



**Loving**

**Danielle Steel**

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# ***LOVING***

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*Danielle Steel*

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v3.1

*TO BEATRIX*

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May you always be  
proud to be  
yourself,  
because you  
happen to be  
the loveliest lady  
I know.

With all my love,  
Mommy

---

*Ever hopeful,  
filled with dreams,  
bright new,  
brand-new  
hopeful schemes,  
pastel shades  
and Wedgwood skies,  
first light  
of loving  
in your eyes,  
soon to dim  
and then you flee,  
leaving me  
alone  
with me,  
the things I fear,  
the things you said  
burning rivers  
in my head,  
bereft of all  
we shared,  
my soul  
so old,  
so young,  
so bare,  
afraid of you,  
of me,  
of life,  
of men ...  
until  
the bright new  
dreams  
begin again.  
the landscape never  
quite the same,  
eventually  
a different game,  
aware at last  
of what I know,  
and think,  
and am,  
and feel,  
the gift of love  
at*



*long*  
*last*  
*real.*

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DANIELLE STEEL

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*“Real isn’t how you are made,” said the Skin Horse. “It’s a thing that happens to you. When a child loves you for a long, long time, not just to play with, but REALLY loves you, then you become Real.”*

*“Does it hurt?” asked the Rabbit.*

*“Sometimes,” said the Skin Horse, for he was always truthful. “When you are Real you don’t mind being hurt.”*

*“Does it happen all at once, like being wound up,” he asked, “or bit by bit?”*

*“It doesn’t happen all at once,” said the Skin Horse. “You become. It takes a long time. That’s why it doesn’t often happen to people who break easily, or have sharp edges, or who have to be carefully kept. Generally, by the time you are Real, most of your hair has been loved off, and your eyes drop out and you get loose in the joints and very shabby. But these things don’t matter at all because once you are Real you can’t be ugly, except to people who don’t understand ... but once you are Real you can’t become unreal again. It lasts for always.”*

from “The Velveteen Rabbit”  
by Margery Williams

Bettina Daniels looked around the pink marble bathroom with a sigh and a smile. She had exactly half an hour. She was making remarkable time. Usually she had much less time which to make the transition from girl, student, and ordinary mortal to bird of paradise and hostess extraordinaire. But it was a metamorphosis she was thoroughly used to making. For fifteen years she had been her father's aide-de-camp, going everywhere with him, fielding off reporters, taking telephone messages from his girl friends, even sitting backstage to lend him support as he did late-night talk shows to promote his latest book. He scarcely needed to make the effort to do the promotions. His last seven books had automatically spiraled up *The New York Times* Bestseller List, but still, promotion was something one did. Besides which, he loved it. He loved the preening and parading, the food for his ego, and the women who found him irresistible, confusing him with the heroes in his books.

It was easy to confuse Justin Daniels with the hero in a novel. In some ways Bettina herself had done it for years. He was so blatantly beautiful, so unfailingly charming, so witty, so funny, so delightful to be with. Sometimes it was difficult to remember how selfish, how egotistical, how ruthless he could also be. But Bettina knew both sides of the man, and she loved him anyway.

He had been her hero, her companion, and her best friend for years. And she knew him well. She knew all the flaws and the foibles, all the sins and fears, but she knew too the beauty of the man, the brilliance, the gentleness of his soul, and she loved him with every ounce of her being, and knew that she always would. He had failed her and hurt her, he had forgotten to be at school for almost every important moment, had never shown up for a race or a play. He had assured her that young people were boring, and dragged her along with his friends instead. He had hurt her over the years, mainly in the pursuit of his own shimmering dreams. It never occurred to him that she had a right to a childhood, and picnics and beaches, birthday parties, and afternoons in the park. Her picnics were at the Ritz or the Plaza Athénée in Paris, her beaches were South Hampton and Deauville, her birthday parties were with his friends at 21 in New York or the Bistro in Beverly Hills; and rather than afternoons in the park he would insist she accompany him on the yacht cruises he was constantly being invited to share. Hers was hardly a life to be pitied, and yet Justin's trusted friends often reproached him for how he brought up his child, what he had deprived her of, and how lonely it was to tag along constantly with a bachelor father eternally on the prowl. It was remarkable that in some ways even at nineteen she was still so youthful, still so innocent with those enormous emerald eyes; yet there was the wisdom of the ages lurking there too. Not because of what she had done, but rather because of what she had seen. At nineteen she was still in some ways a baby, and in other ways she had seen an opulence, a decadence, an existence that few men or women twice her age had ever seen.

