

The
Captivating
Bestseller

OLD SINS

"STEAMY."
CHICAGO TRIBUNE

A Novel by
**PENNY
VINCENZI**

0941-9/U.S. \$5.99



Sale of this book without a front cover may be unauthorized. If this book is coverless, it may have been reported to the publisher as "unsold or destroyed" and neither the author nor the publisher may have received payment for it.

Ivy Books

Published by Ballantine Books

Copyright © 1989 by Penny Vincenzi

All rights reserved under International and Pan-American Copyright Conventions. Published in the United States by Ballantine Books, a division of Random House, Inc., New York, and simultaneously in Canada by Random House of Canada Limited, Toronto. Originally published in Great Britain by Random Century House in 1989. First published in the United States by Crown Publishers, Inc. in 1990.

No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher.

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 90-2577

ISBN 0-8041-0941-9

This edition published by arrangement with Random Century Group Ltd.

Manufactured in the United States of America

First Ballantine Books Edition: April 1992

**HUNGRY FOR PASSION,
FLIRTING WITH SCANDAL,
THEY WANT MORE THAN A
PIECE OF THE ACTION.
THEY WANT IT ALL. . . .**

LETITIA, Julian's mother—The ageless, still-beautiful matriarch who started the company with him and knows much more than she lets on.

ELIZA, Julian's first wife—Their marriage was a case of natural selection: Julian needed a wife and Eliza needed a fortune.

ROZ, Julian's spoiled daughter—Sharp and clever, she has everything it takes to run her father's empire, but ambition may be her downfall.

CAMILLA, Julian's sexy mistress—She found a kindred spirit in her lover, an accomplice in her struggle to do not merely better . . . but *best*.

SUSAN, Julian's employee and friend—A business-savvy, working-class girl who made good, she understands more about the company than *anyone*.

PHAEDRIA, Julian's young second wife—She's much more than the toy pistol her husband thought he'd acquired; she's a high-caliber revolver.

Acknowledgments

BOOKS ARE NEVER A SOLO PERFORMANCE; I WOULD LIKE TO thank the small army of people who have given their time and expertise to help me get *Old Sins* on stage:

In England, Robin Vincent, Sarah Gilbert, Nicky Lyons-Maris, and Stephen Sutton from Clarins Cosmetics, Janet Fitch, Lindy Woodhead, Sally O'Sullivan, Major Anthony Harvie MC, Minna and Peveril Bruce, Tim and Maxi Hudson, Geoff Hollows, Jo Foley, Sue Stapely, Peter Townend, Fred Perry, Caroline Richards, Penny Rossi, Vicky Carrel, James Crocker.

In the United States of America, my editor Betty A. Prashker, Brian Sharoff, Carol Schuler, Lewis Sterler, Ruth and Michael Harris, Clive and Elaine Dawson, Gabrielle Donnelly, Debra Ghali, John Hiscock, Cathy Hudson, Anita Alberts, Benjamin Urmston.

And crucially, Desmond Elliott for continuing faith and encouragement; Rosemary Cheetham for inspirational editing and knowing how the book should be; Susan Lamb for some dazzling communication; Patricia Taylor Chalmers, Julia Forrest and Charlotte Bell for administering much-needed nuts and bolts; and most importantly, my husband, Paul, and our four daughters, Polly, Sophie, Emily, and Claudia, for their unstinting, uncomplaining, and loving support through a long year.

OLD SINS

Prologue

ROSAMUND EMERSON LOOKED ACROSS THE ROOM AT HER STEPMOTHER and her father's mistress and decided he couldn't possibly have loved either of them.

Not to have subjected them to this; to have insisted that they meet under these circumstances. She found the thought comforting.

Just for a moment, just a brief moment, it was almost worth all her own pain, her sorrow that he had died, to witness theirs: and the added distress they were feeling by being forced to be in the same room, observing a degree of social nicety.

They were sitting, the two of them, on either side of the heavy marble fireplace in the first-floor boardroom of the family solicitors' office in Lincoln's Inn, both formidably quiet and still, neither looking at the other. Occasionally Camilla would shift in her chair and turn another page of the magazine she was reading. *Ms.*, Roz noted with a stab of vicious amusement. Such inappropriate reading for a mistress, so deeply symptomatic of Camilla's earnest American feminism. Phaedria stared fixedly into the fire, almost unblinking; she seemed barely conscious.

