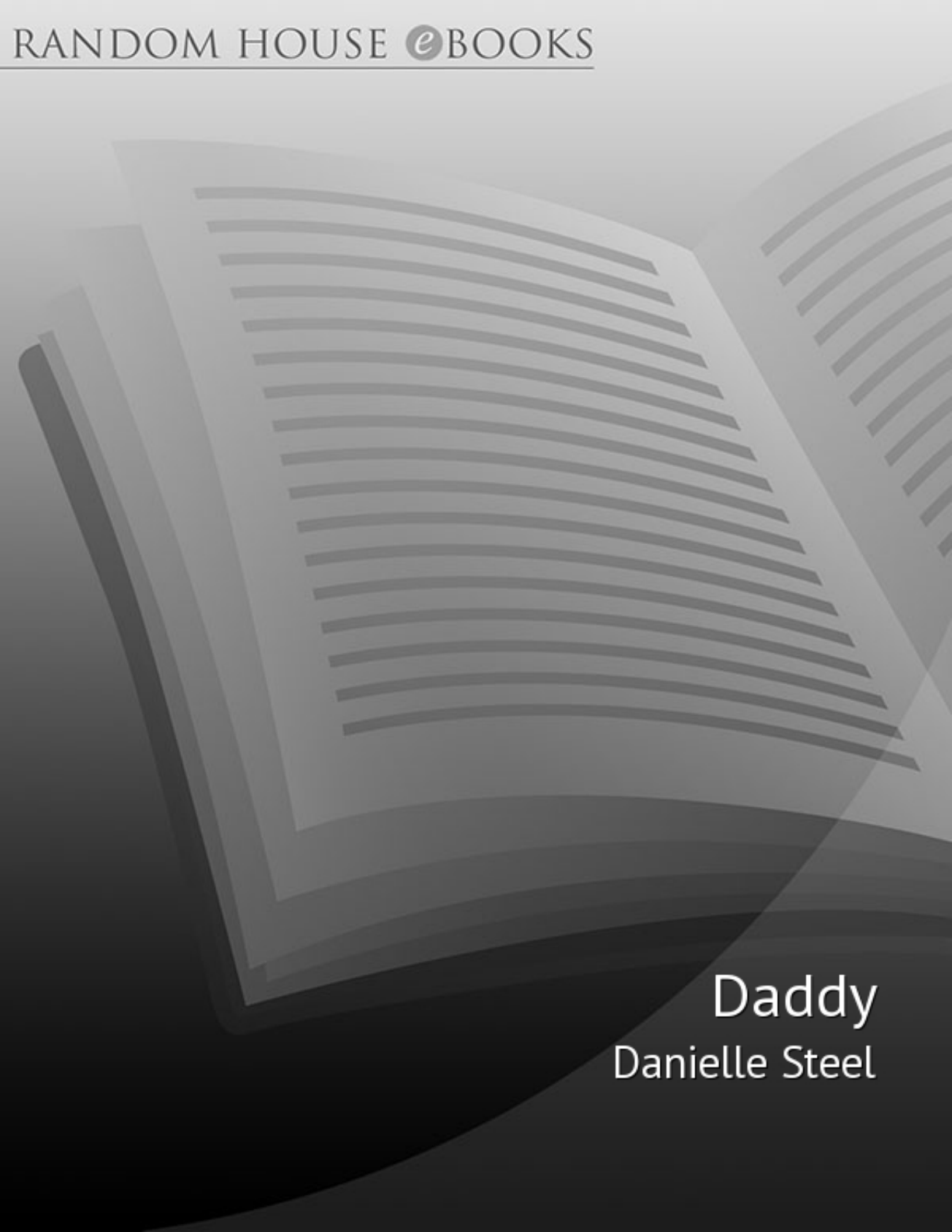


RANDOM HOUSE  BOOKS



Daddy
Danielle Steel

About the Book

To the outside world, Sarah and Oliver Watson have the perfect marriage. Happy and successful, with three beautiful children, they seem to have it all. But under the surface, Sarah feels lost, empty and inadequate. And one Christmas, after eighteen years of marriage, she walks out.

Left alone, Oliver struggles to cope with raising his three children. Benjamin, the eldest, rebels with disastrous consequences, while fifteen-year-old Melissa angrily turns against her father, and nine-year-old Sam, the 'baby', is too shaken to deal with his mother's abandonment.

And then tragedy strikes once more when Oliver's mother dies in an untimely accident. Three generations of the Watson family find that they must pull together to cope, and maybe one day move on and love again...

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About the Author

Also by Danielle Steel

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DANIELLE
STEEL

DADDY

DADDY

To the Very Best Daddy
I know . . . times nine!
Daddy theirs. . . .

Daddy ours. . . .

Daddy mine!!

With all my heart,
With all my love,
To Popeye again,
but this time from
All of us,

with all my heart

and soul,

my love,

from

Olive.

