



# Jewels

Danielle Steel

## **About the Book**

A journey through five eventful decades, *Jewels*, Danielle Steele's twenty-ninth work of fiction, is the story of a family whose lives are woven into the fabric of history.

On the eve of Sarah Whitfield's 75th birthday, she stands at the window of her chateau in France, waiting for her family to join her. Her memories take her back to the 1930s in New York, to her early marriage and subsequent shameful divorce. She is persuaded by her parents to join them on a trip abroad in the growing turmoil of pre-war Europe.

There she meets William, Duke of Whitfield. Older than Sarah, and fourteenth in line to the British throne, he sparks her intellectual curiosity and makes her laugh. They make their home in a beautiful crumbling French chateau until they are parted by the war. Afterwards they are able to return to the chateau and establish the jewel collection which leads to the House of Whitfield, jewellers to the crowned heads of all Europe. Together they produce a family of four, each of whom is drawn into the family business.

*Jewels* is the story of a great house of gems, a rare family, and an extraordinary marriage. Once again, Danielle Steel explores the lives of people facing challenges we recognise as our own, against the backdrop of war, passion and international intrigue.

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About the Author

Also by Danielle Steel

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STEEL

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JEWELS

*TO POPEYE*

*There is only one real love in a lifetime, only one, that matters,  
that grows, and that lasts forever... in life... in death...  
together, as one ... sweet love, you are mine. My one and only love ... forever.*

*With all my heart,  
Olive*

# Chapter 1

THE AIR WAS so still in the brilliant summer sun that you could hear the birds, and every sound for miles, as Sarah sat peacefully looking out her window. The grounds were brilliantly designed, perfectly manicured, the gardens laid out by Le Nôtre, as Versailles' had been, the trees towering canopies of green framing the park of the Château de la Meuze. The château itself was four hundred years old, and Sarah, Duchess of Whitfield, had lived here for fifty-two years now. She had come here with William, when she was barely more than a girl, and she smiled at the memory as she watched the caretaker's two dogs chase each other into the distance. Her smile grew as she thought of how much Max was going to enjoy the two young sheepdogs.

It always gave her a feeling of peace, sitting here, looking out at the grounds they had worked so hard on. It was easy to recall the desperation of the war, the endless hunger, the fields stripped of everything they might have had to give them. It had all been so difficult then ... so different ... and it was odd, it never seemed so long ago ... fifty years ... half a century. She looked down at her hands, at the two enormous, perfectly square emerald rings she almost always wore, and it still startled her to see the hands of an old woman. They were still beautiful hands, graceful hands,

useful hands, thank God, but they were the hands of a seventy-five-year-old woman. She had lived well, and long; too long, she thought sometimes ... too long without William ... and yet there was always more, more to see, to do, to think about, and plan, more to oversee with their children. She was grateful for the years she had had, and even now, she didn't have the sense that anything was over, or complete yet. There was always some unexpected turn in the road, some event that couldn't have been foreseen, and somehow needed her attention. It was odd to think that they still needed her, they needed her less than they knew, and yet they still turned to her often enough to make her feel important to them, and still somehow useful. And there were their children too. She smiled as she thought of them, and stood, still looking for them out the window. She could see them as they arrived, from here ... see their faces as they smiled, or laughed, or looked annoyed as they stepped from their cars, and looked expectantly up at her windows. It was almost as if they always knew she would be there, watching for them. No matter what else she had to do, on the afternoon they were to arrive, she always found something to do in her elegant little upstairs sitting room, as she waited. And even after all these years, with all of them grown, there was always a little thrill of excitement, to see their faces, hear their tales, listen to their problems. She worried about them, and loved them, just as she always had, and in a way, each one of them was a tiny piece of the enormous love she had shared with William. What a remarkable man he had been, larger than any fantasy, than any dream. Even after the war, he was a force to be reckoned with, a man that everyone who knew him would always remember.

Sarah walked slowly away from the window, past the white-marble fireplace, where she often sat on cold winter afternoons, thinking, writing notes, or even writing a letter to one of her children. She spoke to them frequently on the



telephone, in Paris, London, Rome, Munich, Madrid, and yet she had an enormous fondness for writing.

