

RANDOM HOUSE  BOOKS



Malice  
Danielle Steel

## **About the Book**

One extraordinary woman's struggle to triumph over malice and betrayal.

On the night of her mother's funeral, Grace Adams is attacked. A young woman with secrets too horrible to tell, Grace will not reveal the truth about what happened. After a lifetime of being a victim, she must now pay the price for other people's sins.

From a small town in Illinois to the depths of a women's prison; from a Chicago modelling agency to a challenging career in New York, Grace carries the past with her wherever she goes. When Grace meets Charles Mackenzie, she finds a man who wants nothing from her - except to heal her and to give her the family she so desperately wants. But with happiness finally within her grasp, Grace is at her most vulnerable - in danger of losing everything to an enemy from her past, an enemy bent on malice...

# **Contents**

Cover  
About the Book  
Title Page  
Dedication

Chapter 1  
Chapter 2  
Chapter 3  
Chapter 4  
Chapter 5  
Chapter 6  
Chapter 7  
Chapter 8  
Chapter 9  
Chapter 10  
Chapter 11  
Chapter 12  
Chapter 13  
Chapter 14  
Chapter 15  
Chapter 16

About the Author  
Also by Danielle Steel  
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DANIELLE STEEL

MALICE

To my extraordinary, loving,  
and very remarkable children,  
Beatrix, Trevor, Todd,  
Nick, Samantha, Victoria,  
Vanessa, Maxx, and Zara.  
You make my life worth living,  
you are all that has made  
my life worthwhile.  
You are my life and my heart.  
With all my thanks and love,  
and apologies for the pain  
I may have brought you  
with this wicked thing  
called "fame."  
I love you so very, very much,  
d.s.

## Chapter 1

THE SOUNDS OF the organ music drifted up to the Wedgwood blue sky. Birds sang in the trees, and in the distance, a child called out to a friend on a lazy summer morning. The voices inside the church rose in powerful unison, as they sang the familiar hymns that Grace had sung with her family since childhood. But this morning, she couldn't sing anything. She could barely move, as she stood, staring straight ahead at her mother's casket.

Everyone knew Ellen Adams had been a good mother, a good wife, a respected citizen until she died. She had taught school before Grace was born, and she would have liked to have had more children, but it just hadn't happened. Her health had always been frail, and at thirty-eight she had gotten cancer. The cancer started in her uterus, and after a hysterectomy, she'd had both chemotherapy and radiation. But the cancer spread to her lungs anyway, and her lymph nodes, and eventually her bones. It had been a four-and-a-half-year battle. And now, at forty-two, she was gone.

She had died at home, and Grace had taken care of her single-handedly until the last two months when her father had finally had to hire two nurses to help her. But Grace still sat next to her bedside for hours when she came home from school. And at night, it was Grace who went to her when she called out in pain, helped her turn, carried her to the bathroom, or gave her medication. The nurses only worked in the daytime. Her father didn't want them there at night, and everyone realized he had a hard time accepting just how sick his wife was. And now he stood in the pew next to Grace and cried like a baby.

John Adams was a handsome man. He was forty-six, and one of the best attorneys in Watseka, and surely the most loved. He had studied at the University of Illinois after serving in the Second World War, and then came home to Watseka, a hundred miles south of Chicago. It was a small, immaculately kept town, filled with profoundly decent people. And he handled all their legal needs, and listened to all their problems. He went through their divorces with them, or battles over property, bringing peace to warring members of families. He was always fair, and everyone liked him for it. He handled personal injury, and claims against the State, he wrote wills, and helped with adoptions. Other than the town's most popular medical practitioner, who was a friend of his too, John Adams was one of the most loved and respected men in Watseka.

John Adams had been the town's football star as a young man, and he had gone on to play in college. Even as a boy, people had been crazy about him. His parents had died in a car accident when he was sixteen, and his grandparents had all died years before that, and families literally argued over who was going to invite him to live with them until he finished high school. He was always such a nice guy and so helpful. In the end, he had stayed with two different families, and both of them loved him dearly.

He knew practically everyone in town by name, and there were more than a few divorcées and young widows who had had an eye on him ever since Ellen had been so sick in the last few years. But he never gave them the time of day, except to be friendly, or ask about their kids. He had never had a roving eye, which was another nice thing people always said about him. "And Lord knows he has a right to," one of the older men who knew him well always said, "with Ellen so sick and all, you'd think he would start to look around ... but not John ... he's a right decent husband." He was decent and kind, and fair, and successful. The cases he handled were small, but he had an amazing number of

clients. And even his law partner, Frank Wills, teased him occasionally, wanting to know why everyone asked for John, before they'd ask for Frank. He was everyone's favorite.

"What do you do, offer them free groceries for a year behind my back?" Frank always teased. He wasn't the lawyer John was, but he was a good researcher, and good with contracts, with minute attention to detail. It was Frank who went over all the contracts with a fine-tooth comb. But it was always John who got all the glory, whom they asked for when they called, whom clients had heard about from miles away in other towns. Frank was an unimpressive little man, without John's charm or good looks, but they worked well together and had known each other since college. Frank stood several rows back in the church now, feeling sorry for John, and his daughter.

