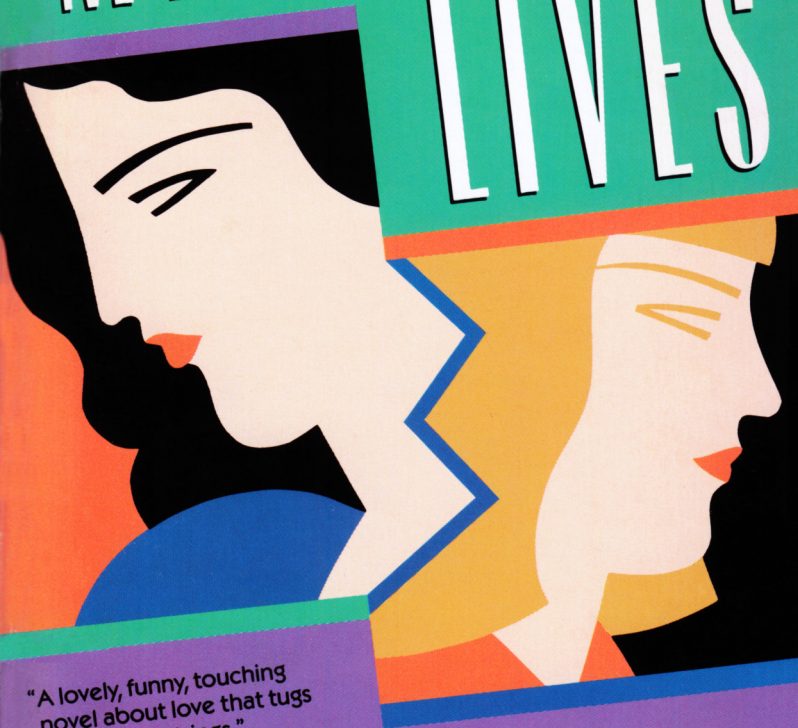


MISPLACED LIVES



"A lovely, funny, touching
novel about love that tugs
at the heartstrings."
—Barbara Taylor Bradford

BARBARA VICTOR

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PROLOGUE

“DOUBLE FAULT!” Adrienne calls the ball right before it crashes into the green netting behind her. Taking a position on the other side of her court, she hunches over her racket in preparation for his next serve. “Love-thirty,” she adds.

“Damn it,” Pete explodes, “I don’t need the score, thank you very much!”

“Lighten up, it’s only a game!”

“Only a game when you’re winning. When you’re not, it’s World War Three with the original cast!” He swings his arm around in a circular motion.

“Got a kink?” She wipes the sweat from her face with one corner of her T-shirt.

“More like shooting pains.”

“Quit finding excuses just because you’re out of shape!”

“Like hell I am!”

“So play ball, sweetheart,” she teases. Rocking on her heels once more, she leans forward to receive the ball.

Pete Molloy does his usual two-step shuffle, a quick movement at the baseline at the same instant that he tosses up the ball, his right arm slicing the air in an upward motion before it comes down hard on its target. “Nice shot,” Adrienne yells as she dives for it and misses. “Good one!”

It happens without any warning so that it takes Adrienne Fast fully several seconds to comprehend and to react. Had she been totally logical right then it might

have occurred to her that the quickest way to reach him was to walk around the side of the court. Instead she rushes forward to jump over the net. "Pete," she shrieks. "Oh, my God, Pete!"

The couple who had been volleying next to them appears to be frozen, watching in horror as the scene unfolds. "Please, someone help," Adrienne cries as she collapses over Pete's crumpled figure. Her hand reaches out to touch him but instead ends up over her mouth to stifle another scream. "It was your point," she sobs irrationally. "Please get up, it's still your serve."

Now the couple has rushed over, and while the woman hangs back, the man bends down next to Adrienne. "Please," she whimpers as she watches this stranger press his fingers against Pete's neck, "please help him, he's sick!" The man's response is to snap at his companion, who is still hanging back. "Call 911 and make it fast!" Horrified, Adrienne watches as the woman bolts across the court, almost crashing into a group of people who are heading in their direction.

Pete lies motionless, flat on his face, his damp tennis shirt hiked up at his waist to expose a patch of bare flesh, his arms to his sides, racket near his left knee, one tennis ball still bulging from a hip pocket, another rolling toward the net. Somehow Adrienne has been edged aside, crying softly by herself, while the man and several others attend to Pete. But when they manage to turn him over on his back Adrienne lets out a piercing scream. Blood covers his entire face where his nose was smashed against the floor in his fall.

