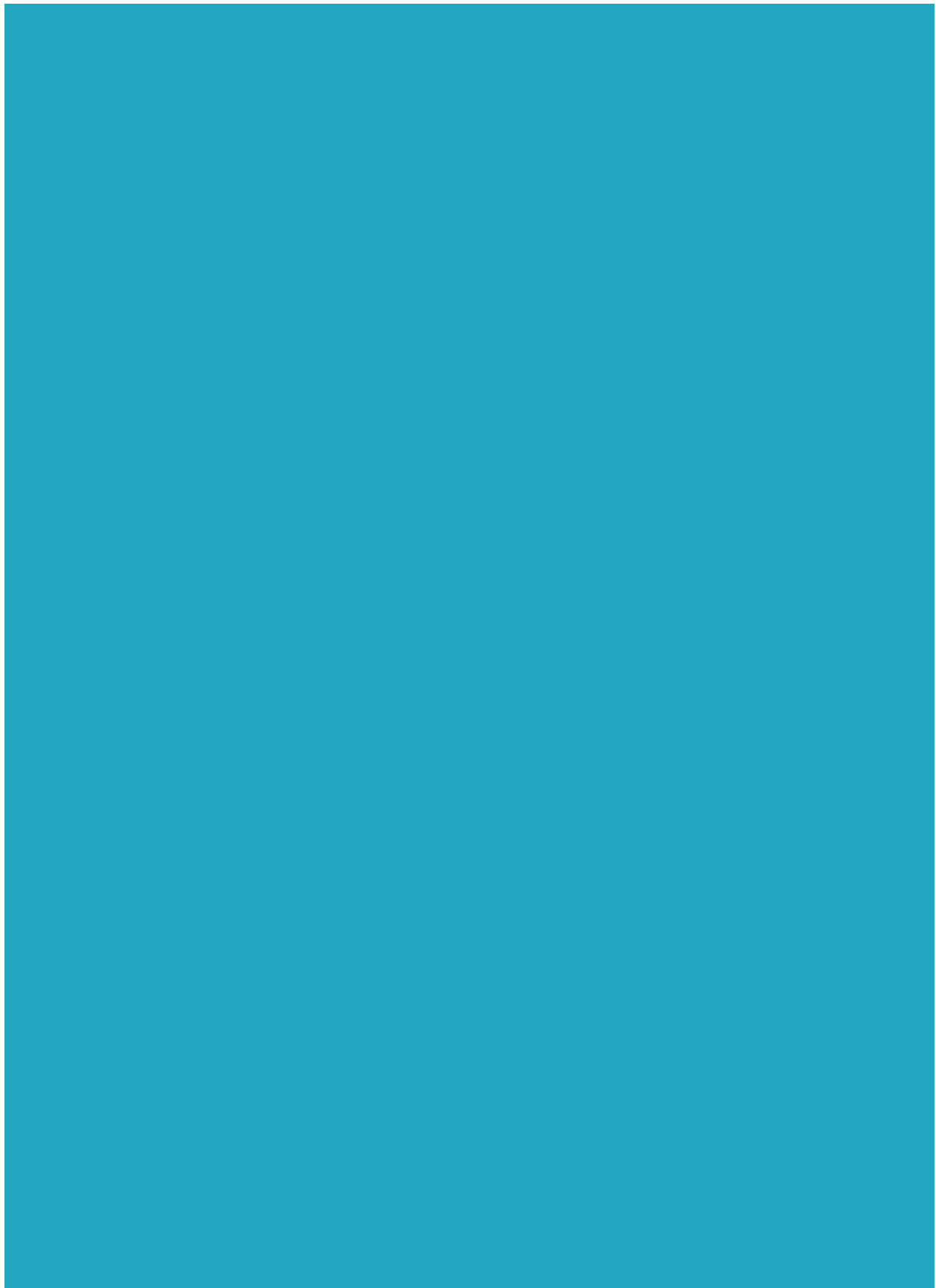


# *The Love Collection*



**VOLUME THREE**

**BARBARA CARTLAND**



# Barbara 11 Cartland

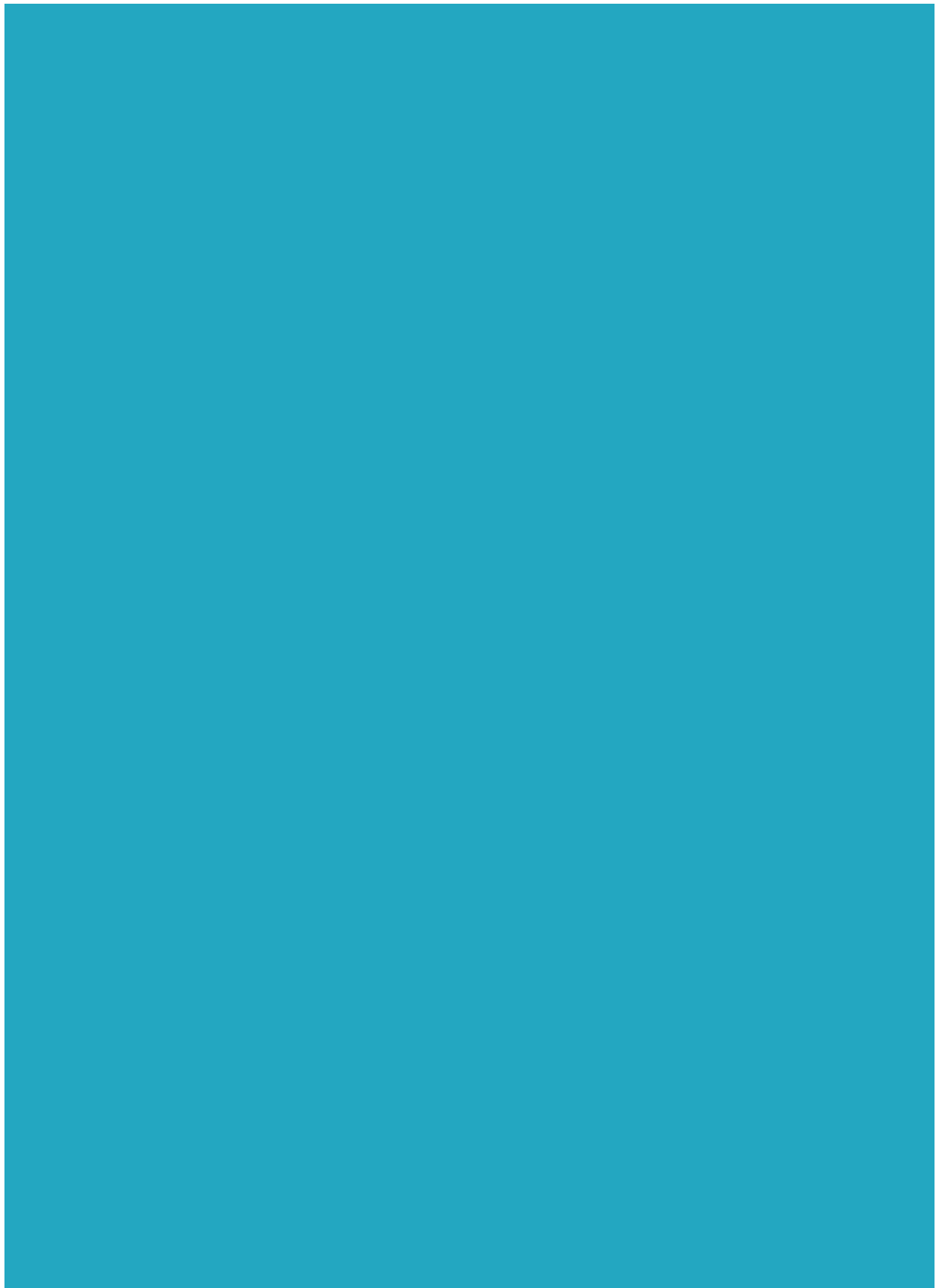


## Lies for Love



the Barbara Cartland Eternal Collection

*[www.barbaracartland.com](http://www.barbaracartland.com)*



## Lies for Love

Destitute after the death of her beloved Papa, Carmela is miserable working as Nanny to the brattish children of the local vicar. So when her closest friend Felicity asks her to take her place in the home of her guardian, the dictatorial Earl of Galeston, she nervously agrees.

The subterfuge is necessary to ensure Felicity can marry the love of her life – and possible firstly because none of Felicity's feuding family have set eyes on her since she was a child... And secondly because both young women are blue-eyed, blonde and beautiful.

The Earl's ancestral home is awe-inspiring – but it is the Earl himself who makes the greatest impression on Carmela. Growing to appreciate the profound kindness behind his steely façade, she falls deeply, utterly in love... But can true love live when it's based on a lie?

The Earl finds the answer in his heart when Carmela's life – and any hope of love – is at stake...

## *Author's Note*

At the beginning of the 19th Century the penalty for robbery of any sort was very severe. A person was hanged for “privately stealing in a shop, warehouse and coachhouse or stable to the amount of five shillings.”

Poaching a hare or a pheasant meant as a merciful sentence, transportation in a convict ship to New South Wales, for seven years.

The prisons were filthy shambles, the police were inadequate, badly organised and poorly paid, which meant they were often corrupt.

A boy arrested for minor pilfering could be sent to prison, flogged, then turned out without a penny in his pocket.

Select Committees set up in 1817 produced numerous petitions to Parliament but the Reform Bill was many frustrating years ahead.

# CHAPTER ONE

“Timothy, stop kicking Lucy and eat up your porridge,” Carmela said.

“I won’t!”

Timothy was a fat, ugly boy nearly seven years of age and in Carmela’s opinion quite uncontrollable.

To prove his defiance he gave his sister Lucy another kick and she started to cry.

“Stop that at once, do you hear?” Carmela said sharply, thinking as she spoke it would have little effect.

She was right.

Timothy picked up his bowl of porridge and deliberately turned it upside-down on the table-cloth.

At the same time the baby in the cot awakened by the noise Lucy was making started to cry too.