Daddy

First love,
first son,
or perhaps
a precious
daughter,
their laughter
swift
and sweet,
his hand so sure,
his love so pure,
his loyalty
to them
amazing,
his patience
vast,
and his heart
wider
than the heavens,
the leaven
for their
lives,
the bright sun
in their skies,
the one to
whom they
turn,
the man for whom
they burn,
the flame
of love
so bright,

his wisdom
always right,
his hand
so strong,
so seldom
wrong,
so sweet,
so near,
so dear,
so much the hub
of all,
and once upon a time
so tall,
his love for them
never waning,
always entertaining,
handsome,
dashing,
teaching,
reaching
for the stars,
driving funny cars,
a loving hand and heart
for every lass
and laddy,
beloved man,
eternal friend,
how lucky
you are,
sweet children,
to have him
for
your
daddy.

Chapter 1

THE SNOWFLAKES FELL in big white clusters, clinging together like a drawing in a fairy tale, just like in the books Sarah used to read to the children. She sat at the typewriter, looking out the window, watching snow cover the lawn, hanging from the trees like lace, and she completely forgot the story she'd been chasing around in her head since early that morning. It was so damn picturesque. So pretty. Everything was pretty here. It was a storybook life in a storybook town, and the people around her seemed like storybook people. They were exactly what she had never wanted to become, and now she was one of them, and had been for years. And probably always would be. Sarah McCormick, the rebel, the assistant editor of the *Crimson*, the girl who had graduated from Radcliffe in 1969 at the top of her class and knew she was different, had become one of them. Overnight. Or almost. In truth, it had taken almost twenty years. And now she was Sarah Watson. Mrs. Oliver Wendell Watson. She lived in Purchase, New York, in a beautiful house they almost owned, after fourteen years of struggling with the mortgage. She had three children, one dog, the last hamster had finally died the year before. And she had a husband she loved. Dear sweet Ollie. He graduated from Harvard Business School when she finished Radcliffe, and they'd been in love since her sophomore year. But he was everything that she wasn't. He was conservative when she was wild, he had believed in what they had tried to do in Vietnam, and for a while she had

hated him for it. She had even stopped seeing him for a time after graduation, because she insisted that they were too different. She had gone to live in SoHo, in New York, and tried to write, and she'd actually done pretty well. She'd been published twice in *The Atlantic Monthly*, and once ... holy of holies ... in *The New Yorker*. She was good and she knew it. And Oliver lived uptown, in an apartment he shared with two friends on East 79th Street, and with his MBA, he got a pretty good job in an ad agency on Madison Avenue. She wanted to hate him for it, wanted to hate him for conforming, but she didn't. Even then, she knew how much she loved him.

He talked about things like living in the country, having Irish setters, wanting four kids, and a wife who didn't work, and she made fun of him for it. But he just grinned that incredible boyish grin that made her heart pound even then ... even when she pretended to herself that what she really wanted was a man with hair longer than her own ... an artist ... a sculptor ... a writer ... someone "creative." Oliver was creative, and he was smart. He had graduated magna from Harvard, and the trends of the sixties had never touched him. When she marched, he fished her out of jail, when she argued with him, even calling him names, he explained quietly and rationally what he believed in. And he was so damn decent, so good-hearted, he was her best friend, even when he made her angry. They would meet in the Village sometimes, or uptown for coffee, or drinks, or lunch, and he would tell her what he was doing and ask her about the latest piece she was writing. He knew she was good, too, but he didn't see why she couldn't be "creative" and married.

"... Marriage is for women who are looking for someone to support them. I want to take care of myself, Oliver Watson." And she was capable of it, or she had been then, after a fashion. She had worked as a part-time gallery sitter

in SoHo, and a free-lance writer. And she'd made money at it. Sometimes. But now, sometimes, she wondered if she would still be able to take care of herself, to support herself, to fill out her own tax forms, and make sure her health insurance hadn't lapsed. In the eighteen years they'd been married, she'd become so dependent on him. He took care of all the little problems in her life, and most of the big ones. It was like living in a hermetically sealed world, with Ollie always there to protect her.

