

DANIELLE STEEL

ANSWERED
PRAYERS

DOUBLEDAY LARGE PRINT
HOME LIBRARY EDITION

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This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places and incidents are either the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, events or locales, is entirely coincidental.

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To my very wonderful children,
who are the answers to my prayers,
Beatrix, Trevor, Todd, Samantha,
Victoria, Vanessa, Maxx, and Zara,
and Nick who was not only the answer
to my prayers, but has my prayers now,
and my heart, as he always will.
I love you all, with all my heart and soul.

with all my love,
Mom/d.s.

ANSWERED PRAYERS

1

FAITH MADISON LOOKED SMALL and serious and stylish, as she set the table, tossed a salad, and glanced into the oven at the dinner she'd prepared. She was wearing a well-cut black suit, and at forty-seven, she was still as slim as she had been when she married Alex Madison twenty-six years ago. She looked like a Degas ballerina, with her green eyes, and her long straight blond hair, which she had knotted into a sleek bun. She sighed, and sat down quietly in one of the kitchen chairs.

The small elegant brownstone townhouse on East Seventy-fourth Street in New York was deadly quiet, and she could hear the clock ticking, as she waited for Alex to come home. She closed her eyes for a minute, thinking of where she had been that afternoon. And as she opened them again, she could hear the

front door open and close. There was no other sound, no footstep on the hall carpet, no shout of "hello" as he walked in. He always came in that way. He locked the door behind him, set down his briefcase, hung his coat up in the closet, and glanced at his mail. In time, he would come looking for her. He would check her small study, and then glance into the kitchen to see if she was there.

Alex Madison was fifty-two years old. They had met when she was in college, at Barnard, and he was in business school at Columbia. Things had been different then. He had been enchanted by Faith's open easy ways, her warmth, her energy, her joy. He had always been quiet and reserved, and cautious with his words. They married as soon as she graduated, and he got his MBA. He had been an investment banker ever since. She had worked as a junior editor at *Vogue* for a year after graduating, and loved it, and then stopped when she went to law school for a year. She dropped out when her first child was born. Eloise had just turned twenty-four and had moved to London in early September. She was working at Christie's, and learning a lot about antiques. Faith's other daughter, Zoe, at eighteen, was a freshman at Brown. After twenty-four years

of full-time mothering, Faith had been out of a job for the past two months. The girls were gone—and she and Alex were suddenly alone.

“Hi, how was it?” Alex asked as he walked into the kitchen looking tired. He barely glanced at her and sat down. He’d been working hard on two IPOs. It didn’t even occur to him to touch her or to hug her. Most of the time, he spoke to her from across the room. He didn’t do it out of malice, but it had been years since he’d come home from the office and given her a hug. She had no idea when he’d stopped. She’d been so busy with their daughters that she didn’t notice, until one day she realized that he didn’t touch her when he came home anymore. She was always doing homework with the girls, or bathing one of them, when he came home at night. But it had been a long, long time since he’d been affectionate with her. Longer than either of them knew or cared to remember. There was a chasm between them now that they had both long since accepted, and she felt as though she were looking at him from a great distance as she poured him a glass of wine.

“It was all right. Sad,” she said, as he glanced at the paper, and she took the chicken out of the oven. He preferred fish, but she hadn’t

had time to buy any on the way home. "He looked so small." She was speaking of her stepfather, Charles Armstrong. He had died two days before, at the age of eighty-four. The rosary had been that day, and the casket had been open so Charles could be "viewed" by family and friends.

"He was old, Faith. He'd been sick for a long time." As though that not only explained it, but dismissed it. Alex did that. He dismissed things. Just as for years now, he had dismissed her. She felt lately as though she had served her purpose, done her job, and been dispensed with, not only by her children, but by her husband as well. The girls had their own lives now that they'd left home. And Alex lived in a world that didn't include her, except on rare occasions, when he expected her to entertain clients, or go to a dinner party with him. The rest of the time, he expected her to amuse herself. She saw women friends sometimes in the daytime, but most of her old friends still had children at home and were pressed for time. In the past several months, since Zoe left for college, Faith had been spending most of her time alone, trying to figure out what to do with the rest of her life.

