# "THE LOVE PENDULUM"

BY MARION RUBINCAM

## I KNOW THE WORST

Chapter 55

The old lift had completely swallowed me up. Fight as I would, there was no getting away from it. It was not only that one evening, when the queer little shuddering feeling went over me as I watched my husband and Gwendolyn—it was every evening—it became even every woman.

And that, I think, is the worst thing in the world. One known enemy can be fought with some sort of intelligence—but what is the woman to do who must look upon every other member of her own sex as a possible problem, let us say, if not an actual enemy?

That evening Win was devoted to Gwendolyn. But the next evening we were at a theatre party, and there were four women and two men. Three of us sat in the front of the box—Jimmie Squire and a worldly-wise little woman whom I knew to be 30 but who posed as 22 and Win, sat behind us. It was only accidently that I turned to find my fur—and saw Win holding hands with the girl, their hands more or less concealed under her great feather fan.

I turned back from that a little shocked and revolted, not at what I saw—it was too silly and childish to be shocking, but by the sudden discovery that Win, my ideal of everything fine and good, was getting to be nothing more than a philanderer.

So it wasn't to be only Gwen—it was to be every attractive woman!

Again I tried going my own way, as that winter ran along. But my way and Win's way more or less coincided. They had to, for we were naturally invited together.

By this time Gwen had succeeded in one, at least, of the schemes she was forever playing with. She managed to juggle things so that conductor of one of the symphony orchestras. This gave him immediate social position, to say nothing of immediate money, which I suspect he needed.

Gwen still played patroness to our old friend Nardonski, was made him—this time as the successful patroness. She had a box at every concert, and she attended them all, and when Nardonski was applauded, he always bowed to her as well as to his audience. And Win was asked again and again to go with her. Gwen asked me too. I must say for her that she rarely slipped on a question of social form. But as often as possible I managed to have other things to do, so I could refuse.

"I miss my Cherry Blossom at my concerts," Nardonski managed to say to me once when we met at a party.

"Why the Cherry Blossom?" I asked, somewhat rudely I think.

"Don't you remember?" His lifted brows and puckered mouth expressed the greatest surprise. Don't you remember that I called you 'Cherry Blossom' the first night I met you? You were so fragile and delicate—so—"

I smiled at him, my smile somewhat cynical and disconcerting to the very pampered gentleman. He had remembered—but he had gotten the name wrong! It was not "Cherry Blossom" that he had called me.

"I am often at your concerts. You are a great conductor," I said, afraid I had been rude and anxious now to remove any such impression.

He beamed with delight.

"Will you come the third Wednesday from this? You shall have a box in which I wish you to sit alone. I will play the Love Music—do you remember, that you played for me one evening at our dear Gwen's house? You were so beautiful that night—that I called you Cherry—"

"I'll come with pleasure."

"I'll play the Love Music. They will think it is for them, the stupid audience, but I shall play it directly to you, for you—you will inspire—"

"How delightful, to be an inspiration!" I said this nervously. I had no desire to get into a flirtation with this dark eyed, too impulsive man. But I went, as I promised. Only I took my always faithful Colin with me, since Win refused to go.

"Don't drag me to highbrow concerts, I hate them," he said pettishly.

"But I thought you must like them. You go to so many with Gwen," I answered, stung to sudden anger.

"I never hear the music. I like to have people sit and admire her and to be there when old Nardonski bows to her," he answerd.

Again there was that odd simplicity that in its earlier stages had so fascinated me. But now the simplicity lay only in his confession that he liked to be dragged into the limelight, even thought it was as the lesser satellite around the shining star that was Gwendolyn herself!

"Are you in love with her?" I asked suddenly, keeping my voice level and calm.

"Not particularly," he answered, equally cool. "No more so that I am with all a dozen others. You know I like brilliant women, women who go out and accomplish things. I like to be with them and listen to them."

That remark hurt more than anything else he could have said then. For I knew these women so much better than he—I had introduced him to all of them—and now, caught by their glittering surface, he was turning from me to them. He could not see below the surface, as I could—and I was responsible for the very thing that was dragging him away from me.

## HESITATION

Chapter 56

At some time or other we all have to stop and think where we are drifting. I thought of it often enough as the winter days went by, and as the eternal empty round of social frivolity little by little dragged down my vitality.

