

# RICH MENS CHILDREN

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## CHAPTER I.

### The Bonanza King.

The cold of foothill California in the month of January held the night. The occupants of the surrey were too cramped and stiffened by it, and too uncomfortably enwrapped against it to speak. Silence as complete as that which lay like a spell on the landscape brooded over them. At the last stopping place, Chinese Gulch, a scattering of houses six miles behind them on the mountain road, they had halted at the main saloon, and whisky and water had been passed to the driver and to the burlier figure on the back seat. The wretched that thronged to the saloon door had eyed the third occupant of the carriage with the intent, sheepish curiosity of the isolated man in presence of the stranger female. Afterward, each one was visible in his impressions of her face, pale in the smoky lamplight, and the hand that slid, small and white, out of its loose glove when the warming glass was offered her.

Since then both she and her companion had leaned back in their several corners and preserved an unbroken silence.

The surrey sped swiftly along the road which wound in spectral pallor over the shoulder of the foot-hill, now dipping into the blackness of a ravine, then creeping up a bare slope, where the horse's hoofs dug in laboriously amid loosened stones. The solemn loneliness of the landscape, faintly revealed by the light of large, clear stars, seemed to find appropriate expression in this frosty, smoke-breathing stillness.

The larger figure on the back seat averted, and turned a face, all of which was hidden save the eyes, toward its companion.

"Hungry?" queried a deep bass voice; the inquiring polysyllable shot out suddenly over an upturned, bulwark of collar.

"Fearfully," came the answer in a muffled feminine treble, that suited the more diminutive bulk.

"Get a move on, Jake," to the driver. "This girl's most famished."

"Hold your horses," growled the other man; "we're just about there."

At these words the woman pricked up her ears, and, leaning forward, peered ahead. As they rounded a protruding angle of the hill, a huddle of roofs and walls spotted with lights came into view, and the slight drew her hand forward with an eagerly-pointing finger.

"So that's Rocky Bar!" she cried.

"Have we really got there at last?" The driver chuckled.

"That's Rocky Bar all right. Now get your appetite good and ready."

"No need," she responded gaily; "it's been ready and waiting for hours. I was beginning to think that you'd lost your way."

"Me!" with an accent of incredulous scorn. "Ah, get out! How does it come, Governor, that Bill Cannon's girl don't know no more about these parts than a young lady from New York?"

"She's never been up here before," said the man on the back seat, beginning to untangle himself from his enfolding rugs. "I've brought her up with me this time to show her some of the places where her pa used to work round with the boys, long before she was ever thought of."

A loud barking of dogs broke out as they approached the first detached houses of the settlement. Shapes appeared at the lighted doorways, and as the surrey drew up at the hotel balcony a crowd of heads was seen in the windows. The entire population of Rocky Bar spent its evenings at this hospitable resort, in summer on the balcony under the shade of the locust trees, in winter round the office stove, splitting and smoking in cheery sociability. But at this hour the great event of Rocky Bar's day was over. The eight stages, the passengers of which dined at the hotel, had long passed onward on their various routes up and down the "mother lode" and into the camps of the Sierra. That the nightly excitement of the "victualing up" was to be supplemented by a late arrival in a surrey, driven by Jake McVeigh, the proprietor of the San Jacinto stables, and accompanied by a woman, was a sensational event not often awarded to Rocky Bar, even in the heyday of summer-time.

The occupants of the office crowded into the doorway and pressed themselves against the windows. The hotel proprietor, an ancient man with a loosened vest, and trousers tucked into long boots, dispersed them as he ushered the strangers into the office. That they were travelers of distinction was obvious, as much from their own appearance as from the fact that Jake McVeigh was driving them himself, in his best surrey and with his finest team. But just how important they were no one guessed till McVeigh followed them in, and into ears stretched for the information dropped the sentence, half-heard, like a stage aside:

"It's Bill Cannon and his daughter Rose."

