

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. Eileen Erroll, ward of Nina and Austin, is part of their household. Selwyn has been divorced, without guilt on his part, by his wife, Alice, who is now the wife of Jack Ruthven, with whom she ran away from Selwyn. Eileen, who is very fond of her brother, Gerald, despite the young man's neglect of her, makes friends with Selwyn. III—Gerald is worried about young Erroll's mingling in the fast set. Gerald is employed by Julius Neergard, a real estate operator in a large way. Selwyn promises Eileen he will look after her brother. He tells her about Boots Lansing, his army chum in Manila, who is coming to New York. In the park Eileen and Selwyn ride past Alice. IV—Eileen's deceased father was an archaeologist, and she has inherited some of his scholarly qualities. Selwyn helps Gerald to settle a gambling debt and determines to undertake his reformation.

Chapter 5

HE prospect perplexed and depressed Selwyn. He was suddenly aware that in a town where the divorced must ever be reckoned with when dance and dinner lists are made out there is always some thoughtless hostess and sometimes a mischievous one, and the chances were that he and Mrs. Jack Ruthven would collide either through the forgetfulness or malice of somebody or through sheer hazard at some large affair where destiny and fate work busily together in criminal co-partnership.

Their encounter was all a mistake, born of the haste of a heedless and elderly matron celebrated for managing to do the wrong thing, but who had been excessively nice to him that winter and whose position in Manhattan was not to be assailed.

"Dear Captain Selwyn," she wheezed over the telephone, "I'm short one man, and we dine at 8 and it's that now. Could you help me? It's the rich and yellow this time, but you won't mind, will you?"

He explained to Mrs. T. West Minister his absurd delight at being asked. Then he went for a cab and sauntered into the dining room, where he was received with undisguised hostility.

"She's been civil to me," he said; "jeunesse oblige, you know, and that's why I—"

"There'll be a lot of debutantes! What do you want to go for, you crab robber?" protested Austin. "A lot of water bibbing, olive eating, talcum powdered debutantes!"

Eileen straightened up stiffly, and Selwyn's teasing smile and his offered hand in aid completed her indignation.

"Oh, goodby! No, I won't shake hands. There's your cab now. I wish you'd take Austin too. Nina and I are tired of dining with the prematurely aged."

"Indeed we are," said Mrs. Gerard. "Go to your club, Austin, and give me a chance to telephone to somebody under the anaesthetic age."

Selwyn departed, laughing, but he yawned in his cab all the way to Fifty-third street, where he entered in the wake of the usual laggards and, surrendering hat and coat in the cloakroom, picked up the small, slim envelope bearing his name.

The card within disclosed the information that he was to take in Mrs. Somebody-or-other. He made his way through a great many people, found his hostess, backed off, stood on one leg for a moment like a reflective waterfowl, then found Mrs. Somebody-or-other and was absently good to her through a great deal of noise and some Spanish music, which seemed to squirt through a thicket of palms and bespatter everybody.

"Wonderful music," observed his dinner partner with singular originality; "so like 'Carmen.'"

"Is it?" he replied and took her away at a nod from his hostess, whose daughter Dorothy leaned forward from her partner's arm at the same moment and whispered: "I must speak to you, mamma. You can't put Captain Selwyn there because—"

But her mother was deaf and smilingly sensitive about it, so she merely guessed what reply her child expected: "It's all settled, dear. Captain Selwyn arrived a moment ago." And she closed the file.

It was already too late anyhow, and presently, turning to see who was seated on his left, Selwyn found himself gazing into the calm, flushed face of Alice Ruthven. It was their third encounter.

They exchanged a dazed nod of recognition, a meaningless murmur, and turned again, apparently undisturbed, to their respective dinner parties.

A great many curious eyes lingering on them shifted elsewhere in reluctant disappointment.

As for the hostess, she had for one instant come as near to passing heavenward as she could without doing it when she discovered the situation. Then she accepted it with true humor. She could afford to. But, her daughters, Sheila and Dorothy, suffered acutely, being of this year's output and martyrs to responsibility.