Win and I were nominally living together. Actually we had drifted as far apart as two people can—and still be together day in and day out in a five-room apartment.

It finally reached the state where we went out very little together. I tried to accept Gwendolyn's invitations. I tried to have her and the people she fancied at my own home—and gave it up at last as impossible.

Her attitude changed I think in response to my own. Gwen was the sort who must surround herself with people. She rarely had less than a dozen in the room with her. She might dislike me intensely—as I think she did—but it would make no difference to her because my company was so to speak, diluted by that of so many others. She had about her a great many people she did not like and a great many that merely bored her but it never mattered because there were always so many others.

So she simply asked Win without me finally—an arrangement I found much easier. Here big affairs were different. I was asked to these and accepted and we were very charming to each other. That social duty over we began to ignore each other again. Win was asked, and went, to her intimate teas and dinners.

The comments about this, when it began to get out and to be talked about it, were very odd—and interesting later when I took a less personal view of the whole thing.

"I'm glad you've ceased to be such a little clinging vine," my father said once. He was back from a run through the South and was already restlessly planning to go abroad. But he was staying in the city for a month and was often at my place afternoons.

"I met Winthrop at Gwen's," he went on. "Fascinating woman. I suppose that's why the other women do not like her. Evidently you don't, since I've been there four times and haven't seen you. Did you drop her or did she drop you?"

"It was mutual" I answered coelly. "We have nothing in common."

"Nothing but Win," he remarked, then laughed lightly. "You seem to have him in common."

I made no retort. Later Aunt Harriet was with me, one stormy afternoon when I was staying indoors with a heavy cold.

"All the town talks of Win's devotion to Gwen," she remarked. "I'm broad minded. I don't believe in a woman ttying a man to her apron strings merely because she has married him. But really, you know Win is carrying this too far. It's not only Gwen, but he's constantly with Polly Squire and with Djuna Felton."

"Is he?" I asked indifferently. "Well, they're both nice enough—if one likes their type. I don't."

"Nor I," replied my aunt. "As I said I'm very broad minded about these things, but after all there's a certain good taste to be displayed. However, I must say, Constance, I'm inclined to blame you. If a woman can't hold her husband's affection more than a year and a half—"

"Father seems to think it's quite the proper thing for Win to run all over the town with every other woman," I answered cheerfully.

"Your father!" Aunt Harriet was roused at once, all the old opposition came out at once. Aunt Harriet switched to my side immediately. I could have said nothing more effective to bring her around to my defence.

But it was Colin, after all, with whom I really discussed the great problem that confronted me.

Colin was in every day, either for tea or for the evening. When I chose to stay home and dine, he came at my phone call his quiet, humorous talk acting like a tonic to my nerves.

And the rare days when he did not appear were blanks. It did not matter whether it was only a meeting among a party of friends at some big house, it was simply his presence, the sense of his sympathy that kept me going.

"I asked you once what I was going to do about all this," I said one afternoon. It was late in the winter and the sun came warmly through the windows of the apartment though the streets were covered with slush and melting snow.

"I remember. I didn't help you any," he answered lighting a cigarette by slipping the end of a long piece of paper between the logs of my blazing fire, and using its flame. The glare of the flame threw into relief his ugly profile, his wide mouth his brilliant red hair. It was always odd that so ugly a man could be so beautiful.

"I know what I'm going to do now," I answered. "I'm going to leave Win."

He was stirred for once from the little cloak of composure that completely covered him always. He straightened up from his hunched position in the low chair. He threw his newly lit cigarette into the fire and turned to stare at me.

"That is—I think—I think I am."

"As bad at that!" he said, still staring at me. "Tell me about it, Connie. Things usually aren't so bad you know after all. Win is pretty young, and he really is very founof you—"

"Fond won't do—he's fond of others too. I can't quite make up my mind. I'm miserable staying here. I'd be as miserable more so, away. But I think—Colin I with I could make up my mind. I can't go on with this."

## DECISION

Chapter 57

Colin continued to stare at me and I continued to stare miserably into the fire. So there was silence in the room for a few moments. Finally I repeated:

"I can't go on with this."

"No, that's evident," Colin responded, beginning to light another cigarette. "But I don't want you to do anything rash. Tell me about it. You know sometimes when a thing seems unbearable, if you'll only talk about it to someone—"

"Talking about it won't help this time," I said. "Besides, I've talked about it a lot to you. Surely you can see too? You've been out with me. You've seen how Win acts when we are together. Why, even my aunt is shocked because he neglects me quite openly for other people."

