

DANIEL STEEL

AUTHOR OF THE COTTAGE  
AND THE KISS



NO GREATER  
LOVE

# DANIELLE STEEL

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# NO GREATER LOVE

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*To Beatrix,  
sweet, special girl,  
you fill me with joy  
and love and admiration.  
Brave girl, may your life  
be ever easy,  
on calm seas,  
with kind people,  
gentle breezes, sunny days  
and if a storm should ever come  
one day,  
remember how much we love you.*

*And to John,  
for whom there never was,  
never will be,  
never could be . . .  
a greater love than mine for you.  
No greater love,  
and all my heart and life,  
forever.*

*d.s.*



**NO GREATER  
LOVE**

# Chapter 1

10 April 1912

THE ONLY SOUND IN THE DINING ROOM WAS THE TICKING OF the large, ornate clock on the mantelpiece, and the occasional muffled rustling of a heavy linen napkin. There were eleven people in the enormous dining room, and it was so cold that Edwina could barely move her fingers. She glanced down at them and caught the gleam of her engagement ring in the morning sunlight, and then smiled, as she glanced across the table at her parents. Even with his eyes cast down at his plate, she could see the mischief at the corner of her father's mouth. And she was sure that beneath the table, he was holding her mother's hand. Left to themselves, they were always teasing and laughing, and whispering playfully, and their friends liked to say that it was no wonder they had six children. At forty-one, Kate Winfield still looked like a girl. She had a lithe figure and a slim waist, and walking behind them at a distance, it was often difficult to discern Kate from her oldest child, Edwina, who was also

tall and had shining dark hair and big blue eyes. They were very close, as the entire family was. It was a family in which people laughed and talked and cried and hugged and joked, and great mischief was conducted daily.

It was difficult now for Edwina to keep a straight face as she watched her brother George make clouds of vapor with his breath in the arctic dining room, which their uncle Rupert, Lord Hickham, liked to keep slightly colder than the North Pole. The Winfield children were used to none of this. They were used to the comforts of their American life in the warmer climate of California. They had come all the way from San Francisco a month before to stay with their aunt and uncle, and announce Edwina's engagement. Their ties to England seemed to be repeating themselves. Kate's sister, Elizabeth, had married Lord Rupert twenty-four years before, and she had come to England to be the second viscountess and the mistress of Havermoor Manor. At twenty-one, she had met the much older Lord Hickham when he had come to California with friends, and she'd been swept off her feet. More than two decades later, her nieces and nephews found it difficult to understand the attraction. Lord Hickham was distant and gruff, inhospitable in the extreme, he never seemed to laugh, and it was obvious to all of them that he found it extremely unpleasant having children in his house. It wasn't that he *disliked* them, Aunt Liz always explained, it was just that he wasn't *used* to them, never having had any of his own.

This by way of explanation for his being most unamused when George put several small tadpoles in his ale, after Uncle Rupert went duck hunting with their father. In truth, Rupert had long since stopped wanting children of his own. Long since, he had felt he needed an heir for Havermoor Manor, and his other large estates, but eventually it was obvious that that was not

part of the Grand Plan. His first wife had suffered several miscarriages before dying in childbed some seventeen years before he married Liz. And he had always blamed Liz for not bearing him any children either, not that he would have wanted as many as Kate and Bertram had, and he would most assuredly have wanted his to be better behaved than theirs were. It was absolutely shocking, he assured his wife, what they let their children get away with. But Americans were known for that. No sense of dignity or control, no education, no discipline whatsoever. He was, however, enormously relieved that Edwina was marrying young Charles Fitzgerald. Perhaps there was some hope for her after all, he had said grudgingly when Liz told him.

Lord Hickham was in his seventieth year, and he had been less than pleased when Kate wrote to her sister and asked if they could all come and stay. They were going to London to meet the Fitzgeralds and announce the engagement, but Rupert was aghast at the idea of all of them coming to Havermoor after that.

