

*Even Such Is Time*

By Elizabeth Bartel

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*In bringing this book to birth, I am indebted and everlastingly grateful to my editor, Wendy Dyck for challenging me to write a truer, finer story; to all my friends and especially the women of the Comox Valley's University Women's Book Club who read and cheered me on. I thank my children for allowing me to be their mother, and lastly, I dedicate this book to my husband Dennis, who believed in me and did not leave during some trying times.*



Even such is time, which takes in trust  
Our youth, our joys and all we have,  
And pays us but with age and dust,  
Who in the dark and silent grave,  
When we have wandered all our ways,  
Shuts up the story of our days;  
And from which earth and grave and dust  
The Lord shall raise me up I trust.

*Sir Walter Raleigh*



## *Prologue*

Here she comes. Lily. A figure in dark green - or is it black? Slipping and sliding in the icy ruts of the driveway, the prairie sky behind her streaked rose and violet with the morning rays of the sun. On each side of her, young Manitoba maples march along like scrawny sentinels, bare branches laced against the April sky.

Lily. I get up from my chair behind the Boston fern and go to the big doors, ready to push the buzzer and let her in. Through the glass she smiles with those perfect teeth all the young people seem to have nowadays. This is not quite the Lily I remember, of course - a small girl with her father's brown eyes and her mother's high cheekbones. Last night her voice on the telephone had sounded quite grown up.

"Anna? Anna Heppner?"

What to say? It was a voice I couldn't place, smooth and professional with a big city confidence.

"So who is this?" I finally asked, clearing my throat, the black receiver clutched tightly against my ear. I thought it might be a pollster doing a survey. Last week there was one, asking endless questions - what kind of cake-mix did I use? Had I used cake-mix in the last week? The last month? The last year? I finally hung up on that girl. It's not polite but I lost patience. After all, I'm eighty years old and should be allowed a few lapses.

"Is this Anna Heppner?" The voice was more urgent.

"I was Anna Heppner before I married. Who is this?"

A crank phone call, I thought, wait until I tell Conrad.

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Even though he is retired and somewhat forgetful, my brother would put a stop to this. I would tell him tomorrow when he came for his daily visit.

"My name is Lily Heppner," she had said slowly as if I might not understand her. Deaf and dumb besides old, she probably thought.

"I'm Lily. Remember now?" There was a little laugh. "I believe I'm related to you."

"Oh, oh, yes," I stuttered. "Lily? Felix's Lily? Of course, that Lily...how are you? It's been some time. Where are you calling from? It's nice to hear - how is Alice, your mother?" Suddenly I was breathless. My heart fluttered in my throat. I had to sit down.

"I've come to see my father's grave," she said abruptly. "I've come to find out, to ask...what really happened, you know about the accident?" The voice of the woman on the telephone paused before going on uncertainly. "My mother gave me your address, your phone number. She says you always kept a journal." Her voice rose at the end of the sentence so that it was half question, half statement. I smiled grimly into the telephone. My journal. Why had I ever confided that to Alice? Not even Conrad knew I kept a journal.

It was my father who had encouraged me. "Someday you will be glad," he said. "You will surprise yourself." That had been years ago, the first one begun when I was a bare fifteen and left home to work for the Strachans in the city. Now the journals, one for each year, gather dust. They are stacked on a shelf of the linen closet in this retirement home where I now live.

I will have to read through them before I let anyone see, especially Lily. I remember only my rage and grief. Those memories pierce me still. What have I written about that terrible quarrel between my brothers? And what of the accident itself and after that? Can I bear to go over all those old wounds? What has Alice told Lily, who will want to know everything? She is my dead brother's daughter after all, and has a right to know.

But she has come, sweet Lily, after these many years, come to the place where she was born, the daughter I never had. Lily, Felix's Lily. I pressed the buzzer to let her in.

I had always hoped, always wondered, if anyone would come.