Her mother had died of leukemia shortly after Bettina's fourth birthday and was nothing more than a face in a portrait on the dining room wall, a laughing smile with huge blue eyes and blond hair. There was something of Tatianna Daniels in her daughter, but not much.

Bettina looked like neither Tatianna nor Justin. She looked mainly like herself. Her father's striking black hair and green eyes were partly passed down to his daughter, whose green eyes were not wholly unlike his. However her hair was rich auburn, the color of very old, very fine cognac. His tall angular frame was in sharp contrast to Bettina's, which was narrow, minute, almost elfin in its delicate proportions. It served to give her an aura of fragility as she brushed the auburn hair into a halo of soft curls, as she did now, looking at her watch once again.

Bettina made a rapid calculation. Twenty minutes. She would be on time. She sank rapidly into the steaming water in the tub and sat there for a moment, trying to unwind as she watched the snow falling outside. It was November, and this was the first snow.

It was also their first party of the "season," and for that reason it had to be a success. And it would be. She would see to that too. She mentally checked over the guest list again, wondering if there were some who would fail to arrive because of the snow. But she thought it unlikely. Her father's parties were too celebrated, the invitations awaited too breathlessly for anyone to want to miss the occasion or risk not being invited again. Parties were an essential part of the life of Justin Daniels. When he was between books, he gave them at least once a week. And they were noteworthy for the people who came and the costumes they wore, the incidents that happened, the deals that were made. But above all they were special, and an evening at the Danielses' was like a visit to a faraway, once-dreamed-of land.

The parties were all spectacular. The luxurious surroundings sparkled in seventeenth-century splendor, as butlers hovered and musicians played. Bettina, as hostess, floated magically between groups, always seemed to be everywhere that she was wanted or needed. She was a truly haunting creature; elusive, beautiful, and very, very rare. The only one who did not fully realize how remarkable she was, was her father, who thought every young woman was naturally as gracious as Bettina. His casual acceptance of her was something that had long since irritated his closest friend. Ivo Stewart adored Justin Daniels, but it had irked him for years that Justin never saw what was happening to Bettina, never understood how she worshiped him, and how much his attention and praise meant to her. Justin would only laugh when Ivo made comments, which he did frequently, shaking his head and waving his well-manicured hand at his friend.

"Don't be ridiculous. She loves what she does for me. She enjoys it. Running the parties, going to shows with me, seeing interesting people. She'd be embarrassed if I made a point of telling her how I appreciate what she does. She knows I do. Who wouldn't? She does a marvelous job."

"Then you should tell her that. Good God, man, she's your secretary, your housekeeper, your publicity girl—she does everything a wife would do and more."

"And better!" Justin pointed out as he laughed.

"I'm serious." Ivo looked stern.

"I know you are. Too much so. You worry too much about the girl." Ivo hadn't dared to tell Justin that if he didn't worry about her, he wasn't sure if Justin would himself.

Justin had an easy, cavalier way about him, in sharp contrast to Ivo's more serious view of the world. But that was also the nature of Ivo's business, as publisher of one of the world's largest newspapers, the *New York Mail*. He was also older than Justin, and not a young man. He had lost one wife, divorced another, and purposely never had children. He felt it was

unfair to bring children into such a difficult world. And at sixty-two he did not regret the decision ... except when he saw Bettina. Then something seemed always to melt in his heart. Sometimes seeing Bettina, he wondered if remaining childless had been a mistake. But it didn't matter now. It was too late to think about children, and he was happy. In his own way he was as free as Justin Daniels.

