

# **Coming Out Study Guide**

## **Coming Out by Danielle Steel**

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# Plot Summary

The novel opens with Olympia Crawford Rubinstein working in the kitchen of her family's brownstone on Jane Street. The area was once in the old meat packing section but was now a fashionable area. There were high rise apartment buildings with doormen now. Her son Max would be home any minute. It was a Friday and he only had half a day of school. He always tried to spend Friday afternoons with the kindergartener. Max is only one of Olympia's children but he is the only child from her marriage to Harry. Her other three children are older and from a previous marriage. Olympia has been married to Harry for thirteen years now and had waited eight years to have Max.

This simple beginning introduces Olympia. She is a big lawyer with a son in Dartmouth and twin daughters in high school who will attend Brown in the fall. She is a busy mother and wife juggling all of the aspects of being a working mom and successful wife with her legal career. Her daughters receive an invitation to be debutantes in the coming-out ball at the Arches, the same ball that Olympia participated in years ago. Olympia, who is pleased at the invitation, is not prepared for the chaos that erupts around her as a result of the invitation. One twin is excited while the other is dead set against the principle of a coming-out ball. Her former husband, snobby as he is, demands the twin's attendance while her current husband is against the ball as a form of discrimination and says he will not attend. This sets the scene for the events of the novel.

Olympia must navigate her way between everyone's values and viewpoints and try to pull off the perfect evening for her daughters to remember, just as she always remembered her own debut fondly. Olympia makes her statement about the snobbery of The Arches by inviting her Jewish mother-in-law and her African American law partner and her husband, all of whom will share the table with her snobbish former husband Chauncey and his frivolous wife. In addition, there is her son Charlie who has a problem that his mother senses but doesn't know what it is.

As the time for the ball approaches, there is one calamity after another, ranging from lost gloves to broken ankles. Olympia must help her family deal with them all while still driving toward her goal of a perfect evening for the girls' coming-out. From broken relationships to an escort with blue hair and a daughter with a backless dress and a giant butterfly tattoo, Olympia manages to deal with it all in spite of everyone's principles and values.

This book is pleasant reading as the reader watches a super mom deal with some super problems while trying to make a pleasant evening for everyone involved while respecting all of their different values. In the end, they all have a good time at the twins' debut.



# Chapter 1

## Chapter 1 Summary

The novel opens with Olympia Crawford Rubinstein working in the kitchen of her family's brownstone on Jane Street. The area was once in the old meat packing section but was now a fashionable area. There were high rise apartment building with doormen now. Her son Max would be home any minute. It was a Friday and he only had half a day of school. She always tried to spend Friday afternoons with the kindergartener. Max is only one of Olympia's children but he is the only child from her marriage to Harry. Her other three children are older and from a previous marriage. Olympia has been married to Harry for thirteen years now and had waited eight years to have Max.

Olympia practices law in the area of civil rights and class-action lawsuits. Her favorite cases involved discrimination and child abuse. Harry was also a lawyer and taught law at Columbia Law School which is where he met Olympia when she was a student. His parents were immigrants, survivors of the Holocaust who worked in the garment district sweatshops to provide for themselves and him. Olympia was a convert to Judaism from her Episcopalian origins. She came from a blueblood well known New York social family whose fortune had expired by the time she was in college. She had to sell their Newport cottage to pay off the debts when her parents died. She had enough to pay for her law school when she needed it.

Olympia married her first husband, Chauncey Bedham Walker IV right after she graduated from Vassar. He was from a moneyed background and she loved him very much, enough to overlook his drinking and messing around with other women. She did not begin to notice any of this until she had her three children, Charlie and twins, Veronica and Virginia. Olympia and Chauncey divorced when Olympia was twenty-nine years old and the children were five and two.

Chauncey had paid child support for his children after the divorce. He provided an adequate amount for them but was not overly generous. He was bigoted and anti-Semitic. Chauncey moved to Newport and lived on his grandmother's cottage grounds and married a woman named Felicia Weatherton a year after his divorce from Olympia. They had three daughters over the next four years.

"There was no question in Harry's mind, or even his mother's, that Olympia was a fantastic woman, a great mother to all her children, a terrific attorney, and a wonderful wife" (Chapter 1, pg. 3.) His mother Frieda, adored Olympia and Max.

Max would be home any minute and the twins would be home when they finished their after school activities. Both had been accepted to Brown University for the fall semester. In another week, Charlie would be home for the summer. He would work for the summer teaching children how to ride horses. The twins were spending the summer in Europe



as a graduation present. Harry, Olympia and Max would meet them in Venice in August, after spending two weeks in the south of France.

Max arrives home and Olympia gives him his lunch. She keeps her work life as separate from her home life as she can. Occasionally she has to bring work home, but for the most part, she tries to leave her job at the office. Home is for the family. As Olympia flips through the mail, she finds an invitation to the cotillion ball at The Arches. The ball is a socially important event but not in the way it had been in the past. It is not for those who are presented to find husbands. It is now just a fun social event. Olympia had made her own debut at The Arches twenty-seven years ago and had fond memories of the event and had hoped her own daughters would have the same experience. She knew that Chauncey expected it of them.

Olympia is pleased that her daughters are on the list. She knows that she will enjoy helping them select their dresses and prepare for the ball. There is no pressure to find a husband as there was in the old days. It is just a chance for everyone to have a good time. She has to explain to Max what the invitation is for and what a debutante cotillion ball is.

The girls had four weeks to respond to the invitation but Olympia would make sure the check was mailed the next week.

After soccer practice, Max was sick and it was nine thirty by the time Olympia had him in bed. The girls went out with their friends and Harry was working on a stack of papers when Olympia joined him in the study. On Sunday night, when everyone was gathered in the kitchen, Olympia remembered about the invitations and tells the family. Veronica thought it was stupid and can't believe that her mother expects them to take part in the ball. Virginia is happy and says that she was afraid that she wouldn't be asked.

Olympia is surprised at Veronica's reaction. She is dead set against it and calls it an instrument of discrimination because it is a WASP event. Veronica says she is not going. Virginia is just as upset about not attending as Veronica is about attending. Olympia had not anticipated the intensity of either girl's reaction. Both girls run to their rooms and slam their doors. Harry asks what The Arches are and what the big deal is all about. Olympia has to explain. He asks if it is open to everyone and Olympia explains that it is by invitation only. Harry says he agrees with Veronica if they don't have blacks, Asians and Hispanics and Jews there. He cannot be associated with anything discriminatory because of his position as a judge on the court of appeals.

Olympia and Harry have a discussion about the discriminatory and elitist aspects of The Arches. Harry feels that it is wrong and that its whole basis is wrong and compares it to Nazi Germany. Olympia feels that it is a form of harmless fun. She does not see why it has to be a political issue. Harry agrees with Veronica and says the girls should not be a part of the event. He will not attend the event and he leaves the dinner table. Even Max thought they should not go after he sees their reactions.



## Chapter 1 Analysis

The opening chapter basically introduced the characters and the setting. Olympia, a lawyer with a blue-blood background, is married to Harry Rubinstein, who is also a lawyer. They have a five-year-old son Max. Olympia has three children, Charlie and twins, Veronica and Virginia from an earlier marriage to Chauncey Walker. Olympia is from a blue-blooded family and Chauncey is from a very wealthy family.

As part of her social legacy, Olympia had her debut at The Arches which is the most prestigious debutante cotillion ball in New York. Veronica and Virginia receive an invitation to this year's ball. Olympia is ecstatic thinking it will be a nice experience for the girls. The invitation causes family problems. Veronica labels the whole process as a form of racism and refuses to attend. Harry learns some of the background details and ends up agreeing with Veronica and says he will not attend no matter what. Virginia is upset at Veronica's reaction and afraid that she will not be able to attend. All leave the dinner table and go to their rooms, each one visibly upset about the circumstances surrounding the invitation. This was not the reaction that Olympia had expected from her family.

This chapter serves not only to introduce the principle characters of the novel but also to define their positions about the ball.



