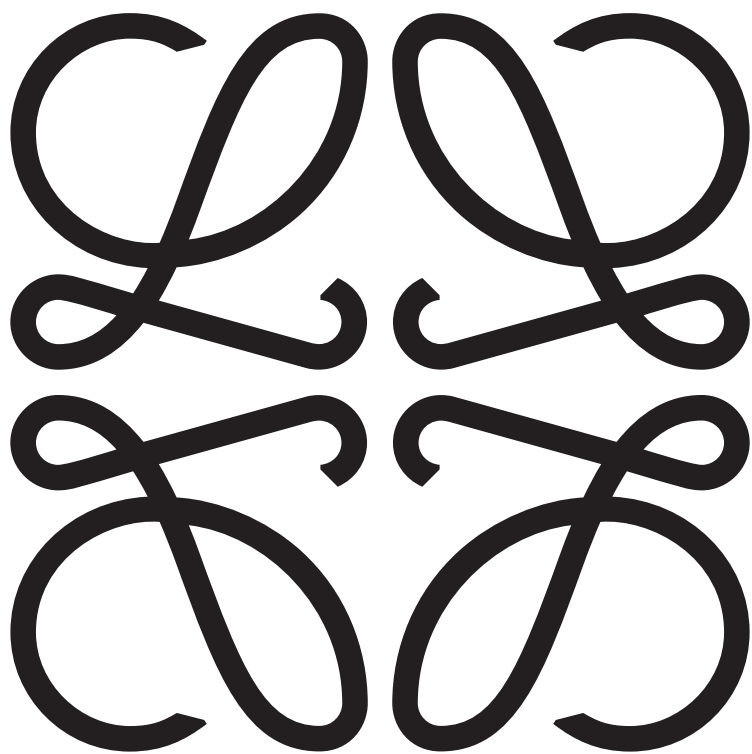


Danielle
Steel



The Affair

CHAPTER I

Heads always turned when Rose McCarthy walked into a room.

Nearly six feet tall, she was ramrod straight, and impeccably put together with faultless style, long graceful legs, and her snow white hair cut in a chin-length rounded cap. Her piercing blue eyes missed nothing. She could terrify anyone with a few well-chosen, soft-spoken, eloquent words, or comfort and delight a young employee with generous praise. For twenty-five years, she had been the legendary editor-in-chief of *Mode Magazine*. Gentle, polite, supremely competent, she ran it with an iron hand, with the ultimate grace and discretion. She was known for excellent judgment, wise decisions that always benefited the magazine, her dedication, and love of fashion.

She always wore a touch of color somewhere, or an interesting, eye-catching accessory, a ring she had found at an ancient, dusty jewelry shop in Venice, a bracelet from a Moroccan bazaar, a scarf, a pin, an unusual piece of some kind. Her elegance was in her bones. She usually wore black, but then would surprise everyone with a strong color occasionally. No one could ever manage to emulate her, although they tried.

No one looked as perfectly turned out as she did at nine in the morning, or any other hour of the day. She was wide awake and alert the moment she got to the office, and never stopped all day. She pushed her employees hard and expected the best from them, but she was infinitely harder on herself than on anyone else.

Her background was fascinatingly contradictory. Her father had been a much published, highly respected British historian, who had taught at Oxford. Born and raised in London, she attended Oxford for two years at her father's urging, but never liked it. Her Italian mother was a well-known expert on the paintings of the Italian Renaissance. She was from a large aristocratic family. Rose's daughters teased her that she was Italian at home and British at work. There was some truth to it. Rose's mother had been as emotional as her father wasn't. Rose had learned from them, and flourished as an only child, with love and support from both her parents. She loved visiting her mother's warm family in Rome frequently. She spoke fluent Italian, French, and English, and after two years at Oxford she had attended the Sorbonne for a year, which she liked much better. Her passion and instinct for fashion had surfaced at twenty, when she was living in Paris. She returned to London then, became an intern at a well-known British magazine, and within months had fallen in love with an American banker, Wallace McCarthy. On an impulse, at twenty-one, she moved to New York for him, got a low-level job at *Vogue*, fought her way up through the ranks, and became an associate editor by the time she was thirty. Eleven years later, at forty-one, she was

