

Like the Wind

A NOVEL

ROBIN LEE
HATCHER



THOMAS NELSON
Since 1798

Like the Wind

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Prologue

BETHLEHEM SPRINGS, IDAHO

A strong March wind buffeted Olivia Ward's back as she climbed the steps to the deck of her friend's cabin.

"Olivia?" Sara Cartwright's voice came to her through a fog of thoughts. "Are you all right?"

She turned. "I'm fine." It was a lie, of course. She wasn't fine. She would never be fine again. Her life was in tatters.

Sara closed the door, plunging the living room of the aging log house into shades of gray and muting the wind outside. With resolute steps, she walked to the nearest lamp and turned it on. "Let me show you around."

Olivia nodded.

"There's one bedroom down." Sara pointed toward a short hallway. "And the bath is next to it. Kitchen and eating nook are right through there. And upstairs there are two small bedrooms and a half bath. You can use those bedrooms to store things if you need to." She faced Olivia again. "Do whatever you want. Rearrange the furniture. Move it all out and bring in what you have. Paint the

walls and cabinets. Hang new curtains. Anything that makes you feel at home.”

Tears welled in Olivia’s eyes. “I’ll never be able to thank you enough.”

“Don’t be silly. You’ve already thanked me enough. Besides, this is what friends do. They help each other out. I’ve got this old place that’s just sitting empty. We haven’t come up to stay here in over two years. And you need a home.”

Throat too tight to speak, Olivia reached out and embraced her friend.

When they separated at last, Sara had tears on her cheeks too. “Do you need anything before I go?”

“No. Really. I’ll manage.”

“You’ve got my number. Don’t hesitate to call for any reason. I’m only an hour away if you need me.” Sara set the keys on the entry table near the door. “Any reason at all,” she repeated.

Olivia nodded, both relieved and saddened by her friend’s departure.

Once alone in the house, she went to the sofa and sat. The silence swirled around her, strange and disconcerting. No, it wasn’t the silence that felt strange. It was the lack of something more to do. There was nothing more to do. For more than a year she’d fought in every way she knew how to keep from losing what mattered most. She’d researched. She’d met with her attorney. She’d talked to family and friends. She’d met with her attorney. She’d gathered statements. She’d met with her attorney.

All to no avail.

Two days ago the judge had not only ended Olivia’s thirteen years of marriage to Daniel Ward; he’d given primary custody of their nine-year-old daughter to Olivia’s now ex-husband. With a stroke of his pen, the judge had destroyed her life.

“Don’t You care, God?” she whispered, not for the first time

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since her world had spun out of control. “Don’t You care what’s happened? To me and to Emma.”

Silence.

Daniel didn’t want custody of his daughter because he desired more time with her. He wanted custody so he could hurt Olivia by taking Emma away. He’d said as much to her months ago, and because he had lots of money and plenty of power, he’d succeeded.

“No, You don’t care.” Olivia covered her face with her hands.

God hadn’t stopped the lies her ex told to get what he wanted. He hadn’t stopped the deceit, the trickery, or the betrayals that had brought her world crashing down.

Why don’t You care?

One of Olivia’s so-called friends had said that everything happened for a reason.

What’s the reason for all of this? For taking Emma away. For everything.

Olivia no longer had a home of her own. She would see her daughter only every other weekend—and then only if Daniel didn’t take Emma with him on his frequent business trips. Olivia had lost her job after too many absences as she’d fought Daniel in court. She had nothing left in savings. Her bank account had run dry long ago. Her parents had helped her as much as possible with attorney fees, but even that hadn’t been enough. Daniel had too much money, too much clout, too many favors he could call in with people in power.

Olivia lay on her side and curled herself around a throw pillow. “Just let me die. Please. Just let me die.”

Chapter 1

SIX YEARS LATER

Olivia ignored the phone when it rang at 7:30 a.m. She ignored it again at 8:00 and 8:20. She hated to be interrupted when she was working on a new design for a client. Much easier to let callers leave a message. Only no one had left a message, and when the phone rang again at 8:35, she lifted the handset from its cradle. “Olivia Designs,” she all but snapped.

“Mrs. Ward?”

She hated to be called that. *Ms.* suited her much better. “This is Olivia Ward.”

“My name is Savannah Hodgkiss. I’m a counselor at Blakely Academy. I’m calling about your daughter.”

Her heart almost stopped. “Has something happened to Emma?” She clutched the handset tighter.

“No . . . but there’s been an accident.”

“An accident? Is she in the hospital?” Olivia looked toward her computer screen. How long would she have to wait for a flight? It was over an hour’s drive to the Boise airport, and there wouldn’t be a direct flight from there to Orlando. A layover would add another

hour or two or more to an already lengthy flight. When could she get there? Maybe before midnight?

