

THE DAUGHTERS *of* BOSTON · 1

A large, light gray decorative frame with ornate scrollwork on the sides and a scalloped top and bottom edge, containing the title text.

A PASSION
MOST PURE

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Revell

Grand Rapids, Michigan



BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS, LATE SUMMER, 1916

Sisters are overrated, she decided. Not all of them, of course, only the beautiful ones who never let you forget it. Faith O'Connor stood on tiptoe behind the side porch, squinting through her mother's prized lilac bush. The sound of summer locusts vibrated in her ears as she gasped, inches from where her sister, Charity, stood in the arms of—

"Collin, someone might hear us," Charity whispered.

"Not if we don't talk," Collin said. His index finger stroked the cleft of her sister's chin.

Faith's body went numb. The locusts crescendoed to a frenzy in her brain. She wanted to sink into the fresh-mown lawn, but her feet rooted to the ground as firmly as the bush that hid her from view.

Three years had done nothing to diminish his effect on her. He was grinning, studying her sister through heavy lids, obviously relaxed as he leaned against the wall of their wraparound porch. His serge morning coat was draped casually over the railing. The rolled sleeves of his starched white shirt displayed muscled arms snug around Charity's waist. Faith knew all too well that his clear, gray eyes held a maddening twinkle, and she heard

the low rumble of his laughter when he pulled her sister close.

“Collin, nooooo . . .” Charity’s voice seemed to ripple with pleasure as her finger traced a suspender cinched to his pinstriped trousers.

“Charity, yes,” he whispered, closing his eyes as he bent to kiss her.

Faith stopped breathing while his lips wandered the nape of her sister’s neck.

Charity attempted a token struggle before appearing to melt against his broad chest. She closed her eyes and lifted her mouth to his, her head dropping back with the ease of oiled hinges.

Without warning, Collin straightened. A strand from his slicked-back hair tumbled across his forehead while he held her sister at arm’s length. His expression was stern, but there was mischief in his eyes. “You know, Charity, your ploy doesn’t work.” His brows lifted in reprimand, making him appear far older than his twenty-one years. He adjusted the wide, pleated collar of her pink gabardine blouse. “You’re a beautiful girl, Charity O’Connor. And I’m quite sure your doe-eyed teasing is most effective with the schoolboys that buzz around.” His fingers gently tugged at a strand of her honey-colored hair before tucking it behind her ear. “But not with me.” He lifted her chin to look up at him. The corners of his lips twitched. “I suggest you save your protest for them and this for me . . .”

His dimples deepened when his lips eased into that dangerous smile that always made Faith go weak in the knees. In one fluid turn, he backed her sister against the wall, hands firm on her shoulders as his mouth took hers. Then, in a flutter of Faith’s heart, he released her.

On cue, Charity produced a perfect pout, stamping her foot so hard it caused her black hobble skirt to flair at her

ankles. Collin laughed out loud. He kissed her on the nose, grabbed his coat, and started down the steps.

“Collin McGuire, you are so arrogant!” Charity hissed through clenched teeth.

“And you, Charity O’Connor, are so vain—a perfect match, wouldn’t you say?” He headed for the gate, whistling. Charity stormed inside and slammed the door. Collin chuckled and strolled toward the sidewalk.

Faith crept to the lilac hedge at the front of the house and peeked through its foliage. A stray ball from a rowdy game of kick ball rolled into the street. Collin darted after it just as a black Model T pattered by, blaring its horn. He jumped from its path, palming the ball with one hand. In a blink of an eye, he was swarmed by little boys, their laughter pealing through the air as Collin wrestled with one after another.

All at once he turned and loped to a massive oak where tiny, towheaded Theodore Schmidt sat propped against the gnarled tree, crutches by his side. Raucous cheers pierced the air when Collin tossed his coat on the ground and bent to carefully hoist Theo astride his broad shoulders. The little boy squealed with delight. A grin split Collin’s handsome face. He gripped Theo’s frail legs against his chest and sauntered toward home plate. Scrubbing his palms on Theo’s faded, brown knickers, Collin dug his heels in the dirt and positioned himself. The pitcher grinned and rolled the ball. The air was thick with silence. Even the locusts seemed to hush as the ball wheeled in slow motion. Faith held her breath.

Collin’s first kick sailed the ball five houses away. Champion and child went flying, the back tail of Theo’s white shirt flapping in the breeze as Collin rounded the bases. They crossed home plate to a roar of cheers and whistles and all colors of beanies fluttering in the air like confetti.

Theo's scrawny arms flapped about, his tiny face as flushed as Collin's when the two finally huffed to a stop.

Faith exhaled. *Everybody's hero, then and now.*

Collin set the child back against the tree. He squatted to speak to him briefly before tousling his hair. Rising, he snatched his coat from the ground and slung it over his shoulder. The boys groaned and begged him to stay, but Collin only waved and continued down the street, finally disappearing from view.

