

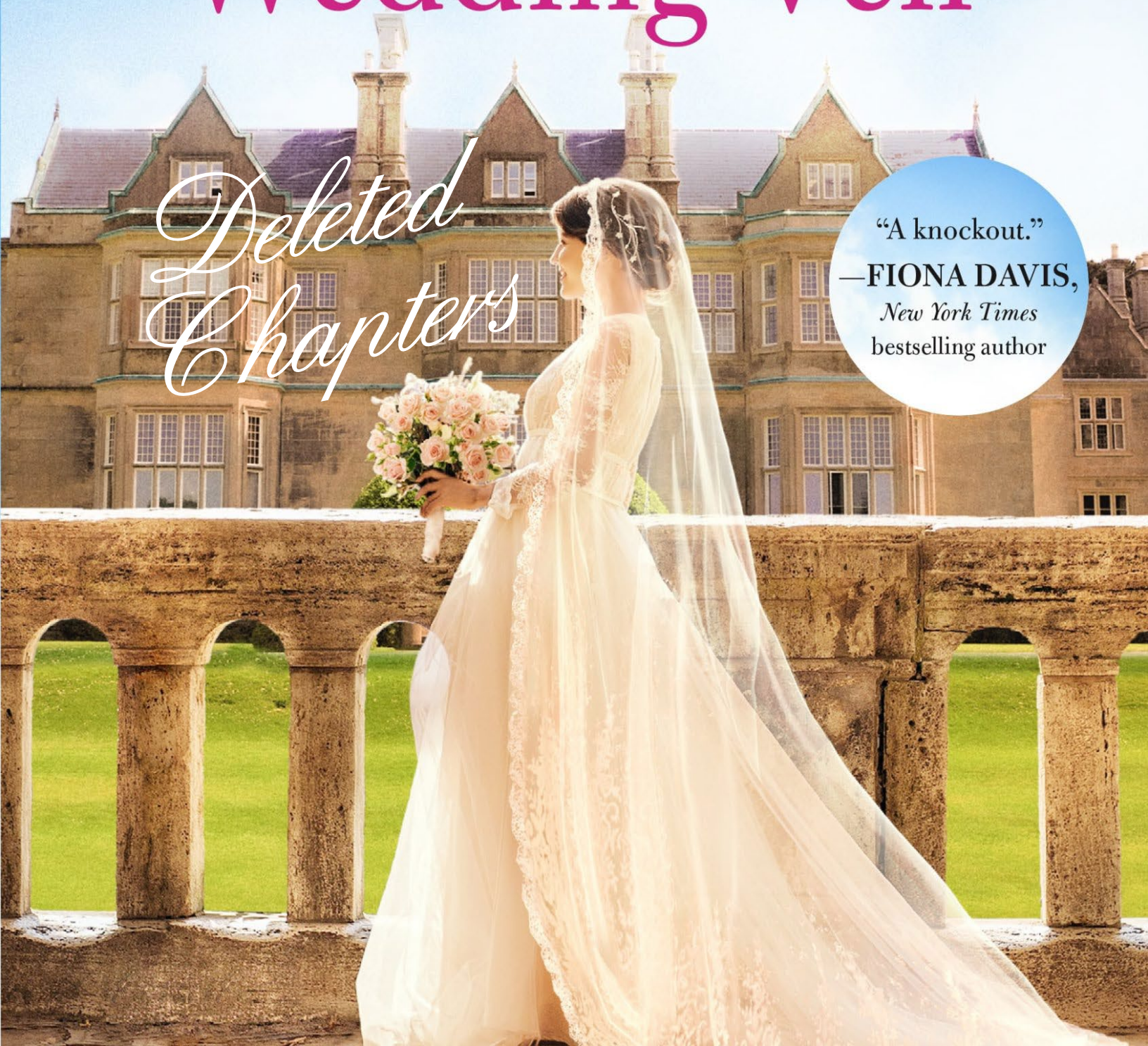
NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR

Kristy Woodson Harvey

The Wedding Veil

*Deleted
Chapters*

"A knockout."
—FIONA DAVIS,
New York Times
bestselling author



December 1905

“Edi!” Edith exclaimed as the footman opened the back door of the black Ford and her friend came into view.

