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The Wall Flower

(Continued from Page Ten)

looked like and what his profession was. It was in this way that she picked up her almost broken connection with her family. For Aunt Maude answered as volubly as she talked.

"I got three rugs the size you wanted, though one has to be added to to make it large enough," the letter said. "You'll have to pay high for them. Everything has gone up so since I bought. Seems to me the cheapest thing would be for you to make them but as Gladys says, it takes years to collect rag stripes enough and I suppose you've got everything new in your house."

Pan smiled a little at this, remembering her long hunts for properly aged furniture and the training she had had from Gloria to make her distinguish real old from fake old.

"Anyway, they would have been $10 apiece, but I told them they were for you and as you'd married an artist you probably couldn't afford that much, so I got $5 off. And then we decided that as we hadn't given you a present and you were our niece, we'd give you one of these.

"I don't suppose you'll be able to afford going away next Summer as you're furnishing your house, so we thought you could both come here, to the farm. It would be a change for you anyway—and you can work as you did, so you needn't pay board and probably George could make himself useful too—we always need extra hands. Gladys says he can paint the barn as he's a painter, I told her he wasn't that sort, but she said she supposed he could do plain painting anyway—"

Pan in disgust, suddenly threw the note into the fire.

GLORIA'S RETURN

Chapter 105

It isn't necessary to follow far into Pan's married life. That was to be happy enough, as Gloria herself was to see. Gloria, who always saw deeper into people than they suspected, and further into a subject than most others, at first, had her doubts about the wisdom of these two friends marrying.

"Pan is to gentle, too easily lead about," she said once to Santley "for a very dictatorial man, that might be all right. But George himself is inclined to be passive, though he likes his own way as well as any man. I was simply thinking—" she paused, staring into the blue water that washed the sides of the ship, "I was simply thinking that one might tire of the other."

"That's a danger they'll share with every other couple that ever married." Santley answered laughing a little. "Doubtless even you and I stand some such risk—you do at least. For me, you have infinite variety."

"A nice compliment," approved Gloria, moving the least fraction of an inch nearer to him as they stood together at the ship's rail.

They had shortened their trip a little, taking a cruise in the Mediterranean and stopping only a day or two at various cities where Golria had been during the distant unhappy, days of her first marriage. And they were returning now to Venice, from which place of enchantment they were to go in a week to Paris and London.

"And then I must leave you," Gloria had decreed. "If we had Frankie along, it would be different, but I feel sufficiently disgraced as it is, deserting him for two long months."

"Long months!" echoed Santley "All right, have it your way—to me they've been brief enough. But I can't get away from London for three weeks at least—"

"So counting the week or ten days of sailing, you'll be away from me a month at least," Gloria summed it up. "Well, in that time I'll hunt a decent sized apartment for us and move in a table or so, and a chair and such necessities. Also, I'll see how my neglected business is to be saved."

"So you are going on with it!" Santley was slightly disappointed.

"Oh yes I must. Otherwise my energy will run you to death. I must have an outlet for it."

"I've money enough you know."

"It isn't that. I won't work hard at it, I promise. It's simply that I've been independent I must go on feeling so."

And Santley, who saw the wisdom in that, made no further objection.

But when they reached London there were letters from Pan, telling ofg her daily trips to the office and a package of letters that only Gloria herself could answer.

" thought my poor little trade would have died of neglect by this time," Gloria remarked. "And that I would have to start all over again—having tea with stuffy old ladies and taking tiring chatterboxes to lunch, until I'd persuaded them they needed rooms done over.

"But it appears that little Pan had been going down every day and looking after things. I can see her, clearing and straightening my correspondence as she cleared and straightened my flat last Winter when she came and found it in confusion. What would we do without her?"

So Gloria sailed alone on the fastest ship she could find passage in, and thrilled, as she always thrilled when they slipped into New York Harbor, at the golden rays of the sun picking out the tallest of the towers for special illumination.

She scanned the seas of upturned faces as the big ship was slowly warped into the dock, but could find none she knew.

"They'll be there of course," she kept up her courage by saying to herself. "I cabled I was sailing."

She did not know how much she had missed Frankie until she caught sight of a small figure waving a handkerchief. But it wasn't Frankie, for when she borrowed a pair of opera glasses from a fellow passenger the child had features quite different and hair much darker, and Gloria was almost weeping with vexation and impatience.

