

The Fighting Chance.

... By ...
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(CONTINUED FROM LAST PAGE.)

"Doubtless he had forgotten to tell her the time. She had almost forgotten that she had asked him. With the silence of sunset a languor, the indolence of content, crept over her. She saw him close his watch with the absentminded air which she already associated with him, and she let the question go from sheer disinclination for the effort of repetition—let the projected drive go—acquiescent, content that matters shape themselves without any interference from her. The sense of ease, of physical well-being, invaded her with an agreeable relaxation as though tension somewhere had slackened.

The conversation drifted illogically. Sometimes he stirred her to amusement, even a hushed laughter. Sometimes she smilingly agreed with his views. Sometimes she let them go uncontradicted or, intent on her own ideas, shook her small head in amused disapproval.

The stillness over all, the deepening mellow light, the blessed indolence of the young world and their few years in it—youth—that was perhaps the key to it all, after all.

"Tomorrow," she mused aloud, knees cradled in her clasped fingers—"tomorrow they'll shoot, with great circumstance and fuss, a few native woodcock—there's no flight yet from the north—a few grouse, fewer snipe, a stray duck or two. Others will drive motor cars over bad roads. Others will ride, sail, golf—anything to kill the eternal enemy. You know the majority of the people here or coming, don't you?"

"Who are they?"
She began, "The Leroy Mortimers."
"Oh, yes."

"Lord Alderdene and Captain Voucher and the Page twins and Marion?"
"Yes."

"Rena Bonnesdel, the Tassel girl, Agatha Cuthbert, Mrs. Vendenning—all sorts, all sets." And, with an effort, "If I'm to drive I should like to know what time it is."

He informed her, and she, too indolent to pretend surprise and darning reproach easier, told him that he had no business to permit her to forget.

His smiling serenity under the mellow light aroused in her a slight resentment, as though he had taken something for granted.

Besides, she had grown uneasy. She had wired Quarrier, saying she would meet him and drive him over. He had replied at once, naming his train. He was an exact man and expected method and precision in others. She didn't exactly know how it might affect him if his reasonable demand was unsatisfied. She did not know him very well yet.

And, thinking of him now, she again made up her mind to give him the answer which he now had every reason to expect from her. This decision appeared to lubricate her conscience. It ran more smoothly now, emitting fewer creaks.

"You say that you know Mr. Quarrier?" she began thoughtfully.
"Not well."

"I hope you will like him, Mr. Seward."

"I do not think he likes me, Miss Landis. He has reasons not to."

She looked up, suddenly remembering: "Oh—since that scrape? What has Mr. Quarrier to do?" She did not finish the sentence. A troubled silence followed. She was trying to remember the details—something she had paid small attention to at the time; something so foreign to her, so distant from her comprehension, that it had not touched her closely enough for her to remember exactly what this young man might have done to forfeit the good will of Howard Quarrier.

She looked at Seward. It was impossible that anything very bad could come from such a man. And, pursuing her reasoning aloud: "It couldn't have been very awful," she argued; "something foolish about an actress, was it not? And that could not concern Mr. Quarrier."

"I thought you did know; I thought you remembered—while you were driving me over from the station—that I was dropped from my club."

She flushed up. "Oh, but what had Mr. Quarrier to do with that?"
"He is a governor of that club."

"You mean that Mr. Quarrier had you dropped?"
"What else could he do? A man who is idiot enough to risk making his own club notorious must take the consequences, and they say I took that risk. Therefore Mr. Quarrier, Major Belwether—all the governors did their duty. I—I naturally concluded that no governor of the Patrons club feels very kindly toward me."

Miss Landis sat very still, her small head bent, a flush still brightening her fair face.

She recalled a few of the details now—the scandal—something of the story. Which particular actress it was she could not remember, but some men who had dined too freely had made the wager, and this boy sitting beside her had accepted it and won it by bringing into the sacred precincts of the Patrons club a foolish girl disguised in a man's evening dress.