Meanwhile Selwyn, grimly aware of an accident somewhere and perfectly conscious of the feelings which must by this time dominate his hostess, was

wondering how best to avoid anything that might resemble a situation.

Instead of two or three dozen small tables scattered among the palms of the winter garden their hostess had preferred to construct a great oval board around the aquarium. The arrangement made it a little easier for Selwyn and Mrs. Ruthven. He talked to his dinner partner until she began to respond in monosyllables, which closed each subject that he opened and wearied him as much as he was boring her. But Bradley Harmon, the man on her right, evidently had better fortune, and presently Selwyn found himself with nobody to talk to, which came as near to embarrassing him as anything could and which so enraged his hostess that she struck his partner's name from her lists forever. People were already glancing at him askance in sly amusement or cold curiosity.

Then he did a thing which endeared him to Mrs. T. West Minister and to her two disconsolate children.

"Mrs. Ruthven," he said very naturally and pleasantly, "I think perhaps we had better talk for a moment or two if you don't mind. My dinner partner is quite impossible, you see, and I happen to be here as a filler in—commanded to the presence only a few minutes ago. It's a pardonable error. I bear no malice. But I'm sorry for you."

There was a silence. Alice straightened her slim figure and turned, but young Innis, who had taken her in, had become confidential with Mrs. Fane. As for Selwyn's partner, she probably divined his conversational designs on her, but she merely turned her bare shoulder a trifle more unmistakably and continued her gossip with Bradley Harmon.

Alice broke a tiny morsel from her bread, sensible of the tension.

"I suppose," she said as though reciting to some new acquaintance an amusing bit of gossip, "that we are destined to this sort of thing occasionally and had better get used to it."

"I suppose so."

"Please," she added after a pause, "add me a little."

"I will if I can. What am I to say?"

"Have you nothing to say?" she asked, smiling. "It need not be very civil, you know, as long as nobody hears you."

To school his features for the deception of others, to school his voice and manner and at the same time look smilingly into the grave of his youth and hope, called for the sort of self command foreign to his character. Glancing at him under her smoothly fitted mask of amiability, she slowly grew afraid of the situation, but not of her ability to sustain her own part.

They exchanged a few meaningless phrases; then she resolutely took young Innis away from Rosamund Fane, leaving Selwyn to count the bubbles in his wineglass.

But in a few moments, whether by accident or deliberate design, Rosamund interfered again, and Mrs. Ruthven was confronted with the choice of a squabble for possession of young Innis, of conspicuous silence or of resuming once more with Selwyn, and she chose the last resort.

"You are living in town?" she asked pleasantly.

"Of course; I forgot. I met a man last night who said you had entered the firm of Neergard & Co."

"I have. Who was the man?"

"You can never guess, Captain Selwyn."

"I don't want to. Who was he?"

"Please don't terminate so abruptly the few subjects we have in reserve. We may be obliged to talk to each other for a number of minutes if Rosamund doesn't let us alone. The man was Boots Lansing."

"Boots! Here!"

"Arrived from Manila Sunday. As usual, he introduced you as the subject and told me—oh, dozens of things about you. I suppose he began inquiring for you before he crossed the troopers' gangplank, and somebody sent him to Neergard & Co. Haven't you seen him?"

"No," he said, staring at the brilliant fish, which glided along the crystal tank, goggling their eyes at the lights.

"You—you are living with the Gerards, I believe?" she said carelessly.

"For awhile."

"Oh! Boots says that he is expecting to take an apartment with you somewhere."

"What! Has Boots resigned?"

how. That is the wretched explanation of it all."

"And we could never have learned. That's the rest of the answer. But the fault is not there."

"I know—better to bear the lily we have."

"Yes; more respectable to bear them. Let us drop this in decency's name, Alice."

After a silence she began: "One more thing. I must know it, and I am going to ask you if I may. Shall I?"

He smiled cordially, and she laughed as though confiding a delightful bit of news to him.

