The Younger Set

By ROBERT W. CHAMBERS,

Author of "The Fighting Chance." Etc.

satisfied that it's a devilish good thing."

"Are you?"

"Emphatically. I've mastered the details, virtually all of 'em. Here's the situation in a grain of wheat. The Siowitha club owns a thousand or so acres of oak, scrub, pine scrub, sand and weeds and controls 4,000 more—that is to say, the club pays the farmers' rents and fixes their fences and awards them odd jobs and prizes for the farm sustaining the biggest number of bevies; also the club pays them to maintain millet and buckwheat patches and to act as wardens. In return the farmers post their 4,000 acres for the exclusive benefit of the club. Is that plain?"

"Perfectly."

"Very well, then. Now, the Siowitha is largely composed of very rich men, among them Bradley Harmon, Jack Ruthven, George Fane, Sanxon Orchil, the Hon Delmour-Carnes—that crowd—rich and stingy. That's why they are contented with a yearly agreement with the farmers instead of buying the 4,000 acres. Why put a lot of good money out of commission when they can draw interest on it and toss an insignificant fraction of that interest as a sop to the farmers? Do you see? That's your millionaire method, and it's what makes 'em in the first place."

He drew a large, fancy handkerchief from his pistol pocket and wiped the beads from the bridge of his limber nose. But they reappeared again.

"Now," he said, "I am satisfied that, working very carefully, we can secure options on every acre of the four thousand. There is money in it either way and any way we work it. We get it coming and going. First of all, if the Siowitha people find that they really cannot get on without controlling these acres, why"—and he snickered so that his nose curved into a thin, ruddy beak—"why, captain, I suppose we could let them have the land. Eh? Oh, yes, if they must have it!"

Selwyn frowned slightly.

"But the point is," continued Neergard, "that it borders the railroad on the north, and where the land is not wavy it's flat as a pancake, and"—he sank his husky voice—"it's fairly riddled with water. I paid a thousand dollars for six tests."

"Water!" repeated Selwyn wonderingly. "Why, it's dry as a desert!"

"Underground water—only about forty feet on the average. Why, man, I can hit a well flowing 3,000 gallons almost anywhere. It's a gold mine. I don't care what you do with the acreage—split it up into lots and advertise or club the Siowitha people into submission, it's all the same; it's a gold mine, to be swiped and developed. Now, there remain the title searching and the job of financing it, because we've got to move cautiously and knock softly at the doors of the money vaults, or we'll be waking up some Wall street relatives or secret business associates of the yellow crowd, and if anybody bawls for help we'll be up in the air next New Year's and still hiking skyward."

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He stood up, gathering together the mail matter which his secretary had already opened for his attention. "There's plenty of time yet. Their leases were renewed the first of this year, and they'll run the year out. But it's something to think about. Will you talk to Gerald, or shall I?"

"You," said Selwyn. "I'll think the matter over and give you my opinion. May I speak to my brother-in-law about it?"

Neergard turned in his tracks and looked almost at him.

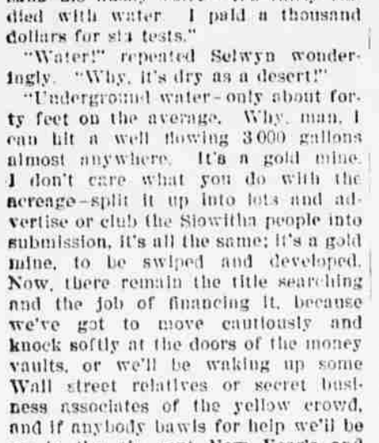
"Do you think there's any chance of his financing the thing?"

"I haven't the slightest idea of what he might do, especially"—he hesitated—"as you never have had any loans from his people, I understand."

"No," said Neergard, "I haven't."

"It's rather out of their usual, I believe."

"So they say. But Long Island acreage needn't beg favors now. That's



Draymore.

all over, Captain Selwyn. Fane, Harmon & Co. know that. Mr. Gerard ought to know it too."