She counted on him for everything, and more often than not, it scared her. What if something happened to him? Could she manage? Would she be able to keep the house, to support herself, or the kids? She tried to talk to him about it sometimes, and he only laughed, and told her she'd never have to worry. He hadn't made a fortune, but he had done well and he was responsible. He had lots of life insurance. Madison Avenue had been good to him, and at forty-four, he was the number three man at Hinkley, Burrows, and Dawson, one of the biggest ad agencies in the country. He had brought in their four biggest accounts himself and he was valuable to the firm, and respected among his peers. He had been one of the youngest vice-presidents in the business, and she was proud of him. But it still scared her. What was she doing out here, in pretty little Purchase, watching the snow fall, and waiting for the kids to come home, while she pretended to write a story ... a story that would never be written, that would never end, that would never go anywhere, just like the others she had tried to write in the last two years. She had decided to go back to writing on the eve of her thirty-ninth birthday. It had been an important decision for her. Thirty-nine had actually been worse than turning forty. By forty, she was resigned to "impending doom," as she woefully called it. Oliver took her to Europe alone for a month for her fortieth birthday. The kids were away at camp, two of them anyway, and her

mother-in-law had kept Sam. He had only been seven then, and it was the first time she'd left him. It had been like opening the gates to heaven when she got to Paris ... no car pools ... no children ... no pets ... no PTA ... no benefit dinners to run for the school or the local hospitals ... no one ... nothing ... except the two of them, and four unforgettable weeks in Europe. Paris ... Rome ... driving through Tuscany, a brief stop on the Italian Riviera, and then a few days on a boat he rented, drifting between Cannes and St. Tropez ... driving up to Eze and Saint-Paul-de-Vence, and dinner at the Colombe d'Or, and then a few final whirlwind days in London. She had scribbled constantly during the trip, and filled seven notebooks. But when she got home ... nothing. None of it wanted to be woven into stories, or tales, or articles, or even poems. She just sat there, staring at her notebooks, and a blank page in her typewriter that she never seemed to fill. And she was still doing it a year and a half later. At forty-one, she felt as though her entire life were behind her. And Oliver always laughed at her when she said it.

"Christ, Sarrie ... you haven't changed a bit since I met you." And he meant it. It was almost true. But not quite. She, and those who wanted to be critical, could tell the difference. The shining dark red hair that used to hang down her back in sheets of coppery brilliance had faded to a reddish brown now. She wore it to her shoulders and there were more than a few threads of silver, which bothered the children more than they did Sarah. The bright blue eyes were the same, they were a dark, vibrant blue, and the creamy skin was still fine and for the most part unlined, but there were tiny traces of time here and there, but Oliver only said that they gave her face more expression. She was a pretty woman, and she had been a pretty girl, long and lean, with a good figure and graceful hands, and a sense of humor that danced in her eyes. It was

that that he had loved about her from the first. Her laughter and her fire, and her courage, and her rabid determination to stick by what she believed in. There were those who thought her difficult when she was young, but not Ollie. Never Ollie. He liked the way she thought, and the things she said, and the way she said them. They had a relationship built on mutual respect and caring, and they had a very good time in bed. They always had, and they still did. Sometimes he even thought that after twenty years it was better. And it was, in some ways. They knew each other perfectly, like satin-smooth wood that had been touched and caressed and traveled a thousand times by loving hands and the tenderness of true belonging.

It had taken him exactly two years to convince her to marry him after her SoHo days, and at twenty-three she had become Mrs. Oliver Watson. Balking all the way, and in typical fashion, she had refused to have a traditional wedding. They had been married in the garden of his parents' Pound Ridge home, and her parents and her younger sister had come from Chicago. Sarah had worn a bright red dress and a big picture hat, and she looked more like a young girl in a painting than a bride, but they had both been happy. They had gone to Bermuda for their honeymoon, and the weather had been lousy, but they never noticed. They laughed and played, and stayed in bed until the late afternoon, emerging only for an early foray in the staid dining room of the hotel, and then they would hurry back to their room again, giggling and laughing, like two children.

It was three weeks after that that Sarah was less amused. They were living in a small apartment on Second Avenue, in a building filled with stewardesses and young executives, and "singles" who seemed to turn the entire building into a constant party.

He had come home from work to find her looking as though her best friend had died. But it was no friend, it was only "the rabbit." She had been puzzled by the absence of her period once they got home, but she had been religious about using her diaphragm, and knew she couldn't be pregnant. She had worn it practically night and day from the altar till they got home from their honeymoon, but somehow, some way, something had gone wrong, and she was pregnant. And she wanted to have an abortion. Oliver was horrified that she would even think of it. But Sarah was even more so at the thought of having children so quickly.

"We don't want a family yet ... I want to get a job again ... to do something ..." She'd been thinking of getting a job this time as an editor at a literary magazine, her stories hadn't been selling quite as well, and she had applied to Columbia Graduate School to do some work toward her master's. She had quit the gallery-sitting job as soon as she married Ollie, because commuting to SoHo every day wouldn't have been convenient.

"You can always get a job later!" He reasoned with her. He comforted, he cajoled, he did everything he could to try to make her feel better. But she was inconsolable, and every evening on the way home, he was suddenly overwhelmed by a wave of terror ... what if she did it ... if she went to someone while he was at work, and had an abortion. But she didn't. Somehow, she was too sick, and too exhausted, and too depressed to even attempt it, and the next thing she knew she was waddling around their apartment, wondering how she could have let it happen. But Oliver was thrilled. He wanted four kids, he had always said so, and even if it stretched their budget just then, he was willing to face it. He was doing well, advancing rapidly in the firm, and even if they had been starving, he wouldn't have let her get an abortion. He just wouldn't. It was their baby. Theirs. And long before the baby came, he loved it.

