

The Rose-Colored Rug

J. U. Giesy

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The Rose-Colored Rug

By J. U. Giesy

WHY JANIE GARNS CHANGED HER MIND ON THE
IMPORTANT
QUESTION OF THE BEST FLOOR COVERING
FOR HER FUTURE HOME

THERE is a Spanish saying which runs—"Tomavo la por rosa, mas devenia cardo"—or, in English, "I took her for a rose, but she proved to be a thorn."

Janie Garns knew nothing at all of Spanish, and little enough of roses, save an occasional flower shop bunch; yet the quotation is not inapt as applying to her mental condition on the evening when she came back to her lodging house room and found the note from her roommate, Helen Long. After reading that cruel missive, she went over to her cedar chest, opened it, and knelt beside it, now and then dropping a

slow tear on what it contained—things gradually gathered together and laid within it by Janie's own hands.

For a long time the cedar chest had been no more or less than Janie Garns's hope chest. Until the last month there had been no indication that it would not eventually fulfill the hope that had inspired its possessor; but now—a fresh tear trickled from Janie's dark eye and dropped unstayed from Janie's chin.

Until a month ago, not taking into account the chest and its contents, Janie had been possessed of several valuable things. She had youth. She was just past nineteen. She had a darkly piquant beauty of face and a figure not to be overlooked, since it was so well worth looking over. She had a good position, and the expectation of presently getting married—which was where the hope chest came in.

Getting married is not a difficult accomplishment, provided one has both the inclination and—the man; and it happened that Janie had been possessed of both those things.

The first was natural enough in a perfectly normal young woman. The second was Reginald Harding—Reggie, to the set with which he played about. He was a slenderly graceful young man, with the usual complement of eyes and nose and mouth, a not too masculine chin, and hands and feet. These last he used in a skillful manner when dancing, as well as for the purpose of transporting himself about. He was employed in the sales department of a large wholesale concern with offices a scant block from the building in which Janie herself was employed.

Before she met young Harding, Janie had had several matrimonial chances, but none of her suitors had suited her well enough to arouse more than a passing interest. Reggie, however, was a careful dresser with a careless manner that rather lifted Janie out of herself. In the evenings he took her to movies and dances, declaring himself extremely fond of music—by which he meant the type of music customarily denominated as jazz.

That is, he took her to such places of amusement at first. Later—well, later it was Janie who suggested that they ought to save. It was Janie who inaugurated the fifty-fifty lunches, where each paid his own check, which from then on became the routine of their lives. They still went occasionally to a place of amusement. Being young, of course they did; but they sort of soft-pedaled on expenses, after they became engaged.

Besides everything else that she had, Janie had a head, and she figured that the way to get ahead was to use it. That was about the time when she bought the cedar chest and began to fill it. She and Reggie began to do window shopping. They would pause before some display behind heavy plate glass to indulge in some such conversation as—

"Oh, Reggie, isn't that the swellest rug? The rose-colored one, I mean."

"Sure!" Mr. Harding would assent, eying the article in question.

"Still, rose does fade awfully," Janie would consider.
"Maybe we'd better get a green one."

That was where the streak of thriftiness in Janie's make-up came in; and that streak of thriftiness, as we shall see, was to blame for everything.

The trouble began when she invited Helen Long to share her room. Helen worked in the same office as Janie, and she appeared a very rose of young womanhood. Where Janie was dark, Helen was blond. As opposed to Janie's somewhat quietly reserved disposition, Helen prattled and sang and sparkled like a rippling, sun-kissed stream.

Janie didn't really want a roommate; but she wanted to fill the cedar chest as quickly as possible, and by dividing room rent that object could be furthered. She had heard Helen announce that she was going to change her room; so she asked her, and Helen assented. Janie mentioned the fact to Reggie at their fifty-fifty noontide lunch.

"Oh, for weepin' in public!" Reggie exclaimed. "Now you've spilled the beans, I guess. Where are you goin' to park this jane when we want to go out and play around?"

"Why, I suppose she will attend to that herself," Janie said, a little slowly—for, until Reggie voiced his question, it had not occurred to her that she had erected the third angle of a triangle by inviting Helen to share her room.

"And if we drag her around with us, where are we goin' to save anything on the proposition?" Reggie went on.

"We won't drag her," Janie declared, with a conviction which events were to prove unjustified; for while Janie fully expected Helen to look after her own entertainment, she did not expect her to do it in quite the fashion that Miss Long employed. Helen proved an interested roommate from the first. The very next day after she moved in, she met Janie as they were leaving the office at noon.