“Darling Edi,” Edith Wharton said back to her long-time friend Edith Vanderbilt.

Mrs. Vanderbilt walked down the steps. Instructions already given to the footman about bags and plans, she led her friend into the room that, during her 1902 stay at Biltmore, she knew she had found most agreeable. It was, unsurprisingly, the library.

Mrs. Wharton had been enthralled by the electric ivory button that served instead of a bell attached to a rope to call the servants. She had requested that George show her the elaborate electric dumbwaiter again and again and had played hide-and-seek with Cornelia by folding herself inside the beautiful oak paneled passenger elevator near the entrance.

Biltmore was, no doubt, a modern marvel. But, being a lover of words, always, it was the library, where she was surrounded by books, where Mrs. Wharton found the most joy. The twenty-two thousand volumes housed in the two-story library certainly wowed a lover of words. But, as one of the country’s foremost interior design experts, Wharton also couldn’t help but be drawn in by the oak carvings of Demeter and Hestia above the mantel, the black marble hearth, the ornate spiral staircase. Wharton had, on her last trip to Biltmore, utilized that secluded passageway to sneak into the second story of the library. Dark and cozy, ornate and smelling richly of leather, it was the perfect place for a writer to sneak away to be with her thoughts.

Edith Vanderbilt could never see her friend without thinking of the first Christmas without her grandmother, of the way that Edith Wharton took her family in, fed them, celebrated with them, made them feel warm during the coldest part of their life.

“Darling Edi, you look splendid,” Mrs. Vanderbilt said to Mrs. Wharton. And she did, with hair piled up on her head and ruffles around her neck. “You may be a grown-up famous writer now but you are still that handsome little Edith Jones, always scribbling.”

The pair laughed as the butler silently brought in tea service.

Her friend nodded. “What splendors do you have in store for me this time?”

“Well, we’ll certainly have to go for many, many swims,” the hostess replied, winking. Both friends were avid swimmers and Mrs. Wharton, in particular, was enchanted by the electric lights and the mere idea of an indoor swimming pool. “And then I simply cannot wait to show you Biltmore Estate Industries. I believe last time you were here Yale and Vance had just begun to found the Boys Club and Girls Club apprenticeships, but it’s such a sight to behold now. They are teaching these children carving, weaving, needlepoint, and pottery. I feel so strongly that we are doing good here.” Mrs. Vanderbilt could feel herself light up when she talked about the growing educational opportunities for Asheville chil-

dren. It was her passion, her life’s calling. She felt surer of it now more than ever. She had been brought here to give Appalachian children an opportunity, the chance to be something more, to go far in life while keeping their morals intact. Some days the good it was doing in their community overwhelmed her.

“I am so proud of you, Edith,” Mrs. Wharton said. “I truly am. You are changing people’s lives. You have always been the most generous person I know, and Biltmore has helped you prove it. It warms my heart to see you have found your happiness.”

“What about you?” Mrs. Vanderbilt asked, feeling embarrassed that she had kept the talk on herself, not her guest, for so long. The House of Mirth is magnificent.” Mrs. Vanderbilt knew she wasn’t the only one who related wholeheartedly to well-bred but penniless Lily Bart. It was a position she remembered well. Mrs. Vanderbilt had heard rumblings that her friend had based her Lily on Alva Vanderbilt, Edith’s sister-in-law. But, as it was not nice to repeat gossip, she had only repeated it to George who had told his wife that he would like to doubt it very much, but wasn’t fiction always based at least in part on fact? And so it was.

“I brought a signed copy for George,” Edith said, gesturing to the books around her. “I thought it might fit nicely in his library.”

The author leaned back in her chair and sighed, “My darling friend, how do the papers contend that you could hate this place? Who could hate such a place as Biltmore?”

“Well, our dear Henry James for starters.”

The pair burst out laughing.