offered the position of editor-in-chief of *Mode Magazine*, and had made it the vast success it currently was. She was the soul and spirit of the magazine, and set a high standard. Twenty-five years after she took over, *Mode* was one of the most influential magazines in the fashion world. Its success was unquestionably credited to Rose. Her husband, Wallace, was proud of her, and always supportive of her career. Their marriage was important to both of them, rock solid and a priority for her. She was a powerhouse in the office, and a loving wife at home.

True to her British upbringing, she never said a word about her personal life at work. She rarely mentioned Wallace in the office, although he was the center of her life at home. And in the midst of her steady rise to stardom as a fashion editor, she'd given birth to four daughters who she privately admitted were the joy of her existence. She hardly ever talked about them during her daily life. She was a consummate professional, had taken a minimum of time off when she had them, and returned to the office, ready to work. When she came back from maternity leave, she was as slim and stylish as ever, with every hair in place, ready to focus on the magazine again.

Her forty-year marriage had been stable until her husband's death four years before.

Only her faithful assistant, Jen Morgan, who had followed her from *Vogue* and was still with her, ever knew anything about her personal life, or how truly heartbroken she was when Wallace died after a shockingly brief illness. More than ever afterwards, Rose was extremely close to her daughters and spoke to them often, but as had always been the case, when she was

at the office, she was all about *Mode*, and nothing else. Her career had always been her passion, but it became her refuge too, once Wallace was gone. Her two lives never intersected. She had created an incredibly successful magazine, and a family of four young women who were very different, but immensely close to each other and to her. She was proud of them and the lives they led as adults.

She had always made time for her husband and their daughters, but now that she was widowed and the girls had grown up, she dedicated herself even more to her work. Sometimes it seemed as though she never left the office. She was often there when everyone else came in. An early riser, she liked getting a head start, and left the office late every night. She had compartmentalized her time for years between husband, children, and job, and now her work had her full attention and took up the lion's share of her time. She adored her daughters, but they were busy with their own lives, which she felt was as it should be. She didn't interfere with them, nor make demands on their time. She filled her days and nights with what she did for *Mode*. She lived and breathed the magazine, and every detail and issue had her full attention. Nothing escaped her notice.

She looked around the table on that particular May morning with a cool smile. The important senior editors were at the meeting, as well as the full creative board. She always listened to what they had to say, but Rose had the final word. If asked, all of them would have said that she was fair. She didn't impose her opinions on them, but when they heard her reasoning, they often recognized that her instincts for *Mode* were right. She

loved it almost as a child, like a living, breathing human being, which it was to her. She didn't guess.

She *knew* what was right for *Mode*, and in twenty-five years, her mistakes could be counted on one hand.

They were having an early planning session for the massive September issue they published every year. All the major fashion magazines did, but *Mode's* September issue was the most coveted by all. It became a collector's item every time and was as iconic as Rose herself. She was a fashion legend and everyone wanted to see what *Mode* was telling them about the styles for the coming winter season. Women redesigned their whole look and wardrobe according to what *Mode* told them about their makeup, their health, their hair, and what they should wear. *Mode* didn't impose anything on them. Their readers begged for what *Mode* had to offer.

They normally got an early start and began working on each issue three months in advance. But they began working on the September issue even earlier. There was so much to think about, and discuss, starting with who they put on the cover. And beyond that, the theme, the editorials, the articles, and the placement of the ads of their advertisers, who paid a fortune to be highlighted in the September book.

