

The Lottery

Shirley Jackson was born in San Francisco in 1916. She first received wide critical acclaim for her short story ‘The Lottery’, which was published in 1949. Her novels — which include *The Sundial*, *The Bird's Nest*, *Hangsaman*, *The Road through the Wall* and *The Haunting of Hill House*, in addition to *We Have Always Lived in the Castle*, are characterized by her use of realistic settings for tales that often include elements of horror and the occult. *Raising Demons* and *Life Among the Savages* are her two works of non-fiction. *Come Along With Me* is a collection of stories, lectures and part of the novel she was working on when she died in 1965.

SHIRLEY JACKSON

The Lottery
and Other Stories



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EPILOGUE



THE INTOXICATED

HE WAS JUST TIGHT ENOUGH and just familiar enough with the house to be able to go out into the kitchen alone, apparently to get ice, but actually to sober up a little; he was not quite enough of a friend of the family to pass out on the living-room couch. He left the party behind without reluctance, the group by the piano singing “Stardust,” his hostess talking earnestly to a young man with thin clean glasses and a sullen mouth; he walked guardedly through the dining-room where a little group of four or five people sat on the stiff chairs reasoning something out carefully among themselves; the kitchen doors swung abruptly to his touch, and he sat down beside a white enamel table, clean and cold under his hand. He put his glass on a good spot in the green pattern and looked up to find that a young girl was regarding him speculatively from across the table.

“Hello,” he said. “You the daughter?”

“I’m Eileen,” she said. “Yes.”

She seemed to him baggy and ill-formed; it’s the clothes they wear now, young girls, he thought foggily; her hair was braided down either side of her face, and she looked young and fresh and not dressed-up; her sweater was purplish and her hair was dark. “You sound nice and sober,” he said, realizing that it was the wrong thing to say to young girls.

“I was just having a cup of coffee,” she said. “May I get you one?”

He almost laughed, thinking that she expected she was dealing knowingly and competently with a rude drunk. “Thankyou,” he said, “I believe I will.” He made an effort to focus his eyes; the coffee was hot, and when she put a cup in front of him, saying, “I suppose you’d like it black,” he put his face into the steam and let it go into his eyes, hoping to clear his head.

“It sounds like a lovely party,” she said without longing, “everyone must be having a fine time.”

“It is a lovely party.” He began to drink the coffee, scalding hot, wanting her to know she had helped him. His head steadied, and he smiled at her. “I feel better,” he said, “thanks to

you.”

“It must be very warm in the other room,” she said soothingly.

Then he did laugh out loud and she frowned, but he could see her excusing him as she went on, “It was so hot upstairs I thought I’d like to come down for a while and sit out here.”

“Were you asleep?” he asked. “Did we wake you?”

“I was doing my homework,” she said.

He looked at her again, seeing her against a background of careful penmanship and themes, worn textbooks and laughter between desks. “You’re in high school?”

“I’m a Senior.” She seemed to wait for him to say something, and then she said, “I was out a year when I had pneumonia.”

He found it difficult to think of something to say (ask her about boys? basketball?), and so he pretended he was listening to the distant noises from the front of the house. “It’s a fine party,” he said again, vaguely.

“I suppose you like parties,” she said.

Dumbfounded, he sat staring into his empty coffee cup. He supposed he did like parties; her tone had been faintly surprised, as though next he were to declare for an arena with gladiators fighting wild beasts, or the solitary circular waltzing of a madman in a garden. I’m almost twice your age, my girl, he thought, but it’s not so long since I did homework too. “Play basketball?” he asked.

“No,” she said.

He felt with irritation that she had been in the kitchen first, that she lived in the house, that he must keep on talking to her. “What’s your homework about?” he asked.

“I’m writing a paper on the future of the world,” she said, and smiled. “It sounds silly, doesn’t it? I think it’s silly.”

“Your party out front is talking about it. That’s one reason I came out here.” He could see her thinking that that was not at all the reason he came out here, and he said quickly, “What are you saying about the future of the world?”

“I don’t really think it’s got much future,” she said, “at least the way we’ve got it now.”

“It’s an interesting time to be alive,” he said, as though he were still at the party.

“Well, after all,” she said, “it isn’t as though we didn’t *know* about it in advance.”

