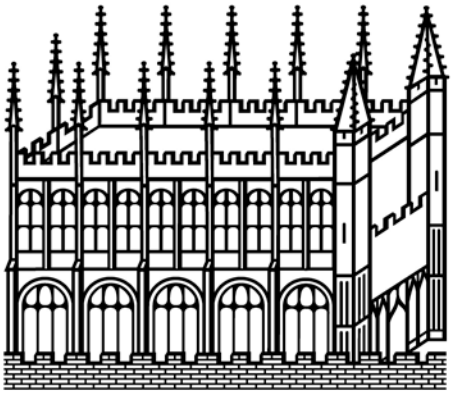

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PHILOPENA

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BY

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"THE REAL ADVENTURE," "MARY WOLLASTON," ETC.

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PHILOPENA

CHAPTER I

THEY had been talking for more than an hour without getting anywhere. The momentary silence that had fallen meant nothing except that neither side was willing to yield an inch. Young Henry Pyncheon leaned back in his swivel chair, put on his rimmed spectacles, and gazed wistfully at the clock. It was a quarter to two and he wanted his lunch, but there was nothing to indicate that he was going to get it.

The bank had a way of dumping cases like this into Henry Pyncheon's lap. He had been discovered to possess a special knack for talking to unreasonable heirs, telling them, without giving offence, what they could do and what they could not. Persuading them to be reasonable, and tactfully keeping them away from the portals of the courts. But he was about ready to admit that this situation had completely baffled him. In one respect it

was unique in his experience. The quarrel was not about money at all.

In a compact group at his left sat Mrs. Howard between her two grown-up children. She must have been getting on towards sixty, but was extraordinarily fresh-looking, enthusiastic, eager—she flushed as easily as a boy—intelligent, of course—dressed rather romantically perhaps, but not ludicrously so—faddy, probably, in her ideas—it was a safe bet that she was heart and soul in the cause of woman suffrage. But there was no harm in that.

Her children were all right, too.

The son, Vincent, a man somewhere in his thirties, was the headmaster of a school where they put into practice some rather startling theories of education. There could not be any harm in them, though, for many perfectly sound people sent their children to him. He had a likeable look, and when, as once or twice happened, he smiled, it became positively magnetic. He was married, which was perhaps a factor in the situation.

The daughter, Janet, had just published a highbrow novel about which people were talking. It was rather advanced in its ideas, but Pyncheon, who had—in the line of duty—read as much of it as he could, had found nothing really objectionable in it.

The younger son, Anson, for whom they wore mourning, had probably been the wildest of the lot—

an out-and-out socialist. Henry Pyncheon felt that that was going too far. But then, Anson was dead.

No, they were an exceptionally fine lot of people, these Howards.

But then, the other camp, the Wainwrights, who sat at his right hand, were a fine couple, too.

Mr. Wainwright was an extraordinarily attractive man ; grey, trim, soldierly. A bit of a martinet one might guess, but not an unkindly one. He was rich by inheritance, and had probably made himself richer by his own abilities. But that was not the chief thing about him. He was a trustee of the Art Museum, and a director of one of the settlements—a really public-spirited citizen. He was very conservative, of course ; an old line Republican who regarded President Roosevelt as a menace to society ; but you could hardly say that this opinion rendered him unfit to be a guardian of the young.

Outraged as he must have felt over the impasse they were in—he certainly could not have been used to having his reasonable wishes denied him—he betrayed no sign of impatience. Pyncheon was interested in his hands. One of them, as he sat there so straight in his chair, lay relaxed upon his knee. But the other, the one nearer his wife, the one whose arm had a black band round it, moved occasionally with a wordless message to her. He was holding her in.

The Wainwrights wore mourning too, for their only daughter, Dorothy, who had been Anson Howard's wife.

That young pair had certainly started something when they fell in love and married, as they had done a year and a half ago. An earthquake shock it must have been to the Wainwrights, and to the Howards hardly less. The youngsters did not care. They had each other, and that was enough for them.

Six months ago Dorothy had given birth to a pair of twin girls; Cynthia and Celia they had named them. And then this summer, only a few weeks ago, the young parents had gone off by way of a holiday on a camping and fishing trip in Canada. They had been caught in a sudden squall on the lake in a canoe, and had both been drowned, the bodies having been recovered by the guides the next day. They had had each other to the full and had gone to death in each other's arms.

But tragedy sometimes leaves echoes of comedy behind it. The insoluble problem which now held five people deadlocked in implacable opposition across Henry Pyncheon's desk was the disposition of the future of two unconcerned fat little gurgling, rattle-banging six-months-old babies.

"I can't see that there's anything more to say." Mrs. Howard's full-bodied voice was passionately repressed into the inflections of courtesy. "We feel,

my son and daughter and I, that enough has been said already."

" Too much ! " Mr. Wainwright crisply agreed.

Mrs. Howard ignored him. She went on speaking to young Pyncheon.

" The question is, what are we going to do ? The thing simply must be decided. The present situation's impossible. A trust company and a nurse can't bring up children. They must have a home at once."

" I quite agree with Mrs. Howard," Wainwright said.

But of course they had agreed to that an hour and a half ago. The wheel was simply starting again.

" It doesn't seem to us," Mrs. Howard went on, " that there can be any doubt as to how the decision should be made. If Mr. Wainwright wishes to contribute to the support of the children, we shall make no objection. But we certainly shall make no objection if he does not. We are amply able to bring them up, to educate them to lead useful lives, and to support them till it's to their own best interest that they shall support themselves. They're my son's children ; they've inherited his name. And it's perfectly obvious that they should be brought up in accordance with the ideas we know he had for them. To find themselves. To live and express their own lives finely and freely. It's simply unthinkable that

they should be brought up under the taboos and fetishes . . . "

Mrs. Wainwright drew a quick breath, but her husband's hand went out and rested upon her arm, and Mrs. Howard was permitted to round out her sentence.

" . . . for which our friends profess so deep a reverence."

" The taboos and fetishes," Mr. Wainwright pointed out politely, " to which Mrs. Howard refers are discipline and duty, and also, I suppose, religion. We've been over this ground a dozen times, and there's no use going over it again. Our daughter was the mother of these children, and the responsibility for their upbringing naturally comes back to us. My wife and I will never consent to their education on the lines Mrs. Howard indicates."

Henry Pyncheon glanced once more at the clock and then took off his rimmed spectacles and laid them on the desk. There was only one way out that he could see, and a memory of King Solomon showed him that.

" Fortunately," he observed mildly, " there are two of them. Why not divide them up? Let each family take one."

For a moment or two after he had made the suggestion everybody talked at once. He waited until the crackle of protest had died down.

" It isn't an ideal solution, I admit," he then

went on. "It seems too bad that each of these two little girls should be deprived of a sister who's really hers, and a twin sister at that. But I imagine the judge will consent to it if he's convinced that there's no other basis for agreement. I don't believe he'd award both to either family against the protest of the other. The procedure would be for each side to draw up a petition to be guardian of one of the children."

Young Pyncheon had a feeling that his compromise was going to be accepted. He was not pleased with it himself. It seemed a shame that two nice little twins like that should be split like a philopena. He decided to bluff a little in the hope of improving the situation.

"As I said," he went on, "I can't, of course, speak for the court, but I believe that the judge will regard the petitions more favourably if they contain an agreement that the children shall not be unnecessarily separated; that they shall be allowed to visit each other at stated times."

"We'll agree to that," said Mr. Wainwright.

After a brief consultation the Howards agreed to it, too.

"Then," said Pyncheon cheerfully, "the only remaining question is which family shall take which child."

"I can't see that it makes much difference," said Mr. Wainwright. "They can't be told apart."

"We'll take Cynthia, then?" suggested Mrs. Howard.

Mr. Wainwright nodded.

His wife took his arm pleadingly. "I wonder," she said, "if they'd mind changing names. I love the name Cynthia."

"It would be easier to change the children," said Mrs. Howard. "We'll be perfectly content to take Celia."

At half-past two Henry Pyncheon, famished but cheerful, sat down to his belated lunch. He had settled that business pretty well, he thought. He had started something, too, but he did not know that.

"It's half-past four," Aunt Janet called, "and the car is coming for Cynthia at five, so she'd better come down and dress."

The twins were playing up in the tree-house, having much too good a time to welcome an interruption.

"Don't hear her yet," said Celia. "It won't take you any half an hour to dress. She can't see us, anyhow. She only thinks we're here."

"Children!" the voice called again.

"Yes, Aunt Janet," Cynthia answered.

She got up with a sigh and dusted her bare knees.

"What did you go and do that for?" Celia demanded. "We could have played much longer. I suppose you *want* to go home."

" I do not," Cynthia returned. " But what's the use? She'd know when we did come down that we'd heard her the first time, wouldn't she? "

" Oh, I suppose so," Celia agreed. " Only I wish you didn't have to go."

Cynthia climbed over the railing round the platform that formed their house—twenty-five feet off the ground it was—jumped for the rope which dangled from a higher bough of the great maple tree, and came down, hand under hand. This had been Celia's special trick that morning, and Cynthia had spent an exciting hour mastering it.

" Oh, do be careful! " her grandmother cried from the veranda.

Aunt Janet made no comment till she had reached the ground.

" I suppose I'll get used to that in time, if I don't die of heart failure first," she then commented. " Cynthia's coming right along, isn't she?"

" Yes, Aunt Janet," said Cynthia.

" ' Yes, Aunt Janet ' ! " echoed her aunt, with a laugh. " It's perfectly ridiculous the way you children mimic each other. Cynthia says that because they teach her to."

" Oh, all right," said Cynthia, with a grin.

Then she turned and called up the tree, " Come on down, Celia! "

Celia took the tip and came clambering down.

" Really," said Janet to her mother, as the very

red-faced pair were disappearing into the house, "really, since Cynthia had her hair bobbed, and when they're dressed alike, you can hardly tell which is which."

"I can't tell at all," said her mother, "I don't pretend to. I assume that they know, and leave it at that."

The twins had at this time never heard of Mr. Henry Pyncheon, and so had no idea how much they owed to that happy afterthought which had mitigated the harshness of his version of the judgment of Solomon. At no other moment, perhaps, than that one, a dozen years ago now, at the end of the long struggle in his office when compromise was in the air, would either the Wainwrights or the Howards have consented to these weekly visits between the twins.

The gulf between the two families had widened. Arthur Wainwright was older and richer and more conservative. Just now—this was 1915—the thing about the Howards that made him see red was their attitude towards the war. The Howards were pacifists. Janet had just written a novel in which the hero was a socialist and had a German name. Vincent in his school was revising the *Battle Hymn of the Republic* so that it went, "As he died to make men holy, let us *live* to make men free." And as for Mrs. Howard, she was simply on the rampage; lecturing against preparedness; urging upon wom-

en's clubs a crusade against war-like toys for children, and all the rest of it.

What the Howards thought of Mr. Wainwright need not be dwelt upon. One of the things he owned was a factory that was manufacturing trench mortars.

But young Pyncheon's happy idea, embodied as it had been in two petitions addressed to the Probate Court, had become, as it were, the law of the land. Weekly visits at one house or the other for the twins who, despite the terrific emotions that were discharging their lightning overhead, remained completely calm. They greeted each other rapturously every Saturday morning, and parted regretfully at five in the afternoon.

In theory the visits were divided alternately between the two houses. But in practice they took place, in fine weather at the Howards' big suburban house which stood at the edge of the school grounds, rather more often than at the Wainwrights' more formal mansion in town. In winter it was the other way about.

The twins argued a good deal as to which of them had the preferable lot. Supposing they could live together all the time in one household or the other, which would they choose ?

Celia said that she would choose Cynthia's. Cynthia had a million times more things than she had. Her playroom had everything in it you could

think of. There had been a three storey doll-house, now rather outgrown, to be sure, with a bathroom and a piano, and tiny electric lights that you worked from a switch outside. She had a little electric stove that you could really cook things on ; a grocery store with a counter and scales, and miniature drawers you could keep things in. She had boys' toys, too ; an electric train, lead soldiers, and cannons that would shoot little wooden balls and knock the soldiers over. She had so many dresses she simply didn't know how many there were ; and soft, shiny silk things underneath. She had a coral necklace and a coral ring. To-day she was wearing for the first time a little gold wrist-watch her grandfather had brought home to her from New York, not because it was her birthday or anything, but just because he thought she would like it.

Cynthia's counter-argument was that, though she had more things, Celia had more fun. People let her alone more. It was no crime to be late for meals. If she wanted to take " Huckleberry Finn " to bed with her, and turn on the light and read long after she was supposed to be asleep, nobody minded. She did not have to study French, nor take music and dancing lessons. She never seemed to get any orders that had to be, without argument, obeyed. Her grandmother and her uncle and her aunts frequently asked her if she did not think it would be better if she did this or that, but if Celia remained convinced

that it would not, that seemed to end the argument.

Cynthia could not really be so sure, as Celia seemed to be, that the other had the better of it. The factor that baffled her was one of which she was not fully conscious, namely, that she really loved her grandparents, particularly her grandfather, much more whole-heartedly than Celia loved any of the Howards. To-day, however, had been more than usually joyous, and Cynthia wanted not to go home with an intensity which took her to the length of wishing she were Celia so that she might stay.

She had dressed on her arrival that morning, for purposes of their rough and tumble play, in some spare clothes of Celia's; tunic, bloomers and tennis shoes. And she now stood gazing discontentedly at the daintily smocked dress, the silk stockings and the shoes which lay neatly arrayed, just as she had left them, waiting to be put on. Her precious wrist-watch was on Celia's bureau. She had left it behind when they started out to play, fearing that it might be broken. Celia went over to it now and picked it up rapturously, held it to her ear to hear it tick, and then carried it out into the hall to compare it with the clock and see if it were really telling the correct time. She came back a moment later with the expression of one convinced against her will.

"It says exactly the same as the hall clock—

almost," she remarked. " I don't see why I can't have one." She laid it down with a sudden gesture of petulance. " It's just simply not fair. I wish I was you."

" Well," said Cynthia, " you can be if you like. For a time, I mean. Till next Saturday."

They stared at each other round eyed.

" You mean," said Celia, in an awed whisper, " me dress up in your clothes and go back with the car when it comes ? And pretend I'm you ? "

Cynthia nodded.

They continued to stare at each other. Then, with a giggle, Celia pulled her tunic over her head, threw her shoes across the room, slid out of her bloomers and made a dash for Cynthia's clothes.

" Wait a minute ! " said Cynthia. " We've got to change everything, underclothes and all. Hannah comes and gets my things every night to put them in the wash. What time does that watch say ? "

" Quarter to five."

" We'll have to fly."

When they were both stark naked they paused to grin at each other. They looked very nice, with their black hair and white skins and big grey eyes. Celia giggled again, but this time weakly. She was beginning to waver.

" We can't ever do it," she said.

" I'd like to know why not ? We're exactly alike,

aren't we? How do *we* know which of us is which?"

"'How do *we* know?'" Celia gasped.

"Yes," Cynthia persisted. "Perhaps we're mixed up now. Don't you remember when you got that bruise on my leg?"

"You got it yourself," insisted Celia, "when you ran into the wheelbarrow."

"How do you *know?*" demanded Cynthia. "Maybe we were mixed up then."

"Silly!" Celia said scornfully.

Cynthia was already putting on her sister's discarded clothes.

"You'd better hurry up and put on your things or you'll keep the car waiting," she observed.

Celia, trembling with excitement, picked up the silk vest and put it on.

"But can I really do it? Won't they know?"

Cynthia reassured her. "Of course you can. How are they going to know? Go on dressing. I'll tell you everything before the car comes.

"You've got to curtsy to people. But you know how to do that. Remember the day you practised? And when people kiss you, turn your cheek so that they won't kiss you on your mouth. That's supposed to be terrible. You know how to play dominoes, don't you? Match the ends and see who comes out first? Grandfather will probably play a game with you to-morrow afternoon. Lessons will be

easy. There are book marks in all my school books. You just go on from there. It's all right about French, because my French governess is ill."

"What about your music lessons?" asked Celia.

And for an instant this stumped them both.

Cynthia recovered first. "Oh well," she said easily, "she'll probably be surprised and pretty cross, but she won't think you aren't me because she's never seen you. You'll have to be ill, I expect, or hurt your wrist, or something."

Celia was now dressed and she flew to the bureau to get the watch.

"I should think," said Cynthia, doubtful for the first time, "that you might go off and forget that watch. I can bring it back when I come next Saturday."

"No," said Celia passionately. "I *couldn't* forget my watch. They'd know I couldn't."

Cynthia admitted the logic of that and gave in.

"Be careful of it, though," she instructed. "Don't forget to wind it every night just before you get into bed."

Then, she thought of something else.

"Which way do you say your prayers?" she asked. "Do you say debts or trespasses? I say debts when I say it to grandmother because that's the way they say it in church. But Miss Halsey's English, and they say trespasses."

"I don't know it either way," Celia gasped. "I've

heard it lots of times, but I couldn't repeat it. I don't know any prayers at all."

" Well, you'll have to learn this one quick."

Celia was quick, but the task had not been accomplished to Cynthia's satisfaction when the car came. However, an expedient had occurred to her.

" Borrow Miss Halsey's prayer-book to-night," she advised her sister, " and study it. You'll be all right. Come along, they're waiting."

She opened the door and led the way into the hall.

" But how about you ? " Celia whispered, horror-stricken. " I haven't told you a thing ! "

" Oh, I'll be all right," said Cynthia, calmly. " I'm going to live my own life."

CHAPTER II

THEY had been travelling round Italy together for six weeks, but Cynthia still experienced every now and then the same shock, only in milder form, that she had received the first time, after a five year separation, that she had seen her sister. Perhaps shock is too strong a word, for it was not painful. A start, anyhow; a moment of blank incredulity.

She got one of them, one winter afternoon in Venice, when, coming into the room they shared, she saw what might have been herself, clad in her own rose pink dressing gown, lying in a careless heap on the bed. She might have flung herself down exactly like that. It was a little uncanny, vaguely disturbing, the persistence of a physical identity like this between two persons who were really so different.

"Hullo!" said the voice from the bed. "You back?"

To Cynthia, it sounded as if her own voice had spoken. She pulled herself together, and said,

" Yes, I'm back. How are you ? Feeling better ? "

Celia sat up and stretched. " Oh, I'm all right, I hope you don't mind my borrowing your dressing gown. It's warmer than mine ; looked warmer, anyhow."

" Silly ! " said Cynthia. " Why should I mind ? It made me jump, that's all. I thought for a minute it was me."

" No such luck ! " Celia remarked.

This was getting on dangerous ground, so she went on hastily :

" Yes, I'm all right. But it was rotten luck that it had to spoil our last day together."

Cynthia agreed that it was, and meant it. Meant to mean it, anyhow. But Celia's mind short-circuited the unexpressed thought.

" You don't look as if the day had been spoiled for you," she remarked. " You look as though you'd been having a lovely time. What have you been doing all day ? "

" Oh, I had lunch with the Pyncheons at the Danieli. Since then I've strolled round and done a little shopping."

Celia's face had darkened at the name Pyncheon, but the shadow cleared as Cynthia added, " I got this for you," and held out a parcel.

It was a beaded bag, old, almost unbelievably fine, in colour a deep, luminous blue. It was as soft

as a piece of heavy silk and as heavy as woven gold. The mounting was of gold.

Celia went into raptures over it. " I'll never have anything so lovely as this ! " she cried. " And I don't suppose," she added, " that I'll ever have any clothes fit to wear with it."

She opened it and found a couple of thousand-lire notes folded up inside. At the sight of them her expression changed.

" Oh no, Cynthia ! " she protested. " What's the use ? I know you'd like to, but you can't—thanks to Grandfather Wainwright and Mr. Pyncheon."

She held out the notes to her sister. " Take them back and forget about it."

Cynthia turned away. " I know I can't do much," she said. " But this isn't anything. I was trying to find something to put in the bag ; something you could keep as a memento, you know. I hunted through two or three antique shops, and then I found something I thought, at first, would do, but it turned out it wouldn't. It was late then and I didn't feel like shopping any more. So I put that money in the bag instead."

" Oh, I know you're an angel—just as well as I know I'm a pig," said Celia.

She put the notes back in the bag, and kissed her sister's cheek.

" Where's Aunt Janet ? " Cynthia asked.

" Oh, she's in her room, I think," said Celia,

" tuning in on the infinite somehow. She's found a theosophist circle in Venice, so she thinks she'll stay here instead of going back to Florence for the rest of the winter. She's always funnier than usual when she's getting material for a new novel. Nice prospect for me, isn't it ? And you going away to-morrow ! Oh, damn it all, I wish . . . No, it's all right. I won't. We're going to be gay. What shall we do to-night ? "

" The Pyncheons want us to dine with them," Cynthia said, a little doubtfully, " at some wonderful restaurant they know about. And then go to the opera afterwards. I said you weren't feeling very well, but I'd let them know. They asked Aunt Janet too, of course."

" You and Aunt Janet can go if you like," said Celia. " But I don't want to."

" You're the one they want," Cynthia told her. " Mr. Pyncheon was so pleased with the little glimpse he had of you yesterday, and he says that although he separated us when we were babies he wants to bring us together again whenever he can, now. And of course Junior's crazy to meet you."

" Well, I don't want to meet him," said Celia, " nor see any more of his father, nor his mother, nor anybody whose name is Pyncheon. I may be nasty, and narrow-minded, but I bet you'd feel the same way if you were me."

"Yes," Cynthia assented, "I've no doubt I should."

But she wondered whether she would. It was the same old problem she had been debating, off and on, ever since she was twelve years old.

It was no one's fault that the twins had been divided, nor that after they were sixteen the separation should have become complete. The plain-living, high-thinking Howards had gone their way with Celia. They had sent her to college, they had tried conscientiously to bring it about that every door of opportunity should be unlocked to her. They had brought her up in an atmosphere of stimulating ideas. They had brought before her the widest variety of intellectual interests. They had respected, as a sacred thing, her liberty. They had made her capable of earning her own living. She was supposed to begin doing it at the end of this year abroad, which followed her graduation from college. Uncle Vin had offered her a position on the staff of his school, and in so doing had paid her a high compliment. In short, the programme indicated by old Mrs. Howard that day in Henry Pyncheon's office had been faithfully carried out.

Cynthia's education had been a comparatively ramshackle affair. She had been sent to one of those much despised institutions known as a fashionable finishing school, and had completed her studies with a year at an equally fashionable school in Florence.

Her Grandmother Wainwright had died while Cynthia was abroad, and her grandfather, broken by his loss, had summoned the girl back to his side. Until his death she had lived with him, taken care of him, submitted to his whims, gone here or there as his fruitless search for health seemed to direct.

There was no liberty about it. She had been brought up to be an obedient and dutiful child, and neither he nor she had questioned that her duty was to him. She would not have understood the question had it been raised. He was her grandfather, and she loved him, and there it was. She had not been a martyr in the least. She had had, in the main, a very good time. But this had been, as it were, a by-product.

Then he had died and left a will; a will which had, thanks to his own astuteness, aided, no doubt, by that of Mr. Henry Pyncheon, the merit at least of making his intention clear and effective. He had left all his money to Cynthia. But he had left it in trust, and the trustee was Henry Pyncheon. He was to pay her from it until she was twenty-five years old what he regarded as a suitable allowance. From then on she was to have the income from it for life. At her death it was to go to her issue, if any, and if she had no children, to be divided among certain charities.

It was perfectly plain, that he had not meant his other grandchild, Celia, the one the Howards had

insisted on bringing up according to their wild ideas, to get any of it. No rash impulse of misguided generosity on Cynthia's part could bring about a division with her sister.

It was natural enough, and perhaps fair enough. Certainly none of the Howards would have denied that. But it was natural, too, that Celia should feel hurt about it.

Mr. Pyncheon's idea of an allowance was liberal, but it did not run to any figures that would cover Celia too.

He was not Cynthia's guardian, of course. She was twenty-one years old, and technically her own mistress. But it was a rather illusory sort of liberty as long as he had the power to increase or diminish her allowance. He had suggested that she should spend a year in Egypt, India, China and Japan with his family, and she had accepted. Celia, after the winter in Italy with Aunt Janet, was going home to work.

Cynthia understood her sister's feeling about not wanting to meet the Pyncheons. But would she have felt that way about it herself ? She could not be sure.

" Junior's young Henry Pyncheon, isn't he ? " Celia remarked after a silence. " I suppose you'll come home engaged to him. That's what his father and mother want of course."

" I like Henry well enough," Cynthia said rumi-

natively, " but I'll be the most surprised person in the world if I ever find myself falling in love with him."

" That's the way it gets you. By surprise, I mean. At least it does some people. I don't believe you need worry, though. It won't happen to you."

" You mean you think I won't ever fall in love ? Why ? "

" Oh, I don't know." Celia gave a short laugh. " You're awfully funny about men. You seem to like them well enough—but you just don't know they're there. I don't believe you've really *seen* one since we sailed from New York. And I can't imagine your going off your head about a man."

" There's been too much else to see, this trip. You, for one thing. Naturally I haven't been on the look out. But if you're right, I don't see why you should worry about Henry Pyncheon."

" I didn't say I thought you'd fall in love with him."

" Oh ! " Cynthia exclaimed, a little blankly, " I wouldn't marry any man I hadn't fallen in love with. Would you ? "

" Like a shot, if I liked him," Celia replied. " If you want a little sisterly advice," she went on, " it's better like that. Falling in love is—beastly—by all accounts. I knew a girl in college who did and—well, I don't want any of it in my life."

" Why not ? " Cynthia asked curtly. " Even if

the girl you knew in college did get into a beastly mess, I don't believe it's being in love that's beastly. It all depends on what you're really like."

"Brings out your true self, you mean?" Celia's tone was openly derisive.

But Cynthia answered, "Yes, like being drunk, you know."

Celia laughed. "I bet you know as much about being drunk as you do about falling in love."

"Well, I've seen both things happen," Cynthia maintained, "and I've heard grandfather quote *in vino veritas* ever so many times. He said he really believed it was true. Falling in love is a kind of intoxication, isn't it? So why shouldn't it work the same way?"

"You aren't so far wrong about that," Celia agreed thoughtfully. Then she sprang up with a laugh, came over to Cynthia and shook her.

"You're a perfect child," she said. "I don't believe we're twins at all. I must be years older than you."

"That's just an idea of yours," Cynthia argued. "Isn't it funny how little we really know about each other?"

Celia's hands dropped from her sister's shoulders. She turned sharply and walked away into the embrasure of the window. It was plain that she had been hurt by that chance remark.

Cynthia waited through a troubled moment to

see whether it was anything her twin wanted to talk about, and then, finding it was not, went on talking herself.

"You said just now I hadn't seen a man since we sailed from New York. But I have seen one, this very afternoon."

"Fallen in love with him?" Celia asked.

"No," Cynthia admitted. "But I think I might if I weren't sailing for Alexandria to-morrow. There was quite a little adventure in it."

"I didn't know there were any adventures left," said Celia. "Let's hear about it."

"It was in the last antique shop I went to, looking for some nice little thing to put in your bag. It was that shop just over the second bridge—on our regular walk, you know. You'd better not go there or they'll think you're me. I thought I'd found just what I wanted, two babies—twins, you see—cuddled up together in a little ball. Not as big as an egg; perfectly beautifully carved in old clouded amber. The woman said it was an unflawed piece, and very fine. She swore it was old, and I think perhaps it was. Anyhow it was done by a real artist, you could see that. I loved it. But when I carried it out to the front of the shop to see it in a better light, the thing just came apart in my hands.

"The woman said I'd broken it, and I knew I hadn't. She said I'd got to pay for it, and I told her I wouldn't. Then she called the man and he

got very nasty about it, like most people do when they're caught cheating. I could see that it had been cemented, and showed him, but that only made him shout all the louder. He said he wouldn't let me leave the store till I'd paid for it. He threatened to have me arrested.

" I was furious, of course. I told him I was sure it was an old trick that he'd played on a lot of people before and I meant this to be the last time. I said if he didn't call the police, I would. Then he began to lose his nerve and got away from between me and the door. He went on talking, sneering, and shrugging his shoulders. But I saw he'd given in, so I came away."

The diversion had worked. Celia had come away from the window and was listening with undisguised interest.

" Well, but the man ? " she demanded, perplexed. " It wasn't the Italian you fell in love with, was it ? "

Cynthia laughed. " No, he was an American ; looking at some old iron work outside the door. I think they'd rather forgotten he was there. He was very tall, even for our men. Oh—and nice, and easy, and exactly right."

" But what did he do ? " Celia wanted to know.

" He didn't do anything," Cynthia said. " That was what was so nice about him. He was just there. Taking it all in, of course, and—waiting."

"I think he might have come to the rescue if he'd been any good," Celia remarked.

"No, that's exactly the point," Cynthia insisted. "Anybody could have done that. Come in and shouted at the Italian and made me feel that he'd saved my life. He was clever enough to see that I could run the show and then he was nice enough to wait and let me do it. He did help me, of course, just by being there. But he didn't try to interfere."

"What did he look like?"

"Oh, awfully tall, as I said, and quite thin. Dark, with a long jaw and a little short moustache, and nice twinkly eyes."

"When did he twinkle them at you?" Celia asked.

"When I came out. I smiled at him and he took off his hat."

"And that was all?" Celia did not think much of the adventure, it seemed. "How did you know he was an American if he didn't speak to you?"

"He was talking to another man about the iron when I went in."

"Well," said Celia, "I think you might have brought him home to me even if you didn't want him."

"How do you know he'd have come?"

"With you?" Celia cried. "Looking like that?"

She tried to laugh, but it did not work. " I'm so tired," she gasped, when Cynthia's arm came round her, " of looking like a high-brow frump."

" Listen," Cynthia said. " I was trying to get up my nerve to ask you if you didn't want some of my clothes. I wish you'd take this anyhow. I shan't want anything with fur on it in Egypt and India. And by the time we get to Japan, if we ever do, I'll probably be wearing a cherry blossom kimono. Come along! Put it on now—hat and all."

Celia dried her tears, and before the exchange was half effected she broke into a giggle.

" Gosh, it's a long time since we've done anything like this! " she said.

When Aunt Janet came in ten minutes later, she remarked to Cynthia, " You're looking better." Then she turned to her more familiar niece and said, a little more formally, " I hope you've had a pleasant day."

Both girls laughed.

" I am feeling much better," Celia said. " Cynthia's just given me some of her clothes."

" It really is amazing," Aunt Janet pronounced after a long look—incredulous at first and then judicial—from one to the other. " However, I think one could always tell the difference if one took time to notice."

The girls smiled at each other.

"Did you know," Cynthia asked, "that we changed round once for a whole week, Celia living at grandfather's and I with you?"

"Never!" Aunt Janet cried.

"Well, we did," Celia affirmed. "I think the Wainwrights thought I'd gone crazy—that Cynthia had, I mean. But neither grandmother nor Uncle Vin nor anybody—noticed a thing. We changed back the next Saturday when Cynthia came to the Wainwrights' to pay my visit to her."

"How old were you then?" Aunt Janet wanted to know.

"Oh, about twelve," Cynthia said. "We never did it again for as long as that. Celia refused. But we changed for a day lots of times."

Aunt Janet went on exclaiming and wondering over these revelations until, impatiently, Celia cut her short.

"Well, we'll never change again," she said. "That's a certainty. And I hope, Aunt Janet, that when Cynthia's gone you won't go round telling everybody how exactly alike we look. When people get started on that they never let it alone. I used to get perfectly sick of being half a twin."

"Of course I shall respect your wishes in the matter," Aunt Janet said stiffly. Then to Cynthia, "What about plans for this evening, my dear? It's your last night in Europe, you know. What would you like to do?"

Celia asked, " Would you mind giving up the Pyncheons and the restaurant and just having dinner here quietly together ? "

" Not a bit," said Cynthia cheerfully. " I'll ring them up."

CHAPTER III

CYNTHIA'S train was getting into Chicago. The porter had come into the drawing-room, tidied up, been tipped, and carried away her hand-baggage, brightly encrusted with steamship labels, to the platform. There was nothing to do now but wait.

She sat on the edge of her seat, the muscles of her young back drawn taut in an unconscious effort to push the train along faster. As she closed her wrist-bag after giving the porter his money, she had caught a glimpse of Celia's vaguely alarming and utterly inexplicable letter. She wouldn't get it out. She would *not*. She had read it uncounted times since it had met her at the boat. She knew it by heart. And there was simply nothing more to be made of it.

All the same she did get it out and spread it open upon her knee. It was queer that anything written in what might have been her own hand-writing—they had written identical hands since they were fifteen—could be so compact of mystery. The stationery was embossed with the words "The

Prince," evidently a residential hotel or an apartment building.

" Dear Cyndy," it read. " This is a pretty rotten sort of welcome home, I know. But you're the only person I can ask. Are you willing to go it blind and help me out of a sort of mess? I don't think it's serious. It absolutely isn't what you'll probably think, but it's so perfectly crazy that I can't think about anything else till I've settled it and know that it's all right.

" What I want you to do isn't much, but you're the only person in the world who can do it. If you aren't willing to—and I don't know whether you will be or not—just burn up this letter and act as you would if I'd never written it. But if you *are* willing to be an obliging angel, do exactly what I say. Don't try to understand it because you can't. And above all, don't do anything different from what I tell you.

" Don't telegraph. Don't show this to any one nor ask any one's advice, no matter who it is nor how much you like him. If you've got cold feet, don't read any further. If you haven't, go ahead.

" Take the first train you can get to Chicago. Better get a drawing-room, and stay in it. Anyhow, don't speak to anybody on the train. Don't let anybody you may know in Chicago know you're coming. When you get here, take a taxi to a hotel, it doesn't matter which. The Blackstone's all right. Register in your own name, of course, and take a room. As soon as you're in it, ring up this number on the telephone—Noble

1418. Copy it out on a card so that you won't forget it, and then destroy the letter. When you get the number, don't say who you are, but ask for me.

