RICH MEN'S 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. 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. Tells Rose he doesn't love wife, and never did. Stormbound 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. Berny exerts herself to please him, but he is indifferent. Cannon calls on Mrs. Ryan. They discuss Dominick's marriage difficulties, and Cannon suggests buying off Berny. Dominick goes to park on Sunday with Berny and family, sees Miss Cannon, bows to her and starts uneasiness in Berny. In Mrs. Ryan's name Cannon offers Berny $50,000 to leave her husband and permit divorce. She refuses. Dominick sees Rose. Cornelia Ryan engaged to Jack Duffy. Cannon offers Berny $100,000 and is turned down. Berny tells sisters of offer. Buford, the actor, makes a hit in vaudeville. Rose tells Dominick that he must stick to wife, and first time acknowledges that she loves him. Cannon offers Berny $500,000 which she refuses, saying Cannon wants Dominick for Rose. Gene wins the ranch.

CHAPTER XVII.—Continued.

It was, however, her husband's voice that answered her. He spoke quickly, as if in a hurry, telling her that he would not be home to dinner, as a college friend of his from New York had just arrived and he would dine and go to the theater with him that evening. Berny's ear, ready to discover, in the most alien subjects, matter bearing on her husband's interest in Rose Cannon, listened intently for the man's name. As Dominick did not give it she asked for it, and to her strained and waiting attention it seemed to come with an intentional indistinctness.

"What is his name?" she called again, her voice hard and high. "I didn't catch it."

It was repeated and for the second time she did not hear it. Before she could demand it once more, Dominick's "Good-by" hummed along the wire and the connection was cut.

She did not want any more lunch and went into the parlor, where she sat down on the cushioned window-seat and looked out on the vaporous transparencies of the fog. She had waked with the sense of weight and apprehension heavy on her. As she dressed she had thought of the interview of yesterday with anger and also with something as much like fear as she was capable of feeling. She realized the folly of the rage she had shown, the folly and the futility of it, and she realized the danger of an open declaration of war with the fierce and unscrupulous old man who was her adversary. This, with her customary bold courage, she now tried to push from her mind. After all, he couldn't kill her, and that was about the only way he could get rid of her. Even Bill Cannon would hardly dare, in the present day in San Francisco, cold-bloodedly to murder a woman. The thought caused a slight, sarcastic smile to touch her lips. Fortunately for her, the lawless days of California were passed.

With the curtains caught between her finger-tips, her figure bent forward and motionless, she looked out into the street as if she saw something there of absorbing interest. But she saw nothing. All her mental activity was bent on the problem of Dominick's telephone message. She did not believe it. She was in that state where trifles light as air all point one way, and to have Dominick stay out to dinner with a sudden and unexpected "friend from New York" was more than a trifle. She assured herself with slow, cold reiteration that he was dining with Rose Cannon in the big house on California Street. If they walked together on Sunday mornings, why shouldn't they dine together on week-day nights? They were careful of appearances and they would never let themselves be seen together in any public place till they were formally engaged. The man from New York was a fiction. She—that immaculate, perfect girl—had invented him. Dominick could not invent anything. He was not that kind of a man. But Berny knew that all women can lie when the occasion demands, and Rose Cannon could thus supply her lover's deficiencies.

With her blankly-staring eyes fixed on the white outside world, her mental vision conjured up a picture of them at dinner that night, sitting opposite each other at a table glistening with the richest of glass and silver, while soft-footed menials waited obsequiously upon them. Bill Cannon was not in the picture. Berny's imagination had excluded him, pushing him out of the romance into some unseen, uninteresting region where people who were not lovers dined dully by themselves. She could not imagine Rose and Dominick otherwise than alone, exchanging tender glances over the newest form of champagne glasses filled with the choicest brand of champagne.