Roz felt an almost overpowering urge to go over and wave her hand in front of her face, to say boo. This personification of grief, the latest of the many roles she had watched Phaedria play over the past two and a half years—ranging from child bride to wronged wife, via media cult figure—was probably, she thought, the most pathetic. She was doing it well, though, as she had done all of them. God in heaven, why had Roz's father not seen through her earlier? She sighed, her own unhappiness surfacing again, fiercer for the brief respite; the pain made her irritable, impatient. What the hell was going on? Why wasn't anything happening? Why had she bothered being punctual, when half

the family—well, a good third of it—still hadn't arrived? And what was Henry Winterbourne doing? He was so hopelessly inefficient; just because Winterbourne and Winterbourne had looked after the family since 1847, when old Sir Gerald Winterbourne had offered his services to his friend Marcus Morell in settlement of a gambling debt, nobody ever seemed to question his tendency to behave as if Queen Victoria were still on the throne or his inability to recognize the close association between time and money. Well, Roz was about to question it, and to find herself a lawyer of her own: someone young, hungry, and who appeared to be a little more *au fait* with the existence of such late twentieth-century aids to efficiency as the word processor, the motorbike messenger and the fax machine; Roz was always mildly surprised to find Henry using a telephone and not signing his letters with a quill pen.

She walked over to the large Georgian window and looked down briefly on Lincoln's Inn in the late spring sunshine, trying to distract herself, take in what she saw, but it was all meaningless. Barristers striding about in their court robes and wigs, pink ribbon-bound papers under their arms. Why pink? she wondered idly, such a frivolous, unsuitable color. Why not black? Sober-suited solicitors making a business of hurrying, bustling along. Some ordinary people—clients, she supposed—walking more slowly. A pair of extremely elderly looking judges, heads together, in earnest discussion. All those people with happy straightforward lives, and here was hers, a complex nightmare. And quite possibly about to become more complex, more of a nightmare. She turned and looked back into the room; her husband was hovering rather helplessly in the doorway, trying to look purposeful, as if he was actually doing something.

"C.J.," she said, "would you get me a drink, please? Not coffee, something stronger. And while you're about it, could you ask Jane why we're being kept waiting like this? I have a meeting at two-thirty; I can't spend the entire day here. I do think it's too bad of Henry not to get things properly organized. And also, is there any news of the others? Have they got the wrong day or something? I just don't understand why this family can't get together without being hours late for everything."

C. J. Emerson, christened Christopher John, but nicknamed by his initials in the good old American tradition when he was only two years old, turned obediently to go in search of Jane Gould, Henry Winterbourne's secretary, and almost collided with her as she walked in with an armful of files.

"Jane," he said apologetically, "I'm sorry to bother you when

you're so busy, but do you have anything stronger than coffee? My wife is feeling the strain, and I think we could all use a little something to lift our spirits."

Jane Gould looked at him with immense sympathy. She had rarely seen a man more miserable. Like a dog, she thought, who has been thoroughly whipped already and is waiting in the certain knowledge of a second onslaught. She wondered, and was not alone in wondering, why C.J. stayed with Roz, how he had ever got mixed up with her in the first place; he was so gentle, and charming, too, and so good-looking, with his brown eyes, his freckly face, his floppy hair.

"Well," she said, her usual irritation at being treated like a waitress by clients eased by her sympathy for him, "we've got some sherry. Would that do? Nothing stronger, I'm afraid."

"I'm sure sherry will be fine," said C.J., anxious to be as little trouble as possible. "Thank you very much. Oh, and Jane . . . ?"

"Yes, Mr. Emerson?"

"Jane, do you have any idea what this delay is about? Is Henry going to be much longer? Eleven, he said, and it's not like him to be late."

Jane's face went instantly and loyally blank. "I'm afraid I couldn't possibly tell you," she said. "I have no idea what can be delaying Mr. Winterbourne. But I'm sure he'll be with us as soon as he possibly can."