She stood looking down at a table draped in an ancient, faded brocade, a beautiful piece of antique workmanship that she had found years ago, in Venice, and she gently touched the framed photographs there, picking them up at random to see them better, and as she looked at them, it was suddenly so easy to remember the exact moment ... their wedding day, William laughing at something someone had said, as she looked up at him, smiling shyly. There was so much happiness evident there, so much joy that she had almost thought her heart would break with it the day of her wedding. She wore a beige lace-and-satin dress, with a very stylish beige lace hat with a small veil, and she had carried an armload of small, tea-colored orchids. They had been married at her parents' home, at a small ceremony, with her parents' favorite friends beside them. Almost a hundred friends had come to join them for a quiet, but very elegant, reception. There had been no bridesmaids this time, no ushers, no enormous wedding party, no youthful excess, only her sister to attend her, in a beautifully draped blue-satin dress with a stunning hat that had been made for her by Lily Daché. Their mother had worn a short dress in emerald-green. Sarah smiled at the memory ... her mother's dress had been almost exactly the color of her own two extraordinary emeralds. How pleased with her life her mother would have been, if only she had lived to see it.

There were other photographs there as well, of the children when they were small ... a wonderful one of Julian with his first dog ... and Phillip, looking terribly grown-up, though he was only eight or nine, when he was first at Eton. And Isabelle somewhere in the South of France in her teens ... and each of them in Sarah's arms when they were first born. William had always taken those photographs himself, trying to pretend not to have tears in his eyes, as he looked at Sarah with each new, tiny baby. And Elizabeth

... looking so small ... standing beside Phillip in a photograph that was so yellow, one could hardly see now. But as always, tears filled Sarah's eyes as she looked at it and remembered. Her life had been good and full so far, but it hadn't always been easy.

She stood looking at the photographs for a long time, touching the moments, thinking of each of them, gently brushing up against the memories, while trying not to bump into those that were too painful. She sighed as she walked away again, and went back to stand at the long French windows.

She was graceful, and tall, her back very straight, her head held with the pride and elegance of a dancer. Her hair was snowy-white, though it had once shone like ebony; her huge, green eyes were the same deep, dark color as her emeralds. Of her children, only Isabelle had those eyes, and even hers weren't as dark as Sarah's. But none of them had her strength and style, none of them had the fortitude she had had, the determination, the sheer power to survive all that life had dealt her. Their lives had been easier than hers had been, and for that, in some ways, she was very grateful. In other ways, she wondered if her constant attention to them had softened them, if she had indulged them too much, and as a result had made them weaker. Not that anyone would call Phillip weak ... or Julian ... or Xavier ... or even Isabelle ... still, Sarah had something that none of them had, a sheer strength of soul that seemed to emanate from her as one watched her. It was a kind of power one sensed about her as she walked into a room, and like her or not, one couldn't help but respect her. William had been like that, too, although more effusive, more obvious in his amusement about life, and his good nature. Sarah had always been quieter, except when she was with William. He brought out the best in her. He had given her everything, she frequently said, everything she had ever cared about, or loved, or truly needed. She smiled as she

looked out over the green lawns, remembering how it had all begun. It seemed like only hours ago ... days since it had all started. It was impossible to believe that tomorrow was going to be her seventy-fifth birthday. Her children and her grandchildren were coming to celebrate it with her, and the day after that, hundreds of illustrious and important people. The party still seemed foolish to her, but the children had absolutely insisted. Julian had organized everything, and even Phillip had called her from London half a dozen times to make sure that everything was going smoothly. And Xavier had sworn that, no matter where he was, Botswana or Brazil, or God only knew where else, he would fly in to be there. Now she waited for them, standing at the window, almost breathlessly, feeling a little flutter of excitement. She was wearing an old, but beautifully cut, simple black Chanel dress with the enormous, perfectly matched pearls that she almost always wore, which caused people who knew to catch their breath the first time they saw them. They had been hers since the war, and had they sold in today's world, they would have surely brought well over two million dollars. But Sarah never thought of that; she simply wore them because she loved them, because they were hers, and because William had insisted that she keep them. "The Duchess of Whitfield should have pearls like that, my love." He had teased her when she first tried them on, over an old sweater of his she had borrowed to work in the lower garden. "Damn shame my mother's were so insignificant compared to these," he had commented, and she'd laughed, and he had held her close to him as he kissed her. Sarah Whitfield had beautiful things, she had had a wonderful life. And she was a truly extraordinary person.

And as she began to turn away from the window at last, impatient for them to come, she heard the first car coming around the last turn in the driveway. It was an endless black Rolls-Royce limousine, with windows so dark, she

wouldn't have been able to see who was in it. Except that she knew, she knew each of them to perfection. She stood smiling as she watched them. The car stopped directly in front of the main entrance to the château, almost exactly below her window, and as the driver stepped out and hurried to open the door for him, she shook her head with amusement. Her eldest son was looking extremely distinguished, as always, and very, very British, while trying not to appear harassed by the woman who stepped out of the car just behind him. She wore a white silk dress and Chanel shoes, her hair cut short, very stylishly, with diamonds glittering in the summer sun absolutely everywhere she could find to put them. She smiled to herself again as she turned away from the scene at the window. This was only the beginning ... of a mad, interesting few days.... Hard to believe ... she couldn't help but wonder what William would have thought of all of it ... all this fuss over her seventy-fifth birthday ... seventy-five years ... so much too soon.... It seemed only moments since the beginning....

