

RICH MENS CHILDREN

Dr. GERALDINE BONNER
Author of "THE PIONEER
TOMORROW'S TANGLE," etc.

Illustrations by
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SYNOPSIS.

Bill Cannon, the bonanza king, and his daughter, Rose, who had passed up Mrs. Cornelius Ryan's ball at San Francisco to accompany her father, arrive at Antelope. Dominick Ryan calls on his mother to beg a ball invitation for his wife, and is refused. The determined old lady refuses to recognize her daughter-in-law. Dominick had been trapped into a marriage with Bernice Iverson, a stenographer, several years his senior. She squanders his money, they have frequent quarrels, and he slips away. Cannon and his daughter are snowed in at Antelope.

CHAPTER IV.—Continued.

"And the other one," went on Cora, her eyes riveted on the half-dressing, her subconscious mind making notes of the disposition of every coil, "his name's J. D. Buford. And I'd like you to guess what he is! An actor, a stage player. He's been playing all up the state from Los Angeles and was going down to Sacramento to keep an engagement there. It just tickles me to death to have an actor in the house. I ain't never seen one close to before."

The last hair-pin was adjusted and Miss Cannon studied the effect with a hand-glass.

"An actor," she commented, running a smoothing palm up the back of her head, "that's just what he looked like, now I think of it. Perhaps he'll act for us. I think it's going to be lots of fun being snowed up at Antelope."

The sound of a voice crying "Cora" here rose from the hallway and that young woman, with a languid deliberation of movement, as of one who obeys a vulgar summons at her own elegant leisure, rose and departed, apologizing for having to go so soon. A few minutes later, the hour of supper being at hand, Rose followed her.

She was descending the stairs when a commotion from below, a sound of voices, loud, argumentative, rising and falling in excited chorus, hurried her steps. The lower hall, lit with lamps and the glow of its stove, heated to a translucent red, was full of men. A current of cold could be felt in the hot atmosphere and fresh snow was melting on the floor. Standing by the stove was a man who had evidently just entered. Ridges of white hair caught in the folds of his garments; a silver hoar was on his beard. He held his hands out to the heat and as Rose reached the foot of the stairs she heard him say:

"Well, I tell you that any man that started to walk up here from Rocky Bar this afternoon must have been plumb crazy. Why, John L. Sullivan couldn't do it in such a storm."

To which the well-bred voice of Willoughby answered:

"But according to the message he started at two and the snow was hardly falling then. He must have got a good way, past the Silver Crescent, when the storm caught him."

A hubbub of voices broke out here, and, seeing her father on the edge of the crowd, Rose went to him and plucked his sleeve, murmuring:

"What's happened? What's going on?"

He took his cigar out of his mouth and turned toward her, speaking low and keeping his eyes on the men by the stove.

"The telegraph operator has just had a message sent from Rocky Bar that a man started from there this afternoon to walk up here. They don't think he could make it and are afraid he's lost somewhere. Perley and some of the boys are going out to look for him."

"What a dreadful thing! In such a storm! Do you think they'll ever find him?"

He shrugged, and replaced his cigar in his mouth.

"Oh, I guess so. If he was strong enough to get on near here they ought to. But it's just what the operator says. The feller must have been plumb crazy to attempt such a thing. Looks as if he were a stranger in the country."

"It's a sort of quiet, respectable way of committing suicide," said the voice of the actor behind them.

Rose looked over her shoulder and saw his thin, large-featured face, no longer nipped and reddened with cold, but wreathed in an obsequious and friendly smile which furrowed it with deep lines. Her father answered him and she turned away, being more interested in the preparations for the search party. As she watched these she could hear the desultory conversation behind her, the actor's comments delivered with an unctuous, elaborate politeness which, contrasted with her father's gruff brevity, made her smile furtively to herself.

Supper was an animated meal that evening. The suddenly tragic interest that had developed drew the little group of guests together with the strands of a common sympathy. The judge and the actor moved their seats to the Cannons' table. Cora was sent to request the doctor—a young man fresh from his graduation in San Francisco who took his meals at the bachelor's table—to join them and add the weight of medical opinion to their surmises as to the traveler's chances of survival. These, the doctor thought, depended as much upon the

man's age and physical condition, as upon the search party's success in finding him.

