

The Younger Set

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SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS.
CHAP. I.—Returning from Manila, Captain Selwyn, formerly of the army, is welcomed home by his sister, Nina Gerard, her wealthy husband Austin, and their numerous children.

"I infer," observed Selwyn blandly, "that your father and mother are not at home. Perhaps I'd better stop in later."

"But you are going to stay here, aren't you?" exclaimed Drina in dismay. "Don't you expect to tell us stories? Don't you expect to stay here



"Hi, forward!"

and live with us and put on your uniform for us and show us your swords and pistols? Don't you?"

"We have waited such a very long time for you to do this," added Billy.

"If you'll come up to the nursery we'll have a drag hunt for you," pleaded Drina. "Everybody is out of the house, and we can make as much noise as we please! Will you?"

"Haven't you any governesses or nurses or something?" asked Selwyn, finding himself already on the stairway and still being dragged upward.

"Our governess is away," said Billy triumphantly, "and our nurses can do nothing with us."

"I don't doubt it," murmured Selwyn, "but where are they?"

"Somebody must have locked them in the schoolroom," observed Billy carelessly. "Come on, Uncle Phillip. We'll have a first class drag hunt before we unlock the schoolroom and let them out."

Before Selwyn understood precisely what was happening he found himself the center of a circle of madly racing children and dogs.

When there was no more breath left in the children and when the dogs lay about, grinning and lolling, Drina approached him, bland and disheveled.

"That circus," she explained, "was for your entertainment. Now will you please do something for ours?"

"What am I to tell you about—our missionaries in Sulu?" said Selwyn.

"In the first place," began Drina, "you are to lie down flat on the floor and creep about and show us how the Moros wriggle through the grass to bolo our sentinels."

"I don't want to get down on the floor," he said feebly. "Is it necessary?"

But they had discovered that he could be bullied, and they had it their own way, and presently Selwyn lay prone upon the nursery floor impersonating a ladron while pleasant shivers chased themselves over Drina, whom he was stalking.

And it was while all were passionately intent upon the pleasing and snakelike progress of their uncle that a young girl in furs, ascending the stairs two at a time, peeped perfunctorily into the nursery as she passed the hallway and halted amazed.

Selwyn, sitting up ruffled and cross legged on the floor, after having bemoaned Drina to everybody's exquisite satisfaction, looked around at the sudden rustle of skirts to catch a glimpse of a vanishing figure, a glimmer of ruddy hair and the white curve of a youthful face half buried in a muff.

Mortified, he got to his feet, glanced out into the hallway and began adjusting his attire.

"No, you don't!" he said indignantly. "I decline to perform again. If you want any more wriggling you must accomplish it yourselves. Drina, has your governess—by any unfortunate chance—er—red hair?"

"No," said the child, "and won't you please crawl across the floor and bolo me—just once more?"

"Bolo me!" insisted Billy. "I haven't been mangied yet!"

"Let Billy assassinate somebody himself. And, by the way, Drina, are there any maids or nurses or servants



Looked around at the rustle of skirts.

In this remarkable house who occasionally wear copper tinted hair and black fox furs?"

"Phillip! You are common!"

"Oh, I know you and Austin think you want me."

"No, Eileen does. Won't you please wriggle?"

"Who is Eileen?"

"Eileen? Why—don't you know who Eileen is?"

"No, I don't," began Captain Selwyn, when a delighted shout from the children swung him toward the door again. His sister, Mrs. Gerard, stood there in carriage gown and sables, radiant with surprise.

"Phillip! You! Exactly like you, Phillip, to come strolling in from the antipodes—dear fellow!" recovering from the fraternal embrace and holding both lapels of his coat in her gloved hands. "Six years!" she said again and again, tenderly reproachful. "Alexandrine was a baby of six—Drina, child, do you remember my brother—do you remember your Uncle Phillip? She doesn't remember. You can't expect her to recollect. She is only twelve, Phillip!"

"I remember one thing," observed Drina serenely.

Brother and sister turned toward her in pride and delight, and the child went on: "My Aunt Allie; I remember her. She was so pretty," concluded Drina, nodding thoughtfully in the effort to remember more. "Uncle Phillip, where is she now?"

