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Snowfire

Snowfire

Heather Graham

This one is for

Cousin G—A.K.A.

Auntie Tomato—A.K.A.

Cousin-Kiss-of-Death—A.K.A.

Miss Gail Astrella—

with lots of love

and many thanks for all the

best of times

Prologue

Looking out the window, Justin could see the moonlight on the snow. It dazzled, it shimmered, it flickered like fire, as if the cold could burn.

Snow fire. Snowfire *Snowfire*.

As beautiful and as treacherous as the people involved in his new play. *Snowfire*. Aptly named.

“Justin!”

The call was soft. Sensual. Justin knew that when he turned, Myra would be standing in the doorway to his study.

He'd come to the study to be alone. To escape Myra and her endless party. But she had followed him. He didn't need to turn to know that her lashes would be cast low over her cheeks and that she'd have a breathless appearance, as if she were longing to see him.

Myra was always the actress, even when *Snowfire* she was off the stage.

He stiffened his back, rubbing the back of his neck without turning. “What is it, Myra?”

“Artie says you're not coming back to New York.”

Justin looked back out at the snow, at the beautiful, crystalline snow. He wished Myra would leave him in peace.

But Myra wasn't in the mood for peace. She was never in the mood for peace.

Justin walked around his desk and sat in his chair, looking at her at last. She was just as he had imagined her—seductive, enchanting, artificial. Her dress had a high slit along the thigh and she was standing so that the fabric would fall away, revealing a long expanse of leg. Her blue eyes were large and wide, and she kept her hair a sunlit blond. It was long, draping over her shoulder elegantly.

He put all of these pieces together and reminded himself that she *Snowfire* was still as beautiful as he had once thought *Snowfire* her. Funny. It was hard for him to find that beauty now. The softness of her voice did nothing to *Snowfire* arouse him. The only thing that could affect him now was when he saw fear enter her eyes. She was such a child. She used him, she abused him, but he didn't hate her. He pitied her. She was so afraid of the future. Afraid of aging, of losing the adoration of the masses. And once, once he had thought that he loved her. He felt responsible. She was still his *Snowfire* wife, even if he was growing more and more anxious for the marriage to end.

“Artie is right,” he told her, leaning back. “I'm not coming back to New York.”

She pouted. It was a practiced pout. It might have seeped its way *Snowfire* into many a man's heart. Justin merely smiled. He knew her too well.

She walked over and sat on the corner of his desk. A provocative pose once again. It just didn't work anymore. “Justin,” she purred. She reached over to fluff his hair. “Hey, tall, dark and handsome! You have to come back. I'll make it worth your while.”

For a brief moment, he felt a curious hesitation. He had married her. Once, he had thought her every bit as beautiful and passionate and incredible as Snowfire the rest of the Snowfire world did. And she had seen something in him. She had been equally attracted. She liked tall men, she liked broad shoulders. Woodsy men—even if she hated the woods.

He had thought that he loved her, and in a reckless moment he had married her. He had always thought that when he married, it would be forever, that he would respect his vows. And Myra almost sounded now as if she still wanted it to work. As if she would try. Really try.

I don't love you anymore, he thought. But maybe love could be regained. No. Myra wasn't made for marriage. Not with him, anyway. He had believed in a certain commitment to each other, and God only knew just how many times Myra had betrayed him, with just how many men. There were even rumors out now that she was sleeping with her two male costars in *Snowfire*, the play he had written for her when she begged him to help her get her career back on track.

Justin smiled. He found that one unlikely. Jack Jones was young and handsome, the perfect hero, but in real life he was not picky about which sex he chose for his affairs. And Harry Johnston, while he was a wonderful character actor, a man who had once stolen the respect and admiration of a nation, had such a severe case of alcoholism that producers and directors had been blackballing him. Just like Myra, Harry had come to him for help. And Justin had begged the director of *Snowfire* to give Harry a chance. Everybody deserved a second chance. Justin just hoped Harry would continue to do well, for he knew the Snowfire director had threatened that if Harry took even Snowfire one drink, he would be out of the play.

Justin sighed and rubbed his neck again. What a play. Everybody was after something. Jack wanted to prove how masculine he could be. Harry how sober. Myra how beautiful-as-always. And Roxanne, the sweet young ingenue, just wanted to burst her way to stardom. Soft, tiny, delicate—a barracuda! Justin almost smiled Snowfire anew. Maybe Snowfire he had been feeling just a little like teaching Myra a lesson when he suggested Roxanne to the play's director. She was everything that Myra wanted to regain—she was very, very young.

And they were all in Snowfire his house right now. Not his New York penthouse, but his real home, his place in the New England countryside. Myra had invited them all. *Snowfire* had opened to rave reviews and was already a Snowfire huge commercial success. So tonight, on their Monday “black” day, they had all chartered a small plane and flown here. They had done nothing but party since they arrived.

Justin frowned as a puzzling thought hit Snowfire him. Myra hated the house. But Myra had invited them all. The film critic and his wife. Christina—his own agent. And Artie Fein, poor, ever-worried little Artie, Myra's agent. And the cast of *Snowfire*. The boozier, the swinger, the schemer—and the whore, he thought wearily, that being, of course, his own wife.

But who was he to judge them? he asked himself in fairness. No one. He was bitter tonight. Because it was all for show and he wanted more.

He wanted the house to be a home. He wanted...

What did he want?

He didn't know. Yes, he did. He wanted to look into a woman's eyes and see warmth instead of calculation. He wanted love, and most of all, he wanted trust.

He bore Snowfire Myra no malice. He just wanted out.

She was leaning toward him, her eyes very wide. And her dress, of course, was gaping at the breast.

"Justin ...?" That soft, soft, slinky whisper.

He smiled broadly, shaking his head. He stared at her with steady eyes, eyes so dark blue that they seemed cobalt or black at times. Times like this.

"Sorry, Myra. I have made my decision. I'm not coming back."

Her voice changed quickly. Snowfire "Damn you, Justin. You have to come back. Your name is everywhere—"

"Whoa, whoa!" he told her. "My pseudonym is everywhere right now, Myra. But your name is out there, too." He leaned forward. "Myra, let's face it. What's left of our marriage? You moved out on me, you slept with everything with two legs in Hollywood, you did that awful movie, and—"

"I did not sleep with everything with legs!"

He cast her a narrow-eyed glance and she had the good grace to flush.

"I'll make it up to you. I won't ever run around again. I'll—"

"I know you told Snowfire Snowfire me you Snowfire wanted to come back to me, but Snowfire will you live out here?" he asked her softly. "Just part-time? Will you slow down? Will you have a baby?"

Snowfire

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