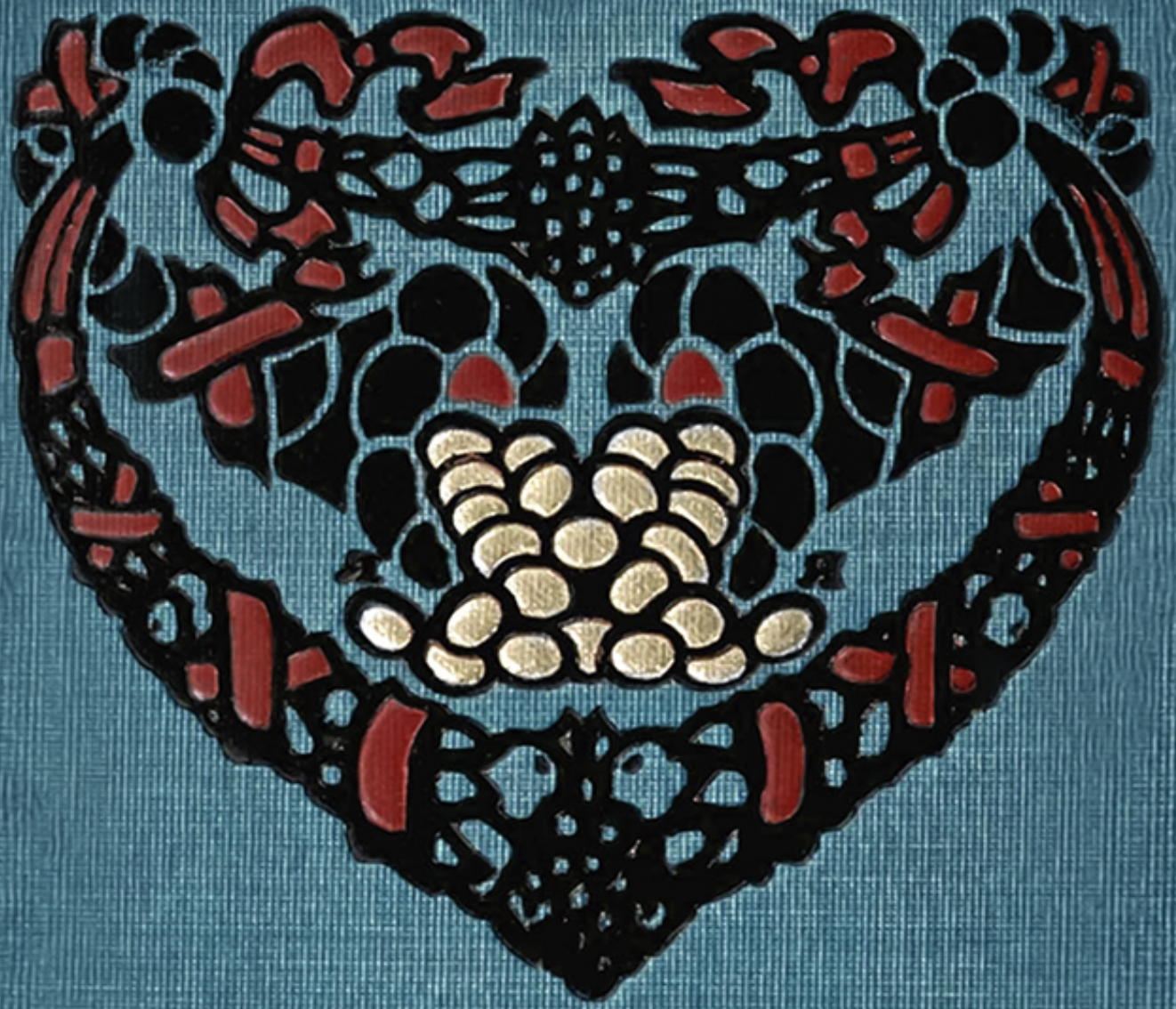
CLASSICS TO GO

RICH MEN'S CHILDREN



GERALDINE BONNER

RICH MEN’S CHILDREN

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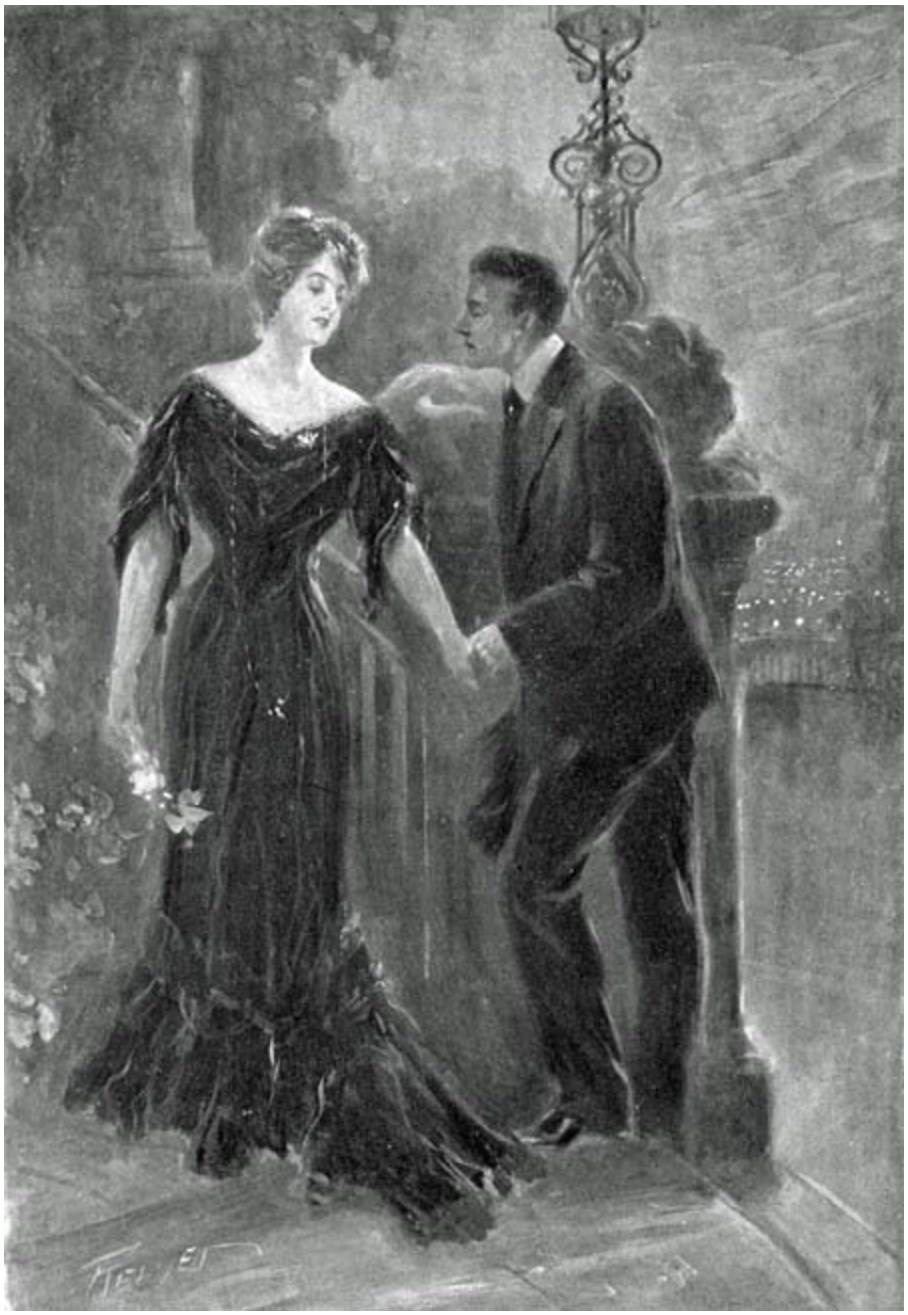

“Oh, Rose, if I could see you now and then—only for a moment like this”

CHAPTER I
THE BONANZA KING

The cold of foot-hill California in the month of January held the night. The occupants of the surrey were too cramped and stiffened by it, and too uncomfortably enwrapped against it, to speak. Silence as complete as that which lay like a spell on the landscape brooded over them. At the last stopping place, Chinese Gulch, a scattering of houses six miles behind them on the mountain road, they had halted at the main saloon, and whisky and water had been passed to the driver and to the burlier figure on the back seat. The watchers that thronged to the saloon door had eyed the third occupant of the carriage with the intent, sheepish curiosity of the isolated man in presence of the stranger female. Afterward, each one was voluble in his impressions of her face, pale in the smoky lamplight, and the hand that slid, small and white, out of its loose glove when the warming glass was offered her.

Since then both she and her companion had leaned back in their several corners and preserved an unbroken silence. Even the driver’s tongue had showed the benumbing effects of the darkness and cold, and the flow of conversation with which, earlier in the day, he had entertained his fares, gradually languished and died.

The surrey sped swiftly along the road which wound in spectral pallor over the shoulder of the foot-hill, now dipping into the blackness of a ravine, then creeping up a bare slope, where the horses’ hoofs dug in laboriously amid loosened stones. The solemn loneliness of the landscape, faintly revealed by the light of large, clear stars, seemed to find appropriate expression in this frosty, smoke-breathing

