

The background of the entire page is a photograph of a misty, mountainous landscape. In the foreground, a dark, winding stream flows through a field of dry, brownish grass. In the middle ground, a small, white, two-story house with a dark roof and a small steeple sits atop a grassy hill. The background features rolling hills and mountains shrouded in a thick, white mist or fog, creating a sense of depth and mystery. The overall color palette is muted, with greys, browns, and soft whites.

Annie Haynes

**THE
SECRET
OF
GREYLANDS**

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The Secret of Greylands

e-artnow, 2022

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Chapter I

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“Glastwick? Next stopping-place, miss! We ought to be there in twenty minutes.”

Cynthia Letchingham shivered as she sat back in the corner of her third-class railway carriage. She felt a sudden shrinking from the end of this journey of hers. After all, she wondered if she had made a mistake in coming? Then, for the hundredth time, she told herself that she could have done nothing else. But, as she mechanically watched the dreary northern country through which they were passing, her eyes filled with tears—she felt so young, so friendless, so alone. At last she took a letter from her hand-bag. The envelope was soiled and creased as if with much carrying about, and was addressed to Miss Cynthia Densham, in an old woman’s shaking writing.

The mist before Cynthia’s eyes thickened as she looked at it. Alas, she who had been yesterday morning Cynthia Densham was now Cynthia Letchingham, a woman flying from the man she dreaded most on earth—her husband!

She drew out the letter from its envelope and glanced over it once more:

GREYLANDS

GLASTWICK

NORTHUMBERLAND.

DEAR CYNTHIA,

I expect you have forgotten me. It is many years since we met, but I know you have heard your father speak of his

Cousin Hannah, and I could not let this momentous occasion in your life pass without a word from me. In a very few days you will receive my wedding gift. It is one that perhaps you will think little enough of now, but at any rate it will give you what I myself prize above all things, a certain independence of your husband—a refuge to which you can turn in time of trouble. I can assure you...

Here the letter broke off abruptly and began lower down the page in a strangely different strain.

Oh, Cynthia, come to me! If you can only spare a day or two from your preparations for your wedding, come. I have tried to bear it in silence to the end, but I am old and weak and frightened — so frightened! For your father's sake, come and help me, Cynthia.

Your cousin,
HANNAH GILLMAN.

Cynthia read it over again; she felt the same thrill of amazement as when she first saw this extraordinary epistle. What could be wrong with her cousin, Lady Hannah Gillman?

At any rate, Lady Hannah lived in a country-house far away from London; she had begged Cynthia to come to her, and to the best of the girl's belief her husband had never heard of the old lady. Greylands seemed to Cynthia the only refuge to which she could go in her present sore straits.

She slipped the letter back into its envelope and opened her bag to put it away. As she did so, she caught sight of another letter folded away in the corner—a letter, the very look of which drove the blood from her cheeks and moistened her forehead with sickly fear. And yet it did not

look such a terrifying affair—just a very short note, undated, with no address. It began abruptly:

I have seen the announcement of your approaching marriage to Lord Letchingham; I must make one effort to save you from such certain unhappiness. Lord Letchingham is the man whose name I refused to give your mother—the man who deceived me by a false marriage and left me to a life of shame and misery. Now that you know the truth you must do as you think fit. Only for the value of the love we bore one another in the old days have I broken the silence I had hoped to maintain to the end.

Your heart-broken friend,
ALICE WINTHROP.

If it had only reached its destination two hours earlier! But already Cynthia Densham was Lady Letchingham when she received it.

And then she had not taken it on trust. She had taxed her newly-made husband with being Alice Winthrop's betrayer. The very memory of the scene that followed was terrible and, seizing her first chance of escape, she had fled from her husband and, remembering her Cousin Hannah's letter, had determined to appeal to her for refuge. But now that the actual moment was at hand she was beginning to feel nervous, and to wonder uncertainly what kind of a reception her Cousin Hannah would give her. Quite possibly she thought, she might have changed her mind about wishing to see her; in any case, she would certainly not expect to see her now, and she asked herself for the hundredth time whether she had done wisely in coming to Greylands for refuge.

