

# 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. II.—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 his office, a plan to control the about Boots Lansing, his army chum in Manila, who is coming to New York. In the park Eileen and Selwyn meet. 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. V.—Alice and Selwyn meet and discuss their altered relations. He is introduced to Mrs. Rosamund Fane, leader of the fast set and Alice's closest friend. He appeals to Alice to help him keep Gerald from gambling. VI.—The ship of Eileen and Selwyn progresses. VII.—Gerald promises Selwyn he will stop gambling. Neergard discloses to Selwyn, who is interested in his office, a plan to control the Slowitha Country club by buying up farms essential to the club's existence. The plan does not appeal to Selwyn, and he consults Austin, who denounces Neergard and his methods. VII.—At night in his room Selwyn answers a knock at his door. IX.—The caller is Alice, who is very unhappy with Ruthven and wants to talk with Selwyn. For a moment their old love flashes up, but at the mention of Eileen he knows that his past resurrection. X.—Rosamund distresses Eileen by telling her society is gossiping about Alice and Selwyn. XI.—Alice gets a promise from Selwyn to help her get back to her home with him in the modest house he has bought. Selwyn declares he will no longer let the past mar his chance of happiness, and Nina declares her belief that Eileen has fallen in love with him. Nina fears that Alice, restless and disgusted with Ruthven, will make mischief. Selwyn is experimenting with chassite, his discovery is explosive.

## Chapter 14

EILEEN, sewing by the nursery window, looked up. Her little Alsatian maid, cross legged on the floor at her feet, sewing away diligently, also looked up, then scrambled to her feet as Selwyn halted on the threshold of the room.

"Why, how odd you look!" said Eileen, laughing. "Come in, please. Susanne and I are only mending some of our summer things. Were you in search of the children? Don't say so if you were, because I'm quite happy in believing that you knew I was here. Did you?"

"Where are the children?" he asked.

"In the park, my very rude friend. You will find them on the mall if you start at once."

He hesitated, but finally seated himself, omitting the little formal hand-



Eileen looked up.

shake with which they always met, even after an hour's separation. Of course she noticed this and, bending low above her sewing, wondered why.

It seemed to him for a moment as though he were looking at a woman he had heard about and had just met for the first time. His observation of her now was leisurely, calm and thorough—not so calm, however, when, impatient of his reticence, bending there over her work, she raised her dark blue eyes to his, her head remaining lowered. The sweet, silent inspection lasted but a moment. Then she resumed her stitches, aware that something in him had changed since she last had seen him. But she merely smiled quietly to herself, confident of his unaltered devotion in spite of the strangely hard and unresponsive gaze that had unhesitatingly evaded hers.

As her white fingers flew with the glimmering needle she reflected on conditions as she had left them a week ago. A week ago between him and her the most perfect of understandings existed, and the consciousness of it she had carried with her every moment in the country—amid the icy tumble of the surf, on long, vigorous walks over the greening hills where wild moorland winds whipped like a million fairy switches till the young blood fairly sang, pouring through her veins.

Since that—some time within the week—something evidently had happened to him here in the city while she had been away. What?

As she bent above the fine linen garment on her knee, coddle flying, a sudden memory stirred coldly—the recollection of her ride with Rosamund—and instinctively her clear eyes flew open, and she raised her head, turning directly toward him a disturbed gaze she did not this time evade.

In silence their regard lingered; then,

satisfied, she smiled again, saying, "Have I been away so long that we must begin all over, Captain Selwyn?"

"Begin what, Eileen?"

"To remember that the silence of selfish preoccupation is a privilege I have not accorded you?"

"I didn't mean to be preoccupied."

"Oh, worse and worse!" She shook her head and began to thread the needle.

"I see that my week's absence has not been very good for you. I knew it the moment you came in with all that guilty, absentminded effrontery which I have forbidden."

He colored up as he took her hand in his. Then they both laughed at the very vigorous shake.

