The Younger Set

By ROBERT W. CHAMBERS,
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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. Selwin has been divorced, without guilt on his part, by his wife, Alixe, 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 the fast set. Gerald is employed by Julius Neergard, a reale state 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 Alixe. 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—Alixe and Selwyn meet and discuss their altered relations. He is introduced to Mrs. Rosamund Fane, leader of the fast set and Alixe's closest friend. He appeals to Alixe to help him keep Gerald from gambling. VI—The friendship 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 Alixe,, who is very unhappy with Ruthven and wants to talk with Selwpn. For a moment their old love flashes up, but at the mention of Eileen he knows that it is past resurrection. X—Rosamund distresses Eileen by telling her society is gossiping about Alixe and Selwyn. Alixe gets from Gerald, who has again lost heavily, a promise not to play again at her house. XI—Alixe and Ruthven quarrel over the gaming by which he lives, and he reveals his knowledge of her visit at night to her ex-husband's room. XII—Gerald's increasing intimacy with Neergard displeases Selwyn, who breaks with the real estate man over the Slowitha matter. Neegard is trying to break into society. XIII—Lansing invites Selwyn to make his 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 Alixe, restless and disgusted with Ruthven, will make mischief. Selwyn is experimenting with chaosite, his discovery is explosive. XIV—Eileen asks Selwyn to remove Gerald from Neergard's influence. XV—Through Ruthven and the Fanes, Neergard forces himself a little way into society and tries to compel the Slowitha to elect him. Gerald loses more and more at cards, sinking Eileen money as well as his own. Trying to save him, Selwyn quarrels with him and then appeals in vain to Neergard, Rosamund and Ruthven. He almost kills Ruthven, whose heart is weak, when the latter hints at a possible divorce suit, with Selwyn as correspondent. XVI—Correspondence between Alixe and Selwyn seems to confirm Nina's belief that Selwyn's ex-wife is, as her late father was, mentally unsound. Selwyn makes up with Gerald and helps him out financially, seriously impairing his own resources. XVII—At Silverside, the Gerards' country place, Eileen declares she cares for Selwyn, but she will not say that she will marry him. Her brother is now turning over a new leaf. XVIII—Eileen and Selwyn make a "lifelong and anti-sentimental compact." XIX—Gerald renews his friendship with Neergard. Selwyns experiments with chaosite are very promising. The younger set of girls becomes devoted to Philip, and Eileen has a touch of jealously. XX—The reckless behavior of Alixe, who has left Ruthven and is cruising with the Fanes and others on Neergard's yacht, furnishes gossip for society. Nina and her brother are now convinced of Alixe's irresistability. Selwin proposes to Eileen, but the girl is not sufficiently sure of herself to give him her promise. They agree to remain friends.—XXI—Gerald's appearance in public with the fast set, among whom is Alixe, angers his own people. Selwyn takes the boy away from them and learns that he has quarreled with Neergard, to whom he owes much money, and with Ruthven, who has accused him unjustly of undue friendship with Alixe. The boy has been helping Alixe, abandoned financially by Ruthven, with money borrowed from Neergard and is in desperate straits. Selwyn aids him again, leaving himself almost without money. XXII—Alixe is in a sanitarium, and Ruthven is in the clutches of Neergard. Selwyn informs Ruthven that Alixe, for whom Selwyn assumes responsibility, is mentally very ill, having become childish, and threatens to kill Ruthven if he tries to cast her off. XIII.—Selwyn paying Alixe's bills is in hard financial straits. There is no hope of Alixe's recovery. Selwyn sees his own people very seldom.

Chapter 24

THE winter promised to be a busy one for Selwyn. If at first he had had any dread of enforced idleness, that worry, at least, vanished before the first snow flew, for there came to him a secret communication from the government suggesting, among other things, that he report three times a week at the proving grounds on Sandy Hook; that experiments with chaosite as a bursting charge might begin as soon as he was ready with his argon primer.

This meant work—hard, constant, patient work. But it did not mean money to help him support the heavy burdens he had assumed. If there were to be any returns, all that part of it lay in the future, and the future could not help him now.

Yet, unless still heavier burdens were laid upon him, he could hold on for the present. His bedroom cost him next to nothing; breakfast he cooked for himself, luncheon he dispensed with, and he dined at random—anywhere that appeared to promise seclusion, cheapness and immunity from anybody he had ever known.

