

RICH MENS CHILDREN

By **GERALDINE BONNER**
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Illustrations by **DOM J. LAVIN**
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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 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. 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.

CHAPTER IX.—(Continued.)

At dinner that evening Gene was very talkative. He told of his life on the ranch, of its methodical monotony, of its seclusion, for he saw little of his neighbors and seldom went in to the town. Rose listened with eager interest, and the old man with a sulky, glowering attention. At intervals he shot a piercing look at his boy, eying him sidewise with a cogitating intensity of observation. His remarks were few, but Gene was so loquacious that there was little opportunity for another voice to be heard. He prattled on like a happy child, recounting the minutest details of his life after the fashion of those who live much alone.

In the light of the crystal lamp that spread a ruffled shade of yellow silk over the center of the table, he was seen to be quite unlike his father or sister. His jet-black hair and uniformly pale skin resembled his mother's, but his face in its full, rounded contours, slightly turned-up nose, and eyebrows as thick as strips of fur, had a heaviness hers had lacked. Some people thought him good-looking, and there was a sort of unusual, Latin picturesqueness in the combination of his curly black hair, which he wore rising up in a bulwark of waves from his forehead, his white skin, and the small, dark mustache, delicate as an eyebrow, that shaded his upper lip. It was one of his father's grievances against him that he would have made a pretty girl, and that his soft, affectionate character would have been quite charming in a woman. Now, listening to him, it seemed to the older man as if it were just the kind of talk one might expect from Gene. The father had difficulty in suppressing a snort of derision when he heard the young man recounting to Rose his troubles with his Chinese cook.

Before dinner was over Gene excused himself on the plea that he was going to the theater.

"I'm such a hayseed now," he said as he rose, "that I don't want to miss a thing. Haven't seen a play for six months and I'm just crazy to see anything. 'Monte Cristo,' 'Uncle Tom's Cabin,' 'East Lynne.' I'm not particular, anything'll suit me."

"Don't you go over to San Luis?" growled his father sulkily. "They have plays there sometimes, I suppose."

"Oh, yes, but I'm keeping out of harm's way. The boys in San Luis don't understand and I'm not going to put myself in the way of temptation. You know, father, I want that ranch."

He turned a laughing glance on his father; and the old man, with a sheepishly-discomfited expression, grunted an unintelligible reply and bent over his plate.

He did not raise his head till Gene had left the room, when, looking up, he leaned back in his chair and said with a plaintive sigh:

"What a damned fool that boy is!"

Rose was up in arms at once.

"Why, papa, how can you say that! Especially when you see how he's improved. It's wonderful. He's another man. You can tell in a minute he's not been drinking, he takes such an interest in everything and is so full of work and plans."

"Is he?" said her father dryly.

"Maybe so, but that don't prevent him from being a damned fool."

"You're unjust to Gene. Why do you think he's a fool?"

"Just because he happens to be one. You might as well ask me why I think the sun rises in the east and sets in the west. That's what it does, and when I say it does, I'm not criticizing or complaining, I'm only stating the plain facts."

Rose made a murmur of protest and went on.

"You're queer cattle, you women. I suppose a feller could live in the world a hundred years and not understand you. There's Della Ryan, for example, the brainiest woman I know, could give most men cards and spades and beat 'em hands down. Last night at Rocky Bar they were telling me that she's written to the operator there and told him she'll get him a position here in the Atlantic and Pacific Cable Company, in which she's a large

stockholder, that'll double his salary and give him a chance he'd never have got in this world. She wants to pay off a mortgage on a ranch Perley has in the Sacramento Valley and she's sent Mrs. Perley a check for five hundred dollars. She's offered Willoughby a first-rate job on the Red Calumet group of mines near Sonora in which Con had a controlling interest, and she's written to the doctor to come down and become one of the house physicians of the St. Filomena Hospital, which she practically runs. She's ready to do all this because of what they did for Dominick, and yet she, his own mother, won't give the boy a cent and keeps him on starvation wages, just because she wants to spite his wife."

