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The Wall Flower

by Marion Rubincam

MAKING HER WAY.
Chapter 88.

Pan, however, now faced a problem. To this time, she had gone with Gloria and Gloria's friends, or else she had been with Frankie, who was very companionable. In New York, there had been dozens of friends, in London, a very few though enough acquaintances to keep Gloria as busy as she could be. Now Gloria was gone, it was not likely that any of these people would bother with her!

So she thought, half miserably as she sat alone, that evening in the hotel apartment. Frankie stepped in the next room, Gloria's left over possessions once more packed away in their trunks.

At home, too, there had been George, who often came simply to see her, who often took her to theatres and concerts. George was in France, there was no knowing when he would come back. Last winter she had often gone to so many parties with Gloria that she was glad of an evening at home alone! This evening she sat and thought about a great many things a book neglected on her lap.

Gloria was gone, Gloria was married. In her early thirties, she was beginning life all over again. "It's sure knowing it won't be happy. For ten years she had had nothing but misery, disillusion, finally even poverty and the complete destruction of everything she had cared for, barred from the love or even the companionship of Santley, keeping away from him so as not to interfere with his own life—and as because of a youthful mistake and the selfishness of a man now dead. All this she had faced with a smile that was sometimes impish, sometimes really amused, sometimes only the grim setting of her lips.

And she had won through every thing, she had taken things seriously where she had suffered from illusions, ceased to expect more from people than she was sure of getting, took what she found with a great deal of humor. Mostly because of her extraordinary personality, she had even gone into business and made enough to be independent. And with all this she found time to be a charming mother to her small son, even though she had to entrust his physical care to someone else.

"After all, I've nothing to feel badly about," Pan thought as she started to bed. "I'll read all evening and I've a home and plenty of money. Suppose I were left alone and penniless?"

Next day she arranged for a less expensive apartment, they did not need the extra bedroom now. The moving, Frankie's walk, a bit the sight seeing to some of their favorite places, took them to the boy's bedtime. She spent another evening alone.

She spent a third evening alone and began to feel sorry for herself. Then she had a note from George. "I'm doing a portrait I must finish," he wrote. "Otherwise, my business is over and I'll be back in London, as soon as I can make it. But it's still a bit indefinite. I hope you are having a good time. Don't stay in, women go all over London alone at night as they do at home. On the whole, it's good practice for you to be alone, it will make you self-reliant, you've depended so on Gloria. However, you don't need this counsel any more. It's been a long day since you felt no one wanted to be friends with you. I hope it's a day that will never return."

He wrote again about Gloria—"I'm so glad about it. I was puzzled over her absence, but she's suddenly never thought she might have gone to her in New York. They're an ideal pair, her vivacity balanced by his steadiness, his extreme quiet by her animation. And they're both as true and sincere and fine as any people I expect to meet in this life."

"It's quite true, I have depended upon her too much," Pan said to herself after she had read this letter several times. "This is my chance to be independent. I've everything in my favor. I have no worries over a home or money. I'm in a city where I'm not known. If it were Norris City, I could only see people who didn't like me and for whom I shouldn't care. But it was easier to say than to put into practice. Invitations to Gloria she had answered by saying that Gloria had left town for a time in a day or so letters ceased to come. If she wanted to be alone, she had a splendid opportunity! Then she realized that she was discouraging other people from looking her up. But where to make a beginning of all these new friendships?

Not that stunning golden haired woman with the old little husband who twisted his mustache all the time! She would be polite and bored.

Not that gorgeous black-haired blue-eyes woman with a skin like

rich cream, who danced now and then on the stage and wore black velvet and satin and pearls. Pan could never think of a thing to say to her.

Not the little chatterbox with the pink cheeks, who rattled along telling gossip about everyone mentioned, politicians, actors, actresses, writers, artists, and mere private friends. Pan hated gossip never talked it and was too earnest minded to care about listening to it.

Not—but there was that nice old English lady who had taken a fancy to her.

"We'll go call on Mrs. Clarke," she told Frankie when they started for a walk. Frankie gave her courage.

But her heart was beating at what seemed twice its normal speed when she rang the bell and sent in her name.

FRIENDS.
Chapter 87.

As in most undertakings, the beginning is always the hardest.

Had Mrs. Clarke not been in had the maid who answered her door a stiff and severe expression had there been uncongenial guests. Pan would have fairly quaked in her shoes, and probably given up her attempt to make new friends.

But Mrs. Clarke was in and delighted to see her young American friend. The tea hour, as the girl had already found out, was the great period of the English day, and Mrs. Clarke was the most English of English women.

"She's just changing her gown, mem," the maid said. "She'll be down in a moment." While they waited, the maid came and went with trays of tea things.

