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## **Analysis of the Character of Isabella di San Gregorio in Daniel Steele's Novel, *To Love Again***

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### **Abstract:**

The research paper stresses upon the struggle and challenges that the female protagonist of Steele's novel faces. It traces her journey of a long ordeal of love, fear, suspicion, hatred and love. Her battle of life begins with the love of her husband and ends with her falling in love again with Corbett. Her long journey lays witness to her strength of character, dedication, hard work, self control and a firm resolution to carve out a better future for herself as well as for her son. Faced with several obstacles in her path, she finally manages to return to a life of normalcy. She, through her long toil, confirms our belief in the idea that a woman can achieve her dreams if she has made up her mind to do so.

**Keywords:** protagonist, character, resolution, normalcy.

As the title of the novel suggests, the theme of this novel revolves around the idea of love. The female protagonist, Isabella, around whom the entire novel revolves, falls in love twice in this novel. As the novel opens, the readers are introduced to the chief female character, Isabella, who is sitting in the backseat of her car driven by her driver. She was born in a rich family in Paris and was married to a rich businessman named Amadeo di San Gregario in Rome. Business was in her blood and it was owing to the mixture of her beauty and brains that Amadeo got attracted towards her.

It has taken six months for their paths to cross, six weeks for their hearts to determine what the future would be and only three months after that before Isabella became Amadeo's wife and the brightest light in the Heavens of the House of San Gregario (Steele 2).

Soon she became the chief designer of his business. In short, she possessed all those qualities, seeing which anyone could feel jealous of- elegance, beauty and a crown of success on her head. The beautiful couple was blessed with a son named, Alessandro. She was not only a great business woman and a good wife but she also bore the qualities of a responsible mother. Although business was her life-stream, yet she felt that if she would concentrate too much on her business then she would not be able to pay attention towards her son. .

As the years had gone by, she had felt an even greater gnawing at her soul, a yearning,

loneliness when she returned home at eight thirty and the child was already asleep, tucked into bed by other hands than her (Steele 3).

Much to her good fortune, she and her husband were blessed with a great friend and a business partner in the form of Bernardo. Bernardo was Isabella's friend and he loved her before her marriage to Amadeo. But it was a one-sided affair. The moment he realized that she treated him as her friend and a well-wisher; he gave up the idea of marrying her. In short, it can be said that she had everything that any person would aspire. She had a caring husband, a loving son, a successful career and an affectionate friend. At the outer level, her life seems to be perfect from all sides but it is a well-known fact that time never remains the same. Therefore, a terrible turning point comes in Isabella's life in the form of her husband's kidnapping and his subsequent death. Anticipation to this occurring could be felt in the words of Bernardo when he warned his friends and business partners against wearing costly items or flaunting their riches. He told Amadeo and Isabella that they should guard themselves against many such kidnappers who had set their eyes on the couple since long. But the couple did not take his words seriously to which Bernardo retorted out angrily:

Do you think you are so sacred? You think no one will touch you? In these times if that's what you think, you're mad! Both of you .... No one is safe anymore. And as long as you both run around like that you are courting disaster (Steele 23).

But that happened which the couple took lightly but which Bernardo feared deadly. That night when Isabella got a call from her husband's kidnappers, she was waiting for him to go to a royal party. She was dressed up and was waiting for her husband's arrival. Alessandro was also tucked in bed. With time, she began to grow restless-

Dammit where the hell was Amadeo? And why was he late? She glanced at the clock again and began to purse her lips (Steele 31).

She realized that Amadeo was two hours late. She alone was suffering the trauma of her husband's absence. She called Bernardo but didn't receive any information about Amadeo from him. And finally, much to her disappointment, she got a call from a stranger who told her that her husband is with them. At first, she thought that it was, "A Crank Call" (Steele 36). But then they made her husband talk to Isabella. Listening to his voice made Isabella feel as if her entire world had collapsed, as she cried out, "Amadeo! They had Amadeo! Oh, God, they were mad" (Steele 37).

The kidnappers had warned her against informing the cops. But being an influential person, the policemen came to know about this kidnapping as a result of which they sealed all her bank accounts. But Isabella was not a weak lady who could admit defeat so easily. Germaine Greer has quoted Nares Hoffman who opines, "I choose to be kind because it makes me happy. But I will defend my boundaries and my loved ones without hesitation" (98). She decided that she would do her best to save her husband from the clutches of his torturers, even if she didn't receive any help from Bernardo or others.

