

The Wall Flower

by Marion Rubboam

THE LETTER

Chapter 40

In due time the letter came in Gloria's large scrawly hand.

"This is being written while I sit on the edge of my child's bed and fill his mouth full of thermometers and tie his poor neck up in smelly flannels," it began. "Frankie has added a chill to his other ailments, poor youngster, but the doctor says he'll be all right in a few days. Meantime I've lost a thousand dollar order to do over a room in order to hold his hand—a piece of bad luck which amuses me, for it would so please out Norris City friends.

"Darling child you must come for we both need you. Being the mother of an ailing child and business woman sharp enough to support that child, are two occupations that do not mix, if one does justice to either. I'm half dead myself too—and not a competent housekeeper in all this town. Darling, I'd love to have you come just to keep an eye on Frankie the rest of this Winter—I'll have a housekeeper installed when you arrive so the only work will be the child.

"I'll tuck \$50 in here in a postal order that will pay your fare."

Directions about trains followed. Then

"Wire me the time the arrive and I'll meet you. Only come at once. I'm sure the farm can dispense with you, and I'm certain you can persuade your aunt to part with you for a while. Don't be alarmed about what I say as to looking after Frankie. He won't need much of that. I only want someone here to keep an eye on things, you won't have any work, it will be a rest for you and we'll visit the entire Winter."

Put like this, the whole thing sounded most alluring. Besides there was a postal order for more money than Dora had possessed for some time. There was no excuse—and she wanted to go.

"It's my one chance!" she told her father. "I've wanted so to get away—perhaps when she doesn't need me I can find a position in the city. But what will you do?"

Jim's face suddenly relaxed into a heavenly smile.

"I'll beat it the day after for South America," he cried.

He looked suddenly like a man, realized from prison. Dora, who was essentially sweet and domestic, could understand this great chafing against domesticity, without in the least sharing it. Jim had been on the farm for nearly two years now. After his long wandering in Europe he was content to stay fairly near her for some time.

Dora had no desire to rough it as he had, though the happiest time of her life had been the few months she did go gypsying with him through the warm South. She liked it when she was staid, what she lacked was initiative. If her father's spirit urged her forward, her mother's timidity held her back.

"Wouldn't you rather go with me, now we've decided to break our chains?" he asked—knowing her answer.

"No! The one thing in the world I'd rather do than anything else, is to stay with Mrs. Gates for a while. I don't care if it is being a nurse, though she says it isn't, she would be so wonderful to live with!"

And the excitement made her cheeks a bit pink and her eyes bright.

Five minutes of happiness had a curious effect on her. Her hollow cheeks seemed to fill out, her whole nervous face relaxed and she looked 19 instead of looking like an old young woman.

"Oh, you won't want to go!" Aunt Maude objected when Dora got up her courage to drive in town cash the postal order and call upon her aunt. "Better stay—if you're lonely and Jim want to go off I don't, come here and live with me. I don't suppose there's any reason why you should stay on at the farm until I move out in the Spring."

Aunt Maude was going against her daughter's orders when she said that. But she had decided that Gladys was all wrong—besides a baby was expected, Gladys was temperamental and Morton was as meekly devoted as any one could expect.

"No—I'd rather go. I must go Dora said.

Aunt Maude showed her displeasure. No one—but her daughter—had ever defied or disagreed with

her. "I don't know what your uncle will say. You've heard what sort of woman that furniture buyer is!"

"I don't believe those stories," Dora defended. She wanted to resent "furniture buyer", too, but didn't know how.

Maude gave her up. She asked her, "Very well. You're of age!" Aunt ungraciously to stay to dinner—Dora had to accept so her father could come in for her. Gladys and Morton came also—the last time she saw them together for a long period.

"Hi! Hi! Going as a servant girl?" Gladys said scottishly.

Morton said nothing. He always looked a little hurt when Gladys was nasty. But she was having a baby—he could not resent anything she said or did at the time.

Dora made ready to leave.

A MEETING

Chapter 41

It was the one decision Dora had ever made against the open opposition of her aunt and the silent depression of her father which acted as strongly as all the other influences to keep her tied down.

She made ready to go—the "making" being to pack her very few possessions into a shabby trunk and put a nightdress and waist into a funny little black bag that had been her mother's, and old-fashioned then.

She was to take an early morning train to Albany, change to an express and arrive in New York early in the evening. Gloria had written it out so she had no trouble.