But her uncle seemed to have lost his voice as well as his color, and Mrs. Gerard's gloved fingers tightened on the lapels of his coat.

"I never dreamed," she began—"the child has never spoken of—of her from that time to this! I never dreamed she could remember!"

"I don't understand what you are talking about, mother," said Drina, but her pretty mother caught her by the shoulders, striving to speak lightly. "Where in the world is Bridget, child? Where is Katie? And what is all this I hear from Dawson? It can't be possible that you have been fox hunting all over the house again! Your nurses know perfectly well that you are not to hunt anywhere except in your own nursery. Such a household, Phillip! Everybody incompetent, including me; everything topsy turvy, and all five dogs perfectly possessed to lie on that pink rug in the music room. Have they been there today, Drina, while you were practicing?"

"Yes, and there are some new spots, mother. I'm very sorry."

"Take the children away!" said Mrs. Gerard to the nurses. She bent over, kissing each culprit as she passed out. "What do you think of them? You never before saw the three youngsters. You saw Drina when you went east, and Billy was a few months old. What do you think of them? Honestly, Phillip."

"All to the good, Ninette; very ornamental. Drina and that Josephine kid are real beauties. I—er—take to Billy tremendously. He told me that he'd locked up his nurses. I ought to have interfered. It was really my fault, you see."

"And you didn't make him let them out? You are not going to be very good morally for my young. Tell me, Phillip, have you seen Austin?"

"I went to the trust company, but he was attending a directors' confab. How is he? He's prosperous anyhow. I observe," with a humorous glance around the elaborate hallway which they were traversing.

"Don't dare laugh at us!" smiled his sister. "I wish we were back in Tenth street. But so many children came—Billy, Josephine, Winthrop and Tina—and the Tenth street house wasn't half big enough, and a dreadful speculative builder built this house and persuaded Austin to buy it. You're going to stay here?"

"No; I'm at the Holland."

"Of course you're to live with us. You've resigned from the service, haven't you?"

He looked at her sharply, but did not reply.

A curious flash of telepathy passed between them. She hesitated; then: "You once promised Austin and me that you would stay with us."

"But, Nina!"

"No, no, no! Wait," pressing an electric button. "Watson, Captain Selwyn's luggage is to be brought here immediately from the Holland! Immediately!" And to Selwyn: "Austin will not be at home before half past 6. Come up with me now and see your quarters, a perfectly charming place for you, with your own smoking room and dressing closet and bath. Wait, we'll take the elevator—as long as we have one."

Smilingly protesting, yet touched by the undisguised sincerity of his welcome, he suffered himself to be led into the elevator—a dainty white and rose rococo affair. His sister adjusted a tiny lever; the car moved smoothly upward and presently stopped, and they emerged upon a wide landing.

"Here," said Nina, throwing open a door. "Isn't this comfortable? Is there anything you don't fancy about it? If there is, tell me frankly."

"Little sister," he said, imprisoning both her hands, "it is a paradise, but I don't intend to come here and squat on my relatives, and I won't!"

"Phillip! You are common!"

"Oh, I know you and Austin think you want me."

"Phillip!"

"All right, dear. I'll—it's awfully generous of you—so I'll pay you a visit for a little while. You are very kind, Ninette." He sat partly turned from her, staring at the sunny window. Presently he laid his hand back along the bed covers until it touched and tightened over hers. And in silence she raised it to her lips.

They remained so for a while, he still partly turned from her, his perplexed and narrowing gaze fixed on the window, she pressing his clenched hand to her lips, thoughtful and silent.

"Before Austin comes," he said at length, "let's get the thing over and buried as long as it will stay buried."

"Allie is here," she said gently. "Did you know it?"

He nodded.

"You know, of course, that she's married Jack Ruthven?"

He nodded again.

"Are you on leave, Phillip, or have you really resigned?"

"Resigned."

"I knew it," she sighed.

He said: "As I did not defend the suit I couldn't remain in the service. There's too much said about us anyway—about us who are appointed from civil life. And then to have that happen!"

"Phill, do you still care for her?"

"I am sorry for her."

