



What if perfect
isn't possible?

A Perfect Life

Danielle Steel

About the Book

An icon in the world of television news, Blaise McCarthy seems to have it all: beauty, intelligence and courage. But privately, there is a story she has protected for years . . .

Blaise's daughter Salima, blinded by juvenile diabetes, now lives in a year-round boarding school with full-time assistance. When the school closes suddenly, Salima returns home to Blaise's New York apartment with her new carer, Simon. Simon rapidly shakes up their world, determined to help Salima find the independence she never thought possible. As they face challenges that change the way they see one another, the bond between mother and daughter deepens as never before.

Then Blaise's personal and professional worlds collide: a young rival at work attempts to take over and the well-guarded secrets of her home life are exposed. Suddenly her life is no longer perfect, but real. Can mother and daughter together learn how to face a world they can't control?

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Also by Danielle Steel

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DANIELLE
STEEL

A PERFECT
LIFE

To my beloved children,
Beatie, Trevor, Todd, Sam, Victoria, Vanessa,
Maxx, and Zara,

May your lives always be as close to perfect as you wish
them, and may your dreams turn out to be even better than
you hoped, with myriad large and small miracles along the
way.

And to my darling Nicky, I hope your world is peaceful and
perfect now.

I love you all so very, very, very much.

Mommy/d.s.

“L’amour n’a pas d’age.”
Love has no age.

“True love is like a special language:
You either speak it, or you don’t.”

—LALEH SHAHIDEH

Chapter 1

CROWDS OF STUDENTS began congregating outside Royce Hall Auditorium at UCLA two hours before Congressman Patrick Olden was scheduled to speak, an hour before they opened the doors. He had been invited by an enterprising professor, who taught a class on citizenship and public service, open to juniors and seniors. But once the congressman accepted, he had sent out notices to all political science majors, and the auditorium was expected to be full. They were estimating that two thousand students would be there. And judging from the number of people waiting for the doors to open, there might even be more. He was a popular congressman, with a liberal voting record dedicated to the underdog and was known for championing minorities, including women, and sympathetic to the issues of youth and the elderly. And he had four kids of his own. He was married to his childhood sweetheart, and everybody loved him. The students were excited to hear him speak that day.

The crowd was orderly once the doors were open, on a brilliantly sunny, warm October day. Olden was scheduled to begin addressing them at eleven, with time set aside for questions from the audience after his speech. He was scheduled to have lunch with the chancellor afterward and fly back to Washington that afternoon. Getting him there at all had been a major coup. It wasn't for a commencement address, or a law school graduation, it was just a class, and all of them were thrilled to have him there. Luckily it had dovetailed with his plans and a meeting with the governor the day before, and a dinner in his honor to receive an

award. Pat Olden was a beloved figure with both young and old.

One of his own kids, his oldest son, was at USC, and he had breakfast with him that morning. Patrick Olden appeared on the stage less than ten minutes late, while they waited backstage for the crowd to settle down. He stood at the podium with his warm smile, his eyes sweeping the crowd. You could hear a pin drop in the room when he began, and students without seats sat cross-legged in the aisles, and stood at the back of the room. They paid rapt attention to everything he said about government today, and what their responsibilities would be if they chose a career in politics. He talked about his own college days and explained what he was trying to do on the various committees he was on, and went into considerable detail. He had already been in office for three years, had done considerable good with the bills he proposed, and this was not an election year for him. He sounded earnest and sincere, and the audience hung on his every word and greeted him with thunderous applause when he was through. He looked pleased. He was the perfect role model for them. The professor who had invited him opened the question and answer period, and a hundred hands shot into the air. The questions were pointed and intelligent and relevant to what he had said. They were twenty minutes into it when a boy in the third row stood up as soon as the congressman pointed at him, and looked him in the eye with a welcoming smile.

