

#1

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER

JUDITH KRANTZ

By the New York Times bestselling author of *Spring Collection*

PRINCESS DAISY

JUDITH KRANTZ

*Princess
Daisy*



BANTAM BOOKS

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PRINCESS DAISY

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Princess Daisy

THE #1 BESTSELLER

"With unfailing panache and a style that swoops from crisply cynical to downright voluptuous, *Princess Daisy* is a guaranteed winner."

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"Judith Krantz has written the glamour novel of the year if not of the decade. *Princess Daisy* has the same storytelling assets as *Scruples*, only more of them. Glamour, glamour is everywhere."

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SCRUPLES

SCRUPLES TWO

PRINCESS DAISY

MISTRAL'S DAUGHTER

I'LL TAKE MANHATTAN

TILL WE MEET AGAIN

DAZZLE

LOVERS

*For Steve—
my husband, my love, my best friend—always.*

Special thanks go to these good friends who answered questions with the gift of their experience:

Bernie Owett

Steve Elliot

Dan Dorman

Aaron Shikler

*and, particularly, to Rosemary de Courcy
and her lurcher, Jake.*

Princess
Daisy

We could always shoot this on top of the RCA Building," Daisy said, walking past the parapet, above which rose a high, metal railing designed to forestall would-be suicides. "They're not nearly as paranoid as you Empire State people." She gestured scornfully at the ledge behind her. "But, Mr. Jones, if it's not the view from precisely here, the message just won't be New York."

The man in uniform watched, motionless in surprise, as Daisy suddenly leapt high and held on to a rung of the railing with one strong hand. With her other hand she took off the sailor hat under which she had tucked her hair and let it blow free. The silver-gilt tumble was caught by the breeze that separated it into a million brave and dazzling threads.

"Come down, Miss," the man in charge of the Observation Deck begged. "I told you it's just not allowed."

"Look, I'm trying to show you what we're after," Daisy persisted. "It's a hairspray commercial, and artistically, what's a hairspray commercial without wind blowing in the hair—can you tell me that? Just hanks of hair, all chunky and boring—wind is *essential*, Mr. Jones."

The uniformed official looked up at Daisy with perplexed admiration and dismay. He didn't understand anything about her. She was young and more beautiful than anyone he'd ever seen but she wore a man's moldy baseball jacket which bore the now mournful legend BROOKLYN DODGERS on its back, a pair of United States Navy sailor pants and dirty tennis shoes. He was far from a romantic man, but everything about her stung his imagination with

an unaccustomed fascination. He found himself curiously unable to look away from her. She was as tall as he, at least five feet, seven inches, and something about the way she walked had suggested the balance of the trained athlete even before she had jumped up to the perch from which she now gestured, intrepid, high-hearted, as if she were trying to catch a beam of the sun itself. The roof supervisor was aware of a particular clarity and cadence in her speech that made him think that perhaps she wasn't American, yet who but an American would dress like that? When she'd first appeared all she'd asked was for permission to film a commercial on his roof and now she was hanging up there like a goddamned angel on a Christmas tree. Thank heaven the place was closed for the day.

"You can't go up there. You didn't tell me you wanted to the last time you came," he reproached her, circling cautiously closer. "It's never permitted. It could be dangerous."

"But all great art has to break rules," Daisy called down to him gaily, remembering that when she had first checked out this location, a week ago, two twenty-dollar bills had ensured Mr. Jones's cooperation. She had many more twenties in her pocket. Several years as a producer of commercials had taught her to travel strictly on folding money.

Daisy scrambled a little higher and took a deep breath. It was a fresh, glinting spring day in 1975 and the wind had blown all the soot away from the city; the rivers that circled the island were as blue and as lively as the ocean itself, and Central Park was a great Oriental rug flung at the feet of the gray apartment buildings of Fifth Avenue.

She smiled down at the worried man looking up at her. "Listen, Mr. Jones, I know all three models we're going to use; one of them lives on raw veggies and is working on her black belt in Karate, the second has just been signed for her first movie and the third is an est trainer who's engaged to marry a man with oil wells—now, would three wholesome American girls like that have any intention of jumping? We're going to build a strong, absolutely safe platform for them to stand on. I guarantee it personally."

