

RICH MENS CHILDREN

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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. Dominick Ryan is rescued from storm in unconscious condition and brought to Antelope Hotel. Antelope is cut off by storm. Rose Cannon nurses Dominick back to life.

CHAPTER VI.—(Continued.)

"I don't see how she could do that—transparent neck and all. I don't think that's the kind of dress to wear in a theater. It's too sort of conspicuous."

"I think Hannah's right," said Josh solemnly, nodding at Bernice. "It don't seem to me the right thing for a lady. Looks fast."

"What do you know about it, Josh McCree?" said Hazel pugnaciously. "You're a clerk in a jewelry store."

"Maybe I am," retorted Josh. "but I guess that don't prevent me from knowing when a thing looks fast. Clerks in jewelry stores ain't such gummens as you might think. And, anyway, I don't see that being a clerk in any kind of a store has anything to do with it."

Hazel was saved the effort of making a crushing retort, by Pearl, who had been silently eating her lunch, now suddenly launching a remark into the momentary pause.

"Did Uncle Dominick go to the ball?" she asked, raising a pair of limpid blue eyes to Bernice's face.

An instantaneous, significant silence fell on the others, and all eyes turned inquiringly to Bernice. Her air of cool control became slightly exaggerated.

"No, he stayed at home with me," she replied, picking faintly at the meat on her plate.

"But I suppose he felt real hurt and annoyed," said Hannah. "He couldn't have helped it."

Bernice did not reply. She knew that she must sooner or later tell her sisters of Dominick's strange departure. They would find it out otherwise and suspect more than she wanted them to know. They, like the rest of the world, had no idea that Bernice's brilliant marriage was not the domestic success it appeared on the surface. She moved her knife and fork with an arranging hand, and, as Hazel started to speak, said with as careless an air as she could assume:

"Dominick's gone. He left this morning."

"Gone where?" exclaimed Hazel. "This was the best question and Bernice had schooled herself in an answer in the car coming up."

"Oh, up into the country," she said nonchalantly. "He's worn out. They work the life out of him in that horrible bank. He's getting insomnia and thought he'd better take a change now before he got run completely down, so he left this morning and I'm a gay grass widow."

She laughed and drank some water. Her laugh did not sound to her own ears convincing and she was aware that, while Hannah was evidently satisfied by her explanation, Hazel was eying her ponderingly.

"Well, if he's got insomnia," said Hannah, "he'd better take his holiday right now. That's the best thing to do. Take it in the beginning. Before father took ill—"

Here Josh interrupted her, as Hannah's reminiscences of the late contractor's last illness were long and exhaustive.

"Where'd you say he'd gone?" he queried.

"I can't remember the name," Bernice answered with skillfully-assumed indifference; "somewhere down toward Santa Cruz and Monterey, some new place. And he may not stay there. If he doesn't like it, he'll just move around from place to place."

"Why didn't you go, too?" said Pearl.

This was the second question Bernice had dreaded. Now suddenly she felt her throat contract and her lips quiver. Her usually iron nerve had been shaken by her passion of the night before and the shock of the morning. The unwanted sensations of gloom and apprehension closed in on her again, and this time made her feel weak and tearful.

"I didn't want to. I hate moving around," she said, pushing her chair back from the table. Her voice was a little hoarse, and suddenly feeling the sting of tears under her eyelids she raised her hands to her hat and began to fumble with her veil. "Why should I leave my comfortable flat to go trailing round in a lot of half-built hotels? That sort of thing doesn't appeal to me at all. I like my own cook, and my own bed, and my own bath-tub. I'm more of an old maid than Hannah. Well, so long, people. I must be traveling."

She laid her napkin on the table and jumped up with an assumption of brisk liveliness. She paid no attention to the expostulations of her relatives, but going to the glass arranged

her hat and put on her gloves. When she turned back to the table she had regained possession of herself. Her veil was down and through it her cheeks looked unusually flushed, and her dark eyes, with their slanting outer corners, brighter and harder than ever. She hurried through her good-bys on the plea that she had shopping to do, and almost ran out of the house, leaving a trail of perfume and high, artificial laughter behind her.

For the next week she waited for news from Dominick and none came. It was a trying seven days. Added to her embarrassment of mind, the loneliness of the flat was almost unbearable. There was no one to speak to, no one to share her anxieties. Her position was unusually friendless. When her marriage had lifted her from the ranks of working women she had shown so cold a face to her old companions that they had dropped away from her, realizing that she wished to cut all ties with the world of her humble beginnings. New friends had been hard to make. The wives of some of the bank officials, and odd, aspiring applicants for such honors as would accrue from even this remote connection with the august name of Ryan, were all she had found where-with to make a circle and a visiting list.

