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# The Long Road Home

*By Danielle Steel*



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## The Long Road Home By Danielle Steel

Bestselling novelist Danielle Steel takes us on a harrowing journey into the heart of America's hidden shame in a novel that explores the power of forgiveness, the dark side of childhood, and one woman's unbreakable spirit.

From her secret perch at the top of the stairs, Gabriella Harrison watches the guests arrive at her parents' lavish Manhattan townhouse. At seven, she knows she is an intruder in her parents' party, in her parents' life. But she can't resist the magic. Later, she waits for the click, click, click of her mother's high heels, the angry words, and the pain that will follow. Gabriella already knows to hide her bruises, certain she is to blame for her mother's rage--and her father's failure to protect her. Her world is a confusing blend of terror, betrayal, and pain. Her parents' aristocratic world is no safeguard against the abuse that knows no boundaries, respects no person, no economic lines. Gabriella knows that, try as she might, there is no safe place for her to hide.

Even as a child, her only escape is through the stories she writes. Only writing can dull the pain of her lonely world. And when her parents' marriage collapses, Gabriella is given her first reprieve, as her father disappears, and then her mother abandons her to a convent. There, Gabriella's battered body and soul begin to mend. Amid the quiet safety and hushed rituals of the nuns, Gabriella grows into womanhood in a safe, peaceful world. Then a young priest comes into her life.

Father Joe Connors never questioned his vocation until Gabriella entered the confessional and shared her soul. Confession leads to friendship. And friendship grows dangerously into love. Like Gabriella, Joe is haunted by the pain of his childhood, consumed by guilt over a family tragedy, for which he blames himself. With Gabriella, Joe takes the first steps toward healing. But their relationship leads to tragedy as Joe must choose between the priesthood and Gabriella, and life in the real world where he fears he does not belong, and cannot cope.

Exiled and disgraced, and nearly destroyed, Gabriella struggles to survive on her own in New York. There she seeks healing and escape through her writing again, this time as an adult, and her life as a writer begins. But just when she thinks she is beyond hurt, Gabriella is once again betrayed by someone she trusts. Brought to the edge of despair, physically attacked beyond recognition and belief, haunted by abuse in her present and her past, she nonetheless manages to find hope again, and the courage to face the past. On a pilgrimage destined to bring her face-to-face with those who sought to destroy her in her early life, she finds forgiveness, freedom from guilt, and healing from abuse. When Gabriella

faces what was done to her, and why, she herself is free at last.

With profound insight, Danielle Steel has created a vivid portrait of an abused child's broken world, and the courage necessary to face it and free herself from the past. A work of daring and compassion, a tale of healing that will shock and touch and move you to your very soul, it exposes the terror of child abuse, and opens the doors on a subject that affects us all. *The Long Road Home* is more than riveting fiction. It is an inspiration to us all. A work of courage, hope, and love.

*From the Hardcover edition.*

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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 570 million copies of her novels sold. Her many international bestsellers include **Rogue, Honor Thyself, Amazing Grace, Bungalow 2, Sisters, H.R.H.**, 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.

*From the Hardcover edition.*

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A clock ticked loudly in the hall as Gabriella Harrison stood silently in the utter darkness of the closet. It was filled with winter coats, and they scratched her face, as she pressed her thin six-year-old frame as far back as she could, deep among them. She stumbled over a pair of her mother's winter boots, as she moved farther back into the closet. She knew that here, no one would find her. She had hidden here before, it had always been a good hiding place for her, a place they never thought to look, especially now, in the heat of a New York summer.

It was stifling where she stood, her eyes wide in the darkness, waiting, barely daring to breathe, as she heard muffled footsteps approaching from the distance. The sharp clicking of her mother's heels clattered past like an express train roaring through town, she could almost feel the air whoosh past her face with relief in the crowded closet. She let herself breathe again, just once, and then held her breath, as though even the sound of it would draw her mother's attention. Even at six, she knew that her mother had supernatural powers. She could find her anywhere, almost as though she could detect her scent, the pull of mother to child inevitable, unavoidable, her mother's deep, inky-brown eyes all-seeing, all-knowing. Gabriella knew that no matter where she hid, eventually her mother would find her. But she hid anyway, had to try at least, to escape her.

Gabriella was small for her age, undersize, underweight, and she had an elfin quality about her, with huge blue eyes, and soft blond curls. People who scarcely knew her said that she looked like a little angel. She looked startled much of the time, like an angel who had fallen to earth, and had not known what to expect here. None of what she had encountered in her six brief years was what they could have promised her in heaven.

