

The New Generation

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THE NEW GENERATION

BY BEATRICE REDPATH

Anthony Chiltern left the car at the gate and walked slowly up the avenue to the house. There had been an early frost the night before, and he noticed how, overhead, the leaves were stiff and bright as though they had been dipped in some liquid metal. The sun had fallen below the wide stone fence that debarred the avenue from trespassers. It still thrust long fingers of light through the tinted foliage. He liked to walk up from the gate, taking a lingering pleasure in the grave dignity of the house, its gables and chimneys silhouetted against the sky.

He glanced with pleasure over the wide sweep of lawn, bordered with beds of scarlet geraniums. Maple leaves mottled the turf with gold and the blue haze of wood fires hung in the still air. Late days of scarlet and gold, days of fulfilment, of achievement, of success. If there were gray days as well, times of doubt, or regret . . . there were bound to be gray days. But life had treated him well on the whole. He had been true to his heritage. He had kept the name of Chiltern an honored one. That was something these days. He had handed down to his son a name in which he might take pride. There had been no blot anywhere on the long family record. There had been no skeletons to hide away; nothing for which he had cause to blush. The record of the Chilterns was inviolate.

Bates, always deferential in manner, was in the hall to relieve him of his coat, and to inform him that tea was served in the library. There, a fire greeted him with a burst of sparks, and he stood for a moment relaxing in the warmth and comfort of the room. He poured himself a cup of tea and placed it at his elbow, while he opened the paper with a sigh of comfort.

He supposed that Adele was out at some tea or reception. She had no lack of invitations. She was discriminating in her friends. She had the same ideas as his own. There was too much democracy in a new country. Adele had a cold unassailable quality of mind that chilled affection. Hugh was different. The boy was more like himself. He saw queer glimpses of the boy that he had been, in Hugh. And yet there was a difference. The new generation were startlingly different. They thrust obstacles aside out of their way, instead of going around them. They were regardless of old tried truths

and maxims. But the boy would learn by experience that the old ways were best. There was good stuff in Hugh. He was enormously proud of him. But the boy had a great deal to learn.

The sound of Adele's footsteps aroused him from a perusal of stock quotations, and he looked up from the paper as she came into the room. She still wore her street clothes, a veil pinned across a face that yet retained more than an average amount of good looks. He noticed how the hard little lines on either side of her mouth were accentuated, and the irritable manner in which she pulled at her gloves. She was visibly upset.

"Anything the matter?" he inquired, lowering the paper to his knee.

"Yes. There's a great deal the matter," she replied crisply. "Hugh told me this afternoon that he intends to marry Joan Gilder."

Joan Gilder. Anthony Chiltern started upright in his chair. Gilder's daughter! That scamp Gilder renowned over two continents! Hugh must surely be mad!

"Martin Gilder's daughter!" he ejaculated with a frown. His mind recoiled from the very suggestion; it was a bomb flung into the very centre of his placidity. He threw aside the paper and looked at Adele inquiringly. As usual her face was coldly passionless. She glanced at him with an expression of tolerance for his slow grasp of the situation.

"Yes, Martin Gilder's daughter."

"Impossible. I won't have it."

"I'd like to know just how you are going to prevent it."

He felt rather than saw her derisive glance. It was so like her when anything went wrong, to throw the blame upon him. She infuriated him at that moment. "I won't allow him a cent," he said firmly.

"He doesn't need your money. I doubt if he would take it. Hugh has such strange ideas. You should have kept him in the business with you and then you would have had some control over him. I told you at the time that it was a mistake."

Anthony Chiltern had no intention of taking up that old argument. He sat silent, thinking over what could be done. Martin Gilder! Why the man's name was a by-word. He had been mixed up in that disgraceful bank fraud where a couple of millions had so mysteriously disappeared. And that was only the culminating point in a long series of frauds which had afterwards come to light, in which Gilder had been implicated. It was too preposterous

that Hugh should even suggest marrying the girl. Hugh! A Chiltern! Why, the man was in the penitentiary. His name to be mixed up in any remote way with a criminal. His grandchildren to be Gilder's grandchildren. Never in this world!

