

An Anonymous Guest.

By MARY ROBERTS RINEHART.

WHEN Professor Phillips received his appointment as a member of the faculty of the Ocean summer school, he was much gratified. Moreover, his pride was largely tinged with relief, the two summer holiday months being usually a period of financial stress. But Mrs Phillips was less exultant.

"It's all well enough for you, William, to talk of closing the house and leaving to-morrow, but I tell you it can't be done. With all the furniture to cover, and the silver to take to the safe deposit vault in town, and the curtains to take down and put away, not to mention packing the woodlens, and putting newspapers over the carpets—and it's so hard to find homes for the canary and the cat—"

Poor Mrs Phillips subsided, breathless and incoherent into a chair. The professor looked at her mildly over his glasses.

"I should think, Amelia," he said, "that you could close the house in a more leisurely manner and follow me a few days later. It is absolutely necessary for me to be present at the opening of the school on Thursday morning."

"And leave me to take that long journey alone? Never! With my tendency to car-sickness, too! Besides, there is Jane."

Yes, there was Jane. For thirteen years all the Phillips' arrangements had been made with reference to Jane. Guests were invited or not invited as it was Jane's day in or out; dishes that Jane disliked to cook were omitted from the daily menu; and Mrs Phillips had been known to curtail the number of bourees on her summer gowns to save Jane's strength and temper on ironing day.

It was not strange, therefore, that at this question the professor became thoughtful. It was manifestly impossible to take Jane along, and it was equally inexpedient to discharge her. As weighed in the balance, a future containing Jane, with her abilities in the line of scrubbing brushes and well seasoned viands, more than outweighed a summer at the seashore and a comfortable, Janeless winter thereafter. It is quite possible that the elderly couple in the osy library would have decided accordingly had not fate, in the shape of a telephone bell, intervened. At the imperative ring the professor rose with a sigh.

"That's Wilson, I suppose. I told him I would see if any of the neighbours wanted to rent their homes for the summer. Ruth isn't well, and he and Mrs Wilson want to get her out of the city for the warm weather. I have been so engrossed with this other matter that I have forgotten to inquire."

But Mrs Phillips was looking at him with eyes in which hope was rapidly dawning.

"Why, it's the very solution of the difficulty," she said eagerly. "Why not rent them this house?"

The professor had taken down the receiver.

"Yes—yes—hello, Wilson, just hold the line a minute," he said. Then, with his hand over the transmitter, "What about Jane?" he queried in a strange whisper.

"They can take Jane along with the house," Mrs Phillips replied in a similar tone.

And that is how it happened that the following evening saw the professor and Mrs Phillips departing down the gravelled walk for the train, Mrs Phillips calling back directions about the canary and the water heater as she vanished into the darkness, while Mrs Wilson and Ruth waved farewell from the porch.

The older woman went indoors, but Ruth stood for a moment in the cool night air and looked about her. On either side of the pretty suburban street were brightly lighted houses, while the sounds of cheerful voices and laughter floated to her across the smooth lawns. She listened a moment to the tuneful tinkle of a guitar, then turned with a sigh, and stepped into the house, closing the door behind her. She paused at the

library door, summoning a smile. Smiles had been rather infrequent on her charming face for several months.

"You're to go to bed at once, both of you. Father, put away your pipe like a good boy. The unpacking is going to wait until morning, and besides, by the time I count ten, the electric light is going out. Now, ready—one, two, three!"

The professor rose reluctantly from the depths of a comfortable chair and emptied his pipe carefully. Mrs Wilson, after examining the window locks, picked up her glasses, and, obedient to her imperious daughter's command, proceeded up-stairs, followed by her husband. Ruth stood for a moment in the hall, her hand on the electric light switch, her eyes on a pale face reflected from the mirror above the hall table, and communed with herself.

"You're a sentimental, wish-washy idiot, and I'm ashamed of you! Your complexion has gone, or nearly, and you go around sighing—an, it's simply, utterly disgraceful!"



"The young gentleman! What young gentleman?"

Which reflection did not prevent her crying herself to sleep with a photograph and a half dozen letters under her pillow—a proceeding not at all original with Ruth.

It was still quite early. Jane in the kitchen put down the almanac and prepared to set the sponge for the morning's baking. Up-stairs everything was quiet and dark. Jane had just dived into the flour barrel—figuratively, of course—when the bell rang. She pulled down her sleeves, tied a white apron round her expansive waist, and leisurely answered the ring.

A young man, tall and well set up, carrying a suitcase and a light overcoat, stood on the porch.

"Is the professor at home?" he asked.

"He is in bed," said Jane ungraciously.

"Well, don't disturb him. I wrote him that I would arrive either to-night or to-morrow morning. Just hold the screen open until I get the suitcase in. That's it, thank you. Now, which way?"

The young man's manner was magnetic, and his smile friendly and winning. Jane's ungraciousness vanished. She closed and locked the front door, and, cautioning him to step lightly, led the way to the immaculate guest-room. Then, after filling the water pitcher and bringing a fresh supply of towels, she departed complacently to her interrupted bread making.

II.

