DANIELLE STEEL

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Lost and Found

A Novel



Delacorte Press | New York

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Dedication By Danielle Steel About the Author

"You're not old until your dreams become regrets." —ANONYMOUS

Chapter 1

M adison Allen lived in an old brick firehouse in the West Village in downtown New York, a few blocks east of the Hudson River. The firehouse was a hundred years old. It had been a departure for Maddie, after living on the Upper East Side most of her life. She had raised her three children in a comfortable although not luxurious apartment, in a serious-looking prewar building. Buying the firehouse downtown had been an act of independence for her, and it had become a labor of love. She had bought it fifteen years before, when her youngest child, Milagra, had left for college. Her older two, Deanna and Ben, were twenty and twenty-one when she bought it, and still came home for school holidays. Two years later, they had moved into their own apartments, and never came home to live again after they had graduated.

Deanna moved into an apartment in Chelsea and got a job as an assistant designer for a successful contemporary fashion brand that was popular with young women. She had gone to Parsons School of Design and had real talent. She was fiercely competitive with other designers and single-minded with her love of fashion, always focused on her own success. She was less intellectual than her brother and sister. Ben, her younger brother, had a keen instinct for business and had done well. Milagra, the youngest, had been writing since she was fifteen, and her first novel was published by the time she was nineteen. All three of Maddie's children were very different from each other, with their interests in design, business, and literature. Unlike her younger siblings, Deanna had a killer instinct.

After graduating from Berkeley, Ben had decided to stay in San Francisco, in the world of start-ups. He swore he'd never come back to New York to live, and he hadn't. He loved the outdoors, California life, and the high-tech world. He was a kind and loving person, a good husband and

father, and caring son, although Maddie seldom saw him, and rarely contacted any of them. She didn't want to intrude on them now that they were adults, and most of the time waited to hear from them. Sometimes it was a long wait, so she called them. But she held out as long as she could.

Milagra had gone to UCLA, taken postgraduate writing classes at Stanford, and moved to Mendocino in northern California. She needed isolation to write her books, and silence. So Maddie heard from her the least often.

Maddie would have rattled around her old apartment alone, like a marble in a shoebox, if she'd stayed there. When she moved downtown, her children had been shocked, and objected strenuously. They felt awkward in their mother's new and somewhat unusual home. But she was firm about it and knew it was right for her at the time and they would adjust to it eventually. And as she knew they would, they grew up and left.

The firehouse still had its original brass pole that the firemen had used to slide down. She had someone come in to polish it every few months, and had tried sliding down it once herself. It was scary and exciting and fun, though she had come down faster than she'd expected. Buying the firehouse had been a happy event for her, and a new adventure. She'd loved it then and still did.

And the statement she made with the move was not as harsh as her children had claimed or feared. There were four floors, with two good-sized rooms and a smaller one that shared a bathroom on the top floor and were set up as bedrooms for Ben, Deanna, and Milagra whenever they wanted to come home. They had hardly ever used them, and now, fifteen years later, never stayed there at all.

With a successful start-up to his credit in his life as a young entrepreneur, Ben had no time to come home. After he sold the business and started a second one, he was even busier. He had a knack for discovering a need that no one else had thought of, and capitalizing on it. Married now, at thirty-five, with three children of his own, Willie, Charlie, and Olive, six, five, and three, he rarely came to New York, and stayed at a hotel when he did. His wife, Laura, was from Grosse Pointe, a suburb of Detroit, and had friends and relatives in Chicago, but she came no farther east than that.

They had full and busy lives in San Francisco, and a beautiful house with a spectacular view of the city in Belvedere, a tiny island of high-priced real estate in Marin County, twenty minutes from San Francisco. They were so heavily scheduled between Ben's work, the social schedule Laura arranged for them, and all the activities for the children that it was never a good time for Maddie to come out, even for a brief visit. The few times she had she'd felt like an intruder. Her grandchildren scarcely knew her. She saw them once or twice a year for a few days, and could barely keep up with their after-school activities, computer lessons, karate, soccer, swimming classes, and ballet for Olive, along with their constant playdates and the other activities their mother organized for them. Laura kept everyone busy, and successfully kept Maddie at bay, although Maddie never complained. Her son was happy, which was good enough for her. She would have liked to see more of him, and to live in the same city, but it hadn't worked out that way. Maddie was generous about it. She always tried to be tolerant of their differences from her, and had encouraged them to follow their dreams, and be independent.