He looked at her for a minute; she was staring absently at the toe of her saddle shoe, moving her foot softly back and forth, following it with her eyes. “It’s really a frightening

time when a girl sixteen has to think of things like that.” In my day, he thought of saying mockingly, girls thought of nothing but cocktails and necking.

“I’m seventeen.” She looked up and smiled at him again. “There’s a terrible difference,” she said.

“In my day,” he said, overemphasizing, “girls thought of nothing but cocktails and necking.”

“That’s partly the trouble,” she answered him seriously. “If people had been really, honestly scared when you were young we wouldn’t be so badly off today.”

His voice had more of an edge than he intended (“When *I* was young!”), and he turned partly away from her as though to indicate the half-interest of an older person being gracious to a child: “I imagine we thought we were scared. I imagine all kids sixteen—seventeen—think they’re scared. It’s part of a stage you go through, like being boy-crazy.”

“I keep figuring how it will be.” She spoke very softly, very clearly, to a point just past him on the wall. “Somehow I think of the churches as going first, before even the Empire State building. And then all the big apartment houses by the river, slipping down slowly into the water with the people inside. And the schools, in the middle of Latin class maybe, while we’re reading Cæsar.” She brought her eyes to his face, looking at him in numb excitement. “Each time we begin a chapter in Cæsar, I wonder if this won’t be the one we never finish. Maybe we in our Latin class will be the last people who ever read Cæsar.”

“That would be good news,” he said lightly. “I used to hate Cæsar.”

“I suppose when you were young everyone hated Cæsar,” she said coolly.

He waited for a minute before he said, “I think it’s a little silly for you to fill your mind with all this morbid trash. Buy yourself a movie magazine and settle down.”

“I’ll be able to get all the movie magazines I want,” she said insistently. “The subways will crash through, you know, and the little magazine stands will all be squashed. You’ll be able to pick up all the candy bars you want, and magazines, and lipsticks and artificial flowers from the five-and-ten, and dresses lying in the street from all the big stores. And fur coats.”

“I hope the liquor stores will break wide open,” he said, beginning to feel impatient with her, “I’d walk in and help myself to a case of brandy and never worry about anything again.

“The office buildings will be just piles of broken stones,” she said, her wide emphatic eyes still looking at him. “If only you could know exactly what *minute* it will come.”

“I see,” he said. “I go with the rest. I see.”

“Things will be different afterward,” she said. “Everything that makes the world like it is
now will be gone. We’ll have new rules and new ways of living. Maybe there’ll be a law not
to live in houses, so then no one can hide from anyone else, you see.”

“Maybe there’ll be a law to keep all seventeen-year-old girls in school learning sense,” he
said, standing up.

“There won’t be any schools,” she said flatly. “No one will learn anything. To keep from
getting back where we are now.”

“Well,” he said, with a little laugh. “You make it sound very interesting. Sorry I won’t be
there to see it.” He stopped, his shoulder against the swinging door into the dining-room. He
wanted badly to say something adult and scathing, and yet he was afraid of showing her that
he had listened to her, that when he was young people had not talked like that. “If you have
any trouble with your Latin,” he said finally, “I’ll be glad to give you a hand.”

She giggled, shocking him. “I still do my homework every night,” she said.

Back in the living-room, with people moving cheerfully around him, the group by the
piano now singing “Home on the Range,” his hostess deep in earnest conversation with a tall
graceful man in a blue suit, he found the girl’s father and said, “I’ve just been having a very
interesting conversation with your daughter.”

His host’s eye moved quickly around the room. “Eileen? Where is she?”

“In the kitchen. She’s doing her Latin.”

“*Gallia est omnia divisa in partes tres,*” his host said without expression. “I know.”

“A really extraordinary girl.”

His host shook his head ruefully. “Kids nowadays,” he said.

THE DAEMON LOVER

SHE HAD NOT SLEPT WELL; from one-thirty, when Jamie left and she went lingeringly to bed, until seven, when she at last allowed herself to get up and make coffee, she had slept fitfully, stirring awake to open her eyes and look into the half-darkness, remembering over and over slipping again into a feverish dream. She spent almost an hour over her coffee—they were to have a real breakfast on the way—and then, unless she wanted to dress early, had nothing to do. She washed her coffee cup and made the bed, looking carefully over the clothes she planned to wear, worried unnecessarily, at the window, over whether it would be a fine day. She sat down to read, thought that she might write a letter to her sister instead, and began, in her finest handwriting, “Dearest Anne, by the time you get this I will be married. Doesn’t it sound funny? I can hardly believe it myself, but when I tell you how it happened, you’ll see it’s even stranger than that....”