Upon the proprietor it had an electric effect. He sped from the room

with the alertness of youth, promising "a cold lunch" in a minute. To the others it came as a piece of intelligence that added awe to the lighter emotions of the occasion. By common consent their eyes focused on the great man who stood warming his hands at the stove. Even the rare, unusual woman, revealed now as sufficiently pretty to be an object of future dreams, was interesting only to the younger and more impressionable members of the throng. All but these gazed absorbed, unblinking, at Bill Cannon, the Bonanza King.

He was used to it. It had been a part of his life for years. Eying his admirers with a genial good humor, he entered into conversation with them, his manner marked by an easy familiarity, which swept away all shades of embarrassment, and drew the men around the stove, eager to respond to his questions as to the condition and prospects of the locality. The talk was becoming general and animated, when the ancient man returned and announced that the "cold lunch" was ready and to please "step after him into the dining-room."

This gaunt apartment, grimly unadorned and faintly illumined, an occasional lantern backed by a tin reflector projecting a feeble light into its echoing emptiness, was swept of all intruders, and showed a barn-like bareness of wall and loftiness of roof. Lines of tables, uncovered between flanking wooden benches, were arranged down its length. Across the end of one of these white cloth was spread and three places set. Jake McVeigh, less innocently democratic than the hotel proprietor, was about to withdraw from the society of his distinguished patron and seat himself in seemingly loneliness at an adjacent table, when Bill Cannon's voice arrested him.

"What are you going off there for, sonny, as if you were a leper? Come over here and sit side of us."

Cannon, his overcoat removed, was seen to be a powerful, thick-set man, with a bulkiness that was more a matter of broad build and muscular development than fat. His coat set ill upon him and strained at the buttons. It had the effect of having worked up toward the shoulders, noticeable in the clothes of men who are deep-chested and sit bunchily. He had a short neck which he accommodated with a turn-down collar, a gray beard, clipped close to his cheeks and square on the chin, and gray hair, worn rather long and combed sleekly and without parting back from his forehead. In age he was close to seventy, but the alertness and intelligence of a conquering energy and vitality were in his glance, and showed in his movements, deliberate, but sure and full of precision. He spoke little as he ate his dinner, leaning over his plate and responding to the remarks of his daughter with an occasional monosyllable that might have sounded curt, had it not been accompanied with a



"What Are You Going Off There For, Sonny, as if You Were a Leper?"

lazy cast of his eye upon her that was as full of affection as a caress.

The young lady, who had also put off her outer wraps, still wore her hat, which was wide-brimmed and cast a shadow over the upper part of her face. Below it her hair showed a fine, bright blonde, giving forth silky gleams in the lamplight. To the peeping heads in the doorway she seemed a creature instinct with romantic charm, which was expressed in such delicacies of appearance as a pearl-white throat, a rounded chin, and lips that smiled readily. These graces, eagerly deciphered through dimness and distance, had the attraction of the semi-seen, and imagination, thus giving an encouraging fillip, invested Bill Cannon's girl with a haunting beauty. It was remarked that she bore no resemblance to her father in coloring, features, or build. In talking it over later, Rocky Bar decided that she must favor her mother, who, as all California knew, had been a waitress in the Yuba Hotel at Marysville, when

Bill Cannon, then a miner in the Freeze-Out, had wooed and won her. It was toward the end of the meal, that, looking at the opposite wall, her glance was caught by a large clock to which she drew her father's attention:

"Half-past nine! How fashionable we are! And when are you going to get us up to Antelope, Mr. McVeigh?" McVeigh studied the clock ponderingly as he felt in his breast pocket for his toothpick.

"Well," he said, "if we leave here at ten and make good time the hill way—it's up hill pretty much without a break—I'll get you there about midnight."

She made a little grimace. "And it will be much colder, won't it?"

"Colder 'n' colder. You'll be gain' higher with every step. Antelope's on the slope of the Sierra, and you can't expect to be warm up there in the end of January."

"If you hadn't wanted to come," said her father, "you'd have been just about getting ready for Mrs. Ryan's ball. Isn't this about the magic hour when you begin to lay on the first layer of war-paint?"

The girl looked at the clock, nodding with a faint, reminiscent smile.

"Just about," she said. "I'd have been probably looking at my dress laid out on the bed and saying to myself, 'Now I wonder if it's worth while getting into that thing and having all the bother of going to this ball.' On the evenings when I go out, there's always a stage when that happens."

