CHAPTER 1

At six they landed at Miami and Judith and Winnie met them.

As always, the sweet, moist tropical air, falling on them like a perfume as they walked down the runway, marked the distance they had come. Only that morning they had been in the modern, civilized skyscraper world of New York City. Now, with a few hours intervening, they were in the tropics, three hundred miles south of Cairo, actually. New York had been hot and lazy with summer, but this was different; the sky had a softer blue, the palms moved with a whispering grace against it; a dusty cloud of smoke drifted from a fire somewhere in the Everglades, as if reminding them of the strange, savage world that lay outside, still untamed and unconquered. There was a world which, at night, seemed to creep nearer, stealthily, as if in an everlasting attempt to reclaim its own.

She faced an unexpected and obscurely frightening thought; it was nonsense and yet it had a certain authority strong enough for Marny to pause a second, her hand on the railing, caught by an absurd compulsion to retreat, to turn

around, re-enter the plane, go back to New York, go anywhere, but go. It was exactly as if she were afraid of something, as if some vague and unaccountable uneasiness, unrealized or, at least, certainly not acknowledged, had crystallized that moment and become fear.

Fear? But fear had to have an object and there was none. It was as baseless as the balmy, humid air. Tim was already ahead and she was holding up the other passengers.

She followed Tim as he bounced down the runway.

Tim Wales quite naturally was the first passenger off the plane, although he had sat in the choice single seat on the right, away up ahead. His promptness in getting back to the door and out of the plane first was not, however, because he was president of the Wales Airlines, which spanned the globe like silver threads, making a shining web over the planet with Tim Wales in its center. Nobody stood back for him in deference; the plane was one of the company's regular passenger air liners, but probably no one on it except Marny and André (and of course the crew) knew he was the great Tim Wales. He got to the runway first merely because it was in Tim's nature to beat anybody to the draw, whether it was a contract for a foreign air base or getting off a plane.

This time Winnie, his daughter, and Judith, his young and beautiful second wife, were waiting. Marny knew him perhaps better than anyone except Judith and Winnie but she was never quite certain of what to expect from him. Except for his eyes (granite eyes with sparks of cold light in them)

he looked rather like a fat, shiny, slightly bald but very rosy and healthy child. He was incredibly energetic, always buoyant and coupled swift-leaping imagination with a cold, acute business sense.

He took off his hat and waved it furiously. Winnie was standing inside the gate, waving too, laughing, and so exactly like the first Mrs. Wales that it was always a little astonishing to see her. Except, of course, she was young and attractive with her neat brown hair in a bun on her neck, her fresh high color, her lipsticked red mouth and even white teeth, her tanned, bare legs. She had slimmed down since Marny had last seen her, in the winter, just before Winnie and Judith left for the Florida house and the stay which had been lengthened, by degrees, for so many weeks. By nature rather on the stocky side, Winnie was now reasonably slender, and it was becoming to her. Her wholesome, laughing face showed very attractive lines; her bones were large and now that she had lost some of the extra flesh that had padded them, were visibly well shaped.

Tim kissed his daughter enthusiastically, and passed her on to Marny. "Darling," she said, embracing Marny and wafting a new and very successful perfume around her. "Judith's in the car. How are you, Father? Marny, you always look marvelous. André . . ."

André Durant had followed Marny. Winnie embraced him with hearty cordiality as she had Marny; he kissed her and pulled her arm through his. Marny saw it, naturally; but

rather unnaturally she looked quickly away. André's dark head bent like that over Winnie!

But everybody always kissed everybody else on arrival anywhere. It didn't mean anything, and even if it did it was nothing to her. André Durant was only a man she'd known (because Judith sent him to Tim Wales in New York with a letter of introduction) for exactly a week. They had lunched, dined, gone to some musicals, done the night clubs, danced. Because Tim asked her to go about with him, because André was a friend of Judith's, because Tim wanted him to enjoy New York. If she wasn't going to like it when she saw André kiss somebody else, even lightly on the cheek, like that, then she was in for a bad time because André would probably kiss everybody all his life.