"What, with their entire brood?" He had looked horrified when Liz gently asked him the question over breakfast. It was almost Christmas then and they wanted to come in March. And Liz had hoped that with enough time to reassure him, Rupert might actually let them do it. Liz longed to have her sister come, and have the children brighten her dreary days. She had come to hate Havermoor in twenty-four years of living there with Rupert, and she missed her sister, and the happy girlhood they had shared in California.

Rupert was a difficult man to live with, and theirs had never become the marriage she had dreamed of. Early on, she had been impressed with his dignified airs, his title, his acute politeness with her, and his stories about the "civilized life" they all led in England. They were twenty-five years apart in age, and when she had arrived

at Havermoor she had been shocked to find the Manor dismally depressing and in shocking disrepair. Rupert had kept a house in London in those days as well, but within a very short time, Liz had discovered that he never used it. And after four years of never setting foot in it, he had sold it to a good friend. Children might have helped, she felt, and she was anxious to start a family and hear young, happy voices echoing in the somber halls. But year after year, it became more obvious that this was not to be her fate, and she lived only to see Kate's children on her rare visits back to San Francisco. And eventually, even those small pleasures were denied her, as Rupert became too ill to travel much of the time, and finally announced that he was too old. Rheumatism, gout, and just plain old age discouraged him from roaming the world anymore and as he needed his wife to wait on him night and day, Liz was trapped at Havermoor with him. More often than she liked to admit, she found herself dreaming of going back to San Francisco, but she hadn't been able to go there in years. All of which made Kate and the children's visit all the more important to her, and she was all the more grateful when Rupert finally said they could stay with them, as long as they didn't stay forever.

This proved to be even more wonderful than Liz had expected. It had been several years since they'd last come, and she was overjoyed. And her long walks in the garden with her sister were all that she had longed for in her years away. Once upon a time, the two had been almost like twins, and now Liz was amazed to see Kate still looking so youthful and so pretty. And she was obviously still very much in love with Bert. It made Liz regret again that she had ever married Rupert. Over the years, she had often wondered what life might have been like had she never become Lady Hickham and instead married someone in the States.

She and Kate had been so carefree as young girls, so happy at home with their doting parents. They had each been properly presented to Society at eighteen, and for a short time they had both had a wonderful time going to dinners and balls and parties, and then too quickly, Rupert had appeared, and Liz had left for England with him. And somehow, although she had lived in England for more than half of her life now, Liz was never able to feel that she truly belonged here. She had never been able to alter the course of anything that Rupert had already established at Havermoor Manor before she arrived. She was almost like a guest here, a guest with no influence, no control, and one who was not even very welcome. Since she had failed to produce an heir, her very presence there seemed without purpose.

Her life seemed so totally in contrast to her sister Kate's. How could Kate possibly understand? With her handsome dark-haired young husband, and her six beautiful children who had come like gifts from heaven at regular intervals for most of the twenty-two happy years they'd been married. There were three sons and three daughters, all full of high spirits and good health, with their parents' beauty and intelligence, and lively sense of humor. And the odd thing was that although Kate and Bert seemed almost too blessed, when one saw them, one had absolutely no doubt that they deserved it. Although Liz had envied her sister for years, and often said as much, she could never allow herself to be jealous in an ugly sense. It all seemed so right, and Kate and Bert were such basically good and kind and decent people. They were all too well aware of the riches of joy they had, and often made a point of saying as much to the children. It made Liz nostalgic for what she had never known . . . the love of a child . . . and the obviously warm loving relationship that Kate shared with her husband. Living with Rupert had made Liz



quiet over the years. There seemed so little to say anymore, and no one to whom to say it. Rupert was never particularly interested in her. He was interested in his estates and his ducks and his grouse and his pheasants and, when he was younger, his horses and his dogs, but a wife was of relatively little use to him, especially now with his gout bothering him so much of the time. She could bring him his wine, and ring for the servants, and help him up to bed, but his sleeping quarters were far, far down the hall from hers, and had been for many years, once he had understood that there would be no children from her. All they shared was regret, and a common home, and the chill loneliness that they shared there. All of which made a visit from the Winfields like throwing back the shutters, tearing down the curtains, and letting in the sunshine and fresh clean air of a California springtime.

