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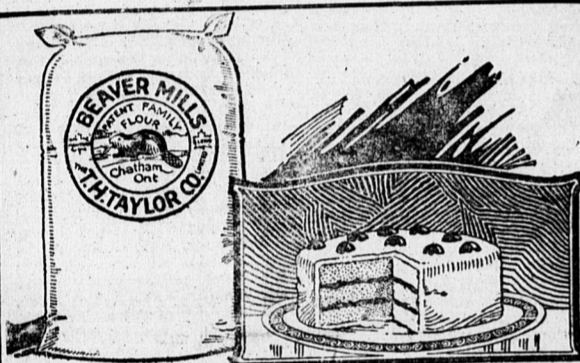
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WIN'S MESSAGE

Chapter 34

Never before had I done so much or accomplished so little, as during that mad, feverish, wasteful winter. Ordinarily I had a great deal of leisure—that winter I had almost none.

At first I went about because my aunt wanted me to, then I began wanting hourly distraction. At first I felt it my duty to please my aunt and my father, since they were giving me a very generous income. To sure, it was my money, some from my mother and there was no one to inherit from either my aunt or my father but myself. Yet I felt dependent and bound to please for that reason—though all the time the money meant little to me.

Part of it was reaction from the narrowness of the little town, too. They were so self-satisfied, so smug, so sure their way was the only right one.

So I plunged in to every frivolity the city offered—and the city offered many distractions. No one ever mentioned Win to me. Everyone seemed to have forgotten him but me. Aunt Harriet now and then referred to my "late unfortunate affair," and father once remarked that he had seen Win on the street.

From mother Taylor, who now wrote me faithfully, I heard only that Win was still in the apartment we used to have together, that he was "doing very well," and that he wrote her about once in two months. In spite of her devotion, she managed to get along very well without him, she was busy running several "worthy causes" at home.

So I went everywhere I could. Luncheon, teas, dinners, theatres. Week-end parties for skating, sleighs. My aunt approved of a marvellous skating costume of blue and white wool that I bought, and had a lot of expensive pictures of me taken in it. These went about with the usual "social notes." I wondered whether Win saw them? The pictures were very flattering, so I hoped he had.

Meantime I made myself very charming to Nardonski, having found out that Gwendolyn wished to keep him in her crowd. Meantime I helped my aunt in her genteel and clever little game of "sets" with Gwen out at the end of the winter no one saw that lady except at large parties—or about town "with people one wouldn't know" as my snobbish aunt put it.

Several times I saw Gwen when I was dining out. I always saw her in the audience at the big concerts, though no longer in the box where Nardonski bowed to her. She was an extraordinary figure that drew everyone's eyes. This winter she affected black, and went everywhere, in a time when short skirts and youthful styles were worn in long, clinging trail dresses of velvet and fur and satin.

I began to lose my dislike of her. I began to admire her rich hair in its eccentric fashion, and her curious, cat-like eyes. Then came Win's message, and then more rumors, and once again I hated her with all the strength I had.

His letter, in his strange but so familiar handwriting, fairly leaped out at me from the morning's pile of mail. I tore it open with trembling fingers, my breakfast neglected, the other letters neglected.

"My dear Connie," he began, "You seem to be the most popular young woman in New York, judging by the publicity you receive. You used to say you hated that, you quarreled with me violently once because I wanted you to send your picture to a magazine. I

never pull through. One day a friend of my husband told him that the Vegetable Compound had done for his wife and advised him to take a bottle home for me. After the fourth bottle I was a different woman. I have four children now, and I always find the Vegetable Compound a great help as it seems to make confinement easier. I recommend it to my friends."—Mrs. FRED H. SMITH, John St., Trenton, Ont.

Lydia E. Pinkham's Vegetable Compound is an excellent medicine for expectant mothers, and should be taken during the entire period. It has a general effect to strengthen and tone up the entire system, so that it may work in every respect effectually as nature intended. Thousands of women testify to this fact.