Roz appeared at C.J.'s side. "Jane dear, I'm afraid that isn't good enough," she said. "Just go and find Henry, will you, and tell him we need to get on. We are all—well, most of us," she added with a ferocious glance at Phaedria, "busy people. We can't afford to sit about for hours on end just because Henry hasn't prepared things properly. And is there any news of my mother and Lord Garrylaig, or Mrs. Brookes? I suppose they're all held up in the traffic?"

"I'm sorry, Mrs. Emerson," said Jane calmly. "It isn't quite hours, of course, only about twenty minutes. But I can see it's irritating for you. Mr. Winterbourne is just on the phone to New York. He really won't be very long, I'm sure. And yes, I was just coming in to tell you, Mrs. Brookes has just telephoned from her car. She is indeed in a dreadful holdup on the Embankment. No news from your mother, I'm afraid, but I expect it's the same kind of problem. Anyway, I'll get you your drink. Would Lady Morell like some sherry, do you think? And Miss North?"

"I really can't speak for them, I'm afraid," Roz said smoothly.

"I suggest you ask them yourself. I daresay Lady Morell would like anything that's going. That's her usual style."

C.J. looked at her nervously. She was wearing a black crepe Jean Muir dress that skimmed over her tall, slim body; her long, long legs were encased in black tights; she wore no jewelry at all; her dark hair was cut very short. She looked dramatic, almost severe. Roz was not beautiful and certainly not pretty, and the fact caused her much anguish, and yet she was striking-looking; she turned heads, with her white skin, her very green eyes, her strong mouth, her straight if rather large nose. And men liked Roz; they were drawn to her in preference to her prettier sisters. She was better fun, she was direct, she was sharp and clever. She was also extremely sexy.

"Roz," said C.J., who spent much of his life wishing she were less direct and who did not benefit greatly from the fun, or even from the sexiness, "please don't start saying things we could all regret."

"C.J.," said Roz, with quiet savagery, "I shall say what I like about whom I like, and I have no intention of regretting any of it. I am finding it very hard to endure the sight of Phaedria sitting there like a queen of tragedy when it's patently obvious she's got exactly what she's been after ever since she married my father. All I can hope is that she will get a few unpleasant shocks when his will is read. Clearly she isn't going to be homeless or penniless—unfortunately, in my opinion—but maybe she won't get quite as much as she has clearly been hoping for. As for Camilla North, well, I really cannot—Oh, Jane dear, how kind, but I really don't like sherry. Haven't you got anything else at all?"

"I'm afraid not," Jane said, irritation breaking into her bland tones. "We don't stock a full bar. I can get you some more coffee, of course."

"Oh, forget it," said Roz, turning back into the room.

"Here, Jane, I'll have some sherry," C.J. said hastily, stifling the thought of the bourbon he had been planning to ask for. "That's very kind, very kind indeed. Would you like me to ask the others what they'd like? Save you the trouble?"

"Yes, thank you, Mr. Emerson," said Jane Gould, "that would be kind. I'll see if I can hurry Mr. Winterbourne along."

C.J. went back into the main room and across to the fireplace. "Phaedria, can I get you anything to drink? A sherry, or maybe something stronger?"

Phaedria Morell looked up at him and smiled. "That's sweet of you, C.J., but what I'd really like is something hot. Coffee

or something. And C.J., could you possibly ask Jane if she could bring in a heater of some kind. It's so cold in here."

C.J. looked at her in astonishment. The temperature in the room was a good seventy-five; he had already removed his jacket and was now glowing profusely in his Brooks Brothers shirt. Phaedria, who was huddled deep in the folds of her sable coat, her hands in the pockets, was clearly, he decided, suffering from shock.

"I will if you like," he said, "but the fire is doing its best for you. Try the coffee first."

Phaedria looked in apparent surprise at the flames leaping in the gas-fired fake coal. "Good heavens," she said, "do you know I hadn't noticed it was alight? Don't worry, C.J., I'm sure the coffee will do the trick. Oh, and do we have any idea why this is taking so long? We seem to have been here forever. And where are the others?"

"I don't really know," C.J. said carefully. "Apparently Henry is on the phone to the States. And Susan, and presumably Eliza and Peveril as well, are stuck in traffic. Now, be sure to shout if the coffee doesn't warm you up. Er, Camilla, would you like anything?"

