

RANDOM HOUSE *e*BOOKS



The House on Hope Street

Danielle Steel

About the Book

A story of courage and loss, of the power of the family and the strength of the human soul.

Life was good for Liz and Jack Sutherland. In eighteen years of marriage they had built a family, a successful law practice, and a warm happy home near San Francisco, in a house on Hope Street. But one Christmas morning, in the midst of joy and children's laughter, tragedy strikes – and Liz is left alone, facing painful questions in the face of unbearable loss. How can she go on without her husband, her partner, her best friend?

The months pass, and Liz finds the strength to return to work and tend to her children. Then a devastating accident sends her oldest son to hospital – and brings a doctor called Bill Webster into her life. As the long days of summer blend into autumn, a new relationship offers new hope. With the anniversary of her husband's death approaching, Liz will face one more crisis before she can look back at a year of mourning and change – and ahead to the beginning of a new life, in the house on Hope Street.

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About the Author

Also by Danielle Steel

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DANIELLE STEEL

THE HOUSE
ON
HOPE STREET

To the beloved friends who
got me through so much,
Victoria, Jo, Kathy, Nancy,
and Charlotte.

To my wonderful children,
Beatrix, Trevor, Todd, Nick,
Samantha, Victoria, Vanessa,
Maxx, and Zara,
who always give me hope
and fill my life with joy.
With all my love and thanks,

d.s.

Cherish small miracles.
Believe in big miracles.
Above all—hope.

Chapter 1

It was ten o'clock in the morning on Christmas Eve, when Jack and Liz Sutherland met with Amanda Parker. It was a sunny morning in Marin County, just north of San Francisco. And Amanda looked both terrified and nervous. She was petite, blond, and delicate, and her hands shook almost imperceptibly as she quietly shredded a Kleenex. Jack and Liz had been handling her divorce for the past year, they worked as a team, and had opened their joint family law office eighteen years before, just after they were married.

They liked working together, and had long since developed a comfortable routine. They enjoyed their practice, and were good at it. They complemented each other, although their styles were extremely different. Inadvertently, and more subconsciously than not, Jack and Liz had adopted a kind of good cop/bad cop routine, which worked well for them and for their clients. It was always Jack who took the more aggressive, confrontational role, the lion in the courtroom, fighting for better conditions and bigger settlements, relentlessly backing his opponents into a corner, from which there was no relief for them until they gave him what he wanted for his client. It was Liz who was more thoughtful, gentler, ingenious about the subtleties, holding the clients' hands when needed, and fighting for the rights of their children. And at times the difference in their styles led to fights between them, as it had in Amanda's case. Despite some of the malicious games Amanda's husband had played on her, the threats, the constant verbal and occasional physical abuse, Liz thought what Jack had proposed was too tough on him.

“Are you crazy?” Jack had asked her bluntly before Amanda arrived. “Look at the crap this guy has pulled on her. He has three girlfriends he’s supporting now, has cheated on her for ten years, has hidden all his assets from her, doesn’t give a damn about his kids, and wants to walk out of the marriage without it costing him a penny. What do you suggest we do? Set up a trust for him, and thank him for his time and trouble?” Jack had his fighting Irish up, and although with her bright red hair and flashing green eyes, Liz seemed to have fiery looks, she was in fact far more moderate than he was. Jack’s eyes were dark and ominous as he glared at her, and his hair had been snow white since he was thirty. People who knew them well teased them sometimes and said that they looked like Katharine Hepburn and Spencer Tracy. But despite their occasionally heated arguments, everyone inside the courtroom and out knew they were crazy about each other. Theirs was a loving, solid marriage, and they had a family that everyone envied, five children whom they adored, four of whom had bright red hair like their mother, and the youngest boy had dark hair, as Jack’s once had been.

“I’m not telling you Phillip Parker doesn’t deserve to get hammered,” Liz explained patiently. “I’m trying to tell you he’ll take it out on her if we’re too heavy-handed with him.”

“And I’m telling you he needs that, or he’s going to push her around forever. You’ve got to hit this guy where he’ll feel it, starting with his wallet. You can’t let him get away with this kind of bullshit, Liz, and you know it.”