And Alex had a full life of his own. It seemed eons since she and Alex had sat for hours at dinner and chatted about the things that were important to them. It had been years since they had gone for long walks on the weekend, or gone to movies and held hands. She could barely remember what that had been like with Alex. He seldom touched her, and rarely spoke. And yet, she knew he loved her, or at least she thought so, but he seemed to have almost no need to communicate with her. It was all shorthand and staccato words, silence suited him better, as it did now, as she set his dinner down in front of him, and brushed away a stray lock of blond hair. He seemed not to notice her at all, and was engrossed in something he was reading in the paper. It took him a long time to answer when she spoke again.

"Are you coming tomorrow?" she asked gently. Her stepfather's funeral was the next day. He shook his head as he glanced up at her.

"I can't. I'm going to Chicago. Meetings with Unipam." He had been having trouble with an important account. Business took precedence over all else, and had for a long time. He had become a very successful man. It had bought them the townhouse, and their

daughters' educations, an unexpected amount of ease and luxury that Faith hadn't expected to enjoy. But there were other things that would have meant more to her. Comfort, laughter, warmth. She felt as though she never laughed anymore, and hadn't in a long time, except when she was with the girls. It wasn't that Alex treated her badly. It was more that he didn't treat her at all. He had other things on his mind, and he didn't hesitate to make that clear to her. Even his lengthy silences told her that he would rather think than talk to her.

"It would be nice if you were there," Faith said cautiously, as she sat down across the table from him. He was a handsome man, and had always been. At fifty-two, he had grown distinguished as well, with a full head of gray hair. He had piercing blue eyes, and an athletic build. One of his partners had died suddenly of a heart attack two years before, and Alex had been careful about diet and exercise since then. Which was why he preferred fish to anything else, and was pushing the chicken she had cooked around his plate. She hadn't had time to be creative. She had been at the funeral parlor with her stepsister, Allison, all afternoon, while people came by to pay their respects. The two women hadn't seen each

other since Faith's mother's funeral the year before, and not for ten years before that. Allison hadn't come to her brother Jack's funeral two years before Faith's mother's. There had been too many funerals in recent years. Her mother, Jack, now Charles. Too many people had disappeared. And although she and her stepfather had never been close, she had respected him nonetheless, and it saddened her to think of his being gone. It felt as though all the familiar landmarks were fading from her life.

"I have to be at the meeting in Chicago tomorrow," Alex said, looking intently into his plate. He was only picking at the chicken, but he hadn't bothered to complain.

"Other people go to funerals," Faith said quietly. There was nothing strident about Faith. She didn't argue with him, didn't fight. She rarely disagreed with him. There was no point anyway. Alex had a way of removing himself. He did what he wanted, usually without asking or consulting her, and had for years. He operated like a separate entity from her most of the time, and what motivated him was business and the demands it put on him, not what Faith wanted him to do. She knew how he worked and what he thought. It was

hard to get behind the walls he put up around himself. She was never entirely sure if it was a defense, or simply what made him comfortable. It had been different when they were young, but it had been this way for years. Being married to him was a lonely place, but she was used to it. She only felt it more now because the girls were gone. They had provided all the warmth she needed for years. It was their absence she felt now, more than his. And she seemed to have drifted away from many of her friends. Time and life and marriage and kids had somehow gotten in the way.

Zoe had left for Brown two months before. She seemed happy there, and had yet to come home for a weekend, although Providence was close enough. But she was busy with her friends, her life, her activities at school. Just as Eloise was happy in London, with her job. Faith had been feeling for a while that they all had fuller lives than she, and she had been wrestling with trying to decide what to do with her own. She had thought of getting a job, but had no idea what kind of work she could do. It had been twenty-five years since she'd worked at *Vogue*, before Eloise was born. She had also thought about going back to law

school, and had mentioned it to Alex a couple of times. He thought the idea was ridiculous, at her age, and dismissed it out of hand.

