

WIDOW FOR RENT

By Georgia Z. Post

Everywhere Julia went she calculated the marriage potential of the men present.

First choice, second choice, perhaps, and never. Never always won at the end of the visits. This was a discouraging fact for Julia, a slightly overweight, sixty-four-year-old widow whose husband had died three years earlier.

I just want to share my life with someone again, she thought. She didn't feel old, and it was fortunate that her husband had left her the means to maintain her modest lifestyle. He could not have foreseen her loneliness or her yearning for male companionship. She longed to have a man with whom to share a walk in the park, dinner in some unexplored area, a poetry reading, or laughter at the day-to-day absurdities of life.

She decided to do something dramatic about her situation. No more church suppers or blind dates. She understood that most men were afraid of commitment, so she approached the problem directly, with humor, in the ad for the personals column that began to take shape in her head.

WIDOW FOR RENT

Average-looking widow in mid-sixties looking for short-term friendship and companionship with widower only. NO playboys. NO hanky-panky. Leave your name and number.

For security, she installed a second phone under her maiden name and recorded this message, "Thank you for calling Rent-a-Widow. Due to the high volume of calls, your call will be returned as soon as possible. Please leave your name, number, and a brief message."

The calls began to come in. Some were ugly, suggesting sexual services only. Others were statements of fact: age, health, financial resources. A few were sad: "Don't call back, my children won't understand. I will try again." One caller pleaded to be rescued—he was beginning to enjoy being alone.

Julia made two piles: prospects and never. The calls to be returned had dwindled to a handful. She planned to invite each prospect to dinner at a diner on the other side of town. She would be carrying a white rose for identification.

Fred was first. "My friends call me Friendly Fred," he declared as he sat down. Widowed for several years, he lived with one of his married adult children. He

confessed to feeling like he was in their way. He was always being told what to do—Hang up your pajamas. Don't be late for dinner

He liked movies and bestsellers. Would Julia like to meet him for a movie? Why not, thought Julia, as she agreed. After watching ten minutes of *Reefer Madness*, Julia thanked him and said good-bye. She wondered if she had the right plan.

Eric was next, a few days later. He was thin, mustached, slightly bald, and nervous. His fingers drummed on the table constantly; he paused only to take a breath as he rambled on. He really missed his wife. She took care of everything. He couldn't seem to start or finish anything. He wanted to travel, but making the arrangements seemed difficult. Money was not a problem; he had more than enough. He invited Julia to take a trip with him—anywhere—but she would have to take care of all the arrangements.

"Thank you, Eric," she said with a sigh, "but I don't think so."

The following week she met Victor, a doctor—tall, gray, muscular, and impeccably dressed. As they greeted each other, his voice was low, his eyes penetrated hers, and his hands were silky smooth.

After a few moments of small talk, he said he had a confession to make: he missed waking up to a wife who smiled when she looked at him, a wife who quoted poetry, and who liked to walk in the park at sunset.

Julia couldn't believe her good fortune. Lowering her lashes, she leaned forward with a smile. "You must have had many opportunities for a relationship, Victor. How long have you been widowed?"

He reached for her hand, and squeezing it gently, he said in a soft voice, "I'm working on it."