

The Girl Who Had No Chance

By MARION RUBINCAM

THE APOLOGY

Chapter 99

Ruth did not answer for so long that Tim repeated his question. "Any way, we weren't engaged when I came to New York, were we, Ruth?"

He was still standing, or rather leaning against the table, head down and arms folded, the smoking cigarette held between his fingers. Several ideas flashed through Ruth's mind. What did he mean?

Did he hope they were engaged—or that they weren't? Did he feel that in some way he had done a dishonorable thing in not letting her know how affairs stood between himself and Myra?

Was he trying to soothe his own conscience when he asked in this way whether or not they were engaged?

"What do you mean?" Ruth asked. But she answered by saying immediately—"We weren't."

But this, again, had the unexpected effect on the man. Instead of seeming relieved, Tim grew moody.

"Even so, I acted pretty rotten," he remarked, disgust of himself in his tones.

"You couldn't help falling in love with Myra—" Ruth began to defend him against himself.

"That's just it, I wasn't!" Tim straightened up suddenly and turned to face Ruth, still leaning or lounging against the big table.

"Ruth, you've got to hear me say this, I don't care what you think."

The girl settled down in the chair, and waited.

"You can say we weren't engaged when I came here—that's part of your sweetness. But we were. At least I certainly considered myself so when I landed here and when I went to work."

"I wasn't getting much and out of that I tried to save a little. I bought my lunch in cheap places and sometimes went without. I walked instead of riding to work. I did all sorts of things like that to put by nickles and quarters. I liked to do it. I knew you were having a hard time there alone in that barn of a house, trying to make ends meet, and I used to go hungry on the days when I got so worried for fear you were hungry too. You were pretty poor then."

"I remember quite well," Ruth said quietly.

"Of course I went to see Myra. She was your friend—and I was so lonesome anyone whose face I'd ever seen before would have been welcome. I never liked Myra much in the old days at home. She used to run after me—"

Ruth stirred impatiently. She did not want to hear this, but Tim went on.

"She used to run after me. I thought you knew it. She even called me up to take her to the class dance when you graduated, though she knew I wanted to ask you."

"You didn't—till the night before."

"Because Myra had phoned and I promised to go with her. I guess she got an attack of conscience the day before, for she called up and said something about getting her dates twisted. Of course I asked you, I always wanted to. I never wanted to see any of the girls in our crowd at home but you."

"Anyway, I got to know Myra better in the city. She was different, or I thought she was. Her cousin had a good effect on her. You know Myra takes after the people she's with—give her an afternoon with Gaby and she'll come home full of Gaby's mannerisms and tricks—same way with Emily—same way with even some of these people living around us that we've picked up since we married."

He ground out the smouldering end of the cigarette in an ash tray on the table, and went on:

"But I thought she was lots different and much more interesting. And I was lonely, so I came around a lot. She had such pretty clothes—not like those girls at home wore. She was so—"

"Never mind, I know," Ruth said. She could see just how alluring Myra at the age had been.

"I kissed her once. That was

when I first felt—well, as though I had hurt you. But she liked it, and I kissed her again, of course. I began to run around town with her. I had to buy good clothes to go with that set, so I borrowed money. And we just drifted along. The other fellows paid the bills for the parties until I was so sick of not having money I was ready to rob for it."

"Then that guy—I forget his name—came along to readjust our office. He was pretty efficient, he knew just how much labor we needed for every job, and where the men should work and how to fix them so they worked better. He made psychology tests of some, and made lists change jobs to ones in the office they were better fitted for."

"But he found I was useless there, not needed, only an addition on the payroll. That meant exit for me—but he was awfully decent. He was so sorry he got me another job—and at a better salary. You can bet I was glad he came around then!"

"So when he mentioned he was going on to Market-town I gave him a letter to you, by way of showing him I was grateful. And I thought you might rent him a room—you needed people in your house. Did he come? I forget his name—was it Will?"

Ruth pointed to a card that lay under the great bunch of roses on the table. Tim read it—it said "Langley Williams."

He looked up suddenly.