As for his clubs, he hung on to them, knowing the importance of appearances in a town which is made up of them. But this expense was all he could carry, for the demands of the establishment at Edgewater were steadily increasing with the early coming of winter. He was sent for oftener, and a physician was now in practically continual attendance.

Also three times a week he boarded the Sandy Hook boat, returning always at night because he dared not remain at the reservation lest an imperative telegram from Edgewater find him unable to respond.

So, when in November the first few hurrying snowflakes whirled in among the city's canyons of masonry and iron, Selwyn had already systematized his winter schedule, and when Nina opened her house, returning from Lenox with Eileen to do so, she found that Selwyn had made his own arrangements for the winter and that, according to the programme, neither she nor anybody else was likely to see him oftener than one evening in a week.

To Boots she complained bitterly, having had visions of Selwyn and Gerald as permanent fixtures of family support during the season now imminent.

"I cannot understand," she said, "why Philip is acting this way. He need not work like that. There is no necessity, because he has a comfortable income. If he is determined to maintain a stuffy apartment somewhere, of course I won't insist on his coming to us, as he ought to, but to abandon us in this manner makes me almost indignant. Besides, it's having anything but a salutary effect on Eileen."

"What effect is it having on Eileen?" inquired Boots curiously.

"Oh, I don't know," said Nina, coming perilously close to a pout, "but I see symptoms—indeed, I do, Boots—symptoms of shirking the winter's routine. It's to be a gay season, too, and it's only her second. The idea of a child of that age informing me that she's had enough of the purely social phases of this planet! Boots, I've given up all hopes of that brother of mine for her, but she could marry anybody if she chose—anybody—and she could twist the entire social circus into a court of her own and dominate everything. I don't know what to do with the girl. Philip never comes near us—once a week for an hour or two, which is nothing—and the child misses him. There, the murder is out! Eileen misses him. What to do about it I don't know—Boots, I don't know."

Lansing had ceased laughing. He had been indulging in tea—a shy vice of his which led him to haunt houses where that out of fashion beverage might still be had. And now he sat, cup suspended, saucer held meekly against his chest, gazing out at the pelting snowflakes.

"Boots, dear," said Nina, who adored him, "tell me what to do. Tell me what has gone amiss between my brother and Eileen. Something has. And whatever it is it began last autumn—that day when—you remember the incident?"

Boots nodded.

"Well, it seemed to upset everybody somehow. Philip left the next day. Do you remember? And Eileen has never been quite the same. Of course I don't ascribe it to that unpleasant episode—even a young girl gets over a shock in a day. But the—the change—or whatever it is—dated from that night. They, Philip and Eileen, had been inseparable. It was good for them—for her too. And as for Phil—why, he looked about twenty-one! Boots, I—I had hoped—expected—and I was right! They were on the verge of it!"

"I think so, too," he said. "Hello! Somebody's coming, and I'm off!"

"I'm not at home; don't go!" said Nina, laying one hand on his arm to detain him as a card was brought up. "Oh, it's only Rosamund Fane! I did promise to go to the Craigs' with her. Do you mind if she comes up?"

"Not if you don't," said Boots blandly. He could not endure Rosamund, and she detested him, and Nina, who was perfectly aware of this, had just enough of perversity in her to enjoy their meeting.

Rosamund came in breezily, sables powdered with tiny flecks of snow, cheeks like damask roses, eyes of turquoise.

"How d'ye do!" she nodded, greeting Boots askance as she closed with Nina. "I came, you see, but do you want to be jammed and mauled and trodden on at the Craigs'? No? That's perfect! Neither do I. Where is the adorable Eileen? Nobody sees her any more."

"She was at the Delmour-Carnes' yesterday."

"Was she? Curious I didn't see her. They say," she said, smiling, "that some very heavy play goes on in that cunning little new house of yours, Mr. Lansing."

"Really?" he asked blandly.

"Yes, and I'm wondering if it is true."

"I shouldn't think you'd care, Mrs. Fane, as long as it makes a good story."

"Where is the adorable Eileen?"

Rosamund flushed, then, always alive to humor, laughed frankly.

"What a nasty thing to say to a woman!" she observed. "It fairly reeks impertinence. Mr. Lansing, you don't like me very well, do you?"