Faith pressed a shaky palm to her stomach. She closed her eyes and leaned against the porch trellis. *A perfectly wonderful Saturday gone to the dogs!* All she had wanted when she slipped out the back door was to escape to her favorite hideaway in the park. To write poetry and prayers to her heart's content in the warm September sun. But no! Once again, her sister had to get in the way. Faith opened her eyes and kicked at a hickory nut, sending it pinging off her mother's copper watering can.

It was bad enough Charity attracted the attention of every male within a ten-mile radius. Did she also have to be the younger sister? It was nothing short of humiliating! Faith plunked her hands on her hips and looked up. *Really, Lord, she's sixteen to my eighteen and fends off men like a mare swishing flies. Is that really necessary? She waved her hand, palm up, toward the infamous porch. And now this? Now him?*

Faith jerked her blanket from the ground and slapped it over her shoulder. She thrashed through the bushes to retrieve her journal and prayer book, then glanced at the side porch to scowl at the very spot he held her sister only moments before. The impact hit and tears pricked her eyes. She swatted at something caught in her hair. A twig with a heart-shaped leaf plummeted to the ground in perfect synchronization with her mood.

Her sister had it all—beauty, beaus, and now the affections

of Collin McGuire. Where was the justice? In Faith's world of daydreams, she had seen him first, smitten on the very day Margaret Mary O'Leary had shoved her against the school-yard fence. Helplessly she had hung, the crippled runt of the fifth-grade class, pinned by bulbous arms for the crime of refusing to turn over her mother's fresh-baked pumpkin bread.

"Drop her, Margaret Mary," the young Collin had said with authority.

The pudgy hands released their grip. "Cripple!" Margaret Mary's hateful slur had hissed in Faith's ears as she plopped to the ground, the steel braces on her thin legs clanking as she fell. The girl's sneer dissolved into a smile when she gazed up at Collin, her ample cheeks puffing into small pink balloons. "Sorry!" she said in a shy voice. With a duck of her head, she wobbled off, leaving Faith in a heap. Bits of bread, now dusted with dirt, clumped through Faith's fingers as she stared up in awe. It had been the first time he had ever really spoken to her. Never again would her little-girl heart beat the same. He was tall and fluid with confidence, with an easy smile—Robin Hood, defending the weak.

"Did she hurt you?" he had asked, extending his arm.

The gentleness in his eyes stilled her. She shook her head and opened her hand to reveal a mangled piece of bread. Without thinking, she tried to blow off the dirt but misted it with saliva instead. "I don't suppose you want some?"

The grin would be branded in her brain forever.

"That's okay, Little Bit," he said with a sparkle in his eye. "I'll just help myself to some of Margaret Mary's."

Faith's mind jolted back to the present. She blinked at the lonely porch and sniffed. Jutting her chin in the air, she flipped a russet strand of hair from her eyes. "I refuse to entertain notions of Collin McGuire," she vowed. Her

lips pressed into a tight line. *It's just a crying shame Mother hadn't found them first!*

As if shocked at her thought, the sun crept behind a billow of clouds, washing her in cool shadows. She crossed her arms and glowered at the sky. "Yes, I know, I'm supposed to be taking every thought captive. But it's not all that easy, you know."

A curl from her halfhearted chignon fluttered into her face. She reached to yank the comb from her hair, then shook her head until the wild mane tumbled down her back. Hiking her brown gingham skirt to her knees, she ignored the curious stares of children and raced down Donovan Street.

She was almost oblivious to the faint limp in her stride, the only mark of her childhood bout with polio. Some of the children still laughed at the halting way she walked and ran, but Faith didn't care. If anything, it only made her chin lift higher and her smile brighter. That slight hitch in her gait—that precious, wonderful gimp—was daily proof she had escaped paralysis or worse. She needed no reminding that countless children had perished in the Massachusetts polio epidemic of 1907, her own twin sister among them. She shuddered at the memory while her pace slowed. God had heard the prayers of her parents—or at least half. Only Faith had survived. And more than survived—she'd never need braces again.

Masking her somber mood with a smile, she flitted by the perfectly groomed three-decker homes that so typified the Southie neighborhood of Boston. She hurried beneath a canopy of trees where mothers chatted and toddlers played peekaboo around their petticoats. A tiny terrier yipped and danced in circles, coaxing a grin to her lips, while little girls played hopscotch on cobblestone streets dappled with sunlight.