" I'll probably be there, but if I'm not, don't give any message. Just ring off and try again. If I am there and what I say doesn't make sense, don't pay any attention to it, but tell me what hotel you're stopping at and give me your room number. Then stay there till I ring up. That's all. When I can talk to you I'll tell you what to do next.

" Oh, it's perfectly rotten to treat you like this, but Cyndy, it's the only thing I can do. I can't even *think* about anything else till I've fixed this thing up. It won't take long—two days at the outside—and when it's finished, we'll go off somewhere together and have a wonderful time. You're the only person in the world I want to be with.

" Tear this up as soon as you're sure you know what to do.

" Yours lovingly—though it doesn't sound much like it— C."

No, it did not sound much like it. None of the three or four letters, which were all she had had from Celia since they had parted in Venice ten months before, had sounded like loving her much. Cynthia had been pretty deeply hurt, not so much by anything that had been said in them, as by their omissions.

She had been up in the hill country in Ceylon with the Pyncheons on a tea plantation when she got Celia's letter announcing her engagement to marry a man named Rowland—Philip Rowland—who lived in Chicago. It seemed she had not carried out her plan of spending the winter in Italy with Aunt Janet. The letter was written from New York. But it did not say why she had returned to America.

One might think it meant that she had met Philip and had become engaged to him in Italy, and had come home to marry him. But Celia said nothing of having met him over there. And if she had come home because she was engaged, why hadn't she written to Cynthia about it from there, instead of waiting till she was ten days and three thousand miles farther away? She might have got engaged to him by letter, of course. But there had been no pining lover writing letters from home in the autumn while she and Celia travelled about together.

She could hardly have become engaged to him after landing in New York because she had written within a day or two of coming ashore. If it had happened on the boat, why had Celia changed her plans for the winter and started for home?

The letter had described Philip in enthusiastic enough terms. He was exceedingly nice, not too good-looking, and had charming manners. He was rich, which Celia did not pretend to regard as a

disadvantage. And almost equally in his favour, he had hardly any family ties, an old aunt who had brought him up being his one surviving near relation. The only thing that Celia had said about her own feeling towards him was contained in a reference to the talk she and Cynthia had had in Venice. It seemed to indicate that she was marrying a man she liked, but one with whom she had not fallen in love, and that she regarded herself as lucky that this was so.

The letter had not contained a word, nor had any of its two or three successors, expressive of the hope that Cynthia would like him, nor of regret that she was not to be present at the wedding.

This had taken place in June. At least there had not been anything hasty or secret about it. It had been a regular family wedding at Uncle Vin's old house, where the twins had tried their first experiment in changing identities. It made Cynthia homesick not to have been there. She would have left the Pyncheons and would have come back for it if Celia had shown any signs of wanting her.

It had taken a good deal of resolution on Cynthia's part not to imagine that something had gone wrong between them. It was all nonsense, of course. They had parted most affectionately in Venice after an autumn of the pleasantest sort of companionship. And nothing could have come between them since. The only thing that had threatened the old alliance

had been Grandfather Wainwright's invidious distinction in Cynthia's favour in his will, and this strain would have been removed, one would think, by Celia's marriage to a man who was rich. She would never have to look dowdy again.

It was silly to speculate about an idea so obviously fanciful. And yet? In this letter upon her knee, Celia was saying she hoped they would *go* somewhere for a holiday after this distressing mess had been cleared up. Cynthia, of course, was homeless, but there was no suggestion in Celia's letter that she should stay at her home. Was Celia ashamed of her?

Or of her husband? That might account for everything—for the reticence, the apparent coldness of those letters. What if Celia had married a man for no other reason than that he was rich, and had already found that the marriage had been a hideous mistake? She might already have found out something discreditable, downright disgraceful perhaps, in Philip Rowland's life; in the way he got his money, for example. There was one sentence in the letter which actually supported this theory. "You're the only person in the world I want to be with." That did not sound like a happy bride.

Of course she needed help, the poor child! And to whom could she turn, surrounded by strangers as she was, but to her twin sister? And it was likely enough that the required service was one that

could not be rendered unless the husband was ignorant of her presence in the city.

Cynthia copied the telephone number on one of her visiting cards; and, as directed, tore Celia's letter into fine scraps just as the train completed its long journey and came to rest in the station.

The first of Celia's instructions were easily carried out. Cynthia took a taxi to the Blackstone, registered from Santa Barbara and got a room. As soon as she had closed its door behind the bellboy, she went to the telephone and called up the number she had written on her card.

A moment later she heard Celia's voice, sharp and quick, saying, " Yes, who is it ? "

" It's Cynthia. I'm at the Blackstone."

" Oh, you darling ! " Celia cried. " I knew you'd come. And it's exactly the right time. Couldn't be better. Luck's turned my way at last. You're at the Blackstone, you say ? What's the number of your room ? "

Cynthia told her.

" And how do you get to it ? Which way do you turn from the lift ? "

" Down the corridor and to the left," said Cynthia, " three or four doors."

" You—you *are* alone, aren't you ? " Celia asked. " There's nobody with you ?—All right," cut across Cynthia's indignant, " Of course not." " I'll be there in about twenty minutes."

At that she rang off without another word.

It was a restless, disquieting sort of wait, but not protracted. Fifteen minutes later, Celia knocked at her door.

Cynthia hugged her and then fell back and had a good look at her sister. Whatever the trouble might be, it had not affected Celia's looks. Cynthia had never, she thought, seen her looking so pretty. Her colour was high with excitement, and her eyes were bright. She had the air of one setting out upon an exhilarating adventure.

Celia was returning her sister's gaze a little more purposefully, taking her in, as it were, point by point.

" I'm glad you haven't changed your hair."

These, astonishingly, were her first words after their exclamations of greeting.

" I mean," she went on, " that I'm glad you've kept the same sort of hair-cut we both got in Paris last autumn. So have I—see ? "

She snatched off her hat and tossed it into a chair.

" Yes," Cynthia agreed, " we could still fool Aunt Janet."

" Or any one else." The words were strangely vehement. " Any one in the world. Of course," she added, with an excited laugh, " all sorts of things might have happened. You might have got fat, or thin. But somehow, I didn't believe you would.

The hair was all I worried about, and that's all right. Thank Heaven we don't tan, either of us."

"Celia dear," Cynthia pleaded, "please stop talking about our looks. Sit down and tell me what the trouble is. I haven't seen you for nearly a year and I don't know *anything* about you, except that you're in distress. I want to know what it is and then find out what I can do to help."

"I've been talking about nothing else since I came in," Celia said, with no change of manner. But the next moment her eyes filled. "Forgive me Cyndy darling," she went on. "I'm not myself now. I don't know what I am. And this isn't the beginning of our good time. To-morrow, perhaps—the next day at the latest—I shall know. And then we can begin again where we left off. That is, if you'll do what I want you to."

"I'm here," Cynthia pointed out, "and that means I'm ready to try. Tell me what you want me to do."

There was a silence.

Then Celia said, "Tell me something first. Are you engaged to Henry Pyncheon?"

Cynthia ignored the wild irrelevance of the question.

"No," she told her. "He asked me, in a thoroughly friendly and brotherly way, to marry him before we left Egypt, and he was nice enough to

seem a little disappointed when I told him I didn't want to. Since then we've been on terms of perfectly comfortable indifference."

"And there's no one else," Celia persisted, "—who's fond of you, I mean, whether you're engaged to him or not? Because if there is—any one who matters—I won't let you do it."

"No," Cynthia told her, "there is nobody."

"All right," said Celia. "Then, for one day, or at the very outside, two, I want you to be me."

"Be you!" Cynthia cried.

"Yes," her twin told her calmly. "Be me. I want you to put on my clothes now, in this room, every stitch I've got on and my wedding ring, take my purse and my key, and go to my flat and live there—as me, until I telephone you from this room that I'm back."

"But Celia, you're married!"

Celia laughed. "That'll be the least of your troubles," she said. "Really, it won't bother you a bit, because Phil's away. He went to Springfield yesterday morning. This *is* Wednesday, isn't it? He won't be back till Saturday."

She turned away from Cynthia's astonished stare and walked nervously to the window.

"There's—there's an errand I've got to do," she explained. "I don't know exactly how long it will take. But anyway it will be over night. And I can't be away like that. At least it mustn't be

known that I am. So I want you for an alibi." She added, with a nervous laugh, " I know it sounds as if I meant to murder somebody, but I don't.

" It won't be hard," she hurried on. " There isn't a thing you'll have to do. I haven't made any engagements for the next two days ; I've kept them clear on purpose. Phil's Aunt Ellen—her name's Rowland too—may come in ; probably will. She's a fussy old thing. She's sure to telephone if she doesn't come. But she won't suspect anything. She'll talk by the hour about Phil if you'll let her, and she'll want to know exactly how you are. I'm supposed to have been rather off colour lately. I think she's got the idea that I'm going to have a baby. I'm not. But if you want to feel faint, or something, and not be able to talk to her when she comes, you can.

" There won't be any other callers that matter, unless—unless there's a man named Hollister. If he sends his name up from down-stairs, don't see him. Tell him you won't, over the phone. That will be best—so that he'll know you're there. Turn him down as hard as you like. He'll know why, all right."

By this time Cynthia had got her breath.

" Celia, it's a perfectly mad idea," she protested. " It couldn't possibly work. I couldn't say three consecutive sentences to Miss Rowland without giving myself away. I don't know *anything* about

your life. I don't even know what your husband's business is."

"Oh, he's a lawyer," said Celia. "I thought I told you. He's down at Springfield now arguing a couple of cases before the Supreme Court. But Cyndy, you don't have to know. She won't suspect, because she'll see you there and she'll think you're me."

"Doesn't she know you've a twin sister?"

"She knows I've a twin, yes. But not that we look alike. Even Phil doesn't know that. So even if you say things that sound funny, it won't matter. Oh, don't make objections! You aren't—you aren't going back on me, are you?"

"No," Cynthia said. "But I don't want to get you into a perfectly idiotic scrape. Why can't you just go ahead and do your errand, whatever it is, openly, as yourself? I suppose it's something you don't want your husband to know about. But if you're sure he's away till Saturday, why can't you go and come back?"

Celia turned round upon her. "Because, if you want to know," she said defiantly, "I'm watched."

"By your husband, do you mean? Is he having it done?"

"I suppose so."

Cynthia felt herself turning a little sick.

"I know how it looks," Celia said, more soberly, after studying her sister's face. "But, Cyndy, it

isn't what it looks like. I'm not going off to spend a night or two with a lover. I haven't any lover. I've never been unfaithful to Phil. We haven't got on particularly well together, but I haven't done that to him. As for Tommy Hollister, he's just a plausible, malicious liar. I think he's trying to put Phil against me, and if it's Phil who's having me watched, then it means he's succeeded. But I haven't done anything wrong. At least, nothing like that. I *know* I haven't.

" But I've simply *got* to find out about something. And the only way I can find out is by going to see the only person who can tell me. It's nothing serious. I'm *sure* it isn't. But it's—but it's so extraordinary that I've *got* to know about it. That's all. I'll see him—the man I have to see, you know—and get him to tell me about it, and if there's anything to do, he'll go and do it. And then I'll turn round and come home and get you, and we'll go somewhere and begin old times again. Cyndy, you *do* believe I'm telling you the truth, don't you?"

Cynthia flung her arms round her. " Oh, my dear," she said, " of course I do."

" And you'll do it ? You'll be me for two days ? Cyndy, it will be a joke when it's over, like the other time. And I'll tell you the whole thing and we'll laugh. If I weren't nearly mad with worrying over it, I'd be laughing now. Will you do it, Cyndy ? "

" You poor lamb ! " Cynthia said. "Yes, of course I will. But you'll have to tell me at least a million things about yourself before I can get away with it."

" I'll tell you everything I can think of while we change clothes," said Celia.

Cynthia's heart was beating pretty hard when an hour later, with Celia's clothes on, her wedding ring on her finger, her wrist-bag on her arm, with her latch-key in one of the compartments of it, she went down in the lift at the Blackstone, committed to attempting this fantastic impersonation. It was like appearing on a stage to try to play a part whose bare lines she did not even know.

As she crossed the lobby, a man, of whose face she caught the briefest glimpse, sharply turned his back on her and walked away, and she took it at the time as an evidence of her extreme self-consciousness that she believed, for an instant, that the action had reference to herself. It was a ridiculous idea, of course. Why shouldn't a stranger strolling about the lobby make as many sudden turns as he liked ? If she began feeling jumpy now, what sort of state of mind would she be in when the ordeal really began ?

She went out and got into a taxi, told the man " The Prince," noted with relief that he knew where it was, and settled back for her ride. It proved not to be very far ; up north across the river, and near the lake.

She steadied herself with a long breath when the taxi stopped before a very handsome, new-looking block of flats. Then she nodded, with a friendly smile, to the liveried servant who had opened the door for her, and got her first thrill of reassurance from the unperturbed manner in which he returned her greeting. Celia would very likely have called him by name, but it did not matter. A smile of half-absent recognition would have to do duty for speech a good many times within the next two days.

The lobby was rather awe-inspiring in its severe magnificence. It had been decorated to resemble an Italian palace. At the far end of it were the bronze lift gates, and a small, brilliantly lighted cubby-hole, where a girl sat at a telephone switch-board. The lift had just gone up, so, to fill in the wait, Cynthia voluntarily submitted herself to a second test. The commissionaire's indifference showed that her appearance was all right. Would her voice work as well ?

She said to the telephone girl, as casually as she could manage, " No one's called for me since I've been out, I suppose ? "

" No, Mrs. Rowland," the girl said. " The letters have just gone up though, and I think there was something for you."

Well that was all right. She had not noticed anything queer, either.

Cynthia had another cheerful nod for the lift boy as she entered his car, got out where he stopped it, and walked firmly down the corridor to the last door. With Celia's key in her hand she steadied herself once more with another long breath, and then let herself into the perfectly strange flat of which she was supposed to be mistress.

CHAPTER IV

SHE could not see very well, for the daylight from the room which the entrance passage, at its far end, opened into, blinded her. The passage itself was rather long, continuing the line of the corridor outside. There were doors on both sides of it, but they were all closed. Here at the right near the entrance door was what seemed to be a recess, covered by a curtain. A coat closet, probably.

The first thing Cynthia did, in the dark, was to run into a small table she had not noticed. It had two telephone instruments on it. There was a small curule chair by it which participated in the noise of the collision. A moment later a door in the right side of the passage opened.

"I'm back, Olga," Cynthia called. "Did you hear me run into the table?" (Heavens, the maid's name wasn't Inga, was it? No, it was all right.)

She came out into the passage as Cynthia finished speaking, a smart-looking girl in her grey uniform dress and her cross-banded apron. She would turn

out to be pretty, Cynthia thought, when she could get a good look at her. At the moment she was looking rather frightened.

" I did not hear madam come in," she said. " The noise—gave me a start."

" I don't wonder," Cynthia remarked. " Is that letter for me ? "

It appeared to her that the girl started again at this question. She had a letter in her hand, half concealed, though probably not intentionally, by her skirt.

" I did not know I had it," she said, staring down at it, and not even then holding it out to her mistress. " It came a moment ago. I was putting the kettle on for tea because Miss Rowland telephoned that she would come in about half-past four."

" That's quite right," said Cynthia. " We'll have tea as soon as she comes."

She dismissed the girl with a nod and walked on down the passage to the large room at the end of it. She believed that one of the doors to the left opened directly into her bedroom, but did not wish to do any exploring till the maid was safely out of the way.

She no longer felt weak about the knees ; the courage of desperation that was, probably. The total stranger she must address affectionately as Aunt Ellen would be arriving in—if Celia's watch was right—half an hour. Celia's suggestion that

she should have a headache and so be too ill to see the old lady was now out of the question for Miss Rowland had telephoned and learned that she was out. There was nothing left to do but bluff through the visit as best she could. If there were an explosion, there would be an explosion. That was all.

She stood for a moment looking absently round the large, handsome, well-lighted room she found herself in. It was furnished with a slavish deference to the decrees of the interior decorator which characterizes suites in the very highest class hotel. It did not, somehow, look a bit like Celia. It did not look like anybody.

Her glance fell upon the forgotten letter in her hand, and as she read the superscription and the postmark, she gave a laugh that sounded funny in her own ears, and felt her heart bump against something—her diaphragm, probably. It was addressed to " Mrs. Philip Rowland," and had been posted the night before from Springfield. Here again was something she and Celia had not thought about. What should she do about that letter ? Did she dare leave it unopened ? Suppose it said he had changed his plans and was coming back tomorrow ?

Well, she would postpone that decision till she had finished with Aunt Ellen. She dropped the letter on a gate-leg table with a lot of current magazines on

it, and walked through a door which she believed led into her bedroom. Yes, it did.

Thanks to the fact that it was not in immaculate order, this room had a slightly more personal look than the one she had just left. The dressing table was littered with toilet things; the small double bed—French, it was, with cane panels at the head and foot—had been lain upon since it was last made and a tumbled dressing gown was flung over the corner of it. Two inner doors, one leading into a big cupboard and the other into a bathroom, were standing open. Certainly, she observed, Celia had plenty of clothes now! all she could want, one would think.

A third door, with a key in it, was shut, and after a moment of hesitation and feeling a little like Bluebeard's last wife she opened it. It was not locked. Phil's room, of course. She smiled at herself for calling it that. "Phil!"

It had more character than either of the others she had seen, for in addition to its single bed, chiffonier and the rest of the bedroom furniture, it had a desk that had obviously been much used. There were some books on it, the titles of which looked interesting, a tray of pipes and a jar of tobacco. Apparently he liked to read in bed. The light was arranged for it, anyhow.

Cynthia found herself faintly perplexed. She had not found anything wrong with him, so far.

Then she smiled again, and reminded herself that she had not much to go on.

She noticed that the room had a bathroom of its own and this reminded her of the key in the connecting door, but she went no farther just then for as she turned to go back she got a start. On the wall hung a framed photograph—of herself! No, of Celia, of course, but it was rather uncanny, just the same.

She pulled herself together by asking herself whether a man who was having his wife shadowed by detectives would keep her picture hanging on the wall where he could see it, the first thing, when he woke up in the morning. Well, he might, she supposed. She didn't know much about men.

Perhaps Celia had a picture of him in her room. Cynthia hoped so. She would feel a little more secure—a little better prepared for Aunt Ellen if she had some idea what her supposed husband looked like. But there was nothing of the kind in sight anywhere and a casual glance into two or three of the drawers in the little writing desk in the corner revealed nothing.

She hadn't time just now for a real search. She could not face a supposititious aunt by marriage until she had washed, and after that long train journey she felt far from clean. Twenty minutes—if Celia's watch was right. Time for a bath, if she

hurried. But Celia's watch must have been slow, for she was not more than a minute out of the bath when she heard the bell ring and Olga letting in her visitor.

"Sit down in the drawing room, if you don't mind, Aunt Ellen," she called through the door. "I'll be out in a minute."

It didn't take her much longer than that to dress. The rose coloured tea-gown she had selected was the easiest thing in the world to get into. But she was delayed a few minutes after she had finished dressing by her first real attack of stage fright. Her hands were shaking uncontrollably, and her mouth had suddenly gone dry. She was sure that she would not be able to speak at all.

What sort of looking woman was it whom she had just addressed as Aunt Ellen? What kind of greeting would she expect? Was Celia in the habit of shaking hands with her, or kissing her cheek? Was it days or hours since their last supposed meeting? What possible opening for their talk could she hit upon that would be safe not to betray the imposture irretrievably and at once?

In her desperation she hit upon a remedy that was to serve her well in extreme moments like this. She said to herself, all right, she would give herself away, but not till the very last minute. She was not responsible for succeeding, but she was responsible for being Celia right down to the very

last wriggle. Whether exposure were two minutes away or twenty-four hours, wasn't her look out.

At that she opened the door and went into the drawing-room.

" I'm sorry I've kept you waiting," she said in her friendliest voice. " My watch must be slow."

The woman who had risen to meet her was not at all what she would have described in Celia's phrase, as " a fussy old thing." She was tall and lean, not much beyond middle age, homely, intelligent. You could not miss that last quality in her penetrating glance, and it was even more unmistakable in her dry, well modulated voice.

" I haven't considered this a long wait," she said, pleasantly enough, though the implication seemed to be that Celia had often kept her waiting longer than this.

" I must look after my watch better," Cynthia remarked, and added, turning away, " I'm sure Olga has the tea ready. She'd put the kettle on when I came in."

She was about to add, " I'll ring," but was checked by the realization that she did not know where the bell was. So she walked over to what was apparently the dining-room door, and called " We'll have tea now, Olga."

Evidently she had done something strange, for Aunt Ellen was looking at her curiously. " I'll be glad of a cup of tea," she said.

Wasn't this usual when Aunt Ellen called? If not, why had Olga put on the kettle?

"I thought it would taste good, myself," Cynthia explained.

"You must be feeling a good deal better," Aunt Ellen remarked. "I was rather surprised when your maid told me you'd gone out. Apparently the airing was just what you needed."

"Oh, I'm feeling much better," Cynthia declared, as the maid came in with the tea.

She was glad of the diversion. It seemed that Miss Rowland had found something either in her manner or in her improved health to think about.

"How shall I make it for you?" she asked, having selected that as the most non-committal formula.

"Strong, with milk and sugar," Miss Rowland said.

It seemed she had not expected Celia to remember.

But she did not yield to the influence of the convivial beverage and open out. Whatever had been on her mind before the tea came in was still there—brewing. Apparently it had to do with Celia's having gone out when her aunt had not supposed her well enough to go, and her having come back in a surprisingly restored state of health—unless the ill health had been a mere pretext in the first place.

The silence became oppressive, and at last Cynthia took the plunge. She could not be sure what she was getting into, but it looked all right.

"I've just had an exciting and most unexpected meeting," she said, "with my sister."

"Your sister!" Miss Rowland echoed incredulously. "That mysterious twin sister of yours? I didn't know she was anywhere in this part of the world. I thought she was travelling in the Far East."

"She was," said Cynthia. "She's only just come back. I didn't expect her out here for some time. But she had a rather urgent letter from a friend who was ill and wanted to see her, and she came straight on from the boat."

"Is she here?" Miss Rowland asked. "In town, I mean. I assume she's not in the flat."

"No," Cynthia said, "she only had an hour or two between trains. She hopes to come back in a few days—I don't know just how soon—and then we're to have a real holiday. Our first for ever so long."

"I don't wonder you found that exciting," Miss Rowland observed.

There was nothing overtly sceptical about her tone. It could not by the wildest exaggeration be called a sneer. Yet the conviction came over Cynthia—not suddenly, gradually rather—that Philip Rowland's aunt thought she was lying. Also she

realized that she must be looking just now remarkably like a liar. She could feel the blood coming up little by little in her face till she was sure it must be fiery red. She did not blush very often, but when she did she made a thorough job of it.

No doubt the story did sound fishy; the sudden unheralded dash to Chicago of this "mysterious twin" of whom the Rowlands had apparently heard so little, her stopping in town for no more than an hour or so between trains and then hurrying on to some destination unstated to "see a sick friend!" Cynthia had made the mistake of relying on the approximate truth of the tale to give it plausibility. She cast about wildly in her mind for some confirmatory detail with which the yarn might be bolstered up, but decided that anything she could add to the story would make it worse.

Miss Rowland was very nice about it, revealing her genuine good-breeding, and possibly real kindness into the bargain, for she asked no prying questions; indeed, no questions of any sort. Cynthia half wished she would. She did not even allow the embarrassing silence to go on very long.

"It must be a very strange relationship," she commented at last, "—that between you and your sister, I mean. I've never heard of anything like it. Twins separated in infancy and brought up in such different surroundings; practically strangers to

each other, and yet not ignorant of each other's existence."

"I suppose," Cynthia said non-committally, "that it seems stranger to other people than it does to us. We have always, you see, taken it for granted."

"And yet, one would think," Miss Rowland went on, "that there would be a strong instinctive affection between you even though it had nothing to feed upon."

"There is," Cynthia said. "And it hasn't been entirely starved either. We're really awfully fond of each other. Did you think we weren't?"

Miss Rowland smiled. "I've no doubt you are in your own way. But it's the way that seems to me—and to Phil, too—so curious. It's a question, of course, as you say, of what you take for granted. But it seems very strange to us that your sister, who is so completely her own mistress, didn't give up her trip round the world and come home for your wedding. Apparently it never occurred to her to do so, nor to you to wonder very much nor to feel hurt at all that she didn't."

Cynthia had not seen what was coming and the rush of emotion caught her unawares. Her eyes filled up with sudden tears before she could hide them from her visitor's gaze. So that was how Celia had told the story!

Miss Rowland was looking at her now in open consternation. "I'm sorry, Celia," she said. "You must forgive me. I had no idea . . ."

"It's all right," Cynthia broke in, quickly drying her eyes. She did not feel like crying any more. "I've no doubt it looked like that."

"I'll pour myself another cup of tea, if I may," Miss Rowland said.

She must have nerves of steel, Cynthia reflected, for she took it strong enough to curl her hair.

"I don't suppose," she remarked, pleasantly, "that you've heard from Phil since he went away?"

Cynthia hesitated. She was not a ready liar, and in this case she could not be instantly sure that a lie was necessary or advisable. And then she realized that her hesitation had deprived her of a choice in the matter. If she were to say no now it would be obvious she was lying.

"I found a letter from him," she said, "when I came in just a few minutes ago, but I haven't read it yet."

Miss Rowland's face became rather serious.

"It's—it's here—waiting to be read," Cynthia went on faltering in her embarrassment. "Shall I—shall I get it and read it now?"

"No, that's quite unnecessary."

She put down her tea-cup absently, and sinking back into her chair gazed thoughtfully past Cynthia's

face. The silence spun itself out longer and longer. Cynthia felt herself powerless to break it. Something was coming now, it seemed, but there was nothing for her to do but sit and wait for it.

"What I'm going to do," Miss Rowland said at last, "is probably foolish and useless. It's against all my principles. I made a promise years ago, when Phil was fifteen. I made it to him, though I said nothing to him about it. The promise was that I'd never interfere with the emotional part of his life.

"I promised that I wouldn't demand any confidences of him, that I'd be contented with those he spontaneously gave me. That I wouldn't try to arrange matters for him, even for what looked to me like his own good; to save him from bad mistakes or to prevent him from getting hurt. I renewed that promise when he married you. I vowed that whatever troubled waters he might get into, I wouldn't put in my oar. I don't know whether you credit me with having kept that promise or not, but I have, faithfully, up to to-day.

"I came up here this afternoon without any idea of breaking it. I'd have said while I was waiting for you to dress, in there, that it would be utterly hopeless for me to try to do anything. But somehow, you've surprised me to-day. I've a misgiving that I may have been wrong about some

things. Well, that's why I'm going to tell you a thing I *know* I'm right about.

" You're making a terrible mistake with Phil, Celia, if you have any wish to live happily as his wife, in not being open and frank with him. That sounds, of course, as if he'd been complaining of you to me, or as if I'd been prying. I don't suppose I can convince you that that isn't the case. But I can tell you truthfully that it isn't. I know Phil so well that he gives himself away to me without being aware of it. I don't think it would be possible for him to have a heavy trouble on his mind without my knowing what it was. Anyhow, one wouldn't need to be a clairvoyant to see that you two aren't happy together.

" Phil's not faultless, and he's got some qualities which I don't regard as faults—one in particular—that could make a wife bitterly unhappy if she didn't understand it. Phil's fastidious about the truth. I suppose he might be regarded as a fanatic about it. Deception simply isn't tolerable to him—it's poisonous. I think it's literally true that it would be better to confess a murder to him, or an adultery—any crime, than to tell him the sort of half-innocent little lies that many a wife is only laughed at for when they're found out.

" There, that's my say. And you've been very patient to listen to me. I can't believe—I find I can't to-day—that you've seriously wronged him—

that there's anything between you that couldn't be cleared up and blown away in an hour's talk—if you'd just be open with him."

Cynthia had suffered this onslaught with curiously divided feelings. She liked Phil's blunt old grenadier of an aunt. She credited her, all the way through, with fairness and honesty, with a genuine love for her nephew, and with a sort of rough kindliness in her feeling towards his wife. But her heart ached for Celia, driven half mad by a crazy something she could not tell anybody. Caught between such a pair of millstones as these!

She said, feeling she must say something as the old lady rose to her feet, the only thing she could think of on the spur of the moment.

"I suppose it's natural that people whose lives have never got tangled up should think of truth as a simple thing, and of all deceptions as shabby and second-rate. But there is such a thing as having secrets to guard that aren't wholly yours, and of finding yourself in a position where the whole truth can't be told to anybody. Phil himself," she added, smiling a little as the name came to her lips, "may find himself, some time, in a position like that. If ever he does, perhaps he'll be more tolerant."

Then she held out her hand to the bewildered old lady. "Thank you for talking to me so frankly. I won't forget what you've said."

" Thank you for listening," Miss Rowland replied, " and for not turning me out of your house. Good-bye. I won't come again until you tell me that you want me to."

CHAPTER V

ONE of the million things Celia had told Cynthia while they were changing clothes at the Blackstone was that Olga had asked for this evening out.

"She's a good-natured little thing," Celia had explained, "willing and interested, and all that. I find her quite good company. But when she does want anything, she wants it very much. So I told her she might go and that I'd have my dinner in the restaurant down-stairs. I thought perhaps you might like it better anyhow. It's quite good, and it won't be so dull as dining all alone in the flat."

Dull was not the adjective Cynthia would have applied to the first two hours of her impersonation. She felt completely worn out when Miss Rowland left, and hardly equal to the ordeal of dressing again and going down to the restaurant, of facing a head waiter whom she would be expected to treat as an old friend, and of wondering whether the people at surrounding tables might not be acquaintances at least, whose names she would be supposed to know.

But she did not like to interfere with Celia's domestic arrangements, so she went out into the kitchen and told Olga that as soon as she had finished washing up the tea things she might go.

"Madam dines in the restaurant?" Olga asked. "At what time?"

"I don't know," Cynthia said, a little surprised at the question. "Not till after seven, anyhow. Why?"

"Pardon," said the maid. "I thought I might stay and help Madam dress."

"Oh, that's not necessary," Cynthia told her. "I shan't want any help. You needn't wait for me."

It was in her mind, even then, that she might not go down to the restaurant at all, and that later, when she felt hungry, she could find what food she wanted in her own larder. But she did not mention this alternative to Olga. It might make the nice little maid feel that she ought to stay in.

It was with a sensation of profound relief that she heard the girl go out and knew herself to be, at least for a while—for a few precious hours—securely alone.

She had not realized how severe the strain had been until now that it was relaxed. She tried to settle herself with a magazine in the drawing-room and found she could not. She was restless in there. Its lack of character made it feel like a vacuum. She

could not breathe in it. So she impatiently turned out the lights and moved into Celia's room.

This was not much better. There were too many of Celia's things in it; too many reminders of things to think about. She did not want to think for a while.

She wanted a comfortable chair and a book to read, good enough to lift her out of this preposterous situation. Later, when she had quieted down a little, she would do any planning and deciding that might seem to be necessary. Should she read Phil's letter or not? That was the most important thing. Her pause here in Celia's room was so brief that she did not even bother to turn on the lights.

Then, with a smile over a childish recollection of the adventure of Goldilocks in the house of the Three Bears, trying one place after another till she found the one that was just right, she went into Phil's room. She would find a book in here that she could read, anyhow, and that big chair of his had certainly looked comfortable.

It proved to be even better than it looked. She found some cigarettes, lighted one of them, switched on the reading lamp, selected her book, and snuggled herself down among the smoky-smelling leather cushions with a sense of being contentedly at home that was almost grotesquely inappropriate to the circumstances.

But the book proved not to be good enough to

play the part she had assigned to it in the programme. It was very intelligent, and beautifully written—but it did not mean anything. Her mind slid from one smoothly finished sentence to another without taking it in. She surmised that this might not be the fault of the book but this did not lessen her irritation with it and presently she closed it and switched off the light. There was enough to see by, coming in from the hall.

What kind of person was Phil? She had had a wildly diverse lot of notions about him since lunch time. Pondering over Celia's letter for the last time, just as her train was getting into Chicago, she had thought of him as some one to be ashamed of—semi-disreputable—perhaps a bootlegger. Or perhaps nothing worse than a rich vulgarian, who splashed his money about and misused the English language. Those guesses were washed out, at all events. The mere sight of Miss Rowland was a guarantee of his respectability and his breeding.

What was the matter with him, then? Was he old? No, he could not be. The aunt who had brought him up was under sixty. He must be an orphan, just as she and Celia were. Spoiled, probably, within an inch of his life, by that adoring old maid; selfish, fussy, an intolerable prig.

That sounded more reasonable, but she could not get up a very strong conviction in support of it. The way his aunt had talked about him had not been

the way of a fool. She had said he was " fastidious about the truth," and this sounded to Cynthia, in retrospect, the description of a man she could like. And a wife would fare better, Miss Rowland had gone on, confessing an adultery to him than getting caught in a mess of little half-innocent lies.

Was that what she really believed Celia had to confess ? Did it already look as bad as that ?

It was what it would look like, if this absence of hers, and Cynthia's impersonation, were ever discovered. What an utterly mad business it was ! Celia must have been simply out of her mind. People like this, like Miss Rowland and the nephew she had brought up, did not hire spies and detectives to watch the members of their families. Cynthia had not known what they were like or she would never have been driven into doing so crazy a thing.

What, she wondered, was the original " crazy thing " that Celia had to find out about and put right ? If it did not involve a lover, or some crime like murder, it was simply mad of Celia to have taken a chance like this. She ought to be sitting here now in her husband's big leather chair dreaming about him, wondering when he would come home.

It was an astonishingly comfortable chair, and the leather smelt good. She must have fallen asleep, since her next conscious moments were con-

fused by rather a nightmarish ignorance of where she was. Then the pleasant smell of the leather re-established her in Celia's husband's chair, in his room, in his flat.