Sitting, pen in hand, she hesitated over what to say next, read the lines already written, and tore up the letter. She went to the window and saw that it was undeniably a fine day. It occurred to her that perhaps she ought not to wear the blue silk dress; it was too plain, almost severe, and she wanted to be soft, feminine. Anxiously she pulled through the dresses in the closet, and hesitated over a print she had worn the summer before; it was too young for her, and it had a ruffled neck, and it was very early in the year for a print dress, but still ...

She hung the two dresses side by side on the outside of the closet door and opened the glass doors carefully closed upon the small closet that was her kitchenette. She turned on the burner under the coffeepot, and went to the window; it was sunny. When the coffeepot began to crackle she came back and poured herself coffee, into a clean cup. I’ll have a headache if I don’t get some solid food soon, she thought, all this coffee, smoking too much, no real breakfast. A headache on her wedding day; she went and got the tin box of aspirin from the bathroom closet and slipped it into her blue pocketbook. She’d have to change to a brown pocketbook if she wore the print dress, and the only brown pocketbook she had was shabby. Helplessly, she stood looking from the blue pocket-book to the print dress, and then put the pocketbook down and went and got her coffee and sat down near the window, drinking her coffee, and looking carefully around the one-room apartment. They planned to come back here tonight and everything must be correct. With sudden horror she realized that she had

forgotten to put clean sheets on the bed; the laundry was freshly back and she took clean sheets and pillow cases from the top shelf of the closet and stripped the bed, working quickly to avoid thinking consciously of why she was changing the sheets. The bed was a studio bed, with a cover to make it look like a couch, and when it was finished no one would have known she had just put clean sheets on it. She took the old sheets and pillow cases into the bathroom and stuffed them down into the hamper, and put the bathroom towels in the hamper too, and clean towels on the bathroom racks. Her coffee was cold when she came back to it, but she drank it anyway.

When she looked at the clock, finally, and saw that it was after nine, she began at last to hurry. She took a bath, and used one of the clean towels, which she put into the hamper and replaced with a clean one. She dressed carefully, all her underwear fresh and most of it new; she put everything she had worn the day before, including her nightgown, into the hamper. When she was ready for her dress, she hesitated before the closet door. The blue dress was certainly decent, and clean, and fairly becoming, but she had worn it several times with Jamie, and there was nothing about it which made it special for a wedding day. The print dress was overly pretty, and new to Jamie, and yet wearing such a print this early in the year was certainly rushing the season. Finally she thought, This is my wedding day, I can dress as I please, and she took the print dress down from the hanger. When she slipped it on over her head it felt fresh and light, but when she looked at herself in the mirror she remembered that the ruffles around the neck did not show her throat to any great advantage, and the wide swinging skirt looked irresistibly made for a girl, for someone who would run freely, dance, swing it with her hips when she walked. Looking at herself in the mirror she thought with revulsion, It's as though I was trying to make myself look prettier than I am, just for him; he'll think I want to look younger because he's marrying me; and she tore the print dress off so quickly that a seam under the arm ripped. In the old blue dress she felt comfortable and familiar, but unexciting. It isn't what you're wearing that matters, she told herself firmly, and turned in dismay to the closet to see if there might be anything else. There was nothing even remotely suitable for her marrying Jamie, and for a minute she thought of going out quickly to some little shop nearby, to get a dress. Then she saw that it was close on ten, and she had no time for more than her hair and her make-up. Her hair was easy, pulled back into a knot at the nape of her neck, but her makeup was another delicate balance between looking as well as possible, and deceiving as little. She could not try to disguise the sallowness of her

skin, or the lines around her eyes, today, when it might look as though she were only doing for her wedding, and yet she could not bear the thought of Jamie's bringing to marriage anyone who looked haggard and lined. You're thirty-four years old after *all*, she told herself cruelly in the bathroom mirror. Thirty, it said on the license.

It was two minutes after ten; she was not satisfied with her clothes, her face, her apartment. She heated the coffee again and sat down in the chair by the window. Can't do anything more now, she thought, no sense trying to improve anything the last minute.

