

# Trology In Hysteria

JANET JARRETT

## Part I

She took out the jar of cold cream and set it on the dressing table before her and looked in the mirror. She had looked good tonight. She had meant to look good. It was her husband's first night home. Not her husband . . . Not her husband. She wished she would look old. She took the shades off the lamps. That was better. She looked worse.

A hunting trip, even post cards from Canada. It had not been a hunting trip, and they were not to be married any longer. She would look old. She unhooked her dress, but her fingers caught in it and she tore it and then tore it more and flung it across the room with her bracelet and her rings.

This was not right. She sat down again slowly. There was a clock ticking and a little noise in the radiator. If she were to kill herself . . . . He would be sorry, but if she killed herself, she would not know that he would be sorry. And if she did not kill herself, he would not be sorry. But if she did . . . .

She turned her head to see if there were really shadows under her eyes. She brushed her hair back tightly from her face. She did look older. She would make him sorry. But if he were, she would not know it.

But this happened every day. This always happened. You said to your friends, "Oh yes, I thought you knew. I believe he's married again." You did not look old because it hadn't mattered. You were gay and clever. It did not matter at all. It happened to everyone. It always happened. It didn't make any difference. She brushed her hair down

again and smoothed cold cream over her face.

## Part II

She felt very strong and full of power as she looked at the people across the table from her. Strong leaders must feel this way before the weight of too many problems broke the pride and made them afraid. It must be the same thing only safer this way because hers was a smaller sphere. This power over people and the knowledge of what they would say and do.

The place was crowded, and at one end of the room a woman played the piano and sang. Her songs were low and husky and almost without words. She watched the people across from her. A man and a woman, friends of hers. She smiled as she saw how driven they were. It was the urge to create; not the usual one, but the urge to create tangible things with their hands and minds. She had felt it once. That was before she learned that it is more satisfactory to use the energy in knowing people and anticipating their actions. This painting of a picture or the writing of a book gave you only a momentary hold on people. Of course, you held people you did not even know, but was it important to hold them? It was better to have this steady power over the ones you knew, to make them a little afraid of you because they felt the power.

She listened to their talk. The man was saying, "But we do not want a complete picture. It is the duty of the artist only to suggest. Take Whistler's etchings. The early ones are full of lines — so full that you are lost in the details and never

see the whole. The Venetian ones — how different they are — only a few lines and great white spaces. He gave the greatest meaning to the empty spaces. The whole of the thing is clear and absolute.”

The woman answered. “Of course, that’s right. I’m only saying that the extreme of either is bad. Don’t you see? Too many empty spaces will mean nothing as well as too many lines. I’m only saying that there must be a middle ground.”

She smiled at their talk. The talk of driven people who had not learned to be powerful. The place was very hot and she was tired of the music. These people were tired of it, too. She knew they were. But they would not suggest going. She would suggest that they leave. That was part of the power, putting other people’s thoughts into words.

“But no.” The woman looked up quickly. “We haven’t nearly finished our discussion. We just got here. I would much rather stay here.”

“So would I,” said the man. “It’s early yet. I don’t want to leave at all.”

### Part III

The hard wood of her chair was good. She leaned her head back against the tall back of it. They were outdoors, and the sun was hot and the grass was freshly cut. Little waves of the smell of the grass came sharply against her nostrils.

She stretched against the sun, and the wood of the chair pushed her up into the sky. There were drifts of white clouds scattered against the blue of it. She pressed her arms against the chair, and she was in the clouds and above them. She could see the whiteness of the top of them as the sun shone against it. She was so high that it was hard to get her breath, and she fought gloriously to catch the thin hard air in her lungs. It was cold, but there was also the warmth of the sun.

She had almost left the earth. It was a spinning, blue-green ball beneath her, and she could see it through the thinness of the clouds. She pulled hard to break the cord that held her to it. She fought through the cold air, and she could feel the cord growing taut about her body. Another moment now, another breath, and she would break it forever. She would leave the blue-green bauble and be free forever in the clear spaces beyond the clouds. One more moment now. She moved her head as she tried to free her body.

“I’ll get you a pillow to put behind your head. That wood must be hard.”

The cord slackened and she lost the clouds and came back to the smell of freshly cut grass. She looked at the woman sitting beside her, and she knew that she could never break the cord.