

# DANIELLE STEEL

## A Mother's Love

A NOVEL





By Danielle Steel

A MOTHER'S LOVE • A MIND OF HER OWN • FAR FROM HOME • NEVER SAY  
NEVER • TRIAL BY FIRE • TRIANGLE • JOY • RESURRECTION • ONLY THE  
BRAVE • NEVER TOO LATE • UPSIDE DOWN • THE BALL AT VERSAILLES •  
SECOND ACT • HAPPINESS • PALAZZO • THE WEDDING PLANNER • WORTHY  
OPONENTS • WITHOUT A TRACE • THE WHITTIER • THE HIGH NOTES • THE  
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THE AFFAIR • NEIGHBORS • ALL THAT GLITTERS • ROYAL • DADDY'S GIRLS •  
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CHILD'S PLAY • THE DARK SIDE • LOST AND FOUND • BLESSING IN DISGUISE  
• SILENT NIGHT • TURNING POINT • BEAUCHAMP HALL • IN HIS FATHER'S  
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A Mother's Love

*A Novel*



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*About the Author*

To my darling children, Beatrix, Trevor, Todd,  
Nick, Samantha, Victoria, Vanessa, Maxx, and Zara,

May you be ever blessed, ever safe, always protected,  
may the forces of evil never touch you,  
and may your only memories of the past  
be filled with the knowledge of how greatly you are loved.

With all my heart and love,  
Mom/d.s.



# Chapter 1

It was a beautiful early October day, the weather was warm, the leaves were starting to turn in a riot of color, and the wedding had gone perfectly. Halley Holbrook sat in a quiet corner of the peaceful terrace overlooking the exquisite garden of the Connecticut estate she had rented for her daughter Valerie's wedding. The bridal couple had wanted a daytime wedding, with a morning ceremony, a celebratory lunch, and an afternoon of dancing. By six o'clock, the couple had left and the guests had said their goodbyes and thanks to Halley for a fabulous event, and she took a moment to sit quietly and think about what an unforgettable day it had been.

Valerie was a tall, fine-featured blonde, twenty-seven years old, and she had been dating Seth Parker for almost three years. They had met at the beginning of the pandemic, and had gotten close quickly, sheltering together in place several times. Valerie was an attorney at a firm that specialized in entertainment law, and Seth Parker was one of their major clients, the producer of a string of hit TV series. He was thirty-nine years old, divorced, with no children, and had a massive, successful, all-consuming career, which was convenient for Valerie, since she was in no rush to have children and start a family. She was much more interested in becoming a partner at the law firm where she worked. They had offices in

Los Angeles and New York and she had been commuting between the two cities for the past two years, in order to be with Seth. She had just moved to L.A., a month before the wedding. Most of the two hundred and eighty-five guests and wedding party had flown in from there, several of them on private planes.

Valerie's identical twin sister, Olivia, had moved to Los Angeles at the same time Valerie did. She was an artist and could work anywhere, and she had just signed a contract with a reputable contemporary art gallery in L.A. to represent her. The girls had given up the New York apartment they shared in Tribeca when Valerie was in town, and Olivia had given up her studio in SoHo. They were making a clean break by going to the West Coast together, which was how they had done everything all their lives. They were inseparable, had gone to school together since nursery school, and had gone to Yale because of the excellent fine arts department for Olivia. When Valerie went on to Columbia Law School in New York, Olivia was back in the city working in her studio.

Halley lived in New York on Fifth Avenue in a beautiful big apartment, where she and her daughters had lived for nineteen years, since Halley's first best-selling novel. The twins had been eight when they moved there from a much smaller, more modest apartment on the Upper West Side, which had been all Halley could afford at the time. Their current apartment still felt like home to the twins. Halley lived there alone now, but the girls visited often, and spent weekends with their mother occasionally. When they did, the three of them always had fun together.

It was going to change Halley's life dramatically not to have her daughters nearby. One or both of them had always been available for a spontaneous meal, a movie, or an afternoon of shopping when she wasn't writing. She rarely had a day without one or both of the twins in it. If Valerie was busy, Halley would drop in at Olivia's studio on her way home, to see what she was working on. Olivia had a great eye for form and color, and real talent. Halley and her daughters were extremely close and called themselves the three musketeers. Now it would all be different, with the girls living in L.A.

