

RICH MEN'S CHILDREN

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

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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 uncongenial 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 Biford, an actor. After three weeks, end of imprisonment is seen. Telegrams and mail arrive. Dominick gets letter from wife. Tells Rose he doesn't love wife, and never did. Strengthened people begin to depart. Rose and Dominick embrace, father sees them and demands an explanation. Rose's brother Gene is made manager of ranch, and is to get it if he stays sober a year. Cannon expresses sympathy for Dominick's position in talk with Rose. Dominick returns home. Bernice exerts herself to please him, but he is indifferent.

CHAPTER XI.—(Continued.)

When he turned into Van Ness avenue the Ryan house was one block beyond him, a conglomerate white mass, like a crumbling wedding cake slowly settling on a green lawn. He surveyed it as he approached, noting its ugliness with a musing satisfaction. Its size and the bright summery perfection of surrounding grass and flower beds lent it impressiveness and redeemed it from the position of a colossal blight on the prospect to which architect and builder had done their best to relegate it. Prosperity, a complacent, overwhelming prosperity, was suggested not only by its bulk but by the state of studied finish and neatness that marked mansion and grounds. There did not seem to be a willing flower bed or withered leaf left on a single stalk in the garden borders. Every window-pane gleamed like a mirror innocent of dust or blemishing spot. The marble steps up which Cannon mounted were as snowily unsoiled as though no foot had passed over them since their last ablation.

The door was opened by a Chinaman, who, taking the visitor's card, left him standing in the hall, and, deaf to his queries as to where he should go, serenely mounted the stairs. Cannon hesitated a moment, then hearing a sound of voices to his right, entered the anteroom that gave on that suite of apartments into which Dominick had walked on the night of the ball. They were softly lit by the afternoon sun filtering through thin draperies, and extended in pale, gilt-touched vista to the shining emptiness of the hall-room. The old man was advancing toward the voices when he suddenly saw whence they proceeded, and stopped. In the room just beyond him Cornelia Ryan and a young man were sitting on a small, empire sofa, their figures thrown out in high relief against the background of silk-covered wall. Cornelia's red head was in close proximity to that of her companion, which the intruder saw to be clothed with a thatch of sleek black hair, and which he recognized as pertaining to a young man whose father had once been shift boss on the Rey del Monte, and who bore the patronymic of Duffy.

Cornelia and Jack Duffy had the appearance of being completely engrossed in each other's society. In his moment of unobserved survey, Cannon had time to note the young woman's air of bashful, pleased embarrassment and the gentleman's expression of that tense, unsmiling earnestness which attends the delivery of sentimental passages. Cornelia was looking down, and her flaming hair and the rosy tones of her face, shading from the faintest of pinks to deepening degrees of coral, were luminously vivid against the flat surface of cream-colored wall behind her, and beside the black poll and thin, dark cheek of her companion. That something very tender was afoot was quickly seen by the visitor, who softly withdrew, stepping gingerly over the fur rugs, and gaining the entrance to the hall with a sensation of hurried alarm.

An open door just opposite offered a refuge, and, passing through it with a forward questing glance alert for other occupants who might resent intrusion, the old man entered a small reception-room lit by the glow of a hard coal fire. The room was different in furnishings and style from those he had left. It had the austere bleakness of aspect resultant from a combination of bare white walls and large pieces of furniture of a black wood upon which gold lines were traced in ornamental squares. An old-fashioned carpet was on the floor, and several tufted arm-chairs, begirt with dangling fringes, were drawn up so close before the fire. This burned cheerily, a red focus of heat barred by the stripes of a grate, and surmounted by a chastely severe white marble mantelpiece. He had been in the room often before and knew it for Mrs. Ryan's own particular sanctum. When a celebrated decorator had been



Cornelia's Head Was in Close Proximity to That of Her Companion.

sent out from New York to furnish the lower floor of the house, she had insisted on retaining in this apartment pieces of furniture and the works of art which she approved, and which the decorator wished to banish to the garret. Mrs. Ryan had her way as she always did, and the first fine "soote" of furniture which she and Con had bought in the days of their early affluence, and various oil paintings also collected in the same era of their evolution, went to the decking of the room she used for her own and oftenest sat in.

