

Button, Button

(Richard Matheson)

The package was lying by the front door – a cube-shaped carton sealed with tape, their name and address printed by hand: "Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Lewis, 217-E, Thirty-seventh Street, New York, New York 10016." Norma picked it up, unlocked the door, and went into the apartment. It was just getting dark.

After she had put the lamb chops in the broiler, she sat down to open the package.

Inside the carton was a push-button unit fastened to a small wooden box. A glass dome covered the button. Norma tried to lift it off, but it was locked in place. She turned the unit over and saw a folded piece of paper scotch-taped to the bottom of the box. She pulled it off: "Mr. Steward will call on you at 8.00 P.M."

Norma put the button unit beside her on the couch. She reread the typed note, smiling.

A few moments later, she went back into the kitchen to make the salad.

The doorbell rang at eight o'clock. "I'll get it," Norma called from the kitchen. Arthur was in the living room, reading.

There was a small man in the hallway. He removed his hat as Norma opened the door. "Mrs. Lewis?" he inquired politely.

"Yes?"

"I'm Mr. Steward."

"Oh, Yes." Norma repressed a smile. She was sure now it was a sales pitch.

"May I come in?" asked Mr. Steward.

"I'm rather busy," Norma said.

"Don't you want to know what it is?"

Norma turned back. Mr. Steward's tone had been offensive. "No. I don't think so," she replied.

"It could prove very valuable," he told her.

"Monetarily?" she challenged.

Mr. Steward nodded, "Monetarily," he said.

Norma frowned. She didn't like his attitude. "What are you trying to sell?" she asked.

"I'm not selling anything," he answered.

Arthur came out of the living room. "Something wrong?"

Mr. Steward introduced himself.

"Oh, the —" Arthur pointed toward the living room and smiled.

"What is that gadget, anyway?"