with wafer-thin slices of sweetbriar ham—more plates of delicate filled cookies, crumby with nuts and raisins. Blink ate and ate again and gloried in the feast, basking in the geniality of the two men, his special particular "finds" in the way of companions. "Gee! It was great!" He wouldn't mind a fire every night!

The coffee cups were empty, and the two men were deep in a discussion of industrial conditions in foreign lands when suddenly, with sharp insistence, the telephone rang out and startled into the conversation. With a frown of annoyance Patterson Greeves finished his sentence and turned to take the receiver.

“Western Union. Telegram for Patterson Greeves!” The words cut across his consciousness and jerked him back into his own troubled life. “Yes?” he breathed sharply.

“Too late! Athalie already on her way. She should reach you tomorrow morning.”

Signed “Lilla.”

It seemed to him as he hung up the receiver, a dazed, baffled look upon his face, that he could hear Lilla’s mocking laughter ringing out somewhere in the distance. Again she had outwitted him!

Chapter III

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HAVING diligently inquired what time the night express from the East reached the nearby city, and finding that it was scheduled to arrive fifteen minutes after the early morning train left for Silver Sands and that there was not another local train that could bring his unwelcome daughter before eleven o'clock, Patterson Greeves ate his carefully prepared breakfast with a degree of comfort and lingered over his morning paper.

He had in a long-distance call for the principal of a well-known and exclusive girls' school in New England, and he was quite prepared to take the child there at once without even bringing her to the house. He had already secured by telephone the service of an automobile to take them at once back to the city, that she might be placed on the first train possible for Boston. It only remained to arrange the preliminaries with the principal, who was well known to him. He anticipated no difficulty in entering his daughter even though it was late in the spring, for he knew that it was likely that a personally conducted tour of some sort, or a summer camp, could possibly be arranged through this school. These plans were the result of a night of vigil. So he read his paper at ease with himself and the world. For the moment he had forgotten the possible arrival of his elder daughter.

His breakfast finished, he adjourned to the library to await the long-distance call. The scattered mail on the desk at once recalled Silver and her suggestion that she would like to visit him. He frowned and sat down at the desk, drawing pen and paper toward him. That must be stopped at once. He had no time or the desire to break the strangeness between them at present. In fact his very soul

shrank from seeing Alice's child, the more so since he had become so aware of Lilla's child's approach.

He wrote a kind if somewhat brusque note to Silver saying that she had better defer her visit to some indefinite period for the present, as he was suddenly called away on business—his half intention to take Athalie to her school served as excuse for that statement to his dulled conscience—and that he was deeply immersed in important literary work in which he could not be disturbed. It sounded good enough as he read it over, and he felt decidedly pleased with himself for having worded it so tactfully. He resolved to send it by special delivery to make sure that it reached her before she started. And by the way—what was it she said about taking a position? Of course that must not be allowed. He was fully able and willing to support her. And she could not be too old to go to school. He would arrange for that—not in the school where Athalie would be, however! Perhaps she herself would have a preference. He would ask her. He reached his hand for her letter, which lay on the top of the pile where he had dropped it the night before, for both Molly and Anne had been well trained by the former master that the papers on that desk were sacred and never to be touched.

As he drew the letter toward him and his eyes fell again upon those unaccustomed words: "Dear Father," something sad and sweet like a forgotten thrill of tenderness went through him, and the face of his beautiful young wife came up before his vision as it had not come now in years.

But before he could read further, or even realize that he had not finished reading the letter the day before, the telephone rang out sharply in the prolonged shrill that identifies a long-distance call, and he dropped the paper and reached for the receiver.

It was the distant school, and the principal for whom they had been searching; but she did not fall in with Patterson Greeves's plans with readiness, as he had expected,

although she at once recognized him. Instead, her voice was anxious and distraught, and she vetoed his arrangements emphatically. An epidemic of measles had broken out in the school in the most virulent form. The school was under strict quarantine, and it was even doubtful, as it was now so late in the spring, whether they would open again until fall. They could not possibly accept his daughter under the circumstances.

In the middle of his dismay there came an excited tapping at the door, following certain disturbing sounds of commotion in the hall, which had not yet been fully analyzed in his consciousness, but which rushed in now to his perturbed mind as if they had been penned up while he telephoned and lost none of their annoyance by the fact that they were now memories.