Her father saw her off—the rest of the family being too busy to pay her that parting courtesy. Gladys had decided, since she was a married woman, that she should go in for Bridge and Five Hundred and afternoon parties, rather than the guessing games and the more childish amusements of former days. A card party was to happen that afternoon and Gladys was busy spending the morning making refreshments for it. Gladys had no maid—Norris City, in fact was quite out of the way and most unsophisticated in its outlook upon life.

Aunt Maude was to "finish up early and go over and help. Uncle Peter was out at the farm part of the time—so it was left to Jim to see her to the station.

And Jim was the last thing she saw of the town as the train pulled out. Catching the last one, she said, "Hello Dora," and she turned with a start at the sound. It was a voice that was going through her mind and her heart almost every waking hour.

Morton stood by the seat—in fact, quite casually sat down. He handed her a large white package. "Chocolates—" he explained awkwardly. "Send-off, you know. Sorry you're going—I mean I'm glad."

"Oh thank you! I mean are you?" was as intelligent an answer as Dora could make.

"I'm going down, just to the next station, got business there," Morton felt his presence needed a planation. "Nice we can both be on the same train—I mean, it gives me a chance to say goodbye."

Dora was not stupid. In spite of her inhibitions, her feeling of inferiority to everyone, her great contrast with Morton—she knew from his voice and his manner that he had no business in the next town, and was doing this to say goodbye to her. It was his one way of showing her he was sorry for everything that had passed.

The next town was a village of 210 minutes down the line. He wanted to know whether she knew how to change at Albany, she showed him the letter of direction. He explained in greater detail, and then there was a sudden silence between them. When he changed at this point, he was on his honeymoon with Gladys.

He shook hands goodbye, scarcely touching her fingers. She watched him from the window—turning out of the village and heading down the road towards Norris City again.

But she understood the awkward attention. Morton knew he had hurt her and was sorry—and generously plain she was going to happier surroundings. It made her feel sad that sort of sadness was rather precious.

The chocolates were all she had to eat that day, for she had not the courage to go into the restaurants near the station in Albany. She sat in the waiting room and read until her train came. Then, half in terror, for fear she had gotten on the wrong one—there were so many—she hurried up by the window to get her first glimpse of the river.

The Hudson fascinated her so she forgot to be frightened. But when the train reached the station in New York and everybody rose as one person and began scrambling towards the door, she was wakened from nervous excitement and terror.

Suppose Gloria forgot to meet her!

Suppose Frankie were ill, so she could not come!

She could see nothing at the platform except people hurrying along in one direction. There was no one to meet her—but there was to one to meet anyone else. Porters in red caps were flying about. "Porter lady, p. ter?"

She turned a white face to a benignant old negro in a red cap. "All alone, missy? O—daz all right, jes' go down pas' the gates yo'll be met outside."

Reassured, she followed the crowd. The station met her with a blaze of lights and an overwhelm-ing grandeur of marble pillars. People were meeting other people, kissing and shaking hands—every-

LUXOR
ORIENTAL
Coffee

GOLDEN LIQUOR
FRAGRANT AROMA
DELICIOUS FLAVOR

one had a friend but her. There was no Gloria.

She stood quaking with terror. Gloria might be late!

A man's voice said,

"You can't be anyone else but Miss Nicholson, Gloria said I'd be sure to know you! She can't come. I beg your pardon, I didn't mean to frighten you. You see, it's this way—"

A BIG PARTY

Chapter 42

Dora turned to find the owner of this voice. A tall young man, rather handsome, with a fresh skin and blank blue eyes, was standing there looking down at her—apparently as much alarmed as she was.

"You see, it's this way—" he began again. Then he broke off to laugh. "I feel like an awful fool. Do forgive me, Miss Nicholson. I'm sure someone's going to pounce on me for abducting a child." He looked around, hunting the "Traveler's Aid" representative to help him out of his difficulty. Half afraid, if she did not come that he couldn't explain.

Then he looked at Dora again and began to laugh.

"Is Gloria ill?" Dora asked.

"No—she couldn't leave Frankie who is getting a temperature again. I've been there all afternoon amusing him because she had to go to her office. Here—she sent this note."

He thrust at her an envelope unsealed. Inside on a single sheet of paper was scrawled in pencil,

"It's all right, darling. Bobby will bring you here."

