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Trade Winds

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TRADE WINDS

BY LOIS ROWLEY

Melanie pulled her hand away from the door knob and listened. From the corridor she could hear her mother's nervous murmur. At the sound of the man's voice Melanie stiffened, then relaxed. Some half-drunk Southerner, she thought. His mellow drone oozed with bulbous vowels like the slippery insides of grapes. No matter who he was. The heat of the last flashing hour of sunshine began to smoulder again in her face and shoulders in spite of the air-conditioning. She pressed her cool hands to her cheeks for a moment and opened the door into their suite.

Her mother was sitting at one end of the pink couch, her legs crossed so that her plump knees showed beneath the hem of the beige dress. An over-sized circle of a hat lay on the couch next to her and on the other side of it sat the man. He was about fifty, Melanie supposed, too old for her mother. His skin, hair, suit and all were the color of blanched almonds.

"Melly-pie, this is Mr. Eddy." Her mother raised her eyebrows at the man like a devilish Mary Pickford. "Jamey," she began.

As Mr. Eddy rose, Melanie noticed that he was the pudgy sort of man who doesn't wear a suit, but wrinkles it. He opened his mouth, but said nothing.

"He likes to be called 'Jamey'. I'm sorry, dear."

Melanie couldn't distinguish to whom the apology was addressed, but assumed that the introduction had been completed as far as it was going to go. For Mr. Eddy's sake, she sat down in the nearest chair.

His mouth was still open. "May I help you?" He motioned toward the cocktail shaker on the coffee table.

"Oh, no," said Mrs. Mainert, laughing. "Melly is just fifteen. You'd never know it, would you?"

"I see," he said, sinking back into the couch. He winked slyly at Melanie. "Still a babe in arms, eh?" He chortled. "Or is it a babe in the woods?"

"Ha," laughed Melanie. Then she looked down and began to purposely demonstrate an interest in the little gold chain that dangled from her watch band. She knew that his eyes were scanning both of them in turn, noting the striking similarity. They had the same widow-peaked forehead, the nose that scooped perfectly into the profile. Their lips were really the same, but her mother painted hers like a story-book doll. Mrs. Mainert wore her platinum hair drawn back in a complex French roll.

Melanie felt her own long hair, still sticky from salt water and wet on the ends from the shower. She might get away with her chignon tonight if she just let her hair hang straight and dry that way. Her mother wouldn't want her to go out with it stringing down and there wouldn't be time to curl it after Tom called. Yes, this was the night for the chignon. She could picture it with the ice-blue dress and the high-heeled sandals and the coral lipstick against her tan. Melanie liked to let her face tan as deeply as the rest of her so that she was one perfect tone all the way up to the shock of bloneness.

She looked at Mr. Eddy. If there were even a dim hope that some of the men would interest her mother, it could not be this one. Melanie could see the waiting even now in her face—the face so smooth that no one would believe she was thirty-five years old. Mrs. Mainert's mouth was moving glibly, gaily, but the waiting was there in her eyes. Of course, Melanie thought, her mother couldn't help picking up these other men, and once she had them she was something like the Pied Piper with his rats, thinking what cute little fellows they were and that since they didn't seem to want to go anywhere else while she played her tune, the very least she could do was keep fluting for a while. It must have been a hard day for her

mother. Melanie wished Mr. Eddy would go. She even wished now that it had been Michael's voice in the room, although she had stood outside the door frozen by the very thought.

Melanie knew that no matter how much longer they stayed, he would never come to them. He was too smart not to know when he was loved. He expected love to grow inevitably out of any woman's contact with him. Her mother had even convinced Melanie in the beginning that she would love Michael. Not as much as her real father, of course, but then she had also told her that she would not be allowed to see her father again. Melanie had been ten years old when her parents were divorced. They sent her to her aunt and uncle when the storm began to gather and then one day her mother had come for her alone. Melanie couldn't remember exactly what her mother had said. It was something like "You will like your new daddy even more" — but the words had been obliterated by the new way her mother looked in her black checked suit with blonde pushed-back hair instead of the long brown shining curls. They had driven in a new white convertible up to a rambling house. Michael was sitting in the living room waiting for them. He was black-haired like Melanie's father but even taller and more particular about the way he spoke.