stillness. There was not a sign of human life. The gray patches of fields melted into the clouded darkness of trees. The domes of the live-oaks were like cairns of funereal rock in the open spaces. Steep, woody slopes swept upward, in the daytime shivering coppices of wintry leafage pierced by spires of fir and pine, now densely black and mysterious under the transforming magic of the night. Over all an expanse of sky arched, the vast, calm sky of mountain regions and Nature's undesecrated places, crystal-clear and velvet-dark, the light of its stars seeming to come, tapping messages in an unknown telegraphy, from illimitable distances.

The larger figure on the back seat moved, and turned a face, all of which was hidden save the eyes, toward its companion.

"Hungry?" queried a deep bass voice; the inquiring polysyllable shot out suddenly over an upturned bulwark of collars.

"Fearfully," came the answer in a muffled feminine treble, that suited the more diminutive bulk.

"Get a move on, Jake," to the driver. "This girl's most famished."

"Hold your horses," growled the other man; "we're just about there."

At these words the woman pricked up her ears, and, leaning forward, peered ahead. As they rounded a protruding angle of hill, a huddle of roofs and walls spotted with lights came into view, and the sight drew her hand forward with an eagerly-pointing finger.

"So that's Rocky Bar!" she cried. "Have we really got there at last?"

The driver chuckled.

“That’s Rocky Bar all right. Now get your appetite good and ready.”

“No need,” she responded gaily; “it’s been ready and waiting for hours. I was beginning to think that you’d lost your way.”

“Me!” with an accent of incredulous scorn. “Ah, get out! How does it come, Governor, that Bill Cannon’s girl don’t know no more about these parts than a young lady from New York?”

“She’s never been up here before,” said the man on the back seat, beginning to untangle himself from his enfolding rugs. “I’ve brought her up with me this time to show her some of the places where her pa used to work round with the boys, long before *she* was ever thought of.”

