

THE ROSE-GARDEN HUSBAND

By MARGARET WIDDEMER

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A princess, too, in the story! But where had she gone? "The two of them only," he had said.

"It must have been scarcely a month," the story went on—Mr. De Guenther was telling it as if he were stating a case—"nearly a month before the date set for the wedding, when the lovers went for a long automobile ride, across a range of mountains near a country place where they were both staying. They were alone in the machine.

"Allan, of course, was driving, doubtless with a certain degree of impetuosity, as he did most things. . . . They were on an unfrequented part of the road," said Mrs. De Guenther, lowering his voice, "when there occurred an unforeseen wreckage in the car's machinery. The car was thrown over and badly splintered. Both young people were pinned under it.

"So far as he knew at the time, Allan was not injured, nor was he in any pain; but he was held in absolute inability to move by the car above him. Miss Frey, on the contrary, was badly hurt, and in suffering. She died in about three hours, a little before relief came to them."

Phyllis clutched the arms of her chair, thrilled and wide-eyed. She could imagine all the horror of the happening through the old lawyer's precise and unemotional story. The boy lover, pinioned, helpless, condemned to watch his sweetheart dying by inches, and unable to help her by so much as lifting a hand—could anything be more awful not only to endure, but to remember?

"And yet," she thought whimsically, "it mightn't be so bad to have one real tragedy to remember, if you haven't anything else! All I'll have to remember when I'm old will be bad little children and good little children, and books and boarding houses, and the recollection that people said I was a very worthy young woman once!" But she threw off the thought. It's just as well not to think of old age when all the ideas brings up is a vision of a nice, clean Old Ladies' Home.

"But you said he was an invalid?" she said aloud.

"Yes, I regret to say," answered Mr. DeGuenther. "You see, it was found that the shock to the nerves, acting on an already over keyed mind and body, together with some spinal blow concerning which the doctors are still in doubt, had affected Allan's powers of locomotion." (Mr. DeGuenther certainly did like long words!) "He has been unable to walk since. And, which is sadder his state of mind and body has become steadily worse. He can scarcely move at all now, and his mental attitude can only be described as painfully morbid—yes, I may say very painfully morbid. Sometimes he does not speak at all for days together, even to his mother, or his attendant."

"Oh, poor boy!" said Phyllis. "How long has he been this way?"

"Seven years this fall," the answer came consideringly. "Is it not, love?"

"Yes," said his wife, "seven years."

"Oh," said the Liberry Teacher, with a quick catch of sympathy at her heart.

Just as long as she had been working for her living in the big, dusty library. Supposing—oh, supposing she'd had to live all that time in such suffering as this poor Allan had endured and his mother had had to witness! She felt suddenly as if the grimy, restless Children's Room, with its clatter of turbulent little outland voices, were a safe, sunny paradise in comparison.

Mr. DeGuenther did not speak. He visibly braced himself and was visibly ill at ease.

"I have told most of the story, Isabel, love," said he at last. "Would you not prefer to tell the rest? It is at your instance that I have undertaken this commission for Mrs. Harrington, you will remember."

It struck Phyllis that he didn't think it was quite a dignified commission, at that.

"Very well, my dear," said his wife, and took up the tale in her swift, soft voice.

"You can fancy, my dear Miss Braithwaite, how intensely his mother has felt about it."

"Indeed, yes!" said Phyllis pitifully.

"Her whole life, since the accident, has been one long devotion to her son. I don't think a half hour ever passes that she does not see him. But in spite of this constant care, as my husband has told you, he grows steadily worse. And poor Angela has finally broken under the strain. She was never strong. She is dying now

—they give her maybe two months more.

"Her one anxiety, of course, is for poor Allan's welfare. You can imagine how you would feel if you had to leave an entirely helpless son or brother to the mercies of hired attendants, however faithful. And they have no relatives—they are the last of the family."

The listening girl began to see. She was going to be asked to act as nurse perhaps attendant and guardian, to this morbid invalid with the injured mind and body.

"But how would I be any better for him than a regular trained nurse?" she wondered. "And they said he had an attendant."

She looked questioningly at the pair.

"Where does my part come in?" she asked with a certain sweet directness which was sometimes hers. "Wouldn't I be a hireling too if—if I had anything to do with it?"

"No," said Mrs. DeGuenther gravely. "You would not. You would have to be his wife."

IV.

The Liberry Teacher, in her sober best suit, sat down in her entirely commonplace chair in the quiet old parlor, and looked unbelievably at the sedate elderly couple who had made her this wild proposition. She caught her breath. But catching her breath did not seem to affect anything that had been said. Mr. DeGuenther took up the explanation again, a little deprecatingly, she thought.