With the facility of youth Melanie had adjusted to the thick carpets and the several staircases as if she were only receiving a fifteen cent raise in her allowance. Her mother bought her soft sweaters and plaid skirts to wear to the new school, and she liked the whole situation immensely. But she didn't try to love Michael; perhaps because her mother seemed to worship him. Her mother went on loving Michael while he screamed at her and loved him more while she was screaming back. She loved him most, Melanie thought, when she was slamming through every room on the second floor. She would crash door after door and finally end in the last guest-room with Michael either pounding to get in or running out to the car and screeching down the twisting driveway to the street. Maybe though, her mother really loved Michael most on the day a month ago when she discovered that he had left Philadelphia with a divorce suit pending silently on his lawyer's desk.

Melanie listened to her mother and Mr. Eddy with just enough consciousness to find that her mother had not yet dropped the first hint. She sighed, wondering how long they would go on pretending

this vacation while they really were only waiting in hope that the law of what goes up has to come down would work on a lateral basis.

Not that it wasn't fun here with the beach and the people who didn't know you and didn't care who you were in Philadelphia or Johannesburg or West Unity.

Melanie could still feel the elation of the hour before. She and Tom, throwing themselves together on the float, had caught the third wave at its rill and surged in on top of the light-bubbled rolling surf. Melanie screeched until she felt her toes scraping against the sand. Then the thin warm water swirled once around them and was sucked back out. It was like playing with the final force of a thousand miles and a billion tons of water that had been gathering in mystic ocean caverns for eons only to make that one wave which they used and laughed at.

They pulled themselves up and Tom took the float on his shoulder.

"Would you like to go out for a few drinks tonight, Melanie?"

She had been sure that, once they were out of the deep water and he could reassure himself that she was not really so young as her face, he would ask her. Now that he had, she was triumphant, carelessly eager. "I'm too young to drink, Tom." She narrowed her brown eyes.

"How old are you, Melanie?"

He was wondering. She was exhilarated. "Fourteen," she said, trying not to laugh giddily.

"All right."

He didn't believe her and that was good because she was lying. She had been waiting for this moment since the night after they arrived in Florida. The waiter had believed her when she told him she was her mother's sister. Maybe he hadn't quite believed her, but it didn't matter because her mother loved the sister joke and the Tom Collins looked like lemonade and the man had paid the bill without looking.

"Really, Melanie, are you busy tonight?" Tom asked.

Melanie kicked at the hot sand as she walked beside him. She hated the feel of it, clinging to her wet feet and ankles. "No," she said, finally. "You see, my parents . . ."

"Oh," he said. He had heard that excuse three times. "Look, I'm not an unreasonable guy, Melanie. But why don't you let me meet them? Anyhow, they can't expect you to sit in every night.

My, God, you're on vacation. You're here for some fun."

"I have fun. For all I know they may go out themselves. I just have to find out their plans. Why don't I meet you somewhere?"

"Well, okay, but what are you going to do? Meet me or maybe meet me or probably meet me?"

"If I'm not there by 8:30, feel free, all right?"

"How are you going to get to wherever we decide to meet?"

"Goodness, you'd think we were negotiating a United Nations meeting. Delegate from France: Monsieur Thomas Piquet."

"Very much present," he said. "Et je vous menerez a la best bar in town."

She laughed.

"Look, I have to go to a Real Estate Brokers' dinner tonight, but I'll cut out of the meeting afterwards and call you at eight. If you're going I'll meet you in the hotel lobby at eight-thirty."

Melanie had left it that way and run up the beach to the shower room. The whole thing was beautiful. Sitting in the room with her mother and Mr. Eddy, she thought that it wouldn't be much longer before he would feel absolutely obligated to leave. Then she could talk with her mother and decide before the telephone rang. The more she thought about it, the more certain she became that although tonight would not be the last chance she would have, she could not wait too much longer. The feeling of power that precoursed every large decision began to swell within her. It would be easy.

Mr. Eddy stood up with difficulty. "Thank you so much, Alice. I'm so pleased to have met you, Miss Melly." The way he said Miss Melly was more like cantaloupe seeds than grapes.

Mrs. Mainert closed the door behind him and turned quickly. She snatched up the hat and went into her bedroom. Melanie looked at the mess from the cocktails. The door of the concealed bar was open as her mother always left it.