A loud barking of dogs broke out as they approached the first detached houses of the settlement. Shapes appeared at the lighted doorways, and as the surrey drew up at the hotel balcony a crowding of heads was seen in the windows. The entire population of Rocky Bar spent its evenings at this hospitable resort, in summer on the balcony under the shade of the locust trees, in winter round the office stove, spitting and smoking in cheery sociability. But at this hour the great event of Rocky Bar’s day was over. The eight stages, the passengers of which dined at the hotel, had long passed onward on their various routes up and down the “mother lode” and into the camps of the Sierra. That the nightly excitement of the “victualing up” was to be supplemented by a late arrival in a surrey, driven by Jake McVeigh, the proprietor of the San Jacinto stables, and accompanied by a woman, was a sensational event not often awarded to Rocky Bar, even in the heyday of summer-time.

The occupants of the office crowded into the doorway and pressed themselves against the windows. They saw that the man who alighted was a thick-set, portly figure, with a short, gray beard and a suggestion of gray hair below the brim of a black wide-awake. Of the lady, shown but dimly by the light of the open door, only a slim, cloaked outline and a glint of fair hair were discernible. But, anyway, it was a woman, and of a kind unusual in Rocky Bar, and the men stared, sunk in bashful appreciation of a beauty that they felt must exist, if it were only to be in keeping with the hour, the circumstances, and their own hopeful admiration.

The hotel proprietor, an ancient man with a loosened vest, and trousers tucked into long boots, dispersed them as he ushered the strangers into the office. That they were travelers of distinction was obvious, as much from their own appearance as from the fact that Jake McVeigh was driving them himself, in his best surrey and with his finest team. But just how important they were no one guessed till McVeigh followed them in, and into ears stretched for the information dropped the sentence, half-heard, like a stage aside:

“It’s Bill Cannon and his daughter Rose.”

Upon the proprietor it had an electric effect. He sped from the room with the alertness of youth, promising “a cold lunch” in a minute. To the others it came as a piece of intelligence that added awe to the lighter emotions of the occasion. By common consent their eyes focused on the great man who stood warming his hands at the stove. Even the rare, unusual woman, revealed now as sufficiently pretty to be an object of future dreams, was interesting only to the younger and more impressionable members of the throng. All but these gazed absorbed, unblinking, at Bill Cannon, the Bonanza King.

He was used to it. It had been a part of his life for years. Eying his admirers with a genial good humor, he entered into conversation with them, his manner marked by an easy familiarity, which swept away all shades of embarrassment, and drew the men around the stove, eager to respond to his questions as to the condition and prospects of the locality. The talk was becoming general and animated, when the ancient man returned and announced that the “cold lunch” was ready and to please “step after him into the dining-room.”

This gaunt apartment, grimly unadorned and faintly illumined, an occasional lantern backed by a tin reflector projecting a feeble light into its echoing emptiness, was swept of all intruders, and showed a barn-like bareness of wall and loftiness of roof. Lines of tables, uncovered between flanking wooden benches, were arranged down its length. Across the end of one of these a white cloth was spread and three places set. Jake McVeigh, less innocently democratic than the hotel proprietor, was about to withdraw from the society of his distinguished patron and seat himself in seemly loneliness at an adjacent table, when Bill Cannon’s voice arrested him.

“What are you going off there for, sonny, as if you were a leper? Come over here and sit side of us.”

The driver, greatly pleased, not only to enjoy the companionship of the richest man in California but to let the peeping heads in the doorway see him in this moment of proud apotheosis, took the third seat with modest complacence. Like most of his kind, the sense of social inferiority was unknown to him. He was simply and naturally himself as he would be anywhere in any company. Even the proximity of Miss Cannon did not abash him, and he dexterously propelled the potatoes into his mouth with his knife and cut fiercely at his meat with a sawing motion,

talking the while with all the freedom and more than the pleasure with which he talked to his wife in the kitchen at San Jacinto.

Cannon, his overcoat removed, was seen to be a powerful, thick-set man, with a bulkiness that was more a matter of broad build and muscular development than fat. His coat set ill upon him and strained at the buttons. It had the effect of having worked up toward the shoulders, noticeable in the clothes of men who are deep-chested and sit bunchily. He had a short neck which he accommodated with a turn-down collar, a gray beard, clipped close to his cheeks and square on the chin, and gray hair, worn rather long and combed sleekly and without parting back from his forehead. In age he was close to seventy, but the alertness and intelligence of a conquering energy and vitality were in his glance, and showed in his movements, deliberate, but sure and full of precision. He spoke little as he ate his dinner, leaning over his plate and responding to the remarks of his daughter with an occasional monosyllable that might have sounded curt, had it not been accompanied with a lazy cast of his eye upon her that was as full of affection as a caress.

The young lady, who had also put off her outer wraps, still wore her hat, which was wide-brimmed and cast a shadow over the upper part of her face. Below it her hair showed a fine, bright blonde, giving forth silky gleams in the lamplight. To the peeping heads in the doorway she seemed a creature instinct with romantic charm, which was expressed in such delicacies of appearance as a pearl-white throat, a rounded chin, and lips that smiled readily. These graces, eagerly deciphered through dimness and distance, had the attraction of the semi-seen, and imagination, thus given an encouraging fillip, invested Bill Cannon’s girl with a haunting beauty. It was remarked that she bore no resemblance to her father in coloring, features, or build. In talking it over later, Rocky Bar decided that she must favor

her mother, who, as all California knew, had been a waitress in the Yuba Hotel at Marysville, when Bill Cannon, then a miner in the Freeze-Out, had wooed and won her.

The conversation between the diners was desultory. They were beyond doubt hungry. Even the young lady was seen to consume the viands set before her with more gusto than a restraining sense of romantic fitness would have dictated. Once or twice, as she bit a semicircle out of a round of buttered bread, her eye, questing sidewise full of sly humor, caught McVeigh's, and a sputter of laughter left her with humped-up shoulders, her lips lightly compressed on the mouthful.

It was toward the end of the meal, that, looking at the opposite wall, her glance was caught by a large clock to which she drew her father's attention:

"Half-past nine! How fashionable we are! And when are you going to get us up to Antelope, Mr. McVeigh?"