Together, the two men went to concerts, operas, parties. They went to London for an occasional weekend, met in the South of France for a few weeks in July, and shared a remarkable number of illustrious friends. It was one of those solid friendships that forgive almost all sins and allows the free expression of disapproval, as well as delight, which was why Ivo was so open in voicing his opinions of Justin's behavior with his child. Recently the subject had come up at lunch at La Côte Basque.

Ivo had chided Justin, "If I were in her shoes, old boy, I'd walk out on you. What's she getting from you?"

"Servants, comfort, trips, fascinating people, a twenty-thousand-dollar wardrobe." Justin prepared to go on, but Ivo cut him off.

"So what? Do you think she really gives a damn? For chrissake, Justin, look at the girl—she's lovely, but half the time she's in another world, dreaming, thinking, writing. Do you really think she gives a damn about all the showy bullshit that means so much to you?"

"Of course she does. She's had it all her life." Her childhood was completely different from Justin's, who had grown up poor and made millions on his books and movies. There had been good times and bad times, and some very hard times, but Justin's spending had only gone in one direction over the years: up. The opulence he surrounded himself with was vital to him. It reassured him of who he was. He was looking at Ivo now over a demitasse of strong coffee at the end of lunch. "Without all that I give her, she wouldn't be able to make it for a week, Ivo."

"I'm not so sure." Ivo had more faith in her than her father. One day she would be a truly remarkable woman, and whenever he thought of it, Ivo Stewart smiled.

Drying herself off quickly with a large pink mono-grammed towel, Bettina knew she would have to hurry. She had already laid out her dress. It was a beautiful watered-silk sheath of the palest mauve, which fell from her shoulders to her ankles like a soft slinky tube. She slipped rapidly into the appropriate laces and silks, climbed into the dress, and stepped carefully into the matching mauve sandals with tiny gold heels. On its own the dress would have been splendid. She admired it again as she fluffed her burnt-caramel hair for the last time, making sure that the mauve on her eyelids was exactly the same as the dress. She clasped a rope of amethysts around her neck and another to her left wrist as tiny diamonds sparkled in her ears. And then, carefully, she lifted the heavy green velvet tunic from its hanger and slipped it over the mauve silk of the dress. The tunic was lined in the same shimmering mauve, and she looked like a symphony in lilac and deep Renaissance green. It was a breathtakingly beautiful outfit, which her father had brought her from Paris the winter before. But she wore it with the same ease and unaffected simplicity that she would have worn a pair of old faded jeans. Having paid the outfit due homage in the mirror, she could not forget that she had it on. And that was precisely what she was planning to do. She had a thousand other things on her mind. She cast a glance around the cozy French provincial bedroom, made sure that she had left the screen in front of the still roaring fire, and glanced

out the window for the last time. It was still snowing. The first snow was always so pretty. She smiled to herself as she made her way quickly downstairs.

She had to check the kitchen and make sure everything looked right for the buffet. The dining room was a masterpiece, and she smiled at the perfection of the canapés that marched along countless silver platters like overgrown confetti scattered everywhere for a holiday feast. In the living room everything was in order, and in the den the furniture had been removed as she'd ordered and the musicians were tuning up. The servants looked impeccably. The apartment looked divine, with room after room of museum-quality Louis XV furniture, marble mantels, overwhelming bronzes, and inlaid wonders at which one could only stare in awe. The damasks were in soft creamy colors, the velvets leaned to café au lait or apricot or peach. The whole apartment was a splendor of warmth and loving, and it was Bettina's taste that was exhibited everywhere, Bettina's caring that so lavishly showed.

