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# Shades of Yesterday

by Leigh Michaels

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## CHAPTER ONE

THE MAIL WAS FULL of bills again. Courtney could see the windowed envelopes peering out of the mailbox at her as soon as she climbed the porch steps to her apartment. It seemed to her that the first of the month was rolling around more and more often.

She dropped her backpack full of textbooks in the front hall and flipped through the envelopes as she walked to the kitchen.

Her room-mate was sitting at the kitchen table. She was wearing a terry bathrobe and slippers, and her hair was uncombed. Courtney glanced at the clock. It was almost two in the afternoon, and Debbie was supposed to be at work in an hour.

*It is not any of your business, she reminded herself curtly as she handed over Debbie's share of the envelopes. If Debbie can't get herself to work on time, it is not your responsibility. You live with the girl because it is convenient to split expenses with a room-mate; you are not her mother.*

The young woman looked at the mail without interest. "Did you survive your exam?"

"I did very well, I think." She was a bit surprised; Debbie seldom showed any interest in Courtney's college courses.

"Good. Now that your midterms are over, I can have my friends in again. I can't imagine why you want to suffer through any more school. It's not as if you're going to get rich teaching kindergarten, that's for sure."

"No," Courtney said patiently, "but if I can hold out for one more year and get my degree, I'll have a job I love to go to every day, and that's worth a lot more than money."

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“By the time you finish, you’ll be the oldest kindergarten teacher in the whole city of Green Bay.”

Courtney reached for a kitchen knife and began slitting envelopes. The first one she opened was the electricity bill, and she winced when she saw the balance. “Debbie, have you had any luck yet in finding someone to share the apartment with us?”

Debbie shook her head and started to file her fingernails.

“I haven’t, either,” Courtney said. “And we’re going to have to do something about it soon. It’s been three months since Paula moved out, and paying half the bills instead of a third is putting a terrible dent in my bank balance.” It seemed impossible, she thought, that she could spend in a year what it had taken four years to save—without indulging in a single luxury.

“Courtney, I’ve been meaning to talk to you...”

*What now?* Courtney wondered. From the airy tone in Debbie’s voice, it couldn’t be good news. In the year she had shared an apartment with the girl, she had learned to recognize danger.

“I can’t pay my share of the bills this month. My expenses have been awfully heavy, and I haven’t got a dime to my name.” Debbie was paying careful attention to her index fingernail.

“The rent is due next week,” Courtney reminded.

“Would you rather I had waited till next week to tell you?”

Courtney swallowed her anger and asked bluntly, “Where are you planning to move to?”

Debbie looked startled. “You can’t mean you’d throw me out? You know how much I hate the idea of living with my parents.”

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“It’s not a case of me throwing you out, Deb. If we can’t pay the rent, neither one of us can live here.”

Debbie looked at her in silence for a long moment. “All right, if you’re going to be such a stickler about it, I’ll be out as soon as I can get someone to help me move. But I think it’s ridiculous. If you’d just take care of the rent this month, I’ll pay you back when I get my next check.”

For an instant, Courtney wavered. Everyone needed a helping hand sometimes, she thought. And at least if Debbie stayed, she wouldn’t have the whole weight of the bills to pay—

*Don’t be an idiot*, she told herself firmly. Debbie had asked for a loan before, and Courtney had never seen her money again. If she gave in now, she would end up paying all her own bills and Debbie’s as well.

She shook her head. “Sorry,” she said. But I don’t have any money to spare right now, either.”

“I don’t see why you’re being such a snip about it. You’ll have to pay all the rent anyway, unless you can find someone to move in by next week. But since you’re being difficult, I’ll have my stuff out as soon as I can.” Debbie pushed her chair back. “I’d better get ready for work. I don’t dare be late again, or McGuire will have my head.”

“Don’t forget,” Courtney said crisply, “that moving doesn’t get you out of your half of the bills for this month. You did help use the electricity and water, you know.”

“Don’t you trust me?” Debbie flared.

*Not as far as I can throw you*, Courtney thought.