Selwyn looked troubled. "Shall I consult Mr. Gerard?" he repeated. "I should like to if you have no objection."

Neergard's small, close set eyes were focused on a spot just beyond Selwyn's left shoulder.

"Suppose you sound him," he suggested, "in strictest"—

"Naturally," cut in Selwyn dryly and, turning to his littered desk, opened the first letter his hand encountered. Now that his head was turned, Neergard looked full at the back of his neck for a long minute, then went out silently.

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That night Selwyn stopped at his sister's house before going to his own rooms and, finding Austin alone in the library, laid the matter before him exactly as Neergard had put it.

"You see," he added, "that I'm a sort of ass about business methods. This furtive pouncing on a thing and clubbing other people's money out of them with it—this slyly acquiring land that is necessary to an unsuspecting neighbor and then holding him up—I don't like. There's always something of this sort that prevents my cordial co-operation with Neergard—always something in the schemes which hints of—of squeezing—of something underground."

"Like the water which he's going to squeeze out of the wells?"

Selwyn laughed.

"Phil," said his brother-in-law, "if you think anybody can do a profitable business except at other people's expense you are an ass."

"Am I?" asked Selwyn, still laughing frankly.

"Certainly. The land is there plain enough for anybody to see. It's always been there. It's likely to remain for a few eons, I fancy.

"Now, along comes Meynheer Julius Neergard, the only man who seems to have brains enough to see the present value of that parcel to the Siowitha people. Everybody else had the same chance. Nobody except Neergard knew enough to take it. Why shouldn't he profit by it?"

"Yes, but if he'd be satisfied to cut it up into lots and do what is fair"—

"Cut it up into nothing! Man alive, do you suppose that Siowitha people would let him? They've only a few thousand acres. They've got to control that land. What good is their club without it? Do you imagine they'd let a town grow up on three sides of their precious game preserve? And, besides, I'll bet you that half of their streams and lakes take rise on other people's property—and that Neergard knows it—the Dutch fox!"

They discussed Neergard's scheme for a little while longer. Austin,

They discussed Neergard's scheme.

shrewd and cautious, declined any personal part in the financing of the deal, although he admitted the probability of prospective profits.

"Our investments and our loans are of a different character," he explained, "but I have no doubt that Fane, Harmon & Co."—

"Why, both Fane and Harmon are members of the club," laughed Selwyn. "You don't expect Neergard to go to them?"

A peculiar expression flickered in Gerard's heavy features. Perhaps he thought that Fane and Harmon and Jack Ruthven were not above exploiting their own club under certain circumstances; but, whatever his opinion, he said nothing further and, suggesting that Selwyn remain to dine, went off to dress.

A few moments later he returned, crestfallen and conciliatory.

"I forgot Nina and I are dining at the Orchils'. Come up a moment. She wants to speak to you."

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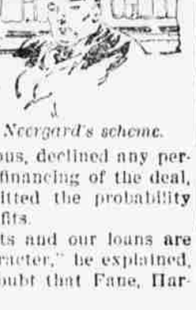
So they took the rose tinted rococo elevator. Austin went away to his own quarters, and Selwyn tapped at Nina's boudoir.

"Is that you, Phil? One minute. Watson is finishing my hair. Come in now and kindly keep your distance, my friend. Do you suppose I want Rosamund to know what brand of war paint I use?"

"Rosamund?" he repeated, with a good humored shrug. "It's likely, isn't it?"

"Certainly it's likely. You'd never know you were telling her anything, but she'd extract every detail in ten seconds. I understand she adores you, Phil. Eileen is furious at being left here all alone. She's practically well, and she's to dine with Drina in the library. Would you be good enough to dine there with them? Eileen, poor child, is heartily sick of her imprisonment. It would be a mercy, Phil."



"Is that you, Phil?"

"Why, yes, I'll do it, of course, only I've some matters at home"—

"Home! You call those stuffy, smoky, impossible, half furnished rooms home! Phil, when are you ever going to get some pretty furniture and art things? Eileen and I have been talking it over, and we've decided to go there and see what you need and then order it, whether you like it or not."