After supper they retired to the parlor, piled the fire high and sat grouped before it, the smoke of cigars and cigarettes lying about their heads in white layers. It was but natural that the conversation should turn on stories of the great storms of the past. Rose had heard many such before, but to-night, with the wind rocking the old hotel and the thought of the lost man heavy at her heart, she listened, held in a cold clutch of fascinated attention, to tales of the emigrants caught in the passes of the Sierra, of pioneer mining-camps relieved by mule trains which broke through the snow blockade as the miners lay dying in their huts, of men risking their lives to carry succor to comrades lost in their passage from camp to camp on just such a night as this.

The clock hand passed ten, and the periods of silence that at intervals had fallen on the watchers grew longer and more frequent, and finally merged into a stillness where all sat motionless, listening to the storm.

It was nearly eleven, and for fifteen minutes no one had spoken a word. Two of the dogs had come in and lain down on the hearth-rug, their noses on their paws, their eyes fixed brightly and ponderingly on the fire. In the midst of the motionless semicircle of them suddenly raised his head, his ears pricked. With his muzzle elevated, its eyes full of awakened intelligence, it gave a low, uneasy whimper. Almost simultaneously Rose started and drew herself up, exclaiming, "Listen!" The sound of sleigh bells, faint as a noise in a dream, came through the night.

In a moment the lower floor was shaken with movement and noise. The bar emptied itself on to the porch and the hall doors were thrown wide. The sleigh had been close to the hotel before its bells were heard, and almost immediately its shape emerged from the swirling whiteness and drew up at the steps. Rose, standing back in the parlor doorway, heard a clamor of voices, a rising surge of sound from which no intelligible sentence detached itself, and a thumping and stamping of feet as the searchers staggered in with the lost traveler. The crowd separated before them and they entered slowly, four men carrying a fifth, their bodies incrustated with snow, the man they bore an unseen shape covered with whitened rugs from which an arm hung, a limp



"Do You Think They'll Ever Find Him?"

hand touching the floor. Questions and answers, now clear and sharp, followed them, like notes upon the text of the inert form:

"Where'd you get him?"

"About five miles below on the main road. One of the horses almost stepped on him. He was right in the path, but he was all sprinkled over with snow."

"He's not dead, is he?"

"Pretty near, I guess. We've pumped whisky into him, but he ain't shown a sign of life."

"Who is he?"

"Search me. I ain't seen him myself yet. Just as we got him the lantern went out."

There was a sofa in the hall and they laid their burden there, the crowd edging in on them, horrified, interested, hungrily peering. Rose could see their bent, expressive backs and the craning napes of their necks. Then a sharp order from the doctor drove them back, sheepish, tramping on one another's toes, bunched against the wall and still avidly staring.

As their ranks broke, the young girl had a sudden, vivid glimpse of the man, his head and part of his chest uncovered. Her heart gave a leap of pity and she made a movement from the doorway, then stopped. The lost traveler, that an hour before had almost assumed the features of a friend, was a complete stranger that she had never seen before.

He looked like a dead man. His

face, the chin up, the lips parted under the fringe of a brown mustache, was a marble white, and showed a gray shadow in the cheek. The hair on his forehead, thawed by the heat, was lying in damp half-curved semicircles, dark against the pallid skin. There was a ring on the hand that still hung limp on the floor. The doctor, muttering to himself, pulled open the shirt and was feeling the heart, when Perley, who had flown into the bar for more whisky, emerged, a glass in his hand. As his eye fell upon the man, he stopped, stared, and then exclaimed in loud-voiced amazement:

"My God—why, it's Dominick Ryan! Look here, Governor"—to Cannon, who was standing by his daughter in the parlor doorway, "come and see for yourself. If this ain't young Ryan I'm a Dutchman!"

Cannon pushed between the intervening men and bent over the prostrate figure.

"That's who it is," he said slowly and unemotionally. "It's Dominick Ryan, all right. Well, by ginger!" and he turned and looked at the amazed inkeeper, "that's the queerest thing I ever saw. What's brought him up here?"

Perley, his glass snatched from him by the doctor who seemed entirely indifferent to their recognition of his patient, shrugged helplessly.

"Blest if I know," he said, staring aimlessly about him. "He was here last summer fishing. But there ain't no fishing now. God, ain't it a good thing that operator at Rocky Bar had the sense to telegraph up!"

