

Bargain

An Excerpt From *Rebecca's Road* by Marlene Lee

"I want a motor home," Rebecca said. She looked up from the breakfast table and stared across the lawn at the peach orchard; at the cool, dusty rows between trees where she used to walk in the hot Sacramento Valley summers when she was young, before her parents installed air conditioning and built her wing of the house.

"Why?" said her father. "You have spacious rooms of your own." He glanced through the window at the white stucco and orange tile roof of her wing.

Underneath the breakfast table, Rebecca crossed and recrossed her long legs. "I want to travel," she said, adjusting a supportive stocking at the knee. "I want to have some fun before I get old."

"You're already fifty." Her father spit a grapefruit seed into his spoon. "How much does a motor home cost?"

"Thirty-thousand dollars, second-hand."

"You can't afford it."

Rebecca rang for more toast. "Maybe you could give me some of my trust fund early."

Her father gripped the walker he'd been using in the three months since Mother's death and tried to stand. "Motor homes have license fees," he said. "Just like cars. Renewable annually."

"This is the last of Mother's marmalade," Rebecca said, playing with the jam jar lid. Her hands were beginning to look old and spotted. Fingers big-jointed. Her face was plain and weathered. She never thought about her looks nor competed for

attention. Still, people noticed her because of her height and dyed red hair: Mother had been alarmed by her daughter's first graying when she was thirty-five.

"How many miles on it?"

"Twenty-thousand. It's got all the conveniences, Daddy. Holding tanks for fresh water and black water. Heating. Air-conditioning. Generator. AC/DC. Propane."

"You don't have that kind of money, Becky. And have you ever driven one of those things? Have you ever emptied a holding tank?"

Rebecca put the lid back on the marmalade and looked at a point just below her father's thin hairline. "Couldn't I have some of my trust money now instead of waiting till you're dead?"

While her father turned away and fingered the knot of the necktie he wore every day with a white shirt, Rebecca twisted the marmalade jar around and around. "Mother said you'd take care of me after she died."

"Don't I?"

"Board and room and clothes, the best, Daddy. But sometimes that's not enough."

He reached his hand toward her. "Let's not talk about money so soon after Mother"

"I'm not getting any younger," Rebecca said.

"Nonsense," said her father.