She had sensed on the day of the wedding that she had lost Ben to his new in-laws. Ben and Laura spent Christmas in Grosse Pointe with Laura's parents, and her siblings and their children. Her parents' home on the Big Island in Hawaii was an easy vacation spot for all of them. Ben and his family went there for most school holidays, or to Mexico, or Aspen. Nothing Maddie had to offer could compete. She had no country home, and a busy work life herself. They could have stayed at the firehouse with her in New York, but she recognized that, as Ben's family grew rapidly, it would have been too cramped, even dangerous for such young children, with the narrow circular metal staircase and the fire pole. She was hoping to get them to New York on their own when they were older, but that wouldn't be for a long time. And Laura's goal in the meantime was to be important in the San Francisco social scene and show off her husband's success. There was no time or room for Maddie in all that.

Milagra lived in an entirely different universe from Ben, in windswept, foggy, rugged Mendocino. She had bought a small crumbling Victorian house after she sold her second book, and she restored the house herself. She never drove the three or four hours to San Francisco. She wrote eerie, haunting gothic novels, which weren't bestsellers but enjoyed a steady, moderate success, enough for her to live comfortably. She had a solid following of faithful readers who loved her books. Her work was dark and strange, and her isolated life in Mendocino suited her. She had started writing at fifteen and had nearly been a recluse ever since. Milagra didn't need people around her to be happy. In fact, she preferred her solitude so she could write. Even a friendly phone call felt like an intrusion to her, so she didn't give her number to anyone, and called no one. Most of her contact with her mother was by email, when her internet was working. She had internet access where she lived, most of the time, but poor cellphone reception, which suited her perfectly. She was always working on a book, and at thirty-three she lived alone, with three large dogs and two stray cats. She hardly ever saw her brother, but emailed him from time to time. She never wrote to Deanna. They were just too different. She hadn't been to New York in six years, since she'd bought her house. Maddie visited her whenever Milagra was between books and allowed her to.

Milagra had gotten her name when Maddie had almost lost her several times before she was born. They named her "Miracle" in Spanish. She was a solitary person whose life was her work. She had nothing in common with Ben and his wife, Laura, and Milagra always told her mother that they had nothing to say to each other when they met. She had even less in common with her older sister, Deanna, who was hardworking, hard-driving, and fully engaged in the fast-paced world of fashion in New York. Milagra had always thought her sister aggressive, and said she scared her. Deanna had bullied her as a child and ordered her around, always convinced that she knew best. Deanna had always called Milagra "the weird one."

Deanna was married to David Harper, the executive editor of a highly respected publishing house. As a designer, Deanna made more money than he did, and she added glamour to his life. She had always had a sharp edge, even as a child, and an equally sharp tongue. But she and David were a good match. She ran their life together and her career with an iron hand. They had two daughters, Lily, seven, and Kendra, nine, and Deanna was as ambitious for them as she was for herself. They went to one of the best private schools in New York, and were just as busy as Ben's children with after-school activities. Kendra was serious about ballet, and Lily took hiphop lessons. They both took violin and piano. Deanna had their lives carefully mapped out.

All four of them retreated to their house in the Berkshires on weekends, where David could read manuscripts, Deanna could work on designs, and the girls could take riding lessons. The girls were taken care of by a nanny, which gave David and Deanna a break from their stressful high-powered lives during the week.

Deanna never invited her mother to spend weekends with them. They entertained in New York but never included her there either. Deanna had always been critical of her mother, and thought she was too much of a freethinker, and a little eccentric. The firehouse had been the first sign of it, in her opinion, although it suited Maddie perfectly, much more than an empty, lonely apartment uptown would have, once they'd grown up. David and Deanna lived in a co-op in the East 70s, between Madison and Park. The apartment had been photographed by Architectural Digest and Deanna had decorated it herself. Maddie's neighborhood in the West Village was warm and friendly, with small restaurants, fun shops, and people wandering the streets in good weather on the weekends. Maddie went for long walks along the river, which both invigorated and relaxed her. Her contact with her oldest daughter was often tense. At thirty-six, Deanna was outspoken about whatever she didn't like, and she thought that her mother living in an antiquated firehouse was Bohemian, made no sense, and was even embarrassing. Why couldn't she live in an apartment uptown like other people her age?