Melanie took the wash-cloth from a rack inside the bar and began to dab carefully at the sugary rings on the coffee table. She wanted to go in—she would have to—but not until there was nothing left to do. When the shaker and glasses were tucked away and the washcloth rinsed and hung again, she closed the door and transformed the bar into an innocent cabinet in the bookshelves.

Mrs. Mainert was lying on her big white bed. She looked like a small blonde curl which someone had cut off and tied in the middle

with a string before tossing it on the bed. Melanie sat down carefully and looked into her mother's face. Tension wrinkled the usually flawless forehead and Mrs. Mainert stared out of the window. Melanie looked, but there was nothing outside but the top of the other hotel.

"I don't know what to do." Her mother's voice was ordinarily bell-toned, and now it seemed to be jerking itself up from the hollow of her throat.

"Why don't you go out with Mr. Eddy?" Melanie had almost said "Jamey." Why at times like this did some spurious quirk of her mind try to twist itself into her words?

"He didn't ask to take me out. I just met him today." Her voice was tired and she was not telling the truth.

"He would have," Melanie said. "Really, mother, don't stay here tonight. Go out somewhere even if it's just for a little while. She could call any number of men. Three had proposed marriage in the month they had been there.

"I wonder if Michael will be at the Tradewinds tonight."

With Ellen. Melanie completed the sentence mentally as she knew her mother must be doing. She shivered, remembering the evening when they had found out about the Tradewinds and the other woman. It was the night after Melanie and her mother had arrived on the plane and taken this suite of rooms. They had chosen the Morehouse because it was directly across the street from the hotel where they knew Michael was staying. None of it had been an articulate plan. They had found out where he had gone and then they had come to find him, Melanie supposed; but the only voiced reasoning her mother had offered from the beginning was simply that he would never expect it. He would expect them to sit in the house in Philadelphia among the onyx ash-trays and the Italian lamps and wonder when he would come back.

The evening after they arrived, Melanie and her mother had walked across to Michael's hotel. The lawyer hadn't given them his room number, so they asked the man at the desk. He smiled at Mrs. Mainert and gave her a note from Michael's box. "Ellen, darling," it said, "I'm at the Tradewinds. It's the only decent place in this hunky town. Sorry I couldn't meet your train, but hope you won't mind driving over here. I've left the car in the garage for you. See you then. Love, Mike." The simple directions were penciled at the bottom. Melanie and her mother had stood and stared at each other. The car was

waiting. He had taken the black Buick—the car her mother had driven, ridden in beside him a thousand times. Mrs. Mainert held the piece of paper in her trembling hand for a minute, then gave it back to the man. "Just put it back in his box," she had said.

Silent wide-eyed tears were starting to roll downward toward the pillow. Melanie wished she could soothe her mother somehow, massage her back or simply reach for her hand, but the very thought knit her fingers together and chained them to her lap. There was one perfect word to say, but Melanie could not find it, and she knew that even if she could, she would never be able to say it. Any rapport which had existed between her and her mother had worn clear through on that night a year ago. Her parents had been entertaining when the maid discovered that they had forgotten to order the sherbet for dessert. Michael had called Melanie to go with him to the delicatessen and run in for it. Mrs. Mainert smiled at him and frowned at Melanie, so she went with him. When he parked the car and she opened the door, Melanie suddenly felt an unfatherly arm around her waist. "Don't hurry, honey," he said. "I want to talk to you about why you never call me 'daddy' like a good little girl." He was pulling her across the seat, but she squirmed out of his shaky grasp and slammed the car door after her, barely missing his fingers. Then she looked back at him over her shoulder. Melanie could still see the crooked laughter frozen on his face, framed in the car window.

She had wanted a chance to give him back that smile for so long, and now it had come. She would walk into the Tradewinds and see them, the strange woman's face half hidden by Michael's unmistakable sloping shoulder and square black head. Melanie would lead Tom across the room, walking as she had been taught in modeling class, very tall in her high heels. Then when they stopped at the table, Melanie would smile down at him.

"Did you pour out the rest of the cocktails, Melly?" Mrs. Mainert's voice resounded in the silence.

"I'm not hungry. Why don't you have something?"

Melanie got up from the bed. "I'm not hungry either." She glanced at her watch. It was almost eight o'clock. Until the phone rang, she could do some reading.

