

**The Gold Medal Mate**

By

**Raymond L. Fowler**

Ann. Yes, Ann.

Reed had thought of Ann for the past ten miles. It had been two years since she transferred in her job with a whopping promotion.

Their relationship had been fun. Spontaneous, and flexible, a genuine companionship- more like what he thought marriage would be like.

He loved her, but he was not deeply or marriage ably in love with her.

No, not the stuff life-long matches are made of.

Reed chuckled, she had needed her space on Fridays. And Saturdays, too.

But come Sunday, she needed and demanded his entire Sunday, every Sunday.

The all of him.

He had indulged her.

He would have rather been chopping wood, clearing land, carpentering, working out, sailing, water skiing- things that invigorated and challenged him.

So he lost his Sundays. La de dah.

The weekdays had been perfect. Meeting after work. Having dinner in, and out. Grabbing a movie for in or out. Dressing full tilt for a play or a concert. Or just hanging out together. It all was perfect. No fights. No fuss. No criticism.

Marriage was not for either of them. They understood and accepted that. It made it easy.

What they experienced was a deeper bond than marriage. Independence was a priority, followed by genuine, mutual respect. They were happy together, they were completely supportive of one another. Neither could have asked for more of the other. It was, well, perfect.

Yet, he had never shared Sky Ranch with her. He had kept it private. Sky Ranch was special.

It would be the final test of any marital caliber of love. Whether he would share his personal roots!

They were his alone and he clung to them with his whole being. Protectively.

He had never felt Ann would be compassionate about the items he prized. Rather he saw her saying something such as, "Do you know the value of this? Sell it and move on, unless, of course, it might increase in value soon!"

And now she was in St. Louis fulfilling her career dreams, not knowing that the reason he would not visit her there was because that city held for him great pain he had not conquered.

He liked his life. He cherished his freedom. He was alone, not lonely.

Someday there would be someone with Ann's great personal qualities plus a uniqueness of character that would drive him to committing himself fully, forever.

Meanwhile Friday nights were Reed's to tinker, to dream, or to do his thing of the moment. Friday evenings were the beginning of the weekend, not the end of the week.

He enjoyed his personal time. Friday nights brought him joy.

Usually he holed up in Cincinnati's King's Tower drawing floor plans or writing letters, catching dinner in the Lancelot Room during the evening. Sometimes he dropped into the Nightcap Lounge and played the piano, giving the regular a break.

Reed Banks had been in Kentucky, driving home to Cincinnati on U.S. 75.

The sprawling convention center of Ivanhoe Inn lay ahead to his right. It reminded Reed of Helsinki, Finland and the gatherings of well-dressed singles and young professionals early evenings to drink and talk and laugh.

His spirit tugged at him to stop. Well, alright, he agreed. But I don't need the whole banana split, just the chocolate topping, then go.

The Ivanhoe was in full bloom. Tables were filled, bar stools both occupied and shared, people standing everywhere. Waitresses were floating like butterflies, trays held high. People were massed around great trays of hors d'oeuvres and finger foods.

The crowd included stay-overs and weekend retreats, partiers, and early birds, all matching the Helsinki memories in both dress and excitement.

Reed caught the pointing and felt eyes upon him, but he sensed they weren't quite sure.

He moved into another area and out of sight.

It was a bad move. It placed him in the same area as the man who would become key to changing his life.

He sensed his mistake and groaned.

Reed immediately saw and heard the great Lothario himself, the happy seducer of women. They were charmed by him. These ladies called him Matt.

One in every crowd. Always.

This one was a five-feet-eight or ten inch philanderer. A bore to everyone except many of the women.

The type, decided Reed.

Married. Nice house. Good job. Wife. Children.

His personality carries him, opens doors.

Makes instant friends Madly plays around. Drops names to impress.

Enviously successful with the ladies.

They would die for him, wait for him, take from him, give for him, do for him.

The blurred masses waiting for him to get to each of them. Each of them eager for him or the dream of him. Putty. Waiting for his hands, his touch, his molding.

He's good at it. He knows it. He glories in it. It's in his blood.

No firm character. Not a drop of genuine compassion. Not a drop of loyalty.

Clogged arteries of caring. A master of slipping in and out of fidelity each beckoning moment.

Good God, here he is!

"You look familiar. "What do you do?" The boy wonder in front of me gracing my presence.

Reed could answer "thirty-two minutes and forty seconds", and get a response of admiration or turn this guy off and discourage further attention.

"Carpenter. Master of wood," Reed replied matter-of-fact.

"No!" Matt exclaimed. "For sure?"

"you got it from me," Reed assured him.

"Are you good?"

"The best in Western Hills!"

"I've been looking for a man to build me shelves in my den!"

"No!"

"Yes! I have this home in Forest Park – Tommy Post use to own it- and I need a place of my own away from the kids and wife, a place I can work and have peace of mind...

Here we go.

Reed checked them off.

Home,

Wife,

Children, and

Names all four...in one sentence.

Oh, how lucky I am Reed silently declared.

“Look, why don’t we go to my place now and you check my drawing and give me an estimate?”

He was about to give Matt an appointment with Peter Petry for an estimate when his curiosity welled up and imprisoned him.

How he would like to see the wife of this sexual predator! What kind of a women would put up with a jerk like this?

Reed would bet on a nerve-frayed nagger.

“Alright, give me your address and I’ll lead you there.”

This guy was twenty miles from home! He lives in Cincinnati but works in Dayton! What a big territory!

“Tell me,” Reed asked Matt, “Why are you so willing leave this sanctuary? You appear to have it in the palm of your hand.”

“They can tell I will be back”, Matt assured him.

“I collected three telephone numbers to tide me over. I’ll call one tonight. You saw that I got many eye messages. I acknowledged several with my eyes. They say “I love your feelings, honey!”

“About your call tonight. Isn’t your wife at home?”

“I have a telephone in the basement. My wife will sleep early so she can get up to keep the kids quiet. I sleep in Saturdays if I don’t play golf.”

Of course you do, conceded Reed to himself.

Matt charged into the house, leading Reed.

“I’m home,” he called out.

“You certainly are early!” a voice called back. “I haven’t started dessert.”

His wife entered the living room, threw her arms around her husband’s neck and kissed him on the cheek. He pushed her away from him.

“Liz, this is Reed.”

“Reed Banks, Ma’am,” Reed hastened to supply.

“Lizlee Resler, Matt’s wife,” Lizlee told him.

“Liz will do,” Matt told him.

“Mrs. Resler, it is a joy to meet you.”

“Thank you.”

Matt whisked him into the den off the living room.

When the children came inside, Reed heard Lizlee caution them, “Hold it down, children, your father’s home.”

Reed and Matt poured over Matt’s drawing, measured and made changes with Reed making his own drawing for Peter Petry.

“Look, why not have dinner with us?” Matt proposed.

Reed was about to give his usual decline and thanks for the invitation. He never joined clients for dinner in their home.

Once again he was checked by a power within. “I would like that.”

Matt yelled out, “Hey, woman fair, Reed is staying for dinner.”

Reed was embarrassed by Matt’s manners. His wife was polished. Her nerves were not frayed.

It would seem she had trained the children well. (Their table conduct would tell.) They did not dominate the home.

Matt evidently did.

The dinner was alternately interesting and fun. Matt and Reed talked. Matt, Reed and Lizlee talked. Reed and the children held absorbing, both serious and fun, discussions.

When Lizlee participated in the discussions, it was because Reed drew her in. Matt was always the center of discussion, except with the children, a boy and younger girl. He did not enter into Reed’s and their talk. Neither did Lizlee, but because of her breeding, and respect for the children’s expression, not because of disinterest. She listened, smiled and laughed.

What a mismatch in culture these two are, thought Reed. What an unusual lady she must be.

Lizlee served dessert. Reed got up and served the coffee. He then held Lizlee's chair and commanded she sit down and enjoy herself, he would finish up.

He related with this lady.

When Reed gathered the dessert dishes, Lizlee started to protest.

"I know, Mrs. Resler, you have a dishwasher. I recognize one. I can even operate one. You two sit and I will be back to talk."

Reed called the children, Nathan and Mary. They came immediately.

"I want you two to know that I am most impressed by your discussion skills and your hospitality. I want to thank you for sharing with me your father and mother tonight. When I finish dishes and finish making final plans with your parents, I will read to you before I go. You choose the book, or I will bring one in from the truck. Your choice."

Reed served more coffee.

"I will do this job myself," he told them. If I don't have to do it all in one day, I will start it next week. I will get the materials Monday or have them delivered. It will be afternoon. Will you be home?"

As Reed left, Matt brightened.

"Would you like to play golf Saturday?"

"I would find that interesting."

Monday afternoon Reed pulled up as Lizlee was about to leave.

"The lumber was delivered," she told him. "The house is unlocked. I'm going after the children."

"Good. I'll work a while." Then something inside him kicked in. "Come, I'll drive you to pick up the children. This truck will be a new experience for them. Then I will brief them on what is going to happen here."

He left her no room to refuse.

Later he took the children and Lizlee to a restaurant and a caged-in children's play maze. On the way home, he stopped at a delicatessen for a salad plate for Matt.

He left them at eight. Matt was not home yet!