"There's going to be a party, I think," Frankie observed, counting the articles that loaded the large table. "There's a samovar for the tea, and five kinds of big cake and a whole plate of little ones and she's going out for sandwiches, I heard her say so." Greedy eyes scanned the table.

"You mustn't count the dishes, that's not nice," Pan rebuked him secretly worried for fear strange people were coming.

But there was no party. They were the only guests.

"It's so sweet of you to drop in on an old lady like me," Mrs. Clarke fairly bubbled, rustling into the room.

"You kissed Pan and shook hands with the child, knowing that sandwiches prefer this to kissing, and plumped herself down behind the table. This elaborate set table Pan found later, appeared every afternoon, sometimes a dozen people came in, sometimes Mrs. Clarke in great splendor of heavy black silk and jet tassels, and and drank her tea alone.

"You like it weak, don't you—any one lump? Yes! Plunket, bring Master Frankie a glass of milk, he's too young for tea. Frankie, your eyes are devouring that little pink cake, your mouth is watering, follow suit. Now, my dear, what's the story. I hear of Mrs. Gates sloping with that odd Mr. Collins. Is it true?"

"Dear me, how lovely!" Her plump many ringed hands were moving about among the silver and china, she scarcely waited for an answer, but rattled on.

"Dear me! And you're alone. You must come to us for dinner—aren't you lonely?"

"I have Frankie," Pan managed to say.

"Oh yes, of course—and children are so companionable, aren't they? Much more so than some grown up children. Frankie's such a nature child too. I can quite see you wouldn't be lonely with him around all day. Here's the milk, Frankie. But of course, the evenings are different—yes, you must come to us for dinner. Do come tomorrow night at eight and I'll think up all the nice young men I know to meet you. Now tell me all about Mrs. Gates—such a charming woman. I've heard she was something about a child, she's a sidelong glance at the child showed that she dared not refer openly to Gloria's past misfortunes in his presence.

But she sent him off presently with the maid, to be taken to play in the garden, and then, with her third cup of tea, she settled down for a lot of gossip, always of the kindest, about Gloria and her present young guest.

Pan often remembered this visit, the first independent attempt she had made at friendship. She remembered the plump, pleasant woman with the hopelessly antiquated black silk and the dozen or so superfluous jet tassels, the innumerable rings, the unbecoming hair dressing and the healthy tan on her skin. Mrs. Clarke was "settled" in figure, by day she went about in baggy tweed suits and mannish felt hats, carrying an umbrella in town, and a heavy walking stick in the country. She wore flat holed, heavy soled brogues, she was a type unknown to Pan's New York. Shop girls there would have snubbed her for her shabbiness, shop girls in London recognized this costume as the mark of wealth and position so sure of itself that it could afford to be careless.

One hears such nice stories of Mr. Collins. I do hope we'll have the pleasure of knowing him sometime. Poor dear, she deserves happiness, she'll be sure to have it now—" Mrs. Clarke was rattling on. Pan had only to listen.

The room, too, Pan remembered the inevitable lace curtains of the old fashioned English house, in this case faintly yellowed real lace with here and there a darn as fine and

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she might have stepped from the rustic chorus of an opera. At bedtime a ladies maid appeared to ask if she could help her. The little checked maid was apparently to be Frankie's nurse during the visit. There was a cook and a scullery maid and Pan wondered how many more—in this delightful place they referred to modestly as the farmhouse.

It was so like Mrs. Clarke—to keep her magnificence hidden away in the country—to own antiques and silks and dresses and the smartest of butlers, to live in a jumble of furniture in the city, and in the country, have a house of priceless antiques, and keep every room to the good taste of its period.

"She's a marvellous woman, never met anyone quite like her," Pan told Ned next day as they went for a long tramp over the hills.

"You know, I was just thinking that about you," he answered impulsively. "You've been telling me a little about you—I thought you were marvellous enough to stay here alone with Frankie—are you lonely?"

Pan looked out over the hills—they had climbed to a point where one might glimpse the sea, miles off and silver blue in the sun. Rolling green hills, sun and a blue sky, warmth and a sweet wind (thatched cottages in the hollows and flocks of sheep in the meadows, and a friend beside her—behind her a dull and cheerless past, barren of friendship, barren of pleasure, the sense of having been saved from a mistake.

"No, I'm not lonely," she answered.

But she was conscious suddenly that she was lonely. Over that strip of sea and hours beyond in the other country—was George, who thought of Gloria and not of her.

And she knew she was lonely for him.

GEORGE COMES BACK.
Chapter 90.