“What’s your position on gun control now?” the young man asked him, which was a topic he hadn’t touched on that day and didn’t want to. He was gentle but firm in his views in favor of gun control, but it was a sensitive issue that had had no place in his talk, advising them about careers in government and it was a subject he had chosen to avoid. The boy who asked the question had neatly combed blond hair, was clean-shaven, and was wearing a

blue shirt and an army surplus jacket. He looked orderly and well-groomed, but didn't smile back when Pat Olden smiled at him, and someone said later that the boy looked unusually pale, as though he hadn't seen daylight in a long time.

Pat Olden began answering his question with a serious expression. "I think you all know how I feel about it. Despite the provision in our Constitution that gives us the right to bear arms, I think that terrorism is an important factor today that can't be ignored. And guns too easily fall into the wrong hands. I feel," he said, and before he could finish his sentence or reiterate his position, the young man in the blue shirt and army jacket pulled a gun out of his pocket and, barely pausing to take aim, shot him squarely in the chest, and then followed with a shot to his neck. The congressman fell forward across the podium and then slid to the ground gushing blood, as students throughout the room began to scream. Security guards rushed forward, along with two bodyguards who had accompanied him. People began running toward the exits, others crouched on the ground, as the boy with the gun shot the girl sitting next to him in the head, and then shot randomly into the crowd, while guards in uniform rushed toward him and he killed two of them when they approached. The seats on either side of him were empty by then, and he ran swiftly across them shooting at other students trying to run from the room. He shot three in the back and another girl in the head. There were bodies lying everywhere as a crowd on the stage was ministering to the fallen congressman. There was blood all over, as people continued to scream in terror and grief watching their classmates being killed. And knowing exactly what he was doing, the shooter saved the last round for himself. A university guard in uniform was within a foot of him and was about to grab him, as the shooter hesitated for only a fraction of a second, deciding whether or not to kill him, and then shot himself in the

head, and ended the carnage he had begun only minutes before. The entire episode had taken exactly seven minutes, and eleven students and two guards lay dead, eight more had been injured, and the congressman was unconscious, covered in blood as paramedics rushed him from the auditorium on a stretcher. There were already a dozen emergency vehicles outside and more on the way, as university police attempted to control the crowd, to no avail. Several of them had been trampled on the way out and were injured too. All you could hear was crying and screaming in the room, as two thousand students had attempted to escape.

Police had rapidly surrounded the lifeless form of the shooter, and a policeman checked his pockets for ID. Moments later paramedics took him away. His brain was smeared across the seats around him.

It took hours to get injured students to hospitals by ambulance, remove the dead, clear the area, and begin to calm everyone down. Two of the victims died on the way to the hospital, which brought the student death toll to thirteen. It was a scene of carnage and grief, which, sadly, was not entirely unfamiliar in the world of campus violence today. It was an event that had happened before. All network programming was interrupted, with on-the-scene reports of the shooting at UCLA. Congressman Olden was listed as in critical condition, hovering between life and death from the wounds in his chest and neck, and he was in surgery at last report, while surgeons fought for his life.

Within an hour, the identity of the shooter was on the air. He was a pre-law student who had dropped out the year before, and had a history of mental instability. He had evidenced signs of mental illness for a year before he left school. He had refused treatment while at UCLA and had previously been admitted to a psychiatric hospital while in high school. He had been reported in college for threatening an ex-girlfriend with a gun when she dated

someone else, but he had never injured anyone before. He was nineteen, currently living in an apartment by himself, and working at a pawnshop, where he had bought the gun he had used that day. And his parents weren't reached for comment until later that afternoon. His mother was incoherent with grief as police led her from her home for questioning, and his father was reported to be away on a fishing trip. Neighbors, when asked to comment, said he was a nice boy, always polite, although a little strange. He was obsessed with computers, rarely left his place except for work, and seemed to have no friends. He had been a loner all his life. And the portrait of him painted by those who knew him, teachers, co-workers at the pawn-shop, neighbors, all presented a classic image of a mentally disturbed boy who had somehow slipped through the cracks of treatment and run amok, killing sixteen people that day, including himself, and injuring seven others including the congressman. It was a wanton waste of life, and police believed that he had gone there to kill Pat Olden, for his stance on gun control, since he had been armed and taken a seat in the third row.