McVeigh studied the clock ponderingly as he felt in his breast pocket for his toothpick.

"Well," he said, "if we leave here at ten and make good time the hull way—it's up hill pretty much without a break—I'll get you there about midnight."

She made a little grimace.

"And it will be much colder, won't it?"

"Colder 'n' colder. You'll be goin' higher with every step. Antelope's on the slope of the Sierra, and you can't expect to be warm up there in the end of January."

"If you hadn't wanted to come," said her father, "you'd have been just about getting ready for Mrs. Ryan's ball. Isn't this about the magic hour when you begin to lay on the first layer of war-paint?"

The girl looked at the clock, nodding with a faint, reminiscent smile.

“Just about,” she said. “I’d have been probably looking at my dress laid out on the bed and saying to myself, ‘Now I wonder if it’s worth while getting into that thing and having all the bother of going to this ball.’ On the evenings when I go out, there’s always a stage when that happens.”

McVeigh, with his toothpick in full operation, looked at her, admiring and half comprehending, for the first time feeling himself an outsider. She caught his eye, read its meaning, and with the quick tact of a delicate nature, said:

“It’s Mrs. Cornelius Ryan in San Francisco. She has a ball to-night and I was going, but I came up here with papa instead. I don’t care for balls.”

“Sort of late to be primping up for a ball,” said McVeigh, restoring the toothpick to his pocket and pushing back his chair. “I’ll go and have a look at the horses. And, Governor, if you’ll be ready in fifteen minutes I’ll be round at the porch waiting.”

Cannon nodded, and, as the driver clumped off over the board floor, said to his daughter,

“I wonder if Dominick Ryan’ll be there—at the ball, I mean. His mother’s made up her mind not to recognize the woman he’s married, and to freeze her out, but I wonder if she’ll have the nerve not to ask her to-night.”

“I don’t see how she could do that,” said the girl. “This is one of the largest balls ever given in San Francisco. She can’t leave her son out, and she couldn’t ask him without his wife.”

“Couldn’t she?” said the old man, with a narrowing of his eyes and a knowing wag of his head. “You don’t know Delia Ryan. I do. I’ve known her forty years, ever since she was

first married and did washing on the back porch of her shanty in Virginia City. She was a good deal of a woman then, a strong, brainy woman, and she's the same to-day, but hard as nails. I'll bet a hat she hasn't asked Dominick's wife to that ball."

"What do you suppose he'll do?" asked the daughter, somewhat aghast at this glimpse of the Ryan family skeleton.

"Don't ask me such conundrums. I'm glad I'm not in it, that's all I know. When two women lock horns I'm ready to step quietly down and out. I never to my knowledge saw Dominick's wife, but I've heard about her, and take it she's a pretty hard kind of a proposition. They say she married the boy for money and position, and hasn't got either. Delia, who has the money, hasn't given them a cent since the marriage; made up her mind, people say, to force Mrs. Dominick out. She doesn't seem to have done it, and I guess it's been sort of aggravating to her. Just the same I'd like to know if she's had the nerve not to send the woman an invitation to the ball. That would be pretty tough."

"I've never seen either Dominick or his wife," said the girl. "It seems odd when I know Mrs. Ryan and Cornelia so well. But he married the year I came back from Europe, and he's never been anywhere since. I don't believe he ever goes to his mother's. There's Mr. McVeigh in the doorway; we'd better be going."

Once again in the carriage they were soon clear of the last straggling shanty, and speeding along the pale, ascending road. The silence that held the trio before their arrival at Rocky Bar again fell on them. Wrapped in overcoats and rugs, Bill Cannon appeared to slumber, every now and then —as the wheels jolted over a piece of rough road-bed— shaken into growling wakefulness. McVeigh also rolled sleepily in his seat, occasionally leaning sidewise to spit

over the wheel. Only the girl seemed alert and wide-awake, her face craning out from the shadowed back seat, her eyes strained to pierce the obscurity and see for the first time the landscape of foot-hill California, of which her father had so often told her.

Now it was all a dark, formless background of broken blacknesses, where the light, open spaces of fields alternated with blotches of woods and trees. At intervals they passed a lone cabin, solitary in its pale clearing, the red eye of a stove sending a gleam through an uncurtained pane. Once they woke the echoes in the single street of a tiny town, sleeping behind its shuttered windows. Dogs barked, the shout of a belated reveler rose from a congeries of gaudily-bright doorways, and over all, imposing its mighty voice on the silence, came the roar of the stamp-mill on the hill above. It rose into the night like a fortress, a black mass looming from the slant of vast dumps, lines of lit windows puncturing its sides. The thunder of its stamps was loud on the night, fierce and insistent, like the roar of a monster round whose feet the little town cowered.

McVeigh looked back over his shoulder, saw the bright eyes under the hat-brim, and said softly,

“The Silver Crescent stamp-mill. The last big mine we’ll see.”

It was the last town they passed; even the groups of buildings that marked embryo mines grew rare. The dimly-seen country became wilder, seemed to shake off the signs of man’s encroachment and to be sweeping up into mountain majesty. The ascending road crept along the edges of ravines whence the sound of running water came in a clear clinking, dived down into black caverns of trees unlighted by the feeblest ray of star-shine, and then climbed in slow, laborious loops the bare bulwarks of the mountain. Had the girl been able to see plainly she would have noticed

the change in the foliage, the disappearance of the smaller shrubs and delicate interlacement of naked boughs, and the mightier growth of the pines, soaring shafts devoid of branches to a great height. Boulders appeared among their roots, straight falls of rock edged the road like the walls of a fort.

McVeigh turned again, and again caught the bright eye.

“Seems like your paw must think a lot of what he’s heard about the new strike at Greenhide to come all this way,” he whispered.