It made perfect sense to Maddie, and when she restored the firehouse, she set it up for her convenience, with the guest bedrooms on the top floor for her absentee children. The floor below it, the third floor, was made up of her own bedroom and a small sitting room she spent her evenings in, reading or doing research relevant to her work. Her living room was on the second floor, along with a renovated kitchen large enough to eat in. She never entertained, but she could have, at her table for ten. And on the ground floor were two small offices, one for herself and the other for her assistant, Penny. The large space with twenty-foot ceilings once used to house the fire trucks was her photography studio. Once she moved in, she was able to live and work in the same place for the first time, and her clients loved coming there. It was sparsely but stylishly decorated, she had wonderful, eclectic taste, and great style. She had a collection of antique fireman's helmets from around the world on one wall, which fascinated people. Everything about the place was interesting, unusual, warm, and charming, like Maddie herself.

Maddie had backed into her career by accident. Blond, tall, and lithe, with an exquisite face, she had done some modeling after college at NYU. Her parents were both high school teachers. She hadn't figured out her own career, all she knew was that she didn't want to be a teacher like them. They were underpaid, overworked, and disillusioned with the public school system. She modeled as a stopgap, for the money, and it paid well. She hadn't enjoyed modeling but she liked the freedom it gave her. She had her own apartment on the East Side in a decent neighborhood. She hated the cattle calls, the pressure, nasty magazine editors, and bitchy, competitive girls, but she was able to live on what she made, and only planned to model for a year or two. She had majored in art history in college, which didn't pay her rent when she graduated, and her parents weren't able to help.

Within months, she was noticed by a well-known French fashion photographer, Stephane Barbier, who lived and worked in New York. He hotly pursued her personally and professionally. She fell in love with him, and he convinced her he was madly in love with her too.

Six months into their passionate relationship, she discovered she was pregnant with Deanna. After long nights when Stephane drank too much and smoked furiously, they decided to get married at city hall. Her parents would have objected to the hasty decision, but Maddie's father was dying of cancer by then, and her mother was too devastated to pay attention to what her only child was doing. Maddie settled into life with Stephane in utter bliss. It wasn't how she had intended to start her life, with a shotgun marriage, but it all seemed to be working out. Once her pregnancy showed and she couldn't model, Stephane put Maddie to work as one of his studio assistants. She became an avid student of everything he did. She loved watching him during the shoots, and continued working for him after the baby was born, eventually becoming his first assistant on every shoot he did. When Deanna was four months old, believing that nursing would keep her from getting pregnant, Maddie got pregnant with Ben. Stephane was ecstatic when their son was born and acted as though Maddie had really done it right. Deanna had been a fussy, difficult baby. Ben was a ray of sunshine, always laughing and smiling, almost from the moment he was born.

The marriage held up for three years, until Milagra was born after a difficult pregnancy. Maddie was eight months pregnant when she discovered Stephane's torrid affair with a nineteen-year-old Polish model, the star of the hour, and all the infidelities that had come before her. Their life unraveled rapidly, and by the time Milagra was born, Maddie's world was crashing down. Stephane was drinking too much, and his career was slipping by then. When Milagra was a month old, Stephane told Maddie he was leaving her and going back to Paris with his new love. Maddie's mother had died the year before, of cancer like her father, and she had no one to turn to. At twenty-five, Maddie was abandoned with three young children, and no way to support herself. Her parents had had nothing to leave her. She had to live by her wits and hard work, and would have to pay for childcare while she did. Stephane told her bluntly that he couldn't afford to pay child support, and left. She didn't want to go back to modeling, although she could have and would have if she had had no other choice. Instead she took a job as another photographer's assistant, for a salary she could just barely manage to exist on to feed her children, pay for day care for the kids, and pay her rent. He was a young, earnest photographer, just starting out in the business. True to his word, Stephane sent her not a penny from Paris, and she heard that he was having a baby with the Polish girl. She filed for divorce, and rapidly discovered that she knew much more about photography than her new employer did. In a bold move, she decided to work as a fashion photographer herself. The money she made increased quickly beyond subsistence level, and within two years she became more successful than Stephane had ever been. She was willing to work hard, long hours, and collaborated well with the major fashion magazines. They loved her work.