"Do you regard me as sufficiently important to dislike me?"

"I do not—dislike you."

"Is it stronger than dislike, Phil?"

"Yes."

"Contempt?"

"No."

"What is it?"

"It is that—I have not yet—become—reconciled."

"To my—folly?"

"To mine."

She strove to laugh lightly and, failing, raised her glass to her lips again.

"Now you know," he said, pitching his tones still lower. "I am glad, after all, that we have had this plain understanding. I have never felt unkindly toward you. I can't. What you did I might have prevented had I known enough, but I cannot help it now, nor can you if you would."

"If I would," she repeated gayly, for the people opposite were staring.

"We are done for," he said, nodding carelessly to a servant to refill his glass, "and I abide by conditions because I chose to, not," he added contemptuously, "because a complacent law has tethered you to—the thing that has crawled up on your knees to have its crabs rubbed."

The level insult to her husband stunned her. She sat there, upright, the white smile stamped on her stiffened lips, fingers tightening about the stem of her wineglass.

He began to toss bread crumbs to the scarlet fish, laughing to himself in an ugly way. "Why, Alice, only look at him! Look at his gold wristlets; listen to his simper, his lip. Little girl—oh, little girl, what have you done to yourself, for you have done nothing to me, child, that can match it in sheer atrocity?"

Her color was long in returning.

"Phillip," she said unsteadily, "I don't think I can stand this—"

"Yes, you can."

"I am too close to the wall. I—"

"Talk to Scott Innis. Take him away from Rosamund Fane; that will tide you over. Or feed those fool fish; like this! Look how they rush and flap and spatter! That's amusing, isn't it—for people with the intellects of canaries? Will you please try to say something? Mrs. T. West is exhibiting the restless symptoms of a hen turkey at sundown, and we'll all go to roost in another minute. Don't slobber that way!"

"I can't control it. I will in a moment. Give me a chance. Talk to me, Phil."

"Certainly. The season has been unusually gay and the opera most stuporously brilliant. Stocks continue to fluctuate. Another old woman was tossed and gored by a mad motor this morning. More time, Alice? With pleasure. Mrs. Vendemian has bought a third rate castle in Wales. A man was found dead with a copy of the Tribune in his pocket, the verdict being in accordance with fact. The Panama canal—"

But it was over at last—a flurry of sweeping skirts, ranks of black and white in escort to the passage of the fluttering silken procession.

"Goodby," she said. "I am not staying for the dance."

"Goodby," he said pleasantly. "I wish you better fortune for the future. I'm sorry I was rough."

He was not staying either. A dull excitement possessed him, resembling suspense, as though he were awaiting a denouement, as though there was yet some crisis to come.

After awhile he found himself in the ballroom.

The younger set was arriving. He recognized several youthful people, friends of Eileen Erroll, and, taking situation," she said under her breath, but with a charming smile. "Do you know you are scowling? These people here are ready to laugh, and I'd much prefer that they tear us to rags on suspicion of our overfriendliness."

"Who is that fool woman who is monopolizing your partner?"

"Rosamund Fane. She's doing it on purpose. You must try to smile now and then."

"My face is stiff with grinning," he said, "but I'll do what I can for you"—"Please include yourself too."

"Oh, I can stand their opinions," he said. "I only meet the yellow sort occasionally. I don't herd with them."

"I do, thank you."

"How do you like them? What is your opinion of the yellow set? Here they sit all about you—the Phoenix Mottlys, Mrs. Delmour-Carnes yonder, the Draymores, the Orchills, the Vendemian lady, the Lawns of Westlawn—he paused, then deliberately—and the Jack Ruthvens. I forgot, Alice, that you are now perfectly equipped to carry aloft the golden hood."

"Go on," she said, drawing a deep breath. She forced a smile and drew her glass toward her. The straw tinted wine slopped over and frothed on the white skin of her arm.

"Well," she breathed, "this ghastly dinner is nearly ended."

He nodded pleasantly.

"And Phil?" a bit tremulous.

"What?"

