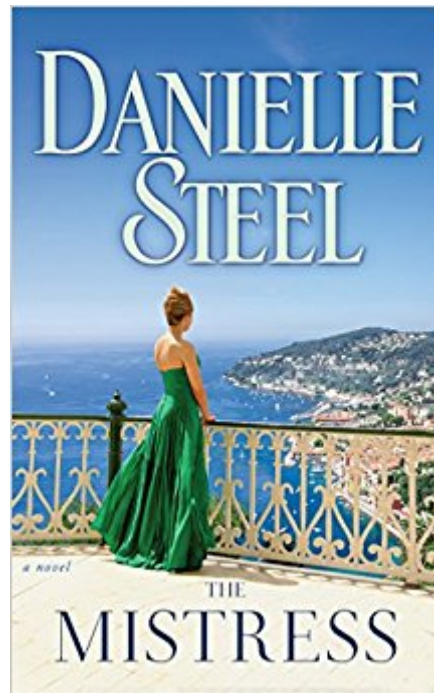




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The Mistress



Synopsis

Incomparable storyteller Danielle Steel illuminates rarely glimpsed precincts of unimaginable wealth and power, where love and freedom are the most dangerous desires of all. Natasha Leonova's beauty saved her life. Discovered on a freezing Moscow street by a Russian billionaire, she has lived for seven years under his protection, immersed in rarefied luxury, while he pursues his activities in a dark world that she guesses at but never sees. Her home is the world, often on one of Vladimir Stanislas's spectacular yachts manned by scores of heavily armed crew members. Natasha's job is to keep Vladimir happy, ask no questions, and be discreet. She knows her place, and the rules. She feels fortunate to be spoiled and protected, and is careful not to dwell on Vladimir's ruthlessness or the deadly circles he moves in. She experiences only his kindness and generosity and believes he will always keep her safe. She is unfailingly loyal to him in exchange. Theo Luca is the son of a brilliant, world famous, and difficult artist, Lorenzo Luca, who left his wife and son with a fortune in artwork they refuse to sell. Lorenzo's widow, Maylis, has transformed their home in St. Paul de Vence into a celebrated restaurant decorated with her late husband's paintings, and treats it as a museum. There, on a warm June evening, Theo first encounters Natasha, the most exquisite woman he has ever seen. And there, Vladimir lays eyes on Luca's artwork. Two dangerous obsessions begin. Theo, a gifted artist in his own right, finds himself feverishly painting Natasha's image for weeks after their first meeting. Vladimir, enraged that Lorenzo's works are not for sale, is determined to secure a painting at any price. And Natasha, who knows that she cannot afford to make even one false move, nevertheless begins to think of the freedom she can never have as Vladimir's mistress. She cannot risk her safety for another man, or even a conversation with him, as Theo longs for a woman he can never have. From Moscow to the Riviera, Paris, and London, *The Mistress* is a riveting tale of vast fortune, cruelty, creative genius, and daring courage, as uncompromising individuals chart a course for collision.

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Customer Reviews

Danielle Steel has been hailed as one of the world's most popular authors, with over 590 million copies of her novels sold. Her many international bestsellers include *Happy Birthday*, *44 Charles Street*, *Legacy*, *Family Ties*, *Big Girl*, *Southern Lights*, and other highly acclaimed novels. She is also the author of the story of her son Nick Traina's life and death.