“You’re pulling the rug out from under him, and paralyzing his business.” What she was saying was sensible, but Jack’s hard-line tactics had worked before for many, many of their clients, and he had achieved settlements for them that few other attorneys could have. His reputation was for not only being tough, but brilliant when it came to getting big money for their clients, and he particularly wanted to achieve that for Amanda. Despite several million dollars Phillip Parker

had stashed away, and a booming computer business, he had kept Amanda and their three children living at starvation level. And ever since the separation, she had barely been able to get enough out of him to keep them fed and in shoes. It was even more ridiculous once they figured out what he was spending on his girlfriends, and he had just bought himself a brand-new Porsche. Amanda hadn't even been able to buy a skateboard for her son for Christmas.

"Trust me on this one, Liz. The guy's a bully, and he's going to start squealing like a little pig when we put the squeeze on him in court. I know what I'm doing."

'Jack, he's going to hurt her, if you squeeze him too tight.'" This particular case frightened Liz, and had ever since Amanda had told them of the psychological torture she'd lived with for ten years, and two memorable beatings. She had left him after each one, but he had wooed her back with promises, emotional blackmail, threats, and gifts. And the one thing Liz knew for sure was that Amanda was deathly afraid of him, and Liz thought with good reason.

"We'll get a restraining order on him if we have to," Jack reassured his wife just before Amanda walked into their office, and he was in the process of describing to her what they were going to do in court that morning. Essentially, they were going to freeze all the assets they were aware of, and cripple his business for the time being, until he gave them the additional financial information they wanted. And one thing all three of them agreed on was that Phillip Parker was not going to like it. Amanda looked terrified as she listened to Jack.

"I'm not sure that we should do that," she said softly, looking to Liz for reassurance. Jack had always scared her a little, and Liz smiled at her encouragingly, even though she wasn't totally convinced that Jack knew what he was doing on this one. As a rule, she had a lot of faith in him, but this time, his heavy-handedness worried her. But no one liked a fight, or a victory, particularly for the underdog, better than

Jack Sutherland. And he wanted to win big-time for his client. In his opinion, Amanda deserved it, and Liz didn't disagree with him, only with the way he wanted to accomplish the win for Amanda. Liz felt that, knowing Phillip Parker, it was dangerous to push him too far.

Jack continued to explain his strategy to Amanda for the next half hour, and at eleven that morning they walked into the courtroom for the hearing. Phillip Parker and his attorney were there when they arrived, and he glanced up with a seeming lack of interest at Amanda. But a minute later, when he thought no one was looking, Liz saw a look pass between them which spoke volumes and sent shivers down her spine. Phillip Parker's whole demeanor was designed to remind Amanda who was in control. Just the way he glanced at her was both frightening and demeaning, and then as though to confuse her, he smiled at her warmly. It was all cleverly done, and the clear message he put out to her seemed to vanish in an instant, but not without its desired effect on Amanda. She looked instantly and visibly more nervous, and leaned over to whisper to Liz as they waited in the courtroom for the court to convene.

"He's going to kill me if the judge freezes his business," Amanda said nervously so no one but Liz could hear her.

"Do you mean that literally?" Liz asked in a clear whisper.

"No ... no ... I don't think ... but he's going to go crazy. He's coming to pick the kids up tomorrow, and I don't know what I'll say to him."

"You can't talk to him about this," Liz said firmly. "Can someone else drop the kids off to him?" As Amanda shook her head silently, she looked helpless, and Liz leaned over to say something to her husband. "Go easy," was all she said to him, and he nodded, as he shuffled through some papers, and then glanced up with a small, terse smile first at Liz, and then Amanda. The smile told them both that he knew what he was doing, he was a warrior ready to ride into

battle, and he didn't intend to lose to his opponent. And as usual, he didn't.

After hearing the shenanigans that had been pulled by Phillip Parker and his legal team, the judge agreed to freeze his assets and monitor his companies for the next thirty days until he came up with the information his wife's legal team needed to reach a settlement with him. His lawyer argued vehemently against it, protesting hotly to the judge, but the judge refused to hear it, ordered him to sit down, and minutes later, rapped his gavel and called a recess. And within seconds afterwards, after an ominous look at his soon to be ex-wife, Parker stormed out of the courtroom. Jack was beaming from ear to ear as he watched him, and put his files back in his briefcase with a victorious look at his wife.