“I guess he does,” came the response in the same key.

“It sort of stumps me to know why you came along with him,” he continued, his eyes on the horses, but leaning back to catch her answer.

“Mightn’t I just want to see the country?”

“Well, mebbe you might, but it don’t seem to me that you’re seein’ much of it to-night.”

He heard her smothered laugh, shot his glance back to see her face, and laughed himself, turning to his horses, and then turning back to her.

“You’re a lively girl, ain’t you?” he said.

“I don’t feel very lively just at this minute. I’m a cold girl, the coldest in California, I think.”

That made him laugh, too, but he turned back to his horses, saying with quick consideration:

“I guess you are. Come boys,” to the horses, “we’ve got to get a move on. We can’t let this young lady catch cold.”

The horses quickened their pace and there was no more talk. An hour later the first broken lights of Antelope sparkled along the road. The old mining camp, in a hollow

between two buttresses of the Sierra, lay shuttered and dreaming under the starlight. A lamp-lit window, here and there, showed the course of its straggling main street, and where the hotel stood, welcoming rays winked between the boughs of leafless trees.

As the thud of the approaching hoof-beats woke the echoes a sudden violent barking of dogs broke out. Antelope was evidently not as sound asleep as it looked. At the hotel, especially, there was life and movement. The bar disgorged a throng of men, and Perley, the proprietor, had to push his way through them to welcome his midnight guests. Antelope, though remote, was in telegraphic communication with the world, and the operator at Rocky Bar had wired Perley to be ready for the distinguished arrivals,—news that in a half-hour was known throughout the town and had brought most of the unattached male population into the hotel.

Jake McVeigh was pulling the luggage from under the seats and Cannon was interchanging the first greetings with his landlord, when the girl, who had gone to the balcony railing and was looking out into the darkness, cried:

“Why, papa, snow!”

The information seemed to startle every one. The men crowded from the doorway and balcony into the street. McVeigh set down the bags, and, turning his weather-beaten face to the sky, uttered a smothered ejaculation of a profane character. Cannon came forward to where his daughter stood and looked into the blackness beyond. The girl had drawn off her glove and held her bare hand out, then stepping back to the light of the window, she showed it to her father. The white skin was sprinkled with snow crystals.

“Sure enough,” he said in a thoughtful voice. “Well, it won’t be the first time I’ve been snowed up at Antelope.”

CHAPTER II
A YOUNG MAN MARRIED

That same evening, at the hour when Bill Cannon and his daughter were setting out from Rocky Bar, Dominick Ryan was walking up Van Ness Avenue toward his mother's house.

Dominick did not know at what hours balls of the kind Mrs. Ryan was giving that evening were supposed to begin. It was nearly three years since he had been a participant in such festal gatherings. He had not been at a dance, or a dinner, or a theater party since his marriage. He had heard that these "functions," as people now called them, began later than they did in his day. Stopping by a lamp he drew out his watch—ten o'clock. It was later than he expected. In truth, as he had seen the house looming massively from its less imposing neighbors, his foot had lagged, his approach had grown slower and slower. It was his mother's home, once his own, and as he drew nearer to it his reluctance to enter grew stronger, more overpoweringly oppressive.

In the clear, lamp-dotted night it looked much larger and more splendid than by day. When Cornelius Ryan had built it he had wanted to have the finest house in San Francisco, and he certainly had achieved the most spacious and ornate. Its florid ornamentation was now hidden by the beautifying dark, and on its vast façade numerous windows broke the blackness with squares of light. In the lower ones the curtains were drawn, but slivers and cracks of radiance slipped out and penetrated the dusk of a garden, where they encountered the glossy surfaces of leaves and struck into whispering darknesses of shrubbery.

The stimulating unquiet of festival was in the air. Round the mouth of the canvas tunnel that stretched from the door a dingy crowd was assembled, staring in at nothing more inspiring than the blank visage of the closed portal. At every passing footstep each face turned to the street, hopefully expectant of the first guest. The whining of catgut strings, swept by tentative bows, struck on Dominick's ear as he pushed his way through the throng and passed up the tunnel. Before he touched the bell the door swung back and a man-servant he had never seen before murmured in politely low tones,

"Gentlemen's dressing-room first floor to the right."

Dominick stood uncertain. He was only a rare, occasional visitor at his mother's house, and to-night the hall stripped for revelry looked strangely unfamiliar. The unexpectedness of a great, new mirror, surmounted by gold heraldic devices, confused him. The hall chairs were different. The music, loud now and beginning to develop from broken chords and phrases into the languorous rhythm of a waltz measure, came from behind a grove of palms that stood back under the stairs, where the organ was built into the wall. Both to the right and left, wide, unencumbered rooms opened, brilliantly lighted, with flowers banked in masses on the mantels and in the corners. The scent of these blossoms was rich on the air and seemed to blend naturally—like another expression of the same sensuous delightfulness—with the dreamy sweetness of the music.

"Gentlemen's dressing-room first floor to the right," repeated the servant, and Dominick became aware of the man's eyes, fixed on him with a gleam of uneasy scrutiny shining through cultivated obsequiousness.

"Where is my——" he was going to say "mother," but checked himself, amending it with, "Where is Mrs. Ryan?"

The servant indicated the open doorway to the right and Dominick passed in. Through the vista of two rooms, their connecting archways uncurtained, he saw the shining spaciousness of the ball-room, the room his mother had added to the house when Cornelia, his sister, had “come out.” It seemed empty and he walked toward it, stepping softly on rugs of tiger skin and polar bear. He noticed the ice-like polish of the oak floor, the lines of gilt chairs, and a thick, fat garland of roses—leaves and blossoms combined—that was festooned along the wall and caught up at each sconce.