"What a horribly unfriendly creature you can be," said Eileen. "Never a greeting, never even a formal expression of pleasure at my return."

"You have not returned," he said, smiling. "You have been with me every moment, Eileen."

"What a pretty tribute!" she exclaimed. "I am beginning to recognize traces of my training after all."

When the children came in they left the nursery together and descended the stairs to the library. Austin had just come in, and he looked up from his solitary cup of tea as they entered.

"Hello, youngsters! What conspiracy are you up to now? I suppose you sniffed the tea and have come to deprive me. By the way, Phil, I hear that you've sprung the trap on those Slowitha people."

"Neergard has, I believe."

"Well, isn't it all one?"

"No, it is not," retorted Selwyn so bluntly that Eileen turned from the window at a sound in his voice which she had never before heard.

"Oh!" Austin stared over his suspended teacup, then drained it. "Trouble with our friend Julius?" he inquired.

"No trouble. I merely severed my connection with him."

"Ah! When?"

"This morning."

"In that case," said Austin, laughing. "I've a job for you."

"No, old fellow, and thank you with all my heart. I've half made up my mind to live on my income for awhile and take up that chassite matter again."

"And blow yourself to smithereens! Why spatter nature thus?"

"No fear," said Selwyn, laughing. "And if it promises anything I may come to you for advice on how to start it commercially."

"If it doesn't start you heavenward you shall have my advice from a safe distance. I'll telegraph it," said Austin. "But, if it's not personal, why on earth have you shaken Neergard?"

And Selwyn answered simply: "I don't like him. That is the reason, Austin."

The children from the head of the stairs were now shouting demands for their father, and Austin rose, pretending to grumble.

"Those confounded kids! A man is never permitted a moment to himself."

Is Nina up there, Eileen? Oh, all right! Excuses, etc. I'll be back pretty soon. You'll stay to dine, Phil?"

"I don't think so."

"Yes, he will stay," said Eileen calmly.

And when Austin had gone she walked swiftly over to where Selwyn was standing and looked him directly in the eyes.

"Is all well with Gerald?"

"Y-yes, I suppose so."

"Is he still with Neergard & Co.?"

"Yes, Eileen."

"And you don't like Mr. Neergard?"

"No."

"Then Gerald must not remain."

He said very quietly: "Eileen, Gerald no longer takes me into his confidence. I am afraid—I know, in fact—that I have little influence with him now. I am sorry. It hurts, but your brother is his own master, and he is at liberty to choose his own friends and his own business policy. I cannot influence him. I have learned that thoroughly."

Better that I retain what real friendship he has left for me than destroy it by any attempt, however gentle, to interfere in his affairs."

She stood before him, straight, slender, her face grave and troubled.

"I cannot understand," she said, "how he could refuse to listen to a man like you."

"A man like me, Eileen? Well, if I were worth listening to no doubt he'd listen. But the fact remains that I have not been able to hold his interest."

"Don't give him up," she said, still looking straight into his eyes. "If you care for me, don't give him up."

"Care for you, Eileen! You know I

do."

"Yes, I know it. So you will not give up Gerald, will you? He is only a boy. You know that. You know he has been—perhaps—indiscreet. But Gerald is only a boy. Stand by him, Captain Selwyn, because Austin does not know how to manage him—really he doesn't. There has been another unpleasant scene between them. Gerald told me."

"Did he tell you why, Eileen?"

"Yes. He told me that he had played cards for money and he was in debt. I know that sounds almost disgraceful, but is not his need of help all the greater?"

Selwyn's eyes suddenly narrowed. "Did you help him out this time?"

"I—how do you mean, Captain Selwyn?" But the splendid color in her face confirmed his certainty that she had used her own resources to help her brother pay the gambling debt, and he turned away his eyes, angry and silent.

"Yes," she said under her breath. "I did aid him. What of it? Could I refuse?"

"I know. Don't aid him again—that way."

She stared. "You mean—"

"Send him to me, child. I understand such matters. I—that is"—And in sudden exasperation inexpressible, for the moment, to them both: "Don't touch such matters again! They soil, I tell you. I will not have Gerald go to you about such things!"