She had a vague sense that something had wakened her, and in another moment her muscles tightened with the realization that she was no longer alone in the apartment. Oh, but of course! It was the maid back from her evening out. That must have been a good deal more than a nap Cynthia had taken in the big chair. In a minute she would turn on the light and go and ask Olga for a cup of chocolate or something to replace the dinner she had not had. There was no hurry.

She noticed that the sounds had ceased, and presently the silence became a little unnatural. Then came a sound, a creak, which she recognized. It was the service door opening into the passage; the door through which Olga had first appeared that afternoon with Phil's letter in her hand. It was a self-closing door, and should creak again when it shut. It had not yet creaked the second time. It was being held open while some one listened!

If it was a burglar, Cynthia reflected, now was the time to scream, while his way of retreat was open. But she did not think it was a burglar. She still believed it was the maid. So she lay motionless in the dark, waiting.

At last the listener was satisfied. The door

creaked shut, and a light, assured step went down the passage towards the drawing-room, paused there for the briefest moment, and then returned to Celia's bedroom. All the doors on this side of the flat were open, and when the light went on in Celia's room, Cynthia, in her rose-coloured tea-gown, was in some danger, she realized, of being discovered. But she did not want to risk the noise she might make getting up out of that deep chair, so she stayed where she was.

The part of her sister's room which the view commanded included the writing desk in the corner, and it was but a second or two before the figure of the intruder moved into this field of vision. It was Olga, as Cynthia had guessed, though the recognition was delayed a moment by the girl's unfamiliar, rather smart out-door dress, and the little round pulled-down hat she wore. Her objective as Cynthia had also, but only half-consciously, surmised, was the writing desk.

She did not cast a glance in the direction of the open doorway into Phil's room—it was evident that she was perfectly satisfied she was alone in the flat —and with the briskness of experience, she went straight at her work. She seated herself before the desk, let down the lid, and examined, rather cursorily, the unclassified odds and ends which she found lying about. She looked under the desk blotter, too. So far she seemed to have found nothing

that interested her. Nor had she done anything that might not be considered to be merely illicit rummaging, dictated by an idle curiosity.

But her next move made her purpose clear beyond any possibility of doubt. She opened a little black wrist-bag she had brought in with her, took out a small key, and unlocked the drawer which was set in the middle of the frame of pigeonholes.

The production of that key had a queer effect on Cynthia. Momentarily it made her perfectly incredulous of the evidence of her own eyes. Also —a purely physical phenomenon that seemed to have nothing to do with her emotions—it made her a little sick. She had never seen a crime committed before. She knew they happened, but she did not know they *really* happened—to real people.

That state did not last long, and right on the heels of it came a wave of anger, which in one movement picked her up out of her chair and carried her into Celia's room.

"Give me that key!" she said, as the terror-stricken maid sprang to her feet and faced her.

The key flew from the spy's hand as she did so, and went sliding across the polished floor.

"Never mind. I'll get it," Cynthia added. "Now go!"

For a few seconds Olga stood her ground, casting about frantically for some excuse. But she had

been utterly unprepared for the surprise, and could not manage a word. Presently, with a shrug, she turned and left the room.

Cynthia followed at her heels, anger burning hotter in her every moment, and reflection simply nowhere.

The maid went in flight to her own room, and she would have locked herself in if Cynthia had not been over the threshold before she could close the door.

"Give me your door key, too," Cynthia commanded. "Then pack your things. I shall stay here while you do it."

"Madam would turn me out of my room tonight? Without notice? With nowhere to go?"

"I imagine you've somewhere to go," Cynthia said. "Anyhow, you're going out of this flat at once."

Olga turned, half-heartedly, and opened her cupboard door. And then something—the sight of her clothes hanging there, probably—roused her to a spurt of resistance.

"I will not be turned out like this," she said defiantly. "I refuse!"

"You have a choice," Cynthia told her. "You can pack your things and go wherever you like, or you can go to the police station as you are, without packing anything at all."

The girl tried to laugh at that.

" Madam will not call the police," she said.

" You never were more mistaken in your life," Cynthia retorted. " You will discover that for yourself in about a minute."

The girl took just half that time to make up her mind. Then, with an acquiescent shrug, she admitted her defeat.

" Madam also is making a mistake," she said. " Nevertheless, I will go. Pay me my money that you owe me, and I will go at once. I have no longer any wish to stay here."

The realization that she had no idea what Celia owed the maid, or even what wages she paid her a week, brought home to her a moment of misgiving that her whole course of action might have been better considered. It was too late, though, to back out now.

" I won't pay you anything," she said. " Mr. Rowland will be home in a few days, and you can see him. He can pay you," she contemptuously added, anger again getting the better of discretion, " whatever he likes."

Olga shot a curious look at her, surprised at first, but ending in a derisive smile.

" I will see Mr. Rowland," she said, " and he will not like what I have to tell him."

Cynthia was not troubled by the sneer. It was the initial start of surprise that perplexed her.

"We won't discuss Mr. Rowland, nor any one else," she said. "Go ahead! Pack!"

That was the end of their talk. Cynthia watched while the maid wept and packed in silence.

In half an hour the small trunk was locked and strapped, waiting to be collected the next morning, and Olga, with her suitcase and her bandbox was out of the flat.

She fired one parting shot as Cynthia closed and bolted the servant's door behind her.

"You are a fool!" she cried passionately. "A great big simple fool!"

Cynthia could not be quite so sure as she would like to have been that this statement was not true. That the maid had, or thought she had, some sort of hold over Celia was meant to be indicated by her prediction that Madam would not call the police. That could not be anything but a bluff. The situation was surely plain enough. Olga was Philip Rowland's hired spy, employed to watch his wife, to read her letters received in his absence, to get evidence to be used by him in the divorce court. The police had nothing to do with a case of that sort.

What troubled Cynthia most was the realization that by turning the spy out of the house in that summary way she had, perhaps, forced Celia's hand; precipitated a show-up between the pair which her sister would sooner have postponed. But then,

granted Celia herself in this situation, having surprised the maid in the act of searching her desk, would not her hand have been forced? Could she have done less than discharge the thief, just as her substitute had done, and then face the consequences —whatever they might be? And was not Cynthia's only safe rule, up to the very last moment of the impersonation, to do exactly what Celia would have done in her place?

She was wandering restlessly about the flat as she pursued these reflections—it was incredible to her that she could have been peacefully asleep in Philip Rowland's chair less than an hour ago; she would never enjoy another relaxed nor contented moment in this flat, she was sure—and she found herself beside the gate-legged table with the magazines on it where she had dropped the letter from Celia's husband that Olga had handed to her.

It lay there now just as it had left her hand, and she looked at it with profound distaste. Under the rule she had just adopted, to do whatever Celia would have done, she must open and read the thing. There was one consideration now which would make this easier to do. She felt in no danger of surprising any confidences. A man who would hire his wife's maid to spy upon her would not have any confidences to give his wife. Still it was with a very doubtful, reluctant hand that she picked up the letter.

Her scruples were still further relieved—the oddity of the fact did not strike her till later—when she noticed that she would not be obliged to tear open the envelope, since it was already unsealed. That settled the question for her, and she drew out the contents of the envelope. They were a short typewritten letter, and a cheque for five hundred dollars.

"Dear Celia," the letter read. "I forgot to leave you this before I went away. According to your pass-book, which I looked at this morning, you are down pretty low and if you have any outstanding cheques you're likely to be overdrawn. Even if you don't remember any, you'd better deposit this as soon as possible after you receive it. Thursday morning that will be, I suppose.

"Yours very sincerely,

"PHILIP."

It was ridiculous, Cynthia admonished herself with an exasperated laugh, the way every personal manifestation of this man appealed to her instinct as likeable. His room, his chair, his books, his cigarettes, and most of all, if she could be included in that category, his aunt. She could not make him seem, somehow, like a man who would resort to spies to settle his difficulties with his wife. Except for the aunt, she had no real data to go on. It was just a groundless, irrational feeling.

What was there to like about this letter? Noth-

ing, really, but its omissions. It was more or less decent of him not to stick in any hypocritical endearments. And not to sneer at the inadequacy of his wife's bookkeeping, nor at her presumable extravagance. She could imagine a smug, self-righteous husband writing a very nasty letter indeed upon the framework of this one. Still, this was a pretty negative sort of thing to like him for. Yet the feeling of liking had sprung up and had to be stamped on very vigorously by the memory of the sight of Olga getting out her key and unlocking the drawer at that desk—the key he had given her, of course.

Absently she picked up the envelope, intending to replace the letter and the cheque in it, and now, for the first time, the queerness of its having come unsealed drew her attention. She certainly had not remembered it as an unsealed letter when Olga put it into her hand. It had felt, through her glove, she now remembered, rather limp and damp, from association with Olga's hand that had been putting the kettle on for Miss Rowland's tea.

She carried the envelope to the light. It *had* been damp, as its warped condition now proved.

The telephone girl had told her that the letters had just gone up. But that did not necessarily mean just that moment. Cynthia had let herself into the flat with her latch-key. Celia, being rather lazy, in all probability rang her own door-bell four times out of five, rather than bother to get out her key.

Anyhow, Cynthia had not made any noise till she had run into the telephone table. And at that the maid had come out of the kitchen with the letter in her hand. Why had she taken the letter into the kitchen ? Why had she held it behind her skirt as she came out of the kitchen with it unless in the hope of dropping it unobserved on the telephone table where it properly belonged ?

The chain of inference was inescapable. The maid had been in the act of steaming open the letter—she might or might not have succeeded in doing so—when she was interrupted by her mistress's return. Of course ! Just what a spy would do.

But if she were Phil's spy, why should she be opening his letter ?

Cynthia turned rather limp at that, and dropped into a chair. Unless the girl was working on her own, which did not seem likely, somebody had hired her ; somebody whose instructions were responsible for her defiance, for her hardly veiled threats, and for her parting declaration that Cynthia was a fool. It might be Phil, of course, since the maid might not have recognized this letter as coming from him ; would have had no means of recognizing it unless she had been told that he had gone to Springfield. But if Phil had not hired her, who had ?

She went into the kitchen after a while and got herself something to eat. And then, fortified

a little by food, she settled down to try to think the problem out. But she was no nearer the solution at one o'clock the next morning when she crawled wearily into Celia's bed and fell asleep.

CHAPTER VI

CYNTHIA had one new idea which she must have picked up in the interstices of a good night's sleep. Anyhow it was in full possession of her mind when she woke up at eight o'clock on Thursday morning. This idea was that Phil's letter might not be so innocent as it looked. If he suspected Celia of wanting to go away in his absence and did not altogether trust his spy—nobody but a fool would trust a spy, of course—the sending of the cheque with explicit instructions to deposit it not later than Thursday morning, would be a rather adroit way of getting confirmatory evidence one way or the other. Olga, as matters turned out, would not be able to testify to Celia's whereabouts after Wednesday night. Was it not up to Cynthia, then, to deposit the cheque ?

During the preparation and finishing of a very good breakfast—she could not help regarding this phase of the adventure as rather good fun—she several times decided that this interpretation of the letter and the cheque was fantastically far-

fetched. But always within five minutes after so deciding she found herself wondering whether it might not be right after all. If there was any doubt about it, even a shadow of a doubt, had not she better follow last night's rule to do whatever Celia would do—and deposit the cheque ? There was no conceivable reason why Celia would not want it deposited.

She thought for a few minutes, with a sort of relief, that the question was decided for her when it occurred to her that she did not know in what bank Celia kept her account. But then she reflected that the writing desk in her sister's bedroom probably contained the answer to that question.

So after she had washed up the breakfast dishes and made her bed, she sat down in the little chair she had startled Olga out of last night and began a search, feeling rather guiltier and more uncomfortable, she imagined, than Olga had when engaged in the same occupation.

Luckily it did not take her long to find what she wanted, and with the idea of getting a disagreeable business over as soon as possible, she put on her hat and coat, tucked the cheque into the bank book, and set out. The cover of the book did not provide her with the address of the bank. She must trust once more to the omniscience of a taxi driver.

Luckily he knew where the Tower Bank was. Probably everybody did, but herself.

It was a nice day, and it occurred to her that when her errand was done, she might like to walk back to the flat. She would not dare to go out again, because Celia might be telephoning almost any time after lunch. So, with the idea of picking up a landmark or two that would enable her to find her way " home" she looked out of the back window of the cab just as it was driving off.

A man was speaking to the chauffeur of another cab, the next in the rank behind hers, and his action in turning away to get in, the slope of his shoulder and the angle of his hat, rang the bell of recognition in her mind. Was he the man who had turned away from her so sharply in the hotel yesterday ? Well, if she saw him in the bank, she would know.

The mere suspicion that she was being followed roused the same white-hot anger in her that she had felt when she saw Olga getting out the key. And it focussed itself again, despite last night's doubts, on Phil. What a rotter a man must be who would subject a wife like Celia to such a gratuitous humiliation as that !

Apparently she was not being followed very closely—probably her shadow had heard the address she had given her chauffeur—for the other taxi was not in sight when hers pulled up before the bank.

If she could do her errand quickly enough perhaps she could get away again before her pursuer arrived. She would like to elude him for nothing else than the satisfaction of making him feel foolish.

She walked straight up to the receiving teller's window, pushed her book with the cheque in it under the grating, and in answer to his pleasant, "Good-morning," said, "I'd like to deposit this, please."

He opened the book, unfolded the cheque, and turned it over. Then, with a faint and rather weary smile, he said, "I'm afraid I'll have to ask you to endorse it, Mrs. Rowland."

If her feeling at the time offered trustworthy evidence, she stood there, confounded, frozen, for a matter of minutes before she stirred or spoke.

She knew, as a matter of academic fact had always known, that cheques have to be endorsed with the signature of the payee, but she had had almost no personal experience with cheques. Her grandfather, and since his death, her trustee, had kept her supplied with all the money she wanted. About the only time she had ever had to look after her own finances had been while she was abroad, and then she had used a letter of credit. So, in the whole course of her cogitations whether or not to deposit Celia's cheque in the bank, the necessity of forging Celia's signature on the back of it had never occurred to her.

So there she stood, with the choice of three things to do. She might confess to the teller that she was not Celia. She might take back the cheque and say she had changed her mind about depositing it to-day, or she might accept the pen which the man had obligingly dipped into the ink and pushed out to her through his grating, and write "Celia Rowland" on that piece of paper. It was the last of these choices she accepted.

As far as the word "Celia" went, she knew she was all right. The two of them wrote that name exactly the same way. But she had no recollection of ever having seen the name "Rowland" written in Celia's handwriting. Her only hope was that if she wrote it fast and did not stop to think it would look as it did when Celia wrote it in similar circumstances.

If it did not, what would happen? She had not the faintest idea, though it did not seem quite credible that the teller would call a policeman and have her put in jail at once. But she was ready even for that. She was going to be Celia as well as she could up to the last stroke of the pen.

But the teller did not call a policeman. He glanced with the utmost indifference at the signature, entered the amount in the bank book, pushed it towards her, and then began filling out a deposit slip. She turned away from the window giddy and rather weak in

the legs, but buoyed up somehow by an enormous exhilaration.

It was a bad moment for the man she met coming in at the door just as she was going out of it. It was her man, all right, the one she had seen in the Blackstone, and later getting into a cab.

He made a clumsy attempt to avoid her, but she was too quick for him, and confronted him with an electric smile.

"How do you do?" she said. "I'm going straight back to the flat, so you needn't follow me unless you like. But if you feel you must, I might give you a lift in my cab."

The man smiled sheepishly, but had nothing to say.

"Why not," she persisted, "save expense?"

"Oh hell!" he said disgustedly. "Do you want to lose me my job?"

"I see," she conceded. "You have to regard the proprieties. You think my husband might consider it odd. I suppose he would. All right then! Follow along."

She really enjoyed her walk back to the flat. She glanced back now and again, but at no time did she see anything of her disconcerted shadow. Most likely he had abandoned his pursuit for the time being—or turned it over to some one else. Anyhow, she had scored, that time!

Would the man, she wondered, confess the mis-

hap in his report to Phil? And would Phil look as foolish over it as the man himself had looked? She hoped so. She wished she might be there to see.

The only thing that stood in the way of her complete enjoyment of the incident was a fleeting impression which she tried to dismiss from her mind as imaginary. This was that the man had started slightly at her remark that her "husband" would think it odd if the detective drove back in the cab with her. Just as Olga had started at her contemptuous remark that Phil could pay her "whatever he liked."

Could it be anyone else than Phil who was having Celia watched? Oh, it was absurd to suppose it! Celia herself had seemed to take it for granted that the watcher was her husband. Who else could it be? Celia was not a criminal!

The whole thing was plain enough. Olga had not recognized the letter as Phil's and had opened it. And the two queer looks or starts she had thought she noticed were all imagination.

As she slipped her key into the lock of her door she heard the telephone bell just inside ringing persistently. She had not expected Celia to be returning so early as this. She would have to be gone for one night, she had said, and possibly two. Cynthia had made up her mind not to begin expecting her until late in the afternoon of to-day. But this

was more likely to be Celia than anyone else. Heavens, what a relief if it was!

Her heart was beating hard—or she would have said it was—when she unhooked the receiver. It was not Celia's voice, though, that answered her. It was an operator. "Mrs. Philip Rowland?" it asked. It might be Celia, after all.

But the next thing the operator said was, "Go ahead, Springfield. There you are!" and Cynthia's heart showed what it could do in the way of racing.

A man's voice, sounding rather small and far away, but nice and clear, said, "Hullo, Celia, is that you? This is Phil." After a short but very dead silence he repeated, "Hullo!"

"Yes," Cynthia managed to say. "This is Celia."

"Did you get my cheque all right?" he asked. "I'm sorry I forgot it."

A memory of her suspicion of his purpose in sending that cheque roused her a little and restored her voice. "Yes, I got it, thank you," she said. "I'm just back now from putting it in the bank."

"That wasn't why I called up," he went on. "One of my cases has been postponed. Won't be argued till next term. So I'll be coming home to-night. I'll be turning up at the flat for breakfast."

Naturally he would expect her to say something to that and after a moment of appalling silence he added in a little different tone, " I just thought I'd let you know."

She must not try to think what it meant until she had answered him. " All right," she said, " I'll be here."

This seemed, somehow, to touch his sense of humour, for he laughed. " Well, I hope so ! " he exclaimed, good-humouredly. And then rather quickly, " Good-bye."

Cynthia laughed too, as she hung up the receiver, but it was a wild, frightening sort of laugh to hear and she checked it abruptly. There was no use going into hysterics about it. It was exactly what they might have expected.

Well, there was no good thinking about that. What could she do ? The answer seemed to be, nothing. She could just stay here in the flat and hold her breath, wondering whether Celia would get home in time or not.

No, she could not do that. The suspense would be unendurable. What else ? If she could only delay Phil's return ! Concoct some sort of message that would send him off on a wild goose chase for a day or two ; some message that purported to come from his office. Hopeless, of course ! No doubt his telephone number was in the book, but she did not know the name of anyone in his office.

Get word to Celia, then! Warn her that she must, at all hazards come back to-day. And that was equally hopeless. She had no idea where Celia had gone.

A few minutes later, though, she thought of something that checked her desperate pacing up and down the flat and sent her back to the telephone. It was not much of a chance but it was worth trying. During the hour she had been out this morning Celia might have telephoned from her room in the Blackstone. She might be there now, waiting to try again a little later. It was even possible, for all Cynthia really knew, that she had never left town at all. She might have wanted that room for a sort of headquarters.

When the Blackstone answered her call she found that in her excitement she had forgotten the number of her room, so she asked for the room clerk and said she would like to speak to Miss Wainwright—Miss Cynthia Wainwright.

"Wait a minute, please," the clerk said.

Didn't that mean that Celia *was* there? Otherwise he would either have said she was out or simply rung through to her room. But the next voice that spoke was not Celia's. It was a woman who did not seem to know what anything was about.

"What is it, please?" she asked, mechanically. "Whom do you wish to speak to?"

Cynthia said, as patiently as she could manage, " Miss Cynthia Wainwright, please."

" Oh ! " said the woman. " Just a minute."

This was getting maddening, but she had not waited anything like a minute when a man's voice, rather crisp and managerial, spoke to her.

" Hullo," he said. " Are you calling for Miss Wainwright ? "

" Yes ! " Cynthia cried. Her throat was getting dry.

" Forgive me for asking," the voice went on, politely, " but are you a friend of Miss Wainwright's ? "

Cynthia was no longer impatient ; she was terrified. " I'm her sister," she answered. " Mrs. Philip Rowland."

" Oh, I'm very glad you've telephoned, Mrs. Rowland," he said. " Your sister has had an accident. She's at St. Luke's Hospital.

" Really an accident," he went on, after a moment's pause. " I mean, I'm not trying to break worse news to you gently. It's serious, but I understand it's not likely to prove fatal. She's still unconscious—or was, some hours after she'd been brought into the hospital. She had her room key with her, but they had no other clue as to whom to notify, so they notified us. She was registered from Santa Barbara, but that was all we knew. So I left orders that any call for her should be sent in

to me. I'm very glad we've been able to get in touch with her friends."

"Thank you very much," Cynthia managed to say. "I'll go to the hospital at once."

CHAPTER VII

It was lunch time and she thought she ought to eat something before starting to the hospital—at least some biscuits and a glass of milk—but she found it impossible. However, apart from the conviction that she could not swallow anything, she felt calm enough, rather unnaturally so. The mirrored door where she waited for the lift that was to take her down to the street reported no signs of undue excitement about her looks. The seriousness of the news she had just had about Celia seemed to have steeled her nerves, immunized her against further surprise. Nothing more that could happen would matter much one way or the other.

But she was mistaken about that. The lift boy, it seemed, sold newspapers. He had a great stack of them in the corner of his car. The news of the day had never meant less to the girl, and it was a purely automatic action that directed her gaze to the confusion of headlines which streamed in different sorts of type across the upper half of the first page of the paper on the top of the heap.

An instant later the boy suddenly stopped his car and turned to her with a quick, " What is it ? What's the matter, Mrs. Rowland ? "

She did not know that she had made any noise—but she must have cried out, or gasped, or something.

" It's all right," she told him. " Take me down. I want to buy one of your papers, though."

She saw he was deeply concerned, and not half convinced.

" I'm not ill," she asserted. " There's nothing the matter with me. I've just had some bad news that's all. My sister's had an accident."

Her hands were shaking so that she had trouble with the unfamiliar clasp of Celia's purse, and the boy, noticing her difficulty, said, " Never mind paying me now, Mrs. Rowland."

He walked with her down the long lobby to where he could turn her over to the hall porter. She thanked him for this service with a smile, and felt a smart of tears in her eyes when he said, kindly, " I hope you find your sister isn't so bad as you think."

" Do you want a taxi, Mrs. Rowland ? " asked the hall porter.

" Yes. I want to go to St. Luke's Hospital."

It did not seem to matter now whether she was followed or not. She did not even glance back to see if another car was following her.

She deferred opening the paper she had bought for a moment or two. Had it been nothing but a trick of her excited imagination, or had she really read somewhere, in the stentorian confusion of those headlines, the question, "WHO IS CYNTHIA WAINWRIGHT?"

It took her the better part of a minute to make sure, but presently her eyes lighted once more upon the printed query that had wrung that startled cry from her in the lift. It was a sub-heading to one of the lesser headlines which read, across two columns, "Mystery Woman Hurt." She turned the paper over and read the news story.

"An unconscious woman, apparently about twenty-five years old, richly dressed in expensive French clothes, was brought to St. Luke's Hospital at an early hour this morning, suffering from serious injuries apparently received in an automobile accident.

"Her name, if she is correctly identified by the visiting cards in her purse and the marks upon her clothing, is Cynthia Wainwright. But who Cynthia Wainwright may be, where she lives, and who her friends are, the hospital authorities have no idea.

"She was brought to the hospital in a sedan car with a Wisconsin licence, by a man and a woman who gave their names as Mr. and Mrs. Robert B. Browning of Milwaukee. They professed a complete ignorance of her identity.

They told a rather queer story, but there seems to be no reason for doubting that it was true.

" According to Mr. Browning's account, he and his wife were driving home from the Dunes where they had been spending the past two weeks. They had left Miller's before daylight in the hope of getting through the Chicago area ahead of the traffic.

" About six o'clock, in South Chicago, while they were proceeding slowly on account of the fog, they came upon a Ford car swung across the road. A young man near the curb was bending over the body of the injured woman.

" He said, according to Browning, that his companion had been leaning out of the car to see round the wind screen, and that on their colliding with an unlighted obstruction in the road, she had been thrown bodily out of the car, landing, apparently, on her head.

" It did not occur to Browning to question the young man's explanation, nor was there anything indicative of foul play about the accident. The woman's wrist-bag lay on the ground beside her, and Mrs. Browning herself picked it up unopened. The young man did not appear to be drunk, though he showed signs of being rather badly shaken up.

" Browning agreed to take her in his car to a hospital, and chose St. Luke's as being the nearest one to the scene of the accident. The young man agreed to follow him in his Ford, which seemed to be undamaged. Neither the young man nor his car have been heard of since.

"An examination of the young woman's clothing and effects showed no indications of robbery or assault, and the Brownings were not detained. The young woman's wrist-bag, gold mounted and bearing the monogram, 'C. W.,' contained over one hundred and fifty dollars in currency, some visiting cards engraved with the name 'Cynthia Wainwright,' and a room key at the Blackstone.

"The management of the hotel say that a Miss Cynthia Wainwright arrived yesterday at about two o'clock, registered from Santa Barbara, California, took a room, and somewhat later that afternoon went out. So far there has been no response to the inquiry directed to Santa Barbara, and no one in Chicago has turned up to solve the mystery.

"Miss Wainwright's injuries are severe, but the doctors say probably not fatal. They include cuts about the face and head, a probably fractured skull, and a broken wrist. At last reports she was still unconscious.

"Does any one know who Cynthia Wainwright is?"

Queerly enough, the first thing Cynthia felt on reading the body of the article was relief. The conclusion she had jumped to from that sickening printed question, "*Who is Cynthia Wainwright?*" was that the impersonation had been discovered and that poor little Celia's secret, for all her valiant efforts to protect it, lay open to the world. But this

clearly had not happened. They did not doubt it was Cynthia, but they wanted to know who Cynthia was.

And this, she realized, was what she would be expected to tell the moment she reached the hospital.

What should she tell them? All other questions, fears, surmises that kept surging through her mind—— What should she do about Phil when he came home? What if Celia should die? Where had the poor child been and what was her secret? How could any one have been such a cold-blooded brute as to desert her the way the young man in the Ford had done?—all this flood of feeling must be kept back till she had decided coolly and deliberately what she should say, how much she dared tell the authorities at the hospital.

Did she dare go there at all? Would not her identical resemblance to Celia be perceived at once, and would it not give rise to some dangerous surmises? That was a risk that must be accepted. As for the story she would tell, this, she decided, must be practically the same as the one she had told Phil's Aunt yesterday afternoon. Thank heaven she had told Aunt Ellen!

If they pressed her with the questions Aunt Ellen had been too well-bred to ask, as to who the sick friend was whom Cynthia had made that hurried trip to Chicago to see, and where that friend

lived, she would simply tell them she did not know. They could believe her or not, as they liked. They could interpret the story as they liked.

It did not make much difference, she reflected, a little forlornly but with relief all the same, what anybody thought of Cynthia Wainwright. There was no one, except perhaps the Pyncheons, who mattered. Cynthia's reputation could be sacrificed at comparatively small loss to anybody, now that dear old Grandfather Wainwright was dead.

A little later she was able to smile over these apprehensions of hers, for they proved totally unfounded. Her bare statement that she was Mrs. Philip Rowland and that their mysterious patient was her sister, was all the hospital authorities wanted to know. Neither did her appearance excite any embarrassing curiosity. It was remarked several times that she and her sister must look very much alike, to which Cynthia always replied, calmly, that they did. And once she went so far as to add that they were frequently mistaken for each other. It did not matter. People did not believe that an identical resemblance could exist. She remembered the way Aunt Janet had persisted, in the teeth of experience, in maintaining that she could tell which was which.

They suggested that she would probably want her sister moved to a private room. She was in

a ward now, they said, which did not matter as long as she remained unconscious, since she was getting every care. Cynthia promptly arranged for the best room available, and engaged a special nurse. It was a relief to be able to do something.

But when the removal had been accomplished and Miss Mason, the nurse—an exceptionally nice one, Cynthia thought—installed; when there was nothing to do but pull up a chair to the bedside and gaze at the pitiful broken figure that lay there, the face half concealed by bandages, the right arm in a cast;—nothing to do but gaze at that, and listen to the stertorous breathing, wait for the dawn of consciousness that might never come, and *think* —the thing became a sort of nightmare.

It was no good, she fiercely told herself again and again, guessing where Celia had been nor what she had been doing during those hours between their parting at the Blackstone yesterday and her being found unconscious this morning.

She had certainly implied to Cynthia that her errand involved a train journey out of town. Otherwise why had she said she would have to be away for one night at least? She might, on the other hand, have gone out of town, and the young man might have been driving her back in his car.

But why had he abandoned her like that? There was one rather obvious and sickening possibility. If he were the one person whose presence with Celia

would compromise her, would damn her fatally and finally in the eyes of her husband—if he were, in other words, the lover she had denied she had, then perhaps in disappearing he had reluctantly been making the best of an impossible situation. He had not helped it much, however. By giving it the element of mystery which made it news and put it on the front page of the newspaper, he had ruined whatever bare chance Celia had of escaping discovery. When Philip Rowland learned who Cynthia Wainwright really was, would the identity of that young man be any mystery to him? Probably not.

And Phil was coming home for breakfast to-morrow morning. What should she do when she saw him? Tell him in the first breath who she was and that the woman in the hospital was his wife? Tell him as much of the truth as she knew and trust to simple human pity for the forgiveness Celia needed? She herself could put in no effective plea for that forgiveness unless she told the truth instantly; without waiting, that is to say, for her own imposture to be discovered. Even so, what chance would it have with a man who regarded deception as the least pardonable of crimes?

She had not yet been able to make up her mind what manner of man Philip was. If he had bribed the maid and hired the detectives to watch his wife,

he was not worth saving for her. In that case the thing to do was to save Celia from him. Carry her off, and let him get his divorce.

But suppose, in spite of all reasonable inference, he was not like that? Suppose the net round Celia's feet was none of his weaving, and the secret—the "perfectly crazy" thing she had taken so desperate a chance to put right—were one that she could honourably keep from his knowledge, to tell him anything while she lay helpless, unconscious like this, would seem a betrayal.

Would it be possible to gain the grace of another day? Could she greet him to-morrow morning as his wife—her distress and anxiety over the accident would account for any minor strangeness in her manner—give him breakfast and send him back to his office, in the hope that before another night Celia's own wishes could be consulted? Was it still her duty to be Celia till the very last possible moment?

The surgeon in charge of the case visited the room about five o'clock, and in the main, brought comfort. The sciagraphs were "negative," he said, which meant that they showed no fracture of the skull, and there were not any signs so far of other undiscovered injuries. She was doing as well as it was possible to expect. But he would make no prognostications at all as to when there would be a recovery of consciousness. "Very unlikely it will

be within twenty-four hours," he said. " It may be two or three days, possibly a week."

Cynthia hated him for saying it so complacently.

About an hour after he had gone, in one of Celia's occasional moments of restlessness, Cynthia saw her lips move. The nurse for the moment had her back turned. Cynthia leaned eagerly forward and listened. The nurse turned at the movement, but stayed where she was, and until Cynthia leaned back in her chair, she did not stir. When that happened, she asked, " Did she say anything ? "

" Yes," Cynthia told her. " I think she was back at the moment of the accident. She said something about going slow because of the fog."

But that was not all she had heard. What Celia had said was, " Drive slow, Fred. You can't see a thing in this fog."

" Fred ! " She had learned the first name of the mysterious young man. It was not, necessarily, a very important discovery. He might be anybody ; the driver of a hired car, as likely as not. Still the name was all she had, and she kept it to herself.

At the end of another hour during which the patient had not stirred, Miss Mason suggested that Cynthia should go home.

" You'll be a lot more use to her later," she said, and perhaps with more truth than she realized, " if you don't wear yourself out now. Get some dinner and have a good night's sleep. Give me your

telephone number, and I promise if there's the slightest return of consciousness to ring you up."

Cynthia had no confidence in her ability either to eat or to sleep, but the suspense of waiting having become unendurable, she obeyed.

CHAPTER VIII

CYNTHIA was standing on the pavement in front of the hospital watching the flashing stream of traffic for a taxi with its flag up, when she heard a man say, " Hullo, Celia ! "

She had not seen the man before he spoke, and a frozen moment went by before she could nerve herself to the point of turning to look at him. She would have to do it, of course. He might be anybody. He might even—conceivably—be the man who believed himself her husband. The mere wildness of that idea keyed her up and it was with a genuine smile that she looked round at him and answered, " Oh, hullo ! "

He must have noticed her hesitation, for he said, " I didn't know whether you were going to speak to me or not."

" Oh, I don't mind—*speaking* to you," she said.

There was a sort of exhilaration about playing a game like this ; it was a kind of mental blind-man's bluff, fencing in the dark. She would follow his lead correctly, this time. Whether his

quarrel with Celia had been playful or serious, her answer would do.

She did not like the look of the man, whoever he was; neither his voice nor his appearance, though there was nothing patently at fault about either. He was not much older than she, well-dressed, and would pass for good-looking. He seemed rather nervous or excited, his glance constantly darting past her as if he were on the look out for somebody.

"Does that mean——" he asked, but he broke the words for another look behind him, even as he was moving closer to her side. "Does that mean that you've forgiven me?"

"It doesn't mean," she said, still managing a tone of colourless indifference which seemed the safest thing to stick to, "that I'm willing to stand here talking to you about it on the pavement. Do you mind seeing if you can stop me a taxi?"