"Oh, hello!" she smiled and dimpled. "Goin' to lunch? If you are, I'll go along."

"Why, yes, but I'm going with—some one," Janie said slowly, thinking of Reggie and knowing that her cheeks turned pink.

"Your B.F.?" Miss Long inquired—by which Janie knew she meant "boy friend."

She nodded.

"We always have lunch together," she explained.

"Me and my boy friend—my boy friend and me," Helen giggled, and gave Janie's arm a squeeze. "Well, that's fine! Every girl ought to have one. I won't mind. Take me along, and we can talk him over to-night. How long you had him?"

"Long enough to become engaged. We're going to be married soon," Janie said, a little stiffly, since she was none too well pleased by the turn of events.

She took her roommate with her, however, because she couldn't very well help it. Helen prattled gayly through the

course of the meal, at the end of which Reggie, abandoning his thrifty custom, paid the three-fold check.

"Fine way to save money!" he jeered that evening, when he and Janie were attending a movie.

"I'm sorry, I just couldn't shake her," Janie returned. "She seemed to want to meet you."

"Oh, I ain't kickin'. It was you suggested the fifty-fifty lunch arrangement in the first place," Reggie pointed out, in a way to show that he was taking their engagement seriously, since he was already adopting a matrimonial style of recrimination. "Personally, I don't mind spendin' a dollar now and then, and—she seems a nice little thing."

"It isn't that I mind spending money, either, Reggie. It's just that I want to save so that we can have our own home," Janie protested, as the picture faded out with the heroine in the hero's arms.

"Well, yes," Mr. Harding assented dubiously, rising.

A few nights later, when they planned another excursion, it was Reggie who suggested taking Helen along. Miss Long accepted the invitation. She had a way of accepting—everything.

They went to dance; and if there was anything Helen could do it was that. She shook a dainty and wicked little foot, and had a way of yielding a litesome figure to her partner's arms.

Janie did not enjoy the evening as greatly as she had enjoyed similar evenings in the past; and on the way back to their lodgings a further episode occurred to mar her happiness.

They were passing a window in which was displayed a rose-colored rug—the shade that nagged at Janie's inclination, as against her sense of practicality, in planning her prospective home.

"Look, Reggie! Isn't that a beautiful rug?" she exclaimed.

"Swell," said Mr. Harding, as they paused to inspect it; "but I thought you said rose faded."

"Well, it does," Janie admitted. "I s'pose it would be better to get a blue or green one."

"I like rose better. It matches my complexion," Helen giggled. "That would be swell in a room with a brass bed and white or walnut furniture, and the walls done in cream."

"I'll say it would!"

Reggie gave her a glance which might have indicated even to a casual observer that he was adding her blondness and pink-and-whiteness to the suggested color scheme.

"S'pose it does fade," Miss Long added, shrugging graceful shoulders. "You'd get the fun out of it while it was doin' it, and we only live once. I believe in havin' a good time as you go along!"

"Me, too," averred Mr. Harding, with a positiveness which displeased Janie, and which ought to have warned her.

But to Janie their engagement was such a definite fact—she had accepted it so fully, and had schemed toward its final fruition with such absolute concentration—that she never dreamed of the disaster that was coming. Not even on the night at the movies when the orchestra was playing "Roses of Picardy," and Reggie, in what seemed an absent-minded fashion, picked up Helen's hand instead of her own, did Janie foresee the imminent future.

Instead, she showed Helen her hope chest, displayed its contents, and discussed her plans. Miss Long giggled, as usual.

"Squirrelin' things away already! You're a great one! Say, listen—anybody can get married and furnish a flat nowadays without waitin'. There's always the installment plan."

"Not for me, thank you," Janie objected. "I like to pay for things as I go along."

"Well, you would that way, too," Helen snickered; "but I get what you mean. At that I can see you're goin' to be the *Shylock* of the family. Reggie would show a lot more speed if you'd let him. His tastes are more like mine."

By this time she was calling Mr. Harding "Reggie"—which, even if not wholly to Janie's liking, was natural enough, since wherever he and Janie went Helen made one of the party. If Reggie was less demonstrative in his manner

toward Janie than in the past, that, too, seemed natural, considering the fact that Helen was with them.

So that Janie really did not mentally visualize the actual situation until the day when Helen, pleading a headache, stayed home from the office, and Janie, returning at her usual hour, found the note telling her, in carelessly written phrases, that no matter how much like a rose Helen had appeared, she, like other roses, was possessed of thorns, and that Janie had been—stung.

