

# "The Brief Summer Of His Rose;" The Story Of A Heart's Tragedy

"They Also Serve Who Only Stand And Wait" Is True Of Many Who Have Faced Simple Domestic Tragedies With Courage And "Carried On" Even When Compelled To Do So Without The Inspiration Of Military Service.

By EMILY EMERSON LANTZ.

IT was Fourth of July and Mrs. Grason, editor of the Woman's Page of the only paper she ever loved, felt that at the office, because of the reduction of staff and duties occasioned by the holiday, she would really enjoy a couple of hours of undisturbed work before joining a house party in the suburbs for luncheon.

But the hushed office proved drear, rather than inspiring. One desolate girl at the telephone exchange and a couple of office boys yawning over the morning edition of the paper were not enlivening and she promptly telephoned her prospective hostess that she would come out on an earlier train than had been arranged.

As she turned away from the telephone booth a gay and gallant figure, just entering the office, advanced to meet her. With a glad little cry of welcome she caught in her own the hand of a youth who had been one of her boys at the office long before he found fame and fortune on a metropolitan journal. She recalled that as a child his "shining morning face" was always in brilliant contrast to the snail-like juveniles that crept languidly about the editorial room in response to repeated calls for "copy." She had watched his evolution from a "cub" reporter under the bluff tutelage of the marine man and had fostered his instinctive trend toward military news-gathering until he had become an authority on military affairs long before the great war convulsed the universe. All the officers at the several forts that then lay brooding in peaceful inaction about the city, liked the lad because of his blithe personality, while army matrons admired his handsome face, his tall slender figure, carried with soldierly erectness and a certain graceful deference toward womankind in his manner that was infinitely alluring.

She had also comforted his boy's despair when an untoward accident had injured the sight, but not the beauty, of one of those friendly eyes now looking so cordially into her own. Today he was gaiety personified. His mere presence seemed to stimulate the atmosphere of the dusty room. His sport suit was of such fashionable cut, his Panama hat was set at such metropolitan angle, the artistry of his necktie was above reproach. Radiating elegance, he looked out upon the world with cheerfulness.

"Come into my den and give an account of yourself," the woman suggested, and he came, talking gayly the while of his journalistic experiences, but beneath all the bright glances and flow of friendly speech the keen eye and ear of the listener detected a change in the lad. A new sternness had crept into the young face, a hint of pain, that could not be concealed, into the voice. There was absence of genuine mirth in his frequent laughter.

Suddenly he leaned forward and touched with caressing fingers a rose that scattered perfume and radiated beauty from a vase upon the desk.

"I have been married since I saw you last," he said abruptly, "married and lost my wife. I was in the National Guard before the war, you know, and I was ordered to Texas with my regiment only a short while after we were married and had not more than gotten home again and we had just gone to house-keeping when she died. Her name was Rose and she was like a rose, so sweet." There was a husky catch in his voice and his eyes again sought the fragrant flower.

"Tell me about it," said the editor simply. "Where and when did you meet her?"

"At my boarding place," he answered. "I had a right cozy room in New York. Big center table, nice reading lamp, plenty of books and papers, and as I was away so much of the time all the young folks in the house used it as a sitting

room. Rose boarded there, too. She was a trained nurse, graduate of a New York hospital school, an orphan and a German. I don't care whether we have been at war with Germany or not, you can't find any sweeter girls than German ones. You know they are educated to make home the first consideration and to find happiness in making their husbands happy. We fell in love with each other without knowing it. My sister came to make me a visit, and when she went home she told mother Rose and I were in love with one another, but did not know it—and it was true. We did not know we cared for one another until I got mad with my landlady and decided to leave her home. I had started to look for rooms, was at the door and rung the bell of a house where I had seen some rooms advertised, when I suddenly thought: If I leave my old camping ground I will have to leave Rose, and I could never do that! It was a waste of labor showing me those new rooms. I knew I wasn't going to rent them before I ascended the staircase—they were real nice rooms, too—but they meant separation from Rose. When I told Rose, she confessed she felt the same way about it, and so I said: 'Rose, it is just this, I can't be happy without you, and I believe you are happier with me than alone, so why not get married?' And when Rose agreed, I said: 'Why have any further talk about it or waiting, or anything else. Let us go to a priest and get married at once.'

