

The Wall Flower

By MARION RUBINCAM

A BREACH

Chapter 51

The general significance of Gloria's remark did not strike the girl until later when she was thinking over this whole story.

Gloria meantime was going on with this voluntary confession.

"He did get a few thousands out of his mother and he went back again to Europe. He had an idea that he could write—diplomatic work of course was impossible after his African record. The odd part was that he could. Frank was enormously talented."

Something odd came to Pan as she sat listening. Gloria was actually boasting of the accomplishments of the man she could not bear to live with!

"Frank was the spoiled son—I mean that in several ways. His mother spoiled him, so did his fate. He was born rich, had extravagant tastes, and the money to gratify them. He adored pretty women, and not one could refuse him anything. He had an impish and a cruel streak in him. He used to let me see his devotion to other women because he knew it hurt me. Then when I looked too miserable and ran down, he would come around and be a perfect lamb, and would either say he'd lost interest in the other woman, or

that he never had had any and was only teasing—and he so sweet that I would forgive him and think myself happy all over again.

"It was always necessary to forget the past—and start new."

"You can't forget the past—that easily," Pan said sadly.

Gloria gave her one of the quick glances that Pan felt through and through. She was sure that Gloria saw straight into her own miserable little secret.

"You can, though," Gloria resumed. "You can drop off the past like a worn cloak and start all over again as though nothing had happened—or almost as though nothing had happened."

"Possibly it takes practice. I was always beginning over again with Frank. He had such a convincing way of saying 'It will never happen again.' Every woman believes that statement when the man she is in love with says it. It's the only thing to do."

Pan sat silent, thinking, while Gloria stared into the fire again. One white arm was behind her head, whiter in contrast to her very black hair. The loose, scarlet sleeve of her silk robe fell away from her elbow, adding its splash to the vivid colors that always surrounded Gloria. What a lot she must have gone

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through to be so cynical. Pan thought. And, in her sympathy, her own unhappy little love affair seemed much less important.

"We went to Paris," Gloria continued. "We had a gay and hectic winter and went on to Monte Carlo in the early spring, where poor Frank thought he would win back all he'd lost that winter. And oddly enough, he did win a lot of money. I felt it was too dishonest to take it—but after all, it wasn't nearly as dishonest as taking money from his mother on false pretences as he always did. These questions of metaphysics are always delicate," and she laughed a little.

Gloria, it appeared, dragged him away from Monte Carlo to Germany for a summer. The third winter of their marriage was spent in Italy. Frankie was born there.

"You've been everywhere," Pan said, thinking enviously of the wonderful places Gloria had seen.

"Frank had a restless foot," Gloria said. "We went to Sweden for a summer, and back to Florence for the winter. I wasn't feeling up to much after Frankie arrived. And Frank himself had quite decided that his talent was literature. He could write beautifully, too, when he wanted to."

"He was asked to lecture once and toured Europe alone giving talks on aspects of American literature, which had been his hobby at college. He went off before the baby came—packed off to Poland and parts unknown. I think it was a blonde, rather than his aesthetic feelings, but the reason didn't matter much."

She was working herself into a state of excitement over her own past bitterness as she talked. And, as excitement always brought her up, she began now to look well again, even to look rested. Pan watched in wonder.

"I stayed in Florence for some time, then settled in Paris. Oddly enough, we had avoided London. Frank thought English women too heavy to be attractive. Bobby used to come to Paris often, and George was there doing portraits and making a name for himself. Frank raged when either of them came around—he was just as jealous as that sort of man always is."

"And he went on, getting more and more unreasonable, drinking more, caring more for other women and less for me. He hated the baby. And George urged me to leave, for



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out and he and George had a most awful fight. I got them quieted after a time. Then Frank's mother died, and left him all her money. I said we would go either to London or New York, and he agreed.

"He sent me to London to find a house and furnish it. Santley was there, and helped me find a place—Santley Collins, you've heard his name from George. Then I had a wire from Frank—he'd gone off to Monte Carlo with—well, I used to know her—staked every penny he'd inherited and lost it all. He was my own salvation. Frank found it

wiring me for money!"
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