



No Greater Love

Danielle Steel

About the Book

In her twenty-eighth bestselling novel Danielle Steel portrays the full breadth of human emotions as she sweeps us back to a dramatic moment in history no-one will ever forget.

On the maiden voyage of the greatest ship ever built, the Titanic, Edwina Winfield was returning from her engagement trip to England with her fiancé, her parents and five siblings.

In one fatal, unforgettable night, Edwina instantly becomes a woman mourning the loss of the man she loved, and mother to her five brothers and sisters. Her struggles to keep the family together go on for twelve long years, but as each child sets sail at last, to Hollywood, Europe, and elsewhere, Edwina finds her own life finally, and frees herself from the ghosts of those she loved and lost on the Titanic.

In this magnificent work that brings a new authenticity and immediacy to the Titanic disaster and its impact on those who survived, Danielle Steel is at the height of her enormous talent as one of the world's most respected and beloved writers.

Contents

Cover

About the Book

Title Page

Dedication

Chapter 1

Chapter 2

Chapter 3

Chapter 4

Chapter 5

Chapter 6

Chapter 7

Chapter 8

Chapter 9

Chapter 10

Chapter 11

Chapter 12

Chapter 13

Chapter 14

Chapter 15

Chapter 16

Chapter 17

Chapter 18

Chapter 19

Chapter 20

Chapter 21

Chapter 22

Chapter 23

Chapter 24

Chapter 25

Chapter 26

Chapter 27

Chapter 28

Chapter 29

Chapter 30

Chapter 31

Chapter 32

Chapter 33

Chapter 34

Chapter 35

Chapter 36

Chapter 37

Chapter 38

Chapter 39

About the Author

Also by Danielle Steel

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DANIELLE
STEEL

NO GREATER
LOVE

*To Beatrix,
sweet, special girl,
you fill me with joy
and love and admiration.
Brave girl, may your life
be ever easy,
on calm seas,
with kind people,
gentle breezes, sunny days
and if a storm should ever come
one day,
remember how much we love you.*

*And to John,
for whom there never was,
never will be,
never could be ...
a greater love than mine for you.
No greater love,
and all my heart and life,
forever.*

d.s.

Chapter 1

10 April 1912

THE ONLY SOUND in the dining room was the ticking of the large, ornate clock on the mantelpiece, and the occasional muffled rustling of a heavy linen napkin. There were eleven people in the enormous dining room, and it was so cold that Edwina could barely move her fingers. She glanced down at them and caught the gleam of her engagement ring in the morning sunlight, and then smiled, as she glanced across the table at her parents. Even with his eyes cast down at his plate, she could see the mischief at the corner of her father's mouth. And she was sure that beneath the table, he was holding her mother's hand. Left to themselves, they were always teasing and laughing, and whispering playfully, and their friends liked to say that it was no wonder they had six children. At forty-one, Kate Winfield still looked like a girl. She had a lithe figure and a slim waist, and walking behind them at a distance, it was often difficult to discern Kate from her oldest child, Edwina, who was also tall and had shining dark hair and big blue eyes. They were very close, as the entire family was. It was a family in which people laughed and talked and cried and hugged and joked, and great mischief was conducted daily.

It was difficult now for Edwina to keep a straight face as she watched her brother George make clouds of vapor with his breath in the arctic dining room, which their uncle Rupert, Lord Hickham, liked to keep slightly colder than

the North Pole. The Winfield children were used to none of this. They were used to the comforts of their American life in the warmer climate of California. They had come all the way from San Francisco a month before to stay with their aunt and uncle, and announce Edwina's engagement. Their ties to England seemed to be repeating themselves. Kate's sister, Elizabeth, had married Lord Rupert twenty-four years before, and she had come to England to be the second viscountess and the mistress of Havermoor Manor. At twenty-one, she had met the much older Lord Hickham when he had come to California with friends, and she'd been swept off her feet. More than two decades later, her nieces and nephews found it difficult to understand the attraction. Lord Hickham was distant and gruff, inhospitable in the extreme, he never seemed to laugh, and it was obvious to all of them that he found it extremely unpleasant having children in his house. It wasn't that he *disliked* them, Aunt Liz always explained, it was just that he wasn't *used* to them, never having had any of his own.

This by way of explanation for his being most unamused when George put several small tadpoles in his ale, after Uncle Rupert went duck hunting with their father. In truth, Rupert had long since stopped wanting children of his own. Long since, he had felt he needed an heir for Havermoor Manor, and his other large estates, but eventually it was obvious that that was not part of the Grand Plan. His first wife had suffered several miscarriages before dying in childbed some seventeen years before he married Liz. And he had always blamed Liz for not bearing him any children either, not that he would have wanted as many as Kate and Bertram had, and he would most assuredly have wanted his to be better behaved than theirs were. It was absolutely shocking, he assured his wife, what they let their children get away with. But Americans were known for that. No sense of dignity or control, no education, no discipline whatsoever. He was, however, enormously relieved that

Edwina was marrying young Charles Fitzgerald. Perhaps there was some hope for her after all, he had said grudgingly when Liz told him.

