

The 1 7 5 —dollar Bill

I stretched my legs under the living—room desk, picked up a letter and cut it open. It came from Martel's Department Store. I was shocked when I saw the amount we owed them: 1 7 5 dollars. It was a mistake, of course. Janet and I had not spent that kind of money, certainly not with the way we had been counting every penny and saving for the first payment on the house we planned to buy. I looked at the amount again. Of course, they had meant 1 7 dollars 5 0 cents. They had added an extra zero, and misplaced the decimal¹⁾ point. I rubbed my hand across my face. The shock was gone. I looked up across the living room into the bedroom beyond. I saw Janet curled up²⁾ under the covers reading a magazine. I often looked at her lying that way, as I sat working late at night. To me it represented every thing. Janet was my wife, my partner. We had great plans ahead. “Janet, ” I called to her, “I think that Martel's made a mistake. They sent us a bill for 1 7 5 dollars. I'm sure it should be 1 7 dollars 5 0 cents. Will you call about it tomorrow, so I can send the cheque? ” Janet did not answer. “Janet, ” I called again, “did you hear? I said Martel's made a mistake. ” She lowered the magazine slowly, lying it across her chest. I could tell she was trying to be calm. “I did not want you to see that, ” she said slowly. “I thought I had hidden it from the other letters. ”

I flushed³⁾ when I realized that Janet had spent the money. She had not even asked me about it. I went from the living room to sit on the edge of the bed, watching her closely. We might as well get it all out in the open, I felt. “Do you mean, ” I began, “that you spent 1 7 5 dollars without discussing it with me? And why not? ” Janet tried to smile. “I am working, too. I'm going to pay for it. ”

“That's what I want to know, Janet. Pay for what? I haven't seen anything new around here. ” Janet lowered her eyes. “I— —I don't want to tell you, Barney. It's— —just something I wanted to buy. ” I kept looking at her. It was hard to believe what I had heard. Janet had spent the money, admitted it, and now didn't even want to tell me what it was for. I just could not understand that at all. There was no money in the checking account to pay this bill. It would have to be taken from our savings account. That meant another month's delay in buying the house. It was not fair. It violated³⁾ our plans and agreement, and worst of all, I would never be able to trust her again. Why had she done this to me? I was becoming angrier, and I decided I was going to get to the bottoms of it all. “Look, Janet, ” I said sharply. “Let's not play games. I want to know what that bill is for? I have a right to know. ” Janet touched my arm. “Don't be angry with me, Barney? You've been working much too hard these last few months. You're so jumpy⁴⁾ and nervous. ” She was trying to escape from the situation and I knew it. That made me angrier. I pulled away roughly, displeased. “Look, ” I repeated, “I asked you a question. Do you refuse to give me an answer? ” Janet looked up at me, puzzled, as if she was struggling with a problem. When she finally answered, I did not like what she said. “You'll just have to accept the matter as it is, ” she said quickly. “Just because I married you does not mean I have no right to a few private affairs. Yes, I refuse to answer. ” With that, she looked me in the eyes again. That turned the devil loose in my brain. I stood up and started to walk back and forth, unable to control my boiling anger. All at once, I stopped dead still. I knew everything. She did not

have to tell me. She had bought a damned mink fur scarf⁵). Her friend Carol had just gotten one a month before, and I had seen that look in Janet's eyes, that look of green-eye envy. Just like a woman. What to put on her back came first.

"You little cheat." I said, looking down, the words coming slow and burning. "I know what you bought, a home really doesn't mean anything to you. All you want is a pile of fancy clothes. I thought you were the kind of wife I wanted, but you had me fooled. You're like a lot of others, a loose spender, that's what you are. A spendthrift." Janet's eyes narrowed to slits and her face showed horror and amazement, and I enjoyed seeing it. It was exactly what I wanted, to see her suffer a little, too. She got out of bed and stood before me. "Is that what you think of me?" Her own anger sent mine up higher. "You're damned right, it is." I exploded. "I just wish I had known in time." Now her anger was as hot as mine. We stood on equal ground.