The wind took the smoke from the little tug boats and blew a screen of it between the decks and the wharf. The tide was against them too and made things difficult. More tugs had to be called, a swarm of them were around the big ship, pushing and shoving and sputtering black smoke—like ants trying to carry some gigantic bread crumb with them.

But at last as they drew slowly nearer, she recognized a tall figure waving, not a handkerchief but a cane. As she signalled back, George lifted Frankie to his shoulder and the child waved his cap high over the heads of the crowd. After that she counted minutes until the passengers could be off and she stood finally with Frankie in her arms and in the combined embrace of Pan and George.

"We've got a new car, a big one, outside," Pan told her. "George is teaching me to drive. We're to take your trunks to our place and then tonight we're driving up to a camp in Connecticut—the loveliest place!"

Gloria was ready to weep with joy. Pan was already doing so.

DISCOVERIES

Chapter 106

From the dock to the camp was a rushing three hours trip. They stopped simply to put Gloria's trunks into the care of the janitor at George's apartment house, leaving only a suitcase with present necessities in the car.

"But I need some old clothes for real camp life," Gloria protested. "Shall we stop at my little flat—?"

"Oh, I went around there and packed your last season's tweed, wool stockings and old shoes and some other things you'd need. They're in the car now," Pan assured her.

Gloria leaned back with an odd little gesture.

"You reduce me to helpless amazement," she laughed. "You think of everything. George, has she spoiled you completely too?"

"Not yet, but she does her best," said George from the front seat.

Then followed two hours of fast driving over Connecticut roads, and a turn from the main road to smaller and smaller ones leading into hills, until they finally reached the "camp". They had tea, hot fro ma patent bottle and sandwiches while they sped along, but reached their journey's end with splendid appetites.

It was really a camp—that is, it was a rought little logbuilt house with a sitting room that opened with wide doors and windows to a screened porch, and the tinest of kitchens, and above, small bedbedrooms whose windows looked into the green gloom of pine trees.

"It belongs to a bachelor friend of George," Pan explained as she led the way by lamplight to Gloria's room. "You can see how it's done up, with brown repp curtains and leather chairs—a man's idea of simplicity and utility."

Gloria laughed at this. Pan spoke with an assurance of opinion she had never before known in her.

"We're thinking of buying it," Pan went on, a little self-conscious still of the matrimonial "we" "If we do, I'll fix it up—I know of the loveliest, coolest glazed chintz—"

She put down the lamp and adjusted the windows. A woman came every day to clean and cook Pan herself, however, was to get dinner, as the woman left early.

"Frankie's eating his supper now, it was all ready for him. I'll get ours while you're putting him to bed."

But this process took so long and was such a mixture of hilariousness and sentiment that Pan had long since finished her preparations before Gloria came down t othem—her hair mussed and her eyes alight from the last merry scramble with the child.

They settled at length, after their late meal, before the log fire of the one big room. The leather covered chairs were delightfully comfortable, even though Pan did not approve of them from the ornamental poin of view—so comfortable, indeed that the three friends realized how deliciously weary they were and sat there in the warmth, too lazy and too contented to talk.

"Such a contrast from sea air—this curious pine odor," Gloria murmured once, stretching herself a bit in her chair.

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In spite of her talk of the simple clothes she needed, she couldn't resist putting on a tea gown of the most vivid kind of crepe of the real Chinese lacquer red, something made from a deeply fringed shawl that was draped about her, the sort of thing that only Gloria could wear, but that Gloria looked charming in.

She explained it, or apologized for it, by remarking that it was "in the suitcase I had with me, so of course,—"

"Of course as you got it in Paris you had to put it on and show it to us," finished George.

"Of course," agreed Gloria serenely.

At ten Pan went to bed, pretending the pine laden air made her sleepy.

"It's part of her charming tact to leave us alone for a bit of gossip," said Gloria when Pan kissed them both good night. "And much as I adore Pan, it's good to gossip a bit with you alone. For one thing—how is it?"

George paused to light a cigarette, give it a long fpuff to fan it into glowing life, and leaned back, the cigarette as usual between limp fingers. Behind her casually worded question he knew the amount of friendly anxiety that existed; behind the great black eyes that regarded him with apparent carelessness, he knew there was real concern.

"It's very well," he answered, his tone matching hers for lightness. Then he laughed. "Why? Didn't you think I was what they call a "marrying man?"

"No," she answered, turning back to the fire. "You never seemed to be one. I believe I am the only woman you never were superior towards, and that's because I never took you seriously. I would be happy married, though I've always wanted you to marry if there was, well, anyone nice enough."