They already had three options for the cover, but none of them excited Rose. They seemed tired and obvious to her. She wanted someone on the cover who would grab their readers' imaginations and make a big splash. One of the senior editors had suggested a female rock star of major importance. They'd done her several times before, and there was nothing new or

different about her, although she was a fabulous-looking woman. They had also considered an Oscar-winning actress, but Rose wanted someone younger. The beauty editor wanted to see the First Lady on the cover. She had won America's hearts with her good deeds and sharp mind. She was an attorney, and had championed women's causes since her husband had come to the White House. It was a noble thought, but she had a ladylike, somewhat prim, conservative style, and with the First Lady on the cover, it would be hard to make it about fashion.

"She's my age," Rose said with a dissatisfied look. "We can't do that for September. We can use her later."

Their most hard-edged senior stylist, Charity Bennett, had another suggestion, and made herself heard shortly after the meeting started. Rose frequently had run-ins with her, but respected her style and quick mind, and Charity often took them the extra mile to something truly avant-garde. She was young and daring. Rose always kept a leash on her so she didn't take them too far. Charity had jet-black hair, a sharp ivory-white face, and was never afraid of going toe-to-toe with the editor-in-chief. Rose admired her for it, and listened to what she had to say. Even if Rose wasn't crazy about her personally, the pepper and spice she contributed to their editorials were a good wake-up call to help them stay ahead of current trends.

"What about Pascale Solon?" Charity suggested. "She's twenty-two years old, spectacular looking, and she just won every prize there was at the Cannes Film Festival for her new film. She's having a white-hot affair with Nicolas Bateau, who wrote the book the movie was based on. He's forty-two,

nearly twice her age, and they were the big item in Cannes. He made it very obvious that he's having an affair with her. He's married of course, and the biggest bestselling author in France. Everyone says she's going to win an Oscar for the film, and for sure a Golden Globe," the award given by the foreign press, which often presaged how the Academy would vote for the Oscars. "She's young, she's new, and one of the most sensational looking girls I've ever seen. She's so sexy, she has an almost innocent pornographic quality to her. She makes Lolita look like Minnie Mouse. What do you think?" She looked straight at Rose, who sat quietly, expressionless, thinking and not reacting for a minute. At times, Rose was inscrutable, until she wished to share her thoughts. "She's a possibility," was all Rose would concede. When there was something about an idea she didn't like, she became Sphinx-like. To those who knew her well, she was obviously not sold on the idea.

And if they couldn't get Rose on board, they all knew it wasn't going to happen. Rose had to believe in the decisions she made.

"If we don't get her, Vogue will," Charity said, knowing that that might make Rose want to grab Pascale before someone else did. Charity knew that Rose never let Mode stoop to tabloid journalism, but they were not above touching lightly on some tantalizing detail of a subject's personal life, without taking it too far. Rose had rules and set boundaries she expected her editors to respect. She would only agree to what they wrote if it was confirmed as fact, and would not tolerate editorials in the magazine that were handled in a sleazy way. She hated filth and idle gossip. The magazine was about fashion, not peeping into

their subjects' occasionally unsavory lives. If they were famous, they usually had secrets. Charity Bennett always tried to push Rose beyond that line, and when sufficiently annoyed by it, Rose didn't hesitate to push back. This time, she didn't comment, she just pursed her lips, which everyone in the room knew was a warning sign to back off.

"We can't base our interest in her on an affair with a famous writer," Rose finally commented. "By the time the September book comes out, it could be over anyway. The film just came out. Four months from now she may be sleeping with someone else, and we'll be old news and look foolish." She hated publishing gossip, as they all knew, and steered clear of it whenever possible. They did serious articles and interviews about the direction of their subjects' careers and lifestyles, and an affair with a married man, even a famous one, was not enough to convince Rose to put Pascale on the cover. But there was no question, Pascale Solon had become a major star overnight, in a tough role that she had handled brilliantly. And Nicolas Bateau had been the co-producer and director, and had apparently been coaching her in his spare time. He had gotten a fabulous performance out of her. Rose hadn't heard about the affair until Charity brought it up. It was just the kind of salacious information and innuendo that Charity thrived on. Rose wanted a fashion story on the cover, not a tell-all piece.