The campus was closed immediately, classes stopped as news got around, and crying students congregated everywhere, with their arms around each other, mourning lost friends.

Pat Olden's wife, already on a flight to Washington that morning, after the awards ceremony the night before, was told what had happened to her husband. She was on a chartered plane, which landed in Denver. Pat Olden was still in surgery but was not expected to survive, and his wife called their four children while on the ground before they headed back to L.A. Their oldest son, at USC, was already at the hospital, waiting outside surgery. He had been in class when he heard, and a friend at UCLA sent him a text even before it hit the news.

Everyone was in shock, and by late that afternoon, another of the victims had died from his wounds, a member of the university police. It was one of the worst shootings of its kind, compared to others in recent years, and events like it were precisely why Pat Olden was opposed to guns, readily available, and too often in the wrong hands in today's world. The boy in the blue shirt had proven him right, yet again.

Blaise McCarthy sat in her office at the network in New York, watching the images of crying, hysterical students, and the reruns of what had happened, from a video taken on someone's phone, which was a crazy jumble of visuals captured while the person who had recorded them hid under a seat at the back of the room. All you could really see was people running, and hear horrible screams and gunshots as the shooter took his victims down.

She was serious as she watched, when her assistant, Mark Spencer, walked into the room, with a stack of reports on the stories she was covering the next day. Blaise had been an anchor on morning news for years, but had moved on and had her own segment on the show now, to cover the most important aspects of the news. She did editorial pieces, and in-depth interviews of important famous people that were legendary. It was a long way from where she'd started, as a weather girl in Seattle, fresh out of college at twenty-two. Twenty-five years later, she had become the most famous woman ever to cover the news, and an icon in the business. And Mark had worked for her for ten years. He was a quiet, somewhat nervous man, who tried to anticipate her every thought and need, and had deep respect and affection for her. He was a perfectionist, who took pride in doing his job well. He loved her values, as well as her talent.

"You going out there?" he asked her, fully expecting that she would, but she surprised him and shook her head.

Blaise had a mane of red hair, finely chiseled features, huge green eyes, and a famously cleft chin, all of which had been caricatured for years. She had a distinctive face, a great figure, and she looked easily ten years younger than her forty-seven years.

"There isn't enough for me to cover yet," she said succinctly, with an unhappy look. Like Pat Olden, she was in favor of gun control, although she knew it would never happen. The lobby against gun control was one of the most powerful in the country, despite incidents like this. Blaise knew Pat Olden and liked him and his wife, and she was sorry to hear what had happened to him, and she knew he had young kids. And worse, Blaise always felt sickened by tragic incidents like this one, where so many innocent people got killed. It was so senseless. She hated the stories about mentally ill students who slipped through the cracks and then went on rampages. And afterward everyone cried about what they should have seen and should have done. But they didn't, and no one woke up until it was too late.

"It's all in the hands of local reporters," she explained to Mark, "and they're doing a good job. The kind of piece I'll do on it won't make sense until the dust settles a little, maybe in a few days. Besides, I have to go to London tomorrow night," she reminded him, which Mark knew well, since he had organized the trip for her, meticulously, as he always did. She was going to be interviewing the new British prime minister in two days, and an oil magnate in Dubai the day after. Blaise never stayed in one place for long. She had interviewed every head of state and royal on the planet, every major movie star, noteworthy criminals, politicians, and everyone worth knowing about all over the world, both in and out of the news. Her specials were remarkable and unique, and her editorial comments on her segment of the show every morning cut to the bone. Blaise McCarthy was beautiful, in an interesting way, and more than that, she was smart. She had character and guts, she