A sound escaped her, a sound of pain, as if forced from her by the grinding of jealous passions within. She dropped the curtain and rose to her feet. If they married it would be always that way with them. They would have everything in the world, everything that to Berny made life worth while. Even Paris, with her three hundred thousand dollars to open all its doors, would be a savorless place to her if Rose and Dominick were to be left to the enjoyment of all the pleasures and luxuries of life back in California.

Unable to rest, fretted by jealousy, tormented by her longing for the offered money, oppressed by uneasiness as to Cannon's next move, the thought of the long afternoon in the house was unendurable to her. She could not remain unemployed and passive while her mind was in this state of disturbance. Though the day was bad and there was nothing to do down town, she determined to go out. She might find some distraction in watching the passers-by and looking at the shop windows.

By the time she was dressed, it was four o'clock. The fog was thicker than ever, hanging over the city in an even, motionless pall of vapor. Its breath had a keen, penetrating chill, like that exhaled by the mouth of a cavern. Coming down the steps into it she seemed to be entering a white, still sea, off which an air came that was pleasant on the heated dryness of her face. She had no place to go to, no engagement to keep, but instinctively turned her steps in the down-town direction. Walking would pass more time than going on the car, and she started down the street which slanted to a level and then climbed a long, dim reach of hill beyond. Its emptiness—a characteristic of San Francisco streets—struck upon her observation with a sense of gripping, bleak dreariness. She could look along the two lines of sidewalk till they were lost in the gradual milky thickening of the fog, and at intervals see a figure, faint and dreamlike, either emerging from space in slow approach, or melting into it in phantasmal withdrawal.

It was a melancholy, depressing vista. She had not reached the top of the long hill before she decided that she would walk no farther. Walking was only bearable when there was something to see. But she did not know what else to do or where to go. Indecision was not usually a feature of her character. To-day, however, the unaccustomed strain of temptation and

"A Man Doesn't Tell His Wife About His Affairs With Other Women."

worry seemed to have weakened her resourcefulness and resolution. The one point on which she felt determined was that she would not go home.

The advancing front of a car, looming suddenly through the mist, decided her. She hailed it, climbed on board, and sank into a seat on the inside. There was no one else there. It smelt of dampness, of wet woolens and rubber overshoes, and its closed windows, filmed with fog, showed semicircular streaks across them where passengers had rubbed them clean to look out. The conductor, an unkempt man, with an unshaven chin and dirty collar, slouched in for her fare, extending a grimy paw toward her. As he took the money and punched the tag, he hummed a tune to himself, seeming to convey in that harmless act a slighting opinion of his passenger. Berny looked at him severely, which made him hum still louder, and lounge indifferently out to the back platform, where he leaned on the brake and spat scornfully into the street.

Berny felt that sitting there was worse than walking. There was no one to look at, there was nothing to be seen from the windows. The car dipped over the edge of an incline, slid with an even, skimming swiftness down the face of the hill, and then, with a series of small jouncings, crossed the rails of another line. Not knowing or caring where she was, she signaled the conductor to stop, and alighted. She looked round her for an uncertain moment, and then recognized the locality. She was close to the old Union Street plaza on which the Greek Church fronted. Here in the days before her marriage, when she and Hazel had been known as "the pretty Iverson girls," she had been wont to come on sunny Sunday mornings and sit on the benches with such beaux as brightened the monotony of that unaspiring period.

She felt tired now and thought it would not be a bad idea to cross to the plaza and rest there for a space. She was warmly dressed and her clothes would not be hurt by the damp. Threading her way down the street, she came out on the opening where the little park lies like an unrolled green cloth round which the shabby, gray city crowds.

She sank down on the first empty bench, and looking round she saw other dark shapes, having a vague, huddled appearance, lounging in bunched-up attitude on the adjacent seats. They seemed preoccupied. It struck her that they, like herself, were plunged in meditation on matters which they had sought this damp seclusion silently to ponder. The only region of activity in the dim, still scene was where some boys were playing under the faintly-defined outline of a large willow tree. They were bending close to the ground in the performance of a game over which periods of quietness fell to be broken by sudden disrupting cries. As Berny took her seat their imp-like shapes dark and without detail, danced about under the tree in what appeared a fantastic ecstasy, while their cries broke through the woolly thickness of the air with an intimate clearness strangely at variance with the remote effect of their figures.

