

# RICH MEN'S CHILDREN

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

Illustrations by DOM J. LAVIN

Copyright 1934 by The BOBBS-MERRILL CO.

## 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 bill 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 shown 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. Two weeks later Bernice discovers in a paper where husband is and writes letter trying to smooth over difficulties between them. Dominick at last is able to join fellow snowbound prisoners in hotel parlor. He loses temper over talk of Buford, an actor. After three weeks, end of imprisonment is seen. Telegrams and mail arrive. Dominick gets letter from wife.

## CHAPTER VIII.—(Continued.)

He suddenly looked away from her and, turning to the chimney-piece, rested one hand upon it and gazed down at the logs. A charred end projected and he pushed it with his slippers foot, his down-bent face, the lips set and brows wrinkled, looking like the face of a sullen boy who has been unjustly punished. An icy, invading chill of depression made Rose's heart sink down into bottomless depths. She faltered in faint tones:

"Well, you'll be there soon now."

"I don't know," he answered without moving. "I don't know whether I shall."

"You don't know whether you'll be home soon? The roads are open; the postman has come in."

"I don't know whether I'll go home," he repeated.

The snapping of the fire sounded loud upon the silence that followed. The thrill of strong emotions rising toward expression held them in a breathless, immovable quietude.

"Don't you want to go home?" said the young girl. Her voice was low and she cleared her throat. In this interchange of commonplace sentences her heart had begun to beat so violently that it interfered with the ease of her speech.

Dominick leaned forward and dropped the crumpled letter into the fire.

"No, I don't want to. I hate to."

To this she did not reply at all, and after a moment he continued: "My home is unbearable to me. It isn't a home. It's a place where I eat and sleep, and I'd prefer doing that anywhere else, in any dirty boarding-house or fourth-rate hotel—I'd rather."

He stopped abruptly and pushed the log farther in. The letter was caught up the chimney in a swirl of blackened scraps.

"But your wife?" said Rose.

This time her voice was hoarse but she did not know it. She had lost the consciousness of herself. It was a profound moment, the deepest she had so far known, and all the forces of her being were concentrated upon it. The young man answered with deliberation, still not moving.

"I don't want to see my wife. We are—we are—uncongenial. There is nothing but unhappiness between us."

"Don't you love her?" said the girl.

"No. I never did," he answered.

For a moment neither dared speak. They did not look at each other or stir. They hardly seemed to breathe. A movement, a touch, would have rent the last thin crust of reserve that covered what were no longer unsuspected fires. Dominick knew it, but the girl did not. She was seized by what to her was a sudden, inexplicable fear, and the increased, suffocating beating of her heart made her feel dizzy. She suddenly wished to fly, to escape from the room, and him, and herself. She turned to go and was arrested by Cora's voice in the hall:

"Say, you folks, are you in there?"

Cora's visage followed her voice. She thrust it round the door-post, beamingly smiling under a recently-applied coat of powder.

"Do you want to tackle a game of euchre? Mr. Willoughby and I'll lay you out cold unless that British memory of his has gone back on him and he's forgot all I taught him last time."

They were too bewildered to make any response. Rose gathered up her coat and dropped it again, looking stupidly from it to the intruder. Cora turned back to the passage, calling:

"Here they are, Mr. Willoughby, all ready and waiting for us. Now we'll show them how to play euchre."

Before Willoughby appeared, responsive to this cheerful hail, Cora had pulled the chairs round the table and brought out the cards. A few moments later, they were seated and the game had begun. Cora and her partner were soon jubilant. Not only did they hold the cards, but their adversaries played so badly that the tale of many old scores was wiped off.

The next day the first movements of departure began. Early in the afternoon Buford and Judge Washburne started for Rocky Bar in Perley's sleigh. The road had been broken by the mail-carrier, but was still so deeply drifted that the drive was reck-

oned a toilsome undertaking not without danger. Perley's two powerful horses were harnessed in tandem, and Perley himself, a mere pillar of wrappings, drove them, squatted on a soap box in front of the two passengers. There were cries of farewell from the porch and tappings on the windows as the sleigh started and sped away to the diminishing jingle of bells. A sadness fell on those who watched it. The little idyl of isolation was over.

