

RANDOM HOUSE  BOOKS



The Kclone and I:

A High-Tech Love Story

Danielle Steel

About the Book

Finding the perfect mate in an imperfect world . . .

Stephanie had a rat of a husband. But after thirteen years of marriage and two kids, she was devastated when he left her for a younger woman. Suddenly, Stephanie was alone, and after trying to find a little romance on New York's wild singles circuit, she was reconciled to raising her kids alone – until a spur-of-the-moment trip to Paris changed everything. On the Left Bank she met Peter Baker, a marvellously handsome high-tech entrepreneur. He seemed just too perfect, but to Stephanie's amazement he contacted her when they returned to New York – and Stephanie embarked upon a bizarre and hilarious adventure beyond her wildest dreams.

Shy, serious Peter, chairman of a bionic enterprise, was supposed to be away on business. But instead, he's standing at her door, wearing day-glo satin and rhinestones. Naturally, Stephanie thinks this is a joke, until she discovers – this isn't Peter, but his double! Calling himself Paul Klone, this wild, uninhibited creature isn't remotely like Peter except for his identically sexy good looks.

An uproarious novel which explores the outrageous triangle between Stephanie, Peter . . . and The Klone.

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Also by Danielle Steel

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DANIELLE STEEL

THE
KLONE
AND

♥
I

A High-Tech Love Story

To Tom Perkins,
and his many faces,
Dr. Jekyll, Mr. Hyde,
and Isaac Klone, who,
of them all, gives the best
jewelry ...
but most of all, to Tom,
for giving me the Klone,
and so many good times.

With all my love,
d.s.

Chapter One

My first, and thus far only, marriage ended exactly two days before Thanksgiving. I remember the moment perfectly. I was lying on the floor of our bedroom, halfway under the bed, looking for a shoe, with my favorite well-worn flannel nightgown halfway to my neck, when my husband walked in, wearing gray flannel slacks and a blazer. As always, he looked immaculate, and was impeccably dressed. I heard him say something vaguely unintelligible as I found the glasses I'd been looking for, for two years, a fluorescent plastic bracelet I never knew was gone, and a red sneaker that must have belonged to my son, Sam, when he was a toddler. Sam was six by the time I found the lost sneaker. So much for thorough cleaning at our house. Apparently none of the parade of cleaning ladies I had ever looked under the beds.

As I emerged, Roger looked at me, and I politely rearranged the nightgown. He looked embarrassingly formal, as I glanced at him, the top of my hair still sticking up from my foray under the bed.

"What did you say?" I asked with a smile, unaware that one of the blueberries from the muffin I'd eaten an hour before was delicately lodged next to my eyetooth. I only discovered it half an hour later, when my nose was red and I was crying, and happened to see myself in the mirror. But at this point in the saga, I was still smiling, with no inkling of what was to come.

"I asked you to sit down," he said, eyeing my costume, my hairdo, and my smile, with interest. I have always found it difficult to discuss anything intelligent with a man when he

is dressed for Wall Street, and I am wearing one of my well-loved nightgowns. My hair was clean, but I hadn't had time to comb it since the night before, my nails were trimmed and also clean, but I had given up wearing nail polish sometime in college. I thought it made me look more intelligent not to wear it. Besides, it was too much trouble. After all, I was married. At that point, I was still suffering from the delusion that married women don't have to try as hard. Apparently, I was sorely mistaken, as I discovered only moments later.

We sat down across from each other in the two satin-covered chairs at the foot of our bed, as I thought again how stupid it was to have them there. They always looked to me as though we were meant to sit there and negotiate going to bed. But Roger said he liked them that way, apparently they reminded him of his mother. I had never looked past that statement for a deeper meaning, which was, perhaps, part of the problem. Roger talked a lot about his mother.

He looked as though he had something important to say to me, while I carefully buttoned up the nightgown, sorry that I had not yet made it into a sweatshirt and blue jeans, my daily costume much of the time. Sex appeal was not foremost on my mind. Responsibility was, my kids were, being Roger's wife was important to me. Sex was something we still played at, once in a while. And lately it had not been often.

"How are you?" he asked, and I grinned again, somewhat nervously, the mischievous little blueberry undoubtedly still twinkling naughtily at him.