"I dare not," he said, "because you are married. If you were only free, a vinculo matrimonii"—

Rosamund laughed again and sat stroking her muff and smiling. "Curious, isn't it," she said to Nina, "the inborn antipathy of two agreeable human bipeds for one another?" And again to Nina: "Dear, have you heard anything about Alixe Ruthven? I think it is the strangest thing that nobody seems to know where she is. And all anybody can get out of Jack is that she's in a nerve factory or some such retreat and a perfect wreck. She might as well be dead, you know."

"In that case," observed Lansing, "it might be best to shift the center of gossip. De mortuis nil nisi bonum, which is simple enough for any body to comprehend."

"That is rude, Mr. Lansing," flashed out Rosamund, and to his astonishment he saw the tears start to her eyes.

"I beg your pardon," he said sulkily.

"You do well to. I care more for Alixe Ruthven than—than you give me credit for caring about anybody. People are never wholly worthless, Mr. Lansing—only the very young think that."

Boots said respectfully: "I am sorry for what I said, Mrs. Fane. I hope that your friend Mrs. Ruthven will soon recover."

Rosamund looked at Nina, the tears still rimming her lids. "I miss her frightfully," she said. "If somebody would only tell me where she is—I—I know it could do no harm for me to see her. I can be as gentle and loyal as anybody—when I really care for a person. Do you know where she might be, Nina?"

"I? No, I do not. I'd tell you if I did, Rosamund."

"Don't you know?"

"Why, no," said Nina, surprised at her persistence.

"Because," continued Rosamund, "your brother does."

Nina straightened up, flushed and astonished.

"Why do you say that?" she asked.

"Because he does know. He sent her to Clifton. The maid who accompanied her is in my service now. It's a low way of finding out things, but we all do it."

"He—sent Alixe to—to Clifton!" repeated Nina incredulously. "Your maid told you that?"

Rosamund finished the contents of her slim glass and rose. "Yes, and it was a brave and generous and loyal thing for him to do. I care for Alixe, and I honor your brother for what he did."

She stood with pretty golden head bent, absently arranging the sables around her neck and shoulders.

"I have been very horrid to Captain Selwyn," she said quietly. "Tell him I am sorry, that he has my respect. And—if he cares to tell me where Alixe is I shall be grateful and do no harm."

"Good night," said Boots to Nina. Then he took Rosamund down to her brougham with a silent formality that touched her present sentimental mood.

She leaned from her carriage window, looking at him where he stood, hat in hand, in the thickly falling snow.

"Please—without ceremony, Mr. Lansing," and as he covered himself. "May I not drop you at your destination?"

"Thank you," in refusal.

"I thank you for being nice to me. Please believe there is often less malice than perversity in me. I—I have a heart, Mr. Lansing—such as it is. And often those I torment most I care for most. It was so with Alixe. Good-by."

Boots' salute was admirably formal. Then he went on through the thickening snow, swung vigorously across the avenue to the park wall and, turning south, continued on parallel to it under the naked trees.

Now he began to understand something of the strange effacement of his friend Selwyn. He began to comprehend the curious economies practiced, the continued absence from club and coterie, the choice of the sordid lodging whither Boots, one night, seeing him on the street by chance, had shamelessly tracked him, with no excuse for the intrusion save his affection for this man and his secret doubts of the man's ability to take care of himself and his occult affairs.

Into the doorway of Selwyn's lodgings Lansing turned. When the town was young a Lansing had lived there in pomp and circumstance—his own great-grandfather—and he smiled grimly, amused at the irony of things terrestrial.

A slattern at the door halted him.

"Nobody ain't let up them stairs without my knowin' why," she mumbled.

"I want to see Captain Selwyn," he explained.

"Hey?"

"Captain Selwyn!"

"Hey? I'm a little deef!" screeched the old crone. "Is it Cap'n Selwyn you want?"

Above. Selwyn, hearing his name screamed through the shadows of the ancient house, came to the stair well and looked down into the blackness.

"Nobody ain't let up them stairs."

"What is it, Mrs. Glodden?" he said sharply; then, catching sight of a dim figure springing up the stairs: "Here, this way! Is it for me?" and as Boots came into the light from his open door, "Oh," he whispered, deadly pale under the reaction, "I thought it was a telegram! Come in. I don't know how you came to stumble in here, Boots," he said, "but I'm glad to see you. I—it's not much of a place," forcing a smile. "However, you see I'm so seldom in town. I'm busy at the Hook, you know, so I don't require anything elaborate."

