



## Accident

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# Accident

*Danielle STEEL*

**Accident** Danielle STEEL

In one tragic moment everything changed. Her daughter's life. Her marriage. Her world.

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Présentation de l'éditeur

La maison des Clarke, au sein d'une banlieue cossue de San Francisco, abrite une famille heureuse. Il y a là Page, bonne épouse et mère modèle. Brad, son mari, publiciste prospère. Andy, leur fils de sept ans, passionné de base-ball. Allison enfin, leur fille aînée, une adolescente qui voudrait connaître les premières expériences de la vie. Avec son amie Chloé et deux garçons plus âgés, Allison, à bord d'une voiture d'emprunt, se laisse gagner par la fièvre du samedi soir. Et c'est le drame : une collision avec un autre véhicule et quatre jeunes vies sont en péril. Brad étant absent pour affaires, c'est Page qui accourt à l'hôpital. Le père de Chloé, Trygve, est déjà sur place. Durant les longues heures d'attente angoissée, Page est assaillie de questions sans réponses. Que s'est-il passé ? Les jeunes accidentés étaient-ils ivres ? Ou, pis, drogués ? Privée de la présence de son mari, la jeune femme devra affronter seule, avec l'aide de Trygve, le fait que sa fille Allison va peut-être mourir. Et que, si elle survit, elle ne sera sans doute plus jamais la même. Il suffit d'un instant fatal pour que la vie d'une famille soit brisée à jamais. D'un instant pour que le bonheur que l'ont avait cru immuable bascule dans l'horreur. Mais, même en plein malheur, le courage et l'amour représentent toujours une ultime lueur d'espoir.

Extrait

*Chapter One*

It was one of those perfect, deliciously warm Saturday afternoons in April, when the air on your cheek feels like silk, and you want to stay outdoors forever. It had been a long, sunny day, and driving across the Golden Gate Bridge at five o'clock, into Marin, it took Page's breath away as she looked across the water.

She glanced over at her son, looking like a small blond replica of her, beside her, except that his hair was sticking up straight where his baseball cap had been, and there was dirt all over his face. Andrew Patterson Clarke had turned seven the previous Tuesday. And just sitting there, relaxing after the game, one could feel the strength of the bond between them. Page Clarke was a good mother, a good wife, the kind of friend anyone would be grateful for. She cared, she loved, she worked hard at whatever she did, she was there for the people who meant something to her, she was artistic in ways that always amazed her friends, she was unconsciously beautiful, and fun to be with.

"You were great this afternoon." She smiled over at him, one hand briefly leaving the wheel to ruffle the already tousled hair. Andy had the same thick, wheat-colored blond hair that she did, the same big blue eyes, and creamy skin, only his was well dusted with freckles. "I couldn't believe that ball you caught in the outfield. Looked like a home run to me." She always went to his games with him, and his school plays, and on field trips with his class and his friends. She did it because she loved it, and she loved him. It was obvious when he looked at her that he knew it.

"It looked like a homer to me too." He grinned, showing gums where both of his front teeth had been until recently. "I thought Benjie would get to home base for sure." He chortled mischievously as they reached the Marin County side of the bridge. ". . . but he didn't!"

Page laughed along with him. It had been a nice afternoon. She wished that Brad could have been there, but he played golf with his business associates every Saturday afternoon. It was a chance to relax and catch up

with what they were all doing. It was rare for him to spend Saturday afternoons alone with her anymore. And when he did, there was always something else they had to do. Like Andy's games, or one of Allyson's swim meets, which always seemed to be held in the most godforsaken places. Either that, or their dog cut her paw, the roof leaked, the plumbing fell apart, or some other minor emergency had to be taken care of. There were no lazy Saturdays anymore, there hadn't been in years. She was used to it, and she and Brad stole whatever moments they could, at night when the kids were asleep, between his business trips, or on their rare weekends away together. Finding time for romance in busy lives was quite a feat, but somehow they managed to do it. She was still crazy about him, after sixteen years of marriage and two kids. She had everything she wanted, a husband she adored, and who loved her, a secure life, and two wonderful children. Their house in Ross wasn't elaborate, but it was pretty and comfortable, it was in a nice area, and with her constant putting and knack for improving things, Page had made it really lovely. Her years as an art student and an apprentice set designer in New York hadn't served her much, but she had used her talents in recent years to paint beautiful murals for herself and friends. She had done a spectacular one at Ross Grammar School. She had turned their home into a place of real beauty. Her paintings and murals and artistic touch had turned an ordinary little ranch house into a home that everyone admired and envied. It was all Page's doing, and all who saw it knew that.

She had painted a baseball game in full swing on one wall of Andy's room as his Christmas present the previous year, and he really loved it. For Allyson, she had done a Paris street scene the year she'd been in love with all things French, and later a string of ballerinas inspired by Degas, and more recently she had turned Allyson's room into a swimming pool with her magic touch. She had even painted the furniture in *trompe l'oeil* to match it. The reward was that Allyson and her friends thought the room was "really cool," and Page was "wow . . . really rad . . . she's okay," which were high marks from the fifteen-year-old set.

