Cissy Honoré stood at the head of the stairs in her parents' home. Below her, at the foot of the stairs, she saw her father waiting, his carefully brushed black frock coat pulled tight over the white tucked shirt beneath. Next to him, Ida was ready to carry out the obligations of the maid of honor. Beyond, in the spacious gallery of the home, some forty friends and family were seated in patient expectation. Her grandmother and other relatives had come from Louisville, though Eliza's mother, Mary York, was not charmed with the city to which her son-in-law had taken her daughter. "A flat city on a flat prairie by a dull lake," she had said bluntly after her servant took her about in the carriage. Cissy's four brothers, scrubbed and starched to the nines, sat beside the relatives.

When Cissy and Potter became engaged, Chicago society buzzed with anticipation. Theirs would surely be the biggest wedding of the year. Speculation ran wild on which church would be honored to host the event—probably not the Baptists and surely not the Catholics, so perhaps the Methodists.

Cissy confounded even her parents by announcing she wanted a small wedding at home.

"I can afford a big church wedding," Henry Honoré protested, "and I'd like to do that for my oldest daughter."

Eliza Honoré was more direct. "Everyone will think we've avoided the big wedding because of...of...uncertainty about the age difference between the bride and groom."

Cissy laughed aloud at that. "Well, I'll tell people that it was my wish. I want only people who care a great deal about me or about Potter to witness the marriage. You may invite the whole city of Chicago to a reception, if you wish."

Now, standing at the top of the stairs, the long anticipated moment having arrived, Cissy pictured in her mind Palmer taking his place next to the minister by the carefully constructed altar with its large bouquet of mock orange blossoms artistically arranged in a silver urn. He wore a black frock coat and certainly, she knew, the satin waistcoat she had fashioned for him as a wedding gift.

"Like carrying coals to Newcastle," she had fumed at her mother. "The man can buy any piece of clothing he wants...and ten of each if it pleases him."

"He will be pleased," her mother replied, "with the love that accompanies something from your hand."

"And the blood?" the daughter asked, sucking the finger she had just pricked for the tenth time. She wanted no more lectures on a wife's duties in relation to her husband. It was one of her mother's favorite topics lately.

During all the elaborate wedding preparations, Mrs. Honoré had not, of course, mentioned intimate relations—both mother and daughter would have been uncomfortable with that, even though both knew that Cissy's knowledge, if she had any at all, was slight and probably mistaken. No, pinning hems and planning menus, making up invitation lists and worrying about the bridal veil, Mrs. Honoré had talked of a woman's proper place, supporting her husband yet remaining strong herself.

Cissy was unable, in her mind, to move beyond the moment of the marriage. It was as though the ceremony, the culmination of all her wishes, would happen in a void. Everything led up to it—but what followed? When she thought of the future, of her life as Mrs. Potter Palmer, she could put no shape to it. In recent months, thoughts of the next time she saw him, when he was coming to dinner, where they might go to a party, had given meaning and shape to her days. She had planned her life around being with Potter Palmer. But now she would be with him day and night—she would, she vowed, think about that later!—and what would bring excitement to her life?

When the first strains of Vivaldi's "Spring" were heard from the gallery, where a string quartet played, Cissy started alone down the wide staircase. She moved confidently, never looking down at her feet, never reaching for the rail, the smile on her face steady and sure. The nuns had taught her well, and her inner confusion was hidden. Little did she know that no woman goes to the bridal altar without doubts. Yet doubts

had assailed her all day, and she was indignant that this, the day she'd waited so long for, was marred by her thoughts, which ranged as far as, "Why am I doing this?" Deliberately, she smiled at Ida, who, watching, was touched with yet another pang of jealousy.

Ida proceeded into the gallery, where chairs had been set to approximate church seating. As Ida walked the length of a center aisle, heads turned away from her, toward the doorway where Cissy and her father stood.

Everyone thought Cissy Honoré would choose an extravagant and elaborate gown for her wedding. She could afford it, said the gossips. Again, she surprised them by choosing a simple silk gown that was fitted tightly at her waist and swelled into a wide skirt that swayed ever so slightly as she walked. The top was modest, rising to a banded collar, but without beading and elaborate decorations. The sleeves were long and appropriately modest, and Cissy was grateful that this June day was cool enough that the dress was comfortable. In contrast to the simplicity of the dress, her head was covered with a veil of intricate and old Spanish lace. As she entered the gallery, Cissy heard the gasps of delight, but her attention was on Palmer, who stood by the makeshift altar. She smiled slightly at him. Only he recognized the nervousness in the smile, but his in return was broad and unabashedly delighted.