JEALOUSY

Chapter 100

"Langley Williams—yes, that's him!" Tim said. "He looked you up? Is he in town?"

"No, he's at home."

"What's his card doing here then?"

"He sent the flowers," Ruth answered simply.

"There was a silence."

"How did he get them?"

"I suppose he sent an order to a city florist," Ruth answered with great unconcern—secretly thinking how the same question had agitated her until she learned how Langley's flowers came to be on her table.

"Now I remember!" Great light dawned on Tim. "He's the guy—the fellow you talked about the other night—the one that's been working on this new building operation with you—"

"Yes, he's the one."

"Are you in love with him?"

"Tim!" Ruth stood up, the color coming to her cheeks. "That's the second time you've asked that sort of question. Did you come back here to talk like this?"

"You are in love with him!" Tim, relaxed, slouched again once more against the table. He stared at the floor a moment.

"You said something about apologizing," Ruth said. "You've already done so. Don't you think—"

"No, I'm not going yet," he was growing angry too. He came and stood by her chair, looking down at her.

"I did come to apologize—only, well, that man was mentioned, and it interrupted me."

Ruth almost laughed outright at this silly excuse.

"Why go on, Tim?" she asked. "I know the whole story. You didn't mean to get into a real love affair with Myra. She was sweet and pretty and pleasant—and the first thing you knew you were in love! Why not? I was at home, doing nothing interesting, only worrying Myra was near you where you could see her, she was doing all sorts of interesting things."

"You were doing the real things. You were putting up a fight to make money for a sick father and a family. Myra was living off her parents and doing nothing to deserve what they gave her. But you're wrong—I almost fell in love, but I didn't really. But I guess I must have said something, maybe I did ask her to marry me, in some sentimental mood. You ought to see that living room her cousin had—soft lights, cushions, beautiful things sitting around—everything to put a man in a sentimental mood—no wonder I lost my head!"

He stared at her for a moment. Ruth was trying to keep her dignity. But the air in the room was electric. She was getting nervous, and she felt when she grew nervous

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or frightened that she would lose control of the situation.

"But I was in love with you all the time," he said suddenly. "I never forgot you, though I felt mighty uncomfortable about the way I acted. And when Myra said you were falling in love with someone else she never mentioned names, she pretended you didn't want her to say who it was—well, I got furiously jealous. I wanted to come home and punch his head—then I remembered I was engaged to another girl and had just as good as jilted you. And when you came to the city, you remember—for that visit?"

Ruth nodded.

"Then I knew I loved you, and not Myra. But after you left—well, she has a way of not making me care. She takes things so easily herself, she makes me feel that way to—sort of letting them slide. Maybe it's a good thing—"

The girl wanted to protest that it wasn't, but held her peace.

"But Myra was wrong when she thought she's make me stop caring by pretending you were in love with another man. That only made me want you more. The night I took you to a show—do you remember—she told me something like that, and I wanted to ask you it all evening and didn't dare. Then we got to your boarding house, and stood in the little vestibule while I unlocked the door for you—do you remember—Ruth, I kissed you—I was so jealous, Ruth!"

The girl started, she tried to push her chair back, but it was heavy and she could not move it. She tried to rise to get away, and she found herself suddenly in the man's arms.

Instinctively she fought to get away, only to have his arms come more tightly around her. Every emotion went through her, anger that he should dare to touch her, and that she could not fight free. In her head was the thought of the night in the vestibule when he had kissed her before, and of her mad joy in his kisses.

One arm was around her, in some way he had caught her hanging hair and pulled her head back so her face was turned up towards his. They stood looking at each other an instant so wide-eyed, both a little frightened.

Suddenly Tim laughed—the little low laugh she used to like so much in the old days when they spent long happy evenings by the fire in her living room at home.

"Let me go," she said weekly.

And he kissed her again. And again. Then she knew where she was. And with a sudden rush of clear understanding she remembered she had to be on the white negligee and that her hair was hanging. Her cheeks were scarlet when she looked up.

"Tim, please! You mustn't—" she began.