On the following day Bill Cannon and his daughter were to leave. A telegram had been sent to Rocky Bar for a sleigh and horses of the proper excellence to be the equipage of a Bonanza Princess. Rose had spent the morning packing the valises, and late in the afternoon began a downstairs search for possessions left in the parlor.

The dusk was gathering as she entered the room, the corners of which were already full of darkness, the fire playing on them with a warm, varying light. Waves of radiance quivered and ran up the ceiling, hers and there touching the glaze on a picture glass or china ornament. The crude ugliness of the place was hidden in this unsteady, transforming combination of shadow and glow. It seemed a rich, romantic spot, flanked with fire that pulsed on an outer edge of mysterious obscurity, a vestor of familiar, intimate life, round which coldness and the dark pressed.

She thought the room was unoccupied and advanced toward the table, then started before the uprising of Dominick's tall figure from a chair in a shadowed corner. It was the first time they had seen each other alone since their conversation of the day before. Rose was startled and agitated, and her break backward movement showed it. Her voice, however, was natural, almost easy to casualness as she said:

"I thought there was no one here, you've hidden yourself in such a dark corner. I came to gather up my books and things."

He advanced into the light, looking somberly at her.

"It's true that you're going to-morrow," he said almost gruffly.

"Oh, yes, we're really going. Everything's been arranged. Horses and a sleigh are expected any moment now from Rocky Bar. They rest here all night and take us down in the afternoon. I think papa'd go crazy if we had to stay twenty-four hours longer."

"I'll follow in a day or two," he said, "probably go down on Tuesday, the doctor says."

She began gathering up the books, reading the titles, and putting aside those that were not hers.

"I'm so sorry it's over," she said in a preoccupied voice without any particular regret in it. "The Mill on the Floss is Mrs. Perley's, I think."

"I'm sorry, too," he commented, very low.

She made no reply, selected another book, and as she held it up looking at the back, said:

"But it's not like a regular goodbye. It's not as if you were going in one direction and we in another. We'll see you in San Francisco, of course."

"I don't think so," he answered.

She laid the book on the table and turned her face toward him. He stood looking into the fire, not seeing the face, but conscious of it, of its expression, of its every line.

"Do you mean that we're not going to see you down there at all?"

"Yes, that's just about what I meant," he replied.

"Mr. Ryan!" It was hardly more than a breath of protest, but it was as stirring to the man as the whisper of love.

He made no comment on it, and she said, with a little more of insistence and volume:

"But why?"

"It's best not," he answered, and turned toward her.

His shoulders were squared and he held his head as a man does who prepares himself for a blow. His eyes, looking straight into hers, enveloped her in a glance soft and burning, not a savage glance, but the enfolding, possessive glance, caressing and ardent, pleading and masterful, of a lover.

The books that she was holding fell to the table, and they looked at each other while the clock ticked.

"It's best for me not to come," he said huskily, "never to come."

"Very well," she faltered.

He came a little nearer to her and said:

"You know what I mean."

She turned away, very pale, her lips trembling.

"And you'd like me to come if I could—if I were free?"

He was close to her and looked down to see her face, his own hard, the bones of the jaw showing through the thin cheeks.

"You'd like me to?" he urged.

She nodded, her lips too dry to speak.

"O Rose!" he whispered, a whisper that seemed to melt the strength of her heart and make her unvanquished, maiden pride dissolve into feebleness.

He leaned nearer and, taking her by the arms just above the elbows, drew her to himself, into an embrace, close and impassioned, that crushed her against him. She submitted passively, in a dizzy dream that was neither joy nor pain, but was like a moment of drugged unreality, fearful and beautiful. She was unconscious of his lips pressed on her hair, but she felt the beating of his heart beneath her cheek.

They stood thus for a moment, rising above time and space. They seemed to have been caught up to a pinnacle of life where the familiar world lay far beneath them. A joy, divine and dreamy, held them clasped together, motionless and mute, for a single point of time beyond and outside the limitations that had heretofore bound them.

Bill Cannon had a question to ask his daughter and he came down stairs to the parlor where she had told him she was going. He had dressed himself for supper, the most important item of his toilet being a pair of brown leather slippers. They were soft and made no sound, and stepping briskly in them he advanced to the half-open parlor door, pushed it open and entered the quiet room. On the hearth-rug before the fire stood a woman clasped in the arms of Dominick Ryan.