“Poor Henry,” Mrs. Vanderbilt said. “It was cold and snowing, he got a terrible case of gout and, unbeknownst to us until he left, the buzzer in his room wasn’t working quite properly. I’m afraid he didn’t have a very pleasant go of things here.”

Her friend rolled her eyes. “So what? It’s snowing now and it’s positively magnificent. How can one even have Christmas without snow? It’s appalling. Henry, bless his soul, can be quite dramatic. If you can’t find a reason to be happy at Biltmore, then you can’t find a reason to be happy.”

Edith smiled, the warmth of her friend’s words washing over her. She had known that James hadn’t much enjoyed his time at her home, but it felt personal to her. She was always praised for her skills as a hostess but even her charm, sparkling wit and eight- to ten-course meals couldn’t turn James’s affections toward Biltmore. It was a mixed blessing, though, because the slight made Edith realize how much she had truly come to love Biltmore, its sweeping grandeur but also its perfectly down-to-earth harmony. The nature outside her door juxtaposed so perfectly with the glamour around her creating what she believed was a perfect existence. When she found herself in Bar Harbor or New York, or even on the Continent, she longed for Biltmore.

Maybe because here they were just Edith and George. No fancy parties and social gatherings that her husband wasn’t terribly keen on. No airs to put on. Just two people,

man and wife, who loved each other and wanted a happy life together with their bright and beautiful daughter that made everything better. George had had a vision here, a dream, a wish. And Edith had caught it.

“Won’t Teddy be terribly sad without you by his side for Christmas?”

Mrs. Wharton looked at her friend warily. “You and I know each other far too well for pretense. We both know I should never have married Teddy. We both know that I should have followed my heart, but I wasn’t brave enough to stand up to my evil mother.” She lowered her voice and said, “But what I should have listened to most was the voice inside my head warning me that Teddy would turn out like his father.”

Mrs. Vanderbilt gasped, feeling a surge of fear for her friend. Yes, she knew Edith shouldn’t have married Teddy. Everyone knew Edith shouldn’t have married Teddy. Edith was bright and vivacious. She wrote beautifully, had the most perfect eye for design, which she also had been published on extensively. She had dreams and aspirations, and Teddy wanted to sit in Newport and go to parties. What’s worse is that he didn’t want Edith to even have her ambitions. It had nearly killed her friend. If she hadn’t pulled herself out of it, made up her own mind and begun her staggering career, the lack of creativity would have killed her. She was sure of it. Mrs. Vanderbilt often wondered what it must be like to be a fly on the wall at the Wharton residence. What would Edith and Teddy possibly have talked about? She suspected nothing at all, which made her friend’s sadness all the more understandable. Teddy’s own father’s institutionalization for melancholia was talked about all over polite society—in a less than polite way, mind you. But the doctors had promised Edith it wasn’t hereditary. “You aren’t saying…”

Wharton nodded. “I can feel it, Edi. He hasn’t descended completely yet, but that man is on the way to total madness. And then what am I going to do?” She shook her head. “I just hope the papers don’t catch wind of the news. That’s all I need. The book is going so well that I worry constantly some scandal is going to just blow it all away.”

“You are entirely too well-established, successful and brilliant to be blown away by a scandal,” Mrs. Vanderbilt said supportively.

“But I am a woman,” Mrs. Wharton said dully, as though her friend had failed to understand that fact. “You know we can’t get away with the things our male counterparts can. Even getting here has been such a struggle. The fear that I won’t be able to stay, that I’ll have to go back to that wordless life of meaningless parties and uninteresting conversation haunts me night and day.”

Mrs. Vanderbilt understood her friend more than she could say. She had so many wonderful, important things to fill her time. She had purpose, productivity. She was convinced now more than ever that those were the elements that added up to a happy life. “But things are changing. Can’t you feel it? You’re one of the most important authors in the world. Women are on the rise.”

Even as she said it, Mrs. Vanderbilt got a familiar feeling of nervousness in her stomach.