McVeigh, with his toothpick in full operation, looked at her, admiring and half-comprehending, for the first time feeling himself an outsider. She caught his eye, read its meaning, and with the quick tact of a delicate nature, said:

"It's Mrs. Cornelius Ryan in San Francisco. She has a ball to-night and I was going, but I came up here with papa instead. I don't care for balls."

"Sort of late to be primping up for a ball," said McVeigh, restoring the toothpick to his pocket and pushing back his chair. "I'll go and have a look at the horses. And, Governor, if you'll be ready in fifteen minutes I'll be round at the porch waiting."

Cannon nodded, and, as the driver clumped off over the board floor, said to his daughter:

"I wonder if Dominick Ryan'll be there—at the ball, I mean. His mother's made up her mind not to recognize the woman he's married, and to freeze her out, but I wonder if she'll have the nerve not to ask her to-night."

"I don't see how she could do that," said the girl. "This is one of the largest balls ever given in San Francisco. She can't leave her son out, and she couldn't ask him without his wife."

"Couldn't she?" said the old man, with a narrowing of his eyes and a knowing wag of his head. "You don't know Della Ryan, I do. I've known her forty years, ever since she was first married and did washing on the back porch of her shanty in Virginia City. She was a good deal of a woman then, a strong, brainy woman, and she's the same to-day, but hard as nails. I'll bet a hat she hasn't asked Dominick's wife to that ball."

"What do you suppose he'll do?" asked the daughter, somewhat aghast at this glimpse at the Ryan family skeleton.

"Don't ask me such conundrums. I'm glad I'm not in it, that's all I know. When two women lock horns I'm ready to step quietly down and out. I never to my knowledge saw Dominick's wife, but I've heard about her, and take it she's a pretty hard kind of a proposition. They say she married the boy for money and position, and hasn't got either. Della, who has the money, hasn't given them a cent since the marriage; made up her mind, people say, to force Mrs. Dominick out. She doesn't seem to have done it, and I guess it's been sort of aggravating to her. Just the same I'd like to know if she's had the nerve not to send the woman an invitation to the ball. That would be pretty tough."

"I've never seen either Dominick or his wife," said the girl. "It seems odd when I know Mrs. Ryan and Cornelia so well. But he married the year I came back from Europe, and he's never been anywhere since. I don't believe he ever goes to his mother's. There's Mr. McVeigh in the doorway; we'd better be going."

Once again in the carriage they were soon clear of the last straggling shanty, and speeding along the pale, ascending road. The silence that held the trio before their arrival at Rocky Bar again fell on them. Wrapped in overcoats and rugs, Bill Cannon appeared to slumber, every now and then—as the wheels jolted over a piece of rough road-bed—shaken into growing wakefulness. McVeigh also rolled sleepily in his seat, occasionally leaning sideways to spit over the wheel. Only the girl seemed alert and wide-awake, her face craning out from the shadowed back seat, her eyes strained to pierce the obscurity and see for the first time the landscape of foothill California, of which her father had so often told her.

McVeigh looked back over his shoulder, saw the bright eyes under the hat brim, and said softly:

"The Silver Crescent stamp-mill. The last big mine we'll see."

The ascending road crept along the edges of ravines whence the sound of running water came in a clear clink, dived down into black caverns of trees unlighted by the feeblest ray of star-shine, and then climbed in slow, laborious loops the bare bulwarks of the mountain. Had the girl

been able to see plainly she would have noticed the change in the foliage, the disappearance of the smaller shrubs and delicate interlacement of naked boughs, and the mightier growth of the pines, soaring shafts devoid of branches to a great height. Boulders appeared among their roots, straight falls of rock edged the road like the walls of a fort.

McVeigh turned and caught the bright eye.

"Seems like your paw must think a lot of what he's heard about the new strike at Greenhide to come all this way," he whispered.

"I guess he does," came the response in the same key.

"It sort of stumps me to know why you came along with him," he continued, his eyes on the horses, but leaning back to catch her answer.

"Mightn't I just want to see the country?"