"I will speak to Hugh," he said, "the thing is impossible."

Adele lifted her fine black eye-brows with an expression of impatience.

"I told him so this afternoon . . . but he couldn't see it. Hugh is surprised that there should be any objection on our part."

"The boy doesn't understand." Anthony Chiltern said slowly. "Hugh is impatient of all the things which we have learned to value. He will come to it in time."

He wished that Adele had left things alone. He knew how she would irritate Hugh. In the first place Hugh did not understand all the circumstances in the Gilder case. He had been too young at the time. And he had always laughed more or less at any question of heritage. It didn't matter to him, he always said, what those who had come before him had been. He was wholly concerned with the future . . . not with the past. It was along those lines that he would frame his appeal. The question of his sons . . . and his son's sons. They might care for their heritage. Hugh would listen to him.

"This girl," he said, stopping Adele as she was about to make her way from the room, trailing her furs limply from one arm, "what became of the rest of the family?"

"Mrs. Gilder died," Adele replied looking back over her shoulder from the doorway. "The girl lives by herself; does settlement work or something of the sort. I suppose she thinks it's a fine coup to marry Hugh. She must be pretty tired of carrying the stigma of Gilder about with her. Of course she imagines that once married to Hugh, people will forget. But they won't. Hugh's ruined if he marries that girl."

"He won't marry her," Anthony Chiltern said with decision, picking up his paper from the floor to put an end to the discussion. "I'll see to it that he doesn't."

Adele looked as though she would speak, but changed her mind, and with a shrug of her thin shoulders she left the room.

Anthony Chiltern brought the matter up with Hugh that evening after dinner.

"It's impossible," he said definitely, "you must be quite mad even to consider such a thing."

Hugh Chiltern stood with his back to the fire, his chin thrust out, and his brows drawn into level lines. He reminded Anthony Chiltern very much of himself as he had been at that age, only Hugh did not see life as clearly as he had seen it. There had been no need for anyone to point things out for him. He had seen for himself. He had never hesitated. There had been more of steel in his composition. Hugh was all hot-headed impulsiveness with a balance of doggedness that it was hard to beat down.

"I'm sorry, father," Hugh said patiently, "but we don't see things in the same light. I know that Gilder was just the scamp you say he was. I'm not defending him . . . nor am I considering marrying him either you know," he said with the sudden smile that made him appear so extremely boyish. "Joan is quite a different person. I'm afraid I can't give her up. I'm sorry you feel as you do. I had no idea that you would feel this way. It seems to me so incongruous. Isn't it what you are yourself that counts? What does it matter to me what her father was? Joan is fine . . . straight through. I'm sorry you have these ideas."

He was sorry. That was all! It was almost absurd. The quixotic wrong-headedness of this generation. Where were they going? They would not even listen . . . or if they listened it was almost with a sense of tolerance for ideas antiquated and outworn. But it was insupportable. Gilder's daughter in his house . . . sitting at his table . . . eating his food . . . drinking his wine . . . one of themselves. A Chiltern! Impossible!

He looked at Hugh doubtfully. The boy was so fixed in his resolve; he had listened to everything that he had had to tell about Gilder, and now all he had to say was to state that he had known it all.

"Joan has told me all about her father. There were more things than what you speak of. Joan said ever since she was a little bit of a thing her father had gone in the same rut. The man was a sort of genius. You can't help feeling sorry for him . . . a queer twist of the brain and a big man becomes a criminal."

A criminal! Hugh even admitted it. It was too childish. Didn't he even recognise that there was such a thing as heredity, he demanded? Did he realize that his own children might inherit the taint? Hugh merely shrugged his shoulders.

"I don't believe much in heredity," he said, "not in that way. Life's made harder for some from the beginning . . . but every man can put up a fight

against his disabilities. Some have more than others to fight against . . . they may come out the better for it. Joan's sons . . . will come out all right. I'm not afraid on that score."

