

MARGARET KARMAZIN

FORTY YEARS

1971

"You were gassed? Far out," said Brenda.

She leaned forward, the better to observe this hippie friend of David's. David was Brenda's teaching buddy at Montbleu High and having one of his frequent parties. The woman sported the hippie chic look Brenda wished she herself could achieve, but wasn't the physical type for it.

"Yeah, the pigs gassed us. It was amazing. Everyone scattered, Susan and Terry ended up in jail. They met some really interesting people there."

"I'll bet," said Peter, another friend of David's. Brenda had never seen before tonight.

David was gay and Brenda loved him. Not romantically; she wasn't that dumb, but in a best friend way. He was always trying to fix her up, as if he had a mission to marry her off.

"Why?" she asked him once. "Are you afraid I'll come on to you?"

"I just think you're the marryin' kind. So, I keep my eyes open."

So why had he never fixed her up with this Peter?

Hippie chick tossed her long hair and shot Peter a contemptuous look. "Yeah, we *did* meet interesting people in there. We invited them to join us at the commune we're starting up."

Peter smiled in the manner of a jaded police detective. It was so convincing, Brenda wondered if he actually *was* a cop. But if so, he might have gotten pissed at the reference to "the pigs."

"I'll bet you're a vegetarian too," Peter said in his sly way and for a moment, Brenda felt torn, part of her sympathetic to the woman's hippie culture, another part disdainful and enjoying Peter's dig.

"Do you have a problem with that?" the girl snapped before turning away, dismissing someone so bourgeois.

Brenda looked Peter over. She could tell somehow that he hadn't

gone to college, or if he had, possibly on the GI bill. He had a different look from the preppie men she usually dated. His clothes seemed just a shade gangsterish.

As the party broke up, he approached her by the front door. She was staying to help David clean up. Looking down at her, he said, "You want to go out sometime?"

She wasn't surprised. The whole thing seemed fated, as if she had no choice in the matter. Not that she minded. "Okay," she said, writing down her number.

"Nice meeting you," he finished before going out the door.

It seemed forever before the guests were all gone. *Finally*, she and David were alone. He said, "I caught that, girl. He asked you out, didn't he?"

"Yeah. How come you never mentioned him? I thought we discussed all your friends."

He picked up wine glasses, holding them between his fingers in the manner of a seasoned waiter. "I didn't think he was your type, hon."

"Yeah?" said Brenda. She ran the dishwasher hot and sudsy

"He's pretty blue collar. Moved here from New Jersey a couple of years ago with his wife."

Brenda felt herself grow hot all over. "What? He's *married*? That *bastard!*"

"No, no," said David quickly, "he's divorced now. She was a piece of work, ran around on him, stole drugs or something."

"Wow." So he was from New Jersey; that explained that difference in the way he dressed. She had a certain TV image of the state just across the river from her own.

"You sure he's over her?"

"Far as I know, he's washed his hands of her. Good riddance."

"What does he do, this blue-collar man?" she asked, grinning. Why was she grinning? Her facial expressions seemed to be out of control.

"Electrician. They do okay in the money department, but—"

"But—" she repeated.

"Well, anyone I know you've dated has had a college degree and that one guy from Philly was plain ole *rich*. So, I assumed—"

She was staring into space. "He seems so—I don't know, dangerous and stable at the same time?"

David wiggled his arched eyebrows. "Dangerous and stable, oooo, I