She knew but little of her Cousin Hannah, as she had been taught to call her. That Lady Hannah Gillman, the daughter of an impoverished Irish peer, was her father's cousin Cynthia knew; and she had sometimes fancied that in their youth there had been some closer and warmer tie. The girl remembered still how, when she was a child, on one of her rare visits her Cousin Hannah had been left alone with her, and she had never forgotten how she had been caught up and the passionate kisses mingled with bitter tears that had been pressed upon her cheeks.

After her father's death, however, the acquaintance had ceased; without the matter being put into so many words, Cynthia had gathered that her mother did not care for Hannah Hammond, as Lady Hannah was then. For many years, on her birthday, an expensive present had come for Cynthia from her father's cousin, with a few brief lines expressing the donor's best wishes for the occasion; that and Cynthia's letter of thanks had been the only communication between them.

Through a mutual relative, however, Mrs Densham and her daughter had heard that a large fortune had been left to Lady Hannah, and that she had virtually adopted the orphan son of her only sister, who had married a Scotch baronet and died fifteen years afterward, predeceasing her husband, and leaving this one child, in regard to whom Lady Hannah now took his mother's place.

Then, quite casually, just before Mrs Densham's death, Cynthia had heard that there had been a quarrel, that young Sir Donald Farquhar had gone to seek his fortune ranching in British Columbia, and that Lady Hannah was left alone. She would have had no difficulty in obtaining another heir among her numerous connections; and her relatives were still speculating as to upon whom her choice would fall when

they were thunderstruck to receive the announcement of her marriage with a man considerably younger than herself, whom she had met while staying in a *pension* at Brussels. She had not suffered any hint of her intention to get abroad until the wedding was an accomplished fact, and indignation and remonstrance were alike useless.

That such of her relatives as had met her husband since their marriage had disliked him intensely, and had barely troubled to conceal their opinion that he was a fortune-hunter, apparently worried Lady Hannah but little. She and her husband continued to live abroad for some time; then there had been rumors that they intended to take a country-house in England. But Cynthia, absorbed at first in grief for her mother's death, and later on in preparations for her wedding, had heard nothing more of them until the delayed letter which had reached her on her wedding morning.

She opened her little bag, and, taking out Lady Hannah's letter, perused it once more. The extraordinary way in which it stopped short in the middle and the blotted hurried appeal at the end, with the curious contrast between the two styles, struck her more than ever. That the marriage with Gillman had turned out a failure she was quite ready to believe; but there was a tone of fear, of helplessness, about the conclusion which seemed strangely at variance with what Cynthia had previously heard of her cousin's resolution and self-reliance. However, no fresh light was to be gained by re-reading the letter, and, with a puzzled sigh, she crammed it in her pocket just as the train began to slow down for Glastwick.

Cynthia opened the window and put her head out. The station was the veriest little shanty; it looked extremely dreary and desolate in the twilight. Though rain was not falling now, it had evidently been pouring quite recently—

the eaves were dripping and pools of water were lying on the platform outside the scanty shelter.

Cynthia reached down her bag and got out. The porter, the only one apparently that the station boasted, was busied with the luggage at the farther end of the platform; her trunk, already out, stood in conspicuous loneliness.

Cynthia went up to it; she waited until the many milk-cans had been safely put in and a mountain of empties had been deposited on the platform, then she addressed the porter.

"I want to go to Greylands. Can you tell me how far it is and the best way to get there?"

The man turned a red, bucolic face and gaped at her without replying.

"Can't you tell me?" Cynthia repeated impatiently. "Greylands? Mr Gillman lives there."

The man scratched his head.

"Can't say as ever I heard of it, miss," he said, the broad northern burr very apparent in his speech.

Cynthia looked at him in amazement.

"This is Glastwick, is it not?"

"Ay, this is Glastwick, sure enough; but I know nowt of the other place," the man said, beginning to move off.

"What am I to do?" Cynthia questioned, following him despairingly.

The porter eyed her stolidly.

"Mr King may have heard of it maybe," he said, with a jerk of his head in the direction of the little booking-office.

With a feeling of relief Cynthia turned towards it quickly. Two men were standing just inside.