"The affair may not be over as fast as you think," Charity persisted. "There's a rumor that she's pregnant, so we may be right on target with the story in September." She was smug, as another editor rolled her eyes.

"Oh please, don't give me another cover of a naked star with a big round belly on the cover. I'd rather see the First Lady in one of her navy blue suits and a white blouse with a bow. We can't do another pregnant star," Rose said, starting to seem annoyed.

"It won't show if we shoot her now." Charity gave her a quelling look, as Rose went down a list of someone else's suggestions, none of which grabbed her either.

"What about Michaela Lim?" Rose said, distracted. She was another new young star, and had just delivered a brilliant performance in a recent movie.

"Next year," Charity countered. "No one's heard of her yet. She's not nearly as glamorous as Pascale. And she really is too young. She just turned nineteen. She needs to be more seasoned before we put her on September." Rose nodded agreement. She had a valid point. "Let's face it, Nicolas Bateau is a hunk, and if he leaves his wife for Pascale Solon, it's going to be news around the world, and our September issue is going to be the hottest issue on the stands. I want to grab that," Charity said with dogged determination. Pascale was heartbreakingly beautiful, and there was no denying that she would look fabulous in anything they put her in. It was a no-brainer, but Rose didn't like it.

"It will also seem as though we endorse infidelity, and men cheating on their wives. This is America, Charity. Americans don't like men who cheat. This isn't France." Charity had worked for a French fashion magazine before coming to *Mode*, and it came dangerously close to tabloid journalism. Rose's

face was expressionless and her tone cold when she turned her electric-blue gaze on the senior stylist who was so determined to put Pascale on the cover. "We're not a tabloid or a movie magazine," Rose reminded her sternly. "There are plenty of other magazines to cover that. Let's not forget who we are." Charity looked frustrated, and they went on to other details of the issue that had to be decided in the coming weeks. When the meeting ended, they hadn't agreed on the cover yet.

"I think he's fooled around before," Charity said, as the meeting came to a close. "I forget who he's married to, someone ordinary but nice looking. I think she's a writer or a journalist or something."

"She's a well-known interior designer," Rose corrected her. "And they have young children. I don't like the story." She stood up, which was the signal for all of them to go back to work. The meeting had lasted for two hours, and they had covered considerable ground on other points. There were a million component parts to their big issue. In the end, the final decisions would be made by Rose, but they all knew that without exception, Rose did what was best for *Mode*, and had unfailing instincts for what that was, whatever her personal opinions. They respected her for it, even Charity, who didn't agree with her in this instance. Their other options all seemed like such a bore to her. She was the youngest of the senior staff, and on most occasions, Rose liked the spice she brought to it, but not this time.

Rose left the conference room quickly after the meeting. She knew there would be a mountain of emails and messages

on her desk. Jen Morgan would handle as many as she could, but most of them would require callbacks from Rose to reach resolution. The proverbial buck stopped with her. She never complained about it. Even her rivals agreed that she was one of the best editors in the business, and courageous about the stands she took. She was a strong defender of women's rights. Integrity and honesty were important to her, vital in fact, and were at the heart of every interview and editorial.

She flew past Jen's desk, barely looking at her, clutching a thick stack of files from the meeting to her chest. She had appointments lined up all day long and was in a rush.

"Do we have a cover?" Jen smiled at her.

"Not yet. I have to make a confidential call. I'll probably be on for fifteen or twenty minutes. Hold my calls till then," she said, as she reached her office and paused in the doorway. Jen sat just outside.

"The stack on your desk is already pretty bad," Jen reminded her. "Another twenty minutes and you'll be buried."

"Can't be helped. I've got to make this call. There's a storm brewing." She offered no explanation as to the nature of the storm.