Which was an irrelevant and silly thought and had nothing to do with her. But she listened, all the same. He said, "Winnie, dear! It's grand to see you. How was the tennis match? How are you? How's Judith?"

"Come along, come along," fussed Tim, bouncing ahead again and through the building, letting Marny and André and Winnie follow him to the long, shining car, chauffeur-driven, in which Judith sat waiting for them.

"Darlings," she said. Her voice was low and husky and beautiful. "How wonderful! Winnie, did you see to their baggage? Tim, my precious, you look too marvelous. Sit by me, Marny. André, how did you like New York?"

Winnie had seemed smart and pretty with her wholesome,

fresh face and her white sports dress, pearls at her throat and in her ears, her new comparative slimness and new perfume, until they saw Judith. Judith was so lovely, so sleek, so streamlined and smart and groomed down to the last fine detail that, by comparison, she made Winnie lapse into the thick, rather awkward girl of teen age that she had actually been. Marny got into the car beside Judith and felt Judith's slender, cool cheek press her own in the only gesture of affectionate greeting Judith allowed herself and wondered if she, too, beside Judith's perfection, slipped back to the gangling, uncertain, awkward little-girl state. But she liked Judith; everybody liked her: Winnie, who might have been expected to dislike the beautiful young woman who had slipped into her mother's place and who instead had loved, mimicked, run errands for and adored her from the beginning; Tim, who'd fallen in love with her at what amounted to first sight. The business staff, the servants, trained by the first Mrs. Wales, resenting and fearing the advent of the new and young Mrs. Wales, had at once succumbed to her beauty and friendliness—as had Marny herself.

When she first heard of the projected marriage, two years ago, she'd been skeptical, mainly because of Judith's youth and Tim's money. She knew little of Judith, only what Tim had told her. Judith was young, she was a widow, Tim had met her during a trip to Buenos Aires and married her as soon as she arrived in New York. Marny's slight skepticism did not survive her first interview with Judith.

She looked at Judith now, as the porter finished stowing the bags in the back and the big car moved smoothly away. Judith looked remarkably well. She was only lightly tanned, as if she knew that a certain pallor was becoming to her. Her black hair was done with a long, straight white part in the middle and a kind of fan on her neck, so smoothly and so neatly that you felt there was not a hair out of place. She wore white, too, simple and straight, with a green belt and green sandals and an emerald Tim had given her as an anniversary present, glowing on her long, lovely hand. She was wearing mother-of-pearl nail polish, instead of red or pink. There was no detail of dress too small to engage Judith's lively and experimental attention. Tim had her other hand in his own. She turned to smile at him, but he was leaning out, in order to watch ahead through the space between André and Winnie who sat on the folding seats, and drive mentally with the chauffeur. He did not return Judith s smile and, in fact, except for clasping his young wife's hand, looked rather preoccupied and grim. The lines showed sharply around his eyes and mouth as they did when he was intent upon some urgent business problem and something he intended to settle promptly and in any way he could employ to settle it. Tim was always within the law but was not too scrupulous about the finer points of human relationship when he wanted his way. He'd been distrait, Marny reflected briefly, for several days. Probably some business deal was brewing and seething in his active mind and he was

simply not ready to tell her about it yet. It was always like that. Yet he depended upon her, in an odd way, too.

Winnie was talking rapidly, about the week's tennis match in which, it developed as André questioned her, she had won a cup; about some recent changes in the house, about their trip, and the weather in New York, and how nice it was to have them there. Winnie was always dependable socially; Judith rarely. Tim peered ahead at the traffic. Judith smiled and listened.

They turned along Biscayne Boulevard and the smell of the sea came through the open windows of the car. Winnie said, "We had no idea you were planning to come, Father. Did you come on business or just to see us?"

For an instant Tim said nothing. Judith's lovely face was very still. Everyone, suddenly, in the car seemed to listen. Winnie turned, surprise in her candid face, and repeated, "Why did you come?"

"Wanted to," said Tim. "Glad to see me?"