Benjamin Watson arrived with a shock of bright red hair, and a look of astonishment in his bright eyes, exactly nine months and three days after his parents' wedding. He looked anxious to discover the world, cried a lot, and looked almost exactly like his mother, much to Oliver's delight, who was thrilled to have a son, and particularly one who looked like Sarah. Benjamin grew like a weed, and had more than Sarah's looks. He had her determination, her stubbornness, and her fiery temper. And there were days when she thought she would strangle the child before Oliver got home to soothe them. Within minutes of his arrival on the scene, he had the baby cooing happily, laughing, playing peekaboo, and he walked around the house, carrying him in his arms, while Sarah collapsed in a chair with a sigh and a glass of wine, wondering how she was going to survive it. Motherhood was definitely not her strong suit, and the apartment was so small, it was driving her crazy. When the weather was bad, as it often was that year, they couldn't get out at all, and the baby's screams seemed to echo off the walls until she thought she would go crazy. Oliver wanted to move them out of town somewhere to a home of their own, but that dream was still a long way off, they couldn't afford it. Sarah offered to get a job, but whenever they tried to figure it out, it seemed pointless, whatever she might have earned would have gone to pay a sitter, leaving them with no more money than they had before. The only purpose it would serve would be to get her out of the house, and although it appealed to Sarah, Oliver thought that it was important for her to be with the baby.

"Talk about chauvinistic, Ol. What do you expect me to do, sit here all day and talk to myself while he screams?" There were days when she really thought she couldn't take it. And the prospect of having the four children he still wanted made her suicidal.

Her own parents were no help because they were in Chicago, and for all their good intentions, his weren't much better. His mother had had one child, and the memory of how to cope with it seemed to have escaped her. Being around Benjamin only seemed to make her nervous. But not nearly as nervous as it was making Sarah.

Eventually the baby settled down, and Benjamin seemed a lot less terrifying to her by the time he was walking. They were finally out of the woods. They rented a house on Long Island for the summer, and in another year she could send him to nursery school ... one more year ... she was almost home free ... and then she could go back to writing. She had given up the idea of a job. She wanted to write a novel. Everything was starting to look up, and then she got the flu. It was the flu to end all flus, and after a month of it, she was convinced she was dying. She had never been so sick in her life. She had a cold that simply would not go away, a cough that sounded like TB, and she was nauseated from morning till night from coughing. In the end, after four weeks of battling it, she decided to go to the expense and see the doctor. She had the flu, but she had more than that. She was expecting another baby. This time there was no anger, no rages, no outrage or fury, there was simply despair, and what seemed to Oliver like hours and hours and hours of crying. She couldn't face it, she couldn't do it again. She couldn't handle another child, and Benjamin wasn't even out of diapers, and now there would be two of them. It was the only time she had actually seen Oliver down too. He didn't know what to do to turn her around. And just like the first time, he was thrilled about the baby, but telling her that only made her cry harder.

"I can't ... I just can't, Ollie ... please ... don't make me. ..."

They argued about an abortion again, and once she almost swayed him, for fear that if he didn't agree, she might go crazy. But he talked her out of it, and he got a

raise when she was halfway through the pregnancy, and spent every penny of it hiring a woman to come in and help her with Benjamin three afternoons a week. She was an Irish girl from a family of thirteen children, and she was just what Sarah needed. Suddenly she could go out, to libraries, to meet friends, to art galleries and museums, and her disposition improved immeasurably. She even started to enjoy Benjamin, and once or twice she took him to the museum with her. And Oliver knew that although she wouldn't admit it to him, she was beginning to look forward to their second baby.

Melissa was born when Benjamin was two, and Oliver started thinking seriously about moving his family to the country. They looked at houses in Connecticut almost every weekend, and finally decided they just couldn't afford them. They tried Long Island, Westchester, and it seemed as though every weekend they were riding to look at houses. Pound Ridge, Rye, Bronxville, Katonah, and then finally, after a year, they found just what they wanted in Purchase. It was an old farmhouse that hadn't been lived in in twenty years, and it needed an enormous amount of work. It was part of an estate, and they got it for a song in probate. A song that still cost them dearly to sing, but scraping and saving and doing most of the work themselves, they turned it into a remarkably pretty place within a year, and they were both proud of it. "But this does not mean I'm going to have more children, Oliver Watson!" As far as she was concerned, it was enough of a sacrifice that she was living in the suburbs. She had sworn that she would never do that when they were dating. But even she had to admit that it made more sense. The apartment on Second Avenue had been impossible to manage, and everything else they'd looked at in town seemed tiny and was ridiculously expensive. Here the children had their own rooms.