Carmela thought helplessly there was really nothing she could do about them.

It was almost to be expected, she thought as she had thought many times since she came to the Vicarage that the Vicar’s children should be the worst behaved and most unmanageable of any in the village.

Because she felt she could do nothing with Timothy, and Lucy would cry whatever happened, she went to the cot to pick up the baby and rock him in her arms.

As she was doing so the door opened and the Vicar’s wife put her head round it to say: “Can’t you keep those children quiet? You know the Vicar’s trying to write his sermon for tomorrow.”

“I am sorry, Mrs. Cooper,” Carmela apologised.

The Vicar’s wife did not wait for her answer, but merely shut the door so sharply that it sounded suspiciously like a slam.

Timothy waited until his mother had gone, then shouted above the noise his sister was making: “I want my egg!”

“You can have it after you have eaten your porridge,” Carmela replied.

She knew as she spoke she was fighting a losing battle.

Sure enough while she was away from the table Timothy seized an egg-cup next to the ones intended for his sister and Carmela, and knocking off the top of the egg, started to eat it eagerly.

Carmela felt despairingly there was nothing she could do with him.

Ever since she had come to the Vicarage to look after the children she had known that however clever she might be, she could not control Timothy.

His parents must have discovered this almost as soon as he was born. They had given in to him on every occasion and allowed him to have his own way with the result that like a cuckoo in the nest he pushed the other children aside, and invariably got what he wanted.

Sometimes when she went to bed at night too tired to sleep, Carmela thought she could not face the years ahead spent in looking after children like Timothy and knowing that she was capable of making little or no impact on them.

After her father died there had been the necessity of finding herself employment of some sort, and when Mrs. Cooper suggested that she came to the Vicarage it had seemed the easy solution to her problem.

At least she told herself she would be staying amongst people she knew and who did not make her afraid.

She faced her position bravely and admitted she was afraid of being alone, afraid of going out into an alien, hostile world, and most of all, afraid of being incompetent.

That her father had always found her very intelligent was quite a different thing from being able to earn money by using her brain.