“Mrs. Ward, Emma is fine. She wasn’t with her father.”

She drew a deep breath. “Daniel?” Why would the school call her about Daniel having an accident?

“Mr. Ward was killed late last night in an accident on the freeway.”

Olivia almost dropped the phone.

“As you can imagine, your daughter is rather distraught. I believe she needs you.”

Olivia didn’t ask if Emma had actually *asked* for her. She suspected she hadn’t. She looked toward the computer screen again. “Please give me your contact number, I’ll book a flight, then call you to let you know when I’ll arrive. How long a drive is it from the airport to the school?”

“About an hour and a half with traffic.”

“Okay. I’ll call back as soon as I’m able.”^⑧

“Thank you, Mrs. Ward.”

Olivia set the phone in its cradle.

Daniel dead. Gone, just like that. His life over. There had been moments in the past when—in her anger—she’d wished him dead. Now he was. What should she feel? What *did* she feel? She didn’t know. She wasn’t sure.

Drawing a deep breath, she closed her eyes, then slowly exhaled. After a moment more, she looked at her computer again and focused her attention on her most pressing need. Fifteen minutes later she had her flight booked without maxing out her credit card, as she’d feared it might. Soon after, she contacted her virtual assistant so the young woman could advise Olivia’s clients of the situation. The next call was back to Savannah Hodgkiss with her estimated arrival time. After that she began to pack, taking far more than would likely be necessary.

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It had been nearly a year and a half since Olivia had seen her daughter in person. The last two summers the girl had refused to come for the month-long visit agreed upon after Daniel relocated to the far side of the country, and more often than not, Emma had an excuse for why she couldn't FaceTime with her mom either. Emma had changed a great deal in the six years since her parents' divorce finalized. The distance between Olivia and her was far more than mere miles.

"She's fifteen," Sara liked to say. "All girls are impossible at fifteen. It'll get better."

Bitterness left a bad taste in Olivia's mouth.

She knew Daniel delighted—correction, used to delight—in doing whatever he could to drive a wedge between mother and child. Worse still, he'd succeeded. Olivia was rushing to Florida to see a daughter who had become almost a stranger to her. And it was all *his* fault.

"He's dead," she whispered to herself. She tried to feel sorry about that. She couldn't. Not with anger roiling in her chest.

Once upon a time, she'd loved Daniel Ward. She knew that had been true, although it was hard to believe today. She'd fallen hard for him when she was a sophomore in college. Daniel had been nearly seven years older than Olivia and already a successful businessman. She'd never met anyone quite like him. So handsome. So charming. So in control.

He'd controlled her, too, although she hadn't realized that at first. Perhaps she hadn't let herself realize it.

Her parents had expressed concern when she'd wanted to marry Daniel before they'd dated even a year, but nothing could have stopped her from going through with it. Nothing. And she'd been blissfully happy. She hadn't minded when her new husband asked her to quit college and stay at home. She hadn't minded when

she lost touch with most of her friends. Daniel had wanted her all to himself. Wasn't that how it was supposed to be?

Things had started to go wrong after the birth of Emma, and it had taken her years to understand why. She'd finally understood that Daniel had hated he was no longer the very center of her world.

And so he'd torn everything apart.

Her thoughts continued to churn during the hour-long drive from her home in Bethlehem Springs, a former gold-rush town in the Idaho mountains, to the Boise airport. She left her car in long-term parking and pulled her rolling suitcase toward the terminal, wondering what awaited her at Blakely Academy. She ached to hold her daughter in her arms. Would Emma allow it?

At the counter she checked the larger bag, then headed for the TSA screening area. Fifteen minutes later she settled onto a chair to await the call to board. As she withdrew her mobile phone from her carry-on, it began to vibrate. Sara's picture appeared on the screen.

"Hi, Sara," she answered.

"What was that message I got on your answering machine at home? You're out of the office?"

"I'm at the airport. I'm flying to Florida."

"Florida? Good grief. What's up now?"

Sara Cartwright was one of the few friends who had stuck with Olivia through her marriage to Daniel, the messy divorce, and the grizzly past six years. Sara knew all the details of Olivia's life, had witnessed many of her meltdowns, and had loved her at her most unlovable points—of which there'd been plenty. Bless her, she still put up with Olivia's foul moods. A more loyal friend couldn't be found. The only thing that would have made the friendship better was if they lived in the same town. Get-togethers were too few and far between.