"Rose was a Catholic, but I did not care. A runaway wedding always appeals to a man more than a conventional one, and Rose had no immediate relatives to object. We obtained a license and went to a priest's house. He demurred at first because Rose was not in his parish, but I said she did not belong to any American parish. She had been devotedly nursing the sick in a hospital while other folk went to mass. So after considering and telephoning my paper and the hospital where Rose graduated and his own bishop and had obtained the latter's permission to perform the ceremony, he called in witnesses and without more ado we were married. My Rose was my own.

"I did not write my people about it because I wanted to tell my mother personally and wanted to bring my wife home in some style. Then, all of a sudden, the National Guard was called to Texas. I had to go out with my regiment and also as staff correspondent for my paper. But when we got South and it came to a physical examination for the regular army, I was turned down because of this defective eye." He gave himself a scornfully withering glance in a small mirror hanging on the back of a door.

"I wanted to come home then, but my paper telegraphed me to stay on the border, and I had to stay—with Rose crying her eyes out in New York!

"Yes, there I stuck until the troops came North. Then I came with them, in civilian clothes! That nearly killed me. But Rose did not care. She was content just to have me with her, and then I took her home to my mother. Rose was so fearful the family might not like her. She need not have worried. Why, I was merely an outcast at home in comparison to Rose. She was the whole thing. My mother and sister adored her.

"Then we went North again and started to build our own little home. Such a time as we had finding a nest to suit us. Rose searched and I searched, and at last we found an apartment that spelled home the minute we crossed the threshold. We hadn't much furniture to start with. I think I sat on a soap box for the first few meals, but Rose had such a gift for creating a home atmosphere. All her table furnishings were

dainty and always there was a bowl or vase of flowers in the center of the table, because she thought, as I do, that food is only half of a meal. After dinner was over she would put a decorative centerpiece on the table and replace the flowers with a lamp—and there was home and a cozy evening. Such fun we had selecting our modest furniture. Rose had set her heart on a solid oak bedroom set. I was all for mahogany, but I let her have her way and we ordered the very style she wanted. It was not beyond our means because through a friend we ordered direct from the manufacturer. Only we had to wait a long time because the factory was rushed. But Rose talked about it and watched for it every day." There was a pathetic pause: "It came the day after her funeral," he said with a catch in his voice and a sudden dash of his hand across his eyes.

"We were so happy," he went on bravely. "The end was so unforeseen and came so suddenly. You see, there was going to be three of us soon and somehow things were not quite right with Rose. She went to consult the physicians and nurses where she had received her hospital training. They were grave about her state and it was all arranged that she was to go over there and be under their care a little while, but before she could even go over there there was a sudden day of anguish and my Rose was gone."

The young face was white and drawn with pain. "Where are you living now, dear?" asked the editor when the strangling stricture upon her throat permitted her to speak.

"Oh, right there—why, I could not leave the place. Some fellows couldn't have stayed, I suppose, but I couldn't go away. Her little apron is still hanging behind the door where she left it. She had such dainty clothes and ways—everything she wore or did was so pretty. She had learned it in the hospital, I suppose, trying to tempt sick people back to health. My mother and sister have come on. They are keeping house for me. But the heart is out of everything for me. I can't understand why she was taken!

"If they had only let me enter the army and got shot. I would not have cared into what danger they sent me, and I'd have served all right. In spite of my injured eye I am a better shot than half the men who passed the physical examinations. If only I could have shouldered a musket and served!"

"You are serving, with or without a musket—you are fighting the great battle of life and will be worthy of your country and of Rose," said the editor quietly.

He made a pitiful attempt to smile and the sudden musical blare of a passing military band afforded excuse for a quick movement toward the open window. Some acquaintance hailed him from the pavement below.

"Coming! Coming!" he responded, cheerily.

One moment he stood tightly clasping the hand of the woman who appreciated his sorrow. Then with a gay wave of the Panama hat to the friend in the street, he turned and left the room.

Mrs. Grason reached mechanically for hat, gloves and parasol, then laid them down again in order to refill with fresh water the tiny vase that held the radiant rose. The Foreign Legion of France is a refuge for such heartaches, she thought, wistfully, as she passed from the office and quietly, almost reverently closed the door.