The fact that no one noticed her, or could clearly see her, affected her as it seemed to have done the other occupants of the benches. She relaxed from her alert sprightliness of pose, and sank against the back of the seat in the limpness of unobserved indifference. Sitting thus, her eyes on the ground, she heard, at first unheeding, then with a growing sense of attention, footsteps approaching on the gravel walk. They were the short, quick footsteps of a woman. Berny looked up and saw a woman, a little darker than the atmosphere, emerging from the surrounding grayness, as if she were slowly rising to the surface through water.

Her form detached itself gradually from the fog, the effect of deliberation being due to the fact that she was dressed in gray, a long, loose coat and a round hat with a film of veil about it. She would have been a study in monochrome but for the color in the cheek turned to Berny, a glowing, rose-tinted cheek into which the damp had called a pink brighter than any rouge. Berny looked at it with reluctant admiration, and the woman turned and presented her full face, blooming as a flower, to the watcher's eye. It was Rose Cannon.

If in these wan and dripping surroundings the young girl had not looked so freshly fair and comely, Berny might have let her pass unchecked. But upon the elder woman's sore and bitter mood the vision of this rosy youthfulness, triumphant where all the rest of the world sank unprotesting under the weight of a common ugliness, came with a sense of unbearable wrong and grievance. As Rose passed, Berny, with a sudden blinding up-rush of excitement, leaned forward and rose.

"Miss Cannon," she said loudly. "Oh, Miss Cannon—just a moment."

Rose turned quickly, looking inquiringly at the owner of the voice. She had had a vague impression of a figure on the bench but had not looked at it. Now, though the face she saw was unfamiliar, she smiled and said:

"Did you want to speak to me?"

The ingratiating amiability of her expression added to Berny's swelling sense of injury and injustice. Thus did this siren smile upon Dominick, and it was a smile that was very sweet. The excitement that had seized upon the older woman made her tremble, but she was glad, fiercely, burning glad, that she had stopped Miss Cannon.

"Yes," she said, "just for a moment, if you don't mind."

Rose had never seen the woman before, and at the first glance supposed her to be some form of peddler or a person selling tickets. The daughter of Bill Cannon was eagerly sought by members of her own sex who had wares for sale, and it did not strike her as odd that she should be stopped in the plaza on a foggy afternoon. But a second glance showed her that the woman before her was better dressed, more assured in manner than the female vender, and she felt puzzled and interested.

"You had something to say to me?" she queried again, the questioning inflection a little more marked.

"Yes, but not much. I won't keep you more than a few moments. Won't you sit down?"

Berny designated the bench and they sat on it, a space between them. Rose sat forward on the edge of the seat, looking at the strange woman whose business with her she could not guess.

"You've never seen me before, have you, Miss Cannon?" said Berny. "You don't know who I am?"

The young girl shook her head with an air of embarrassed admission.

"I'm afraid I don't," she said. "If I've ever met you before, it must have been a long time ago."

"You've never met me," said Berny, "but I guess you've heard of me. I am the wife of Dominick Ryan."

She said the words easily, but her eyes were lit with devouring fires as they fastened on the young woman's face. Upon this, signs of perturbation immediately displayed themselves. For a moment Rose was shaken beyond speech. She flushed to her hair, and her eyes dropped. To a jealous observation, she looked confused, trapped, guilty.

"Really," she said after the first moment of a shock, "I—I—I really don't think I ever did meet you." With her face crimson she raised her eyes and looked at her companion. "If I have, I must have forgotten it."

"You haven't," said Berny, "but you've met my husband."

Rose's color did not fade, but this time she did not avert her eyes. Pride and social training had come to her aid. She answered quietly and with something of dignity.

"Yes, I met Mr. Ryan at Antelope when we were snowed up there. I suppose he's told you all about it?"

