



Family Album



Danielle Steel



*Family
Album*



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To my family:
With love to
Beatrix, Trevor, Todd, Nicholas,
Samantha, Victoria, and Vanessa,
and especially . . . most especially,
with all my heart . . . to John.

d.s.

“God places the solitary in families,” comforting words from the Bible . . . families, by blood, by obligation, by necessity, by desire . . . and sometimes, if one is very lucky, by love. It is a word that implies solidity, a rock-solid foundation, a place to go home to . . . to grow out of . . . to grow away from, and yet to remember and hang onto . . . the echoes never leaving one’s ears or one’s heart, the memories carved like painted ivory, from a single tusk, delicately colored in brilliant hues, and softer ones, faded sometimes, so dim as to be almost forgotten . . . and yet never to be totally forgotten or left behind. The place where one begins, and hopes to end . . . the thing one works hard to build on one’s own . . . the pieces like building blocks reaching high into the sky. . . . Family . . . what images that conjures . . . what memories . . . what dreams.



Family Album



Prologue
1983



The sun was so brilliant nearly everyone was squinting, though it was only eleven o'clock in the morning. The tiniest of breezes ruffled the women's hair. The day was so beautiful there was a kind of agony to it, an amazing silence, and all one could hear in the silences were birds, a quiet chirping, a sudden shrieking, and the overwhelming smell of flowers . . . lily of the valley, gardenias, freesia, buried in a carpet of moss. But Ward Thayer saw none of it and he seemed to hear nothing at all. His eyes had been closed for several minutes, and when he opened them, he stared for the longest time, almost like a zombie, looking colorless, so unlike the image everyone had of him . . . had had for the last forty years. There was nothing dashing or exciting or even handsome about Ward Thayer this morning. He stood immobilized in the brilliant sunlight, watching nothing, his eyes closed again, almost too tightly, he pressed his eyelids tightly together, and for a moment he wanted never to open them again, as she had not, as she never would again.

There was a voice, droning softly in the distance, saying something, sounding no different than the hum of insects buzzing near the flowers. And he felt nothing. Nothing. Why? Why did he feel nothing, he asked himself? Had he felt nothing for her? Had it all been a lie? He felt a wave of panic wash over him . . . he couldn't remember her face . . . the way she wore her hair . . . the color of her eyes . . . his eyes flew open brusquely, tearing the lids apart like hands that had been clasped, skin that had once upon a time been grafted. The sun blinded him in an instant, and he saw

only a flash of light and smelled the flowers, as a bee hummed lazily past him, and the pastor said her name. Faye Price Thayer. There was a muffled popping sound to his left and the lightning of a camera exploded in his eyes, as the woman beside him pressed his arm.

He looked down at her, his eyes adjusting to the light again, and suddenly he remembered. Everything he had forgotten was reflected in his daughter's eyes. The younger woman looked so much like her, yet how different they were. There would never be another woman like Faye Thayer. They all knew that, and he knew it best of all. He looked at the pretty blonde beside him, remembering it all, and longing silently for Faye.

His daughter stood tall and sedate. She was plainer than Faye had been. Her smooth blond hair was pulled tightly into a knot, and beside her stood a serious-looking man, who touched her arm often. They were on their own now, all of them, each one different, separate, yet part of a larger whole, part of Faye . . . and of him as well.

Was she truly gone? It seemed impossible, as tears rolled solemnly down his cheeks and a dozen photographers leapt forward to record his pain, to put on front pages around the world. The grieving widower of Faye Price Thayer. He was hers now, in death, as he had been hers in life. They were all hers. All of them. The daughters, the son, the co-workers, the friends, and they were all there to honor the memory of the woman who would never come again.

The family stood beside him in the front row. His daughter Vanessa, her bespectacled young man, and beside him, Vanessa's twin, Valerie, with hair of flame, a golden face, a perfect black silk dress which clung to her breathtakingly, her success stamped on her unmistakably, and beside her an equally dazzling man.

They made such a beautiful pair one had to stare at them, and it pleased Ward to see how much Val looked like Faye. He had never noticed it quite so much before, but he saw it now. . . . And Lionel, who looked so like her too, though more quietly. Tall and handsome and blond, sensual, elegant, and delicate, yet at the same time proud. He stood staring into the distance now, remembering the others he had known and loved. . . . Gregory and John, lost brother, treasured friend. He thought too of how well Faye had known Lionel, better than anyone perhaps. She had

known him better than he knew himself . . . and as well as he himself knew Anne, standing beside him now, prettier than she had been before, so much more confident, and still so young, in sharp contrast to the gray-haired man who held her hand.

They were all there in the end. They had come to pay homage to all that she had been. Actress, director, legend, wife, mother, friend. There were those who had envied her, those she had driven too hard and wanted too much from. Her family knew that best of all. She had expected so much of them, yet given so much in return, driven herself so hard, gone so far. Ward remembered it all as he looked at all of them, all the way back to that first time in Guadalcanal. And now here they were, a lifetime past, and each of them remembering her as she had been, as she once was, as she was to them. It was a sea of faces in the bright Los Angeles sun. All of Hollywood had turned out for her. A last salute, a final smile, a tender tear, as Ward turned to glance at the family he had built with her, all of them so strong and beautiful . . . as she had been. How proud she would have been to see them now, he thought, tears burning his eyes again . . . how proud they were of her . . . finally. It had taken a long time . . . and now she was gone . . . it seemed impossible to believe when only yesterday . . . only yesterday they'd been in Paris . . . the South of France . . . New York . . . Guadalcanal.

