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Button, Button

By Julia Frances Wood

Pansy Flower of Georgia Was Branded a Thief; the Society Don Juan Proved Only a Juan, But the "Gold Brick" Turned Out to Be Genuine.

BETWEEN her cigaret, her fan, and that far famed little trick she had of shutting her eyes before she spoke, Mrs. Braithwaite flattered herself she had concealed admirably the shock of amazed anger Carrisford's words had given her.

"But the details, dear man—have mercy upon a mere woman—the details!" she demanded, her silver voice the merest trifle throatier than usual. In that one second's reprieve of lighting her cigaret she had discarded with pas-

sionate swiftiness the garment of wounded love, one of injured friendship, one of mocking indifference, and had slipped finally into just the right combination of warm, a little reproachful friendliness. "This is a romance, I infer, dear Tony, is it not?—not a railroad time table or a telegram! And remember I have been flattering myself I am your best friend!"

"Merely that?" Tony Carrisford dared to ask her, and raised to his lips with his usual lazy gallantry the white, helpless hand she stretched out to him.

The gesture stirred in Mrs. Braithwaite the same old baffled, bewildered anger she had cloaked for two years, as today, under discreetly lowered lashes and her loveliest smile.

For two years, with every wile a beautiful and clever woman could possess, she had tried to whip into flaming action that maddently indolent, insolent love-making of his. And today he dared to tell her, with no faintest tremor of voice or eye, with even his slight, bored smile twitching a corner of his handsome mouth, that he was going to marry another woman.

While, before the unlooked for opening his last words had given her, she was weighing with desperate uncertainty a flood of tears or a passionate avowal of love, her moment had passed and Tony was lightly acceding to her request.

"A true movie romance, I assure you, Meredith. My car spilled me—providentially or otherwise—only time alone can tell—before her hospitable gate. I was ill for two weeks in her home. She nursed me and won me. You have the five reels in a nutshell."

"The toast of five counties, it goes without saying," Mrs. Braithwaite wrapped herself again temporarily in interested friendliness.

"Scarcely that," he corrected. "Only a tenth of one county knows her, and I don't believe they toast her—just love her."

"And this tenth inhabits?"

"Tallahaha, Jawgeah," he smiled. "Exceeding Tallahaha and still more Jawgeah."

"Name—age—coloring—family—bank account! Don't

play with my curiosity, Tony. I am only a woman and—rather interested in you."

"I can lump the last two answers together," he placidly disregarded the poignant pause and break in the last three words. "Her father is a parson—which speaks volumes naturally for his bank account. Her name is—brace yourself, Meredith—it is really Pansy Flower—though there live none so brave as to call her so. She prefers to be known as Patsy. She is delightfully young—officially 21; 41 in common sense and 11 in enthusiasms. I don't know that one could call her regularly pretty."

"You don't mean she isn't beautiful?" Mrs. Braithwaite was for once shocked into total naturalness.

"Certainly not that," he answered, enjoying her amazement. "Astonishing, isn't it—when I have always worshiped so at Beauty's shrine." He bowed charmingly to his hostess.

"I'll tell you what we must do, Tony. I'll have her up here to visit me. It will give you a chance to see her, and give her a chance to know your world before she has

this—perhaps when you see me up there among all your friends you won't want to marry me, and we had better find that out right away, don't you think? Please remember always the one thing I could never forgive in you would be if you weren't perfectly frank in telling me so. And because it would make that easier in case you should change your mind, I don't want anybody to know besides Mrs. Braithwaite, who writes me that you have already told her, that we are engaged or even specially interested in one another. Let's meet as strangers all over again up there. If I come you will promise me this, won't you, Tony?"

Tony showed this letter to Mrs. Braithwaite with something of the proud strut of a parent exhibiting a first born's new tooth. "Willing to give me a loophole of escape," he commented to her in dazed tones. "Can such a creature really exist in this money-mad world?"

Mrs. Braithwaite, than whom no one was money madder, found some difficulty in assenting enthusiastically. "I fancy Patsy may adjust a few of her values when she has



seen more of the world," she remarked with a slight acidity in the perfect tones.

She had chosen, after a good deal of thought, Braithwaite lodge instead of New York as her battleground. With meticulous care she had picked her house party, weighing each member as a possible ally against the Tallahaha foe. The little Georgia girl could be at no crueler disadvantage than facing winter sports without and within, the one outsider in a close and critical corporation of members of the same social set. As Tony Carrisford's fiancée the gates would have been at least ostensibly flung wide before her; as merely Miss Flower of Tallahaha they were irrevocably barred and barricaded. Mrs. Braithwaite's much lauded smile was for the first time in weeks wholly spontaneous as she held in her hand the telegram announcing the hour of Patsy's arrival.

In accordance with his fiancée's instructions, Tony did not meet her at the train; Mrs. Braithwaite, a feverish eye upon the clock, carefully overcalculated the distance from the station. The huge limousine deposited Patsy noiselessly at the door of the great country house. One impassive footman absorbed her luggage, another conducted her silently to the long, low living room echoing to a babel of voices and gusts of merriment.

Tony saw her first: "Patsy, by Jove," he murmured. Mrs. Braithwaite in answer leaned forward over the tea table, both hands outstretched, the winsomest of smiles upon her lips. As the solitary little figure made its way towards her through the long gamut of appraising glances she checked off with mounting relief item after item: "Boyish figure—best contrast in the world to mine; that Norfolk just suits her; brown hair, gray eyes; good enough skin, but no beauty of coloring; nice little nose and attractive mouth; carries her head well; would pass in a crowd; but for Tony—beside me—it's ridiculous!" Then Patsy's hands were in hers and she was saying aloud, caressingly, "You dear child! I'm so glad you're here. I didn't realize it's so late. I meant to meet you in the hall and bring you in myself."

The small gloved hand still in hers, she turned person-

"I meant to meet you—in the hall."

to enter it as Mrs. Tony Carrisford. And perhaps I can help the dear child a bit—with her clothes, I mean, and a few little pointers like that."

"My dear Meredith, it would mean a liberal education for Patsy to visit you," he told her. "For you both," he added to himself with the cynical amusement women's emotions were apt to arouse in him. "Anything you can do for her will mean a lot to me. I've really come a cropper at last, hardened old worldling that I am. I love that girl, Meredith—bucolically, if you will, but sincerely."

Safe upstairs in her own room, Mrs. Braithwaite let herself rage at will at his words and the whole intolerable situation. She had known always, to be sure, the cord by which she held was pitifully frail and all too easily snapped. With every possible device she had sought in vain to make it stronger. Before the world he was her property; his cars and yacht at her service, his invitation lists for her inspection, his conservatories decorating her dinners, he himself lazily trailing her at ball and opera, yielding her beauty a cynical, indolent homage which her hard working husband had neither time nor inclination to question. "Tony's armor against matrimony," one of his friends had dubbed her, and she had chafed furiously under the truth of the title.

It was her vanity that wrung always her sincerest tears. Love, too, however, was giving its own frantic cries of pain for the dark splendor of Tony's look, his charm of speech and gesture. She could not—would not give him up!

Her mirror shook her from despondency, renewed her courage. "Not even regularly pretty—a country parson's daughter!" Why the girl would be the very best foil in the world for her! Let Tony once see them together, away from this environment of an adoring family and town, in the shock of this disillusionment would come her most vivid opportunity—if the girl would only come!

After nearly a month of patient effort on Mrs. Braithwaite's part, come she did.

She had written Tony: "I have been thinking a lot about

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