"A platform! You never said . . ."

Daisy jumped down and stood close to him. Her dark eyes, not quite black, but the color of the innermost heart

of a giant purple pansy, caught the late afternoon light and held it fast, as she deftly pressed two folded bills into his hand. "Mr. Jones, I'm sorry if I alarmed you. Honestly, it's safe as houses up there—you ought to try it."

"I just don't know, Miss."

"Ah, come on," Daisy cajoled him. "Didn't you promise me you'd be all ready for us on Monday? Didn't you promise me a special freight elevator open for business at six A.M.?"

"But you never said anything about going *above* the roof level," he grumbled.

"Roof level!" Daisy said indignantly. "If all we wanted was a simple high view there must be a dozen buildings in this city we could use—but we want yours, Mr. Jones, no one else's." The story board for the commercial had specifically stated the Empire State Building. Leave it to Revlon to complicate her life. As Daisy reached into her reserve pocket for an additional twenty, she remembered that, three years before, when she had started working as a production assistant, she had first seen a taxi-cab driver cheerfully accept forty dollars to turn off his meter to allow his taxi to be used for six hours in the background of a street scene. "But that's bribing people," Daisy had objected. "Think of it as rent, if you want to stay in the business." She'd been warned, and she'd taken the advice. Now, as the experienced producer of many of the best commercials ever filmed—if you like commercials—Daisy was hardened to the objections of civilians, and if Mr. Jones was more difficult than many, he was easier than some. Her next gambit was the one that usually clinched matters.

"Oh, I forgot to tell you," she said, coming closer to him. "The director wanted to know if you'd be in the commercial, standing there in the background, like the keeper of the keys to the kingdom. We only pay Screen Actors' Guild minimum, so you don't have to do it if you don't want to—we could hire an actor to play you, but it wouldn't be nearly as authentic."

"Well . . ."

"And, of course, you'd have to have make-up," she said, playing her best card.

"Oh. I guess it'll be all right. Yeah, without wind in the hair why would you need hairspray? I see your point. Make-up, huh? And would I have to wear a costume?"

"Your uniform will be perfect, just as it is. Goodbye,

Mr. Jones—I'll see you first thing Monday morning." Daisy waved cheerfully at him as she walked toward the covered center core of the building. As she waited for the elevator to reach the eighty-sixth floor, the blonde girl in the baseball jacket, born Princess Marguerite Alexandrovna Valensky, reflected that it was truly fortunate that there was one thing you could count on in this world: *everybody* wanted to be in show biz.

Mr. Jones was only one in a long line of men who had been fascinated by something in Daisy Valensky. Among the first of them had been the famed photographer, Philippe Halsman, the man who would take more *Life* cover photographs than any other in the history of the magazine. In the late summer of 1952 he had been assigned to take Daisy's first official photographs for a *Life* cover, since absolutely everyone, or so it seemed to the editors of the magazine, wanted to know what the child of Prince Stash Valensky and Francesca Vernon looked like. The sudden marriage of the great war hero and incomparable polo player to the matchless romantic American movie star had intrigued the world and inspired rumors which were only expanded and exaggerated by the seclusion in which Prince and Princess Valensky had lived with their first child since her birth in April.

Now, in August, Francesca Vernon Valensky sat in a field of long grass, in a Swiss meadow, with Daisy in her arms. Halsman found the actress faintly pensive, even remote, although he had photographed her twice before, the second time after she had won an Oscar for her Juliet. But it was the laughing child who interested him even more than the mystery of her mother's mood. The tiny girl was like a new hybrid rose in the inconsistency of her coloring. By rights, he thought, only generations of selective breeding should have produced a child who had the classically Italian dark eyes of her mother, and skin that had a Tuscan warmth to it, like the particular part of a peach into which you bite first, knowing that it will be the ripest spot on the fruit. Yet her little head was covered with Saxon-white curls that blew around her vivid face like the corolla of a flower.