had been to war zones and palaces, attended coronations and state funerals. Blaise McCarthy was simply one of a kind, and Mark knew that when she did the piece on the UCLA shooting, it would be more than just about a congressman and a number of students who'd been shot. It would be an important statement on the world today. Her coverage of 9/11 from Ground Zero had reduced everyone to tears each time it ran. She had won countless prizes and awards over the years. There was no subject she hadn't touched. The audiences loved her, and the ratings reflected that. Blaise McCarthy was the gold standard in her business, and thus far was untouched. No one dared argue with success, and although they sent up trial balloons from time to time, trying out a new face on the news, grooming them for her spot, they didn't even come close. But she was always aware that they might try to fill her shoes one day. She didn't like to think about it, but it happened in her business. And it could to her one day too, and she knew it.

She had no illusions about network news. It was a cutthroat world. And she knew that no matter how good she was, one day she'd be gone. But for now, for today, she was safe. It was a battle to stay on top that she fought every day. She was never afraid of hard work. She thrived on it. Part of her success was that she worked harder than anyone else. She always had, right from the beginning. Blaise had been in love with her work and her career, from the very first day. Aside from her early days right out of college at the local station as weather girl in Seattle, which had seemed frivolous and embarrassing to her, from then on, once she got to reporting news, first in Seattle when she got her first promotion, then when she moved to the affiliate in San Francisco two years later, and four years after that when she got her first really big break at network news in New York at twenty-eight, every step of the way had been exciting for her. Not a moment of it had been boring. And she had been willing to sacrifice anything and

everything to keep her career moving forward, and to protect it once she got to the top. Blaise never took her eye off the ball. She was a genius at what she did, and what she chose to cover, the angles she saw, the subjects she interviewed. The choices she had made had made her who she was. Being as famous as she was had never been her goal, but excellence in everything she did was. Blaise had never slipped, not for a minute. The ratings had never stopped loving her, and even when changes at the network rocked the boat at times, Blaise had stayed solid. Unmovable, indefatigable. She had more energy than ten people half her age all put together. And at forty-seven, she looked great. In a business where youth and beauty were prized, people had long since stopped caring about her age, and lucky for her, she didn't look it. She took decent care of herself, but most of the time, all she thought about was work. She was tireless, and a great part of the year, she was on the road, interviewing important, famous, powerful, fascinating people, and doing what she did best.

Blaise glanced at the television behind where Mark was standing as he heard the announcer say that two more of the shooter's victims had just died. But Congressman Olden was still alive and remained in critical condition, still in surgery at Cedars Sinai L.A. while his family waited at the hospital. His other three children had come to L.A. that afternoon. And his wife, Rosemary Olden, and their four children were standing by in a private room the hospital had set aside for them.

The anchorman said that the bullet had gone through his neck and exited on the other side, fracturing several vertebrae. There was some speculation about whether he'd be paralyzed if he survived, but no one seemed to know. The bullet the shooter had shot into his chest had cost him a lung, but miraculously hadn't touched his heart. There was a slim chance he might survive.

Blaise looked somber as she put some research about the British prime minister in her briefcase and got ready to leave for the day.

“Salima called,” Mark told her as Blaise stood up and grabbed her coat. Salima was Blaise’s nineteen-year-old daughter. She had been away at school since she was eight. Blaise felt guilty about it at times, but they had a good relationship anyway. Salima was a kind, gentle girl, who was proud of her mother and respected the determined way she worked. Blaise couldn’t be any other way. She loved her daughter, but she could never have been a full-time hands-on mother, and had never pretended to be, nor tried. Her assistant talked to her more often than Blaise. Mark loved her honesty about it. Blaise never tried to pretend she was something she wasn’t. And her maternal instincts had never been as acute as her work ethic.

“How is she?” Blaise asked, with a worried look, referring to her daughter.

“She was very upset about the shooting at UCLA.”

