Lovable

by MARY RAYMOND © 1934 NEA SERVICE INC

CHAPTER XL

o one expected Peter's marriage tick. Everyone knew he loved you. er was a darn fool to go out and p that girl in a fit of pique. s evidently come to his senses. It's mendable of him, I think."

aleria was silent. She knew it was coming silence. Everybody would saying, "Valeria's sweet not to when Peter walked out on her. tried to do the decent thing by the he married, but of course they ly couldn't make a go of it, with r still in love with Valeria."

hat was what people would think. one of her crowd dreamed that e had fallen for Ann.

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later, alone with her thoughts, eria was conscious of failure. She embered the sarcasm in Millicent's n ought to know." It was always way whenever Peter's affairs e being discussed.

Well, she would play her cards more fully in the future—and not as had played bridge this afternoon. had played really dreadful bridge. e Millicent's voice had broken ugh her abstraction. "Come back the game, Valeria." She had led des after a declared heart suit and a heart discard from her part-

Mrs. Wainwright was amazed to Valeria call off her date for the ing, pleading a headache.

"Not sick, are you," she asked, as eria passed through the living room her way back from the telephone. No. Just tired. I think I'll go to right after dinner."

"A very good idea."

* * *

About nine her niece went to her m. Drawing the Venetian blinds to window ledge, Valeria began stripp off her clothes. Her bath was ing. That was what she needed. warm both and good night's sleep. constant going and getting nore was getting on her nerves. With vivid velvet robe about her Valeria down at her dressing table, studythe mirrored face.

es, she was lovely. The ashen d hair rippling away from her her big blue eyes and soft, red Why didn't Peter love her? The er was Ann.

o be honest, Valeria had to admit girl was attractive. Very attrac- Valeria hated her. Absent, Ann dominating Peter's every thought. e lifted a hand and brushed back hair, moving closer to the mirror. re were tiny tracings near her little hard lines forming near mouth.

All I need,' Valeria said to herself, a little more sleep and fewer tails."

e had been fighting a desperate ledge, but all barriers were down ht. More than Peter's money, tion, and power, she wanted r, the man. She wanted to take away from Ann more than she ever wanted anything in her life. combination—jealous rage and ning—brought pain that was al- more than she could bear.

he warm, fragrant bath quieted nerves and after a while she slept. last waking thought was "Whatit takes, I'm ready for. I'll make sacrifice if I can have him back n."

the days passed, Mrs. Wainght became aware of what she d "a changed Valeria."

he restless girl who had opened y eyes about noon was gone. In place was a freshly groomed niece, y for breakfast at the conservahour of nine, prepared to plunge sect into her day's program.

he program itself amazed her even more. Valeria, who had ed similar tasks throughout her ed, had volunteered to aid in a dozen worthy enterprises. She become actively interested in her 's welfare work. She spent most e days for one entire week colng garments for the needy. She accepted the chairmanship of a p that was doing valiant work in community chest drive. She had ired the sponsorship of a new free for children. Her picture had ared in the papers frequently, never in any studied pose.

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e had been caught by a photogher among a group of children at clinic. During the drive she was ographed pinning a button on the of a contributor. Another time, -column picture appeared showing Valeria entering a poverty-stricken home, her arms filled with packages.

Mrs. Wainwright was amused at first, then puzzled. As the days passed, she was almost convinced that at last Valeria had decided to give up her "wild ways" and settle down.

Valeria confirmed the idea one morning. "I'm fed up with parties," she said pensively. "I realize I've wasted a lot of time."

"I'm glad you've waked up," her aunt said dryly. She added, because she was not entirely convinced that her niece's transformation was genuine, "if you have."

Valeria did not flare up. She said, "I have. I want to marry and have a home of my own."

"Well, Jack Latimer is probably ready to give you one."

"Jack!"

"He's not a bad catch. Has a very good position, hasn't he?"

"He's light wood. I want stronger support for my future."

"Somebody like Peter?"

"Yes."

"Pity you didn't know you were so much in love sooner. I hear he's been turning the city upside down looking for his wife."

"I suppose you've been talking to Mrs. Kendall. It's true he had two private detectives trying to find her. They finally found the taxi driver who drove her away the morning she left. The man said she got out at a restaurant. They lost the trail there."

"I can imagine how sorry Mrs. Kendall was when the detectives failed to find her!"

"Now Aunt Louise, don't be sarcastic. Of course she realized he and Ann were not really suited to each other."

"And of course you and Peter are!"

Valeria got up from the table, saying reasonably, "I do think so. Peter and I grew up in the same world. Our friends are the same. But I won't stop to argue with you. I've worlds to do."

"I wish he would get divorced then."

"It takes a little time to work out a divorce," Valeria said.

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MRS. WAINWRIGHT turned about and faced her niece. "Peter's had time enough to get a divorce," she said. "It's three months since his wife left him. I saw him on the street yesterday and he looked like a ghost."