He nodded and turned to look up the street. But he asked her in a low voice as he did so:

"Phil hasn't come back yet, has he?"

"No." The monosyllable sounded rather hostile and by way of preserving neutrality, for she did not yet know whether this was friend or enemy, she added, "He's coming to-morrow, I believe."

He was in the act of hailing a taxi as she spoke, but at this information he turned back to her, looking a little startled.

"He is, is he!—Come along," he added, and

taking her arm he led her down the pavement to the place where the taxi was pulling up.

She did not like him; she was sure she did not like him. It had been hard not to flinch from the familiarity of his touch.

"Where are you going?" he asked.

"Home."

"Had your dinner?"

"No."

She wanted to get into the taxi and be rid of him but he continued to hold her arm. If he was the man Celia had spoken of as Tommy Hollister she would be justified in snatching her arm away from him and leaving him without ceremony. She suspected that he was Tommy, but she could not be sure.

"Come down to my club and have dinner with me," he suggested. "The Athletic Club wouldn't compromise anybody. A nice little quiet dinner, so that I can explain things. You owe me a chance to do that, Celia. You have misjudged me."

"No!" she said sharply. And then, as before, she watered down the negative a little. "I don't want to dine with anybody to-night."

"I know you're worried about your sister. Tell me about her."

"She has been badly hurt," Cynthia told him, "but they say she'll get well. Now, let me go, please."

She hated him now. Even his profession of sympathy had sounded flagrantly insincere.

"Take me with you," he entreated. "I don't mean into your flat. Just as far as the door—for a talk, you know."

He must have read refusal in her face, for he added quickly, "It will be better for you if you do —a whole lot better."

At that she snatched her arm from his grasp and sprang into the taxi.

"I didn't mean that as a threat," he protested. "That's the mistake you made the other time. You've misjudged me, Celia."

She realized suddenly, from the way he reached for the door-handle, failed to connect with it and slightly lost his balance before the error was corrected, that he was a little drunk, and this discovery, oddly enough, decided her.

"All right," she said, "get in!"

"Drive to the Prince," he told the chauffeur. Then accurately negotiating the step, he seated himself beside her and slammed the door.

She was not in the least afraid of him. Even in physical strength she believed that she was his match, and the cab, she was sure, had been hailed absolutely at random. She was convinced by now that he was Tommy Hollister, and she thought she saw a chance of extracting something from his fuddled wits—some hint of the truth, anyhow—

that would guide her in dealing with Phil to-morrow.

" You're a good sport, Celia," he said, " just as I always thought." Then he laughed and added, " And that sister of yours must be a good sport too."

" What makes you think so ? " she asked.

" Of course it might look to some people," he explained, " as if she'd been out making a bright night of it—a joy-ride—but that's not the way it looks to your Uncle Tommy." Then he smiled round at her and asked, " She was doing an errand for you, wasn't she ? "

This came a lot nearer home than anything she had bargained for. She had to clench her teeth to keep them from chattering, but her voice, she thought, had just the note of sceptical amusement in it that she wanted when she asked, " How do you figure that out ? "

" Oh, it wasn't so bad." (As a piece of reasoning, he probably meant.) " You listen and tell me if I'm wrong.

" You have her here unknown to anybody. She goes to the Blackstone ; you go to the Blackstone. You walk away and the poor old flat-foot who followed you there, follows you back again, and never pays any attention to her. And then she goes away to do your errand and gets involved in an accident. How about it ? "

" Oh, I've nothing to say."

The voice did not sound like her own, but evidently he heard nothing queer about it. He must have referred, of course, to the man she had seen in the hotel, the man who had followed her to the bank.

" You know more about Flat-Foot," she added, " than I do."

" Now, that's just where you've got me wrong," he protested. " I haven't a thing to do with that. That's another matter altogether. I wouldn't do anything like that to you for all the money Jimmy Beale makes in a year."

She was fighting now against an absolute loathing of the man. His mere presence beside her had become an almost unendurable affront. Yet she managed to ask, casually enough, " What has Jimmy Beale got to do with it ? "

He started at the question. Evidently his mention of the name had been a slip.

" Oh, Beale's got his own fish to fry, of course, and you can't deny it's natural, the way Phil's been going after him."

Her unguarded frown, the result of the intense effort she was making to remember all this and keep it clear, must have been interpreted by him as simple perplexity.

" Do you mean to say Phil hasn't told you anything about that ? "

She shook her head.

" You know who he is, don't you ? "

It was a rhetorical question, and she did not know whether she dared risk an unqualified denial or not.

" If I ever did, I've forgotten," she said. "Tell me about him."

" Beale's a lawyer," he told her, and then something struck him as funny, and he laughed. " Same as Phil," he explained. " Both lawyers. Birds of a feather, see ? Though they don't always flock together—not so you notice it."

" You haven't told me yet," she reminded him, " where Mr. Beale comes in."

" I didn't know," he assured her pathetically, " that there was anything between him and Phil—no more than you did. If I had known I'd never have mentioned it to him. And I never did mention it to him except as an abstract case, something I thought he'd be interested in. That was all it was, I give you my word—purely abstract."

" What was the case you mentioned to him ? " Cynthia asked.

" Why, yours ! " he answered. " Just what I told you about, that day before Phil came in and found you crying, and practically kicked me out of the flat. He can't treat a man like that, and some day he'll find it out. But I swear I didn't mean you any harm, Celia. I didn't mean to frighten you by telling you I knew. And I only discussed it with Beale as an abstraction. He has things like that

put up to him every day. That's the sort of thing that makes him one of the biggest lawyers in town.

" And if you want a piece of disinterested"—he negotiated the word with some difficulty, and, evidently, not quite satisfied with it, tried again—" of disinterested advice, you go to him. Tell him the whole thing. Where and when it happened, and all that, and he'll get you out of it as slick as a piece of wet soap. Fix it up for you any way you like. He's a good friend of mine and you can trust him absolutely—Promise me you'll go to him," he added fatuously, " just to show you've forgiven me. Will you ? "

" I'll think about it," she said.

" All right, think about it," he agreed. " But don't waste too much time. Not if Phil's coming home to-morrow. You said to-morrow, didn't you?"

She nodded.

So completely was she meditating, a mere disembodied intelligence trying to fit together his drunken admissions and protestations into a consecutive story, that when he reached for her hand she let him have it to fondle as he liked.

" You're the sweetest girl in the world," he told her. " I've always thought so, and I don't think any the less of you for getting into a mess like that with Fred. He's the one I blame. He always was a rotter back in college days—a rotter and a fool," he added viciously.

The taxi had stopped. It was standing before the entrance to the Prince. Her old friend, the hall porter, had his hand upon the door.

" Won't you let me in now, Celia ? " Tommy begged. " Now that you know all about it. Just to show that you forgive me."

" No," she said sharply.

The cab door was open and she got out. " Drive on," she told the chauffeur.

The hall porter slammed the door and the taxi moved away with Tommy Hollister's miserable little drunken face at the window staring after her protestingly.

The empty flat, as she entered it, seemed like heaven to her, with the promise it held of solitude and quiet, a chance to sort out her tumultuous thoughts and reduce them to order. But before she had had time to do more than take off her hat and coat, the telephone rang. She flew to it thinking it must be Miss Mason with the promised news of Celia.

But it was a man's voice that answered her " Hullo ? " Not Phil's though, nor, thank heaven, Tommy's.

" Celia ? "

" Yes. Who is it ? "

" Don't you know me ? I expect my voice does sound funny. It's Fred."

She all but dropped the receiver, and the " Oh ! "

she uttered was fairly jolted out of her. Which Fred? she wondered wildly. The one Celia had warned to drive slowly in the fog, or the one Tommy had just called a rotter? Or were they both the same man?

"I know I shouldn't have risked ringing up," he said, "but I saw you go in just now. I saw you drive up with that little sneak, Hollister. Celia, *don't* have anything to do with him! He's dangerous, whatever he says."

"I won't," she promised, and then chanced a question, "Where are you?"

"Not at the Prince. As soon as I saw you go in I walked away to a drug store with a telephone booth. I don't know where it is. Celia, dear, I'm all mixed up. Have been ever since the smash. I must have got a bump on the head. There was something wrong with the car—a broken spring, I think—and I left it in a garage somewhere to be repaired. But I don't know where. I don't even know where I've been exactly. I waited a long time outside the Prince, and when I saw you come, I—I was worse mixed up than ever. You see, I thought you were badly hurt and they'd taken you to a hospital. I couldn't remember which hospital they said, but I was sure you were hurt. They carried you away. It's driven me almost crazy. And just now you looked as if you hadn't been hurt at all."

The very force of her impulse to say, "But I'm

Cynthia," was what pulled her up. It did not seem like a trap, but it might be. Anyhow, she could not trust Celia's secret to an unknown voice over the telephone.

" It's my sister, Cynthia, who's at the hospital," she explained. " She is badly hurt, but they think she'll get well."

" Oh—oh yes, I see," the voice said blankly.

Then, before she could think of another word she could safely say, she heard the click of disconnection. Fred had rung off—vanished !

CHAPTER IX

CYNTHIA felt, though, as she turned away from the telephone that between Tommy and Fred she had—must have—the raw material of Celia's story. It seemed a perfect labyrinth, to be sure, but she believed that by weighing and scrutinizing the items in her possession she could reach, before Phil arrived, some sort of working plan, some notion as to what her own line ought to be. Just now, though, she was too confused, too tired, and probably too hungry to think. So she resolved not to try, not to permit herself a single speculation upon the Celia mystery until she was refreshed and had eaten.

Her inclination was to begin by getting out of her clothes and having a bath, but the possibility of her being summoned back to the hospital at any time deterred her from doing that. She washed her face and combed her hair, and then went into the kitchen to get supper.

There was plenty of food in the larder. She selected a couple of lamb chops, and made some toast and a pot of tea. The food revived her at once, and

in much better spirits, she washed up the dishes afterwards, and put them away. It took her back to the play-house-keeping days with the little electric cooking range that had beguiled so many holiday hours which she and Celia had spent at the Wainwrights' when they were little. It *was* fun. She would like to have a place of her own like this to play with. She would not have a maid ; she would do it all herself. To make it complete, however, she ought to have a play husband to cook breakfast and dinners for. And then it struck her that for about an hour to-morrow morning that's what she would have.

Heavens, what about Phil's breakfast ! Examination showed that there was plenty of material—fruit, eggs and bacon, coffee, all the trimmings except that she must remember to mark up the milk and cream on the card. But what kind of breakfast would her temporary husband expect ? Was he the fussy sort of person who always wanted exactly the same thing, cooked in the same way ? That was the sort of thing that a wife, any sort of a wife, would be expected to know. She would have to ask him what he wanted for breakfast. The fact of his having just arrived from a night spent on the train would warrant the question. But supposing he were to say, " Oh, just the regular thing." Well, there was no use crossing that bridge till she came to it.

She went ahead and set the table for breakfast. There was a chance for betrayal here, of course, since she could not be sure what plates and things they customarily used. Then having made all the advance preparations she could, she settled herself again in Phil's chair, lighted another of his cigarettes, and deliberately started to think out her problem.

It seemed to begin with Tommy Hollister. Personally he was no longer an unknown factor. She was confident that she knew him as well as if her acquaintance covered as many years as it did minutes. Celia had characterized him as a plausible, malicious liar who had deliberately tried to " put Phil against her."

It was evident enough that he wanted, or once had wanted, to be Celia's lover, and had been disappointed in his expectations of success. It was plain, too, that he knew something about her that he thought gave him a hold over her, that put her, as they say in melodramas, in his power. He had revealed to her his knowledge of that fact, and then somehow, Phil had come—opportunely or inopportunely—on the scene and had kicked him out of the house. That was one nice thing about Phil to remember, anyhow.

What was the fact Tommy had known—the fact which, according to the statement he had just made to her, he had not meant to frighten Celia by re-

vealing? Apparently it had some connection with the "mess" she had got herself into with the man whose first name was Fred.

It was *not* a fact, Tommy had virtuously declared during their ride in that taxi, that made him think any worse of Celia. But this was because he attached all the blame to Fred, the man he pretended to have known since college days for a rotter and a fool. Feeling about Tommy as she did, Cynthia was inclined to enter this characterization in the ledger on the credit side of Fred's page.

It was not much, she admitted, to go on, but the obvious conclusion, so far, seemed to be—and it remained after making full allowance for the fact that Tommy was a liar—that Fred was Celia's successful lover, and that Tommy had discovered the fact. It was easy to surmise a series of actions on Celia's part that fitted on from there.

She had been terrified at Tommy's knowledge, terrified lest he should reveal it, or had revealed it, to Phil. She had felt herself watched, and believed her husband was the watcher. She had felt it imperatively necessary to warn Fred of the discovery of their secret. She had substituted Cynthia in her place and had gone to warn him. And the motor accident at the end of their night together had frustrated her plan for a safe return.

What Fred himself, if it really had been Fred, had said over the telephone after her return to

the flat fitted in precisely with this interpretation. He had sounded like a distracted lover, and if a lover, his distraction was natural. It would, of course, have been fatal to their secret for him to take Celia to the hospital, or to allow it to be discovered in any way that he was concerned with her in the accident. His dazed mind had recognized that fact, and he had disappeared.

He had hung about outside the Prince, either on a mere forlorn hope, or with the idea of warning Cynthia herself, whom he may have known to have been planted there in Celia's place, that the accident had occurred. Presumably he had not looked at the newspaper all day.

But even he had been deceived by the sight of Cynthia driving up, unhurt, in the taxicab with Tommy Hollister. Evidently he had not been prepared for the exactness of the resemblance. He had thought she was Celia and had rung her up on the telephone. And then, at her statement that Cynthia was in the hospital, he had suddenly realized his mistake and had rung off. Celia had told him, no doubt, that she had not taken her sister into her confidence.

There was the outline, clear enough, rather sickeningly clear. The outline of the old familiar cheap and nasty triangle. It got a certain amount of corroboration from the things nice old Miss Rowland had said yesterday afternoon. And it was pointed

by Celia's own admission that she and Phil had not "got on particularly well together," as well as by the obvious fact that Celia had not wanted her sister as a visitor in her house.

If the outline were true, then Cynthia's desperate part in the game was not worth playing. The sooner Phil found out the facts the better it would be for everybody.

But Cynthia did not believe the outline was true. She recalled the sound of Celia's voice when she had said, "I'm not going out to spend a night or two with a lover. I haven't any lover. I've never done that to Phil. I've done nothing wrong, nothing like that. I *know* I haven't."

That last expression was a curious one for Celia to have used, Cynthia now reflected. It had struck her as odd at the time, but she hadn't stopped to think about it. One didn't say emphatically like that, "I'm sure," or "I know," except as an admission that one was not really sure, did not really know. How could she have had any doubt, even the faintest, as to whether she had been unfaithful to her husband or not?

The mental picture she had presented to Cynthia had been that of one tormented by some fantastic surmise that had got to be set at rest before she could have any peace. Something she expected to laugh over as soon as it had been, as of course it would be, settled. A woman going to warn her

lover that their affair had been found out could not be in that state of mind—not possibly. No, unless Celia had been acting, and acting very cleverly too, this outline was not true.

Then there must be an alternative explanation that would prove a better fit. Better go back to some of Tommy's other admissions, which she had so far ignored.

James Beale, a lawyer, a man with fish of his own to fry; a man who, she thought Tommy had indicated, had some grudge or grievance against Phil. Tommy had laughed over the notion that they were both lawyers. That remark of his about their being birds of a feather had been apparently a drunken sarcasm. If Phil, then, was respectable, Beale, presumably, was not. A man to whom messes like this of Celia's were put up every day. A man who could get you out of them as slick as a piece of wet soap. Probably the sort of man who procured fraudulent divorces and was skilled in the technically legal equivalents of blackmail. A friend of Tommy, too. That in itself was almost enough to damn him.

To him Tommy had presented the thing he knew, or pretended to know, about Celia, as he declared, an abstract case. That was a lie, of course, because he had admittedly told him that it concerned Celia. But his declaration that he had told it to Beale in ignorance of the quarrel between Phil and

Beale might perhaps be true. He might have told it idly, in a spirit of only mildly malicious gossip, and have been caught up sooner than he had expected to be. Beale, it appeared, had found a ready use for Celia's secret.

But if he had it, why had he not used it at once? That imploring letter of Celia's had been written more than a week ago.

The only explanation she could see for the delay was that Tommy's knowledge, sufficient to terrify Celia, had not been complete enough or solid enough for Beale to proceed upon.

Yes, of course. That would account for the detectives, and for the bribed maid. And Tommy had admitted that the detectives were Beale's detectives. That cleared Phil. It accounted for the maid's attempt to steam open Phil's letter; for the funny look in Flat-Foot's face, there in the bank, when she had spoken of what her husband would think of his riding home in the taxi with her.

Beale would not hire detectives, for the mere purpose of proving to Phil that his wife was unfaithful to him? No, it was some other sort of net poor little Celia had got her feet entangled in.

And yet, how did this theory account for the passion in Fred's voice over the telephone; for the "Celia, dear," and for the "It's driven me almost crazy"?

Was there any possible way of putting the two

outlines together, reconciling their contradictions? Cynthia gave it up with a sigh. She could not see any.

The telephone rang again, and once more the thought of Miss Mason drew her to it in haste.

This time, as far as the voice went, her hope was not disappointed. It was Miss Mason calling.

"Is that Mrs. Rowland?" she asked.

"Yes," Cynthia cried. "Is she conscious? Has she spoken?"

"No," the nurse said—and her voice sounded suddenly to Cynthia as if she were keeping something back, "it isn't that."

Cynthia held back a sob long enough to ask, "Is she worse—dying?"

"No, no," Miss Mason assured her soothingly. "I'm sorry you took it like that. There's no change; certainly none for the worse. If anything, she's a little better. But—I wonder if you'd mind coming back to the hospital, Mrs. Rowland. To-night, I mean. Now. There's a—there's a new aspect of the case I'd like to talk to you about. Not an alarming one, but perhaps immediate. I can't go into it over the telephone."

"I'll come at once," Cynthia said.

She agonized over the delays of the traffic. It seemed as if she never was going to get there. And she had moments of complete scepticism about Miss Mason's reassurances during which she expected to

find Celia dead when she arrived. If she did die—this was the form the nightmare took—what would there be to tell Phil ?

So, coming in breathless, her heart in her throat, she was rather let down to find everything just as the nurse had said. The interne was there on his rounds, and he lingered a moment or two to say how easy it was to see that she and the patient were sisters, how distressed she must have been by the accident, and how little cause she had to feel any apprehension about the future. He was a perfectly good sort of young chap, and not to be blamed for being a man and not a doctor for a few minutes, but Cynthia could not bear him. It was with a somewhat premature sigh of relief that she saw him turn towards the door. Miss Mason closed it after him.

" She looks better to me," Cynthia then declared. " She's breathing more quietly, isn't she ? "

" That's mostly the hypo," the nurse told her. " She'll have a quiet night and probably be really a little better in the morning. No, it isn't the medical aspect of the case I sent for you about. I'm not sure I haven't gone rather outside my province. But I thought you'd want to know.

" A man came in here about an hour ago, a detective from the State's Attorney's office. At least that's what his star, and he, said he was."

" What did he want ? "

"He told a straight enough story. Said their office had had a tip that this wasn't an accident, that there'd been foul play in it. They were looking for the young man who'd disappeared. They had reasons for thinking they wanted him, but had to go about it quietly."

"But why did he come here?"

"The idea was that your sister, in her stupor or as she was recovering consciousness, might say something that would give them a clue to him. He wanted me to listen to everything she said and let him know.

"Up to then I thought he might be all right. I told him, of course, that he'd have to see the superintendent. I couldn't do anything like that except under her instructions. That's when I began to think he was crooked.

"He said he didn't want any red tape about the business; didn't want it known that that was what they were doing. He was working round to offering me money. I pretended not to understand till he came straight out with it.

"Then I told him if he didn't go I'd get an orderly to throw him out. He threatened to lose me my job, and then went, saying he was going to the superintendent. That's the last I've heard of him."

"He can't get you out of your job, can he?" Cynthia said. "Won't the superintendent back you up?"

" He never went near the superintendent," Miss Mason declared confidently. " I don't think he's in the State's Attorney's office at all. Or if he is, he's working to-night for some one else."

" How could he ? " Cynthia exclaimed. " How would any one dare try a trick like that ? He could be put in jail for it, couldn't he ? "

" That's what you'd think," Miss Mason agreed. " But I know more about such things than I did once. My sister's a law stenographer, studying to be a lawyer herself. She worked for some time in Beale's office. She says there's no sort of crookedness or crime that he won't resort to if he's pushed, and get away with. He'd think nothing of sticking a star on a man and sending him out to work a game like that. For that matter, probably every big crook has got somebody in the State's Attorney's office working for him."

Cynthia could feel her face burning.

" You think . . . ." she began (what did Miss Mason think ?) " you think Beale or some one like that wanted you for an innocent spy on my sister ? Why do you suppose they would want that ? "

Miss Mason met her look steadily. " I don't know," she said. " Very likely I'm wrong."

There was a moment's silence.

" No, I think you're right," Cynthia suddenly declared. If one could not trust Miss Mason, one could not trust anybody. " And I think," she added,

" that I know what the trap was, and whom it was for. And I'm very much obliged to you for telling me about it."

" I'm glad I did," Miss Mason said, in a way that finished off the subject. " Now," she went on briskly, " you go home to bed, and don't worry. My prophecy is that you'll find your sister better in the morning."

" Conscious ? " Cynthia asked.

" Possibly. That's nothing to count on, though."

" It's easy to say that when it doesn't matter. But you see, I've *got* to talk to her. There are things, one or two, that I've got to ask her about. Things that can't wait."

" Well, they'll have to wait. She won't be well enough to be asked a question of any more importance than a cup of tea for several days."

Several days ! And Phil coming home to-morrow !

Well, that consideration was no reason why she should not get a night's sleep now. To-morrow could take thought for itself.

She all but fell asleep in the taxicab, and when she got out at the Prince, her drowsy preoccupation with the nice soft bed she meant to tumble into in about three minutes left her a conscious margin only wide enough for a most mechanical acknowledgment of the services of the hall porter and the lift boy.

She walked down the corridor towards her door as familiarly as if she had been living on the other side of it for a year. She was so sleepy she fumbled a moment with her key. The sound of briskly approaching footsteps in the flat took her the wrong way, bewildered her instead of bringing her faculties into instant focus as it should have done.

She was still standing there in a daze, not even frightened yet, when the man inside opened the door for her.

" Hullo, Celia," he said.

She recognized even in the moment of shock that the greeting was friendly, but she could not respond to it. Throat and all, she was simply frozen. How could this be Phil? It was not morning yet. She could only half see him in the dim light of the passage.

" I'm sorry I frightened you," he added, almost at once. " You poor child! What a day you must have had. I hope things aren't worse at the hospital."

Automatically she shook her head, but her mind was not yet anywhere near in focus.

" You've come back *to-night!* " she said blankly. She might still, for any move she made, have been cemented fast to the tiles out there in the corridor. She must do something. He was beginning to look as if he saw something queer about her.

" You aren't annoyed because I came back, are you? " he ventured. " I happened to see the Chicago

paper about six o'clock, just in time to catch the train. I telegraphed, but found when I got here it hadn't been delivered. And then I telephoned the hospital and they told me you'd left. You don't think I came back for any other reason than . . ."

" No," she said, " it's all right."

With that she went in and he closed the door behind her.

CHAPTER X

Of course the game was up. A man as intelligent and observant as this one was could not go on for more than a very few minutes mistaking a woman he had never seen before for his wife, no matter how exactly alike they looked. He had seen at a glance that she was more than merely startled by finding him there to-night; that she was profoundly disconcerted by his return before his time.

He had been awfully decent about it, though. He had not complained of her not seeming very glad to see him, nor uttered any sarcasm to the effect that he feared he had disarranged some other plan of hers by coming home too soon. She had an idea there were lots of husbands who would not have let such a chance for setting up a grievance go by.

She noticed, as she walked ahead of him into the brightly lighted drawing-room, that he had not offered to kiss her, nor even to touch her with his hands as she passed him in the narrow corridor. If they were on terms as remote as that . . .

Oh, but it would be impossible! She might as

well throw up the sponge now, when she turned again to face him, before he had a chance to detect the imposture for himself. She was incredulous that he had not already discovered it.

Automatically, though, she acted on her old resolution to carry on, even in the face of what seemed certain discovery, right up to the very last instant. She had got away with it once or twice before. Let her remember Aunt Ellen and the teller down at the bank.

She turned to the man who thought he was her husband with the best smile she could muster.

"I'm sorry," she said. "It was good of you to hurry back. I've had so many shocks to-day . . . It hadn't occurred to me that you'd see the paper."

There was a distraction of her own that worried her; a persistent feeling that she herself, somewhere, had seen this man before. His unusual height and slenderness, his easy lounging attitude, the keen pleasant alertness of his face, all seemed to remind her of something. Well, certainly that did not matter now. She could not let her attention wander an instant from this preposterous part she was trying to play.

"I might have seen the paper," he was saying, "and been none the wiser if Aunt Ellen hadn't told me last night when she telephoned that your sister was here."

"She telephoned that to you? In Springfield?"

Cynthia spoke lightly, but she felt the blood coming up into her cheeks. They did keep watch on poor little Celia, then !

" Oh, please don't take it like that ! " he said, a little impatiently. " You ought to know Aunt Ellen. That wasn't why she telephoned. She always rings up after I've had an important day in court, to ask how it has gone."

" How *did* it go ? " Cynthia asked, in a tone and with a smile meant to acknowledge her own remissness in not having telephoned.

Apparently her question startled him a little, for he gave her a quick look ; then smiled himself, and answered very casually, " Oh, pretty well, I think. You never can tell, of course.

" I wish," he added pleasantly, " that you'd take off your things, or let me take them, and settle down a little."

It struck her ludicrously that she was being treated like one of his wife's callers, with just the right mixture of ceremony and friendliness. It was lucky in the present case that their relations were no more intimate. But why in the world was this the best that Celia could make of marriage with a man like that ?

" Have you had any dinner ? " he asked, returning from her bedroom, whither he had carried her coat and hat, to find her settled back comfortably enough in one of the silk-cushioned chairs.

" Oh yes," she assured him. " I came home and got something to eat about seven. I'm not a bit hungry now. Why don't you sit down too ? "

She found herself dangerously inclined to be nice to him. The cold neutrality she had preserved so well with Tommy Hollister did not come so easily with Phil. Yet it was the only line that gave her any chance at all. She had got to spend the night here with this stranger, and if she did not want to be driven to a defensive declaration that she was not his wife, it was necessary for her to remember that the ice was thin.

" What's become of Olga ? " he asked. " I notice she's already laid the table for breakfast."

Cynthia looked at him squarely, and said, " She's gone."

He took it without batting an eye, apparently thinking she meant the maid had gone out for the evening. While she was deciding whether to set him right on this point or not, he gave her something else to think about.

" Smoke ? " he suggested, getting out his cigarette case.

Did he already suspect her identity, she wondered, and was this a test ? Celia, a year ago, had never cared much about cigarettes, but she had occasionally smoked one. Cynthia really wanted one herself just now, and decided to chance it.

After he had held a match for her and brought

her an ash tray, he drew his own chair a little nearer, and having settled himself in it, filled and lighted his pipe. The atmosphere was getting distinctly more domestic and she warned herself to be more alertly than ever on guard.

"I wish you'd tell me about Cynthia," he said.

She got a perfectly unwarranted sensation of pleasure from hearing him speak her own name in that familiar, friendly fashion, and by way of keeping her own balance she emphasized a little the formality of her answer.

"Apparently the skull isn't fractured," she told him. "They thought, at first, that it was, but it seems it's just a bad concussion. And of course, the cuts and bruises and the broken wrist aren't dangerous. If there's any other injury, at least they haven't found it yet. They've given her a hypodermic to quiet her restlessness for the night, and the nurse says she expects her to be a little better in the morning, though she doesn't predict that she'll be conscious."

"I'm glad to have even an official bulletin," he said. There was no note of satire in his kindly voice. "If you don't want to give me anything more than that, it's all right. But it wasn't exactly what I asked for. I'd like to be of some real help to you, if you'd let me try."

"Thanks, Phil," she said, without looking at him, "—I may ask for help some time."

For some time after that they smoked in silence. She knew what she wanted to say, but she was trying to think it through as her grandfather had tried to teach her to do when they played chess.

When she finally spoke, though, it was on impulse rather than from any reasoned assurance that she could foresee where she was going to bring up. Upon the foundation of the basic lie that the person at the hospital was Cynthia could she not tell him a good deal of the truth?

"I know it must look awfully mysterious," she said. "That's the way it looked to Aunt Ellen yesterday, and I don't blame her for not thinking I was telling the truth. I wasn't exactly, and the lie I did tell sounded perfectly silly. I said Cynthia was on her way through town to see a sick friend.

"Really, I didn't know what her errand was. I don't know now. She didn't even tell me where she was going. She said she'd be back in a day or two and that then she hoped I could go away with her somewhere, where we could have a real good time together. But she said that until she got this off her mind she couldn't think of anything else. She said she didn't believe it was serious, but that it was so perfectly crazy she had to find out about it and set her mind at rest. We talked about an hour, and at the end of it I came back here. That was all I knew when I heard about her accident."

She sat breathless during the ensuing silence.

Had she, by some unwitting admission, betrayed the whole thing? Was his keen, quiet mind fitting the pieces of the puzzle together while he gravely smoked his pipe?

What he finally said was, "And I suppose, as long as she's been unconscious ever since, that it's still all you know—except for what was in the paper."

"Not quite," she confessed. "But I don't know whether I can tell you anything more. Wait—I'll tell you this.

"I think I know the man's first name, the man who was with her at the time of the accident. She spoke it while I was sitting close by her bed this afternoon. She was telling him to drive slow because of the fog. When I came home to supper a man rang up and gave the same name. He wanted to know how badly she was hurt. He said he was all mixed up, didn't know what hospital they'd taken her to nor where he'd left his car, nor anything. It was smashed up, and he thought he'd taken it to some garage. Of course he couldn't have read the papers or he'd have known where she was."

"Did you tell him where she was?"

"No," she said, a little uncertainly, "I don't think I did. I was trying to find out something more about him when he rang off."

He must have noticed that she had deliberately refrained from telling him the man's first name, for he did not ask her what it was. She wanted to

tell him. She wanted to tell him Miss Mason's story too. She wanted—how she wanted!—to tell him everything. He seemed so clear and cool and strong.

"I suppose," he remarked at last, "—you needn't tell me whether I'm right or not—that you had some intimation of this mystery about her, a year ago when you were in Italy together."

Cynthia stared at him. "What makes you think that?" she asked.

"Well," he said, good-naturedly, "you made her something of a mystery to me from the very first. I was curious about her, having so narrowly missed seeing her, and was rather disposed to ask questions, till I saw that you didn't want to talk about her. You never even showed me a picture of her. You never told me how much nor how little she looked like you. I've always felt you were guarding some secret about her. And I assumed, just now, that this—adventure of hers might be a part of it."

"I see," she said blankly, though it must be obvious, she thought, that she did not.

Why had Celia made a mystery of her like that? Refused to talk about her, concealed the fact of their resemblance, hidden or destroyed the amusing picture they had had taken together in Paris just after they had had their hair cut in the same fashion? And why, on the other hand, had she been so uncommunicative about her husband to Cynthia? There was a curious kink about it somewhere.

But now was not the time to be casting about for solutions to that enigma. There were more pressing problems closer at hand.

She restated Phil's question as he had really meant it ; as it applied to the girl now in the hospital, the girl who had set out yesterday on that secret errand to put her mind at ease about some crazy thing that was driving her frantic. Had there been any shadow of that mystery upon her, upon Celia, when they had parted a year ago in Venice ? She told herself confidently that there had not, and then her confidence ebbed a little.

They had been having a rather funny talk that last day in Venice, she remembered, about falling in love. Celia had struck her as rather cynical about it. She had spoken of it as a beastly sort of experience which she herself meant to avoid. That did not necessarily mean much. Probably many girls regarded it in the same way.

But there had been a little more to it than that. Something Cynthia had said—she could not remember now what it was—had dealt her sister a hard blow. She had winced under it and walked away to the window to hide her feelings. But that could not have been anything that would lead, a year later and half the world away, to detectives and the steaming open of letters and the sinister interest of a man like Beale.

She let her gaze rest on Celia's husband. He

was sitting very still, not even smoking, though his teeth were clenched hard on the stem of his pipe. There was a look, she noticed, of profound discouragement about him. The only response she had made aloud to that last remark of his had been her blankly uninformative, " I see."

" You mustn't mind if I don't talk more about it to-night," she ventured to say. " I'd like to. I don't like mysteries any more than you do. And I don't believe she does either. But she's helpless now —just as helpless as if she were dead."

She felt the tears smarting. " I can't talk about her any more," she finished, raggedly.

She did not dare look at him and could not have seen much if she had, through the blur of her silly tears. She tried to hide them from him by turning her face away, but she knew she had not succeeded. She could feel him looking at her in a different manner. The intensity of it was palpable. Somehow, by something she had said or perhaps by her mere manner of saying it, she had lighted up in his mind some new electrical surmise.

What was it ? Had he guessed the secret ? Did he know now who she was ?

" Celia . . ." he began.

No, he had not guessed that, and under a sudden emotion that could have been nothing but relief, a sob broke away from her before she could stifle it.

He got up abruptly and walked away to the

other end of the room. When he came back he said, " Don't be frightened. I won't say it—not to-night, anyhow. You must be worn out. Don't you think you'd better go to bed ? "

" Yes," she agreed, " I think I had."

He did not come any nearer. He had occupied himself relighting his pipe. " Good-night," he said, when she had got up. " Sleep well, and don't worry—Shall I see you at breakfast ? "

She did not tell him she was going to cook it for him. She did not want to start anything more to-night.

