

THE TRADERS

By James Collins

Stan, Tom, and Caroline were a weird triangle. To say that their interaction was unusual is being kind. It was Bohemian; it was both outrageous and immoral and was beyond the pale. Originally, Tom and Caroline were married. They moved to Europe where Stan worked in the same office with Tom. For a period, they both lived in Turkey with all of its Oriental intrigue and open society. Caroline visited Tom for weeks at a time and then returned to her European job while Tom and Stan remained friends and cavorted with the local prostitutes.

Tom became bored with Caroline and divorced her. At this point Stan indicated his attraction for Caroline and feeling very kind; Tom 'gave' Caroline to Stan, just as if they were trading commodities --a joint venture they created. Whether there was any formal, marriage in this transaction has never been clear or mentioned. Those of us who come from more a traditional lifestyle would like to believe that a justice of the peace or an eastern potentate performed some kind of ceremony, which formally tied them together. However, to this day no one has ever seen a document or heard of such a ceremony.

A few years later Stan and Caroline came to New England when Stan became vice president of a large corporate division. They bought a modest house and moved in as Mr. and Mrs. Smith. When an opening in the international marketing operation appeared, Stan hired Tom as his overseas marketing manager. When Tom came to this country, Stan and he would go out together on the town and carouse with the local female population at the lower class bars. On a weekly basis, Stan would receive calls from women he had met over the weekend. His secretary, who was a blabbermouth, let these little tidbits be known to her Associates and as a result were known throughout the company.

Caroline began to have symptoms, which looked like Alzheimer's. This was noted at several company parties and by neighbors in the area. Caroline began to acquire some very odd characteristics. Initially she became vegan which was noted when the orders were taken for company dinners. Then she began to sleep all day and would only come out at night. This was reported by the neighbors and once by the police who found her wandering around the yard in a white gown at three in the morning. Stan now began to date the secretaries in the company. Many of these were not too particular and their reputations were not damaged more than when they started. To certain members of the company this was outlandish. Others would just say,

“Well that's Stan.”

Then Caroline seemed to disappear. She was not sighted or heard from. She just vanished. Then the rumor was Stan had divorced Caroline. No reasons were cited. Then Stan increased his dating, with one secretary obtaining 80% of his activity. Three or four others shared the remainder of his time. Slowly the ratio changed until one executive Secretary named Susie had his full

attention. A few months later, they were engaged and four months later, they got married. The happy couple moved into a much larger house. Nothing was heard of Caroline.

Six months after the blessed event, Stan was made CEO of the division and he threw a party, which included all the vice presidents and directors of the organization with their wives or guests. It was a sumptuous dress-up party and cocktail hour. All of the vice presidents and directors wives wanted to see the inside of the new house. Tom attended having been brought in from Europe on a trumped up reason to attend the party. All knew about the triumvirate and wanted to see the other participant. Caroline of course was a vague memory.

As the cocktail hour was winding down and everybody had a few drinks, the party started to loosen up and everyone was getting ready to go in for the main dinner. Little groups were scattered throughout the downstairs, everyone was talking, and chatting about various items but no one was paying much attention to the side of the room. A door from the basement opened and a vision appeared. Caroline in a long sweeping formal white dressing gown walked across the floor. The room went very silent. She nodded to a few she knew and said "hello." She walked over to the sideboard, took some sliced pieces of fish, and put two full cocktail glasses on a plate. Then she turned around, walked back to the door, opened it, went downstairs and closed it behind her. The silence was deafening. It took about ten seconds and then everyone started talking and pointing waving and asking what was that. At that point, Tom spoke up. He explained Caroline was suffering from dementia and Stan had divorced her for that reason. However, Stan could not put her out on the street and he could not put her into a home so Stan decided that Caroline would live in the basement. She had a complete apartment down there with her own kitchen and bathroom. Stan, and Suzie took care of her. However, the reason no one ever saw her was that she still slept all day and only came out after sunset. Apparently, Stan had a solution to the problem and he felt no obligation to let anyone else know about the triumvirate and how they solved problems. To this day, no one has ever heard of Caroline's passing though she would have to be close to 90. Tom is still somewhere in Europe and Stan has moved to the West Coast after he retired and Susie died. There may never be a closing chapter to this little story but the parts of it that remain are still intriguing.

THE END