There was a small hiccup, and then a stifled giggle at the other end of the table from where Liz and Kate sat on either side of Lord Rupert, who appeared not to have heard it. The two women exchanged a smile. Liz looked ten years younger than she had when they arrived. Seeing her sister and her nieces and nephews always seemed to revive her sagging spirits. It always broke Kate's heart to see how her sister had aged, and how lonely she was living here in the bleak countryside, in a house she hated, with a man who very clearly did not love her, and probably never had. And now she felt the anguish of their leaving. In less than an hour they'd be gone. And Lord only knew when they'd come back to England. Kate had invited her to come to San Francisco to prepare for Edwina's wedding, but Liz felt she couldn't leave Rupert for that long and promised to come in August for the wedding.

The hiccup at the other end of the table was almost a relief, as Kate glanced down at nearly-six-year-old

Alexis. George was whispering something to her, and Alexis was about to erupt in gales of giggles.

"Shhh . . ." Kate whispered, smiling at them, and glancing at Rupert. Their own breakfast table usually sounded like a Fourth of July picnic, but here they had to behave, and the children had been very good about following Rupert's rules this time, and he seemed to have mellowed slightly with age. He had taken sixteen-year-old Phillip hunting several times, and although Phillip had admitted to his father that he hated it, he was always polite, and he had thanked his uncle and gone with him. But Phillip was like that, wanting to please everyone, he was always kind, gentlemanly, polite, and astonishingly thoughtful for a boy his age. It was difficult to believe he was just sixteen, and he was clearly the most responsible of all the Winfield children. Except for Edwina, of course, but she was twenty, and full grown, and in five months she would have a home and a husband of her own. And a year after that, she hoped perhaps even her own baby. It was hard to believe, Kate kept reminding herself, that her oldest child was old enough to be married and have children.

They were going home now to attend to all the preparations for the wedding and Charles was coming back to the States with them as well. He was twenty-five years old, and he was head over heels in love with Edwina. They had met, by chance, in San Francisco, and they had been courting since the summer before.

The wedding was going to be in August, and they were taking with them yards and yards of the exquisite ivory fabric that Kate and Edwina had bought in London for her dress. Kate was going to have her dress-maker in San Francisco embroider it with tiny pearls, and the veil was being made by a Frenchwoman who had just come to London from Paris. Lady Fitzgerald was going to bring it over with her, when they came to

San Francisco in late July. And there would be lots to do in the meantime. Bertram Winfield was one of the most prominent men in California. He and his family owned one of San Francisco's most established newspapers, and there were hundreds of people they had to invite to the wedding. Kate and Edwina had been working on the list for a month. And it was already well over five hundred people. But Charles had only laughed when Edwina warned him that there might even be more.

"It would have been far, far worse in London. There were seven hundred two years ago when my sister got married. Thank God, I was still in Delhi." He had been traveling for the past four years. After two years in India with the military, he had then ventured to Kenya where he had spent a year, traveling and visiting friends, and Edwina loved hearing about all of his adventures. She had begged to go to Africa on their honeymoon, but he thought something a little tamer might be in order. They were planning to spend the autumn in Italy and France, and they wanted to be back in London by Christmas. Edwina secretly hoped that she'd be pregnant by then. She was madly in love with Charles, and she wanted a large family like her own, and a relationship like the happy one she'd always seen between her parents. It wasn't that they didn't fight from time to time, they did, and it almost shook the chandeliers in their San Francisco house when their mother really lost her temper, but along with the anger, there was always love. There was always tenderness and forgiveness and compassion, and you always knew, no matter what, how much Kate and Bertram loved each other, and that was exactly what Edwina wanted when she married Charles. She didn't want anything more or less than that, she didn't need an important man, or a title, or a fancy manor house. She wanted none of the things that had once foolishly drawn her Aunt Liz to Uncle Rupert. She