He said something in answer, but she did not hear it. He took both her hands and pulled her over to the couch, and sat down by her. He held both hands in one of his, and he suddenly threw back his head to toss his hair from his forehead.

It was a gesture that used to fascinate Ruth to watch, it was a conqueror's gesture. She waited now knowing that with his free hand he would smooth back the hair. And he did. And all the old tenderness came back to her.

"Ruth dear—I know, I'll go in a minute. I shouldn't—but I can't help it!"

He was elated, exalted, by his little triumph. His eyes were shining his whole face had an animation it lacked before—Tim was once more the bright, energetic boy she had adored—he was the Tim of the old days.

It threw its spell over her, the fascination of watching this sudden transformation. A few moments before she had looked at him impersonally, criticising his bent shoulders and drooping head!

And he kissed her again, seeing something of this in her eyes.

For one long moment he held her against him. For one long moment Ruth forgot everything in the caress.

Then the phone rang. Its sudden buzzing made them both start; it broke the spell. Ruth sprang up, her face white, one hand at her heart.

"Never mind, someone calling. Don't look so scared. Shall I answer? Tim asked, much calmer than she was.

She shook her head.

"Who can it be?" She picked up the receiver. Per "hello" was so weak that she had to repeat it three times before she was heard. Then her face, if possible, grew still whiter.

"Wait a moment," she said into the phone.

"It's Myra," she whispered to Tim.

"Yes, hello," she said again into the phone. "What? No, I wasn't asleep. My voice—oh, there's nothing wrong with it. What—is Tim here?"

Wide, frightened blue eyes turned towards the man. He shook his head violently.

"No," she said, obeying his gesture. "What? No, he hasn't been here. But I thought you said he always went out Saturdays—yes, I'd like to see you tomorrow. Come for me. I'll call up Gaby too, if you want." She was getting control of her voice. "My voice better? Well, I was a little sleepy. Goodnight."

She put the phone back on its table and turned to face the man.

"You made me tell a lie," she said furiously. "You made me lie—why didn't you go?"

"I'm going," he said miserably. "I'm sorry, I apologize—that's all I seem to do. But I'm going to telephone you Monday."

AN INTERLUDE

Chapter 102

The door closed, and the lock clicked as it fell into place. Ruth was alone.

She dropped to the couch, her hands pressed against her cheeks, staring at the door. She was only conscious of a tremendous silence and the beating of her own heart.

Then she wondered whether it was late, so she got up and went to the window. From there she could see over the buildings to the great clock in Madison Square Tower, its face out lined in light against the dark sky.

It was only half past ten—the chiming began sounding as she looked out over the city.

So the whole second half of his visit had taken much less than half an hour! She could not believe this, and stared at the clock face again to make sure. Then she stood looking from the window—the city made an illuminated map below her. From her high window she

And feeling his arms loosen, she pulled away.

But it was only to be caught suddenly again. And Tim kissed her before she could turn away her face.

It was not the sweet affectionate caress she had seen before, when Tim came home to greet Myra. It was the hot impulsive caress of the old days—the days when she and Tim were much in love—when nothing in the world mattered beyond that—when Ruth, through all the hard work and discomfort of the day, had this evening visit to look forward to, and Tim's love to strengthen her when she was discouraged.

For a moment she forgot where she was. It seemed only as though Tim had run up to the big house on Main Street to read a little, to smoke a cigarette and talk to put his hand over hers as it lay on the arm of the chair, to tell her sentimental little things as they stood by the fire to say good night. She should be able to hear Mrs. Belding's footsteps on her way up the stairs—there was always one stair that creaked under even that light little lady's tread.

And Tim kissed her again. It was more impulsive, too impulsive. Or was that it? She tried to get away though she still had the feeling that she was at home, and ignorant, and faced with the great task of earning a living, of saving a desperate financial situation, and that this man and his love were the only sweet things in a life of hard and discouraging work, and a fight for education.

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could see over all the roofs of the nearer buildings, far down to the tip of the island where the great mass of skyscrapers were, and on each side the moving lights of boats going up and down the two rivers.

It was a gorgeous view which she never tired of, but tonight she did not take it in as she stood and stared from back over the events of the last half hour.

