

Book The Right Time: A Novel By Danielle Steel



NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER • Filled with heartbreak and betrayal, triumph and fulfillment, *The Right Time* is an intimate, richly rewarding novel about pursuing one's passion and succeeding beyond one's wildest dreams. Abandoned by her mother at age seven, Alexandra Winslow takes solace in the mysteries she reads with her devoted father—and soon she is writing them herself, slowly graduating to dark, complex crime stories that reflect skill, imagination, and talent far beyond her years. After her father's untimely death, at fourteen Alex is taken in by the nuns of a local convent, where she finds twenty-six mothers to take the place of the one she lost, and the time and encouragement to pursue her gift. Alex writes in every spare moment, gripped by the plots and themes and characters that fill her mind. Midway through college, she has finished a novel—and manages to find a seasoned agent, then a publisher. But as she climbs the ladder of publishing success, she resolutely adheres to her father's admonition: Men read crime thrillers by men only—and so Alexandra Winslow publishes under the pseudonym Alexander Green, her true identity known only to those closest to her, creating a double life that isolates her. Her secret life as the mysterious and brilliantly successful Alexander Green—and her own life as a talented young woman—expose her to the envious, the arrogant, and Hollywood players who have no idea who she really is. Always, the right time to open up seems just out of reach, and would cost her dearly. Once her double life and fame are established, the price of the truth is always too high.

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Review "Steel pulls out all the emotional stops....She delivers!" --Publishers Weekly "Steel is one of the best!" --LA Times "What counts for the reader is the ring of authenticity." --San Francisco Chronicle 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 *The Duchess*, *Against All Odds*, *Dangerous Games*, *The Mistress*, *The Award*, *Rushing Waters*, *Magic*, 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 books *Pretty Minnie in Paris* and *Pretty Minnie in Hollywood*. Excerpt. © Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved.

Chapter 1

Alexandra Cortez Winslow was seven years old, with long straight black hair, creamy white skin, and big green eyes, which she had squeezed shut as she lay facedown on her bed, trying not to listen to her parents argue. Sometimes their fights lasted for hours. They always ended with a door slamming, and then her father would come up to see her in her bedroom and tell her everything was fine. They had been arguing for an hour this time, and Alex could hear her mother screaming. She had a hot Latin temper, and Alex could remember her parents' arguments for as long as she'd been alive. They had gotten worse in the last year or two, and afterward her mother would be gone for a few days, or a few weeks sometimes, and everything would be quiet for a while when she came back. And then it would start again, like tonight. Her mother had said at dinner that she wanted to go to Miami for a few days to see friends, her father had reminded her unhappily that she'd just been there, and then they sent Alex upstairs. Her mother didn't care who heard them fight, but her father always sent Alex to her room. She put her pillows over her head as she tried not to listen, but you could hear them all over the house. They lived in a residential neighborhood of Boston, and sometimes Alex's friends next door said they could hear them too. Her mother did most of the shouting, and threw things sometimes, while Alex's father tried to calm her down before she broke something or one of the neighbors called the police. That hadn't happened yet, but he was afraid that one day it might. Carmen Cortez and Eric Winslow had met in Miami when he was there on a business trip. He was the head of a construction firm that built office buildings and specialized in banks. He was there for a job they were bidding on, and had gone to dinner alone at a lively restaurant on the first night of his trip. He had seen a group of attractive young people walk in, and heard them speaking Spanish when they sat down at a table next to his, and a spectacular looking young woman had instantly caught his eye. Sensing him watching her, she had glanced over and smiled at him. He was a goner after that. Eric was a sensible man with a quiet life. He had been married to a college professor who had died of breast cancer two years before, after putting up a noble fight. They had no children, and had made a conscious decision not to have any, due to health problems his wife had had all her life. They had never been unhappy about their decision, and accepted it as a reasonable choice for them. He had done well at his job over the years, Barbara enjoyed her work teaching American history at Boston University, and they loved their home, which felt too large for him without her. He had expected them to spend their golden years together and hadn't anticipated being widowed at forty-eight. That hadn't been in their plan, and once she was gone, he felt like a marble in a shoebox, rolling around, lost at home, as he sat alone reading in his den every night. Everything seemed so meaningless without her. He traveled for business frequently, but there was no one to come home to, no one to tell about the projects he was working on, and he had thought this trip to Miami would be no different. The silence in the house would be deafening when he got back. Their housekeeper, Elena, still came in several times a week and prepared meals she left for him in the freezer, and he put them in the microwave when he got home from work. He had no family, no siblings, no children, and he felt like a fifth wheel now with their friends, and spent most of his nights and weekends alone. His only pleasure and distraction were the crime thrillers he loved to read. He had a bookcase full of them. He was surprised when a live salsa band started playing at the restaurant during dinner the night he met Carmen, and even more so when she got up and invited him to dance. She was wearing a short, low-cut red dress that clung to her perfect body, and she told him that she was a model and occasional actress. She had come from Cuba at eighteen four years before. They danced for a few minutes, and then with a warm smile she went back to her friends. He had no idea what had gotten into him when he agreed to dance with her, it was unlike him, but she was so dazzling that when she walked over to him, he couldn't