She finished opening the stack of envelopes and was sitting with her elbows on the table, contemplating what seemed to be a staggering total, when Debbie

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came back. She was wearing jeans and the heavy shoes that her factory job required, but her make-up was perfectly applied and her hair looked as if she was on her way to a party. She paused in the doorway and said, with an air of helpfulness, “McGuire keeps asking me how you’re doing, Courtney. I’m sure he’d find you a job if you want to come back to the plant. He is a supervisor, after all, and I think he’s sweet on you.” She studied Courtney with frank eyes, and added, “Though I must admit I can’t see why. You’d be attractive enough, if you took some pains with yourself, learned to use make-up, put a rinse on your hair to cover up those reddish streaks—”

“Don’t let me keep you from getting to work on time,” Courtney said coolly, without looking up.

“I’m only trying to help,” Debbie said with a shrug. The front door banged behind her, and Courtney sank into her chair with a burst of bitter, helpless laughter.

The really awful thing, she told herself, was that Debbie had no idea how impossible she was, how childish, how immature. It would be a relief not to have to live with the girl any more, not to see her belongings piled in the living room, her dirty dishes stacked in the kitchen, her clothes draped over every surface. It was almost worth the additional costs.

“Almost,” Courtney reminded herself dryly. The fact was she had to find either a new room-mate or another source of income, or her carefully planned budget was going to go down the drain, and the dream that had kept her going for the past ten years would vanish into the mists of might-have-been.

“It’s not fair,” she muttered. “I’ve worked so hard, and so long, and now that I’m within shouting distance of my goal, this happens.”

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The apartment seemed suddenly small and stuffy, and she felt that if she stayed there an instant longer she would smother. She left the bills scattered on the table and went outside.

The whispery breeze of an Indian summer day rattled the drying leaves on birch trees. Courtney didn't pause at the bus stop; she had no destination in mind, only a need to work off her frustration. So she walked, her heels clicking against the concrete, her eyes fixed on the pavement her shoulders hunched, trying to see a way out of this predicament.

Finding another roommate would take time, as she had already learned to her regret. Now, she really needed two roommates—and there was no guarantee of how long it would take to find them. In the mean time, she would be spending money she could ill afford—money she had intended to live on for the next year.

If she kept the apartment by herself, she would have to find a job, that was certain. Debbie had said she could go back to work at the factory, that McGuire would find her a place. Courtney shivered. She had been so happy to leave the hot, oily stink of the assembly line that she had celebrated for a week; and the very idea of going back made her want to cry.

She had worked at the factory only because it was the best-paying job she could find, and she had lived frugally and pinched every penny, looking forward to the day when she had enough money put away to support herself while she finished college. To have to go back to it now, when she was so close to her goal—

“You survived it before,” she reminded herself. “And you can do it again.”

But she couldn't hold down a full-time job and take the heavy load of classes that she needed in order to complete her degree in one more year. She would have to go back to the old schedule of a class or two a term, the way she had

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started out. Her sensitive soul rebelled. At that rate, it could take years, and she was already twenty-six.

“You’ll be the oldest kindergarten teacher in Green Bay,” Debbie had said with thoughtless cruelty. Right now, it seemed that Debbie was right. Surely, there must be another way. If she could find someone to give her a loan—but most of her friends were on tight budgets too.

She realized suddenly that she’d come out without her jacket. The October days were getting crisp, and the breeze that had been so pleasant when she first stepped outside now seemed to hint of winter lurking just out of sight. It seemed to slice through the loose knit of her sweater and chop her flesh into shivering splinters.

She had walked a long way. Several miles, she realized in astonishment as she paused to look around; the soles of her feet burned as if in confirmation. And she was cold because she had just crossed the river that split the city of Green Bay into halves. The breeze was stronger and colder here, a northerly wind that was coming in from the bay.

There was a little coffee shop on the corner. She turned in and found a dim booth in the back corner. “A cup of tea,” she told the waitress absently, and was startled at what she had said. Tea had been her mother’s cure for all evils. “Whatever the problem is,” she remembered her mother saying, “you can think about it better after you’ve had a cup of tea.”