" Yes," she answered. " Good-night, Phil."

CHAPTER XI

CYNTHIA closed the door to her bed-room behind her as she entered it, then quickly crossed the room and closed the door of the room beyond, Phil's room, hoping, as she softly turned the key in the lock, that he would not hear her do it. It seemed, somehow, like not trusting him, after what he had said about seeing her at breakfast. It never even occurred to her to lock the other two.

She got into bed under the conviction that she was going to lie awake all night. Nobody a shade more imaginative than a cow could expect to sleep in a situation like this. Her thoughts, as she saw the fillet of light that crept in under the locked door to Phil's room—he must be reading in there, she supposed—were simply too wild and confused to be taken seriously.

At that they were not any wilder than the actual broad daylight facts of the situation she had got herself into by agreeing to be Celia for a day—or two at the outside. It was becoming flatly incredible, and that was all you could say about it. She doubted very much whether she and Celia, together, could

make Phil believe the truth when they tried to tell it to him.

The fillet of light disappeared from the floor at last. He must have stopped reading and gone to bed. Was he finding it any easier to sleep, she wondered, on his side of the door, than she was on hers?

But she must have fallen asleep at last, or she could not have sat up in a daze, as she did, under the realization that some one was knocking on her door and that it was full day. And if she had not still been more than half asleep, she would not have answered the knock by calling, "Come in!"

She recognized the indiscretion when it was too late to recall it. She could not see the door that had been knocked on, for it was the one round the corner that led into the passage. The one person who could have knocked was Phil, and he had immediately opened the door, and with a puzzling deliberateness, was coming in.

When he appeared, an instant later, she forgot everything else in her surprise, for he was carefully bearing a big tray with her breakfast on it.

"Heavens!" she cried. "How late is it? I meant to get up and get *your* breakfast."

"You knew, then," he asked, gazing at her across the tray, "that Olga had disappeared, bag and baggage? Is that what you meant last night when you said she'd gone?"

She nodded. "I ought to know," she said. "I gave her notice the night before last. I simply turned her out of the house."

"Good Lord!" he exclaimed. "What had she been up to?"

At the memory of her suspicion that Phil, here, had hired the girl to spy on her, Cynthia felt herself beginning to blush. And then, and not till then, did it occur to her that she had something a good deal more in the foreground to blush about. Sitting up in bed with nothing on but one of Celia's little silk nightgowns, her hair in a perfectly chaotic mess, she must look—well, a good deal more wifely than the circumstances warranted.

"Put down the tray, will you, Phil, and hand me that jacket? I must look perfectly awful."

What amused and rather scandalized her was her recognition of the fact that she really was not embarrassed a bit. What about maiden modesty? Had she not any? It was all right, anyhow. Phil was perfectly matter-of-fact about it, though he did say quietly, "I shouldn't describe you that way." However, it relieved her to think of an errand for him. "Would you mind telephoning St. Luke's and finding out about Cynthia?" She could see it pleased him to be asked to do that. He closed the door behind him and she sprang out of bed. When he knocked again, a few minutes later, she was ready for him; the pillow smoothed, the coverlet straight-

ened, the one hair-pin she needed in place, and her face—washed, anyhow.

" There's no change," he reported as he brought her the tray, and then cautiously seated himself at the foot of the bed on the far side. " She's had a quiet night and seems a little easier, but there's been no sign of consciousness. I told the nurse you'd be at the hospital some time this morning."

" That's the way they said it would be," she told him. " Thanks, Phil. You're awfully nice to do this for me," she went on, beginning her breakfast. " But I didn't mean it to be this way. I'd made everything ready to get yours for you."

" Yes," he said, " I found your preparations. It struck me that Olga had been rather unusually forehanded. What did she do that you fired her for ? "

" I caught her going through my desk," Cynthia said. " I wasn't sure at first that it was anything more than idle curiosity. There are plenty of maids who do that without meaning any real harm. But when I saw her get a key out of her own wrist-bag and unlock the drawer, I flew at her."

" That's a sickening thing to have happen," he commented. " It must have upset you rather badly, I should think."

" It turned me a little sick," she acknowledged, " just for a minute, before I'd had time to lose my temper."

He was not taking it lightly. She noticed, as she

went on with her breakfast, that there was a formidable angry gleam in his blue eyes. She reflected, with a momentary sinking of the heart, that some time soon he would probably be looking at her like that.

"I wish, if you don't mind, you'd tell me all about it," he said at last. "I don't suppose it's important—that there's anything more to it than appears—but it's possible that there is. Had you already suspected her and set a trap?"

"I might have suspected her," Cynthia told him, "but I didn't; and I did set a trap but without meaning to. She'd asked for the evening out, and I had told her I'd get my dinner in the restaurant. I'd seen my sister that afternoon and then had had a rather stirring visit with Aunt Ellen at tea time, so I put off dressing for the restaurant and fell asleep instead—Well, I was wakened by hearing some one come in. So I kept still and listened. She listened too, and when she was satisfied she was alone in the flat, she came straight to the desk and went to work."

"With you in here!" he exclaimed. "And she didn't see you?"

"No." She suspected herself of blushing a little under this admission. "I'd chosen the big easy chair in your room to go to sleep in."

It brought another intent look from him, and she hurried on.

"The door was open and I could see her at the desk from where I sat. I didn't move till she got out the key, and then I came down on her in about one swoop."

"And turned her out then and there?" he asked. "Did she make any trouble about going?"

"She couldn't. I followed her to her room before she had time to lock herself in and told her she could either pack her things and go—wherever she liked, or she could go to the police station without packing at all. And when she saw that I meant it, she decided to go."

"You didn't pay her anything more than her bare wages, did you?" he asked. "Nothing in lieu of notice, I mean?"

"I didn't pay her a cent. I told her that if she was dissatisfied she could apply to you."

"Good work!" he said, with a broad smile. "I only hope she does apply to me."

The look of familiarity about him came back stronger than ever before when he smiled like that. She was absolutely certain now that she had seen him somewhere. But the recollection could not be placed. And queerly enough, he was looking at her as if he had just thought the same. As if he had been surprised, that is, by seeing something familiar about her.

"Do you know what that reminded me of," he

said, " —your doing a thing like that, I mean ? It reminded me of the first time I ever saw you."

That remark, of course, took her hopelessly beyond her depth. The only comment she could venture on it was a faint smile, and it struck her that even this perplexed him a little. She hurried on.

" I told you I might have suspected her sooner. I think now that when I came back from the hotel, from seeing—from seeing Cynthia, you know—she'd been trying to steam open your letter ; the one with the cheque in it. I didn't realize it then. But I think I might have if my mind hadn't been so full of other things."

She thought his manner was preoccupied as she went on to tell him the details of the letter episode, though he listened attentively enough.

" Well," he said, when she finished, " I hope that young lady does come to my office to collect her wages, but I don't believe she will. I'm glad you chucked her out of the house, just as you did. Look here, though ! You're without anybody."

" I don't mind," she said. " I rather like it for a change. I'm afraid it's hard on you, though, because I'll be at the hospital most of the time."

" I shall like it, too," he said.

He got up rather quickly at that, and turned away from her. " I must be off to work," he went on. " Would you mind ringing me up from the hospital if you find any change when you get there?"

"No," she told him cordially. "Of course I will."

He got half way to the door; then, with an odd gesture of resolution, he stopped short and turned back to her.

"I can't help it," he said. "I can't help feeling it, and I'm going to say it. You seem—different to me somehow, Celia. I don't believe it's all Cynthia—her trouble, I mean—that's changed you. I think something's happened—something else—that gives us a better chance. Something, since I went to Springfield, has changed your feelings for me. Hasn't it?"

She must not, *must not* sit there looking at him like that! But she could not take her eyes away. She was trembling. She felt herself blushing all over.

"I don't know," she said, uncertainly.

"I do."

The next moment he had taken her in his arms and was kissing her. But in another instant he was back where he had stood before. Her gasp of pure panic had effected her release.

"I'm sorry," he said. "I didn't mean to frighten you. But—but I still believe there is a difference, Celia. I won't do that again. I won't try to force you. But I've got something to hope for, anyhow."

Without giving her time to answer, he said, in a perfectly matter-of-fact tone, "I'll be back about six, I suppose; in time for dinner, anyhow," and

went away. A moment or two later she heard him letting himself out of the flat.

For some time she sat just as she was, trembling, too limp even to lift the breakfast tray off her legs.

She had been kissed before, experimentally or casually, but nothing like this had ever happened to her. It made her gasp again just to remember it. It put an end to the impersonation. She could not go on with Celia's husband—like this.

Why, *why* had Celia not wanted it like that? What was the undiscoverable barrier between them? He had built up his hopes upon her treatment of him since last night. Yet surely she had shown him nothing more than ordinary decent friendliness. Would Celia be less kind to him than that when she came back from the hospital?

She slid out from under the breakfast tray, curled up, her face buried in the pillow, and just cried. Then, properly ashamed of herself, she got up, took a cold bath, and began to dress.

For her visit to the hospital she wanted something a little simpler than any of Celia's clothes she had seen so far, so she searched the big cupboard to its remotest corner. There she found something which, when brought out to the light, afforded her a laugh of pleased surprise. Her own dress! The one she had given Celia at the end of their last day together in Venice.

She had been wearing it when they had had that funny talk about falling in love, the time she had hurt Celia unwittingly by something she had said and then had cheered her by telling her of the adventure with a bit of broken amber and the Italian who had tried to make her pay for it, and that nice American . . .

The memory broke off there with an astonished gasp of discovery. That man had been Phil!

Of course. She could see him now, standing just outside the shop where the old iron work was, taking in her quarrel with the Italian, ready to help, helping, of course, just by being there—yet nice enough to let her enjoy the victory she was capable of winning for herself. He had smiled at her in his own enjoyment of it just as he had smiled this morning over her report of the victory over Olga.

He had told her it had reminded him of the first time he had seen her. Could that be the time he meant?

For a long time she stood there just as she was, in a brown study, holding the dress in her hands. That *must* have been the time Phil meant. He had said, " the first time I saw you," not, " the first time I met you." What he had told her last night made it plain that he did not know that he had ever seen Cynthia. He had " so narrowly missed " seeing her, he had said. That must mean that it had only

been a day or two, at the most, after she had sailed that he had met Celia. And unless in that time he had completely forgotten the face of the girl he had watched and smiled at in the antique shop, he would have referred to the incident the first time he spoke to the girl with the same face, the girl who might well enough have been wearing the same dress.

She knew he had not forgotten. She was certain it had happened that way. If it had, then it was plain enough what Celia had done. She had let his mistake go uncorrected. She had allowed Phil to think that it was she who had won that trivial, but exhilarating, little victory over the dishonest Italian shopkeeper.

Suddenly she flung the dress out of her hands and turned away as if she hated the sight and touch of it. Then she tried to laugh at herself for the violence of the spurt of unpremeditated anger that had exploded the action. What on earth did it matter? Why should not Celia have accepted a little temporary advantage like that in the game of attracting a man she liked?

Temporary, though? It had not been temporary. Celia had never told him the truth. Had he not said last night that she had never told him whether they looked alike or not?

Had that been her reason for not urging Cynthia to come back for her wedding? For making her out to the Rowlands a heartless stranger with no

sisterly feelings at all? For talking in her letter about their going away together somewhere for a holiday? Had she meant her never to meet Phil at all?

When she got as far as that, Cynthia pulled herself up short, and put the Venice dress back in the farthest corner of the cupboard. What was the matter with her, anyhow? If ever there was a mountain demonstrably made out of a mole-hill, this was it. She had never indulged in a sillier performance.

She hadn't time to be dawdling like this. She ought to be on her way to the hospital. And—heavens!—there was all her housework to do first.

CHAPTER XII

It was just luck that she had not forgotten that altogether. She might as easily as not have dressed and walked out of the flat, leaving unmade beds and unwashed dishes behind her. She welcomed having a lot to do. If she let herself sit mooning round there was no telling what idiotic notions would enter her head.

But domestic duties in Phil's flat, hers only on the assumption that she was Phil's wife, were not, she found, as good an antidote against idiotic notions as she would have chosen: Making his bed, hanging up his pyjamas, putting his soiled linen in the laundry basket, even the kitchen work, clearing up the astonishing amount of confusion he had made getting his breakfast and hers, and the marketing over the phone—ordering his dinner—all this kept her thinking about him, imagining things.

Suppose she had suddenly changed her mind about sailing for Alexandria with the Pyncheons and stayed in Venice instead ? Might she not have been here now by right instead of as a mere transient

impostor, practically certain to be detected before she went away.

She caught herself hoping, and repudiated the hope almost before she had acknowledged it, that she would be detected. It would be beastly, of course, for Phil to find that she was a fraud, and her reputation would be ruined—not that that would matter to anybody—but at least he would know that she existed. And he would probably be clever enough to guess that she had been the one of the pair he had first seen. It was perfectly ridiculous how intensely she wanted him to know that. It amounted so nearly to nothing that it was not worth thinking about.

The only important fact about Phil for her was that he was Celia's estranged husband. It was her job, by guile or by candour, or by a mixture of both, to see the pair of them reconciled.

The first thing to do now was to go to the hospital and see how "Cynthia" was getting on. It was with a decided slam that she closed the door behind her as she started out.

For the first few minutes that she sat beside her sister's bed she found it easy to feel as she knew she ought, and to see things in their just proportion. You could not feel anything but pity for the bandage-swathed figure that lay there so still, so remote, so helpless; nor consider anything but plans for helping her.

But the only thing one could do in this room was wait, and passive waiting was to Cynthia, in her present state of restlessness, simply beyond her powers.

What was there to do anywhere? She had promised to telephone to Phil if she found any change. There was not any change, but it would be nice of her, she supposed, to telephone anyhow. If she did, a little later, was it not possible, since he knew she had not any maid, that he would ask her to have lunch with him?—Well, she might think of idiotic things, but she would not do them. She would not telephone to him at all.

She got up briskly and told Miss Mason she was going home. And what she did the moment she was back in the flat, before taking time even to remove her coat and hat, was to call up the Athletic Club and ask for Mr. Thomas Hollister.

She had thought of him while she was waiting for a taxi outside the hospital. He had told her more during their ride back to the Prince last night than she had learned from anybody else. He knew—obviously he knew—the "perfectly crazy thing" that had terrified Celia into undertaking this mad adventure. This thing, and one other, were what she needed to know if she were going to do anything but wait and go on pretending to be Phil's wife. Well then, why not go after Tommy and wring these two facts out of him?

It was an incautious sort of plan, to be sure. It might result not in her getting anything out of Tommy, but in her giving herself dead away. She decided she would try it anyhow. If she did not succeed in getting the facts she wanted from him, she would go a step farther and tackle Beale himself.

She had to give her name before the telephone clerk at the Club would tell her whether Tommy was there or not. But as soon as she said she was Mrs. Rowland, she was connected straight through to his room, apparently, for he answered at once.

" This is Celia Rowland," she told him.

He exclaimed, " What ! What did you say ? " as if he doubted his ears.

" It's Celia," she repeated.

" Where are you ? " he asked. " Where are you telephoning from ? "

" I'm at home," she told him. " And I'd like you to come here and see me. At once, if you can."

" But isn't Phil home ? " he asked.

" He's in town," she said, " but he's not here."

She heard him say, " Shut up, damn you ! Leave me alone !

" I beg your pardon," he went on again. " I was talking to some one else. I'll come, of course, if you really want me to."

" I do," she told him crisply. " It's important," and without giving him time to ask any questions, she rang off.

She saw the moment she let him in, fifteen minutes later, that he was a changed, if not a chastened Tommy, from the somewhat inebriated philanderer she had driven home with last night. He still showed the effects—or the after-effects—of alcohol. She guessed that he had spent the rest of the evening getting a good deal drunker than he had been when she left him, but it was plain that nothing was further from his intentions just now than making love to her.

She found his surly mood so much less unpleasant than his amorous one that she greeted his sulky, "What do you want to see me about?" with a hospitable invitation to come in, and allowed herself a cheerful smile at the spectacle he presented after he had seated himself in the same chair that Phil had occupied last night. They certainly made an effective contrast. How in the world had a cowardly, cringing little creature like that been able to terrify Celia out of her wits?

"There are two things I want you to tell me about.—All about," she added, "and just as truthfully as you can. The first thing is: just exactly what is Mr. Beale trying to do to Phil?"

The question was not, she saw, one that he had been expecting, and apparently he was glad that it was not. He recovered enough of his assurance to get out a cigarette and light it, and he lounged a little more comfortably in his chair.

"What makes you think he's trying to do anything to Phil?" he asked.

"Something you told me last night. One of the things you told me."

He turned a startled look on her, then laughed.

"Oh come!" he said. "I had a drink or two before I met you, but it wasn't so bad as that. I didn't let out anything that I didn't mean to tell."

He was not as sure as he would like to be about this, though, since he asked in the next breath, "What were some of the other things I told you?"

"We'll stick to Mr. Beale for the present," she said. "You were trying to make me believe that you hadn't meant me any harm when you went to him with your story about me. You said you wouldn't have done it for all the money he makes in a year if you'd known of his grudge against Phil. You do know about it now, and I want you to tell me what it is."

"He hasn't any grudge that I know about—any personal grudge, I mean. You're always misunderstanding me. I don't see why you should come to me about it, anyhow."

"It's because you seem to have such lots of information about all sorts of things, Tommy. And because you're usually so ready to pass it on—to anybody."

For a moment she regretted having indulged in the sneer. He turned upon her with a flush of

anger, and snapped out, " Well, I haven't anything more to say to you. Not after the trick you played on me last night."

What trick did he mean ? As they had driven up to the Prince last night he had been fondling the hand she had given him while telling her she was the sweetest girl in the world. He had begged her to let him come in. She had refused pretty shortly, of course, but that could not be the trick he meant.

He must hold her responsible for something that had happened to him since. Something *had* happened to him since, she was certain. Frightened him, she guessed. His smouldering rage this morning was due to something more than the after-effects of alcohol. She wished she could find out what it was. But she could not think at this moment of a question or a comment that she dared risk.

" Well," she remarked at the end of a deliberate silence, " if you won't tell me about Mr. Beale, you won't. I wanted you to before I saw Phil. Because, of course, knowing no more than I do about it, I'll have to tell him what I do know."

" Tell Phil ! What ? "

" What you told me last night ; that he's one of the fish Beale is trying to fry."

" Yes you will ! " He tried to laugh at that. " The first question Phil would ask you would be how you knew."

" And that would be the first thing I'd tell him,"

she said. " I'd tell him how you spoke to me in the street outside the hospital and got into the taxi with me and told me how you'd gone to Mr. Beale. I'd tell him that I didn't know whether it was true or not, since you were a little drunk and rather amorous, but he could look into it for himself if he thought it worth while."

He was so frightened that he went white. " You're crazy ! " he shouted at her.

" I'm not so very far from it," she admitted. " Anyhow, I'm willing to risk a show-up."

She perceived from the way he was staring at her that he had room, amid all his fears, to be profoundly puzzled.

" I really think you *are* crazy," he said. " Something's happened to you. I never saw you like this before. But you'd better think twice before you go to Phil."

" I'm willing to think once. That's why I asked you to come here and tell me, before I saw Phil, what his quarrel with Mr. Beale is really about. If it isn't so important as you made me think it was last night . . ."

" It's not important," he insisted. " I'll give you my word it's not. As I told you just a minute ago, it isn't personal at all. It's simply that Phil happens to be on the Grievance Committee of the Bar Association, and they're getting after Jimmy hammer and tongs about that Murphy case. If Beale's dis-

barred, that's very likely the end of him. Naturally he'd like to be able to persuade Phil to call it off. But you can't do anybody any good by butting in."

"I see," she said. "Much obliged, Tommy. That's one of the things I wanted you to tell me. Here's the other: I want to know exactly—word for word, if you can remember it—what you told Mr. Beale about me."

He sprang to his feet in a frenzy of exasperation. "Nothing doing!" he proclaimed. "Absolutely nothing to say. That's finished, see?"

"I see you're frightfully excited about it," she remarked, settling back a little more comfortably in her chair. "Sit down again, Tommy, and smoke another cigarette. Calm your nerves. There's nothing to be frightened about. You advised me last night, as a good friend, to go to Mr. Beale and put my 'case,' as you called it, before him. I haven't decided whether to do it or not. But if I do decide to go to him, I want to know just exactly what he's already been told."

"If you take my advice," he said, "you'll let Beale alone. You've made trouble enough already with the people you've talked to."

Trouble for himself he must mean, of course. That was all the miserable little creature would ever think about. He had had a scare and he was holding her responsible for it. She could not be, could she? The only person she had talked to was

Phil, and the only specific thing she had told him had been about her detection of the prying maid, Olga. Had Olga been to Tommy? That seemed very unlikely.

She had an idea, anyhow, that Tommy had been frightened by a man. Not by Phil, for he had not known that Phil was back until she had told him. Beale, then? That seemed a little more plausible.

"Anyhow, I haven't talked to Mr. Beale yet," she said at last. "And your advice to me last night, when you seemed to be feeling friendlier than you do now, was that that was the best thing I could do. You said he'd get me out of the mess I was in as slick as a wet cake of soap. Have you changed your mind about me? Don't you want me to get out of it?"

"I don't care a damn what you get into or out of. I know you won't get *me* into anything more. Not after the trick you played me last night."

"I'm getting rather tired of hearing about that trick," she said. "If I knew what it was I might be more interested in it. Since you won't tell me what it is I'm supposed to have done . . ."

"'Supposed'!" he snapped. "Look here! Why didn't you tell me last night Fred was in town?"

That question left her for the moment speechless; amazed, when she started to think again, at her stupidity for not having guessed. Celia had told Fred about Tommy. That had been a part

of her errand. She might have brought Fred back for no other purpose than to settle with Tommy. And Fred apparently had come out of his daze at last.

" I take it you've seen him, then," she said.

" You know damned well I've seen him, since you told him where I live. You might have got me murdered, Celia, doing a thing like that."

" Well," she pointed out consolingly, " it seems I haven't. I haven't even," she added, " got you a black eye."

" Well that's no fault of yours," he told her spitefully. "—A great big fool of a brute like that ! "

" I'd like to see Fred myself. You wouldn't tell me where he is now, would you ? "

" I can tell you where he was. He was up in my room when you telephoned, and he knew who you were when he heard me ask you about Phil. —I don't know how much you like that," he added. " *He* didn't."

" No," she conceded, " I suppose not. But I didn't send him to you nor even tell him where you lived. And I mean you no more harm than you say you meant me when you went to Mr. Beale. Now won't you tell me how much or how little you told him ? "

The question galvanized him just as it had before. He fairly sprang out of his chair.

"I will *not!*" he shouted. "I've got nothing to do with that at all. I'm out, see—out!"

At that she got up too.

"Well, I suppose that's where you'd better be," she remarked, with a glance at Celia's watch. "I don't think Phil means to come home for lunch, but it's a possibility. Good-bye, Tommy."

CHAPTER XIII

It was with a genuine elation that she attended his precipitate departure from the flat. If he had not actually got what he deserved, he had at least come close enough for a good look at it. He had given her an exhilarating notion of what Celia's Fred must be like. Young, if he had been at college when Tommy was, and big, or he could not have terrified Tommy like that, and, well—simple-minded, or Tommy would not have called him a fool; full of honest wrath and honest might, ready to champion Celia's cause against the world. He had begun by scaring the life out of Tommy. What would he do next?

When she seriously considered the possible answer to this question she felt less cheerful. In this desperate complication of Celia's he might prove a terribly embarrassing ally. It would need a very different antagonist from an indignant young man with a punch to make any impression on James Beale. She wished desperately that she knew where to find

Fred. Could she have got his address out of Tommy if she had managed him better? Probably not. Probably Tommy did not know it.

She did not wonder, now that she knew Fred had been up in his room when she had telephoned, that she had not been more successful in getting what she wanted out of Tommy.

She had not got much. In her ignorance of the main fact—the fact she felt she must know before she saw Phil again—she was exactly where her talk with Celia at the Blackstone had left her. But among the corollaries to that fact she had learned one important one from Tommy. James Beale, fighting for his professional life, had seen in Tommy Hollister's story a weapon he could use against Phil.

Blackmail that meant, of course. He had agreed to keep quiet about Celia if Phil would call off the Grievance Committee.

It must be a terrible story if he could hope to intimidate Philip Rowland with it. Could any story be terrible enough to accomplish that? She doubted it. Not if Beale put it up to him in his usual manner, as a threat, as a dirty blackmailing bargain, one crook to another. Phil would tell him to go to hell and would stir up the Grievance Committee after him harder than ever. And poor Celia, when she had recovered consciousness at the hospital, would find herself torn to rags.

But if she, Cynthia, could go to Phil with the story she would not put it to him like that. She would be able to appeal to his pity. She would tell him the truth. Who she was. Who the girl in the hospital was. She would tell him how Celia had not believed that the thing Tommy had terrified her with was true or was serious. She would tell him of the desperate attempt Celia had made to find out how serious the thing was that she had done. She would try to persuade Phil not to see Beale at all.

But she could not tell Celia's story to Phil unless she knew what it was. She could not accomplish anything until she knew what Tommy had told Beale. Tommy would not tell. But perhaps Beale would. Well then, she would go to Beale.

It would have been an easier resolution to carry out if by the mere making of it she could have found herself in the lawyer's presence. It was a frightening sort of adventure to set out upon. If she were to let herself begin thinking of the possibilities of mischance involved in it, she would never go at all. She could not help thinking, of course, but she would not let herself sit still and think.

She wondered how she should set about finding him. What sort of den would this monster of iniquity inhabit? It did not seem likely that he would be listed in anything as prosaic and respectable as the telephone directory. And yet, of course,

he would be. A lawyer, even though he were a crook, would have a telephone.

When she found his name in the list, unmistakably identified since the only James Beale in the book had " lwyr " printed after his name, she was tempted to call up his office and learn if he were there. If they should tell her he was out of town or busy in court for the day it would at least mean a few hours' reprieve. But they would not tell her anything, she thought, without knowing who she was, and she knew it would be a mistake to warn her adversary that she was coming to see him. So she copied out the address, put on her things and went out.

This time the sense that her errand was desperate and rather disreputable caused her to look up and down the street with quick glances into all the doorways to discover whether she was going to be followed. She did not see anybody who looked at all suspicious, but all the same she got into her taxi and drove off before she told her chauffeur the address.

She was not familiar enough with the city to have gained any reassurance from the number and the street which she repeated to the taxi driver. She thought of it as some remote, dismal place in keeping with the sinister character of the man she was going to see, just as it would have been if this had been happening in a Dickens novel. So when

her taxi pulled up before the entrance to a modern office building that housed a bank in its lower three or four storeys, she suspected the chauffeur of having made a mistake, and was not really convinced that he had not until she found James Beale's name on the lobby directory.

His suite of offices on the sixteenth floor was as business-like and respectable as Uncle Henry Pyncheon's. There was the usual pretty—but very stiff—girl at the telephone switchboard near the door, who asked when she inquired if Mr. Beale were in, " Who wishes to see him, please ? " There was perhaps a slight flicker of interest in the girl's eyes when she heard the name, " Mrs. Philip Rowland," but her voice as she spoke into the transmitter was perfectly non-committal.

A moment later an intelligent-looking young man with untidy hair appeared and conducted her down the corridor to an unoccupied office. Just a plain, regular sort of office, with a cleared desk, three or four chairs and a coat-stand in it.

" Mr. Beale will see you in a very few minutes," the young man said. " He's engaged just now but he won't keep you waiting long."

He left the door open behind him when he went away. Well, apparently she was not going to be locked up or kidnapped, anyhow.

It was only in this revulsion of relief that she

realized how wildly silly her anticipations had been. She had picked them up probably out of the mystery stories she used to read by the hour to Grandfather Wainwright. She got the greatest revulsion of all when the man she was waiting for came into the room and said, "Good-morning, Mrs. Rowland. I'm Mr. Beale."

He was sixty years old, perhaps, very grey and a little stooped, clean shaven, with a slightly quizzical look in the eyes she saw through the lenses of a pair of old-fashioned gold-rimmed spectacles. There was simply nothing formidable about him at all.

Luckily for her, the very completeness of that impression carried its own warning with it. Of course that was *why* he was dangerous. No man who looked like a sinister villain out of the movies could successfully be one. This was the man who was facing disbarment for the malpractice of his profession, the man who had bribed Olga to steal her letters, who had instructed the detectives who had shadowed Celia and herself about the streets.

She experienced a sudden almost sickening fear that she would not prove a match for a man who could look so innocent when he was really as unscrupulous as that. Already she had given herself away a little. He had seen that she was frightened.

" I'm very glad you've come to see me," he said. " Let's go down to my own office where it isn't quite so cheerless."

The room to which he conducted her occupied a corner of the building; a large, pleasant room, with pictures on the wall, photographs—one of them of a group of rather nice looking children.

She found herself involuntarily slipping off guard again, and pulled herself together. She thought he expected some comment from her and she said, " This isn't cheerless at all."

" I've tried to make it a little home-like," he said. " People hardly ever come to see lawyers upon pleasant errands, so we do what we can to take off the curse."

She took the chair he indicated for her and he settled himself deliberately in his own.

Then, with a straight but kindly look at her he said, " It's no use putting off the evil moment, though. Why have you come to see me, Mrs. Rowland? "

" A friend of mine," she said, "—he's a friend of yours, too, I think—Mr. Hollister—advised me to come."

Beale rocked slightly back and forth in his swivel chair, gazing out of the window, and waited for her to go on.

" You *do* know him, don't you? " she asked.

" Mr. Hollister? Oh yes. It was very good of him to recommend me to you. Your husband, Mr. Philip Rowland, is a lawyer, isn't he? "

The question had its amusing aspect. But she was in no mood to be amused by it now.

" Yes," she said.

Now he looked round at her again. " Have you let him know that you were coming to consult me? "

She sat silent for a desperate moment, trying to decide which answer to make. It was no use. She could not foresee the consequences of either a yes or a no.

At last, with a smile, she inquired, " Do I have to answer that? "

He smiled too, indulgently.

" It's a point that it's rather important to settle at the outset of a consultation of this sort, but you needn't worry about it. You *have* answered, Mrs. Rowland."

" Yes," she admitted, " I suppose I have."

" Well, then," he suggested, " let's begin over again. It was not your husband, but Mr. Hollister, who is a friend of yours, who advised you to consult me. What is it you wish to consult me about? "

" Mr. Hollister told me that he had told you more or less about it. If you'd tell me what he said . . . "

Beale interrupted her by laughing outright.

"We lawyers have a horror of hearsay, Mrs. Rowland. Instead of my telling you what he told you he told me, suppose you go straight at it and tell me yourself."

What a fool she was to have come! To have dreamed that she could find out anything from a wily old fox like this! Already she had admitted that she had come to him behind her husband's back, and had allowed him to infer that she was on terms of some sort of intimacy with Tommy Hollister. And he had asked her whether Philip wasn't a lawyer! She could feel her face getting red. No doubt, behind his own demure face, he was laughing at her.

Anger, though, was beginning to warm her veins. She would not let him have so easy a victory as this. If he had already decided she was a fool it was so much the better.

"It isn't very pleasant to talk about it," she said at last. "I don't know how to begin, exactly. And as long as we're not in court, or anything, it would be ever so much easier if you'd tell me—the things I needn't tell you. The things you know already, I mean."

She wondered if she had really seen, or only imagined, a gleam of suspicion in his eye. There was no sign of it when he spoke.

"Most people feel like that; especially women;

most especially women who have been so fortunate as not to have had to go to lawyers for advice. That is because they don't realize the—sacredness of a lawyer's position towards his client. It's exactly the same position as that of a priest or a physician. And like the priest and the physician the lawyer must demand absolute frankness. Come now! Forget your fears and tell me all about it."

The personal appeal had come so swiftly and so persuasively as to be almost irresistible. All that saved her, she reflected with a flicker of amusement, was that she did not know.

"Does a lawyer," she asked after a moment of reflection, "have to regard everything that's told him as—sacred, whether it's told him by a client or not?"

There was no doubt now that he suspected a trap. "I must understand," he said incisively, "before we go any further with this conversation, whether you have come to consult me as a client or not. And if not, why you have come."

"I don't know," she told him. "You see, it all depends."

Evidently the feminine folly of that answer irritated him for he snapped out, "What depends? On what?"

"Whether I want you to be my lawyer. I don't

know if I even need a lawyer. It depends on what Tommy Hollister has told you."

"If what he has told me is true, I can assure you that you do need a lawyer—badly."

"But I don't know whether what he has told you is true or not," she objected.

The flash of anger in his eyes might have frightened her if it had not reminded her that this was just what Beale did not know, either. If he had known he would not have bribed Olga nor hired the detectives. She caught a whiff of victory in the air.

"Tommy isn't an altogether reliable person," she went on. "He told me he was sorry he'd gone to you with that story about me. He wouldn't tell me, when I asked him, what the story was. He seemed frightened about it. He said he wouldn't have mentioned it to you if he had known—that you had any special reason for being interested in it. So, you see, I must know what he told you before I can decide."

He was rocking back and forth again, nursing his knee and gazing out the window.

"I think," he said judicially, "that this is the most extraordinary conversation I have ever listened to. I don't know, now, whether you are a genuine simpleton or a naturally intelligent young woman who has been betrayed by her belief in her own

cleverness into acting like one. If Rowland has sent you to me he's made a bad mistake."

He was trying to frighten her now. Well, perhaps she'd better be frightened.

"I don't know what you mean, Mr. Beale."

"Don't you?" he asked, contemptuously. "No, perhaps you don't even know that."

"I do know this much, though," she asserted, getting to her feet. "I know I don't want you to be my lawyer."

She was half way to the door when his voice stopped her. He had not moved. "I think you'd do well to reconsider that decision," he said.