## Chapter 2

SARAH THOMPSON HAD been born in New York in 1916, the younger of two daughters, and a slightly less fortunate but extremely comfortable and respected cousin of both the Astors and the Biddles. Her sister, Jane, had in fact married a Vanderbilt when she was nineteen. And Sarah got engaged to Freddie Van Deering exactly two years later, on Thanksgiving. She was nineteen herself by then, and Jane and Peter had just had their first baby, an adorable little boy named James, with strawberry-blond ringlets.

Sarah's engagement to Freddie came as no great surprise to her family, as they had all known the Van Deerings for years; and although they knew Freddie less, as he'd been in boarding school for so many years, everyone had certainly seen a lot of him in New York while he was going to Princeton. He had graduated in June, of the year they got engaged, and had been in high spirits ever since that illustrious event, but he had also managed to find time to engage in courting Sarah. He was a bright, lively boy, always playing pranks on his friends, and intent on seeing to it that everyone had a good time wherever they went, particularly Sarah. He was seldom serious about anything, and always joking. Sarah was touched by how attentive he was, and amused to find him in such good

spirits. He was fun to be with, easy to talk to, and his laughter and high spirits seemed to be contagious. Everyone liked Freddie, and if he lacked ambitions for the business world, no one seemed to mind it, except perhaps Sarah's father. But it was also well known to everyone that if he never worked, he could live very handsomely on the family fortune. Nevertheless, Sarah's father felt it was important for a young man to participate in the business world, no matter how large his fortune, or who his parents were. He himself owned a bank, and spoke to Freddie at some length about his plans, just before the engagement. Freddie assured him that he had every intention of settling down. In fact, he'd been offered an excellent position at J. P. Morgan & Co., in New York, as well as an even better one at the Bank of New England in Boston. And after the New Year, he was going to accept one of them, which pleased Mr. Thompson no end, and he then allowed their official engagement to go forward.

The holidays were great fun for Sarah that year. There were endless engagement parties for them, and night after night they were going out, having fun, seeing their friends, and dancing until all hours of the morning. There were skating parties in Central Park, luncheons and dinners, and numerous dances. Sarah noticed that during that time Freddie seemed to drink a great deal, but no matter how much he drank he was always intelligent, and polite, and extremely charming. Everyone in New York adored Freddie Van Deering.

The wedding was scheduled for June, and by spring, Sarah was overwhelmed, between keeping track of wedding presents, fittings for her wedding gown, and more parties given by still more friends. She felt as though her head were spinning. She hardly saw Freddie alone at all during that time, and it seemed as though the only time they met was at parties. The rest of the time, he was with

his friends, all of whom were “preparing” him for the great plunge into A Serious Life of Marriage.

It was a time Sarah knew she was supposed to enjoy, but the truth was, as she confided to Jane finally in May, she really wasn't. It was too much of a whirlwind, everything seemed out of control, and she was absolutely exhausted. She ended up crying late one afternoon, after the final fitting for her wedding gown, as her sister quietly handed her her own lace hankie, and gently stroked her sister's long dark hair, which hung far past her shoulders.

“It's all right. Everyone feels like that just before a wedding. It's supposed to be wonderful, but actually it's a difficult time. So much is happening all at once, you don't get a single quiet moment to think, or sit down, or be alone. ... I had an awful time right before our wedding.”

“You did?” Sarah turned her huge, green eyes to her older sister, who had just turned twenty-one and seemed infinitely wiser to Sarah. It was a huge relief to her to learn that someone else had felt equally overwhelmed and confused just before their wedding.

The one thing Sarah did not doubt was Freddie's affection for her, or what a kind man he was, or how happy they would be after their wedding. It just seemed as though there was too much “fun” going on, too many distractions, too many parties, and too much confusion. All Freddie ever seemed to think about was going out and having a good time. They hadn't had a serious conversation in months. And he still hadn't told her what his plans were about working. All he kept telling her was not to worry. He hadn't bothered to take the job at the bank after the first of the year, because there was so much he had to do before the wedding that a new job would really have been too distracting. Edward Thompson took a dim view of Freddie's ideas about work by then, but he had refrained from saying anything about it to his daughter. He had discussed it with his wife, and Victoria Thompson felt sure that after the

wedding, Freddie would probably settle down. He had, after all, gone to Princeton.