As he entered he saw his mother and Cornelia. They had been standing in one corner, Cornelia adjusting the shade of an electric light. One white arm was raised, and her skirt of lace was reflected clearly in the parquet. The light shone along her bare shoulders, having a gloss like old marble. From the nape of her neck her hair, a bright, coarse red, was drawn up. She seemed all melting shades of cream color and ivory, but for this flaming crest of copper color.

Her mother was standing beside her watching the arranging hand. She was sixty-eight years of age and very stout, but her great wealth made it possible for her to employ dressmakers who were artists and experts, and her Parisian costume made her look almost shapely. It fell about her in dignified black folds, sparkling discreetly with some jetted garnishings. With their shifting gleam the glint of diamonds mingled. She also wore pearls round her neck and some diamond ornaments in her elaborately-dressed gray hair.

The coarseness of her early beginnings could not be hidden by the most proficient artificers in millinery or jewels. Delia Ryan had come from what are vulgarly called “the lower orders,” having, in her ragged childhood, crossed the plains at the tail-board of an ox cart, and in her girlhood been a general servant in a miners’ boarding-house at Sonora.

Now, as she stood watching her daughter's moving hand, her face, set in a frowning rigidity of observation, was strong but unbeautiful. Her small eyes, shrewd and sharp, were set high in her head under brows almost rubbed away. The nose was short, with an undeveloped bridge and keen, open nostrils. Her mouth had grown thinner with years; the lips shut with a significant firmness. They had never been full, but what redness and ripeness they had had in youth were now entirely gone. They were pale, strong lips, the under one a little more prominent than the upper.

"There!" said Cornelia. "Now they're all even," and she wheeled slowly, her glance slipping along the veiled lights of the sconces. In its circuit it encountered Dominick's figure in the doorway.

"Dominick!" she cried, and stood staring, naïvely astonished and dismayed.

Mrs. Ryan turned with a start, her face suffused with color. The one word seemed to have an electrifying effect upon her, joyous, perturbing—unquestionably exciting.

"My boy!" she said, and she rustled across the room with her hands out.

Dominick walked toward her. He was grave, pale, and looked thoroughly miserable. He had his cane in one hand, his hat in the other. As he approached her he moved the hat to his left hand and took hers.

"You've come!" she said fondly, "I knew you would. That's my boy. I knew you'd come when your mother asked you."

"Yes, I've come," he said slowly, and looking down as if desiring to avoid her eyes. "Yes, I've come, but——"

He stopped.

His mother's glance fell from his face to his figure and saw under the loose fronts of his overcoat that he wore his

business suit. Her countenance instantly, with almost electric suddenness, stiffened into antagonism. Her eye lost its love, and hardened into a stony look of defiant indignation. She pulled her hand from his and jerked back the front of his coat with it.

“What’s this mean?” she said sharply. “Why aren’t you dressed? The people will be here in a minute. You can’t come this way.”

“I was going home to dress,” he said. “I am not sure yet that I can come.”

“Why?” she demanded.

His face grew red. The mission on which he had come was more difficult, more detestable, than he had supposed it would be. He looked down at the shining strip of floor between them and said, trying to make his voice sound easy and plausible:

“I came to ask you for an invitation for Berny.”

“Hah!” said his mother, expelling her breath in an angry ejaculation of confirmed suspicion. “That’s it, is it? I thought as much!”

“Mama!” said the girl who had been standing by, uneasily listening. “Mama dear——”

Her voice was soft and sweet, a placating woman’s voice. And as she drew nearer to them, her figure seeming to float over the shining parquet in its pale spread of gauzy draperies, her tone, her face, and her bearing were instinct with a pleading, feminine desire to soothe.

“Keep quiet, Cornie,” said her mother, “you’re not in this”—turning to Dominick. “And so your wife sent you up here to beg for an invitation? She’s got you under her thumb to that extent? Well, go back to her and tell her that she can send you forty times and you’ll not get it. She can make you

crawl here and you'll not get it—not while this is my house. When I'm dead you can do what you like."

She turned away from him, her face dark with stirred blood, her body quivering. Anger was not the only passion that shook her. Deeper than this went outraged pride, love turned to gall, impotent fury that the woman her son had married had power over him so to reduce his pride and humble his manhood—her only son, the joy and glory of her old age, her Benjamin.

He looked after her, uncertain, frowning, desperate.

"It's not right," he protested. "It's not fair. You're unjust to her and to me."

The old woman moved across the room to the corner where she had been standing when he entered. She did not turn, and he continued:

"You're asking people to this ball that you hardly know. Everybody in San Francisco's going. What harm has Berny done that you should leave her out this way?"

"I don't want women with that kind of record in my house. I don't ask decent people here to meet that sort," said his mother over her shoulder.

He gave a suppressed exclamation, the meaning of which it was difficult to read, then said,

"Are you never going to forget the past, mother?"

She wheeled round toward him almost shouting,

"No—no—no! Never! Never! Make your mind up to that."

They looked at each other across the open space, the angry defiance in their faces not hiding the love and appeal that spoke in their eyes. The mother longed to take her son in her arms; the son longed to lay his head on her shoulder and forget the wretchedness and humiliations of the last

two years. But they were held apart, not only by the specter of the absent woman, but on the one side by a fierce, unbendable pride, and on the other by an unforgettable sense of obligation and duty.

“Oh, mother!” he exclaimed, half-turning away with a movement of despair.

His mother looked at him from under her lowered brows, her under lip thrust out, her face unrelenting.

“Come here whenever you like,” she said, “as often as you want. It’s your home, Dominick, mine and yours. But it’s not your wife’s. Understand that.”

She turned away and again moved slowly toward the corner, her rich skirts trailing fanwise over the parquet. He stood, sick at heart, looking at the tip of his cane as it rested on the floor.