Lord Hickham was in his seventieth year, and he had been less than pleased when Kate wrote to her sister and asked if they could all come and stay. They were going to London to meet the Fitzgeralds and announce the engagement, but Rupert was aghast at the idea of all of them coming to Havermoor after that.

"What, with their entire brood?" He had looked horrified when Liz gently asked him the question over breakfast. It was almost Christmas then and they wanted to come in March. And Liz had hoped that with enough time to reassure him, Rupert might actually let them do it. Liz longed to have her sister come, and have the children brighten her dreary days. She had come to hate Havermoor in twenty-four years of living there with Rupert, and she missed her sister, and the happy girlhood they had shared in California.

Rupert was a difficult man to live with, and theirs had never become the marriage she had dreamed of. Early on, she had been impressed with his dignified airs, his title, his acute politeness with her, and his stories about the "civilized life" they all led in England. They were twenty-five years apart in age, and when she had arrived at Havermoor she had been shocked to find the Manor dismally depressing and in shocking disrepair. Rupert had kept a house in London in those days as well, but within a very short time, Liz had discovered that he never used it. And after four years of never setting foot in it, he had sold it to a good friend. Children might have helped, she felt, and she was anxious to start a family and hear young, happy voices echoing in the somber halls. But year after year, it became more obvious that this was not to be her fate, and she lived only to see Kate's children on her rare visits back to San Francisco. And eventually, even those

small pleasures were denied her, as Rupert became too ill to travel much of the time, and finally announced that he was too old. Rheumatism, gout, and just plain old age discouraged him from roaming the world anymore and as he needed his wife to wait on him night and day, Liz was trapped at Havermoor with him. More often than she liked to admit, she found herself dreaming of going back to San Francisco, but she hadn't been able to go there in years. All of which made Kate and the children's visit all the more important to her, and she was all the more grateful when Rupert finally said they could stay with them, as long as they didn't stay forever.

This proved to be even more wonderful than Liz had expected. It had been several years since they'd last come, and she was overjoyed. And her long walks in the garden with her sister were all that she had longed for in her years away. Once upon a time, the two had been almost like twins, and now Liz was amazed to see Kate still looking so youthful and so pretty. And she was obviously still very much in love with Bert. It made Liz regret again that she had ever married Rupert. Over the years, she had often wondered what life might have been like had she never become Lady Hickham and instead married someone in the States.

She and Kate had been so carefree as young girls, so happy at home with their doting parents. They had each been properly presented to Society at eighteen, and for a short time they had both had a wonderful time going to dinners and balls and parties, and then too quickly, Rupert had appeared, and Liz had left for England with him. And somehow, although she had lived in England for more than half of her life now, Liz was never able to feel that she truly belonged here. She had never been able to alter the course of anything that Rupert had already established at Havermoor Manor before she arrived. She was almost like a guest here, a guest with no influence, no control, and one

who was not even very welcome. Since she had failed to produce an heir, her very presence there seemed without purpose.

Her life seemed so totally in contrast to her sister Kate's. How could Kate possibly understand? With her handsome dark-haired young husband, and her six beautiful children who had come like gifts from heaven at regular intervals for most of the twenty-two happy years they'd been married. There were three sons and three daughters, all full of high spirits and good health, with their parents' beauty and intelligence, and lively sense of humor. And the odd thing was that although Kate and Bert seemed almost too blessed, when one saw them, one had absolutely no doubt that they deserved it. Although Liz had envied her sister for years, and often said as much, she could never allow herself to be jealous in an ugly sense. It all seemed so right, and Kate and Bert were such basically good and kind and decent people. They were all too well aware of the riches of joy they had, and often made a point of saying as much to the children. It made Liz nostalgic for what she had never known ... the love of a child ... and the obviously warm loving relationship that Kate shared with her husband. Living with Rupert had made Liz quiet over the years. There seemed so little to say anymore, and no one to whom to say it. Rupert was never particularly interested in her. He was interested in his estates and his ducks and his grouse and his pheasants and, when he was younger, his horses and his dogs, but a wife was of relatively little use to him, especially now with his gout bothering him so much of the time. She could bring him his wine, and ring for the servants, and help him up to bed, but his sleeping quarters were far, far down the hall from hers, and had been for many years, once he had understood that there would be no children from her. All they shared was regret, and a common home, and the chill loneliness that they shared there. All of which made a visit from the Winfields like

throwing back the shutters, tearing down the curtains, and letting in the sunshine and fresh clean air of a California springtime.

