

The Fighting Chance

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"He kissed you?" repeated Grace Ferral incredulously.

"Yes; a number of times. He was silly enough to do it, and I let him."

"I don't know what he said. I was all nerves, confused, scared—a perfect stick, in fact. I don't believe he'd care to try again."

Then Mrs. Ferral deliberately settled down in her furs to extract from the girl beside her every essential detail, and the girl, frank at first, grew shy and silent—reticent enough to worry her friend into a silence which lasted a long while for a cheerful little matron of her sort.

Presently they spoke of other matters—matters interesting to pretty women with much to do in the coming winter between New York, Hot Springs and Florida—surmises as to dinners, dances and the newcomers in the younger sets, and the marriages to be arranged or disarranged, and the scandals humanity is heir to, and the attitude of the bishop toward divorce.

Then at last as the big motor car swung in a circle at Weaniston Crossroads and poked its brass and lacquer muzzle toward Shotover the talk swung back to Seward once more, having traveled half the world over to find him.

"He is the sweetest fellow with his mother," sighed Grace, "and that counts heavily with me. But there's trouble ahead for her—sorrow and trouble enough for them both if he is a true Seward."

"Hereditarily again?" said Sylvia impatiently. "Isn't he man enough to win out? I'll bet you he settles down, marries and—"

"Marries? Not he! How many girls do you suppose have believed that—were justified in believing he meant anything by his attractive manner and nice ways of telling you how much he liked you? He had a desperate affair with Mrs. Mortimer—innocent enough, I fancy. He's had a dozen within three years, and in a week Ben Bonnesdel has come to making eyes at him, and Elleen gives him



no end of chances which he doesn't see. As for Marion Page, the girl has been on the edge of loving him for years. You laugh? But you are wrong. She is in love with him now as much as she ever can be with anybody. Did he propose to you?"

"Yes—I think so."

"Then it's the first time for him. He finds women only too willing to play with him, as a rule, and he doesn't have to be definite. I wonder what he meant by being so definite with you."

"I suppose he meant marriage," said Sylvia serenely, yet there was the slightest ring in her voice, and it amused Mrs. Ferral to try her a little further.

"Oh, you think he really intended to commit himself?"

"Why not?" retorted Sylvia, turning red. "Do you think he found me over-willing, as you say he finds others?"

"You were probably a new sensation for him," inferred Mrs. Ferral musingly. "You mustn't take him seriously, child—a man with his record. Besides, he has the same facility with a girl that he has with everything else he tries; his pen—you know how infernally clever he is, and he can make good verse and write witty jingles, and he can carry home with him any opera and play it decently, too, with the proper harmonies. Anything he finds amusing he is clever with—dogs, horses, pen, brush, music, women."

That was too malicious, for Sylvia had flushed up painfully, and Grace Ferral dropped her gloved hand on the hand of the girl beside her. "Child, child," she said, "he is not that sort. No decent man ever is unless the girl is too."

Sylvia, sitting up very straight in her furs, said, "He found me anything but difficult, if that's what you mean."

"I don't. Please don't be vexed, dear. I plague everybody when I see an opening. There's really only one thing that worries me about it all."

"What is that?" asked Sylvia, without interest.

"It's that you might be tempted to care a little for him, which, being useless, might be unwise."

"I am—tempted."

"Not seriously."

"I don't know." She turned in a sudden nervous impatience foreign to her. "Howard Quarrier is too perfectly imperfect for me. I'm glad I've said it. The things he knows about and doesn't know have been a revelation in this last week with him. There is too much surface, too much exterior admirably fashioned, and inside is all clockwork."

"Of course it's my meddling." "Of course it isn't. I asked your opinion, but I knew what I was going to do. Only I did think him personally possible, which made the expediency, the mercenary view of it, easier to contemplate."

She was becoming as frankly brutal as she knew how to be, which made the revolt the more ominous.

"Sylvia dear, I wish I hadn't meddled. I'm meddling some more, I suppose, when I say to you, Don't give Howard his course for the present. It is a horridly common thing to dwell upon, but Howard is too materially important to be cut adrift on the impulse of the moment."

"I know it."

"You are too clever not to. Consider the matter wisely, dispassionately, intelligently, dear, then if by April you simply can't stand it, talk the thing over with me again," she ended rather vaguely and tristfully, for it had been her heart's desire to wed Sylvia's beauty and Quarrier's fortune.

"Do you believe I could induce him to wear his hair any way except pompadour?" said Sylvia. "And, dear, his hair is so dreadfully silky. Isn't there anything he could take for it?"

"Only a razor, I'm afraid. Those long, thick, soft eyelashes of his are ominous. Eyes of that sort ruin a man for my taste. He might just as reasonably wear my hat."