There was a huge but cozy living room with a fireplace, a library they lovingly filled with books, a cozy kitchen with two brick walls, heavy wooden beams overhead, and an old-fashioned stove that Sarah insisted on restoring and keeping. It had huge bay windows that looked over what she magically turned into a garden, and she could watch the children playing outside when she was cooking. With their move to the country, she had lost the Irish girl, and it was just as well, because for the moment they couldn't afford her.

Benjamin was three by then anyway, and he was in school every morning, and two years later Melissa was in school too, and Sarah told herself she would go back to writing. But somehow there was no time anymore. She always had things to do. She was doing volunteer work at the local hospital, working one day a week at the children's school, running errands, doing car pools, keeping the house clean, ironing Ollie's shirts, and working in the garden. It was a hell of a switch for the once assistant editor of the *Crimson*. But the funny thing was, she didn't mind it.

Once they left New York, it was as though a part of her got left behind there, the part of her that had still been fighting marriage and motherhood. Suddenly, she seemed a part of the peaceful little world around her. She met other women with children the same age, there were couples they played tennis and bridge with on the weekends, her volunteer work seemed to be constantly more demanding, and the thrashing and fighting she had done was all but forgotten. And along with all of that went her writing. She didn't even miss it anymore. All she wanted was what she had, a happy, busy little life with her husband and children.

Benjamin's screaming babyhood began to fade into distant memory and he turned into a sweet sunny child, who not only had her looks but seemed to share all her interests and passions and values. He was like a little

sponge, soaking up everything she was, and in many ways, he was like a mirror of Sarah. Oliver saw it and laughed, and although Sarah seldom admitted it to anyone, in some ways it flattered and amused her. He was so much like her. Melissa was a sweet child too, she was easier than Benjamin had been, and in some ways she was more like her father. She had an easy smile, and a happy attitude about life. And she didn't seem to want much from either of them. She was happy following Sarah everywhere with a book or a doll or a puzzle. Sometimes, Sarah even forgot she was in the next room. She was an undemanding little girl, and she had Oliver's blond hair and green eyes, yet she didn't really look like him. She looked more like his mother actually, which when commented on by her in-laws never failed to annoy Sarah.

She and Oliver's mother had never really become friends. Mrs. Watson had been outspoken early on and had told her only son what she thought of Sarah before they were married. She thought her a headstrong, difficult girl, who wanted her own way at any price, and she always feared that one day she might hurt Oliver badly. But so far Sarah had been a good wife to him, she admitted to her husband begrudgingly when he stood up for the girl, but Sarah always felt that the older woman was watching her, as though waiting for some slip, some faux pas, some terrible failing that would prove her right in the end. The only joy the two women shared was the two children, who delighted Mrs. Watson, and whom Sarah loved now as though she had wanted them from the first, which Mrs. Watson still remembered she hadn't. Oliver had never told her anything, but she had sensed what was going on, without being told. She was an intelligent woman with a quick eye, and she knew perfectly well that Sarah hadn't been happy to be pregnant, nor had she enjoyed Benjamin's early days, but on the other hand, she had to admit that he hadn't been

an easy baby. He had unnerved her, too, with his constant colicky screaming. But all of that was forgotten now, as the children grew, and Sarah and Oliver thrived, both of them busy and happy, and doing well. And Sarah finally seemed to have given up her literary aspirations, which had always seemed a little excessive to Mrs. Watson.

"She's a good girl, Phyllis. Don't be so hard on her. She was young when they got married. And she makes Oliver very happy." Her husband had always been more philosophical than she was.

"I know ... but I always get the feeling that she wants something more, something just out of reach ... something that will cost Oliver dearly." It was an astute remark, more so than she knew. But George Watson shook his head with an indulgent smile.

"Ollie can handle her."

"I'm not sure he wants to. I think he'd let her have anything she wants, whatever the cost to him. He's that kind of man." She smiled gently up at the husband she had loved for almost forty years, years that were too precious to even count now. They had become bonded like one body, one soul, long since. She couldn't even remember a time without him. "He's just like his father. Too good. Sometimes that can be dangerous in the hands of the wrong woman." She was always concerned about her son, and even after all these years, always faintly distrustful of Sarah.

But the compliment had not gone unnoticed by her husband, as he smiled down at his bride with the look that still made her tingle. "Give the girl a little credit, Phyllis. She hasn't hurt our boy, and she's given him, and us, two beautiful children." Indeed they were, and although neither of them looked exactly like their father, they both had some of his classic good looks. Oliver was tall and graceful and athletic-looking, with thick, straight blond hair that had been the envy of every mother when he was a child, and

every girl when he was in college. And although Sarah seldom acknowledged it to him, because she didn't want to bloat his ego beyond something she could cope with, more than once she had heard it said that Oliver Watson was the best-looking man in Purchase. For six months of the year, he had a deep tan, and his green eyes seemed to dance with mischief and laughter. And yet he was unaware of his good looks, which made him all the more attractive.