There was a small hiccup, and then a stifled giggle at the other end of the table from where Liz and Kate sat on either side of Lord Rupert, who appeared not to have heard it. The two women exchanged a smile. Liz looked ten years younger than she had when they arrived. Seeing her sister and her nieces and nephews always seemed to revive her sagging spirits. It always broke Kate's heart to see how her sister had aged, and how lonely she was living here in the bleak countryside, in a house she hated, with a man who very clearly did not love her, and probably never had. And now she felt the anguish of their leaving. In less than an hour they'd be gone. And Lord only knew when they'd come back to England. Kate had invited her to come to San Francisco to prepare for Edwina's wedding, but Liz felt she couldn't leave Rupert for that long and promised to come in August for the wedding.

The hiccup at the other end of the table was almost a relief, as Kate glanced down at nearly-six-year-old Alexis. George was whispering something to her, and Alexis was about to erupt in gales of giggles.

"Shhh ..." Kate whispered, smiling at them, and glancing at Rupert. Their own breakfast table usually sounded like a Fourth of July picnic, but here they had to behave, and the children had been very good about following Rupert's rules this time, and he seemed to have mellowed slightly with age. He had taken sixteen-year-old Phillip hunting several times, and although Phillip had admitted to his father that he hated it, he was always polite, and he had thanked his uncle and gone with him. But Phillip was like that, wanting to please everyone, he was always kind, gentlemanly, polite, and astonishingly thoughtful for a boy his age. It was difficult to believe he was just sixteen, and he was clearly the most responsible of all the Winfield children. Except for

Edwina, of course, but she was twenty, and full grown, and in five months she would have a home and a husband of her own. And a year after that, she hoped perhaps even her own baby. It was hard to believe, Kate kept reminding herself, that her oldest child was old enough to be married and have children.

They were going home now to attend to all the preparations for the wedding and Charles was coming back to the States with them as well. He was twenty-five years old, and he was head over heels in love with Edwina. They had met, by chance, in San Francisco, and they had been courting since the summer before.

The wedding was going to be in August, and they were taking with them yards and yards of the exquisite ivory fabric that Kate and Edwina had bought in London for her dress. Kate was going to have her dressmaker in San Francisco embroider it with tiny pearls, and the veil was being made by a Frenchwoman who had just come to London from Paris. Lady Fitzgerald was going to bring it over with her, when they came to San Francisco in late July. And there would be lots to do in the meantime. Bertram Winfield was one of the most prominent men in California. He and his family owned one of San Francisco's most established newspapers, and there were hundreds of people they had to invite to the wedding. Kate and Edwina had been working on the list for a month. And it was already well over five hundred people. But Charles had only laughed when Edwina warned him that there might even be more.

"It would have been far, far worse in London. There were seven hundred two years ago when my sister got married. Thank God, I was still in Delhi." He had been traveling for the past four years. After two years in India with the military, he had then ventured to Kenya where he had spent a year, traveling and visiting friends, and Edwina loved hearing about all of his adventures. She had begged to go

to Africa on their honeymoon, but he thought something a little tamer might be in order. They were planning to spend the autumn in Italy and France, and they wanted to be back in London by Christmas. Edwina secretly hoped that she'd be pregnant by then. She was madly in love with Charles, and she wanted a large family like her own, and a relationship like the happy one she'd always seen between her parents. It wasn't that they didn't fight from time to time, they did, and it almost shook the chandeliers in their San Francisco house when their mother really lost her temper, but along with the anger, there was always love. There was always tenderness and forgiveness and compassion, and you always knew, no matter what, how much Kate and Bertram loved each other, and that was exactly what Edwina wanted when she married Charles. She didn't want anything more or less than that, she didn't need an important man, or a title, or a fancy manor house. She wanted none of the things that had once foolishly drawn her Aunt Liz to Uncle Rupert. She wanted goodness, and a sense of humor, and a fine mind, someone she could laugh with, and talk to, and work hard with. It was true that theirs would be an easy life, and Charles enjoyed sports and going out with friends, and had never been burdened with having to earn a living, but he had the right values and she respected him, and one day he would have his father's seat in the House of Lords.