He would really like to know her better. She was so...perfect. So in command of herself and her world!

A strange setting. He's a creep in fine clothes. She is a model mother and wife,  
he told himself.

What a waste!

He knew this so far. She was an honor student. Matt had boasted so. She had gone to college two-and-a-half years majoring in music. Then she had married Matt and put him through his last two years of college while she worked and raised a baby.

And she fed Matt by hand too, Reed guessed, while he blessed womankind as the campus stud.

Reed showed up Tuesday morning in coveralls, ready for work. Lizlee had left the front door unlocked for him.

She had returned from taking the children to school. She was out back picking up twigs and sticks. He stopped working and watched her out the den window. Guilt stabbed him, but he had to seal the moment. The back yard was large, complete with swings, cookout equipment and tables. The landscaping was attractive, relaxing, almost professional. No, actually professional in its design.

Her hand, I'll bet, thought Reed. She was routing rose bush trailers around wires. He watched her a while longer.

What more could any man want? He asked himself.

Why did she have to be taken?

So I would allow myself to look closer, he laughed to himself, and went back to work.

Then he stopped and sat back.



Distinctly he had felt the taps on his shoulder. Clearly he had heard the words, “This is the one for you.”

He had even answered, “But she’s married!”

“Is she? Or is she alone and abandoned, with no husband?”

But he had never mixed intimacy and business relations. Even his dad had warned him and enforced his warning. With his own crew he would not permit familiarity between client and staff member. He stood firm on this. He wanted none of the problems that crossing the line created.

But it happened. Never before, on his watch! Never in her life!

It happened suddenly. Some force took over from each of them.

She came in. She looked at him in coveralls. He looked masculine, he was tall, and athletic in build. He was erect. He was in charge of himself but he didn’t order others. Matt was bossy. This man led and shared those around him. He was caring and aware.

He turned, and stopped still.

She was seeing him for the first time and he sensed it.

He was looking at her, direct, and seeing her with his full being. She knew he was admiring her. She warmed. She felt pretty. She felt a whole person, an important being.

His eyes penetrated. His jaw bone structure impressed her. He was a manly but handsome person.

He was aware of her wasp waist, her figure. Her clothes were her. Natural, blending, not garish. Casual. In her face he saw her soul, her breeding and her beauty.

She had a pretty face of lovely skin and innocent, trusting, friendly, open eyes. The ready smile charmed. There was nothing blatant about her looks or personality. She fit. She belonged. She was everyone's friend.

Why was she subservient to her husband? She was anyone's equal. How he would love to have someone like her at his side for life! Or, was she the one?

Each had concentrated on the other for what seemed a free, relaxed eternity. It really got them over a hump and past embarrassment or confusement.

"Well!" Lizlee exclaimed. "Perhaps you should wear bathing trunks. I don't seem to handle coveralls in stride."

"Bathing trunks are a second nature to me. But can't we take a break periodically and just look at each other to one's content? I like what I saw. These coveralls? Out-of-place in your presence, for sure. Tomorrow I'll wear my clown suit to give you a laugh."

They both laughed nervously, each relieved to get past what had just happened. It was awkward, still.

"Let's don't prescribe what each other wears" she proposed. It would be nice, I suppose, to have someone notice. But wear your coveralls and be your own person. I would like a jumpsuit, myself, and one day I shall have one.

They each were beginning to feel safe from any unwise direction of reaction from the revealing incident. Face it, Reed. They had bonded in every way.

"Have you noticed", Reed asked her, "that women notice what men have on, and that women always notice what other women wear? "Did you know we single men do notice? We do not make it a big issue. Married men are numb to it all unless the neck-line plunges toward earth."

He wasn't being clear at all. "Don't you want to talk about paint recipes or the number of beans in a gallon?" She asked.

"Get outa here," Reed cheerfully commanded. "Next you'll be getting bossy. I'll see you during our next break when I am composed."

He returned to work. He had much to think over. He had just dropped his reserve with this lady. She was wondering upstairs what had possessed her down there!

He had to work. He had to focus on the job at hand. He knew what was coming. He wanted it to come. He wanted a girl like her. He knew it was absurd. And damned unwise.

She did not know something had happened to her down there. Unlike him, she did not know something was coming. Se she could not sop it. Besides, that was ridiculous. What was there to stop or to accept?

Reed left for a part of the day.

That evening he made them all a stew, a St. Louis recipe. He played with the children. He read to the children. He liked feeling her near. He said goodnight to them all about eight o'clock. Matt was not home.

Wednesday morning Lizlee and Reed were acutely aware of the other.

She felt she flirted with him outrageously. But she couldn't leave him alone. All day long!

He teased her, enjoyed her, and felt her experiencing the same feelings that possessed him. All day long! He accomplished little. But he could not leave her alone.

She had to hurry to get the children. He fixed dinner for her. The children played outside when they returned.

As he left about five, he told her, “Lizlee, you have some decisions to make tonight. You know as I know that in another twenty-four hours we will be in one another’s arms. We can stop tonight. We can’t stop tomorrow. We won’t stop the next day

“I won’t stop it myself. I realize I want this with all my heart. It is as if I am willed, destined, to do this. You can say STOP in the morning. I won’t say it. If you don’t say it, we will in no time belong to each other for life.”

She was stunned by his directness. He had spoken. He had gone.

When Reed got home, he called Simon, “Have you found anything?”

He had. Oh, had he! Reed now knew of Matt’s whereabouts Monday and Tuesday night. He was into another woman, an Annelis Parker. They were together in her apartment in Dayton both Monday and Tuesday nights. They had lunched together both days. The match was hot and heavy.

Matt has abandoned his marriage! Reed told himself. He has broken his marriage  
vowels. He has abandoned Lizlee.

The road is mine. The coast is clear. The signals are Go.

Six white horses and all, Lizlee, here I come. I’ve waited years for you. I’m  
capturing you for me, now that you are abandoned, for life.

This dinner was important to Reed. Rice Phipps had been with Reed’s father, Fletcher Banks, in the Banks’ building and supply business in St. Louis for years. He was like a second father. Reed had brought him to his own business.

“I had to talk to you tonight.

“Tomorrow my life is changing. I want it to change. I can stop now. Tomorrow I can’t”

Reed told him about Lizlee and Matt. He confided his own thoughts and his own desires.

The talking refreshed Reed.

He had frantically set up this meeting, wanting Rice to reason him out of his bent and intent.

But now Reed knew nothing would deter him. No one could deter him. He had already made up his mind.

Thursday morning Lizlee rehearsed her little speech on her way home from delivering her children to their school.

She planned to frankly express her deep gratitude for his high opinion of her and his complimentary attention to her; but to gently convey to Reed the impossibility of it all.

She did not have in her speech any statement of love for Matt. The very thing Reed would pick up on.

She arrived home, confident. It had to be done. She had to stop this.

She appeared in the den door. He put down his measuring tape. He looked into her face. At the same exact second, each one ran toward the other. They were in each other’s arms. They could not get enough of the other. Reserve, caution were gone. They were completely open toward one another. There would be no STOP today.

He whispered in her ear. She looked surprised.

Heavens! He was truly in charge.

She followed him in her car to an apartment he had just finished and furnished.

Immediately they fell into making love.

She had never felt so loved.

She was ecstatic. Three times he brought her to orgasm. She could not remember ever having had an orgasm in her lifetime. His staying power seemed endless. Matt never stayed the course. He was there one minute and then gone. She dreaded sex with Matt; It was just that, sex. No love. No passion for the other. A matter of obligation.

With Reed it was love, passionate, deep love. It was not all work and deception for Lizlee. It was music and pure joy. It was ascending, relaxing and ascending again, yet higher still.

Yet he did not give her the intercourse she so dreaded. They focused on her. Not him. They manipulated and stimulated her. She was the center of full attention and consideration. She had gasped from genuine thrills and pleasure. She had not known that her body was so alive, so responsive, or so fully capable on its own.

This was truly a honeymoon all her own with a man who gave love.

She would remember this day forever.

Only six days ago Matt had brought him home. Now she sat curled up on his lap, without clothing, covered by a blanket and his hands and his kisses.

In a few days on a safe date of the month they would totally consummate their union. She felt fulfilled and complete now. Was there more? Yet more?

Friday Reed brought Peter Petrey to finish the job while he took Lizlee to see the barn he was converting into a house. This was a personal project. Reed worked on in his free time.

She returned happy.

God she was happy! Her spirits soared. Her body was alive. Her heart was full.

Reed told her she looked radiant.

“You brought fresh air into my life,” she told him.

Saturday Reed went calling. Ashton was a close single friend of Lizlee and Matt. That was Ashton West, the architect. Reed knew of him and had once met him at a meeting.

On that first Friday night Lizlee had asked Matt whether Ashton had viewed his shelving plan. He had grown indignant and irritated with her.

“I know what I am doing. I don’t need an architect!” he had told her sharply. In other words, “shut up.”

Lizlee had explained to Reed that Ashton West was a friend and occasionally babysat for them. She had then dropped the subject.

Reed called on him at his house.

Ashton invited him in.

Reed introduced himself.

“The Reed Banks?” Ashton asked.

“The former that Reed Banks.” Reed replied.

“Tell me, why didn’t you ever return?”