The wedding vows were quickly said, one musical selection played—Cissy had carefully chosen "Ode to Joy"—and the couple pronounced man and wife. They held hands tightly when the minister intoned, "Whom God hath joined together, let no man put asunder." And then, when he said, "You may kiss your bride," Potter raised the veil, murmured "Cissy," and kissed her so soundly that she was sure she heard her mother gasp. She herself simply stood still while he kissed her—what else, she wondered, was she supposed to do?

Several hundred guests—"all of Chicago, just like Cissy said," her father had ranted at one point—had been invited for a wedding supper at Kinsey's Restaurant on Adams Street. Cissy, Potter, and the Honorés stood in the receiving line for two hours, but Cissy never faltered, never had to ask that a name be repeated, greeted each guest with a smile and a warm handshake. Next to her, Potter wilted visibly, and she knew he longed for the ordeal to end.

"You do business with them," she whispered to him at one point.

With a wry smile, he whispered back, "They damn well better do business with me after this!" Then, turning, he greeted a guest yet unknown to Cissy.

She had recognized many of the guests, friends of her parents and business associates of her father's. And she had been glad to see Marshall Field when he came through the line. Since he and Levi Leiter bought Potter's business, Cissy still shopped at the store often, even though she missed Potter's presence. Mr. Field was attentive, but it wasn't the same.

Somehow, this stranger that Potter turned to greet didn't look like the business associates of either her father or Potter. He was a large man, tall and heavy-boned, with a bushy beard and mustache. And his suit was, well, rumpled was the only thing Cissy could say to herself. But the man smiled easily and had a nice twinkle in his eyes.

"Harrison! Good of you to come!" The entrepreneur in him took over, and Potter was all smiles again. "Cissy, I want you to meet Carter Harrison, one of the most important men of this city. Carter's one of your fellow Kentuckians," Potter said, turning to Cissy.

"So glad to meet you," Cissy said. "I don't believe I've heard Papá mention your name."

"No, ma'am, but we're acquainted...and we'll be better acquainted."

Not knowing quite what the man meant, Cissy simply smiled and said, "I'm sure you will." Though he puzzled her, there was something about the man that attracted her—a good-natured honesty in his smile...maybe it was his eyes, which danced with laughter.

Harrison moved on through the line, but Cissy had no time to ask Potter about him.

The guests feasted on boned quail in jelly, chicken and lobster salads, escalloped oysters, Charlotte Russe, and various fruits. They toasted the newlyweds with champagne and soothed their palates with ices and frappes. Cissy and Potter Palmer ate as heartily as any of their guests. Palmer responded to the toasts with one of his own, gracefully thanking the Honorés for entrusting him with the well-being of their daughter and all the guests for celebrating this happy occasion with him. Cissy raised a silent glass toward him when he finished, and he leaned down to kiss her forehead.

It was, everyone agreed, the most impressive wedding yet seen in the city, even if the ceremony had been private. Chicagoans had shown that they were not the country bumpkins New York expected.

"You were magnificent, Mrs. Palmer," Potter said. He stood in front of the fireplace in which a small fire glowed, built in deference to a slight chill that had settled on the June night. "Are you exhausted?"

They would depart for Europe the next day, leaving Chicago in one of Pullman's fancy rail cars. But meantime they had simply returned to the farmhouse outside the city where Potter had been living until his hotel was complete.

His housekeeper, a woman named Margaret, had seen to it that sherry and brandy were neatly set out, the fire lit, the lights turned low—and then she had tactfully disappeared to the quarters that Potter had built for her next to the barn, so that he could have the house to himself in privacy. Now, with a young bride, he had even more reason to wish for privacy.

Cissy, seated on the sofa opposite the fireplace, laughed aloud for the first time. "No," she said, "I'm too exhilarated to be exhausted. It was a wonderful day." Her doubts were all banished, and she was truly happy. As she looked at her new husband, she thought how handsome he was.

Potter Palmer eyed his bride with a slightly bemused look. "Ah...did your mother...have a talk with you?" It was, of course, too much to hope that they had talked of the intimate side of marriage. Still, Potter had long thought that a mother was obliged to inform her daughter, for the husband's sake, if nothing else.

"Oh, yes," Cissy drawled, "about responsibilities. I shall have to stop being the carefree young debutante."

"No," he said expansively, "you can always be carefree. I'll see to that."

She shook her head. "It's all right when you're young, but it's not a way to live your life. I...I'll find my purpose," she said with a determination that sent a slight shudder through him.

"I thought," he said carefully, "that your purpose might be to ensure my happiness."

She looked at him with wide, innocent eyes. "Oh, of course, Potter. But that won't take all my time." He sighed.

"Tell me, Potter," she said, "about that man named Harrison. How have I never met him before, if he's from Kentucky?"