And just as Edwina did, Charles wanted at least half a dozen children. Her parents had had seven, although one had died at birth, a baby boy who had been between her and Phillip, which had made Phillip feel even more responsible about everything. It was as though he were taking someone else's place by being the eldest son now, and everything he did, or that touched him, seemed to put more responsibility on Phillip's shoulders. All of which made life very simple for George who, at twelve, felt his only mission in life was to amuse everyone, and

responsibility was the furthest thing from his mind at any moment. He tortured Alexis and the little ones whenever he could, and felt that it fell to him to lighten his older brother's more austere behavior, and he did that by short-sheeting his bed, or putting harmless snakes in his shoes, a well-placed mouse was useful here and there, and pepper in his morning coffee, just to start his day off right. Phillip clearly felt that George had been visited on him to ruin his existence, and during his rare and extremely cautious pursuits of the opposite sex, George always seemed to appear, ready to lend his expert assistance. George was in no way shy around girls, or around anyone for that matter. On the ship coming over, it seemed as though everywhere Kate and Bertram went, they were greeted by enchanted acquaintances of their second son ... "Oh, *you're* George's parents!..." as Kate inwardly cringed, wondering what he had done now, and Bertram laughed, amused by the boy's harmless pranks and high spirits. The shyest one was their next born, little Alexis with her halo of white-blond curls and huge blue eyes. The others all had dark hair and blue eyes, like Kate and Bert, except Alexis, who was so fair her hair looked almost white in the sunlight. It was as though the angels had given George all their mischief and courage, and they had given Alexis something very delicate and rare. And everywhere she went, people looked at her and stared and talked about how pretty she was. And within minutes, she would disappear into thin air, only to reappear again, quietly, as though on silent wings, hours later. She was Kate's "baby girl," and her father's "special baby," and it was rare that she ever spoke to anyone else. She lived happily within the confines of her family, and was protected by all. She was always there, silent, seeing, yet saying very little. And she would spend hours in the garden sometimes, making garlands for her mother's hair. Her parents meant everything to her, although she also loved Edwina. But Edwina was actually closer to their next born, four-year-old

Frances. Fannie, as she was called by everyone; Fannie of the sweet round cheeks, and chubby hands and sturdy little legs. She had a smile that melted everyone's heart, especially her daddy's, and like Edwina, she had blue eyes and shining black hair. She looked exactly like their father, and she had his good nature. She was always happy, and smiling, and content wherever she was, not unlike baby Teddy. He was two, and the apple of his mother's eye. He was talking now, and discovering everything around him, with a headful of curls and a cheerful belly laugh. He loved to run away and make Oona chase him. She was a very sweet Irish girl who had fled Ireland at fourteen, and Kate had been grateful to find her in San Francisco. She was eighteen years old, and a great help to Kate with all of them. Oona would tell Kate reproachfully that she spoiled little Teddy. And she laughingly admitted that she did. She indulged all of them at times because she loved them so dearly.

But what Kate marveled at each year was how different they all were, what totally unique and individual people they were, and how varied their needs. Everything about them was different, their attitudes, their aspirations, their reactions to her, and life, and each other ... from Alexis's timidity and many fears, to Phillip's staunch sense of responsibility, to George's complete lack of it, to Edwina's strong, quiet self-assurance. She had always been so thoughtful and so kind, thinking of everyone before herself, that it was a relief to Kate to see her now, head over heels in love with Charles, and enjoying it so much. She deserved it. For years, she had been her mother's right hand, and it seemed time to Kate now for Edwina to have her own life.

She only wished that she weren't moving to England. This was the second time in her life that she had lost someone she loved to foreign shores. And she could only hope that her daughter would be happier than her sister Liz had been there, but fortunately Charles was entirely

different from Rupert. Charles was charming and intelligent and attractive and kind, and Kate thought he would make a wonderful husband.

They were meeting Charles that morning at the White Star dock in Southampton. He had agreed to go back to the States with them, in part because he couldn't bear the thought of leaving Edwina for the next four months, and also because Bert had insisted that he sail with them as an engagement present. They were sailing on a brand-new ship, on her maiden voyage. And all of them were enormously excited.

They were still sitting in the dining room at Havermoor Manor, and Alexis was starting to laugh out loud, as George said something outrageous in an undertone and then made more vapor with his breath in the frigid air. Bertram was starting to chuckle at his children, when Rupert stood up at last, and they were free to go. Bert came around the table to say good-bye to him, and shook his brother-in-law's hand. And for once, Rupert was actually sorry to see him go. He liked Bert, he had even come to like Kate over the years, although he was still rather tentative about their children.

"It's been wonderful staying with you here, Rupert. Come back to see us in San Francisco," Bertram said, and almost meant it.

"I'm afraid I'm a bit beyond it." They had already agreed that Liz would travel to San Francisco for the wedding with Charles's parents. She was just relieved that Rupert would let her go at all, and she could hardly wait. She had already picked her dress in London with Kate and Edwina.

"If you feel up to it, come." The two men shook hands again. Rupert was glad they had come, and now glad again that they were going.