"Thanks," he said, laughing. "It's just what I've tried to avoid. I've got things where I want them now, but I knew it was too comfortable to last. Boots said that some woman would be sure to be good to me with an art nouveau rocking chair."

"A perfect sample of man's gratitude," said Nina, exasperated, "for I've ordered two beautiful art nouveau rocking chairs, one for you and one for Mr. Lansing. Now you can go and humiliate poor little Eileen, who took so much pleasure in planning with me for your comfort. As for your friend Boots, he's unspeakable—with my compliments."

Selwyn stayed until he made peace with his sister, then he mounted to the nursery to "lean over" the younger children and preside at prayers. This being accomplished, he descended to the library, where Eileen Erroll in a filmy, lace clouded gown, full of turquoise tints, reclined with her arm around Drina amid heaps of cushions, watching the waitress prepare a table for two.

He took the fresh, cool hand she extended and sat down on the edge of her couch.

"All O. K. again?" he inquired, retaining Eileen's hand in his.

"Thank you—quite. Are you really going to dine with us? Are you sure you want to? Oh, I know you've given up some very gay dinner somewhere"—

"I was going to dine with Boots when Nina rescued me. Poor Boots! I think I'll telephone"—

"Telephone him to come here!" begged Drina. "Would he come? Oh, please—I'd love to have him."

"I wish you would ask him," said Eileen; "it's been so lonely and stupid

Eileen reclined with her arm around Drina.

to lie in bed with a red nose and fishy eyes and pains in one's back and limbs. Please do let us have a party."

So Selwyn went to the telephone and presently returned, saying that Boots was overwhelmed and would be present at the festivities, and Drina, enraptured, ordered flowers to be brought from the dining room and a large table set for four, with particular pomp and circumstance.

Mr. Archibald Lansing arrived very promptly, a short, stocky young man of clean and powerful build, with dark, keen eyes always alert and humorous lips ever on the edge of laughter under his dark mustache.

His manner with Drina was always delightful, a mixture of self repressed idolatry and busily naive belief in a thorough understanding between them to exclude Selwyn from their company.

"This Selwyn fellow here!" he exclaimed. "I warned him over the phone we'd not tolerate him, Drina. I explained to him very carefully that you and I were dining together in strictest privacy."

"He begged so hard," said Eileen. "Will somebody place an extra pillow for Drina?"

They seized the same pillow fiercely, confronting each other; massacre appeared imminent.

"Two pillows," said Drina sweetly, and extermination was averted. The child laughed happily, covering one of Boots' hands with both of hers.

"So you've left the service, Mr. Lansing?" began Eileen, lying back and looking smilingly at Boots.

"Had to, Miss Erroll. Seven millionaires ran into my quarters and chased me out and down Broadway into the offices of the Westchester Air Line company. Then these seven merciless millionaires in buckram bound and gagged me, stuffed my pockets full of salary and forced me to typewrite a fearful and secret oath to serve them for five long, weary years. That's a sample of how the wealthy grind the noses of the poor, isn't it, Drina?"

The child slipped her hand from his, smiling uncertainly.

"You don't mean all that, do you?"

"Indeed, I do, sweetheart."

"Are you not a soldier lieutenant any more, then?" she inquired, horribly disappointed.

"Only a private in the workman's battalion, Drina."

"I don't care," retorted the child obstinately. "I like you just as much."

"How tall you're growing, Drina," remarked Selwyn.

"Probably the early spring weather," added Boots. "You're twelve, aren't you?"

"Thirteen," said Drina gravely.

"Almost time to elope with me," nodded Boots.

"I'll do it now," she said—"as soon as my new gowns are made—if you'll take me to Manila. Will you? I believe my Aunt Alixe is there"—

She caught Eileen's eye and stopped short. "I forgot," she murmured. "I beg your pardon, Uncle Philip."

