

The Girl Who Had No Chance

By MARION RUBINCAM

THE OLD BURDEN

Chapter 49

So Ruth turned her back upon the city that meant so much to her, and started home. The right train ran through the tunnel that went under the river and under the great hill beside it, and came out upon the marshy flat between New York and Newark.

Ruth turned to the window and looked back. Lights twinkled from the hill side. Beyond its horizon the big city of her dreams lay, the place of fortune and opportunity, as they stood over the flats, she could see the tops of the biggest buildings emerge from the right—the great lantern in the Woolworth Tower, the light atop the great tower on Madison Square. She tried to identify the various big buildings that had so captured her imagination, and was pleased when she succeeded. Then, as the train roared through the streets of the great city of factories that was spreading so rapidly over the Jersey fields she turned away and tried to read.

Next morning early she changed at a junction field, and finally, hungry and tired, she arrived at Marketown.

Her mother and father were there to meet her. It was at least a pleasure to see them again. And there was a certain pleasure in being at home again. The spring was well advanced. Marketown's front yards were a mass of lovely flowers, and the air was deliciously warm and fragrant. And the first day passed pleasantly. For the Weeds wanted to know all about Myra and had invited Ruth and her father and mother to dinner. "Myra wrote you were staying with them after your Aunt left," the gentle little Mrs. Weed said as they sat at dinner. "But you should have gone there at once after your aunt left. I'm glad this new friend of hers—this Gaby—didn't mind Myra having a guest."

Ruth answered nothing but looked down at her plate. Gaby minding her there! It was Gaby, not Myra, who insisted on her coming. But Ruth, of course, said nothing. This she gave a long account of her good times and the theatres she went to and the huge size of the city.

"Never quite trusted theatrical folks," Mrs. Weed said again. "But this girl seems to be a good friend of Emily's, and for all her wild ways Emily is thoroughly trustworthy. And now you say you like her, why, why I feel easy in my mind."

"Gaby is a wonder," Ruth answered. "She could only be a good influence."

"Well, Myra's so interested in her singing lessons and working so hard I hated to take her away. But I was getting worried about it. And Ruth had to answer she did not think so—remembering how successfully Myra avoided all exertion, and how little time her lessons really took.

"Anyway, I was glad when she wrote she was engaged to young Turner," Mrs. Weed put in (a great man whose voice and whose presence filled whichever room he was in). "He's a sensible lad, and a hard worker, and I like his family. Of course, they won't be married for years. They're both too young and he has nothing yet, but he'll be a steady influence for Myra."

Ruth was glad her mother answered this. It saved her, and she did not want to use her voice just then.

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Walking home through the quiet streets later, Ruth felt a sense of relief coming over her. She had gotten through, now all the necessary social formalities that connected her with Tim's engagement to Myra. Except for the two or three moments when she broke down in the hallway of the board-house and sobbed with her head against Tim's shoulder she had not shown any of her real feelings.

And that one evening Tim had been upset, too—and no one knew it except the two of them. Myra would never guess just how deeply Ruth was hurt, and these people in Marketown should never know how truly she cared for the man who had left her.

She had kept her peace, she had deceived them all—but Tim and Gaby, and the secret was safe with them. Even the 11-year-old Kenneth was convinced—for the gossip of small children was a thing to be dreaded.

And now she was free of it all—free, and most terribly alone. She was almost glad to be back in her old room again. She certainly enjoyed the physical comfort of the large bed, for the couch she had been sleeping on was too narrow for real rest.

The next morning Mrs. Belding tapped on her door to wake her. Ruth stood a moment looking out at the garden—a careless confusion of grass, but beautiful in its fragrance and freshness. She put on her oldest working dress and went down to help get breakfast.

An hour later she was ironing, two hours later cleaning the top floor. Early in the afternoon she did some special baking and, when her father begged her to rest and read to him, she suggested he sit on the lawn and talk to her while she weeded the flower beds.

