

White Balloons for *Sarah*



JACQUELINE LAURENT

'AS THE STORY UNFOLDS, YOU WILL LAUGH, YOU WILL CRY, BUT MOST OF ALL, YOU WILL CARE...'

—BARBARA MORRIS, AUTHOR AND SCREENWRITER

WHITE BALLOONS FOR SARAH



Jacqueline Laurent

Sample Chapter

During the summer, Jeff and Ellen often took Kim, Harry and Sarah to the family's small holiday home, and they loved it when Julia and Kelsey could join them.

Nearly every day, the girls took Sarah and Harry to the lake behind their home for a late-afternoon swim. Sarah had become very agile, and could master many strokes, but butterfly was her favorite.

"Look at me!" she exclaimed over and over, begging her brother and sisters to watch her progress. Often they invented swimming races, and Sarah would win, never realizing that Julia and Kelsey let her win, knowing how much pleasure it gave their little sister. But Sarah would also applaud loudly when Harry beat her sometimes and challenge him for new races. It seemed that Sarah had no limitations, and she was happy whether she won or lost.

That afternoon, Kelsey and Julia were watching Sarah from a distance through the wide kitchen window. The lake behind the summer home was like a mirror, and Sarah and Harry were squealing while trying to compete against each other.

“It’s the race that counts,” Kelsey murmured to herself, and she noticed that she was somewhat envious of that carefree attitude.

In college, she had been warned how competitive the world of business could be, and admittedly she was daunted by it. She realized she would have to fight for a job in her field, and at the moment, she felt like escaping that reality. She felt like jumping in the lake. She wanted to swim and laugh, win or lose; it didn’t matter, she just wanted to enjoy the race.

Julia looked over at her sister, and caught her reflective mood.

“What’s up, Doc?” she questioned her sister cheerfully, using her favorite phrase, which was a warning sign for Kelsey that Julia had tuned in to her wavelength.

“Nothing serious, just thinking.”

“Hurts?” Julia amusingly asked, trying to lighten up Kelsey’s mood.

“No! Just dreaming, and wishing, and wanting, and hoping, and all that unrealistic stuff. Never mind.”

“Never mind what?” Kelsey knew how tenacious Julia could be.

“Exactly, what are you dreaming about? Why won’t you tell me?”

“Because that’s all it is, dreaming.” Kelsey shrugged her shoulders.

“So, you are allowed to dream, nothing wrong with that, just share it with me, will you?”

“Do you really want to know? I am jealous, can you believe it? I am so jealous!”

“Jealous of what, of who?”

“I am jealous of Sarah!”

“Of Sarah?”

“Yup! Of Sarah!” Kelsey nodded and Julia threw a look of disbelief.

“What do you have to be jealous about? What does Sarah have that you don’t have a hundred times over?”

“I don’t think you’ll understand, my reasoning I mean,” Kelsey added, trying not to offend her sister.

“At least explain! Just give me a chance,” Julia asked, surprised by Kelsey’s assumption.

“I think that Sarah has got it all.” Kelsey looked at Julia who was perplexed by that statement but tried not to show it.

“You really believe so? Hmm...that is quite a statement. I love my little sister, but to say that she has it all is...uh...should I use the word *debatable*?” Julia carefully chose her words, realizing the delicate nature of the conversation.

“I didn’t think you’d get it,” Kelsey said defensively.

“Kelsey, what are you trying to say? Sarah is nine years old, but she can’t read properly, she is not capable of holding a conversation at a level acceptable for her age, she still does not eat properly, she throws tantrums which is really embarrassing sometimes, and...”

“And what else?” Kelsey was about to erupt but waited till she had heard the last words of attack on Sarah.

“Well, you asked for it, but...Sarah looks funny too. Her eyes are slanted in a way that makes her handicap obvious. You know how people sometimes stare at her. And believe me, Kelsey, I don’t like it either, but there is no point in making something out of her that she is not, or even suggesting that her condition is better than it really is. And have you ever seriously thought about her future? You are attractive, bright, and have a college degree. You and I are set for the future. We’ll be capable of earning our own money, marrying sometime, and having a family. Do you really think that Sarah is able to accomplish any of this? And you are jealous? You dare to say that Sarah has it all, obviously implying that you don’t?”

“Look, I am not complaining about myself, and I don’t know how to explain it, but...I don’t know, Julia. There is something about Sarah that is so real, yet so inexplicable. I wished I could exactly say what it is, but I can’t. All I can do is feel it, sense it, and admire it.”

“It?”

“Yes, it! Let me explain *it* the best way I can.”

Kelsey stood by the window, and when she started to talk it seemed that she was weighing each word, each sentiment, and she was speaking from a distant world, Sarah’s world, that she tried to understand, and could feel, but could not easily explain. It was a world inside the mind of a child that knew how to live, but others didn’t see it that way and perceived it as an existence full of limitations.

“Sarah may be slow, but that also means that she doesn’t rush, run and speed through life like most of us do. When Sarah runs, she enjoys the race, when we run, we need to get somewhere fast, and forget about the race. And when we finally get there, we are already preparing for the next starting block. So, is the fact that Sarah is slow an advantage or a disadvantage? What is the point in being faster when you miss out on noticing the ground underneath your feet?” Julia rarely heard Kelsey in such a contemplative mood and was closely hanging on to every word.