Her father had tried to do so by selling his pictures which unfortunately had not proved at all saleable.

Just occasionally he received what seemed to Carmela and her mother a large sum for the portrait of some local dignitary, but the pictures he really enjoyed doing were on the whole “too beautiful to be sold”.

That was how her mother had once described them and they had all laughed, but Carmela had known exactly what she meant and why her father’s pictures did not appeal to the ordinary purchaser.

But to her the manner in which he painted the mist rising over the stream at dawn, or a sunset behind the distant hills, was so lovely that she felt



as if when she looked at them they carried her into a mystical world which only she and her father realised existed.

It was the same world she had known as a child when he had told her stories of fairies and goblins, of elves and nymphs, and showed her the mushroom rings in the fields where the 'little people' had danced the night before.

It was a world of wonder and of beauty and to Carmela very real, but it was not really something one could express on canvas. Peregrine Lyndon's beautiful pictures therefore stayed in the art dealer's shop until he sent them back as unsalable.

Her mother had died first and there was very little money coming into the small house where they lived on the edge of the village.

This was because the only way Carmela's father could assuage his grief was by painting the pictures that appealed to him, and he gave up suggesting to the fat Aldermen in the market town five miles away, and the local Squires, that they should have their portraits painted.

Because her father was so handsome and what in the village they called a 'perfect gentleman', it was locally considered a compliment to be painted by him.

Unfortunately however, few people in Huntingdon were willing to pay for such luxuries and Peregrine Lyndon's commissions were few and far between.

The house became filled with the pictures he liked painting, and after her mother's death Carmela would ask her father when the day was over, what work he had done, and find as often as not that because it dissatisfied him he had cleaned it off and started again.

"I always think of your mother," he would say, "when I see the sun rising above the horizon."

In consequence he expected his picture to be perfection and he would paint the same scene over and over again and still not be satisfied with the result.

Only by taking the canvases away from him after two or three attempts could Carmela keep the pictures she liked best from being destroyed. She had to hide them in her bedroom to look at them when she was alone.

When her father died last winter having caught pneumonia through sitting out in the bitter cold and frost to paint the stars, she had discovered as

soon as she could take in what had happened that all she possessed in the world were her father's pictures which nobody wanted and the few pounds which was all she could get by selling the contents of the house.

The house itself was only rented and although what they paid was very little she knew that she could not find even that without earning it.

It was when she was in the depths of despair over losing her father whom she had dearly loved that Mrs. Cooper's suggestion that she might work at the Vicarage had seemed like a glimmer of light in the darkness.

It was only when she had moved into the ugly house and was confronted by the Vicar's extremely plain children that she realised to what misery she had committed herself.

But she could think of nothing else she could do, and at least the Vicarage would provide a roof over her head and food to eat that she did not have to pay for.

With some embarrassment Mrs. Cooper had suggested she should pay her £10 a year for her labours, and as Carmela had no idea if that was generous or not she had accepted the offer thankfully.

Now she thought, as she had a dozen times already, that she would rather starve than go on trying to cope with children whose only response to anything she said was to be rude and obstructive.

Carmela had always thought that anyone with any intelligence should be able to communicate with other human beings however primitive or difficult they might be.

She had often talked with her father of the way missionaries travelled in countries inhabited by savage tribes and somehow gained their confidence even though in many cases they could not speak their language.

"Men and women should be able to communicate with each other in the same way as animals do," Peregrine Lyndon had said.

He therefore believed there must be people somewhere in the world who would understand what he was trying to say on canvas because it was something which came both from his mind and heart.

"I think the truth is that you are in advance of your time, Papa," Carmela told him. "Artists at the moment want to portray exactly what they see. In the past there have been men like Botticelli and Michelangelo who have painted with their imagination, and that is what you are trying to do."

“I am honoured by the company in which you include me,” her father smiled. “But you are right. I want to put down what I think and feel rather than what I actually see with my eyes, and as long as you and I understand why should we worry about anybody else?”

“Why indeed?” Carmela replied.

However, imagination did not pay the butcher, the baker, the grocer, and their landlord would not accept ‘imaginary’ money.

The baby stopped crying to fall asleep and Carmela laid him down very gently in his cot. At the moment he was comparatively good, but already she felt that soon he would grow up to be like his brother and sister.

As she turned towards the table Lucy gave a little scream.

“Timothy’s eating my egg! Stop him, Miss Lyndon. He’s eating my egg!”

It was true, Carmela saw. Timothy, having eaten his own egg had now taken the brown one which was set on one side for Lucy.

This too he was eating as quickly as he could, defying her with his small pig-like eyes to stop him.

“Never mind, Lucy,” Carmela said to the small girl, “you can have my egg.”

“I want mine, it’s brown!” Lucy expostulated fiercely. “I hate Timothy, I hate him! He’s always taking my things!”

Carmela looked at Timothy and thought she hated him too.

In front of him on the table the porridge was oozing out from the bowl which had cracked when he turned it over. The empty egg-shell from the first egg had fallen out of the egg-cup, and the yoke from the second egg was spilling onto the table-cloth because of the haste in which he was eating it.

It was also spattered on his white shirt which Carmela had spent a long time yesterday washing and pressing. She did not say anything, but merely put her egg in front of Lucy, took the top off it, and put a clean spoon in her hand.

“I want a brown egg - a brown one!” Lucy shrieked. “I don’t like white ones!”

“They taste exactly the same inside.” Carmela tried to console her.

“You’re a liar!” Timothy said rudely.

“That’s right! You’re a liar!” Lucy echoed forgetting her anger with her brother and glad to have an ally against a common enemy. “Brown eggs taste different from white ones! I want a brown egg!”

Carmela gave a sigh and sat down at the table.

She filled her cup with the cheap rather unpleasant tasting tea which was all that was provided at the Vicarage, and cut herself a slice of bread from a loaf which had been stale yesterday.

Lucy was still screaming for a brown egg, when suddenly, getting into a worse tantrum than she was in already, she hit the egg in front of her with the back of her hand.