# Chapter 2

## Chapter 2 Summary

The coming-out ball was still causing problems in the Rubinstein household. Olympia had to call Chauncey and tell him that the twins were invited but Veronica said she would not attend. If Olympia forced her to attend she would move in with her step grandmother. Olympia found that Veronica had Harry's support in this. Virginia was in tears over a discussion with her brother. He took Veronica's side in the argument but felt that both twins should participate in the ball because of the family tradition. The family was in the position of Harry being mad if the twins took part in the ball and Chauncey being mad if they didn't take part in the ball.

Olympia told Chauncey that she was hoping that the problems would run themselves out by the time of the ball. She told him not to fuel the fire and keep it going but he informs her that he will not pay Veronica's tuition at Brown if she does not attend The Arches ball. They then proceed to have a discussion about Olympia's conversion to Judaism. The discussion is based on Chauncey's bigoted comments. By the time the discussion is over, Chauncey has said that he will not pay tuition for either girl unless Veronica attends The Arches and he does not care if Olympia takes him to court.

"'I'm taking Virginia as a hostage, to bring Veronica to her senses.' And he was taking her hostage, too. She had no desire to take legal action against him over tuition. The kids would hate her for it, Veronica would be even more outraged, and she knew even Charlie would be upset. It was utterly absurd and not an empty threat from him. She knew Chauncey was foolish enough to do it and follow through" (Chapter 2, pg. 44.) Olympia tells him it is just a party and to stop getting so worked up over it. Chauncey says he will not go through the embarrassment of having a daughter who doesn't come out at The Arches.

Olympia just wanted the girls to have fun at the ball. She did not want to see them threatened over it. If Veronica really did not want to attend, that was up to her. There was no reason for Virginia to be affected by that. She also told Chauncey that he could relay his threat to Veronica on his own. She was not going to be caught in the middle with Veronica angry at her over her father's threat. Olympia's plan was to sign-up both girls up for the ball. She would not bring the subject up again until September, hoping that by that time, Veronica will change her mind.

Olympia tells Chauncey to let her handle it in her way. As soon as she hangs up on Chauncey, Frieda calls and tells her that Veronica called her and asked if she could spend the night with her. Frieda wanted to know how Olympia wanted to handle the situation. She tells her that Veronica and Max can spend the night in a few days. Frieda does not tell Olympia that Harry told her what the issue was. Olympia tells Frieda the story of who's mad at whom all because of an invitation. Frieda's advice is for Olympia to tell them to 'take a hike.'



Olympia asks Frieda if she would like to come to the ball. Frieda, who thought the ball did not allow Blacks and Jews, said she would love to attend. They decide they will shop for dresses for the event in the fall. Olympia, who is still at the office, has Margaret Washington walk in. Since Olympia looked stressed, she asked her what happened, and Olympia ended up telling her the story about the ball invitations and the family's reactions. Margaret, an African American, had the same reaction that Frieda had. They don't have whites where her mother plays bingo in Harlem, is her response. Olympia invites Margaret to the ball at The Arches.

Several days later Veronica receives a letter from Chauncey where he says that he will not pay the twins' tuition if they both did not come out at The Arches. Veronica is very angry at her father. She and her sister make up but Veronica does not discuss whether or not she will attend the ball. Olympia did not tell them that she had signed them up for the ball and had sent the required amount of money. Nobody talked about the situation until Charlie came to visit for a weekend. Harry said he would not go to the ball. Ginny listened and asked for Charlie to be her escort. Olympia was hoping that there would be a lot of changes before the ball.

## Chapter 2 Analysis

The issue of the twins attending the debutante cotillion ball at The Arches continues to be a controversial subject with the Rubinsteins and the Walkers. Olympia keeps saying that the ball is nothing but a party and an evening of fun for the girls and their families. However, the ball is really more than just that. It means something different to the different people. To Chauncey, it is a social must. He would be embarrassed if his daughters were not presented at the ball. To Veronica and Harry, it is a symbol of racism, like private clubs that exclude certain races or ethnic groups. Frieda views the ball as everything she did not have as a youngster herself.

Olympia decides to take Frieda's advice and let things settle down before discussing the subject. She does not tell them that she signed up the girls for the ball and sent in the money.





# Chapter 3

## Chapter 3 Summary

Charlie was home from Dartmouth for the summer. Olympia thought he was very quiet. Even though he was active in sports and had performed well in school, she was worried about him. He went out with Max and friends and would be leaving soon for his job in Colorado. While playing tennis with Harry, she asks him if he notices any change in Charlie and he says no. Olympia beat Harry at tennis, which they were playing when she asked him about Charlie. Suddenly, Harry tells her that she is a better lawyer than he was. "She always had a good time with him. And she was pleased to see that he'd relaxed finally, after their battles about the ball. He still said he wasn't coming, but she hadn't mentioned it to him in a while. She wanted to let the subject cool off before she tried again" (Chapter 3, pg. 63.)

Harry tells her that if something is bothering Charlie, he will tell Olympia about it when he is ready to. Olympia's concern was aroused again when she received a bill for counseling that Charlie had incurred at Dartmouth. Charlie told her that he was upset over a friend's suicide and had sought counseling. He was still thinking of divinity school after graduation. Harry was impressed by Charlie's thoughts and insights.

The time came for the girls to leave for Europe with their friends. Ginny had ordered her ball dress by then. Ginny and Olympia also chose a ball dress for Veronica without telling her about it. Two days after the twins departed for Europe, Charlie departed for Colorado and then Olympia, Harry and Max set off for the south of France. They meet the girls in Venice, travel through Northern Italy and Switzerland and finally end up in London.

Arriving back in New York after their vacation, there was only a very short time before the twins left for Brown.

Veronica found the pictures of Ginny in both dresses and confronts Ginny. Ginny said that Veronica is putting Olympia in a bad position. She will have to pay their tuition at Brown and Ginny does not want her mother punished for her sister's position. Frieda talked to Veronica and took the same position. Veronica finally decided to attend for her mother's sake. She too did not want to see Olympia punished because of Chauncey's unreasonable position.

Harry understood Veronica's position and reason for conceding but he wouldn't change his own position. Charlie could not discuss the situation with Harry but he did have lunch with his mother before leaving for school. The summer seems to have done Charlie a world of good and Olympia is no longer worried about him. He discusses his options for the future with her, whether he'll go to divinity school, work for his roommate's father in San Francisco or travel for a year. He is not considering his father's offer of training polo ponies.



Olympia and Frieda went shopping for their ball gowns the day after Charlie left for Dartmouth. They return to Frieda's apartment and have tea and talk about Charlie. Chauncey and Charlie have a very poor relationship. Frieda says Charlie will be okay. She thinks that he will make a good minister. Olympia stays and talks until almost dinnertime. When she arrives home she finds Harry and Max cooking dinner. She tells him that she and Frieda bought their gowns for the ball.

Max asks questions about the coming-out ball and Olympia answers them. She tells him how the girls have to curtsy and shows him how. She explains what an escort is and what the escort does. She tells Harry she wishes he would attend so both twins can dance with the "father." She remembers her own debut and how it was her last dance with her own father who died several months later. She wanted her daughters to have fond memories of that night just as she had. Harry had a different view of the situation. He did not view the ball in terms of the fond memories it would have for Ginny and Veronica. He viewed it in terms of the fact that it was not politically correct.

Both parents put Max down for the night. Then they talked. All of the older children were away at school and would not be home for Thanksgiving. Olympia fell asleep in Harry's arms, thinking how happy she was.

## Chapter 3 Analysis

The family is mum about the ball. It is still an emotional subject so nobody bothers to talk about it. Olympia took Ginny shopping for her ball gown. They did not tell Veronica that they purchased a gown for her also. Olympia and Ginny are both still hoping that Veronica and Harry will change their minds about the ball. Olympia and Ginny did all of the preliminary work, like pictures, without Veronica. Veronica is angry when she learns of this and confronts her sister. Veronica finally agrees with her sister and Frieda about not punishing Olympia because of her and her father's position. Harry agreed with Veronica's decision but still refuses to attend the ball himself.