Boots was talking very fast and laughing a great deal. Eileen's plate claimed her undivided attention. Selwyn quietly finished his claret. The child looked at them all.

"By the way," said Boots abruptly, "what's the matter with Gerald? He came in before noon looking very seedy." Selwyn glanced up quietly.

"Wasn't he at the office?" asked Eileen anxiously.

"Oh, yes," replied Selwyn. "He felt a trifle under the weather, so I sent him home."

"Is it the grip?"

"N-no, I believe not."

"Do you think he had better have a doctor? Where is he?"

"He was here," observed Drina composedly, "and father was angry with him."

"What?" exclaimed Eileen. "When?"

"This morning before father went downtown."

Both Selwyn and Lansing cut in coolly, dismissing the matter with a careless word or two, and coffee was served, cambric tea in Drina's case.

"Come on," said Boots, slipping a bride rose into Drina's curls. "I'm ready for confidences."

"Confidences" had become an established custom with Drina and Boots. It meant that every time they saw one another they were pledged to tell each other everything that had occurred in their lives since their last meeting.

So Drina, excitedly requesting to be excused, jumped up and, taking Lansing's hand in hers, led him to a sofa in a distant corner, where they immediately installed themselves and began an earnest and whispered exchange of confidences, punctuated by little whirlwinds of laughter from the child.

Chapter 8

EILEEN settled deeper among her pillows as the table was removed, and Selwyn drew his chair forward.

"What is the matter with Gerald?" she asked. "Could you tell me?"

"Nothing serious is the matter, Eileen."

"Is he not ill."

"Not very."

She lay still a moment; then, with the slightest gesture, "Come here."

He seated himself near her. She laid her hand fearlessly on his arm.

"Tell me," she demanded. And as he remained silent, "Once," she said, "I came suddenly into the library. Austin and Gerald were there. Austin seemed to be very angry with my brother. I heard him say something that worried me, and I slipped out before they saw me."

Selwyn remained silent.

"Was that it?"

"I—don't know what you heard."

"Don't you understand me?"

"Not exactly."

"Well, then"—she crimsoned—"has Gerald m-misbehaved again?"

"What did you hear Austin say?" he demanded.

"I heard—something about dissipation. He was very angry with Gerald. It is not the best way, I think, to become angry with either of us—either me or Gerald—because then we are usually inclined to do it again, whatever it is."

They laughed a little. Her fingers, which had tightened on his arm, relaxed, her hand fell away, and she straightened up, sitting Turk fashion and smoothed her hair, which contact with the pillows had disarranged so that it threatened to come tumbling over eyes and cheeks.

"Oh, hair, hair," she murmured, "you're Nina's despair and my endless punishment. I'd twist and pin you tight if I dared. Some day I will too. What are you looking at so curiously, Captain Selwyn—my mop?"

"It's about the most stunningly beautiful thing I ever saw," he said, still curious.

It was a new note in their cordial intimacy, this nascent intrusion of the personal. To her it merely meant his very charming recognition of her maturity—that she was fast becoming a woman like other women, to be looked at and remembered as an individual and no longer classed vaguely as one among hundreds of the newly emerged whose soft, unexpanded personalities all resembled one another.

For some time now she had cherished this tiny grudge in her heart—that he had never seemed to notice anything in particular about her except when he tried to be agreeable concerning some new gown. The contrast had become the sharper, too, since she had awakened to the admiration of other men. And the awakening was only half convinced happiness mingled with shy surprise that the wise world should really deem her so lovely.

"A red headed girl," she said teasingly. "I thought you had better taste than—than"—

"Than to think you a raving beauty?"

"Oh," she said, "you don't think that!"

As a matter of fact he himself had become aware of it so suddenly that he had no time to think very much about it. It was rather strange, too, that he had not always been aware of it, or was it partly the mellow light from the lamp tinting her till she glowed and shimmered like a young sorceress, sitting so straight there in her turquoise silk and misty lace?