Camilla North looked up slowly from her magazine, shaking back her heavy gold-red hair, brushing a speck of dust disdainfully from her cream silk dress; she looked immaculate, cool, and in command, not in the least as if she had just made the flight from New York, and if she was fazed at being confronted by much of the Morell family, including her lover's widow, she certainly did not show it. She appeared to consider the question very carefully.

"I'd like a mineral water, C.J., if that's not too difficult. Still, not sparkling."

"Fine," said C.J. "Ice?"

Camilla looked at him in apparent astonishment. "Oh, no, thank you," she said, "no ice. Not with water." She made it sound as if ice were as unsuitable an addition to water as gravy or black treacle. "In fact, C.J., unless it's room temperature I won't have it at all, thank you."

"Why not?" said Phaedria curiously. They were the first words she had ever spoken to Camilla.

"Well," said Camilla, seriously courteous, "iced liquid of any kind is very bad for the digestion. It predisposes the system toward gallbladder disease. Or so my yoga instructor tells me."

"Good heavens," said Phaedria, "I had no idea. I love it iced. Only the sparkling sort, though."

"Well, really, you shouldn't drink that at all," said Camilla.

"It is very seldom naturally sparkling, as of course you must know, and it often has a considerably higher sodium content."

"Oh, dear," said Phaedria, "well, that's a shame. I hate the still sort."

C.J. held his breath. He had been watching the two women warily all morning, half expecting them suddenly to hurl a stream of abuse at each other, fearful at the way they had settled together on either side of the fire, and here they were discussing the relative virtues of mineral waters. Deciding that the room temperature in Henry Winterbourne's boardroom had to be practically boiling—why did he have to keep that fire going almost all year round? tradition, he supposed—he moved off in search of further orders.

"Letitia," he said, crossing the room to another large wing-back leather chair set at the end of the large mahogany table. "Would you like a sherry?"

Letitia Morell, Roz's grandmother and one of the few people in the family C.J. felt properly at ease with, had also been reading a magazine; it was *Tatler*, as appropriate to her tastes as *Ms.* was to Camilla's, and she was totally engrossed in the society section, her eyes moving swiftly from captions to pictures and back again. "Look," she said. "Roz's school friend Rosie Howard Johnson. Did you ever meet her, C.J.?"

"No," C.J. said, "no, I don't think so."

"Well, she's just got married. To Lord Pulgrave. I always liked her so much. Such a lovely dress. Where is Roz? I'd like to show her."

"I think she's in the rest room," said C.J.

"The what, darling? Oh, you mean the lavatory. Such a curious name they have for it in your country. Well, anyway, never mind. Yes, please, C.J., I'd love a drink. But not sherry; I do hate it, especially in the morning. I always think it's rather common. I don't suppose Henry has any champagne?"

"I doubt it," said C.J. "Jane said only sherry. I'm sorry, Letitia. Shall I go and see if I can find some for you?"

"Oh, good gracious, no. Sweet of you, but I wouldn't dream of it," said Letitia. "I'll have the sherry. It will be better than nothing. Oh, dear, I seem to have been drinking much too much ever since Julian died. It's the only way I can get through a lot of the time."

C.J. looked at her tenderly. She was very old, eighty-seven, but until the death of her son three weeks ago she had very rarely looked anything near that age. Suddenly now she seemed smaller, frailer than she had been, a little shaky. But she was beautifully dressed today in a vivid red suit—from Chanel, de-

cided C.J., who was clever at such things—sheer black stockings on her still-shapely legs, black low-heeled shoes; her snowy hair was immaculate, her almost-mauve eyes surprisingly sparkly. She was courage incarnate, he thought, smiling at her with a mixture of affection and admiration.

“All right,” he said, “I’ll buy you some champagne at lunch-time if you like. Will that do?”

“Of course. Thank you, darling. Oh, how nice, here’s Eliza. And Peveril. Oh, thank goodness. C.J., go and tell Roz her mother is here; it will calm her down a bit.” C.J. thought this was very unlikely, but went off obediently in search of Roz. Letitia patted the chairs on either side of her and beamed at the new arrivals being propelled gently into the room by Jane Gould. “Come in, you two, and sit here with me. I was just telling C.J. that Rosie Howard Johnson has been married. Did you go to the wedding?”

