

# Princess Daisy Short Guide

## Princess Daisy by Judith Krantz

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# Characters

As the title character, Daisy is central to the themes and popularity of the book.

Here Krantz has created an appealing mixture of fairy tale princess and ordinary American working girl. Daisy's beauty is undeniable, but she frequently hides her gorgeous hair and perfect figure beneath clothing suited to her demanding job: overalls, cap, baseball jacket and sneakers.

And yes, she was born to wealth and privilege, but by a series of events she finds herself not only without money but with the extreme financial pressures of supporting her hospitalized sister and later the beloved Anabel. So she struggles to make ends meet, a familiar battle for readers, but Krantz arranges the story so that she does so in the upper levels of American society: the wealthy horse set of Virginia and the elite of New York.

In her insecurities and fears, Daisy also combines fantasy and reality. Her sexual experiences are by no means common, as they include an incestuous liaison with her half-brother Ram. Thereafter follow several years of virtual, although not complete, celibacy, and then a more intense but strangely loveless relationship with her boss, the dynamic and egotistical Frederick Gordon North. Thus the stage is set for her true love, Patrick Shannon.

Here again Krantz mixes romantic fantasy with familiar reality. The lovers are passionate, although not immediately attracted to each other, and the affair is finally consummated at Anabel's French country house. After a night of sexual passion, Daisy and Shannon are lying together in bed, and Daisy farts. Shannon proves his acceptance of her by joking and helping her to overcome her mortification. Never before has a romantic heroine in literature farted after sex. In this one moment, Krantz succeeds in humanizing both her heroine and this central love affair in a way which no amount of explicit sexual detail could accomplish.

The male characters in *Princess Daisy* are also an interesting mixture, not of fantasy and familiar reality, but of attractive and unattractive characteristics. Patrick Shannon, Daisy's match, can be picked out from his first appearance as the likely romantic interest, given his male beauty and his domineering personality. However, he is not entirely likable. He is ruthless, embarrassingly obsessive in his drive to master whatever challenge is put before him, be it horse riding or women taming, and coldly businesslike in his dealings with everyone around him. Unlike Daisy, he has no close friend with whom to unwind and reveal a warmer, more humorous, joyful personality. Yet Krantz slips in a few hints of the warmth and loyalty which he will reveal to Daisy.

Patrick Shannon spends not only money but time with orphans and fatherless boys, in part to save them from the lonely childhood he suffered.



Stash Valensky also has all the external attributes of a romantic hero: looks, charm, wealth, and a total and obsessive love for Daisy's mother and Daisy herself. But he too is flawed, and in a way that makes him the villain of the first part of the novel. Stash has an obsession about illness, the result of an invalid mother, and he ruthlessly sets about eliminating the imperfect daughter from his life. He goes so far as to lie to his wife and say that the child is dead. Francesca discovers the truth, and escapes with both her daughters to America. Even when Daisy is restored to Stash at Francesca's death, he will have nothing to do with her sister.

Ram Valensky, Stash's son by a first marriage, is another mixture, this time with the evil outweighing the good. His looks, his unhappy childhood, and Daisy's childhood love for him make it hard to write him off as a villain, although he commits the cruelest attacks on Daisy.

Yet all of his actions are presented as stemming from an obsessive love for his half sister, not much different in kind or degree from Stash's love of Francesca.

There is one significant difference, however. Ram often refers to Daisy as belonging to him, as his to possess. This signals the essentially unpleasant aspect of his love; he cares not for Daisy's happiness, but to control her for his own pleasure.

By creating characters with attributes which go against the stereotypes of hero, villain, romantic interest, and even heroine, Krantz not only adds another dimension to her major characters but also keeps the readers' interest, for one is never quite sure what any one of the characters will do next.



## Social Concerns

The central character in *Princess Daisy*, Marguerite Alexandrovna Valensky, lives what is in many ways a fantasy life, having noble blood inherited from her Russian father, beauty from her movie star mother, and wealth, contacts, and glamorous places to call home. But at the same time, Krantz has built into her life story a series of problems and questions about universal concerns. What is the true nature of love, and how can it be distinguished from infatuation, lust, sexual politics? How can a woman succeed in a competitive and ruthless world (in this case the production of television commercials and advertising cosmetics) while retaining her generosity, loyalty and ability to love deeply? And most importantly, how does one achieve and maintain a firm sense of self in a world of pretense, manipulation and public image?

