



Secrets

By Danielle Steel



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Danielle Steel, America's number-one best-selling novelist, has held millions spell-bound with such novels as **Family Album**, **Full Circle**, and **Changes**. But with **Secrets** she takes her readers beyond the tightly knit world of the family, into the heart of the nation's most glamorous industry: television.

Here is the drama behind the creation of *Manhattan*, a first-of-its-kind prime-time television series produced by Melvin Wechsler. Tempered by tragedy, seasoned by success, a man with a Midas touch, Mel Wechsler will assemble a dazzling cast:

Sabina Quarles at forty-five has managed to maintain—by dint of spunk and surgery—the body of an eighteen-year-old. Tough, spirited, and self-sufficient, she has survived twenty years in Hollywood, never marrying, never quite succeeding, never deigning to work in television. Yet *Manhattan* may bring her both the stardom she craves—and the security her very special needs require.

Jane Adams is an earthy thirty-nine-year-old beauty. Devoted to her children, dominated by her abusive and violent husband, forced to choose between her husband and her acting career, Jane may find that her role in *Manhattan* has cost her everything that matters most.

Zack Taylor, the leading man, is a paragon of professionalism. Yet beyond the smooth good looks, the easy warmth, and the slick charm of the eligible bachelor, he remains an enigma.

The charming ingenue, *Gabrielle Thornton-Smith*, seems to have appeared out of the blue. Beautiful, talented and on the brink of success at twenty-five, what can she have to hide?

And *Bill Warwick*, plucked from the ranks of struggling young actors, is now slated to be the nation's new heartthrob. But he has lied about one issue in his background. Not only will Bill's future hang in the balance, but the success of the whole series may be jeopardized when he is forced publicly to confront the consequences of his little white lie.

Set in Los Angeles and New York, **Secrets** carries the reader behind the scenes into the making of a major television series. Probing even deeper beneath the polished surfaces, Danielle Steel explores the dilemmas both men and women, in

and out of the searchlight of the media, confront today. She paints a vivid, compelling picture of a sophisticated world and the surprisingly real problems of the people who inhabit it.

Here Danielle Steel delineates her richest and most complex cast of characters, people forced together by extraordinary circumstances who must perform even when they're torn apart by their deepest secrets.

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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 One

The sun reverberated off the buildings with the brilliance of a handful of diamonds cast against an iceberg, the shimmering white was blinding, as Sabina lay naked on a deck chair in the heat of the Los Angeles sun. She lay sparkling and oiled, warmed to a honey brown by the relentless sun. Later she would go down to the pool for a little while, just to cool off, but there were a dozen rituals she had to perform first. First she lay on her back every morning, her face creamed, her body oiled, the spectacular mane of blond hair shielded from the sun, her eyes covered with pads dipped in witch hazel, a damp washcloth framing her face so as not to leave the unseen scars of the year before unprotected in the sun. The breasts similarly protected by small, damp gauze pads for the same reasons. The three surgeries she had endured had served her well and didn't show. The first, at thirty-eight, later than she would have thought, just to smooth a small furrow from between her brows, and raise her eyelids to the exact location they had been ten years before. The second at forty-one, to enhance her breasts, and give them a fullness and upward tilt they had never really had, even at sixteen. And the last surgery a year before, a repeat of the first one, with only slightly more emphasis this time, and a few tucks above her ears. On a good day she looked thirty-five, a great one thirty-one, and in the camera's eye, she looked younger than that sometimes. . . sometimes. . . if the cameraman was any good. Sabina Quarles was forty-five years old. And her body was honed to perfection. She exercised every morning for an hour, was massaged three times a week, swam every afternoon, and walked two miles if it was cool enough. Not jogged, walked. She was no fool. She hadn't spent five thousand on her tits to shake them down another three inches jogging along the concrete of Beverly Hills.