Eliza, countess of Garrylaig, crossed the room and bent and kissed Letitia. “Hallo, Letitia darling, how are you? We’ve had the most dreadful journey from Claridge’s, haven’t we, Peveril? It took almost as long as the entire trip from Scotland. We hardly moved at all for about forty minutes. No, no, we didn’t go to Rosie’s wedding. Peveril doesn’t like weddings, do you, darling?”

Peveril, ninth earl of Garrylaig, half bowed to Letitia, and settled down thankfully in the seat beside her.

“ ‘Morning, Letitia my dear. God, I hate London. Dreadful morning, dreadful. No, I don’t like weddings. The service always makes me cry, and the receptions bore me to tears. Saves on handkerchiefs to stay away.”

He beamed at her and patted her hand. He was tall, white-haired, charmingly courteous, and acutely vague, and only came properly to life when he was pursuing some animal, fish, or bird—and presumably, Letitia thought, his wife. He was dressed as always in extremely elderly tweeds; he looked, she thought, among the collection of people in the room, like a wise old buzzard settled briefly but very deliberately among a gathering of feckless birds of paradise. Why the dashing Eliza—then the vicomtesse du Chene, formerly Mrs. Peter Thetford, and once Mrs. Julian Morell—had married him only a few years earlier was something that probably only she herself and Letitia really understood. Even Letitia found it difficult entirely to accept; Peveril was nearer her own age than Eliza’s, and they seemed to have absolutely nothing in common. But then, Eliza had always had a predilection for people considerably older than herself, and a talent for charming them, beginning with Julian Morell,

so many years ago. And there was no doubt she was very fond of Peveril and was making him extremely happy. Letitia smiled at them both.

"I'm afraid the only thing on offer is sherry, but after being stuck in traffic, perhaps even that would be welcome. Or would you rather have coffee?"

"Oh, I think coffee," said Eliza. "I do hate sherry. What about you, Peveril darling?"

"What's that? Oh, no, not coffee, thank you. Dreadful stuff. I'll just have a glass of water if I may."

"I'm sure you may," said Letitia. "I'll ask Jane."

Peveril looked around the room, and his eyes rested on Phaedria. He beamed happily; he liked her.

"'Morning, Phaedria my dear. How are you?"

Phaedria looked at him and smiled back. "I'm fine, Peveril, thank you. It's lovely to see you. And you, Eliza. I'm sorry you've had such an awful journey."

Peveril studied her more closely.

"You don't look fine, my dear, if you don't mind my saying so. You look a bit peaky."

"Oh, Peveril, don't be so tactless," said Eliza. "Of course she's looking peaky. Poor angel."

She walked over to the fireplace and kissed Phaedria. "It's lovely to see you, darling. I wish you'd come up and stay with us for a bit. It would do you so much good."

"I will," said Phaedria, clearly trying to sound enthusiastic.

"I will. But not just yet. Thank you," she added dutifully.

Eliza patted her hand. "Well, when you're ready. Ah," she added, a thick ice freezing over her bright voice, "Camilla. Good morning."

"Good morning, Eliza," said Camilla, smiling calmly back at her. "How are you?"

"I'm extremely well, thank you. I don't think, Camilla, you have ever met my husband. Have you?"

"No, I don't think I have," said Camilla. Her smile became more gracious still; in deference to Peveril's age she stood up. "How do you do. I'm Camilla North."

Only Peveril, Letitia thought, watching this cameo with a sort of pained pleasure, could fail to appreciate the fine irony of this tableau: the two wives of Julian Morell grouped with the mistress who had usurped them both.

He smiled, half bowed over Camilla's outstretched hand.

"Heard a lot about you, my dear. How do you do? Nice to meet you at last."

"Peveril," said Eliza briskly, "come along. Let's go and sit down with Letitia."

"I'll sit down when I'm ready, Eliza," said Peveril firmly. "Been sitting much too long this morning as it is. Nice to stand up for a bit. Do sit down again, Miss North. You must be tired. I believe you've only flown in this morning. I expect you've got that jet lag or whatever it calls itself."