"Can you tell me the way to Greylands, please?" she began abruptly. As she spoke, the taller of the two men moved aside and apparently occupied himself in studying

the outside of a large crate of crockery that stood near; the other, a dapper-looking, sandy-haired man, in the uniform of the company, came forward to meet her.

"Greylands, miss? You mean Mr Gillman's place, I suppose. It is a matter of six or seven miles off—over Grimston way."

"Six or seven miles away?" Cynthia's heart sank. "So far?" she said blankly. "I had no idea of that. How can I get there? Is there a taxi?"

"I am afraid there is nothing of that kind to be got here," the station-master said, pursing up his lips. "You would have done better to drive from the junction."

"How was I to know that?" Cynthia said helplessly. "Lady Hannah Gillman's letter was dated from 'Greylands, Glastwick.'"

"Ah, that is right enough for the post," the man agreed. "But this is only a small place—there are no conveyances to be hired here! If Mr Gillman is expecting you, though, he will, maybe, be driving in presently."

"He is not," Cynthia said hopelessly. "Do you mean that I shall have to go back to the junction?"

"No, no, you can't do that," the man said, with an apologetic laugh. "There is no train back to-night."

"Then what on earth am I to do?"

Cynthia's underlip quivered ominously; she was tired by the long railway journey, and her nerves had been sadly shaken by the events of the past few days.

The station-master pulled his small sandy mustache thoughtfully.

"I don't know what is to be done, I am sure!" he said perplexedly. "This isn't much of a place to stop at, but—"

"Oh, I can't stay here!" Cynthia broke in hurriedly. "I must get to Greylands, if I have to walk! There must, however, be

some way—”

The station-master took off his cap and scratched his head, looking round as if for enlightenment.

“Mr King!” It was the voice of the man who had been looking at the crate in the booking-office, and who had now strolled to the doorway.

With a muttered word of apology the station-master joined him.

Standing alone Cynthia glanced at her trunk outside and wished despairingly that she had waited, that she had written and informed her cousin of her coming.

At length the station-master, his brief colloquy over, returned.

“There is Will Joyce outside,” he said slowly. “He’s driving back to Farmer Fowkes’s, as lives out beyond Greylands. He might give you a lift, if you didn’t mind a roughish cart. He brought in a calf to the sale to-day.”

Cynthia’s face lighted up.

“I don’t mind what sort of a cart it is.”

“Come along, then!” The station-master was evidently a man of few words. “Bring that trunk along, Jim!” he shouted to Cynthia’s first friend as he led the way to the entrance. “Ay, you will be all right with Will Joyce,” he went on to Cynthia. “He may be a rough one to look at, but—”

Cynthia glanced apprehensively at the man seated in a sort of market-cart as she waited while her companion went forward and explained matters. Mr Will Joyce did not appear particularly anxious to fall in with the scheme, she thought, and it seemed quite a long time before she was beckoned to unceremoniously.

“He will take you as far as Gillman’s gate,” the station-master explained as, with more courtesy than Cynthia had expected, he helped her in and gave a hand with the trunk,

which was hoisted up behind. "I am sorry that this is the best we can do for you, but, anyway, it is better than having to walk."

"A good deal, thank you!" Cynthia said gratefully as she drew her rug around her and dropped a silver coin into the porter's hand.

Her charioteer shook the reins, and they started off in a leisurely jog-trot fashion.

"Did you hear that young lady's name? Who is she?"

As the station-master turned, he found himself confronted by the tall dark man to whom he had been talking in the booking-office.

He looked surprised.

"I don't know, I am sure, sir. Oh, stay, I did catch sight of the name on the box; I believe it was Hammond."

"Ah"—the stranger looked after the cart in a speculative fashion—"that would be one of Lady Hannah Gillman's relatives, then?"

The station-master knocked a loose stone down the step.

"I couldn't say, sir. That Gillman—do you know him, sir?"

"No," laconically.

"He is a queer sort of fellow for a gentleman," the station-master went on conversationally. "Though he talks to you as if butter wouldn't melt in his mouth, he has got a very bad temper. I saw him beating a young horse one day, and I haven't forgotten it; though I am not over squeamish, it turned me fair sick. Well, well, it takes all sorts to make up a world, they say. I'll see that your box goes up by the next passenger train, sir," as the other began to move off.

