

She wished Ted would come home. She needed him to go to bat for her tomorrow. The dancing sequences were too tough. She could dance, but this was ridiculous. She'd get Ted to say she couldn't dance in the costumes, then they'd have to make the dances easier. She had hardly been able to catch her breath today. Those green pills were beautiful

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258 and kept you awake and skinny, but they also made your heart pound so you couldn't practice a two-hour dance routine. Maybe Ted was at his office. Maybe he wasn't mad, just working late. She reached for the phone. No, if he wasn't at his office she didn't want to know. And

what the hell—what would it prove? He could be at his office doing it with a guy. Jesus, why did she love him this much? He wasn't even a real man. But then Mel was kinda weakish, too. Why did she get attracted to men like this? They seemed so strong in the beginning—helping her, telling her what to do—real strong. Then they petered out.

She looked at the clock—midnight. The pills weren't working. She needed some more Scotch to help them along. Damn—it was downstairs. It was lucky she had learned booze helped the pills work. She wondered if Jennifer had found out about that. The dolls without booze were nothing. Well, she'd just have to go downstairs and get some more.

She ran down the marble stairs barefoot. The servants were asleep. The lights were out in the living room. While she was groping for the light switch, she heard a splash in the swimming pool. She walked to the patio doors. Who in hell was in the pool? The cabana lights were on, and their reflection hit the pool. It was Ted! She laughed with relief. Geez, what a nut—swimming nude at this hour. She fumbled at the buttons of her pajamas. She'd jump in and surprise

him. No, that would wake her completely, and she had an early call. She was just about to shout to him when she saw the girl coming out of the cabana, hesitating shyly, clutching the towel she had draped around her.

"Come on, drop the towel. The water's heated," Ted called.

The girl looked up at the dark, rambling house. "Suppose she wakes up?"

"Are you kidding? With what she takes an earthquake couldn't wake her. Come on, Carmen, or I'll drag you in!"

The girl dropped the towel demurely. Even in the semi-darkness Neely could see she had a wonderful body. Neely squinted her eyes. She had seen this girl somewhere. . . . Sure! Carmen Carver. She had won some beauty contest, and the studio was testing her.

Ted swam to meet the girl. Neely heard a squeal. "Oh, Ted! Not in the water. . . . Don't!"

259 "Why not? We've done it every other way."

Neely felt her stomach quiver. Oh, God! No—not this! A boy occasionally she had accepted. It was a sickness of Ted's—that's what the psychiatrist had told her. It had nothing to do with unfaithfulness to her. But this!

She grabbed the bottle of Scotch and stumbled up the stairs. She poured a stiff drink and took another pill, then climbed into bed. To hell with Ted and his whore! Geez, she'd be hungover enough tomorrow. And she had to be up at five.

Suddenly she sat up. What would happen if she didn't go in? In her whole life she had never been five minutes late for a rehearsal, a fitting or an interview. And what did it get her? Sure, she was making five thousand a week now—but what did she have to show for it? The house wasn't paid for yet—the studio had loaned her the money. Dr. Mitchell said the house was important for her sense of security, that it would rid her of her childhood instability. Some advice at twenty-five bucks a shot! She'd see him tomorrow—let him explain this! And now that she

thought about it, what in hell did Ted pay for? The servants, the car, his office, the food and the booze. Maybe it had been a mistake to sign a premarital agreement. His business was going great. *Vogue* was always giving him big layouts. What did she have? After the studio took out a thousand a week toward the loan on her house, then the agent, the income tax, her personal maid, her secretary . . . Jesus! She couldn't save a dime. Well, in another three years she'd be clear with the house. She gulped down some more Scotch. A feeling of euphoria began to float through her. Once everything was paid for, everything would be all right. . . .

All right! Holy Christ! With Ted down there banging some girl in *her* swimming pool? She shot out of bed. She was dizzy and her head was heavy, but she had to throw that girl out of *her* pool. She held onto the banister as she fumbled her way down the stairs. She groped her way to the light switch and triumphantly flooded the pool with light.

Ted and the girl were scrambling out of the pool as she staggered out, holding a bottle of Scotch.

"Having a good time, kiddies?" she shrieked. "Fucking in *my* pool? Be sure you drain it out. Remember, Ted—*your* children go wading in it every morning."

260 The girl dodged frantically behind Ted. Neely carefully emptied the bottle into the pool.

"Maybe this'll disinfect it," she sneered. Then she stared at Ted. "So now it's a girl tramp instead of a boy. I guess Dr. Mitchell will tell me you need this too!"

Ted stood erect and silent, his arms behind him to shield the shivering girl. This protective gesture added to Neely's rage. "Who are you protecting! A whore who contaminated my pool? You know, honey, you mean nothing to him. He usually likes boys for his diversion. Maybe that's it . . .

maybe you have no tits—or maybe you're a Lesbian!"

The girl broke away and fled into the cabana. Ted stood very still. He had a crazy dignity in spite of his nakedness. For a split second she wanted to rush to him, to say that she was sorry, that she loved him. He was so tall and bronze . . . But she couldn't let him get away with this.

"All right, faggot—start explaining!"

He smiled slightly. "I think you need glasses. I'd hardly say she was built like a boy."

Her lip quivered. "I could take that better—"

"I'll bet you could," he said slowly. "You drove me to that."

"I drove you!"

"You almost made me think I *was* a queer. Sure, I tried it with a few guys. In some crazy way I felt I wasn't cheating on you. And you made me feel I wasn't desirable to a woman. When was the last time you wanted me, Neely?"

"Why, you're my husband. Whattaya mean, 'want you'? I always want you."

"You want me *around!* To fight your battles at the studio, design your clothes, escort you to openings. But as a man . . . You're always too tired for sex. When did you think about it last?"

"You're nuts!" she yelled. "Say, don't try and switch things. I catch you red-handed and you stand there with your dingle blowing in the breeze and a naked broad in my cabana, and *you* sermonize with *me!* Who in hell is paying for this pool and this house?"

"Who wanted it?" Nonchalantly, he reached for a towel and draped it around his waist.

"We couldn't live in that apartment you had."

**From *Valley of the Dolls*, Jacqueline Susann,
1966**