Stash Valensky's old wet nurse, Masha, who still formed part of his household, had, with her characteristic self-importance, informed the photographer that Princess Daisy's hair was exactly like that of her father when he was a

child. It was true blonde hair, she explained proudly, which may become gold in time but never changes to ash brown with age. She boasted of this Valensky hair, which was found somewhere in each generation as far back as the family could be traced, yes, back to the days of the earliest hereditary Russian nobility, the *boyars*, who were the companions of the Tsars for almost a thousand years before Peter the Great. After all, she asked, almost indignantly, was not her master a direct descendant of Rurik, the Scandinavian Prince who had founded the Russian monarchy in the 800s? Halsman quickly agreed with her that little Daisy's hair would always remain blonde. Remembering Masha's imperious ways, and realizing that she would soon be coming to take the infant back for her supper, he worked quickly to make the most of the time left to him.

Tactfully, he decided not to ask Francesca to jump in the air for a picture, his favorite ploy after a sitting, and a trick he had practiced with success on many celebrities and dignitaries of the highest order. Instead, the photographer used his charm to cajole Stash Valensky, who had been standing behind him, observing the scene, into posing with his wife and daughter.

But for all his poise and pulsing authority, Valensky was not at ease in front of a camera. He had lived for much of his forty-one years with two phrases somewhere in the back of his mind. One of them came from Tolstoy: "... living like a nobleman is a nobleman's business, only the nobility can do it." The other phrase came from a tattered text on the beliefs of Hinduism which had fallen into his hands during a brief period of hospital convalescence after he had bailed out of his first Hurricane fighter plane during the Battle of Britain. "Be like the eagle when it soars above the abyss. The eagle does not think about flying, it simply feels that it flies."

Neither of these two guiding principles permitted him to feel comfortable while holding still for a photograph. He was so stiff that Halsman, in a flash of inspiration, suggested that they go to the stables where the Prince's nine polo ponies were kept in loose-boxes, attended to by three grooms.

Francesca cradled Daisy in her arms while Valensky indicated the fine points of the animals. Carried away by his enthusiasm, Valensky had just invited the photographer to inspect the mouth of his favorite pony, Merlin, when

Halsman wondered out loud if the pony would allow the Prince to lift Daisy on his back.

"Why not? Merlin has a contented mind."

"But he isn't saddled," Francesca objected.

"So much the better. Daisy will have to learn to ride bareback some day."

"She still can't sit up by herself," Francesca said nervously.

"I don't intend to let go of her." The Prince laughed, firmly taking the baby and setting her astride the low curve of the pony's back between loins and withers. Francesca reached up to steady her child and Halsman finally got his cover picture; the magnificent man and the magnificent woman, their hands clasped around the little body, faces uplifted eagerly toward the sprite in a flowered lawn dress whose hands fluttered the air in jubilation.

"She has no fear, Francesca," Stash exclaimed proudly. "I knew she wouldn't have. Valensky women have ridden hard for hundreds of years—haven't I told you?"

"More than once, darling," Francesca answered with a laugh that held a wisp of sadness in its loving mockery, a laugh that only sounded for a brief moment. It was at that instant Halsman decided that the timing was right to get a jumping picture of the Prince. When he proposed the idea Valensky barely hesitated. Then, lifting Daisy from Merlin's back, he grasped her under her arms, held her high above his head, and jumped straight up into the air, with a wild and ferocious leap. The child screamed with delight and Francesca Valensky shuddered, she who had once been so dangerously reckless. What had this marriage done to her, Halsman wondered?

Normally the *Queen Mary* makes the New York to Southampton crossing without a stop. On this particular trip, in June of 1951, the great engines came to a full halt as the ship arrived at Cherbourg. It lay just outside the harbor while a barge approached the ocean liner and tied up at a baggage port. A dozen sailors wheeled large carts piled with luggage down the gangplank and deposited it in two heaps, one mountainous and one relatively modest. By the time all the trunks and suitcases were arranged, thousands of curious passengers crowded the railings to discover the reason for the unexplained delay. After a brief wait, three people walked down the gangplank, a slender man, arm in arm with a trim woman, preceded by four small excitable dogs, and finally another woman whom the college students in third class immediately recognized and greeted with cheers and applause. While Francesca Vernon sat on one of her suitcases and waved merrily at her admirers, the Duke and Duchess of Windsor, standing with dignity near the dozens of steamer trunks which held their summer wardrobes, saw no reason to respond to the democratic hullabaloo, nor did they deign to even nod to the actress whose face was as famous as theirs. Since they never set foot in England, yet always traveled by Cunard, their yearly arrival on the Continent was made in this unfortunately public fashion. While on board the *Queen* they invariably ate in their suite and only emerged to walk their band of cairns. Inured by habit, resolutely they paid no attention to the spectators, but to Francesca the audience only increased the swelling thrill she felt as the barge approached the customs shed

where her agent, Matty Firestone, and his wife, Margo, were waiting for her.