Though the face was hidden, the first glance told him it was his daughter. The young man's head was bowed on hers, his brown hair rising above the gleaming blondness of hers. They were absolutely motionless and silent. For an amazed moment the father stared at them, then turned and tipped out of the room.

He mounted several steps of the staircase and then descended, stepping as heavily as he could, and, as he advanced on the parlor, coughed with the aggressive loudness. He was on the threshold when he encountered his daughter, her head lowered, her gait quick, almost a run. Without a word he stepped aside and let her pass, the rustling of her skirt diminishing as she ran up the hall and mounted the stairs.

Dominick was standing on the hearth-rug, his head raised like a stag's; his eyes, wide and gleaming, on the doorway through which she had passed. Cannon stopped directly in front of him and fixed a stony, menacing glare on him.

"Well, Dominick Ryan," he said in a low voice, "I saw that. I came in here a moment ago and saw that. What have you got to say about it?"

The young man turned his eyes slowly from vacancy to the angry face before him. For a moment he looked slightly dazed, staring blankly at Cannon. Then wrath gathered thunderously on his brow.

"Let me alone!" he said fiercely.



"Well, Dominick Ryan," He Said, in a Low Voice, "I Saw That."

thrusting him aside. "Get out of my way and let me alone! I can't talk to you now."

He swept the elder man out of his path, and, lurching and staggering on his wounded feet, hurled himself out of the room.

## CHAPTER IX.

The Sons of Their Fathers.

It was at the end of the Bonanza times, that period of startling upheavals and downfalls, when miners had suddenly become millionaires, and rich men found themselves paupers, that Bill Cannon built his mansion in San Francisco. He had made his fortune in Virginia City, not in a few meteoric years, as the public, who loves picturesque histories, was wont to recount relishingly, but in a series

of broken periods of plenty with lean years in between. The Crown Point and Belcher rise made him a man of means, and its collapse was said to have ruined him. Afterward, wise-aces shook their heads and there were rumors that it was not Bill Cannon who was ruined. In the dead period which followed this disastrous cataclysm of fortune and confidence, he was surreptitiously loyal to the capricious town from which men had withdrawn their affection and belief as from a beguiling woman, once loved and trusted, now finally proved false.

In those short years of mourning and lost faith between the downfall of Crown Point and the rise of Con- Virginia and the Rey del Monte, Bill Cannon "lay low." His growing reputation as an expert mining man and a rising financier had suffered. Men had disbelieved in him as they did in Virginia, and he knew the sweetness of revenge when he and the great camp rose together in titanic partnership and defied them. His detractors had hardly done murmuring together over the significant fact that Crown Point "had not scooped every dollar he had" when the great ore-bod was struck on the thousand-foot level of the Rey del Monte, and Bill Cannon became a Bonanza King.

That was in seventy-four. The same year he bought the land in San Francisco and laid the foundation for the mansion on Nob Hill. His wife was still living then, and his son and daughter—the last of seven children, five of whom had died in infancy—were as yet babies. A year later the house was completed and the Cannon family, surrounded by an aura of high-colored, accumulating anecdote, moved down from Nevada and took possession.

Mrs. Cannon, who in her girlhood had been the prettiest waitress in the Yuba Hotel at Marysville and had married Bill Cannon when he was an underground miner, was the subject of much gossip in the little group which at that time made up San Francisco's fashionable world. They laughed at her and went to her entertainments. They told stories of her small social mistakes, and fawned on her husband for positions for their sons. He understood them, treated them with an open, cynical contempt, and used them. He was big enough to realize his wife's superiority, and it amused him to punish them for their patronizing airs by savage impertinences that they winced under but did not dare resent. She was a silent, sensitive, loving woman, who never quite fitted into the frame his wealth had given her. She did her best to fill the new role, but it bewildered her and she did not feel at ease in it. In her heart she yearned for the days when her home had been a miner's

establishment, began to show that capacity for management, that combination of executive power and gentle force—bequests from both parents—that added admiration to the idolizing love the Bonanza King had always given her.