"You see now why I requested you to investigate our reputation?" he said. "Such a proposition as this, especially to a young lady who has no parent or guardian, requires a considerable guarantee of good faith and honesty of motive."

"Will you please tell me more about it?" she asked quietly. She did not feel now as if it were anything which had especially to do with her. It seemed more like an interesting story she was unravelling sentence by sentence. The long, softly lighted old room, with its Stuarts and Sullys, and its gracious, fair haired host and hostess, seemed only a picturesque part of it. . . . Her hostess caught up the tale again.

"Angela has been nearly distracted," she said. "And the idea has come to her that if she could find some conscientious woman, a lady, and a person to whom what she could offer would be a consideration, who would take charge of poor Allan, that she could die in peace."

"But why did you think of asking me?" the girl asked breathlessly. "And why does she want me married to him? And how could you or she be sure that I would not be as much of a hireling as any nurse she may have now?"

Mrs. DeGuenther answered the last two questions together.

"Mrs. Harrington's idea is, and I think rightly, that a conscientious woman would feel the marriage tie, however nominal, a bond that would obligate her to a certain duty toward her husband. As to why we selected you, my dear, my husband and I have had an interest in you for some years, as you know. We have spoken of you as a girl whom we should like for a relative."

"Why, isn't that strange?" cried Phyllis, dimpling. "That's just what I've thought about you!"

Mrs. DeGuenther flushed, with a delicate old shyness.

"Thank you, dear child," she said. "I was about to add that we have not seen you at your work all these years without knowing you to have the kind heart and sense of honor requisite to poor Angela's plan. We feel sure you could be trusted to take the place. Mr. DeGuenther has asked his friend Mr. Johnston, the head of the library, such things as we needed to supplement our personal knowledge of you. You have everything that could be asked, even to a certain cheerfulness of outlook which poor Angela, naturally, lacks in a measure."

"But—but what about me?" asked Phyllis Braithwaite a little piteously, in answer to all this.

They seemed so certain she was what they wanted—was there anything in this wild scheme that would make her life better than it was as the tired, ill paid, light hearted keeper of a roomful of turbulent little foreigners?

"Unless you are thinking of marriage—" Phyllis shook her head—"you would have at least a much easier life than you have now. Mrs. Harrington would settle a liberal income on you, contingent, of course, of your faithful wardship over Allan.

We would be your only judges as to that. You would have a couple of months of absolute freedom every year, ample leisure to enjoy it. You would give only your chances of actual marriage for perhaps five years, for poor Allan cannot live longer than that at his present state of retrogression, and some part of every day to seeing that Allan was not neglected. If you bestow on him half of the interest and effort I have known of your giving any one of a dozen little immigrant boys, his mother has nothing to fear for him."

Mr. DeGuenther stopped with a grave little bow, and he and his wife waited for the reply.

The Liberry Teacher sat silent, her eyes on her slim hands, that were roughened and reddened by constant hurried washings to get off the dirt of the library books. It was true—a good deal of it, anyhow. And one thing they had not said was true also: her sunniness and accuracy and strength, her stock in trade, were wearing thin under the pressure of too long hours and too hard work and too few personal interests. Her youth was worn down. And—marriage?

What chance of love and marriage had she, a working girl alone, too poor to see anything of the class of men she would be willing to marry? She had not for years spent six hours with a man of her own kind and age. She had not even been specially in love, that she could remember, since she was grown up. She did not feel much, now, as if she ever would be. All that she had to give up in taking this offer was her freedom, such as it was—and those fluttering, perhaps that whisper such pleasant promises when you are young. But, then, she wouldn't be young so very much longer. Should she—she put it to herself crudely—should she wait long, hard, closed in years in the faith that she would learn to be absolutely contented, or that some man she could love would come to the cheap boarding house, or the little church she attended occasionally when she was not too tired, fall in love with her work dimmed looks at sight, and—marry her? It had not happened all these years while her girlhood had been more attractive and her personality more untired. There was scarcely a chance in 100 for her of a kind lover husband and such dear picture books children as she had seen Eva Atkinson conveying. Well—her mind suddenly came up against the remembrance, as against a sober fact, that in her passionate wishings of yesterday she had not wished for a lover husband, nor for children. She had asked for a husband who would give her money, and leisure to be rested and pretty and a rose garden! And here, apparently, was her wish uncannily fulfilled.

"Well, what are you going to do about it?" inquired the destinies with their traditional indifference. "We can't wait all night!"