She was given to low-cut dresses that revealed the cleavage she was so proud of, the perfect expanse of honey-colored flesh that showed no signs of age. And she wore her skirts slit up high along her thigh as well. And with good reason. She had the kind of legs most women would have died for. Surgery hadn't given her those. God had. And He had endowed her well. In fact, he had been more than generous with Mary Elizabeth Ralston, born in Huntington, Pa., almost half a century before. Her father had been a miner, her mother a waitress at a truckstop lit with a blinking neon sign that flashed all night and was called "The Cafe." Her father had died when she was nine, her mother had married three more times in seven years, been widowed twice, and had died herself when Mary Elizabeth was seventeen. There was nothing left to hang around for, there hadn't been anyway. And Mary Elizabeth swung her long, shapely legs onto a Greyhound bus and headed for New York. Mary Elizabeth Ralston, for all intents and purposes, died that day. In New York she became Virginia Harlowe, a name she thought glamorous at the time, as she tried out for small modeling jobs and finally wound up in a chorus line in a show that was very much off Broadway. She thought it was the high point of her life, until at twenty-one, someone offered her a part in a movie. Her hair was jet black in those days. She carefully dyed it to hide the paler roots so it would set off her wide almond-shaped green

eyes. She was not given a wardrobe for this movie but told to go to a freezing cold warehouse on the Lower East Side with two other girls and a man. It was a role she no longer ever thought of. Ever. Virginia Harlowe's life was even shorter than Mary Elizabeth Ralston's. There were a few more similar parts, a job in a strip joint on the West Side, and she was smart enough to know a dead end when she saw one. The name Sabina Quarles leapt at her from the pages of a magazine someone had left in the communal dressing room one night, and the money she had managed to save paid for a ticket to L.A. She was twenty-four and she knew it was almost too late. Almost, but not quite. She left the black hair dye in New York, and became a blonde when she hit California. Within three weeks, she found herself a rented room and an agent, and there was no mention of the film work she had done in New York. It was part of another life, a life she no longer chose to remember. Sabina Quarles, as she became and stayed after that, had a knack for forgetting whatever it was no longer convenient to remember, the life of the coal mines, the strip joint in New York, and the small budget ugly porn films she had made in the warehouse on the Lower East Side. In L.A., she became a model, and was cast in a few commercials, had a screen test at MGM and another at Fox, and in less than six months, she had landed a part in a very decent movie. There were three more small parts after that, and finally a decent role, and by twenty-six, Sabina's face was one that a number of directors knew and remembered. Her acting didn't set the world on fire, but she was good enough, and her agent found her a coach who helped her over the rough spots. He also helped her to get a few more parts. By twenty-eight, people knew her name and face, and her press agent saw to it that her name appeared regularly in the papers. She was linked with a number of male stars, and at thirty she had an affair with one of Hollywood's hottest stars. And she was more in demand after appearing with him in one of his movies. It was a career that had been hard earned, hard won, by the flesh on her back, her willingness to take off more clothes than some of her colleagues were at the time, and the fact that eventually she really did learn how to act. In her early thirties she disappeared for a while, and then reappeared with a bang in a hotly touted film everyone vowed would make her a star. It did not, but it etched her name in people's minds a little more firmly, and won her some better roles than the ones she'd had before.

Sabina Quarles had worked hard to get where she was, and where she was at forty-five was no pinnacle of success, but her name was known in Hollywood, and with a moment's thought, she was known to moviegoers all over the country. . . Oh, I know. . . wasn't she in. . . a moment's blank stare and then a smile, a leer, a look of desire on men's faces. She was the kind of woman men had fantasies about going to bed with, although with age she became surprisingly selective. Sabina Quarles had staying power and a body that just wouldn't quit, no matter how old she was. She saw to that, to all of it, she kept up all her contacts, called her agent every day, worked hard when she got a part, and was surprisingly easy to work with.

Sabina Quarles was not a prima donna, she was a movie star. . . more or less. . . one of those second-string bright lights who sometimes outlive the really big names who come and go and die every day in the studios of Hollywood, replaced by younger, fresher faces. Sabina Quarles's face was still well worth looking into, and her name didn't mean money in the box office, but it meant happy men when they left the theater. She still had the same quality she'd had at twenty-one. Men wanted to reach out and touch her. And she liked that, whether she chose to let them or not. That wasn't the point. Her body was her vehicle to success, and it always had been.

With a glance at the alarm clock she kept on her terrace for exactly that purpose, she turned from her back to her stomach with a graceful flip, and with a familiar, reflexive flick of her wrist toward a large jar of cream, she creamed her face again and her arms. They were as young and firm as the rest of her. There was not a millimeter of droop or sag to Sabina.

The phone rang just as she was about to get up anyway. It was almost time for two big glasses of mineral water, before she went downstairs to the pool for a swim. She glanced instinctively at her watch, wondering

who it was. She had already called her agent.

"Hello." Everything about Sabina Quarles was as smooth as honey. Her voice was deep and soft, a sexy voice that made men want to hold themselves as they sat staring at her in a darkened theater.

