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Palomino

Danielle Steel

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Book by Stell Danielle Steel D

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348 pages

Extrait

Chapter One

Hurrying up the steps of the brownstone on East Sixty-third Street, Samantha squinted her eyes against the fierce wind and driving rain, which was turning rapidly into sleet. It whipped her face and tingled as it pricked at her eyes. She made a soft purring noise, as though to urge herself on, and then stopped, gasping, as she fought with the lock, her key refusing to turn. Finally, finally, the door gave, and she fell into the warmth of the front hall. For a long moment she just stood there, shaking the dampness off her long silvery blond hair. It was a color one rarely saw, like spun silver meshed with fine gold; a towhead they had called her as a child, and she had hated it, and then in her teens and twenties her hair had won her lavish praise. Now at thirty she was used to it, and when John had told her that she looked like a fairy princess, she laughed at him, her blue eyes dancing, her beautiful, delicately angular face in sharp contrast to the full breasts and softly rounded hips. Her legs were long and thin and endless.

She was a woman of a thousand contrasts, huge dancing eyes with a sharp look that saw all, in sudden contrast to the sensual fullness of her mouth, the narrow shoulders, large breasts, the long graceful hands; the softness of her voice in contrast to the intelligent precision of her words. Somehow one expected Samantha Taylor to have a southern drawl, to languish on a velvet chaise longue, her form framed by a negligée trimmed in marabou. Instead she was given to jeans and bounded across rooms with a long stride. She was filled with energy and life, except tonight, except for the past hundred nights.

She stood now, as she had since late August, silent, still, waiting, the rain running off the tips of her hair, listening...but for what? There was no one here anymore. She was alone in the old brownstone. The couple who owned it had been in London for six months, their duplex apartment had been lent to a cousin who was almost never there. A reporter for *Paris-Match*, he spent more time in New Orleans, Los Angeles, and Chicago than he did in New York. And then there was the top floor. Samantha's domain...Samantha's...only hers now, although once upon a time it was Samantha and John's, an apartment they had put together with such devotion and such care. *Every elegant inch of it, dammit.* Samantha thought of it again with a small frown as she left her umbrella in the front hall and made her way slowly upstairs. She hated to come home now and managed to see to it that she came home later every night. It was almost nine o'clock this evening. But it had been later than that the night before. She wasn't even hungry. She hadn't been since she had first heard the news.

"You're what?" She had stared at him in horror on a broiling August evening. The air conditioner was broken, and the air was heavy and still. She had come to greet him at the front door, wearing only white lace underpants and a little lilac bra. "Are you crazy?"

"No." He had stared at her, looking wooden and strained. Only that morning they had made love. And now his Viking-like blond beauty seemed...beyond her reach. He looked like someone she didn't even know. "I can't lie to you anymore, Sam. I had to tell you. I've got to get out."

For what seemed like hours she had only stared at him. He couldn't mean it. He had to be kidding. But he wasn't. That was the insanity of it. He was deadly serious. She knew it from the look of agony on his face. She walked slowly toward him, but he shook his head and turned away. "Don't...please don't." His shoulders

shook softly, and for the first time since he had spoken she felt pity slice through her like a shaft of pain. But why was she feeling sorry for him? Why? How could she feel sorry for him after what he had just said?

"Do you love her?" The shoulders she had loved so much only shook more, and he said nothing. But the pity began to fade now as Samantha moved toward him. Anger began to boil within her soul. "Answer me, dammit." She yanked hard on his shoulder, and he turned to look into her eyes.

"Yes. I think so. But, Sam, I don't know. I just know I have to get out of here for a while so I can figure it out."

She stalked across the room, stopping only when she reached the far side of the delicate French rug that looked like a carpet of flowers beneath her bare feet. There were tiny violets and small dusty-colored roses, and a myriad of still smaller flowers one had to stoop to see. The overall impression was one of pastel pinks and reds and mauves; it was a warm link to the soft pinks and mauves and deep dusty green on the couches and chairs that filled the large wood-paneled room. The house was an old brownstone, and the top floor was theirs. And Samantha had taken two years to decorate it, lovingly, with beautiful pieces of Louis XV furniture that she and John bought together at antique shops and auctions at Sotheby Parke Bernet. The fabrics were all French, the vases constantly filled with freshly cut flowers, the paintings all Impressionistic, and the overall feeling of the apartment was decidedly European and very elegant. Yet there was a cozy side to it too, as there was to Sam. It wasn't the beauty of the apartment she was seeing now as she stood with her back to her husband, wondering if they would ever be the same again. It was as though one of them had just died, as though everything had been instantly and irretrievably shattered and would never be repaired. And all with a few well-chosen words.