# Chapter 4

## Chapter 4 Summary

After going through midterms, all of the older children came home for Thanksgiving. Max was happy with the attention that Charlie showered on him, taking him ice skating and to the zoo. Frieda arrived on Thanksgiving morning and the whole family contributed to the preparation of the meal.

Veronica announces that she has asked a boy named Jeff Adams to be her escort for the ball. Olympia is a little concerned and comments that she hopes that he is reliable. She asks Veronica what happens if they stop dating before the ball. Veronica says that he is just a friend and there will be no problems. He is skiing in Vermont or he would have come to New York to meet Ginny and Charlie. Charlie finds out that Jeff plays football and ice hockey.

Virginia announced that she has a boyfriend and is madly in love. The boy is a junior who she has been dating for three months. He is also on the football team. Ginny is told that Steve can come to the ball. There is a table and Olympia will include a seat for him. Charlie is still Ginny's official escort for the ball. Olympia learns more about Steve from Veronica, who doesn't seem too impressed with him. Olympia was worried about Virginia because she admitted that she was sleeping with Steve. She assured her other that they always used protection.

Veronica says that she does not want her sister to get hurt with Steve. She does not like the kind of person that Steve is. Veronica does not talk to Olympia about her own love life. She is not as open as her sister is so Olympia has problems learning about Veronica's relationship with Jeff. She did learn that Jeff's sister came out the previous year and that he felt the same way toward the coming-out balls as Veronica did. She said he was the only friend that she has that she could ask without being laughed at. She assures her mother that he will be fine at the ball.

Olympia is beginning to be nervous about the ball. She knows that she will not have Harry there for support or to lean on if anything goes wrong. "She was beginning to feel stressed about the event, and she wouldn't have Harry to lean on. Olympia, Frieda, Margaret Washington and her husband, another couple, Ginny's new boyfriend Steve, and Chauncey and Felicia would be sharing a table. A motley crew at best. The debutantes and their escorts would be seated elsewhere" (Chapter 4, pg. 93.) Charlie tells his mother to relax. It is only one evening and there is not much that can go wrong.

Olympia still detects the sadness in Charlie. It is the same feeling she had when he first came home for summer and he was so quiet after his friend's suicide. She knew that he was stressed over his future. He had applied to Oxford and was planning on interviewing with his roommate's father over spring break. He still had not made up his mind on what he wanted to do and Olympia knew that that bothered him.



The family is planning on going skiing in Colorado for a week at Christmas. Charlie says he will try to visit Chauncey before the trip. Charlie visited his father out of a sense of duty, not because he enjoyed spending time with him. Chauncey wanted him to see some new polo ponies. He knew that his father was disappointed that Charlie didn't share his passion for polo. Olympia tells Charlie that he is welcome to invite friends to Colorado. Olympia insists the girls try on their ball gowns before they returned to school. If alterations were needed, there wouldn't be time at Christmas. She also made sure they had shoes and all of the accessories that they required.

Back at the office after the holidays, Olympia has a very busy day. After she returns all of the phone calls, she calls Chauncey in Newport. Felicia answers and they make small talk for a few minutes. It still amazes Olympia that Chauncey is happy living off of his inherited wealth. All he does is buy horses and play polo. They talk about the plans for the evening of the ball. Olympia tells Chauncey about Veronica and the escort she invited. Chauncey asks some questions that Olympia can't answer. All she knows is that his sister came out last year. She does not know anything about his family or anything else. He tells Olympia to find out what Jeff's father's name is so he can look him up in the Social Register. Chauncey also finds out that Harry will not be attending the ball. Their discussion ends.

Margaret walks in with a stack of briefs. Olympia tells her about the conversation with Chauncey and how she cannot believe how pleasant he was.

## Chapter 4 Analysis

When the older kids come home for Thanksgiving, Olympia learns more about their lives at school. Both girls have boyfriends. Veronica has asked Jeff Adams to be her escort at the ball. She tells Olympia that Jeff is just a friend. Ginny has a boyfriend named Steve, who will also be a guest at the ball. Veronica tells Olympia that she isn't very impressed with Steve who she thinks is too impressed with himself. Veronica is able to find out less about Jeff. Veronica said he is the only one who would not laugh if she asked for him to be an escort. His sister debuted the year before and he knew the routine.

Charlie's suggestion that Olympia call Chauncey to break the ice for the ball seems to be a good idea to Olympia. She knows that have to sit together at the same table and that the situation could be difficult. Chauncey is very pleasant during their conversation which surprises Olympia so much that she tells Margaret about it.



# Chapter 5

## Chapter 5 Summary

Two days before the ball, Olympia falls ill with a fever and flu-like symptoms. On the Sunday, Max also is ill with the chicken pox. Margaret is off for the week and the work is piling up at the office. Olympia's fever eases by Sunday night but Max is still sick. Charlie will be home on Tuesday and the girls on Wednesday. They will be able to help with Max then. Until then Olympia has to manage with a sitter. Ginny calls and Olympia finds that she is sick with bronchitis. She has final exams on Monday and if she has to take any make-up exams, it will have to be on Friday. That means she will be late coming home. She is worried about the ball. Her mother tells her to go to the infirmary for antibiotics before it turns into something worse.

Ginny receives antibiotics and takes her exams on Monday, and is afraid that she failed the exams, since she felt so ill. Max is still home sick and Olympia has a babysitter for him. Olympia was not one hundred percent but she still went to work. On top of everything else, there was a blizzard that blanketed the city with snow. Harry has to work late that night and Olympia is glad that Charlie will be home the next day. He will be able to help out with Max. At least Veronica hasn't come down with any illness.

She and Max have chicken soup and pizza for dinner. Just as she gets Max tucked in for the night, Frieda calls to see how he is. Olympia tells her that she hopes that she, Olympia, is over her flu by Saturday, the night of the ball. Noticing that Frieda's words are slurred, Olympia asks her mother-in-law if she is all right. She tells her that she fell earlier in the day when she went to the store. She broke her ankle and Olympia finds out that she is in the hospital at NYU. Harry has been in meetings all day and she didn't want to bother Olympia at work.

Olympia says that Frieda will stay with them. After checking with the hospital to be sure that Frieda was okay physically and could be released, Olympia called the sitter to come and stay with Max. Harry was still unreachable. While Olympia went to pick-up Frieda, the sitter turned the main floor den into a bedroom for Frieda. She was back home with Frieda in an hour and settled her into the den-guest room. When Harry arrives home at ten, he finds out from Olympia that his mother is in the den room. She tells him about his mother's accident. He goes down to check on Frieda and finds that she is still asleep.

Olympia tells Harry that she is glad that Charlie will be home the next day. She can use the help. Harry apologizes that he cannot take off work now and Olympia says she cannot either. They have colds, bronchitis, chicken pox and now broken ankles to contend with.



## Chapter 5 Analysis

The weekend before the coming-out ball, Olympia had a raging fever. This is only the beginning of their luck the week before the ball. Max comes down with chicken pox. Ginny has bronchitis. On Monday, Frieda slips on the ice and breaks an ankle. Both Olympia and Harry both have heavy workloads and no way of taking off work but Olympia didn't hesitate to drop everything and call a sitter, and go and pick-up Frieda at the hospital. Frieda is now settled in their main floor den-guest room. Harry learns all of this when he comes home a ten o'clock that night.

Frieda insists that she will walk for the ball but she has had a bad break. She is on crutches with a big cast up to her knee. It is true that she can't stay alone because she might fall again. Olympia tells Harry that she will probably be up making them breakfast the next day.



# Chapter 6

## Chapter 6 Summary

The next morning Olympia goes to check on Frieda when she awakens at six. Frieda has not moved during the night. Max says he feels better and Harry has to leave early because of a press conference. Harry feels relieved knowing that Frieda will not be attending the ball. He will stay home with her. He has been feeling guilty about his stance and figures that staying home with Frieda will get him off the hook with Olympia and the others.

