

"Now Sam, you know that you can't buy flowers this time of the year for less than \$15. We've got other places for our money. Honestly, Sam dear, I don't need flowers." Sam stared at her, unanswering.

"Well," she went on, faltering a little, "if you really want to buy something, get a nice ivy plant or a geranium or something. You know I'd like a nice plant for the kitchen."

It was settled. Sam never argued. When they were married, he had said she would always have things the way she wanted them, and it had been that way. Her way, the sensible way, had been so clear last night.

And now it was another night and the clatter of food trays sounded down the hall.

"M-m-m, doesn't it smell good? Chicken, maybe?" Anne asked, and then laughed. "Honestly, I feel like a pig waiting at its trough, I'm so hungry."

Irene laughed, too. "Motherhood must agree with us."

Companionably, they discussed in delighted detail their new babies all through the creamed chicken, as they had through lunch and breakfast. Their trays were removed and the nurse came in with pans of water so they could pretty up before evening visiting hours.

"Golly, I just love this routine," Anne exclaimed gleefully. "I can take hours to put on my face. At home, I'm in such a hurry, I feel all thrown together."

IRENE LIGHTLY powdered her nose, ran a comb through her dark brown hair, and lay back against the pillow to watch Anne. It was really a wondrous display. The fat gold-capped bottles, the slender perfume jars, lipsticks, fluffy powder puffs. When at last Anne was through, she tied a pink satin ribbon around her long curling hair in back and fluffed up the bangs in front with a few brisk motions.

The nurse came in again, and Anne asked for the pink jacket from her suitcase. It was a lovely thing, all satin and lace, and when Anne had it on she looked like a doll, Irene thought, an exquisite, fragile doll.

Irene glanced hastily at the mirror on her own table and away again. She asked for nothing from her suitcase. She had nothing pink and lacy to put on. She smoothed her hair back again. Well, all right, she wasn't beautiful. But she wished, for Sam's sake, she was just a little.

The thought struck her that it was night and no plant had been delivered to her. She was angry with herself for her sudden uneasiness. She hadn't wanted one and Sam knew it. Yet—

Anne's husband burst in with a shout, carrying packages and magazines. He stopped silently at his wife's bed and stood looking at her for a moment. Then he gathered the smiling doll into careful arms. The head of the house had come, the protector.

Irene felt a queer prickle in her nose. She wouldn't cry. There was no reason to. Certainly a full-grown woman doesn't cry because she has just realized that no man had ever looked at her as though she needed to be cherished. Maternity weeps this must be—she'd heard of such a thing. But she certainly wouldn't cry!

Sam would be here soon. Maybe he was working. Sometimes he worked way past dinnertime. Sometimes he got so involved that he forgot the time. *Oh Sam, please come.*

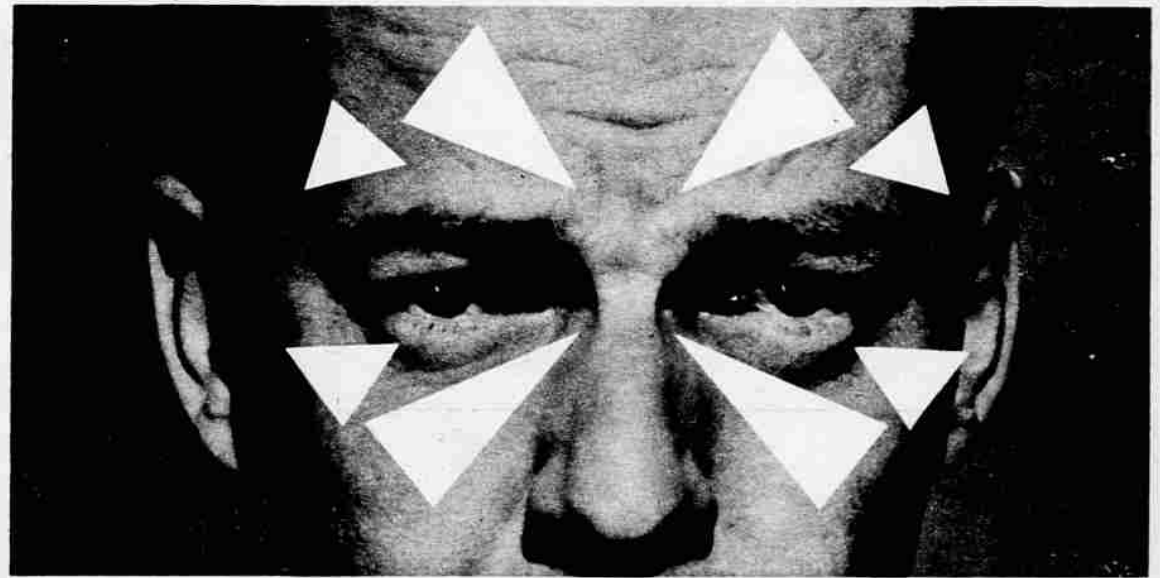
Mrs. Jordan appeared in the doorway. She had a huge white box under her arm. "This is for you," she said to Irene and waited to see what was inside. Irene wondered at the swift excitement that made her breathless, made her fingers tremble on the heavy satin ribbon. The green waxy paper! They didn't send geraniums that way. She opened the paper and saw the yellow roses. Two dozen of them, creamy yellow with drops of moisture clinging to the tender buds. Yellow roses!

Irene picked up the card, dimly aware of Mrs. Jordan's awed exclamations. The card, in Sam's writing, said: "Nevertheless, I insist my beautiful wife have roses today!"

Mrs. Jordan hustled importantly out of the room with the roses in search of a vase, and Irene sat staring at the card for a long moment.

Then her hands began to search feverishly through the crumpled paper on her lap. The wetness of tears on her cheeks surprised her a little, but she had no time for this. She had to hurry and find a piece of ribbon to tie in her hair before her husband arrived.

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