"Sabina Quarles, please." A twenty-two-year-old secretarial voice chattered at the other end. The voice was unfamiliar to her.

"This is she." She stood long and tall and beautiful in her living room, holding the phone, as she smoothed the blond mane off her shoulders with her other hand. No one would have guessed that the color was not entirely hers. Everything about Sabina was beautifully done, carefully thought out, and well maintained. She had spent a lifetime becoming who she was and she had done it well. It was only too bad that she hadn't gone further in her career. She wondered about it sometimes, but she hadn't given up. She was well known, if not the hottest item in town. But she never felt it was too late. There was nothing old or tired or middle-aged or defeated about Sabina. She was still a woman on her way up, even if she had hit a plateau in the last year or so. The lack of important parts was not something that fazed her, as long as the money kept coming in. She had done an ad featuring a sable coat only a month before. She was willing to do any number of things to keep her income flowing at a steady pace. . . as long as it wasn't TV. Television was something she would never stoop to.

"This is Mel Wechsler's office," the voice said, full of self-importance. Melvin Wechsler was the biggest producer in Hollywood, and whoever worked for him shared in that limelight, or at least his secretary sounded as though she believed that. Sabina smiled. She had been out with him two or three times a few years before. Mel Wechsler, aside from everything else, was an attractive man. And she wondered why he was calling.

"Yes?" There was laughter in the golden voice now, as she cast a glance around her living room. The apartment was modern, spare, on Linden Drive, in a slightly less than fabulous slice of Beverly Hills. But the address was good, and the apartment was furnished mostly in white, with two mirrored walls. She saw her naked image now, the breasts high and firm, just as she had paid for them to be, the legs still long and beautiful. She liked looking at herself, there was nothing in her image to worry or frighten her, and if something appeared she didn't like, she knew just how to have it taken care of.

"Mrs. Wechsler was wondering if you could have lunch with him today. At the Bistro Gardens." She wondered why he hadn't called himself, and why it was on such short notice. Maybe it was for a part in a film, although he made fewer movies these days. In the last ten years, Melvin Wechsler's biggest hits had been on TV, although he did still make films. And he knew she didn't do TV. Everyone knew that about Sabina. Television was crap, and she said so every chance she got. She was Sabina Quarles, she didn't have to do TV. That was what she told her agent every time the subject came up, and it didn't come up very often anymore. He had better luck talking her into ads like the one with the sable coat. That had some class, as far as she was concerned, television did not. But Mel Wechsler did. And she had nothing to do for lunch. It was ten forty-five. "One o'clock?" It never occurred to the girl that Sabina would say no. No one ever did. Or damn few people anyway, and never actors.

"One fifteen." Sabina looked amused. It was a game everyone played in Hollywood, and she was tougher than this girl and they both knew it.

"That will be fine. The Bistro Gardens." She repeated as though Sabina would forget.

"Thank you. Tell him I'll be there."

You bet your ass you will, sweetheart, the girl thought to herself as she hung up, and buzzed through to Mrs. Wechsler. The secretary at the other end took the message that Sabina Quarles would meet him at one fifteen and Wechsler looked pleased when she handed him the note.

At her end, Sabina looked pleased as well. Mel Wechsler. Now that she thought about it, she realized that she hadn't seen him in ages. He had even taken her to the Academy Awards ten years before. She always thought he'd been attracted to her more strenuously than he showed, but somehow they'd never gotten around to doing anything about it.

She walked into her dressing room, a mirrored cubicle that led into a tiny bathroom, and stepped into the shower, flipping the knobs with practiced hands. The tingle of hot water felt good on her well-oiled flesh, and she washed her hair at the same time, wondering what she should wear for lunch with Melvin Wechsler. It all depended what he had in mind, a job, or something more personal. She wasn't quite sure which persona to be for him, hot star on the way up, or sultry woman of the world, and then she laughed. The two were one and the same. She was Sabina Quarles after all, long and lean and blond and beautiful. He could do a lot for her, in a number of ways, and she knew it.

She ran the water ice cold over her flesh before she stepped out again, and her whole body tingled as she dried herself and then ran a comb through her long blond hair. If you didn't look too carefully, she decided, she could have been twenty-five. . . twenty-eight?. . . twenty-nine. . . she smiled. She didn't give a damn. Fourteen or ninety-eight suited her just fine. She was having lunch with Melvin Wechsler.

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