The sitter will soon be there and will take care of both Max and Frieda. Charlie will be home in the evening and the girls will be home the next day. Olympia tells Harry that they will be able to manage. Harry does not hink Veronica and Ginny will be much help but he does not say anything. Five minutes later, he is on his way to work. Olympia makes breakfast for Max, checks on Frieda and is on her way to work as soon as the sitter arrives. Frieda still had not awakened.

Margaret calls Olympia at the office and asks who everything was. Olympia laughing responds, "Well, let's see, Max has chicken pox, Frieda broker her ankle yesterday and is staying in our den. I have the cold of the century. Ginny is sick at school. And Charlie's coming home tonight, thank God" (Chapter 6, pg. 125.) Olympia is hoping that nothing else happens before the Saturday night ball. She and Margaret exchange news about their family situations.

Olympia left her office early and was home by five. Max was in the den with Frieda. He was not supposed to be contagious any longer according to his pediatrician so he and Frieda kept each other company all afternoon. Charlie arrived a few hours earlier than they expected him so everyone was happy. Frieda had wanted to cook dinner but Charlie said no. They decided to order Chinese food and Harry soon arrived home.

After everyone retired to their rooms, Charlie stayed and talked to Olympia. In response to Olympia's question, he said he didn't have anything on his mind and that he just wanted to talk to her and was happy to be home. He said he would stay with Max and Frieda the next day and then went out with friends. Later, as they were getting ready for bed, Olympia has Harry what he though about Charlie. Again, she is worried about him. Harry says that Charlie seems fine to him. Olympia says that something is wrong with him but she doesn't know what.

The next day, Olympia discusses Charlie with Frieda. Frieda agrees with Olympia. Something seems to be troubling Charlie. She says he's probably just worried about what he will do after graduation. He has a lot of good options to consider and will feel better once he makes his decision. Frieda tells Olympia that she still plans on attending the ball. She told Harry that and that he could stay home if he didn't mind making a fool



of himself with his ideas. Olympia says they will rent a wheelchair for her and Frieda agrees. She says if they cannot find a wheelchair, she will go on crutches.

Olympia is wondering about asking Margaret and her husband to wheel Frieda in the wheelchair. She has to be at the hotel to help the girls dress. Charlie has to be there early for the rehearsal. Harry refuses to go to the ball. Maybe if she rents a limo they can pick-up Frieda and help her into the ballroom. She brings the subject up with Harry. He says he told her not to go. Olympia explains that the ball is important to Frieda. Olympia felt that if the woman wanted to go to the ball, she should be allowed to attend.

Harry still holds to the view that his position with the court of appeals prevents him from attending a discriminatory event like the ball. Olympia tells him that the family should be more important than any political views. She is becoming angry at Harry and his position and says to hell with him and his views. Harry is not going to give in on this one. She leaves the room, angry, before anything is said that they will both feel sorry for.

## Chapter 6 Analysis

The situation does not seem as bad the next day. When Olympia arrives home, Charlie is there. Max is feeling better and watching television with Frieda. Harry comes home early and they eat a Chinese dinner. Olympia is still worried about Charlie. She again, can't put her finger on it, but senses the same sadness in him that she did when he came home at summer. She discusses the situation with Frieda, who also senses something wrong. They decide that he just is worried about the decisions he has to make regarding his future.

Olympia realizes how important attending the ball is to Frieda. The ball represents everything Frieda missed as a youngster. Frieda wants to wear her ball gown and feel like Cinderella, at least once before she dies. Olympia tells her they will rent a wheelchair for her. Frieda says she will hobble on crutches if they cannot find a wheelchair.

The ball is still an issue between Olympia and Harry. Harry will not give in on his position about the ball being a discriminatory event. He says he cannot endorse it by attending due to his position on the court of appeals. Olympia accuses him of putting his political views ahead of the family. She leaves the room before they get into a fight.





# Chapter 7

## Chapter 7 Summary

Olympia's daughters finally arrived home from school. The house was much livelier with all of the comings and goings. Both Ginny and Veronica had their friends over. Ginny's friends were all excited about the coming-out ball and were looking at Ginny's dress. Some of them were also coming-out at The Arches. Veronica's friends were not interested in the ball and stayed in Veronica's room. Frieda watched all of the activities from her room in the den.

Olympia was very busy but still managed to prepare a kosher diet for Frieda. Frieda did not complain if it was not as strict as the diet she usually maintained. Olympia was doing the best she could under the circumstances. That Thursday, they celebrated Chanukah. They lit candles, said prayers and exchanged gifts. Ginny said that Steve would arrive on Friday night and Veronica said Jeff would arrive on Saturday. Veronica still was not talking about the ball. Olympia decided to be certain that Veronica had white shoes and what ever else she needed.

Veronica is just getting out of the shower when Olympia walks in and screams. There is a giant butterfly tattoo on Veronica's back. Veronica had not told her mother about the tattoo. Olympia never allowed anything beyond pierced ears. Veronica apologizes for upsetting her mother. She tells her that she has wanted a tattoo for years. She is eighteen and has a right to do what she wants with her own body. Olympia says they have to buy a different dress for the ball. The one she and Ginny bought was backless and would show off the tattoo. Veronica says no and she likes the dress her mother and sister chose for her.

Veronica also admits that she cannot find her white shoes. Olympia says she will buy her a pair of white shoes the next day, which was Friday. She always took off work on Friday to be home for Max. Olympia was crying over the tattoo and wondering what to do about the dress. How was she going to find a dress for Veronica in one day? "'I'll wear a sweater over it,' Veronica volunteered as Olympia started to cry again. This was too much for her already frayed nerves. Frieda's accident, Max's chicken pox, Harry's stubbornness, the cold she had had all week, and now the horror of the tattoo" (Chapter 7, pg. 142.)

Olympia says that maybe they can find a stole for her to wear. She cannot wear a sweater over a ball gown. Veronica reminds her that she did not want to come-out to begin with. Later that day Frieda, knowing that Olympia was upset, walked to the kitchen using her crutches. She finds Olympia sitting at the table crying. Olympia tells Frieda about Veronica's tattoo and how she has to buy her a new dress or stole or do something in only one day. Frieda tells Olympia to buy some good white satin material and she will make a stole for Veronica.



The details for the ball were being worked out. The dress problem was solved by Frieda hand sewing a stole for Veronica. Olympia rented wheel chair that Frieda was comfortable in. The limo driver would pick the wheel chair and Frieda up along with Margaret and her husband who would escort Frieda to the ball. Since the three older children went out with the friends, the Rubinsteins spend a quite evening at home, celebrating the second night of Chanukah.

As they were preparing for bed, Ginny came home. There was a commotion downstairs and Ginny ran up to her room crying. Steve broke up with her and already had another girlfriend. He came to New York to tell her that. Ginny tells Olympia that she does not want to go to the ball the next night. Olympia is mad at Steve doing this right before the ball. He could have waited until Sunday.

## Chapter 7 Analysis

Olympia is nervous as the time for the ball approaches. When she decides to check to be sure that Veronica has shoes for the event, she finds her daughter has a huge tattoo of a butterfly on her back. Since the ball gown is backless, the tattoo will show. Olympia wants to go out and buy a new dress. Veronica does not want to. She likes the dress she has. The problem is finally solved by Frieda who sends Olympia out to buy some good white silk material and hand sews a stole for Veronica. Olympia is thankful that she has a mother-in-law who helps solve problems.

Later that night as Olympia is preparing for bed, Ginny comes home and runs to her room crying. Her boyfriend Steve has another girlfriend and has broken up with her. She now does not want to attend the ball. Olympia tells her she has to attend the ball and not to let someone like this Steve interfere with her plans. What kind of person is he to do this the night before the ball?



# Chapter 8

## Chapter 8 Summary

"The next day, Saturday, the day of the ball, dawned icy cold and brilliantly. It didn't snow, it didn't rain, it was colder than the north pole, but it was a gorgeous day when Olympia woke up with trepidation. All she wanted to do was get through the day, dress the girls, watch them curtsy and come down the stairs, and survive the evening. It didn't seem like a lot to ask, but these days it was beginning to seem like a miracle if no one broke a leg, came down with a rare disease, or had a nervous breakdown. If anyone had one of those, Olympia was planning to be first" (Chapter 8, pg. 152.)