Courtney grinned wryly. *Well, Laura Martin, she thought, come up with the answer to this one, if you can. A cup of tea isn’t going to make a whole lot of difference, except that I’ll have a few cents less in my pocket after I’ve finished drinking it.*

She sipped the scalding liquid, musing about how strange it was that childhood memories came back so strongly in times of trouble. She thought of her

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mother often, of course, the dark-haired, lovely woman Laura Martin had been in her daughter's childhood years. Her father Courtney tried not to think of at all; it hurt too much to remember him.

She tried to laugh at her own foolishness. *If I'd planned things well, she thought, I would have chosen parents who had bunches of wealthy friends. Then I wouldn't have this problem. I could just call on a few people who owed them favors and in a matter of minutes I'd have a loan—*

But there had been a person who fitted into that category, she reminded herself. Funny that she had forgotten all about him, till just now.

A voice seemed to echo in her mind, the thin, reedy voice of Laura Martin just a couple of days before she had died...

"He owes your father and me a favor," she had said, her words sounding almost desperate in the starkness of the hospital room. "It happened years ago. The Winslows had money. It's the only thing I can give you, Courtney, the only thing I can leave to you—"

Courtney had hushed her, frightened by the woman's tenacity and the toll that it was taking on her limited strength. "I don't need anything," she had said.

"But if you ever do," Laura had insisted, "go to Nate. Go to Nate Winslow, and tell him who you are."

"Nate Winslow," Courtney said thoughtfully, staring into her teacup. She had almost forgotten what her mother had said, in the anxiety of those last few days in the hospital, and she had certainly never tried to contact him, not even when her mother had died. *Perhaps I should have, she thought. I wonder if he would have wanted to know she was gone...*

On a sudden whim, she beckoned to the waitress who had brought her tea. "Do you have a telephone directory?"

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It wasn't exactly a common name, she thought. If he still lived in Green Bay, it shouldn't be hard to find him. Not that she would seek him out, she told herself, but she was curious.

There was only one Nathan Winslow. He was a lawyer, the listing said; it gave an address in downtown Green Bay, in one of the newer, more expensive buildings along the Fox River. If that was any indication, Courtney thought, Nate Winslow must still have money. She let the directory close. It was a little comfort, she thought, to know that there was someone out there who thought of her as Ted and Laura's daughter. It seemed to bring them back within her grasp...

It was her father's voice that came out of the dim reaches of memory this time. Her father, furious and red-faced and shouting at Laura, which he never, ever did.

"What do you mean, suggesting I go talk to Nate Winslow? How dare you suggest that I beg him for help?"

"It wouldn't exactly be begging," Laura had said quietly. "He did offer to help us once. Perhaps he feels he owes us something."

"I take care of my own," Ted Martin had shouted. "And I don't need any help from that shyster!"

Courtney had tuned out the rest. The words he used had meant nothing to her; she had been only a child, and it was the first time she had ever heard her father swear. After that, she never heard Nate Winslow's name again, until the day years later in Laura's hospital room, long after Ted had died.

She had thought about it sometimes, for she had been a solitary child, and she loved a mystery. She had turned it over in her mind and constructed a dozen different reasons for her father's unaccountable anger, each longer and more

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complicated than the last. Then, with the possibilities finally exhausted, she had put Nate Winslow from her mind.

She smiled a little, remembering in faded snatches the fantasies she had constructed. In her favorite one, Nate Winslow had been a cackling old man who had tried to snatch an infant Courtney from her parents' arms so he could turn her over to a royal family who wanted to make her a princess. She had loved that fantasy; she had been deliciously torn between loyalty to her parents and the wistful longing to be someone important.

“What an imagination,” she muttered.

Now, with the objectivity of adulthood, she knew that the quarrel had had nothing to do with her. Perhaps Nate Winslow had simply got the best of her father in a business deal. She understood Ted Martin well enough to know that he had been quite capable of holding a grudge over something like that, whether or not there had been any reason to think himself cheated.