The house in which this pampered princess ruled was one of those enormous structures which a wealth that sought extravagant ways of expending itself reared upon that protuberance in the city's outline called by San Francisco Nob Hill. The suddenly-enriched miners of the Comstock Lode and the magnates of the railway had money waiting for investment, and the building of huge houses seemed as good a one as any other.

Here, from their front steps, they could see the city sweeping up from its low center on to the slopes of girdling hills. It was a gray city, crowding down to the edge of the bay, which, viewed from this height, extended far up into the sky. In summer, under an arch of remote, cold blue, it looked a bleak, unfriendly place, a town in which the stranger felt a depressing, nostalgic chill. In winter, when the sun shone warm and tender as a caress, and the bay and hills were like a mosaic in blue and purple gems, it was a panorama over which the passer-by was wont to linger. The copings of walls offered a convenient resting place, and he could lean on them, still as a lizard in the bath of sun.

Bill Cannon's house had unbroken command of this view. It fronted on it in irregular, massive majesty, with something in its commanding bulkiness that reminded one of its owner. It was of that epoch when men built their dwellings of wood; and numerous bay-windows and a sweep of marble steps flanked by sleeping stone lions were considered indispensable adjuncts to the home of the rich man who knew how to do things correctly. Round it spread a green carpet of lawns, close-cropped and even as velvet, and against its lower story deep borders of geraniums were banked in slopes of graduated scarlet and crimson. The general impression left by it was that of a splendor that would have been ostentatious and vulgar had not the studied elegance of the grounds and the outflaring glories of sea, sky and hills imparted to it some of their own distinction and dignity.

On the day following their departure from Antelope, Cannon and his daughter reached home at nightfall. The obsequiously-welcoming butler—an importation from the East that the Bonanza King confided to Rose he found it difficult to refrain from kicking—acquainted them with the fact that "Mr. Gene had been up from San Luis Obispo" for two days, waiting for their arrival. Even as he spoke a masculine voice uttered a hail from the floor above and a man's figure appeared on the stairway and ran quickly down. Cannon gave a careless look upward.

"Ah there, Gene," he observed, turning to the servant who was helping him off with his coat. "Come up to town for a spell?"

The young man did not seem to notice anything especially ungracious in the greeting or probably was used to it.

"Yes, just up for a look around and to see how you and Rosey were. Got snowed in, didn't you?" he said, looking at his sister.

She kissed him affectionately and drew him to the light where she subjected him to a sharp, exploring scrutiny. Evidently the survey was satisfactory, for she gave him a little slap on the shoulder and said:

"Good boy, Gene, San Luis is agreeing with you. Yes, we were snowed in for nearly three weeks. Papa's been half crazy. And you've been in town two days, Prescott says. It must have been dull here all alone."

"Oh, I haven't been dull. I've been going round seeing the boys and—his sister's sudden, uneasy look checked him and he answered it with quick reassurance of glance and tone. "Everything strictly temperance. Don't you get uneasy. I've lived up to my promises. The ranch is mine all right, father."

He had a high, rather throaty voice, which, without seeing his face, would have suggested weakness and lack of purpose. Now as he looked at his father with a slight and somewhat foolish air of triumph, the old man responded to his remark with a sound which resembled a grunt of scornful incredulity.

"Really, Gene," said his sister, her manner of fond gratification in marked contrast to her father's roughness, "that's the best news I've heard for a year. It's worth being snowed up to hear that when you come out. Of course you'll get the ranch. I always knew you would. I always knew you could pull up and be as straight as anybody if you tried."

The old man, who had been kicking off his rubbers, here raised his head with a bull-like movement, and suddenly roared at the retreating butler, who was vanishing toward the dining-room.

"My cigars. Where in hell are they? Why doesn't somebody attend here?"

The servant, with a start of alarm and a murmured excuse, disappeared for a moment, to reappear, hurrying breathlessly with a box of cigars. Cannon selected one and turned to the stairway.

"How long are you down for?" he said to his son as he began ascending. "I thought a week, perhaps two," answered the young man. "A fellow gets darned lonely, down there in the country."

There was something apologetic, almost pleading in his words and way of speech. He looked after his father's receding figure as if quite oblivious to the rudeness of the large,

retiring back and the manner of careless scorn.