"How am I? Fine, I think. Why? How do I look?" I thought maybe he meant I looked sick or something, but as it so happened, that came later.

I sat, waiting expectantly to hear him tell me he'd gotten a raise, lost his job, or was taking me to Europe, as he sometimes did, when he had time on his hands. Sometimes he just liked to take me on a trip as a surprise, it was usually

his way of telling me he'd lost his job. But he didn't have that sheepish look in his eyes. It wasn't his job this time, or a holiday, it was a different kind of surprise.

The nightgown looked a little frail as we sat in the satin chairs, me sliding slowly forward uncomfortably. I had forgotten how slippery they were, since as a rule I never sat there. There were several small tears in the ancient flannel I was wearing, nothing too revealing of course, and since I get cold at night, I was wearing a frayed T-shirt underneath. It was a look that had worked well for me, for thirteen years of marriage with him. Lucky thirteen, or at least it had been till then. And as I sat looking at him, Roger looked as familiar to me as my nightgown. It felt as though I had been married to him forever, and I had, and of course I knew I always would be. I had grown up with him, had known him when we were both kids, and he had been my best friend for years, the only human being I truly trusted in the world. I knew that whatever other failings he had, and there were a few, he would never hurt me. He got cranky now and then, as most men do, he had trouble hanging on to a job, but he had never seriously hurt me, and he was never mean.

Roger had never been a raging success in his career. He had played at advertising when we were first married, had a number of jobs in marketing after that, and invested in a series of less than stellar deals. But I never really cared. He was a nice man, and he was good to me. I wanted to be married to him. And thanks to the grandfather who had set up a trust fund for me before he died, we always had enough money not just to get by, but to live pretty comfortably. Umpa's trust fund had not only provided well for me, but for Roger and the kids, and allowed me to be understanding about the financial mistakes Roger made. Let's face it, and I had years before, when it came to making money, or keeping a job for more than a year or two, Roger did not have whatever it took. But he had other things. He was great with the kids, we liked to watch the same shows

on TV, we both loved spending our summers on the Cape, we had an apartment in New York we both loved, he let me pick the movies we went to once a week, no matter how sappy they were, and he had great legs. And when we were sleeping with each other in college, I thought Casanova paled in comparison to him in bed. I lost my virginity to him. We liked the same music, he sang in my ear when we danced. He was a great dancer, a good father, and my best friend. And if he couldn't hold on to a job, so what? Umpa had taken the sting out of that for me. It never occurred to me that I could, or should, have more. Roger was enough for me.

"What's up?" I asked cheerfully, crossing one bare leg over the other. I hadn't shaved my legs in weeks, but it was November after all, and I knew Roger didn't care. I wasn't going to the beach, only talking to Roger, sitting at the foot of our bed on those stupid, slippery satin chairs, waiting to hear the surprise he had for me.

"There's something I want to tell you," he said, eyeing me cautiously, as though he secretly knew I was wired with an explosive device, and he was waiting for me to blow up in a million pieces. But discounting the stubble on my legs and the blueberry in my teeth, I was relatively harmless, and always had been. I'm pretty even-tempered, a good sport most of the time, and never asked a lot of him. We got along better than most of my friends, or so I thought, and I was grateful for that. I always knew we were in it for the long haul, and figured that fifty years with Roger would not be a bad deal. Certainly not for him. And not even for me.

"What is it?" I asked lovingly, wondering if he had gotten fired after all. If he had, it certainly wasn't anything new to either of us. We'd gotten through that before, though lately he seemed to be getting defensive about it, and I'd noticed that the jobs seemed to be shorter and shorter. He felt he was being picked on by his boss, his talents were never appreciated, and there was "just no point taking any more

crap at work.” I had figured one of those moments was heading our way again, as I’d noticed that he’d been crabbiest than usual for the past six months. He was questioning why he should have to work at all, and talking about spending a year in Europe with me and the kids, or trying to write a screenplay or a book. He had never mentioned anything like it before until recently, and I figured he was having a mid-life crisis of some sort, and contemplating trading in the daily grind at an office for “art” instead. If so, Umpa’s trust fund would have to get us through that too. In any case, so as not to embarrass him, I never talked about his frequent failures or countless jobs, or the fact that my dead grandfather had supported our family for years. I wanted to be the perfect wife to him, and even if he wasn’t the wizard of Wall Street, he had never promised to be, and I still thought he was a good guy.