John would be all right, Frank knew, he'd land on his feet, just like he always did, and although he insisted now that he wasn't interested, Frank was betting that his partner would be remarried in a year. But it was Grace who looked absolutely distraught, and shattered, as she stared straight ahead at the banks of flowers at the altar. She was a pretty girl, or she would have been, if she'd allowed herself to be. At seventeen, she was lean and tall, with graceful shoulders and long thin arms, beautiful long legs, and a tiny waist and full bust. But she always hid her figure in baggy clothes, and long loose sweaters she bought at the Salvation Army. John Adams was by no means a rich man, but he could have bought her better than that, if she'd wanted. But unlike other girls her age, Grace had no interest in clothes, or boys, and if anything, she seemed to diminish her looks, rather than enhance them. She wore no makeup at all, and she wore her long coppery auburn hair straight down her back, with long bangs that hid her big cornflower-blue eyes. She never seemed to look straight at anyone, or be inclined to engage them in conversation. Most people were surprised by how pretty she was, if they really looked at her, but if you

didn't look twice, you never noticed her at all. Even today, she was wearing an old dreary black dress of her mother's. It hung like a sack on her, and she looked thirty years old, with her hair tied back in a tight bun, and her face deathly pale as she stood beside her father.

"Poor kid," Frank's secretary whispered, as Grace walked slowly back down the aisle, next to her father, behind her mother's casket. Poor John ... poor Ellen ... poor people. They'd been through so much.

People commented from time to time on how shy Grace was, and how uncommunicative. There had been a rumor a few years back that she might even be retarded, but anyone who had ever gone to school with her knew that that was a lie. She was brighter than most of them, she just didn't say much. She was a solitary soul, and it was only once in a while that someone in school would see her talking to someone, or laughing in a corridor, but then she would hurry away again, as though she was frightened to come out and be among them. She wasn't crazy, her classmates knew, but she wasn't friendly either. It was odd too, considering how sociable her parents were. But Grace never had been. Even as a small child, she had always been solitary, and somewhat lonely. And more than once as a child, she had had to go home from school with a bad attack of asthma.

John and Grace stood out in the noon sun for a little while, shaking hands with friends, thanking them for being there, embracing them, and more than ever, Grace looked wooden and removed as she greeted them. It was as though her body was there, but her mind and soul were elsewhere. And in her dreary too-big dress, she looked more pathetic than ever.

Her father commented on the way she looked on the way to the cemetery. Even her shoes looked worn. She had taken a pair of her mother's black high heels, but they were out of style, and they looked as though her mother had gotten plenty of use from them before she got sick. It was almost

as though Grace wanted to be closer to her now, by wearing her mother's clothes, it was like camouflage, or protective coloring, but it wasn't flattering on a girl her age, and her father said so. She looked a lot like her mother, actually, people always commented on it, except that her mother had been more robust before she'd been taken ill, and her dress was at least three sizes too big for Grace's lithe figure.

"Couldn't you have worn something decent for a change?" her father asked with a look of irritation as they drove to St. Mary's Cemetery on the outskirts of town, with three-dozen cars behind them. He was a respected man, and he had a reputation to uphold. It looked strange for a man like him to have an only child who dressed like an orphan.

"Mama never let me wear black. And I thought ... I thought I should ..." She looked at him defenselessly, sitting miserably in the corner of the old limousine the funeral home had provided for the occasion. It was a Cadillac, and some of the kids had rented it for the senior prom two months before, but Grace hadn't wanted to go, and no one had asked her. With her mother so sick, she had barely even wanted to go to graduation. But she had, of course, and she had shown her mother the diploma as soon as she got home. She had been accepted at the University of Illinois, but had deferred it for a year, so she could continue taking care of her mother. Her father wanted it that way too, he felt that Ellen preferred Grace's loving touch to that of her nurses, and he had pretty much told Grace that he expected her to stay, and not leave for school in September. She hadn't argued with him. She knew there was no point. There was never any point arguing with him. He always got what he wanted. He was used to it. He had been too good-looking and too successful for too long, it had always worked for him, and he expected things to stay that way. Always. Particularly with his own family. Grace understood that. And so had Ellen.

"Is everything ready at the house?" he asked, glancing at her, and she nodded. For all her shyness and reticence, she ran a home beautifully, and had since she was thirteen. In the past four years, she had done everything for her mother.

"It's fine," she said quietly. She had set everything out on the buffet before they left for church. And the rest was covered, on big platters in the refrigerator. People had been bringing them food for days. And Grace had cooked a turkey and a roast the night before. Mrs. Johnson had brought them a ham, and there were salads, and casseroles, some sausages, two plates of hors d'oeuvres, and lots of fresh vegetables, and every imaginable kind of cake and pastry. Their kitchen looked like a bake sale at the state fair, there was plenty for everyone. She was sure that they were going to be seeing well over a hundred people, maybe even twice that many, out of respect for John and what he meant to the people of Watseka.