Things were changing. She was thrilled by the prospect of women getting the vote, of, if not herself, her dear Cornelia being able to hold political office one day. Edith was for change. She liked change. She wanted change. But the change she wanted was also going to create change in their very existence, their lifestyles. She had been subject to genteel poverty. She knew she could survive. But, my, how good life was without being constantly embroiled in that bitter struggle.

“Things are changing, all right,” Wharton said. “But we can’t be in the dark about what that might mean for people like us.” She paused. “The papers certainly have something to say about it.”

Mrs. Vanderbilt had felt a shift lately. Before, she had been in the paper when something particularly noteworthy happened. Now, it seemed that the papers invented noteworthy things in order to have the Vanderbilts in the paper. She hated to think that it all really started when Cornelia was born. And then, of course, there was poor LeRoy. Feeling a fierce need to protect her daughter and her brother, Edith exclaimed, “But why do the papers care so very much about our lives?” Don’t they understand that we are people too? That we have our own problems just the same as everyone else.”

“Well, darling, I believe it’s our problems that entertain them most of all.” Mrs. Wharton sighed, setting her tea cup on the end table. “But, no, we aren’t real people to them. There’s no real sympathy for the trials and tribulations of American Heiresses devastated by a drop in the stock market and having to fire a footman or let go a maid.” Then the author took in a sharp breath and put her hand to her mouth. “Dearest friend, forgive me. I’m over here trying to be clever while your brother is being raked over the coals.”

Her brother’s financial misfortunes had been a black cloud over the family—a black cloud that even Edith and George couldn’t fix. LeRoy had at least tried to keep his sisters out of the papers with him, but who could blame them for wanting to sell more issues? It broke Edith’s heart, though, to see her brother in such misery. What must it have been like for him to see his sisters make such advantageous marriages and succeed so wildly? Of course he would have felt the need to keep up. Who wouldn’t? In his quest, LeRoy, via his new bank Trust Company of the Republic, had loaned millions to a shipbuilding company that, well, sunk. And LeRoy sunk with it.

George and Edith were already, quite truthfully, feeling a bit of a financial pinch from the combination of overspending on the house, a serious downturn in the market and, though George, Edith, and Natalie had tried to help LeRoy secretly, rumors about the shares of stock they had bought at ninety cents on the dollar were true. And now they were worthless. Another large-scale financial blow.

It made Edith’s stomach turn to think what her husband had lost because of her, what they had lost together. But nothing hurt her quite as much as the idea that her dear brother was embroiled in such a scandal, such a public court case. But this is America, she thought to cheer herself up. People remade their lives here, they redefined themselves. She

knew deep in her heart, though, that no matter what her brother did next he would always wear the scarlet letter. He would always be a bankrupt.

“It breaks my heart,” Mrs. Vanderbilt answered truthfully. “But what I think concerns me the most is what delight the papers seem to get from seeing his troubles. It scares me a little for the future, especially for Cornelia. What is she going to face at the hands of the press?”

As if she had heard her name, that precious little girl, still in her peacoat, ribbons in her hair, ran into the library. Nanny was close on her heels, but, well, no one could keep up with Cornelia. Mrs. Vanderbilt pulled her up onto her lap. “Hello, my darling.”

“Hi, Mommy,” she said, that little cherry of a mouth smiling at her mother. She was a true beauty, that child. And her mother hoped to foster that kind heart that she already had. George and Edith had grown up in a different world from Cornelia, a world of society, of parties, of clubs, where social standing was more important than anything else.

Cornelia partially led that life, of course. She had traveled all over the world, spent a good deal of time in New York and Washington. But, already, like her father, Asheville was Cornelia’s home. She felt most comfortable among the pines, laughed hardest when playing with the sons and daughters of household staff and dairy workers. Cornelia was a bridge, a sign of the change that was taking place in the world, where the divide between the rich and the poor was closing—if not monetarily than at least socially. She would grow up in a society different than George and Edith had.

“The press loves her,” Mrs. Wharton enthused. “How could they not?”

“When it comes to outside forces being too involved in your life, there’s a very thin line between love and hate,” Mrs. Vanderbilt responded.