Valerie's fiancé, Seth, didn't mind having Olivia tag along. He enjoyed having two beautiful women with him, and teased them about it. Valerie was confident and outgoing, with determined opinions and occasionally a sharp tongue. She didn't hesitate to go after what she wanted, and was outspoken. Olivia was quieter and more retiring, she had a gentler style and her mother often found her to be the kinder, more empathetic, and compassionate of the two. Valerie was a fighter for whatever she set her sights on. Olivia was less sure of herself and could be swayed more easily. She was no match for her twin sister in an argument, and favored the underdog in most things. She was usually more sympathetic to her mother than Valerie, who had a more cut-and-dried, black-and-white view of everything, including their mother. Valerie's battles with their mother had been fierce in her teens, but had calmed down eventually. Olivia had been the peacemaker.

Olivia was worried about her mother now that she'd be alone in New York. Valerie said she'd be fine and dismissed her twin's concerns. She was busy setting up the spectacular house Seth had just bought for them in Bel Air. Olivia was renting a small, modest 1930s Spanish-style house with a pool, nearby in Beverly Hills, but Valerie had set up a room for her in their house too, so Olivia could stay with them whenever she wanted. They had shared a room for their entire lives until Valerie got married. Valerie tried to include her twin in everything she did. Olivia was the person Valerie loved most in the world, even more than Seth or their mother. It was the nature of twins, and a relationship like no other, for both of them.

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Halley had brought the girls up on her own, in somewhat unusual circumstances. She was twenty-two when they were born, and forty-nine now. She was turning fifty in December, which was a landmark she wasn't looking forward to. It made her feel old, although she wasn't, and she looked younger than her age. She was facing an empty nest for the first time. The three of them often took trips together. Now she'd have to wait

for them to visit from L.A. She didn't want to intrude on them, particularly Valerie in her new life. It was all going to be very different. Halley was determined to make the best of it and fill her own life. She had a demanding writing career, which would keep her busy. She worked late into the night, and hadn't had a man in her life in three years.

Valerie's wedding had marked the end of a chapter, a big one for Halley. The twins had been the hub of her life and her whole universe for twenty-seven years. She would have to get used to being on her own now, with them living far away. Halley was still a strikingly beautiful woman, with creamy white skin, green eyes, and hair as dark as the twins' was fair. The girls looked a great deal like her, except for their coloring. Like her own mother, Halley had modeled briefly when she was at Connecticut College and after she graduated. She had done it for the extra money, but writing had been her passion. She poured her heart and soul into what she wrote, which her readers could feel in every word. There was honesty and integrity and raw emotion in her writing. She never hid from the truth and her stories touched her readers deeply.

She had started writing seriously after the twins were born. After five years of struggling with her first novel, her perseverance paid off. Her first book was published when she was twenty-seven, and she had her first bestseller three years later, at thirty. It was a dark, complicated psychological novel that had captivated reviewers and won her a loyal readership from then on. She had a deep compassion for human suffering, and clearly a profound knowledge and understanding of those who created it. There was a hungry audience for what she wrote. She struck a universal chord in her readers. For the past nineteen years, every book she'd written had been on the major bestseller lists. She had a rewarding career, which would fill her time once the twins left.

She was planning to start a new book that week, which would distract her from their absence. Valerie would be on her honeymoon, and Olivia painting in L.A. All Halley's familiar landmarks were slipping away. She tried not to dwell on it, but she felt like a ship slowly leaving port for unknown destinations. She had no idea where she was headed, without her

daughters near at hand, other than writing the next book. Writing was what she knew, and it had always saved her. It was the one place where she felt safe and comfortable, and she knew that writing the book now would ground her, as it always did. She was determined to fill her time without her daughters, and have a good life on her own, whatever it took. She would have to learn to live without them.

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The wedding was lavish but just restrained enough to be elegant and not overdone or pretentious. *Vogue* had covered it. The guests were exuberant in a wholesome way. They danced through the afternoon and into the evening. Seth and Valerie's friends were happy for them. In their three years together they had built a solid relationship, knew each other well, had a wide circle of friends, and always managed to include Olivia. Halley had written Valerie a letter, telling her how happy she was for her and that she was sure their union would be a success, and Valerie was touched by her mother's faith in her. Halley had given her the letter the night before the wedding.