Cannon approached the fire, and stood there looking up at the life-size portrait in oils of the late Cornelius Ryan, which hung over the chimney-piece. The artist had portrayed him as a thickly-whiskered man with the complexion of a healthy infant and eyes of baby blue. A watch chain, given him by his colleagues in the old days at Shasta, and formed of squares of quartz set in native gold, was painted with a finished carelessness which had pleased Mrs. Ryan even more than the likeness had done. In showing the picture, she was wont to say proudly: "Just look at the watch chain! Seems as if you could almost hear the ticking of the watch."

Cannon was speculating as to the merits of the likeness when he heard the silken rustling of skirts, and turned to greet his old friend. She came in smiling, with extended hand, richly clad, the gleam of a fastening jewel at her neck. Her hair was dressed with a shining, smooth elaboration, drawn up tightly at the sides and arranged over her forehead in careful curls. As she and her visitor exchanged the first sentences of greeting he noticed that she looked much older and more worn than she had done the last time he had seen her, but her face was as full of pugnacious force as ever. While Della Ryan's body lived her spirit would hold its dominion. She had ruled all her life and would do so to the end.

They sat down on either side of the fire and the old man said: "I don't know whether I ought to be in here. The Chinaman left me to my fate, and I had to nose about myself and find out where I belonged."

"Oh, that's Lee," she answered with a short laugh. "He waits on the door every other Sunday. We've had him ten years and no one's ever been able to make him show people into the parlor. He thinks it better to leave them standing in the hall till one of us sees the card. Then he'll go down and tell them as sociably as you please 'to go right in and sit down.' I asked him why he didn't do it at first, and he said: 'They might steal something.'"

Cannon looked into the fire with an amused eye. "I guess he thought I was after the spoons. It's a dangerous habit, for I took the first turning to the right and

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boy if she was a day. You didn't have to tell me any more. I saw then just like a flash in the dark what my son had let himself in for. And then, not a month after, I heard the rest about her, and I knew that Dominick had started in to ruin his life about the best way he knew how."

Cannon gave another grunt, and this time it contained a recognizable note of sympathy. She went on, absorbed in her recital, anxious to pour out her griefs, now that she had begun.

"Right there from the start I thought of divorce. I knew it was the only way out and was bound to come in time. The woman had married Dominick for money and position. I knew that, saw it in her face along with other things. There was no love in that face, just calculation, hard and sharp as a meat ax. I shut down on the money right there and then. Dominick had three thousand a year, so I knew he couldn't starve, but three thousand a year wasn't what she'd married him for."

"She's got along on it for over two years."

"That's it. She's beaten me so far. I'm the keeper of Con Ryan's fortune and I just closed my hand on it and said to her in so many words, 'Not a cent of this for you.' I thought she'd tire of struggling along in a flat with one Chinaman and not a soul to come near her. But she's stood it and she's going to go on standing it. Where she's concerned, I did something the smartest men and women sometimes do—underrated the brains of my enemy."

"She's pretty smart, I guess," said Cannon, raising a gravely-commenting eye to his companion's face.

"That's what she is—smart and long-headed. She's more far-sighted than women of her kind usually are, and she's got her eye on the fortune. She's not going to give us a chance for divorce. She's not going to make any breaks or mistakes. There's not a more respectable woman in San Francisco. She doesn't go with any one but her husband and her own sisters, two decent women that you can't believe have the same blood in them. She's the quietest, most domestic kind of a wife. It don't matter, and nobody knows, that she's making her husband the most miserable man in the country. That doesn't cut any ice. What does it that there's no ground for divorce against her. If she had the kind of husband that put up with anything from a woman, all he could do would be to leave her and she'd go around then getting everybody's sympathies as a virtuous, deserted wife."

