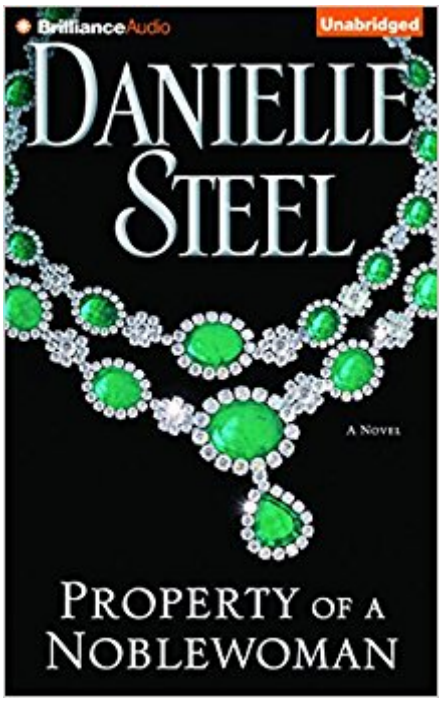
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Synopsis

In Danielle SteelÃ¢â ¬â„¢s thrilling novel, a womanÃ¢â ¬â„¢s legacyÃ¢â ¬â •shaped by tragedy, fortitude, and undying devotionÃ¢â ¬â •transforms lives and hearts long after she is gone, and fulfills at last her most precious bequest.Faded photographs of a glamorous couple in postwar Europe. Old letters hinting of tragic loss. And a breathtaking array of magnificent jewelry, spectacular stones in exquisite settings. These are the contents of a safe-deposit box long abandoned in a New York City bank. If no heir can be identified, the jewelry will be auctioned. But who was the woman who left such a fortune and no will?Two people, drawn together by chance, begin to unravel the mystery. Jane Willoughby is a law clerk at the surrogateÃ¢â ¬â„¢s court and Phillip Lawton a fine arts expert for ChristieÃ¢â ¬â„¢s auction house. They are simply doing their jobs when they come to the bank to inspect the contents of the box. But for both Jane and Phillip the search turns personalÃ¢â ¬â •and their efforts to reconstruct an enigmatic life will lead from New York to London and Paris, to Rome and Naples, and a series of stunning revelations.Eighteen-year-old Marguerite Pearson left America with a broken heart in the shadow of World War II. She found a new life in Europe but forever mourned what she left behind. As the truth about MargueriteÃ¢â ¬â„¢s extraordinary historyÃ¢â ¬â •her forbidden love affair and her familyÃ¢â ¬â„¢s treacheryÃ¢â ¬â •is slowly revealed, more people are drawn into the puzzle that Jane and Phillip have pieced together, and one among them will inherit the most unexpected gift of all.

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Customer Reviews

Danielle Steel has been hailed as one of the worldÃ¢â ¬â„¢s most popular authors, with over 650 million copies of her novels sold. Her many international bestsellers include Blue, Precious Gifts, Undercover, Country, Prodigal Son, Pegasus, A Perfect Life, Power Play, Winners, First Sight, and other highly acclaimed novels. She is also the author of His Bright Light, the story of her son Nick TrainaÃ¢â ¬â„¢s life and death; A Gift of Hope, a memoir of her work with the homeless; Pure Joy, about the dogs she and her family have loved; and the childrenÃ¢â ¬â„¢s book Pretty Minnie in Paris.