DEAR JANIE:

Me and Reggie have talked it over and decided that we are better suited to each other than you and him. That being the case, he and you getting married would be all wrong; so we're being married this afternoon. I guess you'll think this a pretty low-down trick, but Reggie feels I'm his sort of girl, just as I know he's my sort of man; and you've got to look out for yourself in this world, and grab what you want when you get the chance. After all, we only live once. Tell the boss I'm all through with him. HELEN.

That was the missive Helen left. As has already been recorded, Janie read it and went over and opened the cedar chest and knelt beside it, staring into it as one stares into a casket. Truly it seemed to her that it held, not the things she had placed within it, but rather the broken shapes of dreams.

II

HOW long she knelt in such fashion she never afterward knew; but after a time she closed the lid and rose.

"Tell the boss," Helen had written.

Janie's lips set into a straight line. She was glad, now, that she had not told her employer of her own intended marriage, as she had more than once been on the point of doing. This way there would be no need of explanations. She had been tricked and betrayed. She had lost Reggie; but she still had her job.

And because of that more serious element in her nature, so different from Helen's, she continued to keep it in the days that followed. She simply lived on and worked on.

The cedar chest no longer held her interest. Like the episode that had inspired its purchase and filling, it remained a closed thing.

She changed the scene of her noonday meals from the little café where Reggie and she had formerly met for their fifty-fifty lunch. She found another place in quite the opposite direction from her office building; and if for any reason she had to pass the store in which it was located, she kept her eyes away from the window in which she had seen the rose-colored rug.

Janie was human, and there were times when she questioned the poet's assertion that it is better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all—even as there were other times when she surprised herself by realizing that, now that everything was over, she really didn't miss Reggie so very much. From this last fact an older and wiser head than Janie's might have deduced that she had been in love with love, rather more than with Reggie himself.

And then one day somebody spoke her name as she was consuming a solitary lunch:

"Janie Garns!"

She glanced up into the steady brown eyes of Joe Berry, a boy whom she had known when the two of them were children, but whom she had not seen for a good many years.

"It is Janie Garns, isn't it?" he said, as their glances crossed.

"Yes, Joe." Janie smiled. Joe wasn't as handsome as Reggie. There was a sort of squareness about him—all over, but particularly in the lower part of the face. He wasn't unhandsome, either. There was a dependable look about him, and Janie was glad to see him. "Take the other side of the table, Joe," she urged.

"I mean to, now that I've found you like this," he said. "After all, the world isn't such a big place, is it? You can meet 'most anybody if you'll just stand still in one place long enough."

"You haven't been standing still, have you, Joe?" Janie quizzed.

"Well, no—not exactly."

He drew out a chair, and sat down and grinned at her.

"Let's see!" said Janie, knitting her brows. "You went into the newspaper business, wasn't it?"

"Yes and no," replied Joseph. "I'm a reporter. The city editor says I'm quite a reporter, and I think he means it, because he backed up his opinion with a raise, last week."

"That's splendid!" Janie declared. "I'm awfully glad to hear you're getting along so well!"

"Oh, I'm getting by, all right," said Joseph. "You're looking wonderful yourself," he added.

"Am I?" Janie dimpled before the frank admiration he made no seeming effort to keep out of his words or his eyes. "In just what way do you mean?"

"Every way," Joseph told her, unabashed.

A waitress took his order. They chatted about each other until he was served, and their luncheons were finished, and Joseph had paid his own and Janie's check. She allowed him to do so without protest; and after they were outside, she gave him her address.

That night, for the first time in weeks, Janie opened the cedar chest. It was two-thirds filled—and it had been good to meet Joe Berry. He was going to take her to a show—not a movie, but a real dramatic performance, for which he had passes from his newspaper. Last week he had had a raise. Some of the strained reserve of the last weeks went out of Janie's eyes, leaving room for a softer, more speculative light.

As before mentioned, Janie Garns had a head; and for this reason she changed her technique.

The show to which Joe took her two nights later was the first of a series of dramatic and musical entertainments they attended during the ensuing months. Like Reggie, young Berry was fond of music; but the type he preferred was the sort that Messrs. Wagner, Grieg, Schubert, and Tschaikowsky wrote. Highbrow stuff, Reggie would have called it, and so it was, in a sense; but Janie liked it, and gradually came to feel that she liked it infinitely better than the syncopated concoctions that Reggie had insisted on—especially when she heard it with good-natured, dependable, appreciative Joe Berry at her side.