“And indeed, Sarah can’t read yet. And I certainly wouldn’t know what to do if I was illiterate, but I also know that because I can read, comprehend, and

think, I have the added responsibility to make choices. And Sarah doesn't. She makes choices simply because she is taught right from wrong, not through her own thought processes. Does that limit her? According to our educated minds, it does, but according to her, it certainly doesn't. Actually, it gives her a sense of freedom that neither you or I have, or will ever understand. An uncluttered mind, or perhaps *a simple mind*, is deceptively appealing. A paradox, correct? Maybe so, but I can predict that someday you and I will be frantically working on a career, constantly annoyed with mandatory paperwork, cursing about continual updates, complaining about lack of personal time, and eventually, like a lot of working adults, wondering what it is all about, perhaps resorting to Prozac, hoping it's the answer to our self-induced, out-of-control lifestyle..." Grabbing a Coke from the refrigerator, Kelsey continued her closing arguments, unaware of an attentive audience that had joined Julia in the kitchen.

"Sarah won't ever have to wonder what her life is all about. And why not? Because she can't! She doesn't have the ability to think ahead, to organize, to map out her life. It is our responsibility to do that for her. And does that leave her off the hook? No, certainly not. She knows what is right and what is wrong; Mom and Dad taught her and she has to live up to it. She knows that she has to say please and thank you, and she understands that it takes discipline to learn new words every day, and that she has to apply herself. She has lessons to learn, just like you and I, every day.

"But...there is something that Sarah knows how to do, something we never taught her, and we are not capable of doing ourselves. I don't know how to explain it, but I can see it sometimes when she swims across that lake, and how she enjoys every stroke, every splash of water hitting her little face. I can feel it when I walk with her through the rain, and she squeals and puts her little arms up and tries to dance between the drops, and I catch myself laughing and joining in..."

"And I can sense it when she tiptoes in Harry's room at night and kisses him good night, and talks to him even when he is sound asleep, and she sits there and tells him his favorite story, and she won't quit until she has recited the last line, night after night. And Harry never knew she was there, but Sarah did, and that is what matters to her. There are no games with Sarah, just plain innocence. Sarah seems to deeply understand and express the emotions that are often elusive to most of us, like passion, and closeness, and unconditional love, regardless of educated expectations. To me, that's real freedom. For Sarah, it's the race that counts, not the finishing line, and she knows better than anyone how to do that."

Slowly, Kelsey turned to Julia, and with one last rhetorical question: “Something to be jealous about, right?” she closed her case.

An unexpected applause ruptured which startled Kelsey and made her turn around swiftly, only to stare in the faces of Jeff and Ellen who were smiling warmly at their daughter.

“Sorry for eavesdropping, but we couldn’t help but stay and listen, Kelsey. Wow, that was quite a speech, and no doubt you meant every word of it,” Ellen said, obviously impressed.

“Yes, I did. Thanks, Mom. But believe me, it is not because I am jealous that I am less happy, or that I think I am missing out on something, or that you or Dad failed somehow. It’s not that at all, it’s simply, well, you heard me, it’s simply that education seems to put the breaks on living in the moment, like Sarah does. You do understand, don’t you, Mom?” Kelsey hesitantly looked at her mother, as if she was seeking final affirmation of her monologue.

“Of course I do, sweetheart. And I wholeheartedly agree with you, and I am proud of the way you defend your little sister, because she will never be able to do it herself. One moment of empathy is worth more than a thousand theories. The best we can do for Sarah is to teach her to be a big fish in a very small pond, and to enjoy every nook, every inch, and every ripple in that pond. And believe me, there is nothing limiting about that,” Ellen concluded, hugging Kelsey.

Julia had been quietly observing the scene, carefully keeping her thoughts to herself, not wanting to upset her sister, or her mom. She knew that, if she expressed her point of view, she would start an argument she couldn’t possibly win.

To Kelsey, defending Sarah was sacred territory, and whether she was right or wrong, whether she was told that children better adhere to new-age psychology or old-fashioned conventional discipline, Kelsey wouldn’t listen. She would simply go to war for her little sister, no matter the dispute. And Julia would let her. However, deep down, she realized that if Kelsey would ever have to defend Sarah in a court of law, the deck would be stacked against her, knowing that emotional reasoning had no place in the judicial system.

But the debates wouldn’t be easy, Kelsey would even take on Aristotle whose infamous declaration, “Law is reason free from passion” had evoked many controversial arguments in the fight for justice.

“Jacqueline Laurent paints a picture with great detail, until you find you don’t want to put the book down...”

—Barbara Morris,
Author and Screenwriter

When Sarah Klein was born, there was no one who told her how beautiful she was, how her blond hair already had the tiniest little curls, and how she crinkled her mouth as if she wanted to tell you something really important.

After Bernice Stetson abandoned her newborn baby Sarah, authorities placed the little girl in an institution. When Sarah was two years old, Ellen and Jeff Jansen became Sarah’s foster parents and took her in their home and their hearts. For eight years, Sarah lived an idyllic life.

Suddenly, an unexpected letter arrives, and Sarah’s life spins into turmoil. Who will win the heartwrenching battle that will decide Sarah’s fate? Her loving foster parents? Her erratic birth mother? Or Bill Black, the egocentric director who has power of attorney?



www.iuniverse.com

\$23.95 U.S.

 iUniverse™