Someone kneels down to breathe for him while someone else begins pressing in and out on his chest. The man from the neighboring court puts a comforting arm around Adrienne's shoulders to steady her while the woman, after seeing all the blood, issues her own warning. "Jack, be careful, just don't touch him, you never know!" But she needn't have worried since someone else, with obvious expertise, is giving Pete

mouth-to-mouth resuscitation while the tennis pro takes over massaging his heart.

"Do it slower," the man named Jack advises. "You're doing it too fast!" Tears continue to stream down Adrienne's cheeks and into the corners of her mouth.

"Are you a doctor?" she asks desperately, clutching at his arm.

"No, I'm an accountant," he answers, standing firm as Adrienne tries to push him forward to volunteer him for the job. But the woman is upon them again, yanking at his sleeve.

"Don't you dare!" she yells. "He's all covered with blood, are you crazy?" Then she adds in a hoarse whisper that can be heard clear across the tennis bubble, "You don't know where he's been."

At that moment Adrienne loses what little control she has left. "He's been with me," she cries before collapsing in a heap on the court, "only with me." But nobody pays attention. Still they all try to breathe life back into Pete Molloy.

Still Pete Molloy doesn't breathe back.

Several minutes later the paramedics finally arrive only to push everyone out of the way and start from the beginning, this time aided by tubes, dozens of vials of medicine, needles, oxygen, electric wires, suction cups, and a complicated computerized heart monitor.

It is too late. Clearly all the life has seeped out of his body, even from his eyes, which stare blindly into space. Adrienne has managed somehow to crawl over to him when she sees that the others have given up, after the paramedics disconnect all the wires and the tubes and other equipment. Now she is in charge. Gently wiping the blood from his face with the bottom of her tennis skirt, she weeps softly, smoothing his face tenderly, leaning her cheek against his chest. "My whole life," she moans, "you were my whole life."

"Were you here when it happened?" one of the paramedics asks her, but she doesn't respond.

"I was," Jack, the accountant, offers, "and he just fell over."

"Well, it's apparently a heart attack, but no one will know for sure until they do an autopsy," the other paramedic says.

"Jesus, just like that," Jack says, "and the guy was in really terrific shape." He shakes his head in bewilderment. "Go figure, he played tennis three times a week, a real health nut, too. I used to watch him in the locker room downing a handful of vitamins, mixing up wheat germ, a real clean liver!"

"You never know about cholesterol," his companion whines.

"Anyone know who he was?" one of the paramedics asks, motioning to Adrienne. "She's in shock!"

"He's the Nassau County district attorney," the tennis pro answers.

Adrienne raises her head then from Pete's chest and in a small voice filled with grief asks, "He's dead, isn't he?"

"I'm afraid so," someone says gently, bending down to comfort her.

She draws back from the body suddenly, her lips pressed together in anguish.

"Are you his wife?" Jack inquires, kneeling on the other side of her.

Adrienne's eyes appear as lifeless as Pete's now. "I would have been," she answers softly, "maybe someday."

CHAPTER ONE

The News

IT IS SPRING IN PARIS, that spectacular season when the chestnut trees are in bloom again along the Avenue Foch and the chestnut vendors, if they're Algerian, are paying fines for illegal peddling somewhere near the Mairie. Paris-in-the-spring, those brief several months a year when the *bateaux mouches* list precariously to one side under the weight of the hordes of German tourists, and the boutiques along the Faubourg St. Honoré are mobbed with myopic Japanese peering into display cases for one more whiff of the latest designer scent. May in Paris, when Scandinavian families wearing clumsy leather sandals and drab cotton socks sift through piles of souvenir T-shirts and gaudy key chains while their tour buses block traffic on the Rue de Rivoli. Spring—that special time of the year when artists venture out of their Left Bank garrets (now more costly than SoHo lofts) to exhibit their paintings on the narrow streets that border the Boulevard St. Germain des Prés, and Portuguese laborers exit from their hovels (now more dilapidated than Harlem tenements) to hawk their gold-filled religious medals on the steps of Notre Dame.

This is the season of brilliant sun and flawless skies, when the air is filled with the smells of freshly baked pastry, diesel fuel being pumped into gaping holes in the sidewalks, and stale cigarette smoke; when the rancid odor of steak tartare left out too long in the sun and unbathed French dogs left in too long in the rain permeate those quaint, but filthy, outdoor cafés.

Springtime—the season when terrorists of all persuasions, having met their bomb-throwing quota along the Champs Élysées, install themselves in well-guarded villas on the Riviera, making their Neuilly apartments available to deposed African leaders nervously waiting for a coup to end. Paris, the city Americans perceive as one exotic marathon, inspiring them to dress in jogging attire as they race from museum to museum in search of culture. It is spring in Paris—that exciting, stupendous, all-too-brief season that precedes the saddest months of the year—summer in Paris, when there are no French.

