



## The New You

### a short story by Kit Reed

"Now-- The New You," the ad said. It was a two-page spread in one of the glossier fashion magazines, and it was accompanied by a shadowed, grainy art shot that hinted at the possibility of a miraculous transformation which hovered at every woman's fingertips.

Raptly, Martha Merriam hunched over the magazine, tugging at her violet-sprigged housedress so that it almost covered her plump knees. She contemplated the photograph, the list of promises framed in elegant italics, unaware as she did so that her mouth was working, gnawing a strand of dirty, dun-colored hair.

In her more wistful, rebellious moments, Martha Merriam forgot her dumpy body and imagined herself the svelte, impeccable Marnie, taller by six inches and lighter by forty pounds. When a suaver, better-dressed woman cut her at a luncheon or her husband left her alone at parties she would retreat into dialogs with Marnie. Marnie knew just the right, devastating thing to say to chick, overconfident women, and Marnie was expert in all the wiles that keep a man at home. In the person of Marnie, Martha could pretend.

"Watch the Old You Melt Away," Martha read, and as she mouthed the words for the second time Marnie strained inside her, waiting for release. Martha straightened imperceptibly, patting her doughy throat with a stubby hand, and as her eyes found the hooker-- the price tag for the New You in small print in the lower right-hand corner-- longing consumed her, and Marnie took over.

"We could use a New You," Marnie said.

"But three thousand dollars." Martha nibbled at the strand of hair.

"You have those stocks."

"But those were Howard's wedding present to me-- part of his *business*."

"He won't mind..." Marnie twisted and became one with the photograph.

"But a hundred shares..." The hank off hair was sodden now, and Martha was chewing faster.

"He won't mind when he sees us," Marnie said.

And Martha, eyes aglow, got up and went to the telephone almost without realizing what she was doing, and got her broker on the line.

The New You arrived two weeks later, as advertised, and when it came Martha was too excited to touch it, alone in the house as she was, with this impossibly beautiful future.

In mid-afternoon, when she had looked at the coffin-shaped crate from every possible angle and smoothed the rough, splintered edges of the wood, she nerved herself to pull the ripcord the company had provided-- and let her future begin. She jumped back with a squeak

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