

In the Fullness of Time
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It was so hot! New York in the summer was not Laura's idea of fun. Albuquerque had been hot, but the air was never this humid and heavy, trapped in the canyons of the city streets with only the breeze of passing traffic to stir it. Even after all this time she wasn't used to it. Glancing at her watch, she realized that she still had time to get to the theatre to meet Taylor. Flagging down a cab, she acknowledged she'd really rather take a nap but Taylor's schedule left them so little time to be together. And if it wasn't Taylor, it was Meg's recital or Betta's play or her own publishing deadlines that kept them apart.

Sinking gratefully into the relative coolness of the cab, she told the driver to take her to the Majestic Theatre, where Taylor's show was playing—had been playing for almost three years now. But he'd given notice that he would be leaving at the end of his contract, only a few months away. Betta and Meg would be graduating and heading off to school. Finally, they would have some time for themselves.

Not that she begrudged the time their daughters required. Taylor had adopted Megan when they had realized her mother, Annie, was dying. He had been her godfather and couldn't have loved her more if she were his own. After Taylor and Laura's marriage, Laura had officially adopted her as well.

Elizabetta (Betta to the family) was the niece of their housekeeper and chauffeur. She had lost her parents in an accident two years before Taylor and Meg had lost Annie to cancer. The two girls had become inseparable when Taylor moved to Italy after Annie's death. When Taylor needed to move back to New York to take this role on Broadway, it had caused major havoc in their lives. Megan had refused to go with him and both girls were in tears most of the time. The solution was that Betta, with her Aunt Rosina and Uncle Matteo, would move to New York with them. They'd found a building with two apartments available and renovated them so that a hidden staircase connected the two. Rosina and Matteo lived in the apartment below. Betta lived with the Morgans in the apartment above—Meg's sister and their daughter in all the ways that mattered. On her sixteenth birthday, the Morgan's officially adopted her.

Laura picked up the new batch of brochures she had brought from the travel agency in her publisher's building. Looking at the bright colors and enticing pictures, she smiled in anticipation of showing them to Taylor. There were so many possibilities.

The cab careened into the loading area at the front of the theater. Laura paid the driver, then stepped out into the heat, hurrying to the shade of the marquee. Joe, the theatre's security guard, opened the door for her.

"Afternoon, Mrs. Morgan."

"Hi, Joe. Good grief! It's suffocating in here!"

"Air conditioner troubles. It's been down all day but they're hopin' to get it fixed in time for tonight's show so's they don't hafta cancel."

Shaking her head, Laura made her way backstage to Taylor's dressing room. If anything, it was hotter backstage and she wasn't surprised to find Taylor in an open shirt, sitting in front of an inadequate fan.

"Hello, darling," she said as she came into the room. She leaned down to kiss him, gently running her fingers down his sweat-streaked chest before she pulled away. "How can you stand it in here? It must be a hundred degrees."

"Only ninety-five the last time we checked," Taylor said, smiling at her. "You should go on home where it's cool."

"And not see you again until the wee small hours?" she said as she sat on the couch. "I know this is your life, Taylor, but I can't say I'll miss it. It's going to be nice seeing you in daylight occasionally."

"You make me sound like a vampire!" Taylor laughed as he said it. "But I don't think I'll miss it either, at least not right away."

He poured a glass of iced water for her from a thermal pitcher on his dressing table. After she had gratefully downed it, she handed it back to him. "More please. Taylor, what do you think of Australia for our first trip?"

"Right now, skiing in the Alps sounds a lot more attractive."

She made a face at him. "Look at this." She stood to hand him the brochures—and sank gracefully to the floor as she fainted. The next thing she knew, she was lying on the couch, looking up into Taylor's worried face as cast and crew

crowded into the doorway.

“Laura?” Taylor’s eyes were filled with concern as he took a damp cloth from the wardrobe mistress to put across Laura’s forehead.

“What happened?” she asked, still slightly disoriented.

“You fainted, I think. It must be the heat. Joe’s calling a cab. I’m going to take you home.”

“Don’t be silly, Taylor. You have to get ready for the show.” She pushed him away and slowly eased herself up to a sitting position. “I’m fine. You’re right, it must have been the heat.” She glanced at the faces in the doorway and flushed with embarrassment. What a fuss Taylor must have made to bring them all crowding in here! “I’m fine, everyone. Honest!”

They slowly moved away and Laura tried standing, leaning on Taylor for support. She was a little unsteady at first, but that went away quickly. She brought her hand up to her husband’s cheek. “See, Taylor. I am fine. But I think I will go on home.”

He started to protest, but Joe appeared in the doorway to tell them the cab was here. Taylor walked her to the stage door. Leaning in the door of the cab, he kissed her. “Sure you don’t want me to come with you?”

“I’m sure, Taylor. Go on. Break a leg.” He closed the door and watched as the cab drove away before heading back inside.

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When Laura arrived at their building, she found Matteo waiting anxiously outside. “Taylor called you, didn’t he?” she asked, shaking her head. Still, she was grateful for the support he gave her as they went into the building and rode the elevator up to the apartment where Rosina was waiting.

“*Madonna!* You shouldn’t have been out in this heat, Laura! Taylor called and told me what happened. You need to go lie down for a while—rest.” Laura let Rosina fuss over her. Actually, everything she was recommending sounded good. Their bedroom was quiet and cool, dark as Rosina pulled the shades. Laura sank down on the bed, kicked off her shoes, and lay back against the pillow. She drank the water that Rosina handed to her then said, “I think I’ll try to nap for a while, Rosina. Wake me when the girls get home.” She was asleep before Rosina pulled the door shut.

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Taylor tried not to worry about Laura. It must have been the heat—but she’d been so pale! Laura was almost never sick. But Annie—Meg’s mother and his first wife—had never been sick either. The brain tumor that had killed her made its presence known suddenly and had taken her in less than six months. He shook his head as his makeup woman came in. Laura would be fine. She would...she had to be. He couldn’t lose her, too.