"My own brother! What do you mean?"

"I mean that, brother or not, he shall not bring such matters near you!"

"Am I to count for nothing, then, when Gerald is in trouble?" she demanded, flushing up.

"Count! Count!" he repeated impatiently. "Of course you count! Good heavens! It's women like you who count, and no others—not one single other sort is of the slightest consequence in the world or to it."

She had turned a little pale under his vehemence, watching him out of wide and beautiful eyes.

What she understood, how much of his incoherence she was able to translate, is a question, but in his eyes and voice there was something simpler to divine, and she stood very still while his roused emotions swept her till her heart leaped up and every vein in her ran fiery pride.

"I am—overwhelmed. I did not consider that I counted—so vitally—in the scheme of things. But I must try to if you believe all this of me, only you must teach me how to count for something in the world. Will you?"

"Teach you, Eileen. What winning mockery! I teach you? Well, then, I teach you this—that a man's blunder is best healed by a man's sympathy. I will stand by Gerald as long as he will let me do so, not alone for your sake nor only for his, but for my own. I promise you that. Are you contented?"

"Yes."

She slowly raised one hand, laying it fearfully in both of his.

"He is all I have left," she said.

"You know that."

"I know, child."

"Then, thank you, Captain Selwyn."

"No; I thank you for giving me this charge. It means that a man must raise his own standard of living before he can accept such responsibility. You endow me with all that a man ought to be, and my task is doubled, for it is not only Gerald, but I myself, who require surveillance."

He looked up, smilingly serious.

"Such women as you alone can fit your brother and me for an endless guard duty over the white standard you have planted on the outer walls of the world."

"You say things to me—sometimes"—she faltered. "That almost hurt with the pleasure they give."

"Did that give you pleasure?"

"Y-yes; the surprise of it was almost too—too keen. I wish you would not—but I am glad you did. You see"—dropping into a great velvet chair—"having been of no serious consequence to anybody for so many years—to be told suddenly that I—that I count so vitally with men—a man like you!"

She sank back, drew one small hand across her eyes and rested a moment; then, leaning forward, she set her elbow on one knee and bracketed her chin between forefinger and thumb.

"I've not had you to talk to for a whole week," she said, "and you'll let me, won't you? I can't help it anyway, because as soon as I see you—crack—a million thoughts wake up in me and clipper-clapper goes my tongue. You are very good for me. You are so thoroughly satisfactory except when your eyes narrow in that dreadful, far-away gaze which I've forbidden, you understand. What have you done to your mustache?"

"Clipped it."

"Oh, I don't like it too short! Can you get hold of it to pull it? It's the only thing that helps you in perplexity to solve problems. You'd be utterly helpless mentally without your mustache. Shall we take up our Etruscan symbols again when you come down to stay with us at Silverside?"

"Indeed we shall," he said, smiling.

"Which also reminds me"—

"He drew from his breast pocket a thin, flat box, turned it round and round and glanced at her, balancing it teasingly in the palm of his hand.

"Is it for me? Really? Oh, please don't be provoking! Is it really for me? Then give it to me this instant!"

He dropped the box into the pink hollow of her supplicating palms. For a moment she was very busy with the tissue paper, then said:

"Oh, it is perfectly sweet of you! Burning the small book bound in heavy Etruscan gold. 'Whatever can it be?'"

And, rising, she opened it, stepping to the window so that she could see.

Within, the pages were closely covered with the minute, careful handwriting of her father. It was the first notebook he ever kept, and Selwyn had had it bound for her in gold.

For an instant she gazed, breathless, lips parted. Then slowly she placed the yellowed pages against her lips and, turning, looked straight at Selwyn, the splendor of her young eyes starred with tears.