"But he can't follow the fashions in eyes," laughed Sylvia. "Oh, this is atrocious of us—it is simply horrible to sit here and say such things. I am cold blooded enough as it is, material enough, mean, covetous, contemptible."

"Dear," said Grace Ferral mildly, "you are not choosing a husband; you are choosing a career."

"Grace! Do you wish me to marry him?"

"What is the alternative, dear?"

"Why, nothing—self respect, dowdiness and peace."

"Is that all?"

"All I can see."

"Not Stephen Seward?"

"To marry? No. To enjoy? Yes. Grace, I have had such a good time with him. You don't know! He is such a boy—sometimes, and I believe that I am rather good for him. Not that I'd ever again let him do that sort of thing. Besides, his curiosity is quenched. I am the sort he supposed. Now he's found out he will be nice. It's been days since I've had a talk with him. He tried to, but I wouldn't. Besides, the major has said nasty things about him when Howard was present—nothing definite, only hints, smiling silences, innuendoes on the verge of matters rather unfit, and I had nothing definite to refute. I could not even appear to understand or notice, it was all done in such a horridly vague way. But it only made me like him, and no doubt that across company than he finds in nine places out of ten among his own sort."

"Oh," said Grace Ferral slowly, "if that is the way you feel I don't see why you shouldn't play with Mr. Seward whenever you like."

"Nor I. I've been a perfect fool not to. Howard hates him."

"How do you know?"

"What a question! A woman knows such things. Then, you remember that caricature—so dreadfully like Howard, Howard has no sense of humor. He detests such things. It was the most dreadful thing that Mr. Seward could have done to him."

"Meddled again!" groaned Grace. "Doesn't Howard know that I did that?"

"Yes, but nothing I can say alters his conviction that the likeness was intended. You know it was a likeness. And if Mr. Seward had not told me that it was not intended I should never have believed it to be an accident."

After a prolonged silence Sylvia said overcaressfully: "I don't quite understand Howard. With me anger lasts but a moment, and then I'm open to overtures for peace. I think Howard's anger lasts."

"It does," said Grace. "He was a mummy as a boy—a prig with a prig's memory under all his shallow, showy surface. I'm frank with you. I never could take my cousin either respectfully or seriously, but I've known him to take his own anger so seriously that years after he has visited it upon those who had really wronged him. And he is equipped for retaliation if he chooses. That fortune of his reaches far. Not that I think him capable of using such a power to satisfy a mere personal dislike. Howard has principles, loads of them, but the weapon is there."

"Is it true that Mr. Seward is interested in building electric roads?" asked Sylvia curiously. "Mr. Mortimer said so."

"Then I suppose he is. I'll ask Kemp if you like. Why? Isn't it all right to build them?"

"I suppose so. Howard is in it somehow. In fact, Howard's company is behind Mr. Seward's, I believe."

Grace Ferral turned and looked at the girl beside her, laughing outright.

"Oh, Howard doesn't do mysterious financial things. Besides that, if Howard is in that thing no doubt Kemp and I are too. So your nice

young man is in very safe company." "You draw such silly inferences," said Sylvia coolly, but there was a good deal of color in her cheeks, and she knew it and pulled her big motor veil across her face, fastening it under her chin, all of which amused Grace Ferral infinitely until the subtler significance of the girl's mental processes struck her, sobering her own thoughts. Sylvia, too, had grown serious in her preoccupation, and the partie-deux terminated a few minutes later in a dust of silence over the teacups in the parlor.

A few moments later Sylvia, glancing over her shoulder, noticed that a fine misty drizzle had clouded the easements. That meant that her usual evening stroll on the cliffs with Quarrier before dressing for dinner was off. And she drew a little breath of unconscious relief as Marion Page walked in, her light wooden shooting jacket, her hat, shoes and the barrels of the fowling piece tucked under her left armpit, all glistening frostily with powdered raindrops.

She said something to Grace Ferral about the mist promising good point shooting in the morning, took the order book from a servant, jotted down her request to be called an hour before sunrise, filled in the gunroom records with her score—the species and number bagged and the number of shells used—and, accepting the tea offered, drew out a tiny cigarette-case of sweet bay wood heavily crusted with rose gold.

"With whom were you shooting?" asked Grace, as Marion dropped one well shaped leg over the other and wreathed her delicately tanned features in a smile.

"Stephen Seward and Blinky. They're at it yet, but I had some letters to write." She glanced leisurely at Sylvia and touched the ash tray with the whitening end of her cigarette. "That dog you let Mr. Seward have is a good one. I'm taking him to Jersey next week for the cock shooting."

Sylvia returned her calm gaze blankly. An unreasonable and disagreeable shock had passed through her.

"My North Carolina pointers are useless for close work," observed Marion.



Marion Page.

Indifferently, and she leaned back, watching the blue smoke curling upward from her cigarette.