Her mother's heels rattled past again, pounding harder on the floor this time. Gabriella knew instinctively that the search had heightened. The closet in her own room would have been torn apart by then, also the equipment closet under the stairs, behind the kitchen, the shed outside the house, in the garden. They lived in a narrow town house on the East Side, with a small, well-kept garden. Her mother hated gardening, but a Japanese man came twice a week to cut things, mow the tiny patch of lawn, and keep it tidy. More than anything, her mother hated disorder, she hated noise, she hated dirt, she hated lies, she hated dogs, and more than all of it, Gabriella had reason to suspect, she hated children. Children told lies, her mother said, made noise, and according to her mother, were continually dirty. Gabriella was always being told to stay clean, to stay in her room, and not disturb anything. She wasn't allowed to listen to the radio, or use colored pencils, because when she did, she always got the colors on everything. She had ruined her best dress once. That had been while her dad had been away, in a place called Korea. He had been gone for two years, and come back the year before. He still had a uniform in the back of a closet somewhere, Gabriella had seen it there once, when she was hiding. It had bright shiny buttons on it, and it was scratchy. She had never seen her

father wear it. He was tall and lean, and handsome, with eyes the same color as her own, blond hair, like hers, but his was just a little darker. And when he came home from the war, she thought he looked like Prince Charming in "Cinderella." Her mother looked like the queen in some of the storybooks Gabriella read. She was beautiful and elegant, but she was always angry. Little things bothered her a lot, like the way Gabriella ate, especially if she dropped crumbs on anything, or knocked over a glass. She had spilled juice on her mother's dress once. She had done a lot of things over the years that she wasn't supposed to.

She remembered all of them, knew what they were, and she tried hard not to do them again, but she couldn't help it. She didn't want to upset anyone, didn't want her mother to be mad at her. She didn't mean to get dirty or drop things on the floor, or forget her hat in school. They were accidents, she always explained, her huge eyes imploring her mother for mercy. But somehow, no matter how hard she tried, the wrong things always happened.

The thin high heels walked past the closet again, more slowly this time, and Gabriella knew what that meant. The search was ending. She had narrowed it down to the last of the hiding places, and it was only a matter of time before her mother found her. The child with the huge eyes thought of turning herself in, sometimes her mother told her that she wouldn't have been punished if she had been brave enough to do that. But most of the time, she wasn't. She had tried it once or twice, but it was always too late, by then, her mother said, if only she had confessed earlier, it would have been different. It would all have been different if Gabriella behaved properly, if she answered when she was spoken to, or didn't when she wasn't, if she kept her room clean, if she didn't push her food around on her plate, and let the peas fall over the edge until they left grease spots on the table. If only Gabriella could learn to behave, speak only when spoken to, and not scuff her shoes in the garden. The list of Gabriella's failings and transgressions was endless. She knew only too well how terrible she was, how bad she had been all her life, how much they would love her if she could only do what they told her to, and how much they couldn't because of the constant grief she caused them. She was a bad child, she knew, a sad disappointment to both of her parents, and that pained her greatly. Knowing that was the crushing burden she had carried throughout her short existence. She would have done anything to change that, to win love and approval from them, but so far she had done nothing but fail them. Her mother made that clear to her constantly. And the price Gabriella paid for it was the constant reminder of her failings.

The footsteps stopped outside the closet door this time, and for a brief moment, there was an interminable silence before the door was suddenly yanked open. Light filtered back into the bowels of the closet where Gabriella hid, and she closed her eyes as though to shield herself from it. It was the merest crack of light reaching toward her through the coats, but to Gabriella it felt like the bright sunlight of exposure. She could smell her mother's perfume heavy in the air, and sense her closeness. The rustle of the petticoats her mother wore were like a warning sound to Gabriella, and then slowly the coats were pushed apart, creating a deep canyon leading straight into the back of the closet. And for a long, silent moment Gabriella met the eyes of her mother. There was no sound, no word, no exchange between them. Gabriella knew better than to explain, to apologize, or even to cry. Her already too-big eyes seemed to outgrow her face as she watched the inevitable rage grow in her mother's eyes, and with a single superhuman gesture, her mother's arm lunged toward her, grabbed her by one arm, yanked her off the ground, and pulled her forward with such speed that the air seemed to leave Gabriella's lungs with a small whooshing sound as she landed unsteadily on her feet next to her mother. And within an instant the first blow fell, dropping her to the ground with such force it left the small child breathless. There was no whimper of pain, no sound at all, as her mother slapped her hard across the top of her head, and then pulled her to her feet again with one hand, and hit her as hard as she could across the face with the other. To Gabriella, the sound of the blow was deafening.

"You're hiding again," the tall, spare woman shrieked at her. She was almost beautiful, and might have been,

had there been something different in her eyes, something other than rage running rampant across her face. Her long, dark hair was woven into a loose bun. She was elegant and graceful and had a lovely figure. The dress she wore was well cut, an expensive navy silk. And on her hands she wore two heavy sapphire rings. They left their mark on Gabriella's face now, as they had done before. There was a small cut on her head, and bright red marks where she had been slapped, a welt from one of the rings already visible on her cheek. Eloise Harrison slapped the child across her right ear, and then shook her, holding her by both arms, shouting into the tiny, devastated face. "You're always hiding! Always giving us problems! What are you afraid of now, you little brat? What have you done? You did something, didn't you? Of course you did . . . why else would you hide in the closet?"

"I didn't do anything. . . . I promise. . . ." The words were barely more than a whisper as Gabriella gasped for air. The beating seemed to take all the wind out of her, all the life out of her soul, as she looked up imploringly with tear-filled eyes at her mother. "I'm sorry, Mommy. . . . I'm sorry. . . ."

## **Users Review**

### **From reader reviews:**

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