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"I have been thinking that, as you are so popular, you might find it inconvenient to be tied to me. If you want an entire separation, I shall do everything I can." I don't think I ever finished that letter. After all these months, Winthrop could still reach across the space between us and hurt me in a letter as he had so often hurt me in speech.

The rest of the letters stayed there until night. After I had riven over the first sick pain of it, I dressed and went to my aunt's. I would go to someone, and she would know whatever gossip was about.

I showed her the letter. "What have you heard about Win? Why should he suddenly write me like this?" Aunt Harriet suddenly softened, and grew sweeter and more lovable than I ever seen her. A friend of Nedda's heard that he wanted to marry Gwen. I thought you know, that she would drop him as she drops all these chaps she grows enthusiastic about. But she hangs on to him—though I haven't seen them together for a long time. Win has a great deal of charm—she may really like him—

"But a separation—?" "Well, why not?" asked aunt Harriet calmly. "I couldn't bear it," I said, and burst suddenly into hysterical tears.

But I was ashamed of showing my feelings, so I controlled myself as soon as possible. "Now, don't go and call up that little Colin—," she said as she left. But that was my only refuge. I needed Colin's sympathy and strength as I had never needed anything before.

HEART BALM
Chapter 85

But I did not call up Colin. Perhaps if I had been perfectly calm and logical I would have gone to my own place and telephoned him. But an empty taxi was passing when I left my aunt's house, and I hailed it and mechanically gave Colin's address. It was not yet noon and I knew as Colin spent his mornings working he would be in. His housekeeper ushered me in to a tiny reception room, and said she would send "Mr. MacReady" to me in a moment. Evidently she took me for a client who wanted to arrange for a portrait.

While she was gone I started about me in surprise, wondering for a moment whether I was in the right place. I was so absorbed with my own affairs that I had the curious feeling that everything outside myself was unreal. Every woman who has been through a sudden sorrow or crisis must know this feeling.

Then I remembered that Colin had done over his apartment. He was making quite a good income. Now, but instead of moving into a more pretentious place, he had kept his old apartment and had it done over in a beautiful fashion. He came hurrying in, with rolled up sleeves and old working clothes, his hands covered with paint.

"Sorry to have kept you," he apologized. "I've been cleaning out an old canvas. What is it, Connie? You look rather bad."

"All right, come back into my workshop." Colin never called his studio anything but his "workshop." "Do you like my grand reception room? Done for my millionaire clients. You look lovely against that black velvet hanging, Connie, especially with your pale skin. Shall I do you a portrait?"

"No," I said abruptly. "Where's the workshop?" He led the way to a small room with a north window. I had been in his place before when he gave little parties, but never in this tiny studio. It was littered with canvases and paints, with odd stools and chairs and pieces of lovely old brocades and velvets for backgrounds. It looked more like a photographer's studio than an artist's.

I held out the letter from Win, and he read it. "So that accounts for the tragic face," he remarked, calmly tearing the letter into bits. "Reason enough! Colin, what shall I do?"

"Oh, answer it, I suppose. It's the usual thing with letters—to answer them. I think we'll have some lunch first." "Lunch! I don't want to eat!" "I do. Then we'll answer it!" He rang a bell and the housekeeper appeared. "I think we'll keep Mrs. Taylor for luncheon," he said. "She isn't feeling well, so we'll have a lot of hot coffee. I think we might have some of that consomme you make so well—"

your and sit in that chair with your profile toward me," he said suddenly. "Will you? I want to make a sketch for a figure in a group picture, and I have no model for it."

I sat down as he asked. He went to work industriously. I never knew you had a studio that he did it only to distract me, to give me something else to think about. The instinct in me to do as I was asked came up at once—the curious yielding quality that never said "no" to Win, nor to my family. When the housekeeper announced lunch, I found I was calm and ready to eat it.