Gabriella Carlucci-Molloy would have known it was spring in Paris even if she wasn't walking in the soft evening breeze on her way home from work, her head buried in the pages of *Paris Actualité*, reading Pascal Bourget's regular social commentary, this week accompanied by the photographs that she shot all over the city. Gabriella would have known it was spring in Paris by the usual collection of derelicts who surface every year at this time to sprawl on benches along the Rond Point of the Champs Élysées.

She tucks the magazine underneath her arm as she walks past the smooth stone fountain, close to the neatly lettered signs in perfect French that the homeless have spread on the sidewalk. As she leans down to drop some change in their cups, it occurs to her that the homeless problem in Paris is another American import that is beginning to blend into the Champs as easily as McDonald's once did years before.

Crossing the street, she walks past the Yves St. Laurent boutique where the window arrangement is a nightmare of purple and orange polka-dot miniskirts, near the tax-free perfume shop where the display is a collection of melted lipsticks and one resident dachshund meticulously licking a mangy front paw. She turns the corner toward Avenue Matignon and is conscious of several admiring glances. For despite her too-curvy body—given the anorexic tastes of the French—

and her too-healthy complexion that does nothing to capture that popular pale Parisian look, Gabriella is sought after constantly. Perhaps she touches something in the French male, a reminder of his Latin roots that he has forgotten after years of gazing northward across the channel—genetic links to pasta and bull fighting long since forgotten for hamburgers and table tennis. Or perhaps it is because she is considered an exotic bird in a jungle that has become less than paradise, a symbol of a country where it is still rumored that the streets are paved with gold. Yet Gabriella is not fooled by this flattery nor does she allow herself to be lulled into believing that she is anything more to them than an interesting foreigner. In France she will always remain a stranger, at best an ex-patriot who has landed in their midst for a short-lived French connection.

The Drugstore is just ahead, where the outdoor metal stands are already filled with an array of shellfish. Several policemen with machine guns slung across their chests pace aimlessly back and forth, turning around only when a siren begins in the distance—a two-note augmented fourth singsong that conjurs up images from other times. And despite all the picturesque history that Paris offers, it is a city where Gabriella finds few distractions to interfere with her work. It is a place where every scene is a potential landscape to be photographed, every face on the street an interesting character study. There is nothing about its nature that tempts her, nothing about its essence that puts her at risk emotionally.

Since joining the staff of *Paris Actualité*, Gabriella's subjects have ranged from death-row inmates to Basque Separatists; from high-ranking political leaders to low-profile fashion designers; and who all, amazingly, allow her into their cells, bunkers, palaces, and showrooms where she captures their frailties on film. And how has she managed to succeed when others in her field have failed? Yankee ambition, they accuse,

or perhaps it's because she's relentless, they add (either one a typically American trait), at tracking her subjects down and then not letting up until they give in to her requests. She is seductive, her almond-shaped amber eyes holding promises of friendship and more. She is shrewd, convincing them that hers is the only lens that will portray innocence, justice, power, and beauty, if any of those things really exists anyway. But if they don't, she can always go back to making a living shooting christenings, weddings, and First Holy Communions which was one of the reasons why she came to Paris in the first place—since taking on such jobs over here seemed more creative than taking them on in Freeport, Long Island, New York.

The white brick building where she lives is straight ahead. She climbs the three steps that lead to the cobblestone courtyard before pressing in the numbered code that releases the black wrought-iron door. The elevator is a glass and wood cage suspended by two worn and creaky cables that she rides to the fourth floor.

Pascal Bourget is waiting for her in the foyer, his hands crammed into the pockets of his crumpled jacket, an anxious expression on his narrow face.

"Gabriella," he says immediately when she enters. "I'm afraid there's some bad news."

"What happened?" she asks as she slips out of her coat.

His hands flutter in the air, thin Gallic fingers that flick a perfect ash from the tip of a Galloise onto the floor. "Your ex-husband died."

She looks at him in disbelief. "What are you talking about?"

"There's a message on your machine—I heard it."

Gabriella's head tilts in the direction of the bedroom before she races in, kneeling on the floor in front of her answering machine. Rewinding the tape, she waits anxiously for the message to play. Pascal is right behind her, standing in the doorway with his arms folded

across his chest. "Gabriella," the nasal voice of her former sister-in-law, Claire, whines, "Pete had a heart attack." Pause. "On the tennis court, you know the one he always liked to play at in Freeport—the one with the green bubble." Cough. "Near the courthouse." Sob. "Gabriella, please come to the funeral, at Conroy's, you know, it's near the courthouse, it wouldn't look good for him if you didn't mourn." The machine clicks off then, the time having run out even if it's all very clear. Stunned, Gabriella looks up at Pascal, her face registering disbelief.

"A heart attack." She barely is able to mouth the words. "It's just not possible, not Pete!"

