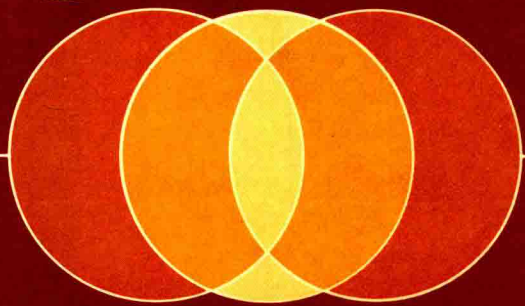


*Danielle
Steel*



FULL
CIRCLE

FULL CIRCLE



Danielle Steel



DELACORTE PRESS/NEW YORK

**Published by
Delacorte Press
1 Dag Hammarskjold Plaza
New York, N.Y. 10017**

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*FULL
CIRCLE*

To Alex Haley,
my brother,
my friend,
with much, much love.

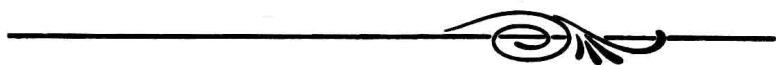
To Isabella Grant,
with love and admiration,
and immeasurable gratitude.

And with special love
and thanks
to Lou Blau.

And always,
always,
to John,
with my heart and
soul.

D.S.

Part I



*THE
EARLY
YEARS*

Chapter 1

On the afternoon of Thursday, December 11, 1941, the country was still in a daze. The casualty list was complete, the names of those killed had already been released, and slowly, slowly, in the past few days, the monster of vengeance was raising its head. In almost every American breast pounded a pulse that had been unknown before. It had finally hit us at home, and it wasn't simply a matter of Congress declaring war. There was much more to it than that, much, much more. There was a nation of people filled with dread, with rage, and the sudden fear that it could happen here. Japanese fighter planes could appear overhead at any time of day or night and suddenly wreak destruction in cities like Chicago and Los Angeles, Omaha . . . Boston . . . New York . . . it was a terrifying thought. The war was no longer happening to a distant, remote "them," it was happening to *us*.

And as Andrew Roberts hurried east in the chill wind, his coat collar up, he wondered what Jean would say. He had already known for two days. When he had signed his name, there hadn't been any doubt in his mind, yet when he'd come home, he had looked into her face and the words had caught in his throat. But there was no choice now. He had to tell her tonight. Had to. He was leaving for San Diego in another three days.

The Third Avenue El roared overhead, as his feet pounded up the front steps of the narrow brownstone in which they lived. They had lived there for less than a year, and they hardly even noticed the train anymore. It had been awful at first, at night they had held each other tight and laughed as they lay in bed. Even the light fixtures shook as the elevated train careered by, but they were used

to it now. And Andy had come to love the tiny flat. Jean kept it spotlessly clean, getting up sometimes at five o'clock to make him homemade blueberry muffins and leave everything immaculate before she left for work. She had turned out to be even more wonderful than he'd thought and he smiled to himself as he turned the key in the lock. There was a chill wind whistling through the hall and two of the lights were burned out, but the moment he set foot inside, everything was cheery and bright. There were starched white organdy curtains, which Jean had made, a pretty little blue rug, slipcovers she had gone to a night class to learn how to make. And the furniture they'd bought secondhand shone like new beneath her hardworking hands. He looked around now, and suddenly felt the first shaft of grief he had felt since he signed up. It was an almost visceral ache as he thought of telling her that he was leaving New York in three days, and suddenly there were tears in his eyes as he realized that he didn't know when he'd be back . . . when . . . or even if . . . but hell, that wasn't the point, he told himself. If he didn't go to fight the Japs, then who the hell would? And if they didn't, then one of these days the bastards would be flying overhead and bombing the hell out of New York . . . and this house . . . and Jean.

He sat down in the armchair she had upholstered herself in a deep, cozy green, and was lost in his own thoughts . . . San Diego . . . Japan . . . Christmas . . . Jean . . . he didn't know how long he'd been sitting there when suddenly, startled, he looked up. He had just heard her key in the lock. She flung the door wide, her arms filled with brown bags from the A&P, and she didn't see him at first, and then jumped as she turned on the light, and saw him smiling at her, his blond hair falling over one eye as it always did, the green eyes looking straight at her. He was still as handsome as he had been when they first met. He had been seventeen then, and she had been fifteen . . . six years . . . he was only twenty-three.

"Hi, sweetheart, what are you doing here?"

