

maternity ward.”

Ed Thatcher held a bunch of flowers wrapped in green waxed paper. The broad stairs swayed as he stumbled up, his toes kicking against the brass rods that held the fiber matting down. The closing of a door cut off a strangled shriek. He stopped a nurse.

“I want to see Mrs. Thatcher, please.”

“Go right ahead if you know where she is.”

“But they’ve moved her.”

“You’ll have to ask at the desk at the end of the hall.”

He gnawed his cold lips. At the end of the hall a red-faced woman looked at him, smiling.

“Everything’s fine. You’re the happy father of a bouncing baby girl.”

“You see it’s our first and Susie’s so delicate,” he stammered with blinking eyes.

“Oh yes, I understand, naturally you worried.... You can go in and talk to her when she wakes up. The baby was born two hours ago. Be sure not to tire her.”

Ed Thatcher was a little man with two blond wisps of mustache and washed-out gray eyes. He seized the nurse's hand and shook it showing all his uneven yellow teeth in a smile.

“You see it's our first.”

“Congratulations,” said the nurse.

Rows of beds under bilious gaslight, a sick smell of restlessly stirring bedclothes, faces fat, lean, yellow, white; that's her. Susie's yellow hair lay in a loose coil round her little white face that looked shriveled and twisted. He unwrapped the roses and put them on the night table. Looking out the window was like looking down into water. The trees in the

square were tangled in blue cobwebs. Down the avenue lamps were coming on marking off with green shimmer brick-purple blocks of houses; chimney pots and water tanks cut sharp into a sky flushed like flesh. The blue lids slipped back off her eyes.

“That you Ed? ... Why Ed they are Jacks. How extravagant of you.”

“I couldn’t help it dearest. I knew you liked them.”

A nurse was hovering near the end of the bed.

“Couldn’t you let us see the baby, miss?”

The nurse nodded. She was a lantern jawed gray-faced woman with tight lips.

“I hate her,” whispered Susie. “She gives me the fidgets that woman does; she’s nothing but a mean old maid.”

“Never mind dear, it’s just for a day or two.”

Susie closed her eyes.

“Do you still want to call her Ellen?”

The nurse brought back a basket and set it on the bed beside Susie.

“Oh isn’t she wonderful!” said Ed. “Look she’s breathing.... And they’ve oiled her.” He helped his wife to raise herself on her elbow; the yellow coil of her hair unrolled, fell over his hand and arm. “How can you tell them apart nurse?”

“Sometimes we cant,” said the nurse, stretching her mouth in a smile. Susie was looking querulously into the minute purple face. “You’re sure this is mine.”

“Of course.”

“But it hasn’t any label on it.”

“I’ll label it right away.”

“But mine was dark.” Susie lay back on the pillow, gasping for breath.

“She has lovely little light fuzz just the color of your hair.”

Susie stretched her arms out above her head and shrieked: “It’s not mine. It’s not mine. Take it away.... That woman’s stolen my baby.”

“Dear, for Heaven’s sake! Dear, for Heaven’s sake!” He tried to tuck the covers about her.

“Too bad,” said the nurse, calmly, picking up the basket. “I’ll have to give her a sedative.”

Susie sat up stiff in bed. “Take it away,” she yelled and fell back in hysterics, letting out continuous frail moaning shrieks.

“O my God!” cried Ed Thatcher, clasping his hands.

“You’d better go away for this evening, Mr.