

A woman with blonde hair is wearing a long, flowing red dress with a white lace collar and a fitted bodice. She is standing against a light-colored, textured background.

OVER A MILLION COPIES IN PRINT

*Redeeming  
A NOVEL  
Love*

FRANCINE  
RIVERS

20<sup>th</sup>  
ANNIVERSARY  
EDITION

## Praise for *Redeeming Love*

“Francine Rivers is one of the most riveting novelists I’ve ever read. *Redeeming Love* is spell-binding. Her vivid word-pictures of the pursuing-forgiving love of God thrilled my soul.”

—PATSY CLAIRMONT, author of *Sportin’ a “Tude”*

“The timeless biblical themes of surrender to God, forgiveness, and unconditional love are beautifully portrayed in this compelling novel, brought to life through unforgettable characters.”

—STEVE ARTERBURN, New Life Clinics, Laguna Beach, CA

“As she carefully reveals God’s love and transforming power in Angel’s life, Francine Rivers has skillfully taken a story out of biblical history and made it relevant for today. The story becomes a reality. I highly recommend it for a worthwhile and enjoyable read.”

—BEVERLY LAHAYE, founder and president of Concerned Women for America and author of bestselling, *Spirit-Controlled Women*

“Simply put, *Redeeming Love* is the most powerful work of fiction you will ever read. Steeped in Scripture and filled with grace, it is a masterpiece that moves beyond allegory to touch the reader at the deepest level where faith is born. Michael Hosea is the consummate hero; Angel, in one way or another, is every woman who has ever lived without love. You cannot read this book and not be changed.”

—LIZ CURTIS HIGGS, author of *The Parable of the Lily*, Louisville, KY

“One of the most important things I do as a writer is read—a lot. Some books teach me, others entertain me, others thrill me by carrying me to worlds far away. Francine Rivers’ *Redeeming Love* does all of the above and so much more. My heart and soul were profoundly shaken as I realized anew the lessons portrayed through the stories of Hosea and Gomer, Michael and Angel. This may be the single most moving book you will read this year—or in your lifetime.”

—ANGELA ELWELL HUNT, Angela Hunt Communications, Seminole, FL

“Another great story from Francine Rivers. Men and women pick this up! Is it a western or a romance? It doesn’t really matter. The story will intrigue you! Men, rediscover the joy and importance of honor. Women, be affirmed in your real worth! Together, discover a God of redeeming love. A wonderful piece of fiction that could be truth for you!”

—DON PAPE, Literary Agent, Alive Communications, Inc.

## A NOTE FROM THE PUBLISHER

Over the past decade, thousands of letters and e-mails to Francine have poured in from people who, after reading this book, experienced life-changing encounters with God's relentless love, people who felt inspired to love their spouses more, and those who felt the healing touch of true redemption. If you've read this powerful story before, we believe you will be touched more deeply than you were the first time. If you're about to delve in for the first time, prepare to join those of us who have wept, repented, rejoiced, and made new commitments to Christ.

A caution to first-time readers: In this retelling of the biblical story of Hosea and Gomer in an 1800s setting, Francine was faced with some difficult choices. Scripture deals openly and frankly with Gomer's marital infidelity and prostitution. How much "detail" then, should Francine include to bring that impact into a fresh setting? As you can see in her author's note on pages 465–468, she was concerned that her readers would understand why she must deal so directly with these issues. We believe that you will understand—when you have read the whole book. But until you have, please exercise discretion with younger readers. If this book were a movie, it would be rated PG-13.

Here at the WaterBrook Multnomah Publishing Group, we measure the success of our books by whether or not they deliver real life-change to our readers. We aspire to produce books that challenge you to grow and to persevere, and that draw you closer to God. Year after year, *Redeeming Love* continues to do just that. Readers of all ages and genders have been impacted by this touching account of hope and redemption. Many of Francine's fans have hailed this riveting story as one of the best works of fiction of all time. We agree, and we expect you will too.