People's kindness had been staggering. The sheer number of floral arrangements alone had surpassed anything they'd ever seen at the funeral home. "It's like royalty," old Mr. Peabody had said when he handed the guest book full of signatures to her father.

"She was a rare woman," John said quietly, and now, thinking of her, he glanced over at his daughter. She was such a beautiful girl, and so determined not to show it. That was just the way she was, he accepted it, and it was easier not to argue about it. She was good about other things, and she had been a godsend for him during all the years of her mother's illness. It was going to be strange for both of them now, but in a way, he had to admit, it was going to be easier now too. Ellen had been so sick for so long, and in so much pain, it was inhuman.

He looked out the window as they drove along, and then back at his only daughter. "I was just thinking about how odd it's going to be now without your mama ... but maybe ..." He wasn't sure how to say it without upsetting

her more than he meant to, "... maybe easier for both of us. She suffered so much, poor thing," he sighed, and Grace said nothing. She knew her mother's suffering better than anyone, better even than he did.

The ceremony at the cemetery was brief, their minister said a few words about Ellen and her family, and read from Proverbs and Psalms at the graveside, and then they all drove back to the Adamses' home. A crowd of a hundred and fifty friends squeezed into the small neat house. It was painted white, with dark green shutters and a picket fence. There were daisy bushes in the front yard, and a small rose garden her mother had loved just outside her kitchen windows.

The babble of their friends sounded almost like a cocktail party, and Frank Wills held court in the living room, while John stood outside with friends in the hot July sunshine. Grace served lemonade and iced tea, and her father had brought out some wine, and even the huge crowd scarcely made a dent in all the food she served. It was four o'clock when the last guests finally left, and Grace walked around the house with a tray, picking up all their dishes.

"We've got good friends," her father said with a warm smile. He was proud of the people who cared about them. He had done a lot for many of them over the years, and now they were there, in their hour of need, for him, and his daughter. He watched Grace moving quietly around the living room, and he realized how alone they were now. Ellen was gone, the nurses were gone, there was no one left except just the two of them. Yet he was not a man to dwell on his misfortunes.

"I'll go outside and see if there are any glasses out there," he said helpfully, and he came back half an hour later with a trayful of plates and glasses, his jacket over his arm, and his tie loosened. If she'd been aware of such things, she would have seen that her father looked more handsome than ever. Others had noticed it. He had lost some weight in the last

few weeks, understandably, and he looked as trim as a young man, and in the sunlight it was difficult to see if his hair was gray or sandy. In fact, it was both, and his eyes were the same bright blue as his daughter's.

"You must be tired," he said to her, and she shrugged as she loaded glasses and plates into the dishwasher. There was a lump in her throat and she was trying not to cry. It had been an awful day for her ... an awful year ... an awful four years.... Sometimes she wished she could disappear into a little puddle of water. But she knew she couldn't. There was always another day, another year, another duty to perform. She wished that they had buried her that day, instead of her mother. And as she stared unhappily at the dirty plates she was loading mechanically into the racks, she felt her father standing beside her. "Want some help?"

"I'm okay," she said softly. "Do you want dinner, Dad?"

"I don't think I could eat another thing. Why don't you just forget it. You've had a long day. Why don't you just relax for a while?" She nodded, and went back to loading the dishes. He disappeared into the back of the house, to his bedroom, and it was an hour later when she had finally finished. All the food was put away, and the kitchen looked impeccable. The dishes were in the machine, and the living room looked tidy and spotless. She was well organized and she bustled through the house straightening furniture and pictures. It was a way of keeping her mind off everything that had happened.

When she went to her room, her father's door was closed, and she thought she could hear him talking on the phone. She wondered if he was going out, as she closed her own door, and lay on her bed with all her clothes on. She'd gotten food on the black dress by then, and she'd splashed it with soap and water when she did the dishes. Her hair felt like string, her mouth like cotton, her heart like lead. She closed her eyes, as she lay there miserably, and two little

rivers of tears flowed from the outer corners of her eyes to her ears.

“Why, Mama? Why ... why did you leave me?...” It was the final betrayal, the final abandonment. What would she do now? Who would help her? The only good thing was that she could leave and go to college in September. Maybe. If they’d still take her. And if her father would let her. But there was no reason to stay here now. There was every reason to leave, which was all she wanted.

She heard her father open his door and go out into the hall. He called her name, and she didn’t answer him. She was too tired to speak to anyone, even him, as she lay on her bed, crying for her mother. Then she heard his bedroom door close again, and it was a long time before she finally got up, and walked into her bathroom. It was her only luxury, having her own bathroom. Her mother had let her paint it pink, in the little three-bedroom house her mother had been so proud of. They had wanted the third bedroom for the son they’d planned to have, but the baby had never come, and her mother had used it as a sewing room for as long as Grace could remember.

She ran a hot bath almost to the edge of the tub, and she went to lock her bedroom door, before she took off her mother’s tired black dress, and let it fall to the floor around her feet, after she kicked her mother’s shoes off.