But she was intimate with none of them and was now too worried to seek the society of mere acquaintances. She ate her solitary meals in oppressive silence, feeling the Chinaman's eyes fixed upon her in ironic disbelief of the story she had told him to account for Dominick's absence. Eat as slowly as she would, her dinner could not be made to occupy more than twenty minutes, and after that there was the long evening, the interminable evening, to be passed. She was a great reader of newspapers, and when she returned from her afternoon shopping she brought a bundle of evening papers home in her hand. She would read these slowly, at first the important items, then go over them for matters of less moment, and finally scan the advertisements.

At the end of the week she felt that she must find out something, and went to the bank. It was her intention to cash a small check and over this transaction see if the paying teller would vouchsafe any information about Dominick. She pushed the check through the opening and, as the man counted out the money, said glibly:

"Do you hear anything of my wandering husband?"

The teller pushed the little pile of silver and gold through the window toward her and leaning forward, said, with the air of one who intends to have a leisurely moment of talk:

"No, we haven't. Isn't it our place to come to you for that? We were wondering where he'd gone at such a season."

Bernice's delicately-gloved fingers made sudden haste to gather up the coins.

"Oh, he's just loafing about," she said as easily as was consistent with the disappointment and alarm that gripped her. "He's just wandering round from place to place. He was getting insomnia and wanted a change of scene."

She snapped the clasp of her purse before the man could ask her further questions, nodded her good-bys, and turned from the window. Her face changed as she emerged on the wide, stone steps that led to the street. It was pinched and pale, two lines drawn between the eyebrows. She descended the steps slowly, the flood of magnificent sunshine having no warming influence upon her. Many of the passing throng of men looked at her—a pretty woman in her modestly-made dress of tan-colored cloth and her close-fitting brown turban with a bunch of white paradise feathers at one side. Under her dotted veil her carefully made-up complexion looked

naturally clear and rosy, and her eyes, accentuated by a dark line beneath them, were in attractive contrast to her reddened hair. But she was not thinking of herself or the admiration she evoked, a subject which was generally of overpowering interest. Matters of more poignant moment had crowded all else from her mind.

The next week began and advanced and still no news from Dominick. He had been gone fourteen days, when one evening in her perusal of the paper she saw his name. Her trembling hands pressed the sheet down on the table, and her eyes devoured the printed lines. It was one of the many short despatches that had come from the foot-hill mining towns on the recent storms in the Sierra. It was headed Rocky Bar and contained a description of the situation at Antelope and the snow-bound colony there. Its chief item of information was that Bill Cannon and his daughter were among the prisoners at Perley's Hotel. A mention was made, only a line or two, of Dominick's walk from Rocky Bar, but it was treated lightly and gave no idea of the real seriousness of that almost fatal excursion.

Bernice read the two short paragraphs many times, and her spirits went up like the needle of a thermometer when the quicksilver he grasped in a warm hand. Her relief was intense, easeful and relaxing, as the sudden cessation of a pain. Not only was Dominick at last found, but he was found in a place as far removed from his own family and its influences as he was from her. And best of all he was shut up, incarcerated, with Bill Cannon, the Bonanza King. What might not come of that? Bernice was not glad of the quarrel, but it seemed a wonderful piece of luck that that unpleasant episode should have sent him into the very arms of the man that she had always wanted him to cultivate and who was the best person in the world for him to impress favorably. If Bill Cannon, who had been a friend of his father's, took a fancy to Dominick, there was no knowing what might happen. In a sudden reaction of relief and hope Bernice saw them almost adopted children of the Bonanza King, doting the Ryans in the pride of their new-found honors.

CHAPTER VII.

Snow-Bound.

While the world went about its affairs, attended to its business, read its papers, sent its telegrams and wrote its letters, the little group at

Antelope was as completely cut off from it as though marooned on a strip of sand in an unknown sea. A second storm had followed the original one, and the end of the first week saw them snowed in deeper than ever, Antelope a trickle of roofs and smoke-stacks, in a white, crystal-clear wilderness, solemn in its stillness and loneliness as the primeval world.

The wires were down; the letter-carrier could not break his way in to them. They heard no news and received no mail. Confined in a group of rude buildings, crouched in a hollow of the Sierra's flank, they felt for the first time what it was to be outside that circle of busy activity in which their lives had heretofore passed. They were face to face with the nature they thought they had conquered and which now in its quiet grandeur awed them with a sense of their own small helplessness. Pressed upon by that enormous silent indifference, they drew nearer together, each individual unit gaining in importance from the contrasting immensity without, each character unconsciously declaring itself, emerging from acquired reticences and becoming bolder and more open.