After lunch he began: "Win doesn't want to get away from you, as you think. He wants you to come back. But he—" "If he wants me I'll go at once." "No, not yet—not if you are wise. I know about this rumour concerning Win and Gwen. I don't believe it—but I expected some such letter as this. That's why I asked you the other day whether you had heard—"

"But it's evident he wants to get away." "No, it's evident he wants to see you. I'm more afraid of that than that he wants to marry this other woman. I'm afraid you will go as soon as he asks you to come back." "I will."

"And there make a mistake and start all his trouble over again. Let him wait and wait for a while—"

"Do you really think he is feeling—that he likes me more?" I did not believe what Colin said. But when I left a few moments later, I felt calm again, and quieted. Colin, his bulky working clothes making his figure uglier than ever, and a little goodbye from the doorway.

AN ANSWER.
Chapter 86.

Was it really true? What was behind Winthrop's letter? Did he really think that I wanted my freedom since I seemed to be going about in such a frivolous manner? Or was this the beginning of a reaction on his part? Win never believed I could stay away from him, or keep silent so long. He was always sure of my love, entirely too sure. I made the enormous mistake of giving him all he wanted and more than he wanted. It is a fault of my type as I know now; I sacrificed everything for my love of him, and found my greatest pleasure in doing so.

Had he been another sort, that would only have made us happier, but he happened to be the type that finds zest in the unattainable. That was Gwen's great hold over him, but I could not see it—I was too jealous, too easily worried. Gwen would be as charming to him as anyone could be—but he had only her friendship and that he shared with a great many other men. Gwen was always beyond his reach, always to be sought after, never to be had.

And I did not realize this until long after. If I had, I would have profited by her example—and would not have been so jealous. Colin made another illuminating remark that afternoon. He had been so busy when I interrupted him, that he had sent me away almost at once after luncheon, promising to come late in the afternoon to talk over the next step. He did not come until nearly six, and he looked thoroughly tired out.

"I said I would not answer until you came," I began. "So I haven't. Now what shall I say?" "Perhaps I should answer the big antique desk, where paper and envelope were ready." "Not so fast," Colin said. "Connie, when will you learn that nothing is gained by hurry, everything by deliberation in some cases? This is one of them."

"I must answer it now." "That's all right. Wait—wait, don't rush on this! This is Wednesday. Date it Friday. Then give it to me and I'll mail it Saturday and Win won't get it until Sunday."

"Dear girl, how lacking you are in the first principles of feminine art! Keep him guessing, that's why." I obediently dated the letter ahead. "Now, what sort of letter will you write after my lecture on indifference?"

I began to write and he to smoke. When he had finished his third cigarette I handed him my very brief reply.

"My dear Winthrop: The inconvenience and disagreeableness of getting a legal separation are so great that I would not think of asking for it unless you wanted it."

"CONSTANCE." Colin laughed. "That does very well. It says

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nothing and leaves the matter up to him, to make more definite, or to drop."

"What do you think he'll do?" Colin folded the letter, slipped it into the envelope, sealed it and put it in his pocket. He evidently did not trust me enough to let me have the letter to hold a few days and mail. He was sure I would repent, and it up and write something quite different.

Colin was right—that's what I, in my weakness, would have done. I felt the thing was accomplished when the letter went into Colin's pocket. It would have been as hard to get it back from him as to get it out of one of the little green letter boxes.

"I don't think you'll hear from him," he said. "As I told you, I sincerely believe he wants to make up. But don't do it—yet. It's too early."

"He's still going about with Gwen—not always openly, though. I've seen her alone sometimes—"

"Do you think he spends all his time running about town with her?" "With her, or someone else. Win must spend his leisure running about. He can't ever stay quietly at home or in any one place."

Colin lit another cigarette. "He'll probably get over that—though I'll admit he's been at it for some time. Would you still like to go back to Wellsville to live, if Win went along?"

"I'd like nothing better," I said promptly. "No one would gossip then. It would be ideal."

Colin shook his head. "You see, you haven't changed, either—you and Win are each just where you started. Neither will yield an inch. You must learn that the great art of life is compromise, Connie. No, don't go back yet."