He looked at his daughter across the table with narrowed eyes. "What have you got to say for yourself after that, young woman?" he demanded.

Rose had evidently nothing to say. She raised her eyebrows and shook her head by way of reply. Her face, in the flood of lamplight, looked pale and tired. She was evidently distraught and depressed; a very different-looking Rose from the girl he had taken away with him four weeks earlier. He regarded her for an anxiously-contemplative moment and then said:

"What's the matter? Seems to me you look sorter peaked."

"I?" she queried with a surprised start. "Why, I'm quite well."

"Well, you were before you went up to the mines?"

A color came into her cheeks and she lowered her eyes:

"I'm a little tired, I think, and that always makes me look pale. It was a hard sort of trip, all those hours in the sleigh, and that hotel at Rocky Bar was a dreadful place. I couldn't sleep. There was a cow somewhere near—it sounded as if it were in the next room—and the roosters all began to crow in the middle of the night. I'll be all right to-morrow."

Her father drew his coffee-cup toward him and dropped in a lump of sugar. No word had passed between him and his daughter as to the scene he had witnessed two days before in the parlor of Perley's Hotel. She was ignorant of the fact that he had seen it and he intended that she should remain ignorant of it. But the next morning he had had an interview with Dominick Ryan, in which the young man, confronted with angry questions and goaded past reserve by shame and pain, had confessed the misery of his marriage and the love that in an unguarded moment had slipped beyond his control.

Cannon had said little to him. Beyond telling him that he must not see Miss Cannon again, his comments on Dominick's confessions had been brief and non-committal. It was not



Before Dinner Was Over Gene Excused Himself

his business to preach to Della Ryan's boy, and a large experience of men had given him a practically limitless tolerance of any and all lapses of which the human animal is capable. They only concerned him as they bore on his own affairs. In this particular case they did bear on his affairs, closely and importantly, on the affair of all others dearest and nearest to him—the happiness of his daughter. He knew that in this three weeks of imprisonment she had come to feel for Dominick Ryan a sentiment she had never before felt for any man. He had seen her in the young man's arms, and, knowing Rose as he knew her, that was enough.

Driving down from Antelope in the sleigh he thought about it hard, harder than he had ever before in his life thought of any sentimental complication. He was enraged—coldly and grimly enraged—that his girl should have stumbled into such a pitfall. But it was not his habit to waste time and force in the indulgence of profless anger. The thing had happened. Rose, who had been courted many times and never warmed to more than pity for her unsuccessful suitors, had suddenly, by a fateful, unpremeditated

chance, met her mate—the man she loved. And the most maddening part of it was that he was the man of all others her father would have chosen for her had such a choice been possible.

He bit on his cigar, turning it over between his teeth, and looked sidewise at her as she sat silent in the sleigh beside him. She was unquestionably pale, pale and listless, her body wrapped in enveloping furs, sunk in an attitude of weariness, her eyes full of dejected reverie. Even to his blindly-groping, masculine perceptions her distracted looks, her dispirited silence, told of melancholy preoccupation. She was not happy—his Rose, who, if she had wanted it and he could have bought, begged or stolen it, would have had the moon.

To-night, in her white dress, the mellow radiance of the lamp throwing out her figure against the shadowy richness of the dining-room walls, she bore the same appearance of despondency. Her luster was dimmed, her delicate skin had lost its dazzling, separated bloom of pink and white, her glance was absent and unresponsive. Never, since the death of her mother, now ten years back, had he seen her when it was so obvious that she harbored an inner, unexpressed sense of trouble.

"I guess the city's the best place for you," he said. "Roughing it don't seem to suit you if cows and chickens keep you awake all night. I've seen the time when the hotel at Rocky Bar would have been considered the top notch of luxury. I wish you could see the places your mother lived in when I first took her up here. You're a spoiled girl, Rose Cannon."

"Who spoiled me, I wonder?" she said, looking at him with a gleam of humor in her eyes.

"We're not calling names to-night," he answered, "anyway, not since Gene's gone. All my desire to throw things and be ugly vanishes when that boy gets out. So the noises at Rocky Bar kept you awake?"