Not only does *Princess Daisy* offer fascinating background information about life among the idle rich of Europe and about the rough and tumble world of television commercials, but also examines the more familiar and personal struggles of growing up, dealing with loss of loved ones, coping with guilt (deserved or not), and becoming a complete and self-accepting adult. Daisy struggles with several burdens, any one of which would crush an ordinary girl, and in combination they serve to balance the many benefits she inherits. Her problems center on a single issue: Who is she? By the end of the novel, Daisy has come to an important realization, that she will only be able to answer that question when she faces the reality of her retarded and secreted twin sister, that there can be no *Princess Daisy* without *Princess Danielle*. Krantz uses these two sisters as symbols of two sides of Daisy's personality: the beautiful, strong and public, as opposed to the flawed, weak and private. She suggests that everyone suffers from such a split, and society is most cruel in its insistence on ignoring or hiding the flawed while glorifying an unrealistic portrait of the perfect exterior.



## Techniques

Essential in a "good read" are a variety of events, each following in quick succession, and Krantz delivers these. *Princess Daisy* is filled with exotic locations in which the characters interact. Krantz avoids sensational events such as murder, war, or political or natural storms, using instead the various manipulations of ambitious or obsessive people to forward the story. However, several coincidences do occur. The loss of Daisy's share of the considerable family fortune is achieved through a contrived series of events: Stash's loyalty to the Rolls Royce company, the naming of Ram as executor and manager of Daisy's income, and the final touch—Daisy throwing Ram's letters in the garbage and thus not sending him permission to sell her Rolls Royce stock in time to avoid the crash.

In the business world, Daisy's success is also implausible. She happens to be standing by when a production team discovers that a planned location has been renovated. She offers herself as designer and her college theater group as executors of a set for the shoot. Leaving aside the questionable abilities of the students of a small liberal arts college, the union regulations in the real world make this highly unlikely. But in the rush of events, these contrivances are forgiven, and Krantz is careful never to push the reader's imagination too far. Daisy does not immediately win a fantastic job opportunity as a result of her amateur set design. Instead, the incident is forgotten until she gets a low-level, underpaid, dogsbody position with the production company some time later. She works her way up to an interesting, if still underpaid, job, through hard work and willingness to do and learn everything.

By using personal conflict as the source of the conflicts in the novel, Krantz keeps the tension high without having to resort to a string of sensational events.

The complex and obsessive individuals in the novel have no difficulty creating enough action and excitement to sustain the story.

## Themes

Princess Daisy points to the importance of private and public acceptance of the weakest as well as the best aspects of the self. The novel also points to the dangers of secrets, those horrific burdens which place one at the mercy of ruthless people.

The novel also explores the difference between healthy and destructive sexual relations, with the clear indication that any relationship which serves one at the expense of another is destructive, while mutually supportive relationships, even if not conventional, can be positive. Stash Valensky, Daisy's father, and his mistress of many years, the maternal Anabel, accept each other's faults, fulfill each other's needs, and succeed in creating an environment of stability to love and support Daisy in her early years.

# Adaptations

Princess Daisy was filmed as a four-hour miniseries by CBS in 1983. Several wellknown television performers appeared.

Lindsay Wagner played Francesca opposite Stacey Keach as Stash Valensky.

Anabel was played by Claudia Cardinale, and Robert Urich appeared as Patrick Shannon. Daisy, however, was played by an unknown: Marete Van Kamp, who physically matched Krantz's description of her heroine but who lacked the acting ability to bring the role to life.





## Key Questions

1. What are Daisy's qualities that make her so attractive? Is she too much of a princess to be regarded as a modern woman?
2. Of what significance are Daisy's various men to her? What does each represent?
3. According to this novel, how can love be distinguished from infatuation, lust, and sexual politics?
4. What are the novel's qualities that lead most critics to regard it as pulp fiction? Is it fair criticism?

## Literary Precedents

The formula that Krantz uses is popular as a result of its familiarity, for it is one used by writers since novels first appeared. Heroine battles the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, but the real struggle is toward true love, and in the final pages that is her reward. Romantic fiction, whether set in an historical period or foreign country, or set in the exotic locales of contemporary society, enjoys an enduring popularity because of this formula and its promise of a happy ending. The glamorous qualities in this novel come from the wealthy individuals and their life styles which are described in some detail, their scandals included, of course, and the behind-the-scenes look at an exotic industry: commercial advertising.

# Copyright Information

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