When Drina had gone to bed Boots also took his leave, and Selwyn rose, too, a troubled, careworn expression replacing the careless gayety which had made him seem so young in Miss Erroll's youthful eyes.

"Wait, Boots," he said. "I'm going home with you." And to Eileen, almost absently: "Good night. I'm so very glad you are well again."

"Good night," she said, looking up at him. The faintest sense of disappointment came over her—at what she did not know. Was it because in his completely altered face she realized the instant and easy detachment from herself and what concerned her? Was it because other people, like Mr. Lansing—other interests, like those which so plainly in his face betrayed his preoccupation—had so easily replaced an intimacy which had seemed to grow newer and more delightful with every meeting?

What was it, then, that he found more interesting, more important, than their friendship, their companionship? Was she never to grow old enough or wise enough or experienced enough to exact—without exacting—his paramount consideration and interest? Was there no common level of mental equality where they could meet—where termination of interviews might be mutual, might be fairer to her?

Now he went away, utterly detached from her and what concerned her, to seek other interests of which she knew nothing; absorbed in them to her utter exclusion, leaving her here with the long evening before her and nothing to do, because her eyes were not yet strong enough to use for reading.

Lansing was saying, "I'll drive as far as the club with you, and then you can drop me and come back later."

"Right, my son. I'll finish a letter and then come back."

"Can't you write it at the club?"

"Not that letter," he replied in a low voice and, turning to Eileen, smiled his absent, detached smile, offering his hand.

But she lay back, looking straight up at him.

"Are you going?"

"Yes. I have several"—

"Stay with me," she said in a low voice.

For a moment the words meant nothing; then blank surprise silenced him, followed by curiosity.

"Is there something you wished to tell me?" he asked.

"N-no."

His perplexity and surprise grew. "Wait a second, Boots," he said. And Mr. Lansing, being a fairly intelligent young man, went out and down the stairway.

"Now," he said too kindly, too soothingly, "what is it, Eileen?"

"Nothing. I thought—but I don't care. Please go, Captain Selwyn."

"No, I shall not until you tell me what troubles you."

"I can't."

"Try, Eileen."

"Why, it is nothing, truly it is nothing. Only I was—it is so early—only a quarter past 8."

He stood there looking down at her, striving to understand.

"That is all," she said, flushing a trifle. "I can't read, and I can't sew, and there's nobody here. I don't mean to bother you"—

"Child," he exclaimed, "do you want me to stay?"

"Yes," she said. "Will you?"

He walked swiftly to the landing outside and looked down.

"Boots," he called in a low voice, "I'm not going home yet. Don't wait for me at the Lenox."

"All right," returned Mr. Lansing cheerfully. A moment later the front door closed below. Then Selwyn came back into the library.

For an hour he sat there telling her the gayest stories and talking the most delightful nonsense, alternating with interesting incisions into serious subjects which it enchanted her to dissect under his confident guidance.

Alert, intelligent, all aquiver between laughter and absorption, she had sat up among her silken pillows, resting her weight on one rounded arm, her splendid young eyes fixed on him to detect and follow and interpret every change in his expression personal to the subject and to her share in it.

His old self again! What could be more welcome? Not one shadow in his pleasant eyes, not a trace of pallor, of care, of that gray aloofness. How jolly, how young, he was after all!

They discussed or laughed at or mentioned and dismissed with a gesture a thousand matters of common interest in that swift hour—incredibly swift unless the hall clock's deadened chimes were mocking time itself with mischievous effrontery.

She heard them, the enchantment still in her eyes. He nodded, listening, meeting her gaze with his smile undisturbed. When the last chime had sounded she lay back among her cushions.

"Thank you for staying," she said quite happily. "Do you think me interesting to real men, like you and Boots?" she asked.

"Yes," he said deliberately, "I do. I don't know how interesting, because I never quite realized how—how you had matured. That was my stupidity."