"But I'll give up anything for Win—"

"Would you though?" He turned around with a little cynical smile. "Almost anything," I amended.

DRIFTING.
Chapter 87.

"Almost anything," I repeated. "My ideal is a quiet life, with only a few real friends, with time to read, time to think, time to relax—this mad rush isn't living."

at the Mardens, with all the social lights out for it, and then—" "Great heavens, you're already up to two a.m." "No, only about one. Then a few of us are going down to a funny little restaurant where they have a magician—sounds awful, but he's really remarkable, they say. He tells you your name at once, and who you are in love with—it makes most awful mix-ups with some of the parties that go down. Billy Trevor threatened to divorce his wife when they went, because the man named someone Billy was already jealous of—"

"Connie, what rot! You're getting as bad as the rest of them." "I know, but one has to be something, and this sounds amusing. The man is Russian, and they say is a Nihilist and has second sight as well."

"What an awful combination!" "He isn't always right, though. He told one chap he was in love with some woman and gave her name, and it happened to be the chap's own grandmother who died when he was a year old."

"Enough! You're chattering worse than the silliest society butterfly of the season. I'll go home and dress, and come for you in less than an hour."

"I'll be ready," I promised. I held out my hand. "Compromise, Colin! You just told me the great art of life is in compromise. I'll make a bargain, I won't have the blues tonight, if you won't."

"Right! Now put on your most frivolous frock." "Very frivolous! Blue sequins, so I glitter like a peacock. You can paint me in that against your black velvet curtain, and I'll put on white powder to gain a becoming pallor, in case I look red checked and healthy."

The reaction was setting in. I wanted to laugh and dance and be happy. I even sang a little while I dressed and when I rang for Ellen I felt as fast as my gowns she smiled a little in approval of my good appearance.

I was conscious how well I looked that evening. I was conscious that Colin, with his homeliness, set off my own delicacy to great advantage. If I thought of Win at all that evening, I put the thought of him out of my mind instantly.

DRIFTING FURTHER.
Chapter 88.

All that winter I went about as hard as I could. I never allowed myself a moment's leisure, for if I did, I dropped—mentally and physically. I caught my father's trick of skimming the papers and magazines, so I could talk with superficial intelligence about the news of the day. I had all the best of the new books sent me, skimmed them, and read reviews of them—and talked about them with great animation and very little real knowledge.

In other words, I was becoming exactly like all these other women. My aunt, hearing me finish an opinion on a myth discussed novel, said "was out that week, remarked to my father."

Continued on Page 1

MEN AND HORSES

How closely related is man to the most intelligent of the animals is seen in many of the ailments to which both are prone and the remedies to which they answer.

Doctors and veterinarians are often surprised to learn of the similarity of their methods of handling ailments of man and beast.

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"You see, it's as I said. When she was tied up to that man, she had no ideas beyond running her house and repeating his opinions. She might just as well have been a suburban housewife! Now she is really developing some intelligence."

I smiled a little to myself. The opinion I had delivered with so much conviction was the result of a ten minute's perusal of an overview of that novel. My intelligence was borrowed from headlines from glances at magazine articles from repetition of other people.

Nevertheless, I was developing one thing which neither my aunt nor my father guessed. That was a certain independence of mind. Before, I had been a curious combination of weakness and stubbornness, a very usual sort of combination.

Father became restless during the winter and announced one morning that he was off for Spain the end of that week.

"Want to come?" "No thanks," I answered, as casually as he had asked me. "You've odd taste," my father answered, looking at me curiously. "Don't you want to see any part of the world?"

"Yes, but not now." He thought this over for a moment.

"I'll make it France, if you'll come. You wouldn't feel strange there, since you speak French very well."

"I wouldn't feel strange in Spain. I just don't want to go away." He frowned a little, staring at the smoke of his cigarette, and what was in his mind—their foreign countries that had been my mother so lonely and anxious and homesick when he took her to road. Both he and my aunt watched with

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