"I don't know any details," Olivia answered, glad there was no need to pretend with Sara. "Just that Daniel was killed in an

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accident on the freeway. I'm headed for Emma's school now to get her."

"Oh, Olivia. I'm sorry. Will Emma come home with you?"

"Of course," she answered, but doubt was already causing her to wonder.

Would Daniel have done something to prevent her from taking Emma back with her to Idaho? *Could* he have done anything? She was Emma's mother, but that hadn't been enough six years ago. Daniel had a string of lawyers on retainer to make sure things happened the way he wanted them to. Would he have prepared the same for after his death? Or had he thought his wealth could prevent even death?

"I'll pray for you," Sara said, intruding on Olivia's thoughts.

"Thanks." She'd stopped believing in prayer. She hadn't stopped believing in God, but she'd stopped asking Him for anything. He hadn't cared when her world fell apart. She didn't imagine He would care if it should happen all over again. But Sara believed both in God and in the power of prayer, and it was easier to simply thank her than to say not to bother.

"When will you and Emma be back?"

"I don't know. I really don't know anything."

"Did you talk to Emma yourself?"

"No. Just to the counselor at the school."

"Is there anything I can do to help while you're gone?"

"Not that I can think of. Not now. But I'll let you know if there's anything that comes up."

"Be sure you do." Sara paused, then asked, "Would it be okay if I prayed for you now?"

Her pulse quickened, almost as if she were afraid. "Sorry. I can't. I need to go."

"Okay. Safe flight. Text me when you land."

"Will do."

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“I’ll be praying. I love you, Olivia.”

“You too.” She pulled the phone from her ear and ended the call.



THOMAS NELSON
Since 1798

December 10, 1931

Thursday

I'm twenty years old today. Isn't that something to write? I'm no longer teenaged. Not that it should matter. I've been married three and a half years now. I'm not a little girl. Haven't been for a long time. I've got a husband and two sweet daughters. Still, I like writing that I'm twenty. Makes me feel more grown up.

This is my first entry in this new diary. Harry gave it to me this morning for my birthday, although he probably shouldn't have spent the money on it. I plan to keep it out of reach of my girls. Gladys took my last diary (the one my mother gave me the last Christmas before I married) and scribbled on nearly every page. The pages I'd filled with writing and the blank ones too. I scolded her, but I'm not sure she understood what she did wrong. She's only two and a half.

Dottie ran a fever again today. Dr. Harper wants to put her in the hospital to do tests. She's so little. Much too young to be apart from me. She wouldn't understand the separation. Neither would Gladys. The girls are only ten months apart in age. Almost like twins, they are so inseparable.

Harry says I worry too much. About Dottie. About money. But it's hard not to worry, what with so much hardship all around us. It's been two years since that New York

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stock market crashed. I don't pretend to understand what that has to do with us here in California. The orchards need sunshine and water, and we've got those. But I guess it does matter because we've got neighbors who have given up and moved away. And because Harry worries, too, even though he tells me not to do the same.

Life doesn't always go the way we think it will. Mother told me something like that before Harry and I left Iowa. But I don't think I believed her then. I do now.



THOMAS NELSON
Since 1798

January 1, 1932

Friday

A new year.

The house is quiet. I am the only one awake at this early hour. Even Harry is still asleep. That's unusual for him. I have put the coffee on so that it will be ready when he rises. For now, I sit at the table with this new diary.

A new year. 1932. What will it bring?

When I was a girl, I thought I wanted to be an actress. I told Mother I wanted to go to New York City and appear on the Broadway stage. That was the same year a company performed *H.M.S. Pinafore* at the theater in town. Afterward I got to talk to the actress who played Little Buttercup. Oh, how I longed to be like her. To get to perform. To get to travel the country. I was determined to leave home as soon as I finished school.

But then I met Harry and everything changed.

I'm not sorry everything changed. But I miss having that dream of being on the stage. Aunt Tess liked to do dramatic readings. She performed in Grange halls and schools. Maybe I could do that, once the girls are older. Aunt Tess memorized *The Gift of the Magi*. That was my favorite of her performances. Maybe because I love the O. Henry short story so much. I have a copy that I brought with me from Iowa. I think I'll take it off the shelf and try to memorize it.

Chapter 2

Thomas Nelson
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Tyler Murphy drove his black SUV slowly along Main Street. Bethlehem Springs had retained much of its Old West appearance over the past century and a half, but it wasn't a ghost town or a tourist trap trying to entice visitors to the mountains of Idaho. It was a small community with its own schools, churches, a bank, a grocery store, a gas station, a movie theater that was open on the weekends, a café, and the municipal building that housed the courthouse, sheriff's office, and jail. Residents tended to be of the independent sort, and yet they formed close relationships at the same time.