"Thank you very much. Good day." The stranger started off down the same road as that taken by Cynthia, walking with a long swinging stride.

The station-master looked after him curiously.

"I wonder what his business down here is?" he soliloquized. "Seemed wonderfully struck with the young lady, I thought. Ah, well, she is a good-looking girl too!" with a sigh as if dismissing the subject.

Cynthia, meanwhile, was looking about her with interest. Twilight though it was, she could catch a glimpse of the distant hills, and she fancied that in the daytime the moorland for which they were making would prove good ground for exploring.

Presently the road grew rough and uneven. The market-cart was of the most primitive description, and Cynthia was jolted about and shaken from side to side till she had much ado to hold herself in her place. The driver took it all phlegmatically, never even glancing at Cynthia. At length a particularly deep rut almost shook the girl from her seat, and she caught hold of the rail in front.

"Are we far from Greylands?" she gasped.

"A matter of four miles or so," Mr Joyce replied stolidly.

"Oh!" Cynthia drew a long breath. "Is it like this all the way?"

"It is a roughish bit like just here," the driver answered, without turning his head, "but it is a good road, take it altogether."

Cynthia felt inclined to dissent most emphatically from this statement as another jerk sent her up against the speaker.

"If—it is only four miles," she said breathlessly, "perhaps I could walk?"

"You'd miss your way for a surety," Mr Joyce replied without slackening. "Happen you'll get caught in the bog. It'll be pitch-dark directly. Best bide where you be."

Cynthia shivered as she resigned herself to the inevitable.

“Well, perhaps so,” she said reluctantly. “I am sure it is very kind of you to drive me,” she added politely.

Mr Joyce only responded by a grunt; evidently he was not inclined to carry on the conversation, and Cynthia relapsed into silence, clinging with both hands to the side of the cart, and endeavoring to steady herself to the best of her ability. In a short time, however, the road grew a trifle less rough, the worst of the jolts grew less frequent, and Cynthia was able to sit up and survey her surroundings once more, though it was little enough she could see now. The last gleams of light were fading away; the lamps at each side of the cart only served to make the darkness more visible; in the distance she could hear the wind rising and souging among the leaves of unseen trees. To complete her discomfort a drizzling rain began to fall. She drew her rug over her shoulders and tried to forget her miserable plight, but, look where she would, no very pleasant subject for meditation presented itself, and her thoughts flew back to Lord Letchingham.

What had he said when he discovered her flight, she wondered. Was he still searching for her? She shuddered as she told herself she had undoubtedly taken the best course.

At length Mr Joyce pulled up and said:

“Yon’s Greylands.”

Cynthia peered forward into the darkness.

“I don’t see it,” she remarked helplessly.

“Noa; but you’ve naught to do but follow the road. I’ll show you, if you’ll get down.” He clambered slowly and heavily out of the cart.

“You are not going to leave me here?” Cynthia cried in dismay, as, with difficulty, she managed to make her way to the ground. “You will at least drive me up to the house?”

"I can't do that," Mr Joyce said slowly. "You can't miss it, keeping to the road, I tell you. Your trunk will be all right till Gillman can send for it in the morning." He hoisted it out of the cart as he spoke, and, opening the gate, deposited it inside a kind of small barn. "There it'll be dry and under cover." He unfastened the reins and put his foot on the step.

"You are not going to leave me like this? I cannot even see Greylands!" Cynthia cried, catching at his arm in her desperation.

Mr Joyce deliberately shook himself free as he made his way to his former seat.

"I can't do no more for you, miss. I said I'd bring you as far as Gillman's gate, and at Gillman's gate you are. It is a roughish bit of road to the house, and it ud mean a difference of half an hour to drive there and back by this light, and I've got my time to account for to my master."

Cynthia looked round despairingly.

"If you will only drive me up to the house, I will pay you."

"'Tain't that, miss. It is just as I can't. As for Greylands, you can't miss it, and there's naught to be feared of. You won't meet anyone, and walking'll get you there as quick as driving a night like this. Just go through that there gate and keep straight on. It is but a step. Good night, miss."