Their wedding day came in June, and the extensive preparations had been worthwhile. It was a beautiful wedding at St. Thomas Church on Fifth Avenue, and the reception was held at the Saint Regis. There were four hundred guests, and wonderful music that seemed to go on all afternoon, delicious food, and all fourteen bridesmaids looked adorable in their delicate peach-colored organdy dresses. Sarah herself wore an incredible dress of white lace and French organdy, with a twenty-foot train, and a white lace veil that had been her great grandmother's. She looked absolutely exquisite. The sun had been shining brilliantly all day. And Freddie looked as handsome as anyone could. It was in every possible way, the perfect wedding.

And almost the perfect honeymoon. Freddie had borrowed a friend's house and a little yacht on Cape Cod, and they were completely alone with each other for the first four weeks of their marriage. Sarah felt shy with him at first, but he was gentle and kind, and always fun to be with. He was intelligent when he allowed himself to be serious, which was rare. And she discovered that he was an excellent yachtsman. He drank a good deal less than he had before, and Sarah was relieved to see it. His drinking had almost begun to worry her just before the wedding. But it was all in good fun, as he told her.

Their honeymoon was so lovely that she hated to go back to New York in July, but the people who had lent them the house were coming back from Europe. Sarah and Freddie knew that they had to get organized and move into their apartment. They had found one in New York, on the Upper East Side. But they were going to stay with her parents in Southampton for the summer, while the painters and the decorator and the workmen got everything ready.



But that fall, once they returned to New York after Labor Day, Freddie was too busy to get a job once again. In fact, he was too busy to do much of anything, except see his friends. And he seemed to be doing a great deal of drinking. Sarah had noticed it in Southampton that summer, whenever he got back from the city. And once they moved into their own apartment in town, it was impossible not to notice. He came home drunk, late every afternoon, after spending the day with friends. At times, he didn't even bother to show up until long after midnight. Sometimes, Freddie took Sarah out with him, to parties or balls, and he was always the life of the party. He was everyone's best friend, and everyone knew they would always have a good time as long as they were with Freddie Van Deering. Everyone except Sarah, who had begun to look desperately unhappy long before Christmas. There was no longer any mention at all of his getting a job, and he brushed off all of Sarah's delicate attempts to discuss it. He seemed to have no plans at all, except having fun and drinking.

By January, Sarah was looking pale, and Jane had her over to tea to see what was the matter.

"I'm fine." She tried to seem amused that her sister was concerned, but when the tea was served, Sarah turned paler still and couldn't drink it.

"Darling, what's wrong? Please tell me! You have to!" Jane had been worried about her since Christmas, Sarah had seemed unusually quiet at their parents' house for Christmas dinner. Freddie had charmed everyone with a toast in rhyme about the entire family, including the servants who had worked for them for years, and Jupiter, the Thompsons' dog, who barked on cue while everyone applauded Freddie's very accomplished poem. It had amused everyone, and the fact that he was more than a little tipsy seemed to go unnoticed.

“Really, I’m fine,” Sarah insisted, and then finally began to cry, until she found herself sobbing in her sister’s arms and admitting that she wasn’t fine at all. She was miserable. Freddie was never home, he was out constantly, he stayed out until all hours with his friends, and Sarah didn’t admit to Jane that she sometimes suspected the friends might even be female. She tried to get him to spend more time with her, but he didn’t seem to want to. And his drinking was worse than ever. He had his first drink every day long before noon, sometimes when he got up in the morning, and he insisted to Sarah that it wasn’t a problem. He called her “his prim little girl,” and brushed off her concerns with amusement. And to make matters worse, she had just learned that she was pregnant.

“But that’s wonderful!” Jane exclaimed, looking delighted “I am too!” she added, and Sarah smiled through her tears, unable to explain to her older sister how unhappy her life was. Jane’s life was totally different. She was married to a serious, reliable man who was interested in being married to her, while Freddie Van Deering most assuredly wasn’t. He was many things, charming, amusing, witty; but responsibility was as foreign to him as another language. And Sarah was beginning to suspect that he would never settle down. He was just going to go on playing forever. Sarah’s father had begun to suspect that, too, but Jane was still convinced that everything was going to work out happily, especially after they had the baby. The two girls discovered that their babies were due at almost exactly the same time—within days of each other, in fact—and that bit of news cheered Sarah a little before she went back to her lonely apartment.

