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**A Sweetheart at Thirty**

THE STORY OF A WOMAN'S TRANSFORMATION  
By Marlon Rubincam

**AN UNKIND REMARK**

Chapter 8

So it was decided Violet could go, as far as the money was concerned. When her first enthusiasm was over—and she was pleased enough to more than reward me for the gifts of my little inheritance—she ran out to the kitchen again to write to all the nearer girls colleges, for catalogues.

James and Laura came home while she was out.

Laura, at 21, was the image of Esther at 18. Indeed, one day Laura had put on her mother's old wedding gown to go to a dress party, and then had combed her hair to imitate Esther's. For Esther had had a photograph taken of herself in all her wedding finery, the day before the ceremony, and the picture was in the house of honor, in a brass frame, in the parlor mantel. And for a joke, but Pearsall had brought around his camera and taken a picture of Laura in the same prim attitude Esther had posed in, all face, and holding a bouquet of flowers. And the snapshot might have been taken of the picture instead of the girl, so much alike did they seem.

"Laura's all my family," Esther would often say complacently.

And she was.

She was already too stout, her figure was of the matronly maturity of 30. Her skin was the wonderful creamy whiteness of the healthy country girl, her cheeks were prettily pink. She had brownish-gold hair, straight and lank, and it never combed neatly. Her gray eyes were always bland in expression, except for occasional bursts of sullenness. Her nose would have been nicely shaped had it not been thick at the tip and her mouth was heavy. She was ordinarily good natured; she hated lessons, indeed she left in the second year of High School. She read perhaps two books a year and they were novels.

But her shoulders were beautifully formed, her arms as strong and white and firm as could be. She had chubby hands too, and small, flat nails that broke easily. Esther loved housework and her greatest joy was to take a better look than any other woman in the village. There was no bond between herself and Violet at all. Laura was smiling with pleasure when she came in.

"Look mother!" she exclaimed, holding out a piece of linen. "Ever since all this row, Mrs. Dwyer showed me a new stitch—so neat on an old yard."

She broke off as Violet came into the room.

"Guess what, Laura! Vi cried, "I'm going to college this fall!"

The smile of satisfaction on Laura's face changed slowly, as this news seeped into her mind. Gradually the smile gave way to a more curious expression—surprise, then something that looked like envy, and finally a slight bitterness marred her mouth.

But her words were—

"Well, do tell. This is sudden. Did father say so?"

"He did after Aunt Enid promised to send me. She's going to give me all her money—enough for a couple of years at least. And I'm to live near the college. It will be in a big city—think even in New York."

The mention of the biggest city in the country was uttered in an awestruck voice. We were not so far from the metropolis but Violet had never been there, and she wanted to go more than any other girl I knew.

For that matter, I had never been there either.

Laura sat down. The queer expression still remained. She looked from the way her mouth pursed up, as though she were tasting something sour. And indeed something had soured in her, and never again was her attitude towards her younger sister quite the same. But this we did not see for a long time of course.

Small minds have little room for generosity. That is one of the first emotions to be crowded out of a woman must go forward, or go

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back—there is no standing still if she does not keep her soul filled with the sweetness of love, it will indeed turn hard and sour within her.

"Well, of course, I always knew you wanted to go, but I didn't think father could afford it," Laura said later.

"But it's Aunt Enid—its her money, is it?"

"You're not going to take her money, are you?" Laura's voice rose shrilly.

"Of course, because it's so sweet of her to offer it. And I'm going to pay it back later. Why Laura think, if I have enough education I can do anything—I can be rich."

Laura broke in sharply, "Yes, teach school here for maybe 10 or 15 a week. Or marry Bud Pearsall, who won't be a farmer and can't be much else; seems to me you'd better let Aunt Enid keep her money for her old age."

"I don't think I'll need it back for a while," I said gently.

Laura looked at me her eyes flashed suddenly. Then the light of resentment went out, leaving them blank and gray.

"You'll need it soon enough," she answered. "You'll be an old woman before Vi pays it back. You're old now."

"She looked seriously like Esther when she said it."

So all of them thought me old!

I TRY AN EXPERIMENT

The events of that week and the few weeks following only deepened the feeling that Violet and I must get away from the sort of life we were leading.

Can you imagine the helplessness of a woman who has decided things for her, and left me free to turn my mind to myself.

And what was I to do? Life on the Haine's farm was slowly becoming intolerable.

I had attained the first stage of growth, which is discontent. Discontent has been called "divine fire" because it leads to sincere efforts towards betterment.