Since that was the way in which Hugh talked, there was no sense in further discussion. But all the same he wasn't through. Not by any means. He had won harder battles before this for the sake of that which he cherished. Think of the ignominy of knowing that the men at the club were discussing Hugh's marriage behind his back. Some would be pleased—there are always those who are glad to see a good name smirched. Even if Hugh wanted to ruin his own life, he had no business to injure them in this way. It was wanton selfishness. His face flushed with anger at the thought of what it would mean to him. His pride in his name! What pride could he have, seeing it coupled with the name of Gilder? It was abominable even to contemplate. He was not going to stand by and see Hugh fling away what he knew so well was of value. Perhaps he had made a fetish of his heritage. Well . . . what if he had? Pride of race had always been his, even at Hugh's age. He had been more balanced, he had been made of sterner, harder stuff. This young generation were beyond his understanding.

It was Anthony Chiltern's way to say little when he knew words were flung away. Adele would have had a series of scenes that would only have made the boy go off in a rage. He had always hated scenes. They savored of a different plane of life.

He left his office early the following afternoon, with the intention of seeing the girl, to discover whether he could not make her see the utter folly of the whole affair. Hugh had mentioned where she lived and he found the apartment after some difficulty, for he was not used to this part of the city. The place offended him as he went in the shabby entrance, and he felt a fresh annoyance against Hugh that he should be subjected to this disagreeable visit.

Joan Gilder was somewhat different from what he had expected. He had thought to find either a calculating young person to whom he could make an offer that would be worth her while to accept, or a girl crushed and trampled upon by life. She was neither of these. She came into the room with complete self-possession and greeted him with perfect poise. She was curiously boyish and unself-conscious in manner. He felt that honesty was her dominant characteristic . . . honesty and courage, he added suddenly to himself. He was uncertain how to cope with this young person, so different in every way from what he had expected.

“Hugh has told me that you intend to marry one another,” he said, a trifle stiffly, after a few opening remarks. “Of course it is impossible.”

He saw how her eyes widened in surprise, while she looked at him with a clear direct expression. Her eyes made him think of open seas. There was nothing hidden, nothing furtive there. That look made him feel curiously uncomfortable. He cleared his throat and continued.

“You must see . . . that it’s quite impossible.”

She was silent for a moment thinking over what he had just said. And then she looked at him, with her eyes narrowing, as though a sudden thought had stabbed her.

“Did Hugh know that you were coming to tell me this?” she asked without a vestige of coldness; only a puzzled inquiry in her tone.

“No, of course he is quite determined. But if you love him, you won’t marry him.”

She had seated herself in a boyish fashion, on a low rose colored chair, while he sat down opposite, still holding his gloves in his hand. She looked from him to the flames that broke from the logs in the shabby fireplace.

“That is what you would say, of course,” she said, her chin on her hand. “It’s the usual remark, isn’t it? And the usual thing for me to do would be to play the martyr, make a pretty sacrifice, and go away and hide a broken life. But you know, I’m not going to do it. I’m going to marry Hugh.”

“It’s not a question of sacrifice,” he returned slowly, “as I look at it you will only make matters worse for yourself. Hugh won’t always think as he does now. At present he’s infatuated . . . but I wonder . . . A man thinks a good deal of his name in the long run. He may have regrets. I wonder how you would feel then.”

She threw back her head and met his eyes squarely. He could not help admiring her courage.

“There is such a thing as love,” she replied. “You seem to leave that out of your consideration.”

He looked away from her. He was sorry that the situation was what it was. Life was harsh to some and curiously unfair. There was something rather splendid about her, something that called out his respect. If only things had been different, he could not have asked for more in the girl that Hugh should marry. But it made it several degrees harder for him that he should feel about her as he did. This new generation were baffling to him.

She had the same fiery eagerness towards life which he felt in Hugh. Girls, as he had known them, in his day, had been somehow different.