She took the long green velvet boxes in which she kept her jewellery to her room, locked the door and spread everything out on her bed (Steele 43).

She decided to sell all her precious jewels in order to collect the required cash in return of

which she could get back her husband, the love of her life. For Isabella, the value of love, value of relationships matter much more than her precious jewellery. She was not one of the spoiled rich ladies who could afford to sacrifice her husband. She had managed to collect the required cash and was waiting for the call of the kidnappers which came but very late. “Strong women don’t play victim, don’t make themselves look pitiful and don’t point fingers. They stand and they deal” (Hale 115). But the kidnappers didn't call her for money but to tell her that owing to her silly act of amassing the cash, she was in the headlines and as a result, her husband would have to pay for her fault. The kidnappers squeezed life out of her when they said –

Even if you didn't tell the cops, they'll know now. They'll come snooping around. How dumb do you think we are? And then came the final blow- You want to say good-bye to your old man? (Steele 51).

While Amadeo was talking to her, she was crying continuously. The beauty of their relationship lies in the fact that even with the fear of death lurking over his head; Amadeo didn't accuse his wife of putting his life in danger. Rather he praised her saying, “How perfect you are. What a good wife. You have never given me a single unhappy day” (Steele 52). With that, the connection was snapped and the next day, police found Amadeo's strangled body near a warehouse in Suburbs of Rome. With the death of Amadeo, a part of Isabella's self died, “Amadeo was gone. Taking with him the warmth and the laughter, the love and the dreams. Gone. Forever” (Steele 53). She didn't know as to who was the traitor who had betrayed her and her husband. The whole atmosphere of the house seemed to have come to a standstill. Alessandro was crying, Isabella was crying and both the mother as well as the son trembled with the fear that the kidnappers might attack them again and that they would lose each other. After Amadeo's funeral, Bernardo talked to Isabella and expressed his fear that Alessandro might be the next target of the kidnappers, therefore Bernardo advised the lady to leave Rome as soon as possible but Isabella replied, “You're wrong. This is where I need to be. Near his things, his home..... near.....him...” (Steele 55). She was adamant and she told Bernardo that she would not leave Amadeo's house, his business and his memories in the lurch. Rather, she would try to return to normal life as soon as possible and would also do her best to give Alessandro a better future. She said-

I can't sit here and abdicate. I can't give up what Amadeo and I shared, what he built, what we loved, what we made. I owe it to him. And to Alessandro (Steele 56).

This would be the biggest tribute that she thought she could give to her husband who had left no stone unturned in loving her and looking after her. The only interests left in her life were her child and her work. No doubt, she was physically tired, drawn out but mentally she was strong enough to overcome all the challenges of her life. “I can be changed by what happens to me, but I refuse to be reduced by it” (Angelou 110). She sent her child back to school. She taught him to be proud, not afraid, to be brave and not angry.

Every day when she went to her office, she could feel the presence of her husband over there. But she drew strength from that presence. It did not seem to weaken her. There was an international company named F-B which had been working with Di San Gregario since many years. F-B wanted the latter company to sell its shares to the former. Even Bernardo wanted

Isabella to sell her business to F-B and that she should go to America and should restart her life over there. But Isabella was too strong to be easily won over. Isabella was somewhat successful in leading her life in a normal way but again her future had something different in store for her. The next day when she went to office, she got a call where she was told that her son was kidnapped. Immediately she and Bernardo went back to her house. She felt as if her whole world has come to an end. But the call was a mere joke because as she went home, she found her son waiting for him. It was either an ordinary prank played upon her or it was a deliberate attempt made to frighten her. Bernardo told her that by staying in Rome, she was not only putting her life at stake but also her son's life and that Amadeo would never forgive her for this. But Isabella, though a bit frightened for her kid, was not very easily shaken as she said, "What do you think I should do? Run away? Leave Rome? Hide for the rest of my life?" (Steele 87). What she could not understand was as to why she and her son should suffer by leaving their roots behind. They hadn't committed any crime so why should they run away. But she also knew that she could no longer risk her son's life. Therefore, she agreed to shift to her friend's Natasha's place in New York but only for a short period of her life i.e. a year maximum. The strength of her character is reflected in the following lines –

The look in her eyes said that she wasn't beaten, that she hadn't given up. That there was still hope. She wouldn't let them drive her away from her home, from her work, from where she belonged. But she would go for a while (Steele 89).