She and the children never heard from Stephane after he left and less than two years after he moved back to Paris, he died in a motorcycle accident. His death didn't change anything for her or the children, except the idea that the children had a father who might want to see them again someday. By the time he died, he was no longer with the Polish girl. She had left him for someone else and taken the baby with her, and his career had tanked after he went back to France. When the money and his prospects ran out, the Polish girl did too. He had left behind in the world four children he had done nothing for.

Maddie was alone in the world with three children. She worked harder than ever, and became one of the most sought-after fashion photographers in New York. The lean years were over for her then. She had a life and a successful career she loved. It allowed her to spend time with her children, except when she had to shoot on location. She had a housekeeper who took care of the children when she had to go away, but she was with them as much as she could be in her off hours.

Maddie managed to balance her life efficiently, and eventually broadened her work to include portraits of important people and celebrities. For her own satisfaction, once her children were in college, she expanded her scope further to include major newsworthy events and moving human portraits at the scenes of wars and natural disasters, showing old men and women, devastated young children, lovers in each other's arms, some women holding dead children and others giving birth. She went to elections, riots, demonstrations, earthquakes. She took the high-risk assignments she wouldn't when her children were younger, out of a sense of responsibility to them. She was in love with the human condition, sometimes at its worst, seen through the camera's lens, whatever caught her eye, grabbed her heart, or fascinated her and the people who saw her photographs, and bought them.

In recent years she did less and less work in fashion, although she was still very much in demand. Thirty years into her career, she could pick and choose who and what she photographed now.

The firehouse was the perfect setting for her. Her clients loved coming there, exploring it, and listening to her talk about it. Maddie had a warm, modest, humble way of dealing with her subjects. It put them totally at ease and the photographs she took of them were extraordinary and looked straight into their souls.

Ben was very proud of her, although from a distance. Milagra paid little attention to her mother's career, only her own, and Deanna always had

some caustic comment to make or criticism to offer about her mother's work. Maddie was used to it, and tried not to let it upset her, but sometimes it did anyway. Deanna knew just where to put the knife and when to turn it. At times, Maddie wondered if Deanna was jealous of her, even though that seemed unlikely since she was successful on her own. But Deanna had a fierce competitive streak with everyone. To Deanna, life was a race she had to win, no matter who she had to kill to do so. She'd had a sharp tongue all her life, and only her husband didn't seem to mind it. He liked how ambitious she was and admired the results. She pushed him hard too, and her daughters.

Deanna dropped in at the firehouse occasionally, usually unannounced, at a convenient time for her, with total disregard for her mother's schedule. She acted as though Maddie were a housewife taking photographs as a hobby, rather than one of the most important photographers in the business. There had even been two museum shows of her work, which only impressed Deanna briefly. Her husband, David, was more generous about his mother-in-law, and realized how talented and respected she was. But even he couldn't curb Deanna and rarely tried to. Maddie had never been able to either, and she sympathized with David. Her oldest daughter was a force to be reckoned with, and she was just as harsh with her own children, although Maddie was sure she loved them. Deanna was very much her own person, and, at thirty-six, nothing was going to change her. And Maddie was too wise to try.

Although Maddie felt guilty whenever she thought it, in some ways it was a relief that Deanna didn't make time to see her more often. Deanna was too busy and thought she was too important herself to spend time with her mother. Deanna had her father's dark hair and good looks, although none of his irresistible Gallic charm, and none of her mother's gentle softness, which made all her subjects fall in love with her.

Maddie was a kind, compassionate woman and it showed. She was strong, and had worked hard for her success, but she never imposed her own will on others. She had earned everything she had fair and square, while being an attentive, loving mother, and she was never demanding of her children's time. They were all adults now, and she respected the fact that they had busy lives of their own. The reality was that, except for a few old friends she rarely saw and her work, Maddie was essentially alone, and she didn't mind. Her photography filled her life and satisfied her. She used her time well. Work had occupied her every waking hour since her kids had grown up. And with the passage of time, and busy lives, she and many of her friends had drifted apart. Close friendships were difficult to maintain, working as hard as she did.

At fifty-eight, divorced for thirty-three years, there had been men in her life. A few of them had been important to her, for a time, but she had never married again. Marrying the men she'd fallen in love with had never seemed like the right thing for her children. Now they were grown up and gone. There hadn't been a serious man in her life for years. Sometimes she missed the companionship, but she was busy and independent, and didn't think she could make the necessary compromises to share her life with anyone now. She had gotten comfortable as she was, doing what she wanted, traveling as she wished, making all the decisions herself. She had no desire to give that up or even modify it. She knew she had been more accommodating when she was younger. Now it seemed like too high a price to pay for love, which might be fleeting anyway. Her own freedom appealed to her more.