Reconciled, settled, she tried to think of Jamie and could not see his face clearly, or hear his voice. It's always that way with someone you love, she thought, and let her mind slip past today and tomorrow, into the farther future, when Jamie was established with his writing and she had given up her job, the golden house-in-the-country future they had been preparing for the last week. "I used to be a wonderful cook," she had promised Jamie, "with a little time and practice I could remember how to make angel-food cake. And fried chicken," she said, knowing how the words would stay in Jamie's mind, half-tenderly. "And Hollandaise sauce."

Ten-thirty. She stood up and went purposefully to the phone. She dialed, and waited, and the girl's metallic voice said, "...the time will be exactly ten-twenty-nine." Half-consciously she set her clock back a minute; she was remembering her own voice saying last night, in the doorway: "Ten o'clock then. I'll be ready. Is it really *true*?"

And Jamie laughing down the hallway.

By eleven o'clock she had sewed up the ripped seam in the print dress and put her sewing box away carefully in the closet. With the print dress on, she was sitting by the window drinking another cup of coffee. I could have taken more time over my dressing after all, she thought; but by now it was so late he might come any minute, and she did not dare try to repair anything without starting all over. There was nothing to eat in the apartment except the food she had carefully stocked up for their life beginning together: the unopened package of bacon, the dozen eggs in their box, the unopened bread and the unopened butter; they were for breakfast tomorrow. She thought of running downstairs to the drugstore for something to eat, leaving a note on the door. Then she decided to wait a little longer.

By eleven-thirty she was so dizzy and weak that she had to go downstairs. If Jamie had had a phone she would have called him then. Instead, she opened her desk and wrote a note "Jamie, have gone downstairs to the drugstore. Back in five minutes." Her pen leaked onto

her fingers and she went into the bathroom and washed, using a clean towel which she replaced. She tacked the note on the door, surveyed the apartment once more to make sure that everything was perfect, and closed the door without locking it, in case he should come.

In the drugstore she found that there was nothing she wanted to eat except more coffee, and she left it half-finished because she suddenly realized that Jamie was probably upstairs waiting and impatient, anxious to get started.

But upstairs everything was prepared and quiet, as she had left it, her note unread on the door, the air in the apartment a little stale from too many cigarettes. She opened the window and sat down next to it until she realized that she had been asleep and it was twenty minutes to one.

Now, suddenly, she was frightened. Waking without preparation into the room of waiting and readiness, everything clean and untouched since ten o'clock, she was frightened, and felt an urgent need to hurry. She got up from the chair and almost ran across the room to the bathroom, dashed cold water on her face, and used a clean towel; this time she put the towel carelessly back on the rack without changing it; time enough for that later. Hatless, still in the print dress with a coat thrown on over it, the wrong blue pocketbook with the aspirin inside in her hand, she locked the apartment door behind her, no note this time, and ran down the stairs. She caught a taxi on the corner and gave the driver Jamie's address.

It was no distance at all; she could have walked it if she had not been so weak, but in the taxi she suddenly realized how imprudent it would be to drive brazenly up to Jamie's door, demanding him. She asked the driver, therefore, to let her off at a corner near Jamie's address and, after paying him, waited till he drove away before she started to walk down the block. She had never been here before; the building was pleasant and old, and Jamie's name was not on any of the mailboxes in the vestibule, nor on the doorbells. She checked the address; it was right, and finally she rang the bell marked "Superintendent." After a minute or two the door buzzer rang and she opened the door and went into the dark hall where she hesitated until a door at the end opened and someone said, "Yes?"

She knew at the same moment that she had no idea what to ask, so she moved forward toward the figure waiting against the light of the open doorway. When she was very near, the figure said, "Yes?" again and she saw that it was a man in his shirtsleeves, unable to see her any more clearly than she could see him.

With sudden courage she said, "I'm trying to get in touch with someone who lives in this

building and I can't find the name outside."

"What's the name you wanted?" the man asked, and she realized that she would have to answer.

"James Harris," she said. "Harris."

The man was silent for a minute and then he said, "Harris." He turned around to the room inside the lighted doorway and said, "Margie, come here a minute."

"What now?" a voice said from inside, and after a wait long enough for someone to get out of a comfortable chair a woman joined him in the doorway, regarding the dark hall.