“I lost my reason and my private world.”

“What a pity. You were the charm boy of the world and the media. No one could come near you in performance.”

“Look,” Reed urged, “Could we get this conversation off me? I’m complimented, but long forgotten.”

“Not in my book! What brings you here into my home and my life?”

“I’m told you are a close friend of Lizlee and Matt Resler.”

“Yes, indeed. Lizlee will never attend the annual Earl’s Ball with Matt unless I sit the children. Periodically I have the two children here for a twenty-four hour vacation. I spoil them with Kings Island, Big Mac’s and mud puddles.

“Lizlee is the only girl I have ever loved. She is the only girl I know who is loving, non-critical, non-possessing, non-bossing and non-available. I would walk a cable across the Ohio river for her. And heights make me ill!”

“Good,” Reed pronounced. “Then you are protective of her.”

“With all my heart.”

“You would protect her even from Matt?”

“Wait. Why do you ask that? Why are we discussing them?” Ashton grew cautious.

“Because I have fallen in love with Lizlee and I want to be her husband. I have observed Matt in the bar arena and in her home. He has little respect for women, even less for Lizlee. In his world women are servants or sex toys or both. In addition, he



owns Lizlee. Men who own even stolen persons or goods will predictably fight to retain ownership and mastership?

“Well, I’ll be damned,” Ashton marveled. “Reed Banks and Lizlee! Do go on, please.”

“I need to know more about Matt. I need a friend who will stop in occasionally to pick up Lizlee at the campus late at night, or help me with the children in times of tight schedules. I want her and the children to be protected at all times.”

“How can I help?”

“You can call her privately and tell her to call you any time for any purpose. I would like for you to give me the privilege of calling you to help me in behalf of their well being. I need to be able to trust you completely. I need for you to continue your friendship with each of them without any visible partiality, to keep in confidence any plan I confide in you, and to reveal nothing to him but to report to me any intent of his to harm Lizlee or the children.”

“You said campus. What goes there?”

“Matt promised she could finish college after he graduated with her helping him. I intend to see that he keeps that promise by paying for half of her expenses if not all. I will do what he can’t reasonably handle.”

“You are a determined man,” Ashton observed. “This is all amazing. It fits your clean-cut image.”

Reed ignored this.

“Do you know Annelis Parker? Reed asked.

“I know who she is. She lives in Dayton. She and Matt have been in my house. They have slept together here. He is crazy about her. They do not work together in the same firm. She has class. She is no slut. She doesn’t want a marriage. She wants a lover. Her position in the business world is every bit as high as Matt’s. He will step out on her, he always does. She won’t complain as long as he fulfills her expectations of him.

“Look, Reed, Matt is Dayton’s and Cincinnati’s stud-- not an impressive and accomplished one, but a dedicated one. Matt is made for politics. He thrives on idolation and adoration and attention. He lies beautifully. He promises plentifully. He will never change. Lizlee should go her way and live a life of her own. But she is perfection. Perfection includes loyalty. And these will be your block, Reed. You must handle it well.

“Yes, I will help,” Ashton concluded.

Reed told him he was in the construction business.

“So that’s where you are today.”

They talked about their activities. Ashton was considered among the better architects in the area. Reed respected talent and the product of talent. Perhaps one day he would use him professionally.

His next call was upon Oma Nelson

Her husband, Herb, would be playing golf in Matt’s foursome, and hence not home.

Oma was a friend to Lizlee. At least Matt and Herb were good friends. Oma and Matt had had an affair not long ago.

She answered the door bell.

“Well...hello..”

“Ma’am, I am Reed Banks.”

“I see you are! How did you jump out of my picture album?”

Oh, please, dear God, this once,” Reed quietly pleaded.

“When I was trying to become less innocent,” she said, “I had your pin-up on my bedroom wall. You were sixteen and one hunk of a man!”

“I am always flattered to be mistaken for that Reed Banks.”

“You are the real one. I watched you walk up the drive. Your frame...your authoritative gate,...your openly looking at-one’s eyes...., your....well, I never forget one’s life center and its fullness. You are the one alright. Remove your shirt and I’ll show you your birthmark”

Reed laughed heartily. Then he plunged in. “Now don’t lose your sparkle. I’m here to talk about Lizlee and Matt Resler.”

“Don’t get boring and mundane.”

Oma wanted a Saturday conquest by either of them. She steered their conversation in her direction at every opening.

He would pick up on each straying by her and place the conversation firmly back on his path. She was persistent. He was determined.

He found leading her to his simple request almost impossible. On the way he was learning more than he needed to know.

Her husband would rather play golf than to go to bed with her. She answers to one man, her husband, but he always goes to sleep. He eats, sleeps and plays golf well. That's his whole life.

About Matt.

"Matt is not married except to himself. He loves himself. He is faithful to himself.

"He has never been married to any woman. He has a paper legal mate because society and his business required it.

"Never have I had a love affair with Matt!"

"We do have sex. We stay available to each other. He's my regular. He's not heavy stuff. He's light weight, but he's a performer."

"With you?"

"Who else?"

"You mean you have had an affair with him?"

"Heavens no. I don't care that much about him."

"He has always been there sexually for me throughout college and my marriage.

"He's convenient, easy sex when I need it."

And about Oma, Reed could now write a book.

Even in high school she preferred the furnace break room to the library. And so did the young school engineer.

She would rather have an afternoon of love making in a choice hotel with a select virile man of choice than to have an unlimited shopping spree at Tiffany's.

“Reed, sweat innocent, I can make Mrs. Robinson seem like a choir girl. I don’t depend on alcohol. I talk before and after. And I am good, special, and unforgettable.

“You should try me before this wedding you seek! I recognize you won’t after the wedding.

“As to your question, ‘why don’t you marry Matt?’ I could never love him. He’s good for sex but not for marriage. God forbid!

“I don’t know what to do about your request. I want Matt on call, for a long time yet.

“But, yes, Reed Banks, I will face your sweet Lizlee and tell her ‘I have your man’ as you ask. Whenever you say. I will enjoy it.

“Poor innocent, respected, naïve, blind, nice-friend Lizlee. Give her a cook stove oven and kids and she will knit her way to heaven, She’s pathetic. She needs a good jolt and a man bigger than Matt to bring her alive.

“How long have you loved her?” Oma asked him.

“Going on eight days,” he replied.

His next call established a life-long friendship.

Tom and Jean Mathews, Lizlee’s college roommate, and her husband, were down-to-earth, open people. They lived on the north side of the city in the northern suburbs, with a nice lawn and two children.

Tom told Reed that they did not go near Matt. He would not expose his wife to Matt’s hip-level community service.

Lizlee and Jean met monthly for lunch.

Lizlee didn't seem to notice that neither of them invited the other couple for dinner.

"But understand Lizlee and I get along delightfully," he said. "We banter and laugh together. I love that lady. She is a class act. But she is far too good for Matt. And I would tell her what I think of him, but Jean stands firm that I hold my tongue."

"Lizlee doesn't want to hear about Matt," Jean pointed out. "She is happy not knowing. We never mention him. So she continues to bring the children to visit us.

"Matt made a fool of Lizlee from the start," Tom declared. "Libby Donaldson dated a football king, but she liked Matt's persistence and wanted him in her pants. She talked Lizlee into dating Matt. The football players had a curfew and Lizlee always got in her sleep and studying. "So after their dates had turned in, Matt and Libby would slip off and make out."

"Lizlee and I both were in college to learn. We were dedicated students, period," Jean professed. "I wasn't on the make and certainly Lizlee wasn't."

"I had to study her and map out my approach long before I trapped her," Tom laughed.

"But you didn't keep me from my studies, you often helped me and didn't manipulate me to fool around instead of studying."

"There was a time for study and a time for play," Tom declared. "I was a student, too!"

"Lizlee and Tom were the bright ones" Jean confessed. "I worked. Matt played around. Soon Lizlee was composing Matt's papers."

Tom interrupted to interject, “But I don’t see how Lizlee got pregnant. She was so self-disciplined and dedicated. She wasn’t madly in love with Matt. He was on hand, for God’s sake, and that was all. She was no mouse overtaken by a rat. She was the “for keeps and forever’ type. She wouldn’t have given a nod of her head to a lady killer.”

Jean explained to Reed, “Tom’s mission in life is to figure out that unthinkable mismatch. He thinks Lizlee was created by God to be his model lady on earth.

Reed like these people and enjoyed them.

“In what city or town were you raised?” Tom asked him.

“St. Louis”

“Then you are Reed Banks of St. Louis.”

Reed laughed enjoyably. “O.K., Tom, let’s get it over with. I know no other Reed Banks. I don’t know even myself at times. Just let me be the person you see.”

Tome laughed. “No problem. You just be yourself. The world is big enough for you to walk freely.”

“Hold it, boys. If Tom was permitted a question, then I get one.”

“Shoot.” Reed told her.

“You sound and look as though you are in love with Lizlee. Are you?”

“Very much so.”

Jean squealed in delight.

“I see where you are headed,” Tome said. “You fervently believe that Matt deliberately and decidedly left Lizlee and their marriage and all emotional ties long ago—several relationships and many one-nighters ago!”

“Exactly.”

“Jean, baby, let’s go to work!

Jean was excited.

