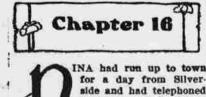


SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS

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side and had telephoned Selwyn to take her some where for luncheon. She urged him to return with her, insisting that a week end at Silverside was what he needed to avert physical disintegration.

"What is there to keep you in town?" she demanded. "The children have been clamoring for you day and night, and Elleen has been expecting a let-You promised to write her, der. Phil "

"I'm going to write to her," he said impatiently

He nodded and for awhile made some pretense of eating, but presently leaned back and looked at his sister out of dazed eyes.

"Do you suppose," he said heavily, "that she was not entirely responsible when-when she went away?"

"I have wondered," said Nina simply. "Austin believes it."

"I can't believe it," he said, staring at vacancy. "I refuse to." And, thinking of her last frightened and excited letter imploring an interview with him and giving the startling reason, "What a scoundrel that fellow Ruthven is," he said, with a shudder.

That night he wrote to Alixe:

If Ruthven threatens you with divorce on such a ground he himself is likely to be adjudged mentally unsound. It was a be adjudged mentally unsound. It was a brutal, stupid threat, nothing more, and his insuit to your father's memory was more brutal still. Don't be stampeded by such threats. Disprove them by your calm self control under provocation. Dissuch threats. Disprove them by calm self control under provocation. cain self control under provocation. Dis-prove them by your discretion and self confidence. Give nobody a single possi-ble reason for gossip. And, above all, Alixe, don't become worried and morbid over anything you might dread as inover anything you might dread as in-haritance, for you are as sound today as you were when I first met you, and you shall not doubt that you could ever be anything else. Be the worman you can be. Show the pluck and courage to make the very best out of life. I have slowly learned to attempt it, and it is not diffi-cult if you convince yourself that it can be done.

To this she answered the next day:

To this she answered the next day: I will do my best. There is danger, treachery, everywhere, and if it becomes unendurable I shall put an end to it in one way or another. As for his threat-incident on my admitting that I did go to your room and defying him to dare be-lieve evil of me for doing it-I can laugh at it now, though when I wrote you I was terrified, remembering how mentally broken my father was when he died. But, as you say, I am sound, body and mind. I know it. I don't doubt it for one moment-except, at long intervals, when, apropos of nothing, a faint sensation of dread comes creeping.

apropos of norming, a taint someation of dread comes creeping. But I am sound! I know it so absolute-ly that I sometimes wonder at my own perfect sanity and understanding, and so clearly, so faultlessly, so precisely does my mind work that—and this I never told you-I am often and often able to detect mental inadequacy in many people around me, the slightest deviation from the normal, the least degree of montal instabil-ity. And it would amaze you, too, if I should tell you how many, many people you know are in some degree more or

oss insane. He's only screncly disagreeable to me He's only serenely disagreeable to me now, and we see almost nothing of one another except over the card tables. Ger-ald has been winning rather heavily, I am glad to say-glad as long as I cannot prevent him from playing. And yet I may be able to accomplish that yet in a roundabout way, because the apple vis-aged and hawk beaked Mr. Neergard has apparently become my alwich chesture. apparently become my slavish creature-quite infatuated. And as soon as I've fastened on his collar and made sure that Rosamund can't unhook it I'll try to make him shut down on Geraid's play-ing. This for your sake, Phil-because ing. This for your sake, Phil-because you ask me and because you must al-ways stand for all that is upright and good and manly in my eyes. Ah, Phil, what a fool I was! And all, all my own fault too! ALIXE. This ended the sudden eruption of

correspondence, for he did not reply to this letter, though in it he read enough to make him gravely uneasy, and he

Selwyn closed the door and seate. himself, apparently not noticing Ger ald's dishevelment.

"Thought I'd drop in for a good nigh pipe," he said quietly. "By the way. Gerald, I'm going down to Silverside next week. Nina has asked Boots too. Couldn't you fix it to come along with

"I don't know," said the boy in a low voice. "I'd like to."

"Good business! That will be fine! What you and I need is a good stiff tramp across the moors or a gallop if you like. It's great for mental cobwebs, and my brain is disgracefully unswept. By the way, somebody said that you'd joined the Slowitha club."

"Yes," said the boy listlessly.

"Well, you'll get some lively trout fishing there now. It's only thirty miles from Silverside, you know. You can run over in the motor very easily.' Gerald nodded, sitting silent, his

handsome head supported in both hands, his eyes on the floor. That something was very wrong

with him appeared plainly enough, but Selwyn, touched to the heart and miserably apprehensive, dared not question him unasked.