It shot across the table and smashed against the teapot.

The yoke scattered in all directions and Carmela received a large portion of it on her hand.

She opened her lips to reprove Lucy and suddenly thought the whole thing was too much for her.

She felt the tears come into her eyes and as she did so the door behind her opened.

She stiffened expecting to hear Mrs. Cooper's querulous voice demanding that she should keep the children quiet, or else the Vicar shouting at them, which always made things worse.

Then when she was aware that somebody had come into the room but had not spoken, she turned her head.

Then she stared in astonishment.

Standing in the doorway, making the untidy room that was used as a nursery look even more unpleasant than it usually did, was a Vision of Loveliness.

The Vision wore a high-crowned bonnet trimmed with flowers, a high-waisted gown of sprigged muslin trimmed with bows of mauve ribbons, and had a very attractive face with two exceedingly large blue eyes and a red mouth, smiling at her.

"Hello, Carmela!"

"Felicity!"

Carmela jumped up from the table, wiping the egg-yolk from her hand as she did so, to run to the doorway and kiss the girl who had just appeared.

Lady Felicity Gale was her closest friend and except when she was away, staying with friends, they had been inseparable.

"When did you get back?" Carmela asked. "I have been – longing to – see you."

Her words seemed to fall over themselves and Lady Felicity kissed her affectionately as she replied: "I got back only last night. I could not believe it

when I was told you had come to the Vicarage!”

“There was nowhere else I could go, after Papa died.”

“I had no idea he was dead. Oh, Carmela, I am sorry!”

Carmela did not speak, but she could not help the tears coming into her eyes.

She could be brave until anybody spoke of her father, but then however hard she tried, it was impossible not to realise how terribly she missed him.

“Now I am back,” Lady Felicity said, “and I want you. I want you at once, Carmela!”

“I – I am working – here.”

Lady Felicity looked at the table and the children who were gaping open-mouthed at her appearance.

“I have something better for you to do than look after these little horrors!” she said. “I remember Timothy. He is the one who was always spitting and making faces in Church when his father was not looking,”

Carmela laughed. She could not help it.

“Who are you?” Lucy asked, resenting that she was no longer the centre of attention.

“Somebody who is going to take this nice, kind Miss Lyndon away from you,” Lady Felicity replied, “and I hope perhaps your father will find somebody horrid to take her place and give you the beating you all deserve!”

She did not sound very ferocious because she was laughing as she spoke. Then taking Carmela by the hand she said: “Get your things. I have a carriage waiting outside.”

“But I cannot – leave just like – that,” Carmela protested.

“Yes, you can,” Felicity replied, “and while you are packing I will explain to Mrs. Cooper that I need you, and it is absolutely essential that you come with me at once.”

“She will be furious!” Carmela said, “and she will never employ me again.”

“She is not going to have the chance to do so,” Felicity stated. “I will explain everything when we get away from here.”

She looked round the room and added: “Hurry, Carmela, I cannot bear to be in such a sordid place longer than a few minutes. I cannot think how you have endured it.”

“It has been rather horrid,” Carmela admitted, “but Felicity, I must give my notice in the proper way.”

“Leave everything to me,” Felicity replied. “Just do as I tell you.”

“I – I do not think I – should.”

Even as she spoke Felicity gave her a little push with her kid-gloved hands.

“I need you, I need you desperately, Carmela, and you cannot refuse me.”

“I suppose not,” Carmela said doubtfully, “and you know I want to come with you, Felicity.”

“Then pack your clothes - no, never mind - you will not need them. I have masses of things for you at the Castle.”

Carmela looked at her a little bewildered as she went on: “Just do as I say. Bring only the things you treasure. I expect that includes your father’s pictures.”

“They are downstairs in an outhouse. There was no room for them here.”

“I will tell the footman to collect them,” Felicity said, “and then to come upstairs for your trunk. I will go and talk to Mrs. Cooper.”

Before Carmela could say any more she turned and left the room.

The children stared after her until Lucy asked: “Are you going away with that lady?”

“Mama won’t let you go,” Timothy said before Carmela could reply.

It was as if his rude, oafish voice made up her mind for her.

“Yes, I *am* going away,” she said, and ran into the small room next door.

Because there was nowhere else to put her clothes except a small rickety chest-of-drawers which she shared with Lucy, most of her things had been left packed in her trunk.

She hurriedly packed what she had been using, put the dressing-table set that had been her mother’s on top, added a shawl that was on the bed because there were so few blankets, and did up the strap of her trunk.

As she was doing so a footman appeared in the doorway resplendent in the Gale livery with its crested silver buttons and carrying his cockaded top-hat in his hand.

“Morning, Miss Carmela,” he said with a grin.

“Good-morning, Ben.”

“Her Ladyship says I were to fetch yer trunk.”

“It is there,” Carmela said pointing to where it stood. “Can you manage it alone?”

“Course I can!” Ben replied.

He put his hat on his head and picked up the trunk and carried it easily across the nursery.

The children were still sitting at the table watching what was occurring in astonishment.

As Carmela came from the bedroom wearing the cloak that had belonged to her mother and a plain chip bonnet trimmed with black ribbons, she thought that compared to Felicity she must look like a hedge-sparrow beside a bird of paradise.

At the same time she felt nervous as to what Mrs. Cooper would say.

As she went down the stairs she was aware that the Vicar’s wife would have every right to be annoyed and insulted by her precipitate departure.

Carmela had always done whatever Felicity wanted, and although she was in fact only a few months younger in age her friend seemed at times almost to belong to a different generation.

She had always been the ring-leader in all their activities, and she was also very self-assured having travelled and met people of importance. She was, Carmela had often said with a smile, in consequence grown up before she was a child.

As Carmela reached the small dark hall, she was aware that Felicity was in the sitting room talking to Mrs. Cooper.

With her heart beating apprehensively, Carmela walked into the room half-expecting to receive a torrent of abuse in the querulous voice that Mrs. Cooper could use most effectively when anything annoyed her.

Instead to her surprise the Vicar’s wife was smiling.