She lifted her head and cast an almost frightened look at the DeGuenthers, waiting courteously for her decision. In reply to the look, Mr. DeGuenther began giving her details about the money, and the leisure time, and the business terms of the contract generally. She listened attentively. All that—for a little guardianship, a little kindness and the giving up of a little piece of life nobody wanted and a few little hopes and dreams!

Phyllis laughed, as she always did when there were big black problems to be solved.

"After all, it's fairly usual," she said. "I heard last week of a woman who left money along with her pet dog, very much the same way."

"Did you? Did you, dear?" asked Mrs. DeGuenther, beaming. "Then you think you will do it?"

The Liberry Teacher rose, and squared her straight young shoulders under the worn net waist.

"If Mrs. Harrington thinks I'll do for the situation!" she said gallantly—and laughed again.

"It feels partly like going into a nunnery and partly like going into a fairy story," she said to herself that night as she wound her alarm. "But—I wonder if anybody's remembered to ask the consent of the groom!"

V.

He looked like a young Crusader on a tomb. That was Phyllis' first impression of Allan Harrington. He talked and acted, if a moveless man can be said to act, like a bored, spoiled small boy. That was her second.

Mrs. Harrington, fragile, flushed, breathlessly intense in her wheelchair, had yet a certain resemblance in voice and gesture to Mrs. DeGuenther—a resemblance which puzzled Phyllis till she placed it as the mark of that far off ladies' school they had attended together. There was also a graceful, mincing white wolfhound, which, contrary to the accepted notion of invalid's faithful hounds, didn't seem to care for his master's darkened sick room at all, but followed the one sunny spot in Mrs. Harrington's room with a wistful persistence. It was such a small

spot for such a long wolfhound—that was the principal thing which impressed itself on Phyllis' frightened mind throughout her visit.

Mrs. DeGuenther conveyed her to the Harrington house for inspection a couple of days after she had accepted some one's proposal to marry Allan Harrington. (Whether it counted as her future mother-in-law's proposal, or her future trustee's, she was never sure. The only sure thing was that it did not come from the groom.) She had borrowed a half day from the future on purpose, though she did not want to go at all. But the reality was not bad; only a fluttering, emotional little woman who clung to her hands and talked to her and asked useless questions with a nervous insistence which would have been nerve wearing for a steady thing, but was only pitiful to a stranger.

You see strange people all the time in library work, and learn to place them, at length, with almost as much accuracy as you do your books. The feet specimen of the Loving Nagger, long for this world did not prevent Phyllis from classing her, in her mental card catalogue, as a very perfect specimen of the Loving Nagger. She was lying back, wrapped in something gray and soft, when her visitors came, looking as if the lifting of her hand would be an effort. She was evidently pitifully weak; but she had, too, an ineradicable vitality; she could summon at need. She sprang almost upright to greet her visitors, a hand out to each, an eager flood of words on her lips.

"And you are Miss Braithwaite, that is going to look after my boy?" she ended. "Oh, it is so good of you—I am so glad—I can go in peace now. Are you sure—sure you will know the minute his attendants are the least bit negligent? I watch and watch them all the time. I tell Allan to ring for me if anything ever is the least bit wrong—I am always begging him to remember. I go in every night and pray with him—do you think you could do that? But I always cry so before I'm through—I cry and cry—my poor, helpless boy—he was so strong and bright! And you are sure you are conscientious—"

At this point Phyllis stopped the flow of Mrs. Harrington's conversation firmly, if sweetly.

"Yes, indeed," she said cheerfully. "But you know, if I'm not, Mr. DeGuenther can stop all my allowance. It wouldn't be to my own interest not to fulfill my duties faithfully."

"Yes, that is true," said Mrs. Harrington. "That was a good thought of mine. My husband always said I was an unusual woman where business was concerned."

So they went on the principle that she had no honor beyond working for what she would get out of it! Although she had made the suggestion herself, Phyllis' cheeks burned, and she was about to answer sharply. Then somehow the poor, anxious, loving mother's absolute pre-occupation with her son struck her as right after all.

"If it were my son," thought Phyllis, "I wouldn't worry about any strange hired girl's feelings either, maybe. I'd just think about him. . . . I promise I'll look after Mr. Harrington's welfare as if he were my own brother!" she ended aloud impulsively. "Indeed, you may trust me."

(To be continued next week.)

The Unbeliever.

If I am blind and cannot see
The gaunt, stark limbed, accursed tree
Whereon, men say, You died for me—
Miserere, Domine.

If I am deaf and cannot hear
Your skiey promise falling clear,
Nor, in my need, Your whisper near—
Miserere, Domine.

If I am lame and cannot tread
The sturft path the Magi led,
To bow before Your manger bed—
Miserere, Domine.

