



Past Perfect

Danielle Steel

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A magical tale of a modern family sharing a gorgeous Pacific Heights mansion with their ghostly, elegant predecessors.

Sybil and Blake Gregory are the quintessential 21st century power couple: she a cutting-edge interior designer; he a forward-thinking top business analyst. They revel in the privileged, ordered life they lead in Manhattan with their children, teenagers Andrew and Caroline and 6-year-old Charlie. But when Blake accepts a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to become the CEO of a visionary social media start-up in San Francisco—and then buys a magnificent turn-of-the-20th-century Pacific Heights mansion on impulse—all that will change. Built by the Butterfields, a prominent banking family, abandoned for decades, the grand house retains its exquisite furnishings and aura of long ago elegance. And that's not all it retains. The modern Gregorys are about to meet their ghostly long ago counterparts....

Past Perfect Details

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From Reader Review Past Perfect for online ebook

Esther E. Willson says

Well, this is weird....

I like it!

I think you may too. Families from 1917 and 2017 somehow meet and become friends after the younger clan purchases the elder's home in San Francisco. The house had been cherished by its original owners. After the new ones obtain and reposition much of the 19th century fittings and furniture, the spirits appear and new friendships span a century.

Though this is a love story, it involves the love of family and friends in addition to romance. Anyone merely in the mood for 'mush' may be disappointed.

I, however, found this to be an engaging and heartwarming novel.

Laura says

Well, I don't even know what this was. Whilst I must applaud Danielle Steel for getting out of her comfort zone, this made absolutely no sense whatsoever and I am still trying to get my head around it.

I don't want to label it as the worst Danielle Steel book I have ever read, but yeah.

Jeanne says

A bit of a stretch in believability; however, the story was endearing and shows how the importance of family is priceless and timeless. Just OK for me -- 4 out of 10.

Suzanne says

2.5*

I liked a little bit of it, but honestly it got strange when the ghosts showed up. It had some interesting aspects when they did but I just could not get as into this one as I do other Danielle Steel books, or even other paranormal genre books. On to the next Steel book for me!

Debbie says

This is not a typical Danielle Steel book. This book deals with ghosts. A family, the Gregory's, move cross country and buy a historical mansion. They find it is inhabited by a family of ghosts, the Butterfields, from 100 years ago. These ghosts are very friendly and can only be seen by the the Gregory family. This book follows the interaction between both families. It was a fun and interesting read and a reminder not all ghosts are unfriendly.

Liz says

A slice-of-life novel about two families living 100 years apart side by side.

As a ghost story, this was not very engaging, Steel admits herself that she doesn't like conventional time travel stories and so tries to put a personal spin on it by using ghosts, however, it just comes across confusing and unnecessary because, evidently, she doesn't know much about or really care for ghost stories either. This book really should have just been about the Butterfield's, the Gregory's did little to nothing for the story. With less little encounters between the two families, this book could have focused more on character development and growth instead of being a synopsis about a family's history across generations. I mean, there was more focus on Gwen making .jpgs on the computer than her son dying in the war. Huge oversight there.

I understand what Steel was trying to do with two families from different time periods learning from each other, but, in the end, that hardly ever happened. Overall, there was no conflict or climax to this story at all, everything just worked out easily for all of the two-dimensional characters, making it a rather dull read.

Laura Rash says

I think this is the lowest rating I've ever given a DS book. A little out of the normal for her, as in paranormal, and it just didn't do it for me.

lacy [a ravenclaw library] says

3.5 stars!

tw: child death, parental death, sexist comments (not challenged)

Well this was a first for DS. She has never written a ghost story before and in some aspects, I could tell. Mainly, because it wasn't scary. However, she wrote a nice letter explaining why she wrote this and how nervous she was. I thought that was nice. Kudos to DS for writing outside her comfort zone. I can always respect an author that tries to branch out of their normal comfort zone.

Now for the real question: **Did it pay off?** Hmmmm. Yes and no. I enjoyed the story immensely. Especially when it came to the ghost family. I would have loved to read a novel of just them. That is where DS shines. She is so great at writing novels based in history. My favorite book of hers is based during World War two. I loved the combinations of the two families, centuries apart, and how they interacted with each other. They each taught each other that family isn't always blood. I think that is just oh so important.