"Why?" she demanded.

"You should consider it, it seems to me, as something quite apart from my controversy with Mr. Rowland. You've your own interest and your own safety to look after, my dear young lady. There's no one else, unless you want to turn to me, to look after them. You're in an unusually solitary and rather—desperate position."

"Why?" she repeated, stubbornly.

"Why!" he echoed. Then his voice broke out like a clap of thunder. "Don't you know what you are? Do you really believe that you're Philip Rowland's wife?"

"What am I, then?" she asked.

"You're the wife of another man. When you went through that marriage ceremony with Rowland you committed bigamy. Bigamy is a crime. In the eyes of the law you're a criminal."

CHAPTER XIV

CYNTHIA had never fainted in her life and it was not probable that she was going to begin by doing so now. But under the impact of that astounding assertion of his she felt herself turning rather sick and swaying where she stood. She moved to where she could clutch the back of a chair for support. She was facing him, but not looking at his face. It seemed to her that she literally lacked the strength to raise her eyes. Their gaze rested upon his neat fingers which lay upon his desk as if it were a piano he was about to play, but with the thumbs under the ledge. The muscles of the right hand tightened a little, and after a moment the silence was broken by the ring of his telephone.

It was not until later that she decided that he himself had given the signal for having it rung.

He answered its summons very promptly and in a cold, non-committal voice. " Yes ? Very well, I'll see him at once." Then, " Excuse me a moment,

Mrs. Rowland," he said, and went out, leaving her alone.

She dropped, with a gasp of relief, into the chair whose back had been supporting her. " That can't be true," she was saying to herself. " It can't be true. Celia wouldn't have done that."

But this was a mere mechanical response to the engulfing conviction that it was true. It fitted in. It made everything else fit. The knowledge of the marriage had happened to come, somehow, into Tommy's possession. He had sprung it upon Celia, either in the hope that it would induce her to give him what he wanted, or in mere angry disappointment because she would not. Anyhow, he had terrified her with it. She was afraid he had told Phil about it or was going to tell him. Perhaps he had threatened to do so.

The man, of course, was Fred. And the only thing to do that she had been able in her desperation to think of, had been to go to Fred, and tell him that Tommy knew. To find out from him how and how much Tommy knew. She was relying on him, perhaps, to frighten Tommy into keeping silent. Probably that, since she had brought Fred back to town with her.

But Tommy, whether in deliberate malice or in mere idleness, had told the story not to Phil but to Beale. And to Beale it had been a heaven-sent opportunity to dispose of one of the antagonists

who was threatening to put an end to his professional life. Bigamy! It simply delivered Phil into his hands. Phil might be able to prove that he had not been a party to the crime, but would he sacrifice poor little Celia like that? She knew that he would not. Probably Beale knew it, too.

The man was coming back. She sprang up in a sort of panic as he entered the room, for she had no weapon yet, she felt, to meet him with.

He did not look at her until he had seated himself once more and tilted back, with one of his lean knees clasped in his hands.

"Sit down again, Mrs. Rowland," he said, good-humouredly. It seemed incredible that this was the same man's voice that had been thundering those horrible sentences at her only a few minutes ago. "You've had a little time to think it over. Now, don't you think you'd better tell me all about it?"

She could almost have laughed at him, for he himself had given her the weapon she needed. He had reminded her of the thing she had forgotten.

"No," she said, "I don't think I need sit down because I haven't much to say. I'm not going to tell you all about it because you don't really know anything about it. If you did you wouldn't have bribed my maid to steal my letters. Good-bye, Mr. Beale. It's been a very interesting talk."

She did not give him time to answer that. She turned and fled. The intelligent young man and the stiff-mannered girl stared at her as she went by, but she did not look back.

It was an exultant sort of flight, though; like that of a cavalry commander who has just executed a successful raid. Her mood at this end of the pendulum swing would acknowledge no serious dangers. Beale had not the facts he needed for an attack upon Phil. Tommy, even if he possessed the information, would be afraid to give it to him.

She even doubted now—this occurred to her as she stood by the lift doors waiting for a car to stop—whether there were any facts behind the charge. If Celia, knowing herself already married to Fred, had been guilty of the incredible folly of marrying Phil, she would not have declared, as she had, to Cynthia up in that room in the Blackstone, "It's nothing serious. I'm sure it isn't. But it's so perfectly crazy I've got to know about it." She could not have got married without knowing it.

Unless—one did hear of things like that sometimes—there had been a wedding ceremony carried through as a joke, and a question had arisen afterwards, whether it might not have been real, after all. That looked plausible. Anyhow . . .

A lift was stopping three or four doors down the

rank, and she moved towards it with a little rush before she perceived that it was going up. It was stopping to let a young man out—a big, fair young man, with a worried look. She stopped right in front of him, having discovered this was not the car she wanted, and said, " Down," to the lift boy, who slammed his doors.

It was not until she spoke that the big young man looked at her.

" Celia ! " he gasped. Then he flushed crimson, said, " I beg your pardon," lifted his hat and turned away.

She stood gazing for a second or two, and then darted after him. There was only one person in the world who, having mistaken her for Celia, could perceive the mistake by himself.

" You're Fred, aren't you ? " she asked, laying a detaining hand upon his arm. He still showed a disposition to run away. " I'm Cynthia, of course," she added.

" Yes," he told her reluctantly, " I'm Fred."

" You weren't on the way to James Beale's office?"

" Yes," he said, " that's where I'm going."

" I wish you wouldn't—not till after you've talked with me. You see—I've just been in there talking with him, myself."

" I've got something important to see him about," he insisted, " and there isn't any time to lose."

" I don't think it would be lost." She smiled as she said that.

He flushed again. " I didn't mean it like that."

" I didn't take it like that, either," she assured him. " Only, please come away from here. If he were to come out and find us together . . . He thinks I'm Celia, you know."

It was not easy to persuade him that his business with Beale would wait.

" What did you come to see him about ? " he asked. Then, with a sudden gleam of anger, " Did Hollister advise you to ? "

" I won't stand talking here," she insisted, and taking a chance that he would follow her, she went back to the lifts.

He hesitated a moment, and then came.

" I suppose," he grudgingly conceded, " I'd better know what you've been talking to him about before I take him on myself."

" He'd have liked nothing better than to see you walk into his office," she told him.

His manner irritated her a little. She reflected upon it during their descent in the lift and their walk through the lobby to the street. It was aggrieved, rather than indifferent, as if somehow he did not like her looks. If he was in love with Celia—and circumstances certainly pointed that way—it was not very logical of him to object to them.

Oh, but of course, that was why! It *must* annoy a lover to find the face, figure, voice, everything, of the only girl in the world reproduced by a total stranger so exactly that he could mistake one for the other. She felt kindlier towards him after she had thought of that.

"I suppose the best thing to do," she remarked, as they halted uncertainly on the pavement, "is to get into a taxi and just drive round for a while."

He assented without much enthusiasm, hailed a cab, and told the chauffeur to drive to Lincoln Park.

"What's your other name?" she asked, after he had got in and seated himself beside her. "It's funny I shouldn't know when Mr. Beale has just been telling me I was married to you."

"He said that, did he?" Fred—last name still unknown—reached for the door latch as if he meant to jump out of the cab.

"Oh, wait!" Cynthia implored him. "You can't do things like that—without stopping to think—when you're up against a man like James Beale. You can't frighten him as you did Tommy. He's clever, and he's really dangerous."

"But if he knows about that marriage . . ." he began.

Cynthia's heart sank. There really had been a

marriage, then. But there was not time to think about that now.

"He doesn't know it," she asserted. "He pretended he did to bluff me into telling him. Don't you see? Tommy hasn't told him enough. He may be practically certain it happened, but he can't *do* anything. He can't attack Phil with the story until he can prove it."

"He can do anything he likes to Philip Rowland, for all I care," Fred said, sulkily.

Fred, then, did not like Phil. Oh, well, he would not if he was in love with Celia. He was not what you would call intelligent, but there was a whole-heartedness about him that she rather liked.

"He couldn't," she pointed out, "use a crime of Celia's to blackmail her husband without hurting Celia, too."

"How do you know Beale hasn't anything but a guess to go on?" he asked.

"Because he hasn't done anything with it yet, though he's in a hurry. Because he hired detectives to watch Celia, and bribed her maid to open her letters. He's just been trying every trick he knew to frighten or cajole me into telling him. He wouldn't have wasted time doing all that if he'd known."

"How do you know *you* didn't give it away, if he's as clever as all that?"

"Because I don't know anything to tell him, Fred. That's what made me a safe person to go to him. I didn't know she'd married any one but Phil until you told me so just now. And I don't know now what your last name is."

"It's Carpenter," he said.

"Where do you live?"

"Indianapolis."

"That's where Celia went, isn't it?"

"Look here!" he said. "If she didn't tell you, I won't. I won't talk about her—behind her back—while she's unconscious in the hospital."

"You're awfully nice," she said, "and I don't wonder Celia's fond of you. But you *are* pigheaded about this."

For a moment she doubted the wisdom of that remark, as rather too sisterly for the immature state of their acquaintance.

"You don't understand the position I'm in," he protested with dignity.

"Well, try to imagine the position I'm in. I'm supposed to *be* Celia. Philip Rowland thinks I am, and his Aunt Ellen, and all the people in the building, and Tommy Hollister, and Beale. People speak to me like old friends—or old enemies—and I don't know who they are. So far I've managed not to give myself away. It's a perfectly heavenly relief to be here with you—though we're quarrelling like

cats and dogs—just because I don't have to pretend."

"Gosh!" he exclaimed in a tone of genuine appreciation. "I don't see how you've managed to get away with it."

"Well, then, don't you see I need all the help I can get? I'm the only Celia there is—that can do anything. If I make a mistake, do anything wrong, in the dark like this, she'll be lost. Everything'll be spoiled, hopeless for her before she wakes up. I'm on her side, Fred. There's *nothing* I won't do for her. Nothing in the world. But you've got to help me."

He patted her arm in a comforting, brotherly sort of fashion. "All right," he said, "I'll tell you anything you want to know."

"I want to know everything," she told him. "The whole story about you and Celia, from the beginning. When did you meet her?"

"My second year at the University, when I went over to one of her college dances. Lost my credit with the girl who'd invited me because I couldn't see anybody but Celia. I'd never seen any one like her before, and I've never seen any one like her since. There *isn't* any one like her. I'm just as crazy about her now as I was then, and always will be, whatever happens. Well—and I think she liked me too, right off, more or less the same way."

Cynthia listened rather absently to the details

of the early stages of the romance—they were plentiful enough now she'd launched him—her own thoughts carrying on an only half-conscious *obbligato* to the theme. A sex attraction of that sort was a strange thing. Celia had evidently adored this big good-looking youngster recklessly, almost from the moment of her first glimpse of him; yet she herself, with a body that could not be distinguished from Celia's, had felt, when he had patted her arm just now, no more of a thrill than if it had been Aunt Ellen. Whereas, if Phil had touched her like that . . .

And Celia apparently did not like Phil, shrank from his touch, so that, though they had only been married a few months, he had not offered to kiss her on his return from Springfield.

Fred, sitting here beside her, had just told her that there was no one like Celia in the world, and resented, apparently, the fact that her own looks contradicted this assertion. Phil, believing she was Celia, had felt, somehow, a difference underneath the mere cool friendliness of her manner that had encouraged him to take her in his arms and tell her he believed they were going to be happy together after all.

It was as mysterious as the wireless, this love business. And how thoroughly the four of them had got themselves at cross purposes with it. Was there

any possibility that the tangle would ever come straight?

But now she began listening to him in earnest.

"We decided to go back east together after the Christmas holidays in our first year. I'm two years older than she is, but I was backward in everything but mathematics, and I was in the same class as she was.

"I got on her train at Cleveland, and we were going to travel together as far as Albany. That's where I had to get off.

"That was the winter of the big blizzard. It was down below zero and snowing like mad when we started, and the train kept getting later and later. The cold lessened during the night, but it went on snowing harder than ever. We didn't care what happened, of course. The observation car was so cold no one else would sit in it, but we thought that was great luck, because we had it practically to ourselves. We made them lend us some blankets, and wrapped ourselves up in them, and talked and talked. We couldn't bear the train going on because it brought Albany nearer and nearer.

"Finally it did stop, for good, it seemed, in a little town—I'm not going to tell even you where it was. There was a square, and a building that looked like a court-house, some shops, and one rotten little hotel. The whole thing was buried in snow

by that time. It was late in the afternoon. We asked the conductor how long we'd be there, and he said till morning, as far as he could see. I don't suppose he meant that. It was probably just because he was annoyed at having been asked the same question so many times.

" Anyhow, we were cold and sort of cramped from keeping still so long, so we decided to get off the train and walk round the town. It was my fault. I ought to have known better, of course. But Celia was crazy to get out in the snow, and so was I. She had some Russian boots—all the girls were wearing them that winter—and a fur coat, and it wasn't so terribly cold then, only snowing straight down like flour out of a big sieve.

" We floundered round in the square for some time, but there was nothing to see there, and nothing to do. It was a perfectly God-forsaken town. There were a lot of men standing in front of the stove, smoking and spitting, in the grocery store where we stopped to get some grub—cookies and such—so we struck out on a side road into the country. There wasn't any road that you could see. The snow was over the tops of the fences.

" Finally I stamped out a sort of hollow in the lea of a strawstack, and we cuddled up in there, called it an igloo, and pretended we were Eskimos. It was all right. We were just crazy kids. Only, of course, I was old enough to have known better.

" I don't know how long we stayed there ; quite a while, I guess. It was beginning to get dark when we started back, and it took us longer than we figured it would. Well, and when we did get back, the train was gone. Gone, of course, with all our baggage, and things in it. I asked them in the station when there'd be another train along, and they said positively there wouldn't be another east-bound train that night.

" I felt sort of dazed when we'd come out of the station and stood there looking round the square. No place to go for the night except that beastly little hotel. We'd looked in at it earlier in the afternoon. I started cursing myself for a fool, but Celia put her hand on my arm, and I looked round at her. She told me not to mind. She didn't.

" I don't suppose you've ever seen her look like that. Not as if she was going to cry, but—well, sort of a starry look. I kissed her. It wasn't the first time that day, but this was different. And then I looked over at the court-house across the square. There were lights in it, and I asked her if she'd marry me. She just nodded, and we started across to the court-house together without another word.

" After we were married we went round to the hotel, registered and got a room—Mr. and Mrs. Frederick Carpenter, of course. I told the pro-

prietor the train had gone off without us. He looked a little bit curious, but he didn't ask any questions.

" We went into the dining-room for supper, but we didn't eat much. And then we went and sat down for a while in a horrible place called the ladies' parlour. It was cold and stuffy and uncomfortable in there, and finally I said I thought we'd better go up to our room. Celia was crying by that time, but she came along.

" It wasn't until we got there that—that I knew what a horrible mistake the whole thing had been. You see—you see, I'd supposed she'd known what she was doing all the time, just as well as I had. And she didn't. She didn't know at all. She just went to pieces. Told me she hated me—never wanted to speak to me again.

" I don't blame her now. But I did then. I was simply wild—acted a good deal like a brute, I guess. About midnight I came down-stairs and spent the rest of the time till morning in the office, wrapped up in my overcoat, half-frozen.

" About ten o'clock in the morning a train came along, and we both took it. I tried two or three times to talk to her about it and explain things, but she just went to pieces again every time I started. So I gave it up. Got off at Albany, of course, and she went on.

"Well, that's all there was to it. I never saw her again till she came down to Indianapolis the night before last."

CHAPTER XV

He had ended the story rather abruptly, and she, absorbed in it, deeply moved by it, had no glib comment ready in her mind with which to break the following silence.

He misinterpreted it, and said at last, "I suppose you think I ought to have been taken out and shot for doing a thing like that. I don't suppose you can understand how I *could* do it."

"I think I do," she told him. "I think I understand it all, your side of it and hers." She laid her hand on his knee as she added, "And I don't think anybody ought to have been shot—so far. It's what happened afterwards that I don't understand. —Or rather, what didn't happen."

Fred did not answer and she looked round at him. He was in a brown study. Evidently he did not mean to follow that last lead of hers. He might not have been conscious of it. She roused him at last with a question.

"Why did Celia go to Indianapolis? Had she any sort of plan?"

"No," he told her, "I don't think she had. Except to ask me what we were going to do about it, and why I'd told Tommy Hollister."

"You hadn't told him, had you?"

"It was natural for her to think I had. You see, he and I were at college together; the same class and the same fraternity, worse luck. I hadn't told him, though. I'd never even come near telling it to a living soul. I'd simply buried it, just as she'd asked me to."

"When did she ask that?"

"In a letter a few days after I got back to college. She asked me to give her my solemn promise that I'd forget the whole thing, or at least treat it as if it had never happened. We'd both been idiots, she said, but we'd got out of the scrape better than we deserved. Nobody but ourselves knew anything about it, and if I'd agree with her to bury it, there was no harm done. Nothing had happened, and nothing could possibly happen as long as we didn't tell. It couldn't have been a real marriage, because—because nothing had happened. She asked me to write to her, promising on my honour, you know, to do as she asked, and to burn her letter. And then not to write to her any more, nor come to see her. That was the only safe way for us, she said, after what had happened. I did everything she asked me to."

"It was a real marriage, though, wasn't it?"

"Yes, of course it was. I thought it was then and I know it was now."

"But—but what about the position it put you in?"

"Oh, I didn't mind that so much. I didn't want to marry any one else then, and I don't now. I worried a lot over her end of it, of course, but I didn't see what else I could do. I was a good deal of a kid three years ago, horribly scared and remorseful over what I'd done, and I didn't see anything for it but to let her have her own way. I thought that in time, when we both graduated from college, you know, that she'd give me a chance to see her again, and that we could get married in the regular way and that everything would be all right. It was a pretty stiff jolt when I got the announcement of her marriage to Rowland."

"I don't see," Cynthia cried, "how she could have done a thing like that!"

"Well, I do," he declared, turning upon her, pugnacious at once in Celia's defence. "She really believed that a crazy scrape like the one we had got into simply couldn't count as a marriage. We'd sort of gone off our heads for an hour or two and then waked up and realized what fools we were, but nothing had really happened. She couldn't see that it was anybody's business but our own. I'd agreed to forget it, and that was all that was necessary. She trusted me, of course, absolutely. Well,

she hadn't made any mistake doing that. She thought she had, though, for a while after Tommy Hollister had sprung it on her that he knew."

"I suppose," Cynthia hazarded, "he'd happened to be stopping at that hotel some time or other . . ."

"That was the only thing I could think of at first. But it seems that wasn't how it happened."

"You've found how he knew!" she cried.

"It's one of the things I choked out of him this morning. He told me all about it. And I guess it's mostly true. I told him I was perfectly ready to kill him, and he had sense enough to believe it. It was like this:

"He came into my room at the fraternity house one night when I'd just finished answering Celia's letter. I'd sealed it up and addressed the envelope. I had her letter on my desk. I was going to burn it the next thing I did. But somebody out in the hall yelled to me to come to the telephone just then, and I went, leaving Tommy alone in the room. He says I left Celia's letter lying right out in plain sight. I don't believe I did. I think I probably tucked it under something and he saw me do it and it made him curious. Anyhow, he read the letter and he saw the address on the letter I'd just written to Celia. He remembered the address, or he may have written it down in a notebook. It would be like him. Of course he never gave me a hint that he was wise to anything. Just kept it filed for reference.

" He met Celia out here at a few dances and dinners and things—he's an insinuating little swine —and they talked college days and so on, and he finally found out what her name had been before she was married. That gave him the whole thing, of course. I've got him fixed now, though. I made him write me a letter confessing that he'd made up the whole thing for purposes of blackmail and that there wasn't a word of truth in anything he'd said to Celia or told to Beale. There were a few minutes this morning when he'd have signed anything. That's what I was going to show Beale when you stopped me."

" Fred," Cynthia asked, after a moment of intent thinking, " how well do you remember that letter of Celia's ? "

" I remember it pretty darned well," he told her ruefully.

" She actually used the word marriage in it ? "

He nodded. " Yes, I'm sure she did."

" Did she mention the town it happened in—by name, I mean ? "

" No, nor the date. There wasn't any reason why she should."

" Did she sign her whole name to it—Celia Howard ? "

" Of course not. She didn't even sign it Celia ; that is, I'm practically sure she didn't. She never signed any of her other letters to me that way.

BODLEIANA OXFORD

I used to call her Cee for short, and she used to sign her notes just with the one initial, a little curly C, because it sounded like what I called her. But I can't see that that helps us much, because her whole name was written out on the letter that I addressed to her."

She smiled at him in a sort of affectionate exasperation. "I'm glad I managed to keep you out of Mr. Beale's clutches," she remarked. "Fred, think of the difference it makes! Tommy *guessed*, of course, just as any one would, that the letter in the envelope was addressed to the girl who'd signed herself 'C' in the letter he'd just read. But it was nothing more than a guess. He didn't know it. It wasn't proof of anything. The letter Tommy read might have been written by any other girl whose name began with C. I might have written it to you myself. And if it didn't tell where the marriage happened or when, then Tommy's story left Mr. Beale with nothing to go on. He can't *touch* Phil with that."

"Phil!" he echoed. "Is he the one you're worrying about?"

It made her all the angrier that she should feel herself beginning to blush. "He can't tell Phil that Celia isn't his wife, then—if you like that way of putting it better. It's Phil he's after. He'd been telling me just before I saw you, that I was a bigamist and a criminal—trying to frighten me, of

course—but he'll take care not to say anything like that to Phil unless he can prove it."

"Well, he isn't going to talk like that about Celia to anybody!" Fred exploded. "I'm going to show him Hollister's letter right now." He leaned forward and slammed open the window. "Drive us back to the place you picked us up," he commanded the chauffeur.

With dignity she amended the order, "Let me out at the Prince on the way." Then she restrained herself still for a minute or two and let him fume. When she felt she could manage an air of patient reasonableness she said, "Of course, I don't know what you really want. If you want to force Celia's hand and break up her marriage with Phil . . ."

"You know I don't want that!" he put in.

"Well, that's the way to go about it," she went on. "Fred, can't you see that just going to Beale's office and sending in your name will tell him more than he's been able to find out so far, from either Tommy or me? He won't care about your letter. He'll know you forced Tommy to write it. He knows you're the man she's supposed to have married. If you go to him, he'll know that she's been to you. He'll know—or be able to find out—that you were with 'Cynthia' when she was hurt. And then he'll be just about half a guess away from knowing who the girl in the hospital really is. Leave him *alone*—that's the only thing to do. Disappear.

Go back to Indianapolis on the next train—Unless," she added after a thoughtful silence, " you want to go straight to Phil, himself, and tell him the whole story, just as you've told it to me."

" What ! " he gasped. " That isn't what *you* want me to do, is it ? Look here ! You aren't planning to do that, yourself, are you ? "

" It's what I'd like to do. I mean it looks to me like the—straightest thing. And I—I don't think he's had a fair deal so far. But I won't tell him until I have talked with Celia and found out what she wants me to do."

His consternation over the thing she had suggested held him speechless and gave her time to shoot in a question. " Do you know what she wants, Fred ? "

" She doesn't want to be—betrayed—by her own sister ! " he sputtered.

" She isn't going to be. That isn't what I meant. What does she want—about the whole thing ? Is she in love with Phil ? "

" No ! " he shouted, and then, instantly, tried to take it back. " I don't know anything about it. I don't see how she could be—with a poor prune like that."

Cynthia held herself in. " You don't know him, do you ? " she asked.

His admission that he did not put the responsibility for the description up to Celia. But there

was some excuse for it, Cynthia perceived. Celia had gone to Fred under the belief that it was Phil who had hired the detectives.

" Well, if Celia think's he's a poor prune," she asked, as good-humouredly as possible, " what does she want to do about it ? Does she want to get things fixed so that she can be really married to him, and then go on and live the rest of her life with him ? "

" I don't know," he said uneasily. " You'll have to ask her about that. But if she does want to get out of it, she'd want to get out of it decently."

" I believe she could trust Phil for that," she said unguardedly.

" Well, I don't," he told her, flying up again at the mere suggestion. " And Celia doesn't, and she ought to know. Look here, you keep telling me that I ought to go away and not try to butt in ; leave the whole thing to you. You say you won't give Celia away. What is *your* plan ? "

" I haven't much of a plan," she admitted forlornly. " Just sit tight and keep up the bluff that I'm Celia till she's conscious and I can talk to her."

The taxi stopped just then before the Prince. She looked round at her companion and saw that, for the moment, his attention had been distracted from their problem, absorbing as it was. He was gazing in consternation at the meter.

" I'm going to telephone to the hospital now,"

she said. " Don't you want to come in for a minute and hear the news about her ? "

He jumped at that, as she thought he would, with a really pathetic eagerness—he was a good, whole-hearted fellow—and she settled for the taxi with a mere nod of instruction to the hall porter, over-riding Fred's feeble protest as they walked down the lobby towards the lift.

" Of course it was my taxi. It never was anything else."

The trivial incident had given her a new idea. Fred was probably poor. He naturally would be, in his second year out of college. The obvious solution of their difficulty by the simple expedient of carrying Celia off was not open to him on the thirty or forty a week that he might be earning at his job.

The news from Celia—she telephoned the moment they got inside the flat—was not what she hoped for. It was reassuring as far as it went. Miss Wainwright was much quieter and sleeping almost naturally, but there had been no return of consciousness as yet.

" She's going to get well, though, Fred," Cynthia assured him, as she left the telephone, " and when she is, the problem will work itself out, somehow. We've just got to hang on and wait for that."

He was gazing gloomily about the apartment. Apparently the luxury of it rather depressed him.

" All right," he said. " I'll go back to the job.

I wouldn't have any if I stayed away much longer. I'll go and try to find my Ford, and drive back to-night. Here's my address." He wrote it on a card for her. " And you telegraph as soon as there's any news. Where will you be if I want to get word to you ? "

" Why—why, I don't know," she answered blankly.

" You can't stay here, of course," he went on, " now that her husband's back in town."

" I couldn't stay very long," she conceded.

" You can't stay at all." He was vehement about this. " You'd be sure to give away as much to Philip Rowland in five minutes as I would to Beale."

Her hesitation excited him further. " There's only one thing you can possibly do. Pack a bag and go to a hotel. You can leave a message for him that you want to be nearer Celia. He wouldn't think there was anything funny about that, because it's what she'd do in a minute."

" I suppose you're right," she acknowledged. " Oh, I know you are. I can't stay here. I'll pack up and leave him a note. And—and I won't give Celia away, Fred. I promise you that."

CHAPTER XVI

CYNTHIA thought that she must pack a bag with some of Celia's clothes, write a note to Phil, and then set out in search of a hotel. She could not risk going back to the Blackstone, of course.

Well then, she asked herself fiercely, why not get up and do it ?

But she was weighed down by a heavy lassitude. Her thoughts were careering about, as wild as comets, but her body, for a long time, remained inert in the chair it had dropped into when Fred went away.

There was time enough. Phil had said he would not be back till about six o'clock and it was only four now. It was incredible that it could still be the same day that had been ushered in by his bringing her her breakfast. Had she had anything to eat since then ? No, she did not believe she had. Perhaps if she made herself a cup of tea and ate some of the cookies she had seen in the cake-box . . .

They probably were not the same sort of cookies

that Fred and Celia had bought at the grocery store. What a mad pair of helpless children they had been. She could understand the whole thing now, everything Fred had told her, even Celia's belief that a marriage like that, entered into on the impulse of one moment and repented of almost in the next, could not be real.

But why had she not told Phil about it before she married him? How could she have considered Phil as a man that she could possibly marry unless she had confidence enough in him to tell him all about it?

There could not be an easier person in the world to tell anything to. He would not have required any explanations. He would have understood it like a shot. It was that quality about him that had been her own first attraction towards him. He had understood that she would rather deal with that miserable little Italian antique dealer by herself than be rescued.

Apparently, though, the quality had not attracted Celia. Indeed none of his qualities could have attracted her very strongly. She had as good as said in the letter announcing her engagement that she was not in love with him. Why had she married him, then? Just simply and vulgarly because he was rich?

That was a horrible thing to think about Celia. And it was not fair, either. Her recollection went

back once more to that talk they had had in Venice. Celia had been very depressed, now that their few happy weeks together had come to an end ; she was to be left with Aunt Janet and her new thoughts for companions, and the prospect of settling down and teaching school afterwards, looking like a "high-brow frump." That was what the fine, free life which the Howards had so passionately insisted upon for her had been boiled down to. It was not the life for poor little Celia, anyhow.

Had not Uncle Henry Pyncheon once told her that Grandmother Howard had originally chosen her, and given her up because Grandmother Wainwright liked the name, Cynthia, better ? It was appalling to think that a whole lifetime could be affected by a casual whim like that.

It had been during that talk in Venice that they had drifted on to the subject of falling in love, and Celia had said it was better to marry without it. A girl she had known in college had got into a beastly mess. Why, of course ! The girl had been Celia herself. It was this wild marriage with Fred she had been referring to so darkly.

And Cynthia, to cheer her up, had told her about Phil, and how exactly right everything about him had been. Celia had said, " If you didn't want him, why didn't you bring him home to me ? " And then she had admired Cynthia's dress, and Cynthia had given it to her. And later, when Phil had met her

wearing the dress, he had spoken to her, got introduced to her somehow. That must be how the thing had begun. It had been her own doing, the whole of it.

Celia had liked him, no doubt. She could not have helped liking him. And she had probably guessed from that nice, cool manner of his that he was the sort of man whose love would have nothing "beastly" about it.

But then, here was a new perplexity. Why had Phil wanted to marry her? Why could he not have seen that she did not care for him that way? Well, she supposed that was just the thing men did not see. Some little thing attracted them, started them off, and they kept on going. He had liked the way she had dealt with the man in the antique shop .... But that had not been Celia. That had been herself. She had got Phil into it as well as Celia.

Poor Phil! He had not had a fair deal. This was not one which she herself was planning for him now. He had left her this morning full of the hope that his disappointing marriage was on the way towards turning out right after all. He would come home to find a note saying that she had left him to go to "Cynthia." She did not dare let herself think how he would look when he read that. The less she thought about him from now on, the better.

She got up, made the tea and drank it listlessly, and then packed a small bag with a few of Celia's things. She felt like a thief when she did that. Then, sitting down at her writing-desk, she began the task of writing the note.

She made half-a-dozen starts, but they all went wrong. They all began by being too coldly formal—she could not imagine Celia writing like that to any one—and then they all got too friendly—altogether too friendly to accomplish her purpose.

She was in the act of trying again for the seventh time, or thereabouts, when she heard Phil's key click in the lock.

She called out, "Phil, is that you?" and her heart gave a disconcerting bump on hearing the answer, "Yes. Hullo, Celia!"

She had broken her promise—an implied promise, anyhow—to Fred in letting herself get caught by his return. She ought to be ashamed of herself, and perhaps she was, but she was glad at the same time that he had not come home to find a silent flat and one of her wretched notes on his desk.

She came out into the passage to meet him. He was taking off his overcoat, standing with his back to her, and he was awfully slow about it, so that it was an appreciable time before he turned round.

"I didn't know it was so late," she said.

" I may be a few minutes early. I guess I hurried up, rather."

But his voice sounded a little dull, not even like the voice in which he had told her when he went away this morning that he would be back in time for dinner. Was he just tired from a long day's work, she wondered, or was it something else ?

They walked back together into the drawing-room.

" You've been having a pretty busy day, I suppose," he remarked. " You didn't telephone, so I assumed you'd found no change at the hospital. I hope Cynthia's no worse."

She gave him her bulletin a little stiffly, preoccupied as she was with routing an impulse to tell him how much she had wanted to telephone him, and why she had not done so.

" I didn't stay at the hospital very long," she added. " I've been busy about other things."

That drew an intent look from him that made her regret having said it. Naturally he would want to know what her other occupations had been. She felt herself flushing as she went on, " My sister's affairs, Phil. I'm sorry I can't tell you about them."

" That's all right," he said. But his voice sounded hurt.

" I've got a confession to make," she went on

in a lighter tone. "I haven't even started cooking your dinner."

He turned to her again at that with a stare of frank astonishment.

"I never expected you to. I thought, of course, we'd dine in the restaurant."

"I didn't think that. I ordered some dinner this morning—nothing much but some steak and a can of corn, and a little pie from the baker."

"Well then, by George," he said, "we won't dine in the restaurant after all. You sit still and I'll cook that dinner myself."

"You'll do nothing of the sort," she contradicted. "One meal a day is all any husband could be expected to cook."

She flushed over that like a perfect idiot. It was lucky Fred was not taking this in. What did it matter, though? What did anything matter, so long as she did not betray Celia?

They ended by agreeing to cook the dinner together.

She noticed something new and rather odd about his manner of going about it. His voice was no longer dull, yet it had not the jolly good-humour she had heard in it this morning. It was rather as if he, too, had asked himself what did it matter, or as if he were waiting for something to happen.

That feeling, however, wore away as they went on. It seemed they could not be anything but at

ease in each other's company. They just naturally fitted, somehow ; laughed at each other a little, light-heartedly enjoyed themselves.

He startled her, though, by saying, when they sat down at the table, " Do you realize that this has never happened before ? I only mean," he went on to explain, " that we've never sat down absolutely alone like this, without a maid in the offing, to a meal we'd cooked ourselves."

This was the sort of remark it was not very safe to comment on, so she let a non-committal smile do duty for an answer. She thought he wanted her to say something, but for the time he let it go. It was not until she had poured out their coffee and he had lighted their cigarettes that he went back to it.

" Celia," he began, and the quality of his voice on the one word told her that their pleasantly inconsequent hour had come to an end—" I want to know why you did it."

" Did what ? " She was honestly puzzled.

" Ordered the dinner this morning and planned to cook it for me."