"How are things, Phil?"

"All right. First rate, thank you."

Boots removed the pipe from his lips and swore at him, and Selwyn listened with head obstinately lowered and lean hands plucking at his frayed girdle. And when Boots had ended his observations with an emphatic question Selwyn shook his head.

"No, Boots. You're very good to ask me to stop with you, but I can't. I'd be hampered. There are matters, affairs that concern me, that need instant attention at times—at certain times. I must be free to go, free to come. I couldn't be in your house. Don't ask me. There are telegrams—unexpected ones—at all hours."

"What of it?"

"You don't understand."

"Wait a bit! How do you know I don't? Do the telegrams come from Sandy Hook?"

"No."

Boots looked him calmly in the eye "Then I do understand, old man Come on out of this, in heaven's name! Come, now! Get your dressing gown off and your coat on! Don't you think I understand? I tell you I do! Yes, the whole blessed, illogical, chivalrous business. Never mind how I know, for I won't tell you. Oh, I'm not trying to interfere with you. I know enough to shun buzzsaws. All I want is for you to come and take that big back room and help a fellow live in a lonely house, help a man to make it cheerful. I can't stand it alone any longer, and it will be four years before Drina is eighteen."

"Drina!" repeated Selwyn blankly, then he laughed. It was genuine laughter, too, and Boots grinned and puffed at his pipe and recrossed his legs, watching Selwyn out of eyes brightening with expectancy.

"Then it's settled," he said.

"What? Your ultimate career with Drina?"

"Oh, yes; that also. But I refer to your coming to live with me."

"Boots"—

"Oh, fizz! Come on. I don't like the way you act, Phil."

Selwyn said slowly, "Do you make it a personal matter?"

"Yes, I do."

So Selwyn stood up and began to remove his dressing gown, and Lansing dragged out the little flat trunk and began to pack it.

An hour later they went away together through the falling snow.

For a week Boots let him alone. He had a big, comfortable room, dressing closet and bath adjoining the suit occupied by his host. He was absolutely free to go and come, and for a week or ten days Boots scarcely laid eyes on him except at breakfast, for Selwyn's visits to Sandy Hook became a daily routine except when a telegram arrived from Edgewater calling him there.

Chapter 25

MATTERS at Edgewater were beginning to be easier in one way for Selwyn. Alixe appeared to forget him for days at a time. She was less irritable, less restless and exacting.

"Yesterday," said Miss Casson, one of the nurses, in a letter to Selwyn, "there was a consultation here between Drs. Vail, Wesson and Morrison, as you requested. They have not changed their opinions—indeed, they are convinced that there is no possible chance of the recovery you hoped for when you talked with Dr. Morrison. They all agree that Mrs. Ruthven is in excellent physical condition—young, strong, vigorous—and may live for years, may outlive us all, but there is nothing else to expect."

The letter ran on:

"I am inclosing the bills you desired to have sent you. Fuel is very expensive, as you will see. The items for fruits, too, seem unreasonably large, but grapes are $2 a pound and fresh vegetables dreadfully expensive.

"I meant to thank you for sending me the revolver and cartridges. It seemed a silly request, but we are in a rather lonely place, and I think Miss Bond and I feel a little safer knowing that in case of necessity we have something to frighten away any roaming intruder who might take it into his head to visit us.

"One thing we must be careful about. Yesterday Mrs. Ruthven had a doll on my bed, and I sat sewing by the window, not noticing what she was doing until I heard her pretty, pathetic little laugh.

"And what do you think she had done? She had discovered your revolver under my pillow, and she had tied her handkerchief around it and was using it as a doll!

"I got it away with a little persuasion, but at times she still asks for her 'army' doll, saying that a boy she knew named Philip had sent it to her from Manila, where he was living."

Selwyn read this letter sitting before the fire in the living room, feet on the fender, pipe between his teeth. It was the first day of absolute rest he had had in a long while.

The day before he had been at the Hook until almost dark, watching the firing of a big gun, and the results had been so satisfactory that he was venturing to give himself a holiday unless wanted at Edgewater.

He had seen Eileen seldom that winter. When he had seen her their relations appeared to be as happy, as friendly as before. There was no apparent constraint, nothing from her to indicate that she noticed an absence for which his continual business with the government seemed sufficient excuse.

