

Roses are for girls in ribbons

*You never know about a new father,
especially one like Sam*

As Irene read the card that came
with the roses, she began to cry.

Arthur Sarnoff

By HELEN LAURIE WELCH

MRS. JORDAN'S heavy footsteps awakened Irene, though she hadn't been truly asleep. She had been dreaming about her baby, his warm softness, the sweet new smell of him. The slanting rays of the late afternoon sun fell on Irene's face, and she still felt the heat burning against her cheeks as she watched Mrs. Jordan pound across the room to Mrs. Henry's bed.

It was roses this time. Irene silently watched Anne Henry open the box. A faint flush spread through Anne's young face as she read the card. The waxen green paper was eagerly spread apart and the roses lifted out with tenderness.

"Aren't they the beauties though?" Mrs. Jordan breathed. "Must have set your young man back a pretty penny!"

Irene heard Anne's soft laughter. Perhaps they did cost a lot of money; it didn't seem to matter. Anne was so buoyantly, carelessly young to be a mother. There should be roses no matter what, Irene supposed, when you are young and lovely.

Irene sighed softly. She wasn't *old*, really. She wasn't 30 yet, but she felt ages older than the girl in the next bed.

Maybe she had never been that young. She had had to learn so early to care for people, not to be taken care of. When she was 12 her mother had died, and the years that followed had been hard. There was never quite enough money nor hours in the day. The tender shining moments in a young girl's life: crumpled dance programs, corsages, tremulous good-nights in darkened doorways; she had known none of these. Only the sure bedrock of accomplishment: her brother's happy growing years, her father's last quiet ones.

And then, at last, Sam had come along. Dear, wonderful, gentle Sam, who worked so hard, so long, to earn his degree in the field he loved. It had been an awkward courtship, neither of them quite knowing the way. Irene was his first girl, and he was Irene's first and only love. Sam loved her, too, she knew, and respected her efficiency and economy.

One day, after they'd been married a few months, he said, a little shyly, as he tied his tie before the mirror: "You've made a new man of me, Irene, I've just noticed." He winked at her in the mirror. "You might almost call old Sam a handsome dog!"

Silently, passionately, she told herself, you're the most handsome, most beautiful man in the whole world. But she couldn't say such a thing. Love was still too new for her.

But she knew what he meant. His shirts gleamed white, his shoes glowed, his hair was crisply trimmed. In his absent-minded way he had tended to these things before, but his mind had never really been on them. He was preoccupied with his work at the lab, always some new process or formula.

So she took care of him. She saved his money, cooked good meals, kept house with hard-won efficiency, and with all of these things she said, "I love you, Sam."

She never took a penny for herself for foolishness or fancy clothes. She had never thought of herself as anything but plain. Not ugly, but a plain girl with good teeth and shining hair. She was glad of it, she told herself firmly, because there was no nonsense in her at all. It was enough that Sam loved her for her virtues.

Her only extravagance had been for the baby. She smiled contentedly now, remembering the carefully laundered, lovingly embroidered things stacked neatly in the yellow chest. For her son. Her son and Sam's.

With a start, Irene realized that Anne Henry was asking her a question. The roses? It must be about the roses. "They're perfectly beautiful," she said hastily. "I suppose your husband is mad about his new daughter."

"Oh, he's a scream! Yesterday, right after the baby was born, he went out and bought a doll, one of those with hair you wash and curl. It cost the most, so he figured it was the best. Isn't that cute?"

"Well, I guess you have to expect that in new fathers. As soon as Sam heard about his new son yesterday, he planned to go right out and buy a drum." Irene smiled, and then she remembered something else. Sam said he was going to buy out a flower shop for her and she had said to him: "Oh heavens, Sam, I don't need any flowers. We need to watch our money, now more than ever, for important things." She had two men now to be sensible and practical for. That was yesterday morning and when evening came Anne Henry's husband rushed into the room, buried under a load of bright blossoms that filled the room with fragrance. Anne held out her arms in delight, and Irene watched them with the kindly amusement of a grownup in a children's world.

WHEN SAM came in, empty-handed, Irene was glad she'd made him understand what she meant about extravagant gestures. He leaned over to kiss her, and she could see the new proud look in his eyes. She reached up to stroke his cheek.

With his lips close to her ear he said, "I had some terrible impulses today, Irene. This only comes to a man once. I'm afraid it's going to my head."

His eyes twinkled as he spoke, and Irene told herself she would do anything for this man. He couldn't waste his hard-earned money on her. She wouldn't let him.