"My God, you look pretty, darling." She wheeled at the sound of his voice and stood for a moment, her eyes warm and smiling. "Isn't that the thing I got you in Paris last year?" Just then Justin Daniels smiled at his daughter and she smiled back. Only her father would call the exquisite Balenciaga he had bought her for a king's ransom "a thing."

"It is. I'm glad you like it." And then, hesitantly, almost shyly, "I like it too."

"Good. Are the musicians here?" He was already looking past her, into the wood-paneled sanctum of the large den.

"They're tuning up. I think they'll be starting any minute. Would you like a drink?" He had never thought of her needs. It was always she who thought of his.

"I think I'll wait for a minute. Christ, I'm tired today." He sprawled for a moment in his comfortable bergère as Bettina watched him. She could have told him that she was tired too. She had gotten up at six that morning to work out the details of the party, gone to school at eight thirty, and then rushed home to bathe, dress, and see that everything was just right. But she didn't say anything to him about it. She never did.

"Are you working on the new book?" She looked at him with devotion and interest as he nodded and then looked over at her with a smile.

"You always care about the books, don't you?"

"Of course I do." She smiled gently.

"Why?"

"Because I care about you."

"Is that the only reason?"

"Of course not. They're wonderful books, and I love them." And then she stood up and laughed softly as she bent down to kiss him on the forehead. "I also happen to love you." He smiled in answer and patted her arm gently as she swept away at the sound of the door. "Sounds like someone's arriving." But she was worried suddenly. He did look unusually tired.

Within half an hour the house was jammed with people laughing, talking, drinking, being witty or amusing or unkind, and sometimes all three. There were miles of evening dresses, in rainbow hues, and rivers of jewels, and a veritable army of men in black tie, their white shirts studded with mother of pearl and onyx and tiny sapphires and diamonds. And there were almost a hundred well-known faces in the crowd. Aside from the hundred of relatives and celebrities were another two hundred unknowns, drinking champagne, eating caviar, dancing to the music, looking for Justin Daniels or others they had hoped to glimpse or even meet.



Through it all Bettina passed unnoticed, darting, moving, watching that everything went smoothly, that people were introduced, had champagne, had been fed. She was careful to see that her father had his Scotch, and then later his brandy, that his cigars were always near hand. She was careful to keep her distance when he seemed to be flirting with a woman and quick to bring him an important guest who had just arrived. She was a genius at what she was doing. And Ivo thought she was more beautiful than any woman in the room. It wasn't the first time that he had wished she was his child and not Justin's.

"Doing your usual number, I see, Bettina? Exhausted? Or only ready to drop?"

"Don't be silly, I love it." But he could see that beneath her eyes there was the faintest hint of fatigue. "Would you like another drink?"

"Stop treating me like a guest, Bettina. Can I interest you in sitting down somewhere?"

"Maybe later."

"No, now."

"All right, Ivo. All right," She looked up into the deep blue eyes in the kind face that she had come to love over the years and let him lead her to a seat near a window, where for a moment they silently watched the snow, and then she turned her eyes back to him. His full white mane looked more perfectly groomed than ever. Ivo Stewart always looked perfect. He was just that kind of man. Tall, lean, handsome, youthful, with blue eyes that always seemed about to laugh and the longest legs she'd ever seen. She had called him Ivo Tall when she was a child. Slowly she gave way to small worried frown. "Have you noticed that Daddy looks very tired tonight?"

Ivo shook his head. "No, but I notice that you look tired. Anything wrong?"

She smiled. "Just exams. Why is it that you notice everything?"

"Because I love you both, and sometimes your father is a complete moron and doesn't notice a damn thing. Writers! You could drop dead at their feet and they'd march over you muttering something about the second part of chapter fifteen. Your father's no different."

"No, he just writes better."

"I suppose that's an excuse."

"He doesn't need an excuse." Bettina said it very gently, and Ivo's eyes met hers. "He's marvelous at what he does." *Even if he isn't the most wonderful father, she thought, he's a brilliant writer!* But they were words she would never have said out loud.

"You're marvelous at what you do too."