Besides, her days were full days, consequent upon Nina's goading and indefatigable activity. Selwyn, unable longer to fulfill his social obligations, was being quietly eliminated from the social scheme of things.

Gerald in the early days of an affair with Gladys and before even it had assumed the proportions of an affair had shyly come to Selwyn, not for confession, but with the crafty purpose of introducing her name into the conversation so that he might have the luxury of talking about her to somebody who would neither quiz him nor suspect him.

Selwyn, of course, ultimately suspected him, but as he never quizzed him Gerald continued his elaborate system of subterfuges to make her personality and doings a topic for him to expand upon and Selwyn to listen to.

It had amused Selwyn. He thought of it now—a gay memory like a ray of light flung for a moment across the somber background of his own sadness. Fortunate or unfortunate, Gerald was still lucky in his freedom to hazard it with chance and fate. Selwyn's dull eyes rested upon the ashes of the fire, and he saw his dead youth among them and in the flames his maturity burning to embers.

If he outlived Alixe his life would lie as the ashes lay at his feet. If she outlived him—and they had told him there was every chance of it—at least he would have something to busy himself with in life if he was to leave her provided for when he was no longer there to stand between her and charity. As he lay there in his chair, the unlighted pipe drooping in his hands, the telephone on the desk rang, and he rose and unhooked the receiver.

Drina's voice sounded afar, and "Hello, sweetheart," he said gayly. "Is there anything I can do for your youthful highness?"

"I've been talking over the phone to Boots," she said. "You know, whenever I have nothing to do I call up Boots at his office and talk to him."

"That must please him," suggested Selwyn gravely.

"It does. Boots says you are not going to business today, so I thought I'd call you up."

"Thank you," said Selwyn.

"You are welcome. What are you doing over there in Boots' house?"

"Looking at the fire, Drina, and listening to the purring of three fat tabby cats."

"Oh, mother and Eileen have gone somewhere. I haven't anything to do for an hour. Can't you come around?"

"Why, yes, if you want me."

"Yes, I do. Of course I can't have Boots, and I prefer you next."

The child was glad to see him and expressed herself so, coming across to the chair where he sat and leaning against him, one arm on his shoulder.

"Do you know," she said, "that I miss you ever so much? Do you know also that I am nearly fourteen and that there is nobody in this house near enough my age to be very companionable? Uncle Philip, mother has forbidden me, and I'll tell her and take my punishment, but would you mind telling me how you first met my Aunt Alixe?"

Selwyn's arm around her relaxed, then tightened.

"Why do you ask, dear?" he said very quietly.

"I heard mother say to Eileen that you had never had a chance for happiness. I thought it was very sad. I had gone into the clothespress to play with my dolls; you know I still do play with them—that is, I go into some secret place and look at them at times when the children are not around. So I was in there, sitting on the cedar chest, and I couldn't help hearing what they said. Mother said to Eileen, 'Dearest, can't you learn to care for him?' And Eileen"—

"Drina," he interrupted sharply, "you must not repeat things you overhear."

"Oh, I didn't hear anything more," said the child, "because I remembered that I shouldn't listen, and I came out of the closet. Isn't it possible for you to marry anybody, Uncle Philip?"

"No, Drina."

"Not even if Eileen would marry you?"

"No."

"Why?"

"You could not understand, dear. Even your mother cannot quite understand. So we won't ever speak of it again, Drina."

"I know something that mother does not," she said. And as he betrayed no curiosity: "Eileen is in love. I heard her say so."

He straightened up sharply, turning to look at her.

"I was sleeping with her. I was still awake, and I heard her say, 'I do love you; I do love you.' She said it very softly, and I cuddled up, supposing she meant me. But she was asleep."

"She certainly meant you," said Selwyn, forcing his stiffened lips into a smile.

"No; she did not mean me."

"H-how do you know?"

"Because she said a man's name."

A few moments later her music teacher arrived, and Drina was obliged to leave him.

"If you don't wait until I have finished my music," she said, "you won't see mother and Eileen. They are coming to take me to the riding school at 4 o'clock."

Turning to go, for the house and its associations made him restless, he found himself confronting Eileen, who, in her furs and gloves, was just entering the room.