"Do write and tell us about the ship. She must be quite something." He looked envious, but only for a moment. And this time Liz was not envious at all. Just thinking about

boats of any kind made her desperately seasick. She was already dreading the crossing in July. "Will you write about it for the paper, Bert?"

Bert smiled. He seldom, if ever, wrote anything for his own paper, except for an occasional editorial, when he couldn't restrain himself. But this time, he had to admit, he had thought about it more than once. "I might. If I do, I'll send you a copy when we run it."

Rupert put an arm around Bert's shoulders, and walked him to the door, as Edwina and Kate rounded up the younger children with Oona, the Irish girl, and saw to it that everyone went to the bathroom before they left for Southampton.

It was still shockingly early, the sun was just coming up, and they had a three-hour drive ahead of them to Southampton. Rupert had delegated his chauffeur and two of the stableboys to take them to Southampton in three cars with what little luggage they still had. Most of the trunks had gone down the day before, and would be waiting for them in their staterooms.

And within a few moments, the children had piled into all three cars, Edwina and Phillip with some of the luggage, and George, who insisted on sitting with the stableboy who was at the wheel, Oona with Fannie and little Teddy and the rest of their bags in another car, and Kate and Bertram were going to ride in Rupert's own Silver Ghost with Alexis. Liz had volunteered to come with them, but Kate had insisted that it was too long a journey. They would see each other in four months anyway, and it would be too lonely for her coming back alone in the empty convoy, instead the two women embraced, and for a long moment, Liz held her fast, not knowing why she felt so emotional this morning.

"Take good care ... I'll miss you so...." It seemed so painful seeing her go this time, as though she just couldn't bear too many more partings. Liz hugged her again, and

Kate laughed, straightening the very stylish hat that Bertram had bought her in London.

"It'll be August before you know it, Liz," Kate whispered gently in her sister's ear, "and you'll be home again." She kissed her cheek, and then pulled away to look at her, wishing that Liz didn't look so worn and so dejected. It made her think again of Edwina's moving to England when she married Charles, and Kate could only pray that her daughter's life would turn out to be happier than her sister's. She hated the thought of her being so far away, just as she hated the thought of leaving Liz here now, as Rupert harrumphed, and instructed their drivers, and urged them to leave so they wouldn't miss the ship. She was sailing in just under five hours.

"She's sailing at noon, isn't she?" He pulled out his pocket watch and consulted Bert, as Kate gave Liz a last hug and then climbed into the car, pulling Alexis in beside her.

"Yes, she is. We'll be there in plenty of time." It was seven-thirty in the morning on the tenth of April.

"Have a marvelous trip! She's a great ship! Good sailing!" He waved as the first car drove away, and Liz stood close to him as the second car followed, and then the last, as Kate waved from the window with a broad smile, with Alexis on her lap, and Bertram sitting next to her with an arm around her shoulders.

"I love you!..." Liz called out as they sped away in the roar of the engines. "I love you ..." The words faded away as she wiped a tear from her eye, not sure why she felt so worried. It was silly really, she'd be seeing them all again in August. She smiled to herself then as she followed Rupert inside. He locked himself in his library as he frequently did in the morning, and Liz walked back into the dining room to stare at their empty seats, and watch their empty plates being cleared away, and a terrible feeling of loneliness overwhelmed her. Where they had been only moments

before, the room that had been so full of life and the people that she loved, was all so empty now, and she was alone again, as the others sped toward Southampton.

Chapter 2

AS THEY APPROACHED the dock at Southampton, the car that Kate and Bertram were in led the convoy of Lord Hickham's automobiles to the place where first-class passengers were embarking. In the second car, George was jumping up and down on his seat, and Edwina finally had to insist that he sit down before he drove her and Phillip utterly crazy.

"Look, look at her, Edwina!" He was pointing to the ship's four impressive smokestacks, as Phillip urged him to calm down. Unlike his more exuberant younger brother, Phillip had done considerable reading about the ship as soon as he knew that they would be sailing on her maiden voyage. She had a nearly identical sister ship, the *Olympic*, which had been in operation since the year before, but this was literally the largest ship in existence. The R.M.S. *Titanic* was marginally bigger than her sister ship, but she was half again as large as any other liner afloat, anywhere in the world, and George was in awe of her when he saw her. His father's newspaper had called her "The Wonder Ship" when they'd written about her, and on Wall Street she'd been called "The Millionaires' Special." It was an extraordinary privilege to be sailing on her maiden voyage. Bert Winfield had reserved five of the twenty-eight special staterooms on B Deck, which were among the many features that set her apart from any other ship in operation. These staterooms had windows instead of portholes and were beautifully decorated with French, Dutch, and British antiques. The White Star Line had outdone themselves in every way. And the five staterooms of the Winfield party were

interconnecting so as to make them seem like one very large suite, rather than several adjoining rooms.