"Do you think they'll have more children, George?" Phyllis often wondered but would never have dared to ask her son, much less Sarah.

"I don't know, darling. I think they have a full life as it is. And these days, you can never be too sure of what's going to happen. Oliver is in an insecure business. Advertising is nothing like banking when I was a young man. You can't count on anything anymore. It's probably wiser for them not to." George Watson had been talking that way for the past year. He had lived long enough to watch many of his investments, once so sound, begin to shrink and dwindle. The cost of living was astonishingly high, and he and Phyllis had to be careful. They had a pretty little house in Westchester they had bought fifteen years before, around the time when Oliver was in college. They knew that he'd never be coming home again for any great length of time, and it seemed foolish to continue hanging on to their rambling old house in New London. But George worried about their finances constantly now. It wasn't that they were destitute by any means, but if they both lived another twenty-five years, which at fifty-nine and sixty-two they still could, and he hoped they did, it could stretch their savings beyond their limit. He had just retired from the bank and was getting a decent pension. And he had made numerous wise investments over the years, but still ... you could never be too careful. It was what he told Oliver every time he saw him. He had seen a lot in his lifetime, one big war

and several small ones. He had fought in Guadalcanal, and been lucky enough to survive it. He had been twelve in the crash of '29, he knew just how brutal the Depression had been, and he had seen the economy go up and down over the years. He wanted his son to be careful. "I don't see why they'd want any more children."

And Sarah completely agreed with him. It was one of the few subjects on which she and George Watson were in total agreement. Whenever the subject came up with Oliver, once in a while in bed late at night, or on a quiet walk in the woods in a remote corner of Purchase, she always told him she thought it was silly to even consider it. "Why would we want more kids now, Ollie? Melissa and Benjamin are growing up. They're easy, they have their own lives. In a few years we'll be able to do anything we want. Why tie ourselves down with all those headaches again?" Even the thought of it made her shudder.

"It wouldn't be the same this time. We could afford someone to help us. I don't know ... I just think it would be nice. One day we might regret not having more children." He looked at her tenderly with the eyes that almost made women swoon at the PTA, but Sarah pretended not to notice.

"The kids wouldn't even like the idea by now. Benjamin's seven, and Melissa's five. A baby would seem like an intrusion to them. You have to think of that. We owe something to them too." She sounded so definite, so sure, and he smiled and took her hand as they walked back to where they had parked the car. He had just bought his first Mercedes. And she didn't know it yet, but he was going to give her a fur coat for Christmas. He had just picked it out at Bergdorf Goodman, and it was being monogrammed with her initials.

"You certainly sound sure." As always, he sounded disappointed.

"I am sure." And she was. There was no way he was going to talk her into having another baby. She was thirty-one years old, and she liked her life just fine the way it was. She was swamped with committee work all day long, she spent half her life running car pools, and the rest of it going to Cub Scouts and Melissa's ballet class. Enough was enough. He had tamed her as far as she was willing to be tamed. They had the picket fence, and the two kids, and the house in the country, and they had even bought an Irish setter the year before. More than that she could not give, even for Ollie.

"What do you say we take the kids skiing after Christmas?" he asked as they got in the car. He liked to stay close to home for the actual holidays, because he thought it was more fun to be at home, and he thought it was nicer for his parents. Sarah's parents had her sister and her kids, and they went to Chicago every Christmas from Grosse Pointe, but his parents had only him. And Sarah had no burning desire to go home for the holidays anyway. They had done it once, and she had complained about it for three years. Her sister annoyed her, and Sarah and her mother had never gotten along either, so the arrangement they had was perfect.

"That would be fun. Where? Vermont?"

"What about something a little racier this year? What about Aspen?"

"Are you serious? That must have been one hell of a bonus you got last week." He had brought in the agency's biggest client ever. He still hadn't told her how big the bonus was, and they had both been so busy in the last week, she hadn't pressed him.

"Big enough to splurge a little if you'd like to. Or we could stay around here, and then go away just the two of us after the kids are back in school, if you want to. My mom would come and stay with them." She had before, and now

that they were a little older, it worked better, "What do you think?"

"I think it sounds terrific!" She gave him a hug, and they ended up necking in the new car, which smelled of men's cologne and new leather.