"Lady here," the man said. "Lady looking for a guy name of Harris, lives here. Anyone in the building?"

"No," the woman said. Her voice sounded amused. "No men named Harris here."

"Sorry," the man said. He started to close the door. "You got the wrong house, lady," he said, and added in a lower voice, "or the wrong guy," and he and the woman laughed.

When the door was almost shut and she was alone in the dark hall she said to the thin lighted crack still showing, "But he *does* live here; I know it."

"Look," the woman said, opening the door again a little, "it happens all the time."

"Please don't make any mistake," she said, and her voice was very dignified, with thirty-four years of accumulated pride. "I'm afraid you don't understand."

"What did he look like?" the woman said wearily, the door still only part open.

"He's rather tall, and fair. He wears a blue suit very often. He's a writer."

"No," the woman said, and then, "Could he have lived on the third floor?"

"I'm not sure."

"There was a fellow," the woman said reflectively. "He wore a blue suit a lot, lived on the third floor for a while. The Roysters lent him their apartment while they were visiting her folks upstate."

"That might be it; I thought, though..."

"This one wore a blue suit mostly, but I don't know how tall he was," the woman said. "He stayed there about a month."

"A month ago is when—"

"You ask the Roysters," the woman said. "They come back this morning. Apartment 3B."

The door closed, definitely. The hall was very dark and the stairs looked darker.

On the second floor there was a little light from a skylight far above. The apartment door

lined up, four on the floor, uncommunicative and silent. There was a bottle of milk outside
2C.

On the third floor, she waited for a minute. There was the sound of music beyond the door of 3B, and she could hear voices. Finally she knocked, and knocked again. The door was opened and the music swept out at her, an early afternoon symphony broadcast. "How do you do," she said politely to this woman in the doorway. "Mrs. Royster?"

"That's right." The woman was wearing a housecoat and last night's make-up.

"I wonder if I might talk to you for a minute?"

"Sure," Mrs. Royster said, not moving.

"About Mr. Harris."

"*What* Mr. Harris?" Mrs. Royster said flatly.

"Mr. James Harris. The gentleman who borrowed your apartment."

"O Lord," Mrs. Royster said. She seemed to open her eyes for the first time. "What'd he do?"

"Nothing. I'm just trying to get in touch with him."

"O Lord," Mrs. Royster said again. Then she opened the door wider and said, "Come in," and then, "Ralph!"

Inside, the apartment was still full of music, and there were suitcases half-unpacked on the couch, on the chairs, on the floor. A table in the corner was spread with the remains of a meal, and the young man sitting there, for a minute resembling Jamie, got up and came across the room.

"What about it?" he said.

"Mr. Royster," she said. It was difficult to talk against the music. "The superintendent downstairs told me that this was where Mr. James Harris has been living."

"Sure," he said. "If that was his name."

"I thought you lent him the apartment," she said, surprised.

"I don't know anything about him," Mr. Royster said. "He's one of Dottie's friends."

"Not *my* friends," Mrs. Royster said. "No friend of mine." She had gone over to the table and was spreading peanut butter on a piece of bread. She took a bite and said thickly, waving the bread and peanut butter at her husband. "Not *my* friend."

"You picked him up at one of those damn meetings," Mr. Royster said. He shoved a suitcase off the chair next to the radio and sat down, picking up a magazine from the floor

next to him. "I never said more'n ten words to him."

"You said it was okay to lend him the place," Mrs. Royster said before she took another bite. "You never said a word against him, after *all*."

"I don't say anything about *your* friends," Mr. Royster said.

"If he'd of been a friend of mine you would have said *plenty*, believe me," Mrs. Royster said darkly. She took another bite and said, "Believe me, he would have said *plenty*."

"That's all I want to hear," Mr. Royster said, over the top of the magazine. "No more, now."

"You see." Mrs. Royster pointed the bread and peanut butter at her husband. "That's the way it is, day and night."

There was silence except for the music bellowing out of the radio next to Mr. Royster, and then she said, in a voice she hardly trusted to be heard over the radio noise, "Has he gone, then?"

"Who?" Mrs. Royster demanded, looking up from the peanut butter jar.

"Mr. James Harris."

"Him? He must've left this morning, before we got back. No sign of him anywhere."

"Gone?"

