
The LIGHT

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Rose and the Gardener

Once upon a time not so very long ago, a rose bush grew in a vacant lot in the midst of the city. A grand house with beautiful flowerbeds had once stood there, but after the fire, the house was torn down and never rebuilt. Old bricks, broken glass and garbage now littered the weed-choked lot. Rose, for that was her name, was the only thing of beauty left in that ugly place. Her flowers were sun-yellow and her scent perfumed the night air, but in that busy city, no one ever stopped to admire her or speak a kind word.



One day, three boys came into the lot, looking for adventure. They were all 10 years old and the best of friends. They punched and teased each other as boys are wont do.

“Oh, I wish I had a friend,” Rose thought to herself. “Over here! Look at me! I’ll be your friend,” she cried out, but the boys ignored her. Besides, they didn’t need any new friends; they had each other.

Desperately, Rose reached out to get the attention of one of the boys. In her haste, her thorns tore his blue jeans and scratched his knee.

“Ouch!” he cried. “I’ll teach you to hurt me!” Taking a stick, he beat her until her petals were scattered and her stems were bruised and broken. The other boys joined in, throwing old bricks and laughing at Rose. “That will show her,” they congratulated each other as they ran away.

It took Rose several weeks to grow back. When she did, some of her stems were dead and wooden. Nevertheless, she still longed for a friend. “Next time,” she said, “I’ll be more careful not to hurt them.”

Not long after a little girl and her mother walked hand-in-hand down the road. When the little girl saw Rose, she excitedly exclaimed, “Look, Mommy! Isn’t she pretty?”

The two came to have a closer look. “Why, she’s gorgeous!” the mother said.

“Can we take her home, Mommy?”

Rose’s heart swelled with hope. “Yes, please dig me up and take me home to your garden. If you will take care of me, I promise I will always make you happy!”

“I’m sorry, dear,” the mother said. “We can’t take her home, but I know what we can do!”

Taking a pair of scissors from her purse, the woman cut all of Rose’s flowers from the bush and made a big bouquet. She carefully cut the thorns from one stem and placed it in her daughter’s hair. Then they left. The girl looked beautiful, but Rose felt naked, ashamed and used.

From that moment, Rose grew ever more bitter. She hid her beauty beneath a tangled forest of angry thorns. “I will never let anyone hurt me again! I don’t need anyone! I can take care of myself!” She repeated these words again and again, trying to convince herself that they were true. However, in the darkness of the night, her heart still ached with loneliness and longing.

Then one day a tall man came to the vacant lot. Rose drew her thorns tighter about herself and watched carefully as he came near.

His work boots were caked with dirt and scuffed at the toes. The knees of his overalls were threadbare and grass-stained. His skin was bronzed and weathered from long days spent working in the sun, and his hands were covered with the little scratches and scars that come from tending roses. Rose knew at once that he was a gardener.

Kneeling before Rose, he ignored the discomfort of the pebbles and broken glass that pressed into his knees. Carefully, he pulled back the thorns and looked into her heart, where he saw a perfectly formed flower with soft yellow petals.

“Why, your blossom is beautiful!” exclaimed the gardener. “It’s one of the most beautiful I’ve ever seen.”

A rush of emotions swept over Rose. The gardener’s touch was gentle and his words kind. For the first time in ages, she dared to hope that someone might love and care for her. But then she remembered the disappointment and rejection she had faced before. “How do I know he won’t betray me like the others?” she thought. Fear won out over hope, and in a moment of bitterness and anger, Rose lashed out and slapped the gardener, leaving a deep gash in his cheek.

“Why, you’ve been hurt,” the gardener said with compassion in his voice.

As he spoke, a tear spilled from his eye, mixed with the blood flowing from his wound, and fell from his face. The tear-mingled blood fell upon Rose, staining the edges of her petals bright crimson, giving her a deeper and richer beauty.

“Don’t worry, Rose,” the gardener said. “I’ll take care of you from now on.”

The gardener took a pair of pruning shears from his pocket and carefully trimmed away all of her dead, thorn-choked stems. At first, it hurt, but with each cut, Rose felt lighter and happier. It felt good to let go of the bitterness and resentment she had so long harbored. The sun shone into her heart and the gentle breezes wafted her scent to those passing by.

The gardener dug Rose from the ground, wrapped her roots in some newspapers he found littering the lot, carried her home and planted her in his own garden.



If you go to the Gardener’s house, today, you will find Rose growing in a place of honor, surrounded by other plants the Gardener has rescued from places of ugliness and despair. Each of them has their own story of how the Gardener changed their lives. If you ask Rose her story, she will tell you, “These blood tinged petals are the Gardener’s gift to me, who loved me when I thought that I would never be loved.”

In Christ’s love,

Author’s Note: I wrote this story for our foster daughter, Nicole Fleming. She is the Rose in this story, a thorny girl with a needy but beautiful heart. As a girl, Nicky had a lot of underlying anger that tended to push people away at the same time as she was trying to win their affection. Before she left us, I wanted to write her a story that would speak to her and remind her that there is a Savior who will love her unconditionally.

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