Deanna had never liked the men in her mother's life and openly said so, often to her mother's consternation. She had always been difficult with the men Maddie loved. Deanna was deeply embarrassed by what she knew about her profligate, philandering father, and was relieved he hadn't stuck around, although it was clear that her mother had loved him. But Deanna was suspicious of men as a result. Milagra always said that their father sounded romantic, which even Maddie didn't agree with. He'd been selfish and narcissistic and let them all down when he abandoned them.

Ben was sorry he had never known his father, whatever his flaws were. He had suffered from not having a father when he was young, although Maddie had been a responsible, caring single parent. But with two sisters and a single mother, he longed to have a man around as he was growing up. He was always sorry when Maddie's romances ended, and usually blamed his outspoken, ornery sister for it, which wasn't entirely wrong. Deanna astutely said that if their mother had loved the men enough, she would have married them, but she hadn't, of her own accord.

There was only one man that Maddie really regretted losing, but she knew it would never have worked. Their lives were just too different, and marrying him would have made too much of an impact on her children and changed their lives too radically. She thought of him sometimes and wondered what had happened to him. They had stopped communicating years before, and he was only a tender memory now. She was too busy and fulfilled by her work to spend her time mourning the past. Maddie was always engaged in the present and looking forward to the next project or assignment, and she didn't look back. She had few regrets in her life and was satisfied with the way things had worked out. As adults, all three of her children seemed relatively happy, which was enough for her. Once they grew up, not having to worry about them left her completely free to pursue her work. She was busier than ever and flew around the world photographing subjects that interested her. She could pick and choose now, and had for years. She was always excited when she took an assignment in California, which gave her an excuse to see her son and daughter there, if they were willing, without having to wait for them to suggest an opportune time, since there never was one for either of her children on the West Coast.

It often struck her as unfortunate and the irony of fate that the two children who liked her the most lived so far away. And the one who disapproved of her and didn't enjoy her company was the only one in New York. It was the luck of the draw but she made the best of it, and she loved living in New York. She wouldn't have liked living in San Francisco, and even less the wild, dreary isolation of Mendocino. She loved the people and the pace in New York, the wide variety of cultural options, and having her studio in the city.

She would have felt like a poacher encroaching on Ben's life, or Milagra's, and she knew her daughter-in-law wouldn't have liked it either. Laura's mother was the perfect suburban, country club wife, and Laura had always been ill at ease with her famous mother-in-law. Ben never thought of his mother in that light. She was just his mother. But he knew Laura was fully aware of how important Maddie was and it made her feel as though, by comparison, she fell short in some way. Laura's greatest accomplishment had been marrying Ben, with his very considerable success, and she was content to share in his glory, rather than create her own. Maddie had never planned her own success. She had discovered her talent, and developed it, through need and force of circumstance, trying to support her children. It had turned out well for her and developed into a life of freedom and creativity that she thoroughly enjoyed. She had earned every ounce of her success. It was precisely that freedom and individuality that irked her oldest daughter so much. Even Deanna's disapproval and criticism didn't daunt her. Maddie was always unabashedly herself.

There was still a remarkable natural beauty to her, and an unstudied sexiness she was totally unaware of, with her hair piled on her head to get it out of her way, and a pen or pencil stuck through it, until she removed it to write something down and her long blond hair tumbled down her back. The men who had loved her had been drawn to her modesty and simplicity. Deanna's strict, uptight, meticulous, and measured style was chic, but much less attractive than her mother's ease and warmth. One of Maddie's men had said about Deanna even as a teenager, "I always feel like she's going to spank me," which had made Maddie laugh. Her daughter made her feel that way sometimes too. Deanna set the bar high for herself and everyone else. Maddie was much more likely to be their partner in crime, and was always nurturing. It had drawn men to her like bees to honey for a long time, although she had never taken undue advantage of it. There was an innate femininity to her, no matter what she did or wore. She had been beautiful at every age, with a luminous softness, and she was still very striking, although she insisted that she was past all that now. Fifty-eight was far from old, particularly the way she looked, although Deanna wouldn't have agreed.