Stephen W. Cobb  
President  
WaterBrook Multnomah Publishing Group

*Redeeming  
Love*

A NOVEL



FRANCINE  
RIVERS

*Francine Rivers*



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Study Guide written by P. Lynch.

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# Prologue

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*The prince of darkness is a gentleman.*

S H A K E S P E A R E

N E W E N G L A N D , 1 8 3 5

Alex Stafford was just like Mama said. He was tall and dark, and Sarah had never seen anyone so beautiful. Even dressed in dusty riding clothes, his hair damp with perspiration, he was like the princes in the stories Mama read. Sarah's heart beat with wild joy and pride. None of the other fathers she saw at Mass compared to him.

He looked at her with his dark eyes, and her heart sang. She was wearing her best blue frock and white pinafore, and Mama had braided her hair with pink and blue ribbons. Did Papa like the way she looked? Mama said blue was his favorite color, but why didn't he smile? Was she fidgeting? Mama said to stand straight and still and act like a lady. She said he would like that. But he didn't look pleased at all.

"Isn't she beautiful, Alex?" Mama said. Her voice sounded strange...tight, like she was choking. "Isn't she the most beautiful little girl you've ever seen?"

Sarah watched Papa's dark eyes frown. He didn't look happy. He looked angry. Like Mama looked sometimes when Sarah talked too much or asked too many questions.

“Just a few minutes,” Mama said quickly. Too quickly. Was she afraid? But why? “That’s all I’m asking, Alex. Please. It would mean so much to her.”

Alex Stafford stared down at Sarah. His mouth was pressed tight, and he studied her silently. Sarah stood as still as she could. She’d stared at herself in the mirror so long this morning, she knew what he would see. She had her father’s chin and nose, and her mother’s blonde hair and fair skin. Her eyes were like her mother’s, too, although they were even more blue. Sarah wanted Papa to think she was pretty, and she gazed up at him hopefully. But the look in his eyes was not a nice one.

“Did you pick blue on purpose, Mae?” Papa’s words startled Sarah. They were cold and angry. “Because it brings out the color of her eyes?”

Sarah couldn’t help it, she glanced at her mother—and her heart fell. Mama’s face was filled with hurt.

Alex glanced toward the foyer. “Cleo!”

“She’s not here,” Mama said quietly, keeping her head high. “I gave her the day off.”

Papa’s eyes seemed to get even darker. “Did you? Well, that leaves you in a fix, doesn’t it, darling?”

Mama stiffened, then bit her lip and glanced down at Sarah. What was wrong? Sarah wondered sadly. Wasn’t Papa happy to see her? She had been so excited that she was actually going to be with him at last, even for a little while....

“What would you have me do?” Mama’s words were directed at Papa, so Sarah stayed silent, still hoping.

“Send her away. She knows how to find Cleo, I would imagine.”

Pink spots appeared on Mama’s cheeks. “Meaning what, Alex? That I entertain others in your absence?”

Sarah’s smile fell in confusion. They spoke so coldly to one another. Neither looked at her. Had they forgotten she was there? What was wrong? Mama was distraught. Why was Papa so angry about Cleo not being home?

Chewing her lip, Sarah looked between them. Stepping closer, she tugged on her father’s coat. “Papa...”

“Don’t call me that.”

She blinked, frightened and confused by his manner. He was her papa.

Mama said so. He even brought her presents every time he came. Mama gave them to her. Maybe he was angry that she had never thanked him. “I want to thank you for the presents you—”

“Hush, Sarah,” her mother said quickly. “Not now, darling.”

Papa flashed Mama a thunderous look. “Let her speak. It’s what you wanted, isn’t it? Why are you shushing her now, Mae?”

Mama stepped closer and put her hand on Sarah’s shoulder. Sarah could feel Mama’s fingers trembling, but Papa bent toward her now, smiling. “What presents?” he said.

He was so handsome, just like Mama said. She was proud to have a father like him.

“Tell me, little one.”

“I always like the candies you bring me,” Sarah said, feeling warm and proud beneath his attention. “They are very nice. But best of everything, I love the crystal swan.”