“Who isn’t?” Blaise knew that her daughter shared her own concerns about violence on campuses and gun control. And Blaise was suddenly grateful that Salima attended a small community college in Massachusetts, and wasn’t likely to be caught in a tragedy like the one at UCLA. “I’ll try to call her tonight,” but they both knew that she would only place the call after she finished her research for the segment the next day. It was how she operated, and Salima knew it about her too. Work always came first.

Blaise left her office then, and got into the town car waiting for her outside, provided by the network. It was in her contract, and she had had the same driver for years, a kind-hearted Jamaican man with a warm smile. He drove her to the office, and back, every day.

“Good evening, Tully,” she said easily, as he turned to smile at her. He liked working for her, she was always reasonable and polite, never made crazy demands on him,

and never acted like the star she was. She could have been a real monster, but she wasn't. She was thoughtful, hard-working, and modest. She was an avid sports fan, and they talked baseball scores in spring and summer, football in winter, basketball, or hockey. She was a rabid Rangers fan, and so was he.

"Evening, Miss McCarthy, I see you're going to London tomorrow. Going to interview the queen?" he teased her.

"No, just the prime minister." She smiled at him in the rearview mirror.

"I figured it was something like that." He loved driving her, and watching her on TV. They talked about the shooting at UCLA then. He was an intelligent man, and she was always interested in his point of view. And like everyone else, he had a lot to say about violence in the country today. He had two kids in college himself.

He dropped her off at her Fifth Avenue apartment twenty minutes later, and the doorman touched his hat as she walked in. She rode up to the penthouse, let herself into her apartment, and glanced into the refrigerator at the salad and sliced chicken the housekeeper had left for her. Blaise led a quiet life, and with the exception of important benefits, political or network events, she rarely went out and had few friends. She had no time to maintain friendships, and whenever she was home and not traveling, she worked. Friends didn't understand that, and eventually fell by the wayside. She had a few old friends left over from the early days but never saw them, and there hadn't been a man in her life in four years.

Her first big love had been her only one, when she was still in Seattle, where she had grown up. Her mother had been a schoolteacher, and her father a butcher. She had gone to City College, and they had led a simple life, and she had no siblings. There hadn't been much money growing up, and she never thought about it. She hadn't dreamed of success then, fame or riches, and had only thought of

following her father's advice to work at something she loved. And she found that, once she started reporting the news. She was twenty-three years old then, and Bill was a cameraman, who spent most of his time on location, sent by the network. She was still doing weather then, her first job on TV. They fell madly in love, and she married him three months after she met him. He was the kindest man she'd ever known, they were crazy about each other, and he spent most of his time reporting from war zones. Six months later he was dead, shot by a sniper, and a part of her had died with him. From then on, all she had cared about was work. She took refuge in it, it grounded her, and gave her something to live for when Bill was gone. She had never loved any man that way again, and in time she realized that their relationship probably wouldn't have survived her career either. Her meteoric rise to success in the twenty-three years since then had pretty much precluded all else.

She met Harry Stern when she was working in San Francisco, two years after Bill's death. She interviewed him when he bought the local baseball team. He was twenty-two years older than she was, had already had four wives, and was one of the most important venture capitalists in Silicon Valley, and he had done everything possible to woo her, and was fascinated by how aloof she was. She told him she was too busy working to date. And she knew that her heart still belonged to Bill. Harry didn't care. He thought she was the smartest, most beautiful girl he'd ever met. It took him a year to convince her, wining, dining, and spoiling her every chance he got. There was no man more charming than Harry, and even now, at sixty-nine, he was just as handsome, and he and Blaise were good friends. He had had two wives since her, and had a fatal attraction to young girls.

