

# Sons of Fortune

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**BOOK ONE**

**GENESIS**

# 1

SUSAN PLONKED THE ice cream firmly on Michael Cartwright's head. It was the first occasion the two of them had met, or that was what Michael's best man claimed when Susan and Michael were married twenty-one years later.

Both of them were three years old at the time, and when Michael burst into tears, Susan's mother rushed over to find out what the problem was. All Susan was willing to say on the subject, and she repeated it several times, was, 'Well, he asked for it, didn't he?' Susan ended up with a spanking. Not the ideal start for any romance.

The next recorded meeting, according to the best man, was when they both arrived at their elementary school. Susan declared with a knowing air that Michael was a cry-baby, and what's more, a sneak. Michael told the other boys that he would share his Graham Crackers with anyone who was willing to pull Susan Illingworth's pigtails. Few boys tried a second time.

At the end of their first year, Susan and Michael were jointly awarded the class prize. Their teacher considered it the best course of action if she hoped to prevent another ice-cream incident. Susan told her friends that Michael's mother did his homework for him, to which Michael responded that at least it was in his own handwriting.

The rivalry continued unabated through junior and senior high until they departed for different universities,

Michael to Connecticut State and Susan to Georgetown. For the next four years, they both worked hard at avoiding each other. In fact the next occasion their paths crossed was, ironically, at Susan's home, when her parents threw a surprise graduation party for their daughter. The biggest surprise was not that Michael accepted the invitation, but that he turned up.

Susan didn't recognize her old rival immediately, partly because he had grown four inches and was, for the first time, taller than her. It wasn't until she offered him a glass of wine and Michael remarked, 'At least this time you didn't pour it all over me,' that she realized who the tall handsome man was.

'God, I behaved dreadfully, didn't I,' said Susan, wanting him to deny it.

'Yes, you did,' he said, 'but then I expect I deserved it.'

'You did,' she said, biting her tongue.

They chatted like old friends, and Susan was surprised at how disappointed she felt when a classmate from Georgetown joined them and started flirting with Michael. They didn't speak to each other again that evening.

Michael phoned the following day and invited her to see Spencer Tracy and Katharine Hepburn in *Adam's Rib*. Susan had already seen the movie, but still heard herself accepting, and couldn't believe how long she spent trying on different dresses before he arrived for that first date.

Susan enjoyed the film, even though it was her second time, and wondered if Michael would put an arm around her shoulder when Spencer Tracy kissed Katharine Hepburn. He didn't. But when they left the movie house, he took her hand as they crossed the road, and didn't let it go until they reached the coffee shop. That was when they had their first row, well, disagreement. Michael

admitted that he was going to vote for Thomas Dewey in November, while Susan made it clear that she wanted Harry Truman to remain in the White House. The waiter placed an ice cream in front of Susan. She stared down at it.

'Don't even think about it,' Michael said.

Susan wasn't surprised when he called the following day, although she had been sitting by the phone for over an hour pretending to be reading.

Michael had admitted to his mother over breakfast that morning it had been love at first sight.

'But you've known Susan for years,' remarked his mother.

'No I haven't, Mom,' he replied, 'I met her for the first time yesterday.'

Both sets of parents were delighted, but not surprised, when they became engaged a year later, after all, they'd hardly spent a day apart since Susan's graduation party. Both had landed jobs within days of leaving college, Michael as a trainee with the Hartford Life Insurance Company and Susan as a history teacher at Jefferson High, so they decided to get married during the summer vacation.

What they hadn't planned was that Susan would become pregnant while they were on their honeymoon. Michael couldn't hide his delight at the thought of being a father, and when Dr Greenwood told them in the sixth month that it was going to be twins he was doubly delighted.

'Well at least that will solve one problem,' was his first reaction.

'Namely?' asked Susan.

'One can be a Republican, and the other a Democrat.'

'Not if I have anything to do with it,' said Susan, rubbing her stomach.

Susan continued teaching until her eighth month, which happily coincided with the Easter vacation. She arrived at the hospital on the twenty-eighth day of the ninth month carrying a small suitcase. Michael left work early and joined her a few minutes later, with the news that he had been promoted to account executive.

'What does that mean?' asked Susan.

'It's a fancy title for an insurance salesman,' Michael told her. 'But it does include a small pay raise, which can only help now we're going to have two more mouths to feed.'

Once Susan was settled in her room, Dr Greenwood suggested to Michael that he wait outside during the delivery, as with twins there just might be complications.

Michael paced up and down the long corridor. Whenever he reached the portrait of Josiah Preston hanging on the far wall, he turned and retraced his steps. On the first few of these route marches, Michael didn't stop to read the long biography printed below the portrait of the hospital's founder. By the time the doctor emerged through the double doors, Michael knew the man's entire life history by heart.