And so they sat there for awhile. Selwyn making what conversation he could, and at length Gerald turned and dragged himself across the bed, dropning his head back on the disordered pillows.

"Go on," he said; "I'm listening."

So Selwyn continued his pleasant, inconsequential observations, and Gerald lay with closed eyes quite motionless until, watching him, Selwyn saw his hand was trembling where it lay clinched beside him. And presently the boy turned his face to the wall.

Toward midnight Selwyn rose quietly, removed his unlighted pipe from between his teeth, knocked the ashes from it and pocketed it. Then he walked to the bed and seated bimself on the edge.

"What's the trouble, old man?" he sked coolly.

There was no answer. He placed his hand over Gerald's. The boy's hand lay inert, then quivered and closed on Selwyn's convulsively.

"That's right," said the elder man; "that's what I'm here for-to stand by when you hoist signals. Go on."

The boy shook his head and buried it deeper in the pillow.

"Bad as that?" commented Selwyn quietly. "Well, what of it? I'm standing by, I tell you. That's right"-as Gerald broke down, his body quivering under the spasm of soundless grief-"that's the safety valve working. Good business. Take your time."

It took a long time, and Selwyn sat silent and motionless, his whole arm numb from its position and Gerald's crushing grasp. And at last, seeing that

was the moment to speak, he said: "Now let's fix up this matter, Gerald. Come on!"

"Good heavens! H-how can it be f-fixed 7'

"I'll tell you when you tell me. It's money difficulty, I suppose, isn't it?" "Yes."

"Cards ?"

"P-partly."

"Oh, a note? Case of honor? Where s this I. O. U. that you gave?"

"It's worse than that. The-the note is paid. Good God-I can't tell you!" "You must. That's why I'm here, Gerald."

"Well, then, I-I drew a checkknowing that I had no funds. If it-if they return it marked"-

"I see. What are the figures?" The hoy stammer

clear conviction of its futility. The boy had brushed too close to dishono: not to recognize it. And if this were not a lifelong lesson to him no promises forced from him in his dire need and distress, no oaths, no pledges, could bind him. No blame, no admoni-

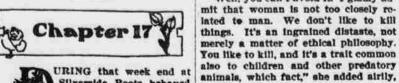
tion, no scorn, no contempt, no reproach, could help him to see more clearly the pit of destruction than he could see now.

> "You need sleep, Gerald," he said quietly. "Don't worry. I'll see that your check is not dishonored. All you have to see to is yourself. Good night, my boy."

> But Gerald could not speak, and so Selwyn left him and walked slowly back to his own room, where he seat ed himself at his desk, grave, absent eyed, his unfilled pipe between his

And he sat there until he had bitten clean through the amber mouthpiece, so that the brier bowl fell clattering to the floor. By that time it was full daylight, but Gerald was still asleep. He slept late into the afternoon, but that evening, when Selwyn and Lansing came in to persuade him to go with them to Silverside, Gerald was gone.

They walted another day for him. you deny it?" He did not appear. And that night they left for Silverside without him. he returned teasingly.



Silverside Boots behaved URING that week end at like a school lad run wild. With Drina's hand in his, the other children and half a dozen dogs as adranced guard and heavily flanked by the Gerard battalion, he scoured the moorlands from Surf point to the Hither woods, from Wonder head to Sky pond.

Nina, Eileen and Selwyn formed a lagging and leisurely rear guard, though always within signaling distance of Boots and the main body, and when necessary the two ex-army men wigwagged to each other across the uplands to the endless excitement and gratification of the children.

Elleen and Selwyn were standing on one of the treeless hills, a riotous tangle of grasses and wild flowers, looking out to sea across Sky pond. He had a rod, and as he stood he idly switched the gayly colored flies backward and forward.

Standing there, fairly swimming in noyed Selwyn to know that men had the delicious upper air currents, she importuned her. She had told him of looked blissfully

"After all," she

across the rolling moors. said, "what more is there than this - earth and sea and sky and sun and a friend to show them to? Because, as 6

in Brier Water to see whether there are any trout there. Well, there are. Austin stocked it years ago, and he

what a trout is for-to kill and be killed."