“I get to help plan the Mathew Resler defrocking party where he gets exposed as the fraud he is. I vote for a surprise party for Matt in his own back yard with Oma Nelson and Annelis Parker among the guests! I’ll bet between Chis-T Dilucchio next door to Lizlee and I can switch pictures in frames inside the house to those of Matt in action outside the home, and then conduct a house tour. Oh, sweet downfall of that little.....boys, close your ears.”

They all fixed dinner in the kitchen and ate in the breakfast room.

The two children were fine kids. Reed got on the floor and played with them. He felt like family with the Mathews. Family he had not had for years.

“Tom, I have a swimming pool all my own tucked away out of sight. Only my sister’s family has seen it or used it. Why don’t we all go for a Saturday night swim? I’ll provide the suits.”

“Sounds great to me. But we’ll call a sitter. A neighbor owes us. No problem. What about it, babe?”

“You don’t have to ask me!” Jean had caught the importance of this private spot. She felt privileged to be invited.

They had fun in the pool.

“Certainly is out of reach,” Tom teased him.

“This is my private world,” Reed confided. All I have left is here. My mother’s antiques...her carpet...her own paintings...My father’s paintings...her grand piano...I couldn’t let them go. I spend Friday nights here. It’s my private time, my free time. It’s



like a memorial, but I feel at home. I feel my past. I feel their presence supporting me. I think in my heart they would embrace Lizlee. For some unclear reason, I want you to know this.

Jean was deeply touched, and ashamed. "Darling Reed. I remember now. I read it in the papers. The plane crash. Both your parents. My dear, my dear, my dear.

They joined hands. For a brief period they were one.

Then Jean took a hand from Tom and Reed each and held them to her face. They felt her tears and her love. Reed choked. His eyes flooded. He loved these two. They felt his pain, pain he had never resolved completely.

After church Reed picked up a large pizza and headed for "The Barn" to putter around on light work.

Lizlee met with her group of children, then took her own to lunch. Mat was playing golf. Afterward she drove by to see Tom and Gene Mathews and the children. All she could do was watch the time.

She wanted to get to Reed. He would be at the barnhouse on Sunday. She had no reason to see him. She had no business taking the children there. But he was there. He talked, he listened, he touched her, he loved her. He made life warm, companionable, interesting, fun, loving. Loneliness did not exist. She headed for his barnhouse.

The children ate the pizza, ran wildly everywhere, and their mother let them.

Lizlee and Reed talked as a second activity because the children demanded Reed be a part of their every game and adventure.

“Tell me about your friends at the club, that circle that sit together and party together.”

Lizlee laughed. “You mean clique.”

“Describe them,” urged Reed. He was really interested.

“I’ll start with Sheila. She holds the group together. She is the leader. Her husband, Dr. Pennington Sparks (Doc), is a good host, a good mixer, and a great background for Sheila, who is sparkling, gregarious, and the center of talk and laughter.

“Jacinda Winchester are an ideal couple. They are perfect examples of what people should be like. They do not gossip, they are gracious and well-mannered and well-educated. He has a high-up position in insurance, if not a director. They are better people than most of us in our circle.”

The mention of Oma Nelson and Herb brought questions from him.

“She was busy last night being the usual Oma, shining up to Matt, loving each man’s story, and forgetting the man she married is bespectacled, bald, and barrel-shaped.”

“This making up to Matt, does it bother you?” Reed asked.

“No. But I have had allegedly good friends tell me for my own good that they were making out, Oma and Matt, that is. If they had made out they wouldn’t be so open in touching and caressing in public. At least Oma doesn’t sit on Matt’s lap every time as Zorane does. That becomes silly and Matt loves it.”

“This Zorane sits on Matt’s lap?”

“I would rather she did this in the open than do what some husbands say she does to them unobtrusively.”

“How does she get by with this?”

“Everyone respects her husband Mitchell Peterson, the jeweler. They feel sorry for him. She is twenty years younger than he.

Mitchell and Wilda built up that business together over the years. In comes teenage Zorane to work for them, and she broke up the marriage and married Mitch. Zorane is too much for a man to resist. Oma flaunts it. Zorane doesn't have to. She radiates sex and turns all heads the minute she enters a room. She nestles at the center of a group of men and never bothers the women. She tickles men's necks, caresses their heads, and lets her hands accidentally touch wherever she wishes. She's our sex siren and we women accept it.”

The children descended again.

This time Reed dispatched them to round up all empty boxes to make themselves a playhouse. He went to carry out two huge boxes for them.

But already they had found two small boxes to form race cars run by their own legs, fast speed.

“You are interested in Matt's friends—a few of them are mine, too. Why don't I arrange with my friend, Ashton West, to take you to our club as his guest? He is a member there and regularly table hops our table in his circulating the crowd. He can introduce you to anyone you wish. He is a good friend of Hans Winchester, Jacinda, Mitch Peterson, Dr. Sparks and Sheila, and to me.”

She left out Matt? He noticed.

“Yes, Lizlee, plug me in. I would like that.”

“You won’t like everyone at these Club functions.” Her eyes searched his. “You will find shallowness and haughtiness and even rudeness here and there.”

“Don’t worry. I can handle them.

He glanced at the occupied children and kissed her hand. She blushed.

“What is it you want to tell me, Lizlee. Relax. Just tell me.”

Lizlee looked aside.

“My parents are coming.”

“Alright. When?”

“Tuesday through Friday.”

“Just relax. Parents are my specialty. Let me handle everything.”

“Glory be. What is there to handle?” She exclaimed.

“You and me. My introduction to them. Your comfort in their presence. The truth. The way things are. What you want.”

“How can I face them?”

“The same as always.”

Reed checked the children, and called to them, “Don’t go beyond the tree with the red flag on it.”

“Lizlee, listen to me carefully. Do and say nothing that you wouldn’t have done or said a month ago. I’ll handle all else. In answer to any question near or within the danger zone, you need only two reactions. First, a clear direct look into the eyes. Second, the simple question, “Why do you ask that?” or ‘why do you say that?’ Those two tools will carry you through.”

They were each looking searchingly at the other.

“Here come the children,” Reed warned. “Quickly, my man, Big Shanks, called on your neighbor, Edith Raymond. He presented a card and a pitch for repair work or remodeling. They talked long. That night she and a lady friend met him in a Harrison Avenue place and danced the evening away. Now she has a life to live. Not someone else’s.”

She laughed, “You clever fox. I must fix you up a basket one day.”

“Fix me one, Mamma!”

As soon as Lizlee drove away, Reed locked up and drove directly to his guest-house weekday home.

In no time he had Lizlee’s parents on telephones in their home in Michigan.

Reed introduced himself to Majorie and Kurt Stowe.

He gave them a synopsis of his business with them. He made it simple.

He wished to be Lizlee’s husband.

Matt had abandoned her for other woman, no one in particular.

The children had not seen their dad this past week from Sunday afternoon

Until Friday evening.

Matt had been with Annelis Parker every night this past week except Saturday night.

Lizlee did not know about Matt’s affairs.

They talked for two hours or more. He told them how he and Lizlee had met; how he and matt had met; how he had knowledge of Matt's infidelity past and present; How they had fallen in love; and his effort to verify the lurid life of Matt Resler.

When he finished, the Stowes knew as much as Reed with one understandable personal omission.

Reed would have pictures for them by Monday noon, he told them,-- pictures of Matt sexually possessive with three different women.

He answered their questions about himself, his occupation, age, education, past marital status, religion and health. Yes, they asked it all, gracefully and diplomatically. He like them. He liked talking to them.

No, they had no plans for Wednesday or Thursday. He assured them they would meet him one of those two days.

He gave them telephone numbers to reach him should they decide they needed to talk to him either over the telephone or coffee before meeting him as anticipated.

Monday noon he instructed Lizlee to save all day Thursday for his being with her parents. He said he had plans to show them his life and city.

"I can't have you meeting them yet," she protested.

"Lizlee, I am going to meet them, either my way or by calling on you in late evening at your home."

"Quincy Adams and I are partners in a limousine service. A driver in a stretch limousine will pick up the three of you at 9:30 am. You will then pick me up at my place."

Reed put his finger to Lizlee's lips to hush her.

“Trust me, the first ingredient of a perfect match.”

It’s also the first in a tragic mating,” she quipped.

“Wise beyond your knowledge! I love you, my trusting Ms. Stowe.

His secretary Grace Conner called his cell phone number with a message. The Stowes had called him. They were catching an earlier flight and would be registered at the airport hotel. He could reach them there.

Reed went into action. Grace would locate the flight number and arrival time. He would cancel their hotel reservation. He would meet them at the airport and take them to his private sky ranch atop the King’s tower. It was on top of the world of Ohio, Kentucky and Indiana. But it was no ranch. It was a generous square-foot spread with his private pool, Olympic length. (He avoided any reference to his sanctuary as a penthouse.) The roof was his, no neighbors. Just the stars; the bridges, highways; tiny moving cars; the Ohio River, skylines, river boats, sunrises, sunsets, Mount Adams, the baseball stadium, Western Hills, University of Cincinnati, Xavier, parks, neighborhoods, Kentucky river communities, hillsides—all the out-of-doors views and wonders that fill the hearts of those who experience the area.