In the tranquil scene, Faith saw no hint of impending

troubles, no telltale evidence of “the Great War” raging in a far-off land across the sea. But the qualms of concern were there all the same. Insidious, filtering into their lives like a patchy gloom descending at will—in hushed conversations over back fences or in distracted stares and wrinkled brows. The question was always the same: would America go to war? One by one, the neutrality of European countries toppled like dominoes. Romania, who had entered the war with the Allies, was quickly overrun by German forces. Now, within mere days, Italy had declared war on Germany as well, sucked into the vortex of hate known as World War I. Would America be next? Faith shivered at the thought and then gasped when she nearly collided with a freckled boy darting out of Hammond’s confectionary.

“Sorry, miss,” he muttered as he clutched a box of Cracker Jack against plaid knickers.

“No, it’s my fault.” She ruffled his hair. He smiled shyly, breaking through her somber mood. Flashing a gap-toothed grin, he flew off to join his friends. Faith laughed and rounded the corner, then sprinted into O’Reilly Park. She breathed in the clean, crisp air thick with the scent of honeysuckle, then exhaled and felt the tension drift from her body.

Oh, how she loved this neighborhood! This was home, her haven, her own little place of belonging. She loved everything about it, from the dirty-faced urchins lost in their games of stickball, to the revelry of neighborhood pubs whose music floated on the night breeze into the wee hours of the morning. This was the soul of Irish Boston, this south end of the city, a glorious piece of St. Patrick’s Isle in the very heart of America. And to Faith, not unlike a large Irish family—brash, bustling, and brimming with life.

Out of breath, she choked to a stop at a wall of overgrown forsythia bushes that sheltered her from view. Emptying her arms, she snapped the blanket in the air

and positioned it perfectly, then smoothed the wrinkles before tossing her journal and prayer book to the edge. She kicked off her shoes and flopped belly down, popping a pencil between her teeth. Thoughts of Collin McGuire suddenly blinked in her brain like a dozen fireflies on a summer night. Her teeth sank into the soft wood of the pencil. She tasted lead and spit.

No! I don't want to think of him. Not anymore. And especially not with her. Out of the corner of her eye, she glimpsed the fluttering pages of her prayer book, conspicuous as it lay open at the edge of the blanket. Her chest heaved a sigh. *I've gone and done it again, haven't I?* She glanced up, her lips quirking into a shaky smile. *People always seem so taken with my green eyes, but I don't suppose "green with envy" is too appealing, is it? I'll get this right, I promise. In the meantime, please forgive me?* She breathed in deeply, taking air like a parched person gulping cool water. Her final prayer drifted out on a quiet sigh. *And yes, Lord, please bless my sister.*

She reached for her journal and flipped it open, staring hard at a page she'd penned months ago. Her vision suddenly blurred, and she blinked, a tear plunking on the paper. *Collin.* She traced his name with her finger. It swam before her in a pool of ink.

Dreams. Silly, adolescent dreams, that's all they were. She had no patience for dreamers. Not anymore. After years of pining over something she could never have, she would choose to embrace the cold comfort of reality instead. No more daydreams of his smile, no more journal entries with his name, no more prayers for the impossible. She would not allow it.

She flipped the page over and closed her eyes, but it only produced a flood of memories. Memories of a gangly high school freshman, notebook in hand and heat in her cheeks, trembling on the threshold of the *St. Mary's Gazette*. She could still see him looking up from the table, a pencil in

hand and another wedged behind his ear. He had stared, assessing her over a stack of books.

“Uh . . . Mrs. Mallory said . . . well, I . . . I mean she said that I was to be on the paper, so I—”

Recognition dawned. His eyes softened and crinkled at the corners just a smidge before that slow smile eased across his lips. “Little Bit! So, you’re the young Emily Dickinson Mrs. Mallory’s been going on about. Well, I am impressed—we’ve never had a freshman on the staff before. Mrs. Mallory told me to take you under my wing.” He pushed pencil and paper across the table and grinned. “Better take notes.”

And, oh . . . she had! In the year they’d been friends, she’d taken note of that perilous smile whenever he was teasing or the fire in his eyes when somebody missed a deadline. She adored that obstinate strand of dark hair that tumbled over his forehead when he argued a point. And she loved the way his voice turned thick at the mere mention of his father. His love for his father had been fierce. He’d often spoken of the day they would finally work side by side in his father’s tiny printing business. McGuire & Son—just the sound of the words had caused his eyes to moisten.

The death of his father a week before graduation had been a shock. Collin never showed up to claim his diploma. Someone said he’d found a job at the steel mill on the east side of town. Occasionally rumors would surface. About how much he’d changed. How wild he’d become. The endless string of hearts he always managed to break. Almost as if his passion and kindness had calcified, hard and cold, like the steel he forged by day.

Faith laid her head on the blanket and squeezed her eyes shut. Despite the warmth of the sun, her day was completely and utterly overcast. How dare her sister be so familiar with the likes of Collin McGuire? How dare

he be so forward with her, in broad daylight, and right under their mother's nose? Faith was disgusted, angry, and embarrassed all at the same time. And never more jealous in all of her life.