“What’s up, sweetheart?” I asked, holding a hand out to him. But to his credit, he didn’t let me touch him. He was acting as though he were about to go to jail for sexually harassing someone, or exposing himself at one of his clubs, and was embarrassed to tell me. And then it came. Roger’s Big Announcement.

“I don’t think I love you.” He stared me right in the eye, as though he were looking for an alien in there somewhere, and he was talking to that person, instead of me with my torn nightgown and my stray blueberry.

“*What?*” The word shot out of me like a rocket.

“I said, I don’t love you.” He looked as though he meant it.

“No, you didn’t.” I stared back at him, my eyes narrowing. And for no reason in the world, I remember noticing that he was wearing the tie I had given him last Christmas. Why the hell had he put that on just to tell me he didn’t love me? “You said you *think* you don’t love me, not ‘you don’t love me.’ There’s a difference.” We always argued about stupid things like that, the small stuff, about who had finished the milk and who had forgotten to turn, the lights off. We never

argued about the important stuff, like how to bring up the children, or where they went to school. There was nothing to argue about. I took care of all that. He was always too busy playing tennis or golf, or going fishing with friends, or nursing the worst cold in history, to argue with me about the kids. He figured that was my domain. He may have been a great dancer, and a lot of fun at times, but responsibility was not his thing. Roger took care of himself more than he took care of me, but in thirteen years I had somehow managed not to notice that. All I had wanted was to get married at the time, and have kids. Roger had made my dreams come true. And undeniably, we had great kids. But what I'd failed to see until that point, was how little he did for me.

"What happened?" I asked, fighting a rising wave of panic over what he had just said. My husband "didn't think" he loved me. How did that fit into the scheme of things?

"I don't know," Roger said, looking uncomfortable. "I just looked around and realized I don't belong here." This was a lot worse than getting fired. It sounded like he was going to fire me. And he looked as though he meant it.

"You don't *belong here*? What are you talking about?" I asked, sliding still farther off the satin chair, suddenly feeling unbelievably ugly in my nightgown. Sometime in the last ten years, I should have found the time to buy new ones, I realized. "You live here. We love each other. We have two children, for chrissake. Roger ... are you drunk? Are you on drugs?" Then suddenly I wondered, "Maybe you should be. Prozac. Zoloft. Midol. Something. Are you feeling sick?" I wasn't trying to discredit what he had said, I just didn't understand it. This was the craziest thing he'd come up with yet. More so even than saying he was going to write a book or a screenplay. In thirteen years of marriage, I had never even known him to write a letter.

"I'm fine." He stared at me blankly, as though he no longer knew me, as though I had already become a stranger

to him. I reached out to touch his hand, but he wouldn't let me.

"Steph, I mean it."

"You can't mean it," I said, tears leaping to my eyes, and suddenly running down my cheeks faster than I could stop them. Instinctively, I lifted the hem of the nightgown to my face, and saw that it came away black. The mascara I had worn the day before was now smeared all over my face, and my nightgown. A pretty picture. Most convincing. "We love each other, this is crazy...." I wanted to scream at him, "You can't do 'this to me, you're my best friend.'" But in the blink of an eye, he no longer was. In a matter of moments, he had become a stranger.

"No, it isn't crazy." His eyes looked empty. He was already gone, and at that precise moment, I knew it. My heart felt as though it had been hit with a battering ram, which had not only shattered it to bits, but driven right through it.

"When did you decide this?"

"Last summer," he said calmly. "On the Fourth of July," he added with absolute precision. What had I done wrong on the Fourth of July? I wasn't sleeping with any of his friends, I hadn't lost any of the children so far. My trust fund hadn't run out, and shouldn't for both our lifetimes. What in hell was his problem? And without Umpa's trust fund and my good nature about the jobs he lost, how did he think he was going to eat?

"Why the Fourth of July?"

"I just knew when I looked at you that it was over," he said coolly.

"Why? Is there someone else?" I could hardly get the words out and he looked wounded by what I said to him.