Sylvia, distracted, but with downcast eyes on fire under the fringed lids, was thinking of the check Seward had given her for Sagamore. The transaction for her had been a business one on the surface only. She had never meant to use the check. She had laid it away among a few letters, relics, pleasant souvenirs of the summer. To her the affair had been softened by a delicate hint of intimacy—the delight he was to take in something that had once been hers had given her a faint taste of the pleasure of according pleasure to a man. And this is what he had done!

In ones and twos the guests reported as the dusk curtailed fog closed in on Shotover. Quarrier came, dry as a chip under his rain coat, but his silky beard was wet with rain, and moisture powdered his long, soft eyelashes and white skin, and his flexible fingers as he drew off his gloves seemed startling in their whiteness through the gathering gloom.

"I suppose our evening walk is out of the question," he said, standing by Sylvia, who had nodded a greeting and then turned her head rather hastily to see who had entered the room. It was Seward, only a vague shape in the gloom, but perfectly recognizable to her. At the same moment Marion Page rose leisurely and strode toward the billiard room.

"Our walk?" repeated Sylvia absently. "It's raining, you know." Yet only a day or two ago she had walked to church with Seward through the rain, the irritated major feeling obliged to go with them. Her eyes followed Seward's figure, suddenly dark against the door of the lighted billiard room, then brilliantly illuminated as he entered, nodded acceptance to Mortimer's invitation and picked up the cue just laid aside by Agatha Cathness, who had turned to speak to Marion.

His fiancée's inattention was not agreeable to Quarrier. A dozen things had happened since his arrival which had not been agreeable to him—her failure to meet him at the Falls Crossing and the reason for her failure and her informal acquaintance with Seward, whose presence at Shotover he had not looked for, and her sudden intimacy with the man he had never particularly liked and whom within six months he had come to detest and to avoid.

In a few years indifference to Seward had changed to passive disapproval, that again in an emotionless dislike, and when the scandal at the Patrons club occurred for the first time in his life he understood what it was to fear the man he disliked. For if Seward had committed the insane imprudence which had cost him his title to membership he had also done something, knowingly or otherwise, which awoke in Quarrier a cold, slow fear, and that fear was dormant, but present now, and it for the time being dictated his attitude and bearing toward the man who might or might not be capable of using viciously a knowledge which Quarrier believed that he must possess.

For that reason when it was not possible to avoid Seward his bearing toward him was carefully civil. Silence was always desirable to Quarrier. Silence concealing all matters was a trait (born and congenitally cultivated to a habit by him in every affair of life—in business, in leisure, in the methodical pursuit of such pleasures as a limited intellect permitted him, in personal and family matters, in public questions and financial problems.

He listened always, but never invited confidences. He had no opinion to express when invited, and he became very, very rich.

And over it all spread a thin membrane of vanity, nervous, not intellectual, sensitiveness, for all sense of humor was absent in this man, whose smile when not a physical effort was automatically and methodically responsive to certain fixed cues.

A sudden rain squall, noisy against the casements, had darkened the room. Then the electric lights broke out with a mild candlelike luster, and Quarrier, standing beside Sylvia's chair, discovered it to be empty.

(Continued from last week)

Real Estate Transfers.

- Homer White et ux to M. F. White, 8.80 a., 17 a r 4 w. \$ 400
- George T. Gerlinger et ux to Williamette Valley Lumber Co., 160 acres, 1 s 8 a r 5 w. 1
- Lila Pugh and hd to Prentiss M. Jones and wife, lots in Falls City, 809
- J. C. Kramer et ux to Sadie F. Dwyer, lots in Falls City, 2500
- A. L. Sperling et al to Maude A. McClunon, 98.6 acres, 1 s 8 a r 4 w. 4732
- Mary I. Babbitt to John W. Allen, 107 acres, 17 a r 1 w. 5000
- J. W. Crider et ux to Walter Davidson, part blk 1, Dallas, 650
- B. D. Fidler et ux to Rosa E. Fidler, lot in Dallas, 1
- M. M. Ellis et ux to H. A. Woods et ux, one-half int. in

61.53 acres, 17 a r 5 w	\$10000
Susan A. Best and hd to Monroe Mulkey, 133 acres, 19 a r 4 w	8645
F. C. Brobst et ux to F. B. Van Nortwick, land in Dallas, 2800	
F. B. Van Nortwick et ux to Olga S. Brobst, 100 acres, 16 s r 5 w	2500
F. B. Van Nortwick et ux to Olga S. Brobst, 70 acres, 16 s r 5 w	2500
F. E. Valliere et ux to Roy H. Campbell, land in Independence Fruit Farms, 2200	
Agatha Quiring and hd to Cornelius B. Priesen, 30 acres, 17 a r 5 w	4000

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