

Years ago, when my husband first went to work on a newspaper, we were invited to a dinner party by the man who was the managing editor. Now I didn't really suppose my husband would be fired if I should prove unsuitable, but I did suppose that I couldn't appear at a chic dinner party in (A)a dress that buttoned down the front. I knew I had to (B)take steps.

I went to Lord & Taylor and bravely marched into "Better Dresses." Then I stood in a corner for a while and studied the salesladies. What I did not want was an elegant saleslady. I knew, from past experience, that in the presence of a really elegant saleslady with a really elegant European accent (C)I tend to drop my purse and my gloves and to develop coughing spells.

I finally selected one who seemed a little shy and nervous. I went over to her and took hold of her elbow. "Don't argue with me," I said, "I want to buy a dress. I want to buy a fancy dress. And I want to buy it this afternoon." (D)She didn't seem startled by my outburst. She just sighed a little sigh that seemed to say, "Boy, I get all the nuts!" Then she went to work and found me a pretty dress. It was made of yellow silk with metallic gold thread woven through the fabric. And so I went to the party calm in my conviction that (E)for once I was wearing something that did not look as though it had been run up by loving hands at home.

My husband and I were the first to arrive because we had made the youthful error of arriving at precisely the time for which we had been invited. The editor and his wife greeted us in the hall and were most gracious. I felt, however, that the wife's smile was a little bit (F)strained. I understood everything when we walked into the living room. Three walls of the room were covered from floor to ceiling with silk draperies. And the draperies were made of exactly the same material as my new dress.

I tried to size up the whole situation. It wasn't so terrible. It just looked as though they'd had enough material left over to make a dress. (G)But then, why, in heaven's name, would I be wearing it? Actually, it didn't matter so much to me that when I was standing in front of a drapery I seemed to be a head without a body. It mattered more to the other guests, who were hard put to analyze what they assumed to be (H)an optical illusion. Finally, I had to devote all of my energies to keeping near the one undraped --- or (I)safe --- wall, where the heat from the open fireplace promptly took the curl out of my hair. Needless to say, (J)we were not invited back.

(注) optical: of the eye; visual

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