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The Younger Set

By **ROBERT W. CHAMBERS,**
Author of "The Fighting Chance," Etc.

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He gathered up his shimmering kimonos, hesitated, halted and again looked back.

"When you're dressed," he drawled. "I've a word to say to you about the same tonight and another about Gerald."

"I shall not play," she retorted scornfully. "nor will Gerald."

"Oh, yes, you will, and play your best too. And I'll expect him next time."

"I shall not play!"

He said deliberately: "You will not only play, but play cleverly, and in the interim, while dressing, you will reflect how much more agreeable it is to play cards here than the fool at 10 o'clock at night in the bachelor apartments of your late lamented."

And he entered his room, and his wife, getting blindly to her feet, every atom of color gone from lip and cheek, stood rigid, both small hands clutching the footboard of the gilded bed.

Chapter 12

DIFFERENCES of opinion between himself and Neergard concerning the ethics of good taste involved in forcing the Slowitha club matter. Gerald's decreasing attention to business and increasing intimacy with the Fane-Ruthven coterie began to make Selwyn very uncomfortable. The boy's close relations with Neergard worried him most of all and, though Neergard finally agreed to drop the Slowitha matter as a fixed policy in which Selwyn had been expected to participate at some indefinite date, the arrangement seemed only to cement the man's confidential companionship with Gerald.

This added to Selwyn's restlessness, and one day in early spring he had a long conference with Gerald—a most unsatisfactory one. Gerald for the first time remained reticent, and when Selwyn, presuming on the cordial understanding between them, pressed



him a little the boy turned sullen, and Selwyn let the matter drop very quickly.

But neither tact nor caution seemed to serve now. Gerald, more and more engrossed in occult social affairs of which he made no mention to Selwyn, was still amiable and friendly, even at times cordial and lovable, but he was no longer frank or even communicative, and Selwyn, fearing to arouse him again to sullessness or perhaps even to suspicious defiance, forbore to press him beyond the most tentative advances toward the regaining of his confidence.

Gerald and Neergard left the office together frequently now. They often lunched uptown. Whether they were in each other's company evenings Selwyn did not know, for Gerald no longer volunteered information as to his whereabouts or doings. And all this hurt Selwyn and alarmed him, too, for he was slowly coming to the conclusion that he did not like Meer-

gard, that he would never sign articles of partnership with him and that even his formal associateness with the company was too close a relation for his own peace of mind. But on Gerald's account he stayed on. He did not like to leave the boy alone for his sister's sake as well as for his own.

Matters drifted that way through early spring. He actually grew to dislike both Neergard and the business of Neergard & Co., for no particular reason perhaps, but in general, though he did not yet care to ask himself to be more precise in his unuttered criticisms. But Neergard broke his word to him.

And one morning before he left his rooms at Mrs. Greeve's lodgings to go downtown Percy Draymore called him up on the telephone, and, as that overfed young man's usual rising hour was notoriously nearer noon than 8 o'clock, it surprised Selwyn to be asked to remain in his rooms for a little while until Draymore and one or two friends could call on him personally concerning a matter of importance.

First there was Percy Draymore, overgrown for a gentleman, fat, good humored and fashionable—one of the famous Draymore family noted solely for their money and their tight grip on it; then came Saxon Orchil, the famous banker and promoter, small, urbane, dark, with that rich, almost oriental coloring which he may have inherited from his Cordova ancestors, who found it necessary to dehumanize their names when Rome offered them the choice, with immediate eternity as alternative.

Then came a fox faced young man, Phoenix Mottly, elegant arbiter of all pertaining to polo and the horse-slim legged, hatchet faced and more presentable in the saddle than out of it. He was followed by Bradley Harmon, with his washed out coloring of a consumptive Swede and his corn colored beard, and, looming in the rear like an amiable brontosaurus, George Fane, whose swaying neck carried his head as a camel carries his, nodding as he walks.

"We heard last night," said Draymore, "how that fellow—how Neergard had been tampering with our farmers—what underhand tricks he has been playing us, and I frankly admit to you that we're a worried lot of near sports. That's what this dismal matinee signifies, and we've come to ask you what it all really means."

"Why did you not call on Mr. Neergard?" asked Selwyn coolly. Yet he was taken completely by surprise, for he did not know that Neergard had gone ahead and secured options on his own responsibility, which practically amounted to a violation of the truce between them. "I know nothing about it. I did not know that Mr. Neergard had acquired control of the property. I don't know what he means to do with it. And, gentlemen, may I ask why you feel at liberty to come to me instead of going to Mr. Neergard?"

"A desire to deal with one of our

own kind, I suppose," returned Draymore bluntly. "And, for that matter," he said, turning to the others, "we might have known that Captain Selwyn could have had no hand in and no knowledge of such an underbred and dirty"—

Harmon plucked him by the sleeve, but Draymore shook him off, his little piggish eyes sparkling.

"What do I care?" he sneered, losing his temper. "We're in the clutches of a vulgar, skinflint Dutchman, and he'll wring us dry whether or not we curse him out. Didn't I tell you that Philip Selwyn had nothing to do with it? If he had, and I was wrong, our journey here might as well have been made to Neergard's office, for any man who will do such a filthy thing—"

"One moment, Draymore," cut in Selwyn, and his voice rang unpleasantly. "If you are simply complaining because you have been outwitted, go ahead, but if you think there has been any really dirty business in this matter go to Mr. Neergard. Otherwise, being his associate, I shall not only decline to listen, but also ask you to leave my apartments."