Jen raised an eyebrow but didn't ask. She knew not to, and also that Rose wouldn't have told her what it was about anyway. She rarely confided in anyone at work, even her trusted assistant. "I'll hold back the invading armies," Jen promised. She was good at her job, and Rose appreciated her for handling the million tiny details of her position so well.

Rose walked into her office and closed the door, then sat down at her desk. She saw that Jen hadn't been exaggerating.

There was a tall stack of messages, printed emails, and other material on her desk. She tried not to look at it as she dialed the familiar number.

She knew she wouldn't be able to reach Olivia at that hour, so she didn't call her. At thirty-nine, she had recently been appointed a superior court judge and would either be on the bench or conferring with lawyers in chambers. Olivia was Rose's third daughter and Rose was proud of her, and the others. Olivia had an enormously responsible job now. She was married to Harley Foster, a federal court judge, who was twenty-one years older than she was. He had been one of her law school professors. They had a fourteen-year-old son, Will, and were a very serious, conservative family.

Athena, her oldest, was never her first choice to call with a problem. She had a laid-back, philosophical, ultra-positive California take on life, and always told her mother that everything would be all right, even if it was obvious that it wouldn't. Her perspective was entirely different from her mother's and her sisters'. She had made other choices in her life. Athena was forty-three years old, had lived in L.A. for fifteen years, was a TV chef, had written the definitive vegetarian and vegan cookbooks, and owned her own vegan restaurants. She had lived with the same partner for thirteen years. Joe Tyler was a chef too, owned his own very successful restaurant in L.A., and was five years younger than Athena. They weren't married and had no wish to be. They lived together and were happy as they were. They shared a flock of dogs that Athena referred to as her "babies". She said they were the only ones she

wanted. Athena said that marriage was a man-made invention that just didn't work most of the time, and children weren't for her. She was great with them, but content to play with other people's children when she had the chance. That was the only "kid fix" she wanted, and Joe agreed with her.

Rose had called her second daughter, Venetia, forty-one years old, a stunningly successful fashion designer who had set up her business fourteen years before, with the sound financial advice of Ben Wade, her venture capitalist husband. Venetia was a remarkable, creative woman, and always had been. She was fearless in running her business, and the designs she created always made a sensation. They were as odd and zany as she was, and she came up with creations that looked like trailer park meets Paris and Las Vegas, on steroids. When Rose first saw her designs, she couldn't imagine who would buy them, unless they were as odd and eccentric as her daughter. But the clothes worked, and seemed to fulfill nearly every woman's fantasy of how they wanted to look. There were sequins and leopard prints in expensive Italian fabrics, serious little Chanel-style jackets in white mink and denim to wear with jeans. She had priced them high to place them in the luxury market, and much to Rose's amazement they took off and were a major hit. A year after she started her business, *Mode* did a feature article on her, and so did *The Wall Street Journal*. She was as tall as her mother, and her dark-haired, green-eyed, movie-star-handsome husband, Ben, was even taller. Venetia had a striking figure and went to the gym at five a.m. every day. She combined discipline and creativity, a blend that had made her a success.

She had a wild mane of long curly red hair. The press called her the Golden Lioness, because she also had the Midas touch and a great head for business.

She had gone to both Parsons School of Design and Columbia Business School. She and Ben had three very appealing although somewhat wild children, two boys, Jack and Seth, and the youngest, India, a girl. Venetia said she wanted more, but hadn't convinced Ben yet. Somehow she managed to do it all, work, marriage, motherhood, just as her mother had. Unlike Rose, however, Venetia had a townhouse in New York that usually looked like a bomb had hit it, but she looked great, and so did the kids. They were all bright and lively, and her five-year-old daughter had her mother's creative streak. She wanted to design sneakers with sparkles on them when she grew up.

In spite of how busy she was, Venetia always took time to listen to her sisters' or her mother's problems, and gave them impressively good advice.