"I came home to see you." He walked towards her and easily grabbed the bags in his powerful arms, and she turned her big, dark brown eyes up to him with the same look of awe she always wore when she looked up at him. She was so impressed with him, always had been, he'd had two years of college, going at nights, had been on the track team in school, the football team for a few months till

he hurt his knee, and had been a basketball star when they met during his senior year. And he seemed no less heroic to her now. In fact, he seemed more so to her, and she was so proud of him. He had landed a good job. He sold Buicks in the biggest dealership in New York, and she knew that he'd be the manager eventually . . . one day . . . or maybe he'd go back to school. They had talked about that. But he brought home a nice paycheck for now, and combined with her own, they did all right. She knew how to stretch a dollar more than a mile. She'd been doing it for a long time. Both her parents had died in a car accident when she was just eighteen, and she'd been supporting herself since then. Fortunately, she had just finished secretarial school when they died, and she was a bright girl. She'd had a job in the same law firm now for almost three years. And Andy was proud of her too. She looked so cute when she went off to work in the well-tailored suits that she made herself, and hats and gloves she always bought so carefully, checking the styles in the magazines, and then consulting with Andy to make sure they looked just right. He smiled at her again now, as she peeled off her gloves, and tossed her black felt fedora onto the big green chair. "How was your day, Cutie Pie?" He loved to tease her, pinch her, whisk her into his arms, nuzzle into her neck and threaten to ravish her as he walked in from work. It was certainly a far cry from her constantly proper demeanor at work. He dropped in to see her there once in a great while, and she looked so serious and sedate that she almost frightened him. But she had always been that kind of girl. And actually, she'd been a lot more fun since she'd been married to him. She was finally beginning to relax. He kissed her on the back of the neck now and she felt a shiver run up her spine.

"Wait till I put the groceries away. . . ." She smiled mysteriously and tried to wrest one of the bags from his hand, but he pulled it away from her and kissed her on the lips.

"Why wait?"

"Andy . . . come on. . . ." His hands were beginning to rove passionately over her, pulling off the heavy coat, unbuttoning the jet buttons on the suit jacket she wore underneath. The grocery bags had long since been cast aside, as they suddenly stood, their lips and bodies pressed tight against each other, until Jean finally pulled away for air. She was giggling when they stopped, but it

didn't discourage his hands. "Andy . . . what's gotten into you . . . ?"

He grinned mischievously at her, afraid to make a remark that would shock her too much. "Don't ask." He silenced her with another kiss, and relieved her of coat, jacket, and blouse, all with one hand, and a moment later, her skirt dropped to the floor as well, revealing the white lace garter belt with matching pants, silk stockings with seams, and a pair of absolutely sensational legs. He ran his hands across her behind, and pressed hard against her again, and she didn't object as he pulled her down on the couch. Instead she pulled his clothes off as suddenly the elevated train roared by and they both started to laugh. "Damn that thing. . . ." He muttered under his breath as he unhooked her bra with one hand and she smiled.

"You know, I kind of like the sound of it by now. . . ." This time it was Jean who kissed him, and a moment later their bodies were enmeshed just as their mouths had been, and it seemed hours before either of them spoke in the silent room. The kitchen light was still on, near the front door, but there was no light in the living room where they lay, or the tiny bedroom beyond. But even in the darkness of the room, he could sense that Jean was looking at him. "Something funny's going on, isn't it?" There had been a small hard rock in the pit of her stomach all week. She knew her husband too well. "Andy . . . ?" He still didn't know what to say. It was no easier now than it would have been two days before. And it was going to be even worse by the end of the week. But he had to tell her sometime. He just wished it didn't have to be now. For the first time in three days, he suddenly wondered if he'd done the right thing.

"I don't quite know what to say."

But instinctively she knew. She felt her heart lurch as she looked up at him in the dark, her eyes wide, her face already sad, as it always was. She was very different from him. There was always laughter in his eyes, always a quick line on his tongue, a joke, a funny thought. He had happy eyes, an easy smile. Life had always been gentle with him. But it was not so with Jean. She had the tense nervousness of those who have had hard times from birth. Born to two alcoholic parents, with an epileptic sister who died in the bed next to Jean when she was thirteen and Jean nine, orphaned at

eighteen, struggling almost since the day she was born, and yet in spite of it all, she had a certain kind of innate style, a *joie de vivre* which had never been allowed to bloom and which Andy knew would blossom in time, if nurtured enough. And he did nurture her, in every way he could. But he couldn't make it easier for her now, and the old sorrow he had seen when they first met suddenly stood out in her eyes again. "You're going, aren't you?"

He nodded his head, as tears filled the deep, dark eyes and she lay her head back on the couch where they'd just made love. "Don't look like that, baby, please. . . ." She made him feel like such a son of a bitch, and suddenly unable to face her pain, he left her side and strode across the room to fish a pack of Camels out of his coat. He nervously tapped one out, lit it, and sat down in the green chair across from the couch. She was crying openly now, but when she looked at him, she didn't seem surprised.