"Life in America is too tense," Pascal observes, his eyes already filled with tears. And if Gabriella hadn't discovered the Pilo Carpine 4 percent drops in his jacket pocket recently and learned that he suffered from glaucoma, she might have assumed that his tears were caused by emotion.

"Dead," she repeats dully, her body seeming to sag under the enormity of the word.

"Will you go?" Pascal asks, clearly ill at ease.

"Where?" she asks, distracted for the moment as memories begin assaulting her.

"To the funeral," he explains. "Will you go to America?"

"Yes, of course," she stammers. "Why yes, how could I not?"

He shrugs. "Then I suppose Bourgogne is off next week—at least for you?"

She wipes her eyes with the heels of her hands. "My child is going to need me. Can you imagine how Dina must feel right now?" And it doesn't escape her that her grief is largely focused on her daughter's grief.

"It seems to me she hasn't needed you since I've known you," Pascal reminds her.

As the tears run down her cheeks, Gabriella buries her face in her hands.

"Try to be calm," Pascal says.

But it is too late for calm. Calm ended when Gabriella decided to impose this geographic distance between herself and her child; when she reasoned or perhaps hoped that it was the only way to make Dina come to her senses and realize how impossible it was to cancel out a mother.

It seems like only yesterday that an adorable baby, a round-faced child with saucer blue eyes and silky blond hair that fell just above her brows and just below her tiny ears, lifted up pudgy arms in the air and whimpered, "Up, mommy, up." Gabriella can still smell the scent of baby powder and cod fish oil, that greasy white ointment that would soothe little Dina's stubborn diaper rash, even now—so many years and miles away. How could it happen that sixteen years later that same child would grow to be a young girl, blond hair cut stylishly to the shoulders, blue eyes rimmed in black kohl, and raise her arms in anger and shout, "Up yours, mother, up yours," before stomping out of Gabriella's house to live with Pete. Out of her life. Gone forever.

Gabriella stands, her hands clasped over her breast. "I'd never ask you ordinarily, Pascal, but could you forget about your plans for tonight and stay with me? I've got a ton of transparencies to go through and film to label from the shoot the other day, if I'm going to get to New York by Thursday." She pauses to calculate, "It's already the end of the day Monday, which only gives me tomorrow and Wednesday. I'll never make my deadline unless I get everything done."

He checks his watch. "It's too late now to change plans. There's a literary awards cocktail party at the Lutetia Hotel that I can't miss. I have to write it up for the next issue and you were supposed to take photographs of everyone arriving, in case you forgot."

"I can't," her voice breaks, "you'll have to go without me."

"You know, Gabriella, Pete won't be any deader if

you go and you can still do all those other things later."

"It's not just that. I've got to call Claire and then I've got to call the editors to tell them I'll be away. And anyway, I'm in no mood for any cocktail parties. My hands are shaking so badly that I could hardly hold the camera steady."

"Perhaps you're being too emotional," he chides. "But then that's the Italian in you, *n'est-ce pas?*"

"He was part of my life for almost twenty years, since I was nineteen, the father of my child. So it's hard not to be emotional."

"Perhaps I'm being unfair but as I remember he would never speak to you lately." He smirks. "Or is that because American men only talk to their psychiatrists?"

Gabriella could spend weeks out of touch with Pascal lately even if she sees him every day. "He certainly wasn't much help when Dina stopped speaking to me," she admits sadly.

"Don't blame Pete," Pascal retorts, "after all, if you hadn't chosen to leave him this whole drama might not have happened."

"But I wasn't the one who left," she begins before turning to wander into the living room.

Magazines are piled high on the seats of two black canvas chairs, plastic-encased photographs of a recent fashion show are strewn all over the chintz sofas, boxes of unused film spill out from an open metal suitcase that is propped up against a plant. Gabriella walks around everything to stand in front of a table. One finger barely touches a picture of a young girl who smiles out from the frame. "She's sweet, isn't she?" she says wistfully, turning to look at Pascal. And as she does each angle of her face reveals a different expression. Her features are perfectly symmetrical with high cheekbones, generous mouth, straight nose, and tiny cleft in her rounded chin. "She's wholesome and fresh," he replies, "very American." Each tilt of her

head betrays a different emotion as she turns away to sit cross-legged on the floor. "You know, *ma coquette*," Pascal tells her, "no one lives forever."

"There's a big difference between living forever and dropping dead on a tennis court at forty-six years old."

"His life was good."

"His life was short."

"You Americans are so into quantity instead of quality."