"Nice work," Liz said calmly, but as she glanced at Amanda, she could see that she was panicked. She said not a word to either of them, as she followed her attorneys from the courtroom, and Liz looked at her with compassion. "It's going to be okay, Amanda. Jack's right. This is the only way we could get his attention." Technically and strategically, Liz knew and believed that, but from a human standpoint, she was worried about their client, and wanted to do everything she could to reassure her. "Can you get someone to be with you when he picks up the kids, so you don't have to face him alone?"

"My sister is coming over with her kids in the morning."

"He's a bully, Amanda," Jack said reassuringly. "He's not going to say anything to you as long as there are other people around."

Historically, that had been true. But this time they had really pushed him. She had never agreed to let them do that before, but she'd been in therapy for months, and was trying to get braver about not letting Phillip abuse her, verbally, physically, or now financially. This was a major step for her, and one she hoped that, once she stopped shaking, she'd be proud of. And as much as Jack scared her at times,

she trusted him completely, and had followed everything he told her to the letter, even this time. She herself was surprised that the judge had been so sympathetic to her, and as Jack said as they walked back to their offices again, that alone should prove something to her. The judge wanted to help and protect her, by freezing Phillip's assets and forcing him to give her the information they'd asked for months before.

"I know you're right," she said with a sigh, smiling at them both. "It just scares me to get tough with him. I know I have to, but he's a demon when he gets angry."

"So am I," Jack said with a smile, and his wife laughed as they said good-bye to Amanda and wished her a merry Christmas.

"It'll be a much better Christmas next year," Liz promised, and hoped to deliver on it. They wanted to get her the kind of settlement that would allow her to live in peace and comfort with her children. The same kind of comfort, or better, that Phillip's girlfriends were living in, in the condos he'd bought them. He'd even bought one of them a ski chalet in Aspen, while his wife barely had enough money to take their children to the movies. Jack hated guys like that, particularly when the kids had to pay a price for their father's irresponsible behavior. "You still have our home number, don't you?" Liz asked, and Amanda nodded, looking as though she were beginning to relax. At least, for now, the worst was over, and she was impressed by the court's decision. "Call if you need us. If for any reason, he shows up tonight, or calls and threatens you, call 911, and then call me," Liz said, sounding a little overprotective, but it didn't hurt to remind her. Amanda left them gratefully a moment later, and Jack took off his coat and tie and smiled at his wife with pleasure as he unwound.

"I love beating that bastard. He's going to get his when we hit him with the settlement offer, and there isn't going to be a damn thing he can do about it."

“Except scare her to death,” Liz reminded Jack with a serious expression.

“At least she’ll be scared living on a decent income. If nothing else, her kids deserve that. And by the way, don’t you think that 911 business you were telling her is a bit excessive? Come on, Liz, the guy’s not a lunatic for chrissake, just an asshole.”

“That’s my point. He’s enough of an asshole to call and threaten her, or show up and try to scare the wits out of her, just enough to make her back down and have us ask the court to cancel the order.”

“There’s not a chance of that, my love. I won’t let her do it. And you’re the one who was scaring her with all that nonsense about 911.”

“I just wanted to remind her that she’s not alone and she can get help. She’s an abused woman, Jack. She’s not some clearheaded, tough woman who isn’t going to take any crap from her ex-husband. She’s a walking victim, and you know it.”

“And you’re a bleeding heart, and I love you,” he said as he took a step closer and wrapped his arms around her. It was nearly one o’clock by then, and they were closing the office between Christmas and New Year’s. And with five children at home, there was no doubt in either of their minds that they would be busy. But Liz was better about leaving the office behind her, when they went home, than Jack was. When she was with her children, they were all she could think of, and Jack loved that about her.

“I love you, Jack Sutherland,” she said with a smile as he kissed her. He wasn’t usually amorous with her at work, but it was Christmas after all, and they had finished everything they could before the holiday, especially now that Amanda Parker’s hearing was behind them.