"Yes, and I was wakeful, anyway."

She looked down at her cup, stirring her coffee. He thought she appeared conscious and said:

"What made you wakeful, guilty conscience?"

"Guilty conscience!" she repeated in a tone that was full of indignant surprise. "Why should I have a guilty conscience?"

"Lord knows! Don't fire off these conundrums at me. I don't know all your secrets, honey."

She did not answer. He glanced furtively at her and saw that her face had flushed. He took a cigar from the box the butler had set at his elbow and bit off the end.

"How should I know the secrets of a young lady like you? A long time ago, perhaps, I used to, after your mother died and you were my little Rosey, fourteen years old. Lord, how cunning you were then! Just beginning to lengthen out, a little woman and a little girl, both in one. You didn't have secrets in those days or wakeful nights either."

He applied a match to the end of the cigar and drew at it, his ears strained for his daughter's reply. She again made none and he shot a quick glance at her. She was still stirring her coffee, her eyebrows drawn together, her eyes on the swirl of brown in the cup. He settled himself in his chair, a bulky figure, his clothes ribbed with creases, his head low between his shoulders, and a reek of cigar smoke issuing from his lips.

"How'd you like it up there, anyway?"

"Up where?"

"Up at Antelope. It was a sort of strange, new experience for you."

"Oh, I liked it so much—I loved part of it. I liked the people much better than the people down here, Mrs. Perley, and Cora, and Perley, and Willoughby—did you ever know a nicer man than Willoughby?—and Judge Washburne. He was a real gentleman, not only in his manners but down in his heart. And even Perley's boy, he was so natural and awkward and honest. I felt different from what I do here, more myself, less as if outside things were influencing me to do things I didn't always like to do or mean to do. I felt as if I were doing just what I ought to do—it's hard to express it—as if I were being true."

"Oh," said her father with a falling inflection which had a sound of significant comprehension.

"Do you know what I mean?" she asked.

"I can make a sort of guess at it."

He puffed his cigar for a moment, then took it from his mouth, eyed the lit end, and said:

"How'd you like Dominick Ryan? You haven't said anything about him."

Her voice, in answering, sounded low and careful. She spoke slowly, as if considering her words:

"I thought he was very nice, and good-looking, too. He's not a bit like Cornelia Ryan, or his mother, either. Cornelia has such red hair."

"No, looks like the old man. Good deal like him in character, too. Con Ryan was the best feller in the world, but not hard enough, not enough grit. His wife had it though, had enough for both. If it hadn't been for her, Con would never have amounted to anything—too soft and good-natured, and the boy's like him."

"How?" She raised her head and looked directly at him, her lips slightly parted.

"Soft, too, just the same way, soft-hearted. An easy mark for any one with a hard-luck-story and not too many scruples. Why did he marry that woman? I don't know anything about it, but I'd like to bet she saw the stuff he was made of and cried and teased and nagged till she got him to do it."

"I don't see that he could have done anything else."

"That's a woman's—a young girl's view. That's the view Dominick himself probably took. It's the sort of idea you might expect him to have, something ornamental and impractical, that's all right to keep in the cupboard and take out and dust, but that don't do for every-day use. That sort of thing is all very well for a girl, but it doesn't do for a man. It's not for this world and our times. Maybe it was all right when a feller went round in armor, fighting for unknown damsels, but it won't go in California to-day. The woman was a working woman, she wasn't any green girl. She earned her living in an office full of men, and I guess there wasn't much she didn't know. She saw through Dominick and gathered him in. It's all very well to be chivalrous, but you don't want to be a confounded fool."

"Are you a 'confounded fool' when you're doing what you think right?"