Thus deserted Cynthia had no choice but to make the best of the situation and try to find her way to the house. She went through the gate, only to discover that merely to keep on the rough path that apparently led across a field was a matter of some difficulty in the dark. Stumbling along, however, falling occasionally over a loose stone or an unusually deep rut, she accomplished it, and found herself at another gate, which apparently opened into a wood.

Rightly concluding this to be a belt of trees surrounding the house, Cynthia kept on her way and was soon rewarded

by seeing a big gloomy pile of buildings looming before her in the darkness. This, then, must be Greylands; but Cynthia's spirits were not raised by the fact that the end of her long journey was now in sight. Instead she felt a nameless depression, an unaccountable prevision of some terrible evil; and as she stood in the great dark porch a longing to get away, an almost over-mastering impulse to turn back, to spend the night in the barn with her trunk or on the moors rather than ask for shelter at this big, desolate-looking house, took possession of her.

Chiding herself, however, for her foolishness, she resolutely stood her ground and lifted the heavy knocker.

The noise it made was startling in the intense stillness around. As it died away, somewhere inside the house a dog howled loudly—a long-drawn-out wail of misery.

Standing there in the damp and the cold Cynthia felt an eerie sense of horror, against which she struggled in vain. Loud though her knock had sounded in her own ears there was no sign of response of any kind. The same stillness prevailed; even the rustling of the wind amid the trees had ceased, not a leaf seemed astir.

Cynthia stepped back and looked up at the house. It was apparently all in darkness. With the thought that possibly her cousin might be away and the place shut up or left to a caretaker, she determined to find her way to the back. Clinging to the wall she managed to turn the corner of the house. As she did so there was a loud clamorous barking inside, and she saw that a distant window was lighted up. With some difficulty she found another door. Knocker or bell there was none, but with the handle of her umbrella she thumped loudly again and again.

Meanwhile the drippings of the eaves fell upon her shoulders, with a great splash on her hat—her only hat,

Cynthia reflected forlornly as she attempted to protect herself. It seemed to her that she had stood there for an eternity, feeling in her nervous terror as though the darkness around was filled with living things—things that whispered together and gibed at her. When at length she caught the sound of heavy, lagging footsteps coming down the passage the dog howled more loudly. Cynthia felt a sudden pang of swift unreasoning terror—something seemed to whisper to her to run away, to hide herself while yet there was time; but she was no coward, and in spite of her terrors she stood her ground as the door was slowly unbarred and unbolted. Then her heart beat quicker as it was opened a foot or two, and, by the light of a dim, flickering lamp suspended above, she saw a man's face—a white, scared face, with a certain defiance underlying its ghastly pallor.

"What is wanted? Who are you?" a voice inquired roughly; but in spite of the abrupt words the intonation was that of a gentleman.

Cynthia gathered up her courage.

"This is Lady Hannah Gillman's house, is it not?" she asked in her clear girlish voice. "I want to see her. She asked me to come. I am her cousin, Cynthia Densham."

"You are—what?" There was an accent of amazement, not unmixed, as Cynthia fancied, with fear.

"Cynthia Densham—Lady Hannah's cousin," she repeated impatiently. "Is she here?"

There was a pause, a long-strained silence, then the answer came in a harsh rasping tone:

"Yes, she is here, but she does not receive strangers."

"Her own cousin, though!" Cynthia began indignantly. "At least you will let me in? Don't you understand—she has asked me to stay with her."

The man made no motion to open the door wider; instead, Cynthia fancied that he moved as though about to close it.

"You are making some mistake. Lady Hannah never receives visitors; she has no wish for them. It is impossible for you to come in."

This time the desire to shut the door was unmistakable, and Cynthia put out her hands in desperation.

"You cannot mean it? I dare not stay out here in the cold. You must let me see my cousin; she asked me to come—she wrote to me!"

"She wrote to you—when?"

"A fortnight ago at least. The letter was delayed—I only had it the day before yesterday; but she said she wanted me to come to her at once."

"What—she wrote before? I cannot believe it!"

There was an indescribable change in the man's voice. He stopped short. Cynthia felt in her pocket.

"Yes, here it is!" she cried, drawing out the letter.

He glanced at the envelope in her hand; then a curious tremor shook him. The lamp above him flickered and went out.