She let herself slowly into the tub, and closed her eyes as she lay there. She was totally unaware of how beautiful she was, how long and slender her legs, how graceful her hips, or how appealing her breasts were. She saw none of it, and wouldn’t have cared. She just lay there with her eyes closed and let her mind drift. It was as though her head were filled with sand. There were no images, no people she wanted to see in her mind’s eye, nothing she wanted to do, or be. She just wanted to hang in space and think of absolutely nothing.

She knew she'd been there for a long time when the water had grown cold, and she heard her father knocking on the door to her bedroom. "What are you doing in there, Gracie? Are you okay?"

"I'm fine," she shouted from the tub, roused from her trancelike state. It was growing dark outside, and she hadn't bothered to turn the lights on.

"Come on out. You'll be lonely."

"I'm fine." Her voice was a monotone, her eyes distant, keeping everyone far from the place where she really lived, deep in her own soul, where no one could find her or hurt her.

She could hear him still standing outside her door, urging her to come out and talk to him, and she told him she'd be out in a few minutes. She dried herself off, and put on a pair of jeans and a T-shirt. And over that, she put on one of her baggy sweaters, in spite of the heat. And when she was all dressed again, she unlocked the door, and went back to unload the dishwasher in the kitchen. He was standing there, looking out at her mother's roses, and he turned when Grace came into the room, and smiled at her.

"Want to go outside and sit for a while? It's a nice night. You could do this later."

"It's okay. I might as well get it done." He shrugged and helped himself to a beer, and then he walked outside and sat down on the kitchen steps and watched the fireflies in the distance. She knew it was pretty outside, but she didn't want to look at it, didn't want to remember this night, or anything about it. Just like she didn't want to remember the day her mother died or the pitiful way she'd begged Grace to be good to her father. That was all she'd cared about ... him ... all that ever mattered to her was making him happy.

When the dishes were put away, Grace went back to her room again, and lay down on the bed, without turning on the light. She still couldn't get used to the silence. She kept

waiting to hear her voice, for the past two days she kept listening for her, as though she'd been sleeping, but would wake up in pain at any moment. But there was no pain for Ellen Adams now, there never would be again. She was at peace at last. And all they had left was the silence.

Grace put her nightgown on at ten o'clock, and left her jeans in a pile on the floor, with her sweater and T-shirt. She locked her door, and went to bed. There was nothing else to do. She didn't want to read or watch TV, the chores were done, there was no one she had to take care of. She just wanted to go to sleep and forget everything that had happened ... the funeral ... the things people had said ... the smell of the flowers ... the words of their minister at the graveside. No one knew her mother anyway, no one knew any of them, just as they didn't know her, and didn't really care. All they wanted and knew were their own illusions.

"Gracie ..." She heard her father knock softly on the door. "Gracie ... honey, are you awake?" She heard him, but she didn't answer. What was there to say? How much they missed her? How much she had meant to them? Why bother? It wouldn't bring her back anyway. Nothing would. Grace just lay in bed in the dark, in her old pink nylon nightgown.

She heard him try the doorknob then, and she didn't stir. She had locked the door. She always did. At school the other girls made fun of her for being so modest. She locked the doors everywhere. Then she could be sure of being alone, and not being bothered. "Gracie?" He was still standing there, determined not to let her grieve alone, his voice sounded gentle and warm, as she stared at the door, and refused to answer. "Come on, baby ... let me in, and we'll talk ... we're both hurting right now ... come on, honey ... let me help you." She didn't stir, and this time he rattled the doorknob. "Honey, don't make me force the door, you know I can. Now come on, let me in."

"I can't. I'm sick," she lied. She looked beautiful and pale in the moonlight, her white face and arms like marble, but he couldn't see them.

"You're not sick." He knew her better than that. As he talked to her, he was unbuttoning his shirt. He was tired too, but he didn't want her locked up alone in her room, with her grief. That's what he was there for. "Gracie!" His tone was growing firm, and she sat up in bed and stared at the door, almost as though she could see him beyond it, and this time she looked frightened.

"Don't come in, Dad." There was a tremor in her voice, as she looked at the door. It was as though she knew he was all-powerful, and she feared him. "Dad, don't." She could hear him forcing the door, as she put her feet on the floor, and sat on the edge of the bed, waiting to see if he could force it. But she heard him walk away then, and she sat shaking on the edge of the bed. She knew him too well. He never gave up on anything that easily, and she knew he wouldn't now.

A moment later, he was back, and she heard an implement of some kind jimmy the lock, and an instant later, he was standing in her room, bare-chested and barefoot, with only his trousers on, and a look of annoyance.

"You don't need to do that. It's just the two of us now. You know I'm not going to hurt you."

"I know ... I ... I couldn't help it ... I'm sorry, Dad ..."

"That's better." He walked to where she sat, and looked down at her sternly. "There's no point in your being miserable in here. Why don't you come on into my room and we'll talk for a while." He looked fatherly, and disappointed by her constant reticence, and as she looked up at him, he could see that she was shaking.

"I can't ... I ... I have a headache."

"Come on." He leaned down and grabbed her by the arm, and pulled her from where she sat. "We'll talk in my room."