When her assistant answered, Rose asked to speak to Venetia. She came on the line a few minutes later, happy to hear from her mother. "Sorry, Mom, I was in a design meeting. What's up?" Rose never called her at that hour. They usually talked when Venetia was on her way home from work in an Uber, which was often the only time she got to herself. Once she got home, she helped the boys with their homework and the kids would monopolize her for hours.

"I just heard something in a meeting that worried me, and I wondered if you know anything about it," Rose said in a solemn tone.

"Hemlines are getting shorter? If mine get any shorter, my customers will get arrested." She laughed. But she realized then that her mother sounded serious.

"It's about Nicolas," her youngest sister Nadia's husband. "He's supposedly having an affair with the girl who starred in his current movie, Pascale Solon. Has Nadia said anything to you? I haven't talked to her in several days. I've been wrapped up in the September issue. I hope it isn't true. Apparently, they outed themselves at the Cannes Film Festival last week. Doesn't Nadia go there with him?"

"Yeah, usually. She was installing a house in Madrid, so she probably didn't go with him this year or she only stayed for a day or two. I haven't talked to her. We've been playing phone tag. I saw something about it on the front page of a tabloid at the grocery store."

"You buy your own groceries?" Her mother sounded shocked. "What don't you do?"

"It was my turn to cook for the kids, and I stopped to buy frozen pizza." They had a housekeeper and a nanny, but Venetia tried to cook for them once a week.

"I feel better." The women in the family were famously poor cooks, except for Athena, who made up for all of them and was a genius in the kitchen, if you liked vegetables.

"I was hoping it was just the usual tabloid crap, since she wasn't there. What did you hear in the meeting?" Venetia sounded worried too.

"That Nicolas is having an affair with Pascale Solon, and she might be pregnant."

“Oh God, I hope that’s not true. Maybe the whole thing is just Hollywood hype, to promote the movie,” Venetia said hopefully. She didn’t want her little sister to get her heart broken. Nicolas had been a flirt when he was younger, but not recently. It was just part of the culture, since he was French, but Venetia didn’t have the feeling it went further than that. Nadia had never complained to her about it, or said he cheated.

As she thought about it, Venetia was wearing one of her creations, signature leopard capri pants, a turquoise sequined sweater, and bright green alligator Hermès high-heeled pumps, with an armload of emerald and diamond bangles on one arm, a bracelet with a huge chunk of turquoise on the other, her red mane pushed up on her head with a diamond chopstick through it. They were standard work clothes for Venetia, and somehow on her it all worked. She was a beautiful woman and could get away with it. She was an icon in fashion and had a style all her own. She had been outrageous with what she wore since she was a teenager, and had made a successful career of it as an adult.

“I hope it’s not true,” Rose said fervently. “I just turned the girl down for the September cover, and I’m sure I haven’t heard the last of it. Especially if the rumor is true, about the affair. I don’t even want to think about a possible pregnancy.”

“That just sounds like tabloid crap, Mom,” Venetia reassured her.

“What do we do now? I don’t want to pry and upset Nadia if she hasn’t heard the rumor,” Rose said thoughtfully.

“I’m sure she has. It’s probably all over the internet.” Venetia clicked on her computer, and there were half a dozen articles to

choose from, and some paparazzi shots. “It might be true, about the affair at least,” Venetia said sadly, sorry for her youngest sister. “Call her, Mom. I’ll call her later. Let me know what she says. I can’t believe he’d be that dumb. He has a beautiful wife, a great marriage, they adore each other, two great kids, and he’s making an ass of himself with a starlet half his age? Pathetic. And way too French. Flirting is one thing, but this is awful for Nadia, if it’s true.”

“I’ll call her. I’ll catch you tonight,” Rose promised Venetia, who went back to work a few minutes later, worried about her little sister. Rose sat at her desk for a minute, thinking of her youngest daughter.

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