She was quick-witted enough to reject the " Why shouldn't I ? " that sprang first to her lips. Evidently she had done an extraordinary thing. " I thought from what you said this morning—about liking our not having a maid—that you'd enjoy it. And I thought I'd like it, too."

" Then you didn't—mean anything by it ? One way or the other ? It wasn't the—the beginning of something new ? "

" No, Phil." She tried to look at him as she said it but her gaze wavered away.

" Nor the end ? " he asked.

She could not answer that. " Please, Phil," she cried, " let's not talk about—meanings, to-night ! It's been a terrible day. I think it's been a bad one for you, too. I thought when you first came in that you were only tired—but I think something must have happened to you. Well, let's not try to settle anything, now. Either of us ! "

" Something did happen to me," he said. " I meant to tell you about it as soon as I got home. When I found you'd ordered the dinner I changed my mind. I thought perhaps that while we were eating it you'd tell me."

" Tell you," she asked, " the thing that had happened to *you* this afternoon ? "

He nodded.

She felt that she was near his meaning, but her mind was too tired to leap the gap.

" A lawyer named James Beale rang me up this afternoon," he said. " Do you know who he is ? "

She could face him now. It was a sort of relief to have come to grips. This was Celia's battle. She must not think of any one else.

" Yes, I know who he is," she said.

She saw him go a little pale, but his gaze was steady too.

" Beale told me," he said, " that you'd just been paying him a call at his office."

" That was true," she said.

" He said you told him you'd come to him without my knowledge, at the advice of Tommy Hollister."

Even in her preoccupation she smiled a little over that.

" That happens to be true, too, Phil," she said.

Why in the world had Beale done that? Her mind was wrestling with this question in an agony of effort. Had he more shots in his locker than she credited him with? Some other source of knowledge besides Tommy? But what had he to gain by giving her away to Phil? He must have expected Phil to come straight home to her with it, of course.

She was not given time to follow the thing any further.

" Celia," Phil asked, " did you know that there was a—quarrel, I suppose it would be called—between Beale and me? "

" Yes," she said, " I knew you were on the Grievance Committee, and I knew they were trying to get him disbarred."

There was a long-stretched silence. Then——

" I can't believe it," he said, quietly, judicially almost. " That's not rhetoric. It's the literal truth.

I can't. I could have believed it up to the time I came back from Springfield, and it wouldn't have hurt so much. I was hopeless, just about. But this last twenty-four hours there's been a difference. Even now, as you sit there telling me these things, there is a difference."

This was dangerous. The ice was getting thinner every minute. She ought to tell him she was going, pick up her packed bag and go. But she was still wrestling with the problem of Beale.

She spoke her thought aloud, only half aware of what she was saying. " Why did Beale call you up ? What had he to gain by it ? " Coming into a little sharper focus, she added, " Of course, what he really wants is to frighten you. Did he tell you anything that might ? "

" I haven't made up my mind," he said, " whether to pass on the real gist of his message to you or not. It implies a sort of insult."

" I shan't mind being insulted," she told him. And then she got the clue. " You mean he gave you a message for me ? "

" Not exactly. He suggested I should ask your advice."

Yes, of course ! He could not go to Phil with a story he could not prove. He had neither the time nor the means to prove the story for himself. So he tried to turn the job of cross-examination over to Phil. He would send the jealous husband home to

the guilty wife and let him frighten the truth out of her. It would not matter whether Beale himself ever knew the truth or not. As long as Phil thought he did, it would work just as well.

" I can give you that advice without waiting for you to ask for it," she told him. " He told you to ask *me* whether you hadn't better leave him alone ; stop the disbarment proceedings, if you could. Wasn't that it ? "

He nodded, speechless.

" Well, my advice to you is, go right ahead. That threat of his hasn't any teeth in it. You needn't hesitate a minute on my account—or any one else's."

" You're sure ? " he asked. " That can't be what Beale thought you'd say."

" Yes, I'm sure," she told him, with a laugh of clear triumph. " That's what I found out by going to his office this afternoon." She would not have put it that way if she had had any adequate idea of the effect that statement would have upon him.

" You went," he said, " you had the courage to go, knowing what he was, knowing the danger—you went to that rascal's office to find whether he had a real weapon against me or not." Then his voice broke and his eyes filled up with tears. " Oh, my dear ! " he said.

Her face was aflame, she knew. She must do something, say something to stop this scene at once.

She must not let him go on thinking that she had done it for him. She had not—or only partly, anyhow. But how could she disclaim the motive he attributed to her without betraying Celia ?

" You don't understand," she said at last. It sounded pretty feeble, but it seemed the best she could do.

" I understand one thing," he told her.

The next moment, so swiftly that she had not time to start to her feet, he was kneeling beside her, his head buried in her lap, his arms round her.

" I understand that I've been a fool," he said, " not to have seen that you were really there all the time ; the you that I first fell in love with."

For a moment, just as had happened before, an ineluctable languor possessed her. She even let one of her relaxed hands rest upon his head. How long or how short the moment was, she did not know. Time had nothing to do with it.

Then, all at once, her moral energy came flooding back through her. Somehow she had got out of his embrace. They were standing erect, looking at each other. He was the first to speak.

" I don't know what the barrier has been," he said, " the thing that's held us apart all these months. I don't know whether it's still there or not. But now that I know you're on the other side of it, it can be surmounted, somehow. Nothing can ever make me doubt that."

" You *can't* understand," she said, " and I can't explain. The barrier's there. It *has* to be there. It's—higher than ever, I guess. Phil, I can't stay here. I'm going away now. I meant to have gone before you came home. I had my bag all packed. I was trying to write a note telling you about it when you opened the door."

She saw his face go pale at that, but the look in his eyes conceded nothing. There was a long silence ; a silence that was broken by the ring of the telephone, but neither of them stirred to answer it.

" I won't try to keep you," he said. " Your being here or somewhere else isn't what matters. It isn't because you like me less than you did last week that you're going. Celia—isn't it because you—you're beginning to love me ? "

" Oh, you don't understand ! " she cried.

" No," he admitted, " I don't. But I shall some day."

With that he went to the telephone and silenced the shrilling of its bell by unhooking the receiver. " It's the hospital," he told her when he came back into the room. " Your sister's conscious and they think you'd better go down to-night and talk to her. I told them you'd come at once."

He had taken on again the quiet friendly manner he had had when he left her that morning. He helped her into her outdoor wraps and carried her

bag for her down to the taxi. He suggested—a thing she had not thought of—that she could probably get a room in the hospital for a few days and agreed to telephone ahead and arrange it for her. "Good-night, my dear," he said as he closed the taxi door. "You'll be coming back some day."

CHAPTER XVII

In the hospital corridor just outside Celia's room she encountered the surgeon she had talked to the afternoon before.

"I'm glad you've come, Mrs. Rowland," he said. "I hope you may be able to have a calming effect on your sister's mind. She oughtn't to be allowed to talk at all, or even to see anybody, but if you have any clue as to what's causing her anxiety and any information for her that will relieve it, it's a chance worth taking."

"I think I can quiet her," Cynthia said.

"Who's that?" Celia's voice asked as she opened the door.

"It's Celia," she answered, promptly and clearly, and went straight on as she rounded into the field of her sister's vision. "I look natural, don't I? You know I'm Celia, don't you?"

There was not enough of the bandaged face visible to show much expression, but the girl in the bed said faintly, "Yes. It's all right. Of course I remember. Is the nurse here?"

Miss Mason answered. " Yes, Miss Wainwright. Do you want anything ? "

" I want to talk to my sister alone," she said.

" Very well," Miss Mason said. But she wanted a private word with the visitor first, so Cynthia accompanied her to the door.

It was to say what the surgeon had said a moment before, with the addition that she would be waiting just outside the door in case of need. " It's of the first importance that she be relieved of the idea that's worrying her," she concluded. " If some good stout lies are needed, I'd resort to them. They may tide us over for a day or two."

Cynthia closed the door behind her and went back to the bedside.

" What was she saying ? " Celia demanded suspiciously.

" Advising me," Cynthia told her, " to lie to you if necessary to get you quiet. But it won't be necessary, dear. Everything's all right."

" You don't know." Her voice was so weak Cynthia had to lean over close to hear. " You can't know whether it's all right or not. Can you ? "

The experience of falling in love had perhaps stimulated Cynthia's imagination.

" Fred's all right, anyhow," she said. " Wasn't hurt to amount to anything ; just a little dazed at first, and he's well over that. I had a long talk with him this afternoon."

The wild look went out of Celia's eyes, carried away in a sudden flush of tears.

"That's what I wanted to know," she said, "and I didn't dare ask anybody. I didn't know how to ask you. I—I don't see now how you saw him or how you knew who he was."

"They won't let us talk very long," Cynthia said, "and that makes quite a long story. You'd better not ask me the how or the why of anything. Just take my word for it that everything's all right."

"Where's Fred now?" Celia asked. "I wish I could see him."

"Gone to Indianapolis," Cynthia told her. "Back to his job, you know."

The tears came again. "He's gone back without seeing me."

"He'll come whenever you want him," Cynthia told her. "He's done what he came to do. He's seen Tommy and frightened him so that he'll never say anything about it again."

"How do you know that? Did he tell you?"

"Fred? Yes."

She hesitated a moment, and then decided to chance it. "He's told me everything, Celia; the whole story."

She feared for a moment that this admission had been a mistake, for Celia's eyes looked frightened again.

"Aren't you glad I know?" Cynthia went on. "Isn't it a relief that I know all about it?"

"Oh, I suppose so," Celia admitted weakly. "But I don't think he ought to have told. I nearly told you in Venice, but didn't have the nerve. Do you suppose it's true what Fred says—that I'm really married to him?"

"I suppose so. I don't know anything about law, of course. He spoke as if he'd looked it up and did know."

"What shall I do, Cynthia?"

"Lie still. Keep quiet. Get well."

"Don't talk like that or you'll drive me crazy. I can get quiet when I know what I'm going to do."

Cynthia gave in. "All right. What do you want to do, Celia? Do you want to be married to Fred? Are you in love with him?"

"I didn't know I was. Remember, I told you before I started out to see him that I wasn't going to see a lover? That I hadn't any? I thought that was true. I'd never have gone to him if I hadn't had to. I'd never thought about him—when I could help it—since—since that night. He—he didn't tell you about that, did he? He *couldn't* have told you about that!"

"Not very much, but I think I could guess the rest. I'm pretty sure I understand. Let me tell you. That'll be easier, won't it? You didn't know

much, and you were frightened, and the hotel was horrible—and you thought you hated Fred. Hated love, anyhow, and if you loved him, you hated yourself for that. So you thought you never wanted to see him again. Or be reminded of what you'd done. That's the way you felt, last year, when I sailed for Alexandria, wasn't it ? "

" Yes. I don't see how you know so much, though."

" Never mind about that. Never mind about anything I know. Just lie still and take it easy. I know a lot more. When Phil came up and spoke to you, thinking you were me—yes, I know that, too ; I've known it ever so long—you liked him just because he was different from Fred. You thought his way of loving you would never remind you of Fred. That's right so far, isn't it ? "

" Oh, I won't try to figure it out," Celia said. " Yes, that's right. And that's where I made my big mistake. Because he did. He made me want Fred instead. I couldn't stand it. I've been rotten to him, I know—but I couldn't help it. I didn't really know what was the matter with me—till I saw Fred in Indianapolis last night. Not last night, but whenever it was."

" And then you did know ?—Well, he's your husband."

" What good does that do, when I'm married to Phil ? "

"It's pretty complicated, of course. But—but don't you think the best person to help you out of it would be—Phil, himself?"

"No!" The cry was weak but it had been propelled by clear terror. "I never could tell Phil. He mustn't ever know. You don't know him or you'd never even think of it. Cyndy, *you* wouldn't tell him! Promise me—you must promise me now you'll never tell him!"

It might kill her to be frightened like that. "I promise," Cynthia said. "I'll never tell him—unless you ask me to. Now we won't talk any more. Go to sleep. I'm staying here in the hospital and I'll come any minute you want me."

She found Miss Mason waiting in the corridor and told her she thought she would find her patient quieter.

"Was she worrying about her scars?" the nurse asked.

"Scars?" Cynthia echoed, blankly.

"I thought she might be afraid she'd be badly disfigured," Miss Mason explained. "Accident cases are that way, often. I didn't like to speak to her about it for fear of putting something in her mind she hadn't thought of."

"No," Cynthia told her. "She didn't mention that and I never thought of it.—Will she be—disfigured?"

"I don't think so," the nurse said comfortably.

" They're doing very well. Of course there'll be scars that she'll carry to her grave."

Cynthia went to her little room in a daze. How could a scarred Celia *ever* go back to Phil ?

CHAPTER XVIII

CELIA had a good night and was distinctly better the next morning. But neither that day nor the next, though Cynthia spent practically the whole of them at her bedside, did she show any inclination, even when Miss Mason's absence from the room left them alone together, to talk about her plans for the future. She liked to hear Cynthia talk about her travels, or to chat with her over their childish memories.

Cynthia, rather to her own surprise, found herself acquiescing willingly enough in this postponement. She was a very strong, invincibly healthy young person, who, so far as the ordinary demands of life are concerned, ignored the factor of fatigue altogether. But the strain of the past three days had, she realized, told upon her a little. She had hardly had a waking moment of security against surprise. Life had just been one ambush after another. So she found it pleasant for a while to relax into trivial reminiscence of the old days, of the weekly visits, jokes they had played on Aunt Janet, expeditions in the convoy of Uncle Vin.

They could not go on for ever with that sort of thing, of course. Indeed, on the afternoon of the second day, Sunday, Celia gave the talk a turn that led it a good deal nearer home.

"Speaking of aunts," she said (Cynthia had been speaking of Aunt Janet), "has Phil's aunt been bothering you?"

"She came over to tea the afternoon you went away. She'd rung up while I was out and left word with Olga that she'd come round at half-past four. I felt I couldn't manage a sick headache on such short notice, so I saw her."

"I might have known she'd do that," Celia observed irritably. "That woman will be the death of me yet."

"What's wrong with her?" Cynthia wanted to know. "She gave me a pretty exciting half hour, of course, but all the same I liked her."

"I suppose she talked most of the time about Phil—what he likes, and what he doesn't, and how perfect he is."

"She did touch on Phil," Cynthia admitted, "but she told me he had his faults."

"It would be irreligious of him not to have any, but I bet she didn't mention any of them."

Cynthia's smile conceded this. "Still," she said, "isn't it natural enough for her to feel like that about him? Isn't her opinion of him pretty near right?"

"Oh, yes, in a way," Celia agreed impatiently. "I've nothing against him—except that I can't stand him. It isn't easy to explain. You'd have to know him."

Cynthia took a minute to think it over, and then said, "I do. You see, he came home last Thursday night. He'd read in the paper about the accident and came straight back to Chicago to see if there wasn't something he could do."

Celia was staring at her wide-eyed under her bandages. "Cyndy, does he know?" she asked.

"Not a thing." She was blushing, but it could not be helped. "We talked for some time that night about the accident, and what he'd been doing in Springfield, and Aunt Ellen. And then I went to bed. I locked my door," she added, "though I was pretty sure it wasn't necessary."

Celia gave a short laugh. "You would be. He was perfectly polite, I suppose. Well, it's lucky for you we aren't a regulation bride and groom."

"That's the way you want it to be, isn't it?"

"Yes, of course it is. It's the only possible way I could live with him at all. All the same . . . Oh, there's no use talking about it—Cyndy, did you know him? I mean did you remember who he was—right off?"

"No. His face bothered me by looking a little familiar, but I couldn't place him at first. It was funny. I didn't do that till after he'd left for the

office the next morning. Then I happened to find the old dress I'd given you in Venice, and that brought it all back."

"You must have thought I was a crook," Celia reflected sombrely. "Oh, Cyndy, I wish you'd never given me that dress. I've been horribly unhappy about it. I might have known—I suppose I did know, in time to have got out of it. If I'd had half your nerve I'd have told him the whole thing and got out. I nearly did once, after a quarrel we had on the boat coming home. Listen, Cyndy, I'm going to tell you all about it.

"I meant to get him as soon as you gave me that dress. That's why I didn't want to go out anywhere with you that last night in Venice. And it's why I asked Aunt Janet not to go round telling people I was half a twin. I don't know why, except that you made him sound like the sort of person I'd like. So I wore the dress whenever Aunt Janet and I went out anywhere for two or three days after you sailed.

"I made up my mind the first day that I knew who he was. He was having a bock at Florian's, two or three tables away from where Aunt Janet and I were having tea. He'd have spoken to me then if I'd given him half a chance, but I was determined not to have that happen when Aunt Janet was mixed up in it. It was three days before the thing came out right. She and I had been

studying the mosaics in St. Mark's all the morning, and just as we were coming out, I saw him buying a ticket to the clock tower; you know, the two men with the hammers. They were going to strike twelve in about five minutes. So I suggested to Aunt Janet that we should go up. I knew she was too tired, of course. She groaned at the very idea. It gave me a chance to go up by myself.

"There were two or three other tourists up there, which took off the edge a little. It wasn't quite so raw as if I'd followed him up and found him alone. I bowed to him as if I didn't quite know whether to or not, and he said, 'Good-morning,' and we talked about the clock. He asked me if I'd had any more adventures with dishonest shopkeepers, and I told him I hadn't. He talked quite a lot about how admirably I'd managed the thing. I didn't take it very seriously; thought he was just using it as a means to get acquainted.

"We stayed up there as long as I dared, with Aunt Janet waiting down below. It was a regular pick-up, but he didn't seem to care, and of course it was what I wanted. I told him Aunt Janet and I were stopping at the Luna, and he said he was stopping at the Britannia. And then he told me his name and I told him my name. On the way downstairs I asked him if he met Aunt Janet not to say anything about the shop, because she was always afraid something would happen to me if I went

about alone. He took that all right, as far as I could see, except that he looked a little surprised for about a second.

"I meant to tell him all about it when I got a good chance, just as a joke, you know, but I never could get up my nerve to do it. I had a hunch, even then, that it wasn't the sort of thing that he'd take as a joke.

"I couldn't tell whether he meant to ask me to marry him or not. He certainly stayed around. Went on all the excursions with us. We had dinner together almost every night. Aunt Janet took a tremendous liking to him. But he didn't act awfully excited over me.

"Well, I liked him just for that. And he has beautiful manners. Not a bit free and easy, and yet not stiff. And it was easy to see that he was rich, and that he wasn't a high-brow. At least, not the same kind of high-brow as grandmother and Uncle Vin and Aunt Janet. Cyndy, I got so bored with the sort of intelligent things they used to talk about that I didn't think I could stand another year of them—not with teaching school thrown in. So when Phil finally did ask me if I'd marry him, I just grabbed him.

"I really thought it would be all right. I thought he knew how I felt about him, and didn't much want me to feel any other way. Only he used to drive me wild by talking about that first time he'd

seen me in the antique shop, and how he loved courage. You would have thought that Italian had been going to murder you. By that time I knew I'd never dare tell him. I didn't see what it was going to let me in for, though. Then I found I couldn't tell him anything about you. I felt sure that if I did, he'd guess.

"We decided to be married in the spring, and that meant coming home. We all came home together, he and Aunt Janet and I, on the same boat. We had a quarrel on the boat that nearly broke up the whole thing. Listen, Cyndy. This will show you what he's like.

"I played bridge quite a lot in my senior year in college, and Aunt Janet and Uncle Vin didn't like it—got quite prayerful about it—and I gave it up. I really did give it up. Phil doesn't play. He can, but he won't. Well, it's an everlasting trip from Naples the way we came, and there were people playing bridge in the smoke room all the time.

"One afternoon when Aunt Janet was taking her nap and Phil was talking politics in French with a couple of Frenchmen, some people asked me to make a fourth, and I did. After I sat down and got all ready to begin, it turned out that they were in the habit of playing for a cent a point. I didn't want to play for money. I didn't have any. But I didn't see any way of getting out of it. So

I said that was all right for me. I had rather poor luck, and I lost about twelve dollars. Of course I couldn't tell Aunt Janet what I wanted twelve dollars for, out in the middle of the Atlantic ocean, so I borrowed it from Phil. I said I didn't dare ask Aunt Janet for it.

"He was only too glad to give me the money, he said, but why not tell Aunt Janet? I said she had a horror of playing cards for money and that she wouldn't believe that I could have got into a game without meaning to. Well, he gave me the money and I paid my debts, and I thought it was all right. But that very night when he and Aunt Janet and I were walking round the deck after dinner, she noticed the bridge going on in the smoke room and began talking about what a hideous waste of time it was, if no worse, and she ended up by telling Phil how noble I was to have stopped playing when I was in college, and how I'd never played since. Of course I had played a few games on the ship before that one—not for any money, or at most, for a tenth of a cent a point—and Phil knew it. Well, he simply turned to stone.

"When I got him alone and asked him what the matter was, he could hardly tell me. He was upset about it; shocked out of a precious year's growth. If he'd caught me robbing a bank he wouldn't have been any more horrified. I was within about half a breath of telling him then that I

wasn't the girl he wanted anyway; that it was you he'd seen in the antique shop and that you were in India somewhere. He'd have broken off the engagement then and there. And I wish now I had. Oh, Lord, how I wish I had! But—well, I'd brought Aunt Janet home from Italy for the wedding, and the engagement was all announced, and he *was* nice—and rich—and I hated the thought of teaching school. So I smoothed him over, and confessed to Aunt Janet—more or less—and the thing went on.

"And then, when we got married, I found that down underneath that nice, cool manner of his, he—he wanted to love me just the way Fred did. And I couldn't stand it. I knew it wasn't fair to him, but I couldn't."

"You mean you've never—been his wife?"

"No. Not that way. Oh, he was decent enough about it. But I could see he was—waiting. It drove me perfectly wild. Oh, well, there's no use talking about that.

"Talk to me about old times, Cyndy, and let's forget it. I haven't cheated you out of anything, though. I really haven't."

It was with an effort that she refrained from disagreeing with Celia about that.

The story gave her a restless night. She tried hard to follow it from Celia's point of view, to range herself on Celia's side. It was the only side she had any business to be on.

There had been nothing intrinsically very bad about the original deception. It was a thing anybody—almost anybody—might have done for a lark. If Phil had not happened to be the sort of man he was—a prig, Cynthia ventured firmly to tell herself, though something in her violently repudiated the description—Celia would have told him about it and he would have seen that it was a lark. And then perhaps she would have told him about Fred, too.

No, she could not imagine Celia telling him about Fred. Celia was not like that. She was a darling in all sorts of ways, but the thing she lacked, the thing she had always lacked, was the pluck to face a difficulty squarely and see it through.

The episode on the boat was a perfect example of the way she involved herself in things by trying to shuffle out of them. There was no harm in the world in her playing a game of bridge now and then if she wanted to, either for fun or for a negligible stake. But she had not had the nerve to let Aunt Janet know that she was doing it. She had not had the nerve to tell the people she sat down with for that final game that she could not afford to play for a cent a point. She had not had the nerve to tell Phil when she went to him for the money that Aunt Janet did not know she played at all. She had not, apparently, had the nerve, when she finally confessed to Aunt Janet, quite to make

a clean breast of it. She had confessed, "more or less," she said. There it was.

But when all was said, need Phil have been quite so horrified about it? Was he not a prig, after all, not to have just laughed at her for her silly fears and evasions?

There was something to be said for Phil, though, and the saying of it took her to the root of the whole difficulty. In pretending to be the girl he had seen in the antique shop, Celia had taken credit, trivial as the incident had been, for the one quality she conspicuoulsy lacked, and for the quality Phil principally admired. Celia never in the world would have fought it out with that tricky dealer. She would either have paid him for the thing, or she would have called for help. And in either case Phil would not have followed her round Venice for three days and scraped an acquaintance with her.

It would not have been possible for him to surmise that he had got the wrong girl. He must believe that the quality he wanted in her was buried there somewhere. It was not his fault that he had driven her frantic hunting for it. They would have been hopelessly enough at cross purposes, even without the complication introduced by Fred.

Well, there was only one way out of the tangle now. Phil had got to be told everything. Celia might not like it, but she would have to face the music, the music of the entire band, for once. She

could not delay the explosion very much longer, either, with Phil waiting at the flat and Fred waiting at Indianapolis. To-morrow they would have a real talk and get down to brass tacks.

The thing that happened the next morning—a new complication, and at first glance, a perfectly appalling one—made this resolution easier to carry out. The superintendent of the hospital sent for Cynthia while she was at breakfast, and upon her coming to the office, handed her a telegram from Henry Pyncheon. It had been despatched from Los Angeles, and it read, " Have just read in newspaper of Miss Cynthia Wainwright's accident. See that she has every possible care. If in need of funds apply to Merchants' Bank where unlimited authorization has been made by wire. Am leaving at once for Chicago and will arrive Wednesday morning."

If he were arriving in Chicago Wednesday morning it meant that he was already on the way. There was no good trying to telegraph him not to come, even supposing she had been able to imagine a message that would have stopped him. It was lucky Los Angeles was a long way off. They had two days of grace, but before these two days were up they would have to know to the last detail what they were going to say and what they were going to do. The tangle was drawn into a hard knot at last ; a Gordian knot apparently.

Celia laughed hysterically over the message when Cynthia read it to her, and then for a time she cried. And between her and the nurse, who thought her patient's convalescence was being dangerously abused, Cynthia had a bad quarter of an hour. For Celia clung to Miss Mason. She wanted a hypo, anything that would put her out of bounds.

Cynthia took Miss Mason out into the corridor. "You know"—she said very steadily—"I think you must know, that my sister's involved in something more than an automobile accident. You must have guessed it that first night when the man who pretended he was a detective came to talk to you. That situation's getting near a point where it's going to explode. My sister doesn't want to face it, but it's necessary for the happiness of her whole life that she should. I believe she's well enough to, and I'm willing to take the responsibility for seeing that she does. I want you to leave me alone with her."

"Well," Miss Mason said, "you've shown a good, level head so far. I'll leave her to you, but be as gentle with her as you can."

Her manner was not especially gentle, though, when she went back. "Miss Mason's gone," she told Celia, "and she isn't coming back until I send for her. I'm not going to send for her until we've got our plans made; until we really know what

we're going to do. There's no special hurry. You can cry as long as you like. But as soon as you're ready we'll go to work trying to straighten this thing out."

Celia told her she was a brute, and in this description Cynthia agreed with her. But it seemed that brutality was needed; surgery, anyhow.

Finally Celia said sulkily, but collectedly enough, "All right, let's talk. But there isn't anything to say; there isn't anything we can do. You haven't any plan, have you?"

"Yes, I've a plan," Cynthia said. "Send for Phil."

"Send for Phil!" Celia echoed, her eyes bright with panic. "Why? What would you tell him?"

"Everything," Cynthia said. "All about Fred. All about me. The whole story down to the last crumb, so that there'd never be anything again that you'd have to lie to him about. He's got twice as much brains as both of us put together. When he knows about it, I think he'll help us."

"Help us? Phil? You're crazy, Cynthia. He'd wash his hands of us and go away. And he'd probably stop at the police station on the way home and tell them I was a bigamist and had better be locked up in jail. He wouldn't think he'd done his moral duty with anything less. You don't *know* him, Cynthia. The whole thing is just completely hope-

less if Phil finds out anything . . . It's all very well for you," she concluded, with a sob, " to say, ' Tell Phil everything,' because you've got nothing to lose if he knows."

" Haven't I ? " Cynthia reminded her. " I went and spent a night with him in his flat when he thought I was his wife. If the whole story comes out in the wash I won't look very much better than you do—not to Uncle Henry Pyncheon, nor to Phil's Aunt Ellen. All the same, I don't see that there's anything else we can do."

It did not seem like much of a solution to her, even as she proposed it. Granting Celia's husband the will to help them, what was there that he could do ? And could they count on his good will ? A man would not have to be the cold-blooded prig Celia pictured him to turn away from the pair of them, when he had heard their story, in cold disgust. She felt, during the long silence that followed, like caving in and crying herself.

After a long while Celia said, " I've got a better idea than that. Mr. Pyncheon won't be here for two days. I'm practically well now, except for my broken arm. Well enough to travel, or I shall be by to-morrow night. Don't you see, Cyndy ? We'll run away."

" Perfectly wild nonsense," Cynthia objected, " even if you're able to travel by to-morrow night."

"Well, what if I'm not? It doesn't matter, really. Mr. Pyncheon will think I'm you. He saw us both in Venice and knows that we look exactly alike. I'll tell him I want you to take me away for a good long trip, just by ourselves. Down to Florida for the winter. That will do as well as anything else. Phil wouldn't mind our doing that. He'd be glad to get rid of me, I guess. Don't you see, Cyndy? That would settle everything. It gives me time to get perfectly well and to let everything settle down. We can have a wonderful time together, and then when we're ready, I can come back."

Cynthia felt her heart getting heavier and heavier till it was as lifeless as a lump of lead.

"Come back to Phil," she asked, "and go on being his wife? Is that what you mean?"

"Oh, it can't last for ever," Celia said, "but I think I could stand it for a little longer."

"How about Fred," Cynthia asked, "now that you're in love with him? Now that you know you're in love with him? You do know it, and so do I. The only thing you worried about and wanted to be told when you woke up here the other night was about him."

There was a stream of tears running down Celia's one unbandaged cheek.

"I know," she said weakly. "But Fred couldn't take me now. He just *couldn't* have a wife on his

hands. He's nothing but some sort of engineer in a big architect's office, getting thirty-five dollars a week. He's got fine prospects, but you can't live on prospects. Perhaps after a few years, if Phil never suspects anything and gets tired enough of me, he may be willing to let me get a divorce. And by that time perhaps Fred will be able to marry me. It isn't very nice, but it's the best thing I can think of."

"And what about me?" Cynthia asked. "What would I do? Disappear and be your mysterious sister, Cynthia, again?"

"We could sneak off together every now and again," Celia said. "But it certainly wouldn't do for Phil ever to see the pair of us together—Why, Cynthia! What is it? What makes you look so funny?"

Cynthia had been listening to the explication of Celia's plan under an overwhelming illusion that it would work, that it was the logical plan to adopt, and that it left her with no hope of ever seeing Philip Rowland again. She had totally forgotten, for the past ten minutes, the one annihilating reason why it would not work. With the recurrence to her mind of the reason why it would not, she saw in a breath-taking flash the one plan that would. There was no wonder, in the circumstances, that she looked queer.

"Wait a minute, Celia," she said, and leaving

her chair she walked away to the window, where she stood, not looking out but at least turned away so that the girl in the bed could not watch her face till she had had time to pull herself together a little.

When Celia called out, "What *is* it, Cyndy?" she said again, "Wait a minute," and added, "It's all right." After a time she came back and sat down on the edge of the bed.

"Your plan won't work, Celia dear," she said. "There's a reason why it won't. It's a reason you don't know, and that I, for the moment, had forgotten about. We don't look exactly alike any more, Celia."

There was panic again in her eyes. "What do you mean?" she cried.

"It isn't very much," Cynthia told her steadily, "and it'll get to be hardly anything at all. But the cut here"—she indicated the place with a feathery touch along the bandages—"will leave a scar that people can see. Oh, my dear, don't cry like that! I'm telling you the truth. You won't be disfigured a bit. And it doesn't matter that we won't look exactly alike any more, because I've thought of a plan now that will work. It will work for everybody. It will make everything come out right. It sounds crazy, but it isn't. It's the only simple easy thing there is to do."

It was a long time before Celia would listen.

But finally, when her crying fit was past, she asked, indifferently, what the plan was.

" It's just to go on as we are," Cynthia told her. " You as Cynthia and I as Celia. Always. Never change back."

Celia's eyes had gone perfectly blank. Her mind had simply stalled under the sudden load of this prodigious conception.

" I don't see what good that would do," she expostulated feebly.

" There's no good it *won't* do," Cynthia told her. " You're Cynthia Wainwright, remember. You're always going to be Cynthia Wainwright. Now the first thing we'll do is to send for Fred and have him marry you. A regular wedding. There's no reason why Cynthia Wainwright shouldn't marry anybody she likes. After all, he is your husband, you know."

" Fred can't marry anybody ; not for years. He hasn't any money."

" That won't matter," said Cynthia easily, " as long as his wife has. Don't you see ? Cynthia's rich. She's got worlds of money."

" You don't mean you'd give your money to me ? "

" I'm not giving it. It goes with Cynthia. And from now on Cynthia is who you are."

" Cyndy, you can't do that. You can't give me

your name and all Grandfather Wainwright's money and everything."

Cynthia felt herself turning rather red. "It's a perfectly satisfactory bargain to me," she said.

"But you don't get anything . . ." Celia started to say, when the look in her sister's face arrested her. "You don't mean—you don't mean you're going to go on pretending to be me—being Phil's wife! Cyndy, you couldn't stand him!"

"I've been in love with him," Cynthia announced, "ever since I saw him outside that antique shop in Venice, though I didn't know it till he brought me my breakfast on a tray that morning in the flat."

"Well," Celia observed at the end of a stupefied silence, "there certainly isn't any accounting for tastes."

Cynthia started to get annoyed at that. Then she thought about Fred, and laughed. "No," she assented, "there isn't.

"But do you agree to it?" she went on. "Is it a bargain? Will you do it? Remember, if we once get in there'll be no getting out. This is your last chance to decide. The only other thing to do is to send for Phil and tell him the whole story."

"Never!" said Celia, with a shudder. "All right. I'll stick. But I don't know what I'll do."

"You won't have to do a thing," Cynthia assured her, "but lie still and leave it to me. And get well enough to be married and start on your honeymoon with Fred on Wednesday afternoon."

CHAPTER XIX

THE way to do any desperate thing—this had been an early discovery of Cynthia's—was, as soon as you had really made up your mind, to go ahead and begin doing it. And this was especially true when the act involved the acquiescence of other people. They were much less likely to raise objections and make difficulties about a plan that they saw actually in motion than about one that was still, as it were, standing in the station ready to start.

She announced to the nurse, when she brought her back into the room, that "Cynthia" was going to be married and leave the hospital on Wednesday afternoon.