Her literature book was in the living room. It was the only dustless book on the shelves and Melanie thought, as she took it down, that all the rest of the volumes could be Gideon Bibles and no one

who stayed here would ever notice. The glamorous white telephone and the bar were the only things that justified the book-shelves. Looking at the telephone, Melanie thought that perhaps she could order dinner. She liked the idea of having them bring it, simmering in silver, on a rolling linen-clothed table, and then letting it stand there and get cold. Mashed potatoes would be good; they would congeal nicely and stick to the plate. She would add a luxurious tip to the check, of course, and it would all be added to their final bill. These things had to be done while the money was still coming in. It might stop quite abruptly, like the curtain between Acts Two and Three; and there might not be much to eat during intermission. Melanie decided that she would get her mother out on a shopping spree tomorrow.

While she stood looking at it, the telephone rang.

"Melanie? This is Tom."

"Oh, hello," she said, realizing that she had stupidly left the door to her mother's room wide open.

"What do you mean, 'oh, hello?' Don't tell me you've forgotten that there's a Security Council meeting tonight?"

Melanie laughed softly into the telephone. "Oh, is there? I guess I had heard about it. Would you hold the line a minute?"

"Happily."

She laid down the phone gently and went into her mother's room.

"Who is it, Melly?" There was apprehension in Mrs. Mainert's voice.

"It's just a boy I met the other day. The one I told you about."

Relief flooded over her mother's face. "The one who—which one?"

"I've only told you about one, mother. His name is Tom Piquet and he's very nice."

"Does he want to take you out?"

"Yes, I think he wants to take me to a show or something."

"Well, I don't know, dear. I wish you would bring him up sometime before you go out with him. Of course, I suppose you had no way of knowing that he would call tonight."

"I know. I would have brought him, but I never dreamed—"

"Well, you say he's nice. And really I suppose you've had enough experience to tell. You know, though, dear, this isn't like home where you meet boys at dances and know something about their parents."

Since Melanie had been going to private school, her mother had made a great effort to be as squeamish as the other mothers. "Yes, I know," Melanie said, trying to strain the disgust out of her voice.

"Well, go ahead, then."

"Are you sure you'll be all right, mother?"

"Of course. Goodness, don't worry about me, dear. Just have a good time."

Melanie went back and picked up the receiver. "I'm sorry, Tom, I didn't mean to keep you waiting."

"Oh, that's all right. Did you finish your dessert?" He was kidding.

"I'll be ready at 8:30 then."

"Well, I guess you didn't finish your dessert."

"Why don't you come up—oh, well, if that would be easier, I'll just meet you in the lobby then. Yes, I'm sure that will be all right."

"Oh," he said. "You're sitting in the same room with your parents. Well, fine, Melanie, I'll meet you in the alley around back. Wear your shorts. You'll recognize me by my conspicuously dirty trench coat."

"All right, Tom, she said, giggling quietly. "I'll see you about eight-thirty."

Melanie ran into the bedroom, unfastening her dress on the way. She opened the top drawer of her vanity and took out the springy mesh doughnut and the pins and the fine net. Opening the other drawers, she began tossing lingerie, stockings, shoes, everything she would need, on the bed.

The dress was still in the box. It was beautifully cut, straight and slim, lined with silk-tafetta so that the linen would not stretch. It went on easily. The shoes matched perfectly. Melanie was glad she had had them dyed instead of trying to find some exactly that ice-blue shade. She used only a light dust of powder over her rich tan, but took time to shape the full line of her lips precisely before filling in the glowing coral. The chignon took a little time, too. Finally it was spread perfectly into a shining roll, and the gold pins were fastened secretly and the invisible net snapped around. Gold round ear-rings were enough. She shoved in her vanity drawers and walked out into the living room. It was eight-thirty.

"Melly, are you ready?"

Her mother had heard her and started into the room. She stopped in the doorway. "My Lord. Come here, dear, and let me see what you've done." Her teary eyes were still wide and wondering.

"This is my new dress, mother. I showed it to you in the box."

"Oh, yes. I didn't know it had a straight skirt. Did you take my chignon?"

"No. I really had to do it this way, mother. My hair was horrible."

"Don't you think you might be overdressed for just a movie?"

"Oh, do you really think it's too much? I couldn't wait to wear it."

"I guess not. I-I'm just a little stunned to see you—I mean, I'm not used to you—" She paused and walked to a chair. "Did I hear you say that you were going to meet this boy in the lobby?"

"Yes," Melanie said. "He could only park in the hotel zone for a few minutes."