"I came up," she said. "They told me you were here, calling very formally upon Drina, if you please. What with her monopoly of you and Boots there seems to be no chance for Nina and me."

"I will stay until Nina comes, if I may," he said slowly.

"You don't look very well, Captain Selwyn. Are you?"

"Perfectly. I"—he laughed—"I am growing old; that is all."

"Do you say that to annoy me," she asked, with a disdainful shrug, "or to further impress me?"

He shook his head and touched the hair at his temples significantly.

"Pooh!" she retorted. "It is becoming—is that what you mean?"

"I hope it is. There's no reason why a man should not grow old gracefully."

"Captain Selwyn! But of course you only say it to bring out that latent

"Do you know that I miss you ever so much?"

temper of mine. It's about the only thing that does it too. And please don't plague me, if you've only a few moments to stay. It may amuse you to know that I, too, am exhibiting signs of increasing infirmity. My temper, if you please, is not what it once was."

"Worse than ever?" he asked in pretended astonishment.

"Far worse. It is vicious. Kit-Ki took a nap on a new dinner gown of mine, and I slapped her. And the other day Drina hid in a clothespress while Nina was discussing my private affairs, and when the little imp emerged I could have shaken her. Oh, I am certainly becoming infirm. So if you are, too, comfort yourself with the knowledge that I am keeping pace with you through the winter of our discontent."

"I am wondering," he said in a bantering voice, "what secrets Drina heard."

"Would you like to know what Nina was saying to me?" she asked.

"I'd rather hear what you said to her. Were you laughing or weeping?"

"Perhaps I was yawning. How do you know?" she smiled.

After a moment he said, still curious, "Why were you crying, Eileen?"

"Crying! I didn't say I was crying."

"I assume it."

"Well—yes," she admitted, "I was crying—if you insist on knowing. Now that you have driven me to admit that, can you also force me to tell you why I was so tearful?"

"Certainly," he said promptly; "it was something Nina said that made you cry."

They both laughed.

"Oh, what a come-down!" she said teasingly. "You knew that before. But can you force me to confess to you what Nina was saying? If you can, you are the cleverest cross examiner in the world, for I'd rather perish than tell you."

"Oh," he said instantly, "then it was something about love!"

He had not meant to say it. He had spoken too quickly, and the flush of surprise on the girl's face was matched by the color rising to his own temples. And, to retrieve the situation, he spoke too quickly again—and too lightly.

"A girl would rather perish than admit that she is in love?" he said, forcing a laugh. "That is rather a clever deduction, I think. Unfortunately, however, I happen to know to the contrary, so all my cleverness comes to nothing."

The surprise had faded from her face, but the color remained, and with it something else—something in the blue eyes which he had never before encountered there—the faintest trace of recoil, of shrinking away from him.

She was beginning to love him no longer in her own sweet fashion, but in his, and she was vaguely aware of it, yet curiously passive and content to put no question to herself whether it was true or false. And how it might be with him she evaded asking herself too. Only the quickening of breath and pulse questioned the pure thoughts unvoiced; only the increasing impatience of her suspense confirmed the answer which now, perhaps, she might give him one day while the blessed world was young.

He had not yet spoken when again she lifted her eyes and saw him sitting in the dusk, one arm resting across his knee, his body bent slightly forward, his gaze vacant.

He did not stir. Then unreasoning, instinctive fear confused her, and she heard her own voice, sounding strangely in the twilight:

"Why you are so silent with me. What has crept in between us? I"—the innocent courage sustaining her—"I have not changed, except a little in—in the way you wished. Have you?"

"No," he said in an altered voice.

"Then what is it? I have been—you have left me so much alone this winter, and I supposed I understood"—

"My work," he said, but she scarcely knew the voice for his.

"I know; you have had no time. I know that. I ought to know it by this time, for I have told myself often enough. And yet when we are together it is—it has been—different. Can you tell me why? Do you think me changed?"

"You must not change," he said.

The mounting sea of passion swept him. He turned on her unsteadily, his hands clinched, not daring to touch her. Shame, contrition, horror that the damage was already done, all were forgotten. Only the deadly grim duty of the moment held him back.

"Dear," he said, "because I am unchanged—because I—I love you so—help me, and God help us both!"

"Tell me," she said steadily, but it was fear that stilled her voice. She laid one slim hand on the table, bearing down on the petals of her fingers until the nails whitened, her head

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