"I knew you'd go."

"I have to, babe."

She nodded her head. She seemed to understand, but it didn't ease the pain. It seemed to take hours to get up the courage to ask the only thing she wanted to know, but at last she did. "When?"

Andy Roberts gulped hard. It was the hardest thing he'd ever said. "Three days."

She visibly winced and closed her eyes again, nodding her head as the tears slid down her cheeks.

And for the next three days, nothing was ever normal again. She stayed home from work, and seemed to go into a frenzy, doing everything she possibly could for him, washing underwear, rolling socks, baking him cookies for the train. Her hands seemed to fly all day long, as though by keeping them as busy as she could, she would be able to keep a grip on herself, or perhaps even on him. But it was no use, by Saturday night, he forced her to put it all down, to stop packing the clothes he didn't need, the cookies he'd never eat, the socks he could have done without, he took her in his arms and she finally broke down.

"Oh, God, Andy . . . I can't . . . how will I live without you . . . ?" He felt as though he had a hole in his guts the size of a fist when he looked into her eyes and saw what he had done to her. But he had no choice . . . no choice . . . he was a man . . . he had to fight . . . his country was at war . . . and the worst of it was that

when he didn't feel sick over what he'd done to her, he felt a strange, unfamiliar thrill of excitement about going to war, as though this was an opportunity he might never have again, something he had to do almost like a mystic rite, in order to become a man. And he felt guilty about that too. And by late Saturday night, it had gotten to him too. He was so torn between Jean's clinging little hands and what he knew he had to do that he wished it was already over with and he was on the train, heading west, but he would be soon enough. He had to report to Grand Central Station at five A.M. And when he finally got up in the tiny bedroom to get dressed, he turned and looked at her, she was quieter now, her tears were spent, her eyes swollen and red, but she looked a little bit more resigned than she had before. For Jean, in some terrible, desperate, frightening way, it was like losing her sister, or her parents, again. Andy was all she had left. And she would rather have died herself than lose him. And suddenly he was leaving her too.

"You'll be all right, won't you, babe?" He sat on the edge of the bed, looking at her, desperate for some reassurance from her now, and she smiled sadly and reached a hand out for his.

"I'll have to be, I guess, won't I?" And then she smiled again, almost mysteriously. "You know what I wish?" They both knew that, that he weren't going to war. She read his thoughts, and kissed his fingertips. "Aside from that . . . I hope you got me pregnant this week. . . ." In the emotions of the past few days, they had thrown caution to the winds. He had been aware of it, but there had been so much else going on. He had just hoped that it wasn't her dangerous time. But he wondered now, as he looked at her. They had been so careful about that for the past year, they had agreed from the first that they didn't want babies for a while, at least not for the first few years until they both got better jobs, or maybe Andy went back to college for another two years. They were in no hurry, they were both young, but now . . . in the past week, their whole life had turned upside down.

"I kind of wondered what was happening this week. . . . Do you think you could have . . . ?" He looked worried. That hadn't been what he wanted at all. He didn't want her to be pregnant alone, with him God knows where, at war.

She shrugged. "I might. . . ." And then she smiled again and sat up. "I'll let you know."

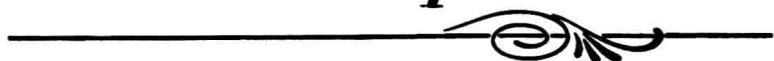
"Great. That's all we need." He looked suddenly upset, and then glanced nervously at the bedside clock. It was ten after four. He had to go.

"Maybe it is." And then suddenly, as though she had to tell him before he left, "I meant what I said just now, Andy. I'd like that a lot."

"Now?" He looked shocked and she nodded her head, her voice a whisper in the tiny room.

"Yes."

Chapter 2



The elevated train roared past the windows of Jean Roberts' apartment, providing the only breeze she had felt in days as she sat motionless in front of the open windows. It felt as though the entire building had turned into an inferno, as the blazing August heat rose off the sidewalks, and seemed to bake right into the walls of the brownstone building. And sometimes at night, she had to leave her bed, and sit on the stoop, just to get some air as the train hurtled by. Or she would sit in her bathroom, wrapped in a wet sheet. There seemed to be no way to cool down, and the baby made it worse. She felt as though her whole body were about to explode, and the hotter it got, the more the baby would kick her, as if it knew, as if it were stifling too. Jean smiled to herself at the thought. She could hardly wait to see the baby now . . . there were only four weeks left . . . four weeks until she held their baby . . . she hoped that it would look just like Andy. He was in the Pacific now, doing just what he had wanted to do, "fighting the Japs," as he said in his letters, although somehow the words always pained her. One of the girls in the law firm she had worked in was Japanese and she had been so nice to Jean when she found out she was pregnant. She even covered for her when Jean was almost too sick to move in the beginning. She would drag herself in to work, and stare into her typewriter, praying that she wouldn't throw up before she reached the bathroom. They had kept her for six months, which was decent of them, it was longer than most firms would have kept her, she knew, but they felt it was the patriotic thing to do, because of Andy, as she told him in one of her letters. She wrote to him almost every day, although she rarely heard from him more