"Well, I suppose it's just as well. I look dreadful."

"No you don't, mother," Melanie said. She hated to see her mother like this. The hurt expression on her face; the worry. It wasn't fair, Melanie thought, to be hurt every time you turned around just because you couldn't help loving. "I won't be late," she said. "But why don't you go to bed anyway?"

When Melanie stepped off the elevator in the lobby, she saw Tom standing near a tropical growth which sprung incongruously out of the center of the expansive tiled floor. He was examining its leaves, fingering their unearthly waxen texture. Melanie could hardly stand to watch him. She hated to fondle things like that, probably because she had been told never to breathe on gardenias or let them touch your skin for fear of turning them brown.

She walked up behind him, but he didn't hear her. "Hello," she said. "You decided against the alley?"

He grinned and took her arm. "Let's go."

Melanie had thought that Tom would comment on the way she looked, but the approval in his eyes sufficed. He had evidently expected no less than what he saw. As they walked along the hot street, she looked at the women who passed them. Tom did not seem aware of them, much less their dragged hair and soaking armpits.

"My car is around the corner. We could walk over to the Marble Bar for a couple and then drive to the Sans Souci or somewhere to dance."

"Fine," she said. It would be good to have a few drinks before suggesting the Tradewinds. Her knees shook a little as she walked beside him. It would be easy to get him to take her there. She would just have to mention it, casually. Maybe he would even ask her if there was any place she would like to go. The white scrolled neon of the Marble Bar was glowing brighter and closer.

The sign hung out over the side-walk from one square of a long caravan of connected facades. Through the glass door, Melanie could

make out only a few greyed forms moving in the darkness. As they entered, she saw tables of people lit by dim halos of candle-light. Others were seated on pelican-legged stools around a piano-shaped black marble bar which filled most of the room. At the far end of it a man sat at a dwarf key-board, playing a melody distorted by the steady hum of voices and the occasional clink of bottles.

Melanie followed the tall black-sheathed hostess to a table in a corner. They sat down.

"What would you like to drink?" Tom asked her, smiling across the table.

"A Tom Collins, please." She had said the first thing that came into her mind. She wished she had thought of a stinger, but she could drink it fast. The hollowness in the pit of her stomach reminded her that she had had nothing to eat.

"What are you looking at?" Tom asked.

"The man playing the piano."

"Oh, I thought maybe you were thinking up a weighty proposal for tonight's meeting."

"No." She wondered how far he was going to pursue this meeting talk. It irritated her somehow.

The waitress left their drinks. Melanie tasted the Tom Collins. It might have been lemonade.

"How was your banquet?" she asked.

"Fine. Dull. Insipid. Thank you for saving me from the meeting. I gave my report to someone else because I thought I'd better leave."

"Oh, I'm sorry. We could have made it later."

"No. I didn't mind waiting for ten minutes either. I had fun with the strange vegetation. Have you ever noticed how they have it planted? In big troughs sunk flush with the floor. I think it's a tremendous thing when you first see it from the door."

"Yes, I love plants." That was a stupid remark. But it was rather a stupid subject. And he started it.

"Do you like animals, too?"

"Some of them," she said, thinking that if he were getting at any kind of animals like male animals, she had said the right thing. If he were not, it was at least more discriminating than "Yes, I like animals."

"Big or little? I like cows."

"I'm flattered."

"Melanie, are your parents normal people? I mean are they the

usual sort for parents—a little fat maybe, or a little skinny, or a little too friendly, but otherwise the ordinary kind?”

Melanie looked at him, wanting to tell him that her mother was a very beautiful woman, neither too fat nor too skinny. “What do you mean?” she asked.

“Well, why do you keep hedging about my meeting them? They can’t be out every afternoon.”

“They aren’t. It just seems like such a production to go up there with you.”

Tom looked away. The piano and talking and smoke rushed into the void between them. Melanie felt imprisoned, as if the corner were there for the sole purpose of separating her from the open street. She pressed her hand against the cool stucco wall and wished that it would suddenly crumble away and let her through. She would run out and find Tom’s car and get in and drive to the Tradewinds. If only she could do it now. If she could just escape while the moment’s inspiration held her buoyant, swept her forward, she would not need whatever weak impetus this drink could give.

“Could we go to the Tradewinds after this?”

“All right,” Tom said. “Is that your favorite spot?”

