

A SWEETHEART AT THIRTY

The Story of a Woman's Transformation
BY MARION RUBINCAM

LETTERS FROM HOME

Chapter 23

Next day we indulged ourselves in the great luxury of lying in bed until 8 o'clock. Then we ate the rest of the sandwiches and jam. But both of us had country appetites, and we had money enough for simple necessities, so we went out and walked until we found a little restaurant and there we ordered eggs and coffee, and felt better.

"This is the second time I've been in a restaurant," Violet whispered, looking about the little place curiously. "That one Bud took up to yesterday was the first. Just wait, Aunt Enid, before we're through, we're going to eat in every restaurant in New York."

"Good Lord, child, what an ambition!" I smiled.

This day was given over to sight-seeing. But first we went back to our room.

"It is dingy," I said, critical for the first time. I looked about it, the faded tan walls, the ornate lace curtains, clean enough, but with a gray-cleanliness that would have shocked the soul of any country woman brought up to sun-bleached clothes. They were torn, too, in dozens of places, and the carpet was worn to the back. It, too, was a faded tan, and the counterpane had also the gray cleanliness that comes from careless washing and indoor drying.

Violet went to the closet and took down my Paisley shawl, a possession of my mother's. She mounted a chair and hung it against the wall, twisting the fringe in some tacks to catch it. It made a gorgeous pattern on the long bare wall.

Then the girl, her eyes alight with inspiration, unpacked the big patch-work quilt Esther had sent us, and flung it over the terrible counterpane. Last, she brought out her yellow silk scarf and threw it over the bureau.

"There," she said, stepping back to view the room.

And, indeed, with those three things she had turned a piece of dingy ugliness into one of life and color.

Violet had the home-maker's touch. It was never so much what she did, as the way she did it. The woman who has that touch, carries a magic wand with her, to transform barren places into comfortable homes. Such a woman has a thousand times more chance of being happy than the one who accepts the ugly places, and complains of them, without trying to better them.

But the girl herself, more than her actions, worked the transformation. Violet was so alive, she glowed with health, and radiated happiness. Partly under her influence, partly because the sense of oppression that Esther exercised began to lift, I, too, found myself feeling lighter and happier.

At this moment, there was a knock, and Mrs. Tupper put her head in the doorway around the open door.

"I guess these is for you," and she held out a couple of envelopes. "I see they're both addressed to 'Miss.' One is Miss Violet Haines. One's Miss Enid. Is that how it's pronounced—Haines?"

"I'm Miss Enid," I answered, holding out my hand. "I'm Miss Violet's aunt."

"I thought you wasn't her mother. I told 'em so too. Them at the door asked me last night when you went in. I says I knew you wasn't married."

"She did not say I looked like an old maid. Herly Falls would scarcely have been so considerate."

"I see you been doin' things to the room," she went on.

"Of course if you mind—" Vi began sarcastically.

"Mind? Oh, no. I never take no one but nice people. And nice people

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are always nice, I says. They would not mark up walls, nor spill ink on a body's carpet. I would have fixed up the rooms myself. But since my last operation I can't do things."

"Operation?" I asked politely, wanting to read my letter.

"Yes, my last." Her eyes lit up with the curiously eager gleam of her species—the sort of woman who delights in talking of serious operations that she has endured. I have found that such women feel a curious aura of romance and importance attached to them, that grows with each operation. In such sections of the city, the more operations a woman has had, the greater her social importance.

"Yes, my last. I had a ligament took out. And ever since, I can't bend over much. Without falling and getting weak. Before that I had an operation right after my last baby was born."

"She gave us some intimate details of this, to which I listened. Violet turned her back and calmly read her letter."

"And after that I couldn't stand up on ladders without getting dizzy. So sometimes there ain't so much cleaning on the walls as I'd like to see. I keep a very clean house. But of course I have to depend on help to scrub surfaces. Seein's as I can't stoop over."

"How old are you?" I asked.

"She had been so frank I dared ask her this."

"Not so old, not like I look. I was 37 last birthday. That was a month ago. I used to look real young. But

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I kept havin' operations. I've had my appendix out—that's real fashionable to have done. And my tonsils. And adenoids. But they ain't much of an operation. They don't give ether. And the ligament. Then the kidney—that was after the baby come. And I've had six teeth out in one year."

Was there much of her left, I wondered? I looked at her curiously. If I looked 60, she looked 60. Thirty-seven!

But I turned to my letter, anxious to know what made Esther write so soon. It could not be anything pleasant. Tomorrow—"I Begin to Awake."

Heart Problems

Dear Mrs. Thompson: I am a married woman almost out of my twenties and have several small children, the oldest not yet eight, and the youngest under one year. Before I was married my husband's mother was terribly against me and said many things to induce my husband to give me up. What hurt me the most was that she said I was lazy and that if we married he would have to go ragged as I would not mend, and also he would have to go hungry.

I have never called her mother, as I thought, according to her views, I was not worthy of being her daughter. Now the time has come when she has a daughter of her own married who is much older than I was when I was married and who doesn't try any way at all to help her in her home. They think I should sew and help her out any way I can. Her mother never tells her anything about trying to help herself. She always says she might get angry.

At times the mother has promised to go places with me and then backs out on account of her daughter, which hurts my feelings terribly. If I say anything they say they didn't mean anything by it. Sometimes I think I will get angry and stay away entirely, but that seems to hurt my husband, and so I always give up that idea and try again. I hate family quarrels and so I am asking your advice what to do. I have always helped my mother-in-law all I could, but I don't feel about to help the daughter when they think she is too good to work. We are all the working class of people and our means are limited. TROUBLED.

No, you should not sew and work for your sister-in-law. You have a heavy burden of your own, taking care of your own home and family, and if you manage to find a few leisure hours you

are entirely to enjoy them in your own way.

You will be respected more by your husband's family if you are independent. Be proud that you are a woman who knows how to work and that you are earning your way in life. People with quantities of money are turning away from idleness because they realize happiness results from usefulness.

To do justice to your husband and your small children, you should keep as rested as possible. Try to keep as much time as you can to get out in the fresh air, to read, or to enjoy yourself in whatever way you choose. Make your own decisions and, when you feel you are right, refuse to worry about the opinions and criticisms of your husband's people.

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