And in the end, they did both. They went to Aspen with the kids for the week between Christmas and New Year, and a month later, he took Sarah away for a romantic week in Jamaica at Round Hill, in their own villa, overlooking Montego Bay. They laughed about their honeymoon in Bermuda, about how they had never left their room, and barely managed to stay in the dining room long enough to have dinner. This vacation was no different. They played tennis and swam and lay on the beach every morning, but by late afternoon, they were making passionate love in the privacy of the villa. And four nights out of six they made special arrangements for room service. It was the most romantic trip they had ever taken, and they both felt reborn when they left Jamaica. Sarah was always amazed to realize how passionately she still loved him. She had known him for twelve years, been married to him for eight, and yet she felt as though their romance was still fresh, and it was obvious that Oliver felt the same about Sarah. He devoured her with the energy of an eighteen-year-old, and more than that, he loved to talk to her for hours. The sex they shared had always been great, but with the years came new vistas, new ideas, new horizons, and their ideas were no longer as diverse or as sharply polarized as they once had been. With the years, they had grown slowly together, and he teased her about becoming more conservative, while he had slowly become a little more liberal. But he felt as though they had slowly become one person, with one mind, one heart, and one direction.

They returned from Jamaica in a kind of haze, mellowed, slowed down from their usual pace, and the morning after

they returned, Oliver sat at breakfast and admitted that he hated to leave her and go to the office. They exchanged a secret look over the children's heads at breakfast. She had burned the toast, left lumps the size of eggs in the Cream of Wheat, and the bacon was almost raw when she served it.

"Great breakfast, Mom!" Benjamin teased. "You must have had a terrific time on vacation, you forgot how to cook!" He guffawed at his own joke, and Melissa giggled. She was still much shyer than Benjamin, and at five she worshiped him as her first and only hero, after her father.

The children left for school in their car pools, and Oliver to catch his train, and Sarah found it impossible to get going. She was disorganized all day, and she felt as though she couldn't get anything done. By dinnertime, she still hadn't left the house, and had puttered around all day, getting nothing accomplished. She assumed it was the price of having had too good a time on vacation.

But the condition persisted for weeks. She barely managed to crawl through the days, and just doing car pools and chauffeuring the kids from here to there seemed to sap all the energy she had, and by ten o'clock at night she was in bed, gently snoring.

"It must be old age," she groaned to Oliver one Saturday morning as she attempted to sort through a stack of bills, unable to do even that without feeling exhausted and distracted.

"Maybe you're anemic." She had been once or twice before, and it seemed a simple explanation of what was becoming an annoying problem. She hadn't accomplished anything in a month, and she had two spring benefits to put on, and all of it seemed like too much trouble.

On Monday morning, she went into the doctor's office for a blood test and a checkup, and for no reason she could

think of, when she picked up the children that afternoon she already felt better.

"I think it's all in my head," she reported to Oliver when he called to say he had to work late and wouldn't be home for dinner. "I went in for a checkup today, and I already feel better."

"What did he say?"

"Nothing much." She didn't tell him that the doctor had asked if she was depressed, or unhappy, or if she and Ollie were having trouble. Apparently one of the early signs of depression was chronic exhaustion. Whatever it was, it was nothing serious, she was sure of that. Even the doctor said she seemed to be in good health, she had even gained five pounds in three weeks since their trip to Jamaica. It was no wonder, all she did was sit around and sleep. Even her diligent reading had been neglected, and she hadn't gotten back to her weekly tennis game again. She had promised to the next day, and was on her way out the door, feeling tired, but with racket in hand, when the doctor called her.

"Everything's fine, Sarah." He had called her himself, which worried her at first, but then she decided it was just a kindness after all the years she'd known him. "You're in good health, no anemia, no major problems." She could almost hear him smiling, and she was so tired, it annoyed her.

"Then why am I so goddamn tired all the time? I can hardly put one foot after another."

"Your memory is failing you, my dear."

"Terrific. You're telling me I'm getting senile? Great. That's just what I wanted to hear at nine-fifteen in the morning."

"How about some good news then?"

"Like what?"

"Like a new baby." He sounded as though he had just announced a million-dollar gift and she felt as though she

was going to faint dead away in her kitchen, tennis racket in hand, as she listened.

"Are you kidding? In this house, that's no joke. My children are practically grown ... I ... I can't ... shit!" She sat down heavily in a convenient chair, fighting back tears. He couldn't mean it. But she knew he did. And suddenly she knew what she had been unwilling to face. Denial had kept her from knowing the truth. She hadn't missed a period because she was anemic or overworked or overage. She was pregnant. She hadn't even told Ollie. She had told herself it was nothing. Some nothing. But this time there was no doubt what she would do. This was 1979. Her children were a reasonable age. She was thirty-one years old. And abortions were legal. This time Oliver was not going to talk her out of it. She was *not* going to have a baby. "How pregnant am I?" But she knew ... it had to be ... it had happened in Jamaica ... just like it had happened in Bermuda when she conceived Benjamin on their honeymoon ... goddamn vacation.

"When was your last period?" She calculated rapidly backward and told him. In medical parlance, she was six weeks pregnant. In "people talk," it was only about a month, which meant she had plenty of time to get an abortion. For a moment, she even wondered about getting one without saying anything to Ollie. But she wasn't going to mention it to their doctor. She would call her gynecologist and get an appointment. "Congratulations, Sarah. You're a lucky girl. I hope Oliver will be happy."