That was bad enough. That some-

body promptly discovered it was worse, but worst of all was the publicity, the club's name smirched, the young man expelled from one of the best two clubs in the metropolis.

To read of such things in the columns of a daily paper had meant little to her except to repel her. To hear it mentioned among people of her own sort had left her incurious and indifferent, but now she saw it in a new light, with the young man who had figured in it seated beside her. Did such men as he—such attractive, well-bred, amusing men as he—do that sort of thing?

"Is that the kind of man you are, Mr. Seward?" she said impulsively.
"It appears that I am, I don't know what I am or may be."

"The pity of it!" she said, still swayed by impulse. "Why did you do—didn't you know—realize what you were doing—bringing discredit on your own club?"

"I was in no condition to know, Miss Landis."

The crude brutality of the expression might merely have hurt or disgusted her had she been less intelligent, nor, as it was, did she fully understand why he chose to use it unless that he meant it in self-punishment.

"It's rather shameful!" she said hotly.
"Yes," he assented; "it's a bad beginning."

"A beginning! Do you mean to go on?"

He did not reply. His head was partly turned from her. She sat silent for awhile. The dog had returned to lie at Seward's feet, his brown eyes tirelessly watching the man he had chosen for his friend, and the man, without turning his eyes, dropped one hand on the dog's head, caressing the silky ears.

Some sentimentalist had once said that no man who cared for animals could be wholly bad. Inexperience inclined her to believe it. Then, too, she had that inclination for overlooking offenses committed against precept which appears to be one of those edifying human traits peculiar to neither sex and common to both. Besides, her knowledge of such matters was as vague as her mind was healthy and body wholesome. Men who dined incautiously were not remarkable for their rarity. The actress habit, being incomprehensible to her, meant nothing, and she said innocently: "It is not for such things that we drop men, Mr. Seward. You know that, of course."

"For what do you drop men?"
"For falsehood, deception, any dishonesty."

"And you don't drop a man when you read in the papers that one of the best two clubs in town has expelled him?"

She gave him a troubled glance, and, naively, "But you are still a member of the other, are you not?" Then, hardening, "It was common, common, thoroughly disgraceful and incomprehensible!" And with every word uttered insensibly warning in her heart toward him whom she was chastening: "It was not even bad. It was worse than being simply bad. It was stupid!"

He nodded, one hand slowly caressing the dog's head where it lay across his knees.

She watched him a moment, hesitated, then, smiling a little, "So now I know the worst about you, do I not?" she concluded.

He did not answer. She waited, the smile still curving her red mouth. Had she been too severe? she wondered. "You may help me to my feet," she said sweetly. She was very young.

He rose at once, holding out his hands to aid her in that pleasantly impersonal manner so suited to him, and now they stood together in the purple dusk of the uplands—two people young enough to take one another seriously.

They waited for awhile, subdued, soberly picking their path through the dusk. After a few moments she began to feel doubtful, a little uneasy, partly from a reaction which was natural, partly because she was not at all sure what either Quarrier or Major Belwether would think of the terms she was already on with Seward. Suppose they objected? She had never thwarted either of these gentlemen. Besides, she already had a temporary interest in Seward—the interest that women always cherish, quite unconsciously, for the man whose shortcomings they have consented to overlook.

As they crossed the headland through the deepening dusk the acetylene lamps on a cluster of motor cars spread a blinding light across the scrub. The windows of Shotover House were brilliantly illuminated.

"Our shooting party has returned," she said.

They crossed the drive through the white glare of the motor lamps. People were passing—grooms with dogs and guns and fluffy bunches of game birds; several women in motor costumes, veils afloat; a man or two in shooting tweeds or khaki.

As they entered the hall together she turned to him, an indefinable smile curving her lips; then, with a little nod, friendly and sweet, she left him

standing at the open door of the gun-room.