The old man gave his head an appreciative jerk, and murmured: "A pretty smart woman, all right."

"She's all that—that and more. It's the future that she's banking on. I'm nearly seventy years of age, Bill Cannon, and this has broken me up more than anything that's gone before. I'm not the woman I was before my boy married. And what's going to happen when I die? I've only got two living children. Outside them there's nobody but some distant relations that Con made settlements on before he died. If I left all I've got to Cornelia, or divided it up between Cornelia and charity, cutting off my son because he'd made a marriage I didn't like, would such a will as that stand? Why had I left nothing to my only son? Because he'd married a woman I didn't think good enough? And what was there against her? She'd been a typewriter and her husband's mistress for six months before he married her. The mistress part of it had been condoned by marriage and good conduct—and after all, how many families in San Francisco and other places were founded on just those beginnings? As for her being a typewriter, Della Ryan herself had been a washerwoman, washed for the miners with these hands;—she held out her blunt, beringed hands with one of those dramatic gestures natural to the Irish—'when Con was working underground with his pick I was at the wash-tub, and I made money that way for him to run the mine. Where's the California jury that would hesitate to award Dominick, and through him his wife her part of the fortune that Con and I made?'"

"Well, that's all possible," Cannon said slowly, "but it's so far off. It's all surmise. You may live twenty years yet. I fancy she'd find a twenty-years' wait under the present conditions rather wearying."

The old woman shook her head, looking very sad.

"I'm not the woman I was," she repeated, "this last thing's broken me more than anything that went before. I lost three children by death, and it wasn't as hard as losing my youngest boy the way I have."

"Have you any idea whether Dominick has ever thought of divorce?" he asked.

"I've the clearest kind of an idea that he hasn't. You don't know Dominick. He's the best boy in the world. He'll blame himself for everything that's gone wrong, not that woman. She's smart enough to let him, too. And suppose he was a different kind and did think of it? That's all the good it would do him. Men don't sue women for divorce except under the greatest provocation, and Dominick's got no provocation at all. My hopes were that the woman herself would sue—that we'd freeze her out with small means and cold shoulders—and you see that's just what she's determined not to do!"

Cannon dropped his supporting hand on the chair-arm and began to caress gently a large tassel that hung there.

"She could be approached in another way," he said with a suggestion of pondering deliberation.

"What way?"

"You say she married Dominick for

money. Have you never thought of buying her off?"

He looked at Mrs. Ryan and met her eyes staring anxiously and, in a sort of way, shyly into his.

"Yes," she said in a low voice, "I have."

"Have you tried it?"

"No—I—I—I don't think I dared," she said almost desperately. "It was my last trump."

He realized, and, though he was unmoved by it, he felt the pathos of this admission from the proud and combative woman who had so long and so successfully domineered over her world.

"I suppose it is a sort of death-bed remedy," he said, "but it seems to me it's about time to try it. Your idea that she's going to wait till you die and then claim part of the estate as Dominick's wife is all very well, but she's not the kind of woman to be willing to wait patiently through the rolling years on three thousand dollars per annum. She's a good bit older than he is and it isn't making her any happier to see her best days passing with nothing doing. I should think you stood a pretty good chance of getting her to listen to reason."

"Offering her a sum down to leave him?" she said, looking at the fire, her brows knit.

"Exactly. Offer her a good sum on the stipulation that she leaves him and goes away to New York or Europe. Then in the course of time she can write him asking him to grant her a divorce on some such technical grounds as desertion, or incompatibility, or anything else that's respectable. He'll have to give it to her. He can't do anything else. And there you are!"

"What if she refuses?" she said in a low voice, and he saw she was afraid of this refusal which would shatter her last hope.

