RICH MEN'S CHILDREN

By GERALDINE DONNER

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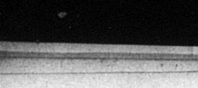

Illustrations by DOM J. LAVIN

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SYNOPSIS.

Bill Cannon, the bronco king and Mr. Carnation Spirit of '49, passed up Mrs. Cornelius Rigby's ball and failed to accompany her father, arrive at Antelope, Nevada, and meet Mrs. Rigby's guests on the train. Bill's first act was to fall in love with Jack Hannah. The determined old lady refused to recognize her daughter's choice and left with her guests. Jack, a scrappy, independent person, is unimpressed by several years of wealth. She and Bill become engaged and his daughter Jeanne and his daughter-in-law are annoyed by the engagement. Brian is rescued from snobbish company by Jack's unconventional thought to Antelope. Jack's delicate turn-off of Mrs. Cannon nurses Dominick back to life.

CHAPTER VI.—(Continued.)

"I don't see how she could do that —transparent neck and all. I don't think that's the kind of dress to wear in a theater. It's too sort of cop-eyebrow."

"I think Hannah's right," said Josh solemnly, nodding at Berry. "It don't seem to me the right thing for a lady. Looks fast."

"What do you know about it, Josh MacCrae?" said Hazel impatiently. "You're a clerk in a jewelry store."

"Maybe I am," answered Josh. "But I guess that don't prevent me from knowing what's what. I've been in jewelry stores ain't such clerks in 'em, you might think. And gimmers as you might think being a clerk anyway. I don't see that being a clerk in any kind of a store has anything to do with it."

Hazel was saved the effort of making a crushing repartee, for Pearl, who had been silently eating her lunch, now addressed her sister with the air of the momentary pause.

"Did Uncle Dominick go to the ball?" she asked, raising a pair of bright blue eyes to Berry's face.

An instantaneous, significant silence fell on the others, and all eyes turned inquiringly to Berry. Her air of cool composure was slightly exaggerated.

"No, he stayed at home with me," she replied, looking down intently at the meat on her plate.

"But I suppose he felt real hurt and ashamed—said Hannah. "He couldn't have helped it."

Berry did not reply. She knew that she must sooner or later tell her sisters of the cause of Dominick's departure. They would find it out otherwise and suspect more than she would set them to know. They, like the rest of the world, had no idea that Berry's brilliant marriage was not the domestic success it appeared on the surface. She moved her knife and fork with an arresting hand, and, as Hazel started to speak, said with as careless an air as she could assume:

"Dominick's gone. He left this morning."

"Gone where?" exclaimed Hazel. This was the last question and Berry had schooled herself to an answer in the car coming up.

"Oh, to the country," she said nonchalantly. "He's worn out. They work him to death and then to that hot white bank. He's getting insomnia and thought he'd better take a change now before he got run completely down, so he left this morning and I'm a gay grass widow."

She laughed and drank some water. Her laugh did not sound to her own ears convincing, and she was aware that, while Hannah was evidently soothed by her explanation, Hazel was eying her ponderingly.

"Well, if that's the case," said Hannah, "he'd better take his holiday right now. June is the best time to do. Take it in the beginning. Before winter took it."

Here Josh interrupted her, as Hannah reminiscently of his late rival transfers their interests were long and exhaustive.

"Where'd you say he'd gone?" he queried.

"I can't remember the name," Berry answered with skillfully assumed indifference. "Some place in the desert around Santa Cruz and Monterey, some new place. And to tell the truth, I've been about like it, he'll just move around from place to place."

"Why didn't you go, too?" said Pearl.

This was the second question Berry had dreaded to receive, and it left her throat contract and her lips quiver. Her usually firm nerve had been shaken by the tension of the night before and the shock of the morning. The sordid associations of alcoh and appetizers closed in on her and for the first time made her feel weak and tearful.

"I didn't—because I have meeting around," she said, pushing her chair back from the table. Her voice was a little luster, and suddenly feeling the sting of tears under her eyelids she raised her hands to her hair and began to fumble with her hairpins. "I should I know my comfortable flat to go traipsing off to the desert with hotels? That sort of thing doesn't appeal to me. I like my own cook, and my own bed and my own bath-tub and my own friends and my own Hannah. Well, so long, people. I must be traveling."