But it seems useless to defend once again even if his derisive view of life—especially life that isn't French—used to fascinate her. In the beginning. Until it became evident how lost he was without his props. Without a cigarette dangling from the corner of his mouth, Pascal was ordinary. With one, he looked the part of the craggy literary figure, the one who constantly criticized her intellect—or more accurately, her lack of it. And with his many props as he strolled along the Seine—the Louvre or Trocadero—she even believed him when he told her that moaning and groaning, thrashing and flashing for a woman of her age, almost forty, was no longer amusing or attractive. For in her naïve American way, she reasoned that nobody could have everything—an obstructed view of the Eiffel Tower from her kitchen window and a great sex life. "Why must you attack America all the time," she wants to know, forgetting that she vowed not to argue—not now.

"I'm not attacking, only trying to make you realize that death knows no boundaries or disparate cultures. It can happen to any of us at any time." A weak smile crosses his face. "So it's a pity not to go to these literary awards. *Il faut vivre*—you must live, *ma chérie*."

Looking at him in amazement for barely a moment, her response is unrelated to his advice. "Dina backed the wrong horse," she says more to herself than to him.

"What does that mean? This isn't exactly a race, it's life and death."

But it is so simple right now, so elemental that her insight into it is consoling somehow. "It's the same in a way," she answers, "since Pete made it to the finish line first and Dina lost her bet."

"She may have lost her bet but she won the prize."

"What prize?"

"The truth is that Dina is going to inherit everything Pete has which makes her one very rich eighteen-year-old girl."

"She didn't run off to live with him for the money," Gabriella says, the anguish clearly etched on her face. "How would she have known? He was the picture of health—young, athletic." She shakes her head. "This wasn't supposed to happen."

"Why did she go off with him?"

"To hurt me. To punish me for something I must have done to her. And what I don't know, because I've tried to figure it out for the past two years and couldn't."

"Haven't you suffered enough?"

"Apparently not," she says with a touch of irony.

"Well, then don't go to the funeral."

"I've got to go because right now Dina is suffering more than I am." Images flash before her eyes then, of Dina before the rupture, always before, as if time stopped on the day that she left her. Gabriella can still see the thirteen-year-old who woke up one morning to discover blood all over her sheets. They decided the day would be theirs, a self-proclaimed holiday where they skipped through Central Park and visited the zoo, balloons and intense discussions about life, ice cream and serious questions about growing up, a recognition of the child becoming a woman or perhaps it was the other way around that day. Neither was sure and neither cared. Or the Sunday afternoon when Dina was six and fell off her tricycle in Washington Square Park, her bottom lip split in two and Gabriella had to carry

her all the way to St. Vincent's Emergency so the child could be stitched and the mother sedated. And it suddenly occurs to Gabriella that if she ever let go of any of these memories, if she allowed them to fade at all, the explosion inside her head would be so final that there would be nothing left.

"It's so typically American for a child to abuse her parents like that," Pascal observes. "Somehow there is a natural respect for authority over here that is missing over there."

Perhaps if Gabriella felt strong right now she would point out that this natural respect for authority was what made it so easy for the Nazis to walk right in and take over France. Instead she says, "It wasn't easy for Dina either to reject her mother. This isn't a one-sided story where only one of us has the pain—it's mutual."

"You Americans are simply too permissive with your children which is why they are so spoiled. Why, even during the Occupation our children behaved so well." He pauses to push a piece of dark hair from his bony brow. "But maybe that was because they watched how hard the adults worked in the Underground to save France." And perhaps if Gabriella felt less fragile right now she would point out that if those adults who claimed to have been in the Resistance really had been, then the Germans would never have had a chance. Pascal clears his throat. "I remember it so well, how we had to make do with so little." A cultural malady, she thinks, and the reason why the homeless are destined not to survive very well on the streets of Paris, since the French never throw anything away.

"I've got to leave, forgive me, but it is the Prix Femina."

She nods. "I understand," she says quietly, not understanding at all and hating herself for needing him so much right now.

He touches the tip of her nose after he helps her to her feet. "There's not much I could do anyway, *chérie*,

except to assure you that this too shall pass as everything passes in life. We are all very ephemeral." He smiles then, that smile that ends up as a smirk, that perpetual smirk found on French faces that tries to cover centuries of emotional inadequacy, the one that begs to be swatted off each time that she notices it. "Perhaps someday under calmer conditions you'll explain why Americans get divorced for such silly reasons."

"It wasn't silly," she defends, walking him to the door.

"Infidelity is a silly reason, at least in Paris."

"That's because in France the decision to be unfaithful usually ends up in the bedroom while in America, that same decision usually ends up in a courtroom."

"But that is exactly what creates so much chaos."

"It's over now," she says sadly. "Pete is dead so it makes no sense to discuss all the mistakes we once made when we were married."

"Perhaps you would still have your daughter if you had overlooked those mistakes then."