But she never could have imagined how true those words would turn out to be.

Cornelia: A Wonderful Luxury

December 1905

Five-year-old Cornelia Vanderbilt was running so fast in her black boots that she felt like she was flying, holding her hat to her head with one free hand, grasping her furry muff with the other. No matter how cold it was, it was never too freezing for ice cream. Cornelia gasped for breath, trying her hardest to keep up with her older cousin Teresa but finding it impossible. Cornelia had 29 cousins, which her mother said was quite a lot, but sometimes she thought it wasn’t enough. She loved the times when her cousins were there, when they slept over, when the world was full of children and laughter. Sure, she had the children of Biltmore for playmates. But there was really nothing like cousins. And, of all of them, Teresa and John were among her favorites. Their mother, Aunt Edith, her daddy’s cousin, was a favorite too, although it puzzled her little mind how her aunt (well, technically her cousin) and her mother could have the same name. She had figured, for a while, that all mothers were given the name Edith.

She didn’t know the first names of any of the other mothers she knew in the village. They were simply Mrs. Bartholomew, Mrs. Smith, Mrs. Miner, and so on. But, then, a visit from Aunt Natalie and her other cousin John blew that theory to bits and she was back to wondering.

“Last one there’s a rotten egg,” Teresa called out, at which Cornelia pumped her legs with newfound vigor. While she had no chance of beating Teresa, her cousin John was right behind her, and there was no way that Cornelia would lose to him. He would be the rotten egg.

There were many places for a little girl to love at Biltmore, but of all the places in the Village, Cornelia loved the Creamery the best. Of course, there was ice cream, which no one could deny was a wonderful luxury for a child. But she also loved to visit the dairy barn, to peek in and see the cows, ninety of them to be exact.

Cornelia decided right then, as Teresa stopped abruptly in front of her, she herself almost running into her big cousin, that she would take Teresa and John to the dairy to see the cows being milked right after ice cream. It was a freezing day, but it was warm inside the dairy both because of the body heat of the cows and because her daddy had installed central heat there so the cows wouldn’t have to be cold. Cornelia found it a nice idea when she lay under her covers at night, warm in her bed, saying her prayers, that the cows would be comfortable.

“What?” Cornelia asked her cousin, who was staring up at the sky.

But it was John who answered, “Look at that!”

Tramlines ran from the dairy to the creamery and, at this moment, a large can of milk was floating overhead making its way to the open far left window.

As the three children looked up, their eyes trained on the tram line, watching with

anticipation as the can of milk made its way to the window there was that inevitable moment of doubt in all their minds. What if the can fell? What if it veered to the right and hit the exterior of the second story not the window? What if a strong wind blew and took the can clear back to the dairy?

“Whatcha lookin’ at, Nell?” a voice not terribly older than Teresa’s said, startling all the children.

Cornelia turned and smiled at Fred, one of the dairy helpers who seemed practically grown to Cornelia but, in actuality, couldn’t have been more than twelve or thirteen.

“Haven’t you ever seen a milk tram before?” the little boy continued, his voice full of the bravado of a child who is older and who knows more. So, no, maybe he hadn’t seen the world already like Cornelia and her cousins, but he knew things.

Perhaps Cornelia’s favorite part of the entire Biltmore Dairy came into view then, rushing around the corner and slowing when it saw the children. Cornelia waved—more to the horse than the driver—as the horse pulling the milk wagon trotted up to her. Sometimes Mr. Towe, who was in charge of delivering milk, would pull her up into the closed milk wagon with him. It smelled a little sour, but she thought it was the neatest thing in all the world.

“Why’s that horse so quiet?” Teresa questioned as Mr. Towe jumped down from the wagon, grinned broadly and said, “Hiya, kids. Gettin’ you some ice cream?”

Fred walked over the horse, patted her flank and kneeling down in a gesture that he had clearly make many times before, picked up the horse’s hoof as the children gathered around. “It’s wearin’ rubber shoes,” he said as if it was the most obvious thing in the world.

“So?” John asked.