They accepted their captivity in a spirit of gay good humor. The only two members of the party to whom it seemed irksome were Bill Cannon and the actor, both girding against a confinement which kept them from their several spheres of action. The others abandoned themselves to a childish, almost fantastic enjoyment of a situation unique in their experience. It was soon to end, it would never be repeated. It was an adventure charged with romance, accidental, unsought, as all true adventures are. The world was forgotten for these few days of imprisonment against the mountain's mighty heart. It did not exist for them. All that was real was their own little party, the white-washed passages and walls of Perley's, the dining-room with its board floor and homely fare, and the parlor at night with a semicircle of faces round the blazing logs.

On the afternoon of the sixth day Dominick made his first appearance down stairs. He achieved the descent with slow painfulness, hobbling between Perley and the doctor. The former's bath-robe had been cast aside for a dignified dark-brown dressing-gown, contributed to his wardrobe by Cannon, and which, cut to fit the burly proportions of the Bonanza King, hung around the long, lank form of the young man in enveloping folds.

The parlor was empty, save for Miss Cannon sitting before the fire. Dominick had ceased to feel bashfulness and constraint in the presence of this girl, who had been pushed—against his will if not against her own—into the position of his head attendant. The afternoon when they had sat together in his room seemed to have brushed away all his shyness and self-consciousness. He thought now that it would be difficult to retain either in intercourse with a being who was so candid, so spontaneous, so freshly natural. He found himself treating her as if she were a young boy with whom he had been placed on a sudden footing of careless, cheery intimacy. But her outward seeming—that she presented to the eye—was not in the least boyish. Her pale, opaque blondness, her fine, rich outlines, her softness of men, were things as completely and gracefully feminine as the most epicurean admirer of women could have wished.

Now, at the sight of her bending over the fire, he experienced a sensation of pleasure which vaguely surprised him. He was hardly conscious that all the time he had been dressing and while he came down stairs he had been hoping that she would be there. He cast a quick glance ahead

of him, saw her, and looked away. The pain of his feet was violent, and without again regarding her he knew that while he was gaining his chair and his attendants were settling him, she had not turned from her contemplation of the fire. He already knew her well enough to have a comfortable assurance of her invariable quick tact. It was not till the two men were leaving the room that she turned to him and said, as if resuming an interrupted conversation:

"Well, how do you like the parlor? Speak nicely of it for I feel as if it belonged to me."

"It's a first-rate parlor," he answered, looking about him. "Never saw a better one. Who's the gentleman with the wreath of wax flowers round his head?"

"That's Jim Granger. He comes from here, you know; and you mustn't laugh at those flowers, they came off his coffin."

"My father knew him," said the young man indifferently. "There were lots of queer stories about Jim Granger. He killed a man once up at Bodie. You've a fine fire here, haven't you?"

"Fine. It's never allowed to go out. What do you think I intend to do with it? I've a plan for amusing and instructing you."

"What is it?" he said somewhat un- easily. "I don't feel in the least as if I wanted to be instructed."

She rose and moved to the center-

table which was covered with an irregular scattering of books.

"Before you came down I was looking over these books. There are lots of them. Mrs. Perley says they've been accumulating for years. Mining men have left them and some of them have the names of people I know written in them. I thought perhaps you might like to read some of them."

Dominick sent a lazily disparaging glance over the books. He was not much of a reader at the best of times.

"What are they," he said, "novels?"

"Mostly." She sat down by the table and took up the volume nearest to her. "Here's 'Tale of Two Cities'—that's a fine one."

"I've read it. Yes, it's splendid. It's all about the French Revolution. The hero's like a real person and heroes in books hardly ever are, only I'd have liked him better if he'd stopped drinking and married his girl."

"I thought perhaps you might like me to read to you," she said, turning a tentative glance on him. "That's how I was going to amuse and instruct you."

"I'm sure it would be much more amusing and probably just as instructive if you talked to me."

"You've got to stay down here two hours. How could I talk and be amusing and instructive for two hours? You'd probably have a relapse and I'm quite sure the doctor'd find me in a dead faint on the hearth when he came in."

"All right. Let's try the books. Don't let your risk relapses and dead faints."

"Very well, then, that's understood. We'll go through the library now. I'll read the titles and you say if you like any of them."

"Suppose I don't?"

"You'll surely have a preference."

"All right, I'll try to. Go on."

"Here's 'Foul Play,' by Charles Reade. It seems to have been a good deal read. Some of the paragraphs are marked with a pencil."

"I think I've read it, but I'm not sure. It sounds like a murder story. No, let's pass on that."

"Well, here's 'Mrs. Skaggs'—Husbands,' by Bret Harte. Does that sound as if you'd like it?"