"But of course," cried Winnie. Judith said nothing. Winnie chattered on: "Charlie Ingram is here too. Staying at his place on Silver Point. He's coming to dinner."

Marny remembered and liked Charlie Ingram, a perennial bachelor of fifty-odd, of vaguely English background, who lived on an inherited income and flitted in and about society with the greatest good nature, kindliness and popularity.

"He's taken up tennis again," went on Winnie. "He's de-

veloped a really good backhand drive. He's one of Judith's admirers this summer." She laughed, but admiringly, at Judith. "He's underfoot all the time."

Marny thought suddenly and rather sharply: Why exactly *had* they come to Florida?

It had been Tim's decision and a sudden one.

This was Monday. Sunday about noon he had announced they were going to Florida, he and Marny and André Durant and that was all. At nine-thirty Monday they had been ushered (with some ceremony and welcome) into one of his own passenger planes.

For André, of course, it was returning; it was in Miami Beach that he'd met Judith. But Tim had added no word to his announcement of the impending journey. Usually he explained trips to Marny, telling her why, telling her what he intended to accomplish, outlining her own duties. He'd had time to tell her all that on the plane and hadn't.

She hadn't, however, given it any particular thought until then. Certainly, whatever the reason was, it was a perfectly matter-of-fact and sensible one.

The plane trip had been monotonous yet tiring. That and the sharply unwelcome notion of something inexorable and rather frightening in the steady encroachment of the tropical night plucked a little at Marny's nerves. Unbidden and unexpected and certainly unwelcome, another thought entered her mind: had Tim failed to tell her the reason for their trip

because it was a personal one? Had it anything to do with Judith?

She glanced at them again; Judith's lovely hand in Tim's fat, shiny, strong one; Tim's preoccupied, uncommunicative face. Had Judith tired of that marriage?

That was unfair; merely a thought with no rhyme and reason for it. Judith and Tim were exactly as they'd always been, happy and in love, in spite of the difference in their ages, in spite of Judith's look of glamour and sophistication and the romantic atmosphere that somehow surrounded her wherever she went.

So far as Marny knew, and she would certainly have known otherwise, without any justification for it. If Judith had had lovers, Winnie would have known it; Marny would have known it.

Moreover, Tim Wales, with his shrewdness, his intuition, his great sensitiveness to people's feelings would probably have known it first.

No, the reason for their trip had nothing to do with Judith, not, at least, in that sense. As Marny thought that, Judith turned her exquisite, triangular face with its pointed chin and high cheekbones, its wide, soft dark eyes and arched, shining eyebrows and smiled at her. The uneasy question, almost, again, the fear (but of nothing certainly) was instantly made the absurdity it actually had to be. Marny felt her heart warming toward Judith as she always did when Judith smiled like that. In a queer way Judith and André

Durant were alike; both of them had the most extraordinary, apparently unstudied and unconscious charm.

Winnie turned, putting her large, fair forearm across the back of the folding seat. "You are very quiet, Marny," she said. "Tired? We'll soon be at the house. We've done wonders with it this year, Judith and I. Of course, we never stayed in Florida long enough to do anything, other seasons. But it's really awfully nice in the summer, you know. We like it better, honestly, than the winter tourist season. There's always a breeze and . . . Here we turn off." She leaned forward and poked the chauffeur efficiently. "Turn here, then right across the bridge."

"New chauffeur?" asked Tim.

"We've had him a week," said Judith lazily. "He can't drive but don't be nervous, darling. We'll be home in a minute or two. It's so hard to get any help now. But Winnie finds them, I don't know how. Winnie is wonderful."

They were on the causeway, with Miami glittering in the setting sun behind them now, strung with a few early lights as if they were jewels, and ahead of them Miami Beach stretching to the right and left beyond the bay, green and white and beautiful. Islands like emeralds dotted the bay. Presently they would turn, and turn again, cross a bridge and reach Shadow Island, which Tim had bought several years before.

André seemed to be going to the island with them; it appeared to be taken for granted. Perhaps he'd been staying