In any case, whatever had happened, it didn't matter to her. Ted Martin was long gone, and Courtney needed help. If this was the same Nate Winslow, and if he really had felt that he owed her parents a favor all those long years ago, perhaps he would be willing to make her a loan now.

Astonished at her own temerity, she flicked through the pages of the telephone directory again and scribbled the address into her pocket notebook. The office was only a few blocks away, and it was still mid-afternoon. If she was lucky, Nate Winslow would be in his office.

She didn't stop to think that she was hardly dressed for an interview with a prominent lawyer until she was actually inside the office suite. Then she paused, her scuffed running shoes sinking into what felt like a foot- thick royal blue carpet. She stood holding the heavy walnut door, so perfectly balanced on its hinges that it

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could be pushed open with a single finger, and wished that there was a gracious way for her to back out.

The receptionist had just pushed a button on her telephone console. “Winslow, Anderson, Percy, and McLean,” she said. “One moment, please; I’ll connect you with his secretary.” Her voice didn’t betray surprise, but her eyebrows had shot up at the sight of Courtney.

*Apparently, Courtney thought wryly, Nate Winslow doesn’t get many clients who came in wearing jeans.*

The whole office breathed quietly of money, from the polished wood of the receptionist’s desk to the subtle art on the walls. There were no clients waiting in the comfortable chairs, but Courtney didn’t doubt that there was no shortage of people willing to pay for the services to be found here.

A door opened across the room, and a couple came out. Courtney glanced up and half nodded, her judgment confirmed. That pair would have no trouble paying for legal counsel, she thought. The woman’s understated make-up only emphasized the gorgeous lines of her triangular face under the coal-black hair, and there was a hint of pearls beneath the deceptively simple neckline of her, silk blouse. The brown-haired man beside her wasn’t handsome, but he had the self-assured bearing that said he was something to be reckoned with. He had tossed a raincoat across his arm; he must have money, Courtney thought, or he wouldn’t treat an expensive coat with quite that casual attitude. And his suit was a sedate navy pinstripe that certainly hadn’t come off the rack.

She could almost have laughed at herself. *As if I’m an expert on people with money, she jeered.*

“May I help you?” There was an undertone that suggested the receptionist’s doubt that Courtney was in the right place.

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“I’d like to see Mr. Nathan Winslow, please. I don’t have an appointment,” she said, before the receptionist could ask.

The woman blinked, and Courtney could almost see the effort required to summon up the necessary tact to dismiss this upstart, who dared invade the sacred premises of Winslow, Anderson, Percy, and McLean without an appointment. “I’m afraid Mr. Winslow is not in the office today.”

*I shouldn’t be disappointed,* Courtney thought. *It was ridiculous to assume I could walk straight in to talk to him.* “Then I’d like to make an appointment,” she said. “Does he have an opening tomorrow?”

The receptionist’s eyes flicked over Courtney from head to foot. “I really don’t think—” she began.

“Tell me,” Courtney said, with only a trace of sarcasm, “does Mr. Winslow know that you pre-select his clients?”

The low-voiced conversation between the couple crossing the reception room died, and the man paused. “Are you having a problem, Dorothy?” he asked.

“Not really, sir, but—” The receptionist sighed. “The young lady wants to see Mr. Nathan.”

The man turned towards Courtney. “Mr. Winslow is retired from the firm. He no longer sees clients at all.”

“But his name is still on the door.”

“It’s standard policy. Perhaps one of the other attorneys could help you.” The expression in his brown eyes made it clear that he doubted she could afford the service. He reached for the woman’s elbow.

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Courtney took a step towards him. “Then could you tell me how I could contact Mr. Winslow? It’s not business, actually, I’m the daughter of an old acquaintance of his.”

He looked at her closely, then, as if searching her face for some clue. “A female acquaintance, no doubt,” he said dryly, and took another step towards the door.

Courtney was puzzled. “Well, yes. My mother was Laura Martin,” she said uncertainly. What difference could it possibly make to this man? she wondered.

He paused in mid-stride. Then, very quietly, he said, “I’ll have to take care of this, Veronica. Will you wait for me?”