It was two weeks before the place was cleaned up to suit her—placed in a wheel chair these days. Much of the city was becoming very much like a hazy dream. Ruth had been absorbed by the deadly old routine. Would it go on like this forever, she wondered?

gave nothing—and of herself who had nothing and who wanted only a chance—only a chance to work) her whole heart, filled with bitterness. She made no attempt to write to Myra now. The conventional thing had been done. She had wished her happiness. She had wished Tim happiness. She had tried awfully hard during her stay in Gaby's place with Myra, to get back on the old chummy footing, but had failed—and not through any fault of hers. So she did not answer the only letter Myra sent. The story of Myra's and Tim's engagement had gone the rounds of the town and had been forgotten. Ruth was glad that her visit to her friend in the city had kept her name out of the gossip.

"I'm going out and find a position," she told her mother one morning—one time in July when fainting with cold water, same as washing, Dy-o-la Dyes are unsurpassed. Best colors to use for tinting—Blue, Light Green, Yellow, Orange, Pink, Purple, Tan or Old Gold, Garnet, and Black used very weak for Gray.

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ation when the apparent limit of feeling has been reached. Ruth had reached this state. And so though she sat on the porch with tears in her eyes that were hot and that hurt, still, the pain was no greater than what she had been carrying about with her for some months.

She had come, she felt, to the place where Tim could not hurt her any more. Except for the fact that the house was physically more comfortable, that there was more to eat and nicer food—except for these little things—her life was so unhappy that a little bit more or less did not matter.

She folded the letter into a tiny bundle and went out to the kitchen. With a casual air she raised the stove lid and dropped the paper into the fire, watching it flare up, then die into ashy flakes before she replaced the lid.

"It was from Tim, wasn't it?" Mrs. O'Neil asked. "Yes, but he had nothing to say—oh, except that has a new job and a raise to \$20 and that he's sending a friend here for a room."

"Nothing! I think that's a lot, \$20 a week!" Mrs. O'Neil paused for a moment, a long pause in her hand. She was "doing" berries for winter use, cooking while she cooked dinner, so as to save time and coal as well. In such little economies and plannings Mrs. O'Neil felt herself supremely efficient—and she was.

"I wonder if he'll get married now," she went on, contemplating the long spoon, dripping with the sweet, sticky preserve. "I hope so. They can afford to now."

Ruth said this calmly, taking off her hat and smoothing back her dark hair with her hand. "I think I'll have a bath before dinner, mother, if there's hot water enough. I feel as though I had lint sticking to me all over, after a day at the factory."

"I don't doubt. Well, there's plenty of water." That was as plain as Mrs. O'Neil could get to her own daughter. But, so the girl should have plenty of time she delayed the meal and went upstairs to put out Ruth's freshest dress thinking the change might make her feel better. But that night Ruth decided to cut the grass, so she came down in her oldest clothes.

And when her mother protested that she had time to keep the place neat, the girl only answered that it kept her from getting round-shouldered, since her work made her bend over so much.

what you can, I'm sure there are boys and girls enough here to make up a club of some sort, for wholesome pleasure." Ruth answered nothing. She tried to fancy some of the young men on Main Street riding horse-back or swinging a golf club. But the words stuck in her mind to bear fruit later.

"I'd like to do something to the factory end of the town," she said finally. "There is work there that ought to be done. Those girls—father, the way they live, the way they talk, the terrible ideas they get when they're only 14 and 15!"

"Well why not try something there?" This started Ruth to thinking, and for a moment she forgot, everything else, as little by little the Real Idea grew.

THE STRANGER Chapter 52 I order to reach the factory, Ruth had to walk through several streets near the edge of the town—streets unpaved, unswep, running between rows of tiny houses cheaply constructed, to house the factory workers.

A little walk would have brought the children of that district to the open fields, but, of course, they rarely went so far to play—possibly fearing the "No Trespass" signs on the farm-lands. They played in the streets instead, often in danger from the trucks carrying materials from the factory to the station.

Beside the factory was a large vacant lot. The owners intended, in some prosperous time, to build an addition here—meantime the ground was idle but beautifully smooth and green.

And one day when the Idea had taken detailed form, Ruth went to the employment manager. By this time he remembered her as the girl he had taken an interest in before. He passed her house on the way home and he had a nodding acquaintance with her father. In fact, he knew her as a girl not of the factory element—but when she went with her idea, she found a ready listener.

