At first glance, the room appeared to be empty of all but the usual fittings—a writing desk, several chairs, and a side table holding a lamp, some decanters, and several glasses. He stepped inside, his gaze falling on the woman who stood motionless by the one window, her back to him. There was something familiar about that straight, slim form and a strange sense of disbelief hit him. Was it possible…?

“Frances?” he said hesitantly, fearing he was mistaken, that the woman was some stranger Summerton wanted him to meet.

“Richard.”

She turned to face him, her clear, musical voice unmistakable.

It *was* his wife. His long lost, presumed dead wife! Shock speared through him and his step faltered, his heart thudding painfully in his chest. “You are real,” he said in a voice tinged with wonder. He forced his feet forward, half expecting her to disappear, that he would wake up and she would be gone. The feeling of relief that threatened to overwhelm him was almost more than he could bear.

His hands shook as he cupped her face, traced her brows and the curve of her cheeks, the skin warm and smooth under his fingers. “I can scarcely believe it.” He drew her close, wrapped his arms around her, and buried his face in her hair. It was not a dream. She was here, in his arms.

“We thought you dead, drowned,” he said huskily.

“Yes, I know. I’m sorry.”

“It is hard to believe, after all this time, that you are alive, truly here in my arms.” He eased back, gently touched his lips to hers, and felt her tremble as she slipped from his grasp.

He stared at her, baffled by her seeming indifference and realized she had stood passively in his embrace, as if it meant nothing. Her eyes were clear. No tears of joy marred their luminosity, no excited flush coloured her pale cheeks and bewildered, he shook his head.

“You are missing for going on two years and that’s all you can say? I’m sorry? No ‘I am so glad to see you, so happy to be home. I’ve missed you terribly?” She was backing away, and he put a hand on her arm to stop her retreat.

“What is going on here, Frances? I am so relieved and joyous to see you I can barely speak coherently and you stand there unmoved.”

“I’m sorry,” she whispered again.

“You’re sorry.” Halcombe felt the intense joy begin to fade. This was *wrong.* He tried to comprehend the bizarre situation, struggled to understand and to believe she did not care. “You disappear for months on end, show not a modicum of happiness at being reunited with your home—your *husband,* and say “I’m sorry” with as much concern as you might feel declining an invitation!” He walked away and then turned back, cursing softly. “Damnation, where the *hell* have you been all this time?”