One thing the town lacked was a motel. While his house to the north of town was undergoing some remodeling, Tyler planned to stay in one of the two bed-and-breakfasts. That would serve his purposes well since he'd heard Mary Ellen Foster loved to gossip. That might be helpful for his new assignment.

He turned right on Bear Run Road and followed it past the firehouse. A left onto Shenandoah Street took him by the three schools on his right—elementary, middle, and high—and the town park on his left. At the corner of Shenandoah and Wallula, he saw

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the sign for the Parker Bed-and-Breakfast and pulled into the gravel parking area behind the two-story house.

A woman, perhaps in her late fifties or early sixties, looked up from behind a counter when he entered through the front door. A smile instantly wreathed her face. "Hello. You must be Tyler Murphy."

"I am." He nodded.

"It's nice to meet you at last. I'm Mary Ellen Foster."

He glanced around the front parlor. While not shabby, it appeared to have been decorated at the turn of the twentieth century rather than the twenty-first.

"If you'll sign the register . . ."

He returned his attention to Mary Ellen and nodded once again, then looked down at the book that had been turned toward him. The sight of it amused him. She really did want her guests to feel transported back in time.

He scrawled his name and put down the pen.

"Remodeling is such a pain," Mary Ellen said. "When I redid the bathrooms, this place was at sixes and sevens forever. And oh my. The construction dust. It covered everything. Took me forever to get the house shipshape again."

He made a sound of agreement to let her know he listened.

"Well, I shouldn't keep you standing here. Follow me. Your room is right at the top of the stairs." As she led the way, she rattled off a few rules of the house and the window of time when breakfast was served in the mornings. "You're our only guest at the moment," she finished as she used a key to open the door.

"There's wired internet in the room," Tyler said. "Is that correct?"

"Yes. The connection's in the wall above the desk, there by the window, and the password's in that book next to the phone."

Tyler knew without looking that his mobile phone wouldn't

have any bars in this location. When the wind was right, he could get service out closer to the two-lane highway. Hopefully the new cell tower would be completed in another week or two, bringing better cellular service to folks in town. But most people in Bethlehem Springs and the surrounding area would continue to rely on landlines, Tyler included. It was one of the downsides of mountain living.

“There’s Wi-Fi in the parlor and dining room,” Mary Ellen continued. “Different password from the wired. You’ll see a sign with the password for Wi-Fi on the welcome counter.”

“Thanks. Good to know.” He dropped his bag onto the floor next to the bed, then turned and held out his hand for the key. “I appreciate your help, Mrs. Foster.”

“Mary Ellen, please. After all, we’re pretty much neighbors even if we’ve never had the chance to meet.” She placed the key on his palm. “Home-baked cookies are available in the dining room at five o’clock.”

He acknowledged her words with one more nod as he reached to close the door. A few moments later he carried his laptop to the small desk near the window and proceeded to get connected to the internet through his own secure router. While he doubted Mary Ellen knew how to access other people’s computers remotely, he took no chances. A habit born out of his profession.

A quick check of his email showed nothing that needed his immediate attention. He already knew Olivia Ward and her daughter wouldn’t land at the Boise airport until four thirty this afternoon, assuming their flights were on schedule. Adding time to collect luggage and the drive up to Bethlehem Springs, he didn’t imagine they would roll into town until six o’clock at the earliest.

Not that it mattered much to him what time they got back tonight. He wouldn’t try to arrange a “chance” meeting for another day or two. He had other work to accomplish first.

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He opened the brief on his laptop and perused the information within. It was a different kind of assignment for him, one that he'd acquired based upon his residence in Bethlehem Springs more than because of his qualifications as an investigator. He was tasked with learning more about Olivia Ward and her daughter but asked not to surveil them in the usual fashion. No taking photographs of their every move. No following around. "I don't want to violate their privacy," the client had told Tyler over the phone.

It was difficult to obtain information without prying, but he would do his best to comply with the client's request. Besides, in a small town like this, it could get back to his subject that he was asking about her. That wouldn't serve his purposes. No, he would have to proceed slowly and carefully.

He closed the brief and opened the browser to begin.

Olivia entered the parking garage and stopped, suddenly unsure where she'd parked her vehicle. A long day of travel, piled upon the stress of the past two weeks, had left her brain foggy.

"Where are we going?" Emma asked, her tone sullen.

Thankfully, her memory returned. "This way." Olivia started walking, accompanied by the sound of small wheels crossing pavement. After the luggage was loaded into the back of the Subaru, Olivia looked at her daughter. "Are you hungry?"