"You poor fool." she said. "You don't even know what you're talking about. You don't even know what marriage is. You'll find out. You have a nice long time to find out, alone. I'm going to take a cab to mother's, and don't trouble calling me. I never want to see you again." I knew the situation was really serious now, but I had no thought of giving in. Let her go. She'll soon realize I was right and come crawling⁶ back.

The next morning at the office, I kept to myself, burying myself in work. No one seemed to notice my quiet manner. When I returned from lunch, I found Bill beside my desk, showing a new set of golf clubs to the other fellows. "Best buy in town." he said proudly. He turned to me with a smile. "Say, Barney, you used to play, didn't you?" I forced a smile and said "Sure did," That gave me an idea, to start playing again. If I bought some golf clubs, that would even things up with Janet. That afternoon, I bought the clubs I wanted and started to swing them on the floor. One ball, I hit harder than I meant to, and the ball rolled across the living room, through the bedroom and into Janet's half-opened closet.

The closet was a big one, and dark. A lot of Janet's things were still hanging there. I got down on my knees and felt around in a dark corner way at the back. My hands rubbed against a heavy box. I lifted the top of the box and looked inside, I was not prepared for what I saw. It was the best-looking set of golf clubs I had ever seen, better than the ones I had chosen. There was also a golf bag, a dozen balls and a pair of golf shoes. The box was marked. It came from Martel's Department Store. It was then that I remembered our wedding anniversary would be Tuesday. All this for me. There was nothing for Janet. Janet, with her love for surprises and her unselfish love for me. How crazy I had been. Janet was right. I was a poor, stupid fool. There was only one thing to do now, I thought. Go crawling and begging for her to return. And I was man enough to do it. And tomorrow I'd do something else. I would hide a mink scarf in my closet.

175 美元的帐单

我坐在客厅的桌旁，伸出双腿，捡起一封信，打开一看，信是马特尔百货商场寄来的。看到我们该付的款额时，我吓了一跳：175美元。肯定弄错了。珍妮特和我不会这样大笔花钱，尤其是在我们计算每一分钱而为我们计划买下的房子积攒第一笔付款时。我又看了一

下钱数。当然，他们可能是要打 1 7 美元 5 0 美分，结果误加了一个零，还把小数点打错了。我用手摸了摸脸，已经镇定下来。我抬头朝客厅那边的卧室望去。珍妮特正蜷在被子里看杂志。我经常看到她这副模样，尤其是在我夜里工作到很晚时。这对我意味着一切。珍妮特是我的妻子，我的伴侣。我们为未来制定了宏伟的计划。

“珍妮特，”我冲她喊道，“我认为马特尔百货商场弄错了。他们给我们寄来一张 1 7 5 美元的账单，我肯定应是 1 7 美元 5 0 美分。你能不能明天打电话问一下，我好寄支票过去？”珍妮特没回答。“珍妮特，”我又叫了一声，“你听见了吗？我说马特尔商场弄错了。”她将杂志慢慢放下，放在胸口，我感到她在努力保持镇静。“我不想让你看到这账单，”她慢吞吞地说。“我以为我已把它藏起来没跟其他的信放在一起了呢。”

当我意识到珍妮特花了这笔钱时，脸都涨红了。她竟然没同我商量过。我起身离开客厅，走进卧室，坐在床沿上，紧盯着她。我想，不如干脆明说了吧。“你的意思是，”我问她，“你没和我商量就花了 1 7 5 美元？为什么？”珍妮特强作微笑：“我也在工作。我打算自己来支付。”