"At your age, Faith? You don't start law school again at forty-seven. You'd be nearly fifty before you graduated and passed the bar." He said it with a look of utter contempt, and although she still thought of it from time to time she didn't mention it to him. Alex thought she should continue doing charity work, as she had for years, and going to lunch with her friends. All of which had begun to seem meaningless to Faith, particularly now with the girls away. She wanted something with more substance to fill her life, but she had yet to find a plan that seemed sensible to her, and one she could convince her husband would be worthwhile.

"No one is going to miss me at Charles's funeral," Alex said conclusively, as Faith cleared his plate, and offered him some ice cream, which he declined. He was careful about his weight, and was very trim and in good shape. He played squash several times a week, and tennis on weekends, when the weather in New York allowed. They had rented a weekend house in Connecticut when the girls

were small, but they hadn't done that in years. Alex liked to be able to go in to the office, if he needed to, on the weekends.

She wanted to tell him that she would miss him at her stepfather's funeral the next day. But she knew there was no point. Once he made up his mind, one way or another, he could not be swayed. It never occurred to him that she might need him there. And it wasn't the nature of their relationship for her to portray herself that way. She was capable, and well able to take care of herself. She had never leaned heavily on him, even when their children were small. She made good decisions, and was sure of herself. She had been the perfect wife for him. She never "whined," as he put it. And she didn't now. But she was disappointed that he didn't want to be there for her. Disappointment had become a way of life for Faith now. Alex was almost never there when she needed him. He was responsible, respectable, intelligent, provided well for them. And the emotional side of him had vanished into thin air years before. They had wound up with the same relationship his parents had. When she had met them, she had been shocked by how cold they were, and unable to express affection for each other. His father

had been particularly remote, just exactly the way Alex had become in time, although Faith had never pointed out to him how similar to his father he was. Alex wasn't demonstrative, and in fact it made him uncomfortable when others were, particularly Zoe and Faith. Their constant displays of affection always made him uneasy, and even more distant and critical of them.

Of the two girls, Zoe was the most like her, warm, affectionate, good-natured, with a sense of mischief about her, reminiscent of Faith when she was young. She was a terrific student, and a bright girl. But it was Eloise who was closer to her father, they had a kind of silent bond that was more comfortable for him. She was quieter than her sister, and always had been, and like Alex, she was often far more critical of Faith, and outspoken about it. Perhaps because he was. Zoe was always quick to come to her mother's defense, and to stand by her. She had wanted to come to Charles's funeral, although she wasn't close to him. He had never had any real interest in the girls. But as it turned out, she had midterm exams, and couldn't get away. And there was no reason for Eloise to come all the way from London for her step-grandfather's

funeral, after he had never given her the time of day. Faith didn't expect it of them, but it would have been nice if Alex could have made the effort to be there.

Faith didn't mention it to him again. As she did with a lot of other things, she let it go. She knew she wouldn't win the argument. As far as he was concerned, she was perfectly capable of going alone. And he knew, just as his daughters did, that Faith and her stepfather had never been close. His loss was more symbolic to her. And what Faith didn't verbalize to him was that it was more painful because it reminded her acutely of the others who had gone before. Her mother, her brother, Jack, whose death had devastated Faith when his plane went down on the way to Martha's Vineyard three years before. He was forty-six years old at the time, had been an excellent pilot, and the engine had caught fire. The plane had exploded in midair, and it was a shock she had only just recently begun to recover from. She and Jack had always been soulmates and best friends. He had been her sole emotional support, and a source of comfort for her throughout her childhood and adult life. He was always forgiving, never critical, and fiercely loyal. They were two years