"Everything was fine, though, perfectly fine. I told you," she said to Mr. Royster, "I told you he'd take care of everything fine. I can always tell."

"You were lucky," Mr. Royster said.

"Not a thing out of place," Mrs. Royster said. She waved her bread and peanut butter inclusively. "Everything just the way we left it," she said.

"Do you know where he is now?"

"Not the slightest idea," Mrs. Royster said cheerfully. "But, like I said, he left everything fine. Why?" she asked suddenly. "You looking for *him*?"

"It's very important."

"I'm sorry he's not here," Mrs. Royster said. She stepped forward politely when she saw her visitor turn toward the door.

"Maybe the super saw him," Mr. Royster said into the magazine.

When the door was closed behind her the hall was dark again, but the sound of the radio was deadened. She was halfway down the first flight of stairs when the door was opened and Mrs. Royster shouted down the stairwell, "If I see him I'll tell him you were looking for him."

What can I do? she thought, out on the street again. It was impossible to go home, not with Jamie somewhere between here and there. She stood on the sidewalk so long that a woman, leaning out of a window across the way, turned and called to someone inside to come and see. Finally, on an impulse, she went into the small delicatessen next door to the apartment house, on the side that led to her own apartment. There was a small man reading newspaper, leaning against the counter; when she came in he looked up and came down inside the counter to meet her.

Over the glass case of cold meats and cheese she said, timidly, "I'm trying to get in touch with a man who lived in the apartment house next door, and I just wondered if you know him."

"Whyn't you ask the people there?" the man said, his eyes narrow, inspecting her.

It's because I'm not buying anything, she thought, and she said, "I'm sorry. I asked them, but they don't know anything about him. They think he left this morning."

"I don't know what you want *me* to do," he said, moving a little back toward his newspaper. "I'm not here to keep track of guys going in and out next door."

She said quickly, "I thought you might have noticed, that's all. He would have been coming past here, a little before ten o'clock. He was rather tall, and he usually wore a blue suit."

"Now how many men in blue suits go past here every day, lady?" the man demanded. "You think I got nothing to do but—"

"I'm sorry," she said. She heard him say, "For God's sake," as she went out the door.

As she walked toward the corner, she thought, he must have come this way, it's the way he'd go to get to my house, it's the only way for him to walk. She tried to think of Jamie: where would he have crossed the street? What sort of person was he actually—would he cross in front of his own apartment house, at random in the middle of the block, at the corner?

On the corner was a newsstand; they might have seen him there. She hurried on and waited while a man bought a paper and a woman asked directions. When the newsstand man looked at her she said, "Can you possibly tell me if a rather tall young man in a blue suit went past here this morning around ten o'clock?" When the man only looked at her, his eyes wide and his mouth a little open, she thought, he thinks it's a joke, or a trick, and she said urgently, "It's very important, please believe me. I'm not teasing you."

“Look, lady,” the man began, and she said eagerly, “He’s a writer. He might have bought magazines here.”

“What you want him for?” the man asked. He looked at her, smiling, and she realized that there was another man waiting in back of her and the newsdealer’s smile included him. “Never mind,” she said, but the newsdealer said, “Listen, maybe he did come by here.” His smile was knowing and his eyes shifted over her shoulder to the man in back of her. She was suddenly horribly aware of her over-young print dress, and pulled her coat around her quickly. The newsdealer said, with vast thoughtfulness, “Now I don’t know for sure, mind you, but there might have been someone like your gentleman friend coming by this morning.”

“About ten?”

“About ten,” the newsdealer agreed. “Tall fellow, blue suit. I wouldn’t be at all surprised.”

“Which way did he go?” she said eagerly. “Uptown?”

“Uptown,” the newsdealer said, nodding. “He went uptown. That’s just exactly it. What can I do for you, sir?”

She stepped back, holding her coat around her. The man who had been standing behind her looked at her over his shoulder and then he and the newsdealer looked at one another. She wondered for a minute whether or not to tip the newsdealer but when both men began to laugh she moved hurriedly on across the street.

Uptown, she thought, that’s right, and she started up the avenue, thinking: He wouldn’t have to cross the avenue, just go up six blocks and turn down my street, so long as he started uptown. About a block farther on she passed a florist’s shop; there was a wedding display in the window and she thought, This is my wedding day after all, he might have gotten flowers to bring me, and she went inside. The florist came out of the back of the shop, smiling and sleek, and she said, before he could speak, so that he wouldn’t have a chance to think she was buying anything: “It’s *terribly* important that I get in touch with a gentleman who may have stopped in here to buy flowers this morning. *Jerrribly* important.”