She smiled again, glowing with joy that Papa listened to her so carefully. He even smiled, though Sarah wasn’t sure she liked his smile. It was small and tight.

“Indeed,” he said and straightened. He looked at Mama. “I’m so pleased to know how much my gifts mean.”

Sarah looked up at her father, thrilled at his approval. “I put it on my windowsill. The sun shines through it and makes colors dance on the wall. Would you like to come and see?” She took his hand. When he jerked away, she blinked, hurt, not understanding.

Mama bit her lip and reached out a hand toward Papa, then stopped suddenly. She looked afraid again. Sarah looked from one parent to the other, struggling to understand. What had she done wrong? Wasn’t Papa pleased that she liked his presents?

“So you pass on my gifts to the child,” Papa said. “It’s good to know what they mean to you.”

Sarah bit her lip at the coldness in Papa’s voice, but before she could speak, Mama touched her shoulder gently. “Darling, be a good girl and go outside and play now.”

Sarah looked up, distressed. Had she done something wrong? “Can’t I

stay? I'll be very quiet." Mama couldn't seem to say more. Her eyes were moist and she looked at Papa.

Alex bent down to Sarah. "I want you to go outside and play," he said quietly. "I want to talk to your mother alone." He smiled and patted her cheek.

Sarah smiled, utterly enchanted. Papa had touched her; he wasn't angry at all. He loved her! Just as Mama said. "Can I come back when you're done talking?"

Papa straightened stiffly. "Your mother will come and get you when she's ready. Now, run along as you've been told."

"Yes, Papa." Sarah wanted to stay, but she wanted to please her father more. She went out of the parlor, skipping through the kitchen to the back door. She picked a few daisies that grew in the garden patch by the door and then headed for the rose trellis. She plucked the petals. "He loves me, he loves me not, he loves me, he loves me not..." She hushed as she came around the corner. She didn't want to disturb Mama and Papa. She just wanted to be close to them.

Sarah dreamed contentedly. Maybe Papa would put her up on his shoulders. She wondered if he would take her for a ride on his big black horse. She would have to change her dress, of course. He wouldn't want her to soil it. She wished he had let her sit on his lap while he talked to Mama. She would have liked that very much, and she would have been no bother.

The parlor window was open, and she could hear voices. Mama loved the smell of roses to fill the parlor. Sarah wanted to sit and listen to her parents. That way she would know just when Papa wanted her to come back again. If she was very quiet, she wouldn't disturb them, and all Mama would have to do was lean out and call her name.

"What was I to do, Alex? You've never spent so much as a minute with her. What was I to tell her? That her father doesn't care? That he wishes she had never even been born?"

Sarah's lips parted. *Deny it, Papa! Deny it!*

"I brought that swan back from Europe for you, and you throw it away on a child who has no appreciation for its value. Did you give her the pearls as well? What about the music box? I suppose she got that, too!"

The daisies fluttered from Sarah's hand. She sat down on the ground, careless of her pretty dress. Her heart slowed from its wild, happy beat. Everything inside her seemed to spiral downward with each word.

"Alex, please. I didn't see any harm in it. It made it easier. She asked me this morning if she was old enough yet to meet you. She asks me every time she knows you're coming. How could I say no to her again? I didn't have the heart. She doesn't understand your neglect, and neither do I."

"You know how I feel about her."

"How can you say how you feel? You don't even know her. She's a beautiful child, Alex. She's quick and charming and she isn't afraid of anything. She's like you in so many ways. She's *someone*, Alex. You can't ignore her existence forever. She's your daughter...."

"I have enough children by my wife. Legitimate children. I told you I didn't want another."

"How can you say that? How can you not love your own flesh and blood?"

"I told you how I felt from the beginning, but you wouldn't listen. She should never have been born, Mae, but you insisted on having your own way."

"Do you think I wanted to get pregnant? Do you think I planned to have her?"