"I don't want to ... I ... *no!*" she snapped at him, and pulled her arm out of his hand. "*I can't!*" she shouted at him, and this time he looked angry. He wasn't going to play these games with her anymore. Not now. And not tonight. There was no point, and no need. She knew what her mother had said to her. His eyes burned into hers as he looked down at her, and grabbed her harder.

"Yes, you can, and you're going to, dammit. I told you to come into my room."

"Dad, please ..." Her voice was a thin whine, as he dragged her from the bed, and she followed him unwillingly into his bedroom. "Please, Mom ..." She could feel her chest tighten and hear the beginnings of a wheeze as she begged him.

"You heard what your mother said when she died," he spat the words angrily at her. "You know what she told you ..."

"I don't care." It was the first time in her entire life that she had defied him. In the past, she had whimpered and cried, but she had never fought him as she did now, she had begged, but never argued. This was new for her, and he didn't like it. "Mom isn't here now," she said, shaking from head to foot, as she stared at him, trying to dredge something from her very soul that had never been there before, the courage to fight her father.

"No, she isn't, is she?" He smiled. "That's the point, Grace. We don't have to hide anymore, you and I. We can do whatever we want. It's our life now ... our time ... and no one ever has to know it..." He advanced toward her with eyes that glittered at her, as she took a step backwards, and he grabbed both her arms, and then an instant later, with a single gesture, he tore the pink nylon nightgown in half, right off her shoulders. "There ... that's better ... isn't it ... we don't need this anymore ... we don't need anything ... all I need is you, little Gracie ... all I need is my baby who loves me so much, and whom I love...." With a

single hand, he dropped his trousers and stepped out of them, along with his shorts, and he stood naked and erect before her.

“Dad ... please ...” It was a long, sad gasp of grief and shame, as she hung her head, and looked away from him, at the sight of him that was all too familiar. “Dad, I can’t ...” Tears slid down her cheeks. He didn’t understand. She had done it for her, because her mother had begged her. She had done it for years, since she was thirteen ... since just after her mother got sick, and had the first operation. Before that, he had beaten her, and Grace had listened to it, night after night, in her bedroom, sobbing, and listening to them, and in the morning, her mother would try to explain the bruises, talking about how she had fallen, or walked right into the bathroom door, or slipped, but it was no secret. They all knew. No one would have believed John Adams capable of it, but he was, and a great deal more. He would have beaten Grace, too, except that Ellen never let him. Instead, she had offered herself up, time after time, for his beatings, and told Grace to lock the door to her room.

Twice, Ellen had miscarried because of the beatings, the last time at six months, and after that, there had been no more children. The beatings had been brutal and terrifying, but subtle enough that the bruises could always be hidden or explained, as long as Ellen was willing to do it, and she was. She had loved him ever since high school, he was the best-looking boy in town, and she knew she was lucky to have him. Her parents had been dirt-poor, and she hadn’t even finished high school. She was a beautiful girl, but she knew that without John, she didn’t have a chance in the world. That was what he told her, and she believed him. Her own father had beaten her too, and at first what John did, didn’t seem so unusual or so awful. But it got worse over the years, and at times he threatened to leave her because she was so worthless. He made her do anything he wanted just so he wouldn’t leave her. And as Grace grew up and

grew more beautiful each day, it was easy to see what he wanted, what would be required of her, if she really wanted to keep him. And once Ellen got sick, and the radiation and chemotherapy changed her so dramatically, deep penetration was no longer possible. He told her bluntly then that if she expected to stay married to him something would have to be worked out to keep him happy. It was obvious that she couldn't keep him happy anymore, couldn't give him what he wanted. But Grace could. She was thirteen, and so very lovely.

Her mother had explained it to her, so she wouldn't be frightened. It was something she could do for them, like a gift, she could help her dad be happy, and help her mom, it would be as though she was even more a part of them, and her dad would love her more than he ever had before. At first, Grace didn't understand, and then she cried ... what would her friends think if they ever knew? How could she do *that* with her father? But her mother kept telling her how she had to help them, how she owed it to them, how her mother would die if someone didn't help her, and maybe he would leave them, and then they'd be alone, with no one to take care of them. She painted a terrifying picture, and put the leaden mantle of responsibility on Grace's shoulders. The girl sagged at the weight of it, and the horror of what was expected of her. But they didn't wait to hear her answer. That night, they came into her room, and her mother helped him. She held her down, and crooned to her, and told her what a good girl she was, and how much they loved her. And afterwards, when they went back to their room, John held Ellen in his arms and thanked her.

It was a lonely life for Grace after that. He didn't come to her every night, but almost. Sometimes she thought she would die of shame, and sometimes he really hurt her. She never told anyone, and eventually her mother stopped coming into the room with him. Grace knew what was expected of her, and that she had no choice except to do it.

And when she argued with him, he'd hit her hard, and eventually she knew there was no way out, no choice. She did it for her, not for him. She submitted so he wouldn't beat her mother anymore, or leave them. But anytime Grace didn't cooperate with him, or do everything he asked, he went back to his own room and beat up her mother, no matter how sick she was, or how much pain she was in. It was a message that Grace always understood, and she would run shrieking into their room, and swear that she'd do anything he wanted. And over and over and over again, he made her prove it. For over four years now, he had done everything he could dream of with her, she was his very own love slave, his daughter. And the only thing her mother had done to protect Grace from him was get birth control pills for her so she wouldn't get pregnant.