She stopped for breath, and the florist said, “Yes, what sort of flowers were they?”

“I don’t know,” she said, surprised. “He never—” She stopped and said, “He was a rather tall young man, in a blue suit. It was about ten o’clock.”

“I see,” the florist said. “Well, *really*, I’m afraid....”

“But it’s so important,” she said. “He may have been in a hurry,” she added helpfully.

“Well,” the florist said. He smiled genially, showing all his small teeth. “For a *lady*,” he said. He went to a stand and opened a large book. “Where were they to be sent?” he asked.

“Why,” she said, “I don’t think he’d have sent them. You see, he was coming—that is, he’d *bring* them.”

“Madam,” the florist said; he was offended. His smile became deprecatory, and he went on, “Really, you must realize that unless I have *something* to go on....”

“*Please* try to remember,” she begged. “He was tall, and had a blue suit, and it was about ten this morning.”

The florist closed his eyes, one finger to his mouth, and thought deeply. Then he shook his head. “I simply *can’t*,” he said.

“Thank you,” she said despondently, and started for the door, when the florist said, in a shrill, excited voice, “Wait! Wait just a moment, madam.” She turned and the florist, thinking again, said finally, “Chrysanthemums?” He looked at her inquiringly.

“Oh, *no*,” she said; her voice shook a little and she waited for a minute before she went on. “Not for an occasion like this, I’m sure.”

The florist tightened his lips and looked away coldly. “Well, of *course* I don’t know the *occasion*,” he said, “but I’m almost certain that the gentleman you were inquiring for came in this morning and purchased one dozen chrysanthemums. No delivery.”

“You’re *sure*?” she asked.

“Positive,” the florist said emphatically. “That was absolutely the man.” He smiled brilliantly, and she smiled back and said, “Well, thank you very much.”

He escorted her to the door. “Nice corsage?” he said, as they went through the shop. “Red roses? Gardenias?”

“It was very kind of you to help me,” she said at the door.

“Ladies always look their best in flowers,” he said, bending his head toward her. “Orchids perhaps?”

“No, thank you,” she said, and he said, “I hope you find your young man,” and gave it a nasty sound.

Going on up the street she thought, Everyone thinks it’s so *funny*: and she pulled her coat tighter around her, so that only the ruffle around the bottom of the print dress was showing.

There was a policeman on the corner, and she thought, Why don’t I go to the police—you go to the police for a missing person. And then thought, What a fool I’d look like. She had a

quick picture of herself standing in a police station, saying, “Yes, we were going to be married today, but he didn’t come,” and the policemen, three or four of them standing around listening, looking at her, at the print dress, at her too-bright make-up, smiling at one another. She couldn’t tell them any more than that, could not say, “Yes, it looks silly, doesn’t it, me all dressed up and trying to find the young man who promised to marry me, but what about all of it you don’t know? I have more than this, more than you can see: talent, perhaps and humor of a sort, and I’m a lady and I have pride and affection and delicacy and a certain clear view of life that might make a man satisfied and productive and happy; there’s more than you think when you look at me.”

The police were obviously impossible, leaving out Jamie and what he might think when he heard she’d set the police after him. “No, no,” she said aloud, hurrying her steps, and someone passing stopped and looked after her.

On the coming corner—she was three blocks from her own street—was a shoeshine stand and an old man sitting almost asleep in one of the chairs. She stopped in front of him and waited and after a minute he opened his eyes and smiled at her.

“Look,” she said, the words coming before she thought of them, “I’m sorry to bother you, but I’m looking for a young man who came up this way about ten this morning, did you see him?” And she began her description, “Tall, blue suit, carrying a bunch of flowers?”

The old man began to nod before she was finished. “I saw him,” he said. “Friend of yours?”

“Yes,” she said, and smiled back involuntarily.

The old man blinked his eyes and said, “I remember I thought, You’re going to see your girl, young fellow. They all go to see their girls,” he said, and shook his head tolerantly.

“Which way did he go? Straight on up the avenue?”

“That’s right,” the old man said. “Got a shine, had his flowers, all dressed up, in an awful hurry. You got a girl, I thought.”