"I have been out with you, but not much with that set where I first met you," Colin said, hunching himself up again the chair and turning once more toward the fire. "You know how Mrs. Van Brugh is, all enthusiasm one day, all forgetfulness the next."

"She's dropped you—?"

"She's dropped me. The winter I met you, Iwas her pet. She was going to discover me, to be my patroness. To give her her due, Connie, she did a lot for me. She had me meet a great many people with a lot of money who wanted portraits done at high prices. Thanks to her, I have a rich clientele, I am financially successful."

"You did a wonderful painting of her, the best she ever had done."....

"One could do no less in gratitude," Colin said simply.

"It was the sensation of the Spring Exhibition. It helped enormously to make her the most discussed woman in New York. And that's what she wanted." I said this viciously.

"Perhaps. But she is fascinating to paint. I could not have helped but make a good portrait."

"I believe you still like her."

Colin turned his head to look at me, a little smile widening still more this extraordinarily wide mouth. I felt ashamed of my remark at once. Colin always had that effect upon me when he turned to look at me—he made me ashamed of whatever I was saying or doing that was wrong.

"I believe I do," he answered calmly. I wouldn't in your place, but then I have no reason not to like her—except for the shabby way she has treated you. There's no excuse for that.

"Gwen is an odd, perverse creature," went on, settling down into the chair for a long talk. "You know, a good many years ago, when I was a poor art student here in town, before I managed to get to Paris, I used to see her a lot. I didn't know her. She had money, she was in school, she was always doing things to get her name in the papers. The papers often had her picture in, I cut one out once and made a pencil sketch of it. Some odd, devilish gleam in her eyes interested me."

"Did she have red hair then?" I asked, cattishly.

"No blonde. She dyed it black in Paris—after her divorce. That's when your father knew her. That's when I met her. I was trying to make a name there, viling among the art students. She made it a fad of hers to run around in the Latin Quarter and in Montmartre, and to know all the struggles and poor wretches of students. She was nice to us too. She helped a lot of us out of tight places.

"So when I came back to New York, and began working here and began earning a little money and gaining a little reputation, I wrote her of my progress. She never answered, but she remembered my letters and when she came here, she had my address and sent for me. She's rather nice, if you get on her nice side."

"Evidently I didn't."

anyway. You are so different from Gwen. Gwen goes dashing about into one enthusiasm after another. Nardonski came after me. She began playing him up, and forgot me. She liked your gold hair and your round blue eyes and your general air of being a sweet little girl, and she would have been very nice to you if you had let her. The fact that you are younger than she is, and pretty where she is merely attractive and eccentric, would not have mattered at all. Gwen must be given credit for that. She has not the ordinary petty jealousy of one woman toward another."

I had never heard Gwendolyn so analyzed. In spite of myself I listened with interest. In spite of my dislike, I knew Colin was speaking fairly to her.

"But then there was Win—if she is above ordinary feminine traits, she might have let him alone. There were plenty of others—"

"Well, there you have it—Gwen's worst fault. She's perverse. She'll do anything people disapprove of, if only to show them she doesn't care for their disapproval. If you had not shown a little jealousy because of her interest in Win, I doubt whether she would have taken him up. After all, she can have no interest in him. There are lots of other men quite ready to be as devoted as she'll let them, who have more—well, who are more interesting than Winthrop. After all, he's very young. He's immature—forget it, Connie and let it all stay as it is for awhile. She'll lose interest if she sees you don't care any more, and he'll lose interest too—"

"That decides me," I said suddenly. "I don't care to sit about and wait for the other woman to drop him, in order to have him back. I have enough independence to to—drop him first."

## RECRIMINATIONS

Chapter 58

But to decide to leave and to carry out the decision, were two entirely different matters, as I soon found out.

It was difficult enough to make up my mind to break with Win—even a few weeks before I would not have thought it possible. I was in love with him, inspite of everything that had happened—in spite of the distrust between us, the long standing absence of sympathy the quite opposite points of view that we led.

Up to a few weeks before this talk with Colin I had only one idea—to hold on, desperately, to him, to any least point of contact, to any slight chance that would bring us together again.