Chapter 15

ALIXE RUTHVEN had not yet dared tell Selwyn that her visit to his rooms was known to her husband. She was now afraid of her husband's malice, afraid of Selwyn's opinion, afraid of herself most of all, for she understood herself well enough to realize that if conditions became intolerable the first and easiest course out of it would be the course she'd take—wherever it led, whatever it cost or whoever was involved.

In addition to her dread and excitement, she was deeply chagrined and unhappy, and, although Jack Ruthven did not again refer to the matter—indeed, appeared to have forgotten it—her alarm and humiliation remained complete, for Gerald now came and played and went as he chose, and in her disconcerted cowardice she dared not do more than plead with Gerald in secret until she began to find the emotion consequent upon such intimacy unwise for them both.

Neergard, too, was becoming a familiar figure in her drawing room, and, though at first she detested him, his

patience and unflinching good spirits and his unconcealed admiration for her softened her manner toward him to the point of toleration.

And Neergard, from his equivocal footing in the house of Ruthven, obtained another no less precarious in the house of Fane—all in the beginning on a purely gaming basis. However, Gerald had already proposed him for the Stuyvesant and Proscenium clubs, and, furthermore, a stormy discussion was now in progress among the members of the famous Slowitha over an amazing proposition from their treasurer, Jack Ruthven.

This proposal was nothing less than to admit Neergard to membership in that wealthy and exclusive country club as a choice of the lesser evil, for it appeared, according to Ruthven, that Neergard, if admitted, was willing to restore to the club free of rent the thousands of acres vitally necessary to the club's existence as a game preserve, merely retaining the title to these lands for himself.

Drymore was incensed at the proposal, Harmon, Orchil and Fane were disgustedly noncommittal, but Phoenix Mottly was perhaps the angriest man on Long Island.

"In the name of decency, Jack," he said, "what are you dreaming of? Is it not enough that this man Neergard holds us up once? Do I understand that he has the impudence to do it again with your connivance? Are you going to let him sandbag us into electing him? Is that the sort of holdup you stand for? Well, then, I tell you I'll never vote for him. I'd rather see these lakes and streams of ours dry up. I'd rather see the last pheasant snared and the last covy leave for the other end of the island than buy off that Dutchman with a certificate of membership in the Slowitha!"

"In that case," retorted Ruthven, "we'd better wind up our affairs and make arrangements for an auctioneer."

"All right. Wind up and be hanged!" said Mottly. "There'll be at least sufficient self respect left in the treasury to go round."

Which was all very fine, and Mottly meant it at the time, but outside of the asset of self respect there was too much money invested in the lands, plant and buildings, in the streams, lakes, hatcheries and forests of the Slowitha. The enormously wealthy seldom stand long upon dignity if that dignity is going to be very expensive. Only the poor can afford disastrous self respect.

So the chances were that Neergard would become a member, which was why he had acquired the tract, and the price he would have to pay was not only in taxes upon the acreage, but secretly a solid sum in addition to little Mr. Ruthven, whom he was binding to him by every tie he could pay for.

He suffered Gerald and little Ruthven to plot him. He remained cheerfully oblivious to the snubs and indif-

ference accorded him by Mrs. Ruthven, Mrs. Fane and others of their entourage whom he encountered over the card tables or at card suppers. And all the while he was attending to his business with an energy and activity that ought to have shamed Gerald and did at times, particularly when he arrived at the office utterly unfit for the work before him.

But Neergard continued astonishingly tolerant and kind, lending him money, advancing him what he required, taking up or renewing notes for him until the boy, heavily in his debt, plunged more heavily still in sheer desperation, only to founder the deeper at every struggle to extricate himself.

Alixé Ruthven suspected something of this, but it was useless as well as perilous in other ways for her to argue with Gerald, for the boy had come to a point where even his devotion to her could not stop him. He must go on.

Meanwhile the Ruthvens were living almost lavishly and keeping four more horses. But Eileen Erroll's bank balance had now dwindled to three figures, and Gerald had not only acted offensively toward Selwyn, but had quarreled so violently with Austin that the latter, thoroughly incensed and disgruntled, threatened to forbid him the house.