Liz put her files away, and Jack stuck half a dozen new ones into his briefcase, and half an hour later they left in separate cars, Liz to go home and get ready for Christmas

Eve, and Jack to do a few last-minute errands downtown. He always finished his Christmas shopping at the last minute, unlike Liz, who did hers, and theirs for the kids, in November. She was intensely organized and detail-conscious, which was the only way she could manage both a large family and a career. That and the wonderful housekeeper they'd had for the last fourteen years, Carole, who was devoted to their children. Liz knew without a moment's doubt that she would have been lost without her. She was a young Mormon woman who had come to them at twenty-three, and loved the Sutherland children almost as much as Jack and Liz did, particularly Jamie, who was nine.

As he left, Jack promised to be home at five or five-thirty. He still had Jamie's new bike to put together that night, and Liz knew he'd be frantically wrapping gifts for her in the office he kept at home, at midnight. But Christmas Eve at their house was everything it should be. They had come to each other with years of Christmas traditions they cherished, and over the years had managed to blend them into one big warm cozy celebration, which their children loved.

Liz drove the short distance to their home in Tiburon, and smiled to herself as she pulled into the driveway on Hope Street. All three of her daughters had just returned from shopping with Carole, and they were getting out of the car with all their packages. Megan was a willowy fourteen, at thirteen Annie was stockier but looked just like her mother, and Rachel was eleven, and looked just like Jack, despite her mother's red hair. The three got on surprisingly well, and were in high spirits as they argued good-humoredly about something with Carole. And all three smiled when they saw their mother walk toward them.

"What have you been up to?" Liz put an arm around Annie and Rachel, and then narrowed her eyes as she looked at Megan. "Is that my favorite black sweater you're wearing

again, Meg? Or do I even need to ask? You're bigger than I am and you're going to stretch it."

"It's not my fault you're flat-chested, Mom," Megan said with a guilty grin. They were always "borrowing" clothes from each other and their mother, more often than not without the owner's permission or approval. It was really the only argument the girls had between them, and hardly a serious problem. Liz felt lucky just looking at them, she and Jack had great kids, and they loved being with them.

"Where are the boys?" Liz asked as she followed them in, and noticed that Annie was wearing her mother's favorite shoes. It was hopeless. They seemed destined to share a communal wardrobe, no matter how many things she bought for them.

"Peter's out with Jessica, and Jamie's at a friend's," Carole filled in for her. Jessica was Peter's latest girlfriend. She lived nearby in Belvedere, and he was there now more often than at his own home. "I have to pick Jamie up in half an hour," Carole explained, "unless you want to do it." Carole had been a pretty blonde at twenty-three, and over the years had widened more than a little, but at thirty-seven, she was still pretty, and she had a warm, affectionate way of handling the children. She was part of the family by now.

"I thought I'd make some cookies this afternoon," Liz said, setting down her bag and taking off her coat. She glanced at the mail sitting on the kitchen table, but there was nothing important. And as she looked up at the view from the kitchen windows, she could see the skyline of San Francisco across the bay. They had a pretty view, and a warm, comfortable home. It was a little tight for them, but they loved it. "Does anyone want to bake with me?" Liz inquired, but she was talking to herself by then. The three girls had already fled to their rooms, more than likely to talk on the phone. The four oldest kids competed constantly for their two phone lines.

Liz was busily rolling out cookie dough and cutting it with Christmas forms, when Carole came back downstairs to go and pick up Jamie half an hour later. Liz still had plenty of work to do, and she suspected that Jamie would want to help. He loved doing things with her in the kitchen. And ten minutes later, when Carole came back with him, he squealed with glee when he saw what she was doing, and grabbed a fingerful of the raw dough and grinned with pleasure as he ate it.

"Can I help?" He was a beautiful child, with thick dark hair and soft brown eyes, and a smile that always melted his mother's heart. He was especially dear to her, as he was to all of them, and he would forever be their baby.

"Sure. Wash your hands first. Where were you?"

"At Timmie's," he said, returning from the sink with wet hands as his mother pointed to the towel so he could dry them.

"How was it?"

"It's not Christmas at his house," he said solemnly, helping her roll out the rest of the dough.

"I know," Liz said with a smile. "They're Jewish."

"They have candles. And they get presents for a whole week. Why can't we be Jewish?"