George was going to be rooming with Phillip, Edwina with Alexis, Oona with the two little ones, Fannie and Teddy, and Bertram and Kate were in the largest of the staterooms, in a room just next to the one occupied by their future son-in-law, Charles Fitzgerald. It promised to be a festive crossing, and George could hardly wait to get on the ship, as he dashed out of the car a moment later and headed for the gangplank. But his brother was too quick for him and he grabbed his arm and hauled him back to where Edwina was helping her mother with the others.

"Just where do you think you're going, young man?" Phillip intoned, sounding more like his father than himself as George gave him a look of intense irritation.

"You're beginning to sound like Uncle Rupert."

"Never mind that. You stay right here until Father tells you that you can board the ship," He glanced over Edwina's shoulder then and saw Alexis shrinking back against her mother's skirts, and the nurse struggling with the two younger ones, both of whom were crying. "Go help with Teddy. Oona's trying to help Mother organize the bags." And their father was in the process of dismissing Lord Hickham's drivers. It was the kind of situation George normally liked, utter chaos, which would allow him to disappear and do exactly what he wanted.

"Do I have to?" He looked horrified at the prospect of having to baby-sit when there was so much to discover. The *Titanic's* awe-inspiring hulk stood next to them at the pier and all George wanted to do was get on her to discover all her secrets. He had a lot of exploring to do, and he could hardly wait to start. There was not a moment to be wasted.

"Yes, you *have* to help." Phillip growled again, pushing George in the direction of the younger ones, as he went to assist his father. He noticed out of the corner of his eye

then that Edwina was having something of a time with Alexis.

"Don't be silly." She was kneeling next to her on the pier, in the elegant new blue wool suit that she'd worn when she'd gone to meet Charles's parents. "What is there to be afraid of? Look." Edwina gestured toward the huge ship. "It's just like a floating city, and in a few days we'll be in New York, and then we'll take the train back to San Francisco." Edwina tried to make light of it, and make it sound like an adventure, but Alexis was clearly terrified of the awesome mass of the ship, and she dived into her mother's skirts and began to cry again as she pulled free of Edwina.

"What's the matter?" Kate glanced over at her oldest daughter and tried to hear what she was saying above the din as the band playing on the bridge launched into ragtime. But aside from that, thus far there had been very little fanfare. The White Star Line had apparently decided that too much fuss would be vulgar. "What happened?" Kate was trying to calm Alexis.

"She's scared," Edwina mouthed, and Kate nodded. It was always poor little Alexis who was terrified of new events, new people, new places, and she had been afraid coming over on the *Mauretania*, too, and had asked her mother repeatedly what would happen if she fell in the water.

Kate stroked her silky golden curls with her thinly gloved hand, and stooped to whisper a secret to her. Her words brought a smile to the child's lips, when she reminded her that in five days it would be her birthday. She was going to be six and her mother had promised her a birthday party on the ship, and another when they got back to San Francisco. "Alright?" she whispered to the frightened child, but Alexis only shook her head as she started to cry all over again and clung to her mother.

"I don't want to go." And then before she could say more, she felt herself gently scooped up in powerful hands and lifted onto her father's shoulders.

"Sure you do, sugarplum. You wouldn't want to stay here in England without us, would you? Of course not, silly girl. We're all going home now on the most wonderful ship ever built. And you know what I just saw? I saw a little girl just about your age, and I'll bet that before we get to New York you two are best friends. Now, let's go aboard and see what our rooms look like, shall we?" He held her firmly on his shoulders and she had stopped crying by then as he took his wife's arm, and shepherded his family up the gangplank. He set Alexis down when they were safely on board the ship, and she clung tightly to his hand as they walked up the grand staircase to the upper deck and peeked in the gym windows at the much-talked-about electric camel.

People were roaming everywhere, looking at the handsome decor, the beautiful wood paneling and wood carvings, the detailing, the elaborate chandeliers, the draperies, the five grand pianos. Even Alexis was quiet as they walked around the ship, before going to B Deck to their staterooms.

"It's quite something, isn't it?" Bert said to Kate, and she smiled. She loved the idea of being on shipboard with him. It seemed so cozy and safe and romantic, suspended between two worlds, with everyone comfortable and well taken care of. For once, she was planning to let Oona chase after the children more than she usually did, and Kate was going to relax with her husband. He had looked particularly enchanted when he saw the gymnasium, and peeked into the smoking room, but Kate grinned and wagged a finger at him.

"No, you don't! I want to spend some time with you on this trip." She moved closer to him for a moment and he smiled.