And she liked the places to which Joe took her afterward—quaint little resorts off the beaten trail of the city's night life, with which he had come in contact in his newspaper work—places where one could sit and talk and watch the other patrons. She came to like such excursions better than the dances of which Reggie had been so fond.

At the same time, Joe and she sometimes danced, or went to a type of show where Reggie's sort of music carried the major theme. Indeed, there was a broadness to Joe's menu of entertainment, as about Joe himself; but it was restful just to sit at a little table and talk to him, or to have him talk to her of his ambitions and aims. For Joe had aims and ambitions, and after a time Janie came to feel that in the end she might become one of them.

The climax came, as such things so often do, in an unexpected fashion, on a night when they were walking back to her room. There was a rose-colored rug in a show window, and, as usual, Janie sighted it, paused, and exclaimed:

"Look, Joe! Isn't that a lovely rug? The rose-colored one, I mean."

"Mighty pretty," Joseph assented, eying the handsome example of the weaver's art.

"Still, rose fades," said Janie. "Blue would wear better—or green."

Joseph eyed her.

"All the same," he declared, "I like rose the best."

Though she didn't admit it, Janie was suddenly happy. What she had been wanting all along was some one to agree with her inclination, rather than with her more practical judgment.

"And," Mr. Berry continued, in amazing fashion, "there's nothing I'd like better than to have you and a rug like that in a home of my own!"

"Joe!" Janie cried in a whisper; for though a whisper isn't very noisy, it can be almost as tense as a scream.

"J-Janie," stammered Joe, as if a little shaken by his sudden outburst, "I—Janie, I mean it. I—I've been—wanting to tell you—for some time!"

"That you wanted a rose-colored rug?"

Janie dimpled. Womanlike, she was more at home in this sort of thing than the man; but Joe stood his ground.

"And you—in my own house. *Everything*—rosy!"

"Why, Joe," Janie teased, her pulses singing, "I didn't know you were a marrying man!"

"I'm not," said young Mr. Berry. "I don't expect to be married more than once—to you. I'm crazy about you, Janie! Janie, don't you care—a little bit?"

Janie did. As a matter of fact, she had been caring more and more as time went on. This being the case, she frankly admitted to Joe that she cared not only a little bit, but quite a lot, and that a flat and the rose-colored rug and herself were none of them unattainable dreams.

As a result, by the time she kissed Joe good night, she was once more an engaged as well as an engaging young woman,

and the cedar chest straightway became a hope chest again.

III

JANIE at once began to complete the filling of the chest. This proved a fairly easy task, since, regardless of her opinion as to the partnership quality of marriage, she was all through for the present with the fifty-fifty system. She let Joe pay the freight wherever they went, and confined herself to playing the part of the clinging vine.

And she clung to such good advantage that Joseph, asserting himself in masculine fashion, was perfectly happy; while Janie, realizing how much better suited they were to each other than she and Reggie Harding had been, began to feel that she actually owed Helen a debt of gratitude for having taken Reggie off her hands.

In the end the chest was filled to overflowing, through Janie's being able to use the money she had formerly paid out on the fifty-fifty scheme. One day she went to her employer with the announcement that she had more than once in the past considered making; and her employer frowned before he smiled.

Janie considered that frown as great a tribute as she did his following words:

"Well, Janie, I certainly hope you'll be happy, and I'm mighty sorry to lose you. All I can say is that whoever he is,

he's a lucky man. When's it going to happen?"

"Next week." Janie blushed. "I—I could go on working, but Joe—he's my *fiancé*—would rather I didn't."

"Joe's right," her employer declared. "He has the right idea. I congratulate you both."

Janie thanked him, put on her hat, and went home; and right here is where this story might have ended had she not found Reggie Harding sitting in the boarding house parlor when she arrived.

"Reggie!" she cried.

"I—was—waiting for you, Janie," Mr. Harding said, as he rose. He spoke a little wildly. "I—I've got to see you—to talk to you, Janie. Couldn't we—take a walk?"

Janie considered. She was surprised. Besides, there was something she couldn't fathom in Reggie's face and manner.

"Well, if it's strictly private and confidential, we might walk over to the park and watch the squirrels for a while," she decided at last. "That is, if you aren't—afraid."

"Meanin' I'm a nut, eh?" Reggie remarked, with no indication of resentment. Indeed, he somehow seemed mild, washed out. "Well, maybe you're right. I ain't sayin' you ain't. I'm about done in—just about shot. That's why I had to see you."