"I've often wondered. Especially when I arranged a way out of the situation for you and you refused. The doctor I sent you to would have taken care of the whole mess. He would've gotten rid—"

"I couldn't do it. How could you expect me to kill my unborn child? Don't you understand? It's a mortal sin."

"You've spent too much time in church," he said derisively. "Have you ever thought that you wouldn't have the problems you do now if you had gotten rid of her the way I told you. It would've been easy. But you ran out."

"I wanted her!" Mama said brokenly. "She was part of you, Alex, and part of me. I wanted her even if you didn't...."

"Is that the real reason?"

"You're hurting me, Alex!"

Sarah flinched as something shattered. "Is that the real reason, Mae? Or

did you have her because you thought bearing my child would give you a hold over me you otherwise lacked?"

"You can't believe that!" Mama was crying now. "You do, don't you? You're a fool, Alex. Oh, what have I done? I gave up everything for you! My family, my friends, my self-respect, everything I believed in, every hope I ever had...."

"I bought you this cottage. I give you all the money you could possibly need."

Mama's voice rose strangely. "Do you know what it's like for me to walk down the street in this town? You come and go when and as you please. And they know who you are, and they know what I am. No one looks at me. No one speaks to me. Sarah feels it, too. She asked me about it once, and I told her we were different from other people. I didn't know what else to say." Her voice broke. "I'll probably go to hell for what I've become."

"I'm sick of your guilt and I'm sick of hearing about that child. She's ruining everything between us. Do you remember how happy we were? We never argued. I couldn't wait to come to you, to be with you."

"Don't—"

"And how much time do I have left with you today? Enough? You've used it up on her. I told you what would happen, didn't I? I wish she had never been born!"

Mama cried out a terrible name. There was a crash. Terrified, Sarah got up and ran. She raced through Mama's flowers and across the lawn and onto the pathway to the springhouse. She ran until she couldn't run anymore. Gasping, her sides burning, she dropped into the tall grass, her shoulders heaving with sobs, her face streaked with tears. She heard a horse galloping toward her. Scrambling for a better hiding place in the vines about the creek, she peered out and saw her father ride by on his great black horse. Ducking down, she huddled there, crying, and waited for Mama to come fetch her.

But Mama didn't come and she didn't call. After a while, Sarah wandered back to the springhouse and sat by the flowered vines and waited longer. By the time Mama came, Sarah had dried her tears and dusted off her pretty frock. She was still shaking from what she had heard.

Mama was very pale, her eyes dull and red rimmed. There was a blue

mark on the side of her face. She had tried to cover it with powder. She smiled, but it wasn't like her usual smile.

"Where have you been, darling? I've been looking and looking for you." Sarah knew she hadn't. She had been watching for her. Mama licked her lacy handkerchief and wiped a smudge from Sarah's cheek. "Your father was called away suddenly on business."

"Is he coming back?" Sarah was afraid. She never wanted to see him again. He had hurt Mama and made her cry.

"Maybe not for a long time. We'll have to just wait and see. He's a very busy and important man." Sarah said nothing, and her Mama lifted her and hugged her close. "It's all right, sweetheart. You know what we're going to do? We're going to go back to the cottage and change our dresses. Then we'll pack a picnic and go down to the creek. Would you like that?"

Sarah nodded and put her arms around Mama's neck. Her mouth trembled, and she tried not to cry. If she cried, Mama might guess she had been eavesdropping and then she would be angry too.

Mama held her tightly, her face buried in Sarah's hair. "We'll make it through this. You'll see, sweetheart. We will. *We will.*"

Alex didn't come back, and Mama grew thin and wan. She stayed in bed too late, and when she got up, she didn't want to go for long walks the way she used to. When she smiled, her eyes didn't light up. Cleo said she needed to eat more. Cleo said a lot of things, carelessly, with Sarah close enough to hear.

"He's still sending you money, Miss Mae. That's something."

"I don't care about the money." Mama's eyes filled up. "I've never cared about it."

"You'd care if you didn't have any."