Dora looked up again at the stranger. He had a somewhat flat face and was too perfectly dressed. His beautifully manicured nails made her ashamed of her own that were split and rough and stained.

But she wasn't at all afraid to go with him. She handed him the check for her trunk and gave herself up to looking around the station while he went away to collect her things and take them to a cab.

When he came back she was standing with her face raised looking at the blue ceiling with its painted stars and marvelling at some of them showed electric lights.

"Beautiful place, isn't it—no one who lives here ever looks at it so you'd better stare your fill now," and then began to laugh again.

In the taxi he said, "I should have introduced myself in a less sketchy manner than Gloria did. My whole name is Robert Darcy."

"Mine is Pandora Nicholson," Dora managed. But she couldn't think of anything more to say, so she turned her face and looked out the taxi window at the houses and people and streets, amazed at the size of everything and the noise of the city, hoping Mr. Darcy wouldn't think her rude.

They stopped at last at an old-fashioned apartment house. They had to climb three flights, the taxman grumbled as he carried the trunk. Then a door was opened and a joyous voice called,

"Hello, dear!"

And Pandora found herself being embraced and kissed by Gloria. They went into a room that seemed full of people—though there were only two men, Frankie on the couch, Gloria, Darcy and herself. A fire was burning in a tiny fireplace—Gloria took the shabby apartment house because of that one feature.

"This is Pan," Gloria announced. "Now then, run home both of you. Bobby can stay because he's been at the station, and is going to make broth for Frankie."

Dora was so frightened she backed off into a corner. The two men left, quiet, comparative quiet, settled on the room.

She turned at an exclamation from the doorway. Gloria, rolled in a flaming scarlet silk robe, her straight black hair hanging around her shoulders, was standing there smiling with amusement.

"I was awakened by the most delicious smell," she was saying. "I was sure I was dreaming, for I haven't smelled such good coffee for weeks. I had to come back here to be sure it was true."

Dora laughed. She moved about competently, at home in any kitchen poor child! Gloria began putting dishes on a tray—it appeared that breakfast was eaten in the living room. Gloria sat curled up on the couch, her feet under her, about six daily papers scattered about and took her eggs and coffee that way. Frankie appeared in a diminutive bathrobe.

McLean Gives Strong Story Of Experience

Declares Mealtime Comes Too Slowly Now, and Says He is Lucky to Get Such a Valued Medicine as Tanlac.

"My troubles are all gone and Tanlac helped me in every way," said James McLean, 229 City Road, St. John, N. B.

"Stomach trouble made my life miserable for three years. I seldom ate anything except at noon, for the food soured on my stomach and caused gas that made me gasp for breath. I got insufficient sleep and while at work such severe pains would come in my side I could hardly stay on the job.

"I heard so much good about Tanlac I tried it and now mealtime comes too slowly, my appetite is so keen. I get plenty of restful sleep and my pains are all gone. Tanlac is sold by all good druggists.

on the stomppes. We were making so much noise."

Gloria suggested Frankie try to sleep—a suggestion that brought prompt tears.

"I want the party to go on," he sobbed.

Gloria sank down in a chair, looking helpless for once.

"I'll leave him to you Pan," she said, "keep him quiet tomorrow. I must be at the office. I'm going back now to see whether Bobby has broken everything in the kitchen getting supper."

Left alone with him, Dora or Pan as she instantly became—began talking quietly about the farm and the children. Francis had met in Norris City one hand over his hot forehead, one holding his two feverish, dry little hands. When Gloria brought him hot milk, he was quieter and in half an hour, Pan undressed him and put him to bed in his own room, ready to drop off to sleep. She hadn't even taken off her hat.

Gloria came back with apologies then, showed her own room—tiny as a hand box, and said they would have to eat scrap dinner in the kitchen.

"I'm glad you've come, Pan," Bobby remarked as he cut up cold chicken. "Gloria needs looking after more than Francis." When he left, Gloria sat on the bed while Pan unpacked.

Pandora fell asleep in this new world, still confused, excited, humbly grateful that Gloria had sent for her, humbly glad she could be of use to her.

NEW DAYS

Chapter 43

In spite of her tiredness Pandora was awake early next morning. Her tiny room was so attractive she lay looking at it for some time, taking in with pleasure each tiny detail.