"You mean Charles and Edwina aren't the only young lovers on this ship?" he whispered to his wife, as he continued to hold Alexis's hand.

"I hope not." Kate smiled meaningfully at him, and gently touched his cheek with the tips of her fingers.

"All right, everybody, what do you say we go to our staterooms, unpack a little bit, and then do some more exploring?"

"Can't we go now, Dad?" George pleaded. He was about to burst with excitement, but Bert insisted that it would be easier if they let the little ones see their rooms and settle in, and then he would personally escort George on his adventures. But the temptation was too much for George, and before they reached B Deck, two floors below the gym, George had disappeared and Kate was worried about where he had gone to, and she wanted Phillip to go and find him.

"Let him be, Kate. He can't go far. As long as he doesn't get off the ship, he'll be fine, and he's much too excited to be on it to get off for anything in the world. I'll go and look for him myself once we get settled."

Kate hesitantly agreed, but she was nonetheless worried about what mischief he might get into. But as soon as they saw the lovely staterooms Bertram had reserved for them, they were all far too happy and distracted to think of anything else, and everyone was delighted to see Charles when he arrived a few moments later.

"Is this it?" He stuck his handsome head in the doorway of the main parlor, his dark hair perfectly groomed, his blue eyes dancing as he saw his future bride, and she leapt to her feet as she saw him and ran across the small private sitting room which Kate and Bertram planned to use, if they wanted to get away from the children.

"Charles!" Edwina blushed furiously, as she flew into his arms, her hair the same color as his, her eyes an even deeper blue, and everything about her attesting to their

happiness as he swung her right off the floor while Alexis and Fannie giggled.

"What's so funny about that, you two?" He loved to play with the little girls, and he thought Teddy was the sweetest baby he had ever seen. He and Phillip were good friends, and even wild George amused him. It was a wonderful family, and he was deeply grateful to have found Edwina. "Have you seen the doggies yet?" he asked the girls over their sister's shoulder. Fannie shook her head, but Alexis looked suddenly worried. "We'll go visit them after your naps this afternoon." He was almost like a father figure to them, just as Edwina was like another mother.

"Where are they?" Alexis asked worriedly, anxious about the dogs now.

"In cages way, way downstairs, and they can't get out," Edwina reassured her. Alexis would never leave the stateroom for the rest of the trip, if she thought there might be a danger of running into a dog lurking in the hallways, outside their cabin.

Edwina turned the children over to Oona then, and followed Charles to his stateroom. Her father had reserved him a lovely room, and away from the children's sharply probing eyes, he pulled her closer to him and kissed her gently on the mouth, as Edwina caught her breath, forgetting everything but the powerful presence of her future husband. There were moments, like this one, when she wondered how they would ever wait until August. But there was no question of that, even on this most romantic ship. Edwina would never have betrayed her parents' faith in her, nor would Charles, but it was going to be difficult to restrain themselves until mid-August.

"Would you like to take a walk, Miss Winfield?" Charles smiled at his fiancée as he tendered the invitation.

"I would love to, Mr. Fitzgerald." He laid his heavy coat down on the bed, and prepared to stroll outside on the deck with her. It wasn't particularly cold in port, and he was so

happy to see her that he could think of nothing else. They had only been apart for a few days, but every hour seemed too much to them now, and she was glad he was going back to San Francisco with them. It would have been unbearable if he hadn't. "I missed you terribly," she whispered as they walked back up the grand staircase to the Promenade Deck just above them.

"So did I, my love. It won't be long now before we never have to be apart again, not even for a moment."

She nodded happily, as they wandered past the French "sidewalk café" with its little "boulevard" in front, and the rapid-fire chatter of the French waiters, as they glanced over at Edwina and smiled in admiration. Many of the first-class passengers seemed to be intrigued by the little "bistro." It was a novelty that existed on no other ship, like so many other features of the *Titanic*.

They walked on to the forward half of the Promenade Deck then with its huge glassed-in section that allowed one to look out over the sea and be sheltered from the weather. "I have a feeling we're going to find a lot of little cozy corners of our own on this ship, my love." Charles smiled and pulled her hand more tightly through his arm, and Edwina laughed as he said it.

"So is George. He already got lost on the way to the staterooms. That child is hopeless. I don't know why my mother doesn't throttle him." Edwina looked exasperated at the mention of her brother.

"She doesn't because he's so charming," Charles defended him. "George knows exactly how far to go." She couldn't really disagree, although at times she would have liked to strangle him herself.

"I suppose so. It's amazing how different he is from Phillip. Phillip would never have done anything like that."