Natasha was a model earlier and she earned huge amount of money through her modeling career. But afterwards, she turned to the career of a writer and had written 5 novels and 2 movies. She was a divorcee and lived with her son in New York. When Isabella called Natasha, the latter looked worried. Natasha welcomed Isabella to her house with open arms and also warned her against setting her foot out of her apartment. It was arranged with Bernardo that Isabella would look after the official work from US.

There are certain episodes in this novel which induce a sense of encouragement in the readers. At one point in the story, Isabella was telling Alessandro a story about a boy who lives with his mother. Due to unforeseen circumstances, the boy and the mother of the story had to leave their home. But Alessandro disapproved this turn of events as he said that his father always said it was wrong to run away. Isabella thought that there are some people worse than dogs and lions that make it mandatory for a person to leave their home, their work and world. People in this world, generally feel happy in making others sad. She felt that it was difficult for her to pack her whole lifetime into two suitcases. Although, she had made up her mind to leave yet there were many questions that were disturbing her mind –

Isabella sat breathlessly, feeling her heart pound in her chest. What was she doing? Was she right to leave? Could she really leave everything? And why was she doing? And why was she leaving her home? (Steele 105).

Memories of a lifetime spent at her home were flooding back to her mind. But she thought that it was the dire need of the hour to leave the house because of Alessandro's safety. But she left Rome with a promise to return to the house, and to Rome. When Isabella reached States, Natasha along with her bodyguards and a friend came to welcome her. Natasha arranged a room for Isabella and her son in her house. Isabella was grateful to her friend for this

arrangement but she did not want to lead a caged life, confined to the four walls of Natasha's room as Isabella says, "I can't live caged up here. I need to walk, to get air, to see people. I have to see them. I have to know them and feel them and watch them" (Steele 129). This shows that Isabella was not a coward. Although she left Rome but still fear hadn't taken a toll on her mind. She did not want to imprison herself within the boundaries. She had the guts to face the world; to face the enemy. She was mentally and physically a strong lady. "May we think of freedom, not as the right to do as we please, but as the opportunity to do what is right" (Marshall 150). Sitting in US, she was expert in handling the business problems that cropped up in Rome. Bernardo was still pressurizing her to sell her business to F-B but Isabella was too strong to break. She was like a mountain who could not be easily broken by difficulties and challenges of life. Isabella was fortunate enough to get a good and an amiable atmosphere at home. She managed to get her son admitted in a school with a promise that he should avoid speaking in Italian otherwise their identity would be revealed.

Natasha's friend Corbett was friendly both to Natasha's son (Jason) as well as Isabella's son. He was very friendly to kids as well as to both the ladies. He was greatly inspired by the kind of devotion that Isabella possessed for her late husband. Isabella dressed herself up in black clothes casually and even during parties. Even when Isabella would go for evening walks, she would dress herself up in black. This highlights the strength of her character, the power of her love for her husband, a love that didn't faint or fade with the passage of time. Loyalty, devotion and true love which are losing their significance with time, people like Isabella uphold their importance. Isabella was not a timid or a weak person who could easily be cowed down. Although she was taking shelter at Natasha's house, yet she wanted to live her life to the fullest. She went with Natasha and Corbett to see a movie. Although Natasha feared that her identity might be revealed but Isabella didn't care a damn, "She felt as though she had opened a new door that night and there was no way she could close it again" (Steele 163).

Natasha felt that the plan Isabella had made was purely madness but she had no other option but to agree to her plan. But Isabella enjoyed the time in theatre, watching the movie. Corbett was also present with the two ladies and he wanted to take out Isabella for a drink. Natasha tried to intervene but Isabella agreed to accompany Corbett. Suddenly two reporters noticed Isabella but before they could reach her, Natasha forced Corbett to take Isabella away from that place. Corbett held Isabella's hand and ran towards the car. That night Corbett realized –

There was something rare and strange about this woman. Something hidden, something remarkable and oblique. Pain, sorrow, loneliness, he had seen it, with her dark and smouldering look (Steele 179).