"Thank you, Ivo. You always say the nicest things. And now"—she stood up reluctantly and smoothed her dress—"I have to get back to playing hostess."

It had gone on until four in the morning, and her whole body ached as she walked slowly upstairs. Her father was still in the den with two or three of his cronies, but she had done her job. The servants had already whisked away most of the mess, the musicians had been paid and sent home, the last guests had been kissed and thanked before they departed, the women bundled in their minks as their husbands led them to limousines waiting outside in the snow. And as she walked slowly to her room Bettina stopped for a moment and looked outside. The city was beautiful; the city looked peaceful and silent and white. And then she went to her room and closed the door.

She carefully hung the Balenciaga back on its hanger and slipped into a pink silk nightgown before sliding between the flowered sheets that one of the maids had turned down earlier.

that night. And as she lay in bed a moment later she ran over the evening again in her head. It had gone smoothly. It always did. She sighed sleepily to herself, wondering about the next party. Had he said next week, or the week after that? And had he liked the musician tonight? She had forgotten to ask. And the caviar ... what about the caviar ... was it as good as ...? Looking very small and fragile, she sighed once more and fell asleep.

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“Care to join us for lunch today? Twenty-one, at noon.” She read the note as she finished her coffee and picked up the heavy red coat she wore to school. She was wearing navy gabardine slacks and a navy-blue cashmere sweater and boots that she hoped would resist the snow. Quickly she picked up a pen and jotted a note to him on the other side of his.

“Wish I could, but I’m sorry ... exams! Have a good time. See you tonight. Love, B.”

She had been telling him about her exams all week. But he couldn’t be expected to remember the details of her life. He was already thinking of his next book, and that was enough. And nothing in her college life had thus far been worthy of his attention. This was easy to understand. It didn’t fascinate her either. In contrast to the life she led with him, everything else was so flat. She did feel secretly that the normalcy of her college life was refreshing, but it seemed somewhat remote to her. She always felt like an observer. She never joined in. Too many people had already figured out who she was. It made her curious, and an object of stares and fascination. But she didn’t feel worthy of their interest. She wasn’t the writer. She was only his child.

The door closed softly behind her as she went off to school, mentally running over the notes she had made for herself to prepare for the exam. It was difficult to feel lively about it on two-and-a-half hours’ sleep. But she’d come out all right, she always did. Her grades were quite high, which was another thing that frequently set her apart from the others. She wasn’t even sure now why she had let her father talk her into going on with school. All she wanted to do was find a corner somewhere to write her play. That was all. Just that.... And then she grinned to herself as the elevator reached the ground floor. There was more to the fantasy after all. She wanted to write a *hit* play. That would take more time ... like twenty or thirty years.

“Morning, miss.” She smiled at the doorman as he tipped his hat, and for a moment she almost ran back into the building. It was one of those stunningly cold days when the first breath of air feels like nails being inhaled. She hailed a cab and climbed in. Today was not the day to prove anything by taking the bus. To hell with it. She would rather stay warm. She settled back against the seat and looked long and hard at her notes.

“Bettina couldn’t come?” Ivo looked up in surprise as Justin joined him at the huge bar that was always their meeting spot at 21.

“Apparently not. I forgot to ask her last night, so she left me a note this morning. Something about exams. I hope that’s all it is.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?”

“It means I hope she’s not involved with some little fool at college.” Both of them knew that up until now there had been no man in her life. Justin didn’t give her time.

“You expect her to stay unattached for the rest of her life?” Ivo looked at him dubiously over his martini.

“Hardly. But I expect her to make an intelligent choice.”

“What makes you think she won’t?” Ivo watched his friend with interest and he could see the tired look about his eyes that Bettina had mentioned the night before.

“Women don’t always make wise choices, Ivo.”

“And we do?” He said it with amusement. “Do you have any reason to suspect she’s married to someone?”

Justin Daniels shook his head. “No, but you never know. I abhor those little bastards who go to college just to screw girls.”