There were plenty of others whom she could marry, plenty whose name could not be smirched by the association with the name of Gilder. And after all love and youth and passion . . . they passed and became as nothing, but one's good name stayed with one till the end. One must not be caught up by currents of feeling and foolishly drifted down alien ways. Hadn't he learned that lesson in his time? Love and youth and passion. What were they but words, vain sighs, leaves upon the wind. A good name, a sound reputation, that was what counted in the long run. He insisted that that was what counted. He would show this girl what he himself had sacrificed. He would speak to her in a way which would show her what others sacrificed. She was speaking again:

"You are talking just as you would talk," she said, "but haven't you ever thought that each human being has a right to a place in the sun? Love is like a white blaze in the dark to show people the way. If you stumble, if you go wrong, you can find the way again by the light of it. I think perhaps that you have never known a light that was big enough to show you the way through life. You have been groping in the shadows always so it seems to me and what have you found? Happiness? Self-satisfaction? Which, I wonder."

Anthony Chiltern twisted uncomfortably in his chair. This was turning the tables and he did not care for it. What right had she to talk to him like this? Martin Gilder's daughter. As though there was no difference in age as though she could put her experience of life beside his own. And yet after all they were two human beings fighting for what to each of them meant most on earth.

He felt a sudden sense of loss sweep over him. Ghosts of the past touched him with frail lingering hands. He had been groping in the shadows she had said. Not always no, not always. A strong white blaze in the dark. He had seen it too but it had been blotted out.

"People who are in love themselves, my dear, think that no one else has ever known love. It's an egotistical state of mind that we are all very likely to fall into. But love isn't everything in life you will find. There are other things that count. Perhaps they count even more in the long run. A good name to hand down to one's children . . . that is something of value. I may seem a little cruel . . . but Hugh is my son I've got to do what I

know is best for him. Life has been unkind to you and I'm sorry that things are as they are."

He paused for a moment pulling at the fingers of his gloves.

"I am going to tell you something about myself something that I don't speak about or even think about very often to show you that others have gone through the same sort of thing . . .?"

He hesitated again. It was hard to drag up the past for this girl. But he felt that he owed something to her because of what he was taking away.

"When I was Hugh's age," he began slowly, "there was a girl in my life too. She might have been about your age, but she was different from you. She hadn't your self-confidence, your assurance. She wasn't so definite, so assertive in her individuality. It was in the spring that I met her, and somehow I always think of her as the spring itself, delicate, wistful, and sweet. I was romantic in those days like Hugh only there was a strain of something else besides, of hard, stern sense. When I asked her to marry me she told me the truth about herself. She was only an adopted child a waif off the streets. At first I was so mad about her that I said I didn't care. What did it matter? And then, gradually, the strain of hard common sense came out. I knew that it could never be. I didn't have to point it out to her that it was impossible. She saw it as clearly as I did myself. It was impossible that I should give my children her heritage. How could I tell my son that his mother was a waif of the streets? We both saw that it was impossible. Oh, it wasn't easy, my dear. I know all about that. But my sound common sense prevailed. I was not going to hand down to my children something for which to blush. She helped me in every way. She was wonderful. I don't know that I could have done it if she hadn't been just what she was."

He stopped awkwardly, startled at having revealed so much to this little stranger before him.

Joan Gilder stirred and unclasped her hands.

"What became of her?" she inquired with her sea-blue eyes turned upon him in question.

Anthony Chiltern hesitated: he did not wish to say. It was something which he would not allow his mind to dwell upon. To tell it to this girl with her clear, far-seeing eyes was out of the question. But something in her expression, something in her own honesty, dragged the truth from him. He stumbled into a reply.

“She was found at the foot of a high cliff. The earth must have crumbled away under her feet.”

“You mean that she killed herself?”

Anthony Chiltern shrank. It was like the clean incision of a scalpel. He had never even admitted it to himself that she had killed herself . . . he would not allow himself to admit it. His shoulders sagged forward. He could not deny the words that she had said, before that honest young gaze. He made an effort to turn the conversation away to abstract things.