She and the girls were having their hair done at the same salon and that would take most of the afternoon. Ginny is panicked because she lost one of her long white gloves that she needs for that evening's coming-out. She took it to her friend's house the night before and the dog destroyed it. Now she is in a panic. Olympia had to run out and buy a new pair of gloves for Ginny. After returning it is time to take the girls to have their hair done. Olympia drops them off and returns to the house to make meals for the rest of the family.

Charlie comes in and acts like he wants to talk to Olympia. She just assumes that he is nervous about that night. She keeps asking him if anything is wrong and he keeps telling her no. More problems appear. Margaret has a sick mother and will be late for the ball. She cannot pick-up Frieda. Olympia talks to Harry about putting Frieda and the wheel chair in the limousine and letting Olympia know when so she can meet the limousine at the other end. Harry agrees to do that much for his mother and wife.

Charlie leaves for the hotel since he has to be there early for the rehearsal. When Olympia and the girls finish at the beauty salon, they gather up their things at the house and leave for the hotel, where they will dress. Olympia has the girls dressed and in the ball room on time for the rehearsal. Jeff Adams arrives carrying his tailcoat. Olympia discovers that he has bright blue hair. On top of everything else, Steve, who had dumped Ginny, was still planning on attending the ball and sitting with Ginny's family. Olympia is flabbergasted to learn that Ginny told him he could.

When the picture taking was over, every one went to dinner. During the dinner, when Chauncey got up to walk to the men's room, he noticed Veronica's tattoo. He says he will not pay her tuition if she does not have it removed. This is Chauncey's latest form of blackmail. Olympia's only comment was that it wasn't the proper place to discuss the issue. Veronica jumped into the conversation and told him to stop threatening her mother. She informed her father that she was eighteen and would do what she wanted. They were making a scene that was being noticed by everyone.

Veronica walks out of the room with Jeff following. Her tattoo was fully exposed as she walked out. Olympia thought that Veronica had handled the situation in a dignified



manner. When dinner ended, other mothers came and talked to Olympia about what their daughters did when they went off to college. They spend a few minutes comparing notes and ended up laughing at the whole situation.

Chauncey returned and took his seat and informs Olympia that she is too liberal with the children. He blamed Olympia for the tattoo and claims that Veronica is disfigured for the rest of her life. Chauncey feels that they should force her to have it removed and Olympia says they should not. The meal was ended so they got up and left the table. It was time for the receiving line upstairs.

## Chapter 8 Analysis

The day of the ball was not problem free for Olympia. Ginny needed a new pair of gloves, having lost one of hers the night before. Olympia had to run out and find a new pair. Then Margaret has to stay with her sick mother later than she thought and can't pick up Frieda. Olympia makes Harry promise to put his mother and the wheel chair in the limo and call her at the hotel so she can meet the limo.

Olympia finds other surprises waiting for her at the hotel. Jeff Adams arrives and Olympia finds that he has bright blue hair. In addition, Steve, who broke up with Ginny the night before, is still planning on attending the ball and sitting at the table with the family. Ginny, who wanted one last evening with him, told him it was okay.

There is a confrontation at the dinner table between Chauncey and Veronica and Olympia. Chauncey notices his daughter's tattoo and makes a scene over it. It attracts the attention of the other diners. Veronica walks away from the table with Jeff following her. Chauncey blames Olympia for the tattoo and wants to force Veronica to have it removed. Olympia, realizing that Veronica is eighteen, tells him no. She knows that any further attempts will lead to problems and infringe on her daughter's rights to make her own decisions.



# Chapter 9

## Chapter 9 Summary

Olympia apologizes to Frieda for the remarks made by Chauncey, saying, "It's not your fault. It always amazes me that there are still people like him around. That kind of prejudice still takes me by surprise. He must live in a very sheltered world" (Chapter 9, pg. 172.) She wheeled Frieda through the receiving line to greet the twins. After getting Frieda settled at her table, she sat down next to her. Margaret and her husband appeared and were introduced to Frieda along with Steve. Chauncey irritated Olympia by staring at Margaret and her husband.

Olympia is slightly amused at the effect the situation had on her former husband. Olympia has brought a Jewish woman to their table and a Black couple. As if that is not enough for the snobbish Chauncey, his daughter has a tattoo. Margaret figured out what Olympia was laughing at and started to laugh also. Olympia decides that she handled the situation better than Harry by inviting Frieda and Margaret. That was the strongest statement she could make about the situation. People, who avoided the event like her husband did, reacted in exactly the way that people like Chauncey wanted them to react. Olympia is happy with herself for doing the things that she did in the way that she did them.

While the girls were doing their last minute preparation for their presentation, Charlie asked Olympia to dance. He knew how difficult it was for Olympia to spend time with Chauncey. While dancing, he tells her that he loves her and then tells her that he is gay. This finally answered the question Olympia had been wondering about since last summer when she noticed how quiet he was. She had the reaction that Charlie had expected. She accepted what he told her.

She then asked if that had anything to do with the friend who committed suicide the previous summer. He said no that that person was just a friend. He told his family that he was gay and was told they never wanted to see him again. When he returned to school, he killed himself. Olympia knew that Chauncey would not take this news well. She cautioned Charlie against telling Chauncey that night, since he was already a little drunk. When they finished dancing, he walked her back to their table and they found Harry standing there.

Harry asks her to dance and she fills him in on the events of the evening concerning Chauncey and Veronica. They laugh about Chauncey's reaction to Margaret and her husband and to Frieda. Olympia and Harry both knew that Harry had done the correct thing in the end by coming to the ball.

The ceremonies begin. The debutantes are presented alphabetically and walk under an arch of sabers made by West Point cadets. After the girls were presented, their father danced with them. Harry, at Olympia's suggestion, got up to dance with Veronica and



Chauncey approved. After half a dance, the men switched twins so each got to dance with both their father and step-father. After the dance they both shook hands. When they returned to the table, Chauncey asked Olympia to dance.

Chauncey tells her that he has not recovered from the shock of the tattoo. She says she really has not herself. They are both lucky that they have such great kids, she tells him. The girls tell Olympia that they are happy that they went through with the ball. Harry and Olympia stay at the ball long after Chauncey and Felicia while Frieda enjoyed the activities in the wheel chair. After a midnight supper they left at two in the morning. Charlie and the twins went to a private club afterward. Both Harry and Veronica told her that they had a good time and were happy that they came.

As Harry and Olympia are preparing for bed, Olympia tells Harry about Charlie's telling her that he was gay. She tells Harry that Charlie told her when they were dancing. In response to his questions, she says she just wants Charlie to be happy.

## Chapter 9 Analysis

When Chauncey arrives at the table, he meets Olympia's colleagues and mother-in-law and "the look on her face was worth the entire night to her daughter-in-law. Whatever Chauncey thought of it, she knew she had done the right thing. Frieda deserved to be there as much as anyone else in the room. The days of Chauncey's world, it values and segregated, secluded life were over. In the end, what Olympia had done was far more powerful than Harry's statement by refusing to come. He had done exactly what people like Chauncey wanted, and stayed home. Olympia had brought the real world right into the ball with her, a Holocaust survivor and a brilliant young black lawyer who had grown up in Harlem. What better way to prove the point to them? She could think of none" (Chapter 9, pgs. 174-175.)

Harry appears at the ball, much to Olympia's surprise. She is very happy that he attends. In the end, Both Veronica and Harry tell Olympia that they are happy that they went to the ball.



# Characters

## Olympia Crawford Rubinstein

Olympia Crawford Rubinstein lives on Jane Street in New York. She lives in a brownstone with her family. Her second husband is Harry Rubinstein and they have a son Max. Her three older children are from a previous marriage and she was married to Harry for eight years before having Max. After divorcing her first husband, Olympia went to law school and at forty-five, is a successful attorney with a big firm specializing in class actions suits and discrimination cases. She met her husband when he was one of her law professors at Columbia.