"Possibly Pan isn't like most women,' George answered. "She has depth of character and earnestness. It's fun to watch her grow and to help her. How about you? I never thought you were the marrying sort of woman, as far as that goes."

Gloria's smile was answer enough.

TWO WOMEN

Chapter 107

Gloria appeared next morning looking like quite another person in a shabby out-of-date tweed suit, old shoes, wool stockings and her sleek hair hidden under a sof tam.

This was Gloria ready for the woods—an amazing contrast to the slim figure with the fashionable droop of the shoulders and the exotic, gorgeous colored gowns.

"You look just like anybody," George greeted her.

Then afraid that when he said was not polite, when both women laughed at him, he added.

"I mean you look like a young girl. I've seen you look like an opera star, a movie queen (a gasp from Gloria) a millionaire and a cover for a Futurist magazine—"

"But never the simple minded motherly creature I really am," put in Gloria. "Frankie, if you go on eating breakfast all the morning you can run it straight into luncheon. And that will save trouble and dishwashing, won't it?"

"Um-hum," agreed Frankie complacently, over a fat jam laden muffin. "I'm getting fat, Mother."

"You're doing your best, at least. Children all, are we to tramp through these heavenly woods this morning?"

They were, it appeared, and set off at once, Frankie and a fox terrier in the lead. It was hard to tell which of the two had the largest amount of restless, untiring, energy.

But in the afternoon George got out the car and proposed a drive. The owner of a famous art gallery—where all the good exhibitions were held—had a country home 1 miles away, and George wanted to see him about exhibiting some landscapes.

"Want to come?" he asked them, but the two women decline and Frankie was refused permission because he had to take a nap.

After they had finally persuaded the youngster to sleep, Pan an Gloria wandered off a little way into the trees and lay on a blanket on earth cushioned with fragrant brown pine needles.

"Most people have a queer idea that an artist's work, when he works at all," said Pan, "consists in putting color on canves. They never thing of him as selling a picture, except when a kind soul comes along, through a good friend, and makes a purchase, or orders a portrait."

"That's true. George is an excellent business man, though he's a good artist too. I think he would have succeeded eventually through sheer merit, but that he has succeeded so splendidly at such an early age is certainly due to his cleverness. I like to tease him about that, he takes it like a lamb." Gloria answered. "Of course it's just like him to dash off and get that gallery for December. The man's just back from Canada, he says."

Pan smiled, a little smile of pride at any sort of praise of her husband. Their talk reminded her of the letter from her aunt, and the suggestion that George paint the barn to earn his 'keep' over the summer. She thought, without pride but with gratitude, of their lovely home in the city, of this charming place for hot days or for late autumn weekends like this one, of their car, of all the opportunities for work and development that an adequate income meant.

But she told the story of the letter to Gloria who laughed over it.

"Surely an ignorance of life as great as that must be wilful," Gloria mused. "Badly chosen books can give one a false idea of life, but even bad books will tell a little truth about what other sorts of people do. And newspapers are simply a daily record of what other people are doing and thinking—"

"Aunt Maude only reads an embroidery quarterly," laughed Pan, "though she glances now and then at our local paper. But that's such a small affair it only tells the doings of the people we know—and we generally have heard the news before the paper has time to write and print it. Possibly as narrow a point of view as theirs is wilful, I don't know. don't think so. I never wanted to be ignorant, but I was—terribly, until you rescued me."

Gloria turned her head slightly—cushioned on her soft cap and her clasped hands, to smile at her young friend.

"You weren't really ignorant—and yet you were of course, poor darling. Where you could gain education from schools and books you had done so and had digested your knowledge very well. You learned volumes from such small experience as came to you—"

"Morton?" asked Pan smiling and casuel.

"Yes, that hurt, and made you bitter and cynical in many ways but it helped you eventually—I mean, when you got away from it. Had you stayed on, brooding over a lost love, of course it would have been mental and spiritual death. I've seen them too—the women who've never survived one early disappointment.".

"Instead of which it has shown me what real love is—my love for George," said Pan softly.

Gloria turned again. "Ah, I'm glad to hear you say that!" she said.

CONFESSION

Chapter 108

They lay for a few moments staring up through the boughs of the tree, before either of them spoke.