"Just bad luck for us, I guess. But you do okay with just one night of Christmas." She smiled at her youngest child.

"I asked Santa for a bike," he said, looking hopeful. "I told him Peter said he'd teach me how to ride it."

"I know, sweetheart." She had helped him write the letter. She had saved all her children's letters to Santa in the back of a drawer, they were wonderful, especially Jamie's. He looked up at her with a warm smile, their eyes met and held for a long moment.

Jamie was a special child, a special gift in her life. He had come more than two months early, and had been damaged first by the birth, and then by the oxygen they gave him. It could have blinded him, but it didn't. Instead, he was

learning-delayed, though not acutely, but enough to make him different, and slower than he should have been at his age. He managed well in spite of it, went to a special school, and was responsible, and alert, and loving. But he would never be like his brother and sisters. It was something they had all long since accepted. It had been a shock at first, and an acute agony, especially for her. She felt so responsible at first. She had been working too hard, she had been in three trials back-to-back, and was stressed over it. She'd been so lucky with the others, she'd never had any problem. But right from the first, Jamie had been different. It was a tough pregnancy, and she'd been exhausted and sick from beginning to end, and then suddenly nearly two and a half months early, with no warning, she was in labor, and they hadn't been able to do anything to stop it. He had been born ten minutes after she got to the hospital, it was an easy birth for her, but a disaster for Jamie. At first it had looked as though the disaster might be even greater, and for weeks it looked like he might not survive at all. When they brought him home finally, after six weeks in an incubator, he seemed like a miracle to all of them, and still was. He had a special gift of love, and his own brand of wisdom. He was the kindest and gentlest of all of them, and had a wonderful sense of humor, despite his limitations. They had long since learned to cherish him, and appreciate his abilities, rather than mourn all that he wasn't and would never be. He was such a handsome child that people always noticed him, and then were confused by the simplicity with which he spoke, and the directness. Sometimes, it took them a while to figure out that he was different, and when they did, they were sorry for him, which annoyed his parents and his siblings. Whenever people told her they were sorry, Liz said simply, "Don't be. He's a terrific kid, he has a heart bigger than the world, and everybody loves him." Besides, he was almost always happy, which was a comfort to her.

"You forgot the chocolate chips," Jamie said sensibly, chocolate chip cookies were his favorite, and she always made them for him.

"I thought we'd make plain ones for Christmas, with red and green sprinkles on them. How does that sound to you?"

He thought about it for a fraction of an instant, and then nodded his approval. "That sounds pretty. Can I do the sprinkles?"

"Sure." She handed him the sheet of cookies in the shape of Christmas trees, and the shaker with the red sprinkles, and he went to work on it, until he was satisfied, and she handed him the next sheet. They worked together as a team until they were through, and she put all the trays in the oven. But by then she could see that Jamie was looking worried. "What's up?" It was obvious that he was upset about something. And once he got an idea in his head, it was hard for him to let go of it.

"What if he doesn't bring it?"

"Who?" They spoke to each other in a kind of shorthand, that was familiar to both of them and easy for them.

"Santa," Jamie said, looking sadly at his mother.

"You mean the bike?" He nodded. "Why wouldn't he bring it? You've been a very good boy this year, sweetheart. I'll bet he brings it." She didn't want to spoil the surprise for him, but wanted at the same time to reassure him.

"Maybe he thinks I won't know how to ride it."

"Santa's smarter than that. Of course you can learn to ride it. Besides, you told him Peter would help you."

"You think he believed me?"

"I'm sure of it. Why don't you go play for a while, or see what Carole's doing, and I'll call you when the cookies are done. You can have the first ones." He smiled at the thought, and forgot about Santa again, as he went upstairs to find Carole. He loved having her read to him. He still hadn't learned to read.

Liz went to a closet and took some presents out that she'd hidden there, and put them under the tree, and when the cookies were ready to come out of the oven, she called him. But he was happy with Carole by then and didn't want to come back to the kitchen. She put the cookies on platters and set them out on the kitchen table, and then went upstairs to wrap the set of leatherbound Chaucer she had bought Jack. The other things she'd bought for Jack had been wrapped for weeks, but she had just found these recently, while browsing through a bookstore.

