

Lovable

BY TITARY RAYMOND © 1934 NEA SERVICE INC

CHAPTER XXII

No. Peter didn't know how he felt toward Valeria. In Florida she had seemed very far away. The thought of her disloyalty brought only a dull pain—the sort of pain that follows sharp suffering.

But back here, with reminders of her everywhere, it was not an easy matter to put thoughts of Valeria completely behind him. It was not an easy matter to forget her soft caresses, her whispered "Peter, darling, you do love me better than anything in the world?" or her curved lips raised for his kisses.

Ann was loyal and generous to the core. He had no doubt she would accept a real wife's role if she believed that was his wish. But she would not be happy. And, sentimentally, perhaps, he felt the same way.

No, they would go on this way as long as Ann wanted to. Some day, this life would not satisfy her. It was natural that there would come a time when she would want to be loved. If she would not love him, if he didn't love her, there would be only one way out—divorce.

Evans said, breaking through Peter's musing, "Here we are, sir." Peter got out. "If Mrs. Kendall finds she will be too busy to come to this afternoon, bring in my card."

Peter went into the building, stepped into the elevator. His office presented a busy appearance at this early hour. Typewriters clicking, mail being assorted, Paul looked up from a set of blue prints.

"Peter, the Lowell specifications are here. Shall we check them?" "Any time you're ready."

Paul spread the prints out and they set to work. After a moment, Peter laughed. "Paul, do you use perfume or scented hair tonic?"

"Gosh, no!" Peter said. "Funny, but—" He stopped because Paul's face was red with embarrassment.

Peter glanced toward his desk. The large robin's egg blue envelope which was so familiar to him was on top of the pile of papers stacked on his desk.

When Paul was gone he picked up the scented letter with his time scratched in Valeria's bright up and down handwriting. He had written: "It was terribly hard to be condemned without a hearing, Peter. And because I'm afraid you won't give me an opportunity to talk things over, this is the only way. I had been ill and that horrible story in the newspaper and then you came in wanting me of such horrible things. I wasn't equal to explaining to you how innocently I got into those parties. They seemed just big larks and I never dreamed you would mind. Peter, I am coming to Millicent's party tonight. Whaps, I shouldn't. But—oh, War, I couldn't help it. I have a see you. Be a little kind to your Valeria."

Valeria was dressing for the reception and dance which would be Millicent's welcome to her step-brother's bride. Mrs. Wainright was in to watch the finishing touches. Valeria was in brilliant supplies, which deepened the blue of her eyes and made her fair hair a shining gold.

When Valeria was a little older, she probably would be called plump. Recognizing this tendency,

she selected her clothes carefully, with thought to lines as well as becomingness. The dress she was wearing made her look graceful and slender. Mrs. Wainright had complained over the extravagance of a new dress, reminding Valeria of other lovely frocks she owned.

But no dress she had worn before would answer the purpose of this occasion. So the frock had been purchased with reckless disregard of future payment.

"It isn't as though you were going to be a millionaire's wife now," Mrs. Wainright said caustically. She had wanted to hurt her niece who had been a fool to lose Peter Kendall.

Valeria did look beautiful tonight, sweet and charming. Only her aunt knew the vicious claws behind the girl's gentle manner; how shrill the low, well-bred voice could become in a moment.

At times when Valeria turned upon her, Mrs. Wainright felt she almost hated her for her arrogance and selfishness. But blood was thicker than water, after all. The older woman had been indignant when the newspapers had printed the startling news of Peter's sudden marriage, hinting that announcement of his engagement to a prominent society girl had been expected.

Valeria's distress had been genuine enough. She had always expected to be Mrs. Peter Kendall. Greedily she had wanted to eat her cake and have it too; unwilling to give up some of her exciting conquests until she was on the eve of marriage. As far as she was capable of loving anyone, she did love Peter. He attracted her. And he was very rich.

"So you think I won't marry a millionaire," Valeria said, smiling into the mirror as she touched her lips with rouge. "Don't give up hope so soon. I still have my hair, eyes and complexion."

"They haven't brought you much except invitations to a few drinking parties."

"They got me Peter!" "What! I don't know!" Mrs. Wainright said doubtfully. "The picture in the paper was beautiful."

"You certainly are a comfort. I suppose you think she has brains, too. Well, she will need them!"

Valeria wore no jewelry. Peter's big diamond was in her jewel case. She had not returned it. Some day she confidently expected it would be slipped back on her finger.

(To Be Continued)

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