“Like you, you mean.” Ivo was now grinning broadly as Justin shot him an evil look and ordered a Scotch.

“Never mind that. I feel like hell today.”

“Hung over?” Ivo didn’t look impressed.

“I don’t know. Maybe. I’ve had indigestion since last night.”

“It’s obviously old age.”

“Aren’t you the smart one today?” Justin gave him a look that Ivo knew meant he’d had enough and then they both laughed. Despite their diverging views about Bettina, the two men never failed to get along. She was the only subject on which they almost never agreed and the only bone of contention between them. “By the way, can I interest you in a brief trip to London next weekend?”

“For what?”

“What do I know? Chasing girls, spending money, going to the theater. The usual.”

“I thought you were already working on the new book.”

“I am, but I’m stuck and I want to play.”

“I’ll have to see. You may not have noticed, but there are several minor wars, not to mention political coups, breaking out all over the world. The paper may want me here.”

“It won’t change a damn thing if you’re gone for the weekend. Besides, you *are* the paper. You can call your own shots.”

“Thank you, sir. I’ll keep that in mind. Who’s joining us for lunch by the way?”

“Judith Abbott, the playwright. Bettina’s going to have a fit that she missed her.” He looked somberly at Ivo then and ordered another Scotch. But Ivo had not missed the frightened look in his eyes.

For a moment Ivo wondered, and then he gently touched his friend’s arm and spoke barely above a whisper. “Justin ... is something really wrong?”

There was a pause for a moment. “I don’t know. I feel strange all of a sudden ...”

“Do you want to sit down?” But it was already too late; a moment later he slumped to the floor and two women looked down and screamed. His face was hideously contorted, as he seemed to wrestle with intolerable pain. Frantically Ivo issued orders, and it was only moments before the paramedics arrived, moments when Ivo held his friend in his arms and prayed that it wasn’t too late. But it was. Justin Daniels’s hand fell limply to the floor the moment Ivo let it go, as police on the scene pushed the curious away and the paramedics fought on for almost half an hour. But it was useless. Justin Daniels was dead.

Ivo watched helplessly as they pounded his heart, gave him artificial respiration, oxygenated everything, while Ivo gave him prayers. But it made no difference. At last they covered his face as tears rolled down Ivo’s cheeks. They asked him if he wanted to come with the body to the hospital morgue. The morgue? Justin? It was unthinkable. But it wasn’t. And they went.

Ivo felt gray and trembling as he walked out of the hospital an hour later. There was nothing more to be done except tell Bettina. He felt sick when he thought of it. Jesus ... how was he going to tell her? What could he say? What did this leave her? And who? She had no one in the world except Justin. No one. She had the best guest list in New York and knew more celebrities than the society writer at the *Times*, but that was all she had. Other than that she had nothing. Except Justin. And now he was gone.