When they reached home, Natasha was in full anger. She told Isabella that owing to her plan, the whole world would now come to know where she had been hiding. Their efforts of many months to hide her seemed to have gone in vain. But Corbett could judge from Isabella's look that the experience hadn't been successful enough to frighten her. She was determined. "She had the look of someone who had taken her chances, lost the first hand, and was not going to give in or quit" (Steele 183). Isabella could feel a comfort zone with Corbett. She understood that he was the man of honour, someone upon whom she could rely, share her thoughts and

feelings with. With each passing day, they drew closer to each other. He played with Isabella's kid, helped her in her work and was a great comfort to both of them. Isabella's life seemed to be returning to a stage of normalcy. Their souls met and soon their bodies too melted into each other. Audre Lord has quoted Steven Benson who opines, "A woman who opens her heart to love you, when its already broken, is braver than any person you will meet". Isabella underwent a feeling of guilt but Corbett came to her rescue and told her that she needed to move ahead in life as Amadeo had gone for seven months.

Due to her relationship with Corbett, Isabella began to remain happy and this change in her temperament was noticed by Natasha as well. But on the other hand, she was facing problems with her business in Rome. Bernardo was forcing her to accept F-B's demands. It was then that she came to know that the chairman of F-B was no other than Corbett. So, her life gave her one more blow in the form of betrayal from a person on whom she had begun to trust more than herself. She began to feel as if her friend Natasha, Bernardo and Corbett were equally involved to take away business from her hands. She began to join each and every happening and incident inch-by-inch as she said to Natasha-

I think Bernardo arranged the hoax about Alessandro to get me out of the way, he used you to send me over here, and you [Natasha] saw to it that Corbett Ewing got close to me! It was all very handsomely done, but it's useless, because I will never sell out. Never! Not to Corbett, not anyone. (Steele 228).

Her life seemed to be full of challenges and difficulties. Firstly, she lost her husband to death and now she had lost her friends and lover to betrayal. Life seemed to be inflicting torture after torture upon her but she decided that she would not yield to her troubles. She would save her business which belonged to her as well as to her kid, Alessandro. Natasha tried her best to remove doubts from Isabella's mind but all in vain. Suspicion had entered in her mind and it was difficult for Natasha to remove that. Isabella left for Rome the very next day. It was difficult for Isabella to stay in US anymore.

When Isabella reached Rome, she was received at the airport by Bernardo and being a close friend, he could sense that, "something dreadful had happened to her. She was dead inside. That pale, ivory face he loved so well was like a mask. He had never seen her like this, not even during those awful hours when they had waited, not during the funeral or even on her flight into exile" (Steele 233). She simply told Bernardo that she would close her business branch at Rome and would shift to US where she would restart her life with her son. She went back to her house in order to pack the left out items. At that time, she missed her husband terribly.

She waited, listening, watching, as though he might come back to her and tell her his disappearance had all been a joke. That she should stop everything and unpack. There had not really been a kidnapping....or there had been but it was someone else they had killed (Steele 247).

She was a strong woman who was fighting bravely against her fears, doubts, insecurities and betrayal. She was completely alone at this time. But still she was successful enough to keep up a brave face before the world, although she was completely heartbroken. She didn't want



the outer world to come to know about her internal insecurities. She succeeded in building up a world of her own of which her son was the only sharer of her emotions, feelings, happiness and sorrows. He alone, now was her world. She bought an apartment of her own in US, restarted her business, sent her son to school and shaped her world according to her desires. The only thing missing in her life was love. Alessandro too was missing the love of a father. Corbett tried to be in contact with Alessandro but Isabella didn't want him to be in touch with her son.

But life again was not too simple for this lady. She had managed to restart her life but again she got a call from her past as Isabella said at one point in the story, "They've caught them.... The kidnappers... and I have to ..... go to the trial.... in Rome....." (Steele 262). The whole trial was a difficult affair but it passed somehow. It was at this very difficult time that she got back her relationships. Bernardo called Corbett to be at her side. Corbett was a great support to Isabella mentally and physically. The title of the novel gets justified at the end when Isabella and Corbett fell in love with one another again putting all her fears, suspicions and doubts behind. Now, she wanted to be with that man who stood by her side in the face of difficulties. "If a man makes his woman feel loved, safe, cherished and valued, she will build an empire with him" (Drake 210). The last words of her prove her reunion with Corbett as she said." Forever, My love... as long as forever may be" (Steele 278).

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