If in my unconscious mind
Nor gem nor pebble I can find
To fit Your temple, man designed—
Miserere, Domine.

If in my pierced and drowning heart,
Transfixed by the Arch Doubter's dart,
I cannot feel You save the smart—
Miserere Domine.

And if at last unshriven I wait
At the bright barrier of Your gate,
And see You shrined in mystic state—
Miserere, Domine.

—Alice Brown, in Atlantic Monthly.

Death Keeps Sealed Bonds.

From the Indianapolis News.
It is a curious fact that physicists who have all their lives been in the highest degree skeptical, and who have doubted or denied religion, should, when they begin to suspect the existence of the spiritual, react violently, and go to great lengths. Much, to take one case, of what Sir Oliver Lodge said in his address in this city, was simply old-fashioned Christianity, which has always taught the survival of personality, and a conscious "life everlasting." Having got thus far, the old materialism reasserts itself and proof—scientific proof—of such survival is demanded. The rest follows. It is perfectly conceivable from a religious point of view that there might be communication between the so-called dead and the living, but it is not scientifically conceivable, nor is it conceivable that science alone should ever prove the existence of life beyond the grave. We know more about the mind, more about human personality than ever before in the world's history, but there has not been the slightest increase in our knowledge of the spirits or the spiritual world. Immortality is as little susceptible of proof—apart from revelation—as it was 1,000,000 years ago.

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"What are those Paris Apaches we hear so much about?"

"Denizens of the underworld, my dear."

"Are they as desperate as we have been led to believe?"

"I hardly think they are as wildly wicked as they are made to appear in the movies. If they were they'd drink blood instead of brandy."—Birmingham Age-Herald.

State of Ohio, City of Toledo, Lucas County—
Frank J. Cheney makes oath that he is senior partner of the firm of F. J. Cheney & Co., doing business in the City of Toledo, County and State aforesaid, and that said firm will pay the sum of ONE HUNDRED DOLLARS for any case of Catarrh that cannot be cured by the use of HALL'S CATARRH MEDICINE.

Sworn to before me and subscribed in my presence, this 8th day of December, A. D. 1888.
(Seal) A. W. Gleason, Notary Public.

HALL'S CATARRH MEDICINE is taken internally and acts through the Blood on the Mucous Surfaces of the System.
F. J. Cheney & Co., Toledo, Ohio.
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For Government Regulation.

"I presume you're mighty glad the war is over."

"Well, I don't jes' know about dat," answered Mandy. "Cose I've glad to have my Sam back home an' all dat, but I jes' know I ain't never gwine to get money from him so regular as I did while he wuz in de army an' de government wuz handlin' his financial affairs."

Cuticura Comforts Baby's Skin

When red, rough and itching with hot baths of Cuticura Soap and touches of Cuticura Ointment. Also make use now and then of that exquisitely scented dusting powder, Cuticura Talcum, one of the indispensable Cuticura Toilet Trio.—Adv.

Wrong Question.

"What'll you be if there's another war?" "What'll I be? Better ask me where I'll be."—Home Sector.

Mistaken Locality.

"Say, is a shipment of liquor to go on this vessel?" "No; this vessel is going to a dry dock."

When Blood Is Bad

Granite Falls, Minn.—"During one expectant period I had varicose veins, which were extremely painful. A couple of bottles of Dr. Pierce's Favorite Prescription completely cured me of this condition, and my system was toned up and I had comparatively no suffering. An old lady recommended Dr. Pierce's remedies to me a couple

of years before when one of my children had a solid crust of sores on his head. She told me that it was because my blood was in poor condition, so I took Dr. Pierce's Golden Medical Discovery to purify my blood, and at the same time gave the baby a few drops several times a day. The effect was wonderful and in a very short time he was a healthy looking baby and had a fine head of hair."

—Mrs. John M. Thompson.

FROM GIRLHOOD UP

Centerville, Iowa.—"I have suffered terribly at times since girlhood; I was all run-down and weak. Was advised to try Dr. Pierce's Favorite Prescription, and when I took the first dose I began to improve. I took only three bottles of it and was cured. Have had five children and have been in good health since. I have frequently recommended the 'Prescription' to others. My sister has also had good results from it."—Mrs. Frank Burns, 727 E. Grant St.

WOMEN EVERYWHERE

St. Paul, Minn.—"For several years I suffered with woman's trouble. I read an advertisement in the newspapers about Dr. Pierce's Favorite Prescription and decided to try a bottle. In all I took about six bottles and it helped me right from the start; it actually cured me of the inflammation and pain in a very short time, and I think it a very wonderful medicine for women."—Mrs. Harry Frederickson, 268 Fuller St.

Eczema

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