"He doesn't look well," Valeria conceded.

"I hear he's thinking of selling the house he bought."

"Where in the world did you hear that?"

"I was driving with Mrs. Preston and she told me the Judson Longworth's had made him a flattering offer. It seems they heard Connie and Paula were getting a divorce, and so they cabled back an offer which was referred to Peter. Mrs. Preston and Judson's mother are friends and the story came pretty straight."

"Oh, Peter mustn't let that darling place go!" Valeria's voice was sharp with anxiety. Mrs. Wainwright thought Valeria sounded more like herself than she had for a long time.

"I imagine Peter has just about given up hope that his wife will come back," Mrs. Wainwright said. "I should think you'd be pleased."

Valeria was not pleased. That house was needed in a scheme she had in mind. She was in Peter's office an hour later.

Valeria faced him across the desk, her eyes on his handsome, unhappy face. "Peter, I hear you're thinking of selling your house."

"Jud and Sally want it. I haven't decided, but there doesn't seem much use in holding on to it."

"Peter, you mustn't sell. It's too lovely. It would be terrible to let it go and then have Ann come back—as she will some day."

"You think she will!" His voice was desperately eager.

"I'm sure of it. Some day she will see how foolish she has been and she'll call you, or you'll run into her on the street and everything will be fine."

"I wish I could believe that." His voice was husky with emotion.

"You need more faith, Peter," Valeria said in a low, soft voice. "I think all of us do. We rush about so much from one thing to another, thinking about things that aren't really vital. We forget the things that are essential—like faith and hope."

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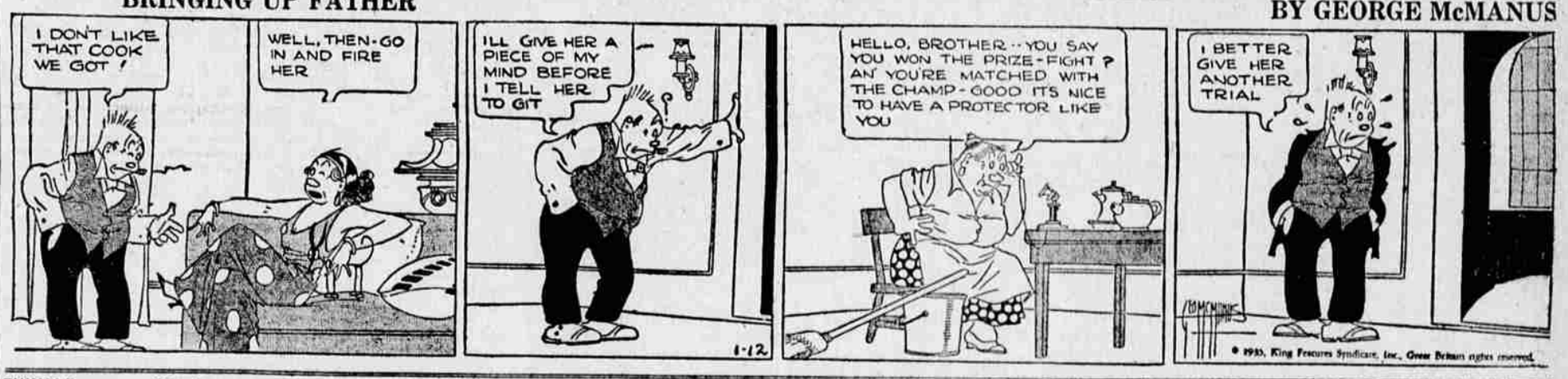

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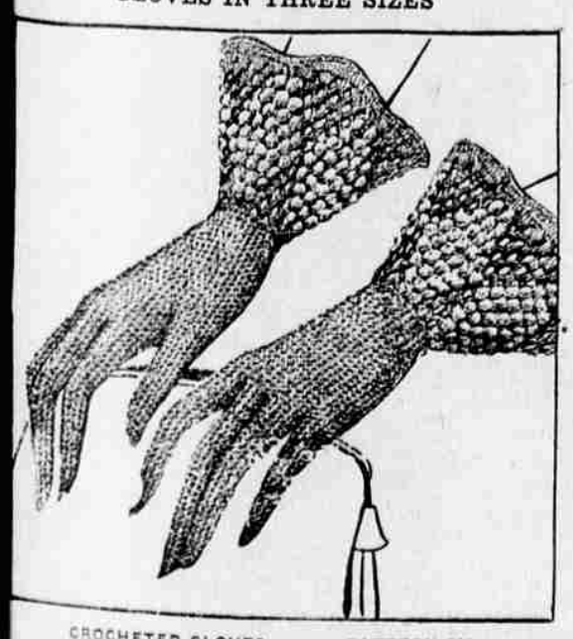

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