She smilled, then sighed. The taking of life and the giving of it were myspries to her. She had never wittingly killed anything. "Do you say that it doesn't hurt the

trout?" she asked. "There are no nerves in the jaw muscles of a trout- Hah!" as his rod twitched and swerved under water and

his reel sang again. And again she watched the performance and once more turned her back. "Let me try," she said when the

coup de grace had been administered to a lusty, brilliant tinted bull trout. And, rod in hand, she bent breathless

third, a small one, but when she lifted

It gasping into the sunlight she shiv-

"Unbook it and throw it back! I-I

Splash! went the astonished trout,

"There's no doubt about it," she said,

"you and I certainly do belong to dif-

ferent species of the same genus. Men

and women are separate species. Do

"I should hate to lose you that way."

"Well, you can't avoid it. I gladly ad-

"convinces me of woman's higher civ-

ered and called to Selwyn:

and she sighed her relief.

simply can't stand that!"

mint.

flization."

man kills for her."

scale yet-particularly you."

tually hurt my wrist."

Percy Draymore.

ing with a club," he suggested.

tively, he has not progressed so very

far," she added demurely. "As an ex-

ample that dreadful Draymore man ac-

Selwyn looked up quickly, a shade of

frank annoyance on his face and a

vision of the fat sybarite before his

eyes. He turned again to his fishing.

but his shrug was more of a shudder

than appeared to be complimentary to

She had divined somehow that it an-

her experience as innocently as she

had told Nina, and with even less em-

barrassment. But that had been long

ago, and now, without any specific rea-

son, she was not certain that she had

acted wisely, although it always

amused her to see Selwyn's undisguised

impatience whenever mention was

So, to torment him, she said, "Of

asked to marry people-rather agree-

Waist deep in bay bushes he turned

toward her where she sat on the trunk

of an oak which had fallen across the

stream. Her arms balanced her body;

swung her slim, russet shod feet above

the brook and looked at him with a

her ankles were interlocked.

She

made of such incidents.

able than otherwise."

"What!"

"Why ?" and intent over the bushes, cautiously "I want you myself," he said, smill thrusting the tip through a thicket of ing at last. "That is flattering, but horridly self. She lost two fish, then hooked a

"Ouite."

marrying, are you?"

"No; I won't."

"Yes," he said, "I am."

"You won't let me?"

"You are quite serious?"

of it!

ish. In other words, you won't marry me and you won't let anybody else do it."

omething to which she could give

neither reason nor name! But how

entisfying it all was-whatever it was

that amused her in this man's uncer-

tainty and in the faint traces of an k-

ritation as unreasoning as the source

"Really, Captain Selwyn," she said,

you are not one of those old fashion-

ed literary landmarks who objects

through several chapters to a girl's

28

Glancing around at her, he caught her eyes, bright with mischief. "You're capable of anything today,"

he said. "Were you considering the



"It would convince me, too," he said, "if woman didn't eat the things that "I know. Isn't it horrid? Oh. dear, we're neither of us very high in the "Well, I've advanced some since the good old days when a man went woo-"You may have. But, anyway, you don't go wooing. As for man collec-

Drina.

advisability of starting me overboard?" And he nodded toward the water beneath their feet.

"But you say that you won't le me throw you overboard, Captain Sel-

wyn." "I mean it, too," he returned.

"And I'm not to marry that nice young man?" mockingly sweet. "Not

What! Not anybody at all-ever and ever? "Me," he suggested, "if you're a

thoroughly demoralized as that." "Oh! Must a girl be pretty thor oughly demoralized to marry you?" "I don't suppose she'd do it if she

wasn't," he admitted, laughing. She considered him, head on on side.

"You are ornamental anyway," sh concluded.

"Well, then," he said, lifting the leader from the water to inspect if course it is somewhat exciting to be "will you have me?"

"Oh, but is there nothing to recom mend you except your fatal beauty?" "My mustache," he ventured. "It' considered very useful when I'm men

tally perplexed." "It's clipped too close. I have tole you again and again that I don't car for it clipped like that. Your mine would be a perfect blank if yo

couldn't get hold of it." touch of coquetry new to her and to "And to become imbecile," he said 'I've only to shave it." She threw back her head and he clear laughter thrilled the silence. H laughed, too, and sat with elbows o his thighs, dabbling the crinkled lead

35 Looked blassfully

dangle those flies

wrote you, the friend is quite necessary in the scheme of things to round out the

symmetry of it all. I suppose across the rolling you're dying to moore.

"Wait a moment, Nina. Don't speak of anything pleasant oror intimate just now, because-because I've got to bring up another mattersomething not very pleasant to me or to you It is about-Alixe. You knew her in school years ago. You have always known her.'

"Yes."

'You-did you ever visit her-stay at the Varians' house?"

"Yes."

"In-in her own home in Westchester?"

"Yes."

There was a silence. His eyes shifted to his plate; remained fixed as he said: "Then you knew her-father?"