But, once I realized that there was no plot of the this book and it was just about the families, my interest waned slightly and I was just reading to finish it at that point. I thought something was going to happen. Like something so dramatic that it would affect both of the families in a pretty significant way because DS has done this in previous novels. I kept waiting and waiting for this but nothing happened. I guess I should have expected this. I've read enough DS novels to know that her novels almost always end with a happy ever after

despite the plot twists she sometimes throws in there. (I'm still traumatized by *The Prodigal Son*)

Overall, I did enjoy this. DS wrote something that was completely out of the norm for her. It worked in some levels but it also didn't work. Regardless, I'm glad I read it and it's onto the next novel of hers.

Tim says

After first being turned off by snobism, classism and racism, Ms. Steele manages to find her stroke when she stops writing about these, "isms," to instead, focus on the story. Initially, I thought this may warrant a 1-star. However, Ms. Steel found her form in the second half, save for one underdeveloped and underutilized female character and missed the opportunity. 6 fo 10 stars

Autumn Duncan says

I wish I could give this a zero. I love Danielle Steel. I've read everything she's written. This was disappointing. The whole thing was ridiculous. I finished it only because I didn't want to end my streak with her books.

Donnell says

Think this is my first one-star review--and to the latest book by an author with over 650 MILLION readers. Does not really make sense.

On top of this, the book involves a time warp/ghost element, with people from the present and the past intermingling--concepts I like. And the past time period is one my favorites: the 1910s and the WWI era. Not to mention a beautiful old mansion is involved.

And a novel about a storied old San Francisco mansion is a natural for Danielle Steel who has long owned the storied Sprekels Mansion in San Francisco.

However, talk about your flat, lifeless collection of pages, for that is what you have in this book.

Check out these opening sentences of two different books:

Sample A:

"Those who can, do.

Those who can't, deejay.

Like Cooper van Epp. Standing in his room--the entire fifth floor of a Hicks Street brownstone--trying to beat-match John Lee Hooker with some piece of trip-hop horror. On twenty thousand dollars' worth of equipment he doesn't know how to use."

Sample B:

"Blake Gregory sat looking out his office window in New York, pondering the offer he had just been made

to be the CEO of a new high-tech social media start-up in San Francisco. He'd had other offers before, in Boston and other cities, though none as enticing as this one, and he'd turned them down without hesitation."

Sample B is by our 650 million reader author. Sample A, by Jennifer Donnelly author of a young adult novel about the French Revolution called *Revolution*.

So strange, while both books involve a story and people in the past, intermingled with a story and people in the present--and both even involve young boys in the past who are killed, and a corresponding young boy in the present--Donnelly's book is SOOO much more ALIVE than Danielle's.

In addition to the flat characters, the bland--barely existent description, the sentences that can meander confusingly--its also not quite clear what Steel is going for in her time warp element.

Steel includes an introductory page where she explains that time travel books never appealed to her, they seemed too "far-fetched." Also, she was frustrated by the person sent back in time having to decide whether to abandon everything and everyone she knows and loves in her present life, or leave behind her true love in the past.

Well, Steel "solves" this problem for herself by not having any present day people actually travel to the past; instead she has a family of ghosts that had lived circa 1917, appear to the present day family.

But then she makes these ghosts zombie-ghosts--in that they don't completely know they are dead. Because deaths happen to the ghosts, and there is much sorrow and pain, but then the dead reappear a short time later--and the family is not surprised because they knew the person could reappear. And even though the six year old boy who had died in 1905 is with the family in 1917, the family acts as if death is a real thing.

These poor ghosts have some other problems that make Steel's after life not very attractive--they still have to have sicknesses--and childbirth!--the 1917 way!

Perhaps what Steel thinks she is doing is creating a time warp wherein the present day family stumbles upon the 1917 family and then the two sets of lives sort of meld as each family lives its life in its own time. If this were the model, the deaths in the past, and the pain felt surrounding them, would make sense. And of course sickness and childbirth would have to be experienced as experienced in 1917.

Steel strengthens the time warp idea by having a whole world out there in the past for the ghost people to travel in. The oldest daughter moves to France, for example.

But the time warp model can not be claimed to be used here, since we've got the six year old boy who died twelve years earlier as part of the mix. Not to mention that the daughter who will die at 20 around 1929, is 20, rather than 8, when with her family in 1917.

We also have the ghost family recognizing that those who have died are now different, though only in that they can not be photographed.