"Raise your offer," he answered briskly. "She probably will refuse the first time."

She pondered, eying the fire with heavy immobility.

"Yes," she said, nodding. "It sounds reasonable. It's about the only thing left."

"If I can be of any assistance to

heard the single note of half-past three chime from the clock on the mantelpiece.

Outside he stood for a moment on the top of the marble steps, looking downward with absent eyes. He was completely engrossed with the just-ended conversation, parts of which repeated themselves in his mind as he stared unseeing down the wide, unencumbered vista of the street.

Carriages flashed past through strips of sunshine; automobiles whirled by, leaving dust and gasoline in their wake. On the sidewalks there were many foot passengers: lazily sauntering couples, lovers, family parties, and little groups bound for the cars which would whisk them over the dunes to the park. As he slowly began to descend, one of these groups, formed of three women, a man, and a child, approached the bottom of the steps. They were walking down the avenue in a close, talkative bunch. The descending magnate was apprised of their proximity by the high, cackling sound of the women's voices and an aura of perfume which extended from them into the surrounding ether. He paid no attention to them, his eye, with its look of inward brooding, passing indifferently over the faces turned eagerly toward him.

They were not so unmoved. Their glances were trained full on him, their eyes wide in the unblinking intensity of their scrutiny. Even the child, who was skipping along beside the eldest of the women, inspected him with solemn care. Brushing by in their gay Sunday raiment they drew together to discuss him, their heads in a cluster, their voices lowered. He was so used to being the object of such interest that he did not bother to look at them, and was therefore unaware that one of the women, quite pretty, with reddish hair and dark eyes, had turned as she moved away and surveyed him over her shoulder.

CHAPTER XII.

Bernie Makes a Discovery.

It was near eleven o'clock on that same Sunday morning, when Bernie, wrapped and heavy-eyed, emerged from her room. She shuffled down the

passage to the dining-room, sending her voice before her in a shrill summons to the Chinaman. The morning papers were scattered over the table as Dominick had left them and she gathered them up, sitting sideways in her chair and running her eye down their columns, while the servant set out her breakfast. She was still sleepy, and frequent yawns interrupted her perusal of the lines of print which interested her above all written matter. A kimono clothed her slim form and from beneath its hem her foot protruded, thrust bare into a furred slipper. She folded the paper over to bring the society column into a prominence easy of access, and, propping it up against a bowl of fruit, read as she ate her breakfast.

Toward the end of the meal she inquired of the servant at what time her husband had gone out, and received the reply that Mr. Ryan had had his breakfast and left the flat two hours earlier. There was nothing disconcerting or unusual about this, as Dominick always went for a walk on fine Sunday mornings, but her mind was far from easy and she immediately fell to wondering why he had departed so early, and the slight ferment of disquietude that was always with her stirred again and made her forget the society column and let her Spanish omelet grow cold.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)



"I've Lost My Son; Lost Him as if He Was Dead."

you," he said, "you just call on me. I'm willing to help in this thing all I can. It goes against me to see Dominick caught in a trap this way just at the beginning of his life."

"A boy," said his mother, "that would have made some good girl so happy."

Cannon rose from his chair.

"That's just it!" he said, "and there are not so many of 'em round that we can afford to lose one of the best. I've always liked Dominick and getting to know him so well up at Antelope I grew downright fond of him. He's a fine boy."

He smiled at her with his most genial air, beaming with disinterested affection for Dominick and the desire to be helpful in a grievous strait. Mrs. Ryan looked brighter and more hopeful than she had done at the beginning of the interview.

"It's very good of you," she said, "to come and listen to an old woman's complaints. But as we get on, we seem to take them harder. And you know what my boy was to me?"

"About the same thing that my girl is to me," Cannon answered as he turned away to look on the table for his hat.

There was a little more talk, and then the set phrases of farewell brought the interview to a close. Though momentous, it had not lasted long. As he left the room Cannon