"Was it all my fault—I mean in the beginning? I've wanted to ask you that—to know your view of it. Was it?"

"I can't do this," he muttered.

"I've sent away my maid," she said.

"Nobody has noticed. Those are servants out there. Will you please come before anybody arriving or departing does notice?"

And as he did not move, "Are you going to make me conspicuous by this humiliation before servants?"

He said something between his set teeth and entered the brougham.

"Do you know what you've done?" he demanded harshly.

"Yes; nothing yet. But you would have done enough to stir this brougham if you had delayed another second."

"Your maid saw"—

"My maid is my maid."

He leaned back in his corner, gray eyes narrowing.

"Naturally," he said, "you are the one to be considered, not the man in the case."

"Thank you. Are you the man in the case?"

"There is no case," he said coolly.

"Then why worry about me?"

He folded his arms, sullenly at bay, yet had no premonition of what to expect from her.

"You were very brutal to me," she said at length.

"I know it, and I did not intend to be. The words came."

"You had me at your mercy and showed me little—a very little at first, afterward none."

"The words came," he repeated. "I'm sick with self contempt, I tell you."

She set her white gloved elbow on the window sill and rested her chin in her palm.

"That money," she said, with an effort. "You set some aside for me."

"Half," he nodded calmly.

"Why?"

He was silent.

"Why? I did not ask for it. There was nothing in the—the legal proceedings to lead you to believe that I desired it, was there?"

"No."

"Well, then"—her breath came unsteadily—"what was there in me to make you think I would accept it?"

He did not reply.

"Answer me. This is the time to answer me."

"The answer is simple enough," he said in a low voice. "Together we had made a failure of partnership. When that partnership was dissolved there remained the joint capital to be divided. And I divided it. Why not?"

"That capital was yours in the beginning, not mine. What I had of my own you never controlled, and I took it with me when I went."

"It was very little," he said.

"What of that? Did that concern you? Did you think I would have accepted anything from you? A thousand times I have been on the point of notifying you through attorney that the deposit now standing in my name is at your disposal."

"Why didn't you notify me then?" he asked, reddening to the temples.

"Because I did not wish to hurt you by doing it that way. And I had not the courage to say it kindly over my own signature. That is why, Captain Selwyn."

And as he remained silent: "That is what I had to say; not all, because I wish to thank you for offering it. You did not have very much either, and you divided what you had. So I thank you, and I return it." The tension forced her to attempt a laugh.

"So we stand once more on equal terms unless you have anything of mine to return."

"I have your photograph," he said.

The silence lasted until he straightened up and, rubbing the fog from the window glass, looked out.

"We are in the park," he remarked, turning toward her.

"Yes, I did not know how long it might take to explain matters. You are free of me now whenever you wish."

He picked up the telephone—hesitated. "Home?" he inquired with an effort. And at the forgotten word they looked at one another in stricken silence.

"Yes; to your home first if you will let me drop you there."

"Thank you. That might be imprudent."

"No, I think not. You say you are living with the Gerards?"

"Yes, temporarily, but I've already taken another place."

"Where?"

"Oh, it's only a bachelor's kennel, a couple of rooms."

"Where, please?"

"Near Lexington and Sixty-sixth. I could go there. It's only partly furnished yet."

"Then tell Hudson to drive there."

"Thank you, but it is not necessary."

"Please let me. Tell Hudson or I will."

"You are very kind," he said and gave the order.

"May I ask my question?" she said.

"Ask it, child."

"Then are you happy?"

He did not answer.

"Because I desire it, Phillip. I want you to be. You will be, won't you? I did not dream that I was ruining your army career when I—went mad"

"How did it happen, Alice?" he asked, with a cold curiosity that chilled her. "How did it come about, wretched as we seemed to be together, unhappy, incapable of understanding each other?"

"Phill! There were days"—

He raised his eyes.

"You speak only of the unhappy ones," she said. "But there were moments—"

"Yes, I know it, and so I ask you why?"