Six months after they married, Blaise got her big break with the network in New York. It hadn't even been a debate

for her, or a struggle to make the decision. She had told Harry from the beginning that her career came first. She had always been honest with him. She loved him, but she was never going to sacrifice an important opportunity for a man, and she hadn't. She had accepted the offer from the network while Harry was on a trip, and he came home to the news that Blaise was moving to New York. They were bicoastal from then on, and it worked for a time. She came home to his palatial house in Hillsborough on weekends, when she could get away. Or he flew to New York. She got pregnant with Salima three months after moving to New York, and didn't slow down for a minute. She worked until the day Salima was born, left for the hospital from her office, and was back on air in three weeks. Harry flew in on his plane for the delivery, and just made it. But he already had five children from his previous wives, and never pretended to be an attentive father, and still wasn't. He saw Salima once or twice a year now and had had two more children since. He had eight in all, and he regarded it as the price he paid for marrying young women. They all wanted kids. He was happy to oblige them, and support them handsomely, but he was an absentee father at best. Salima had been disappointed by it when she was younger, but Blaise explained that it was just the way he was. And Blaise loved her daughter, but there were always a dozen projects and people vying for her time. Salima understood, it was how she had grown up, and she worshipped her mother.

The marriage to Harry had lasted five years after they became bicoastal, and then they both gave up. The relationship had dwindled to nothing by then, except for a warm friendship and occasional late-night calls between California and New York. There had been no hostility, no arguments, and they waited five more years to get divorced, when Harry wanted to get married again. Until then, he claimed that still being married to Blaise kept him

out of trouble. Until he found a supermodel, who convinced him to get divorced and marry her. Blaise had gone to their wedding, and over the years she had wanted nothing from him, except child support for their daughter. They had been legally married for eleven years, but really only lived together full time as man and wife for less than one. And Blaise was thirty-eight when they got divorced.

Her relationships had been inconsistent from then on, as she flew around the world doing specials, and her career continued to climb. There had been a brief affair with a baseball star, which had been silly, they had nothing in common. A romance with a politician, which elicited considerable interest in the press. An important businessman, a famous actor. There was no one she cared about, and she never had time. The affairs would end, and they would move on to someone else before she even noticed. And she didn't care. They were window dressing in her life, and a distraction, and nothing more.

Her last affair, at forty-one, had been different. When Andrew Weyland took over as their news anchor, he was movie-star handsome and had every woman in the building going weak at the knees. As far as anyone knew, he was married, and Blaise had been the first one he told he was getting divorced. He asked her to keep it quiet, so it didn't wind up in the tabloids, and literally days after he shared that with her, he asked her out. She hesitated only for a minute, and although she wasn't immune to his looks either, what she loved best about him was how smart he was. Andrew was brilliant, funny, witty, he had a light touch about everything except love. And their relationship had rapidly grown intense. He was the most seductive, appealing, breathtaking man she had ever met. She fell head over heels in love with him, and when he proposed to her a year after they started dating, she said yes, without hesitation or regret. Even Salima loved him, he had a wonderful way with everyone, even kids. And with both of

them in the same business, and dedicated to their careers, it seemed like the perfect match. He was kind and understanding, and even funny, about everything she did. Where other men had been annoyed by her intensity about her work, Andrew admired it, never complained about how busy she was, and gave her great advice.

Blaise knew, during the year she went out with him, that he still shared a house in Greenwich with his wife and children. He often went there on weekends to see his kids, and had reasonably explained that until the house sold, they were living separate lives under one roof. He had taken an apartment in the city, and most of the time, he stayed with her. And she was away a lot of the time anyway, so the weekends he spent in Greenwich with his children didn't bother her. She understood. And only once, when they started talking marriage, and she questioned him about the details of the divorce, and how advanced they were toward the final settlement, did she see a shadow cross his eyes. It was the first clue she had that something was amiss. The first of many. From there the truth unraveled slowly, a lie here, a small discovery there, like a surprise ball one gives to children, where the prizes fall out one by one. But in this case, they weren't prizes, they were lies.