Courtney thought, *Veronica—I’ll bet nobody dares to call her Ronnie!* She caught the tiny flash of sulkiness on the woman’s face; she didn’t think the young man did.

“If you’ll come into my office?” he was saying. He led her through a small anteroom where a secretary looked up with surprise, and into a large office paneled in golden oak and lined with law books, with a window that gave a glimpse of the bay. There was no plaque on the door. *Of course not*, Courtney thought. *We’re far too high-class for something as gauche as engraved brass name-plates. I wonder if he’s Anderson, Percy, or McLean. He doesn’t look old enough to be a full partner, though—don’t lawyers always have grey hair before they reach that pinnacle of success?*

He gestured to a chair, tossed his raincoat over a table, and sat down on the corner of a well-polished desk. “So you’re Ted Martin’s daughter? I beg your pardon; I thought you might be—someone else.”

He didn’t sound sorry, she thought.

“Miss Martin—or are you married?”

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She shook her head. He looked as if that was the answer he had expected, she thought, and a little flicker of irritation kindled deep inside her. *I might not be as elegantly dressed as the woman out there, she thought, but how dare he assume that I couldn't possibly be as attractive to a man as she is?*

“What is your business with Mr. Winslow?”

He seemed irritated, she thought. That made them even; the very fact that he'd asked the question made her angry. But there was no point in alienating him, so she chose her words carefully. “I wanted to tell him—well, my mother is dead, and she told me that I should talk to Mr. Winslow.”

“I am not surprised.” He stood up abruptly. “I will certainly give Nate the message, Miss Martin, but in all honesty I must warn you that you aren't likely to receive an invitation to visit him. He rarely sees anyone these days.”

“But I just wanted to—”

“If he wishes to see you, I'll be in touch.”

He had dismissed her as if she were a bothersome child, Courtney fumed, and he was standing at the door, his hand on the knob, obviously waiting for her to leave. She reluctantly got to her feet, and then paused. She smiled at him as sweetly as she could manage, and said, “Haven't you overlooked something? You can hardly get in touch when you haven't even got my full name and phone number.” The consternation in his eyes told her that he hadn't intended to say anything to Nate Winslow at all. She scribbled the information on a page torn from her pocket notebook, thrust it at him and walked out with her head high.

Veronica was sitting on a leather couch reading a magazine; her dark eyes glowed maliciously bright. “Well, that was quick,” Courtney heard her say to the young man. “You're so wonderful at handling troublesome people.”

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“Goodnight, Mr. Jefferson,” the receptionist said, with a note of relief in her voice, just as the heavy door closed behind Courtney.

Courtney stood for a long moment in the plaza outside. The wind from the bay was growing even colder, but she didn’t feel it whipping through her hair. The weak sunlight of an autumn afternoon trickled between the clouds and sparkled on the river. Young Mr. Jefferson, she thought, had called it a day rather early. She supposed that Veronica’s presence was ample explanation for that.

So Mr. Jefferson didn’t want her bothering Nate Winslow, she thought. He certainly didn’t intend to pass on that bit of paper; he had probably already thrown it away. But why? What harm could it do if she talked to Nate Winslow? And if she asked him a favor -- well, the man could say no, couldn’t he?

The young lawyer must have confused her with someone else, she thought, someone who had caused trouble in the past. Yet, she reminded herself, he had known her father’s name. And she was positive she hadn’t told him that.

She straightened her shoulders and headed for the nearest branch of the public library. There was more than one way to find Nate Winslow, and she wasn’t about to stop looking because of one lawyer.

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DUSK WAS SETTling over the city when she swung off the bus and headed west into one of the best residential neighborhoods in Green Bay. Astor Park was no longer the most fashionable place to live, but old money had built these houses, which were set far back from wide avenues on lawns blanketed in falling leaves.

The house she sought was almost dark. It was built mostly of stone, and it looked solid, but not as large as some of its neighbors. Dim lamps glowed on the gate- posts, and a matching pair lit the front entrance, refracting off the leaded glass panels that surrounded the massive front door. But the windows were dim,

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and she was unsure if she was seeing lights from within, or merely the last stray beams of sunlight reflecting at unexpected angles. At the last moment, she almost changed her mind and turned back towards the bus stop.