She laid her napkin on the table and jumped up with an assumption of briskness that was not wholly without relation to the unavailable of her trick friend. She arose abstractedly from her hat and put on her gloves. When she started back to the table she was again self-possessed of herself. Her cheeks looked unusually flushed, and her eyes, with their startling variety of corners, brighter and harder than ever. She hurried through her good-bys on the plea that she had shopping to do, and almost ran out of the house, leaving a trail of perfumery and high, artificial laughter behind her.

For the next week she waited for news from Dominick and none came. It was a trying seven days. Added to her embarrassment of mind, the loneliness of the flat was almost unendurable. There was no one to speak to, no one to share her sensations. She was unusually friendless. When her marriage had lifted her from the ranks of working women she had shown no cold a face to her old companions that they had dropped away from her, realizing that she wished to cut all ties with the world of her humble beginnings. New friends had been hard to make. The wives of some of the bank officials, and odd, aspiring applicants for such honors as would accrue from even this remote connection with the august name of Ryan, were all she had found where with to make a circle and a visiting list.

But she was intimate with none of them and was now too worried to seek the society of mere acquaintances when even solitary meals in oppressive silence, feeling the Chinaman's eyes fixed upon her in ironic disbelief of the story she had told him to account for Dominick's absence—all this was slowly as she would, her dinner could not be made to occupy more than twenty minutes, and after that there was the evening, the interminable evening, to be passed. She read a great deal of newspapers, and when she returned from her after noon shopping she brought a bundle of evening papers home in her hand. She would read these slowly, at first the important items, then go over them for matters of less moment, and finally scan the advertisements.

At the end of the week she felt that she must find out something, and went to the bank. It was her intention to cash a small check, and in the course of the transaction see if the paying teller would vouchsafe any information about Dominick. She pushed the check through the receiving slot, as the man counted out the money, said gayly:

"Do you hear anything of my man during business?"

The teller pushed the little pile of silver and gold through the window toward her and bending forward, said, with the air of one who intends to have a leisurely moment of talk:

"No, we haven't. Isn't it our place to come to you for that? We were wondering where he'd gone at such a season."

Berry's delicately gloved fingers made sudden haste to gather up the coins.

"Oh, he's just loafing about," she said as easily as was consistent with the disappointment and alarm that gripped her. "He's just wandering around from place to place. He was getting insomnia and wanted a change of scene."

She snapped the clasp of her purse before the man could ask her further questions, nodded her good-bys, and turned from the window. Her face changed as she emerged on the wide, open stage that led to the street. It was plotched and pale, two lines drawn between the eyebrows. She descend

The Coffee Lavin

"What Do You Know About It, Josh McCrae?" Said Hazel.

ed the steps and walked blindly along the street, mechanically having an warming influence upon her mind that had raised upon her. Slowly the pace of her feet settled at her—a pace that would have carried her to her parents' woman in her condition. Her head ached with the heat and her close-fitting hat pressed down upon her forehead. Her cheeks looked unusually flushed, and her eyes, with their startling variety of corners, brighter and harder than ever. She hurried through her good-bys on the plea that she had shopping to do, and almost ran out of the house, leaving a trail of perfumery and high, artificial laughter behind her.

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The next week began and advanced and still no news from Dominick. He had been gone fourteen days, when one evening in her perusal of the paper she saw his name. Her bounding hands pressed the sheet down on the table, and her eyes devoured the printed lines. It was one of the many short despatches that had come from the food-bill mining towns on the recent storms in the Sierra. It was headed Rocky Bar and contained a description of the situation at Angelo and the snow-bound colony there. Its chief item of information was that Bill Cannon and his daughter were among the prisoners at Parley's Hotel. A mention was made, only a line or two, of Dominick's work with the fire. He already knew her well enough to know that, though it was the first time, she took it out herself and put it in the interests at the correct

CHAPTER VII.

Snow-Bound.

While the world went about its affairs, crowded to its capacity with its papers, sent its telegrams and wrote its letters, the little group at Antelope was as completely cut off from it as though marooned in a strip of sand in an arctic sea. A second storm had followed the original one, and the end of the week found snow then smeared in deeper than ever. Antelope's trickle of roofs and smoke stacks, in a white, crystal-clear silence, solemn in its stillness and loneliness as the primeval world.