Freddie wasn’t there, as usual, and didn’t come home that night at all. The next day he was contrite when he came home at noon, explaining that he had played bridge

till 4 A.M. and then stayed where he was because he was afraid to come home and wake her.

"Is that all you do?" For the first time, she turned on him angrily after he had explained it, and he looked startled by the vehemence of her tone. She had always been very demure about his behavior before, but this time she was clearly very angry.

"What on earth do you mean?" He looked shocked at her question, his innocent blue eyes opened wide, his sandy-blond hair making him look like Tom Sawyer.

"I mean, what exactly do you do at night when you stay out until one or two o'clock in the morning?" There was real anger there, and pain, and disappointment.

He smiled boyishly, convinced he would always be able to delude her. "Sometimes I have a little too much to drink. That's all. It just seems easier to stay where I am when that happens than come home when you're asleep. I don't want to upset you, Sarah."

"Well, you are. You're never home. You're always out with your friends, and you come home drunk every night. That's not how married people behave." She was steaming.

"Isn't it? Are you referring to your brother-in-law, or *normal* people with a little more spunk and joie de vivre? I'm sorry, darling, I'm not Peter."

"I never asked you to be. But who are you? Who am I married to? I never see you, except at parties, and then you're off with your friends, playing cards, and telling stories, and drinking, or you're out, and God knows where you are then," she said sadly.

"Would you rather I stayed home with you?" He looked amused, and for the first time she saw something wicked in his eyes, something mean, but she was challenging his very lifestyle. She was frightening him, and even threatening his drinking.

"Yes, I would rather you stay home with me. Is that such a shocking thing?"

"Not shocking, just stupid. You married me because I was fun to be with, didn't you? If you'd wanted a bore like your brother-in-law, I imagine you could have found one, but you didn't. You wanted me. And now you want to turn me into someone like him. Well, darling, I can promise you that won't happen."

"What will happen then? Will you go to work? You told Father last year you would, and you haven't."

"I don't *need* to work, Sarah. You're boring me to tears. You should be happy that I don't have to scrabble like some fool, at some dreary job, trying to put food on the table."

"Father thinks it would be good for you. And so do I." It was the bravest thing she had ever said to him, but the night before she had lain awake for hours, thinking of what she would tell him. She wanted to make their life better, to have a real husband, before she had this baby.

"Your father is another generation"—his eyes glittered as he looked at her—"and you're a fool." But as he said the words, she realized what she should have known from the moment he walked in. He'd been drinking. It was only noon, but he was clearly drunk, and as she looked at him, she felt disgusted.

"Maybe we should discuss this some other time."

"I think that's a fine idea."

He had gone out again then, but returned early that night, and the next morning made an effort to get up at a decent hour in the morning, and it was then that he realized how ill she was. He was startled as he questioned her about it over breakfast. They had a woman who came in every day to clean the house and do ironing and serve their meals when they were at home. Usually, Sarah liked to cook, but she had been unable to face the kitchen for the last month, although Freddie hadn't been home often enough to see that.

"Is something wrong? Are you ill? Should you go to a doctor?" He looked concerned as he glanced at her over the morning paper. He had heard her retching horribly after they got up, and wondered if it had been something she had eaten.

"I've been to the doctor," she said quietly, her eyes looking at him, but it was a long moment before he glanced her way again, almost having forgotten his earlier question.

"What was that? Oh ... right ... good. What did he say? Influenza? You ought to be careful, you know, there's a lot of it about just now. Tom Parker's mother almost died of it last week."

"I don't think I'll die of this." She smiled quietly and he went back to his paper. There was a long silence, and then finally he looked at her again, having totally forgotten their earlier conversation.

"There's a hell of a stink in England over Edward VIII abdicating to be with that Simpson woman. She must be something else, to get him to do a thing like that."

"I think it's sad," Sarah said seriously. "The poor man has been through so much, how could she destroy his life like that? What kind of life can they possibly have together?"

"Maybe a pretty racy one." He smiled at her, much to her chagrin, looking handsomer than ever. She wasn't sure anymore if she loved or hated him, her life with him had become such a nightmare. But maybe Jane was right, maybe everything would be better after they had the baby.

"I'm having a baby." She almost whispered to him, and for a moment, he seemed not to hear her. And then he turned to her, as he stood up, and looked as though he hoped she were joking.

"Are you serious?" She nodded, unable to say more to him, as tears filled her eyes. In a way, it was a relief finally to tell him. She had known since just before Christmas, but hadn't had the courage to tell him. She wanted him to care about her, wanted a quiet moment of happiness between

them, and since their honeymoon on Cape Cod seven months before, that just hadn't happened.