decline. She concentrated on her friends after that, and he noticed that they laughed a lot, and he felt faintly ridiculous, but he gave her his business card when he left the restaurant, and told her where he was staying in Miami. He was certain that a woman as vivacious and young as Carmen would never call him. "If you ever come to Boston . . ." he said, thinking of how foolish he sounded. He was twenty-eight years older than she was, more than twice her age. He realized full well how old he must seem to her and her friends, but he had never met another woman as exciting in his life. She had black hair and green eyes, light olive skin, a tan, and a flawless body. He thought of her all night, and was stunned when she called him at the hotel the next morning, before he left for a meeting. He invited her to dinner, and she told him where to meet her, and he was obsessed with images of her all day. She looked fabulous when he saw her at the restaurant, wearing a short black dress and high heels. They went dancing after dinner, and then to a bar she suggested, and they talked until four a.m. He was fascinated by her. She explained to him that she was a trade show model, and had dreams of going to L.A. or New York for a big acting career. And in the meantime, since arriving from Havana, she had worked as a waitress, a model, a bartender, and a disco dancer to make ends meet. She spoke excellent English, with an accent, and he thought she was the most beautiful girl he'd ever seen. He was leaving for Boston the next day, but he said if his firm got the Miami project, he'd be back in town frequently. In the end, he returned to Miami two weeks later, just to see her. They had a fantastic weekend, and within a month, he was head over heels in love, and totally besotted with her. It seemed foolish at his age, but he didn't care. Eric took Carmen to restaurants she had heard of but never been to, and they went for long walks on the beach. And on the second weekend he came to visit her, she stayed at his hotel with him. Eric was a handsome man, with a trim, athletic physique, and she said she wasn't bothered by his age. He was aware of her financial struggles and offered to help her, but she always thanked him and declined. His firm didn't get the project that they'd bid on in Miami, but three months after they started dating, in a moment of impulsive madness totally uncharacteristic of him, Eric asked Carmen to marry him. And she accepted. They were married by a justice of the peace in Miami. Although her mother couldn't leave Havana, a handful of Carmen's friends were present, and he had arranged for a wedding dinner at the Fontainebleau Hotel, which Carmen loved. At the end of the weekend, Carmen took her three suitcases full of everything she owned and flew to Boston with him for the first time. When they arrived, he carried his exotic bride over the threshold into a world that was totally unfamiliar to her. Her first months were acute culture shock. The weather was cold and gray, and it snowed frequently, which she hated. She was cold all the time, bored while he was at work, and missed her friends. He took her to Miami after a few months to see her pals. They were all envious of her comfortable new life, although dubious about his age. And six months after they were married, Eric and Carmen were both surprised when they discovered she was pregnant. It was an accident, but after careful thought, Eric felt it was a fortuitous one. Having children had never been an option with Barbara's health, but now the idea of a baby delighted him, and he hoped it would be a son to carry on his name. He would teach him to play baseball since he was an avid sports fan, and take him to games. He might even coach him in Little League. He thought a baby would help to bond Carmen to him, since she still felt out of place in his conservative Boston world and had no friends of her own there. She didn't like his friends and found them boring, so they spent their time with each other. Carmen was considerably less excited about the baby than he was, and didn't feel ready for motherhood at twenty-two. It would shelve her modeling career for a year, although she hadn't been able to get work in Boston, and she had nothing to do all day. Eventually she watched Spanish soap operas on TV until Eric got home from work, and waited for the baby to arrive. It was due in February. And having convinced each other it was a boy, they decorated the nursery in blue. Eric could hardly contain himself he was so excited, and bought a box of cigars to hand out on the big day. Alexandra was born on the night of a blizzard in Boston. The delivery was worse than anything Carmen had imagined, and than he had feared. The doctor said it was normal for a first labor to be lengthy, and for the delivery to be as rough as it was. Carmen didn't even want to see the baby once it was born. Eric had been in the delivery room with her, and there was a shocked silence when the

doctor announced that it was a girl. It took Eric several hours to get over his disappointment, but once he held her, he fell in love with his daughter. Carmen was heavily sedated and asleep by then, and she didn't adjust to the baby as easily as he did. Their housekeeper, Elena, took care of Alexandra when they got home, and all Carmen could talk about was getting her figure back and going to Miami to see her friends. She hadn't been in months, since Eric didn't want her traveling in the last stages of the pregnancy. Going to a local gym every day and dieting, and as young as she was, Carmen got her figure back quickly, and when Alexandra was three months old, Carmen went to Miami for three days and stayed two weeks, partying with her friends. But she was in much better spirits when she got back. Eric and Elena took care of the baby while she was away. She made regular trips to Florida every month after that, even worked a couple of trade shows while she was there, and left the baby with Eric. She still had no friends in Boston, and their life was too boring and traditional for her. It became rapidly obvious to him that motherhood wasn't Carmen's strong suit. All she wanted was to be in Miami with her friends. And when Alex was a year old, Eric discovered that Carmen was having an affair with a male dancer in Miami. He was from Puerto Rico, and she was tearful about it when she confessed and promised it wouldn't happen again. She had several slips in spite of that and committed numerous indiscretions over the years. She was lonely in Boston, she thought Eric's life was tedious and dull, and so was he. Despite Carmen's behavior, he did everything possible to keep the marriage together, for the child's sake as well as his. He was still very taken with his wife in the early years, until it finally dawned on him when Alex was three years old that Carmen was never going to settle down and didn't love him. She might stay with him for practical reasons, and the perks of his lifestyle, but she wasn't in love with him. Eric's worst fear was that she would take the child and leave him, and he didn't want to lose Alex, or even share custody. He knew that if Carmen left him and took Alex to Miami, it would be an unsavory life for the little girl, among Carmen's loosely behaved friends. Alex was his daughter and he wanted her to live a wholesome, traditional life, not the haphazard, dubious one her mother engaged in as soon as she went back to her old familiar world. The only way Eric managed to keep the marriage together was by letting Carmen do what she wanted, come and go as she pleased, and he turned a blind eye to her affairs, although he could always tell when there was a new man in her life. She spent all her time on the phone, smiling happily when she got calls from him.

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