She had no friends at all once he started sleeping with her. She had had few enough before, because she was always afraid that someone would find out he was beating her mother, and Grace knew she had to protect them. But once she started sleeping with him, it was impossible to talk to any of the kids in school, or even the teachers. She was always sure they'd know, that they'd see something on her face, or her body, like a sign, like a malignancy that, unlike her mother, she wore on the outside. The malignancy was his, but she never really understood that. Until now. Now she knew that with her mother gone, she didn't have to do this. It had to stop. She just couldn't now. Not even for her mother. It was too much ... and especially in this room. He had always come to Grace's room, and forced her to let him in. He had never dared take her in his own room. But now it was as though he expected her to step right into her mother's shoes, and fill them in ways that even her mother never could. It was as though he expected her to be his bride now. Even the way he talked to her was different. It was all out in the open. He expected her to be his woman.

And as he looked at her body shimmering enticingly at him, her frantic pleas and arguments only served to arouse him further. He looked hard and ominous as he stood holding her in his powerful grip, and with a single gesture he threw her onto his bed, precisely where his invalid wife had lain until only two days before, and for all the empty years of their marriage.

But this time, Grace struggled with him, she had already decided that she wasn't going to submit again, and as she fought with him, she realized that she had been crazy to think she could stay under the same roof with him, and not have the same nightmare continue. She would have to run away, but first she had to resist, and survive what he was doing to her. She knew she couldn't let him do it to her again ... she couldn't. Even if her mother had wanted her to be good to him, she had been good enough. She couldn't do it anymore ... never again ... never ... but as she flailed her arms helplessly, he pinned her down with his powerful arms, and the weight of his body. Her legs were swiftly parted by his own, and the familiarity of him forced his way through her with more pain than she had ever known or imagined. For a moment, she almost thought he might kill her. It had never been this way before, he had never hurt her as much as he did now. It was as though he were beating her with a fist from inside this time, and wanted to prove to her that he owned her and could do anything he wanted. It was almost beyond bearing and for an instant she thought she might faint, as the room swirled around her, and he hammered at her again and again, tearing at her breasts, chewing at her lips, forcing himself into her again and again, until she seemed to drift in a half state near death, wishing that finally, mercifully, he would kill her.

But even as he ravished her, she knew she couldn't do this again. He couldn't do it to her, she couldn't survive it, for him, or anyone. She knew that she was within an inch of falling off the edge of a dangerous ledge, and suddenly as

she fought and clawed at him, she knew through the blur that she was fighting for her survival. And then, without even knowing how she had remembered it, she knew that they had rolled closer to her mother's night table. For years now, there had been neat rows of pills there and a glass and a pitcher of water. She could have poured the water over him, or hit him with the pitcher, but it was gone. There were no more pills, no water, no glass, and no one to take them. But without thinking, Grace groped her hand along the table, as he continued to pound at her, shouting and grunting. He had slapped her hard several times across the face, but now he was only interested in punishing her with his sexual force and not his hands. He was squeezing her breasts, and pressing her into the bed. He had almost knocked the wind out of her, and her vision was still blurred from when he had hit her, but she felt the drawer of the night table open as she pulled at it, and then she felt the sleek cool steel of the gun her mother had hidden there against intruders. Ellen would never have dared to use it on her husband, or even to threaten him. No matter what he had done to her, or Grace, Ellen had truly loved him.

Grace felt her fingers go around its smooth surfaces, and she got a grip on it, and brandished it above him, for an instant wanting to hit him with it, just to stop him. He was almost finished with her, but she couldn't let him do this to her again. She had to stop him, no matter what or how, she knew she had to stop him before it went any further. She couldn't survive this again. And tonight only told her that he intended this to be her fate for a lifetime. He wouldn't let her go anywhere, he would never let her leave or go to college, or do anything else. She would have no life except to service him, and she knew that whatever it took, she had to stop him. And as she held the gun in her shaking, flailing hand, he came with a huge shuddering shout that made her wince with pain and anguish and revulsion. Just hearing that

again made her hate him. And as she pointed the gun at him, he looked up and saw it.

“You little bitch!” he shouted at her, still shaken by the strength of his orgasm. No one had ever aroused him as Grace did. He wanted to take her and turn her inside out, tear her limb from limb, and devour her. Nothing excited him more than his own flesh, it was deeply primeval. And he was outraged now that she was still going to fight him. He moved to grab the gun from her, and she could see what he was going to do to her. He was going to beat her again and beating her always aroused him further. She couldn’t let him do it, couldn’t let him take her ever again. She had to save herself from him. He was still inside her, as he reached over to grab the gun from her, and in panic she squeezed the trigger as he tried to take it. He looked stunned for just an instant as the gun went off with a sound that terrified her, his eyes bulged, and then he fell down on her with a crushing weight. She had shot him through the throat, and he was bleeding profusely, but he wasn’t moving. She tried to fight her way out from under him, and free herself from him, but she couldn’t do it. He was too heavy, and she couldn’t breathe, and there was blood in her eyes and her mouth now. She was gasping for air, and then with all the strength she had, she forced him from her. He rolled over on his back on the bed, and made a terrifying gurgling sound as he looked at her, but nothing moved and his eyes were open.