Now I had abandoned all such ideas. I could not stay. I did not know what it would be like to leave. I had no idea where I would go. It would mean comment, gossip for a week or so, a little cynical laughter from some people—and then that would be over and they would accept the new arrangement. It meant, perhaps, that I would never see Winthrop—but wasn't even that better than to be pinned and hurt whenever I was with him?

Sitting there in the firelight after Colin had gone, I went back over our life together. How little we understood each other at the start! I was pretty and fashionable. He thought I could give him the frivolous, empty, gaudy life he seemed to delight in. He was straightforward, simple and honest with me. I thought he would give me the quiet wholesome life I seemed to want and to like.

I thought about my family and wondered where I had inherited my simple, domestic tastes. Not from my sophisticated father—to him correct form was everything. Not from his part of the family for my aunt made fashion a religion.

I wondered whether it had come from my mother—the mother I did not remember, about whom I knew almost nothing. I was going to find out about her. I determined that.

Meantime—where was I to go? To my aunt's? That meant my old suite of rooms in her house, a round of dances, dinners, dressmakers—no, there was no improvement in that.

I had to go off alone, at least to live alone. It did not make an appealing picture.

The door swung open and Win came in. He switched on all the lights. He always did when passing through a room or entering. He fairly lived in a glare of electricity.

He looked at the tea table—with its two empty cups.

"Who's been here?" he asked.

"Colin. He left early," I answered.

"He seems to have left you in a romantic mood, since I find you staring at the dying fire in a dark room. Romantic, but not specially cheerful."

"My thoughts weren't romantic, neither were they specially cheerful," I answered.

"Thinking of Colin—?"

"No, not of Colin, of you."

"Oh, so I'm neither romantic nor cheerful! Well, we've been married nearly two years. I suppose you can't expect a honeymoon to last that long.

"It would have lasted if you had tried a little," I began, eager to make my point clear. "I tried to do things your way—I would not even mind going about all the time to these silly places—only—"

"Only what?" Already his brows were drawn together, his face set in the sullen lines I dreaded so.

"Only—the other women. I mean, since I was in love with you, it did hurt me to see you flirting so outrageously."

"There you go again. You accuse me of flirting every time I'm merely pleasant to another woman. I never say a word about that little red headed painter who hangs around you all the time—"

"You know I only like Colin, there's nothing flirtatious about that. If you mind him, I'll never see him again. I don't care."

"And there it is!" He assumed at once the expression of a martyr. "You want to tie yourself to me hand and foot, and expect me to tie myself to you. Why shouldn't I see these other people? It's harmless enough. Some of them like attention. Some of them expect me to hold their hands occasionally and say pretty things. It means nothing to them or to me. It's part of the game."

"I don't like that sort of game!"

Win frowned. He looked rather handsome when he frowned, his well marked brows made a straight dark line across his forehead. His gray eyes had a certain fire that they often lcked at other times.

"Well, I do," he said shortly. "I see no harm in it. You're a prude."

"And you—"

I stopped short. We were quarrelling again. What was the use of saying bitter and nasty things? It only made the gulf wider. I hated to quarrel, I thought it rude and vulgar—yet Win often tempted me into it.

"If you would see things my way a little—" I began.

"If you would see things my way a little," he interrupted. But you are as stubborn—"

"As stubborn as you are." And if it is a satisfaction to a woman to have the last word, as the saying goes, I had that satisfaction. It was the only sort of solace I did have.

## LONELY PLANS

Chapter 59

I had no heart next day for anything. There were enough things I was supposed to do—a bazaar where I was to serve, dressed in a fancy costume, to coax contributions for charity; and after that a dinner and after that a late dance at the home of one of my friends. I could, if I wanted, kill time until two or three in the morning, and spend the hours surrounded by constantly changing crowds of people.

I thought of the people—no one of them interested me. Mrs. Marsden ran the bazaar, she was getting extremely fat. Gwen would drop in for tea there in the afternoon, probably with half a dozen devoted followers. She would wander about looking very magnificent. Win might be one of the "followers."

I had Ellen telephone that I was ill and could not serve that day and after a late breakfast, I went off for a walk. I turned east, thinking vaguely to go to Mrs. Anderson's and see the baby. Little Connie was not as well as she might be, poor child, and no wonder, since she breathed the odor of hot suds all day.