Chapter 1 It was dusk on a warm June day, as the enormous motor yacht *Princess Marina* lay at anchor off the coast of Antibes in the Mediterranean, not far from the famous *Hôtel du Cap*. The five-hundred-foot yacht was in plain sight for all to see, as deckhands of the seventy-five-person crew swabbed down her decks, and washed the saltwater off her as they did every evening. At least a dozen of them were hosing her down. Casual observers could get a sense of just how huge she was when they noticed how tiny the deckhands looked from the distance. You could see lights shining brightly within her, and everyone familiar with that part of the coast knew which boat she was and who owned her, although there were several nearly as large at anchor nearby. The giant superyachts were too large to dock in port, except for ports large enough to handle cruise ships. It was no small thing to dock a boat that size, no matter how large the crew, or how adept they were at maneuvering her. Her owner, Vladimir Stanislas, had three more motor yachts of comparable size positioned around the world, and a three-hundred-foot sailboat he had bought from an American, which he seldom used. But *Princess Marina*, named for the mother who had died when he was fourteen, was the yacht that he preferred. She was an exquisite floating island of ostentation and luxury that had cost him a fortune to build. He owned one of the most famous villas on the coast as well, in St. Jean Cap-Ferrat. He had bought it from a famous movie star, but he never felt quite as safe on land, and robberies and attacks on important villas were common in the South of France. Offshore, with the crew to protect him, most of them trained in high security and antiterrorist measures, and with an arsenal of guns onboard and a specially designed missile system, he felt secure, and able to change locations rapidly at any

time. Vladimir Stanislas was acknowledged to be one of the richest men in Russia and in the world, with the monopoly of the Russian steel industry accorded him by the government almost twenty years before, due to the remarkable connections he had cultivated with key people since his teens. A great deal of money had changed hands at a crucial time, and more had been made than anyone had thought imaginable or even possible. He had heavy investments in oil now too, and in industries worldwide. The kind of money Vladimir had made and had at his disposal was difficult to conceive of. At forty- \hat{A} \hat{A} - nine, he was estimated to be worth \$40 or \$50 billion, on the deals and investments that were known. He was an intimate of high- \hat{A} \hat{A} - up government officials all the way to the Russian president, and was known to other heads of state as well. And the fabulous yacht that shimmered like a jewel in the twilight was only a small symbol of his connections and the brilliant abilities in business that had served him well. Vladimir was both admired and feared. What he had accomplished in nineteen years as a major player on the Russian industrial scene had won him the admiration and envy of men in business around the world. And those who knew him well and had made deals with him were aware that there was more to the story. He had a reputation for being ruthless, and never forgiving his enemies. There was a gentle side to him as well; his passion for art, his love of all things of beauty, and his knowledge of literature were more recently acquired. He preferred the company of his own kind, the friends he had were Russian, all important industrialists like him. And the women in his life had always been Russian too. Although he had a beautiful house in London, the villa in the South of France, and a spectacular apartment in Moscow, he always associated with his own countrymen. He was a man who always got what he wanted, and he controlled the lion's share of Russia's new wealth. Despite his importance and influence, he was easy to overlook in a crowd. Preferring to go unnoticed, he was an unassuming person. Simply dressed, he came and went discreetly, as he chose. It was only when you looked into his eyes that you realized who and what he was: a man of infinite power. He was a keen observer of everything around him. The jut of his jaw and power of his stance said he would not tolerate being refused anything, yet when he smiled, one suspected a well- \hat{A} \hat{A} - hidden and seldom- \hat{A} \hat{A} - indulged warmth. He had the high cheekbones and Mongol look of his ancestors, which added something exotic to the mix. Women had been drawn to him since he was a boy, but he never left himself vulnerable, to anyone. He had no vital attachments, and had controlled his world for a long time, and would settle for nothing less. Tall, rugged, and blond with ice- \hat{A} \hat{A} - blue eyes and chiseled features, Vladimir was not so much handsome in the classic sense as interesting, and by contrast, in a rare, relaxed, unguarded moment, he could seem warm, and had the sentimentality typical of many Russians. Nothing in Vladimir's life was accidental or