“Thank you,” she said, fumbling in her pocket for her loose change.

“She sure must of been glad to see him, the way he looked,” the old man said.

“Thank you,” she said again, and brought her hand empty from her pocket.

For the first time she was really sure he would be waiting for her, and she hurried up the three blocks, the skirt of the print dress swinging under her coat, and turned into her own block. From the corner she could not see her own windows, could not see Jamie looking out

waiting for her, and going down the block she was almost running to get to him. Her key trembled in her fingers at the downstairs door, and as she glanced into the drugstore she thought of her panic, drinking coffee there this morning, and almost laughed. At her own door she could wait no longer, but began to say, "Jamie, I'm here, I was so worried," even before the door was open.

Her own apartment was waiting for her, silent, barren, afternoon shadows lengthening from the window. For a minute she saw only the empty coffee cup, thought, He has been here waiting, before she recognized it as her own, left from the morning. She looked all over the room, into the closet, into the bathroom.

"I never saw him," the clerk in the drugstore said. "I know because I would of noticed the flowers. No one like that's been in."

The old man at the shoeshine stand woke up again to see her standing in front of him. "Hello again," he said, and smiled.

"Are you *sure*?" she demanded. "Did he go on up the avenue?"

"I watched him," the old man said, dignified against her tone. "I thought, There's a young man's got a girl, and I watched him right into the house."

"What house?" she said remotely.

"Right there," the old man said. He leaned forward to point. "The next block. With his flowers and his shine and going to see his girl. Right into her house."

"Which one?" she said.

"About the middle of the block," the old man said. He looked at her with suspicion, and said, "What you trying to do, anyway?"

She almost ran, without stopping to say "Thank you." Up on the next block she walked quickly, searching the houses from the outside to see if Jamie looked from a window, listening to hear his laughter somewhere inside.

A woman was sitting in front of one of the houses, pushing a baby carriage monotonously back and forth the length of her arm. The baby inside slept, moving back and forth.

The question was fluent, by now. "I'm sorry, but did you see a young man go into one of these houses about ten this morning? He was tall, wearing a blue suit, carrying a bunch of flowers."

A boy about twelve stopped to listen, turning intently from one to the other, occasionally glancing at the baby.

“Listen,” the woman said tiredly, “the kid has his bath at ten. Would I see strange men walking around? I ask you.”

“Big bunch of flowers?” the boy asked, pulling at her coat. “Big bunch of flowers? I seen him, missus.”

She looked down and the boy grinned insolently at her. “Which house did he go in?” she asked wearily.

“You gonna divorce him?” the boy asked insistently.

“That’s not nice to ask the lady,” the woman rocking the carriage said.

“Listen,” the boy said, “I seen him. He went in there.” He pointed to the house next door. “I followed him,” the boy said. “He give me a quarter.” The boy dropped his voice to a growl, and said, “‘This is a big day for me, kid,’ he says. Give me a quarter.”

She gave him a dollar bill. “Where?” she said.

“Top floor,” the boy said. “I followed him till he give me the quarter. Way to the top.” He backed up the sidewalk, out of reach, with the dollar bill. “You gonna divorce him?” he asked again.

“Was he carrying flowers?”

“Yeah,” the boy said. He began to screech. “You gonna divorce him, missus? You got something on him?” He went careening down the street, howling, “She’s got something on the poor guy,” and the woman rocking the baby laughed.

The street door of the apartment house was unlocked; there were no bells in the outer vestibule, and no lists of names. The stairs were narrow and dirty; there were two doors on the top floor. The front one was the right one; there was a crumpled florist’s paper on the floor outside the door, and a knotted paper ribbon, like a clue, like the final clue in the paper-chase.

She knocked, and thought she heard voices inside, and she thought, suddenly, with terror, What shall I say if Jamie is there, if he comes to the door? The voices seemed suddenly still. She knocked again and there was silence, except for something that might have been laughter far away. He could have seen me from the window, she thought, it’s the front apartment and that little boy made a dreadful noise. She waited, and knocked again, but there was silence.

Finally she went to the other door on the floor, and knocked. The door swung open beneath her hand and she saw the empty attic room, bare lath on the walls, floorboards unpainted. She stepped just inside, looking around; the room was filled with bags of plaster,

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