"Phill, I don't know. There was that last bitter quarrel—the night you left for Leyte after the dance. I—it all grew suddenly intolerable. You seemed so horribly unreal—everything seemed unreal in that ghastly city—you, I, our marriage of crazy impulse—the people, the sunlight, the deathly creak of the torturing, endless creak of

the punka. It was not a question of love, of anger, of hate. I tell you I was stunned—I had no emotions con-



"I have your photograph," he said, concerning you or myself—after that last scene—only a stupefied, blind necessity to get away, a groping instinct to move toward home—to make my way home and be rid forever of the dream that drugged me! And then—and then—"

"He came," said Selwyn very quietly. "Go on."

But she had nothing more to say. "Alice!"

She shook her head, closing her eyes.

"Little girl—oh, little girl," he said softly, the old familiar phrase finding its way to his lips—and she trembled slightly—"was there no other way but that? Had marriage made the world such a living hell for you that there was no other way but that?"

"Phill, I helped to make it a hell."

"Yes—because I was pitifully inadequate to design anything better for us. I didn't know how. I didn't understand. I, the architect of our future—failed."

"It was worse than that, Phill. We—she looked blindly at him—"we had yet to learn what love might be. We did not know. If we could have waited—only waited—perhaps—because there were moments"— She flushed crimson.

"I could not make you love me," he repeated. "I did not know how."

"Because you yourself had not learned how. But—at times—now looking back to it—I think—I think we were very near to it—at moments. And then that dreadful dream closed down on us again. And then—the end."

For a long while they sat in silence. Mrs. Ruthven's white furs now covered her face. At last the carriage stopped.

As he sprang to the curb he became aware of another vehicle standing in front of the house, a cab, from which Mrs. Ruthven's maid descended.

"What is she doing here?" he asked, turning in astonishment to Mrs. Ruthven.

"Phill," she said in a low voice, "I knew you had taken this place. Gerald told me. Forgive me, but when I saw you under the awning it came to me in a flash what to do. And I've done it. Are you sorry?"

"No. Did Gerald tell you that I had taken this place?"

"Yes, I asked him."

Selwyn looked at her gravely, and she looked him very steadily in the eyes.

"Before I go may I say one more word?" he asked gently.

"Yes, if you please. Is it about Gerald?"

"Yes. Don't let him gamble. You saw the signature on that check?"

"Yes, Phill."

"Then you understand. Don't let him do it again."

"No. And—Phill?"

"What?"

"That check is—deposited to your credit—with the rest. I have never dreamed of using it. Her cheeks were aflame again, but with shame this time.

"You will have to accept it, Alice."

"I cannot."

"You must. Don't you see you will affront Gerald? He has repaid me. That check is not mine, nor is it his."

"I can't take it," she said, with a shudder. "What shall I do with it?"

"There are ways—hospitals, if you care to. Good night, child."

She stretched out her gloved arm to him. He took her hand very gently and retained it while he spoke.

"I wish you happiness," he said. "I ask your forgiveness."

"Give me mine, then."

"Yes, if there is anything to forgive. Good night."

"Good night, boy," she gasped.

He turned sharply, quivering under the familiar name. Her maid, standing in the snow, moved forward, and he motioned her to enter the brougham.

"Home," he said unsteadily and stood there very still for a minute or two, even after the carriage had whirled away into the storm. Then, looking up at the house, he felt for his keys, but a sudden horror of being alone arrested him, and he stepped back, calling out to his cabman, who was already turning his horse's head: "Wait a moment. I think I'll drive back to Mrs. Gerard's. And take your time."

To be continued.

Inconsequent.

I sometimes think it hardly fair that I am here while you are there. Still, I am perfectly aware you might come here or I go there.

And I would just as soon be there Or here, or have you here or there. So, I suppose, I scarcely care. In fact, it's neither here nor there.

—Canadian Magazine.

A Study in Languages.

"Good morning, Mrs. Finnegan, was you at the sociable last evening?"

"I did," said her friend heartily.

"Did what?"

"Wint," replied the other.—New York Herald.