Palmer shrugged, as if to say he couldn't account for it. But then, slowly, he said, "He's a different sort. Has a Yale education as a lawyer and has done very well in real estate. But he"— Palmer hesitated, uncertain how to continue—"he spends as much time with men in pubs as he does at places where you'd see him. Lord knows, though, he loves the city of Chicago."

She raised her eyebrows in question.

"Been known to refer to it as his 'bride,'" her husband explained. "I don't doubt that one day he will be mayor, which is his most fervent hope."

"Then we must entertain him," she said decisively.

"Well, now," he temporized, "we'll see about that. But speaking of brides, I suspect mine is tired in spite of herself. Why don't you go and make yourself comfortable? I'll give you time for your toilette, and then I'll join you."

She smiled, kissed him lightly on the cheek, and left the room, while he stared pensively after her. He had no idea what she expected of him that evening, and he—an urbane man in midlife—was nervous.

An hour later, he swallowed yet another sip of brandy and headed for the guestroom, which had now become his dressing room. A few minutes later, dressed in a nightshirt and robe, he found his wife, wearing a fine silk wrapper, propped up in bed, wide awake, waiting for him. She hadn't known he expected her to call to him when she was ready.

Cissy had, as a matter of fact, been sitting in the bed, propped up by the pillows, for the better part of the hour that Potter had given her. She had first brushed her hair until it shone, cleaned her face, and dabbed cologne on her wrists and earlobes. Then, uncertain what else to do, she climbed into the bed—and waited. The longer she waited, the more her uncertainty grew.

This was, she knew, the moment no one talked about—not her mother, certainly not her father, and not Ida, who knew even less than she did. She wished desperately that she'd had a confidante who might tell her what was expected of her, for that was Cissy's great concern—that she would not know her role. Her knowledge of intimate relations was indeed limited—she had once seen the family dogs copulating, and she'd heard snickers and whispers among her brothers, but how did that apply to men and women? She had little idea, and her only consolation was that Potter should have had experience equal to his age. He would know what she didn't, and because she had absolute faith in him, he would show her what to do. The thought that the only reason he'd know what to do was that he had slept with women he was not married to did not occur to her.

Cissy was not afraid, but it would be fair to say she was very apprehensive. So she waited in anticipation of hearing his step. It was a long hour.

Discreetly, Potter turned the gas lamps off, took off his robe, and pulled aside the covers on his side of the bed, keeping his nightshirt carefully pulled down.

"Cissy," he said softly, moving toward her in the vast expanse of the bed.

"Yes, Potter?"

"I...I..." Words failed him, and he simply pulled himself over so that he leaned above her, reaching down to kiss her, not gently as he had at the altar, but with a certain demand, a need that was his alone and that she knew nothing of. To his surprise, she reached her arms around his neck and held him. As his tongue explored her mouth, his lips working on hers, he felt her answer back—timidly, gently, but a response.

He moved his mouth to her ear, her neck, down toward her bodice, and his hands began to move gently over her body, carefully avoiding any of the places that might cause her alarm and yet trying to relax her. She lay still, but when he would return to kiss her on the mouth, she answered with a kind of surprised questioning. Her hands stayed locked around his neck, though one finger began to twirl a bit of his hair at the nape of his neck.

Slowly, his hands reached under the wrapper—someone, thank heaven, had told her not to wear undergarments, or maybe she had figured it out by herself—and then carefully pulled it up to bunch about her waist. Did he feel a slight shudder as his hands moved lightly over her inner thighs?

As he pulled his own nightshirt up—damn the inconvenience of clothes!—he pressed his mouth, working against hers, and was rewarded with more response. He felt her twist and turn, her body pressing closer to him, her tongue meeting his.

Palmer was as gentle as he could be until need overcame scruples, and he exploded inside her. She never moved her arms from his neck, never cried out in pain—and never joined him in pleasure. That, he told himself, would come later.

"I'm sorry," he said, when his panting was gone enough to allow him to speak with some dignity. "I...I hope I didn't hurt you." He lay on his back, spent, one arm still beneath her neck.

She turned toward him, studying him. "I didn't know what to expect," she said.

He wanted to prod, to ask "And?" but one didn't discuss such matters, and he was quiet, comforted by the thought that his convent-educated, sheltered bride had been more responsive than he had any reason to expect.

Without another word, Potter Palmer turned over on his side of the bed to sleep, and Cissy rose to tend to herself. Finally, they slept on separate sides of the bed, a wide world between them.

The next morning at breakfast, Cissy, sipping a cup of coffee, said, "I'm surprised someone hasn't invented a nightgown that splits down the middle. Having it all bunched up around your waist is really uncomfortable."

Palmer choked on his coffee but said not one word.