"Of course not." Of course not. My husband of thirteen years tells me he no longer loves me and I'm not supposed to at least suspect a rival with enormous breasts who remembers to shave her legs more often than just at the change of the seasons. Now, don't get me wrong, I'm not

entirely disgusting, nor am I covered with fur, nor do I have a mustache. But I will admit to you now, as I look back at that painful time, I had grown a little careless. People did not retch as I walked past them on the street. Men at cocktail parties still found me attractive. But with Roger ... perhaps ... I had become a little less than attentive. I wasn't fat or anything, I just didn't dress up much at home, and my costumes in bed were a little odd. So sue me. He did.

"Are you leaving me?" I asked, sounding desperate. I couldn't believe this was happening to me. All my adult and married life I had been supercilious about women who lost their husbands, i.e., those whose husbands divorced them. *That* could never happen to me, nor would it. I was about to discover it could, and had, and was happening at that exact moment, as I slipped almost entirely off the goddam slippery satin chair in my own bedroom, with Roger watching me as though he were a stranger, and I were someone he hadn't been married to for thirteen years. He looked at me like an alien from another planet.

"I think so," he said in answer to my question about whether he was leaving.

"But *why*?" I was beginning to sob then. I was convinced he had killed me, or was trying to. I have never been so frightened in my entire life. The status and the man who had been my identity, my security, my life, were about to disappear. And then who would I be? No one.

"I have to leave. I need to. I can't breathe here." I had never noticed him having any trouble breathing. He breathed fine, from what I could see. In fact he snored like a Zamboni on an ice rink. I kind of liked it. To me, it sounded like a large cat purring. But then again I wasn't the one who was leaving, he was. "The kids drive me nuts," he explained. "It's just too much pressure all the time, too much responsibility ... too much noise ... too much everything ... and when I look at you, I see a stranger."

“Me?” I asked, with a look of amazement. What stranger would parade around his house with uncombed hair, unshaven legs, and a torn flannel nightgown? Strangers wore micro miniskirts, stiletto heels, and tight sweaters over enormous silicone implants. Apparently, no one had told him.

“We’re not strangers after knowing you for nineteen years, Roger, you’re my best friend.” But not any longer. “When are you leaving?” I managed to choke out the words, while still smearing the watery black mascara all over my nightgown. It wasn’t a very pretty picture. *Pathetic* barely began to touch it. *Ugly* would have done it better. *Revolting* would have said it all. I must have looked nothing short of disgusting, and to add to the romance of it all, my nose started running.

“I thought I’d stay through the holidays,” Roger said grandly. It was nice of him, I guess, but it also meant I had approximately one month to either adjust to it, or talk him out of leaving. Maybe a vacation in Mexico ... Hawaii ... Tahiti ... the Galapagos would do it. Someplace warm and sexy. I’m sure at that moment he had absolutely no problem at all imagining me on a beach somewhere, in a T-shirt and a flannel nightgown. “I’m moving into the guest room.” He looked and sounded as though he meant it. It was my worst nightmare. The impossible had happened. My husband was leaving me, and had just told me he no longer loved me. I managed to throw my arms around his neck then and smear what was left of my mascara all over his immaculate shirt collar. My tears fell unseen on his blazer, and my nose ran on his tie, while ever so cautiously he held me, kind of like a bank teller afraid to get too near the bank robber with sticks of dynamite taped all over his body. The one thing that was obvious was that he didn’t want to get near me.

In retrospect, I’m not sure I blame him. Looking back, I also realize how little contact we had had for a long time. We were making love in those days about once every two or

three months, sometimes as much as every six months, after I'd complained enough about it, and he felt obliged to. Funny how you overlook things like that, or explain them to yourself. I just thought he was stressed about his job, or the lack of one, depending on his current situation. Or it was because one of the kids was asleep in our bed, or the dog, or something, anything. I guess that wasn't the problem. Maybe I just bored him. But sex was the last thing on my mind as I looked across at him that morning. My life was on a tightrope and teetering badly.