Olympia's background differed from her husband. She came from the family of Crawfords who were a famous blue-blood New York family. She was first married to Chauncey Bedham Walker IV, after her graduation from Vassar. She had three children by him, Charlie, and twins Veronica and Virginia. Olympia is utterly amazed at the problems caused in her family by an invitation to the ball at The Arches as she is caught up in a fury of contradicting reactions. Her twin daughters have opposite reactions as Ginny is all in favor of the ball and Veronica is dead set against it. Her former snobby husband demands the girls' presence at the ball while her current husband is against it as a form of discrimination and refuses to attend. Charlie has a problem that she senses but cannot get him to open up and talk to her. All of this culminates in a successful evening as the girls' come-out at The Arches.

## Harry Rubinstein

Harry Rubinstein is the second husband of Olympia. They have been married for thirteen years and live in a renovated brownstone on Jane Street in New York. Harry is a fifty-three year old lawyer who teaches law at Columbia Law School, which is where he met Olympia. He is now a judge on the court of appeals. Harry had been considered for a Supreme Court appointment but didn't get it. He also had a marriage prior to marrying Olympia. Harry's parents had been Orthodox Jews who had survived the Holocaust. His parents met in Israel after the war. They married and moved to London and then to the United States. Harry was their only son and they worked in sweatshops and saved their money to provide him with an education.

Harry sides with Veronica about the ball at The Arches being racists. He says that he will not attend and he maintains this posture until the night of the ball.

## Charlie Walker

Charlie is the son of Olympia and her first husband, Chauncey. He is a student at Dartmouth studying theology. He is not sure what he wants to do after graduation. He may study in Europe or work at his father's investment bank. Charlie, who was called by



Ginny about the problems over the ball invitations, sympathized with Veronica's position but said he felt that both twins should attend the ball. He agrees to be Virginia's escort at the ball. Olympia relies on Charlie to help her with Max and other problems but she senses that he has a problem of his own. She finds out at the ball what he has worrying about having to tell her.

## **Veronica Walker**

Veronica Walker is the twin sister of Veronica and the daughter of Olympia and her first husband Chauncey. Veronica is known as the hothead of the family. Veronica was the more serious of the twins and wanted to be a lawyer and possible go into politics. Veronica is very upset at the invitation to The Arches and refuses to attend. She views it as racist and fascist. She finally gives in and reluctantly agrees to attend because Chauncey has said he wouldn't pay the tuition for her and her sister at Brown if both of them did not attend. Both she and Ginny did not want to see Olympia punished because of Veronica's position. At Thanksgiving, Veronica announces that she has asked a boy named Jeff Adams to be her escort at the event.

## **Frieda Rubinstein**

Frieda Rubinstein is Harry's mother. She is a survivor of the concentration camps and after going to Israel after the war, she met her husband, married him, then moved first to England and finally to the United States. She worked as a seamstress in the sweatshops as a way of contributing to the support of the family. Frieda is one of Olympia's friends and supporters, having been won over by Olympia's conversion to Judaism. She is thrilled when Olympia invites her to The Arches ball. It represents everything that was denied to her as a youngster.

## **Chauncey Bedham Walker**

Chauncey is the former husband of Olympia. They met while they were in college and married six months after her graduation from Vassar. They had three children together, Charlie, and twins Veronica and Virginia, before their divorce. After the divorce, Chauncey moved to his grandmother's cottage at Newport and remarried within a year. He married Felicia Weatherton. Chauncey came from old money and The Arches coming-out ball was important to him. He refused to pay the girl's tuition at Brown if both girls did not take part in the ball. Chauncey is a bigoted snob.

## **Virginia Walker**

Virginia Walker is the twin sister of Veronica and the daughter of Olympia and her first husband Chauncey. Virginia was the frivolous twin and would spend hours reading fashion magazines or Hollywood gossip magazines. She wanted to be a model or an actress. She is happy and excited about being included in The Arches.





## **Max Rubinstein**

Max Rubinstein is the five-year-old son of Olympia and Harry Rubinstein. As the youngest member of the family, Max makes them all laugh and is adored by all of them. He is described as always being happy.

## **Margaret Washington**

Margaret Washington is a law associate of Olympia's. She did her undergraduate work at Harvard and then attended Yale Law School. She and her husband attend the ball at The Arches.

## **Jeff Adams**

Jeff Adams is the boy that Veronica asked to be her escort. When Olympia first meets him, he has bright blue hair. He had to dye it to a normal color in order to be allowed to escort Veronica.

## **Felicia Weatherton Walker**

Felicia is the second wife of Chauncey.



## Objects/Places

### New York

New York is the home of the Rubinsteins who live in a brownstone on Jane Street.

### Newport, Rhode Island

Newport is the home of Chauncey Walker.

### Paris, France

Paris is where Olympia and Harry took Max for the first part of their European vacation. They stayed in a hotel on the Left Bank.

### French Riviera

The Riviera was the next destination in the European trip taken by Harry, Olympia, and Max where they visited St. Tropez, Monte Carlo, and Cannes.

### Venice, Italy

The Rubinsteins met Veronica and Virginia in Venice after leaving France.

### Switzerland

Switzerland and the lakes region was another country visited by the family on their European trip.

### London

London, England is where the Rubinstein's vacation ended.

### Providence, Rhode Island

Providence is the location of Brown University where the twins attend school.



## **The Arches**

The debutant ball known as The Arches is the subject of the book. The term originally applied to the ball that was held at the Astor estate but no just applies to the ball itself.

## **Dartmouth College**

Dartmouth College is the school that Charlie attends.



# Themes

## Principles and Values

Principles and values are a big part of the book and the cause of all the conflict. To Olympia, the coming-out ball is just an evening that results in pleasant memories and a good time for everyone. She doesn't view the event in terms of snobbery or social statements, although she makes the strongest statement by the people she invites to the WASP event. Her twins, who are to take part in the ball, have opposite reactions to it. Virginia, the frivolous twin is all in favor of the ball and wants to begin shopping for the event right away. Veronica, the more serious of the two, sees the event as a form of social effrontery. It represents everything that her father stands for in terms of snobbery and WASPishness and because of that, she doesn't want to attend.

For Chauncey, who is an insufferable snob who lives by the Social Register, The Arches is a must event for his daughters. He won't pay their tuition at Brown if they both don't attend. Harry views the ball as a discriminatory event that he can't be associated with due to his position with the court of appeals.

Frieda, Harry's mother, is a concentration camp survivor. For her the ball represents everything she was denied as a youngster. It is the one night that she can wear a fancy ball gown and feel like a princess.

## Acceptance

A major theme of the book is acceptance. Closely related with this is respect for the other person's position. The various characters have different degrees of acceptance. Olympia exhibits the most acceptance throughout the book. She has to deal with everyone's conflicting positions regarding the coming-out ball. Her former husband demands the twins participate, her present husband plans on boycotting the event because it is discriminatory. Ginny is all gung-ho over the idea of taking part in the ball at The Arches whereas her twin Veronica views it as just this side of a Fascists event. Olympia has to deal with all of these different positions.

Acceptance is the way that Olympia dealt with Charlie's announcement at the ball. She senses throughout the book that something is disturbing her son, but she can't find out what. When she does, she calmly accepts the situation, and lets him know that she accepts the situation. Her love isn't dependent on his actions.

Acceptance means letting the others person have his own position and respecting the other's person's right to his own position even if you don't agree with it. Some of the characters exhibit the quality of acceptance, like Olympia does. Other character's, like Chauncey, do not. This is why Charlie is nervous about telling his father about his situation.



## Compromise

Another theme of the book is the need for compromise. There are conflicting views about the ball at The Arches from the moment Olympia announces that the invitation has arrived. The conflicting views have to be dealt with by all parties or the conflicts remain. This is evident throughout the book.

Veronica is one of the first to compromise. Her father refuses to pay college tuition for her and her sister if they do not participate in the ball. Ginny says that Olympia will be punished for Veronica's position and that isn't fair to their mother. Veronica has to agree with her and compromises her own views and says she will take part in the ball. She does this for her mother's sake.

