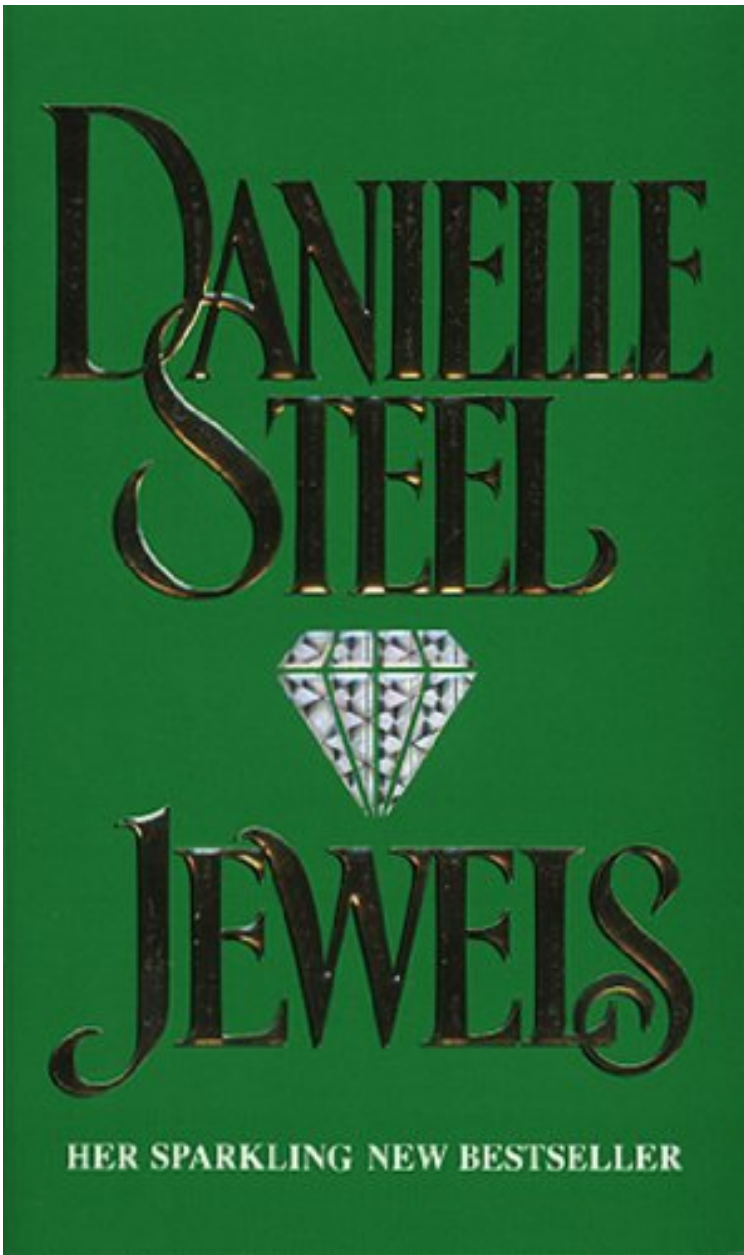


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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurOn 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 Wiliam, 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.

Birthdays are a time for reflection, especially for Sarah, Duchess of Whitfield, who is awaiting the arrival of her far-flung family. Years earlier, reeling from her pending divorce, Sarah Thompson is force-marched through Europe on the grand tour by her concerned parents. Disinterested in the sons, grandsons, and nephews paraded before her by well-meaning acquaintances, Sarah chances upon William Whitfield, the Duke of Whitfield, 14th in line for succession to the English throne. Disarmed by his wit and intrigued by his intellect, Sarah allows William to become her companion in London, warning him they can only be friends. Undeterred, William dismisses Sarah's protestations that her divorce makes her unsuitable to be his duchess and finally convinces Sarah to marry him. While honeymooning in France, Sarah and William happen upon Chateau de la Meuze. Enchanted, the Whitfields buy and set about restoring the estate. But World War II looms, threatening their idyllic existence. Following the birth of their first child, Phillip, William joins the RAF when England declares war on Germany. Reluctantly, he leaves Sarah and Phillip at the chateau. German troops, led by the courtly commandant Joachim von Mannheim, take possession of the chateau to establish a hospital, removing Sarah and Phillip to the caretaker's cottage. When the war ends, William, after being imprisoned for three years and barely surviving the torture that deprived him of the use of his legs, returns to his family. The Whitfields pick up threads of lives strained, but not broken, by war. Soon, they are approached by others who lost everything during the war except a few secreted heirlooms. But jewelry can't put food on the table, and the Whitfields begin purchasing jewelry to provide neighbors with much-needed cash. When William jokingly suggests opening a Paris store, a legacy is born: Whitfield's, Jewelers to the Crown. Over the next decades, which bring three more children, two more branches of Whitfields, and the death of her husband, Sarah is molded into a force to be reckoned with, capable of handling her willful children and a highly successful international business with equal aplomb. Steel paints a portrait of a family, imperfect as they may be, and the powerful matriarch who reminds them of the bond that transcends titles, money, and borders.

--Alison Trinkle

Extrait

Chapter One

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 Ntre, as Versailles' had been, the trees towering canopies of green framing the park of the Chateau de la Meuze. The chateau 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 Dach. 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. #160...