"It depends on what you think right, honey. If it's going to break up your life, cut you off from your kind, make an outcast of you from your own folks, and a poverty-stricken outcast at that, you're a confounded fool to think it's right. You oughtn't to let yourself think so. That kind of a moral attitude is a luxury. Women can cultivate it because they don't have to get out in the world and fight. They keep indoors and get taken care of, and the queer ideas they have don't hurt anybody. But men—"

He stopped, realizing that perhaps he was talking too frankly. He had long known that Rose harbored these Utopian theories on duty and honor, which he thought very nice and pretty for her and which went gracefully with her character as a sheltered, cherished, and unworried maiden. It was his desire to see what effect the conversation was having on her that made him deal so unconcernedly with ideals of conduct which were all very well for Bill Cannon's daughter but were ruinous for Dominick Ryan.

"If you live in the world you've got to cut your cloth by its measure," he continued. "Look at that poor devil, tied to a woman that's not going to let him go if she can help it, that he doesn't care for—"

"How do you know he doesn't care for her?" The interruption came in a tone of startled surprise and Rose stared at him, her eyes wide with it.

For a moment the old man was at a loss. He would have told any lie rather than have let her guess his knowledge of the situation and the information given him by Dominick. He realized that his zeal had made him imprudently garrulous, and, gazing at her with a slightly stupid expression, said in a low tone of self-justification:

"Well, that's my idea. I guessed it. I've heard one thing and another here and there and I've come to the conclusion that there's no love lost between them. It's the natural outcome of the situation, anyway."

"Yes, perhaps," she murmured. She placed her elbow on the table and pressed the tips of her fingers against her cheek. Her hand and arm, revealed by her loose lace sleeve, looked as if cut out of ivory.

"And then," went on her father remorselessly, "the results of being a confounded fool don't stop right there. That's one of the worst things of allowing yourself the luxury of foolishness. They go on—roll right along like a wheel started on a down-hill grade. Some day that boy'll meet the right woman—the one he really wants, the one that belongs to him. He'll be able to stand it all right till then. And then he'll realize just what he's done and what he's up against, and things may happen."

The smoke wreaths were thick in front of his face, and peering through them he saw the young girl move her fingers from her cheek to her forehead, where she gently rubbed them up and down.

"Isn't that about the size of it?" he queried, when she did not answer.

"Yes, maybe," she said in a voice that sounded muffled.

"It'll be a pretty tough proposition and it's bound to happen. A decent feller like that is just the man to fall in love. And he'd be good to a woman, he'd make her happy. He's a good husband lost for some nice girl."

Rose's fingers ceased moving across her forehead. Her hand rested there, shading her eyes. For a moment the old man—his vision precipitated into the half-understood wretchedness of Dominick Ryan's position—forgot her, and he said in a hushed voice of feeling:

"By God, I'm sorry for the poor boy!"

His daughter rose suddenly with a rustling of crushed silks. The sound brought him back in an instant and he leaned over the arm of his chair, his cigar in his left hand, his right waving the smoke wreaths from before his face. Rose's hand, pressing her crumpled napkin on the table, shone pink in the lamplight, her shoulder gleamed white through its lace covering, but her face was averted.

"Going up now?" he asked, leaning still farther over the chair-arm to see her beyond the lamp's wide shade.

She appeared not to hear and moved toward the door.

"Going to bed already, Rosey?" he asked in a louder key.

"Yes, I'm tired," her voice came a little hoarse and she did not look at him. At the doorway she stopped, her hand on the edge of the portiere, and without turning, cleared her throat and said: "The cow and the chickens were too much for me. I'm too sleepy to talk any more. Good night, papa."

"Good night, Rosey," he answered. The portiers fell softly behind her, and her footfall was lost in the thickness of the carpets. Though he had not seen her face, her father had an alarming, and almost terrifying idea,

that his darling had left the table in tears. He sat on for some time, stonily motionless, save for the movement of his lips as he puffed out clouds of smoke. The soft-footed servants, coming to clear the table, fled before his growled command to "get out and let me alone." As he smoked he looked straight before him with fixed, unwinking eyes, his face set in furrows of thought. At long intervals he stirred in his chair, ponderously, like an inert, heavy animal, and now and then he emitted a short sound, like a grunted comment on some thought, which, by its biting suddenness, seemed to force an ejaculation out of him.