He called "Come in," and Anne Truesdale in her immaculate morning dress and stiff white apron and cuffs stood before him, a bright spot of color in her already rosy cheeks and a look of indignant excitement in her dignified blue eyes.

"If you please, Master Pat—" she began hurriedly, with a furtive glance over her shoulder, "there's a strange young woman at the front door—"

"Hello! Daddy Pat!" blared out a hoydenish young voice insolently, and the young woman, who had not remained at the door as ordered, appeared behind the horrified back of the housekeeper.

For Athalie Greeves, never at a loss for a way to carry out her designs and get all the fun there was going, had not waited decorously at the city station for the train that should have brought her to Silver Sands, but had called from his early morning slumbers a onetime lover of her mother whose address she looked up in the telephone book and made him bring her out in his automobile. In his luxurious car he was even now disappearing cityward

having an innate conviction that he and her father would not be congenial.

Patterson Greeves swung around sharply, his hand still on the telephone, his mind a startled blank, and stared.

Anne Truesdale stiffened into indignant reproof, her hands clasped tightly at her white-aproned waist, her chin drawn in like a balky horse, her nostrils spread in almost a snort, as the youngest daughter of the house sauntered nonchalantly into the dignified old library and cast a quick, appraising glance around, leveling her gaze on her father with a half-indifferent impudence.

“Bring my luggage right in here, Quinn! Didn’t you say your name was Quinn?” she ordered imperiously. “I want to show Dad some things I’ve brought. Bring them in *here*, I said! Didn’t you hear me?”

The old servant hovered anxiously nearby, a pallor in his humble, intelligent face, a troubled eye on his master’s form in the dim shadow of the book-lined room. He turned a deprecatory glance on Anne Truesdale, as he entered with two bags, a shiny suitcase, a hat box, a tennis racket, and a bag of golf clubs, looking for an unobtrusive corner in which to deposit them and thereby stop the noisy young tongue that seemed to him to be committing irretrievable indignities to the very atmosphere of the beloved old house.

“Take them out, Joe,” said Anne Truesdale in her quiet voice of command.

“No, you *shan’t* take them out!” screamed Athalie, stamping her heavy young foot indignantly. “I want them here! Put them right down there! *She* has nothing to say about it!”

Joe vacillated from the library to the hall and back again uncertainly and looked pitifully toward his master.

“Put the things in the hall, Joe, and then go out and shut the door!” ordered the master with something in his controlled voice that caused his daughter to look at him with surprise. Joe obeyed, Anne Truesdale thankfully

disappeared, and Patterson Greeves found himself in the library alone with his child.

Athalie faced him with a storm in her face.

"I think you are a perfectly horrid old thing!" she declared hysterically with a look in her eyes that at once reminded him of her mother. "I said I wanted those things in here, and *I'm going to have them!* I guess they are *my* things, aren't they?" She faced him a second defiantly and then opened the door swiftly, causing a scuttling sound in the back hall near the kitchen entrance. Vehemently she recovered her property, banging each piece down with unnecessary force and slamming the door shut with a comical grimace of triumph toward the departed servants.

"Now, we're ready to talk!" she declared, with suddenly returning good humor, as she dropped to the edge of a large leather chair and faced her father again.

Patterson Greeves was terribly shaken and furiously angry, yet he realized fully that he had the worst of the argument with this child as he had nearly always had with her mother, and he felt the utter futility of attempting further discipline until he had a better grasp of the situation. As he sat in his uncle's comfortable leather chair, entrenched as it were in this fine old dignified castle, it seemed absurd that a mere child could overthrow him, could so put his courage to flight and torment his quiet world. He turned his attention upon her as he might have turned it upon some new specimen of viper that had crossed his path and become annoying; and once having looked, he stared and studied her again.

There was no denying that Athalie Greeves was pretty so far as the modern world counts prettiness. Some of the girls in her set called her "simply stunning," and the young men of her age called her a "winner." She was fair and fat and fourteen with handsome teeth and large, bold, dark eyes. But the lips around the teeth were too red and the lashes around the eyes overladen. Her fairness had been