"Yes, Phil," she said quietly, "I knew Mr. Varian."

"Was there anything-anything unusual-about him-in those days?"

"Have you heard that for the first time?" asked his sister.

He looked up. "Yes. What was it. Nina ?"

She became busy with her plate for awhile. He sat rigid, patient, one hand resting on his claret glass. And presently she said without meeting his eves:

"It was even farther back-her grandparents-one of them"- She lifted her head slowly. "That is why it so deeply concerned us, Phil, when we heard of your marriage."

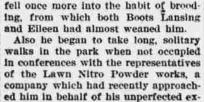
"What concerned you?"

"The chance of inheritance-the risk of the taint-of transmitting it. Her father's erratic brilliancy became more than eccentricity before I knew him. I would have told you that had I dreamed that you ever could have thought of marrying Alixe Varian. But how could I know you would meet her out there in the orient? It wasyour cable to us was like a thunderbolt. And when she-she left you so suddenly-Phil, dear-I feared the true reason-the only possible reason that could be responsible for such an insane

"What was the truth about her father?" he said doggedly. "He was eccentric. Was he ever worse than that?" "The truth was that he became men tally irresponsible before his death."

"You know this?"

"Allre told me when we were school girls. And for days she was haunted with the fear of what might one day be her inheritance. That is all I know.



plosive, chaosite.

Lying back there in his desk chair one evening, Selwyn suddenly remembered that Gerald had come in. They had scarcely seen one another since that unhapy meeting in the Stuyvesant club, and now, remembering what he had written to Eileen, he emerged with a start from his contented dreaming, sobered by the prospect of seeking Gerald.

For a moment or two he hesitated, but he had said in his letter that he was going to do it, and now he rose, looked around for his pipe, found it, filled and lighted it and, throwing on his dressing gown, went out into the corridor, tying the tasseled cords

around his waist as he walked. His first knock remaining unanswered, he knocked more sharply. Then he heard from within the muffled creak of a bed, heavy steps across the floor. The door opened with a jerk. Gerald

Gerald sat on the edge of the

stood there, eyes swollen, hair in disorder and collar crushed and the white evening tie unknotted and dangling ver his solled short front.

"Hello," said Selwyn simply. "May come in?"

The boy passed his hand his eyes as though confused by the light. Then he turned and walked light. Then he turned and back toward the bed, still rabbi ng his ges, and sat down on the edge

wyn's grave face grew graver still.

"That is bad." he said slowly, "very bad. Have you-but of course you couldn't have seen Austin."

"I'd kill myself first!" said Gerald fiercely.

"No, you wouldn't do that. You're not that kind. Keep perfectly cool, Gerald, because it is going to be fixed. The method only remains to be decided upon."

"I can't take your money!" stammered the boy. "I can't take a cent from you after what I've said-the beastly things I've said."

"It isn't the things you say to me, Gerald, that matter. Let me think a bit, and don't worry. Just lie quietly and understand that I'll do the worrying. And while I'm amusing myself with a little quiet reflection as to ways and means just take your own bearings from this reef and set a true course once more, Gerald. That is all the reproach, all the criticism, you are going to get from me. Deal with yourself and your God in sllence."

And in silence and heavy dismay Selwyn confronted the sacrifice he must make to save the honor of the house of Erroll.

It meant more than temporary inconvenience to himself. It meant that he must go into the market and sell securities which were partly his capital and from which came the modest income that enabled him to live as he did.

There was no other way unless he went to Austin. But he dared not do that-dared not think what Austin's action in the matter might be. And he knew that if Gerald were ever driven into hopeless exile, with Austin's knowledge of his disgrace rankling, the boy's utter ruin must result inevitably.

Yet-yet-how could he afford to do this-unoccupied, earning nothing, bereft of his profession, with only the chance in view that his chaosite might turn out stable enough to be marketable? How could he dare so strip himsalf? Yet there was no other way. It had to be done, and done at once very first thing in the morning, before it became too late.

And at first, in the bitter recentment of the necessity, his impulse was to turn on Gerald and bind him to good conduct by every pledge the boy could give. At least there would be co sation. Yet with the thought came

never fishes, so no doubt it's full of fish."

The Brier Water, a cold, deep, icisurely stream, deserved its name. If anybody ever haunted it with hostile designs upon its fishy denizens, Austin at least never did. Belted kingfisher. heron, mink and perhaps a furtive small boy with pole and sinker and barnyard worm-these were the only foes the trout might dread. As for a man and a fly rod, they knew him not, nor was there much chance for casting a line, because the water everywhere flowed under weeds, arched thickets of brier and grass and leafy branches crisscrossed above.