After a painful silence his sister said, "Could you tell me how it began, Phillip?"

"How it began? I don't know that either. When Bannard's command took the field I went with the scouts. Allie remained in Manila. Ruthven was there for Fane, Harmon & Co. That's how it began, I suppose, and it's a rotten climate for morals, and that's how it began."

"Only that?"

"We had had differences. It's been one misunderstanding after another. If you mean was I mixed up with another woman—no! She knew that."

"She was very young, Phillip."

He nodded. "I don't blame her."

"Couldn't anything have been done?"

"If it could, neither she nor I did it or knew how to do it, I suppose. It went wrong from the beginning. It was founded on froth. She had been engaged to Harmon, and she threw him over for Boots Lansing. Then I came along. Boots behaved like a thoroughbred. That is all there is to it—experience, romance, trouble. She couldn't stand me, she couldn't stand the life, the climate, the inconveniences, the absence of what she was accustomed to. She was dead tired of it all. I can understand that. And we went under, that's all—fighting each other heart and soul to the end. Is she happy with Ruthven? I never knew him and never cared to. I suppose they go about in town among the yellow set. Do they?"

"Yes. I've met Allie once or twice. She was perfectly composed, formal, but unembarrassed. She has shifted her milieu somewhat. It began with the influx of Ruthven's friends from the 'yellow' section of the younger married set—the Orchills, Fanes, Ministers and Delmour-Carnes. By the way, I'm dipping into the younger set myself tonight on Eileen's account. I brought her out Thursday, and I'm giving a dinner for her tonight."

"Who's Eileen?" he asked.

"Eileen? Why, don't you—why, of course you don't know yet that I've taken Eileen for my own. Eileen is Molly Erroll's daughter, and the courts appointed Austin and me guardians for her and for her brother Gerald."

"Oh!"

"Now is it clear to you?"

"Yes," he said, thinking of the tragedy which had left the child so utterly alone in the world save for her brother and a distant kinship by marriage with the Gerards.

For a while he sat brooding, arms loosely folded, immersed once more in his own troubles.

"It seems a shame," he said, "that a family like ours, whose name has always spelled decency, should find themselves entangled in the very things their race has always hated and managed to avoid. And through me too."

"But no disgrace touches you, dear," she said tremulously.

"I've been all over that, too," he said, with quiet bitterness. "You are partly right; nobody cares in this town. Even though I did not defend the suit, nobody cares. And there's no disgrace, I suppose, if nobody cares enough even to condone. Divorce is no longer noticed; it is a matter of ordinary occurrence, a matter of routine in some sets. Who cares except decent folk? And they only think it's a pity and wouldn't do it themselves. If Allie found that she cared for Ruthven I don't blame her. Laws and statutes can't govern such matters. If she found she no longer cared for me, I could not blame her. But two people mismatched have only one chance in this world—to live their tragedy through with dignity. That is absolutely all life holds for them; beyond that, outside of that dead line, treachery to self and race and civilization! That is my conclusion after a year's experience in hell." He rose and began to pace the floor, fingers worrying his mustache. "Law? Can a law which I do not accept let me loose to risk it all again with another woman?"

She said slowly, her hands folded in her lap: "It is well you've come to me at last. You've been turning round and round in that wheeled cage until you think you've made enormous progress, and you haven't. Dear, listen to me. What you honestly believe to be unselfish and high minded adherence to principle is nothing but the circling reasoning of a hurt mind—an intelligence still numbed from shock, a mental and physical life forced by sheer courage into mechanical routine. I tell you your life is not finished. It is not yet begun! You need new duties, new faces, new scenes, new prob-

lems. You shall have them. Dear, believe me, few men as young as you, as attractive, as human, as lovable, as affectionate as you, willfully ruin their lives because of a hurt pride which they mistake for conscience. You will understand that when you become convalescent. Now kiss me and tell me you're much obliged, for I hear Austin's voice on the stairs."

"Well, we've buried it now," breathed Selwyn. "You're all right, Nina, from your own standpoint, and I'm not going to make a stalking nuisance of myself. No fear, little sister. Hello—turning swiftly—here's that preposterous husband of yours."