"I'm sure he will be." Her voice felt like lead in her throat as she thanked him and hung up, and with shaking fingers dialed her gynecologist and made an appointment for the following morning. And then, in a panic, she remembered her tennis partners waiting for her on the court at the Westchester Country Club. She would have liked not to go, but it wouldn't have been fair to them, and she hurried out

the door and turned the key in the ignition of her station wagon. And as she did, she caught a glimpse of herself in the mirror. This couldn't be happening to her ... it couldn't be ... it wasn't fair ... when she grew up she was going to be a writer ... when ... if ... or maybe not. Maybe all she'd ever be was a housewife. The ultimate condemnation when she was in college. The thing she had never wanted to be, and now was. That was all she was, wasn't it? A housewife. She said it out loud in the car as though it were a dirty word ... a baby ... Jesus Christ ... a baby ... and what did it matter if it would be different this time, if they could afford help, if the house was big enough to accommodate all of them. The baby would still scream all night, still need to be bathed and dressed and fed and taken care of, and nurtured, and driven around and taken to the orthodontist one day. She would never get a chance to do what she wanted now. Never. She felt as though the unborn child, the mere knowledge of it, were threatening her very existence. And she wouldn't let it.

She forced the car into reverse and shot out of the driveway, and ten minutes later she was at the tennis courts, looking pale, and feeling sick, knowing what she did now.

She managed to keep the patter of conversation somehow, and that night she was grateful that Ollie had to stay late at the office, working on a presentation for a new client. A very big one. But what did it matter now how big his clients were? In Sarah's mind, her life was over.

She was asleep when he got home that night, and managed somehow to get through breakfast the next morning. He asked her what was bothering her, and she told him she had a splitting headache.

"Did you find out about those tests yet? I'll bet you really are anemic." He looked suddenly worried, and instead of

loving him for it, she hated him as she thought of what he had planted inside her.

"Not yet. They haven't called." She turned away to put the plates in the dishwasher so he wouldn't see the lie in her eyes, and a few minutes later he was gone, and the children had been picked up by their car pools. And an hour later she was at the gynecologist's office, planning for her abortion, but the doctor threw her a curve, and asked her how Ollie felt about what she was doing. "I ... he ... uh ..." She couldn't lie to the man. He knew her too well, and in addition to that, she liked him. She looked directly at him with a strange light in her eye, and silently dared him to defy her. "I haven't told him."

"About the abortion or the baby?" He looked startled. He had always thought that they had a very happy marriage, the kind in which two people confide easily and openly in each other.

"Neither one. And I'm not going to." His face set as he listened to her and he slowly shook his head in disapproval.

"I think you're making a mistake, Sarah. He has a right to know. It's his child too." And then he had an uncomfortable thought. Perhaps there were things about them he didn't know. Anything was possible. "It is ... isn't it?"

She smiled in answer. "Of course it is. I just don't want to have it." She told him all the reasons why and he made no comment, but when she was through, he repeated again that he thought she should discuss it with her husband. He urged her to think about it, and after she had he would make the appointment for her, but not before.

"You're still a very young woman. You're certainly not too old to have this baby."

"I want my freedom. In eleven years, my son will be in college, and my daughter two years later. If I have this baby, I'll be tied down for another twenty years. I'm not ready to make that kind of commitment." It sounded

incredibly selfish, even to her ears, but she couldn't help it. That was how she felt. And no one was going to change that.

"Is that what Oliver feels too?" She didn't answer for a long moment. She didn't want to tell him that Ollie had always wanted more children.

"I haven't discussed it with him,"

"Well, I think you should. Call me in a few days, Sarah. You have time to make the decision and still do things safely."

"Time isn't going to change anything." She felt defiant and angry and let down as she left his office. He was the one who was supposed to solve the problem for her and now he wasn't.

She went home and cried, and when Oliver came home at eleven o'clock that night, she was in bed, feigning another headache. The children were long since asleep, and she had left the TV on in the bedroom, droning at her as she waited for him to come home, but still sure she wouldn't tell him.

"How'd it go today? You look tired." She looked up at him sadly as he walked into the bedroom.

"It went okay," he said as he sat down on the edge of the bed and smiled at her and loosened his tie. The blond hair looked tousled by the wind, and he was tired, but he still looked unbearably handsome. How could he look like that? Life was so simple for him. All he had to do was go to an office every day and deal with real people in a real world. He got to have all the fun, while she spent every waking hour with women and children. There were things about life that weren't fair, and in her eyes, that was one of them. There were times when she wished she were a man, when she wished she had lived her life differently, when she wished she had gotten a job years before, instead of doing what she'd done. But this was so easy. She had taken the