"Doesn't Frankie miss his mother?" Mrs. Clarke asked as they sat under a gigantic red and white striped parasol stuck into the green lawn. It was the last part of Sunday afternoon. Mr. Clarke and Ned had gone off for a tramp; Frankie with his watchful nursemaid was across the lawn. Frankie's whole hearted shouts as he played had attracted their attention.

"No, he doesn't seem to," Pan answered. "He's without her a great deal of the time, so he's used to absence—he must be away all day at her office."

"After all, I'm inclined to think that's the best way," Mrs. Clarke said. Her fingers, always busy at something, were making deft motions with knitting needles. Pan could see the lacey shawl growing under her hands.

"Frankie's the self-reliant sort," Pan explained. "I imagine he inherits his independence from his mother. I wish I had as much as that."

"But you've been quite marvellous," Mrs. Clarke told her. "We've all admired you—stopping on here alone and looking after the child, to give Gloria a chance."

"Oh, but she deserves her chance," Pan was so earnest in her defence that she interrupted eagerly with a dog at heels, but after a while she was more than willing to know all she'd been through. She did think of taking Frankie with her—with them—but it seemed so odd to take a big boy like that on a honeymoon—besides, I wanted to keep him, he's been company."

She paused for breath. Mrs. Clarke gave her a quick glance, then she kindly eyes—eyes—eyes—her homely face, then she redeemed her promise.

"And even had it been a trouble, I would have been so glad," Pan went on. "She's done so much for me."

Mrs. Clarke led her on, Pan told her some of the little story that was so commonplace, so unexciting, so pathetic because of that. She could easily picture the dull farm, the work, the child whose sensitive little soul was bruised and hurt by rudeness and stupid misunderstanding.

"But now she is married, will she live here—and what of you?" Mrs. Clarke asked.

"I think they'll live in New York," Pan said. "And as for me—well—she looked over the long stretch of grass, dotted with golden coins of sunlight falling through the trees.

"It will be two years or more before Frankie goes away to school, she'll need me that long—so much has happened in one year—"

"That's a great deal will happen in two more," Mrs. Clarke finished. "And you're young and attractive. Pan, though you don't think so, that's part of your charm—you think only of others and not your own."

Pan laughed at that.

"I think too much of myself—or did. I used to be so sorry for myself."

The knitting needles clicked rapidly and a bit more of the shawl took shape.

"Ned's a nice boy," Mrs. Clarke observed, apparently apropos of nothing.

"Isn't he?" Pan agreed with impersonal enthusiasm.

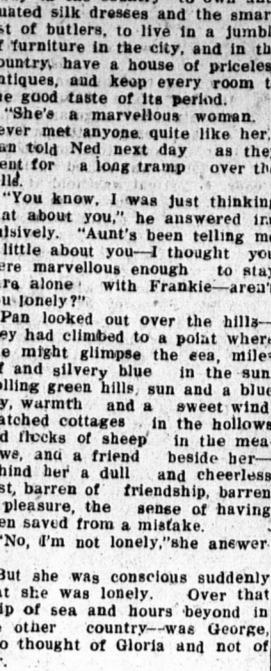
"He'll inherit a charming home and a good income someday," Mrs. Clarke went on. "You'll adore his home—which he evidently means to show you. He's taken for new—and I like only the first sort." Pan observed touching a bit of old tapestry which with her fingers.

"Then you must visit my family sometime," Ned said suddenly. "We've a whole Tudor house which was locked so many years ago that no one came along to throw out the old furniture. You'd adore it."

To Pan it was like fairyland. They dined late from a heavy oak table that once was in a mansion, very attended by the smartest of butlers and the most correct of maids. Frankie was taken to bed, by a girl with apple red cheeks shawl and put on her hat.

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They followed a path through the meadow and crossed a stile and a brook, a short cut brought them soon to the village. The church was a diversion, the were both a little embarrassed by the mention of Ned.

Mrs. Clarke was wondering whether Pan, whom she thought the merriest child, could really be interested in George—she knew George had come over with them. But she said nothing and after church gathered a few friends from the village and they trooped back together over the meadow and the stile and to the gaily striped umbrella where the two men sat at a table set for tea.

It was so different from the flat and so restful life of the old farm, and so lovely after the somewhat hectic afternoons with Gloria—it

was quite perfect, Pan thought her self-consciousness was completely, she wondered, she ever could have been afraid of life and of living. Even Tuesday and the city only meant a change of people; she was picking up friends of her own—Gloria would be back in a week or so.

And George—she wondered Gloria's marriage and hurt, though he'd pretended it was Business might keep him longer—but when she reached London, Tuesday afternoon, she found a note from George postmarked London.

"I'm coming around for your dinner time," was all it said, "that was enough to make her be-

Continued on page 2

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