It was such a glorious day to lie still like this—and simply talk or be quiet as one wished. The real woods spread out above and behind them, the hill dropped away steeply a little distance beyond them, so they could see, through the trees, the tops of other trees down below, gray rocks with greenish moss and lichen in splatches over them, a brown carpet of needles, gorgeous colors where a clump of oak trees grew, and grass still green in the sunny fields beyond. Patches of sunlight, mingled with their shadow, and gave warmth to the autumn air. At one side, a path led deeper and deeper into the trees, at the other, the pine log house met them —its fluttering curtains an odd contrast in so much rough natural scenery.

Gloria, for once, was perfectly relaxed and quiet. Pan thought how young she looked as she lay there, her extraordinary long black lashes against her dead white skin, her large mouth soft her cheeks filled out, most of those faint wrinkles vanished. Gloria looked up suddenly and smiled at the expression of motherly concern in her small friend's eyes.

"What are you thinking of, lambkin?" she asked, using with Pan one of her pet names for Frankie.

"Of you—and myself. Wondering what I should ever have done if you hadn't literally picked me up and taken me away from Norris City," she answered. "It was death—for me—to go on there. Yet I would have gone on. What would you have done, had you been in my place, as I was a year ago?"

"Gotten out—gone away. Made my own life independently, or starved. Had mental freedom, even if it meant bodily starvation.

"Yes, but you have courage. Your sort—gets out, as you say. But mine—too timid even to talk to friends, too timid to think differently from other people, too much afraid of everything and everyone to say a word—what of that sort?"

"That sort," echoed Gloria "is really two sorts There's the girl who sits in a corner, who doesn't know what to say or what to d with her hands, or how to make friends, because she's just too stupid. That sort that even with opportunity they couldn't have gotten much from life.

"But your sort—the sensitive plants of the world, the girls with serious ideas, but too timid to express them, with real ability, but without the courage to try things—they're the problem. Eventually I think they find their way into a congenial life. Take you as a type—had you married a man much below you, as you know now Morton was, you would not have sunk to his level. You would have been unhappy, but kept your ideals. Eventually courage would have come, you would have broken away from a narrow life. You would have taken your husband along, as a handicap. Fortunately, you were saved that by your not-well-meaning cousin, Gladys."

"Yes—but with Morton out of the question—if it hadn't been for you I would have stayed on and grown into a friendless lonely old maid and been 'queer' by the time I was 40. I've seen those 'queer' people so often. You saved me—so if I stand for a type, you're don't always rescue people—circumstances, I mean," she added to make her point clear.

"If I hadn't come, some other opportunity would have come—'once to every man,' you know the proverb says. Or, if not, you would have been driven away by desperation, probably done off with your father to South America. It would have been a different fate, not so pleasant as this, perhaps, but happier than staying on at home as you were."

"You mean," said Pan, "that all of us—we people who are so afraid of life and of ourselves, are helped out? So we needn't be so afraid?"

"Yes," said Gloria decidedly. "The good that's in people comes out. You say you were afraid—heaven knows you were too, when I first saw you—but I saw the good there and the [illegible]. I was touched by your sweetness, I felt your charm—so I sent for you. If it hadn't been that, it would have been another person, another time. You needed only a slight chance. You've changed wonderfully."

"I?" Pan sat straight staring through the trees to the sunny fields beyond, her brown eyes seeing the past with understanding and the future with glad hope. "I'm a different person. I'm not afraid. I feel, as I told George, that I've a secure place in the world—at first with you but only as long as you needed me and you don't need me now. But now and always with him, because he needs me and always will. That's the highest form of love, for me—to be needed and to be able to give. And I have all that—and always will, for George will always love me I know. I'm not afraid because I'm so happy."

Down the road a motor horn set up a cheerful honking, and Pan knew George was on his way back. And Gloria thought of the boat's siren that would sound in a few days, when Santley, too, would be on his way back.

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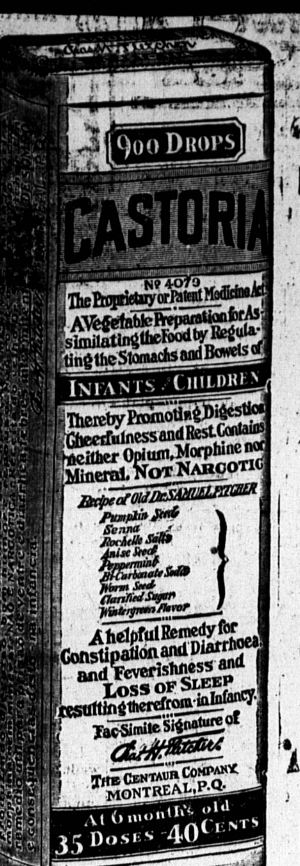

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