Chapter 1It was one of those January days in New York that feels like winter will never end. There had been record-Ã Â- breaking snows since November. And the morningÃ¢â ¬â„¢s snowfall, the second one that week, had turned to sleet with a bitter wind. People were slipping and sliding on the ice, and wincing in the wind as it stung their faces. It was a good day to stay indoors as Hal Baker sat at his desk at a branch of the Metropolitan Bank on lower Park Avenue.Just over three years before, the bank was on the dividing line of the part of New York that had lost power in the epic hurricane that devastated the city. A few blocks north of the power outages and floods, the bank had continued to function and serve its clients, and even offered trays of sandwiches and coffee to flood victims in a gesture of civic compassion.Hal was in charge of the safe deposit boxes, a job others found tedious and that he had always liked. He enjoyed the contact with their older clients, as they came in to riffle through their belongings, check their stock certificates, or deposit new wills in the boxes they rented. He chatted with them if they wanted to, which they often did, or left them alone if they preferred. He knew most of the safe deposit box clients by sight, and many by name. And he was sensitive to their needs. He liked meeting the young clients too, particularly those who had never had a safe deposit box before, and explained to them the value of having one for their documents and valuables, since they lived in apartments that werenÃ¢â ¬â„¢t always secure.He took his job seriously, and at sixty, he was five years away from retirement, and had no burning ambitions. He was married, had two grown children, and running the safe deposit box department suited his personality. He was a Ã¢â ¬Å“people person,Ã¢â ¬Â• and had been at the branch for twenty-Ã Â- eight years, and at another branch of Metropolitan for ten years before that. He was hoping to complete the final years of his career where he was. The safe deposit boxes had always felt like an important responsibility to him. They were entrusted with their customersÃ¢â ¬â„¢ most valuable possessions, and sometimes darkest secrets, where no one else could go or pry, see or touch them, save themselves.The bank was located in the East Thirties on Park Avenue, a previously elegant, entirely residential neighborhood called Murray Hill, which had long since

become interspersed with office buildings. The bankÃ¢â ¬â„¢s clients were a mixture of people who worked in the area, and the genteel older customers who lived in the remaining residential buildings. None of their elderly customers were venturing out today. The streets were slick from the sleet, and anyone who had the option would stay home, which made it a good day for Hal to catch up on the paperwork that had been gathering on his desk since the holidays.Hal had three matters to deal with today. Two of the smaller safe deposit boxes had not been paid for in exactly thirteen months, and the clients who had rented them had not responded to the registered letters heÃ¢â ¬â„¢d sent them a month before, reminding them of that fact. The lapse of payment usually meant that customers had abandoned them, although not always. After waiting a month past the unpaid year, with no response to the registered letter, Hal could now call a locksmith to drill them open, and assumed he would find the boxes in question empty. Some people didnÃ¢â ¬â„¢t bother to tell the bank they no longer wanted them, stopped paying the monthly fee, and threw away the keys. In those two cases, if the boxes were empty, Hal could then turn them over to the waiting list he had of people in need of safe deposit boxes. It was usually a long list for the smaller ones. And it was frustrating waiting thirteen months to reclaim them, but it was the accepted legal procedure at any bank in New York, once clients stopped paying for a box. It would have been easy to notify the bank, relinquish the box, and hand in the keys. But some people just didnÃ¢â ¬â„¢t bother. They forgot about it or didnÃ¢â ¬â„¢t care.The third box he was planning to deal with that day was a different situation. He had seen the client a few times over the years, and remembered her distinctly. She was a very distinguished-Ã Â- looking older woman, who was polite but never chatted with him. He hadnÃ¢â ¬â„¢t seen her in nearly five years. And payment for the box had stopped three years and one month before. He had sent the standard registered letter one year after the payments stopped and then waited the month as required by law before the box could be drilled open in the presence of a notary public. It was one of the five largest boxes available at the bank. And in front of the notary, he had carefully inventoried the boxÃ¢â ¬â„¢s contents, as he was supposed to do. There had been several folders with the ownerÃ¢â ¬â„¢s neat handwriting on them, one with photographs in it, another with documents and papers, including several expired passports, both American and Italian, issued in Rome. There had been two thick bundles of letters, one in an old-Ã Â- fashioned European handwriting, written in Italian, with a faded blue ribbon holding the letters in a neat stack. And the other letters, tied with a pink ribbon, were in English, in a womanÃ¢â ¬â„¢s handwriting. And there were twenty-Ã Â- two leather jewelry boxes, each holding a single piece of jewelry, which he had noted but not examined closely. But even to his untrained eye, the pieces looked valuable. He had listed them simply as diamond ring, bracelet, necklace, pin, without further detail, which