Gloria had used her decorative ability to make her cheap little flat into a perfect gem of a home. The guest room, too small for a bed, had a couch instead, with a silky rug of varying tones of blue thrown over it in the daytime. The one window was veiled with yellow net, and had long curtains of French blue linen lined with orange—the gaudy lining just showing now and then. The dressing table was a kitchen table with orange enamelled top and glass over it and a ruffle of blue silk that fell to the floor—orange and blue silk roses edged the top. Gloria, not able to afford a nice dresser set, took wooden backed brushes and boxes and painted them orange with colored flowers.

There was room for a tiny table holding a lamp, and one armchair done in blue and orange cretonne. Pan's trunk went under the bed.

"And you limit your supply of clothing to the size of your closet," Gloria had said. But the girl's few things had more than enough room, even in this small closet.

Pandora got up and began to dress. She was sure she had overslept, she slipped out to the kitchen to find it was 8 o'clock—an unheard of hour for the country. But the flat was silent, even Frankie was asleep.

The girl began hunting around for supplies, lighted the gas stove and began making hot biscuits for breakfast. She started coffee too, and found eggs for an omelet. It was a mystery where one ate, for the dining room had been made into a bedroom and playroom for the boy.

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"I'm interviewing six cooks today," Gloria said after she had dressed and was ready to go to her office. "I'll send one along to you. I didn't bring you here to work, you know, but for a rest and a change."

"I'm so glad to be here—I'd rather work to show how glad," Pandora answered.

"Darling child!" Gloria's eyes showed amusement, but her mouth was tender and trembled a little, as it did when something touched her—or hurt her.

Dora decided Frankie was too ill yet to go out. So she put him on the couch with some books and

then began a systematic cleaning of the much neglected apartment.

No cook appeared—none came for weeks, but Dora was perfectly happy.

"We haven't had a maid for ages!" Frankie informed her. "And all the last ones were sumpin' awful. We only had nurse, and she was so busy taking care of me she couldn't do any work. Mummy says I take a lot of looking after."

"He never got it, if he needed it," Gloria laughed when she got home and this remark was repeated to her. "Nurse fell in love with a sailor, and found the chap reluctant to marry—so she kept Frankie, herself, myself and everyone else in such a state of nerves and excitement that we were ready to collapse when she did go off and marry him. They eloped somewhere—"

"Maryland," announced Frankie who knew all the details of the affair.

"You young wretch!" Gloria said with an affectionate laugh, picking him up in her arms. "Will you be a good boy and have your bath and go to bed now? Mummy has people to tea."

People always came to tea, Pandora discovered, except when Gloria was out.

"I haven't enough money to entertain," Gloria said once. "But tea costs nothing. It's only necessary to get enough interesting people to sit about and talk."

The girl refused to appear that afternoon. She couldn't face a roomful of strange people. She stayed back in the flat, gave Frankie his bath and supper and put him to bed. She had a glimpse of men and women sitting about and laughing. Bobby kept coming into the kitchen for more tea and hot water. She saw exquisite dresses, heard new voices and laughter and cheerfully went on working in the kitchen.

She was happy to be near this gaiety without being in it. But this state of affairs Gloria refused to allow.

British Weekly

ONE NEW FACE

Chapter 44

"My dear," said Gloria when the last guest had gone, "you'll do me the greatest of favors if you'll let me have some dresses made for you. I'm simply aching to put you into proper clothes."

Pandora consented after conscientious objections. Gloria at once began making plans. She brought out some of her own things which she declared unspeakably old, but which were the last word in magnificence to the country girl.

"You can't wear my sort of things," Gloria laughed. "I have to put on bizarre dresses, otherwise I'd be no nondescript."

"Oh, but you're beautiful!" the girl cried with an innocent candor that made her hostess laugh better than to "get hold" of another one who obviously needs her help—it does not matter whether it's an affair of the heart or a matter of the right sort of husband or the right sort of hat, the feminine zeal becomes equally keen. Gloria cancelled an invitation to dine, perched herself on the bed while Pandora concocted a supper of odds and ends—and began taping of feathers, and flowers and cutting up material.

There's nothing a woman likes

"Your type is the quaint and picturesque," she said as she worked. "I'll send my dress maker around here as soon as she's free, to sew up all the things I'm planning together."

"I'm hopeless to dress," Pandora reflected, seated on the only empty chair in the room and wishing she could be of use. "I'm so awkward and homely—"

Gloria became impatient. "Don't be a goose," she said. (Continued on Page Thirteen)

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