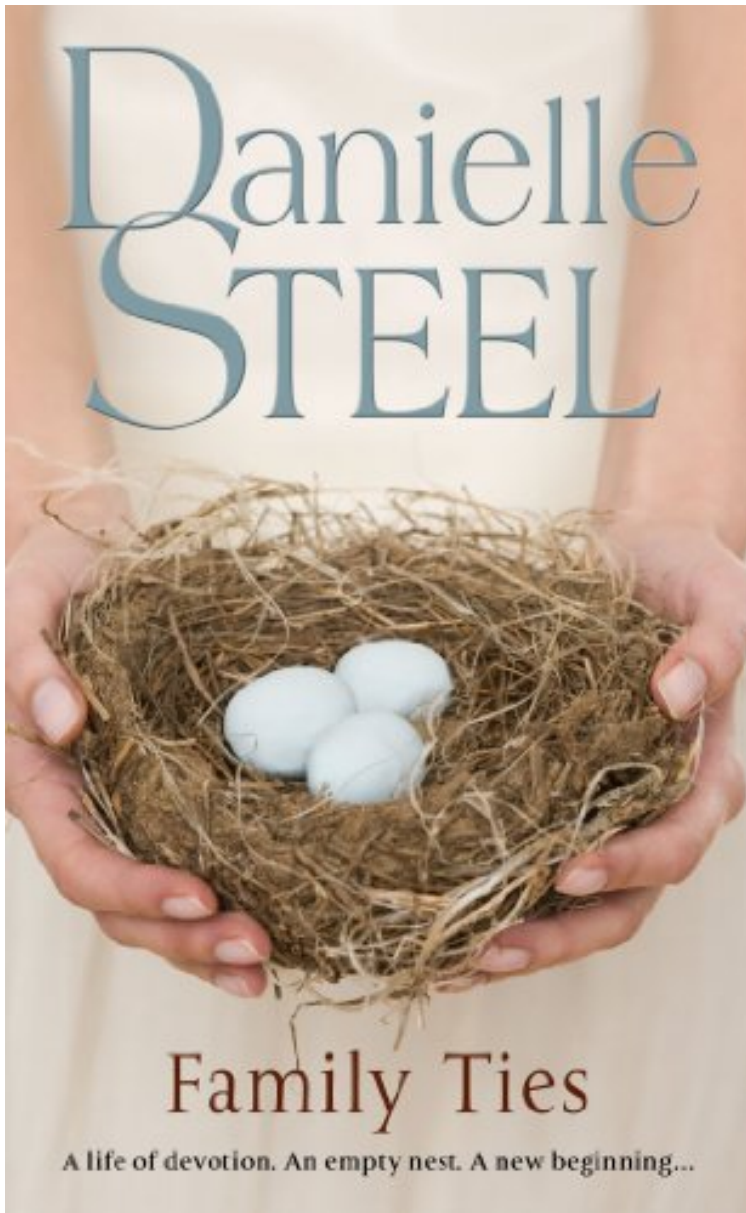


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# Family Ties



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## Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurAnnie Ferguson was one of Manhattan's brightest young architects. But overnight she became mother to her sister's three orphaned children. It wasn't the life she'd planned, but one that rewarded her tenfold for every sacrifice she'd had to make.Now, at forty-two, with a satisfying career and a fulfilling family life, Annie has reconciled herself to being single. With the children now grown into young adults and confronting major challenges of their own, she is navigating a parent's difficult passage between lending them a hand and letting them go. Then, an accident leads Annie to a man who will tempt her to reconsider her belief that it isn't too late to fall in love, after all...ExtraitChapter OneSeth Adams left Annie Ferguson's