"Yes, I'm serious." Her eyes said she was, as he watched her.

"That's too bad. Don't you think it's a little too soon? I thought we were being careful." He looked annoyed and not pleased, and she felt a sob catch in her throat, as she prayed not to make a fool of herself with her husband.

"I thought so too." She raised her tear-filled eyes to him, and he took a step toward her and ruffled her hair, like a little sister.

"Don't worry about it, it'll be all right. When's it for?"

"August." She tried not to cry, but it was hard to control herself. At least he wasn't furious, only annoyed. She hadn't been thrilled when she heard the news either. There was so little between them at this point. So little time, so little warmth or communication. "Peter and Jane are having a baby then too."

"Lucky for them," he said sarcastically, wondering what he was going to do with her now. Marriage had turned out to be a lot more of a burden than he had expected. She seemed to sit around at home all the time, waiting to entrap him. And she looked even more woebegone now, as he glanced down at the little mother.

"Not lucky for us though, is it?" She couldn't restrain the two tears that slid slowly down her cheeks as she asked him.

"The timing isn't great. But I guess you don't always get to call that, do you?" She shook her head, and he left the room, and he didn't mention it to her again before he went out half an hour later. He was meeting friends for lunch, and he didn't say when he'd be back. He never did. She cried herself to sleep that night, and he didn't come home until eight o'clock the next morning. And when he did he was still so desperately drunk from the night before that he never made it past the couch in the living room, on the way

to their bedroom. She heard him come in, but he was unconscious by the time she found him.

And for the next month it was painfully plain how badly shaken he was by her little announcement. The idea of marriage was frightening enough to him, but the idea of a baby filled him with nothing less than terror. Peter tried to explain it to her one night when she had dinner alone with them, and by then, her unhappiness with Freddie was no secret between them. No one else was to know, but she had confided in both of them ever since she had told her sister about the baby.

"Some men are just terrified of that kind of responsibility. It means they have to grow up themselves. I have to admit, it scared me, too, the first time." He glanced lovingly at Jane, and then soberly back at her sister. "And Freddie is not exactly famous for his ability to settle down. But maybe when he sees it, he'll realize it's not the dire threat he thought it was. They're pretty harmless when they're small. But it might be rough until you have the baby." Peter was more sympathetic than he let on to her; he had frequently told his wife that he thought Freddie was a real bastard. But he didn't want to tell Sarah what he thought. He preferred to offer her encouragement about the baby.

But her spirits stayed pretty low, and Freddie's behavior and drinking only got worse. It took all of Jane's ingenuity to get Sarah out at all. Finally, she got her out to go shopping. They went downtown to Bonwit Teller on Fifth Avenue when Sarah suddenly became very pale and stumbled as she grabbed blindly for her sister.

"Are you all right?" Jane looked instantly frightened when she saw her.

"I ... I'm fine ... I don't know what happened." She had had a terrible pain, but it only lasted for a moment.

"Why don't we sit down." Jane was quick to signal someone and ask for a chair and a drink of water, and by then Sarah was clutching at her hand again. There were

beads of sweat on her brow, and her face was a grayish green as she looked up at her older sister.

"I'm so sorry ... Jane, I don't feel well at all...." And almost as she said the words, she fainted. The ambulance came as soon as it was called, and Sarah was carried out of Bonwit's on a stretcher. She was conscious again by then, and Jane looked terrified as she ran along beside her. They let her ride to the hospital with Sarah in the ambulance, and Jane had asked the store to call Peter at his office, and their mother at home. And both arrived at the hospital only a few minutes later. Peter was more worried about Jane than anyone, and she clung to him and sobbed as her mother went in to see her sister. She was in with her for a long time, and when she came out, there were tears in her eyes and she looked at her eldest daughter.

"Is she all right?" Jane asked anxiously, and her mother quietly nodded and sat down. She had been a good mother to both of them. She was a quiet, unpretentious woman, with good taste and sound ideas, and values that had served both girls well, although the sensible lessons she'd taught hadn't done much to help Sarah with Freddie.

"She'll be all right," Victoria Thompson said, as she reached out for both their hands, and Peter and Jane held her hands tightly. "She lost the baby ... but she's very young." Victoria Thompson had lost a baby, too, her only son, before Sarah and Jane were born, but she had never shared that sorrow with either of her children. She had told Sarah now, hoping to comfort her and help her. "She'll have another baby one day," Victoria said sadly, but she was almost more concerned with what Sarah had blurted out about her life with Freddie. She had been crying terribly, and insisting that it was all her fault. She had moved a piece of furniture by herself the night before, but Freddie was never there to help her. And then the whole story had come tumbling out, about how little time he spent with her,



how much he drank, how unhappy she was with him, and how unhappy he was about the baby.