CHAPTER THREE

THE first person he encountered in the gunroom was Quarrier, who favored him with an expressionless stare, then with a bow, quite perfunctory and noncommittal. It was plain enough that he had not expected to meet Seward at Shotover House.

Kemp Ferrall, a dark, stocky, active man of forty, was in the act of draining a glass when through the bottom he caught sight of Seward. He finished in a gulp and advanced, one muscular hand outstretched. "Hello, Stephen! Heard you'd arrived, tried the Scotch and bolted with Sylvia Landis. That's all right, too, but you should have come for the opening day. Lots of native woodcock—eh, Blinky?" turning to Lord Alderdene, and again to Seward. "You know all these fellows—Mortimer, yonder?" There was the slightest ring in his voice, and Leroy Mortimer, red-necked, bulky and heavy-eyed, emptied his glass and came over, followed by Lord Alderdene, blinking madly through his shooting goggles and showing all his teeth like a pointer with a tick. Captain Voucher, a gentleman with the vivid coloring of a healthy groom on a cold day, came up, followed by the Page boys, Willie and Gordon, who shook hands shyly, enchanted to be on easy terms with the notorious Mr. Seward. And, last of all, Tom O'Hara arrived, reeking of the saddle and clanking a pair of trooper's spurs over the door—relics of his bloodless Porto Rico campaign with Squadron A.

It was patent to every man present that the Kemp Ferralls had determined to ignore Seward's recent foolishness, which indicated that he might reasonably expect the continued good will of several sets the orbits of which intersected in the social system of his native city. Indeed, the few qualified to snub him cared nothing about the matter, and it was not likely that anybody else would take the initiative in being disagreeable to a young man the fortunes and misfortunes of whose race were part of the history of Manhattan Island. Swards, good or bad, were a matter of course in New York.

So everybody in the gunroom was civil enough, and he chose Scotch and found a seat beside Alderdene, who sat biting at a smoky pipe and fingering a tumbler of smugler Scotch, blinking away like mad through his shooting goggles at everybody.

"These little brown snipe you call woodcock," he began—"we bagged nine brace, d'you see?"

But of all the damnable bogs and covers—"Rotten," said Mortimer thickly. "Ferrall, you're all calf and biceps, and it's well enough for you to go dogmatising into bogs."

"Oh, go and pot Beverly Plank's tame pheasants," retorted Ferrall amiably. "Captain Voucher had a blank day, but he isn't kicking."

"Not I," said Voucher. "The sport is capital if one can manage to hit the beggars."

"Oh, everybody misses in snap shooting," observed Ferrall—"that is, everybody except Stephen Seward with his unholy left barrel. Crack, and," turning to Alderdene, "It's like taking money from you, Blinky, which reminds me that we've time for a little preference before dressing."

His squinting lordship declined and took an easier position in his chair, extending a pair of little handy legs, draped in baggy tweed knickerbockers and heather spats. Mortimer, industriously distending his skin with whisky, reached for the decanter. The aromatic perfume of the spirits aroused Seward, and he instinctively nodded his desire to a servant.

"This salt air keeps one thirsty," he observed to Ferrall. Then something in his host's expression arrested the glass at his lips. He had already been

One or two other men came in from the billiard room. All greeted Seward amiably, all excepting one, who may not have seen him—an elderly, pink, soft gentleman with white downy chop whiskers and the profile of a benevolent buck rabbit.

"How do you do, Mr. Belwether?" said Seward in a low voice without offering his hand.

Then Major Belwether saw him, bless you—yes, indeed! And, though Seward continued not to offer his hand, Major Belwether meant to have it, bless your heart, and he fussed and fussed and beamed cordially until he secured it in his plump white fingers and pressed it effusively.

There was something about his soft warm hands which had always reminded Seward of the temperature and texture of a newly hatched bird. It had been some time since he had shaken hands with Major Belwether. It was apparent that the bird had not aged any.