"Captain Selwyn is perfectly right," observed Orchil coolly. "Do you think Draymore, that it is very good taste in you to come into a man's place and begin slanging and cursing a member of his firm for crooked work?"

"Besides," added Mottly, "it's not crooked; it's only contemptible." And to Selwyn, who had been restlessly facing first one, then another: "We came—it was the idea of several among us—to put the matter up to you, which was rather foolish, because you couldn't have engineered the thing and remained what we know you to be. So—"

"Wait!" said Selwyn brusquely. "I do not admit for one moment that there is anything dishonorable in this deal, nor do I accept your right to question it from that standpoint, because I personally have not chosen to engage in matters of this—ah—description, is no reason for condemning the deal or its method."

"Every reason!" said Orchil, laughing cordially. "Every reason, Captain Selwyn. Thank you; we know now exactly where we stand. It was very good of you to let us come, and I'm sorry some of us had the bad taste to show any temper."

"He means me," added Draymore, offering his hand; "goodby, Captain Selwyn. I dare say we are up against it hard."

"Because we've got to buy in that property or close up the Slowitha," added Mottly, coming over to make his adieu. "By the way, Selwyn you ought to be one of us in the Slowitha."

"Thank you, but isn't this rather an awkward time to suggest it?" said Selwyn good humoredly.

Fane burst into a sonorous laugh and wagged his neck, saying "Not at all! Not at all! Your reward for having the decency to stay out of the deal is an invitation from us to come in and be squeezed into a jelly by Mr. Neergard. How!"

And so, one by one, with formal or informal but evidently friendly leave-taking, they went away. And Selwyn followed them presently, walking until he took the subway at Forty-second street for his office.

He went into his own office, pocketed his mail and still wearing hat and gloves came out again just as Gerald was leaving Neergard's office.

He walked leisurely into Neergard's office and seated himself.

"So you have committed the firm to the Slowitha deal?" he inquired coolly.

Neergard looked up and then spat him: "No, not the firm. You did not seem to be interested in the scheme, so I went on without you. I'm swinging it for my personal account."

"Is Mr. Erroll in it?"

"I said that it was a private matter," replied Neergard, but his manner was affable.

"I thought so; it appears to me like a matter quite personal to you and characteristic of you. Mr. Neergard, and that being established, I am now ready to dissolve whatever loose ties have ever bound me in any association with this company and your self."

Neergard's close set black eyes shift-

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ed a point nearer to Selwyn's. The sweat on his nose glistened.

"Why do you do this?" he asked slowly. "Has anybody offended you?"

"Do you really wish to know?"

"Yes, I certainly do, Captain Selwyn."

"Very well. It's because I don't like your business methods, I don't like several other things that are happening in this office. It's purely a difference of views, and that's enough explanation; Mr. Neergard."

"I think our views may very easily coincide."

"You are wrong; they could not. I ought to have known that when I came back here. And now I have only to thank you for receiving me, at my own request, for a six months' trial, and to admit that I am not qualified to cooperate with this kind of a firm."

"That," said Neergard, angrily, "amounts to an indictment of the firm if you express yourself in that manner outside, the firm will certainly resent it."

"My personal taste will continue to govern my expressions, Mr. Neergard, and I believe will prevent any further business relations between us. And as we never had any other kind of relations, I have merely to arrange the details through an attorney."

Neergard looked after him in silence. The tiny beads of sweat on his nose unlifted and rolled down in a big shining drop, and the sneer etched on his broad and brightly mottled features deepened to a snarl when Selwyn had disappeared.

For the social prestige which Selwyn's name had brought the firm he had patiently endured his personal dislike and contempt for the man after he found he could do nothing with him in any way.

He had accepted Selwyn purely in the hope of social advantage and with the knowledge that Selwyn could have done much for him after business hours, if not from friendship, at least from interest or a lively sense of benefits to come. For that reason he had invited him to participate in the valuable Slowitha deal, supposing a man as comparatively poor as Selwyn would not only jump at the opportunity, but also prove sufficiently grateful later. And he had been amazed and disgusted at Selwyn's attitude. But he had not supposed the man would sever his connection with the firm if he, Neergard, went ahead on his own responsibility. It astonished and irritated him. It meant, instead of selfish or snobbish indifference to his own social ambitions, an enemy to block his entrance into what he desired—the society of those made notorious in the columns of the daily press.

He was fairly on the outer boundary now, though still very far outside. But a needy gentleman inside was already compromised and practically pledged to support him, for his meeting with Jack Ruthven through Gerald had proved of greatest importance. He had lost gracefully to Ruthven and in doing it had taken that gentleman's measure. And though Ruthven himself was a member of the Slowitha, Neergard had made no error in taking him secretly into the deal where together they were now in a position to exploit the club, from which Ruthven of course would resign in time to escape any assessment himself.

Neergard's progress had now reached this stage. His programme was simple—to wallow among the wealthy until satiated, then to marry into that agreeable community and found the house of Neergard. And to that end he had already bought a building site on Fifth avenue, but held it in the name of the firm, as though it had been acquired for purposes merely speculative.

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