"It was hard to overlook all of Pete's infidelities. It wasn't just one time or even one particular woman. It was a constant assault on our marriage, an impossible test of my understanding."

"Then you should have distracted yourself by taking a lover."

"I did."

His eyebrows rise in surprise. "And what happened?"

"He found out."

A breath expelled between pouty lips. "Americans simply don't understand sex," he complains. "You fool yourselves into believing that you will feel the same way about someone in five years or in five hours or even in five minutes after the moment has passed. The problem is you think too much of the future."

"I wouldn't exactly call five minutes after making love the future," she replies with cautious dignity.

He smiles tolerantly. "It is a part of what is a false expectation since a future based on making love is unrealistic."

This doesn't surprise her although lately she has grown weary of this separation between love and love-making, as weary as she has become of his insensitivity and cultural bigotry in rejecting any music that wasn't Baroque or any art that wasn't created at Giverny. And if she was unable to express her discontent at this lack of growth in their relationship or within him as well, it is only that it never occurred to her that she was entitled to more. At least it never occurred to her since her own daughter rejected her two years ago.

"Will you come back here tonight after the literary awards?"

"It will be very late," he says.

"Will you come here tomorrow?"

"Tomorrow my schedule is hell," he replies.

"Will I see you before I leave?"

"If you come to the office," he assures.

"I don't know if I can, I'm leaving for New York."

"Then I'll call you there," he decides.

Again Gabriella draws that comfortable curtain around her feelings as she waits for the elevator, aware that as time passes it becomes easier and easier to pretend not to care.

"How long do you think you'll be gone?" he asks, an afterthought.

"I'm not sure but maybe until I work things out with Dina."

"Death shouldn't grant her immunity for being so rude."

"Manners aren't exactly the issue here."

"They probably should have been." His expression now is Sixteenth Arrondissement judgmental, that look that can be found around the tables of some of the best

restaurants in Paris; that mournful regard due to an unfortunate experience with the foul odor of spoiled Brie.

"Where will you stay?" he inquires almost as a matter of form.

"At my parents' house."

He leans over to plant a kiss on either cheek. "We'll talk—*bon voyage!*"

And it's not that she doesn't feel a certain loss, especially right now, since it's obviously not the best moment to include an affair on the list of things that died on this perfect spring day in Paris. But what is more disturbing right now is the thought of going back home, not unlike that recurring dream she has had lately, the one that forces her to remember the past, the lives she once created, possessed, and then somehow misplaced along the way.

The morning sun streams in through the floor-to-ceiling casement window that takes up almost one entire wall of the small room. Dina Marie Molloy opens one eye sleepily and turns over on her stomach as she removes his arm from around her shoulder. Cautiously, she edges over to the far end of the bed.

"Don't get up," he whispers. Dina doesn't respond, having decided when she was a child that the sound of her own voice in the morning should be reserved for a dire emergency. Instead she leans over to tuck the sheet snugly around his neck. He groans. "Come back to bed."

The sun streaks its light across the bleached wood floor, settles briefly on the brilliant colors of the American Indian scatter rug that Dina's father brought back from Arizona last summer. She stretches as she surveys the mess in her room—the pile of papers and several heavy textbooks that spill out of a tan canvas knapsack, the broken rocking chair that is propped up against one wall, a reminder that it needs to be repaired, and the clothes. Reaching over on the door-

knob, she retrieves a pair of white cotton shorts and a red T-shirt.

Dina is sturdy, built more like her father than her mother. Tall and well-proportioned, with large bones and broad shoulders, she is a young woman who is most often described as handsome rather than pretty, statuesque but rarely voluptuous. Yet with her startling blue eyes, blond hair, pale skin, and her mother's perfect features, there is something almost ethereal about her.

"I've got a hard on, Dina," he murmurs from somewhere underneath a pile of bedclothes, "and it's got your name written on it." She glances over toward the bed but still doesn't respond, concentrating instead on tying her long hair back into a ponytail. Sitting down on the floor, she begins her morning exercise routine, something that began after she spent spring vacation with her father in Naples and gained five pounds. She grasps the heel of her right foot and extends the leg out to the side. Replacing it, she takes the heel of her left foot and extends it out until it is perfectly straight, repeating the exercise several times more before lying down to do buttocks rolls.

Classes don't begin for Dina until noon, a schedule she carefully arranged when she first arrived at Brampton College in Connecticut. She is a night person, a trait she inherited from her father. But unlike her father who is able to function on practically no sleep at all and still make a brilliant early-morning court appearance, Dina has trouble waking up before ten or eleven.

"Come back to bed and I'll fuck you," the voice offers.

