Lovable

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CHAPTER XLIII

Did you say someone else had ht this house," Ann asked, changthe subject quickly.

es, the chap who engaged me. name is—"

* * *

LAN did not complete the sen-nce. A shrill scream from Sissy ght Allen and Ann both rushing the garden. There were the two nes, safe and sound. Sissy sturdily, her little round legs rently glued to the spot, her waving wildly. "Make 'im away, Ann."

nny, grinning delightedly, was ng an arm out rigidly. "She's d of a worm. Fraidy!" Sonny

's a snake!" Sissy, clinging tight-Ann, peered with fascinated eyes long green object dangling from rwin's hand.

o, it's not a snake," said Allen, ough it wouldn't surprise me if es do come about here some time, cularly near the river edge."

n shivered slightly. "You don't snakes either, do you?" Sissy looking up at her.

n said "No," in a low tone. She thinking of Valeria. Desolation over her at the thought. Fear d her heart.

suppose she's with Peter," she ed. "I suppose she is with him e time now."

leria was with Peter that after-And during other afternoons e weeks passed.

e knew people were speculating ing the announcement that Peter ed to get a divorce and marry She had not mentioned to him subject that was nearest her Valeria was biding her time.

n's name did not come to Peter's s frequently as in the past. But times when Valeria referred to casually she saw a grim look on his face and the muscles et about his mouth.

Peter hadn't forgotten Ann. But s becoming surer as the days by that she would never come Hope was leaving him. And the was now only a symbol of an ture in faith that had failed.

had taken Valeria out to the a number of times and she applauded the decorator's sugtions. Inwardly she raged because as being shut out of the picture. one of her sugestions had been ted. Peter, moving through the with a haunted expression on his was no help in putting Allen nt in his place.

were almost as though Peter seeing ghosts, the way he d about, the way he started nly, hearing Valeria's step behim.

course, Valeria told herself, afhe and Peter were married she always change whatever she d in the house.

y passed Millicent and Mrs. all on the drive home. "Peter Valeria are seeing each other eat deal," Mrs. Kendall said satisfaction. "I'm glad the farce aring an end. But you don't like ria, do you?"

like her so little that I could Ann back by her hair if I where to find her," Millicent ed. "But, though, I dislike Va-I don't underestimate her cleverness. I suppose it won't be long before she lands Peter—hook, line and sinker."

Millicent was thinking, "Dumb, dumb, dumb! He'll be telling it to a lawyer soon, thinking a divorce is what he wants. I'd like to tell him what I think of that blond deceiver. But it would only send him straight into her arms."

The next day Valeria commandeered Peter's services for welfare work.

"I hope I didn't interfere with anything really important," she said, slipping her arm through his as they came down the steps. "But my car was in the shop and I felt I must get these things to my needy families. Could you really spare the time or are you doing this to please me?"

"To please you." He smiled knowing that was the answer she wanted.

"You're sweet." Valeria laid a caressing hand on his arm. She moved closer to him.

"I'm giving you the whole day off tomorrow," she continued. "There's a meeting of my committee in the afternoon and a conference about the clinic tomorrow night. I shall miss seeing you terribly."

"I'll miss seeing you too," Peter said. It came to him as a shock to find that he meant it. Valeria was getting to be a habit with him. The soothing, flattering way of hers had been balm for his wounds. The feeling that he was essential to some woman's happiness was not unpleasant.

Well, why not? After all, Ann had found him not worth loving. Had found the thought of belonging to him intolerable.

"I've found out about you, Peter. And I cannot possibly bear it . . ."

All he needed is feel sick—physically, mentally and spiritually—was to remember that phrase in Ann's letter. Scorning him and casting aside all he had to offer her. Even millions had not been sufficient to make her lot bearable with him.

And here was Valeria, becoming more womanly all the time; showing qualities he had missed in her before.

Thinking of this, Peter patted her hand, saying awkwardly, "You've been sweet to me, Valeria. I wish I could make up for it. Some way."

"Oh, Peter, you are!"

There was a silence after that. A breathless silence, as Valeria waited for his reply.

But Peter said nothing, only frowned intently into space.

It was worth waiting for—Peter's surrender. Valeria settled contentedly against the seat.

"Let's drive out to the house Wednesday night. I want to see it with the lights on. And I'd love to see the garden and river by moonlight."

Peter said, "The furniture isn't there yet. Wouldn't you rather wait?"

"No. We can go again."

"What'll I do with the place—now?"

"Please don't be sorry. I've been happy thinking it was helping you."

"I'm an ungrateful idiot. What time shall I come for you?"

"About eight."

"Afterward we might drive to Ingleside and talk to Mr. Vincent. He'd be pleased."

(To be Continued)

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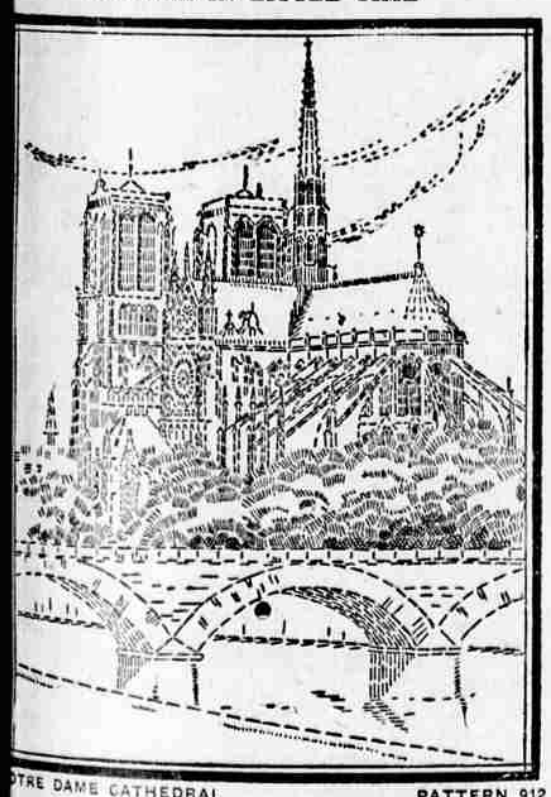

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