The wires were down; the latter carrier could not break his way in to them. They heard no news and received no mail. Confined to a group of rude buildings, crowded on a narrow row of the Sierra's flank, they felt the pressure of the forces that were outside that circle of busy activity which they had been so recently part of. The Rosana King, floating down the Rosana in the grids of the flood, found homers.

It made her feel lenient to Dominick, whose indifference and neglect had put her in the position. She was not fortright. After all, he could not know that she was nervous and ill. The wires were just up, and the rural mail-carrier had not yet been able to effect an entrance into the snow-bound town. Dominick knew, of course, that she was in this direction and attempted an impossible walk to Rocky Bar. He knew, of course, that she knew, nor just now care much. A sentiment as cold as reverence and tenderness as she could feel possessed her. Under its searching influence—spurred by uncertainty and magnanimity by the lifting of the weight of anxiety—she decided that she would write to him. She would write him a letter which would point out the difficulties between them and bring him home ready to be wooed as he once more his old self, kind, quiet, and indulgent, as he had been in the first year of their marriage.

Then and there, without further waiting, she wrote the letter. It ran as follows:

"My Dear Husband—I have only just seen in the paper that you are ill, and, oh, the relief! For two weeks we have been kept cruelly wondering about you, waiting to hear from you. And nothing ever came. Dominick, dear, I have had seen me sitting here alone in the dim, awful evening, thinking and wishing. Looking at the clock and listening all the time, even when I was trying to read—listening for your footsteps which never came—you would have felt very sorry for me, even you, who were so angry that you left me without a word. It's just two-hell this last two weeks. You may not think by the way I acted that I

repeated. It was an adventure charged with romance, sentimental, unenlightened, as all true adventures are. The world was forgotten for these few days of snow-imprisonment in the mountains of mighty heart. It did not exist for them. That was a real town their over little party, the white-wasted pagoda and wives of Parley, the dining-room with its board floor and homely fare, and the parlor at night with a semicircle of faces round the blazing fire.

On the afternoon of the sixth day the snowfall ceased as its first appearance down stairs. He achieved the descent with some difficulty, hobbling between Perley and the doctor. The former's hostelry had been cleaned and made for a dignified dark brown dressing-gown, contributed to his necessities by Cannon, and which, cut to fit the burly proportions of the latter, hung down in long around the long, lank form of the young man in enveloping folds. The parlor was empty, save for Miss Cannon sitting before the fire. Jeanne had been exposed to the bashfulness and constraint in the presence of this girl whom she had snubbed—snubbed with all the sharpness and self-assertiveness of a spoiled child. It would be difficult to retain either in intercourse with a being who was so candid, so spontaneous, so freshly natural. He found himself treating her as if she were a young boy with whom he had been placed at a sudden feeling of careless, cheery intimacy. But her outward seeming—what she presented to the eye—was not in the least boyish. Her pale, opaque blond-

would have cared, but I did. I do, I didn't love you well enough to make your people treated me! That's what makes it so hard, because I do love you and want you to be happy with me, and it's dreadful for me to see that always getting in between us, till sometimes lately I feel that they are going to separate us altogether.

"Oh, my dear husband, don't let that happen! Don't let them drive me away from you! If I have been bad and unreasonable, I have had reason to bear a lot. I am sorry for the past I am sorry for what I said to you that night, and for turning on the gas and scratching the bed. I am ready to acknowledge that I was wrong, and was mean and hateful. And now you ought to be ready to forgive me and forget

it all. Come back to me. Please come back. Don't be scary with me, I am your wife. You chose me of your own free will. You I loved you that I forgot honor and public opinion and had no will but yours. You know better than any one else in the world. It isn't everyone, Dominick, that gets that kind of love. I gave it then and I've never stopped giving it, though I've often been so put upon and enraged that I've said things I didn't mean and done things I've been ready to kill myself for. Aren't I the sorry, myself now, for you, the ring for you. Come back to me.

"Your loving wife, BERNY."

She read the letter over several times and it seemed to her that every sentence was she to have it to go as soon as possible that, though it was past ten, she took it out herself and post-ed it in the interests at the corner