The rest of the afternoon flew by, and Peter came home just before Jack did. Peter looked happy and excited, and gobbled up a handful of the cookies his mother had made, and then asked if he could go back to Jessica's again right after dinner.

"Why doesn't she come here for a change?" Liz asked plaintively. They never saw him anymore, he was either at sports, at school, or at his girlfriend's. Ever since he'd gotten his driver's license, she felt as though he only slept there.

"Her parents won't let her go out tonight. It's Christmas Eve."

"It's Christmas Eve here too," she reminded him, as Jamie wandered back into the kitchen, and helped himself to a cookie, with an adoring look at his older brother. Peter was Jamie's hero.

"It's not Christmas Eve at Timmie's house. He's Jewish," Jamie said matter-of-factly, as Peter ruffled his hair, and ate another handful of cookies. "I made them," Jamie said, pointing at the cookies disappearing into his brother's mouth.

"Delicious," Peter said with his mouth full, and then turned back to his mother. "She can't go out tonight, Mom. Why can't I go there? It's boring here."

"Thank you. You need to stick around to do things here," she said firmly.

"You have to help me leave the cookies and carrots for Santa and the reindeer," Jamie said solemnly. It was something the boys did together every year, and Jamie would have been disappointed not to do it with him, and Peter knew it.

"Can I go out after he goes to bed?" Peter asked, and it was hard to resist him. He was a good kid, and a great student, and it was hard not to reward him for it.

"All right," Liz relented easily, "but you have to come home early."

"By eleven, I promise."

And as they stood in the kitchen, Jack walked in, looking tired but victorious. He had just finished his Christmas shopping, and was convinced he had found the perfect gift for her.

"Hello, everybody, Merry Christmas!" he said, and picked Jamie up right off his feet, and gave him a huge bear hug, while the boy chuckled. "What did you do today, young man? Are you all set for Santa?"

"Mom and I made cookies for him."

"Yum," Jack said, as he grabbed one and ate it, and then walked over to kiss Liz, as a look of mutual appreciation passed between them. "What's for dinner?"

"Ham." Carole had put it in the oven that afternoon, and Liz was going to make everyone's favorite sweet potatoes with marshmallows, and black-eyed peas. And on Christmas Day they always had turkey, and Jack made his "special" stuffing. Liz poured him a glass of wine, and followed him into the living room, with Jamie just behind them. Peter went off to use the phone, to tell Jessica he'd be back after dinner. And they could hear screams as they sat in the living room, when he took the phone out of Megan's hands, and disconnected one of her suitors.

"Take it easy, you two!" Jack shouted up the stairs, and then sat down on the couch next to his wife, to enjoy the spirit of the season. The Christmas tree was lit, and Carole

had put on a CD of Christmas carols. Jamie sat down happily next to his mother, and was singing to himself, as she and Jack chatted. And a few minutes later, Jamie went back upstairs to look for Peter or Carole.

“He’s worried about the bike,” Liz whispered to Jack, and he smiled. They both knew how happy he’d be when he got it. He had wanted one for ages, and they had finally decided he was ready for it. “He’s been talking about it all afternoon, he’s afraid Santa won’t bring one.”

“We’ll put it together after he falls asleep,” Jack whispered, and then leaned over to kiss Liz. “Have I told you lately how beautiful you are, Counselor?”

“Not for a couple of days at least,” she grinned at him. In spite of the many years they’d been married, and the children that constantly surrounded them, there was still a fair amount of romance between them. Jack was always good about that, about spiriting her away for romantic evenings, taking her out for nice dinners, and away for the occasional weekend. He even sent her flowers sometimes for no particular reason. It was an art form keeping the romance in their relationship when they worked together, and had ample reason to either disagree or simply get bored with each other. But somehow they never had, and Liz was always grateful for the efforts Jack made in that direction. “I thought about Amanda Parker this afternoon while Jamie and I were making cookies. I hope that jerk doesn’t make trouble for her, after the hearing today. I just don’t trust him.”

“You have to learn to leave your work at the office,” he chided her, and then poured himself another glass of wine. He pretended to be better at leaving his work behind than she was.

“Was that your briefcase I saw chock full of work in the hallway, or did I imagine it?” she teased him and he grinned.