Sarah tried to cheer Mama up by bringing her big bouquets of flowers. She found pretty stones and washed them, giving them to her as presents. Mama always smiled and thanked her, but there was no sparkle in her eyes. Sarah sang the songs Mama taught her, sad Irish ballads and a few Latin chants from mass.

"Mama, why don't you sing anymore?" Sarah asked, climbing up onto

the bed with her and setting her doll in the rumpled covers. “You’ll feel better if you sing.”

Mama brushed her long blonde hair slowly. “I don’t feel much like singing, darling. Mama has a lot on her mind right now.”

Sarah felt a heaviness growing inside her. It was all her fault. All her fault. If she hadn’t been born, Mama would be happy. “Will Alex come back, Mama?”

Mama looked at her, but Sarah didn’t care. She wouldn’t call him Papa anymore. He had hurt Mama and made her sad. Ever since he’d left, Mama had scarcely paid attention to her. Sarah had even heard Mama tell Cleo that love wasn’t a blessing, it was a curse.

Sarah glanced at Mama’s face, and her heart sank. She looked so sad. Her thoughts were far away again, and Sarah knew she was thinking of *him*. Mama wanted him to come back. Mama cried at night because he didn’t. Mama pressed her face into her pillow at night, but Sarah still heard her sobs.

She chewed on her lip and lowered her head, playing distractedly with her doll. “What if I got sick and died, Mama?”

“You won’t get sick,” Mama said, glancing at her. She smiled. “You’re far too young and healthy to die.”

Sarah watched her mother brushing her hair. It was like sunshine flowing over her pale shoulders. Mama was so pretty. How could Alex not love her? “But if I did, Mama, would he come back and stay with you?”

Mama went very still. She turned and stared at Sarah, and the horrified look in her eyes frightened her. She shouldn’t have said that. Now Mama might guess she’d heard them fighting...

“Don’t ever think that, Sarah.”

“But—”

“No! Don’t you ever ask such a question again. Do you understand?”

Mama had never raised her voice before; Sarah felt her chin quiver. “Yes, Mama.”

“Never again,” Mama said more gently. “Promise me. None of this has anything to do with you, Sarah.” Mama reached out to pull her into her arms and stroke her tenderly. “I love you, Sarah. I love you so much. I love

you more than anything or anyone in the whole wide world.”

Except for him, Sarah thought. Except for Alex Stafford. What if he came back? What if he made Mama choose? What would Mama do then?

Afraid, Sarah clung to her mother and prayed he would stay away.

A young man came to see Mama.

Sarah watched her mother speak with him while Sarah played with her doll near the fireplace. The only people who came to this cottage were Mister Pennyrod, who brought firewood, and Bob. Bob liked Cleo. He worked at the market and teased Cleo about rump roasts and juicy legs o’ lamb. Cleo laughed at him, but Sarah didn’t think he was very funny. He wore a soiled white apron covered with blood.

The young man gave Mama a letter, but she didn’t open it. She served him tea, and he said thank you. He didn’t say very much after that, except to talk about the weather and how pretty Mama’s flower garden was. He said it was a long ride from the city. Mama gave him biscuits and forgot all about Sarah.

She knew something was wrong. Mama sat too straight and she spoke very softly. “She’s a pretty little girl,” the man said and smiled at her. Sarah looked down again, embarrassed, afraid Mama would send her from the room because he had noticed her.

“Yes, she is. Thank you.”

“She looks like you. Pretty as a sunrise.”

Mama smiled at her. “Sarah, why don’t you go outside and cut some flowers for the table.”

Sarah took her doll and went out without a word of argument. She wanted to please Mama. She took a sharp knife from the kitchen drawer and went out to the flower garden. Mama loved roses best. Sarah added spikes of larkspur, red stock, ranunculus, marguerites, and daisies until the straw basket on her arm was full.

When she came back inside, the young man was gone. The letter was open in Mama’s lap. Her eyes were bright and her cheeks full of lively color. She smiled as she folded the letter and tucked it into her sleeve. She stood