The green-clad figure walked slowly towards him before removing his mask. Michael tried to fathom the expression on his face. In his profession it was an advantage to be able to decipher expressions and second-guess thoughts, because when it came to selling life insurance you needed to anticipate any anxieties a potential client might have. However, when it came to this life insurance policy, the doctor gave nothing away. When they came face to face, he smiled and said, 'Congratulations, Mr Cartwright, you have two healthy sons.'

Susan had delivered two boys, Nathaniel at 4.37 and Peter at 4.43 that afternoon. For the next hour, the parents took turns cuddling them, until Dr Greenwood

suggested that perhaps mother and babies should be allowed to rest. 'Having to feed two children will prove exhausting enough. I shall put them both in the special care nursery overnight,' he added. 'Nothing to worry about, because it's something we always do with twins.'

Michael accompanied his two sons to the nursery, where once again he was asked to wait in the corridor. The proud father pressed his nose up against the pane of glass that divided the corridor from the row of cribs, gazing at the boys as they lay sleeping, wanting to tell everyone who passed, 'they're both mine'. He smiled at the nurse who was standing by their side, keeping a watchful eye over the latest arrivals. She was placing name tags around their tiny wrists.

Michael couldn't remember how long he remained there before eventually returning to his wife's bedside. When he opened the door, he was pleased to find that Susan was fast asleep. He kissed her gently on the forehead. 'I'll see you in the morning my darling, just before I go to work,' he said, ignoring the fact that she couldn't hear a word. Michael left her, walked down the corridor and stepped into the elevator to find Dr Greenwood had exchanged his green scrubs for a sports jacket and grey flannels.

'I wish they were all that easy,' he told the proud father as the elevator stopped on the ground floor. 'Still, I'll drop by this evening, Mr Cartwright, to check on your wife and see how the twins are doing. Not that I anticipate any problems.'

'Thank you, doctor,' said Michael. 'Thank you.'

Dr Greenwood smiled, and would have left the hospital and driven home had he not spotted an elegant lady coming through the swing doors. He walked quickly across to join Ruth Davenport.

Michael Cartwright glanced back to see the doctor

holding open the elevator doors for two women, one heavily pregnant. An anxious look had replaced Dr Greenwood's warm smile. Michael only hoped that the doctor's latest charge would have as uncomplicated a birth as Susan had managed. He strolled across to his car, trying to think about what needed to be done next, still unable to remove the broad grin from his face.

The first thing he must do was phone his parents . . . grandparents.



RUTH DAVENPORT HAD already accepted that this would be her last chance. Dr Greenwood, for professional reasons, would not have put it quite so bluntly, although after two miscarriages in as many years, he could not advise his patient to risk becoming pregnant again.

Robert Davenport, on the other hand, was not bound by the same professional etiquette and when he learned that his wife was expecting for a third time, he had been characteristically blunt. He simply issued an ultimatum: 'this time you will take it easy', a euphemism for don't do anything that might harm the birth of our son. Robert Davenport assumed his first born would be a boy. He also knew that it would be difficult, if not impossible, for his wife to 'take it easy'. She was, after all, the daughter of Josiah Preston, and it was often said that if Ruth had been a boy, she, and not her husband, would have ended up as president of Preston Pharmaceuticals. But Ruth had to settle for the consolation prize when she succeeded her father as chairman of St Patrick's Hospital Trust, a cause with which the Preston family had been associated for four generations.

Although some of the older fraternity at St Patrick's needed to be convinced that Ruth Davenport was of the same mettle as her father, it was only weeks before they acknowledged that not only had she inherited the old man's energy and drive, but he had also passed on to her

his considerable knowledge and wisdom, so often lavished on an only child.

Ruth hadn't married until the age of thirty-three. It certainly wasn't for lack of suitors, many of whom went out of their way to claim undying devotion to the heir of the Preston millions. Josiah Preston hadn't needed to explain the meaning of fortune hunters to his daughter, because the truth was that she simply hadn't fallen in love with any of them. In fact, Ruth was beginning to doubt if she would ever fall in love. Until she met Robert.

Robert Davenport had joined Preston Pharmaceuticals from Roche via Johns Hopkins and Harvard Business School, on what Ruth's father described as the 'fast track'. In Ruth's recollection, it was the nearest the old man had come to using a modern expression. Robert had been made a vice-president by the age of twenty-seven, and at thirty-three was appointed the youngest deputy chairman in the company's history, breaking a record that had been set by Josiah himself. This time Ruth did fall in love, with a man who was neither overwhelmed nor overawed by the Preston name or the Preston millions. In fact when Ruth suggested that perhaps she should become Mrs Preston-Davenport, Robert had simply enquired, 'When do I get to meet this Preston-Davenport fellow who hopes to prevent me from becoming your husband?'

Ruth announced she was pregnant only weeks after their wedding, and the miscarriage was almost the only blemish in an otherwise charmed existence. However, even this quickly began to look like a passing cloud in an otherwise clear blue sky, when she became pregnant again eleven months later.

