

GUARDED.

"Come out, please."

A very tiny woman in the cap and gown of a deaconess nurse stood holding open the door of a dark closet. Within stood a huge, black-browed man, his hair disordered, his eyes wild and bloodshot. He glared down at the little woman like a wild beast, and ground his teeth together. Was she afraid? No! Not a tremor passed over her. An hour before, she had been on her knees, and now she knew that an invisible hand protected her.

"I won't come out. Shut the door and leave me alone."

"But I want you to come out first. Why should you stay in here?"

What power it was that prompted the man to obey, the girl herself could not have told, but, crazed with drink as he was, he felt the spell of some power stronger than his own will, and staggered out of the closet. The girl closed and locked the door and then went back to her patient.

The sick woman lay unconscious. Already the cold gray shadows were creeping over her face. All that the nurse could hope to do for her was to protect her from the drunken frenzy of her husband, and suffer her soul to go in peace. The children wept by the bedside, or fled in terror from the presence of the insane father as he approached them. A few neighbors huddled around the doorway, held partly by morbid curiosity, and partly—let us hope—by real sympathy. The man was possessed by a passion to kill, to kill his wife—his children—himself—anyone who should come in his way. Some such threat he had been muttering when he had rushed into the closet and shut the door. He went into the next room, still muttering.

Presently, as the nurse was waiting upon the dying woman, she saw him rush through the room with an axe in his hand. The neighbors fell back terrified, but the nurse followed him into the little hall. Down at the foot of the stairs was a policeman, his foot on the lower step. At the top stood the drunken man, brandishing the axe.

"Come up if you dare!" he shouted with frightful oaths and imprecations. "I'll smash your skull before you shall touch me." The policeman stood still, and the little nurse stepped to the man's side. "Give me the axe," she said calmly, and though he glared at her savagely, he let her take it from his hand. Seeing him disarmed, the policeman came up the stairs. The man was fully his match in size and

strength, and the officer of the law walked around the room a few minutes and then prudently took his departure.

An hour or two passed. The man seemed to have grown more quiet, and the nurse left the sick woman for a minute. But almost immediately one of the children rushed after her, pale and wild-eyed with horror. "Oh come quick!" she cried. "He's going to kill mother!" The nurse hurried back. Stooping over the unconscious woman was her insane husband, clutching a knife in his hand, and looking like a demon incarnate. They took the knife from him, and drew him away. At last, after much persuasion, the nurse induced him to go into another room and lie down. The last stage of intoxication was coming on, and he fell into a heavy slumber. Before he awakened, his wife was forever beyond his reach.

He awoke sober. Finding the house strangely quiet and his daughters weeping together, he inquired what was the matter. The nurse took him to the bedside of his dead wife and told him of her last hours and his own wretched conduct.

"Oh, my God!" he groaned, hiding his face in his hand, "and to think I might have killed her!"

"Or yourself," the nurse suggested.

"It's only you I have to thank that I'm not a murderer or a suicide," he said.

"But you," looking wonderingly at the slight form of the little woman standing before him—"weren't you afraid?"

"No," she replied quietly. "I knew God was able to protect me."

"And He did," was the reply: "but oh, what will become of a wretched man like me?"

"God will help you if you truly repent. No one else can," replied the nurse steadily.

He sank upon his knees, sobbing and praying as only a man can who sees the blackness of darkness yawning before him.

His repentance seemed sincere; his resolution never again to touch the stuff that had ruined his manhood and turned his home into a hell was made with all the strength of his nature: and though that strength was utter weakness, the Christian nurse could point him to one whose grace would be sufficient for him. The two older daughters were also won to try to live a better life. Through the death of the heart-broken wife and mother, the broken remnant of a family may yet be built up into a Christian home.—*The Deaconess Advocate*.