"No."

"Maybe you'd better rethink that. There won't be much waiting for us at home. I'll need to do some shopping."

"It isn't my home."

Olivia swallowed a reply as she moved toward the driver-side door. Even after she was settled behind the steering wheel, she had to wait for Emma. Her daughter was doing everything possible to

irritate Olivia. And it worked. She closed her eyes, remembering the nine-year-old who had clung to her so tightly, tears in her eyes. *"Don't go, Mama. Please don't go."*

The other door opened, and Emma plopped onto the seat. "I guess I could eat," she mumbled.

"We'll grab a hamburger at a drive-through."

"How long does it take to get where we're going?"

"About an hour. Don't you remember your last visit?"

"Not really."

The words hurt Olivia more than she wanted to admit. Were they true? Had Emma truly forgotten her few trips home to see her mom?

To make matters worse, when not in school, Emma was used to living in a mansion with servants, a tennis court, and a swimming pool. A far cry from the quaint log house that Olivia called home. She'd bought the cabin from Sara a few years ago and, with her dad and some of his friends doing the labor, had added a room on the ground level to use as her office and studio. Other repairs and updates had been made as she could afford them. Still, the entire house would have fit into half of Daniel's garage.

She released a breath as she blinked back tears of frustration.

It wasn't as if Emma had spent a lot of time in her dad's home either. Daniel had placed Emma at Blakely Academy, a posh boarding school, soon after their move to Florida. He'd said it was good for her, but the truth was he hadn't had the time to be bothered with parenting.

And this is the result.

Olivia started the engine and backed out of the parking spot, trying not to let bitterness overwhelm her.



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Emma stared out the window at the passing terrain, the road winding between tall mountains on both sides. Everything looked very different from Florida. It was all so . . . brown. Brown and narrow, the sun blocked out by those same tall mountains. No endless blue sky. No ocean lapping at a shore or salty breeze filling her lungs, the way it was at her dad's house.

Of course Emma remembered more about Idaho than she'd let on to her mom. She even remembered that she hadn't always hated coming for a visit. But that had been when she was a little kid. It was different now. She had a *life* in Florida. She had friends there. She even had a boyfriend. Well, she'd had one. But he'd broken up with her, saying he wasn't into long-distance relationships. So that was her mom's fault too. Mom never should have dragged Emma off to Idaho. There must have been some way she could've stayed at Blakely Academy for another few years. There must have been enough money for that. After graduation she could have made up her own mind where to live—and it wouldn't have been *here*.

But no. Others had made those decisions for Emma. Blakely Academy had more or less kicked her out, and the corporate lawyers had taken just about everything else that she'd thought of as her dad's if not hers. The house. The cars. The boat. It was all gone. Apparently there was nowhere to go except to Idaho.

She ventured a glance to the left. Her mom's gaze was locked on the road ahead. Tension made her expression hard.

She doesn't really want me. Nobody wants me.

Emma turned her eyes out the passenger window again.

I wish I'd died with Dad.



The hamburger Olivia ate in Boise felt like a rock in her stomach

by the time she drove up to her house in the pines. Turning off the car's engine, she dared a glance in her daughter's direction.

"You've gotta be kidding me." Emma leaned forward for a better look through the windshield. "You're still living *here*?"

"Home sweet home," Olivia replied, trying to keep her voice light.

"I thought you got a new place. Some place . . . better."

"I decided to buy it instead of move."

"It's a dump."

"Maybe. But it's our dump." She opened the door and got out. Emma stayed in the car.

Fine. Let her sit there as long as she wanted. All night, even. No skin off Olivia's nose, as her mother liked to say. Perhaps she should be ashamed of her attitude, but she was too tired to care at the moment.

She retrieved her own suitcase and carry-on from the back of the Outback and carried them onto the deck, setting them down near the front door. It took a few moments to retrieve the key from the pocket of her travel bag.

Heaven help me, she thought as she glanced back toward the car.

Emma hadn't budged.

Olivia turned the key in the lock, opened the door, and rolled her luggage into the house and straight to her bedroom on the main floor. Minutes later, a quick look in the kitchen told her that Kathy Dover—the only person who had a spare key to the house, so it had to be her—had brought food to restock the refrigerator and pantry. They wouldn't go hungry after all.

Bless you, my friend.

She went to the windows in the living room and opened them, letting in fresh air. The vantage point allowed her to look down at the Subaru in time to see Emma emerge, a scowl on her face. When not crying, it was the girl's most common expression.

