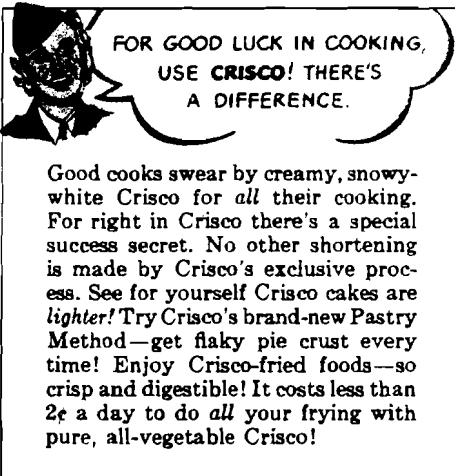


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When Barbara sat up in bed, Amber's eyes followed her. Barbara swung her feet to the floor. She winced as a spot through the small of her back left knee hurt. All her teeth ached a But she could stand. And she could She walked across to where Amber and she slapped Amber's face.

"There," Barbara said softly. She waited for Amber to do something.

The smile was gone. Amber compressed her lips and stared at her but she nothing and she said nothing.

Barbara reached up to one of the hooks. It was supporting several hangers of Amber's clothes. She took the hand down and threw them on Amber's bed. When the hooks were emptied, she emptied one of the closets. Its contents she threw on Amber's bed.

"From now on," she said in a calm, steady voice, "this closet is mine."

Amber, sitting on the bed with clothes all about her, said nothing.

She got up. She picked up a package of cigarettes from the dressing table, leisurely selected one, lighted it, puffed at it and considered Bart through the smoke.

"Now that I've smoked you out," she said to Amber, "shall we be ourselves? I've getting so fed up with your act—and the horrible clothes of yours. I mean whole picture."

"Who," Barbara asked, "do you think I am?" She was determined to say nothing now or ever to this girl about her attempt at drowning her. She was determined to spend the rest of her life necessary, in finding out who had thrown her overboard. She would be as smart they were, as sly.

Amber shrugged and lifted eyebrow and eyes with a wryly despairing grimace. "All right, my dear," she said. "Keep up if you want to. I know you're a great actress. Heaven knows I should. I have the greatest respect for you. I envy you more than any woman that ever lived. You have more lives than a cat. Frank I think you're a witch. I'll be good."

Who, Barbara wondered, was the woman she resembled? A notorious secret agent? It wouldn't do to ask questions. And at the moment she was enjoying this arrogant girl's awe, submission. This woman she resembled must be much more ruthless than Amber.

The phone rang. Barbara answered. Paul's crisp voice said: "Barbara! Are you all right?"

"Yes."
"The nurse told me not to disturb you for a while. I'd like to see you as soon as possible. Are you alone?"

"I will be," said Barbara. She reached for her dressing gown and said to Amber: "You won't mind going out for a while. My fiancé wants to talk things over."

THERE was droll amusement in Amber's answer: "Ah yes! Your fiancé. Not at all, my dear."

Barbara was sitting at the dressing table, thoughtfully considering Amber's array of cosmetics, when Paul knocked.

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