Almost everyone at the network had long since figured out that Andrew wasn't getting a divorce, he was still very much married to his wife, who had no idea what he was up to with Blaise. In fact, she knew as little as Blaise, who had been so busy with work, and traveling so much, that it had never occurred to her to doubt him, or look beyond what he said. His explanation for not having seen a lawyer yet, when she discovered that no papers had been filed, was that they were only "inconsequential administrative details" he was planning to take care of but hadn't yet. There was no divorce. He was simply cheating on his wife and having an affair with Blaise. And while Blaise remained

discreet about their relationship for over a year, so as not to jeopardize his "settlement," he was telling his wife that he was staying in town to work. He had the best of both worlds. The services of a detective told Blaise all she needed to know. Andrew was spending his weekends with his wife and children, and his weeks with her. His friends in Greenwich considered them a happy couple, and his wife had thought that he and Blaise were only friends at work.

"And how were you going to pull off getting married?" Blaise asked him when she learned the truth. "Tell her that you were going away for a weekend? Commit bigamy?" Blaise was heartbroken. Eventually someone talked, and it wound up in the tabloids, with photographs of his wife and children. Blaise got labeled a home-wrecker and spent three months dodging the press while they stalked her outside her apartment and as soon as she left work. Andrew was a liar and a cheater. The relationship she had believed in and relied on was a total fraud. The man she loved and trusted didn't exist. She had opened up her heart and fallen hard, but Andrew had never planned to get divorced. He had conned her all along, and she had bought it hook, line, and sinker. She had believed him completely. It never dawned on her that he was lying, because she wouldn't have. And when Harry read about it, he called her to tell her how sorry he was. He knew she was a decent person, and it wasn't like her to go out with married men. When she ended the affair, she cried for months. She was devastated.

The whole affair had lasted sixteen months, and she had been so shaken by it that there had been no one since. She liked to say now that she was single by choice. She had no desire to risk her heart again. And worst of all, he still called. He had never apologized for the lies he told her, but he sent her e-mails and texts telling her how much he loved her, how much he missed her, but never how sorry he was. And he spent a good two years after she left him, trying to

get her back into bed, knowing it would make her vulnerable to him again. She was smart enough not to fall for it. She still missed him, and what he had appeared to be, but she never believed his lies again. He still claimed that he and Mary Beth were about to get divorced, which was clearly a lie. And after her, she knew that he had cheated with several other women. Apparently, his wife was willing to forgive him anything. Blaise wasn't, and she only had one near slip when they wound up staying at the same hotel in London, and she agreed to have a drink with him. She had too much to drink on an empty stomach, and almost fell for the irresistible charm again. And at the last minute, she remembered who he really was and ran. She would never have admitted it to him, but she was lonely, and often thought of the good times they'd had, and something still stirred in her when she heard from him, wanting to believe that some part of it had been real. But in her more lucid moments, she knew that nothing was. Andrew Weyland was a liar to the core. It had been a relief when he had switched to another network and moved to L.A. And of course his wife and kids went with him. He claimed that after Blaise ended it with him, he no longer had the heart or the motivation to pursue a divorce. He made it sound as though his not getting divorced was her fault, which wasn't true either. Andrew lied as he breathed.

She still heard from him from time to time, and in the absence of anyone else in her life, sometimes she talked to him. He was familiar if nothing else, and she could always talk to him about the network. He was smart and funny, and she was at no risk of falling for him again. It was just nice to hear his voice no matter what he said. And foolish as she felt about it at times, he filled a void that no one else had since they broke up. And invariably she was depressed after they spoke. She felt like a fool and a loser for falling for his lies during their affair. She'd been good enough to sleep with and cheat on his wife with, but nothing more. He

had used her, just as he did everyone in his life. And it had been just bad enough, and painful enough, to make her shy away from getting involved with anyone again. Once again, as she always had before, she found refuge and solace in her work.

Blaise walked into her office at home and turned on the lights. She left her briefcase next to her desk, went to grab the salad in the kitchen, and brought it back to her desk to go over her research for the next day. It was exactly what she had asked for, and she was engrossed in it, as she planned her editorial for the morning segment. And by the time she glanced at her watch, it was ten o'clock. Too late to call Salima, since she always went to bed early, in her peaceful country life. Blaise felt guilty, as she walked into the kitchen to put her plate in the sink. She knew she should have called her and promised herself to call the next day before she left for London. Somehow there was just never enough time, except for work.