"No," said Berny, her voice beginning to vibrate, "he hasn't told me all about it. He's told just as much as he thought I ought to know."

Her glance, riveted on Rose's face, contained a fierce antagonism that was like an illumination of hatred shining through her speech. "He didn't think it necessary to tell me everything that happened up there, Miss Cannon."

Rose turned half from her without answering. The action was like that of a child which shrinks from the angry face of punishment. Berny leaned forward that she might still see her and went on.

"He couldn't tell me all that happened up at Antelope. There are some things that it wouldn't have done for him to tell me. A man doesn't tell his wife about his affairs with other women. But sometimes, Miss Cannon, she finds them out."

Rose turned suddenly upon her.

"Mrs. Ryan," she said in a cold, authoritative voice, "what do you want to say to me? You stopped me just now to say something. Whatever it is, say it and say it out."

Berny's rages invariably worked themselves out on the same lines. With battle boiling within her, she could preserve up to a certain point a specious, outward calm. Then suddenly, at some slight, harmless word, some touch as light as the pressure on the electric button that sets off the dynamite explosion, the bonds of her wrath were broken and it burst into expression. Now her enforced restraint was torn into shreds, and she cried, her voice quavering with passion, shaken with breathlessness:

"What do you suppose I want to say? I want to ask you what right you've got to try to steal my husband?"

"I have no right," said Rose.

Berny was, for the moment, so taken aback, that she said nothing but stared with her whole face set in a rigidity of fierce attention. After a moment's quivering amaze she burst out:

"Then what are you doing it for?"

"I am not doing it."

"You're a liar," she cried furiously. "You're worse than a liar. You're a thief. You're trying to get him every way you know how. You sit there looking at me with a face like a little innocent, and you know there's not a thing you can do to get him away from me you're not doing. If a common gutter girl had acted that way they'd call her some pretty dirty names, names that would make you sit up if you thought any one would use them to you. But I don't see where there's any difference. You think because you're rich and on top of the heap that you can do anything. Just let me tell you, Miss Rose Cannon, you can't steal Dominick Ryan from me. You may be Bill Cannon's daughter, with all the mines of the Comstock behind you, but you can't buy my husband."

Rose was aghast. The words of Berny's outburst were nothing to her, sound and fury, the madness of a jealous woman. That this was a loving wife fighting for the husband whose heart she had lost was all she understood and heard. That was the tragic, the appalling thought. The weight of her own guilty conscience seemed dragging her down into sickened silence. The only thing it seemed to her she could honestly say was to refute the woman's accusations that Dominick was being stolen from her.

"Mrs. Ryan," she implored, "whatever else you may think, do please understand that I am not trying to take your husband away from you. You're making a mistake. I don't know what you've heard or guessed, but you're distracting yourself without any necessity. How could I ever do that? I never meet him. I never see him."

She leaned forward in her eagerness. Berny cast a biting, sidelong look at her.

"How about Sunday morning on Telegraph Hill?" she said.

"I did meet him there, that's true," —a memory of the conversation augmented the young girl's sense of guilt. If half this woman said was madness, half was fact. Dominick loved Rose Cannon, not his wife, and to Rose that was the whole tragedy. Meetings, words, renouncements were nothing. She stammered in her misery.

"Yes—but—but—you must believe me when I tell you that that time and once before—one evening in the moonlight on the steps of our house—were the only times I've seen your husband since I came back from Antelope."

"Well, I don't," said Berny, "I don't for a moment believe you. You must take me for the easiest fruit that ever grew on the tree if you think I'll swallow a fairy tale like that. If you met once on Telegraph Hill, and once in the moonlight, what's to prevent your meeting at other times, and other places? You haven't mentioned the visits up at your house and the dinner to-night."

Rose drew back, frowning uncomprehendingly.

"What dinner to-night?" she said.

"The one you're going to take with my husband."

For the first time in the interview, the young girl was lifted from the sense of dishonesty that crushed her by a rising flood of angry pride.