Guadalcanal
1943



CHAPTER 1



The heat of the jungle was so oppressive that just standing in one place was almost like swimming through thick, dense air. It was a presence you could feel and smell and touch, and yet the men pressed forward wanting to see her . . . to get closer . . . to see more. . . . Their shoulders were tightly compressed, as they sat there, side by side, cross-legged on the ground. In the front, way up front, they had folding chairs, but they had run out of chairs hours before. The men had been sitting there since sundown, baking, sweating, waiting. It felt like a hundred years that they'd been sitting here in the thick jungles of Guadalcanal and they didn't give a damn. They would have waited half a lifetime for her. She represented everything to them right now . . . mothers . . . sisters . . . women . . . girlfriends they had left behind . . . women . . . Woman. There was an almost audible purr after nightfall, as they sat there, talking, smoking, rivulets of sweat pouring down their necks and backs, their faces glistening, their hair damp, their uniforms sticking to their flesh, and all of them so young, children almost . . . and at the same time children no more. They were men.

By 1943, they had been here for longer than they cared to remember, and everyone wondered when the war would end, and if it ever would. But tonight no one thought about the war, only the men on duty had to worry about that. And most of the men waiting for her now had bought out for the night with every kind of currency they could lay their hands on, everything from chocolate bars to cigarettes to cold hard cash . . . anything . . .

anything to see her . . . they would do anything to see Faye Price again.

As the band began to play, the air wasn't thick so much as sultry, the heat no longer oppressive but sensual, and they felt their bodies stir in a way they hadn't in a long, long time. It wasn't just hunger they felt for her, it was something deeper and more tender, something that would have frightened them if they had felt it for too long. They felt the first stirrings of it now as they waited . . . waited . . . every moment a pulse beat as a clarinet began to wail. The music wrenched at the gut and was almost painful, and every face, every man, held his breath and was still. The stage was empty in the darkness, and then suddenly, dimly, they saw her, or thought they did . . . it was impossible to be completely certain, a tiny spotlight sought her in the distance. It found her feet and there was a flash of silver, a sparkle from afar, like falling stars in a summer sky . . . the shimmer of her body as she approached them made their guts ache, and suddenly she stood there before them. Blinding perfection in a silver lamé gown. There was an audible sigh from the men who watched her, a perfect blend of desire and ecstasy and pain. Her skin was like the palest of pink velvet in the dazzling silver gown, the long blond hair was almost the color of ripe peaches and she had worn it down. Her eyes danced, her mouth smiled, she held her hands out toward them as she sang, and her voice was deeper than any woman they remembered. She was more beautiful than any they had known. She moved and the gown revealed endless, exquisite flesh, the pink perfection of her thighs.

"Oh God . . ." One voice murmured in a back row, and around him, a hundred young men smiled.

They all felt that way about her, had for years. They hadn't believed it when they'd been told she was going to do a show for them. She had been doing shows like this halfway around the world. In the Pacific, in Europe, in the States. A year after Pearl Harbor, the guilt had overwhelmed her, and she'd been touring off and on now for more than a year. Recently, she had stopped to make another movie, but she was back on the road now . . . and tonight, she was here . . . with them.

Her voice had grown mournful as she sang to them, and in the front row, the men who watched could see a pulse beating in her neck. She was alive . . . she was human . . . and if they had

reached across the makeshift stage, they could have touched her . . . felt her . . . smelled her flesh. It made them almost keen to watch her, and seeming to look each man in the eye as she sang, Faye Price let no one down.

At twenty-three years of age, Faye Price was already a legend in Hollywood. She had made her first movie at nineteen, and from there had rushed headlong into success. She was beautiful, striking, and so damn good at what she did. She had a voice that ranged from molten lava to melted gold, hair that shimmered like a golden sunset, green eyes like emeralds in an ivory face. But it wasn't the features, or the voice, or the texture of the skin on her long narrow frame that belied the softly rounded hips and full breasts, it was the warmth that lit her from within, the brilliance that exploded in her eyes, the laughter in her voice when she wasn't singing that enthralled the world. She was a woman, in the best and purest meaning of the word. She was someone men wanted to cling to, women wanted to stare at, children loved to look up to. She was the stuff of which dream princesses were made. From a small town in Pennsylvania, she had made her way to New York after graduating from high school, and had become a model. Within six months she was making more than any girl in town. The photographers all loved her, her face was on the cover of every major magazine in the country, but secretly she admitted to her friends that she was bored. There was so little to it, she insisted, all she had to do was stand there. She tried to explain it, and the other girls looked at her as though she were mad. But two men recognized what she was. The man who later became her agent, and Sam Warman, the producer, who knew a gold mine when he saw one. He had seen her pictures on the magazine covers and he thought she was pretty, but it was only when he met her that he realized how fabulous she was. The way she moved, the way she looked into his eyes when she talked to him, her voice, and he knew instantly that this one wasn't looking to get laid. She wasn't looking for a damn thing, not outside herself, at any rate, Sam instinctively suspected. And everything Abe, her agent, said about her was true. She was fabulous. Unique. A star. What Faye Price wanted, she wanted from within. She wanted a challenge, she wanted to work hard, she wanted to try anything they'd let her do . . . and he did. He gave her the chance she wanted. It wasn't difficult for Abe to talk him into that. Sam brought her to Holly-