



Betrayal: A Novel

By Danielle Steel

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BETRAYAL

At thirty-nine, director Tallie Jones is a Hollywood legend, whose award-winning films enjoy both critical and commercial success. With no interest in the glitz of Los Angeles, Tallie centers her life on her work and her devoted inner circle: her family, her producing partner and live-in lover, and her longtime personal assistant and best friend.

As Tallie is in the midst of her most ambitious film yet, small disturbances begin to ripple through her world. An audit reveals troubling discrepancies in the records maintained by Tallie's trusted accountant. Mysterious receipts hint at activities of which she has no knowledge. Soon it becomes clear that someone close to Tallie has been steadily funneling away enormous amounts of her money. After an escalating series of shattering revelations, Tallie must face the harsh truth behind her seemingly perfect life: that sometimes trust can be the greatest illusion of all.

Includes an excerpt of Danielle Steel's *Until the End of Time*

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Editorial Review

About the Author

Danielle Steel has been hailed as one of the world's most popular authors, with over 650 million copies of her novels sold. Her many international bestsellers include *Country*, *Prodigal Son*, *Pegasus*, *A Perfect Life*, *Power Play*, *Winners*, *First Sight*, *Until the End of Time*, *The Sins of the Mother*, and other highly acclaimed novels. She is also the author of *His Bright Light*, the story of her son Nick Traina's life and death; *A Gift of Hope*, a memoir of her work with the homeless; *Pure Joy*, about the dogs she and her family have loved; and the children's book *Pretty Minnie in Paris*.

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Chapter 1

The two men who lay parched in the blistering sun of the desert were so still they barely seemed alive. There had been shattering explosions in the distance earlier, and one of them was covered with blood. Although they had been enemies, one of them now held the other's hand, as the lifeblood trickled from him. They looked at each other one last time, and then the injured man gave his last breath and died, just as there was the cracking sound of a gunshot nearby. The survivor of the pair looked wide-eyed and terrified as the man who had fired the gun appeared from behind them, seemingly out of nowhere, as though he had dropped from the sky like an avenging angel.

"Cut! . . . and print!" a voice rang out in the stillness, and within seconds, everything was action, a flock of men with cameras and equipment entered the scene, the dead man stood up as the blood ran down his neck, and a production assistant rushed up to him with a cold drink and he guzzled it gratefully. The man who had been holding his hand an instant before walked off the set to get something to eat as soon as he was told that they were finished shooting for the day.

Two dozen people were talking, shouting, and laughing, and a tall, thin blond woman in ragged cut-off denim shorts, high-top sneakers, and a torn man's undershirt conferred with the camera crew with an enormous grin on her face. Despite her fair coloring, she had a deep honey tan from being outdoors, and a mass of long, uncombed blond hair piled up on her head. A moment later, she braided it into a disheveled pigtail, and helped herself to a bottle of icy water as someone passed them out. There was an enormous catering truck nearby, and a still photographer shot the actors as they left the set. Four of Hollywood's biggest stars were in the film, which was always the case on her pictures. "It's going to be the best scene in the movie," the blond woman assured the head cameraman, as people came and went around them and checked with her, and the sound technician confirmed that he was happy with the scene too. Everything had gone smoothly. The Sand Man was going to be her best movie yet.

They were making her new film, sure to be an instant hit, like all the others Tallie Jones had made. Her films were box-office gold. She had been nominated for two Oscars and six Golden Globes. There were two Golden Globes on her desk, but no Oscars so far. And her pictures were an enormous success because she included both the kind of intense action men wanted in a film, just enough violence to suit their bloodlust without exploiting it excessively, and the sensitivity and emotional insights that made her films appealing to women. She offered the best of both worlds. Tallie had a Midas touch. At thirty-nine, she had been directing movies for seventeen years, and she hadn't made a lemon yet.