“Oh my God ... oh my God ...” she said, still gasping for air, and clutching her own throat now as she stared at him. She could still taste his blood on her tongue, and she didn’t want to touch him. There was blood all over her and the bed, and all she could think of were her mother’s words ... “Be good to Daddy, Grace ... be good to him ... take care of him ... always take care of your father ...” And she had. She had shot him. His eyes moved around the room, but he seemed to be paralyzed, nothing

moved, as he stared at her in terror. She backed into the corner then, and looked at him, and as she did, her whole body shook violently and she threw up on the carpet. When she stopped, she forced herself to go to the phone, and dial the operator.

"I need ... an ambulance ... ambulance ... my father's been shot ... I shot my father..." She was gasping for air, and she gave them the address, and then she stood staring at him. He hadn't moved since he'd fallen back on the bed, and his organ was limp now. The thing that had so terrified her, that had tortured her for so long, looked suddenly so small and harmless, as did he. He looked terrifying and pathetic, blood was bubbling from his throat, and he moaned from time to time. She knew she had done a terrible thing, but she couldn't help it. The gun was still in her hand, and she was cowering naked in the corner when the police came. And she was gasping from her asthma.

"My God ..." the first officer into the room said softly, and then he saw her and took the gun from her as the others walked into the room behind him. The youngest of them thought to wrap her in a blanket, but he had seen the marks on her, the blood smeared everywhere, and the look in her eyes. She seemed crazy. She had been to hell and only halfway back.

Her father was still alive when the ambulance and the paramedics came, but barely. She had severed his spinal cord and the paramedics suspected that the bullet had gone into his lung after that. He was completely paralyzed, and couldn't speak to them. But he didn't even see Grace as he left. His eyes were closed, and they were giving him oxygen. He was barely breathing.

"Is he gonna make it?" the senior policeman asked the paramedics as they put him into the ambulance and turned the siren on in a hurry.

"Hard to say," they answered, and then in an undertone, "Not likely." They left the scene then, and the older officer

shook his head. He had known John Adams since he was in high school. John had handled his divorce for him. Hell of a guy, and why in God's name had the kid shot him? He'd seen the scene when they'd arrived, and he'd noticed that neither of them was dressed, but that could mean anything. Obviously, it had happened after they went to bed in their own rooms, and John probably didn't sleep in pajamas. Why the girl was naked was another thing. She was obviously unbalanced, and maybe her mom's death had been too much for her. Maybe she blamed her father for the mother's death. Whatever it was, they'd find it out in the investigation.

"How is she?" he asked one of his junior officers. There were a dozen officers on the scene by then. It was the biggest thing that had happened in Watseka since the minister's son had taken LSD and committed suicide ten years before. That had been a tragedy, but this was going to be a scandal. For a man like John Adams to be shot by his own kid, that was a real crime, and a loss for the whole town. No one was going to believe it. "Is she on drugs?" he asked as a photographer took pictures of the bedroom. The gun was already in a plastic bag in the squad car.

"She doesn't look like it," the young cop said. "Not obviously, at least. She looks kind of out of it, and very scared. She has asthma, and she's having a hard time breathing."

"I'm sorry to hear it," the senior officer said sarcastically as he glanced around the neat living room. He had been there only hours before, after the funeral. It was hard to believe why he was back now. Maybe the kid was just plain crazy. "Her father's got a lot worse than asthma."

"What did they say?" The junior officer looked concerned. "Is he gonna make it?"

"It doesn't look great. Seems like our little shooter here did quite a job on her old man. Spinal cord, maybe a lung, God only knows what else, or why."

“Think he was doing her?” the younger man asked, intrigued by the situation, but the older man looked outraged.

“John Adams? Are you nuts? Do you know who he is? He’s the best lawyer in town. And the most decent guy you’d ever want to meet. You think a guy like him would do his own kid? You’re as crazy as she is and not much of a cop if you can come to a conclusion like that.”

“I don’t know ... it kind of looked like it, they were both naked ... and she looks so scared ... there’s a bruise coming up on her arm ... and ...” He hesitated, given the senior man’s reaction, but he couldn’t conceal evidence, no matter who the guy was. Evidence was evidence. “There was come on the sheets, it looked like ...” There had been a lot of blood, but there were other spots too. And the young cop had seen them.

“I don’t give a damn what it looked like, O’Byrne. There’s more than one way for come to get on a man’s sheets. The guy’s wife just died, maybe he was lonely, maybe he was playing with himself when she came in with the gun, maybe she didn’t know what he was doing and it scared her. But there’s no way in hell you’re gonna come in here and tell me that John Adams was doing it to his kid. Forget it.”