CHAPTER V.

Nurse and Patient.

When Dominick returned to consciousness he lay for a space looking directly in front of him, then moved his head and let his eyes sweep the walls. They were alien walls of white plaster, naked of all adornment. The light from a shaded lamp lay across one of them in a soft yet clear wash of yellow, so clear that he could see that the plaster was coarse.

There were few pieces of furniture in the room, and all new to him. A bureau of the old-fashioned marble-topped kind stood against the wall opposite. The lamp that cast the yellow light was on this bureau; its globe, a translucent gold reflection revealed in liquid clearness in the mirror just behind it. It was not his own room nor Berny's. He turned his head farther on the pillow very slowly, for he seemed sunk in an abyss of suffering and feebleness. On the table by the bed's head was another lamp, a folded newspaper shutting its light from his face, and here his eyes stopped.

A woman was sitting by the foot of the bed, her head bent as if reading. He stared at her with even more intentness than he had at the room. The glow of the lamp on the bureau was behind her—he saw her against it without color or detail, like a shadow thrown on a sheet. Her outlines were sharply defined against the illumined stretch of plaster—the arch of her head, which was broken by the coils of hair on top, her rather short neck, with some sort of collar binding it, the curve of her shoulders, rounded and broad, not the shoulders of a thin woman. He did not think she was his wife, but she might be, and he moved and said suddenly in a husky voice:

"What time is it?"

The woman started, laid her book down, and rose. She came forward and stood beside him, looking down, the filaments of hair round her head blurring the sharpness of its outline. He stared up at her, haggard and intent, and saw it was not his wife. It was a strange woman with a pleasant, smiling face. He felt immensely relieved and said with a hoarse carefulness of utterance:

"What time did you say it is?"

"A few minutes past five," she answered. "You've been asleep."

"Have I?" he said, gazing immovably at her. "What day is it?"

"Thursday," she replied. "You came here last night from Rocky Bar. Perhaps you don't remember."

"Rocky Bar!" he repeated vaguely, groping through a haze of memory. "Was it only yesterday? Was it only yesterday I left San Francisco?"

"I don't know when you left San Francisco"—the newspaper cracked and bent a little, letting a band of light fall across the pillow. She leaned down, arranging it with careful hands, looking from the light to him to see if it were correctly adjusted.

"Whenever you left San Francisco," she said, "you got here last night. They brought you here, Perley and some other men in the sleigh. They found you in the road. You were half-frozen."

"What is this place?"

"Antelope," said the woman. "Perley's Hotel at Antelope."

"Oh, yes," he answered with an air of weary recollection. "I was going to walk there from Rocky Bar, but the snow came down too hard, and the wind—you could hardly stand against it! It was a terrible pull. Perley's Hotel at Antelope. Of course, I know all about it. I was here last summer for two weeks fishing."

She stretched out her hand for a glass, across the top of which a book rested. He followed the movement with a mute fixity.

"This is your medicine," she said, taking the book off the glass. "You were to take it at five but I didn't like to wake you."

She dipped a spoon into the glass and held it out to him. But the young man felt too ill to bother with medicine and, as the spoon touched his lips, he gave his head a slight jerk and the liquid was spilt on the counterpane. She looked at it for a rueful moment, then said, as if with gathering determination,

"But you must take it. I think perhaps I gave it wrong. I ought to have lifted you up. It's easier that way," and before he could answer she slipped her arm under his head and raised it, with the other hand setting the rim of the glass against his lips. He swallowed a mouthful and felt her arm sliding from behind his head. He had a hazy consciousness that a perfume came from her dress, and for the first time he wondered who she was. Wondering thus, his eyes again followed her hand putting back the glass, and watched it, white in the gush of lamplight, carefully replacing the book. Then she turned toward him with the same slight, soft smile.

"Who are you?" he said, keeping his hollowed eyes hard on her.

"I'm Rose Cannon," she answered. "Rose Cannon from San Francisco."

"Oh, yes," with a movement of comprehension, the name striking a chord of memory. "Rose Cannon from San Francisco, daughter of Bill Cannon. Of course I know."

He turned his head away from her and said dryly and without interest: "I thought it was some one else."