Allyson was a sophomore in high school. Looking at them, Page was always sorry she hadn't had more children. She had always wanted more, but Brad had been adamant about "one or two," with the emphasis on one. He had been crazy about his little girl, and didn't see why they needed any more children. It had taken seven years to convince him to have another. That was when they moved out of the city, and into the house in Ross, when Andy was born, their little miracle baby, she called him. He was born two and a half months premature, after Page fell off a ladder doing a Winnie-the-Pooh mural in his bedroom. She had been rushed to the hospital with a broken leg, and she was already in labor. He had been in an incubator for two months, but in the end, he was absolutely perfect. She smiled, remembering it sometimes, how tiny he had been, how terrified they had been that they might lose him. She couldn't imagine surviving it, although she knew she would have . . . for Allyson, and Brad, but her life would never have been the same without him.

"Feel like an ice cream?" she asked as they took the Sir Francis Drake turn-off.

"Sure." Andy grinned again, and then laughed as she looked at him. It was impossible not to laugh at that big gummy grin.

"When are you going to get some teeth, Andrew Clarke? Maybe we ought to buy you some false ones."

"Naww . . ." He smiled, and then chuckled.

It was fun being alone with him, usually she had a carful of kids driving home from the game, but today one of the other mothers had done the honors, and she had gone to the game anyway, because she'd promised. Allyson was spending the afternoon with her friends, Brad was playing golf, and Page was caught up with all her projects. She was planning another mural for the school, and she had promised to take a look at a friend's living room and see what she'd recommend, but there had been nothing really pressing.

Andy had a double scoop of Rocky Road in a sugar cone, with chocolate jimmies, and she had a single scoop of coffee-flavored frozen yogurt, the nonfat kind that fooled you into thinking you were doing something really sinful. They sat outside together for a while, as Andy's ice cream got all over his face and dripped on his uniform, which Page said didn't matter. Everything had to be washed anyway, so what harm was there in a little ice cream. They watched people come and go, and enjoyed the warmth of the late afternoon sun. It was a gorgeous day, and Page talked about going on a picnic on Sunday.

"That would be neat." Andy looked pleased as the Rocky Road finally engulfed the tip of his nose, extending all the way to his chin, as Page felt overwhelmed with love for him as she watched him.

"You're cute . . . you know that? I know I'm not supposed to say stuff like that, but I think you're terrific, Andrew Clarke . . . and a great baseball player to boot . . . how did I ever get so lucky?"

He grinned again, even more broadly, and the ice cream was absolutely everywhere, even on her nose, as she kissed him.

"You're a great guy."

"You're okay, too . . ." He disappeared into his ice cream again, and then looked up at her with a question. "Mom . . . ?"

"Yeah?" Her yogurt was almost gone, but his Rocky Road looked as though it was going to go on melting and dribbling and oozing forever. Ice cream had a way of growing in the hands of small children.

"Do you think we'll ever have another baby?"

Page looked surprised by the question. It wasn't the kind of thing boys usually asked. Allyson had asked her that several times. But now, at thirty-nine, she didn't think so. It wasn't that she felt too old, or was, given the ages people had babies these days, but she knew she'd never talk Brad into another child. He always insisted that all of that was behind him.

"I don't think so, sweetheart. Why?" Was he worried or just curious? She couldn't help but wonder.

"Tommy Silverberg's mom had twins last week. I saw them when I went to his house. They're pretty cute. They're identical," he explained, looking impressed. "They weighed seven pounds each, that's more than I weighed."

"It sure is." He had weighed barely three, thanks to his early appearance. "I'll bet they are cute. But I don't think we'll be having twins . . . or even one . . ." Oddly enough, she felt sad as she said it. She had always agreed with Brad, out of loyalty to him, that two children was a perfect family for them, but there were still times when, out of the blue, she found herself longing for another baby. "Maybe you should talk to Dad about it." She teased.

"About twins?" He looked intrigued.

"About another baby."

"It would be fun . . . kind of . . . they look like a lot of trouble though. Everything at Tommy's was a mess, they had all this stuff everywhere . . . you know, like beds and baskets . . . and swings, and there were two of

everything . . . his grandmother was there helping, she cooked dinner, and she burned it. His dad did a lot of yelling."

"Doesn't sound like much fun to me." Page smiled, imagining the scene of total chaos surrounding the arrival of twins in a home where they were already poorly organized and had two other children. "But the beginning can be like that, till you get the hang of it."

"Was everything a mess like that when I was born?" He finally finished the ice cream and wiped his mouth on his sleeve and his hands on the pants of his baseball uniform as Page laughed while she watched... From Publishers Weekly

Packed with Steel's trademark dense plotting and incidents featuring everything from sexual abuse and infidelity to car crashes and impossible relatives, her 32nd novel (after *Vanished* ) is set in California's plush Marin County. Page Clarke, devoted wife of Brad and mother of Allyson and Andy, finds her golden life shattered when 15-year-old Allyson sneaks off with friend Chloe to meet two boys. In a subsequent head-on collision, one boy is killed, Chloe is seriously injured and Allyson lapses into a coma. Page can't reach Brad, who confesses when he comes home that he is having an affair. Stunned and hurt, Page keeps a vigil at Allyson's bedside while also coping with needy seven-year-old Andy and an ambivalent husband who can't decide whether to stay or leave. Her only support comes from Chloe's father, Trygve Thorensen, who has been the primary caretaker for his kids since their mother divorced him. Other plot twists include a visit from Page's self-indulgent, neurotic mother and her sister, and a secret concerning the driver of the other car in the accident. While not drawn in much depth, the characters are believable; Trygve in particular is likable and nurturing. The ending is predictable but pleasant, bound to delight Steel's fans. One million first printing; national ad/promo; Literary Guild and Doubleday Book Club dual main selection.

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