"Husbands! No. We don't want to read about a woman who has husbands. Pass on that, too."

"The next is very nicely bound and

looks quite fresh and new, as if nobody had reach it much. It's called 'The Amazing Marriage.'"

"Oh, pass on that! I had it once and stuck in the third chapter. The last time I went East someone gave it to me to read on the train. I read three chapters and I was more amazed than anybody in sight. The porter was a fresh coon and I gave it to him as my revenge. I'll bet it amazed him."

"You don't seem to have anything in the nature of a preference, so far. I wonder how this will suit you. 'Notre Dame de Paris,' by Victor Hugo."

"I don't understand French."

"It's English and it's quite worn out, as if it had been read over and over. Several of the pages are falling out."

"Oh, I've read that. I just remember. It's a rattling good story, too. About the hunchback and the gipsy girl who tells fortunes and has a pet goat. The priest, who's a villain, falls off the steeple and clings to a gutter by his finger nails with his enemy watching him. It's the finest kind of a story."

"What a pity that you've read it! Oh, here's one that's evidently been a great favorite. It's in paper and it's all thumbed and torn. Somebody's written across the top, 'Of all the damned fool people—'. Oh, I beg your pardon, I read it before I realized. The name is 'Wife in Name Only.' It doesn't seem the kind of title that makes you want to read the book, does it?"

"'Wife in Name Only!' he gave a short laugh. "It certainly isn't the kind of name that would make me want to read a book."

"Nor me," said a deep voice behind them.

They both turned to see Buford, the actor, standing back of the table, his tall, angular figure silhouetted against the pale oblong of the uncurtained window. He was smiling suavely, but at the same time with a sort of uneasy, assumed assurance, which suggested that he was not unused to rebuffs.

"That, certainly," he said, "is not a name to recommend a book to any man—any man, that is, who has or ever had a wife."

He advanced into the circle of the freight, blandly beaming at the young man, who, leaning back in his chair, was eying him with surprised inquiry, never having seen him before. The look did not chill the friendly effusion of the actor who, approaching Dominick, said with the full, deep resonance of his remarkable voice:

"Congratulations, my dear sir, congratulations. Not alone on your recovery, but on the fact that you are here with us at all." He held out his large hand, the skin chapped and red with the cold, and the long fingers closed with a wrenching grip on Dominick's. "We were not sure, when you arrived among us a few nights ago, that we would have the felicity of seeing you so soon up and around—in fact, we were doubtful whether we would ever see you up and around."

"Thanks, very kind of you. Oh, I'm all right now." Dominick pressed the hand in return and then, bending a little forward, sent a glance of imploring inquiry round the stranger's shoulder at Rose.

She caught the eye, read its best, and presented the newcomer:

"Mr. Ryan, this is Mr. Buford who is snowed in here with us. Mr. Buford came here the same day as you, only he came on the Murphysville stage."

Buford sat down between them on one of the horsehair chairs that were sociably arranged round the table. The freight threw into prominence the bony angles of his thin face and glazed the backward sweep of his hair, dark brown, and worn combed away from his forehead, where a pair of heavy, flexible eyebrows moved up and down like an animated commentary on the conversation. When anything surprising was said they went up, anything puzzling or painful they were drawn down. He rested one hand on his knee, the fingers turned in, and, sitting bolt upright, buttoned tight into his worn frock-coat, turned a glance of somewhat deprecating amiability upon the invalid.

"You had a pretty close call, a pretty-close-call," he said. "If the operator at Rocky Bar hadn't had the sense to wire up here, that would have been the end of your life story."

Dominick had heard this from every member of the snowed-in party. Repletion was not making it any more agreeable, and there was an effect of abrupt ungraciousness in his short answer which was merely a word of comment.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Very Easy Money.

An Abilene (Kan.) paper tells how a crowd of college boys, seeking work in the harvest fields, were buncoed in that town. The confidence man was a big, fine looking fellow and this was the talk he gave the collegians: "I'm J. J. Jackson. I'm looking for about twenty high grade harvesters from the Jackson ranch, which my father owns. We have several girls from the east visiting us, and as the women have to be alone a great deal, we don't want to depend on the ordinary class of labor. You fellows are college men, and you look all right to me. If you'll let me have a dollar, as a pledge of good faith I'll take you along." Twenty in one group paid a dollar apiece, and that is the last any one saw of Mr. Jackson.

The Family Trouble.

"Why doesn't that hot-ash of yours rent?"

"For the same reason I myself don't do a lot of things."

"What reason is that?"

"My wife won't let me."



They Accepted Their Captivity in a Spirit of Gay Good Humor.