Deanna only called her mother when she wanted something, when she had a mission of some kind, never just to chat for the pleasure of it. Ben didn't call her often either, but he enjoyed their conversations when he did. He meant to call her more often, but something always distracted him and got in the way. No one made him laugh like his mother, and she was genuinely interested in his life, and proud of what he had accomplished. She consoled him in his losses and celebrated his victories. Deanna felt that Maddie had been an inadequate mother, but Ben never agreed with her. Although Deanna had done well as a designer, she had resented her mother's career, while Ben admired it. Deanna was far less attentive to her own children than Maddie had been to hers. Maddie could do no right in Deanna's eyes, no wrong in Ben's, and Milagra had distanced herself from all of them to live in the fantasy world she created in her books.

There was no man in Maddie's life now. She said it gave her more time to concentrate on her assignments, and she didn't seem to miss having a partner. She insisted to her assistant, Penny, that it was too late for love, and she was good-humored about it. Penny was sure she would meet someone if she was more open to it, but clearly she wasn't. Maddie insisted she was too old to find a man now.

It upset Penny too, on Maddie's behalf, that her children paid so little attention to her. Penny thought they should call her more often just to see how she was. It never seemed to occur to them, judging by how infrequently they called. She was fine now, but what if one day, she wasn't? Then what would they do? Maddie never let herself think about it. There was plenty of time for that.

Penny was all she needed, to help her with her work. She set up all Maddie's appointments, kept her life in order, and organized her travel plans. Maddie had freelance photography assistants who came in to assist her during the shoots. They all considered it an honor to work for her. They learned so much from watching her, and from her clear, precise instructions and explanations. She had taught a photography class at NYU for two semesters, and loved it, but said she no longer had time to do that and her own work. She had loved being with the young people and teaching them what she knew, and was generous with her advice and encouragement, helping them grow, not crushing them with an inflated ego as so many professors in the arts did. She had nothing to prove. She had done it all and had a string of awards to her credit.

Penny had started working for her six months after Maddie had bought the firehouse, and had helped Maddie keep things on track when she renovated it. She loved everything about her job and Maddie, except having to deal with Deanna when she called. Deanna always wanted something from her mother, and was rude and dismissive to anyone in her path. Penny could easily guess that she must be a monster to work for, and hated the hostile, condescending way Deanna treated her mother. Penny was impressed by how little Maddie complained about her, only when she was excessively exasperated or upset by something cutting Deanna had just said to her, which happened often. Most of the time, Maddie said nothing and told Penny it was just Deanna's style, which didn't mitigate it for Penny. She thought Deanna would have benefitted from a good slap in her life at some point, which, knowing Maddie, had never happened.

Penny was forty-two, had never married, was crazy about her white Persian cat, and after a string of bad boyfriends, she had given up on men for the last few years. She worked hard for Maddie and loved her job. She hated leaving on Friday nights to go home to her own dull weekends, puttering around her apartment and doing laundry, waiting to come back to work on Mondays. Maddie was the excitement and inspiration in her life. Penny had a big, noisy Irish family in Boston and kept in close touch with her siblings and nephews and nieces. But on most weekends she stayed home in case Maddie needed her, even though Maddie almost never called on weekends and respected Penny's time off. She loved living in Maddie's shadow and enjoyed making life better for her.

Maddie kept encouraging Penny to try to meet a new man, even on the internet if she had to, but Penny was terrified of internet dating, and had had bad luck with it the few times she'd tried. She was one of those diamonds in the rough that few people had seen the value of, except Maddie, who recognized her for the gem she was. She was unfailingly loyal to Maddie as a result.

"Anything I can do for you before I go?" Penny asked her on a rainy Friday night before she left to take the subway to an unchic part of Brooklyn. She had lived there since she'd come to New York. Penny had red hair and green eyes and a nice face. She was about twenty-five pounds overweight, which she kept meaning to do something about, and said she would, but never did. She had no motivation to do so, and sitting at home in front of the TV all weekend, watching her favorite reality shows and eating ice cream, didn't help. As hard as she was willing to work for Maddie, she did very little for herself.

"I'm fine," Maddie assured her with a smile. She'd been going over contact sheets all day from her last shoot and marking what she wanted to send to the retoucher. She had a keen eye and did just enough, but never too much. She didn't want her subjects to look like they'd had a face-lift for the shoot, or to show them at their most unflattering either. She liked them to look real but beautiful, and she balanced it perfectly. Her subjects were always pleased with the final result. She was very undemanding of Penny about anything other than work. She never called her at home, except in a real emergency. Otherwise she waited until business hours to ask for what she needed. She did all her own personal errands. She never sent Penny to the dry cleaner, the drug store, or out to do menial tasks. She did those herself, and never felt too important to do so.