"Well, maybe you might, but it don't seem to me that you're seein' much of it to-night."

He heard her smothered laugh, shot his glance back to his horses, and then turning back to her.

"You're a lively girl, ain't you?" he said.

"I don't feel very lively just at this minute. I'm a cold girl, the coldest in California, I think."

That made him laugh, too, but he turned back to his horses, saying with quick consideration:

"I guess you are. Come, boys," to the horses, "we've got to get a move on. We can't let this young lady catch cold."

The horses quickened their pace and there was no more talk. An hour later the first broken lights of Antelope sparkled along the road. The old mining camp, in a hollow between two buttresses of the Sierra, lay shuttered and dreaming under the starlight. A lamp-lit window, here and there, showed the course of its straggling main street, and where the hotel stood, welcoming rays winked between the boughs of leafless trees.

As the thud of the approaching

hoof-beats woke the echoes a sudden violent barking of dogs broke out. Antelope was evidently not as sound asleep as it looked. At the hotel, especially, there was life and movement. The bar disgorged a throng of men, and Perley, the proprietor, had to push his way through them to welcome his midnight guests. Antelope, though remote, was in telegraphic communication with the world, and the operator at Rocky Bar had wired Perley to be ready for the distinguished arrivals—news that in a half-hour was known throughout the town and had brought most of the unattached male population into the hotel.

## CHAPTER II.

### A Young Man Married.

That same evening, at the hour when Bill Cannon and his daughter were setting out from Rocky Bar, Dominick Ryan was walking up Van Ness Avenue toward his mother's house.

Dominick did not know at what hours balls of the kind Mrs. Ryan was giving that evening were supposed to begin. It was nearly three years since he had been a participant in such festive gatherings. He had not been at a dance, or a dinner, or a theater party since his marriage. He had heard that these "functions," as people now called them, began later than they did in his day. Stopping by a lamp he drew out his watch—ten o'clock. It was later than he expected. In truth, as he had seen the house looming massively from its less imposing neighbors, his foot had lagged, his approach had grown slower and slower. It was his mother's home, once his own, and as he drew nearer to it his reluctance to enter grew stronger, more overpoweringly oppressive.

The stimulating unquiet of festival was in the air. Round the mouth of the canvas tunnel that stretched from the door a dingy crowd was assembled, staring in at nothing more inspiring than the blank visage of the closed portal. At every passing footstep each face turned to the street, hopefully expectant of the first guest. The whining of catgut strings, swept by tentative bows, struck on Dominick's ear as he pushed his way through the throng and passed up the tunnel. Before he touched the bell the door swung back and a man-servant he had never seen before murmured politely in low tones:

"Gentlemen's dressing-room first floor to the right."

Dominick stood uncertain. He was



"And So Your Wife Sent You Up Here to Beg for an Invitation."

only a rare, occasional visitor at his mother's house, and to-night the hall stripped for revelry looked strangely unfamiliar.

"Gentlemen's dressing-room first floor to the right," repeated the servant, and Dominick became aware of the man's eyes, fixed on him with a gleam of uneasy scrutiny shining through cultivated obsequiousness.

"Where is my—" he was going to say "mother," but checked himself, amending it with, "Where is Mrs. Ryan?"

The servant indicated the open doorway to the right and Dominick passed in. Through the vista of two rooms, their connecting archways uncurtained, he saw the shining spaciousness of the ball-room, the room his mother had added to the house when Cornelia, his sister, had "come out."

As he entered he saw his mother and Cornelia. They had been standing in one corner, Cornelia adjusting the shade of an electric light.

His mother was standing beside her watching the arranging hand. She was sixty-eight years of age and very stout, but her great wealth made it possible for her to employ dressmakers who were artists and experts, and her Parisian costume made her look almost shapely. It fell about her in some jotted garnishments. With their shifting gleam the glint of diamonds mingled. She also wore pearls round her neck and some diamond ornaments in her elaborately-dressed gray hair.

"There!" said Cornelia. "Now they're all even," and she wheeled

slowly, her glance slipping along the veiled lights of the sconces. In its circuit it encountered Dominick's figure in the doorway.

"Dominick!" she cried, and stood staring, naively astonished and dismayed.