“Dominick,” said his sister’s voice beside him, “go; that’s the only thing to do. You see it’s no use.” She made a backward jerk of her head toward their mother, and then, struck by the misery of the eyes he lifted to her face, said tenderly, “I’m so sorry. You know I’d have sent it if I could. But it’s no use. It’s just the same old fight over again and nothing gained. Tell your wife it’s hopeless. Make her give it up.”

He turned slowly, his head hanging.

“All right,” he said, “I’ll tell her. Good-night, mother.”

“Good-night, Dominick,” came the answer.

“Good-night, Cornie,” he said in a muffled voice and left the room.

He passed through the brilliantly bright, flower-scented parlors and was shown out by the strange man-servant. The crowd at the mouth of the canvas tunnel had increased.

Clumps of staring white faces edged the opening and presented themselves to his eye, not like reality, but like a painting of pale visages executed on the background of the night. They drew away as he approached them, making a lane of egress for him, then turned and eyed him—a deserter from the realms of joy—as he stopped by a lamp-post to look at his watch. A quarter past ten. He had been in the house only fifteen minutes. He did not need to go home for a while yet. He could walk about and think and arrange how he would tell Berny.

He was a man in the full vigor of his youth, strong and brave, yet at this moment he feared, feared as a child or a timid woman might fear, the thought of his wife. He dreaded to meet her; he shrank from it, and to put it off he wandered about the familiar streets, up one and down the other, trying to overcome his sick reluctance, trying to make up his mind to go to her, trying to conquer his fear.

CHAPTER III
THE DAUGHTER OF HETH

He walked for nearly an hour, along quiet, lamp-lit streets where large houses fronted on gardens that exhaled moist earth scents and the breaths of sweet, unseen blossoms, up hills so steep that it seemed as if an earthquake might have heaved up the city's crust and bent it crisply like a piece of cardboard. From these high places he looked down on the expanse of the bay, a stretch of ink surrounded by black hills, here and there spangled with the clustered sparklings of little towns. In the hollows below him he saw the lights of the city swimming on its darkness, winking and trembling on receding depths of blackness, like golden bubbles seething on the surface of thick, dense wine.

He looked down unseeing, thinking of the last three years.

When he had first met Bernice Iverson, she had been a typewriter and stenographer in the office of the Merchants and Mechanics Trust Company. He was twenty-four at the time, the only son of Cornelius Ryan, one of the financial magnates of the far West. The career of Con Ryan, as he was familiarly called, had been as varied as the heart of a public, who loves to dwell on the sensational fortunes of its great men, could have wished. In the early days of Virginia City, Con Ryan had been a miner there, had a claim of his own and lost all he had in it before the first Crown Point excitement, had run a grocery store in Shasta, moved to Sacramento, speculated successfully in mining stock and real estate, and in the bonanza days had had money to play the great game which made millionaires of the few and beggars of the many. He had played it daringly and with

profit. When he died he left his widow complete control of a fortune of ten millions.

She had been a sturdy helpmeet—it was generally said that she was the best man of the two—and would keep the fortune safe for the two children, Dominick and Cornelia. Neither she nor Con believed in young men having control of large fortunes. They had seen what came of it in the sons of their bonanza friends. Dominick was sent to the East to college, and on his return, being then twenty-three years of age, was placed in the Oregon and California Bank, of which his father had been one of the founders. He was soon promoted to a position where he earned a salary of three thousand a year. This was all he had when he met Bernice Iverson.

She was seven years older than he, but told him they were the same age. It was not a wasted lie, as she undoubtedly looked much younger than she was, being a slight, trimly-made woman who had retained a girlish elasticity of figure and sprightliness of manner. She came of respectable, hard-working people, her father, Danny Iverson, having been a contractor in a small way of business, and her two sisters being, one a teacher in the primary school department, the other a saleswoman in a fashionable millinery. She herself was an expert in her work, in office hours quiet, capable and businesslike, afterward lively, easy-going and companionable. The entrapping of young Ryan was a simple matter. He had never loved and knew little of women. He did not love her, but she made him think he did, threw herself at him, led him quickly to the point she wished to reach, and secretly, without a suspicion on the part of her family, became his mistress. Six months later, having driven him to the step by her upbraidings and her apparent sufferings of conscience under the sense of wrong-doing, she persuaded him to marry her.

The marriage was a bombshell to the world in which young Ryan was a planet of magnitude. His previous connection with her—though afterward discovered by his mother—was at the time unknown. Bernice had induced him to keep the marriage secret till its hour of accomplishment, for she knew Mrs. Ryan would try to break it off and feared that she might succeed. Once Dominick's wife she thought that the objections and resentment of the elder woman could be overcome. But she underrated the force and obstinacy of her adversary and the depth of the wound that had been given her. Old Mrs. Ryan had been stricken in her tenderest spot. Her son was her idol, born in her middle-age, the last of four boys, three of whom had died in childhood. In his babyhood she had hoarded money and worked late and early that he might be rich. Now she held the great estate of her husband in trust for him, and dreamed of the time when he should marry some sweet and virtuous girl and she would have grandchildren to love and spoil and plan for. When the news of his marriage reached her and she saw the woman he had made his wife, she understood everything. She knew her boy through and through and she knew just how he had been duped and entangled.

She was of that race of pioneer Californians who had entered an uninhabited country, swept aside Indian and Spaniard, and made it their own. They were isolated figures in a huge landscape, their characters, uncramped and bold, developing unrestricted in an atmosphere of physical and moral liberty. They grew as their instincts dictated; the bough was not bent into convenient forms by expediency or pressure from without. Public opinion had little or no weight with them, for there was none. It was the pleasure of this remote group in this rich and exuberant land to do away with tradition and be a law and precept unto themselves. What other people thought and did did not influence them. They had one fixed, dominating idea in a fluctuating code of

morals—they knew what they wanted and they were determined to get it. They were powerful individualities whether for good or evil, and they resented with a passion any thwarting of their plans or desires, whether by the interposition of man or the hand of God.