"Jet lag," said Camilla, smiling at him again, "but no, I don't suffer from that at all. I have discovered that, providing I eat only raw food and drink nothing but water, I'm perfectly all right."

"Good lord," said Peveril, "who'd have thought it? Raw food, eh? So do you ask them to serve you your lunch uncooked? What an idea; I expect they're pretty grateful to you, aren't they? Saves them a bit of trouble. Raw food. Good heavens." He smiled at her benignly. Camilla, most unusually at a loss as to what to say, smiled back at him. Eliza turned rather irritably and looked out of the window.

Letitia smiled at Peveril and wondered if she dared make a joke about Camilla making off with Eliza's fourth husband, as well as her first. She decided it would be in too bad taste even by her standards and that Eliza would certainly not appreciate it. For want of anything else to do, she returned to her *Tatler*.

"Eliza, can I get you a sherry? And you, sir?" C.J. had come back into the room and had witnessed the tableau also. He smiled rather nervously at Eliza as she blew him a kiss; he was always rather afraid of what she might say or do. She was phenomenally tactless. And still so beautiful, he thought. What a mother-in-law to have. Poor Roz, no wonder she had all those hang-ups about her looks with a beautiful mother and grandmother. Eliza was forty-nine years old, awesomely chic—Jasper Conran, who adored dressing amusing middle-aged ladies, traveled up to Garrylaig Castle twice a year with his designs and to stay the weekend—beautifully, if a trifle heavily, made up, her silvery blond hair cut in a perfectly sculptured bob, her body as slender and supple as it had been thirty-one years ago when she had married Julian Morell.

"No, thank you, darling. Just some coffee," said Eliza. "And some water for Peveril, please. And, C.J., what on earth is going on? I thought we were late. Nobody seems to be here. Where's Henry? And what's Roz doing?"

C.J. was beginning to feel like an air steward, nursing his passengers through an incipient disaster.

"Roz is on the phone to her office. She's worried about some meeting she has this afternoon. Susan is on her way. And I don't

know what's happened to Henry. I'm sure it's nothing to worry about."

"Well, let's hope not." C.J. went off again with his orders. Eliza looked after him. "Poor C.J.," she said, apparently irrelevantly.

"I do wish Susan would arrive," said Letitia fretfully. "She always makes me feel so much better. And Roz, too, which is probably more to the point."

"Where is Susan?" said Eliza.

"She's looking at houses with Richard. He has this plan to move down to the country. Wiltshire. Such a mistake, I think, when you've lived in London all your life. Of course everyone in Wiltshire is terribly nice."

"Everyone, Granny Letitia?"

It was Roz; she had come back into the room and heard her grandmother's words. She was smiling for the first time that day. Letitia smiled back up at her.

"Why don't you come and sit here with me, darling? Yes, everyone. So many of the very best people live there."

"Granny Letitia, you're such a snob."

"I know, darling. I'm not ashamed of it. In my young day it was a virtue. It was called having standards."

"Ah. I see."

"I was just saying," Letitia said, "that I wished Susan would arrive."

"So do I. And I really don't want her to go and live in Wiltshire with the best people."

"Well," said Letitia quietly, "it will suit her. She is one of the very best. Oh, Susan darling, there you are. I was just saying you were one of the very best people."

Susan Brookes had hurried into the room. She smiled at Letitia and bent and kissed her cheek. "Not by your standards I'm not. I'm surprised at you, Letitia, saying such a thing. And me only an honorary member of this family. Sacrilege."

"Oh, Susan, don't be difficult," Roz said. "Come and sit by Granny Letitia. She's in a naughty mood. She needs keeping in order. And if I can find C.J., I'll ask for a drink for you. What would you like?"

"Tea, please," said Susan. "I haven't missed anything important, have I? And I don't suppose there's anything to eat, is there? I'm famished."

Roz looked at her and smiled again, leaned forward and kissed her gently on the cheek. Susan was a tall, thin woman with bright brown hair heavily flecked with gray; she was not classically good-looking but with a strong humorous face, clear,

beautiful skin, and startlingly bright blue eyes. She was in her mid-sixties now, and in some ways she looked older, as her face tended to gauntness. But she had a style of her own: she was beautifully and very simply dressed in a navy wool suit and cream silk shirt, her only jewelry a pearl necklace and earrings, which no one, with the exception of Letitia, could ever remember seeing her without.