"Wait a minute!" he said brusquely, and turned abruptly down the passage.

Chapter II

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Cynthia stepped inside to be out of the damp. At the end of the passage she could see the interior of a long, low-raftered room, which looked pleasant and homely, and for a moment her spirits rose. Then, as if suddenly released from some back region, with a mingled growl and whine, a wire-haired terrier sprang towards her, menacingly, as she thought. Before it reached her, however, it stopped and sprang at a closed door at the side of the passage, scratching and giving vent to long ear-piercing howls. Cynthia wondered what could cause its excitement; but the man was coming back, still without a lamp. With an angry word he kicked the dog through the outer door, and drawing Cynthia farther in, closed it behind her.

“That dog is a perfect nuisance!” he said irritably. “I would get rid of him at once if my wife were not so devoted to him. Now, you are Cynthia Densham, you say? I ought to have recognized the name. You are the daughter of Lady Hannah’s—of my wife’s cousin, are you not?”

“Oh, then, you are Mr Gillman?”

Cynthia’s accent was one of considerable relief as she glanced at his tall figure, outlined in the darkness against the warmth and the light of the room beyond.

“I am Henry Gillman,” he acquiesced. “You must excuse this unceremonious reception. If we had had any idea of your coming you should have found us prepared for you in a very different way. But, now that you are here, you must stay the night. We must manage somehow. Come in! Can you see your way?”

“Quite well, thank you,” Cynthia replied as she obeyed.

“I fancy somehow that you have not heard that we are in great trouble?” he went on. “That makes your coming so difficult. I don’t see what is to be done.”

Cynthia felt increasingly uncomfortable.

“No, I had not heard, though I fancied that perhaps—that Cousin Hannah—You do not mean—”

Before she could finish the sentence she set her foot in something slimy near the door at which the dog had barked and came violently to the ground.

With a sharp exclamation Gillman turned and helped her to rise. “How did that happen? I hope you have not hurt yourself?”

“No, I—I think not,” Cynthia said uncertainly as she stood up, too much dazed and bruised to form any very clear idea of her injuries. “I slipped on something—there. I do not know what it is.”

Gillman’s expression changed curiously as he looked down. He caressed his long, fair mustache with one hand and glanced furtively at Cynthia from beneath his narrowed eyelids.

“I am very sorry! I do not know what it is—something the charwoman has spilt, I suppose; she is a careless mortal. But come in. We can at least make you a little more comfortable. You look as though the elements had dealt hardly with you.”

Catching sight of herself in a little old-fashioned glass to her right as she entered the room, Cynthia hardly wondered at his words. Her hair was loosened and hung about her face in untidy wisps, her hat was askew, but her cheeks were glowing from their contact with the cool fresh air, and her eyes looked big and startled.

Gillman pulled forward a chair and stroked his chin in a thoughtful fashion.

"Presently we must see what can be done about the night; but wait and rest awhile first. Let me explain matters."

Cynthia was nothing loath. The capacious armchair rested her tired young body; the very feeling of the cool fresh chintz was refreshing.

Gillman poked the already glowing fire noisily. As he stood with his back to her, she could not help noticing his stalwart proportion and length of limb, the broadness of his shoulders. He was absolutely unlike anything she had expected, and she could not help thinking what a curious contrast he must present to her Cousin Hannah as she had been described to her, and as her childish imagination pictured her—a little, prim, delicate-looking woman, yet with a will of iron beneath her quaint, old-fashioned courtesy. With that thought the remembrance of his words as she fell recurred to her.

"How is Cousin Hannah?" she asked hastily. "You were saying you were in trouble. Surely—"

Gillman did not turn round, but went on poking the fire.

"She was taken ill a fortnight ago. It was paralysis and it has affected her spine. The doctors do not give much hope that she will ever be able to walk again. Still, one never can tell, and I fancy myself we shall see a great improvement as the summer advances."

"Oh, poor Cousin Hannah!" Cynthia cried, indescribably shocked at this intelligence. "It must have been this she meant when she wrote; she seemed to hint at some impending trouble. Perhaps she had some sort of presentiment. I have heard of such things."

Gillman turned, poker in hand.

“What did she say about it?”