"It's simply that I want them to make the empty field into a playground for factory workers' children," she said. And went on to outline her plans. Ruth had been reading up on playgrounds in the magazine at the library, so she talked like an experienced social worker.

"A few dollars will do it. They should have swings see-saws some gymnastic stuff so they can develop their legs and arms, and a shallow pool to wade in on hot days."

And to her delight and amazement, when the managers took it up with the factory owner, Ruth was sent for to outline her idea again, and the playground was established. The owner even put up some young trees, so there would be shade in time—carefully keeping clear the space where the future factory would be built.

happened. To be sure, the playground was there, the laughter and the cries of the children reached her as she sat at her table, even the fights of the small boys were a joy to her. This safe and pretty playground was her creation. It was an improvement over the streets, it was something she had accomplished. Something beside checking up the pieces of work done by these dreary looking girls and computing their week's wages from it.

For she went on as before at \$9 a week—and the only gain was that she had mastered the figures and "pot-hooks" though she was still slow at them and she could use a typewriter with growing accuracy.

One evening she came home worn out. She was not even thinking of Tim—she knew Tim and Myra were not yet married or Mrs. Weed would have told her. She had simply cut herself free from that situation. The old love, her dead hopes, lay heavily enough on her heart. But she tried not to think of it.

It was cool enough now for her father to stay indoors to read. Her mother was in the kitchen cooking. Upstairs came sounds of moving trunks and furniture—the four teachers were back again, getting settled for the new term. That meant more money each month! Also more work. The one solemn man who had the spare room on the second floor had moved to the two lower floor rooms. They scarcely ever saw him.

Ruth went back to the kitchen, felt the water boiler over the stove, decided there was enough hot water for a bath, if she reached the bathroom before the four teachers did. She went upstairs, bathed, and slipped into one of her old summer dresses, freshly laundered that day.

She threw herself in the bed for a moment's rest, and when her mother told her dinner was ready, she got up and combed her hair. As she went downstairs a young man walked up the path from the gate to the front door. The others were back in the dining room; Ruth went to the porch to see what he wanted.

Someone for a room perhaps. Or perhaps only another of the agents that appeared sometimes. But no, the man was no travelling agent.

She watched his swift walk, his long steps, and when he reached the porch steps she had to smile in answer to the smile of greeting he gave her as he took off his hat.

"Is this the O'Neil house? Is Mrs. O'Neil in?" he inquired. "Oh, Mother's in. I'll call her. Yes, I beg your pardon, but then you are Miss Ruth O'Neil, aren't you? I have a letter of introduction to you, from Mr. Turner in New York."

Ruth was silent an instant. Then it flashed back upon her the letter from which she had hoped so much, that contained only a reference about sending a man to her for a room.



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that the man Tim had written about had come for a room. "But I said we had none," she went on. "I don't know why, because we need the money and there's plenty of rooms to rent. Only, somehow I did not want a friend of Tim's to be—well, to board—"

I know my dear. It puts one in a curious position, Duncan O'Neil answered. And Ruth grateful that he could understand the idea she could not explain, said nothing more about it.

The next day Ruth received a note from Langley Williams. It said: "Thanks for your suggestion about a place to live. I'm already fixed very nicely there. This is the letter of introduction Turner gave me. May I come around some evening next week?"

Ruth opened the other note, hating herself for the agitation that the sight of Tim's writing caused. It was only the conventional wording of such notes, and it was dated some time back. Ruth dropped it in the fire as soon as she could and sent the new arrival a brief letter saying she would be glad to see him the following Wednesday. But she was not very much interested.

Mr. Williams, it appeared, was making a stir among her friends as any stranger, particularly a man, would be bound to, in such a small place. Mrs. Weed, it seemed, had had him to dinner and knew a great deal about him.

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THE NEW IDEA

Chapter 51 There comes a time in any situation when the apparent limit of feeling has been reached. Ruth had reached this state. And so though she sat on the porch with tears in her eyes that were hot and that hurt, still, the pain was no greater than what she had been carrying about with her for some months.

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