She stood thinking of her daughter, as she looked out at the view of Central Park. It was a beautiful apartment that she had bought nine years before, when she and Harry had finally gotten divorced, and given up their brownstone on East Seventy-fourth. The penthouse on Fifth Avenue suited her to perfection, a big spacious living room with a handsome view, her comfortable bedroom done in pale pink silk, the home office she spent most of her time in, a huge bathroom in white marble with an enormous tub, and a dressing room. There was a second bedroom down the hall from her suite, which was Salima's room, whenever she was home from school. There was a state-of-the-art black granite kitchen, with a dining room big enough to give dinner parties in, which she never did and never used, and behind the kitchen two maids' rooms, which had been unoccupied since she'd moved in. All she needed was a housekeeper to come daily—Blaise didn't want anyone living there with her. She was used to her solitude and

privacy. She had been willing to give that up when she was planning to marry Andrew, and all of that seemed light-years away now. He had been out of her life, except for his random phone calls, for four years.

The apartment had been photographed by every major decorating magazine when she did it. And nine years later it looked just as perfect and pristine. She was hardly ever there. Blaise lived in a seemingly perfect world, in comfort and luxury, far from the simple life that had begun in Seattle. She was famous, celebrated, successful in a competitive milieu, where few people lasted, and careers usually ended early. But by sheer grit and talent and perseverance, Blaise had risen to the summit and stayed on top. It was an enviable life, one that others longed for and dreamed of, and would have snatched from her if they could.

What they didn't see was the solitude, the loneliness, the private moments devoid of people to love and support her. They had never felt the betrayals she had lived, at the hands of men like Andrew Weyland, or the false friends who had fallen by the wayside, the people who had wanted to ride on her coattails or use her in some way. It was in fact a lonely life, and she smiled when she went back to her desk, and glanced at a magazine Mark had marked for her and slipped into her briefcase. It was a brief profile of her in some magazine that had done a puff piece on her. Above a photograph of her they had gotten from the network was the heading in bold letters: A Perfect Life. And that's what it appeared to be. Only Blaise herself knew different. It was no more perfect than anyone else's life, and in many ways it was harder. Every day was a constant fight so as not to lose what she had, or the ground she had fought so hard to gain. She was alone on the mountaintop, and had been in hotel rooms all over the planet, sick in places no one would want to go even if they were well. And she spent her life getting on and off planes. No one really knew what went

with the life they envied, or the price she'd paid. It was far from a perfect life, as Blaise knew only too well, but no matter how hard or how solitary, Blaise wouldn't have traded her life for anything in the world.

Chapter 2

THE ALARM WENT off at four o'clock, just as it did every morning. Without opening her eyes, Blaise reached her hand out and turned it off. She lay there with her eyes closed for a few minutes and forced herself to get up. It was still dark outside, and on Fifth Avenue, you could already hear the rumble of cars and trucks. She loved knowing that New York never fully slept. There was always someone awake. She found that comforting as she walked into her bathroom, pulled up her bright red hair, and held it with an elastic so she wouldn't get it wet. She had washed it, as she always did, the night before. The hairdresser on the set would do it when she arrived, and the makeup artist she always used did her makeup every morning, as she took a last look at her research.

She slipped into the enormous bathtub with the view of the park, and sat relaxing for a few minutes in the warm water, before she had to rev up her engines and start the day. This was usually the last moment of peace she had, and that night she would be on a plane.

At a quarter to five, she was in the kitchen, and put on water for tea. She went to the front door and got the newspapers. She always tried to get a good look at *The New York Times* and *Wall Street Journal* before she went to work. And then she checked online for anything that might have happened since. Anything even more recent than that would show up on her desk at work before the morning news, and Mark would make sure that she saw it if it was breaking news.