Something in his tone startled Cynthia.

“She spoke of feeling old and weak and wishing to see me,” Cynthia said, after a moment’s pause. “I wish I had been able to, but, as I said, the letter was delayed; I only had it two days ago.” Gillman laid the poker in its place carefully.

“If you had written I should have been obliged to ask you to delay your visit; but it is too late for that now. My wife has been nervous lately. Her old maid, Gleeson, who had been with her for years—as I dare say you know—left her in the beginning of the winter, and we found a great difficulty in replacing her. Then to get servants at all in a place like this is no easy matter; at present we are entirely without them.”

“Entirely without servants?” Cynthia echoed amazedly. “I do not understand! Do you mean that there is no one to attend to Cousin Hannah?”

Gillman took up a position before the fire and leaned against the high oaken mantelpiece, one hand pulling his mustache and partly shading his face.

“Your cousin has the bad taste to prefer my ministrations to those of anyone else,” he said, with a smile which seemed to alter the whole character of his face.

Looking at his expression in repose Cynthia had decided that, notwithstanding his undeniable good looks, the straight, regular features and the large blue eyes, the whole effect was repellent in the extreme; but the smile altered everything—it was curiously bright and winning, and the rows of straight white teeth gave an expression of superb health and strength.

He went on in a moment.

“We have a charwoman who comes up from the village to do the rough work, and in an emergency I am a capital hand

at cooking. I have roughed it on a ranch in Texas as well as in New Zealand. Oh, I assure you, we do very well!"

"I dare say," said Cynthia uncertainly. "I am sure you do your best," she added politely, "but it seems such an unaccountable thing for a woman in Cousin Hannah's position."

"Needs must when—" with another smile.

"You will think I am making your cousin as unconventional as myself, Miss Densham. You will find her a good deal altered. When did you see her last?"

"Not since I was a child," Cynthia answered.

"Indeed, I really cannot remember her at all— properly, that is to say."

"Ah!" He opened the sideboard door. "I am forgetting! Here are our provisions. You see there are eggs, cakes, and I believe there is some cold beef in the larder. What will you have?"

"I should like a cup of tea better than anything," Cynthia said hesitatingly.

He laughed and said:

"The woman's panacea! I should recommend a glass of your cousin's old port myself; but, as you please," shrugging his shoulders as Cynthia shook her head. "Tea is, at any rate, easily obtainable," placing a little kettle on the spirit-lamp. "But now, if you will excuse me, I will tell my wife that you are here, and take counsel with her as to what is best to be done."

"Oh, please ask her to let me come up; I am so anxious to see her!"

"I expect she will be only too delighted to see you," Gillman replied politely. His eyes as he left the room were fixed hungrily on a corner of the white envelope which he could see sticking out of the pocket in the girl's coat.

Left alone, Cynthia rose and, crossing over to the mirror hanging on the wall, took off her hat and coiled up her disordered hair. Her thoughts were busy, meanwhile, with her curious reception and with the extraordinary *ménage* in which she found herself. That her presence there was unwelcome to her cousin's husband she saw plainly enough, but, remembering the letter she had received, she could not divest herself of the belief that in some way Lady Hannah needed her, that she would be glad to hear that she had responded to her summons.

Standing there she took the letter out once more.

"“Old and weak and frightened,”” she read. “It—there must be something she does not want her husband to know; but I cannot imagine that. If there should be ill-treatment—” Her cheeks flamed.

Gillman's step sounded on the stairs—he was coming back; and, moved by some sudden impulse, she stooped and poked the paper through the bars of the fire-place.

Gillman opened the door, glanced quickly at her flushed cheeks, and noted the sound of her quickened breathing.

“My wife seems tired and feverish to-night,” he began. “I dare not take the responsibility of admitting you now; in fact, she herself says she does not feel equal to it; but she sees no difficulty in your remaining here for the night. As a matter of fact”—with that same illuminating smile—“you are not the only relative she has summoned.”

“You do not mean that she has sent for Sir Donald Farquhar?” Cynthia interrupted eagerly. “I am glad to hear of it! She was so devoted to him for so many years!”