“Well, you’re a lucky girl and no mistake!” she said before Carmela could speak. “Her Ladyship’s just been telling me she’s plans for you which’ll be very much to your advantage.”

“Mrs. Cooper is being so sweet and understanding in saying that she will not stand in your way,” Felicity said. Carmela had only to look at her friend to know that her eyes were twinkling, and she was speaking in the soft dulcet tones she used when she was manipulating someone to her own ends.

“It – it is very – kind of you,” Carmela managed to stammer.

"I'll miss you - I don't pretend I shan't," Mrs. Cooper replied. "But her Ladyship has promised to send me one of the young girls from the kitchen of the Castle to straighten things out, and that'll be a help, it will indeed!"

"I will send her as soon as I get back," Felicity said, "and thank you once again, dear Mrs. Cooper, for being so kind. Please remember me to the Vicar. As I will not be able to attend Church this Sunday because Carmela and I are going away, perhaps you will be kind enough to place my small offering in the plate?"

As Felicity spoke she opened a pretty satin reticule that she carried over her arm and took out a little mesh purse from which she counted out five golden guineas into Mrs. Cooper's outstretched hand.

"That is really very kind of you," Mrs. Cooper said in gratified tones. "Very, very kind!"

She transferred the coins into her other hand so that she could say goodbye to Carmela.

Then with Felicity moving ahead like a ship in full sail and Carmela following almost as if she was mesmerised, they stepped into the carriage while Mrs. Cooper waved at the doorway as they drove off.

Only as the horses turned out through the narrow gate onto the roadway did Carmela say: "Have you really - rescued me?"

"You certainly look as if you are in need of it," Felicity answered. "Dearest Carmela, how can all this have happened to you in such a short time?"

"Papa died at the end of January," Carmela replied, "and I could not write to tell you as I had no idea where you were."

"I was in France staying first with one of Grandmama's friends, then another," Felicity replied, "so even if you had written to me, I doubt if the letter would have found me."

"You must miss her very, very much."

Felicity's grandmother with whom she had lived ever since she was a child had been the Dowager Countess of Galeston.

She had been a rather awe-inspiring lady of whom the village had been very much in awe, but she had liked Carmela's mother and father, and even encouraged the latter in his painting by buying several of his pictures.

Because there were few children of Felicity's age in the neighbourhood who her grandmother would allow her to know, Carmela was encouraged to



visit the Castle, and when the two girls became inseparable it was obviously with the Countess's approval.

It was only as Felicity grew older that she went away often to stay with the Countess's friends even though her grandmother was not well enough to accompany her.

This meant that Felicity's knowledge of the world was very different from that of Carmela's.

At the same time, as soon as she came home their friendship continued as before, and Carmela was content to be Felicity's confidante, listening to her adventures not with envy but with admiration.

"I was a success! A great success!" Felicity would boast after some interesting visit, and Carmela was only too ready to believe her.

It was just like old times, Carmela thought now, with Felicity telling her what to do and she being only too delighted and happy to oblige.

"What are your plans?" she asked as the carriage rolled on.

The horse turned through the imposing iron-work gates with their attractive stone lodges on either side which was the entrance to the mile-long drive to the Castle.

"That is what I am going to tell you," Felicity said, "and it is also why I need your help."

"My help?" Carmela asked.

Felicity turned towards her and said in a tone of voice very different from the one she had used before: "You will help me, Carmela? Promise that you will help me!"

"Of course I will, dearest," Carmela replied. "You know I will do anything you want me to."

"That is what I knew you would say," Felicity said. "What I am going to ask may seem a little strange, but I knew when I came to find you that you would never fail me."

"Why should I?" Carmela asked in a puzzled tone. "You have always been so very, very sweet to me."

She waited, wondering why her friend was looking so serious and she knew without words that she was going to ask her something unusual and perhaps difficult.

Felicity was looking ahead to where the Castle stood on a high piece of ground, its towers silhouetted against the sky.

It was built on an ancient site but it was in fact quite a modern Castle, and the Countess had bought it from its previous owner when she was looking for somewhere to live after she had shaken the dust of Galeston from her feet.

Carmela had heard the story often enough.

The Countess, who had been a great beauty and a social personality of her time, had some time after her son inherited quarrelled with him and the rest of the family and finally decided she would have nothing further to do with them.

Although she had always been a very dominating person and determined to have her own way in everything, they had not at first believed her.

But after a series of bitter and prolonged arguments, and letters that sped backwards and forward between the Countess and the rest of the Gale family she finally left the Dower House into which she had moved after her son had inherited.

Taking everything she possessed with her the Countess told the Gales once and for all that she had no wish to see any of them again.

They found it hard to believe, especially as she had taken her son's young daughter with her.

This in fact, had been one of the bones of contention between them because Felicity's mother had died when she was born and the Countess had disapproved of the way in which she was being brought up.

Her son was more interested in his son and had allowed his mother to have the upbringing of Felicity thinking that the child might in fact sooner or later, heal the breach, between them.

The Countess however had moved to another part of England altogether and had no intention of being conciliatory.

As her son was nearly as obstinate as she was, the feud grew and grew until there ceased to be any communication between them.

Then the Countess had died and when Felicity went to France to stay with some of her grandmother's friends, Carmela had wondered if she would turn towards the family she did not know.

This might be impossible, but it would obviously not be correct for her to live at the Castle alone without a Chaperone.

"We are going home," Felicity was saying, "and I will tell you the whole story as soon as we can be alone."

“You are making me very curious,” Carmela said. “Is there anybody staying at the Castle?”

“No, not at the moment.”

The way Felicity spoke also sounded not quite natural and Carmela could not help wondering what she had in store to tell her and how it concerned her personally.

At the same time she was very thankful to leave the Vicarage.

She had always been deeply affected by her surroundings, and the ugliness of the Vicarage itself, the plainness of the children, and of their parents also had been very hard to bear.

She had found it difficult to like either the Vicar or his wife, but though she knew she should be grateful to them, they were just not very pleasant people.