West Village apartment on a sunny September Sunday afternoon. He was handsome, funny, intelligent, fun to be with, and they had been dating for two months. They had met at a Fourth of July picnic in the Hamptons, and he was as excited about his career as Annie was about her own. He had graduated from Harvard Business School two years before and was enjoying a meteoric rise at a Wall Street investment bank. Annie had graduated from Columbia Architecture School six months before, and she was reveling in the excitement of her first job with an important architecture group. It was her dream come true. And the handsome pair had spotted each other across a crowded room, and it was infatuation at first sight. It had been a great summer so far, and they were already talking about renting a ski house together with some of their friends. They were falling in love and looking forward to good times ahead. Annie was having the time of her life: weekends with Seth, passionate lovemaking, happy times on the pretty little sailboat that he had just bought. She had it all, new man, new home, first big step in the career she had worked so hard for. She was on top of the world, twenty-six years old, tall, blond, beautiful. She had a smile that could have melted the world, and a lot to smile about. Her life these days was everything she had dreamed of. She had to force Seth to leave that afternoon after another perfect weekend on his boat, but she had work to do. She wanted to spend some time on her first big project for a client meeting the following day. She knew she had to blow their socks off, and the plans she had been working on were meticulously done, and her immediate supervisor had shown a lot of respect for her ideas and was giving her a chance to shine. Annie was just sitting down at her drafting table when her cell phone rang. Although he had only left the apartment five minutes before, she thought it might be Seth. He called her sometimes on his way home, to tell her how much he already missed her. She smiled, thinking of him, and then saw from the caller ID that it was Jane, her older sister by ten years. The two sisters were crazy about each other, and Jane had been like a mother to her since their parents had passed away when Annie was eighteen. Jane was happily married, lived in Greenwich, Connecticut, and had three adorable children. The two sisters looked almost like twins. Jane was a slightly older version of Annie, and she was looking forward to meeting Seth. He sounded like a keeper to her. All she hoped for Annie was that she would find someone as wonderful as her own husband Bill and be as happily married one day. Jane and Bill Marshall had been married for fourteen years and still acted like they were on their honeymoon. They were role models Annie hoped to emulate one day, but for now she was focused on her brand-new career, in spite of the delightful distraction provided by Seth for the past two months. Annie wanted to be a great architect one day. "Is he there?" Jane asked conspiratorially, and her younger sister laughed. Jane was a freelance illustrator of children's books and a proficient artist, but she had always been more interested in her husband and children than in her career. Bill was the publisher of a small but respected publishing house. They had spent the weekend in Martha's Vineyard, closing up their summer house, and enjoying a romantic weekend away from their three kids. "He just left," Annie answered. "Why so early?" Jane sounded disappointed for her. "I have to work. I have a big presentation tomorrow, to an important client, and I wanted to work on the plans." "Good girl." Jane was infinitely proud of her little sister. She was a star in her eyes. "We'll be home in a couple of hours. We're just leaving now. Bill is pre-flighting the plane. It was gorgeous here this weekend. I hate to close the house." They loved the Vineyard, and so did their kids. They'd bought the house when their oldest, Lizzie, was born. She was twelve now, and the portrait of her mother. Ted was eight and looked just like Bill, with the same sweet nature and easygoing style. And Jane liked to say that her youngest, Katie, came from another planet. At five, she had opinions about everything, was incredibly bright, and was fearless. She was an old soul in a child's body, and she always said that she and her aunt Annie were best friends. "How's the weather in New York?" Jane asked her conversationally. It was hurricane season, but the weather at the Vineyard had been good. "It's been hot and sunny all weekend, but they say there's a storm coming in tonight. It doesn't look like it to me," Annie answered. "They're expecting a storm here too-the wind picked up an hour ago, but it looks okay so far. Bill wants to get home before it starts." He was waving to her from the plane then, and Jane grabbed her styrofoam cup of coffee and walked toward him, as she wound up the conversation with Annie. "I'll call you when I get home. Don't work too hard. . . . I love you. Why don't you bring Seth out to dinner next weekend?" "I'll try. I may have to work, depending on how the meeting goes tomorrow. I love you too. Call me later," Annie said comfortably as they hung up and she went back to work. She spread out the plans and studied them carefully. She could see a few adjustments she wanted to make, just subtle ones, but she was a perfectionist and wanted everything to be flawless the next day. She began slowly and meticulously making the changes she had thought about all weekend. Jane got into the plane that was her husband's pride and joy. He had been a navy pilot, and in love with planes all his life. This was the biggest one he'd had. It was a