They exchanged a firm hand clasp, Austin Gerard, big, smooth shaven, humorously inclined toward the ruddy heaviness of successful middle age; Selwyn, lean, bronzed, erect and direct in all the powerful symmetry and perfect health of a man within sight of maturity.

"Nina's good enough to want me for a few days"—began Selwyn, but his big brother-in-law laughed scornfully: "A few days! We've got you now! And to his wife: 'Nina, I suppose I'm due to lean over those infernal kids before I can have a minute with your brother. Are they in bed yet? All right, Phillip. We'll be down in a minute. There's tea and things in the library. Make Eileen give you some.'"

Chapter 2

ANDS clasped behind his back, Selwyn stood in the center of the library, considering his environment with the grave, absent air habitual to him when brooding. And as he stood there a sound at the door aroused him, and he turned to confront a young girl in hat, veil and furs, who was leisurely advancing toward him, stripping the gloves from a pair of very white hands.

"How do you do, Captain Selwyn?" she said. "I am Eileen Erroll, and I am commissioned to give you some tea. Nina and Austin are in the nursery telling bedtime stories and hearing assorted prayers. The children seem to be quite crazy about you. I congratulate you on your popularity."

"Did you see me in the nursery on all fours?" inquired Selwyn, recognizing her bronze red hair.

Unfeigned laughter was his answer. He laughed, too, not very heartily.

"My first glimpse of our legendary nursery warrior was certainly astonishing," she said, looking around at him with frank malice. Then, quickly: "But you don't mind, do you?"

"Of course," he agreed with good grace; "no use to pretend dignity here; you all see through me in a few moments."

She had given him his tea. Now she sat upright in her chair, smiling, distracted, her hat casting a luminous shadow across her eyes; the fluffy furs, fallen from throat and shoulder, settled loosely around her waist.

Glancing up from her short reverie she encountered his curious gaze.

"Tonight is to be my first dinner dance, you know," she said. Faint tints of excitement stained her white skin; the vivid scarlet contrast of her mouth was almost startling. "On Thursday I was introduced," she explained, "and now I'm to have the gayest winter I ever dreamed of. And I'm going to leave you in a moment if Nina doesn't hurry and come. Do you mind?"

"Of course I mind," he protested amiably, "but I suppose you wish to devote several hours to dressing."

She nodded. "Such a dream of a gown! Nina's present! You'll see it. I hope Gerald will be here to see it. He promised. I hope you'll like my brother Gerald when you meet him. Now I must go."

Then, rising and partly turning to collect her furs:

"It's quite exciting to have you here. We will be good friends, won't we? And I think I had better stop my chatter and go, because my cunning little Alsatian maid is not very clever yet. Goodby."

She stretched out one of her amazingly white hands across the table, giving him a friendly leave taking and welcome all in one frank handshake, and left him standing there, the fresh contact still cool in his palm.

Nina came in presently to find him seated before the fire, one hand shading his eyes, and as he prepared to rise she rested both arms on his shoulders, forcing him into his chair again.

"So you have bewitched Eileen, too, have you?" she said tenderly. "Isn't she the sweetest little thing?"

"She's—ah—as tall as I am," he said, blinking at the fire.

"She's only nineteen; pathetically unspoiled—a perfect dear. Men are going to rave over her and not spoil her. Did you ever see such hair—that thick, ruddy, lustrous copper tint? And sometimes it's like gold afire! And a skin like snow and peaches! She's sound to the core. I've had her exercised and groomed and hardened and trained from the very beginning—every inch of her minutely cared for exactly like my own babies. I've done my



"Now I must go."

best," she concluded, with a satisfied sigh, and dropped into a chair beside her brother.

"I should say," observed Selwyn, "that she's equipped for the slaughter of man."

"Yes, but I am selecting the victim," replied his sister demurely.

"Oh! Are you? Already?"

"Tentatively."

"Who?"

"Sudbury Gray, I think, with Scott Innis for an understudy, perhaps the Draymore man as alternate—I don't know; there's time."

"Plenty," he said vaguely, staring into the fire, where a log had collapsed into incandescent ashes.