“So that’s why it’s so quiet,” Mr. Towe chimed in. “It’s so we don’t wake up people on our early morning milk deliveries.”

Cornelia considered Mr. Towe, in his rumpled jacket, short tie and hat. He had a kind smile like her father, but her father, unlike Mr. Towe, was always wearing clothes that looked clean and pressed because that’s how Mama liked him to look. She wondered if Mrs. Towe didn’t care about Mr. Towe having wrinkles in his jacket and she couldn’t help but think that maybe Mrs. Towe loved Mr. Towe a little less than Mama loved Papa.

“Sometimes we get goin’ as early as five o’clock in the morning,” Fred said.

“That’s right,” Mr. Towe said. “Mr. Gaddy has the dairymen milking the cows at four a.m.”

Cornelia wasn’t sure what Mr. Gaddy did, exactly, only that he was in charge. She wondered what that would feel like, to be in charge. At five-years-old, she wasn’t in charge of anything, not even how often she got ice cream.

Her mother didn’t even like her to venture that far. But, when they had been discussing where she could go on the property on her own, her daddy had pulled her up onto his big, strong lap and said, “Nell, there is nothing better in all this great wide world than

an adventure. Go new places, see everything. You’ll never regret it. You were born into a modern world where you can choose your path. You can grow to be anything and live anywhere.”

Edith had been so charmed she had acquiesced.

“What are you kids asking for for Christmas?” Mr. Towe asked, his short tie blowing in the breeze.

Christmas was Mama’s favorite holiday, so she and Cornelia had been getting ready for weeks. It gave Cornelia cold tingles of excitement to think about Christmas at Biltmore. She had personally helped Edith select dozens of gifts for children and adults that worked on the property. Dolls and bells, dresses and whistles, fabric, and fruitcakes. She could see how Mama would wrinkle her forehead as she made the way down the list with a pencil. She remembered how Mama had looked up to see her studying her and smiled, “It is very important to show each person every day how important they are to us,” she had said. “But it is more important at Christmas than ever.”

Cornelia nodded, thinking that through. She barely remembered being the girl of four she had been the Christmas before. But she did remember everyone at Biltmore, all the people she loved most, going to church at All Souls on Christmas morning, the final light on the Advent wreath lit, the church brimming with greenery and poinsettias. Then everyone gathered around a huge tree and Cornelia got to help pass out presents to her friends. A doll for Jenny, a football for Jack. More than the fancy dress balls or big dinners, it was the part of Christmas she liked best. She was happiest when she was surrounded by all the people she loved.

“I want a new muff like Cornelia’s,” Teresa blurted out.

Cornelia smiled thinking of the special blue box that Papa had showed her. It was a gift for Mama, something from a jewelry store called Tiffany and Company. Cornelia didn’t know what was inside, but just the thought of it made her as giddy as thinking about her own gift. That was the fun of Christmas. You got to be excited with everyone.

“I want a new doll with hair to brush!” she interjected.

“Aw, that’s kid stuff,” Fred said, cutting little John off at the pass, ensuring that the younger boy would say nothing. What child would possibly want to chime in with his wish list when an older boy had deemed it childish?

Cornelia was getting antsy now, dreaming of the ice cream she had brought her cousins here for in the first place.

As if reading her mind, Mr. Towe said, “Are you here for ice cream?”

Cornelia nodded and Mr. Towe took her hand leading her into the building that seemed so huge to Cornelia. It was nothing compared to Biltmore. Tiny, insignificant. But even to a child born in the country’s largest house, the dairy still seemed intimidating, the way large spaces do when we’re very small.

As the creamy vanilla hit Cornelia’s tongue, as she imagined showing the cows in

their warm home to her cousins and maybe visiting the blacksmith shop later, Cornelia felt certain that of all the little girls in all the world, she must have been the luckiest.

She thought back to Papa telling her she could live anywhere she chose. But she loved Asheville. She loved Biltmore. She couldn't have put it into words yet, but they were her safety, her roots, her home. And, even then, she knew down to the very tips of her chilly toes that she would never want to leave.



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