But the words insult her now where once they might have enticed her, once when making love with him held the promise of other possibilities. Or so she made herself believe. But that was in the beginning when she was still optimistic and naïve, before she realized that the price of having even a small part of him in-

cluded being the recipient of his quixotic moods and occasional selfishness. Yet however miserable this affair makes her, however many regrets she may have for having chosen him, she is not unaware that he will always have a permanent place in her heart—if only because he was the first.

The sunlight bounces back through the prisms of the crystal wind chimes that hang from one corner of the ceiling, making streaks of faintly colored pinks and blues that settle on that pile of clothing that is strewn everywhere. Several pairs of jeans, one brown leather cowboy boot—the other kicked underneath the bed—a gold lamé slipper, its mate wedged beneath the closet door, and a pile of freshly washed laundry crammed into a red-and-white checkered sack are scattered around.

"I'm going to have deadly sperm buildup and a rotten headache if we don't do it," he says.

Dina turns around to watch him, fascinated as he slides up in the bed to kick off the covers. Touching his body from his chest down to his lower abdomen, his hand lingers on an enormous erection that seems to have just materialized out of nowhere. He is forbidden to Dina, a man who is old enough to be her father; with masses of gray-streaked hair, he is almost a certain lecherous character out of Nabokov with a broad forehead, heavy brows, black eyes, a malevolent figure in a white silk shirt dueling Pushkin in the St. Petersburg snow, stocky build.

Joshua Moskowitz is a Jew, the son of Russian immigrants, and, at Brompton College, a professor of Social Realism in the Soviet cinema. If they knew, Dina's father would undoubtedly call him a "perverted Commie bastard" and her Aunt Claire would simply refer to him as "that kike." But they don't.

"Let me do it with you," he coaxes her, and it's only because he uses the word *with* that she gives in, just as she gave in the first time—as if without her, it wouldn't be quite the same.

Removing her clothes, she covers her breasts modestly and without a word climbs on top of him. "Oh, my God," she gasps, breaking her vow of early-morning silence because, after all, being filled with an erection of that size certainly falls under the heading of dire emergency.

"Who does it better than me?" he murmurs.

"I don't know," she answers, and chances are if she did know she wouldn't be with him at all. Or perhaps he wouldn't be with her for fear of being discovered as a fraud. But even if Dina doesn't know for sure right now, she does suspect that there could be more. Perhaps it's because of that stranger who lurks within her whenever they make love, that other woman who wants to moan from the pleasure of it all except that there isn't very much of that. And it's probably just as well, for the well-behaved Dina would have trouble allowing that other person to surface. Too shy to be anything but passive, too repressed to be anything but tame, she holds back, not daring to tell Joshua what's going on, which unfortunately for her isn't much. But that has to do with that other presence that invades the bed, someone or something that recites that familiar Catholic platitude in Dina's ear: "Fornication is a mortal sin."

"Fucking you is pure heaven," Joshua murmurs. And Dina holds her breath, waiting for it to end as suddenly and abruptly as it always ends.

"Stay with me for a while," she whispers when she feels him withdraw.

"Can't," he replies without any hesitation. "Now be a good girl and hop off."

She doesn't protest as she raises herself from him, tumbling over onto her side, her legs still slung across his chest. But she feels defeated, inadequate that she hasn't yet found the right combination that will keep him for a while after it's over. "Joshua," she tries again, "you don't have classes until three today, so please stay with me just for a little while."

He smiles patiently. "What's all this now?" he asks, his eyebrows raised in astonishment. "I thought we agreed, no possessiveness."

"Just a cup of coffee. That's not making a life commitment."

Moving her legs from him, he stands up and arranges his testicles within the crotch of his shorts that he has just stepped into.

"Maybe I don't want a cup of coffee, maybe you want one and just assume that I'd go along with the idea, which by the way is a kind of control. Remember, Dina, you start with a cup of coffee and end up with nuclear holocaust—controlling the whole world by destruction or destroying it by control."

And perhaps if Dina didn't find his crotch so fascinating, the way it bulged when he casually propped one leg up on a chair during his lectures, she'd tell him how ridiculous he sounded when he got so pedantic.

"I don't need a lecture now, this isn't a classroom."

"Life is a classroom."

And despite her impatience, her emotions still tend to draw her back to the beginning of their story. "Are you attracted to me, I mean, do you find me interesting and intelligent?"

"Dina, I don't see the connection."

"It has to do with me, Joshua, and why we're together."

"I'm with you because I enrich your life."

"And what about you—what's in it for you?"

"It makes me feel good to do good."

"And the others—do you feel that way about them too?"

"Equally. I try to give you all something different." The playpen is his oyster.

Dina begins pulling the laundry from the bag and folding it.

"So how come I get to do this," she asks, holding

still lingering on Joshua. But Joshua isn't paying any attention to her—he has cleverly seized this opportunity to make a hasty exit. Standing up, he steps into his jeans, pulls on his cowboy boots, grabs his shirt and a windbreaker, and starts for the door.