But men and women never progress beyond this first stage of discontent. Again and again, when I had a few moments to myself, I returned to the mirror in my room, trying to decide what was wrong with myself, and wondering what I could do to correct it.

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thought, I decided to take the staff and make it up.

"Then here's my blue sash—wait and I'll pin it around you." Vi suited the action to the word and we'll turn in the neck a wee bit. Wait till I take of your collar, we'll put some lace around—so.

While I stood there she worked out her inspiration with ribbons and lace and pins. Of course I was flattered. I was so interested I even forgot the garden seeds and Esther working along getting dinner.

"My hair looks so funny," I said presently. I wore it combed back from the face and made it into a firm knot on top of my head—so it would stay all day.

"How did you used to wear it?" the girl asked all interest in her work.

"Parted at one side, and very fluffy," I told her, "and a blue bow in the knot."

Interested and curious I pulled down my hair, I tried to comb it as I had when I was a girl. It was stiff from having been brushed one way for years and it refused to fluff. The knot, made with unaccustomed fingers, was stiff and ugly. The blue bow Violet made of her to offer it. And I'm going to pay it back later. Why Laura think, if I have enough education I can do anything—I can be rich."

Laura broke in sharply, "Yes, teach school here for maybe 10 or 15 a week. Or marry Bud Pearsall, who won't be a farmer and can't be much else; seems to me you'd better let Aunt Enid keep her money for her old age."

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What of the woman like myself, denied love and a husband and children? Should we not have died in the very beginning? Surely there was something else—

Esther's voice went on: "Enid was pretty, and she was awful romantic. Her mother had sentimental ideas, and named her out of a book. When we was—I mean when we were both kids we used to play real lively games, and Enid would shin up trees and go over fences—remember the day we tried to ride the red cow and you got thrown over the wall?"

I laughed and nodded. Those days did seem dim and far off.

"And when we weren't playing with our toys, I remember the reading—mostly fairy tales, you remember though you were getting big, 12 or 13. But you liked the romantic stories."

"Then I got married, and Enid seemed to grow up awful fast—I guess she had to work hard and that'll make any girl grow up fast. Anyway, after Jim and I moved here, and just before Enid came here to live, she seemed to grow up over night. I remember the first time Mark Upjohn saw you was a kid, and the next visit you was grown up."

I started a little Mark Upjohn I had forgotten him. I doubt whether I had thought of him for years.

Laura stopped peeling potatoes and started.

"Mark Upjohn! Related to the Upjohns at Sanders' Corners?" she asked.

"Yes, of Hannah Upjohn and Marcus. She was cousin to Mary Baxter out on the Turnpike and they lived in Henly Falls then. Hannah and Mary are both cousins of the Dwyers."

Esther had all the family genealogies of the neighborhood at her finger tips. And it was a complicated subject, for all the people around our way were related.

"Mark Upjohn!" Esther repeated. "He used to be crazy over Enid. She could have had him too if she'd tried. He hasn't been around here for years."

PLANS

Chapter 11

I fancied there was a slight change in Laura's manner after the day her mother told her that she had one had a "bean"—the word is Laura's. Before this she had always considered me as a nonentity, someone who did odd jobs about the house some one her father supported—and this because I paid no board at my brother's though I did as much work as a hired girl who would have been boarded free and given a salary as well.

A dependent, or a dependent wife often has all the disadvantages. For she gets no salary, and expected to be grateful for her job as well.

"My case of course was a little different. I had some money—only a hundred or so a year—as my share of the rent of the little house where I had been born. This I spent on the three children, usually for Christmas and birthday presents. Esther bought my clothes when she bought her own. Then I had the little inheritance that was to go part way towards sending Violet to college."

Violet had never treated me as a nonentity, and James had been kindly and tolerant. Few boys his age consider old maid aunts as useful creatures, but James was always very nice to me. Laura alone openly looked down upon me.

"I'll bake the cake, I do it better than you," she would say, when we were planning a Saturday's work. Or I'll scrub the porch, I can do it faster."

And so on, with many items of work. My ability to do beautiful darnings was the only thing where I excelled her. Consequently, I had all the family mending—and there was always plenty of it.

The May days ran along. Violet had to be excused from all work at home; her time was taken preparing for the final examinations at school—to be followed at once by entrance examinations for college. We had not yet decided which college she was to go to.

And when the discussion came Laura's hostile feeling towards me grew rather marked, though for a while after Esther's talk of the man who once was in love with me Laura had shown me more respect.

"As long as I can do this at all I want to do it right," Vi said one evening, school books and catalogues piled before her on the kitchen table. Esther and I were washing the dishes. Laura had gone outside to the spring house to look after the milk and butter.