"The little fool," he said to Selwyn, "came here last night stinking of wine and attempted to lay down the law to me—tried to drag me into a compromise with him over the investments I have made for him! By God, Phil, he shall not control one cent until the trust conditions are fulfilled, though it was left to my discretion too. And I told him so flatly. I told him he wasn't fit to be trusted with the coupons of a repudiated South American bond!"

"Hold on, Austin. That isn't the way to tackle a boy like that!"

"Isn't it? Well, why not? Do you expect me to dicker with him?"

"No; but, Austin, you've always been a little brusque with him. Don't you think?"

"No, I don't. It's discipline he needs, and he'll get it good and plenty every time he comes here."

"I'm afraid he may cease coming here. That's the worst of it. For his sister's sake I think we ought to try to put up with"—

"Put up! Put up! I've been doing nothing else since he came of age. He's turned out a fool of a puppy, I tell you. He's idle, lazy, dissipated, impudent, conceited, insufferable!"

"But not vicious, Austin, and not untruthful. Where his affections are centered he is always generous; where they should be centered he is merely thoughtless, not deliberately selfish. And, Austin, we've simply got to believe in him, you know—on Eileen's account."

Austin grew angrier and redder.

"Eileen's account? Do you mean her bank account? It's easy enough to believe in him if you inspect his sister's bank account. Believe in him? Oh, certainly I do. I believe he's pup enough to come sneaking to his sister to pay for all the fooleries he's engaged in. And I've positively forbidden her to draw another check to his order."

"It's that little bangled whelp Ruthven," said Selwyn between his teeth. "I warned Gerald most solemnly of that man, but— He shrugged his shoulders and glanced about him at the linen covered furniture and bare floors. After a moment he looked up.

"The game there is, of course, notorious. I—if matters did not stand as they do"—he flushed painfully—"I'd go straight to Ruthven and find out whether or not this business could be stopped."

If Alixé had done her best to keep Gerald away, she appeared to be quite powerless in the matter; and it was therefore useless to go to her. Besides, he had every inclination to avoid her. He had learned his lesson.

To whom then could he go? Through whom could he reach Gerald? Through Nina? Useless. And Gerald had already defied Austin. Through Neergard, then? But he was on no terms with Neergard. How could he go to him? Through Rosamund Fane? At the thought he made a wry face. Any advances from him she would willfully misinterpret. And Ruthven? How on earth could he bring himself to approach him?

And yet he had promised Eileen to do what he could. What merit lay in performing an easy obligation? What courage was required to keep a promise easily kept? If he cared anything for her, if he really cared for Gerald, he owed them more than effortless fulfillment. So first of all, when at length he had decided, he nerved himself to strike straight at the center, and within the hour he found Gerald at the Stuyvesant club.

The boy descended to the visitors' rooms, Selwyn's card in his hand and distrust written on every feature. And at Selwyn's first frank and friendly words he reddened to the temples and checked him.

"I won't listen," he said. "They—Austin and—everybody has been putting you up to this until I'm tired of it. Do they think I'm a baby? Do they suppose I don't know enough to take care of myself? Are they trying to make me ridiculous? I tell you they'd better let me alone. My friends are my friends, and I won't listen to any criticism of them, and that settles it."

"Gerald"—

"Oh, I know perfectly well that you dislike Neergard. I don't, and that's the difference."

"I'm not speaking of Mr. Neergard, Gerald. I'm only trying to tell you what this man Ruthven really is doing."

"What do I care what he is doing?" cried Gerald angrily. "And, anyway, it isn't likely I'd come to you to find out anything about Mrs. Ruthven's

second husband?"

Selwyn rose, very white and still. After a moment he drew a quiet

breath, his clinched hands relaxed, and he picked up his hat and gloves.

"They are my friends," muttered Gerald, as pale as he. "You drove me into speaking that way."

"Perhaps I did, my boy. I don't judge you. If you ever find you need help come to me. And if you can't come and still need me send for me. I'll do what I can always. I know you better than you know yourself. Goodbye."