There was already a smell of victory on the set, and Tallie looked happy as she walked to the trailer that was

her office on location with her dog-eared copy of the script under her arm. It included all the changes that the screenwriters had made the night before. Tallie was always honing and fine-tuning, she was a perfectionist, and people who worked with her accused her of micromanaging, but it was worth it. She turned her BlackBerry on as she walked into the air-conditioned trailer, and saw that she had two messages from her daughter, who was a freshman in college at NYU in New York, studying pre-law. Maxine, or Max as they called her, had no interest whatsoever in a career in films, only the law. She wanted to be a lawyer like her grandfather, Tallie's father, Sam Jones. He was Tallie and Max's hero, and they were the only two women in his life. Tallie's mother had died of leukemia when Tallie was in high school, and her father had been supportive of everything she did. Tallie had taken him to the Oscars with her as her escort, when she was nominated, and he was fiercely proud and protective of her.

It was Tallie's mother who had made her fall in love with movies. She had taken her to every imaginable movie as a child, watched every classic with her, and was fascinated with films and actors herself. She had named Tallie Tallulah, after Tallulah Bankhead, who she thought was the most glamorous woman who had ever lived. Tallie had always hated her name, and shortened it to something she could live with, but she had loved every film she'd ever seen with her mother, who had wanted desperately to be an actress, and wanted her daughter to fulfill her dreams. She hadn't lived to see Tallie's career or the wonderful films she made. Tallie always hoped her mother would have loved them and been proud of her. Tallie's mother had married her father at twenty-one, when he was already a successful lawyer at forty-five. It was his second marriage, but Tallie was his only child. He was eighty-five now, retired, and suffering from poor health. They called each other every day, and he loved hearing how it had gone on the set. She was his link to the outside world now, since he rarely got out anymore. Crippled with arthritis, it was just too hard.

Tallie's marital career had been a checkered one, not surprisingly in the world she lived in, where unstable relationships and quick turnover were the norm. She always said that it was impossible to meet normal, decent guys in the film industry. Max's father had been another story entirely. He was a cowboy from Montana she'd met at USC, and she'd gotten pregnant at twenty. She had dropped out of school for a year to have the baby, and her father had insisted they get married. They were both barely more than kids themselves, and by the time Max was six months old, her father had gone back to Montana, and they got divorced. Tallie had gone to see him a few times, to see if they could maintain the relationship, but their lives were totally different. Since then, he'd been on the rodeo circuit for twenty years, married a girl from Wyoming, and had three other kids. He sent Max a birthday card every year, a souvenir from the rodeo for Christmas, and Max had seen him four times in her life. He wasn't a bad guy, he just had no connection to Max, and came from another world. He'd been a handsome boy, stunningly so at twenty, and Max was even more beautiful than her mother, a six-foot-tall blonde, long and lanky with sky blue eyes. Tallie's eyes were green, and she was slightly shorter than her daughter. When they went out together, they made a striking pair, and looked more like sisters than mother and daughter.

Tallie's only other foray into marriage had been with an actor in one of her films. She never got involved with actors on the set of her movies, but had made an exception for him. He had been a major heartthrob, a big British star, and had swept her off her feet. She was thirty and he was twenty-eight, and he had cheated on her very publicly six months later when he was on location on another film. The marriage had lasted eleven months, they only spent three months of it together, and it had cost her a million dollars when she wanted out. He drove a hard bargain, and she paid the price.

She was alone for five years after that, and concentrated on her work and Max her daughter. She had no desire to try marriage again. And she'd been startled when she met Hunter Lloyd, a successful producer, and they started dating. There was nothing wrong with him, he wasn't a cheater, a liar, or a drunk. He'd had his own bad experiences with two failed marriages that had cost him a fortune too. They had started dating four

years before, and lived together for the last three. He had moved in with her after a year, and had given up his own house, a palatial home in Bel Air, to his last wife. And for both of them, the arrangement worked. Tallie and Hunt loved each other, Max loved him too, and he was great to her.

Hunt was a big, kind teddy bear of a man, and the picture Tallie was making was the second one she had produced with him. The first one had been a record-breaking box-office hit. Together they were even more successful than either of them had been alone. And Tallie was happier than she'd been in years. She didn't want anything more than they had. Hunt Lloyd and the solid, quiet, stable relationship they shared were perfect for her. She was a modest person, despite her vast success, and liked leading a quiet life. She had no time to go out anyway, she was either shooting, preparing a film, or in post-production. There was rarely a time when she wasn't working.