would have been beyond his competence on the subject, and was not required of him. He had also looked for a last will and testament, should the box holder prove to be deceased, and he had found none among her documents. The client had rented the box for twenty-Ã Â- two years, and he had no idea what had happened to her. And also as required by law, he had waited exactly two years after the box had been drilled open, and there had been no response from the client. His job now was to notify the surrogateÃ¢â ¬â„¢s court of New York of the existence of the abandoned box, the lack of a will, and turn the contents over to them.They would be obligated to try and determine if the renter of the box was deceased, and in the absence of a will, or noted next of kin, they would place an ad in newspapers, inviting relatives or heirs of that person to come forward to claim her belongings. If no one turned up within a month, the surrogateÃ¢â ¬â„¢s court would move forward to sell her possessions as abandoned goods, and the proceeds of a sale would go to the State of New York. And any papers or documents would have to be held for another seven years in case a relative showed up. There were very strict laws that governed intestate estates, where there was no will. And Hal always followed what was required of him scrupulously.He would be moving into the second phase of action today, notifying the surrogateÃ¢â ¬â„¢s court of the abandoned box. And since the woman who had rented the box would be almost ninety-Ã Â- two years old, there was a strong possibility that she was no longer alive, and the court would have to determine that, before taking action to dispose of her possessions. Her name was Marguerite Wallace Pearson di San Pignelli. And Hal had had a gnawing suspicion for two years that the jewelry he had inventoried might be of considerable value. It would be the surrogateÃ¢â ¬â„¢s courtÃ¢â ¬â„¢s job now to find someone to appraise it, if its owner was in fact deceased and had left no will, and no heirs came forward. The court would have to determine its value before it went to auction to benefit the state.As part of the routine, Hal called the locksmith first for the two smaller boxes, and then called the surrogateÃ¢â ¬â„¢s court to ask them to send someone to examine the contents of the larger box with him. He figured they would take their time before they came. They were understaffed and always busy and backlogged, handling the property and affairs of people who had died leaving no will.It was eleven oÃ¢â ¬â„¢clock by the time Hal called the surrogateÃ¢â ¬â„¢s court and Jane Willoughby answered the phone. She was a law student interning for the surrogateÃ¢â ¬â„¢s court for a trimester for credit, before she graduated from Columbia Law School in June, and took the bar exam that summer. Clerking at the surrogateÃ¢â ¬â„¢s court wasnÃ¢â ¬â„¢t the assignment she had wanted, but it had been the only one open to her. Her first choice had been the family court, which was the specialty she hoped to go into, focusing on advocacy for children. And her second choice had been the criminal court, which seemed interesting, but nothing had been available in