She bent down and said, speaking slowly and clearly as though to a child:

"The storm has broken the wires, but as soon as they are up, papa will send your mother word, so you needn't worry about that. But we don't either of us know your wife's address. If you could tell us—"

She stopped. He had begun to frown and then shut his eyes with an expression of weariness.

"That doesn't matter," he said. "Don't bother about it. Let her alone."

Again there was one of those pauses which seemed to him so long. He gave a sigh and moved restlessly, and she said:

"Are your feet very painful?"

"Yes, pretty bad," he answered.

"What's the matter with them?"

"They were frost-bitten, one partly frozen."

"Oh—" he did not seem profoundly interested. It was as if they were some one else's feet, only they hurt violently enough to obtrude themselves upon his attention. "Thank you very much," he added. "I'll be all right to-morrow."

He felt very tired and heard, as in a dream, the rustle of her dress as she moved again. She said something about "supper" and "Mrs. Perley coming," and the dark, enveloping sense of stupor from which he had come to life closed on him again.

Some time later on he emerged from it and saw another woman, stout and matronly, with sleekly parted hair, and an apron girl about her. He asked her, too, who she was, for the fear that he might wake and find his wife by his bedside mingled with the pain of his feet, to torment him and break the vast, dead restfulness of the torpor in which he lay.

It broke into gleams of interest and returning consciousness during the next two days. He experienced an acuter sense of illness and pain, the burning anguish of his feet and fevered misery of his body, bitten through with cold, brought him back to a realization of his own identity. He heard the doctor murmuring in the corner of "threatened pneumonia" and understood that he was the object threatened. He began to know and separate the strange faces that seemed continually to be bending over him, asking him how he felt. There was the doctor, Perley, Bill Cannon, and the old judge and three different women, whom he had some difficulty in keeping from merging into one composite being who was sometimes "Miss Cannon," and sometimes "Mrs. Perley," and then again "Cora."

When on the fourth day the doctor told him that he thought he would "pull through" with no worse ailment than a frozen foot, he had regained enough of his original vigor and impatience under restraint to express a determination to rise and "go on." He was in pain, mental and physical, and the ministrations and attentions of the satellites that so persistently revolved round his bed rasped him into irritable moodiness.

The doctor laughed at his desire to "move on." The storm was still raging and Antelope was as completely cut off from the rest of the world as if it were an uncharted island in the unknown reaches of the Pacific. Propping the invalid up among his pillows, he drew back the curtain and let him look out through a frost-painted pane on a world all sweeping lines and skurrying eddies of white. The drifts curled crisp edges over the angles of roofs, like the lips of breaking waves. The glimpse of the little town that the window afforded showed it cowering under a snow blanket, almost lost to sight in its folds.