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It was something of a shock to learn that Daniel had left this earth owning very little to pass along to his only child and heir. The house, the cars, almost everything he'd possessed, had been in the name of the corporation. Olivia didn't understand all of the legal details, but she did understand what that coven of lawyers had meant when they said there was no inheritance for Emma, that there had been no provisions made for Daniel's daughter to continue her education at Blakely Academy or in any other private institution. That he'd left her nothing at all. That there'd been nothing to leave to her. He'd tied everything up, as if to keep it to himself even after he was gone.

Olivia understood what that meant, but she didn't think Emma had grasped it yet. Emma still expected to live the way she'd been living. While her dad hadn't given her much of his time, he had given her most of what she'd wanted. The clothes. The technology. The trips. All of the trappings of wealth. Even that boarding school had made the girls who lived there feel privileged and better than others.

Had Daniel made his selfish choices because he truly didn't care about Emma or had he done it to punish Olivia, even after all these years? She hoped it was the latter. But neither she nor her daughter would ever know for certain.

She pressed her forehead against the glass. *Please don't let this hurt linger.*

The words in her head sounded suspiciously like a prayer.

January 20, 1932

Wednesday

Dottie is in the hospital. The doctors cannot decide what is wrong with her. They suspect. They discuss. They use words I don't understand. They have ruled out scarlet fever and measles. Or I think they have. But it seems to be a mystery, what is causing her high fever and other symptoms. They have isolated her from other children in the ward. She cries, and I am not allowed to go to her.

Please, God. Please help Dottie get well. I feel so helpless.



THOMAS NELSON
Since 1798

February 10, 1932

Wednesday

We brought Dottie home from the hospital today. She is so frail, a wisp of the chubby toddler she used to be. Her second birthday is a little more than two weeks away. And I am afraid to write the question that screams in my heart.
God, will she?



THOMAS NELSON
Since 1798

May 10, 1932

Tuesday

We have lost the lemon orchard. We have lost our home. What this great depression, as President Hoover has called the financial panic of the past few years, hasn't taken from us, Dottie's illness and medical expenses has. We have nothing left after paying the doctor and hospital what little we had. Nothing.

Tomorrow morning we leave California for Idaho. Harry's brother says there is a tenant farm waiting for Harry to work, with a house for us to live in. Most of what we can take with us is already piled onto our Ford. There is little room left for Harry, Gladys, Dottie, and me. Not to mention Scruffy. A neighbor offered to take the dog, but the girls were heartbroken at the idea of leaving him behind. They have already said goodbye to the horse and the two milk cows and the chickens. We couldn't make them say goodbye to Scruffy too. And so he will go into the automobile with us, and God willing, we will all survive the long journey to Idaho.

When Harry and I married, I didn't know we would soon after move to California to begin a new life. How could I know? I was only sixteen and a half and so innocent about anything beyond our small town, despite my girlish dreams of performing on the stage. What did I know of big cities and Broadway? When we arrived in California, I

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didn't know what it would mean to own a lemon orchard and a fine, big house. Again, how could I? My parents never owned their own place. It seemed impossible that we could be so blessed. Gladys was born before our first anniversary and Dottie came before our second. But Harry worked hard from dawn to dusk, and the orchards thrived, and I thought we would always have what we needed. I never imagined everything could be taken away so quickly. We were blessed.

How could we lose it all?

I have asked God to show me why these things have happened. If He answered, I have not heard or understood.

We are not alone, of course. There is hardship all around us. People are suffering, believers and unbelievers alike. As the Bible tells us, it rains on the just and the unjust.

So why does it feel as if we are the only ones?

THOMAS NELSON
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Chapter 3

This is quite a spread,” Tyler said to Mary Ellen as she set a platter of breakfast meats in the center of the table between the bowl of scrambled eggs and a basket of breads.

“I hope you find something to your liking.” The woman stepped back, her hands folded over her stomach, a pleased smile curving her lips.

He reached for the bowl. “I’m sure I’ll like it all.” He spooned fluffy eggs onto his plate. “Will you join me?”

“Heavens, no. I wouldn’t think of intruding on your morning.”

Tyler smiled as he reached for the platter of ham, bacon, and sausage. “You wouldn’t be intruding. You’d be company. I eat alone all the time at home. Wouldn’t mind someone else to talk to for a change.”

“Well . . .” She took a step closer to the chair at the opposite end of the table. “If you’re sure.”

“I’m sure.” He waited until she sat down before asking, “How long have you lived in Bethlehem Springs?”

“All my life. This house has been in my family for more than a hundred years. It was a boarding house back in the early days, then

a private home again. I decided to turn it into a bed-and-breakfast when the last of my lot headed off to college.”

He wondered if there was a Mr. Foster in the picture.