"Oh, Susan," said Roz, feeling much better suddenly, restored to something near normality, "can any of us think of an occasion when you didn't feel famished? I'll get C.J. to find something for you."

She walked out of the door again; Susan and Letitia looked after her.

"How is Roz, do you think?" Susan asked quietly.

"I think she's in a terrible state," said Letitia. "Eaten up with hatred of Phaedria, whom she seems to blame in some way for Julian's death, desperately unhappy, wretched that she didn't say good-bye to him. Oh, I know it was her own fault—"

"Poor Roz," said Susan. "Poor, poor Roz. I've known her all her life, and I've never felt sorrier for her than I do now. What on earth can we do to help her?"

"God knows," said Letitia with a sigh. "God knows. She will persist in making things worse for herself. She always has, of course. And I feel sorry for Phaedria too. She looks dreadful, poor child. So alone. Well, perhaps today will help in some way. Although I can't imagine how."

Absolutely on cue, Henry Winterbourne suddenly appeared in the room, followed by Jane with yet more files—I'll bet they're just for show, thought Roz—and C.J. bearing a tray and looking like a particularly inept waiter as he hurried around trying to deliver his complex order.

Henry took up his place at the head of the table, his back to the window. "Good morning," he said. "I am extremely sorry to have kept you waiting. A very tedious call from New York. Do forgive me."

He opened the top file on the table, took a large envelope out of it and set it firmly in front of him. Everyone slowly, very slowly, as if in a badly directed play, took up a new position. Phaedria got up and sat with her back to the fire at the end of the table, pulling her coat more closely around her. Peveril sat next to her, assuming an oddly protective role. Eliza settled in the chair next to him. Camilla stood up and walked around to take up the chair nearest to Henry. Letitia and Susan stopped talking. Roz took up a challenging position, standing alone by

the door, every ounce of her formidable energy focused on Henry's face.

Henry smiled faintly around the room, catching everyone's eye in turn with the right amount of sadness and sympathy, bestowing a smile here, a conspiratorial look there. Smooth bastard, thought C.J., finally divesting himself of the tray and moving over to sit next to Susan.

"Lady Morell, are you all right?" C.J. said suddenly.

Everyone looked at Phaedria; she was resting her head on her hands on the table. She appeared to be about to faint.

"Phaedria, let me take you outside," said C.J.

"I'll take her," Eliza said, getting up and crossing over to Phaedria, putting her arm around her shoulders. "She needs some air."

"No, no, really, I'm all right," said Phaedria, "I'm sorry, just a bit dizzy, that's all. Perhaps I could have a glass of water."

"I'll get it," said C.J. quickly, grateful for something to do.

"C.J.," Roz said from where she was standing, "do settle down. You've been rushing 'round with drinks all morning. Jane will fetch Phaedria a glass of water, I'm sure. Jane dear," she called through the doorway, at Jane's back, "could you fetch Lady Morell a glass of water, please? The strain of the occasion is proving a little too much for her."

Roz watched Phaedria carefully as she took the glass of water, sipped at it halfheartedly, put it down, leaned back in her chair, shaking the dark waterfall of hair from her face. Looking at her, Roz did have to admit she looked ill. Her skin was starkly white, rather than its usual creamy pale, and she seemed thinner than ever, shrunk into herself. God, Roz hated her. So much Phaedria had taken from her, so much that should have been hers, and what were they all to learn now? How much more was to go Phaedria's way, away from her, Julian Morell's daughter, his only child, his rightful heir? Roz swallowed, fixed her eyes on Henry's face. She had to concentrate. The words she was to hear, had to hear, were what mattered just now, not her thoughts, her emotions. Time for them later.

"Very well," said Henry. "Perhaps I could begin. Now as you may appreciate, this is an out-of-the-ordinary occasion. These days, public readings of wills are very unusual. Although, of course, perfectly legal. And it was at Sir Julian's request that it should be conducted in this way. In the presence of you all. He particularly specified that you should all"—his gaze fell briefly, unbidden, on Camilla, then shifted hastily again—"all be here. There are of course minor beneficiaries, staff and so on, who were not required to attend. So perhaps the best thing