He turned to the door, and Gerald burst out: "Why can't you let my friends alone? I liked you before you began this sort of thing!"

"I will let them alone if you will," said Selwyn, halting. "I can't stand by and see you exploited and used and perverted. Will you give me one chance to talk it over, Gerald?"

"No! I won't!" returned Gerald hotly. "I'll stand for my friends every time! There's no treachery in me!"

"You are not standing by me very fast," said the elder man gently.

"I said I was standing by my friends!" repeated the boy.

"Very well, Gerald, but it's at the expense of your own people, I'm afraid."

"That's my business, and you're not one of 'em," retorted the boy, infuriated, "and you won't be, either, if I can prevent it, no matter whether people say that you're engaged to her!"

"What?" whispered Selwyn, wheeling like a flash. The last vestige of color had fled from his face, and Gerald caught his breath, almost blinded by the blaze of fury in the elder man's eyes.

Neither spoke again, and after a moment Selwyn's eyes fell, and he turned heavily on his heel and walked away, head bent, gray eyes narrowing to slits.

Yet through the brain's chaos and the heart's loud tumult and the clamor of pulses run wild at the insult flung into his very face the grim instinct to go on persisted, and he went on and on for her sake—on, he knew not how, until he came to Neergard's apartment in one of the vast west side constructions bearing the name of a sovereign state, and here after an interval he followed his card to Neergard's splendid suit, where a manservant received him and left him seated by a sunny window overlooking the blossoming foliage of the park.

When Neergard came in and stood on the farther side of a big oak table Selwyn rose, returning the cool, curt nod.

"Mr. Neergard," he said, "it is not easy for me to come here after what I said to you when I severed my connection with your firm. You have every reason to be unfriendly toward me, but I came on the chance that whatever resentment you may feel will not prevent you from hearing me out."

"Personal resentment," said Neergard slowly, "never interferes with my business. I take it, of course, that you have called upon a business matter. Will you sit down?"

"Thank you. I have only a moment, and what I am here for is to ask you as Mr. Erroll's friend to use your influence on Mr. Erroll—every atom of your influence—to prevent him from ruining himself financially through his excesses. I ask you for his family's sake to discountenance any more gambling, to hold him strictly to his duties in your office, to overlook no more shortcomings of his, but to demand from him what any trained business man demands of his associates as well as of his employees. I ask this for the boy's sake."

"I am not aware that Gerald requires any interference from me or from you either," said Neergard coolly. "And, as far as that goes, I and my business require no interference either. And I believe that settles it."

He touched a button. The manservant appeared to usher Selwyn out.

The latter set his teeth in his under lip and looked straight and hard at Neergard, but Neergard thrust both hands in his pockets, turned squarely on his heel and sauntered out of the room, yawning as he went.

It bid fair to become a hard day for Selwyn. He foresaw it, for there was more for him to do, and the day was far from ended, and his self restraint was nearly exhausted.

An hour later he sent his card in to Rosamund Fane, and Rosamund came down presently, mystified, flattered, yet shrewdly alert and prepared for anything since the miracle of his coming justified such preparation.

"Why in the world," she said, with a flushed gaiety perfectly genuine, "did you ever come to see me?"

"It's only this," he said—"I am wondering whether you would do anything for me."

"Anything! Merce! Isn't that extremely general, Captain Selwyn? But you never can tell. Ask me."

So he bent forward, his clasped hands between his knees, and told her very earnestly of his fears about Gerald, asking her to use her undoubted influence with the boy to shame him from the card tables, explaining how utterly disastrous to him and his family his present course was.

"Could you help us?" he asked.

"Help us, Captain Selwyn? Who is the 'us,' please?"

"Why, Gerald and me—and his family," he added, meeting her eyes. The eyes began to dance with malice.

"His family," repeated Rosamund—"that is to say, his sister, Miss Er-

roll."

"What?" whispered Selwyn.

breath, his