Cessna 414 Chancellor that seated eight. It was perfect for them, their three children, and their babysitter Magdalena when she came to the Vineyard with them, which left room for two friends, or the mountain of shopping bags and suitcases that Jane always dragged back and forth between Greenwich and the Vineyard. The plane was a luxury, but it meant more to Bill than their house and was his most beloved possession. Jane always felt totally safe when Bill was flying, more so than on any commercial flight. He kept his license current and was instrument rated. "Get your ass in here," he said jokingly, as she pushed one more shopping bag into the plane. "There's a storm coming, and I want to get us home before it hits." The sky was darkening as he said it, and Jane's long blond hair was flying in the wind. She hopped in, and he leaned over and kissed her, and then concentrated on the dials in front of him. He had clearance to leave, and they had instruments if the weather got socked in. Bill put the headphones on and talked to the tower as Jane pulled a magazine out of her bag. She loved trashy gossip magazines and reading about famous actresses and their romances and breakups, and discussing them with Annie as though the celebrities were their friends. Bill loved to tease them about it. He carefully watched the sky as they took off in a stiff wind, and he rose quickly to the altitude he'd been assigned by the tower. They would be landing at Westchester County Airport in roughly an hour. It was an easy flight, and he had to pay attention to the traffic around Boston. He chatted amiably with the tower several times and smiled at Jane. They'd had a nice weekend. As much as he loved them, it was nice to get away from the kids and have her to himself. "Annie sounds serious about her new guy," Jane reported as he laughed. "You're not going to be happy until you marry her off." He knew his wife well, and they both knew he was right. "She's still a kid, and she just started her first job." "I was twenty-two when I married you," she reminded him. "Annie is twenty-six." "You weren't as serious about your career as she is. Give her a chance. She's not exactly an old maid." There was no way she would ever be. She was young and beautiful, and men were always pursuing her. But Bill was right—Annie wanted to get her career as an architect squared away before she settled down, which sounded sensible to him. And she loved being an aunt, but wasn't ready to have kids. Jane noticed that Bill was looking distracted then, and concentrating on the darkening sky. The air got choppy, and Jane could see that they were heading toward a storm. She didn't say anything to Bill, she didn't like to bother him when he was flying, so she looked out the window and then opened her magazine and took a sip of her coffee. A moment later, it splashed in her lap as the plane started to bounce. "What was that?" "There's a storm coming up," he said, with his eyes on the dials, and he let the controller know they were hitting a lot of chop, and got clearance to drop to a lower altitude. Jane could see a big airliner flying above them on their left, probably coming in from Europe, heading to Logan or JFK. Their plane continued to bounce even at the lower altitude, and within minutes it grew worse, and Jane saw a bolt of lightning in the sky. "Should we land?" "No, we're fine," he smiled reassuringly, as it started to rain. They were over the Connecticut coast by then, and Bill turned to say something to her just when an explosion hit their left engine like a bomb, and the plane tipped crazily, as Bill concentrated on the controls. "Shit, what was that?" Jane said hoarsely. Nothing like that had ever happened before, and Bill's face was tense. "I don't know. It could be a fuel leak. I'm not sure," he said tersely, as his jaw clenched. He was fighting to control the plane as they lost altitude rapidly, and with that the engine caught fire, and he guided the plane down looking for a clearing to land. Jane said not a word. She just watched as Bill fought to level them out again, but he couldn't. They were listing badly and heading down at a frightening speed as he called in to the controller and told him where he was. "We're going down, our left wing is on fire," he said calmly, and Jane reached out and touched his arm. He never took his hand off the controls, and he told her he loved her. They were his last words as the Cessna hit the ground and exploded in a ball of fire. Annie's cell phone rang again just as she was erasing a change she had spent an hour making on the plans. She didn't like it and was delicately changing it back. She was concentrating intensely, and then glanced at her phone lying on the drafting table. It was Jane, they had obviously gotten home. She almost didn't answer it, she didn't want to break her concentration, and Jane always wanted to chat. Annie tried to ignore it, but the ringing was annoying and persistent, and finally she picked it up. "Can I call you back?" she said as she answered, and was met by a flood of Spanish. Annie recognized the voice. It was Magdalena, the Salvadoran woman who took care of Jane and Bill's kids. She sounded frantic. Annie knew these calls well. Magdalena had her number for when Bill and Jane were away. She usually only called Annie when one of the kids got hurt, but Annie knew that her sister would be home within minutes, if she wasn't already there. She couldn't understand a word Magdalena said in rapid Spanish. "They're on their way home," Annie reassured her. Usually it was Ted who had fallen out of a tree or off a ladder or bumped his head. He was an active boy and accident prone. The girls were a lot more sedate. Lizzie was almost a teenager, and Katie was a fireball, but

she was more verbal than athletic and had never gotten hurt. "I talked to Jane two hours ago," Annie said calmly. "They should be home any minute." With that, Magdalena exploded in another torrent of Spanish.

She sounded as though she was crying, and the only word Annie understood was la policia. The police. "What about the police? Are the kids okay?" Maybe one of them really had gotten seriously injured. So far it had only been small stuff, except for Ted's broken leg when he fell out of a tree at the Vineyard and his parents were there. "Tell me in English," Annie insisted. "What happened? Who got hurt?" "Your sister? . . . the police call? . . . the plane? . . ." Annie felt as though she had been shot out of a cannon and was spinning in midair. Everything was in slow motion, and she could feel herself reeling at the words. "What did they say?" Annie managed to grind out the words through the shards of glass in her throat. Every word she formed was a physical pain. "What happened? What did the police SAY?" She was shouting at Magdalena and didn't know it. And all Magdalena could do was sob. "TELL ME, DAMMIT!" Annie shouted at her, as Magdalena tried to tell her in English. "I don't know? . . . something happen? . . . I call her cell phone and she not answer? . . . they say? . . . they say? . . . the plane catch fire. It was the police in New London." "I'll call you back," Annie said, and hung up on her. She finally got a police emergency number in New London, that referred her to another number. A voice asked her who she was, and after she told them, there was an interminable silence on the other end of the phone. "Are you nearby?" the voice wanted to know. "No, I'm not nearby," Annie said, torn between a sob and an urge to shout at this unknown woman. Something terrible had happened. She was praying they were only hurt. "I'm in New York," she explained. "What happened to the plane?" She gave them the call numbers of Bill's plane, and a different voice came on the phone. He said he was a captain, and he told her what she didn't want to know and never wanted to hear. He said the plane had exploded on impact and there were no survivors. He asked her if she knew who was on the plane. From the Hardcover edition. *Revue de presse* Steel is one of the best! *Los Angeles Times* From the Hardcover edition.