I walked there and sat and played with her awhile. She was growing into a very bright child, with blue eyes and soft brown hair and a fine skin, pathetically pale for a baby. I wished I could get her out in the country again.

The visit only depressed me more. I started home, desperately lonely and worried and tired too. The crowded flats of the street near the river, with their network of iron fire escapes and the eternally airing pillows and blankets, gave way to old fashioned boarding houses, once fine brownstone front

(Continued on page 11)

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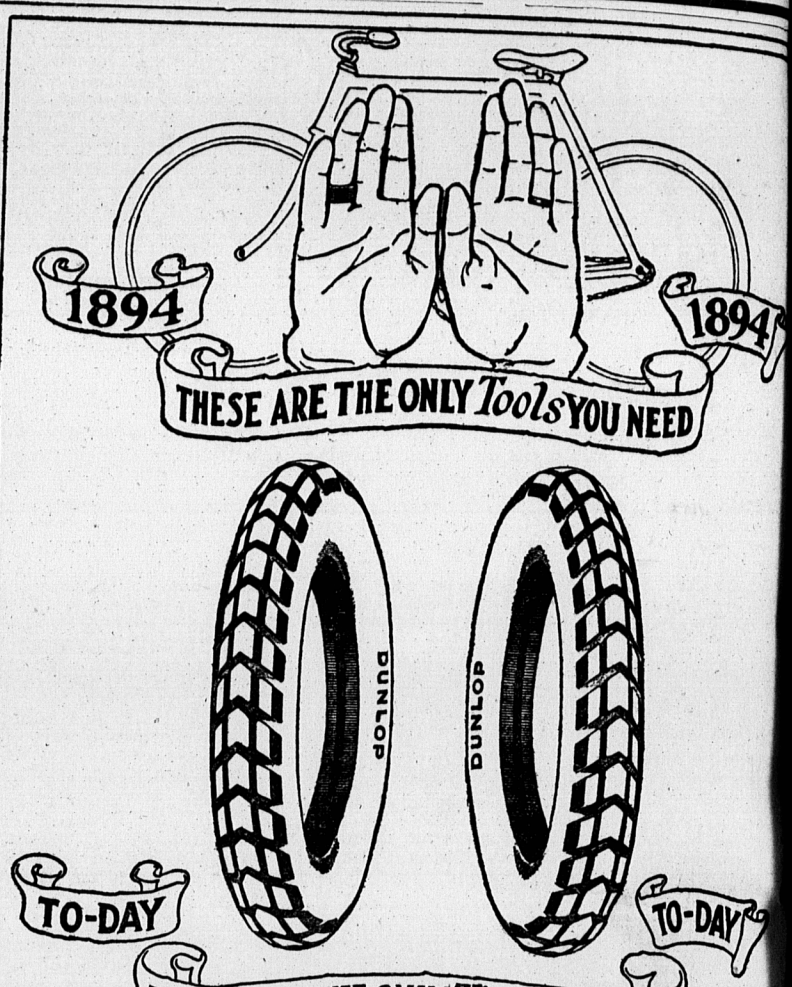


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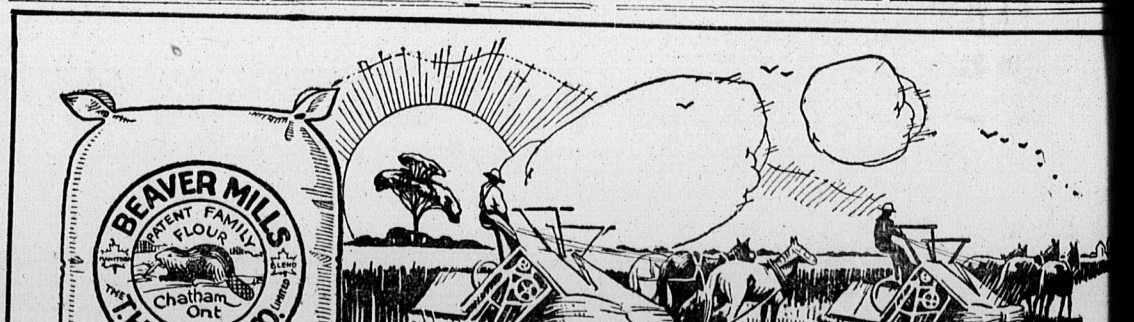


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