"What are you doing this weekend?" Penny asked her, handing Maddie a cup of tea that she hadn't requested but appreciated. Maddie thanked her with a smile.

"I'm going to reorganize some closets. I promised myself I would. I'm running out of room, and I've got so much tucked away that I can't fit anything else in. Time to do some weeding out and spring cleaning, and the weather is so lousy, I'm not going out tonight. It's supposed to rain again tomorrow and Sunday too." Maddie loved puttering around the house. It was early May, but they'd had the wettest spring in New York history, and rain had been predicted for the weekend.

"Don't do any heavy lifting," Penny warned her. "I can help you with it on Monday." Although during the week, they were both usually so buried in work, there was no time for closets. Maddie loved doing projects on the weekends. She was always busy with something.

"It's just a lot of small junk in there. I'm not even sure what there is, which is why I want to go through it. I'm turning into a pack rat," she said with an embarrassed grin, and Penny laughed.

"You don't need to tell me that," Penny answered, smiling. Maddie saved every shred of correspondence, no matter how far back, and almost every photograph she'd ever taken. They had extensive archives in storage.

"I'm going to try to throw some of it out this time," Maddie said firmly. "I promise."

"I'll believe it when I see it," Penny said as she put her coat on and left with a wave a few minutes later. She walked through the studio and let herself out through the side door. She wondered if Maddie got lonely on the weekends. She had her work to keep her occupied, but Penny thought she should be seeing her grandchildren, and knew she hardly ever did. Penny's own mother saw her grandchildren constantly. They were in and out of her house, and she was always cooking for them.

Maddie's life was entirely different and Penny felt sorry for her, although Maddie would have been shocked to know that. She had long since learned how to keep engaged on her own, and in many ways, she enjoyed it. She didn't expect to see her children and grandchildren more often than she did.

Maddie made scrambled eggs and a salad for dinner that night. She'd had half a turkey sandwich for lunch while she was working. She wasn't a big eater and hated to cook for herself. Sometimes she just ate an apple or banana for lunch, and Penny scolded her. Maddie thought food was boring and cooking it even more so. She said it was the beauty of being alone. She didn't have to prepare meals for anyone, not even herself if she didn't want to. She'd rather skip a meal and spend the time doing something else.

After she ate, she got a ladder from the studio and dragged it carefully up the stairs to her bedroom closet. She liked doing chores for herself and had a sense of victory when she got the ladder to the third floor, with a firm grip on it. She set it up, climbed high enough to see the first level of shelves, pulled out a bunch of boxes and dropped them on the floor of her bedroom, and then she sat down next to them and started to go through them. As she suspected, a lot of what she found was junk, and she felt virtuous as she made a big pile of papers and old clothes to get rid of. She was going to have Penny send the clothes to Goodwill on Monday. It was several hours before she climbed to the next level on the ladder and pulled out the boxes on the second shelf. She hadn't unearthed any treasures so far, just a box of letters from her kids when they were younger, which made her smile as she glanced through them. Some of them were letters from camp.

She put what was left neatly back on the shelves, looked at her watch, and wrestled with a decision. It was one in the morning. Should she tackle the highest shelf or go to bed and do it in the morning? She wasn't tired, and often stayed up late either reading or working, which was another pleasure of living alone. She didn't have to apologize to anyone for how late she stayed up or the noise she made, with the lights on at two or three A.M. And she wanted to get that one closet done. She had some things she wanted to add to the shelves, and there hadn't been a spare inch to accommodate anything until she started weeding out. She was curious about what was on the top shelf. Whatever was there had been there for a long time and she'd forgotten what it was.

She decided to stay up and do it. She had the time, was in the mood, and she could sleep late on Saturday morning if it took her too long. She assumed it was probably more junk and she could get rid of it quickly anyway. She had a good-sized pile on her bedroom floor already, to donate or throw away. She pulled out several boxes and tossed them to the floor, climbed back down the ladder, and opened them. The tape was dried and brittle. She didn't remember seeing them before, which meant they had been up there for years. The first box she opened was full of photographs of the children when they were younger. She recognized several images that she already had framed around the house, and guessed that they were duplicates.