The Vicar particularly seemed to be lacking in Christian charity, and Mrs. Cooper was just a tiresome neurotic woman who had too much to do and was not really fond of her children in spite of the fact that she had given them birth.

They were also comparative newcomers to the village, having lived there for only six years while the previous Vicar had died after being the incumbent for over forty.

It was a joy for Carmela as she walked into the Castle to see again the perfect taste with which everything was arranged.

It was not only that the curtains were made of an expensive brocade but they were exactly the right colour, just as the wall-coverings were restful and the pictures on them were a joy to look at.

There were also flowers arranged in large cut-glass vases that scented the atmosphere, and servants in smart uniforms smiling a welcome because they knew Carmela well and made her feel that, like Felicity, she had come home.

Felicity handing her cloak to a footman and pulling off her bonnet led the way into an attractive sitting room that the two girls had always thought of as their own.

It had been furnished by the Countess with blue covers for the sofas and chairs which matched Felicity's eyes, and the pictures were in the Fragonard-style depicting ladies with the same elegance, Carmela thought, as Felicity herself.

“Is there any refreshment you’d like M’Lady?” the Butler asked from the door.

Felicity looked at Carmela who shook her head. “No, thank you, Bates.”

The Butler closed the door and they were alone.

“You are sure you are not hungry?” Felicity asked.

“You could not have eaten that filthy breakfast!”

“The very thought of it made me feel sick!” Carmela answered. “Oh, Felicity, I am hopeless at looking after children. At least - those children!”

“I am not surprised,” Felicity answered, “and how could you do anything so stupid as to think that was where you would be happy?”

“What else could I do?” Carmela asked.

“You should have known I would have wanted you to come here,” Felicity replied, “and do not pretend you were too proud, because I will not listen to you!”

They both laughed because it was an old joke about people being proud.

“When people talk about charity they always mean giving money,” the Countess had said once. “But it is much more difficult and far more charitable to give one’s self to people.”

The two girls had thought this an amusing idea and Felicity would go back to the Castle to say to her grandmother: “I have been very charitable this afternoon, Grandmama. I talked for over ten minutes to that terrible old bore, Miss Dobson, and I feel sure now I have moved up several places on the ladder to Heaven!”

“I am proud,” Carmela said now, “but if you are thinking of being charitable to me I am only too willing to accept.”

“That is exactly what I want to do,” Felicity said, “so now, dearest, listen to me.”

“I am listening,” Carmela answered, “and I have a strong feeling you are up to some mischief of some sort.”

“I suppose that is what you might call it,” Felicity agreed. “As it happens, I am going to be married!”

Carmela sat upright.

“Married? Oh, Felicity, how exciting! But – to whom?”

“To Jimmy - who else?”

Carmela was very still.

“Jimmy Salwick? But Felicity, I did not know that his wife had died.”

“She has not!”

Carmela looked at her friend wide-eyed. “I – I do not – understand.”

“She is dying, but she is not yet dead, and I am going away with Jimmy to France to stay there until we can be married.”

There was silence. Then Carmela said: “But, Felicity, you cannot do such a – thing! Think of your – reputation!”

“There are no arguments,” Felicity said in a low voice. “This is something I must do and Carmela, you have to help me!”

Carmela looked worried.

She had known for over a year that Felicity was in love with Lord Salwick who was a near neighbour.

He was an attractive, very charming young man who had inherited a large but dilapidated ancestral home and an impoverished estate with no money to restore it.

Because Felicity had always known she would come into some money on her grandmother’s death, they had been prepared to wait. She knew that if they approached the Countess she would make a great many difficulties because even if he were free she did not consider James Salwick, charming though he was, good enough for her granddaughter.

The Countess had always moved in the very highest of society, and had been when she was young, a Lady of the Bed-Chamber to the Queen.

She had therefore set her heart on Felicity marrying one of the great noblemen who graced the Court and had compiled a list of the most eligible Dukes and Marquises whom she considered acceptable as her granddaughter’s husband.

“It is no use arguing with Grandmama about Jimmy,” Felicity had said often enough to Carmela. “You know how determined she is when she makes up her mind, and if I insist that I will marry no one else, she will just make it impossible for us to see each other.”

“I can understand that,” Carmela replied, “but what will happen when she produces a man she considers an ideal husband for you?”

Fortunately that situation had not arisen because the Countess became too ill and Felicity therefore was sent away to stay with her relatives, a number of whom, because the Countess had French blood in her, lived in France.

As soon as the war was over and France began to settle down again Felicity was sent to stay in a huge Chateau on the *Loire* with aristocrats who in some miraculous manner had survived not only the Revolution, but the social changes effected by Napoleon Bonaparte.

But the Countess's connections were not only French. Felicity had travelled to Northumberland to stay with the Duke, to Cornwall, to visit some of the ancient Cornish families who had eligible sons, and even once she went as far north as Edinburgh.

Although she always returned with stories of the people she had met and the men who had made love to her, when she was alone with Carmela she admitted that the only man who really meant anything to her was Jimmy Salwick.

When he was very young his parents had arranged his marriage to a wife who gradually became more and more mentally deranged until finally she was placed in a private asylum.

It was a cruel fate for the young man because there was no way he could ever be rid of his wife except by her death, and he was tied to a woman he never saw.

It was inevitable that he should lose his heart to what was to all intents and purposes the girl next door.

It was not surprising that he loved Felicity because, as Carmela saw when they were together, love made her glow with a radiance that any man with eyes in his head would have found irresistible.

At the same time for Felicity to go away with him was to Carmela inconceivable.

"What I do not understand, dearest," she said now, "is why you cannot wait. If Jimmy's wife is dying, then surely as you have waited so long already, another few months or perhaps even a year would not matter?"

As she spoke she thought it would matter even less now that Felicity did not have her grandmother trying to force her to marry somebody else.

"I thought that was what you would say," Felicity replied, "but it is far more complicated than that."

"Why?"

"Because I have only just learned when I returned to London from France that Grandmama has left me a huge fortune."

“A huge fortune?” Carmela repeated.

“It is enormous, really enormous!” Felicity said. “I never had the slightest idea that she had so much.”