"Well, come along, then," Janie prompted, and led the way outside. "How's Helen?" she asked.

"Don't!" said Mr. Harding, in a strangled voice.

Janie knit her brows. The tone of the young man's answer filled her with both speculation and additional surprise; but she kept all that to herself until they had seated themselves on a park bench, with Reggie frowning down at his feet.

"Well?" she said then.

"Eh?" Reggie jerked up his head and turned his face toward Janie. "After all, it's pretty much your fault, you know," he declared.

"What is?" she questioned sharply.

"The whole hash." Reggie drew a long and unsteady breath, and elaborated at length. "It was you that asked her to be your roommate, and introduced her to me. Everything would have been all right if you hadn't done that. As it is, it's a wash-out. I'm fed up. Maybe you're sore. You naturally would be, I guess; but you got your revenge, whether you know it or not. You shoved me up against her, tryin' to save on room rent, just like you was tryin' to teach me to save. You know how the old song goes, don't you, Janie? 'You made me what I am to-day—I hope you're satisfied!'"

"I did?" Janie eyed him. She had an inclination to gasp, for, after what had happened, Reggie's accusation was about the most amazing thing to which she had ever listened in her life; but after a time she contented herself with a deep breath.

"Well, I don't know," she went on. "If I really did have a hand in makin' you what you look like right now, I'd say it was a rotten bad job!"

"It is." Mr. Harding nodded. Apparently he missed the point. "It is, Janie—just that—just a rotten bad job. That's why I came to you. We—we've got to patch it up."

"We have?" Janie faltered, a little bewildered.

Though it was easy enough to gather from Reggie's statements that the rosy Helen had proved a thorny proposition to him as well as herself, still she couldn't see just what she could do about it, or why she should do anything at all.

Reggie nodded.

"Why, yes. Helen and I have talked it over and decided that the best thing is to quit. We don't hit it off, so we're goin' to get a divorce. There's places where incompatibility and failure to support are considered cause for that. I'll say we're incompatible, and, as for support, nobody could give that kid all she wants. You ain't like that. You're sort of restful, Janie, and you don't want everything in sight. You like to save; so after Helen and I are divorced, why, you and I'll get married, just like—"

"Married!" This time Janie did gasp. She hardly knew whether to be angry or to laugh, so she gasped, and rose, and stood looking down at Mr. Harding. "You mean you hunted me up to tell me—ask me—to marry you—after all that's—"

"Why, sure!" Mr. Harding also stood up. Apparently he failed to interpret the strangled quality of Janie's voice. He smiled. One might say he smirked. Almost it seemed that he preened himself before her. "I always was fond of you, Janie—you know that, even if I did make a mistake; so if you'll just wait—"

"Wait?" Janie repeated the word, but in a way that gave Mr. Harding pause. She paused until he stood eying her in a less self-confident fashion before she went on: "Listen, Reggie! I could wait from now until doomsday, and I wouldn't marry you then—not if you were the last man on earth!"

"But, Janie," Mr. Harding protested, "I thought you'd understand me. I thought—"

Janie cut him short.

"I know you did. I know what you thought. You thought I'd be delighted; but you're all wrong about that, even if you're right about my understanding you. I understand that you're a quitter. You quit with me, and you want to quit with Helen; but I made a lucky escape, and I'm glad of it. You and Helen really did me a favor, and I can't marry you after you're divorced, or ever, because, you see, I'm engaged."

"You mean there's—somebody else?" Mr. Harding stammered.

"Yes. Does it surprise you?"

There was a twinkle of amusement, almost of malice, in Janie's blue eyes; but Mr. Harding sighed. All at once his voice, his expression, his entire bearing, became disconsolate.

"No," he said. "No, nothing surprises me, Janie—not now, I guess. It's just—just another illustration of the inconsistency—the injustice of—your sex. You introduce me to her—fling temptation into my path—and then, when I stumble, you won't give me a chance to—to—"

Janie Garns lost her temper.

"I'll give you just about a minute to take yourself away from here," she interrupted, "and then—I'll call a cop!"

For a moment Reggie studied her face, and then, as one who wakes from a dream to a stern reality, he sighed again and walked off.

Janie watched him fade out of her life, and walked home and telephoned Joe Berry.

"Oh, Joe dear!" she said, when he answered. "I just wanted to tell you that I've decided to buy the rose-colored rug!"

[The end of *The Rose-Colored Rug* by J. U. Giesy]