Inside he had the warmth and richness of his twenty years of family life. He had helped architects to re-create his mother’s and father’s bedrooms as they were in St. Louis. All other rooms were Reed’s designs. Every furniture piece, painting or portrait were from the St. Louis home. His large living room was a melding of items from his mother’s and father’s living room, family room and den. His music room was filled with his Mother’s loves and cherished items and pieces. His study held his Father’s massive home desk and huge chair, humidifier and even letter opener.

Here Lizlee's parents would spend the night and come to know the making and life of Reed Banks.

He wanted them to know.

Lizlee's mother had the trimness and grace of Lizlee. He instinctively like Lizlee's father.

That evening nestled above the city, they talked long and earnestly.

The Stowe's urged that Lizlee know about Matt as soon as possible. They were not the one's to tell her. That would hurt her in many ways.

They pointed out to Reed that he took an undesirable risk to tell her himself.

"Reed, Lizlee doesn't want to know," her father cautioned. "To her the facts shout out her own failure."

They suggested her former college roommate Jean Mathews, be recruited possibly along with her husband, Tom.

"They could handle this without permanent scars," Marjorie Stowe assured him.

"My daughter is proud," Curt Stowe observed. "She has always shined brightly in all she has attempted. This marriage she cannot control. She gives it her all as you have seen. She has never failed. She will be embarrassed. But what I fear most is the possibility of resentment. That is the potential bomb we face. I want her love. Resentment wastes too many years." So many people claim their own action is for another's good. If that action causes resentment in the receiver, then the action was the wrong solution, or the action was by the wrong person, or the way the action was initiated was woefully ineffective. Personal relationships must not become a victim in this. Matt is the problem here. Nothing else, as yet."



The parents needed also to explore all avenues of the confrontation with Matt.

“The encounter must be crushing and lasting in evidence and adult and straightforward in tone,” they each agreed.

Reed told them what Tom and Jean championed, and that he supported them: A surprise party for Matt, about twenty people, in the back lawn. The guests would include two of his lovers, Lizlee would make the toast, announce she was giving him over to his new love.

Reed told them his own personal choice.

“I would like to see her face Matt privately with me at her side. His promise to her that she would finish college must be a part of this. He must be held to keep that promise. I need to be at her side so he can’t give a meaningless promise to be true hereafter. To cut off that avenue, she has to announce me, and be engaged to me. He must realize and accept that the pairing of Lizlee and Matt is ended. Over!”

The three oft hem discussed every aspect involved.

The Stowes both rejected the party idea of exposing Matt. Definitely not her style, declared Marjorie. “She could not be unkind. Matt may have humiliated her thoughtlessly or unkindly. She could never do the same in return.”

“It’s a great idea, Reed. How gratifying it would be to watch that surprise evening humiliate and degrade him! But it would be a declaration of a bitter war. Matt is vain and proud and revengeful,” Kurt stressed. “He would get even. The children would be the only resource left to him as his weapon. I’m convinced he would use and bruise them by his mean-spirited tactics. He has no honor, Reed, as you know it”

Reed respected their feelings and advice on their every point but one. He had to be the one to tell Lizlee. He had to be there to shelter her from the devastating hurt.

But all of this was already out of their hands. The plan was in the U.S. Mail in Cincinnati.

In a swift, sure-footed, surprise move, a wronged and jealous woman was stepping in and taking over. She had lost Matt once to Lizlee. She was not now going to lose him to Annelis Parker.

Oma Nelson was now in charge, and fully charged.

Lizlee's parents arrived at Lizlee's by taxi around noon. The mail man delivered her mail at the same time. She greeted both, and took her parents and her mail inside. (Matt's mail went to a post office box in Dayton, near his office.)

Around two in the afternoon, Lizlee picked up a card from their friend, Oma Nelson, as she sat at the table with her parents who were pouring over their grandchildren's school papers.

"While you are looking over those, let me see what this acquaintance wants," she proposed.

Lizlee read Oma's note. She reread it. Then she read it again.

"This is the most amazing thing I have ever read in my life," Lizlee exclaimed to her parents. This wife of Matt's friend, Herb Nelson, wants me to divorce Matt and give him to her. Can you imagine this?"

Her parents were cautious.

"What is her name?" one of them asked.

“Oma Nelson. Oma Resler sounds better, really, than Lizlee Resler, don’t you think?”

“Would Matt want this?” her father asked.

“You would have to ask him. But I can tell you this. She would be good for him. Listen to this.

*“Dear Lizlee,*

*I want you to divorce Matt immediately. I lost Matt to you (on paper) once. I will not lose him now to Annelis Parker.*

*His affair with Annelis has gone beyond mere crush and 24-hour lust. You won’t stop him. I will*

*Matt and I have been a continuous and steady two-some throughout college and throughout our marriages. We have the same ravenous appetite for sex and each of us will go outside for it if it isn’t plentiful at home.*

*You are no match for him. I am. We have refreshed each other for longer than you have known him.*

*Matt and I need love morning, noon, and night. We are alike. I’ll fight for him. I’ll keep him home and busy with me. I will cut off his penis if he services another woman.*

*Matt needs a woman like me. Identical in every way. I’m already his woman, and I am me in every way, including his ways. (I should have coached you years ago.)*

*Don’t worry about Herb.*

*He should have a woman like you who can go endlessly without sex and yet fix triple eggs in the morning with a smile of contentment. (I mean this as praise.)*

*With Admiration and Respect,*

*Oma*

*P.S. I will supply you with all the evidence you need. Let's meet and plan, anywhere, anytime--but soon.*

Lizlee looked brightly at each of them. She smiled. Then she laughed enjoyably.

“She’s terrific. I will never think her a depraved slut ever again. She has guts. She’s bold. She knows what she wants. I don’t believe I would want the children around her, and I think she is needlessly mean to Herb. But what verve! I’ve always thought of her as vulgar. Actually one might say she is plain spoken. Mother, do you suppose she could be good with the children? I’ve never fixed three eggs for anyone in my life. I must speak to her about that. Daddy, do you suppose she and Matt would make a good match? He’s probably a lot more polished than she. He’s certainly not the powerhouse she thinks he is. I am surprised. She loves to be on his lap, but I never thought of her as in my bed. Golly, we could have been sending messages back and forth in his under shorts and saved postage. Can’t you just see her getting in his pants and finding my thank-you to her for the lovely party invitation?”

Tears were rolling down her mother’s cheeks.

Don’t cry, mother. Be thankful for Matt’s assistance. I threw him overboard. Now she’s thrown him a life preserver. Is he trapped or is he saved? If he ever comes home we may know before you leave. Right now we had better put on our happy faces and open our arms for your grand-children.

But first, let me tell you now. The rest of the day is for family time. I have never been happier in my life than the last too-few weeks. I am in a dream so alive and real that I can’t believe this is happening to me. Matt is nowhere about in it or in my personal life. You never asked me who is Annelis Parker. Let me tell you she is one cool,

smashing, fine business lady who is in love with the children's father. I think she would be fascinating to the children. She has class, something Oma lacks. I think I may root for Annelis. I love you both. Go to your grandchildren. I hear them coming. Expect to meet all their friends. They have broadcast your coming.

Her father kissed her on the cheek as he passed her. Then he turned, "You're a winner, girl. I love you dearly."

Lizlee smiled deeply. She felt such a lady, such an equal with her dad. He had always understood her. He had always held her to realistic expectations. He had always been at her side, seeing her through all the way. She felt him at her side this very minute.

She must remember to tell him she registered Monday to continue her schooling. That would make him so happy!

But...music? Probably not. She wanted to make a creative living. Like matching people and homes, decorating their homes, and designing and personalizing features in their homes.

So much was happening so fast. But Dad said I am a winner!

Wednesday Lizlee and her mother went to lunch.

Matt had stayed home to take her dad golfing at the club. He had advised them all that come early afternoon he would have to drive back to Dayton to work into the night. In fact, he decided, he would just sleep on the sofa in his office, there would be little reason to come home for so little sleep.

"Whatever, dear, you are the bread maker," Lizlee had responded.

What do you do with a daughter like Lizlee? Marjorie Stowe asked herself.

“Twenty-four hours since that note, and my daughter doesn’t cry, throw vases, or even talks.

“If you don’t mind my minding, Lizlee, I am uncomfortable with you. I’m walking on eggs. I’m not breathing. I’m not asking the questions I’m dying to ask. Do you mind if I go up to the manager and scream that I’ve been raped? I want attention. I need attention. I’ve earned the right to demand attention. Now, Girl, talk to me!”

Lizlee laughed. She looked at her mother and laughed again and this time she struggled to cease laughing.

“Mother you remind me of young girls begging a friend to tell, tell, tell There is nothing to tell!

“Look, a girl named Oma wants to marry a husband named Matt. A girl like Oma doesn’t love any man. Men are flawed. But she can be one demanding and exciting mate. And she is willing to make their mating nest legal. She has no home now and he no marriage now because he has left it.

“I don’t know whether Matt wants to marry her. That’s really between them. I would like to ask questions, too. Like, ‘Do they love one another?’ But that is none of my business.”

“What do you mean Matt has no marriage?” her mother asked.