What mad idea was in Tim's mind? And what madness in hers, that she should let him kiss her?

Tim was married. That meant he was absolutely the possession of another woman, and that there was not the slightest excuse for even the most casual caress.

And he had kissed her—several times. It was true she had fought against it—but once, just once, she had yielded. Down in her mind she knew that fighting did her no good, it only made him hold her more closely, but even that did not excuse her to herself.

She still stared out the window, full of shame.

She had yielded to one kiss—feeling all the time that she was back in her old home, and that she and Tim were engaged again. And yet Tim had been married some years, and she had wronged Myra by giving in—to that one caress. Not even the knowledge that Myra had wronged her years before made Ruth excuse herself now.

"Madame is still up?"

She jumped at the sound, and turned to see Marie standing in the doorway between her little boudoir and the living room.

"I rapped, but there was no answer. The curtains kill the sound," Marie said apologetically.

"How long have you been here?" Another fear came to her heart, the guilty fear of being overheard—and misunderstood!

"Only one instant, madame. I am off duty Saturdays. I only now came in. I thought madame's suit needed pressing—"

"Never mind it," Ruth answered. Marie could enter the boudoir from the door on the other corridor. Ruth remembered. She wondered whether the little French girl was telling the truth, or whether she had been in the next room and had overheard.

But the girl's face gave no hint of anything but concern as Ruth stared from the window and came to the centre of the room.

"But you are ill!" she exclaimed. "You have been crying—"

"No, I just feel tired. I'm going to bed."

"I will bring you some hot milk—that will help you sleep."

And Marie went away. Ruth turned out the lights and went to bed. But once more she could not sleep. She stared into the dark while her head grew hotter and hotter and a violent pain began over her forehead.

Not even the glass of hot milk Marie brought in soothed her. After the maid had gone, she still lay awake, trying to think over everything Tim had said.

How had it happened that she had picked her up so suddenly and kissed her?

Then she remembered the interruption when he saw Langley Williams' card on the table and accused her of being in love with him. Why shouldn't she be? What right had Tim to demand whether she was in love with another man? Hadn't Tim gone away, practically deserted her when she was feeling the worst, when the struggle was hardest—to marry a pretty little empty-headed girl who flirted with him?

She never knew Tim was jealous—not in all the years she had known him. That was a hateful quality.

But of course in the old days she never did anything to arouse his jealousy.

Then another thought came into her mind out of the confusion of ideas she was struggling with—Suppose Tim was in love with her!

Had he said so—no, but he had acted as though he were. Certainly he would not dare to have kissed her without even that as an excuse!

Suppose Tim was in love—she was in love too!

That was much worse than before. For it made the struggle twice as hard—a hundred times as hard, she thought suddenly. For Tim, she knew, was not the sort to struggle against anything hard. Tim would yield to every impulse—and what could she do? What should she do now?

STRUGGLE Chapter 103

All through the dark hours Ruth went over and over the problem. As Gaby had said, the fact that one was married might not prevent another from being in love. Tim was married, and fight as she would, she knew that all this time she had still cared for him.

troubled her conscience, but it could not help but soothe a certain feminine feeling that Ruth had deep inside her. It was not vanity—she was incapable of being vain; it was merely that an affection returned in kind is always a happiness.

But it brought up so many problems! Finally she went to sleep, deciding to phone the always sympathetic Gaby and talk it all over with her.

Gaby's first remark, after Ruth had given her the whole story next day, was:

"Well, I thought that might happen!"

"You did!" Ruth exclaimed in the greatest astonishment. "Why?"

"Because you had that effect on him the other time you were here when he was engaged to Myra."

"How did you know he kissed me?" Ruth looked very much puzzled, for that impulsive good-bye in the doorway of the cheap little boarding house had been looked up in her breast ever since.

Gaby laughed, leaning back on the couch, and looking at Ruth with kindly amusement.

"What a dear innocent baby you are in spite of your large salary and your model factory town," she said. "I didn't know about that, Ruthie—you never told. But I did know that she started to fall in love with you all over again. And he was only engaged to Myra then."