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The clock on the mantelpiece ticked interminably as Ivo sat in the den, staring bleakly over the park. It was already late in the afternoon and the light was slowly failing. In the street below, the usual angry snarl of traffic crawled south along Fifth Avenue. It was rush hour and there was snow on the ground, to add an extra impediment to Bettina's getting home at the end of the day. The cars barely moved as drivers honked angrily. In the Danielses' apartment the distant honking was a muted sound. Ivo didn't even hear it as he sat there, waiting to hear Bettina's footstep in the hall, her voice calling out, her laughter as she came home from school. He found himself looking around the room, at the trophies, the artifacts handsomely displayed on shelves in the bookcase along with the leather-bound volumes Justin had treasured. Many of them had been bought at auction in London when Ivo had been with him on occasional trips over the years. Just like their trips to Munich and Paris and Vienna. There had been so many years, so many moments, so many good times they had shared. It was Justin who had celebrated and cried and cavorted with him for the thirty-two years of their friendship, over love affairs and divorces and victories of all kinds ... Justin who had asked Ivo to sit with him at Doctor's Hospital the night Bettina was born, as they both got blind drunk on champagne, and then went on to celebrate afterward on the town ... Justin ... who was suddenly no more. So swiftly gone. Ivo's thoughts wandered soberly back to the moments in the hospital that afternoon. It all seemed so unreal. And then Ivo realized that it was Justin he was waiting for, not Bettina ... Justin's voice in the long empty hall ... his elegant frame in the doorway with a smile in his eyes and laughter on his lips. It was Justin, not Bettina, whom Ivo expected to see as he sat in the quiet, wood-paneled room staring at the cold cup of coffee the butler had brought him an hour before. They knew. They all knew. Ivo had told the servants shortly after he arrived at the house. He had also called Justin's lawyer and his agent. But no one else. He didn't want anything in the press or on the radio before Bettina knew. The servants knew also that they were to say nothing to her when she arrived. They were only to direct her to Ivo in the den ... where he waited ... in the stillness ... for one of them to come home.... If only Justin would come home, then it would all be a lie after all and he wouldn't have to tell her ... he wouldn't have to ... it wouldn't be.... He felt tears sting his eyes again as he fingered the delicate blue and gold Limoges cup set before him.

Absently Ivo touched the lace on the edge of his napkin as he suddenly heard the front door open. There was a hushed voice, the butler's, and then her brighter one. Ivo could almost see her, smiling, open, shrugging out of the heavy red coat, saying something to the butler, who smiled for no one else except "Miss." For "Miss," everyone smiled. Except Ivo; this afternoon he couldn't smile. He stood and walked slowly to the door, feeling his heart pound as he waited for her. Oh God, what would he say?

"Ivo?" She looked surprised as she came toward him across the hall. They had just told her that he was waiting for her in the den. "Is something wrong?" She looked instantly sympathetic and reached out both hands. It was too early for him to leave the office and she

knew it. He rarely left his desk before seven or eight. It made him difficult to have as a dinner guest sometimes, but it was a foible everyone easily forgave. The publisher of the *New York Mail* had a right to keep long hours, and he was still sought out by every hostess in town. "You look tired." She looked at him reproachfully and held his hand as they sat down. "Isn't Daddy home?"

He shook his head dumbly, and his eyes filled with tears as she kissed his cheek. "Not Bettina..." And then, hating himself, he heard himself add, "Not yet."

"Would you like a drink, instead of that miserable-looking cup of coffee?" Her smile was so warm and gentle that it tore at his heart, as her eyes took in every detail. She was worried about him and that made him smile. She looked so incredibly young and lovely and innocent that he wanted to tell her anything but the truth. Her auburn hair looked like a halo of curls as it floated around her head. Her eyes were bright and her cheeks pink from the cold, and she looked tinier than ever. But her smile faded as she watched him. Suddenly she knew that something was terribly wrong. "Ivo, what is it? You've hardly said a word since I came in." Her eyes never left his, and then slowly he reached for her hand. "Ivo?" She grew pale as she watched him, and in spite of himself tears filled his eyes as he pulled her gently into his arms. She didn't resist him. It was as though she knew that she would need him, and he her. She found herself holding tightly to Ivo as she waited for the news.

"Bettina ... it's Justin..." He felt a sob rise in his throat, and he fought it. He had to be strong. For Justin. For her. But she had gone tense in his arms now, and suddenly she pulled away.

"What do you mean?... Ivo..." Her eyes were frantic, her hands like frightened little birds. "An accident?" But Ivo only shook his head. And then slowly he looked at her, and in his eyes she saw the full force of her fear.

"No, darling. He's gone." For an instant nothing moved in the room as the shock washed over her like a wave, and her eyes stared into his, not fully understanding, and not wanting to know.

"I—I don't understand..." Her hands fluttered nervously, and her eyes seemed to dart from his face to her hands. "What do you mean, Ivo?... I—" And then, in anguish and horror, she jumped to her feet and crossed the room, as though to get away from him, as though by fleeing him, she could flee the truth. "What the hell do you mean?" She was shouting at him now, her voice tremulous and angry, her eyes filled with tears. But she looked so fragile, so frail, that he wanted to take her in his arms again.