“Just that. He stops in for shaving and a bite or two of breakfast. He is not in a marriage in my place at this moment. He doesn’t see the children. He does see Annelis Parker regularly, evenings and nights. That’s what is driving Oma Nelson to extreme action and risk taking.”

“How do you know Matt is on Annelis Parker’s doorstep?” her mother demanded.

“About the time Matt was having his shelving built, an elderly gentleman came to the door to speak to me about Matt. He explained it was a delicate situation and he was seeking to protect someone dear to him. The gentleman gave his name as Rice Phipps. During our conversation he asked my permission to show me four photos. They were of Annelis and Matt madly in love. Each was on a different day.

“Mother, this Annelis is in love with him! She is an attractive, normal person. Mother, nice people do fall in love with strangers. I wish her well. He absolutely could not do better than her. She’s choice.

“Darling Muh-ma, don’t look that way. I knew when I married Matt that he was not a long-run type of guy. He was a lady’s man, a one-night man. I accepted that. I never expected more of him than I had seen him give.

“I am truly lucky. Matt paid attention to me in college because I would not let him have me. I was never his little mouse!”

“The proverbial once, I remember wanting him to go home. I like to remember the actual five minutes as my eating an apple and reading my Shakespeare assignment over his shoulder. It meant no more to me than that apple. I guess that makes me a candy bar kid. A kid was all I was. I wasn’t old enough for an adult experience”

Marjorie Stowe knew she was hearing the truth from her daughter.

Lizlee spoke one more time completely open.

“Let us both be clear on this. The children need a good father. Why should anyone tear him down or destroy him? I won’t do that. I won’t let anyone I love do that.

No one else matters. I will work with either Annelis or Oma or both to assure he is a good father.

“You once told me the idea of, or even a rumor of, infidelity is more destructive than the actual act. What a wise woman you were!

“Throughout what is bound to come up, I intend to maintain my senses, to blame no one, and to fairly and diplomatically referee.

“Fight? No. I leave that to them.”

“Lizlee, you are one amazing woman.”

Wednesday night Ashton West took Reed to dinner at the Club. Matt and Lizlee’s Club.

“This isn’t exactly your club,” Ashton explained.

“And what club might that be? Reed asked.

“I’ve been there, Reed. Don’t act poor to me. Steryl Shayne is both your architect and your partner. He has had me to lunch at your club at your suggestion. I am also sure Steryl charged our lunches to you.”

“My, you are a detective! Now suppose I tell you that my dinner with you tonight was Lizlee’s idea.”

“Then I would have to tell you you were wrong. She suggested Friday night! The dry run tonight was my idea. I wanted to keep it simple and a few at a time. The snobs descend on Saturday night. Friday night is the fun crowd. Wednesday is primarily family night.”



They entered the club.

“Look, Reed, I have a call I must make. Get lost at the bar and I’ll rescue you in a few minutes.”

Reed surveyed the noisy crowd. A gentleman stood slightly apart from a babbling crowd of men, listening. Reed moved in next to him and listened.

The men were talking of buying and selling stocks, the best buys, but mostly they were trying to impress one another.

As the last of them left, replaced by others with other talk, Reed turned to the older gentleman and observed, “If I were to listen to that bunch of would-be professional stock brokers, I would be selling condoms in front of the downtown Love Inn Tavern!”

“Who is your stock broker?” the gentleman asked Reed.

“Lester Schuester” he told him.

“A fine man,” the gentleman granted. “Your father would fully approve your having him.”

“My father?” Reed asked.

Yes. Your father sought the best information on any subject, and he used the best sources to obtain the best information. Fletcher Banks was both prince and king of the St. Louis business community. I’m Hans Winchester.”

“Reed Banks,” Reed said meekly.

They shook hands.

“I’m sorry I startled you. I admired your father so much. He was a dynamic, powerful man. I called upon him as a young man. He would take time to coach you in matter of importance to success. He even once advised me on married life, which one

day I would like to brief you on. It stuck with me for life. I have heard him speak in several cities, including Washington, D.C. I and others found that if one watched your mother's schedule, you had a fair chance to get him to speak in the same city of her appearance."

Reed was still stunned. This man made his father seem so alive.

"I've read his book so many times it is worn terribly," Hans laughed.

"I will send you another," Reed promised.

Ashton returned. He and Hans Winchester greeted one another as long time acquaintances.

"Members, you know," Ashton explained to Reed.

"He knew my father," Reed told Ashton, almost in awe.

"Tell me, Reed, where is your sister, Rosalee?" Hans asked him.

"She lives in Massachusetts, thank you. Her husband is a professor. They have four children. They summer in Northern Michigan. We stay in close touch."

"That means much to you both."

Hans told Ashton that Doc was table hopping and that Jacinda and Sheila were at their table talking.

"Why don't we arrange a table for six so that the two of you can join us?"

Ashton declined.

But Hans insisted.

"I want to know this young man better. Both Jacinda and I are great fans of his mother. Doc and Sheila were with us for her concert at Wolftrap, Rochester Hills, and in Philadelphia."

“Your mother is a concertist? Ashton asked.

“Was,” Reed spoke lowly. “Concert pianist. Kaela Celest Cahill.”

Ashton spoke in surprise. “You are the son of Kaela Celest Cahill! I have all of her albums. Once you play them you are hooked. I played one last Sunday.

“That’s settled. Now let’s get that table for six or build ours into six.”

Hans took over.

The six were enjoying themselves. Sheila was excited about meeting Karla Celest Cahill’s son. Jacinda had more of a proud, motherly regard. For him Reed felt a personal relationship between them as he had felt with Hans. Reed and Doc were each acceptive of the other. There was a genuine respect toward each other in their conversation.

Then there she was.

Lizlee and her parents were being seated across the room!

Sheila spotted them immediately, and exclaimed delightedly. Lizlee and Sheila waved to one another.

Reed was cautious. Hans had noticed his reaction when they had entered the room.

“Have you met Lizlee Resler?” Hans asked Reed.

“Yes, sir. I built her husband some bookshelves,” Reed replied.

“Not the son of Fletcher Banks! Banks, Barniv, and Shayne built the Mason estate. You are that Banks, not a carpenter,” Hans informed him.

Ashton jumped in with gusto. "He's right, Reed. I know Shayne personally. I know you as a contractor and builder. What are you doing, using company wood and nails on the side? Answer please."

"Mr. Winchester, and, you, Ashton, my father was a silent partner to several people until they could become financially independent. I liked that in him. At present I am a silent partner in six small businesses. Peter Petry's woodwork shop is one. I took the Resler job for Peter. I set up the job for him and did some of the work. He finished it. I never let anything affect my main firm. Two of those small business firms are upholstering and shoe repairing. There is no danger of my interfering there. But I love to putter. A project I have on the side right now is converting a barn into a house."

"I get the picture, son. You are your father. He helped a man get started in an ice cream stand one time," Hans told Reed. "Today that man is the Charlie Marsdale, head of the Marsdales ice cream line, his ice cream is sold and consumed in fifty states. How many others must he have helped and smiled in pride of their success!"

When they finished dinner, Hans leaned over to Reed and urged him to ask Mrs. Resler to dance. "There is not much joy or social pleasure in her life, you can help us to brighten it a bit."

"Alright, sir. The pleasure will be mine. She is one lovely lady."

Reed danced first with Jacinda and Ashton with Sheila. Lizlee was on the dance floor with her father. Hans crossed the room to dance with Lizlee's mother, Majorie Stowe.

Sheila arranged for the two parties to merge.

After dancing with Sheila, Reed danced with Marjorie. Marjorie was a good dancer. She managed to reflect sociability and enjoyment of her partner while informing him about Oma's note and Lizlee's unemotional reaction. All Reed said was, "I see."

Marjorie wanted Reed to know. She could not depend upon her daughter to tell him.

Reed gave the waiter a card and note to the orchestra leader.

The leader nodded to their table.

The musical dance number was, "Shall We Dance" from Rogers and Hammerstein's The King and I. Reed arose and took Lizlee's hand. Away they swept, gracefully gliding around the floor in a waltz. Lizlee was floating effortlessly in his arms. Yul Brenner and Debra Kerr could not have done it better.

Sheila ceased talking, Hans gasped in admiration. Jacinda's eyes shown in joy and approval. Marjorie Stowe was breathless. Her daughter danced so professionally! Her father looked proud and pleased. He had made her go for ballroom dancing instruction when he first suspected Matt of marital funny business. Something to stimulate and avoid depression.

Jacinda claimed Reed for a South American number. She was delighted. He was perfection.

Marjorie was stunned. Curt Stowe held his daughter perfectly and led her perfectly in a rumba, then a samba.

"Ashton", Marjorie demanded, "when they return, you and I are going to show them a real rock and roll. Make your arrangements now."

Marjorie had exercised with dance records for years. Curt was not going to give her that “One-up-on-you-Babe” business. He knew she was surprised! She would surprise him right back.

As Reed left that night he told Hans that he had a private retreat tucked away and would like to have him and Jacinda as his guests very soon. Hans had replied, “Any time”, and smiled a blessing.

Quincy Adams personally drove the stretch limousine Thursday, as planned, he picked up Lizlee and her parents first.

Lizlee wasn't at all clear in her own mind how she was going to handle this matter of Reed and her parents. They had met him last night socially.