"Neither would I as a child. Perhaps that's why I admire him now. I wish I had. And George will never have to regret missing anything he 'should have done.' I'm sure he's done

it all." He laughed and Edwina smiled happily up at him, as Charles put an arm around her shoulders and they watched the huge ship slowly pull away from the dock. She found herself praying that her father had been right, and George hadn't left the ship during his brief excursion. But somehow, like her father, she suspected that he wouldn't, there was too much to see right here, without leaving the ship. And as they looked down, the ship's fiercely resonant whistles gave a blast, rendering all conversation impossible. There was a real feeling of excitement in the air, and Charles pulled her into his arms again and kissed her gently as they listened to the whistles just above them.

Assisted by six tugs, the mammoth ship crept out of the slip and into the channel, headed for Cherbourg, where they were to pick up more passengers before going on to Queenstown and then the high seas and New York. But within moments, there was a brief interlude of excitement that those below were unaware of, but the passengers on deck watched with amazement as the huge ship glided past an American and a British liner, tied up at the quay due to a recent coal strike. The American Line's *New York* had been moored to the White Star's *Oceanic*, and the two small liners stood side by side, rendering the passage for the *Titanic* extremely narrow. There was a sudden sound of what seemed almost like pistol shots, and with no warning the lines tying the *New York* to the *Oceanic* gave way, and the *New York* drifted toward the *Titanic* to within a few feet until it looked as though she would ram the *Titanic* portside. With a series of quick maneuvers, one of the tugs assisting the *Titanic* out of the harbor passed a line to the *New York* and deckhands were able to stop her drift before she collided with the *Titanic*. The *New York* was then towed away, and the *Titanic* was able to steam out of port and head for Cherbourg. But it had been very close, the *Titanic* had almost been rammed. And it was a most impressive series of maneuvers that had spared them. The passengers

who had seen it all felt as though they had witnessed an exhibition of remarkable skill. But the *Titanic* seemed invincible, invulnerable to all. The *Titanic* was four city blocks long, or eight hundred and eighty-two feet, as Phillip had precisely informed them earlier, and she was anything but easy to maneuver.

"Was that as close as I thought it was?" Edwina inquired, mesmerized by what she had just seen, and her fiancé nodded.

"I believe so. Shall we have a little glass of champagne at the Café Parisien to celebrate our safe departure?" Edwina nodded happily and they headed back to the "sidewalk café," where, within minutes, a breathless and slightly ruffled George managed to find them.

"What are you doing here, Sis?" He appeared on the "boulevard" of the café, with his cap askew, his shirttails out, and one knee of his trousers filthy dirty. But he had never looked happier in his life.

"I might ask you the same question. Mother was looking for you everywhere. What on earth have you been doing?" Edwina scowled at him.

"I had to look around, Edwina." He looked at her as though she were extremely stupid, and then cast a winning glance at Charles. "Hello, Charles, how are you?"

"Very well, thank you, George. How's the ship? Sound? Are you pleased with her?"

"She's great! Did you know there are four elevators and they each go nine floors? There's also a squash court, and a swimming pool, and they're carrying a brand-new motorcar to New York, a Renault, and there are some pretty fantastic machines in the kitchen. I couldn't get in to steerage when I tried, but I checked second class and it seems all right, there was a very nice girl there," he reported, as his future brother-in-law looked vastly amused, and Edwina was horrified at the performance of her younger brother. He

had absolutely no self-control, and wasn't even embarrassed by his disheveled appearance.

"I'd say you've had a good look at everything, George. Well done," Charles congratulated him, and the errant child grinned proudly. "Have you been to the bridge yet?"

"No." The boy looked disappointed. "I haven't really had much time to have a good look at the bridge yet. I was up there, but there were too many people to really see what was going on. I'll have to go back there later. Do you want to go for a swim after lunch?"

"I'd like that very much, if that suits your sister's plans."

But Edwina was fuming. "I think you should be put down for a *nap*, with Fannie and Teddy. If you think you can run all over this ship, acting like some wild young hoodlum, you've got another think coming, from me, if not from Mama and Papa."

"Oh, Edwina," the boy groaned, "you don't understand anything. This is really important stuff."

"So is behaving properly. Wait until Mama sees the way you look."

"What was that?" Her father's voice spoke from just behind her, and there was a ring of amusement to it. "Hello, Charles.... Hello, George, I see you've been busy." There was even a small smear of grease across his face, and George had never looked more pleased with life or more at ease, as his father looked down at him with open amusement.

"This is just great, Dad."

"I'm glad to hear it." But at that exact moment, Kate caught a glimpse of her son as she approached, and scolded him when she reached them.

"Bertram! How can you allow him to look like that! He looks ... he looks like an urchin!"

"Do you hear that, George?" his father asked calmly. "I'd say it's time to clean up. May I suggest that you go to your stateroom and change into something a little less ... uh ...