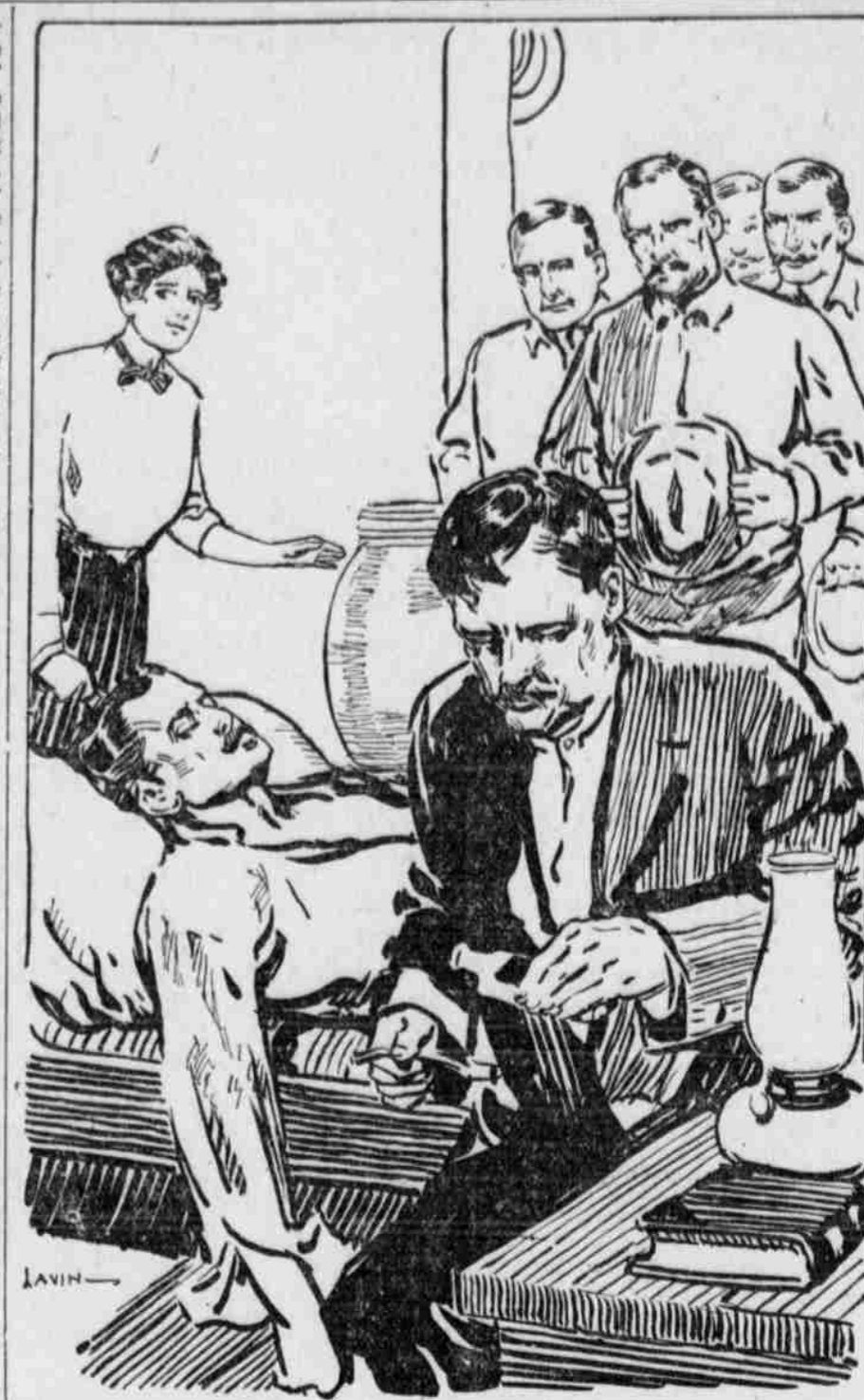
"Even if your feet were all right, you've lied here for two weeks anyway," said the doctor, dropping the curtain. "It's the biggest storm I ever saw, and there's an old timer that hangs round the bar who says it's as bad as the one that caught the Donner party in forty-six."

The next day it stopped and the world lay gleaming and still under a frosty crust.

That afternoon Dominick, clothed in an old bath-robe of the doctor's, his swathed feet hidden under a red rug drawn from Mrs. Perley's stores, was promoted to an easy chair by the window. The doctor, who had helped him dress, having disposed the rug over his knees and tucked a pillow behind his back, stood off and looked critically at the effect.

"I've got to have you look your best," he said, "and you've got to act your prettiest this afternoon. The young lady's coming in to take care of you while I go my rounds."

"Young lady!" exclaimed Dominick in a tone that indicated anything but



He Looked Like a Dead Man.

pleasurable anticipation. "What young lady?"

"Our young lady," answered the doctor. "Miss Cannon, the Young Lady of Perley's Hotel. Don't you know that's the nicest girl in the world? Maybe you don't, but that's because your powers of appreciation have been dormant for the last few days. The people here were most scared to death of her at first. They didn't know how she was going to get along, used to the finest, the way she's always been. But, bless your heart, she's less trouble than anybody in the place. There's twelve extra people eating here, besides you to be looked after, and Mrs. Perley and Cora are pretty near run to death trying to do it. Miss Cannon wanted to turn in and help them. They wouldn't have it, but they had to let her do her turn here taking care of you."

"It's very kind of her," said the invalid without enthusiasm. "I noticed her here several times."

"And as easy as an old shoe," said the doctor. "Just as nice to Perley's boy, who's a waif that the Perleys picked up in the streets of Stockton, as if he were the Prince of Wales. I tell you heredity's a queer thing. How did old Bill Cannon come to have a girl like that? Of course there's the mother to take into account, but—"

A knock on the door interrupted him. To his cry of "Come in," Rose entered, a white shawl over her shoulders, a book in her hand. While she and Dominick were exchanging greetings, the doctor began thrusting his medicines into his bag, alleging the necessity of an immediate departure, as two cases of bronchitis and three of pneumonia awaited him.