As if reading his mind, Mary Ellen said, “My husband passed on when my youngest was still in high school.”

“Sorry for your loss.”

“Thank you, but that’s been many years ago now. The sorrow is gone, and the memories are sweeter. Time has a way of doing that.”

Tyler hoped she was right about that. His sister had died several years before, and he still wrestled with his emotions, with his doubts, with the lingering guilt that maybe he could have done more to help her.

“Mr. Murphy?”

He blinked, his thoughts brought abruptly back to the present. “Sorry.”

“I asked what brought you to Bethlehem Springs.”

“I grew up in Boise,” he answered, knowing that sharing a little about himself could often garner more information from others. “And my family camped in this area a lot in the summers. My dad and I hunted up this way most autumns. When I was looking to buy a place of my own, I liked the idea of living up here. I can work remotely some of the time, and it’s not a bad commute down to Boise when it’s required.”

“What is it you do?”

“I work for a law firm.”

“You’re an attorney?”

“No. I investigate for them. Research and such. Spend a lot of time on the computer.”

“Oh.”

He decided to steer the conversation away from his occupation. “Another reason I wanted to live up here is I’m a bit of an Idaho history buff. I love learning new things about this state.”

“Ah. Well, there’s plenty of that to be found. I guess you know there’s a museum where the Washington Hotel used to be.”

“I’ve been in the museum. Not sure why, but I didn’t realize it used to be a hotel.”

“Saints alive, yes. But I think the hotel closed down around the start of the Second World War. Or maybe it was soon after the war was over. I can’t be sure. It’s been a museum as long as I can remember.”

Before the food on his plate could grow completely cold, he decided to encourage Mary Ellen to do most of the talking. The best way he knew was to ask the right question. “What’s your favorite historical location up here?”

“That’s easy. The New Hope Health Spa. Have you been up there?”

He brought a forkful of eggs to his mouth, an excuse not to answer her.

“You should go explore the site. The spa was in operation for more than fifty years. The hard financial times in the seventies spelled the death of it. A shame because it was a magnificent place.” She began to describe the setting and buildings.

Tyler wasn’t ignorant about the New Hope Health Spa. Back in college he’d done some research into it for a paper he’d written. But that wasn’t pertinent. It was current residents of the town that interested him now. Or rather, one particular resident. It was time to bring Mary Ellen’s thoughts a little closer to home.

Between bites of his breakfast, he began to ply her for information. It didn’t take much to get her talking and keep her talking. Most of what she said would mean nothing to his investigation, but he’d learned to take it all in. He never knew what might turn out to be relevant later on.



Olivia was wiping the counter with a cloth when Emma stepped into the kitchen. Her daughter wore an oversized T-shirt and a pair of baggy shorts. Her long, dark hair was disheveled, and her feet were bare despite the chill in the morning air. "What's for breakfast?" she mumbled as she pushed hair back from her face.

"I made pancakes and bacon earlier. The extra batter's in the fridge. It won't take you long to warm the skillet."

Emma stared at Olivia as if she'd sprouted another head.

There had been a time when Emma loved to help Olivia in the kitchen. The little girl would stand on a stool and complete whatever task her mama asked of her. Usually it was to stir something in a bowl. Judging by Emma's expression, those fun times had been forgotten, along with most of her childhood in Idaho.

It was difficult for Olivia not to curse Daniel Ward one more time. But what purpose would that serve? Daniel was dead, and the damage he'd desired was done. Olivia had to concentrate on how to heal the relationship with her daughter. Hating Daniel wouldn't help. In fact, it could only make things worse.

Emma sank onto a kitchen chair. Was she stubbornly refusing to make her own breakfast, or did she simply not know what to do? She suspected it was the latter.

Olivia drew a deep breath. "I'll make your pancakes. You can pour your own orange juice." She opened the refrigerator and removed both the batter and the bottle of juice, setting them on the counter before retrieving the skillet. "Do you remember where the glasses are?"

"No."

She pointed. "That cupboard there."

Emma grunted but didn't move.

Olivia pretended not to notice as she whisked the pancake batter. "I made an appointment for us to meet with the school principal later today. We must get you registered for the fall."

"I don't want to go to school in this stupid place."

"I'm afraid there isn't any other option, Emma. This is where we live. This is where you'll have to go to school."

Emma leapt up from the chair. "You don't understand anything," she shouted before fleeing the room in tears. Soon after, the door to her upstairs bedroom slammed closed.

Olivia turned off the heat beneath the skillet, then went to the table and sat in the chair Emma had occupied moments before.

What am I going to do? She covered her face with her hands.