Another character who compromises in the end is Harry. He is opposed to the ball right from the beginning claiming it is a WASP discriminatory event and that he can't endorse it by attending due to his position on the court of appeals. Olympia and Frieda think his position is ridiculous. Olympia wants him to attend for their family's sake. She doesn't say much about it during the course of the novel until the day before when she accuses Harry of putting his political views ahead of their family. Harry surprises them at the end by showing up at the ball.



# Style

## Point of View

The book is written from the third-person point of view. The author is basically the narrator of the story. This is effective for a novel of this kind because it allows the narrator to tell the story. The reader is confined to the views of one person in this way. Each character is allowed to express their opinions which are important in a novel where each character's different opinions are the basis for the novel.

Each character is allowed to express their opinion and their reason for their opinion. This is the way in which all of the various conflicts inherent in the novel are revealed and developed. This third-person point of view allows the reader to come to know each of the characters independent of Olympia's views.

Danielle Steel is a popular author who has written many novels. Many of her novels have been adapted for television and movies. A mother herself, the author understands what dealing with children and their views means.

## Setting

The setting for most of the novel's action is New York City. The novel begins with Olympia's brownstone on Jane Street and this is the scene of most of the action of the novel. The characters come and go from the brownstone as the story develops. Frieda ends up living at the brownstone once she breaks her ankle. Charlie, Veronica, and Virginia attend college but return to Jane Street during their vacations.

Part of the setting for the novel is Olympia's law firm office. This is also in New York and is the site of several discussions she has with Margaret. The debutante cotillion ball also takes place in New York at a hotel.

Some of the action of the novel is at Dartmouth, which Charlie attends, or at Brown, which Virginia and Veronica attend. Other sites are Newport, Rhode Island where Chauncey and Felicia live. Newport is the site of the 'cottages' of the wealthy. It is where Chauncey moved after his divorce from Olympia. The children travel there to visit their father at times.

Various sites in Europe are also mentioned since Europe is the setting for the vacation. The twins leave first and travel around Europe with friends. Olympia, Harry and Max travel to Paris and the south of France, and then meet the girls in Venice. From there they travel through northern Italy to Switzerland and end in London.



## Language and Meaning

The novel is written at a very easy to understand level. It is written in everyday English with a lot of conversation between the various characters. There are no hidden meanings in the book. The viewpoints of the different characters are presented and developed in terms that are easy to understand.

The reader does not have to dig to try to find out the positions of the various characters. There are some words that the reader may want to look up, but not that many. The fact that the book is written in plain everyday English makes it easier for the reader to relate to the different characters in the novel. The reader can understand the position of each character, even if the reader does not agree with the character. The characters seem more real to the reader because of the everyday syntax.

The meaning of each character's position is clear. The reader doesn't have to wonder who thinks what about the ball. This means that the reader can concentrate on the interactions between the various characters as they work out their positions, instead of trying to figure out what each character's position is.

## Structure

The structure of the novel is very simple. The novel is divided into nine chapters. Each chapter deals with the plot in a chronological fashion. The first chapter introduces the main characters and the position of each in regards to the coming-out ball. It also introduces the home life of Olympia and their brownstone where most of the novel's action takes place. Each chapter contributes to the story leading to the culmination of events at the ball in the last chapter.

There are many quotes used throughout the novel which allows the reader to learn the position and opinions of each of the characters. Danielle Steel's writing style makes it easy for the reader to come to know each of the characters as people. The reader does not have to back track to look up information on each character.

The story is also told using only essential characters. This is not a book with a myriad of characters that the reader has to try to keep track of. The use of only characters that are essential to the action of the novel makes it easier for the reader to come to know the characters as people and to understand their position. The use of more characters that would be non-essential would make it more difficult for the reader to keep track of each character's position and to understand the principles and values involved.



## Quotes

"Harry adored Olympia, her three children, and their son, Max. And in some ways, her daughter Veronica seemed more like Harry's daughter than Chauncey's. They shared all of the same extremely liberal, socially responsible ideas. Virginia, her twin, was much more of a throwback to their Newport ancestry, and was far more frivolous than her twin sister. Charlie, their older brother, was at Dartmouth, studying theology and threatening to become a minister. Max was a being unto himself, a wise old soul, who his grandmother swore was just like her own father, who had been a rabbi in Germany before being sent to Dachau, where he had helped as many people as he could before he was exterminated along with the rest of her family" (Chapter 1, pg. 7-8.)

"She tore it open as Max began to hum a song he had learned in school, just as she saw that it was not a wedding invitation, but an invitation to a ball that was to take place in December, a very special ball. It was an invitation to the very elite debutante cotillion where she had come out herself at eighteen. It was called The Arches, after the elegant name and design of the Astor estate where it had originally been held. The estate had long since vanished, but the name had held over the years. Several of the city's most aristocratic families had organized the event in the late 1800s, when the purpose of a debutante ball had been to present young women to society, in order that they find husbands. In the hundred and twenty-five years since it was established, the purpose of the ball had inevitably changed" (Chapter 1, pg. 17-18.)

"Now, more than anything, coming out was just an excuse to look lovely, and wear long white gloves and a beautiful white evening gown, often the first one the girls presented had ever worn. It was going to be fun helping Veronica and Virginia pick their dresses, particularly as she knew the choices the girls would make would be so different, as they always were. Having twins come out at The Arches was going to be double the fun for her" (Chapter 1, pg. 21.)

"Go ahead, take me to court, Olympia. I don't give a damn if you do. If you don't give Veronica my message, I will. In fact, just to make sure she doesn't do something stupid, you can tell her I won't pay tuition for either of them, unless they both come out next Christmas. Veronica won't want to screw it up for Ginny, and if Veronica doesn't agree to come out, she will. I don't care if you put me in jail. I'm not paying a red cent for either of them, unless they both make their debut. Put Veronica in handcuffs, or sedate her if you have to, but she will come out at the Arches.' He was every bit as stubborn as his daughter, and more so. He was turning this into a major war for all of them. Everyone was out of control, and all over a debut" (Chapter 2, pg. 43-44.)

"It's just a very pretty, superficial, but lovely Cinderella night. As far as I can see, it doesn't do anyone any harm. I guess it's elitist, but Harry thinks it's a neo-Nazi event. Veronica thinks I'm a fascist. Chauncey thinks we're Communists, and says he won't





pay the girls' college tuition if they don't both come out, which is unfair. Veronica hasn't heard that piece of it yet, but as of this morning, she was refusing to do it, and threatening to move in with you, since my values are so terrible. And Ginny is desperate to do it. Harry says he won't come, and acts like he's going to divorce me. Charlie is mad at Veronica. The girls are at each other's throats, and everyone hates me. The only sane one left in the family is Max, who says this coming-out thing is such a mess that the girls better stay in" (Chapter 2, pg. 50.)

"He is. If he gets a chance, he'll stir the pot. He'd rather have a kid on life support than one not making her debut I just want them to have fun, and do the same thing I did. In my day, it wasn't a big deal, it was just something you did. I did it in the seventies, in the sixties everyone refused to, in the forties and fifties you had to, to find a husband. It isn't about that anymore, it's about wearing a dress and going to a party. That's all it is. A one-night stand for tradition and the family album. Not a travesty of social values" (Chapter 2, pg. 57.)

"They played golf together over several weekends, and Charlie came down to have lunch at his office. He said he was thinking of going to divinity school after he graduated, and the ministry appealed to him. Harry was impressed by what he said, and the insights he had about people and delicate situations. Charlie broached the deb ball with him once or twice, and Harry refused to discuss it with him. He said that he disapproved of an event that excluded anyone, tacitly or otherwise, and he had taken a stand" (Chapter 3, pg. 65.)

"'Why should Mom pay both our tuitions because you want to make a statement and are willing to make Dad mad? It's just not fair to her,' Veronica had refused to visit Chauncey in Newport that summer, in protest of the position he'd taken. Ginny had dutifully gone there alone the weekend after they got home from Europe" (Chapter 3, pgs. 68-69.)

"It's just a rite of passage, Harry. There's no malice behind it, and the girls will be disappointed if you don't go. That seems worse to me, hurting people you love and who love you, in order to make a statement to people you don't know, and who won't care that you're not there. We will" (Chapter 3, pg. 77.)