"Why didn't you tell me?" She turned and her face was filled with accusation.

"I..." He began but couldn't finish. There was nothing he could say now to make it better, to take back the pain he had just inflicted on the woman he had once so greatly loved. But seven years was a long time. It should have been long enough to solder them to each other forever, and yet it hadn't, and somehow, somehow, during the election coverage the year before, he had slipped. He had meant to end it when they all got back from Washington. He had really meant to. But Liz hadn't let him, and it had gone on. And on, and on...until now she had forced his hand. And the bitch of it was that she was pregnant and refused to get rid of the kid. "I didn't know what to tell you, Sam. I didn't...and I thought--"

"I don't give a damn what you thought!" Suddenly her eyes blazed at the man she had known and loved for eleven years. They had become lovers at nineteen. He had been the first man she had ever slept with, when they were both at Yale. He had been so big and blond and beautiful, a football hero, the big man on campus, the golden boy everybody loved, including Sam, who worshipped him from the first moment they met. "You know what I thought, you son of a bitch? I thought you were faithful to me. That's what I thought. I thought you gave a damn. I thought"--her voice quavered for the first time since he'd said the awful words--"I thought you still loved me."

"I do." There were tears running slowly down his cheeks as he said the words.

"Oh, yeah?" She was crying openly now and she felt as though he had just torn out her heart and thrown it on the floor. "Then how come you're moving out? How come you walked in here like a crazy person, dammit, and when I said, 'Hi, babe, how was your day?' you said, 'I'm having an affair with Liz Jones and I'm moving out.'" Her voice was growing hysterical as she advanced on him. "Can you explain that to me? And just how long have you been involved with her anyway? God damn you, John Taylor ... God damn you...." As though

she couldn't stop herself, she rushed at him, fists flailing, and then pulling at his hair, trying to maul his face; he resisted her with ease and pulled her arms behind her as he forced her down to the floor, where he cradled her in his arms.

"Oh, babe, I'm so sorry...."

"Sorry?" It was a shriek between laughter and tears as she struggled free. "You come in here and tell me that you're leaving me for someone else and you're 'sorry'? Jesus Christ..." She took a deep breath then and pushed away from him. "Let me go, dammit." She looked at him with raw pain, and when he saw that she was calmer, he let go of her arms. She was still breathless from her attack on him, but now she walked slowly to the dark green velvet couch and sat down. She looked smaller suddenly, and very young, the thick sheet of pale blond hair hanging down as she buried her face in her hands, and then slowly she raised her face again, her eyes awash with tears. "Do you really love her?" Somehow it was impossible to believe.

"I think so." He nodded slowly. "The worst part is that I love you both."

"Why?" Samantha looked past him into an empty space, seeing nothing and understanding still less. "What was missing between us?"

Slowly he sat down. It had to be told. She had to know. He had been wrong to keep it from her for so long. "It happened during the election coverage last year."

"And it's been going on since then?" Her eyes widened as she wiped away fresh tears with the back of one hand. "Ten months, and I didn't know it?" He nodded and said nothing. "My God." And then she looked at him strangely. "Then why now? Why did you walk in here today like this and tell me? Why don't you stop seeing her? Why aren't you trying to save a marriage we've had for more than seven years? What the hell do you mean 'I'm having an affair and I'm moving out'? Is that all this means to you?"

She was beginning to shriek again and John Taylor almost cringed. He hated this, hated what he was doing to her, but he knew he had to, he had to go. Liz had something he desperately wanted, she had a quality that he needed, a kind of low profile that pleased him. He and Samantha were too much alike in some ways, too visible, too spectacular, too quick, too beautiful. He liked Liz's sensible plainness, her less-dazzling intelligence, her quiet style, her willingness to take a back... *Présentation de l'éditeur*

Samantha Taylor is shattered when her husband leaves her for another woman. She puts her advertising career on hold and seeks refuge at a friend's California ranch, where she loses herself in the daily labor of ranch life.

Here, she discovers the healing powers of trusted friends, simple joys, and hard work. She also meets Tate Jordan, the ranch foreman, and a tumultuous relationship ensues.

When Tate disappears and a fall from a horse changes Samantha's life forever, she is confined to a wheelchair and must look deep inside herself to find the courage to begin again.

Now, fighting the battles of the handicapped, she finds new challenges, new loves, and even the adopted child she's always longed for. *Biographie de l'auteur*

Danielle Steel has been hailed as one of the world's most popular authors, with over 570 million copies of her novels sold. Her many international bestsellers include **Amazing Grace**, **Bungalow 2**, **Sisters**, **H.R.H.**, **Coming Out**, **The House**, and other highly acclaimed novels. She is also the author of **His Bright Light**, the story of her son Nick Traina's life and death.

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