Mrs. Ryan turned with a start, her face suffused with color. The one word seemed to have an electrifying effect upon her, joyous, perturbing—unquestionably exciting.

"My boy!" she said, and she rustled across the room with her hands out.

Dominick walked toward her. He was grave, pale, and looked thoroughly miserable. He had his cane in one hand, his hat in the other. As he approached her he moved the hat to his left hand and took hers.

"You've come!" she said fondly. "I knew you would. That's my boy. I knew you'd come when your mother asked you."

"Yes, I've come," he said slowly, and looking down as if desiring to avoid her eyes. "Yes, I've come, but—"

His mother's glance fell from his face to his figure and saw under the loose fronts of his overcoat that he wore his business suit. Her countenance instantly, with almost electric suddenness, stiffened into antagonism. Her eye lost its love, and hardened into a stony look of defiant indignation. She pulled her hand from his and jerked back the front of his coat with it.

"What's this mean?" she said sharply. "Why aren't you dressed? The people will be here in a minute. You can't come this way."

"I was going home to dress," he said. "I am not sure yet that I can come."

"Why?" she demanded.

"I came to ask you for an invitation for Berny."

"Hah!" said his mother, expelling her breath in an angry ejaculation of confirmed suspicion. "That's it, is it? I thought as much!"

"Mamma!" said the girl who had been standing by, uneasily listening. "Mamma dear—"

"Keep quiet, Cornie," said her mother, "you're not in this"—turning to Dominick. "And so your wife sent you up here to beg for an invitation! She's got you under her thumb to that extent? Well, go back to her and tell her that she can send you forty times and you'll not get it—not while this is my house. When I'm dead you can do what you like."

She turned away from him, her face dark with stirred blood, her body quivering. Anger was not the only passion that shook her. Deeper than this went outraged pride, love turned to gall, impotent fury that the woman her son had married had power over him so to reduce his pride and humble his manhood—her only son, the joy and glory of her old age, her Benjamin.

He looked after her, uncertain frowning, desperate.

"It's not right," he protested. "It's not fair. You're unjust to her and to me."

The old woman moved across the room to the corner where she had been standing when he entered. She did not turn, and he continued:

"You're asking people to this ball that you hardly know. Everybody in San Francisco's going. What harm has Berny done that you should leave her out this way?"

"I don't want women with that kind of record in my house. I don't ask decent people here to meet that sort," said his mother over her shoulder.

"Are you ever going to forget the past, mother?"

She wheeled round toward him at most shouting:

"No—no—no! Never! Never! Make your mind up to that."

They looked at each other across the open space, the angry defiance in their faces not hiding the love and appeal that spoke in their eyes.

"Oh, mother!" he exclaimed, half turning away with a movement of despair.

His mother looked at him from under her lowered brows, her under lip thrust out, her face unrelenting.

"Come here whenever you like," she said, "as often as you want. It's your home, Dominick, mine and yours. But it's not your wife's. Understand that."

She turned away and again moved slowly toward the corner, her rich skirts trailing fanwise over the parquet. He stood, sick at heart, looking at the tip of his cane as it rested on the floor.

"Dominick," said his sister's voice beside him, "go; that's the only thing to do. You see it's no use." She made a backward jerk of her head toward their mother, and then, struck by the misery of the eyes he lifted to her face, said tenderly, "I'm so sorry. You know I'd have sent it if I could. But it's no use. It's just the same old fight over again and nothing gained. Tell your wife it's hopeless. Make her give it up."

He turned slowly, his head hanging. "All right," he said, "I'll tell her. Good night, mother."

"Good night, Dominick," came the answer.

"Good night, Cornie," he said in a muffled voice and left the room.

He passed through the brilliantly bright, flower-scented parlors and was shown out by the strange man-servant.

He was a man in the full vigor of his youth, strong and brave, yet at this moment he feared, feared as a child or a timid woman might fear, the thought of his wife. He dreaded to meet her; he shrank from it, and to put it off he wandered about the familiar streets, up one and down the other, trying to overcome his sick reluctance, trying to make up his mind to go to her, trying to conquer his fear.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)