“No. I’ve never been there. Mother was telling me about it.”

“Say, she sounds like a good old girl. I’m beginning to think you don’t want your parents to meet *me!*”

Melanie watched him light a cigarette from the candle. His hands were very dark against the edge of white cuff and the light suit. They moved softly with a combined strength and gentleness that never existed together in boys. She didn’t want Tom to believe his last remark. Of course, it was something about him. But it was the most wonderful part of him—the fact that he was a man—that would have shocked her mother and ruined the whole plan. In an hour though everything would be explained, and once they had gone and it was over, she would be free to relax with Tom and talk and smile a different kind of smile. She would let him take whatever strange tangents he desired and she would follow him, joking and laughing, fascinating him, swirling lightly from room to room with a drink in her hand. She might even take a cigarette.

“Melanie, what are you thinking about?”

She liked the way he spoke to her. His honest interest was so unlike the artificial solicitude of people who knew, or thought they

knew, what she was thinking. There was nothing perfunctory or pitying about Tom.

“Melanie?”

“Oh, I wasn’t thinking about anything.”

He laughed. “Of course you were. Don’t deny it. It’s a great thing to do. Why don’t you tell me what about and I’ll think about it, too, and then maybe we could bring it up for discussion later.”

She didn’t know what to pretend to have been thinking about.

“I hope that’s a good drink,” Tom said kindly, obviously sorry that he had caught her at a disadvantage. “They water down everything tall and fancy.”

“It is a little weak.”

“That’s what I thought. I’m sorry. I should have warned you before you ordered it. Look, do you want to get out of here? Why don’t we just take off for the Tradewinds?”

“All right,” she said, but suddenly the corner felt snug to Melanie, as safe as her mother’s bedroom.

He signalled the waitress and she came flipping through her book of checks. Tom paid her and left a dollar on the table.

Outside the night heat still emanated from the pavement. It was a shorter walk than she had expected to his car. Melanie got in and sat quietly while he started the motor. In a moment they were driving swiftly through the glittering streets.

“Is it very far to the Tradewinds?” Melanie asked.

“No, it’s just a few blocks out Marathon. I’ve only been there once but I think I can find it.” He looked at her quickly and saw her hand resting open on the seat. Without groping, then, he closed his own hand over it.

Melanie felt a thrill run up her arm. Her thoughts were suddenly confused and what she had to do was no longer clear. She watched numbly the shadowy squares and darkened side-streets swimming past in the rush of warm air. If only he would stop for a moment. If he would pull off into this next deserted street and stop in front of any strange unmindful house to let her sort her whirling thoughts and gather up her certainty. Melanie remembered one night when Michael jerked the car-keys out of the ignition because her mother refused to slow down. But that was not the thing to do.

There were hundreds of bars and cocktail lounges and hotel restaurants in town. It was silly to even expect to find Michael and

the girl in this one place. But there was the note that they had read. Melanie knew that he would be there. She knew it the same way she had always known what he would do before her mother guessed. She had watched Michael, studied him unconsciously, she supposed, until his motions were calculable to her. She wished that she had waited at least long enough to finish her drink.

Suddenly the car slowed down and Tom took away his hand to pull in toward the curb. Thank God, Melanie thought, looking out the window at pure dark night, waving with ghosts of palm trees. The surf was not more than a thousand feet away. It swished softly in her ears as she turned toward Tom. Then, beyond his shoulder, across the street, she saw the tiny sign lit in blue neon.

"Well, we're here," Tom said. "I'm glad you thought of this. It ought to be better than the Marble Bar."

A laughing couple walked along the street and opened the door beneath the sign. Melanie strained her eyes to decipher a familiar form inside, but the door closed. Then she saw the black car parked near the door, and a flash of recognition electrified her. He was there. She had known that he would be and he really was. As she stared at the car, the image of Michael's leering face formed in the window. She shuddered and felt the last drop of resolution drain away.

"What is it, Melanie?" Tom asked softly. "What is it?"

She let him draw her into the warm close solidness of his encircling arms. His fingers stroked her hair smoothly, and Melanie felt her heart pounding against him through her deceiving breasts. "Please," she said. "I can't go in. I thought I had to but—"

"But what?"

Even with her eyes closed tight and pressed against Tom's shoulder Melanie saw the face and the frozen curling smile. "But it doesn't matter. It wouldn't help a thing."