than once a month. Most of the time, he was too tired to write, and the letters took forever to reach her. It was a long way from selling Buicks in New York, as he said in one letter, making her laugh about the bad food, and his buddies. Somehow he always seemed to make her laugh with his letters. He made everything sound better than it was, and she was never as frightened after she heard from him. She had been terrified at first, particularly when she felt so ill. She had gone through agonies of conflict after she first found out she was pregnant. It had seemed like such a good idea at first, during those last few days before he left, but when she found out, she had panicked. It meant she had to give up her job, she'd be alone, and how would she support herself, and the baby? She had been desperately afraid of his reaction too, only when he finally wrote to her, he sounded so thrilled that it all seemed fine to her again, and by then, she was almost five months pregnant, and she wasn't as nervous.

And in the last few months she'd had plenty of time to turn their bedroom into a nursery for the baby. She had sewn everything herself in white eyelet with yellow ribbons, sewing and knitting, and making little hats and booties and sweaters. She had even painted pretty little murals on the baby's walls and clouds on the ceiling, although one of her neighbors had given her hell when he found out that she was doing the painting herself and standing on the ladder. But she had nothing else to do now that she wasn't working. She had saved every penny she could, and she wouldn't even go to a movie now, for fear of eating into those savings, and she was receiving part of Andy's paycheck from the army. She was going to need everything she had for the baby, and she was going to stay home for the first few months if she could, and after that she'd have to find a sitter and go back to work. She was hoping that elderly Mrs. Weissman on the fourth floor would baby-sit for her. She was a warm, grandmotherly woman who had lived in the building for years, and had been excited to hear about Jean's baby. She checked on her every day, and sometimes she would even come down late at night, unable to sleep herself in the heat, and tap on Jean's door, if she saw a light beneath it.

But tonight, Jean didn't turn on the lights. She just sat in the dark, feeling breathless and stifled in the killing heat, listening to train after train come by until they stopped and then started again just before the dawn. Jean even watched the sun come up. She

wondered if she would ever be able to breathe normally again, or lie down without feeling as though she were being smothered. There were days when it was really very trying and the heat and the train didn't help. It was almost eight o'clock in the morning when she heard the knock on her door, and assumed it was Mrs. Weissman. She put her pink bathrobe on, and with a tired sigh padded toward the front door in bare feet. Thank God she only had four weeks to go. She was beginning to think she couldn't take it for much longer.

"Hi. . . ." She pulled the door open with a tired smile, expecting to see her friend, and blushed to find herself looking into the face of a stranger, a stranger in a brown uniform with a cap and mustard colored braid, holding a yellow envelope toward her. She looked at him, uncomprehending, not wanting to understand because she knew only too well what that meant, and the man seemed to be leering at her. It was as though his face was distorted as she reeled from the shock and the heat, clutching the envelope and tearing it open without saying a word to him. And it was there, just as she had feared, and she looked at the messenger of death again, focusing on the words on his uniform as her mouth formed a scream, and she sank to his feet in a quiet heap on the floor, as he gaped at her in silent horror, and then suddenly called out for help. He was sixteen years old and he had never been that close to a pregnant woman before. Two doors opened across the hall, and a moment later, there was the sound of running feet on the stairs above, and Mrs. Weissman was putting damp cloths on Jean's head, as the boy backed slowly away and then hurried down the stairs. All he wanted to do was get out of the stifling little building. Jean was moaning by then, and Mrs. Weissman and two other ladies were leading her to the couch where she slept now. It was the same couch where the baby had been conceived, where she had lain and made love with Andy . . . Andy . . . Andy. . . . "We regret to inform you . . . your husband died in the service of his country . . . killed in action at Guadalcanal . . . in action . . . in action . . ." her head was reeling and she couldn't see the faces.

"Jean . . . ? Jean. . . ." They kept calling her name, and there was something cold on her face, as they looked at her and at each other. Helen Weissman had read the telegram, and had quickly shown it to the others. "Jean. . . ." She came around slowly, barely able to breathe, and they helped her to sit and forced her to drink a