Slipping his arm through the pivot sleeve of Lord Alderdene's shooting jacket, hooking the other in Seward's reluctant elbow and driving Mortimer ahead of him, Major Belwether went gallantly away up the stairs, his lordship's bawdy little legs trotting beside him, the soaking gaiters and shoes stopping at every step.

Seward turned off down his corridor, unaware that the Sagamore pup was following close at his heels until he heard Quarrier's even, colorless voice, "Ferrall, would you be good enough to send Sagamore to your kennels?"

"Oh, he's your dog! I forgot," said Seward, turning around.

Quarrier looked at him, pausing a moment.

"Yes," he said coldly; "he's my dog." For a fraction of a second the two men's eyes encountered; then Seward glanced at the dog and turned on his heel with the slightest shrug, and that is all there was to the incident—an anxious, perplexed puppy lugged off by a servant, turning, jerking, twisting, resisting, looking piteously back as his unwilling feet slid over the polished floor.

So Seward walked on alone through the long eastern wing to his room overlooking the sea. He sat down on the edge of his bed, glancing at the clothing laid out for him. He felt tired and disinclined for the exertion of undressing. The shades were up. Night quicksilvered the widow panes so that they were like a dark mirror reflecting his face. He inspected his darkened features curiously. The blurred and somber tinted visage returned the stare.

"Not a man at all—the shadow of a man," he said aloud, "with no will, no courage, always putting off the battle, always avoiding conclusions, always skulking. What chance is there for a man like that?"

As one who raises a glass to drink wine and unexpectedly finds water, he shrugged his shoulders disgustedly and got up. A bath followed. He dressed leisurely and was pacing the room, fussing with his collar, when Ferrall knocked and entered, finding a seat on the bed.

"Stephen," he said bluntly, "I have not seen you since that break of yours at the club."

"Rotten, wasn't it?" commented Seward, tying his tie.

"Perfectly. Of course it doesn't make any difference to Grace or to me, but I fancy you've already heard 'ou it."

"Oh, yes. All I care about is how my mother took it."

"Of course she was cut up, I suppose?"

"Yes. You know how she would look at a thing of that sort—not that any of the nine and seventy jarring sets would care, but those few thousands invading the edges, butting in, half or three-quarters inside, are the people who can't afford to overlook the victim of a fashionable club's displeasure—those and a woman like my mother and several other decent-minded people who happen to count in town."

Ferrall, his legs swinging busily, thought again, then, "Who was the girl, Stephen?"

"I don't think the papers mentioned her name," said Seward gravely.

"Oh, I beg your pardon. I thought she was some notorious actress. Everybody said so. Who were those callow fools who put you up to it? Never mind if you don't care to tell. But it strikes me they are candidates for club discipline as well as you. It was up to them to face the governors, I think."

"No, I think not."

Ferrall, legs swinging busily, considered him.

"Too bad," he mused. "They need not have dropped you."

"Oh, they had to. But as long as the Lenox takes no action I can live that down."

Ferrall nodded: "I came in to say something—a message from Grace—confound it, what was it? Oh, could you—before dinner—now—just sit down and with that infernal facility of yours make a sketch of a man chasing a gun shy dog?"

"Why, yes, if Mrs. Ferrall wishes."

He walked over to the desk in his shirt sleeves, sat down, drew a blank sheet of paper toward him and, dipping his pen, drew carelessly a gun shy setter dog rushing frantically across the stubble and after him, bare-headed, gun in hand, the maddest of men.

(To be continued)

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Major Belwether.

using the decanter a good deal. Except Mortimer, nobody was doing that sort of thing as freely as he.

He set his glass on the table thoughtfully. A tinge of color had crept into his lean cheeks.

Ferrall, too, suddenly uncomfortable, stood up, saying something about dressing. Several men arose a trifle stiffly, feeling in every joint the result of the first day's shooting after all those idle months. Mortimer got up with an unfeigned groan. Seward followed, leaving his glass untouched.