She could sell the log house in the pines, she supposed, but she would never get enough money for it to buy a suitable place in Boise. The cost of housing in the capital city had skyrocketed in recent years. As for finding a rental, that would be next to impossible. Especially affordable housing. It simply didn't exist. She'd read that a person could spend years on a waiting list before something became available.

Here in Bethlehem Springs, Olivia's income from website design and book-publishing services was adequate. Her home was snug, the payments small, and she had a decent, reliable automobile. She lacked for nothing she truly needed, and sometimes she had enough left over for a few wants as well. Now that there were two in the household, money would have to stretch a little farther, but she could manage in Bethlehem Springs. In Boise her income wouldn't be anywhere near enough. No. Moving was not an option. Emma would have to learn to be content with things as they were, not as she wanted them to be.

Taking a deep breath, she lowered her hands to the table.

The first time Emma had spent a weekend in Olivia's home in the mountains, not long after the divorce was final, she'd loved it. Olivia had imagined the day when her daughter might live there with her. *This* was not the way she'd pictured it. The smiling,

Like the Wind

laughing, adventurous girl of nine had disappeared, leaving a beautiful but spoiled, scowling, disapproving teenager in her place.

“It wasn’t supposed to be like this.”

More than one person over the past two weeks had advised Olivia to take it one day at a time. *Don’t borrow trouble. Deal with today. Live in the present.* But what if the present was impossible?

She drew in a quick breath and released it. “I’m the mom. Emma’s still a child, even if she doesn’t think so.” She stood. “We’ll get through this.”



THOMAS NELSON
Since 1798

May 16, 1932

Monday

We are here. Harry told me when we crossed into Idaho. The countryside didn't change. It was the same on one side of the state's border as it was on the other. Still, there was something good about knowing we'd reached Idaho at last.

We were a tired and dirty group of travelers after all those days on the road, camping under the stars at night. The girls didn't seem to mind the inconveniences, although I worried how the heat and dust would affect Dottie. She still doesn't seem strong to me. I worry so about her.

And there is another worry as well. One that I haven't shared with Harry yet. One I only began to suspect in the days before we left our home. I'm pregnant. I'm sure of it now. The morning sickness has begun. Outside of when I am carrying a baby, I am never sick in that way. I suppose the baby will arrive right after Christmas or maybe in the new year.

I want to be happy about it. I love my daughters so much. When Harry and I married, we talked about the large family we wanted. But now, with things as they are, what if we fail as tenant farmers? What if we can't feed the children we have, let alone another?

Don't worry about tomorrow, Jesus told His followers. Tomorrow has enough worries of its own.

I know this is true. I know I should heed those words. But how can I keep from it?

May 19, 1932

Thursday

The house on the farm is very small. There are two bedrooms upstairs, and the stairway going up is so narrow Harry feels the need to turn his shoulders. The girls share a bed in one bedroom. Harry and I are in the other. There will be room enough for a crib if we can afford to buy one when the time comes. The one we had for the girls was left behind. There wasn't room for it. Perhaps the baby will have to make do with a dresser drawer. That is enough for many newborns.

I still haven't told Harry that I am pregnant.

We are farming forty acres. The land is in corn. Harry's father raised corn back in Iowa, so Harry isn't a stranger to it. Although that was dry farming, and here they irrigate. Across the road is a dairy farm. Holsteins. I rather like the sound of their lowing in the mornings. Scruffy feels the need to bark as the cows come in to be milked. I hope we can teach him it isn't necessary to warn us of their movements. Back home he never barked at our Jerseys, but we only had two.

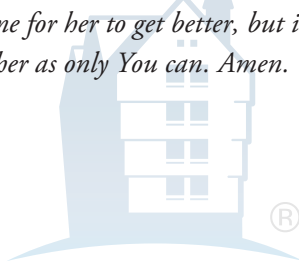
"Back home." I must stop that, mustn't I? This is home now. This little house outside the small town of Thunder Creek. This is where we live. This is where our children will grow up. God willing.

It's pretty here. There are many fruit orchards. Not

ROBIN LEE HATCHER

lemons. Lemons wouldn't grow in Idaho, Harry says. I suppose because it is too cold in the winters. But cherries and apples and apricots and peaches all grow here. Many farmers raise corn and alfalfa for hay and sugar beets. Irrigation with water from the rivers and canals has made this land come alive. Harry says the volcanic soil is rich with the nutrients required to grow healthy crops. He is hopeful. So hopeful.

Please, God, help Harry. Strengthen and encourage him. And make Dottie strong too. She remains frail. The doctor warned it would take time for her to get better, but it hurts to see her like this. Touch her as only You can. Amen.



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