"Now, when he's married, the struggle to be faithful, even in his thoughts, would be much stronger because Tim is really the best man in the world in his intentions, and would have no idea of harming Myra. But you are so much prettier than you were—you have everything in your favor now."

"Don't you see?" she went on "when you came here before, you were tired, unhappy, over-worked, worried and poor and shabby—that's a combination to make any one uninteresting—to a man of Tim's type. Now you come back—you've got a whole suite of rooms in one of the finest hotels, you wear lovely clothes and fix your hair so as to look your best, you have a poise you lacked before, you have money, success, the papers talk about you, the Coopers have taken you up—you've everything to make Tim fall in love."

"It was curious that Myra should have phoned just—well, just when Tim kissed me," Ruth said, looking meditatively at her guest. "Gaby, do you suppose she knows?"

"No, of course not. She's too sure of Tim and her own charms. Wait five years—then she'll see she isn't as fascinating as she thinks—"

"I wish she wasn't coming," Ruth said nervously. "It's curious she should have phoned to ask whether he had been here. It wasn't very—"

"Well, tact was never Myra's strongest point," Gaby answered, playing idly with some tassels of a shawl. "However, we'll see when she comes. She should see when I do. 'You shall I do?' Ruth asked. 'You haven't helped me. I believe you're glad Tim seems to be in love with me.'"

Gaby laughed again.

"I know it's wrong, but I am," she said. "You spent so many years feeling miserable because of him, now let him spend a few years feeling sorry because of you. Yes, I hope he is in love with you—it would do him good!"

"But he's married!"

"I know, but Myra doesn't particularly deserve him—or anyone else."

"But—it makes it worse. He'll come around again. I can't help it. He kissed me once, how can I stop him if he tries to again? I can refuse to see him, but he'll come anyway."

"Oh, that part! Well, the only thing to do is to get away. Can't you finish up your business and go home again? I know, he'll make himself a nuisance."

"I can't go back yet. Not for a week or two," Ruth answered. "You should see the list of things I've yet to do and the people I have to see. The Committee sends me new work every day. They're even thinking of putting me in charge of a temporary New York office!"

"Well, then you'll just have to fight it out," Gaby answered. "I'll back you, and you're a plucky fighter."

But Ruth doubted her strength when her heart was involved.

THE TEA PARTY Chapter 104

Myra came in soon after Gaby spoke. Ruth ordered tea, and went over to the big chair near the table, while Myra curled herself up in one corner of the couch.

She was looking very pretty, even though she was growing just a little too stout for real beauty. Her cheeks, always a lovely pink, were glowing from the cold air outdoors; her blonde hair was waved back under a little grey hat that gave expression to her pleasant, shallow eyes.

"Yes, I made it myself," she said, when Gaby remarked on the hat. "I'm getting so clever! Tim says he wouldn't have believed it!" She laughed, a little pleased, self-conscious laugh.

"I wouldn't either," Gaby remarked with slightly veiled sarcasm. "You couldn't darn stockings in the old days. You sent them home to your mother to do."

"Poor mama! Well, her daughter is no longer a burden, she has a great big man to take care of her now."

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came to her suddenly that Myra no longer had such a pretty foot—it was short, and it was—yes, it was pudgy, and the fancy shoes she had purchased showed up all its defects.

Gaby leaned back, her amusement half showing on her face.

"If you'll come and have tea with me," she suggested, "I'll show you all my new things. I've been economizing lately, and I've saved \$500. Then I was told my salary was going up to \$200 a week next month—"

"So you went out and bought a thousand dollars worth of clothes," Ruth laughed, remembering the sudden economics and equally sudden extravagances of this little actress.

"Only \$950!" Gaby answered. "Besides they were bargains—but I don't suppose you'll come to see me on your Sundays out. At least, not while Ruth has this fascinating suite of rooms. My place is so small, I'm economizing on rent. But after Ruth goes—"

"I came to see Ruth for a special purpose," Myra remarked suddenly. Gaby's amused expressions changed to an intent look. Ruth paled visibly.

"I came to say