At twenty-one, after she had Max, Tallie had been "discovered" by a Hollywood agent, in a supermarket. He had gotten her a screen test and into a film. She had only done it for the memory of her mother, and because she knew what it would have meant to her. She did fine, and the film did well, but she had hated every minute as an actress. It wasn't for her, nor anything that went with it. Much to her agent's annoyance, she turned down all the offers she got after that, and there had been several. The camera had loved her looks, and with some coaching she had been a decent actress, but what she had fallen in love with was directing. It was what she wanted to learn, and when she went back to college after having Max, she enrolled in USC's film school and applied herself. Her senior project had been a small low-budget film that she had made on a shoestring, financed with her father's help, and it had become a cult film, *The Truth about Men and Women*. It was the start of her career as a director. She had never stopped or looked back since.

Her first few movies did well and got rave reviews, and they started making big money by the time she was in her late twenties. She had become a Hollywood legend and a huge success in her seventeen years as a director. She loved what she did. What she didn't love, and never would, were all the trappings that went with it, the fame, the attention, the press, the premieres, all the opportunities to show off and be in the limelight. As far as she was concerned that was for actors, not for her, which was why she hadn't wanted to be an actress and loved being a director, and contributing to each actor's performance and interpretation of the script. After her one film as an actress, she could see what would happen to her if she pursued acting as a career, and she wanted none of it. Tallie was a worker, a creator, an artist. She was willing to work endlessly on everything she did, but not be a star. It was the one thing she didn't want, and she was very clear about it.

She'd had to go out and buy a dress when she went to her first Golden Globes when she was nominated; she didn't own one. All she had were the clothes she worked in, which made her look like a homeless person most of the time. Tallie didn't care. She was happy just the way she was, and Hunt loved her that way too. He was smoother and more worldly than she was, and more involved in the Hollywood scene, but it never went to his head, and he was always content to come home to Tallie, sprawled out on the floor or the couch, poring over scripts. And when she was on location, he joined her whenever he could. He was more of a businessman than someone involved in Hollywood. Pictures were big business to him, and it didn't get much bigger than a film produced with and directed by Tallie Jones. And whether she bothered to comb her hair or not was immaterial to him.

They were near Palm Springs, in the location they had set up. She had a hotel room there for when she wanted to spend the night, but most nights she tried to get back to her house in L.A. to be with Hunt, if she didn't have to work too late, or he came out to be with her.

Tallie wanted to look at some of the day's takes, particularly the last one, before she left the set for the day. She had three pencils and a pen stuck in her hair as she made notes and answered e-mails, and she was just

leaving her trailer to go look at the day's rushes when a cloud of dust appeared on the road leading to the set, with a shiny silver Aston Martin causing it.

She squinted into the remaining sun as the sports car approached, spinning up a cloud of dust around it. The car came to a rapid halt near where Tallie stood, and she grinned as the driver got out. The woman emerging from the car was a spectacular-looking girl in a micromini skirt, with endless sexy legs, a striking figure, and a mane of blond hair. She looked rushed and windblown and like something in a movie as she climbed out of the car. She had an enormous turquoise bracelet on one wrist, diamond studs in her ears, and was wearing towering high heels.

"Shit, did I miss the last take of the day?" Brigitte, the beauty who owned the Aston Martin, looked annoyed, and Tallie grinned.

"It went great. You can watch the dailies with me. I was just going to look." Brigitte looked relieved.

"The traffic was unbelievable. I got stuck for half an hour twice." Brigitte looked every inch a star. In her platform stiletto sandals, she was taller than Tallie, her makeup was perfect, she never went out without it, and her outfit suited her to perfection, showed off her incredible body, and made her look irresistibly sexy. She was the opposite of Tallie in every way. Everything about her had been carefully thought out to catch the eye, as opposed to Tallie, who preferred to think of herself as invisible, and liked it that way. Her whole business was to show off others, not herself. Brigitte Parker loved the attention she got and had none of Tallie's subtlety and shyness. The two women had similar looks, both tall, thin, and blond, but did entirely different things with the attributes nature had given them. Tallie hid them, and Brigitte shone a spotlight on them. Tallie honestly didn't care how she looked and never thought about it. Brigitte put a lot of thought and effort into her dazzling appearance.

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