"Bettina ... darling..." He went to her, but she fought him off, unthinking, unknowing, and then suddenly she reached out to him and clung to him as her whole body was wracked by sobs.

"Oh, God ... oh, no ... Daddy..." It was a long, slow, childlike wail. Ivo held her tightly in his arms. He was all she had.

"What happened? Oh, Ivo ... what happened?" But she didn't really want to know. All she wanted to know was that it wasn't true. But it was. Ivo's face told her again and again that it was.

"It was a heart attack. At lunch. They sent an ambulance immediately, but it was too late." He sounded anguished as he said it.

"Didn't they do anything? For God's sake..." She was sobbing now, her narrow frame

shaking, as he kept an arm around her shoulders. It was impossible to believe. Only the night before they had danced in this room.

“Bettina, they did everything. Absolutely everything. It was just—” God, what an agony was to tell her all of it. It was almost unbearable for him. “It happened very quickly. It was all over in a matter of moments. And I promise you, they did everything they could. But there wasn’t much they could do.” She closed her eyes and nodded, and then slowly she left the comfort of his arms and crossed the room. She stood with her back to him, looking down at the snow and the gnarled, naked trees across the street in Central Park. How ugly it looked to her now, how lonely, how bare, when only the night before it had looked beautiful and fairylike as she stood at her bedroom window, dressing for the party and waiting for the first guests to arrive. She hated them now, all of them, for having robbed her of her last night alone with him ... her last night ... he was gone now. She closed her eyes again tightly and braced herself for the question she had to ask.

“Did he—did he say anything, Ivo.... I mean ... for me?” Her voice was a tiny mouse sound from her vigil at the window, and she didn’t see Ivo shake his head.

“There wasn’t time.”

She nodded silently, and a moment later took a deep breath. Ivo didn’t know whether to go to her, or let her stand there alone. He felt he might break her in half with the merest touch of his hand, so taut and brittle and fragile she seemed as she stood there, aching and alone. She was alone now, and she knew it. For the first time in her life. “Where is he now?”

“At the hospital.” Ivo hated to say it. “I wanted to speak to you before making any arrangements. Do you have any idea what you’d like to do?” He approached her slowly and turned her around to face him. He looked down at her. Her eyes seemed suddenly a thousand years old, and it was the face of a woman she turned up to him, not the face of a child. “Bettina, I—I’m sorry to press you about this, but ... do you have any idea what your father would have wanted?”

She sat down again, softly shaking the halo of auburn curls. “We never talked about—about things like that. And he wasn’t religious.” She closed her eyes and two huge tears rolled somberly down her face. “I suppose we ought to do something private. I don’t want”—she could barely go on speaking—“a lot of strangers there to stare at him and—” But then all she could do was bow her head as her shoulders shook pathetically, and Ivo took her once again in his arms. It took her fully five minutes to compose herself, and then she looked up at Ivo with a bleak look in her eyes. “I want to see him now, Ivo.” He nodded, and she stood up and walked silently to the door.

She was terrifyingly quiet on the way to the hospital and she was dry-eyed and poised as she sat in the backseat of Ivo’s limousine. She seemed to shrink as she sat there, huddled in a silver fox coat, her eyes huge and childlike beneath a matching fur hat.

She stepped out of the car ahead of him at the hospital, and she was instantly through the door, waiting impatiently for Ivo, wanting to be taken to her father’s side. In her heart she had not yet understood the reality, and somehow she expected to find him anxious to see her and very much alive. It was only when they came to the final doorway that she seemed to slow down, the staccato of the heels of her black kid boots silenced on the hospital floor, the light beyond the doorway dim, and her eyes suddenly huge as she stepped slowly inside the morgue. He was there, covered with a sheet, and on tiptoe she went to him, and stood there



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