Of course, an author creating time warps has pretty free rein, as there is no objective standard as to how an imaginary time warp needs to be. There is, however, an objective standard as to how realistic people will act and think. And the Butterfields do not act like real people living in a parallel time. For example, real people would recognize the strangeness of dead family members returning and then being frozen at the age they died. Similarly, real people would remember that there is no death in their world so why fret about death--or anything for that matter--because if the worst that could happen to them is death and that doesn't exist, why worry about anything? Further, they might be a bit depressed, these real Butterfields, in that there seems to be nothing after life except to return to the world frozen at the age one died.

And of course, an author has freedom in creating characters any way she pleases. Yet if fictional humans don't ring true, most books will not be read. This situation is obviously a bit different; Steel has the ability to pretty much type out anything, put a title and her name on it, and it will be a best seller.

In sum: It appears that Steel wants to have created a parallel time--our world 100 years in the past--that happens to intersect via a time warp with our present when the Butterfields and Gregorys meet.

What she has actually created is a family of ghosts who act and think like they are not ghosts (which fits her time warp idea)--forgetting that when they die they will return, for example, and suffering and dying like non-ghosts; but they actually are ghosts or they wouldn't be able to come back to life or be stuck forever at the age they were when they died.

Carol Bailey says

What would it feel like to live in a house that was inhabited with the original owners, even though they lived there 100 years ago. Sybil and Blake purchase a home that is owned by the bank that is a mansion and three days later they begin to see people that look like the portraits that are on the walls.

Anita Soni says

Totally ridiculous! I understand that she is probably run out of ideas because so many books every year, but this, sorry Danielle, I expected better from you! I don't want to write anything more so I don't give away the story to others who might actually be reading the book write now.

Sherri Thacker says

This book started off great but once the ghosts came into the picture, I wasn't sure what to make of it all. I'm not sure I believe in ghosts and I found myself questioning how this family from "Today" was actually conversing with a family from "100+ years ago." I found that I kept skimming through some of the "ghost" talks but I kept reading. And even though I first thought "this is crazy" all of a sudden I found myself wanting to know more about 100 years ago. So I did enjoy this book overall. How could I not "love" another Danielle Steel book???

Susan Becraft says

Ridiculous, even by Danielle Steele standards

Each time I pick up a Danielle Steele book, usually to be read while passing time in an airport, I ask myself why I waste my money. This book hit a new low.

Sybil and Blake Gregory, with their three children, live in a four bedroom Tribeca apartment. When Blake is offered the job of a lifetime at a San Francisco startup, he convinces Sybil to uproot the family and quickly move to the west coast for at least two years.

While searching for an appropriate four bedroom rental, he happens upon a 22,000 square foot boarded up mansion on one acre of land in Pacific Heights. For reasons that make sense only to Danielle Steele, the bank that owns the house sells it to Blake for a song.

Blake is unaware that the mansion is occupied by the ghosts of the entire Butterfield family, who are “living” 100 years prior. The two families become fast friends, dining in splendor most nights. Everyone, including two college aged children, dons formal dress for dinner, which magically appears on the formal banquet table.

As time passes, past and present intersect. The Gregory family adapts to the lifestyle of the 1917 rich and famous, while members of the Butterfield clan become computer literate.

The couple hired to keep house wonder if they have entered the twilight zone because they hear the Gregorys constantly talking to themselves. I am in some sort of zone myself. Do the housekeepers see the formal dining table with its elaborate place settings for a large party almost nightly? Who cooks the multi-course spreads?

More perplexing to me than the ghosts are more practical matters, such as the math. One acre of prime land in San Francisco - priceless. A vacant 22,000 foot mansion that needs only a coat of paint and updated upholstery fabrics - highly improbable. Buying kitchen appliances and utensils at IKEA - bizarre. People who own a large Tribeca apartment and a San Francisco mansion would be more inclined to shop for a Subzero and Wolff at a luxury appliance store and buy kitchen and dining supplies at Williams Sonoma.

And imagine convincing college kids to dress in tuxedos and gowns for dinner, much less putting a harried husband in tails! Yes, books are intended to entertain, but Danielle Steele expected this reader to suspend all credulity.

The writing style is unique to Danielle Steele. Run-on sentences, repetition, inconsistencies and minutiae that do not advance the story - only Danielle Steele gets away with such shoddy writing.

The book, which I read in two hours, was a waste of time and money but it was preferable to staring into space while I waited for my connecting flight.