The second box she opened took her breath away for a minute. It was full of letters in various handwriting, and the photographs mixed in with them made her smile. She remembered the box now. They were old love letters and photographs of three of the men in her life, the three most important ones since her marriage. She had thrown away other letters and photographs a long time ago. But she had saved everything from these three men. She hadn't thought about them in years, nor heard from them. She stared at the familiar faces in the pictures. Jacques Masson was an ambitious young French chef who was working at a restaurant in New York and dreamed of opening his own when she met him. Bob Holland was a brilliant young venture capitalist, working with high-tech investments and just starting out in his first big job with high hopes for his career. And Andy Wyatt was a cowboy from Wyoming. She had met him when she'd taken the kids to a ranch there one summer. She had been madly in love with Andy and they had continued their affair discreetly for over a year, until she called a halt to it. She knew it could go nowhere. They both did. It was getting too intense to be safe for either of them. They knew they had to stop but couldn't. Ending it with him had been one of the most painful things she'd ever done, but it wasn't the right fit for her, or her kids, or him.

She had loved all three of them, but leaving Andy had broken her heart. She sat staring at his photograph for a long time, wondering where he was now. He was eight years older than she was, so he'd be sixty-six now, still probably somewhere in Wyoming. Their affair was eighteen years ago, she was forty then, and he was forty-eight. Ben and Milagra were in high school, and Deanna had just left for college. It seemed as though a thousand years had passed since then. There hadn't been anyone serious since Andy. He had been the love of her life. But she couldn't see herself on a ranch in Wyoming, and he would never have survived in New York. He would have been as miserable as he had been when he visited her, so she had freed him, for both their sakes. She'd never cared as much about any man after him.

She put the photographs back in the box then, set the box on the floor, climbed back up the ladder, and tried to pull down another box. It was bigger and heavier than the first two. She finally tugged it toward her and was juggling it awkwardly when she leaned too far over and lost her balance. The ladder came crashing down with her on it, spilling her across the floor of her bedroom, past the rug and onto the hardwood floor she was so proud of and had refinished when she moved in. She fell with a heavy thud at an awkward angle, pushed the ladder off her, and tried to get up, when an agonizing pain shot through her left leg. She could see that her foot was in a weird position, and when she stood up, she felt like throwing up, and almost fainted. She had to sit down on the floor again and put her head between her knees until she felt less dizzy. She could put no weight on her left foot at all, and she had the sinking feeling that her ankle might be broken or very badly sprained. She hoped the latter, but couldn't tell. She hopped to her bed on one foot, feeling dizzy again, and lay down, telling herself that this was ridiculous. She'd never fallen off a ladder before, or even gotten injured. She was on and off ladders all the time for her work, checking lights and angles for a shot.

She felt worse as she lay on her bed, feeling like a prisoner, knowing she should put ice on her foot, but there was no way she could hop down the narrow metal spiral staircase on one foot to get to the kitchen on the floor below, and then back up to her bedroom again. She had never put in an elevator, which would have been expensive, seemed unnecessary, and would have eaten up space she needed for her studio. Now she regretted it, if this was a harbinger of things to come, if she was going to fall off another ladder or get hurt in the future.

She had no one to call to come and help her. She could have called Penny in Brooklyn, but there was nothing she could do, and Maddie wasn't going to call her at that hour. It was two in the morning by then. She would never have called Deanna, and she would be in the Berkshires anyway. She felt foolish calling a friend to come and help her down the stairs in the middle of the night. And there was no one she was close enough to reach out to except Penny. She hadn't spoken to any of her friends in months, she'd been too busy, and felt awkward calling them now. She wasn't bleeding to death, and an injured ankle didn't seem serious enough to warrant calling 911. All she could do was hope she felt better in the morning and could make it down the stairs to ice it, or go to the emergency room if it hadn't improved.

In the meantime, she lay on her bed, looking at the overturned ladder stretched across the floor from the closet, the box she'd dropped with its contents spilling over the rug, and the one where she'd found the photographs and letters from her old lovers. She lay there for a long time, wide awake, thinking of the photograph of Andy Wyatt, looking so handsome, smiling at her in the image. She wanted to go through that box over the weekend, but instead of making things neater, she'd made a mess. All she could think of was Andy, while trying not to focus on the excruciating pain in her ankle and feeling scared, and she burst into tears as she lay there alone.