Ruth had been chairing a board meeting of the Hospital Trust when the contractions began, so she only needed to take the elevator up two floors to allow Dr Greenwood to carry out the necessary check-up. How-

ever, not even his expertise, his staff's dedication or the latest medical equipment could save the premature child. Kenneth Greenwood couldn't help recalling how, as a young doctor, he had faced a similar problem when he had delivered Ruth, and for a week the hospital staff didn't believe the baby girl would survive. And now the family were going through the same trauma thirty-five years later.

Dr Greenwood decided to have a private word with Mr Davenport, suggesting that perhaps the time had come for them to consider adoption. Robert reluctantly agreed, and said he would raise the subject with his wife just as soon as he felt she was strong enough.

Another year passed before Ruth agreed to visit an adoption society and with one of those coincidences that fate decides, and novelists are not allowed to consider, she became pregnant on the day she was due to visit a local children's home. This time Robert was determined to ensure that human error would not be the reason for their child failing to enter this world.

Ruth took her husband's advice, and resigned as chairman of the Hospital Trust. She even agreed that a full-time nurse should be employed – in Robert's words – to keep a watchful eye on her. Mr Davenport interviewed several applicants for the post and short-listed those whom he considered held the necessary qualifications. But his final choice would be based solely on whether he was convinced the applicant was strong-willed enough to make sure that Ruth kept to her agreement to 'take it easy', and to insist she didn't lapse into any old habits of wanting to organize everything she came across.

After a third round of interviews, Robert settled on a Miss Heather Nichol, who was a senior nurse on the maternity wing of St Patrick's. He liked her no-nonsense approach and the fact that she was neither married nor

graced with the kind of looks that would ensure that situation was likely to change in the foreseeable future. However, what finally tipped the balance was that Miss Nichol had already delivered over a thousand children into the world.

Robert was delighted by how quickly Miss Nichol settled into the household, and as each month slipped by, even he started to feel confident that they wouldn't be facing the same problem a third time. When Ruth passed first five, six, and then seven months without incident, Robert even raised the subject of possible Christian names: Fletcher Andrew if it was a boy, Victoria Grace if it was a girl. Ruth expressed only one preference: that were it a boy he should be known as Andrew, but all she hoped for was to be delivered of a healthy child.

Robert was in New York attending a medical conference, when Miss Nichol called him out of a seminar to report that his wife's contractions had begun. He assured her he would return by train immediately and then take a cab straight to St Patrick's.

Dr Greenwood was leaving the building, having successfully delivered the Cartwright twins, when he spotted Ruth Davenport coming through the swing doors accompanied by Miss Nichol. He turned round and caught up with the two ladies before the elevator doors closed.

Once he had settled his patient into a private room, Dr Greenwood quickly assembled the finest obstetrics team the hospital could muster. Had Mrs Davenport been a normal patient, he and Miss Nichol could have delivered the child without having to call on any extra assistance. However, following an examination, he realized that Ruth would require a Caesarean section if the child was to be delivered safely. He looked towards the ceiling and sent up a silent prayer, acutely aware that this was going to be her last chance.

The delivery took just over forty minutes. At the first glimpse of the baby's head, Miss Nichol let out a sigh of relief, but it wasn't until the doctor cut the umbilical cord that she added 'Alleluia'. Ruth, who was still under a general anaesthetic, was unable to see the relieved smile on Dr Greenwood's face. He quickly left the theatre to tell the expectant father, 'It's a boy.'

While Ruth slept peacefully it was left to Miss Nichol to take Fletcher Andrew off to the special care unit, where he would share his first few hours with several other progeny. Once she had tucked up the child in his little crib, she left the nurse to watch over him before returning to Ruth's room. Miss Nichol settled herself into a comfortable chair in the corner and tried to stay awake.

Just as night was contemplating day, Miss Nichol woke with a start. She heard the words, 'Can I see my son?'

'Of course you can, Mrs Davenport,' replied Miss Nichol rising quickly from her chair. 'I'll just go and fetch little Andrew.' As she closed the door behind her, she added, 'I'll be back in a few moments.'

Ruth pulled herself up, plumped up her pillow, switched on the bedside lamp and waited in eager anticipation.

As Miss Nichol walked along the corridor, she checked her watch. It was 4.31 a.m. She took the stairs down to the fifth floor and made her way to the nursery. Miss Nichol opened the door quietly so as not to wake any of the sleeping offspring. As she entered a room illuminated by a small fluorescent light glowing overhead, her eyes settled on the night nurse dozing in the corner. She didn't disturb the young woman as it was probably the only few moments of slumber that she would manage during her eight-hour shift.

Miss Nichol tiptoed between the two rows of cots, stopping only for a moment to glance at the twins in the

double crib that had been placed next to Fletcher Andrew Davenport.

She stared down at a child who would want for nothing for the rest of his life. As she bent over to lift the little boy from his crib, she froze. After a thousand births, you are well qualified to recognize death. The pallor of the skin and the stillness of the eyes made it unnecessary for her to check the pulse.

It is often spur-of-the-moment decisions, sometimes made by others, that can change our whole lives.