"Oh, my God," Dina suddenly screams, clutching her stomach. "Oh, no!"

Joshua whirls around, one hand still on the knob, a disgusted expression on his face.

"Temper tantrum or not, I'm outta here!" But his words are lost to her as she continues to sob uncontrollably into the telephone.

"Yes, yes," she says, weeping, "the train. No, now, yes, I can do it alone."

"Dina," he says cautiously, "what's going on?"

She has put down the receiver and is now reaching for a wad of Kleenex, the tears still streaming down her cheeks. "My father"—she chokes on the words—"had a heart attack."

"Well, in 1990 the good news is that heart attacks aren't always fatal."

She hiccups. "This one was!" she sobs before collapsing onto the bed. Joshua emits a low whistle.

"Dead?"

"Dead," she repeats, her face buried in the pillow. "Dead, dead, dead," she screams over and over until it begins to register, as if another person is pounding it into her head, forcing her to accept a reality that is too hideous to imagine.

"Hey, take it easy," Joshua cautions, rubbing his stubble, "just take deep breaths." He moves away from the door. "Makes you wonder," he mumbles more to himself than to Dina, "about making big bucks."

Dina moans softly, rocking back and forth with a pillow pressed against her chest. "What am I going to do now," she says over and over. "I have no one left."

He is confused. "Wait a minute, what happened to your mother? Is she dead too?"

"No," she whispers, flinging the pillow aside.

"So you've got someone."

"I have no one," she cries bitterly. But what confuses Dina, even in her current state, is this overwhelming feeling of loss for her mother when she should be feeling it for her father.

All of this is too much for Joshua Moskowitz, who prides himself on an uncanny ability to grasp the most convoluted relationship, to understand the most complicated scenario, who finds new meaning and hidden nuance in every Soviet film that he dissects for his classes, who can remember every character in a Dostoyevski novel without ever having to flip back over the pages. "If your mother's alive, then what's all this about not having a mother?"

"She lives in Paris," Dina answers tearfully, "and I haven't seen or spoken to her in two years."

"A jet-setter," he judges disdainfully. "Amazing how the rich fall in and out of love with their children!"

"She's not a jet-setter and she's not rich. She's a photographer, and it was my choice to cut off."

"Stand by your choices, Zen. But what was the reason?"

"I went to live with my father," she manages to reply before her voice breaks.

"I get it, he was into heavy control."

She glances at Joshua, determined not to let on that his assessment isn't entirely wrong. But suddenly she is back two years ago, on the night of her sixteenth birthday, when her father took her out for dinner and gave her the letter. And even as she read it then and learned things about her mother that shocked her, she knew that her father had written it less for her than for himself. He was just smart enough to play on all the resentment that Dina held for her mother anyway, during a tough adolescent period adjusting to the divorce

and all the financial problems that went with it. Peter Molloy needed to get even. But Dina needed a father. "How could he be dead?" she asks tearfully. "He was so healthy."

"Stress."

"He loved his work."

"Somewhere deep inside of him he was miserable."

She nearly loses hold of herself. "No," she cries, "he was happy, he loved his life."

"You'll never know now."

Picking up one of Joshua's hands, she holds it tightly between hers. "Please stay with me until I leave for the station." And despite her grief, her mind is alert to any possibility. He glances at his watch.

"Can't," he says. "I've got a student coming for a conference in a little while." Uncomfortable, he shifts from one foot to the other. "I'm with you, Dina," he offers. "I'm thinking about you and I'll be back."

"Please," she begs, the tears beginning all over again, "don't leave me now." And she hates herself for sounding so weak and for not being as alert as she imagined.

"I'll see you later."

"I'll be gone."

"Call me tomorrow," he says, leaning over to kiss her cheek.

"I've never asked for anything," she pleads, blinded more by rage than grief at this point, "a cup of coffee after sex, and now, to stay with me when I just found out my father died."

"Don't mix things up," he argues, trying once again to kiss her.

"Get out," Dina suddenly cries, her hand up to create a barrier between his lips and her face, "just go away!"

Dina is running forward now, suddenly light years ahead of him, having already discarded thoughts and feelings that he will never know. She leans against the wall and watches as he opens the door and smiles

weakly at her before bounding down the hall. But she hardly has time to take some clothes from her dresser in a pack when there is a knock on the door. Flinging it open, a rush of hope fills her when she sees him standing there.

"Joshua," she says, her eyes wide.

He is flustered. "I forgot the laundry," he explains, a foolish grin spreading across his face.

And she keeps on running, backward now, her mind settling on a time when her father was alive, when she hated her mother, when she had a lover, only a few minutes ago it seems, when she was still a child.