unplanned, and everything was carefully thought out and part of a larger whole. He had had several mistresses since his rise to power, but unlike his peers and counterparts, he wanted no children with them, and was clear about that with his female companions right from the beginning. He tolerated no encumbrances to tie him down, nor anything that would make him vulnerable. He had no family and few attachments. Most of his male acquaintances had at least one child with each woman they'd been involved with, usually at the woman's insistence, to secure her financial position in future years. Vladimir refused to fall prey to entreaties of that sort. Children were not part of his plan, and he had made that decision, with no regrets, a long time ago. He was generous enough with his women while he was with them, but he made no promises for the future, nor would they have dared to insist on them, or try to manipulate him. Vladimir was like a coiled snake ready to strike, ever vigilant and potentially merciless if crossed. He could be gentle, but one could sense his innate ruthlessness as well, and that if wronged or provoked, he could be a dangerous man. Few people wanted to test that, and no women in his life had so far. Natasha, his current companion, knew that not having children with him was a condition of Vladimir's being with any woman. He made it clear that there would never be marriage or the status that went with it. And once settled and agreed upon, this was not discussed again, and never would be. Those who had attempted to convince him otherwise, or had tried to trick him, had been dispensed with summarily, with a handsome sum, but nothing compared to what they would have derived from the relationship otherwise. Vladimir was no one's fool, and never compromised, except when it served him well in business. He listened to his head and not his heart in all things. He hadn't gotten where he was by being gullible or foolish or vulnerable to women. He trusted no one. And he had learned in his youth to only trust himself. His boyhood lessons had served him well. Since he had risen to the top, Vladimir had gained strength and amassed wealth at a meteoric rate, and was somewhere out in the stratosphere with nearly unlimited power and a fortune people could only guess at. And he enjoyed the fruits of his accomplishments. He liked owning the many toys he indulged himself with, his homes, his boats, fabulous sports cars, a plane, two helicopters he kept in constant use, moving around the world, the art collection that was his passion. Surrounding himself with beauty was important to him. He loved owning the best of everything. He had little time for idle pursuits, but didn't hesitate to enjoy himself when he could. Business was always foremost on his mind, and the next deal he was going to make, but he took time out now and then to play. He had few friends, only the important men he did business with, or the politicians he owned. He was never afraid of risk, and had no tolerance for boredom. His mind moved with lightning speed. And he had been with his current woman for seven years. With only the

occasional rare exception, which was unusual for men of his ilk, he was faithful to her. He had no time for dalliances and little interest in them. He was satisfied with his companion, and their relationship served him well. Natasha Leonova was without a doubt the most beautiful woman he had ever known. He had first seen her on a Moscow street, freezing in the Russian winter but young and proud, and he had liked her from the first moment he met her, when she resisted his attempts to help her, wanting to get to know her better. After a year of his relentless advances, she succumbed to him and had been his mistress since she was nineteen, and she was now twenty- \hat{A} -six. Natasha acted as hostess when needed, to the degree he wanted, never putting herself too far forward. She was a spectacular accessory and tribute to him. He required no more of her than that, although she was a bright girl. All he wanted of her were her presence, her beauty, and her availability to him at all times for whatever purpose he needed, without explanation. She knew better than to ask for information he didn't volunteer. She waited for him where he wanted her to be, in whatever city, home, or boat, and he rewarded her handsomely for her presence and fidelity. She had never cheated on him, and would have been long gone if she did. It was an arrangement that suited them both. So much so that she was still there after seven years, far longer than either of them had expected or planned. She had become part of the finely tuned machine that made his life work, and she was important to him because of it. And they both knew the role they played in each other's lives, and asked for nothing more than that. The balance between them had worked perfectly for years. --This text refers to an alternate Audio CD edition.

I truly loved reading this amazing story. The twists and turns kept me engaged from the beginning and I couldn't put it down. Thanks.

Obviously, I'm not a Danielle Steel fan. I was shocked that the first 30 pages or so is backstory. When she finally gets around to telling the actual story, you can already guess how it's going to end, so why bother? Flat writing, flat characters, no fun at all.

Captivating read. Not finished reading yet but thoroughly enjoying. Recommend Danielle book highly. Don't want to finish!!

First, let me say it was not bad for the price, but had numerous pages with corners turned and then straightened. Again it was ok for the price and had no markings in the book and good dust cover.

Danielle Steel is always a pleasant way to rest if you read a lot ... I use it in between reading books to give me a break on concentration...Thank you Rosanne B

This was a really good book!!! It was different than her other books but it was really good!! My mother in law read it in a day but it took me a few days & we loved it!!

Another very good book from Danielle Steel it's a bitter sweet love story with twists that make it so much more

A fantastic book as all of Danielle Steel books are. Fast shipping. Thank you!!!

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