either court. She had only been offered clerking positions in probate court and the surrogateÃ¢â ¬â„¢s court. She thought both courts were so depressing, dealing only with the affairs of dead people and endless paperwork, with little human contact. She took the surrogateÃ¢â ¬â„¢s court, felt stuck there, and disliked the woman she worked for. JaneÃ¢â ¬â„¢s boss, Harriet Fine, was a tired, faded-Ã Â- looking woman, who clearly didnÃ¢â ¬â„¢t enjoy her job but needed the money and had never had the guts to quit. Her constantly negative comments and sour attitude made JaneÃ¢â ¬â„¢s job harder, and she couldnÃ¢â ¬â„¢t wait for her assignment to end. She was almost finished with her law studies, except for two final months of classes, and a term paper she still had to turn in. The clerkship was a final step toward graduation, and she needed a good report from Harriet to add to her rÃƒÂ©sumÃƒÂ©. She had been applying to New York law firms for the past two months.Jane answered the phone on her desk on the second ring, and Hal explained the situation to her in a pleasant businesslike voice. She wrote down the information he gave her about Mrs. di San PignelliÃ¢â ¬â„¢s safe deposit box, and knew that the first thing she had to do was determine if the box holder was deceased. After that, they could proceed from there, and someone from the court would meet Hal at the bank, to go over the inventoried items with him, and claim them for the state, pending an answer to the ad they would place to locate heirs. It was always interesting to see who would respond to the ad, if anyone did. The surrogateÃ¢â ¬â„¢s court had recently handled a case with no heirs, which had resulted in a sale at ChristieÃ¢â ¬â„¢s, and a nice tidy sum for the state, although Jane hadnÃ¢â ¬â„¢t worked on the case. Harriet, her boss, acted as though it was a personal victory when no heirs appeared, and she could turn the proceeds of a sale over to the state. Jane preferred the more human aspect of people coming to claim items they didnÃ¢â ¬â„¢t expect to inherit from relatives they barely knew, scarcely remembered, or in some cases had never met. It was found money for them, and always an agreeable surprise. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Every, I mean EVERY one of Danielle's wonderful stories reveal something important about life that I am supposed to look at via her characters. Her characters are as 'real' as any can be whether in fiction or non-fiction and we can all resonate one way or another with them be it positive, negative, or simply neutral.Danielle captures the essence of 'being human' with magic tossed in.This story is another realistic look at life being a glass half full vs half empty and I loved the 'tour' into the world of fine art and jewelry auctions - something I knew very little about. Thank you Danielle for another incredible 'window' to the world.

I was really worried about Danielle Steel several years ago. After books like Impossible and Coming Out, I gave up for a while, but after reading several later books, I'm back as a huge fan of hers!Yes, I too get tired of reading about people so rich that I could never relate to them. But as I thought about it, I realized books are an escape, and it's nice to read about more exciting lives than my own!Property of a Noblewoman was a very nice read. Not much drama, and it was easy to see where it was going to end up, yet I still enjoyed it. Another thing about books with happy endings, yes, life is not always like that, but again - that's why we read.....to escape.....welcome back, Danielle!! Please STAY!!

I have always loved Danielle Steel but in the past few years it seems she's just turning out book , after book, after book with little thought toward her readers and more thought for her publishers; and because of that I swore I would never purchase another book of hers, well I did and I got what I deserved. This book is standard current Steele - same plot, same "no twists", same predictable ending. There is nothing earth shattering, no OMG moments, no "can't put this down" pages, just standard girl + bad relationship + enter new man + family rifts = another Danielle Steele book only with different names and different locations.Save your money and time, this book is an ok read but nothing special and let's hope Ms Steele gets back on track and produces a blockbuster book and not this "same old same old " redundant plots/storylines. Her fan base deserves more.

It has been a long while since I have read a Danielle Steel book. I used to be addicted to her work, but had to step away for awhile. Once again, I found her work to be predictable, and her characters not fully developed, but over all I did enjoy this book, mainly just on the premise. This was a good travel book to read, as I could put it down when interrupted. A good read, but not totally absorbing.

Any true romantic would love this story! As is expected from Danielle Steel , another book that cannot be put down. I love how she takes modern day problems and entertwines them in her story. It has many twists and turns. A good read book!

It truly kept my interest,we put so much in raising a family that we forget how to live our life once they have begun their own future. I believe in real life ths happens too often. I was happy to find a woman who was troubled with going on with her life incase the children needed her, but when she needed them they were a little too busy so in the end she began a new life with him and kept her children close at the same time

Great Book. The story was fascinating and deep. I couldn't put it down.Well written and kept me reading to the very end. It was a story of a person coming to find out the truth about her life and helping her to answer questions she had been plagued with for years. Wonderful story.

This was a different type of story than I usually read from Danielle Steel. Again it was interesting and a overturned I was surprised when she did not keep at least one ring for her son to give as an engagement ring but maybe she thought it would be too much. I loved when she fell in love again. What a great story!!!!

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