She continued to talk about Eileen until she noticed that his mind was on other matters. His preoccupied stare enlightened her. She said nothing for a while.

But he woke up when Austin came in and settled his big body in a chair.

"Drina, the little minx, called me back on some flimsy pretext," he said, relighting his cigar. "I forgot that time was going, and she was wily enough to keep me talking until Miss Paisley caught me at it and showed me out. I tell you," turning on Selwyn, "children are what make life worth wh—"

He ceased abruptly at a gentle tap from his wife's foot, and Selwyn looked up.

Whether or not he divined the interference, he said very quietly: "I'd rather have had children than anything in the world. They're about the best there is in life. I agree with you, Austin."

His sister, watching him askance, was relieved to see his troubled face become serene, though she divined the effort.

"Kids are the best," he repeated, smiling at her. "Failing them, for second choice I've taken to the laboratory. Some day I'll invent something and astonish you, Nina."

"We'll fit you up a corking laboratory," began Austin cordially. "There is—"

"You're very good. Perhaps you'll all be civil enough to move out of the house if I need more room for bottles and retorts."

"Of course Phillip must have his laboratory," insisted Nina. "There's loads of unused room in this big barn, only you don't mind being at the top of the house, do you, Phillip?"

"Yes, I do. I want to be in the drawing room or somewhere so that you all may enjoy the odors and get the benefit of premature explosions. Oh, come now, Austin, if you think I'm going to plant myself here on you—"

"Don't notice him, Austin," said Nina; "he only wishes to be implored. And by the same token you'd both better let me implore you to dress!"

She rose and bent forward in the firelight to peer at the clock. "Goodness! Do you creatures think I'm going to give Eileen half an hour's start with her maid and I carrying my twelve years' handicap too? No, indeed! I'm decrepit, but I'm going to die fighting. Austin, get up! You're horribly slow anyhow. Phillip, Austin's man—such as he is—will be at your disposal, and your luggage is unpacked."

In the hallway Selwyn and Austin encountered a radiant and bewildering vision awaiting them—Eileen in all her glory.

"Wonderful!" said Gerard, patting the vision's rounded bare arm as he hurried past. "Fine gown, fine girl! But I've got to dress, and so has Phillip. He meant well."

"Do you like it, Captain Selwyn?" asked the girl, turning to confront him where he had halted. "Gerard isn't coming, and—I thought perhaps you'd be interested."

The formal, half patronizing compliment on his tongue's tip remained there unsaid. He stood silent, touched by the faint underling wistfulness in the laughing voice that challenged his opinion, and something within him responded in time:

"Your gown is a beauty; such wonderful lace. Of course anybody would know it came straight from Paris or from some other celestial region."

She colored enchantingly and, with pretty, frank impulse, held out both her hands to him.

"You are a dear, Captain Selwyn! It is my first real dinner gown, and I'm quite mad about it, and somehow I wanted the family to share my madness with me. Nina will. She gave it to me, the darling. Austin admires it, too, of course, but he doesn't notice such things very closely, and Gerald isn't here. Thank you for letting me show it to you before I go down."

She gave both his hands a friendly little shake and, glancing down at her skirt in blissful consciousness of its perfection, stepped backward into her own room.

Later, while he stood at his dresser constructing an immaculate knot in his white tie, Nina knocked.

"Hurry, Phillip! Oh, may I come in? You ought to be downstairs with us, you know. And it was very sweet of you to be so nice to Eileen. The child had tears in her eyes when I went in. Oh, just a single diamond drop in each.

Your sympathy and interest did it. I think the child misses her father on an occasion such as this—the beginning of life, the first step out into the world. Men do not understand what it means to us. Gerald doesn't, I'm sure. I've been watching her, and I know the shadow of that dreadful tragedy falls on her more often than Austin and I are aware of. You are among your own people, anyhow!"

His own people! The impatient tenderness of his sister's words had been sounding in his ears all through the evening. They rang out clear and insistent amid the tumult of the dinner. He heard them in the laughing confusion of youthful voices. They stole into the delicate undertones of the music to mock him. The rustling of silk and lace repeated them. The high heels of satin slippers echoed them in irony.

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