

## The Flower Wife

Margaret's bike sputtered as she rounded the corner on the street. She was five dollars away from getting the new bike, and she was five minutes late. She parked in the driveway and ran up to the door, ripping off the mittens that her mom had made her for winter. A wreath full of perfectly round cherries and plump red hydrangeas encircled the Mrs. McCormick's peephole. Mrs. McCormick always knew, even when Margaret was early, always swung the door open before Margaret could knock more than once. She reached up and touched the wreath, running her fingers over the perfectly fake flowers.

The door swung open. Mrs. McCormick didn't pause in the doorway to invite her in, but walked over to the staircase, knowing that Margaret would close it. She did.

"Hi Margaret, thank you so much for coming - HONEY ARE YOU ALMOST READY? - Paul is upstairs playing video games. Bedtime is at nine. Please make sure he brushes his teeth for a full two minutes, he had cavities at his last dentist appointment so we're trying really hard this time to get rid of them," she paused as a deep breath ran through her dark wine lips, "oh and here's the money for the pizza, get the gluten free kind, I'm trying to get him to eat healthier. Mr. McCormick and I will be home by two o'clock - BYE PAUL MOM LOVES YOU," she paused again, waiting for the response that Margaret knew wasn't coming. Mrs. McCormick knew too, but she always said it, and she always paused. The silence hung in the air.

"Is there anything else that you need to know?"

"No, I think I'm all set."

"Great, thank you. How do I look?" Margaret had hoped that they could skip the lame kiss-ass conversation that they always had. Mrs. McCormick looked how she always looked on Saturday night. Mrs. McCormick wore a three-quarter-length brown fur coat with leather gloves up to her elbows. Patent nude heels covered her fresh manicure, a black sequined dress hugged her curves, and Barbara Bush pearls dangled around her neck.

She looked like a housewife from the fifties. She looked glamorous.

"You look great."

Mrs. McCormick pursed her lips.

“Perfect.” She said, either thanking her or correcting her. Margaret wasn’t sure. “HONEY ARE YOU ALMOST READY?” Mr. McCormick appeared at the top of the stairs with his coat on and phone in hand. He wore pressed kakis and a crisp designer button down shirt, sleeves rolled and bottom tucked.

When she saw him, Mrs. McCormick bloomed into a new person. She rolled her shoulders back and turned up her chin. She ran her hands through her short blonde hair, fluffing the curls and fixing the part.

“Bye Margaret,” she turned, “call if anything comes up,” and strode out of the front door, her heels clicking against the dark wood floors.

Mr. McCormick walked down the stairs and grabbed the keys from the coffee table in the entranceway and his long, black trench coat from the hall closet never once looking away from his phone, never once looking at Margaret, never once looking at his fleeting wife. His movements were fluid, practiced over and over, every Saturday night. Clockwork.

He left the door wide open, knowing that Margaret would close it. She did. Even though they never acknowledged each other, Mr. McCormick and Margaret always had an understanding. They both had to do things that they were supposed to do. For her, it was the door, the babysitting, the ass kissing. For him it was the parties, the clothing, the luxury.

Margaret waited three minutes before heading up the winding staircase.

She passed the guestroom, Paul’s room, the toy room, Mr. McCormick’s study. She turned the corner and walked into the bedroom, closing the door quietly behind her. Her movements were fluid, practiced. She walked into the bathroom and opened the cabinet, shuffling around the medicine until she found it.

Margaret rolled her eyes, popped the pills in her mouth, and lowered her lips to the faucet. She looked at the bottle and smirked: the label read *Birth Control* in big bold letters, but she noticed weeks ago that the pills matched Hydrocodone, a painkiller that she used after her wisdom teeth were removed.

She walked out of the bathroom and flopped onto the feather pillows and closed her eyes and smiled, embracing the luxury that surrounded her.

Husbands can be so naïve.