The Firestones had been in Europe for several weeks before her arrival. They had rented a huge, prewar Delahaye touring car and engaged an English-speaking chauffeur. Francesca sat mute with expectation as the car sped along the poplar-lined roads leading to Paris. Her dark beauty, which spoke of fifteenth-century Italy in its uncontemporary cut and fashion, was lit by most unclassic anticipation as she leaned forward on the cushions of the car. She possessed a combination of tranquility and pure sensuality in the composition of the essential triangle of eyes and mouth. Her black eyes were long and widely spaced, her mouth, even in repose, was made meaningful by the grace of its shape: the gentle arc of her upper lip dipped in the center to meet the lovely pillow of her lower lip in a line that had the power of an embrace. Margo watched her with maternal emotion. She thought that Francesca had never been quite as touching in any of her roles as she was now, her whole being ignited with the excitement of her first hours on European soil. Few people besides Margo, who had been her friend, confidante and protector for six years, knew just how influenced by the stuff of fairy tales and stories of high romance the twenty-four-year-old movie star still was.

"We'll do Paris for a week, honey," Matty told his client, "and then the grand tour. Straight down France to the Riviera, then along the coast until we get to Italy. We'll hit Florence, Rome and Venice and go back to Paris through Switzerland. Two months of it. Sound good to you?"

Francesca was too moved to answer.

By late August the Firestones and Francesca returned to Paris, where Margo had serious shopping to finish before their ship sailed at the end of the month. They stayed at the George V, then and now the hotel for rich tourists who don't care that the hotel is full of other rich tourists, but who do care about good beds, room service and efficient plumbing.

In the hotel bar, on the first evening of their return, Matty was greeted by David Fox, a studio vice-president he lunched with at least once a month back in Hollywood.

"You all have to come to Deauville for the polo match

next week," David insisted. "It's the first important one since the war."

"Polo?" asked Matty indignantly. "A bunch of fancy no-goods on nervous little ponies? Who needs it?"

"But they've reached the finals—everyone will be there," David persisted.

"How do they dress in Deauville?" Margo interrupted curiously.

"Exactly the same way you'd dress for a cruise on the largest yacht in the world," the man replied knowingly. "And, of course, everyone changes three times a day."

Margo barely prevented herself from licking her lips. The semi-marine mode had always been particularly kind to her.

"Matty, darling, I *need* to go to Deauville," she announced, with an inflection that told Matty there was no use in further discussion.

Deauville, that timelessly chic resort, was established on the coast of Normandy by the Duc de Morny in 1866. From its inception it was intended to be a paradise for moneyed aristocrats, deeply involved in racing, gambling and golf. Because the grass of Normandy is the richest in France, its cows produce the best cheese, cream and butter. This same grass inevitably attracts Horse People, and the breeding and raising of horses takes place on the great stud farms of the surrounding countryside. The city of Deauville itself consists almost entirely of hotels, shops, cafés and restaurants, but the fresh sea air provides the illusion that enables the briskly strolling crowd on the boardwalk, the Edwardian *Promenade des Planches*, to imagine that the previous night, spent at the casino, must have been, in some way, good for their health.

The Hotel Normandy, in which Matty had been able to secure last-minute accommodations, is built in the English half-timbered style, rather as if someone had taken a normal country manor house and turned it into a seaside giant. In August, the Normandy, the Royal and the Hotel du Golf shelter a large portion of the people who will, inevitably, be in Paris in October, in St. Moritz in February and in London in June.

In 1951 these people were called the International Set. For lack of an engine the term "Jet Set" didn't exist, but even then newspapers and magazines, although less preoc-