Carmela did not speak and after a moment Felicity went on: “As you know, she quarrelled with Papa and all my other relatives. She said they were always battenning on her, always expecting her to pay for everything, and it annoyed her.”

“I always thought that living here she must be rich,” Carmela said slowly.

“Yes, of course, rich by ordinary standards,” Felicity agreed, “but not having a fortune that is so large that I cannot believe it! She kept it a secret.”

“I suppose she did not wish your father to know about it.”

“I realise that now,” Felicity said, “but already it has begun to complicate things.”

“Why?”

“Because as soon as the Solicitor came to see me,” Felicity answered, “and he had been waiting for me to arrive back from France, I left London immediately and came here.”

Carmela looked puzzled, and Felicity went on: “I knew that I must go away with Jimmy before he heard of my fortune, and before the Gales tried to get their hands on it.”

Carmela looked bewildered. “I – do not understand.”

“It is quite simple,” Felicity said. “First of all, if Jimmy knows how rich I am, he will not marry me.”

“Why should you say that?” Carmela asked.

“Because he would be too proud,” Felicity said, “and he will think that everybody will call him a fortune-hunter. In consequence he will leave me and it will break my heart!”

The way Felicity spoke was very positive and Carmela could not help agreeing her reasoning was right.

James Salwick was a proud man. He disliked the fact he could not repair his house or run his estate the way he wished to do.

He was also in some ways almost ultra-sensitive about the tragedy of his wife, and Carmela was aware that he had at first fought against his feelings for Felicity because he had nothing to offer her.

It was Felicity who had fallen in love with him when they met out hunting and had done all the running.

Carmela knew how many excuses she had made to meet him when he was not expecting it, she had called at his house and had inveigled him under one pretext or another to come to the Castle.

When finally his feelings had been too much for him and he had confessed his love, Felicity had been frantic that she might lose him.

“He loves me, he loves me!” she had said to Carmela, “but he says he will never stand in my way, and if I want to marry somebody else, he will just disappear and I will never see him again!”

She gave a little cry of terror as she added: “How can I lose him? Oh, Carmela, I cannot lose him!”

Carmela thinking over what Felicity had said understood now the danger if James Salwick knew how rich she was. Aloud she asked: “Will he go away with you?”

“He will when he hears what next has happened.”

“What is that?”

“I came back here from London the very moment I heard what the Solicitor had to tell me. And what do you think I found?”

“What?”

“A letter waiting here from Cousin Selwyn, the new Earl of Galeston.”

“Why should he write to you?”

She knew that since Felicity’s brother, who had been the pride and joy of her father, had been killed just before Waterloo, the Earl when he died of a broken heart a year ago had no direct heir to follow him.

This meant that the title had gone to the son of his brother, who had married when he was very young. The present Earl of Galeston therefore, Felicity’s first cousin, was a considerably older man who had been a soldier without any prospects of inheriting the Earldom.

Carmela remembered hearing all this vaguely but had not been particularly interested because Felicity knew very little about her relatives, having never met them.

She had even learned of her father’s death only through the reports in the newspapers.

“Why should I care!” she asked when Carmela pointed out the Obituary to her.

“Grandmama hated him, and she told me often enough how much my father disliked me because I caused my mother’s death when I was born.”



“It seems wrong somehow not to like your relations,” Carmela said.

“Nanny always said that you choose your friends, but your relatives are wished onto you,” Felicity retorted.

Then Carmela thought it was obvious, since Felicity was now alone in the world, that her relatives would be interested in her, although it seemed rather late after there had been no communication from them since she was five.

“What did the new Earl have to say to you?” she asked.

Felicity’s lips tightened and in a hard voice she said: “He informed me that as Grandmama was dead he was now my guardian, and he ordered me, as if I was one of his troopers, to come to Galeston immediately as he had plans for my future.”

Carmela gasped.

“I cannot believe he wrote like that!”

“He did! You shall see the letter, and if he thinks I am going to obey him, he is very much mistaken.”

“But – if he is your guardian –?”

“He is asserting himself as my guardian now, only because he has heard about the money Grandmama left me,” Felicity interrupted. “I am not a fool. If it had been just a small amount on which I could live without any fuss, Cousin Selwyn would not have bothered about me, or been interested as to whether I lived or died. But now I am an heiress, it is a very different thing!”

“How can you be sure he is like that?” Carmela asked.

She hated the hard note in Felicity’s voice and the hard expression that was in her eyes.

It somehow spoiled her beauty and she loved her too much to wish her ever to be bitter or cynical.

“Grandmama said they were a ‘money-grubbing’ lot, and she was right!” Felicity said. “I am quite certain that now he has heard of the millions I own, Cousin Selwyn wants to get his grubby hands on it!”

“Oh, Felicity, that is going too far!” Carmela protested.

“Why are you sticking up for him?” Felicity asked. “Papa died a full ten months ago, but only now, after Grandmama’s death, is the new Earl ordering me to come to Galeston. I would rather die!”

“You do not mean that!” Felicity suddenly laughed.

“No, I do not mean it. I am going to live and marry Jimmy quickly, before he learns how rich I am. Once we are married there will be nothing that either he or the Earl can do about it!”

“That is true enough,” Carmela agreed. “But you cannot marry Jimmy until – his wife is – dead.”

“She is dying! I told you that! Jimmy had a letter from the Surgeon who is looking after her, saying that she has a brain tumour. I have asked a number of people about it and a person with a brain tumour never lives very long.”

“I cannot pretend I am sorry,” Carmela said, “but at the same time, please wait, Felicity. Please wait before you do anything – foolish.”

“I am not taking any risks on that score!”

“But supposing the Earl finds you wherever you hide, and brings you back?”

“That is the threat which I am going to use to Jimmy to make him take me away,” Felicity said. “I shall show him Cousin Selwyn’s letter, and he will know he means business.”

She paused before she continued: “He will guess there is an ulterior motive in his interest, but I shall not let him think it is money, but only that I am a Gale and therefore come under his jurisdiction because I am young, and of course, - attractive!”