CHAPTER X.

Dominick Comes Home.

Three days after the return of the Cannons, Dominick Ryan also came home. He had answered Berny's letter the day the Cannons left, a few hours after that interview with the Bonanza King, in which, driven to bay by the old man's questions, he had torn the veil from his married life.

After that there was a period of several hours when he sat in his room thinking over what had happened. It seemed to him that he had played a dastardly part. He saw himself a creature of monumental, gross selfishness, who had cajoled a young girl, in a moment of softness and sentiment, into an action which had done nothing but distress and humiliate her. He, who should have been the strong one, had been weak. It was he who should have seen how things were going; he, the married man, who had allowed himself to feel and to yield to a love that ought to have been hidden forever in his own heart.

He felt that it would be a sort of expiation to go back to his wife. That was where he belonged. Rose must never again cross his path, have a place in his thoughts, or float, a soft beguiling image, in his memory. He had a wife. No matter what Berny was, she was the woman he had married. She had not deceived him. It was he who had done her a wrong, and he owed her a reparation.

In his raw state, his nerves still thrilling with the memory of that moment's embrace, he saw Berny from her own point of view. He lost the memory of the complacent mistress in the picture of the unloved wife, on whose side there was much to be said. Morbidity colored his vision and exaggerated his sense of culpability. If she had an ugly temper, had it not been excited, and aggravated by the treatment she had received from his family? If they had maintained

his soreness of shame till it became a weight of guilt. It also stirred afresh the pity, which was the strongest feeling he had for her. It was the tenderest, the most womanly letter, Berny had ever written him. A note of real appeal sounded through it. She had humiliated herself, asked his pardon, besought of him to return. As he thought of it, the vision of her alone in the flat, bereft of friends, dully devoid of any occupation, scornful of her old companions, fawningly desirous of making new ones who refused to know her, smote him with an almost sickening sense of its pitifulness. He felt sorry for her not alone because of her position, but because of what she was, what her own disposition had made her. She would never change, her limitations were fixed. She would go on longing for the same flesh-pots to the end, believing that they represented the highest and best.

Berny had realized that her letter was a skillful and moving production, but she did not know that it was to gain a hundredfold in persuasive power by falling on a guilty conscience. It put an end to Dominick's revolt, it quenched the last sparks of the mutinous rage which had taken him to Antelope. That same afternoon in his frigid bedroom at the hotel, he answered it. His reply was short, only a few lines. In these he stated that he would be back on the following Saturday, the tenderness of his injured foot making an earlier move impossible.

The letter reached Berny Friday and threw her into a state of febrile excitement. Her deadly dread of Dominick's returning to his family had never quite died out. It kept recurring, sweeping in upon her in moods of depression, and making her feel chilled and frightened. Now she knew he was coming back to her, evidently not lovingly disposed—the letter was too terse and cold for that—but, at any rate, he was coming home. Once there, she would set all her wits to work, use every art of which she was mistress, to make him forget the quarrel and enter in upon a new era of sweet reasonableness and mutual consideration.

She set about this by cleaning the house and buying new curtains for the sitting-room. Such purifications and garnishments would have agreeably impressed her on a home-coming and she thought they would Dominick. In the past year she had become much more extravagant than she had been formerly, a characteristic which had arisen in her from a state of rasped irritation against the restricted means to which Mrs. Ryan's rancor condemned her. She was quite heavily in debt to various tradespeople, and

to dressmakers and milliners she owed sums that would have astounded her husband had he known of them. This did not prevent her from still further celebrating his return by ordering a new dress in which to greet him and a new hat to wear the first time they went out together. How she was to pay for these adornments, she did not know nor care. The occasion was so important that it excused any extravagance, and Berny, in whose pinched, dry nature love of dress was a predominant passion, was glad to have a reason for adding new glories to her wardrobe.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Poor Rich.

Sometimes poverty consists in just feeding the poor. Half the millionaires in the country don't know how much they are worth.—Atlantic Constitution.



"How'd You Like Dominick Ryan? You Haven't Said Anything About Him."