“The new generation doesn’t understand the meaning of sacrifice.”

“I wonder,” the clear voice said reflectfully, “if we have not found a new meaning for old words. Sacrifice to my mind sacrifice is something that flames. Your meaning of sacrifice is meekness, submission, resignation. Your story does not thrill me like the story of a sacrifice should. To me it is only very pitiful that neither of you had the courage to face life together. To dare it to do its worst. To fight through in spite of any odds. To love with love that could not be afraid. I don’t think somehow, that Hugh will ever want to change places with you you who have buried your love, your life, your dreams.”

Anthony Chiltern rose slowly and heavily. Suddenly he felt very tired and her words seemed to echo and re-echo through a brain that was intolerably weary. “You who have buried your love, your life, your dreams”

“You are a very startling young woman,” he said, “you make me feel, my dear, that I am a very old man used to a different world from the world you seem to know. But she was not like you . . . life would have broken her perhaps.”

Her face softened and she shook her head.

“You should have been strong enough for two.” And then she came forward with a change of manner, something very sweet and young in her starry face. “I am sorry that you feel as you do about me. But Hugh and I can face life . . . no matter what it intends for us. We do not see any reason . . . why we should be bound to a past that was not of our making. We have a right to happiness. Surely . . . even Martin Gilder’s daughter has a right to live.”

Anthony Chiltern took her hand between his own and looked down into the eager blue eyes.

“There is a whole generation between us, my dear,” he said, “and I am beginning to believe that your generation have learned new ways of living. You are going forward with a new vision . . . perhaps with a better vision . . . I don’t know. You will marry Hugh for I see nothing on earth that will stop you. And some day when you are as old as I am you will know whether you were right and I was wrong. We usually find these things out for ourselves. So far . . . I have had no regrets . . . I hope that you will feel the same. You are the new generation and you are taking your new way.”

He walked slowly down the street from her apartment through the gathering dusk. His mind was a turmoil of things, not altogether connected with Hugh and this girl. He was too tired to argue the matter any further. Hugh must find his own salvation. He had given him all he could, all he knew how. If Hugh chose to throw it away, it was in his own hands.

A new meaning for old words! How that girl’s sentences rang through his brain! A sense of loss swept over him, of loneliness, of emptiness in life. He supposed that it was her youth that made him feel so. It recalled his own youth, and it saddened him.

He dropped in at his club and sat down before an open window, looking vacantly out into the blue dusk. How he was drifting back into the past! Spring! Yes, she had been like spring itself, like the wistful twilights of spring, the sweetness of spring, the gladness of things new.

That flaming young person of Hugh’s. So sure of herself, so certain of being stronger than life. The new generation with their dauntless courage. They made him feel old and tired. She had been sweeter, softer, gentler a blossoming bough not intended for the violence of storm winds. This young person could go out into the storm and perhaps stand up against it. What had she said again? That he should have had the strength for two!

How his spirit cried for the sweetness, the tenderness, the loveliness . . . of spring . . . of spring that was dead . . . buried. Had he no regrets? . . . then what was that ache that had stayed all these years?

He heard voices behind him and listened, vaguely conscious that he did so. There was the sound of laughter from the next room, the click of a billiard ball, and then he heard his own name mentioned. He listened with indifference. It was Smithers who was speaking; he recognized his gruff familiar tones.

“Yes. Chiltern’s name is the one to head the list. His name stands for something.”

He stirred in his chair. What did it all amount to after all? What had he been doing all these years but stifling his regret, deadening his remorse, bolstering up a false ideal. Pride of race! A few ashes that crumbled away before the light that that girl had thrown upon his conduct. He sat looking out into the blue dusk that was splashed by the light from the motor lamps. Love and youth and passion leaves upon the wind No . . . life itself!

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[The end of *The New Generation* by Beatrice Redpath]