Delia Ryan's life had been a long, ascending series of hardly-won triumphs. She had surmounted what would have seemed to a less bold spirit unsurmountable obstacles; gone over them, not around them. She had acquired the habit of success, of getting what she wanted. Failure or defiance of her plans amazed her as they might have amazed the confident, all-conquering, pagan gods. The center of her life was her family; for them she had labored, for them she would have died. Right and wrong in her mind were clearly defined till it came to her husband or children, and then they were transmuted into what benefited the Ryans and what did not. Rigidly fair and honorable in her dealings with the outside world, let a member of that world menace the happiness of one of her own, and she would sacrifice it, grind the ax without qualms, like a priestess grimly doing her duty.

The marriage of her son was the bitterest blow of her life. It came when she was old, stiffened into habits of dominance and dictatorship, when her ambitions for her boy were gaining daily in scope and splendor. A blind rage and determination to crush the woman were her first feelings, and remained with her but slightly mitigated by the softening passage of time. She was a partizan, a fighter, and she instituted a war against her daughter-in-law which she conducted with all the malignant bitterness that marks the quarrels of women.

Dominick had not been married a month when she discovered the previous connection between him and his wife, and published it to the winds. A social power, feared

and obeyed, she let it be known that to any one who received Mrs. Dominick Ryan her doors would be for ever closed. Without withdrawing her friendship from her son she refused ever to meet or to receive his wife. In this attitude she was absolutely implacable. She imposed her will upon the less strong spirits about her, and young Mrs. Ryan was as completely shut off from her husband's world as though her skirts carried contamination. With masculine largeness of view in other matters, in this one the elder woman exhibited a singular, unworthy smallness. The carelessly large checks she had previously given Dominick on his birthday and anniversaries ceased to appear, and masculine gifts, such as pipes, walking-sticks, and cigar-cases, in which his wife could have no participating enjoyment, took their place. She had established a policy of exclusion, and maintained it rigidly.

Young Mrs. Ryan had at first believed that this rancor would melt away with the flight of time. But she did not know the elder woman. She was as unmeltable as a granite rock. The separation from her son, now with age growing on her, ate like an acid into the mother's heart. She saw him at intervals, and the change in him, the growth of discouragement, the dejection of spirit that he hid from all the world, but that her eye, clairvoyant from love, detected, tore her with helpless wrath and grief. She punished herself and punished him, sacrificed them both, in permitting herself the indulgence of her implacable indignation.

Bernice, who had expected to gain all from her connection with the all-powerful Ryans, at the end of two years found that she was an ostracized outsider from the world she had hoped to enter, and that the riches she had expected to enjoy were represented by the three thousand a year her husband earned in the bank. Her attempts to force her way into the life and surroundings where she had hoped her marriage would place her had invariably failed. If her

feelings were not of the same nature as those of the elder Mrs. Ryan, they were fully as poignant and bitter.

The effort to get an invitation to the ball had been the most daring the young woman had yet made. Neither she nor Dominick had thought it possible that Mrs. Ryan would leave her out. So confident was she that she would be asked that she had ordered a dress for the occasion. But when Dominick's invitation came without her name on the envelope, then fear that she was to be excluded rose clamorous in her. For days she talked and complained to her husband as to the injustice of this course and his power to secure the invitation for her if he would. By the evening of the ball she had brought him to the point where he had agreed to go forth and demand it.

It was a hateful mission. He had never in his life done anything so humiliating. In his shame and distress he had hoped that his mother would give it to him without urging, and Bernice, placated, would be restored to good humor and leave him at peace. She could not have gained such power over him, or so bent him to her bidding, had she not had in him a fulcrum of guilty obligation to work on. She continually reminded him of "the wrong" he had done her, and how, through him, she had lost the respect of her fellows and her place among them. All these slights, snubs and insults were his fault, and he felt that this was true. To-night he had gone forth in dogged desperation. Now in fear, frank fear of her, he went home, slowly, with reluctant feet, his heart getting heavier, his dread colder as he neared the house.

It was one of those wooden structures on Sacramento Street not far from Van Ness Avenue where the well-to-do and socially-aspiring crowd themselves into a floor of seven rooms, and derive satisfaction from the proximity of their distinguished neighbors who refuse to know them. It

contained four flats, each with a parlor bay-window and a front door, all four doors in neighborly juxtaposition at the top of a flight of six marble steps.

Dominick's was the top flat; he had to ascend a long, carpeted stairway with a turn half-way up to get to it. Now, looking at the bay-window, he saw lights gleaming from below the drawn blinds. Berny was still up. A lingering hope that she might have gone to bed died, and his sense of reluctance gained in force and made him feel slightly sick. He was there, however, and he had to go up. Fitting his key into the lock he opened the hall door.

It was very quiet as he mounted the long stairs, but, as he drew near the top, he became aware of a windy, whistling noise and looking into the room near the stair-head saw that all the gas-jets were lit and turned on full cock, and that the gas, rushing out from the burner in a ragged banner of flame, made the sound. He was about to enter and lower it when he heard his wife's voice coming from the open door of her room.

"Is that you, Dominick?" she called.

Her voice was steady and high. Though it was hard, with a sort of precise clearness of utterance, it was not conspicuously wrathful.

"Yes," he answered, "it's I," and he forgot the gas-jets and walked up the hall. He did not notice that in the other rooms he passed the gas was turned on in the same manner. The whistling rush of its escape made a noise like an excited, unresting wind in the confined limits of the little flat.

The door of Berny's room was open, and under a blaze of light from the chandelier and the side lights by the bureau she was sitting in a rocking-chair facing the foot of the bed. She held in her hand a walking-stick of Dominick's and with this she had been making long scratches across the foot-