The family slept late the next morning. Ruth was the first to come down, and she stood listlessly sorting over the mail, all for the Phillipses, when her father and mother entered the room. When Jane brought in the coffee urn, Mrs Wilson commented amiably on the fourth plate at the table, but Jane looked bewildered.

"It's for the young gentleman, ma'am," she said.

"The young gentleman!" exclaimed three simultaneous voices. "What young gentleman?"

Whereupon the dismayed Jane related the previous evening's experience, and created a small sensation.

"A burglar!" said Mrs Wilson hysterically. "We must count the spoons at once. I'm so glad we locked our bedroom door last night. That pearl brooch was lying out on the dresser, and this morning's market money was in the upper drawer. Oh, I wish we had stayed in the city!"

"Nonsense, mother," said Ruth. "My door was not locked. Don't you understand? It's some guest of the Phillipses, and he doesn't know of the change that has been made. Go, please, and call him to breakfast, Jane."

But Jane came down in a few minutes to announce that the room was empty, and to place before the professor a slip of paper which had been conspicuously fastened in the corner of the mirror. Professor Wilson straightened his glasses and read it aloud:

Dear Professor:

I am accepting, somewhat tardily, your kind invitation to make this Liberty Hall. I'm off early to watch the football practice game, and will spend the remainder of the day trying to locate a

beyond reach. Even Jane acquiesced, entirely forgetful of the half dollar which rested at that moment on the kitchen mantel-shelf, a mute witness to the evanescence of human gratitude. And so, after a morning spent in unpacking and an afternoon devoted to calls, the ladies hastened to dress for the eventful dinner. Both took especial pains with their toilettes, Ruth looking her best, which was very good indeed, as soft, lacy white. Jane announced dinner punctually.

"But the visitor, Jane," said Mrs Wilson. "Hasn't that young man come back yet?"

"Oh, yes! I forgot to tell you. He was here this afternoon. He said his trunk must be lost, and after he took a bath he borrowed one of the professor's dress shirts, and went out to dinner. He'll be back late to-night."

"Mother," said Ruth, "this is simply disgraceful! The idea of his wearing one of father's shirts! I am not going to stand it. The first time he allows us the privilege of seeing him, I am going to tell him just what I think of him."

"Don't be rude, Ruth, I implore you. Don't say anything you will regret later."

"I can look a great deal that I might not care to say," said Ruth, and being a young woman of spirit there is no reason to doubt that she could.

III.

The evening was not cheerful. The professor amused himself, as was his wont, with the Greek poets. Mrs Wilson crocheted blue bedroom slippers with pink scallops around the tops—an evening custom of hers that derived its sole variety from periodical changes in the colours employed. Ruth spent fully an hour outlining a comprehensive scheme of vengeance against the intruder upon the family peace. Then she went upstairs, took off her wasted fringe, and sat down by the open window in the starlight.

Long after the house was dark and silent she sat there, dreaming of that last summer which had meant so much to her, and which now seemed as dead as its roses. The quarrel had been over such a trifle, and she had deeply repented her hasty return home. She had thought the man would follow her, forgetting that in her anger she had told him that she had never cared for him. He had a very proper pride of his own, and now she was suffering the punishment of the impulsive and wilful.

She rose with a sigh, and prepared for bed, her lips tightening ominously when she heard the click of a latch-key in the front door, and a firm though carefully muffled step on the stair.

She was again disappointed at breakfast. Jane reported that the young man had taken a cup of coffee half an hour before, and had started for the city.

"He's powerful anxious to find a friend that's moved away," she reported. "He says he'll settle down and visit with the family as soon as he finds him. He'll be back late to-night."

That day Ruth and her mother spent in town shopping. When they got home late in the afternoon, Jane met them at the door with a smile. Leading the way into the library, she pointed with pride to the centre table, on which a huge cluster of American beauties



"I wish, if you have the time, you could sew a button on my coat."

friend who has disappeared. Don't worry about my meals. I'll get them wherever I happen to be. Regards—and many thanks to your good wife for her hospitality.

P.S.—Mother sends her love.

"Very surprising, very," said the professor. "The signature is most indelible. 'A' might be anything from Adam to Ananias."

But the professor's attempt at jocularity fell flat. Ruth's eyes were flashing with indignation.

"Outrageous!" she stormed. "Even if the Phillipses were here, such conduct would be insufferable! Then, more mildly: 'What does he look like, Jane?'"

But Jane, thus appealed to, was not a very enlightening witness. Was he tall? Yes, very—or rather, now she thought of it, not so very. Was he dark or light? Well, she thought his hair was brown, but perhaps it was a little red. She knew it looked red in the hall, but of course there was a red globe on the chandelier.

Ruth's small foot tapped the floor impatiently.

"Now, father and mother, and you too, Jane, listen to me." Ruth being an only child, her father and mother always did listen to what she said, but of course Jane was an unknown quantity. "It was extremely rude of this person—there are a great many possibilities of inflection in that small word 'person'—to go away this morning without waiting to say a word to his entertainers, and he needs a good lesson. We will allow him to come and go to-day as he wishes, and Jane, you must not tell him anything. Then, when he presents himself for dinner to-night, there will be a few surprises in store for him!"

There really did not seem to be anything else to do, for the young man was