It was several hours before the doctors would let them see her again, and Peter had gone back to the office by then, but he had made Jane promise she would go home at the end of the afternoon, to rest and recover from the day's excitement. After all, she was pregnant too. And one miscarriage was bad enough.

They had tried to call Freddie, too, but he was out, as usual, and no one knew where he was, or when he would be returning. The maid was very sorry to hear about Mrs. Van Deering's "accident," and she promised to refer Mr. Van Deering to the hospital if he called or appeared, which everyone silently agreed was unlikely.

"It's all my fault...." Sarah was sobbing when they saw her again. "I didn't want it enough. ... I was upset because Freddie was so annoyed, and now...." She sobbed on incoherently, and her mother took her in her arms and tried to stop her. All three women were crying by then, and they finally had to give Sarah a sedative to calm her. They were going to keep her in the hospital for several days, and Victoria told the nurses she would be spending the night with her daughter, and eventually she sent Jane home in a cab, and then she had a long talk on the phone in the lobby with her husband.

When Freddie came home that night, he found his father-in-law waiting for him in the living room, much to his amazement. Fortunately, he had had less to drink than usual, and was surprisingly sober, considering it was just after midnight. He had had a boring evening, and had finally decided to come home early.

"Good Lord! ... sir ... what are you doing here?" He blushed faintly, and then flashed him his broad, boyish smile. And then he realized that something had to be very wrong for Edward Thompson to be waiting for him at this hour in this apartment. "Is Sarah all right?"

"No, she isn't." He looked away for a moment, and then back at Freddie. There was no delicate way to say it. "She ... uh ... lost the child this morning, and is at Lenox Hill Hospital. Her mother is still with her."

"She did?" He looked startled, and felt relieved, and hoped he wasn't so drunk that he couldn't conceal it. "I'm sorry to hear that." He said it as though she were someone else's wife, and it had been someone else's baby. "Is she all right?"

"I believe she'll be able to have more children. What is apparently not all right, however, is that my wife tells me that things have been somewhat less than idyllic between the two of you. Normally, I would never interfere in my daughters' married lives; however, in this rather unusual instance, with Sarah so ... so ... ill, it seems an opportune moment to discuss it with you. My wife tells me that Sarah has been hysterical all afternoon, and I find it rather significant, Frederick, that since early this morning, no one has been able to reach you. This cannot be a very happy life for her, or for you. Is there something we should know about now, or do you feel able to continue your marriage to my daughter rather more in the spirit in which you entered into the union?"

"I ... I ... of course ... would you like a drink, Mr. Thompson?" He walked swiftly to where they kept their liquor and poured himself a liberal glass of Scotch, with a very small splash of water.

"I think not." Edward Thompson sat expectantly, watching his son-in-law with displeasure, and there was no question in Freddie's mind that the older man expected an answer. "Is there some problem that keeps you from behaving appropriately as her husband?"

"I ... uh ... well, sir, this baby thing was a little unexpected."

"I understand, Frederick. Babies often are. Is there some serious misunderstanding with my daughter that I should

know about?"

"Not at all. She's a wonderful girl. I ... I ... uh ... just needed a little time to adjust to being married."

"And to working, too, I imagine." He looked pointedly at Freddie, who had suspected that was coming.

"Yes, yes, of course. I thought I'd look into that after the baby."

"You'll be able to do that now a little more quickly, won't you?"

"Of course, sir."

Edward Thompson stood up, and he was a daunting vision of respectability as he looked over Freddie's rather dishevelled state. "I'm sure you'll be very anxious to visit Sarah as soon as possible tomorrow morning, won't you, Frederick?"

"Absolutely, sir." He followed him to the front door, desperate to see him out now.

"I'll be picking her mother up at the hospital at ten o'clock. I'm sure I'll see you there then, won't I?"

"Absolutely, sir."

"Very well, Frederick." He turned in the doorway and faced him for a last time. "Do we understand each other?" Very little had been said, but a great deal had been understood between them.

"I believe so, sir."

"Thank you, Frederick. Good night. I'll see you tomorrow."