“那正是我要知道的，珍妮特。买了什么？我没发现家里添了什么新东西。”珍妮特垂下了眼。“我——我不想告诉你，巴尼。只是——只是我想买的东西。”我一直注视着她。我很难相信自己的耳朵。珍妮特确实花了这笔钱，而且还承认了，现在竟不愿意告诉我是怎么花的。我简直无法理解。支票付款账户上已没钱支付这账单了，那得动用我们的储蓄账户，那意味着买房的事又要耽搁一个月。这不公平。这破坏了我们的计划和协议；最糟糕的是，我再也不会信任她了。她为什么要这样对我？我越想越来气，决定追究到底。“听着，珍妮特，”我厉声说。“咱们别再玩游戏了。我想知道这笔钱怎么花的，我有权知道。”珍妮特抚摸着我的胳膊说：“别对我发火，巴尼。这几个月你工作太辛苦，你太紧张，太容易动怒了。”她想逃避，我看透了。这使我更加恼火。我粗暴地抽开身，极不高兴。“听着，”我又问道，“我在问你问题，你是不是拒绝回答？”珍妮特抬头看着我，一脸茫然，似乎在费劲地应付一个什么难题。她终于开口了，但说的话却让我很不高兴。“你只能接受事实，”她说得很快。“并不因为我嫁给了你，就意味着我无权保留一些隐私。是的，我拒绝回答。”说完之后，她又凝视着我。她的话使我再也忍无可忍。我站起身，来回走动，怒火中烧，难以克制。突然之间，我停了下来，一切都明白了。不用她说，我知道她买了一条该死的貂皮围巾。她的朋友卡罗尔上个月刚买了一条；我看到过珍妮特眼中嫉妒的神色。女人毕竟是女人。穿戴总是比什么都重要。

“你这个小骗子。”我俯视着她一字一句、怒气冲冲地说。“我知道你买了什么。家对你无足轻重，你想要的只是一大堆漂亮的衣服。我过去以为你就是我所要的妻子，但是你愚弄了我。你跟许多人一样，花钱大手大脚，这就是你，一个挥霍无度的人。”珍妮特的双眼眯成了两条线，一脸震惊和诧异的表情，这让我很得意。让她受点痛苦，这正是我要达到的目的。她起身下了床，站在我面前。“你就这样看我？”她发火了，这使得我更加怒不可遏。“对极了，就是这样。”我大发雷霆。“我早一点看出来就好了。”现在她和我一样横眉怒目，互不相让。

“你这可怜的傻瓜。”她说。“你不知道你在胡说些什么呀，更不懂得什么是婚姻。你会明白的。有的是时间，你一个人好好想想吧。我马上搭车去我妈家，别打电话找我，我再也不想见到你。”我知道现在形势确已很不妙，可我半点也不想让步。让她走吧，她会很快认识到我是对的，会一路爬着回来。

第二天上午在办公室，我埋头忙于工作，谁也不理。好像没有人注意到我的沉默寡言。午餐后回到办公室时，我看到比尔在我的桌旁正向别人炫耀一套新高尔夫球棍。“全城最好的买卖，”他得意地说。然后又微笑着对我说：“嘿，巴尼，你以前也打，对吗？”我强作笑脸回答说：“对，没错。”这使我灵机一动：重新开始打高尔夫球。如果我买些球棍就可以与珍妮特扯平了。当天下午我就买了我想要的球棍，回家后就在地板上挥舞起来。其中有一个球，

我打得太重，球滚过客厅和卧室，钻进了珍妮特半开着的壁柜里。

壁柜又大又暗。珍妮特的许多衣物仍挂在里面。我跪下来，在壁柜后部的角落里四处摸索。我的手摸到一个重重的盒子，我把盖子打开往里一看，大出我的意料，里面竟装着我从未见过的最漂亮的高尔夫球棍，比我买的还要好。还有一个高尔夫球袋、一打儿球和一双球鞋。盒子上面标着马特尔百货商场。那时我才想起来星期二是我们的结婚纪念日。这些都是给我的。她自己什么也没有。珍妮特，她喜欢给人惊喜的天性和对我无私的爱。我真是疯了。珍妮特是对的，我是个可怜的、愚不可及的傻瓜。我想现在只有一件事可做，那就是一路爬过去求她回家来。我是个男子汉，有勇气做到！明天我还要做些事情——在我壁柜里藏一条貂皮围巾。

NOTE 注释：

1. decimal ['desiməl] adj. 小数的,十进制
2. curl [kɜ:l] vi. 卷缩, 卷在一起
3. flush [flʌʃ] vi. (脸)发红, 奔涌
4. jumpy ['dʒʌmpi] adj. 跳跃的, 神经质的
5. mink fur scarf [mɪnk pə: skɑ:f] 貂皮围巾
6. crawl [krɔ:l] vi. 爬行