"You didn't know there were that many people in Antelope," he said as he snapped the clasp of the bag and picked up his hat. "Well, I'll swear to it, even if it does seem the prejudiced estimate of an old inhabitant. So long. I'll be back by five and I hope to hear a good report from the nurse."

The door closed behind him and Dominick and the young girl were left looking rather blankly at each other. He had a hunted, helpless feeling that he ought to talk to the young woman as gentlemen did who were not burdened by the pain of frozen feet and marital troubles. Moreover, he felt the annoyance of being thrust upon the care of a lady whom he hardly knew.

"I'm very sorry that they bothered you this way," he said awkwardly. "I—I don't think I need any one with me. I'm quite comfortable here by myself," and then he stopped, conscious of the ungraciousness of his words, and reddening uncomfortably. "I dare say you don't want me here," said Rose with an air of meekness which had the effect of being assumed. "But you really have been too sick to be left alone. Besides, there's your medicine, you must take that regularly."

The invalid gave an indifferent cast of his eye toward the glass on the bureau, guarded by the familiar book and spoon. Then he looked back at her. She was regarding him deprecatingly.

"Couldn't I take it myself?" he said. "I don't think I'd trust you," she answered.

His sunken glance was held by hers, and he saw, under the depreciation of her look, humor struggling to keep itself in seemingly suppression. He was faintly surprised. There did not seem to him anything comic in the fact of her distrust. But as he looked at her he saw the humor rising past control. She dropped her eyes to hide it and bit her under lip. This did strike him

as funny and a slow grin broke the melancholy of his face. She stole a stealthy look at him, her gravity vanished at the first glimpse of the grin, and she began to laugh, holding her head down and making the stifled, chuckling sounds of controlled mirth suddenly liberated. He was amused and a little puzzled and, with his grin more pronounced than before, said:

"What are you laughing at?"

She lifted her head and looked at him with eyes narrowed to slits, murmuring:

"You, trying to get rid of me and being so polite and helpless. It's too pathetic for words."

"If it's pathetic, why do you laugh?" he said, laughing himself, he did not know why.

She made no immediate reply and he looked at her, languidly interested and admiring. For the first time he realized that she was a pretty girl, with her glistening coils of blond hair and a pearl-white skin, just now suffused with pink.

"Why did you think I wanted to get rid of you?" he asked.

"You've almost said so," she answered. "And then—well, I can see you do."

"How? What have I done that you've seen?"

"Not any especial thing, but—I think you do."

He felt too weak and indifferent to tell polite falsehoods. Leaning his head on the pillow that stood up at his back, he said:

"Perhaps I did at first. But now I'm glad you came."

She smiled indulgently at him as though he were a sick child. "I should think you wouldn't have wanted me. You must be so tired of people coming in and out. Those days when you were so bad the doctor had the greatest difficulty in keeping men out who didn't know you and had never seen you. Everybody in the hotel wanted to crowd in."

"What did they want to do that for?"

"To see you. We were the sensation of Antelope first. But then you came and put us completely in the shade. Antelope hasn't had such an excitement as your appearance since the death of Jim Granger, whose picture is down stairs in the parlor and who comes from here."

"I don't see why I should be an excitement. When I was up here fishing last summer nobody was in the least excited."

"It was the way you came—half-dead out of the night as if the sea had thrown you up. Then everybody wanted to know why you did it, why you, a Californian, attempted such a dangerous thing."

"There wasn't anything so desperately dangerous about it," he said, almost in a tone of sulky protest.

"The men downstairs seemed to think so. They say nobody could have got up here in such a storm."

"Oh, rubbish! Besides, it wasn't storming when I left Rocky Bar. It was gray and threatening, but there wasn't a flake falling. The first snow came down when I was passing the Silver Crescent. It came very fast after that."

"Why did you do it—attempt to walk such a distance in such uncertain weather?"

Dominick smoothed the rug over his knees. His face, looking down, had a curious expression of cold, enforced patience.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Girl in No Hurry.

He—When shall we get married?
She—Oh, John, why do you take our engagement so seriously?