What are they thinking? She pondered. Matt's carpenter at the club last night.  
Dances beautifully with mother. Dances ever so enchantingly with me. Love is in his  
eyes. Now here he is today. Our tour guide!

She would not take this on. Reed had insisted on this venture today. Let him handle it, as he requested! It was to introduce him anyway. And she didn't know how to do that.

The limousine pulled into the driveway to a beautiful home and parked in front of the Guest House. The landscaping and swimming pool designs were of a building-and-gardens-magazine-picture beauty.

Reed entered the limousine and served coffee. He focused all of his attention on Lizlee's parents.

The house, he explained, was designed and built by him. He leased it, but the guest house and pool were his alone. The leaseholder had pool privileges.

He introduced Quincy Adams, the driver, as the owner of the limousine service. He told them that he was Quincy's silent partner and personally handled the advertising.

"Did you wish to see the guest house before we start?" He asked Lizlee.

Lizlee brightened. "I have seen the artist's shelving. I would like to see a complete work."

"And I would like to see where the artist lives!" Marjorie Stowe enjoined.

The party and the day started.

Quincy drove them for a Kentucky view of Cincinnati; through historic Mount Adams; along the Ohio River, through Eton Park, and around the University of Cincinnati and Xavier.

They visited and toured his barn house, his week-ends project.

They had their mid-morning snack in the limousine.

They viewed the work of three of his small businesses and met the people. He was a silent partner in all three.

Then came the big one. Banks, Barniv, and Shayne

Everyone was attentive to Lizlee and gracious to her parents. Reed's two partners were introduced; his secretary and administrative assistant, Grace Conner followed; Chester Crawford, Superintendent of construction was presented and then left.

Lizlee recognized that the staff was expecting them, and ready.

In the privacy of Reed's personal office, with door closed, he prepped them for the next introduction.

“I have someone very special to me that I want you to meet. He does nothing, he does everything. No one losses him. He is always there. Usually uninvited. Usually at my elbows. He keeps an eye on everything. I do and he thinks I do not know. He shuffles through the papers on my desk, shamelessly and in front of me. I value his counsel. But it goes beyond business. He is a father figure. He is my friend.

“He worked for and with my father for years, many years. He was a presence in the lives of both my sister, Rosalee and me.

“My father retired and he and my mother were on their first non-professional trip. It was to be six months to one year. Their plane crashed in South America. Both were killed.

“I was in total shock throughout the funeral period. I remember only that always at my side were my brother-in-law and Dad’s trusted business associate. Rosalee was ten years older than I. I am sure she carried the burden of those days and spared me much.

“This man never left my side. He was there on every occasion and every major decision. It was as if he were on a special mission to oversee me for my father.

“There were times when I was unkind to him for his intrusions, even angry with him when he was saying things that were not in the direction of my intent.”

“One day I gave up and put him on the payroll of whatever I was doing. He had left St. Louise to go with me. He would not say good-bye. He goes with the territory in whatever I do or wherever I go, It would break his heart if I ever cut those ties. I couldn’t put him through what I went through.”

“I ask your indulgence. I will present you to him. Lizlee, I want, so much, for you to like him and understand him.”



Lizlee squeezed his hand tightly. "I like him already."

Reed walked to the connecting door to an adjoining office and knocked. A voice said "Come in". He led them in.

Lizlee silently gasped.

Rice Phipps.

The gentleman who had called on her!

Neither of them revealed knowing the other.

Rice Phipps had come to her to protect Reed from loving a married lady.

Understanding flooded Lizlee. She adored this man. She did not shake his hand. Rather she kissed him on the cheek, ever so warmly. He smiled in return. He felt the message of love and respect.

They went to the Lancelot Room on the top floor of the King's Tower for lunch. They were seated at a choice table by the windows.

Every member of the restaurant staff smiled openly and greeted Reed as Mr. Banks. He addressed them by name.

Kurt Stowe noticed. Reed was at home in this setting. One might say even, in charge.

The manager came to their table to greet them. Reed made the introductions. They chatted pleasantly.

"Who are the owners of your restaurant?" Lizlee's father asked the manager.

"We have five partners. The chef, the bar tender and I are three. The other two are silent partners. One of them is a owner of the Roof Top in New York City. He is prominent on Broadway, and was a great admirer of concert pianist Kaela Celest Cahill."

“All of this is that partner’s dream and tribute to his father. He bought every bit of the ground, piece by piece, that this tower sits on. His hand was in the designing and construction and every bit of the ground, piece by piece, that this tower sits on. His hand was in the designing and construction and every detail of this spread. Would you add anything, Mr. Banks?”

“Not a word. I must say, though, you are in fine voice today.”

“I’m in my happiest hour when I am promoting this patch of sky.”

“I have a novel idea for promoting your business. Step out on a cloud, taking with you your trumpet, sit down gently, and blow your trumpet as you pass our window.”

“Mr. West,” the manager greeted Ashton. Who was approaching them.

Reed arose and skillfully glided Ashton away. “Not now,” Reed implored. Him, “Something is about to happen, Please get lost. I’ll contact you later.”

He returned to the table, “Sorry folks, I want to be alone with you,” Reed explained.

“Now what? That crazy plane. So near the airport. What goes here?”

They all looked out the window. The pilot was writing something in the sky. People from other tables went to the windows.

Reed took Lizlee’s left hand and slipped off her wedding ring and dropped it in her hand bag.

Lizlee looked at him questioningly. He nodded toward the window and sky.

I love you the pilot had written.

Then a second plane soared into sight and wrote Will you marry me?

Lizlee felt him slip a ring on her ring finger under the table. She stole a look at the hand in her lap.

It was a beautiful diamond ring!

“How wonderfully romantic!” exclaimed Marjorie Stowe. “I always wonder who she is and who he is.”

“Perhaps you should look across the table,” her husband suggested.

Reed and Lizlee were each looking deeply into the other’s eyes.

“The ring was my mother’s engagement ring. You have never had one. I want you so much to be promised to me. I want to be your husband for life. Your companion. Your lover. Your friend.”

“We can have an engagement period for you to make sure I am right for you.”

“We can support Matt and his choice of mate. We can handle the paperwork to set Matt free to be free from any commitment. He’ll be no problem as soon as he realizes clearly that you want and will have a full-time husband and that he cannot fulfill that demand.”

Reed looked at Lizlee’s father.

“I’ve just asked your daughter to take me as her husband. What you two have to say to each other about this is your business. But I do ask you to give me your approval and blessing.

“As far as your wife is concerned, she and I will get together and together decide how we feel about this. A husband and daughter have no place in a discussion between prospective mother-in-law and intended son-in-law. We will be discussing college, career, baby names, choice of car, a reliable maid, quality time with the grandchildren,

and many things a daughter so often considers to be her own private domain, but which Mrs. Stowe and I consider to be our concern equally as well.

“And, by the way, the house where you picked me up this morning will be our home unless Lizlee lets me know otherwise.”

A man and young son apologized for interrupting their table.

Kurt Stowe watched the faces at his table. He sensed what was coming.

The father explained to Reed that Reed had been his son’s idol in his son’s early youth. His son even had a big scrapbook on Reed. His son was working hard to be in the Olympics.

“Don’t worry, sir, I can’t break your records,” the boy assured him.

“Oh, yes you can,” Reed told him emphatically.

Reed apologized for not standing, introduced everyone, and wrote something on the back of his card.

“Meet me at that address tomorrow morning. Be in your bathing trunks. We’ll swim. Then your father and I will discuss practice locations, clubs, sponsors, contacts, finances, meets ---all those things that can bewilder and discourage one.

“Thank you for speaking up. I’m pleased to meet a proud couple in my field of interest. Right now, I have just asked a lovely lady to accept me in marriage. My next step is to convince her parents so that their daughter will say yes. We’ll meet in the morning.”

Kurt was smiling at his wife’s and daughter’s reaction to that scene.

Lizlee looked at Reed. “You are Reed Banks?”

Kurt sternly scolded his daughter. “Darling, haven’t I warned you many times not to listen to a man’s proposal unless you know his name?”

“But the Olympic’s Reed Banks was from St. Louis,” she protested.

“I am from St. Louis,” Reed insisted.

“Lizlee, he is Reed Banks!” Her father persisted. World records and all. The same clean-cut image.

Marjorie kept quiet and listened. The conversation was about Reed Banks, the swimmer. America’s heartthrob at age fifteen, or about! She remembered the pictures, the television interviews, but they mentioned records. World records? Still unbroken, they said. She also remembered a nineteen or twenty-year-old swimming champ who stole American hearts and the same acclaim and interviews and endorsements. That boy was the son of the Sought American crash victim, Kaela Celest Cahill, the famous concert pianist! She remembered well the death of the wonderful Cahill. Reed had impersonally said his parents were killed. But Cahill. His mother. How terrible.

Reed led them to the elevators. He passed them by. At a private elevator nearby, he removed a key from his pocket and unlocked it.

They entered. The elevator went up. They got off, stepping into a vestibule furnished with a bench, two chairs, umbrella stand, a grand father’s clock, a huge floor pot with a large plant, and paintings on the only solid wall.

Lizlee like the room. It was cozy, warm, intimate and comfortable.