"Captain Selwyn," in confused triumph, "you never gave me a chance—I mean, you always were nice to—in the same way you are to Drina. I liked it—don't, please, misunderstand—only I knew there was something else to me—something more nearly your own age. It was jolly to know you were really fond of me, but youthful sisters grow faster than you imagine. And now, when you come, I shall venture to believe it is not wholly to do me a kindness—but—a little—to do yourself one too. Is that not the basis of friendship?"

"Yes."

"Community and equality of interests, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"And—in which the—the charity of superior experience and the inattention of intellectual preoccupation and the amused concession to ignorance must steadily, if gradually, disappear? Is that it too?"

Astonishment and chagrin at his misconception of her gave place to outright laughter at his own expense.

"Where on earth did you—I mean that I am quite overwhelmed under your cutting indictment of me. Old duffers of my age"—

"Don't say that," she said. "That is pleading guilty to the indictment and reverting to the old footing. I shall not permit you to go back."

"I don't want to, Eileen."

"I am wondering," she said airily, "about that 'Eileen.' I'm not sure but that easy and fluent 'Eileen' is part of the indictment. What do you call Gladys Orchil, for example?"

"What do I care what I call anybody?" he retorted, laughing.

Their light hearted laughter mingled delightfully—fresh, free, uncontrolled, peal after peal. She sat huddled up like a schoolgirl, lovely head thrown back, her white hands clasping her knees; he, both feet squarely on the floor, leaned forward, his laughter echoing hers.

"What nonsense! What blessed nonsense you and I are talking!" she said, "but it has made me quite happy. Now you may go to your club."

"I don't want to."

"Oh, but you must"—she was now dismissing him—"because, although I am convalescent, I am a little tired, and Nina's maid is waiting to tuck me in."

"So you send me away?"

"Send you"— She hesitated, delightfully confused in the reversal of roles—not quite convinced of this new power which of itself had seemed to invest her with authority over man. "Yes," she said, "I must send you away." And her heart beat a little faster in her uncertainty as to his obedience, then leaped in triumph as he rose with a reluctance perfectly visible.

"Tomorrow," she said, "I am to drive for the first time. In the evening I may be permitted to go to the Grays' mid-Lent dance, but not to dance much. Will you be there? Didn't they

Playing a siphon on a tall, thin glass.

ask you? I shall tell Suddy Gray what I think of him, I don't care whether it's for the younger set or not! Goodness me, aren't you as young as anybody? Well, then, so we won't see each other tomorrow. And the day after that—oh, I wish I had my engagement list. Never mind; I will telephone you when I'm to be at home—or wherever I'm going to be. But it won't be anywhere in particular because it's Lent, of course. Good night, Captain Selwyn. You've been very sweet to me, and I've enjoyed every single instant."

When he had gone she rose, a trifle excited in the glow of abstract happiness, and walked erratically about, smiling to herself, touching and rearranging objects that caught her attention. Then an innocent instinct led her to the mirror, where she stood a moment looking back into the lovely reflected face with its disordered hair.

"After all," she said, "I'm not as aged as I pretended. I wonder if he is laughing at me now. But he was very, very nice to me."

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Selwyn was playing the fizzing contents of a siphon upon the ice; ingredients of a tall, thin glass which stood on a table in the Lenox club.

The governor's room being deserted except by himself and Mr. Lansing, he continued the animated explanation of his delay in arriving.

"So I stayed," he said to Boots, with an enthusiasm quite boyish, "and I had a perfectly bully time. She's just as clever as she can be, startling at moments. I never half appreciated her. She formerly appealed to me in a different way, a young girl knocking at the door of the world and no mother or father to open for her and show her the gimcracks and the freaks and the sideshows. Do you know, Boots, that some day that girl is going to marry somebody, and it worries me, knowing men as I do, unless you should think of"—

"Great James," faltered Mr. Lansing, "are you turning into a schatschen? Are you planning to waddle through the world making matches for your friends? If you are I'm quitting you right here."

"It's only because you are the decentest man I happen to know," said Selwyn resentfully. "Probably she'd turn you down anyway. But"—and he

(Continued next week.)