The Family Man

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stopped and Rafael’s lips touched the base of her neck. Her muscles froze again—this time with horror and disgust. The towel continued to caress her back before Tracy angrily darted from beneath the towel. She raced across the sand to the gleaming water where the first wave knocked her down; then struggling to her feet, she tried to fight down the panic inside and the watery disorder of the waves. After she fought past the last breaker, Tracy turned to find that a wall of water still blocked her view of the beach and she continued to swim until her arms grew tired. The beach was vacant when she turned again, even the car on the cliff was gone. Tracy paused to rest in the choppy water and plan ahead. First, there was the need to get ashore and find a phone; then the long cab ride back to Beverly Hills. Everything seemed to have logic again until she started to swim. Her arms, tired as they were, made little progress against the cold, outgoing tide. She rested again to find strength for another try; but to her surprise, she found her arms were so leaden they could hardly keep her afloat. In her growing panic, she began to cry for help and thrash in confused fury against the waves that pulled her toward the depths. She could only think of tomorrow’s headlines as she struggled to keep light in her eyes.

"DEAD SINGER’S GIRL IS SUICIDE . . . ."

The Family Man

by Paul Kratoska

English, Sr.

IT WAS twilight, in the season when darkness daily intrudes itself earlier on light. The world has tired of the false exuberance of Indian summer, and cold lurks in the falling shadows. It is easy to be weary at such times, and Richard Carr was gladly approaching the refuge of his home.

Richard Carr was of the genus “medical student, married” to which one automatically adds “struggling.” The
home he drove up to was admittedly shabby, but it was a house. To Dick and Jean Carr, home simply was not a government-built rabbit hutch, regardless of how much cheaper they might be. Light flowed warmly from the kitchen windows, welcoming him as he climbed out of the car. The air was cool, rich with the haze and odor of burning leaves, but the smell of browning meat came to him clearly from the kitchen. Round steak, he thought, we eat well tonight. He slipped quietly into the kitchen, tiptoed up behind his wife, and covered her eyes in their daily ritual.

"Guess who?"

"Clarence!" She squealed in mock horror. "I told you never to come here! What if my husband comes home?"

"Your husband be damned!" Dick growled. "I'm crazy about you." He turned her around and kissed her.

"Dick, I have some big news for you."

"Fire away; I'm ready."

"No, not yet. You have to wait until supper."

"Jean, one of these days I'm going to report you to the Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Husbands." Dick walked to the door and paused; "Uh, Jean; Clarence who?" A pot-holder flew at him as he escaped to the living room. "Honey, how long till supper's ready?"

"About twenty minutes. Say, there's a letter there from Jerry Wilcox."

Dick picked up the letter and his anatomy book; might be enough time to finish that chapter. He flopped down in the sagging easy chair, adjusted his light, and slit open the letter. It was scribbled on a piece of yellow paper.

Dear Commuter,

Just a brief word from the world of the living to the land of the shades. I've finished Peace Corps training and in another three weeks I'll be in Nigeria. Things are pretty hectic now, but as soon as I'm settled I'll write and tell you what adventure's like. Don't let the rat race get you down.

Jerry
So he'd really made. It seemed like yesterday that the two of them had planned to join the Peace Corps together. And here he was still a student, and being supported by his wife at that. Dick leaned back and surveyed his living room. There were compensations, though. And when he finished his internship, they were going to live in a large city and he could make it up to her. There were some good times coming. And later there would be children. Dick smiled and closed his eyes. There were compensations.

"Dick, wake up! Supper's ready."

"Hmmmmmm? Oh. Be right there." He scowled at the book in his hand. There wouldn't be much future for him if he couldn't concentrate any better than that. He stretched and walked into the kitchen. "Boy, things smell good." He sampled the dessert with his finger. "Taste good, too. My compliments to the chef."

"Honestly, Richard Carr, didn't your mother teach you any manners?"

He ignored her and began dishing up the potatoes as she sat down. "Jerry's on his way to Nigeria. You know, that'd be frightening, going into a strange country like that, and not just for a visit but to live there. Even with their training, it would take a big adjustment."

"Mmmhmm." Jean was picking at her food.

"It's a funny letter. Jerry won't let anybody forget he was an English major." Dick took a bite of meat and mumbled around it. "Doctor Barker gave the tests back today, and I got that A. Things are looking good—real good."

He remembered something as he stirred his coffee. "What was that exciting piece of news you had for me?"

"Well, you remember I told you I went in to see Dr. Hanson a few days ago." She paused. "Dick, I'm going to have a baby."

He dropped his spoon. A baby. The concept swam about the edges of his mind but flatly refused to penetrate. A baby. The words throbbed in his head but their meaning trailed off incomprehensibly behind them. A baby. Suddenly the thought exploded into his brain.
"A baby!? Jean! Wow! Why didn't you tell me sooner? You must have had an idea weeks ago."

"I didn't want to be one of those fidgety women that go rushing to the doctor as soon as their period's a day late. But listen, Dick. What are we going to do for money? I'll have to quit work in another six months. We won't have any income. We can't afford a baby."

"What do you mean 'can't afford a baby?' We're going to have one, aren't we? You're just too practical. Come on, let's celebrate." He walked to the cupboard.

"One of us has to be practical, and it obviously isn't going to be you."

With a flourish Dick produced two martini glasses and filled them with white wine. "Champagne being in short supply, we'll have to settle for something a little less bubbly. This is all we have in the house. Symbolic, that's what it is, symbolic. To your health, m'lady, to your continued good health." He bowed theatrically.

Jean giggled. "If you knew how silly you look."

"Jean, buy a bottle of champagne. This weekend we celebrate. A real blowout." He noticed her troubled look. "Now, Honey, don't worry about the money. We'll work something out. Besides, we want to welcome the child properly. Now, I've got to hit those books."

In the living room he sat down and started lighting his pipe. He could hear dishes rattling in the kitchen. Jean worried too much. He would get a job for the summer and she'd be able to work again in the fall. And if they had any trouble, his parents would help. Things always worked out somehow. He had to keep relighting the pipe and clouds of smoke swam about his head. Sure, a few things would change, but nobody's plans were that definite. Wouldn't it be nice to be a father! Jerry Wilcox could have his adventure in Nigeria; he was going to be a family man, a man with responsibilities. Maybe they could buy a little house somewhere in the suburbs. . . .

It was the season of the year when leaves are still clinging to the trees. But winter was just ahead.