Although Valerie rarely said it, both twins were fully aware of how much their mother had done for them, with no help from anyone. They didn't know a great deal about her childhood and youth. She seldom spoke of it, and avoided discussing the details with them. She was always reticent and discreet. Both girls had long since understood that she didn't like to talk about her past, and never explained why. But it was obvious that she had suffered more than she admitted. She preferred to live in the present, and had buried the past.

Halley was talented, modest, and enormously successful in her own right, and didn't make a fuss about it. She had no one to rely on but herself. That had always been the case. She was six years old when her mother left her and her father. It had been a blow at first, but a mixed blessing, as it made her strong and resilient and self-reliant, traits she tried to impart to her girls, even though they didn't need to be as independent as she had been as

a child. They had her to comfort and protect them. She had never let them down, and they knew she never would. She was as solid as a rock and had always been there when they needed her, at every age, and even now. Whenever one of them called, she was instantly available to them, eager to listen and offer advice, if asked, or even if not. But she knew she had to let them go and let them fly now, and she had to forge a life of her own without them. Valerie's marriage and the girls' move to L.A. provided a natural break for all three of them, and a time to grow up, for Halley too. It was necessary, but nonetheless painful for her. It was a huge change.

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Halley lay back in a chair on the terrace after everyone had left and she visualized the wedding again. It had been entirely made up of the couple's friends, and very few of Halley's, which was the style of weddings nowadays. Seth's mother was there, although he wasn't close to her. He and his brother, Peter, were the product of her first marriage. She'd had three husbands, and she lived in Palm Springs with her current one. Seth and Peter had no relationship with their father and hadn't seen him in five years. He was married to his fifth wife. Halley had talked to Seth's mother at the wedding and had nothing in common with her. But Seth and his brother were close. They'd had very little parenting growing up in L.A. Seth had made a big career for himself in television production. And Peter was a tax attorney for several famous clients.

The wedding guests were attractive and successful, some of them celebrities with big careers of their own. They were impressed by Seth's dazzling success in TV. He had fallen in love with Valerie the first time he laid eyes on her, when she walked into a meeting at the law firm that represented him. He had been instantly enchanted by her and attracted to her, and fascinated when he discovered she had an identical twin, and met Olivia, who looked entirely the same, but was a completely different person. Like everyone who knew them, he had a hard time telling them apart at first. Even Halley made mistakes at times, and they had loved



playing tricks on their mother, their friends, and their teachers when they were younger, and even on the boys they dated in high school and college. Olivia had never had a long-term serious boyfriend and few short-term ones. Valerie had dated many men, but Seth was the first one she fell seriously in love with. He was her soulmate.

Physically, the twins were indistinguishable, but no two women could have been more dissimilar in personality. Valerie's steely determination served her well in her law career. She was a strong woman with definite ideas, sure of her opinions and willing to defend them. Valerie had her mother's strength and perseverance. Olivia had Halley's warmth, compassion, kindness, and artistic nature. Halley felt at times as though her traits had been equally divided between them, but not blended. She could see herself in both of them, her weaknesses and her strengths. But their history was not even remotely similar to hers. She had done everything in her power to make sure of that.

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Halley had followed in her own French mother's footsteps when she modeled briefly in college and for a short time after. She had no long-term ambitions in that direction, unlike her mother. Halley only did it for the extra money. She'd been in the studio of a famous photographer, Locke Logan, who had been taken with her innocent charm when she modeled for him. She was shy and retiring, always happy to disappear into the background. He had taken an interest in her and had taken her under his wing. He loved photographing her. She had an inner beauty that shone through.

She was twenty-two at the time, and he was forty-eight. He was married and had three children. He fell in love with Halley, and took a spectacular series of nude photographs of her that became legendary. You couldn't see her face but there was an innocence and poignancy to the photographs and a vulnerability that touched him profoundly. He never had any intention of getting divorced. Halley was one of a long series of affairs. His wife was