"This place is impossible," said Sel-yn scornfully. "What is Austin wyn scornfully. about to let it all grow up and run wild"

He recled in his line until only six inches of the gossamer leader remained free. From this dangled a single silver bodied fly, glittering in the wind.

"There's a likely pool hidden under those briers," he said. "I'm going to poke the top of my rod under-this way- Hah!" as a heavy splash sounded from depths unseen and the reel screamed as he struck.

Up and down, under banks and over shallows, rushed the invisible fish, and Selwyn could do nothing for awhile check and recover when the fish permitted.

Eileen, a spray of green mint between her vivid lips, watched the performance with growing interest, but speckled trout was cautiously but successfully lifted out into the grass she turned her back until the gallant fighter had departed this life under a merciful whack from a stick.

"That," she said faintly, "is the part don't care for. Is he out of all pain? What? Didn't feel any? Oh, are you quite sure?"

She walked over to him and looked down at the beautiful victim of craft. "Oh, well," she sighed, "you are very clever, of course, and I suppose I'll eat him, but I wish he were alive again

down there in those cool, sweet depths!" "Killing frogs and in

"Did be do that?" And If I hadn't

have d

him. "Of course it's amusing to be told

you are the only woman in the world," she said, "particularly when a girl has a secret fear that men don't consider her quite grown up."

"You once said." he began impatiently, "that the idiotic importunities of those men annoyed you."

"Why do you call them idiotic?" with pretense of hurt surprise. "A girl is onored"-

"Oh. bosh!"

"Captain Selwyn!" "I beg your pardon," he said sulkily

and fumbled with his reel. She surveyed him, head a triffe on one side, the very incarnation of youthful malice in process of satisfying p. desire for tormenting.

"When I pretended I was annoyed by what men said to me I was only a yearling." she observed. "Now I'm a



two-year, Captain Selwyn. Who can but let him go when he insisted and tell what may happen in my second season?"

> "You said that you were not thethe marrying sort," he insisted.

"Nonsense. All girls are. There are men," she said dreamily, "who might when at length a big, fat, struggling hope for a kinder reception next winter.'

"Oh, no," he said coolly, "there are no such gentlemen. If there were you wouldn't say so."

'Yes, I would. And there are!" jeeringly and now "How many?" quite reassured. "One!"

"You can't frighten me," with a shade less confidence. "You wouldn't tell if there was."

"I'd tell you." "Me7" with a sudden slump in his

emaining stock of reassurance "Certainly. I tell you and Nins hings of that sort. And when I have fully decided to marry I shall, of ourse, tell you both before I inform

ther people. How the blood in her er to and fro in the pool below. "So you won't have me?" he said. "You haven't asked me-have you" "Well, I do now."

She mused, the smile resting light on lips and eyes.

"Wouldn't such a thing astoni Nina?" she said.

He did not answer. A slight cold tinged the new sunburn on his cheek She laughed to herself, clasped h

hands, crossed her siender feet an bent her eyes on the pool below. "Marriage," she said, pursuing h

thoughts aloud, "is curiously unnec sary to happiness. Take our please in each other, for example. It h from the beginning been perfectly fr from silliness and sentiment."

"Naturally," he said. "I'm old enoug to be safe."

"You are not!" she retorted. "Wh a ridiculous thing to say!"

'Well, then," he said, "I'm dreadfu ly unsafe, but yet you've managed escape. Is that it?"

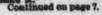
"Perhapse You are attractive to w men! I've heard that often enough be convinced. Why, even I can what attracts them"-she turned look at him-"the way your head a shoulders set-and-well, the-rest. rather superior of me to have escap sentiment, don't you think so?"

"Indeed I do. Few-few esc where many meet to worship at frisky feet, and this I say without c celt is due to my mustachios. Tang in those like web tied files, imprise hearts complain in sighs-in fact, situation vies with moments in Boc

Her running comment was her lau ter, ringing deliciously amid the tr until a wild bird, restlessly attent ventured a long, sweet response fr the tangled green above them.

After their laughter the sobern reaction left them silent for awl The wild bird sang and sang, dropp fearlessly nearer from branch to bra until in his melody she found the to her dreamy thoughts.

"Because," she said, "you are tous of your own value I you bost, I think. I never before a realized just what it was in you." "My value," he sold, "is what ake H."



smaller brother fish?" "No doubt of it. And if I landed him a horse or a mink