“What have you got to lose?” she scolded herself finally. “Maybe you’ll be doing the man a favor by telling him what his young partner is saying about him.” Before she could lose her nerve, she pressed hard on the doorbell.

The door swung open silently. She would not have been surprised if it had creaked eerily, like a haunted house. The man who stood inside was white-haired, expressionless. He looked down his nose at her without a word.

Courtney said, her voice a little shaky, “I’d like to see Nathan Winslow, please.”

The man bowed a little, stiffly. “Mr. Winslow does not see chance visitors, madam.”

*Well*, Courtney thought, *that certainly puts me in my place*. “I’m not exactly a chance visitor—”

“Are you an invited guest?”

“Well, when you put it that way, no. But I’m the daughter of an old friend of his.” She remembered the response the young lawyer had made to that statement, and how it seemed to have won her a bit of credibility and added firmly, “A woman friend.”

The man’s eyebrows went up a hair, but he made no comment. “Your name, miss?”

She told him. Before she could add her mother’s name, the door shut abruptly in her face. “Well!” she said. “I always thought a properly trained butler invited a guest to wait in the hall while he asked the master of the house if he was at home.”

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She hugged her arms around her and wondered what to do next.

The door opened, with less dignity this time, and a much younger man said, “If you’ll step inside for a moment—Miss Martin, is it?”

Courtney did. The hallway was warm, and she wasn’t about to turn down any opportunity to plead her case. But once inside, she looked the young man over and said, “You can’t be Nate Winslow.”

He smiled a little. “No, indeed, Miss Martin. I’m Mr. Winslow’s nurse. He simply doesn’t see guests any more, you understand, because his health does not permit.”

*Is the man senile or something?* Courtney wondered. *That would explain why no one wants me to see him.*

The butler crossed the hallway silent-footed, carrying a silver tray that held a cut-crystal decanter and a single glass, and slipped through the half-open door of a large room. Courtney could get only a glimpse, but that was enough; there was a polished brass chandelier in there, with the bulbs turned down to a mere glow, and a rug in the old, dim, jewel colors of a real Persian carpet. She turned back to the nurse.

She thought, *Do they let senile people drink whisky? Surely not.* “I’m certain he would be very disappointed at not seeing me,” she said finally. “My mother was a friend of his.”

The butler came out and crossed the hall again, without the decanter and tray.

“Her name was Laura Martin. I’m sure if you tell Mr. Winslow that Courtney Martin would like to see him—”

The male nurse looked sympathetic. “I am sorry,” he said again. “But I’m afraid—”

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An odd humming noise filled the hallway, seeming to echo off the vaulted ceiling. Courtney didn't recognize the sound. The nurse darted an uneasy glance past her, towards the half-open doorway.

A voice spoke behind her. It was low and rusty, with a harsh undertone. "Why don't you tell him yourself?"

Courtney jumped and turned. For an instant, she thought the voice had come from nowhere; then her eyes dropped to a figure in a motorized wheelchair. The old man in the chair pushed a control, and the humming filled the hallway again as the chair advanced across the marble floor.

Courtney was speechless. *I shouldn't be shocked*, she told herself. *They said he was ill*. But it wasn't just the wheelchair that surprised her. It was the way his face was lined, like a relief map of rugged mountain terrain. He looked as if he had lived a hundred years and borne a great deal of pain. In contrast, his shoulders were broad and his arms looked powerful under the dark blue velvet of his smoking jacket. But she kept coming back to his face, and the eyes peering out, bright and curious, from the deep lines.

*He looks like the wreckage of what was once a magnificent human being*, she thought.

"So you're Laura's little girl," the man said. He bit down on the stub of his cigar as if he'd like to chew it into fragments.

Courtney nodded. She couldn't say anything.

His eyes were distant, and his voice had a husky edge as he said, "I wondered if you wouldn't turn up some day."

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