"She'll be all right, you'll see," she prophesied confidently, in reply to Miss Mason's protest. "See how much better she is now for having the thing settled and off her mind."

She was better, and the nurse acknowledged it.

That afternoon she despatched a telegram to Fred in Indianapolis. "Come to Chicago to-night,"

it read, " and be at the hospital the first thing Tuesday morning. Cynthia doing well and anxious to see you. Important plans." She signed it, " Celia Rowland."

This would bring him on the scene a day ahead of events, but she had to be sure of his assent to the marriage before she could proceed with her other plans. It was not conceivable that he would refuse, but when she reflected that she would have to pound the whole project into his head so that he, more or less, understood it, she saw that a day would not be any too much. It would probably take hours of drill to teach him to call his bride by her right name.

She lost her slightly derisive feeling about him, for a time at least, when he appeared at the hospital and saw, for the first time, the bandaged figure in bed. His honest eyes filled up with tears, and his voice broke so that he could hardly speak. They did love each other, these two. There was no doubt about it.

He was, though, just as she'd expected him to be, utterly consternated over the plan. She explained it to him patiently, three times over, before he was orientated to it at all. When he comprehended the main lines of it and began seeing for himself some of the things it involved, his face became a study. Cynthia's enormous generosity in turning over her whole fortune with her name—

as if she could have helped doing it—overwhelmed him. He was grateful to her, too, for having thought of the one possible plan for extricating him and Celia from the consequences of their mad escapade during the snow storm nearly three years ago.

But there was another emotion there which she could not at first identify or account for. She did not get it till Philip Rowland's name happened to be mentioned. Then she saw that the part that she meant to play shocked him profoundly, horrified him. He regarded her as an utterly shameless woman.

She could not be quite as genuinely amused over this discovery as she tried to be. It gave her a nightmare misgiving that Phil might regard it in the same way. Well, there was no use worrying about that till the time came.

"The only thing you'll have to do," she told him, "besides learning to call her Cynthia—you can call her Cee, though. I'd forgotten that. It happens to do just as well—the only other thing is to prepare your mind for a serious talk with Uncle Henry Pyncheon. He isn't anybody's uncle, really," she explained, "but Celia will have to call him that. I'll meet him at the station to-morrow morning and prepare *his* mind." She thought for a time, and then announced, "I think I'll tell him about the other marriage—the secret marriage, you know."

They both cried out at that. Celia was in a panic about it, but Cynthia stuck to her guns.

"There are two reasons for doing it," she said. "One is that in a way it's true, and the fewer lies we have to tell, the better. They saw on the boat that I'd had some rather upsetting news. It was your letter, of course. And they wondered at my leaving them the way I did and dashing off to Chicago without any explanation.

"Well, my story will be—Mrs. Rowland's story, you know—that Cynthia had done just what you did, and that she thought because they'd parted so soon afterwards, that it wasn't a real marriage. The letter told her that it was a real marriage, and that one person knew about it. So she made that dash to Indianapolis to see Fred and decide what they were going to do.

"That agrees with what Phil knows and with what Aunt Ellen knows. And there's nothing in it that Uncle Henry—I'll have to begin calling him Mr. Pyncheon—can doubt the truth of. He doesn't know anything about what I was doing then. It *was* my last year at school, before I went abroad."

"But what's the use of it?" Celia protested. "It will make him hate Fred and not like me so well."

"That's the use of it," Cynthia explained. "That's the other reason. You're of age and you don't need his consent to your marriage. He doesn't

pay your allowance because he likes you, but because he's your trustee. And it will be a lot easier for you if he stops feeling quite as affectionate as he was getting to feel about me. You don't want him coming out to Indianapolis for long visits, talking over our trip, things that happened in Bombay and Rangoon. It's too bad that he should be shocked, but I'm afraid he'll have to be."

The argument did not, by any means, win them over at once.

"All right," she said at last, "there's no real need of my meeting Uncle Henry at all. He'll come straight to the hospital, if I don't, and you two can tell him anything you like."

That decided them, as she had thought it would. They wanted her to take the edge off Uncle Henry.

She went out when that was settled without telling them what she was going to do next. It was just as well to leave them alone for a time, to comfort each other and improve their spirits.

What she did was to telephone to Philip Rowland at his office. "I've rung up," she explained, "to invite you to a wedding. It's Cynthia's. Tomorrow afternoon at four o'clock."

"Thank you," he said in his nice comfortable voice. "I'll come with pleasure.—I hope," he added after a momentary hesitation, "that that means things are going a little better for her."

" Lots better," she assured him cheerfully. " Only there's one thing I want your professional advice about. Is it against the law for two people who have already been married to get married again? When they haven't been divorced in the meantime? "

" Oh," he said in a tone of enlightenment. " No, they can get married as often as they like—as long as they stick to the same people." He added, " I didn't mean to say ' oh ' like that."

" It's all right," she told him. " You can guess as much as you like, now. I'll tell you the whole story to-morrow after the wedding."

" Where's the ceremony to be? "

" Why, at the hospital, I thought. It doesn't have to be, since she'll be going away right after."

" Then, why not have it at the flat? " he suggested. " It'll be a little more cheerful, won't it? Less of an odour of carbolic? "

She had caught her breath at that but made her decision instantly. " I think that will be ever so much nicer," she told him. " It won't be a party, of course; nobody but ourselves and Cynthia's trustee, Mr. Pyncheon. And—and perhaps one other person, Phil."—This was so clear an inspiration that she followed it through without stopping to think.

" Not if you don't want him," she went on,

" but he is in it, in a way, and I think it would be a good thing to have him there. Tommy Hollister."

Even over the telephone wire she could feel him jump at that.

" I think you'll have to ask him yourself," she added with a laugh. " He'd be afraid to come if I did. And you needn't if you don't want to, Phil."

" I'm mystified," he admitted, " but I don't mind. I'm in your hands entirely. Sure, I'll ask him."

" You *are* a dear," she said—not quite audibly perhaps, for his voice cut right across the words.

" Who's the parson going to be ? Van Dyne ? "

" Would you mind finding out if he'll do it ? " she asked. " I haven't got any one yet. It's a shame to impose on you like this."

" Not a bit," he assured her. " I'll get him, or somebody. Shall I see you before then ? " he asked.

" No," she told him. " But you'll see plenty of me afterwards. I'll come home in time to put on something respectable for the wedding, and to talk five minutes to Tommy before the ceremony begins."

He laughed. " I'd like to know what's going to happen to Tommy."

" You will in time," she prophesied. " Good-bye."

From that conversation she walked in beaming upon the two lovers. But her news, once more,

spread consternation. Celia jibbed utterly at going back to the flat. " I don't see," she wailed, " why you did it."

" I didn't realize what I was letting you in for," Cynthia admitted. " But once I'd done it, there was no way out. Don't you see, Celia, that we don't want to be any more mysterious than we can help? I invited Phil to the wedding because it would look perfectly odd if I didn't. And the natural place for it to happen, the moment he suggested it, was at our house. He'll have to see ' Cynthia ' for once, at least, if he isn't to go on wondering about her, and it's a whole lot better for him to see you in bandages than without."

Fred did not conceal the fact that he regarded her as a brute. So she diverted his mind by packing him off to the city hall to get his marriage licence. Then, having got Celia alone, she went ahead and reconciled her to the idea more easily. She did not tell either of them about the invitation she had despatched to Tommy Hollister.

The thing she dreaded most about the whole wild affair was her meeting with Henry Pyncheon. And the dread had mounted almost to the point of panic when next morning she saw his train pulling into the shed of the Polk Street station. This was the only real fraud she was committing. Grandfather Wainwright had left his money to her, and here she was, by a trick, handing it over to her

twin sister of whose upbringing he had so bitterly disapproved. Would he turn in his grave, she wondered ?

Well, of course, he would if he knew nothing but the surface facts of the case. But if he now, wherever he was, knew anything at all, he would know the whole thing, not just the surface facts. He would know that the way she was taking was the only way to her great happiness, as well as the only way out of her sister's despair. He wouldn't mind—much—if he knew that, she thought.

But leaving grandfather out of account, here was his living representative, Henry Pyncheon. Not the pleasant, rather jolly old chap who had been so delighted to have her call him Uncle Henry, but an official person—a trustee of funds. Was it possible that after having just travelled round the world with her he could look at her in the full light of day and be made to believe she was some one else ? Well, after all, he did not know her as well as Phil knew Celia.

He was not, of course, one of her life-long friends. Her affection for him did not run very deep. But still she hated having to impose upon him ; hated the prospect of having to tell him that story of " Cynthia's " pathetic, shabby little escapade.

There was no help for it, though. There he was coming down the platform now.

He blinked at the sight of her, just as she knew

he would, then recovered himself and took her outstretched hand.

" I'm glad you've come, Mr. Pyncheon," she said.

It steadied her to call him that. That is what he was to her now and always would be.

" I've got good news for you," she went on. " Cynthia's much better and very eager to see you."

" Ah, that's a relief," he said, a little stiffly. He had a real grievance against her, of course, for not having herself let him know of his ward's accident instead of leaving him to make the horrifying discovery for himself in the newspaper. Should she try to make any excuse ? Better not. It did not matter what he thought of her. Instead she gave him a concise account of her sister's injuries and her recovery from them.

" It's very kind of you," he said, " to have met the train and relieved my mind as soon as possible."

The conductor had set down his bag by now and they were waiting for the taxi.

" It's really an amazing thing," he remarked, " that resemblance between you and your sister. I don't mean to say," he added, " that I wouldn't know, after having a chance for a fair look like this, that you weren't Cynthia."

" No," she agreed, with a smile. She was completely herself again now. " We can be told apart, fortunately.

" I must tell you the rest of my news," she went on, as soon as they were seated in the cab. " You've come on for Cynthia's wedding. It's quite a little drive to the hospital, and I'll have time to tell you all about it. It begins nearly three years ago."

With that for a preface, taking advantage of his speechless astonishment, she told him the story of the boy and girl who had got off the train in the blizzard and been left behind.

It affected him just about as she had expected that it would. He was literally incredulous. He simply could not conceive of a girl like Cynthia Wainwright having done such a thing. He was glad her grandfather had died without finding out about it. He went on exploring the paradox a little further.

" What I can't see is how, granting that it had happened, she could have gone on being the frank, even-tempered, cheerful girl who went round the world with us. It does account, of course " (he was quite beyond himself or he would not have expressed this thought aloud), " it does account for the decisiveness of her refusal to marry my son."

Cynthia smiled faintly at that. " In a way it does," she agreed, " since she's always been in love with Fred. But she believed absolutely that the marriage was dissolved by her agreement with him that it should be."

" Unless he's an utter numskull "—this was

Henry Pyncheon's rather acrid comment—" he must have known better than that."

" He did. He's not a numbskull—really. He's very romantic and chivalrous. He was simply aghast at the thing he'd done."

" He might well be," Henry Pyncheon grunted.

" And he didn't see any other course for himself," she continued, " than to let her have her way. He knew he'd never want to marry any one else—he adores the ground she walks on—and he went on hoping that sometime she'd get over being horrified over what had happened and give him another chance, so that they could be married properly."

" Admirable loyalty," Mr. Pyncheon remarked. " But how much figure did her money cut in that ? You've no means of knowing, of course."

" But I do know. He hadn't the slightest idea that she had any money at all. If you could have seen his face when I told him about it yesterday you'd be satisfied of that."

He was not as impressed as she had hoped he would be.

" After all," she went on, " we're dealing with an accomplished fact. They are already married, and the only question is whether to make the best of it or the worst ; whether to make them happy by lending a little decency and dignity to the situation they're in, or to make them miserable by refusing to."

He made her horribly uncomfortable by saying, after a considerable silence, " You've your sister's logical mind, at all events, Mrs. Rowland. I can't answer that argument."

She had not, when they reached the hospital, accomplished all she hoped. At the most she had blunted the sharpest edge of his displeasure. But it was amusing, in addition to being an enormous relief, to see how easily Celia did the rest, just by the frightened, imploring look she turned upon him when he got his first sight of her. She was still in bed—they were not going to dress her till after lunch—and the pitifulness of her simply swept over him and filled his eyes with tears. He sat down on the edge of her bed, and pressed the uninjured hand she held out.

" It's all right, my dear," he told her, his voice breaking under the effort to make it sound cheerful. " You needn't be afraid of your Uncle Henry."

Then he got up and shook hands, a little stiffly, with Fred.

Cynthia surreptitiously touched wood. It looked a little too easy. She made an end of the scene as soon as she could by suggesting that the bride had better be left alone now to rest as much as possible before being dressed for the wedding. If she had foreseen the consequences of this manœuvre she'd never have made it.

Uncle Henry rose to the hint at once, and as the most natural thing in the world, invited Fred out to lunch with him.

"It will give us a capital chance to get acquainted," he remarked, "and to talk over some business details besides."

Cynthia cast about wildly for something else that Fred ought to be doing at that time, but everything had been done; cars ordered, tickets bought, the luggage brought down from the Blackstone. She had no choice but to let him go. She had spent hours, to be sure, coaching him for the interview with Cynthia's Uncle Henry, but she had not anticipated any such ordeal as a leisurely lunch, and she spent a nightmarish two hours alone—for she had left a perfectly contented Celia to take a nap—imagining dozens of ways by which the powder barrel they were sitting on might be exploded between now and four o'clock. It seemed perfectly fantastic to hope that it would not explode somehow.

But it did not. The two men returned to the hospital at three o'clock almost uncle and nephew. This should have allayed her panic but it had no such comforting effect. Somehow, the more serenely events moved forward toward the consummation of her plans the more unreal and dreamlike the whole thing seemed to be.

She had Celia all dressed and looking very nice, too, despite the cast her arm was in and the band-

ages. There was not a thing to do but sit and wait—and she felt she could not bear another five minutes of it. She would blow up and give the whole show away herself if she did not look out. A way of escape occurred to her.

"I don't know how long I've been wearing this dress," she said. "At least since last Friday, and I know it's nothing to wear at a sister's wedding." She turned to Celia, adding, "And what do you suppose the flat looks like after Phil's been alone in it three days? I'm going on ahead. Don't you dare follow me for at least half an hour."

There was no hurry, really, but she told the taxi driver there was. She was quivering like the hair-spring of a watch when she took out her latch-key and let herself into the flat.

"That you, Celia?" Phil's voice called.

"Yes," she answered. "I came on ahead of the others to change my dress."

She could hear him now splashing in his bath, and she laughed when he said, "I'm glad you haven't got the whole bunch with you."

The queerest thing about it was that her feelings were exactly what they ought to have been if she had really been his wife. It was nice to know that he was in there getting dressed for the wedding and was sure to be ready on time. Her shivers had disappeared at the first sound of his voice. It was perfectly delicious to be shouted at through the

door, to have him inquire whether she wanted him in regulation rig—morning coat, and so on—or not.

"Sure!" she said. "We don't have a wedding every day."

The twinge she got out of the reflection that it was his own wife he was going to see married lasted only an instant. Celia was not his wife, and never had been—legally or otherwise.

Now he wanted to know what she was going to wear.

"I don't know," she answered. "Any choice, Phil?"

He did not answer that question immediately.

"Why, I have one," he said at last, "but I don't know that I dare mention it."

"Why not?"

"Well, you know what it is—the Venice dress."

Her heart gave a jump at that.

"I don't believe I want to wear it for the wedding, Phil," she told him, "but I'll put it on for you afterwards, if you like."

"That will be better," he said gravely.

It meant something, then. Something apparently that Celia had always denied him. She was getting scared again.

He broke the tension by calling, "Hollister was surprised, all right, but he said he'd come. I asked him to be a little early. That's what you wanted, wasn't it? So he may be along almost any minute."

The news just about knocked her flat. She had simply forgotten all about Tommy ; had not thought of him for twenty-four hours. It took her a minute to remember what she had wanted him for.

But she recovered her poise very quickly. " All right," she told Phil. " I'll be ready for him."

She was dressed and answered the phone herself when they announced him from down-stairs. " Send him up," she ordered.

Phil opened his door to speak to her. " I can be dressed in a minute if you want me," he told her. " But you want to run this show yourself, don't you ? "

" Yes, I do, if I can." She added, with a smile : " You've always been nice about letting me do that."

The remark apparently puzzled, as well as pleased him, but it did not matter. Nothing mattered now.

She opened the door for Tommy and led him straight down the corridor into the drawing-room.

" It was very nice of you to come," she told him. " I hoped you would."

Between curiosity and embarrassment, with fright in the background, he was simply squirming. Apparently he considered it a possibility that she meant to make it up with him after all.

" I didn't quite see why I was asked," he began.

" To my sister's wedding ? Sit down, Tommy. You've been interested in Cynthia for a long time,

you see. Ever since you read a letter of hers, years ago, up in Fred's room in the fraternity house."

He jumped as if he had been stung.

" A letter of *hers !* " he cried.

She nodded. " I thought you'd better understand that. It was she Fred married, not I."

" The answer he wrote was addressed to you all right," he asserted, pulling himself together a little.

" No it wasn't," she said. " I never saw the answer. The outer envelope happened to be addressed to Celia Howard. That misled you. It's always a mistake to jump at conclusions, Tommy."

" Look here," he demanded, " why didn't you tell me this before ? "

" I didn't owe you any confidences. It happened to be important then that the marriage should be kept secret. It's not important any longer. Her guardian knows all about it. He's come on for the wedding."

His expression of bewilderment was so ludicrous that she did laugh a little.

" It's all exactly as I tell you," she assured him. " You wait and see."

" But if it was Cynthia who got married to Fred, why is she getting married again to-day ? Who is it she's going to marry, anyway ? " He thought of the answer to that question in the moment he asked it, and jumped to his feet, " Fred ? Is Fred coming here ? "

" Yes," she said. " He doesn't know you've been invited to his wedding, but I'm sure he'll be glad to see you."

The telephone rang just then, and she added, " I guess that's they now, Fred and Cynthia and her guardian." She noticed that Phil was answering the telephone, and turned back to Tommy.

Fred must have frightened him terribly that morning at the club, for the effects had not worn off yet.

" What did you get me up here for ? " he asked. His lips were actually trembling. She was almost sorry for him.

" Not to do you any harm—really not. I wanted to make perfectly sure that you had the pair of us, Cynthia and me, straight in your mind so that you never could mix us up again. I thought if you saw Cynthia and Fred married it would save a lot of explaining. Excuse me just a minute, won't you ? I've got some introducing to do."

She left him in the drawing-room and went down the passage as Phil opened the door.

" This is Phil, Cynthia," she said, and wondered, during half a breath, whether the ceiling would fall or not.

It did not. The other introductions got themselves made somehow. She led the bride down the passage to her own bedroom, leaving Phil to take the men into his room to leave their overcoats.

Celia sat down on the edge of the long chair and looked round. Did it not make her feel a little queer, Cynthia wondered, to be on the point of leaving this home of hers for good? Apparently not.

"I hate this place," she said. "I've always hated it. It seems as if I'd been away a year. Can you realize, Cyndy, that it's been just a week? That it was only last Wednesday afternoon that I met you at the Blackstone and gave you the key to the flat?"

Cynthia delayed her reply for a moment. She was standing near the door, and she heard steps, light, rapid steps, going down the passage. Then the outer door of the flat opened and shut. Well, thank heaven, that was the last of Tommy Hollister.

"No," she answered, "I can't."

She had one more hurdle to take. "There's one thing I want to ask you, Celia, and I may not get another chance. Do you remember that I promised you the other night not to tell Phil—the truth about us, you know—unless you told me I might? Well, I want you to set me free from that promise."

"You'll be perfectly crazy to tell him," Celia warned her.

"I want to be free to, anyhow. If I'm going to be Celia, I want to be able to keep her secrets in my own way."

"Once this is over, you can tell him anything you like—as far as I'm concerned," Celia said.

The telephone rang again. "That must be the minister," Cynthia observed. "Let's go out."

Fred and his bride were catching the five o'clock train, so there was no delay after the arrival of the minister.

Cynthia stood through the reading of the service like one in a trance. Liturgical ceremonies are rather hypnotic, anyhow, and the implications of this one were too queer to bear thinking about. She concentrated her mind upon wondering how she was going to cook Phil's dinner, with presumably none of the materials for it in the house, till this train of thought was routed by the surmise—a devastating one—that Uncle Henry Pyncheon might not go when the others did; might stay to talk it over—might expect to be asked to dinner, and perhaps to let them put him up for the night.

She came out of this nightmare with a start to realize that everything was over, and the handshaking and kissing had begun. The queerest, most dreamlike thing of all was to see Phil gravely and ceremoniously follow the example of the other men in kissing Celia's unbandaged cheek. He produced some sherry and biscuits, passed the cigarettes. The minister took his leave. Fred looked at his watch and said he guessed they had better be starting.

The nightmare about Uncle Henry did not come

off, for he promptly said he must be going too. He had promised to dine with some old friends on the south side.

Phil tossed a handful of rice while they waited for the lift, the lift went down, and the two who were left went back through their open door and closed it behind them.

" Well, good luck to them. They're off your hands now, aren't they, Celia ? That job's finished."

The words were commonplace enough, but his voice was vibrant with a feeling he could not disguise. The unworded question, " Now, what about us ? " sounded as clear as if he had spoken it.

It was high time she settled that question, she knew. But for the moment she felt helplessly unready for it. She could not think at all. He was looking at her, and she could not speak. Panic was mounting in her.

He turned away and looked at his watch. " Would you mind my going back to the office for an hour ? " he asked. " There are some things on my desk that ought to be signed to-night. I'll be back in time for dinner."

She was not for a moment taken in by his excuse. He had seen she was frightened and meant to give her time to get herself together. Perceiving that this was true she was frightened no longer. The panic subsided as suddenly as it had surged up.

But she did not tell him not to go. " I can fill in

a couple of hours myself," she said. " I don't believe there's anything in the house for dinner."

He was putting on his overcoat. " Yes there is," he told her. " I did the ordering this morning myself. But don't you bother about it. Take it easy till I come back, and then we'll do it together the way we did the other night."

She smiled at him. " I won't bother about a thing."

CHAPTER XX

CYNTHIA was out of her wedding dress and into a pinafore before he had more than had time to leave the building, and for the better part of the next two hours she never stopped to think at all. She explored her larder. She studied her cookery book. . . . She had had about as little experience in cooking as a girl can live twenty-two years without . . . She set her table for dinner. She salted, and stirred, and tasted, and watched. She flew from one thing to another, averting disaster now and then by the mere breadth of a hair.

It was quarter-past six when she turned down all the flames to the simmering point, satisfied that the meal was ready, and went to her bedroom—it was hers now if it was anybody's—to put on the Venice dress and get herself ready for Phil. She hoped he would not be late.

He was not. She was only half dressed when she heard him letting himself in.

"Dinner's ready," she called to him, "and I will be in a minute."

" Is that the way you keep your promises ? " he wanted to know as he went into his bathroom to wash his hands.

" Yes," she said. " I promised I wouldn't bother, and I haven't."

" How long is a minute ? " he asked outside her half-opened door. " If I put the dinner on now, will you be ready ? "

She told him she would, and came into the dining-room in her Venice dress just as he, with two plates of soup, pushed open the swing door from the pantry.

" Oh, don't drop them ! " she cried, and the catastrophe didn't quite happen. She rescued one of the plates and he managed to put the other right side up in its place.

" Celia . . ." he began, but waited so long she asked, " What is it ? "

" If I—if I came round the table now and kissed you, would—would the whole building go up in smoke, like one of the Arabian Nights ? "

" I don't know." She smiled at him as she said it, but her voice was grave enough. " I think I'd rather you waited till—till after dinner. I think it might be—safer for both of us."

For a moment it was doubtful whether Phil was going to accept the decision. Then he smiled too and the tension of his body relaxed. When he came round the table it was only to hold her chair for her.

"I wasn't frightened at *our* wedding," he remarked, conversationally, after he had gone back to his own seat, "and I was rather surprised to find myself getting frightened at this. I couldn't think at first what it was I was afraid of. Then I got it. I realized that unless Mr. Pyncheon had another invitation to dinner, we'd have to ask him to stay here."

"That was my nightmare, too," she acknowledged. "I thought I simply couldn't bear it. It isn't that I don't like him, but I've had a good deal of him to-day. I had to meet him at the train and tell him all about my sister before he saw her. And now," she went on, "I'm going to tell you everything I told him."

"Don't you want to let that wait till after dinner, too?" he asked.

But she said she did not. She would rather get it over. Really the little informal digressions of the dinner with its necessary excursions to the kitchen made the telling a lot easier. She could hardly have plodded through the long lie in cold blood, and even with this help she felt she was telling it mechanically. She did not see how he could fail to perceive that she was lying to him.

He did not though. He listened gravely but alertly—without preoccupation.

She thought she had waded through to the farther

side of the morass when she came to the end of the story that she had told Uncle Henry Pyncheon, but in the thoughtful silence that succeeded it she perceived she had not. She had not yet accounted for Tommy Hollister.

Was it telepathy? He said, "I suppose Hollister was the one person who had found out about it."

Luckily for her, she could always smile over the thought of Tommy, and the smile made it easier for her to go on.

"It wasn't what Tommy thought he'd found out," she said. "He saw the letter she'd written to Fred saying it couldn't be a real marriage and asking him to agree that it never had happened. It wasn't signed with anything but her initial, but Fred's answer to it was lying on the desk—sealed up in an envelope—and addressed—under cover—to Celia Howard. I sent it on to her, without knowing what was in it, of course.

"But Tommy thought that it was I who had married Fred. He said nothing to Fred about it, but he remembered the name. Fred thinks he probably wrote it down—filed it for reference. Anyhow when he met me and found out where I'd been to college and that my name had been Howard before I married you—he thought he had something that he could use. It was just after he'd told me about it that you came in and kicked him out."

This was where the ice was thinnest. She hoped it would not break through till she got to the end. It held. He did not ask her why, since Tommy was wrong, she had not merely laughed at him. Instead of that, he said, with a blue-black gleam in his eyes, " I wish I'd kicked him all the way to the street."

" I knew he'd mixed us up, of course," she hurried on. " I'd never seen Fred. But I didn't want to give Cynthia away to him—nor to you. He threatened to tell you about it, but of course he didn't. He told it to James Beale, instead.

" I didn't know he had done that until after Cynthia was hurt. He spoke to me outside the hospital ; wanted to drive home with me and I let him because I saw he was a little drunk and I thought I might find out something. I did, but I couldn't make out exactly how he'd made his mistake nor how much he'd told Beale ; whether it was just a guess that Beale couldn't use unless he could frighten it out of me.

" When I went to Beale's office and he did try to frighten me and then tried to get me to tell him all about it, I knew he hadn't anything he'd even try to use against you—and that I needn't give Cynthia away.

" But Tommy really thought I had married Fred —so I asked him to come to the wedding—so that he could see for himself, and explained how he'd

made his mistake. There! I guess that's the whole story."

She had told this last part of it in breathless haste, without any effort to give it plausibility, frantic to get to the end of it, to get the beastly taste of it out of her mouth. She was amazed that it had not broken down under her in the telling. That Phil had not interrupted to ask her why she was lying to him.

She had seen his eyebrows drawn down once or twice in perplexity, notably when she explained why she had let Tommy get into the taxi with her. It was, of course, fantastic to think that Celia would ever have done that. But it was plain that he had not really doubted her.

"What a hellish time you've had over it!" he said, when she had finished. "And what a—what a good sport you've been! I'm glad it's over." He drew in and let out a long breath. "It's too bad to have made you go through the whole thing again to-night. I'm glad you did it though. I'm glad I know."

Her mouth had got a little dry and she drank some water. Then she leaned back in her chair and allowed herself a steadying look at him. "You *don't* know," she said.

He looked back at her intently, and went a little pale, she thought, but he did not say anything.

"What I've been telling you," she went on, "is—is the official version. It will do, all right, for that, because it's mostly true. Except that it's all a lie. You see—I'm really Cynthia, Phil. That is, I was—until Celia and I changed places to-day."

He smiled in good-natured perplexity. "What sort of riddle is that? I don't believe I get it."

She smiled back at him. "It isn't a riddle at all," she said. "It's perfectly wild, but it's true. It was Celia who married Fred three years ago when she was at college, and thought it didn't count as a marriage, and married you. And I've never married anybody. So we changed places. She's Cynthia now. Henry Pyncheon hasn't a doubt she is. She married Fred Carpenter this afternoon. Of course she was really married to him, already. And I stayed here and cooked your dinner. I'm Celia Rowland—if I'm anybody."

She felt a flaming blush suffuse her face as she said that, but he, staring at her, saw nothing. She stretched out a hand for his coffee cup. "Better let me fill it again," she said, in the most casual tone she could manage. "And then light your pipe. We won't bother about the dishes for a time."

The commonplace domestic touch relieved him for a moment. He gave her his cup and took it back again; got out and loaded his pipe. "I

thought for a minute I was losing my mind," he said.

" I don't wonder," she told him, comfortably. " You see, the thing you have to begin with is that she and I look exactly alike. Nobody would ever admit it ; not even our own families. But it's true. We used to change places and live at each other's houses when we were children without being found out. It seems so—unnatural that people think they can see differences in us. Henry Pyncheon told me, on the station platform this morning, that though we looked a lot alike he could see that I wasn't Cynthia."

" You *weren't* Cynthia ! " he cried.

" I was until this morning. I'd been pretending to be Celia ever since she went to Indianapolis to see Fred, a week ago. But I wasn't—permanently, until we changed places, to-day."

" But you *don't* look alike ! " he protested. " You and the girl who was married here to-day."

" She'd been a week in the hospital and her face was bandaged. But she's the girl you spoke to for the first time up on top of the clock tower in Venice. She's the girl who was living here with you when you went to Springfield, last week. She wasn't your wife, really, because she was already married, to Fred."

He sat back in his chair and tried to light his pipe, but his hands were shaking so that he gave

it up. His control of his voice was not much better, but he managed to ask, "Then—then who are you?"

Her own lips were trembling but she answered steadily enough. "The first time you ever saw me, I was quarrelling with the dealer in a little antique shop in Venice. But I gave this dress to Celia and sailed the next day for Alexandria with the Pyncheons. And I never saw you again until you opened the door of this flat for me the night you came home from Springfield."

"Celia," he began, and then stopped with a wince.

"That's all right," she reassured him. "I *am* Celia now. What is it?"

"I want you to tell me—why you did it."

"Why I came here and pretended to be Celia?"

"No. Why you changed with her—permanently. You've given her your name—and all your money. Why did you do it? Just to help her out?"

She shook her head. "The first time I saw you, outside that shop—you were so nice and friendly, just to *be* there, that I think I must have fallen a little in love with you then. But I didn't know it. I didn't know I wanted to be Celia till that morning when you brought me my breakfast and found me sitting up in bed in her nightgown—and kissed me.

And I hadn't really remembered then who you were. I didn't until I found this dress in her cupboard."

He was sitting there like a man under a spell. She must break it somehow. She would begin to cry—or laugh—in another minute. She pushed back her chair and tried to get up, but found she was too limp to chance it.

"Do you—want me to be Celia?" she asked.

She might have known he would not answer a question like that with words, but she was not prepared for the swiftness of his response. In an instant he was kneeling beside her, his head pressing against her breast. He did not speak. It was doubtful if he could. His breath came in great gasps, as if he had been running.

She must not surrender yet. There was one more thing of which she must remind him. But as had happened the last time when she had been in his embrace, a languor had come upon her and she could hardly summon the will to resist it. He must, though, have sensed some mute protest on her part, for he raised his head and looked at her.

"What is it?" he asked. "You haven't anything more to tell me; you can't have."

"There's something you haven't thought of, and I must make you think of it. Please go back to your chair, Phil. I can't talk like this."

He took his hands away, but remained where

he was. "It isn't about ourselves," he said. "And it can't be about her. She's got the man now she always wanted. Who else is there to think about?"

"There's Aunt Ellen," she said. "Something she said about you. She told me once you were fastidious about the truth."

"This is the truth," he asserted. "At least," he qualified it with a smile, "there's a sort of inner truth about it."

"It's a sort of truth you won't be able to tell to anybody, though. The outside of it will have to be a lot of plain unvarnished lying; to her, to everybody else you know. You'll have to be pretending all the time at first, coaching me, coming to the rescue when I make mistakes. You'll hate that, Phil. I want you to think what it will mean."

Presumably he thought about it, since he was silent for a while. That phrase of Aunt Ellen's must have struck him, for he quoted it.

"'Fastidious about the truth.' That was only a kindly way of saying I was a prig. You'll save me from that. You'll see what a whole-hearted liar I can be in a good cause."

He fell silent again for a minute or two. He had one of her hands and pressed it meditatively with his lips. Presently he came back to the subject and finished it.

" It is the truth, really—the only truth in the world for us—but it's too precious to give away. So we'll seal it up tight—like this."

A little later—clocks and watches had ceased to have the slightest significance—she felt him give a start. She was lying very contentedly in the hollow of his arm, and she moved her head back in order to look up at him and see what the matter was.

" It just dawned on me," he explained, " that you and I aren't married."

She put her head down again.

" Well, you were never married to her," she remarked. " But I don't see why her marriage doesn't do well enough for me." She laughed. " A second-hand wedding ! "

After a moment of comfortable silence he asked, " Wouldn't you like a new one, all of our own ? Not tell any one about it, you know. Just slip away some time . . ."

" Would it make you any happier ? " she broke in. " Because unless it would, I'd rather keep the old one—as is. I'd sort of hate sneaking off and hoping no one found out about it. I *feel* married to you, Phil. I have ever since that first morning. I loved it this afternoon, coming home and finding you taking a bath—I'm afraid I'm not a very respectable person."

" Thank God ! " he remarked.

" But I don't care much," she went on, " and if

you'd rather—well, trade that old marriage in for a new model . . . *Would* it make you any happier ? "

" I couldn't be," he told her.

THE END.

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