He finally managed to unwind my arms from around his neck, and I retreated to my bathroom, where I sobbed into a towel and then took a good look at myself, and saw not only the hairdo that eight hours on my pillow had achieved, but the remains of the blueberry muffin. Seeing myself just as he had, only made me cry harder. I had no idea what to do to get him back, or worse, if I even could. Looking back, I wonder if I had relied on the trust fund to keep him for me. Maybe I assumed that his natural ineptitude would make him dependent on me. But clearly, even that hadn't done the trick. I had thought that sparing him any responsibility, and being a good sport about everything, would make him love me more. Instead, I had the feeling he had come to hate me.

I cried all day, as I recall, and that night he moved into the guest room. He told the kids he had work to do, and like a truck with three flat tires, we lumbered awkwardly through Thanksgiving. My parents were there, and his, and Roger's sister Angela and her kids. Her husband had left her the previous year, for his secretary. I could suddenly see myself in her shoes in the not too distant future. And out of sheer embarrassment I told no one what had happened. Only Roger's sister said that I looked like I was coming down with something. Yeah, the same thing she had when Norman left her. Six months of intense depression. And the only thing

that seemed to be saving her was the fact that she was now having an affair with her shrink.

Christmas was beyond belief that year, the stockings were hung by the chimney with care, and I cried every time no one was looking. Worse yet, I still couldn't believe it, and did everything I could to talk Roger out of leaving, except buy new nightgowns. More than ever, I *needed* my old standbys. I wore them with mismatched pairs of Roger's socks now. But Roger was in therapy by then, and more convinced than ever that he was doing the right thing by leaving me. He wasn't even in trouble at work this time, and had stopped talking about writing a novel.

We told the kids on New Year's Day. Sam was six then, and Charlotte was eleven. They cried so unbelievably that I thought I would die watching them. Someone I knew had described that as the worst day of her life, and I readily believed it. After we told them, I threw up and went to bed. Roger called his therapist, and went out to dinner with a friend. I was beginning to hate him. He seemed so healthy. And I felt dead inside. He had killed me, and everything I had once believed in. But the worst part was, instead of hating him, I hated me.

He moved out two weeks later. I will try to spare you the boring details, and hit only the high points. According to him all the silver, china, good furniture, the stereo, the computer, and sports equipment was his, because he had written the checks that paid for them, although my trust fund had supplied his checkbook. I owned all the linens, the furniture we'd both hated from Day One, and everything in the kitchen, broken or not. He had already contacted a lawyer, but I didn't find out until after he moved out that he was suing me for alimony and child support, equal to whatever he thought he'd spend on them whenever he had the kids, right down to the toothpaste they'd use and rented videos. And he had a girlfriend. The day I found that out was the day I knew we were truly finished.

I met her for the first time when I took the kids down to him in the car on Valentine's Day, and she was with him. She was perfect. Beautiful, blond, sexy, her skirt was so short I could see her underwear. She looked about fourteen, and I hoped had an IQ of seven. Roger was wearing a ski parka, jeans, which he had previously refused to wear, and a grin that was so obscene it made me want to hit him. She was gorgeous. And I felt nauseous.

There was no kidding myself after that. I knew damn well why he had left. It wasn't just a matter of proving something to himself, as he had said to me more than once by then, or no longer wanting to depend on me (Was he kidding? Who was going to support him, if not me?), all of which would have seemed almost admirable, if I hadn't looked right into that girl's face and seen the truth. She was beautiful, and I (whatever looks I still had, and I must have still had some) was a mess. The uncombed hair, the haircuts I never got, the makeup I never wore, the high heels I no longer cared about, the comfortable clothes that were so much easier for carpooling the kids (outfits composed of my oldest faded sweatshirts, Roger's discarded tennis shorts, and espadrilles with holes in them), the unshaven legs (thank God I still shaved my underarms, or he'd have left years before), the things we no longer did ... suddenly, I saw it all, and knew it all. But along with the all-too-clear messages about me, I also knew something else about him. It isn't sexy taking care of a man to the extent that I took care of him. A man who lets you do everything for him because he's too lazy to care for himself, or take care of you, doesn't turn you on after a while. I may have loved Roger, but he probably hadn't revved my motor in years. How could he? I was covering up for him, trying to make him look and feel good in spite of everything he didn't do and wasn't. But what about me? I was beginning to think Umpa may not have done me such a big favor after all. Poor thing, it wasn't his fault, God knows. But I had become some kind of cash cow