"'He's just a friend,' Veronica said, looking unconcerned. She had agreed to make her debut, but without any enthusiasm. She was only doing it so her father wouldn't withdraw his share of the tuition for school. But she was still angry about his blackmail and manipulation. She had told everyone repeatedly that she fully anticipated having a rotten time at the ball" (Chapter 4, pg. 85.)

"It was a mystery to all the children how their parents had ever gotten married. Seven years together was remarkable between people who were that mismatched, although at twenty-two Olympia had been a different person. She had been a product of her own very conservative Episcopalian upbringing, and Chauncey's Social Register world had



been familiar to her. Charlie had always suspected that she had married him because her parents died when she was in college, and she was looking for stability and a family, so she had gotten married" (Chapter 4, pg. 95-96.)

"Chatty calls were unheard of between them. Neither of them was interested in social contact with each other. He couldn't understand the choices she'd made, to go to law school, and marry a Jew. And she had even less respect for how he chose to lead his life, and with whom. She thought Felicia was a moron. But like it or not, she and Chauncey shared three children, which forced them to have some contact with each other, if only on state occasions, like the girls' debut. Later on there would be weddings, shared grandchildren, and christenings. To Olympia, it was not a cheering prospect. Nor to him. He had developed a profound dislike for her over the years, and couldn't imagine why he had married her, either" (Chapter 4, pg. 102.)

"'Shit' she said, as she closed the book. This was not the week for either of them to be sick. She had to have all her wits about her, she had a mountain of new cases in the office, and Margaret had taken the week off. And she hated leaving Max with a sitter when he was sick, if she was even going to be well enough to go to work herself" (Chapter 5, pg. 110.)

"'Yes...yes...I am...!' She hesitated, and her daughter-in-law could hear a tremor in her voice. 'I had a little mishap this afternoon.' She said, sounding embarrassed. She loved her independence, managed well on her own, and never liked to be a burden to anyone. She rarely told anyone when she was sick, but only reported on it days or weeks later" (Chapter 5, pg. 114.)

"'I'll go down and check on her,' he said, looking concerned, and then turned to look at Olympia again as he headed out the door. 'I love you. Thank you for being so good to her'" (Chapter 5, pg. 119.)

"At least, he knew, now his mother going to the ball wouldn't be an issue. He had the excuse of staying home to take care of her, which he felt sure would get him off the hook, and make him look like less of a louse for not going. He had been feeling guilty about not going for weeks, but no matter how guilty he felt, he absolutely refused to go. And now his mother couldn't go either" (Chapter 6, pg. 123.)

"'I can't tell you why, but I had the same impression when he sat here having tea with me yesterday. I can't tell if he's worried or sad. He seems preoccupied. Maybe he's worried about finding a job when he graduates,' she said sensibly. He was a very responsible young man'" (Chapter 6, pg. 130.)

"This was more than just a party for her. It was about being socially accepted in a way she never had been before. She had spent years of poverty, working in a sweatshop as a seamstress, beside her husband, to put their son through school. Just once before she died, she wanted to feel like Cinderella too, even if her son thought she was foolish. And she wanted to see her granddaughters make their debut. Olympia understood that,



even vowed to make it happen for her. It was a dream come true for more than just the girls. It meant a lot to Frieda, too. More than Harry knew" (Chapter 6, pg. 133.)

"And even if it is, I am a judge of the court of appeals. I can't endorse a discriminatory event just to please my mother, or my wife, or your daughters. I'm tired of being made to feel like an asshole about it, Ollie. I firmly believe in what I'm doing. I can't be there" (Chapter 6, pg.135.)

"I am. I just didn't know you'd break my heart in the exchange. Was this your revenge for making you come out? The Iron butterfly?"

'No, Mom,' Veronica said, looking unhappy. 'I got it the first week of school, as a symbol of my independence and flying free. My metamorphosis into being an adult'" (Chapter 7, pg. 142-143.)

"It's all so sweet,' Frieda said, looking starry-eyed, 'and don't worry, we'll cover the tattoo. No one will know except us.' It was lovely having a mother-in-law who wanted to solve problems and not cause them. Olympia knew that was rare and appreciated her enormously. She was more like her own mother than Harry's" (Chapter 7, pg. 147.)

"No, you don't. And you have to come out. This is a special moment in your life. You've been looking forward to it. You can't let this guy spoil it for you. Don't give him that. I know it feels awful right now, but you'll feel better tomorrow night...honest...I know you will.' Her heart was sinking. Why did he have to do that to her now? Couldn't he have waited till Sunday? Didn't the bastard have a conscience? Apparently not" (Chapter 7, pg. 150.)

"She made breakfast for everyone, brought Frieda hers on a tray, and Frieda wished her luck for that night. She asked if there was anything she could do to help, but as far as Olympia knew, everything was in order. Both girls were still asleep. Harry had gone out early to play squash at his club. Max was feeling better: Charlie had spent the night with friends. For the moment, the house was peaceful" (Chapter 8, pg. 152-153.)

"Of course I can. She's my mother.' Olympia made no comment about his not going with them, nor asked him to join her. All she wanted was for him to get his mother into the limousine and call her. They both knew anyone could do that, and it was the least he could do, whatever his political opinions. He looked slightly embarrassed as he assured his wife he'd take care of it on his end" (Chapter 8, pg. 155-156.)

"This was just going to be one of those disappointments that happened in a marriage, that she would have to swallow and forget. There were lots of other things he did right. And other than this, he had always been there for her, and would be again. This was the one thing he couldn't do for her, and that she had no choice but to accept. There was no point damaging their relationship over a coming-out ball he wouldn't attend. She couldn't allow it to mean that much" (Chapter 8, pg. 161.)



"'You're far too liberal with that child, with all of them in fact. She'll wind up in jail as a Communist one of these days.' He said, as he ordered another drink.

'They don't put Communists in jail, Chauncey. She's liberal, but she's not totally out of her mind. She just wants to prove she has her own ideas'" (Chapter 8, pg. 169.)

"And much to Olympia's annoyance, he stared at Margaret and her husband in disbelief as though he had never seen African Americans before. Or surely not here. He said not a word, looked at Olympia unhappily and sat down. She had done the unthinkable. She had not only brought a Jewish woman with her to the ball, she had invited an African American couple. Chauncey looked as though he were going to burst an artery" (Chapter 9, pg. 174.)

"She wanted him to find a girl from a more interesting world than this one. These people were all right for one night, but in some ways they were an oddity, a relic from the past, like Charlie's father. She wanted him to find someone with broader horizons than these, a woman whose values weren't as narrow. And as she thought about it, Charlie looked down at her with a quiet smile.

'I know this is a crazy place to do it, Mom. And I know it's probably the wrong time. But I've wanted to tell you something for a while....I'm gay'" (Chapter 9, pg. 176-177.)

"'You certainly know how to make a statement a lot better than I do. Whatever their rules are, you've probably broken all of them with who you have at your table, along with the biggest WASP in Newport. That's one way to mix it up, and drag these people into the real world" (Chapter 9, pg. 182.)

"There had been tears in his eyes several times that night, and in hers. It had been a night of love and celebration, a night of hope and remembrance, a night when girls became women, children became adults and strangers became friends. Just as she had said it would be, it was a rite of passage, and a lovely tradition, and nothing more. It was a night when he had come out from an old world into a new one, when others got a glimpse backward into an old one. When the past and future met in one shining moment, when time stopped, sadness slipped away and was forgotten, and life began" (Chapter 9, pg. 190-191.)



## Topics for Discussion

What is The Arches? Where did the name come from?

In what way is The Arches considered to be form of discrimination? How does Harry feel about it?

What are the positions of the various family members regarding the ball at The Arches?

What are the principles involved with the various family members over the coming-out ball at The Arches?

Why is it important to Frieda to attend the ball at The Arches?

What were the last minute problems faced before the ball? How were they solved?

Why was Olympia more pleased with the way she handled the whole situation with the ball over the way Harry handled the situation?