Freddie heaved a sigh of relief as he closed the door behind him, and went to pour himself another Scotch before he went to bed, to think about what had happened to Sarah and the baby. He wondered what it must have been like, losing it, but didn't want to ask himself too many questions. He knew very little about things like that, and had no desire to expand his education. He was sorry for her, and he was sure it must have been awful for her, but it was odd how little he felt about the baby, or for that matter,

for Sarah. He had thought it would be so much fun to get married to her, parties all the time, someone to go out with whenever you wanted. He had never anticipated how shackled he would feel, how bored, how oppressed, how claustrophobic. There was nothing about being married he liked, not even Sarah. She was a beautiful girl, and she would have made the perfect wife for someone. She kept a beautiful home, cooked well, entertained beautifully, was intelligent and pleasant to be with, and he had even been excited by her physically at first. But now he just couldn't even bear to think about her. The last thing in the world he wanted was to be married. And he was so relieved that she had lost the child. That would have been the icing on a cake he already knew was poisoned.

He showed up at the hospital the next morning, dutifully just before ten o'clock, so Mr. Thompson would find him there when he arrived to pick up his wife. Freddie looked somber in a dark suit and dark tie, and the truth was that he was extremely hung over. He had bought flowers for her, but she didn't seem to care; she was lying in bed, staring out the window. She was holding her mother's hand as he walked into the room, and for a moment he felt sorry for her. She turned her head to look at him, and without a word, tears rolled down her cheeks, and her mother quietly left the room, with a squeeze of Sarah's hand, and a gentle touch on his shoulder.

"I'm sorry, Freddie," she said softly, as she left, but she was wiser than he knew, and just from the look on his face, she already knew that he wasn't.

"Are you mad at me?" Sarah asked him through her tears. She made no effort to get up, she just lay there. And she looked terrible. Her long, shining black hair was a tangled mess, and her face was the same color as the sheets, her lips looked almost blue. She had lost a lot of blood, and she was too weak to sit up. But all she did now was turn her face away from him, and he had no idea what to say to her.

"Of course not. Why would I be mad at you?" He moved a little closer to her, and moved her chin so that she would look at him again, but the pain in her eyes was almost more than he could bear. He wasn't up to dealing with it, and she knew it.

"It was my fault. ... I moved that stupid chest in our bedroom the other night, and ... I don't know ... the doctor says these things happen 'cause they're meant to."

"See ..." He shifted from one foot to the other, and watched her fold her hands and then unfold them, but he didn't reach out to touch her. "Look ... it's better this way anyway. I'm twenty-four, you're twenty, we're not ready for a baby."

She was silent for a long time, and then she looked at him as though seeing him for the first time. "You're happy we lost it, aren't you?" Her eyes bore into his until they almost caused him pain, as he tried to struggle with his headache.

"I didn't say that."

"You didn't have to. You're not sorry, are you?"

"I'm sorry for you." It was true. She looked really awful.

"You never wanted this baby."

"No, I didn't." He was honest with her, he felt that he at least owed her that much.

"Well, neither did I, thanks to you, and that's probably why I lost it." He didn't know what to say to her, and a moment later her father came in with Jane, and Mrs. Thompson was busy making arrangements with the nurses. Sarah was going to stay for a few more days, and then she was going home to stay with her parents. And when she felt strong again, she would go back to Freddie at the apartment.

"You're welcome to stay with us, of course." Victoria Thompson smiled her welcome to him, but she was firm about not letting Sarah go home to the apartment with him. She wanted to keep an eye on her, and Freddie was visibly relieved that he didn't have to.

He sent her red roses at the hospital the next day, and visited her once more, and he visited her daily during the week she stayed with her parents.

He never mentioned the baby to her. But he did his best to make conversation. He was surprised at how awkward he felt, being with her. It was as though overnight they had become strangers. The truth was that they always had been. It was just that now it was more difficult to hide it. He shared none of her grief with her. He only went to see her because he felt it his duty. And he knew her father would kill him if he didn't make the effort.

He arrived at the Thompson house each day at noon, spent an hour with her, and then went out to have lunch with his cronies. And he very wisely never stopped in to see her in the evening. He was always worse for wear by then, and he was smart enough not to let Sarah or her parents see him. He was really sorry Sarah was so unhappy over losing the child, and she still looked dreadful. But he couldn't bear thinking of it, or what she might expect from him emotionally, or worse yet, the prospect of another baby. It only made him drink more and run harder. And by the time Sarah was ready to come home to him, he was in a downward spiral from which no one could save him. His drinking was so out of control that even some of his own drinking buddies were worried about him.

He nonetheless dutifully showed up at the Thompsons' to take Sarah home, and the maid was waiting for them at their own apartment. Everything was clean and in order, although suddenly Sarah felt out of place there. It felt like someone else's home and she felt like a stranger.

Freddie was a stranger there too. He had only been there to change his clothes since she'd lost the baby. He'd been out carousing every night, taking full advantage of the fact that she wasn't there to see it. And now it was odd and very confining to have her at home again.