"I take dinner with my father to-night in our house on California Street," she said coldly.

"Bosh!" said Berny, giving her head a furious jerk. "You needn't bother wasting time on lies like that to me. I'm not a complete fool."

"Mrs. Ryan," said Rose, "I think we'd better end this talk. We can't have any rational conversation when you keep telling me what I say is a lie. I am sorry you feel so badly, and I wish I could say something to you that you'd believe. All I can do to ease your mind is to assure you that I never, except on those two occasions, have seen your husband since his return from the country and I certainly never intend to see him again."

She rose from the bench and, as she did so, Berny cried:

"Then how do you account for the money that was offered me yesterday?"

"Money?" said the young girl, pausing as she stood. "What money?"

"The three hundred thousand dollars that your father offered me yesterday afternoon to leave my husband and let him get a divorce from me."

Rose sat down on the bench and turned a startled face on the speaker.

"Tell me that again," she said. "I don't quite understand it."

Berny gave a little, dry laugh.

"Oh, as many times as you like," she said with her most ironical air of politeness, "only I should think it would be rather stale news to you by this time. Yesterday afternoon your father made me his third offer to desert my husband and force him to divorce me at the end of a year. The offers have gone up from fifty thousand dollars—that was the first one, with an air of debonair large-mindedness. "I've been telling you what you say is lies and now you tell me what I say is lies. It's not, and you know it's not. How would I have found out about all this? Do you think Dominick told me? Men don't tell their wives when they want to get rid of them. They're stupid, but they're not that stupid."

Rose gave a low exclamation and turned her head away. Berny was waiting for a second denial of her statements, when the young girl rose to her feet, saying in a horrified murmur:

"How awful! How perfectly awful!"

"Of course," Berny continued, addressing her back, "I was to understand you didn't know anything about it. I had my own opinions on that. Fathers don't go round buying husbands for their daughters unless they know their daughters are dead set on having the husbands. Bill Cannon was not trying to get Dominick away from me just because he wanted to be philanthropic. Neither was Mrs. Ryan. You're the kind of wife she wanted for her boy, just as Dominick's the husband your father'd like for you. So you stood back and let the old people do the dirty work. You—"

Rose turned quickly, sat down on the edge of the bench, and leaned toward the speaker. Her face was full of a quivering intensity of concern.

"You poor, unfortunate woman!" she said in a shaken voice, and laid her hand on Berny's knee.

Berny was so astonished that for a moment she had no words, but stared uncomprehending, still alertly suspicious.

"You poor soul!" Rose went on. "If I'd known or guessed for a moment I'd have spoken differently. I can't say anything. I didn't know. I couldn't have guessed. It's the most horrible thing I ever heard of. It's—too—too—"

She stopped, biting her lip. Berny saw that she was unable to command her voice, though she had no appearance of tears. Her face looked quite different from what it had at the beginning of the interview. All its amiable, rosy softness was gone. The elder woman was too astonished to say anything. She had a feeling that, just for that moment, nothing could be said. She was silenced by some-

"You Poor, Unfortunate Woman," She Said.

thing that she did not understand. Like an amazed child she stared at Rose, baffled, confused, a little awed. After a minute of silence, the young girl went on.

"I can't talk about it. I don't altogether understand. Other people—they must explain. I've been—no, not deceived—but kept in the dark. But be sure of one thing, yesterday was the end of it. They'll never—no one that I have any power over—will ever make you such offers again. I'll promise you that. I don't know how it could have happened. There's been a mistake, a horrible, unforgivable mistake. You've been wronged and insulted, and I'm sorry, sorry and humiliated and ashamed. There are no words—"

She stopped again with a gesture of helpless indignation and disgust, and rose to her feet. Berny, through the darkness of her stunned astonishment, realized that she was shaken by feelings she could not express.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Oblivion.

"If our man doesn't make a record in the legislature," says the Whitsett Courier, "we'll send him to congress, where he'll be lost sight of and never heard from again."