"Make it three," said the Bonanza King, turning his head slightly and throwing the sentence over his shoulder.

Gene Cannon was now twenty-nine years of age and had drunk since his eighteenth year. His mother had died in ignorance of his vice. When his father discovered it, it simply augmented the old man's impatience against the feeble youth who would carry on his name and be one of the inheritors of his fortune. Bill Cannon had never cared much for his only son. He had early seen the stuff of which the boy was made. "Doesn't amount to a hill of beans," he would say, throwing the words at his wife over the bitten end of his cigar. He could have forgiven the drinking, as he could other vices, if Gene had had some of his own force, some of that driving power which had carried him triumphant over friend and foe. But the boy had no initiative, no brains, no energy. "How did I ever come to have such a son?" he queried sometimes in an access of disgust in which the surprise was stronger than the disgust. The question possessed a sort of scientific interest for him which was deeper than the personal and over which the disappointed magnate would ponder.

As Gene grew older and his intemperance assumed more serious proportions, the father's scorn grew more open and was augmented by a sort of exasperated dislike. The Bonanza King had no patience with those who failed from ill-health or the persistent persecutions of bad luck. His contention was that they should not have been ill, and they should have conquered their bad luck. He had not excuses for those who were beaten back against the wall—only death should be able to do that. But when it came to a useless, hampering vice, a weakness that in itself was harmless enough, but that was allowed to gain paralyzing proportions, his original contempt was intensified into a fierce intolerance which would have been terrifying if it had not been tempered with an indifferent disdain.

Rose's attitude toward her brother was a source of secret wonder to him. She loved the feeble youth; a tie of the deepest affection existed between them, upon which Gene's intemperance seemed to have no effect. The Bonanza King had always admitted that the ways of the gentler sex were beyond his comprehension, but that the two women he had known best—his wife and his daughter—should have lavished the tenderest love upon an intemperate, incompetent, useless weakling was to him one of the fathomless mysteries of life.

It was Rose's suggestion that Gene should be withdrawn from temptation by sending him to the country. As the only son of Bill Cannon he was the object of a variety of attentions and allurements in the city to which a stronger-willed man might have succumbed. The father readily agreed to the plan. He could graciously subscribe to all Rose said, as the removal of Gene's amiable visage and uninspired conversation would not cause him any particular distress or sense of loss.

But when Rose unfolded the whole of her scheme he was not so enthusiastically in accord with her. It was that Gene should be put on his father's ranch—the historic Rancho of the Santa Trinidad near San Luis Obispo—as manager, that all responsibility should be placed in his hands, and that if, during one year's probation, he should remain sober and maintain a record of quiet conduct and general good behavior, the ranch should be turned over to him as his own property, to be developed on such lines as he thought best.

The Rancho of the Santa Trinidad was one of the finest pieces of agricultural property in California. The Bonanza King visited it once a year, and at intervals received crates of fruit and spring chickens raised upon it. This was about all he got out of it, but when he heard Rose calmly arranging to have it become Gene's property, he felt like a man who suddenly finds himself being robbed. He had difficulty in restraining a roar of refusal. Had it been any one but Rose he would not have restrained it.

Of course he gave way to her, as he always did. He even gave way gracefully with an effect of a generosity too large to bother over trifles, not because he felt it but because he did not want Rose to guess how it "went against him." Under the genial blandness of his demeanor he reconciled himself to the situation by the thought that Gene would certainly never keep sober for a year, and that there was therefore no fear of the richest piece of land in the state passing into the hands of that dull and incapable young man.

The year was nearly up now. It had but three months to run and Gene's record had been exemplary. He had come to the city only twice, when his father noticed with a jealously-watchful eye that he had been resolutely abstemious in the matter of liquor and that his interest in the great property he managed had been the strongest he had so far evinced in anything. The thought that Gene might possibly live up to his side of the bargain and win the ranch caused the old man to experience that feeling of blank chagrin which is the state of mind of the unexpectedly swindled. He felt like a king who has been daringly and successfully robbed by a slave.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Drawing the Line.

Patriotism is our proudest passion, but we refuse to let it induce us to wear a certain sort of hat in the interest of any candidate.—Atchison Globe.