“Before I show you around here, I want to explain.”

They sat down.

“This is my private retreat. I come here almost every Friday evening and anytime I have deep thinking to do. I call this my sky ranch, Lizlee. It is built on top the building’s roof, complete with greenhouse and a swimming pool. One can see three states from here.

“Everything in this residence was used in our St. Lois home. I kept every piece with sentimental meaning or value or history.

“Dad was an antiques man. Mother went for class and beauty--Dad bought paintings, mother painted her own.

“My father was 45 years old when he married. He was twenty years older than Mother. My father was sixty when I was born.

“He didn’t want to miss a minute of my life. When I was ten, he built a swimming pool for me at home so I could stay home to practice.

“I was spoiled by both parents in a positive way. Ours was a home of love. I knew every day of my life that I was loved. Even my sister spoiled me. When my parents were killed, it was as if my home had been burned to the ground. Even worse than that. All I had left were my sister and my memories. Thus I held on to my parents belongings.

“Yes, I wrap myself in that love here. I can play the piano or design or write or attend business or swim or work out. I can do anything here with my parents support.

“Meeting Lizlee has made me want to share this roof-top nest with the closest of our fiends. Your Tom and Jean. Your Hans and Jacinda. My Rice Phipps. For dinner. Our Ashton West for cocktails. That’s as far as I want to go for right now. I want no shallow people nor merely sociable acquaintances here at Sky Ranch. At the barn house

is fine. This place, though, is all about me and what I am. I want only those who can share my feelings to be here. Let me give you a tour, then we will have our dessert.”

To the right the vestibule led into a large living room. Glass separated the indoors from out-of-doors.

Two matching chairs and a table caught the eye of Lizlee. Reed identified them as from his mother’s private or at least personal living room. He took her around to each painting, chair, sofa, and display item.

The living room opened to the music room. The grand piano there seemed a part of the living room.

Reed gestured for Lizlee to play.

“Oh, no! I haven’t played for years.”

“No hurry, no pressure. You will have a piano of your own. But I want you to hear me play so that you know what to expect when you see me headed toward this instrument.

“I can’t help myself. I spent much of my childhood under this piano playing with soldiers, blocks, and games--even reading--as my mother played. He sat down at the keys and talked as he played.

“Lizlee Stowe Reslar and soon to be- Banks. I love you and everything about you. I want to play love songs to you, not beneath your balcony, but at you side and in my arms.”

Changing tunes and tempo and style and mood and commentary he played through church hymns, Christmas pieces, children’s favorites, familiar sing-along numbers, piano-bar playing, dance music, life-of-the-party playing, bachelor party

numbers (here Kurt mischievously sang salty numbers along with Reed), then he changed drastically and gave them some skilled concert pianist playing that moved and glued the Stowes listening. He ended his playing with some soft renditions of music of the Stowe's youth period.

They touched and held hands.

Reed nodded his head for Lizlee to sit on the bench with him. As she joined him, he tilted his head for her to kiss his cheek. She obliged, and then went farther. Slowly she kissed him on his lips, in front of her parents.

No one flinched.

All four knew Lizlee had just brought their love out into the open.

Kurt used Reed's pool atop King's Tower the next morning. He had left word with Marjorie to plan something with Lizlee that he would lunch in the Lancelot Room.

He had exercised in Reed's fitness room, read, relaxed, swam laps, showered and dressed. He felt like a million-dollar person on a million-dollar day.

He took the private elevator down the one floor to the Lancelot Room. He went to the bar and ordered a drink.

"Oh, no!" Kurt exclaimed, alarmed.

There at a window table sat Matt with a stunning, professionally dressed lady. He held her hand and was looking deeply into her eyes.

To the bar tender he asked, "Can you locate Reed Banks for me? It is urgent?"



“I’ll see what I can do. This is Friday. He may be in his office. Once way or another we’ll reel him in.”

“Thank you.”

The bar tender handed him the telephone.

“Reed?”

“Yes, Kurt.”

Kurt told him the situation.

Reed swore.

“Ask the bar tender for George. Tell George I want pictures taken of that couple, and to offer them one in which they pose as they wish. He will know how to handle this. He does anniversaries and special occasions. It is Annelis, right?”

“A dead wringer.”

Kurt called Marjorie.

Lizlee heard her mother’s stressed voice.

“Is that Daddy?”

“Yes.”

“Let me have it.”

“What’s wrong, Daddy?”

Kurt had to tell her.

“I’ll be there as soon as I can,” she told him.

“Mother, I’ll be back. If not, will you watch for the children? Alice Simpson is driving today.”

Her good neighbor Chris T. Dilucchio drove her to King’s Tower.

Lizlee walked into the Lancelot Room and direct to Matt's table. Her father followed her and stood by her side.

Matt looked up, surprised.

Lizlee sat down by Matt and across from Annelis. Her father sat down with Annelis.

Lizlee spoke, friendly.

"I am Lizlee Stowe Resler. And, of course, you are Annelis."

"You are every bit as beautiful as your pictures. But that glow about you, I'm sure Matt has put that there. He is so in love with you.

"I want to welcome you into our family. I've had you checked out-- I hope you understand I had to do that for the children. I am convinced you will be good for the children. I thought you might meet them after their school this afternoon. I know the two of you have Ashton's quarters here for the afternoon, but you can do that one night next week. The children need to meet you when Matt and I are there to ease them into a relationship with you.

"Annelis, I am so happy you are the one Matt has chosen to be his mate for life. Let's do try to have tea together one day soon.

"Daddy, are you ready?"

Lizlee turned to Matt and kissed him on the cheek. "Darling, you do know how to pick them. Congratulations. She is a beauty."

Lizlee stood up. "Oh, you two go ahead and get engaged. There is absolutely no reason to wait."

As they walked away, Oma was headed for Matt's table. As Oma passed, Lizlee said, "He's all yours"

Hans Winchester arose from his table of associates and greeted her. He had been watching her.

"God bless you, Lizlee. He wasn't worthy of you.

"Thank you Hans. Reed wishes you and Jacinda for dinner soon. I'll call you."

The parking lot was a gathering convention.

Ashton West, Reed Banks, Chris T, Kurt Stow, Lizlee...and Tom and Jean Mathews--!

"Let's go home," Lizlee proposed. I'll fix us a late lunch."

"We'll fix us a late lunch." Reed corrected.

They all drove to Forest Park and to Lizlee's home.

Jacinda was soon there with a casserole and was urged to stay.

Sheila showed up at the door with hot bread and gave no indication that she couldn't stay.

Reed felt the support these friends were giving Lizlee. He and Tom were concocting an egg and cheese sandwich dish. The kitchen crew, including Lizlee, had no idea of the drama that had just taken place in the rest of the house.

Sheila had answered the door. Oma stood there. Sheila had sung out "Oma!"

Immediately Ashton West, Jean Mathews, and Marjorie Stowe were at her side.

"I'm here for Matt's clothes," Oma informed them.

“Follow me,” Lizlee’s mother instructed. The four of them accompanied Oma upstairs to the master bedroom. Together they packed up Matt’s clothing and bathroom items. Jean Mathews and Ashton West helped Oma carry Matt’s belongings to her car.

She was gone before the children arrived home.

No one told Lizlee Oma had been there.

Jean managed telling Tom and Reed. Kurt managed getting Reed into the den alone.

“Look, this house is not Matt’s. I own the house and Matt pays me rent. I made that arrangement with Matt years ago. Lizlee need not worry about that. Right now she needs to be in school.”

“Kurt, it’s time we cease making plans for Lizlee. It’s a waste of our time. She is doing everything her way. And damned is she isn’t doing a good job of it. Let’s enjoy the day and wait for her to tell us what she expects us to do.”

Jean entered the den.

“Lizlee just ran upstairs. Everyone carry on naturally,” she instructed them.

“Give her time and space. Pass the word.”

Lizlee stood on the steps of the stairway, surveying the group in the living room. She knew why they were there. She was touched by their caring.

On the floor holding the children as two sacks of flower was Reed.

They all looked up at her, standing poised and bright.

“Ethelia!” Lizlee called. It sounded like Bette Davis calling.

Jean Mathews had not heard that call since their college days.

“Yes, Mam,” Jean replied.

“Mr. Resler will not be home tonight.”

“Shall I save him a plate?”

“Oh, heavens, no, my dear! His clothes are gone.”

Ethelia fretted, “I always knew if he ever dressed he would walk.”

“Ethelia, my dear, would you call me another man?”

“An indoors or outdoors man, m’am?”

“Outdoors, Ethelia, outdoors. As God is my witness, I shall never again be chased by an indoor man.”

They cheered her.

Lizlee swept on down the stairs and embraced Sheila, Jacinda and the other women, including little Mary. Quickly Reed had assembled Tom, Ashton, and Kurt, picked up Nathan in his arms, and found Lizlee.

“As God is my witness, you shall never be without a man.”

The men each kissed Lizlee.

Reed gave her a brief, controlled kiss, but as he lifted his face from her’s he saw in her eyes the answer she had not given the day before.

He filled with joy.

Lizlee’s husband.

Reed and Lizlee Banks.

What more could he ever ask?

He was again the Gold Medal winner, this time the big one in life—a life-time mate who was everything a man could ever want.

THE END