“Certainly it is not Sir Donald Farquhar! Your cousin feels his ingratitude as keenly as ever; but she has written to a young lady, standing, I believe in the same relationship as

yourself—Sybil Hammond. She is coming to stay with us here either to-morrow or the day after.”

“Sybil Hammond!” Cynthia repeated thoughtfully. “I have not heard of her; but I suppose she belongs to the other side of the family. She is coming to be with Cousin Hannah, you say?”

She was at no loss to understand how the matter stood. Quite evidently, she thought, Lady Hannah, thought it hopeless to expect her so soon after her marriage; and since her curiously worded letter had met with no response she determined to appeal to her other relatives.

“My wife seems to have no clear remembrance of what she said in her letter to you,” Gillman went on. “She must have written it when her illness was approaching, and she found it difficult to express herself with clearness. You have the letter with you; would you mind letting me show it to her? She wants to see it.”

Cynthia’s eyes traveled to the little puff of blue smoke in the fire-place, to the fragment of charred ash clinging to the bar.

“Oh, I am so sorry! I never thought of her wanting to see it. I have burnt it.”

Gillman laughed.

“Oh, it is only a trifle. She thought she would like to see it. I was about to say that a room has been got ready for Miss Hammond. It is at your service now, and my wife thinks you might like to take off the dust of your journey while your meal is preparing.”

“Thank you,” said Cynthia gratefully. “I shall be very glad!”

He opened the door.

“It is the first room at the top of the stairs. Perhaps you will kindly go up as quietly as possible. I will carry up your

bag."

"Oh, that is nothing! I will take it; there is not much in it," Cynthia said with a rueful laugh. "The rest of my luggage is deposited in your barn by the gates. The man who drove me said it would be safe enough there."

In spite of her remonstrances Gillman took the bag from her.

"Perhaps I shall walk down for it to-night; but we are honest folk in these parts, if a trifle unceremonious, and it will be safe enough."

"I hope it will, for it contains almost all my worldly possessions," Cynthia said lightly as she crossed the gloomy-looking unlighted entrance-hall, which apparently opened on to the porch, through which she had first tried to gain admittance.

The stairs were of solid black oak, with a fine balustrade, but the need for silence was evident, for they were uncarpeted, and notwithstanding Cynthia's best efforts her small high-heeled shoes clicked irritatingly as she mounted the wide, low steps.

At the door she paused, and Gillman handed her the bag.

"As soon as you have finished, your tea will be ready."

"I shall not be long," Cynthia promised as she opened the door.

The bedroom was better furnished than she had expected, judging from the rest of the house. A large, elaborately-carved wardrobe took up most of one of the walls, and the middle of the room was occupied by an old-fashioned four-poster, but there was a couple of cosy-looking wicker-chairs, and a pretty writing-table stood by the window.

Cynthia threw off her hat and coat and did her best to restore something like order to her appearance; but as she

bathed her glowing face in the cool soft water and twisted up her refractory locks she could not help marveling anew at the extraordinary fashion in which a woman as wealthy as her Cousin Hannah had apparently elected to live.

Her toilet was necessarily a brief one, and she was soon ready to descend. She paused a moment on the landing outside her room and glanced round, wondering which was Lady Hannah's room. So far as she could see by the flickering light of the small lamp standing on a bracket near there were five doors beside her own, and there was evidently another floor. Not a sound was to be heard, however, and she tiptoed downstairs as quickly as possible.

Short as had been the time she had spent on her toilet, already a comfortable meal was spread upon the table. The tea-tray stood at one end, flanked by a round of cold beef, a great glass dish of junket and another of stewed fruit, while Gillman was standing by the fire-place manipulating a small iron saucepan, whence there proceeded a most appetizing smell.

As Cynthia entered he turned the contents into a dish.

"Buttered eggs," he said without looking round. "Your cousin likes them better than anything and I hope you will share her taste."

"I am sure I shall," Cynthia said as she seated herself.

In truth, the keen fresh air had given her an appetite to which she had long been a stranger, and while Gillman waited on her assiduously she made a hearty meal.

At its conclusion she sat back in her chair with a comfortable sense of well-being. Gillman, after asking her permission, lighted a cigar.

"I do hope you will be able to make yourself comfortable for the night," he began. "My wife—"