“Sorry, sir.” The other officers were already rolling up the sheets as evidence anyway and putting them in plastic bags too, and another officer was talking to Grace in her bedroom. She was sitting on the bed, still wearing the blanket they had given her when they got there. She had found her inhaler and she was breathing more easily now, but she looked deathly pale, and the officer questioning her wondered how clear she was on what had happened. She seemed so dazed that he almost wondered if she understood him. She said she didn’t remember finding the gun, it was suddenly just in her hand, and it went off. She remembered the noise, and then her father bleeding all over her. And that was all she remembered.

“How was he bleeding on you? Where were you?” He had the same impression of the scene as O’Byrne, though it seemed hard to believe of John Adams.

“I don’t remember,” she said blankly. She sounded like an automaton, her breath was still coming in little short gasps, and she seemed a little shaky from the medication.

“You don’t remember where you were when you shot your father?”

“I don’t know.” She looked at him as though she didn’t see him sitting there on her bed with her. “In the doorway,” she lied. She knew what she had to do. She owed it to her mother to protect him.

“You shot him from the doorway?” It was impossible, and they were getting nowhere. “Do you think someone else shot your father?” He wondered if that was where she was going with her story. An intruder. But that was even less believable than the story about the doorway.

“No. I shot him. From the doorway.”

The officer knew without a doubt that her father had been shot at close range, maybe no more than an inch or two, by a person right in front of him, obviously his daughter. But where were they?

“Were you in bed with him?” he asked her pointedly, and she didn’t answer. She stared straight ahead, as though he weren’t even there, and gave a little sigh. “Were you in bed with him?” he asked again, and she hesitated for a long time before she answered.

“I’m not sure. I don’t think so.”

“How’s it going in here?” the senior officer inquired, as he poked his head in the door. It was three o’clock in the morning by then, and they had done everything they needed to do at the crime scene.

The officer questioning Grace gave a hopeless shrug. It was not going well. She was not making a lot of sense, she was shaking violently, and she was so dazed that at times he really wondered if she even knew what had happened.

“We’re going to take you in, Grace. You’re going to be in custody for a few days. We need to talk to you some more about what happened.” She nodded, and said nothing to him. She just sat there, with bloodstains all over her, in the blanket. “Maybe you’d like to clean up a little bit, and put your clothes on.” He nodded at the officer who’d been talking to her, but Grace didn’t move, she just sat there. “We’re taking you in, Grace. For questioning,” he explained again, wondering if she really was crazy. John had never mentioned it, but it wasn’t the kind of thing one said to clients.

“We’re going to hold you for seventy-two hours, pending an investigation of the shooting.” Had it been premeditated? Had she meant to shoot him? Had it been an accident? What was the deal here? He wondered too if she was on drugs, and he wanted her tested.

She didn’t ask if they were arresting her. She didn’t ask anything. And she didn’t get dressed either. She seemed completely disoriented, which was what suggested to the officer in charge more and more clearly that she was crazy. In the end, they called for a female officer to come out and help them, and she dressed Grace like a small child, but not without noticing assorted marks and bruises on her body. She told her to wash the bloodstains off, and Grace was surprisingly obliging. She did whatever she was told, but she offered no information.

“Did you and your dad have a fight?” the woman officer inquired as Grace stepped into her old jeans and T-shirt. She was still shaking as though she were standing naked in the Arctic. But Grace never answered her question. “Were you mad at him?” Nothing. Silence. She wasn’t hostile. She wasn’t anything. She looked as though she were in a trance, as they walked her through the living room, and she never once asked about her father. She didn’t want to know where he’d gone, where they’d taken him, or what had happened once he got there. She stopped only for an instant as they

crossed the living room, and looked at a photograph of her mother. It was in a silver frame, and Grace was standing next to her in the picture. She had been two or three years old, and both of them were smiling. Grace looked at it for a long time, remembering what her mother had looked like, how pretty she had been, and how much she wanted of Grace. Too much. She wanted to tell her she was sorry now. She just couldn't do it. She had let her mother down. She hadn't taken care of him. She couldn't anymore. And now he was gone. She couldn't remember where he had gone. But he was gone. And she wasn't going to take care of him anymore.

"She's really out of it," the woman officer said right within earshot, as Grace stared at her mother's picture. She wanted to remember it. She had a feeling she might not be seeing it again, but she wasn't sure why. She only knew that they were leaving. "You going to call in a shrink?" the officer asked.

"Yeah, maybe," the senior officer said. More than ever, he was beginning to think she was retarded. Or maybe not. Maybe it was all an act. Maybe there was more to it than met the eye. It was hard to say. God only knew what she'd really been up to.

When Grace stepped outside in the night air, the front lawn was swarming with policemen. There were seven squad cars parked outside, most of them had come just to see what had happened, some were responsible for checking out the crime scene. There were lights flashing and men in uniform everywhere, and the young cop named O'Byrne helped her into the back of a squad car. The female officer got in beside her. She wasn't particularly sympathetic to her. She'd seen girls like her before, druggies, or fakes who pretended to be out of it so they wouldn't get blamed for what they'd done. She'd seen a fifteen-year-old who'd killed her entire family, and then claimed that voices on television had made her do it. For all she knew, Grace was a