“Do you think Jimmy will believe you?”

“He will believe it because he will want to, and you know as well as I do, Carmela, that he really loves me.”

Felicity’s voice softened and Carmela said quickly: “Yes, darling, I know he does, and you love him. At the same time, it is – wrong for you to be – together unless you are – man and wife.”

Carmela as she spoke thought it was very shocking indeed, but she did not want to upset Felicity by saying so.

However Felicity saw the expression on her face and gave a little laugh.

“I can see what you are thinking, Carmela. At the same time I do not think you need worry about me. Jimmy himself is so protective I am quite certain he will not do anything you think wrong until I am really his wife.”

Her chin quivered as she went on: “At the same time if there is a question of Cousin Selwyn trying to annul the marriage because I am under age, I shall make quite certain that I am having a baby!”

Carmela gave a cry of protest, but Felicity put out her hand to take hers.

“Please dearest, I know what I am doing. Jimmy is everything that matters to me and my whole happiness rests on our being together. That is why you have to help me.

“I – cannot see what I – can do,” Carmela said.

“It is quite simple,” Felicity answered. “You will go to Galeston in my place, and stay there until I am married to Jimmy!”

## CHAPTER TWO

“I cannot do it – it is impossible!” Carmela said over and over again.

But she knew her voice was beginning to weaken as she felt she would not be able to resist Felicity much longer. It had always been the same ever since they were children.

When Felicity made up her mind to do something she was so determined and so plausible that it was impossible to say ‘no’.

“Of course they will know I am not you,” Carmela protested.

“Why should they?” Felicity asked. “None of my relatives have seen me since I was five, and until now, as you well know, they have not been interested in me.”

She paused before she said bitterly:

“There was not a single letter from any of my cousins my great-aunts or other relatives asking me to live with them after Grandmama died until this one from Cousin Selwyn!”

She went on in a contemptuous tone: “He is quite obviously only interested in my fortune. In fact, my Solicitor told me that he was the only person who knew about it!”

“How was your grandmother able to keep such a momentous secret from everybody?” Carmela asked.

“Apparently a great deal of her money is invested in Jamaica and has multiplied enormously in the last few years because of the demand for sugar. The Solicitor told me her investments in England also have been very productive. They must have been, seeing the amount she has left me.”

Carmela did not speak and after a moment Felicity sighed.

“This is a great responsibility and not really a blessing. I know that Jimmy will dislike my being so rich, and I shall never know whether people like me for myself or for what I possess.”

“People will always love you because you are you,” Carmela said impulsively, and Felicity smiled.

“That is what I want to hear,” she said, “and I do not wish to become like Grandmama who hated all the Gales because she felt they were after her money.”

“Please do not let it spoil you,” Carmela pleaded, “and I do understand how worrying it into have so much and to have to hide it from Jimmy.”

“If you understand that you will help me,” Felicity said quickly.

“But no one will believe I am you,” Carmela protested again.

“Why not?” Felicity enquired. “You are just as pretty as I am, and when you are dressed in my clothes we will not look unlike, in fact we might even be sisters.”

There was some truth in this, for both girls were fair, both had blue eyes and both had perfect pink-and-white complexions which were the admiration of the men and the envy of the women.

But while Felicity had a sophisticated elegance, Carmela looked like a simple country girl and lacked the polish which clothes and self-assurance could give.

Felicity looked at Carmela now with a critical eye, then rose to her feet and took her by the hand.

“Come with me,” she said, “we are going upstairs.” “What for?” Carmela asked.

“You are going to be made to look exactly like me,” Felicity replied. “We will start by arranging your hair in a fashionable style, and I have already decided that you shall have all the gowns I have been wearing since Grandmama died.”

Carmela thought that would be very appropriate because she was aware that Felicity was wearing mauve as half-mourning.

She herself had not been able to afford any new gowns after her father’s death, in fact all she could do was to change the ribbons on her bonnet and wear a black sash.

She was acutely conscious as she walked beside Felicity of how threadbare was the gown she was wearing.

Also as she had not changed before she left the Vicarage there were not only some dirty marks on her skirt but there were also a few spots of egg which Lucy had splattered over her.

They went up the broad staircase to the beautiful bedroom where Felicity had always slept.

There were several trunks on the floor, but they were not yet unpacked and there was no maid in the room.

“As I am going away tomorrow,” Felicity explained before Carmela could question her, “I told them to unpack nothing. But these are the trunks you will be taking with you, and they contain all my latest clothes which are either black or mauve.”

“What are you going to wear?” Carmela asked with a little smile.

“I am going to make Jimmy take me to Paris and fit me out with an entire new wardrobe.”

“Paris? Is that wise?”

“As it happens, Grandmama’s French friends all live in other parts of France, so I am not likely to meet them. If I do, I shall just introduce Jimmy as my husband, and there is no reason why they should question it.”

“You seem very sure that Jimmy will agree to this fantastic plan of yours.”

As Carmela spoke she saw the expression of anxiety in Felicity’s eyes before she replied: “If Jimmy loves me as I know he does, he will not want me to go to Galeston to be pressurised into marriage with somebody chosen for me by Cousin Selwyn.”

“Do you really think that is what he intends?”

“I am sure of it!” Felicity said. “And I do not mind betting it is a relation of some sort so that they can keep the money in the family.”

Carmela did not argue, as she felt there was nothing she could say.

At the same time she could not believe that the Gales were quite as unpleasant as Felicity made them out to be.

Yet she was well aware that a guardian, like a parent, had complete control over a young girl until she was twenty-one.

If the present Earl wished Felicity to marry, then he could arrange it and there was nothing whatever she could do to prevent herself being taken up the aisle and married off to some man she did not love.

Because her own parents had been so happy Carmela had always assumed that she and Felicity would someday be happy in the same way, and there was no doubt that Jimmy was the only man for Felicity.

“I still think what you are doing is – wrong,” she said in a low voice, but even as she spoke she was aware that Felicity was not listening to her.

She had thrown open the lid of the trunk which had already been unstrapped and unlocked.