The Fighting Chance ROBERT W. CHAMBERS

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(A continued story.)

The dull red blood mantied Plank's heavy visage. The silence grew grim as he did his slow, laborious thinking. the while his eyes, expressionless and almost opaque in the dim light, never left hers until under the unchanging. merciless inspection the mask dropped for an instant from her anxious face, and he saw what he saw

He was no fool. What he had come to believe she at last had only confirmed. And now the question became simple. Was she worth enlightening? And by what title did she demand his confidence?

"You ask me if it is true any more. You mean about his habits. If I auswer you, it is because I cannot be indifferent to what concerns him. But before I answer I ask you this, Would your interest in his fortunes matter to

She waited, head bent, then;

"I don't know, Mr. Plank," very low. "Did your interest in his fortunes ever concern him?"

"Yes, once." He looked at her sternly, his jaw squaring until his heavy under lip pro-

ship, is he your friend?" "You mean he"-"No; I mean you. I can answer for

him. How is it with you? Do you return what he gives-if there is really friendship between you, or do you take what he offers, offering nothing in re-She had turned rather white under the direct impact of the questions. The jarring repetition of his voice itself was like the dull echo of distant

blows. Yet it never occurred to her to resent it nor his attitude nor his self assumed privilege. She did not care. She no longer cared what he said to her or thought about her, nor did she care that her mask had fallen at last. It was not what he was saying, but what her own heart repeated so heavfly that drove the color from her face. Not he, but she herself had become the pitlless attorney for the prosecution; not his voice, but the clamoring conscience within her demanded by what right she used the name of friendship to characterize the late relations between her and the man to whom she had denied herself.

Then a bitter impatience swept her and a dawning fear, too, for she had set her foot on the fallen mask, and the impulse rendered her reckless.

"Why don't you speak?" she said. "Yes. I have a right to know. I care for him as much as you do. Why don't you answer me? I tell you I care for

"Do you?" he said in a dull voice. "Then help me out, if you can, for don't know what to do, and if I did I haven't the authority of friendship as my warrant. He is in New York. He did go to the country, and at his home the servants suppose he is still away, but he isn't. He is here alone and sick-sick of his old sickness. I saw him, and"-Plank rested his head to do with that collar. I only"on his hand, dropping his eyes-"and he will remember that he met me or that I spoke. And I could do nothing, ing at his elbow, icy and expressionabsolutely nothing. And I don't know where he is. He will go home after awhile. I call every day to see see there I would not know what to do. When he does go home I won't know that is an answer to your question, error. I have not been in Tiffany's in Miss Landis. I give it because you mouths." say you care for him as I do. Will you advise me what to do, you, who are more entitled than I am to know the truth, because he has given you the friendship which he has as yet not accorded to me?"

could find no voice to answer, and after a little while they rose and moved ini a gaucherie. If Quarrier had chosen through the fragrant gloom toward the sparkling lights beyond.

Her voice came back as they entered the brilliant rooms. "I should should he look that way at the foolish like to find Grace Ferrall," she said major, to whose garrulous gossip he "Please keep the othvery distinctly. ers off, Mr. Plank."

Fleetwood had missed his dance with her, but she scarcely heard his eager complaints. Quarrier, coldly inquiring, confronted them, was passed altered face. It relapsed instantly into most without recognition and left behind motionless, looking after them out uncomfortable perplexity began to inof his narrowing, black fringed eyes of a woman.

voice, she raised her colorless face. "Will you take me home with you,

Grace is. Are you in a hurry to go? was evident that Agatha had chanced It's only 4 o'clock."

They were at the entrance to the supper room. Plank drew up a chair for ber, and she sank down, dropping her elbows on the small table and resting her face between her fingers.

Pegged out, Sylvia?" exclaimed Ferrall incredulously. "You? What's the younger set coming to?" and be motioned a servant to fill her glass. But she pushed it aside, with a shiver, and gave Plank a strange look, which he scarcely understood at the moment.

"More caprices. All sorts of 'em on the programme," muttered Ferrall, looking down at her from where he stood beside Plank. "O tempora! O Sylvia! Plank, would you mind hunting up my wife? I'll stay and see that this infant doesn't fall asleep."

But Sylvia shook her head, saying: "Please go, Kemp. I'm a little tired, that's all. When Grace is ready I'll leave with her." And at her gesture Plank seated himself, while Ferrall, shrugging his square shoulders, sauntered off in quest of his wife, stopping a moment at a neighboring table to speak to Agatha Calthness, who sat there with Captain Voucher, the collar of superb diamonds and aquamarines on her slender throat a pale blaze of splendor.

Plank was hungry, and he said so in his direct fashion. Sylvin nodded and exchanged a smile with Agatha, who turned at the sound of Plank's voice. For awhile, as he ate and drank largely, she made the effort to keep up a desultory conversation, particularly when anybody to whom she owed an explanation hove darkly in sight on the horizon. But Plank's appetite was in proportion to the generous lines on which nature had fashloned him, and she paid less and less attention to convention and a triffe more to the beauty of Agatha's jewels, until the silence at the small table in the corner remained unbroken except by the faint tinkle of sliver and crystal and the bubbling hiss of a glass refilled.

Major Belwether, his .white, fluffy, chop whiskers brushed rabbit fashion, peeped in at the door, started to tiptoe out again, caught sight of them and came trotting back, beaming rosy effusion. He leaned roguishly over the table, his moist eyes a-twinkle with suppressed mirth, then, bestowing a sprightly glance on Plank, which said very plainly, "I'm up to one of my frrepressible jokes again!" he held up a smooth, white and overmanicured forefinger.

"I was in Tiffany's yesterday," he said, "and I saw a young man in there who didn't see me, and I peeped ovar his shoulder, and what do you think he was doing?"

She lifted her eyes a little wearily. "I don't know," she said.

"I do," he chuckled. "He was choosing a collar of blue diamonds and aquamarines-te-he-probably to wear almself-te-he! Or perhaps he was going to be married-he-he-next winter-ahem-next November-ha-ha! I fon't know, I'm sure, what he meant

Something in Sylvia's eyes stopped he didn't know me. I-I do not think him, and, following their direction, he turned around to find Quarrier stand-

"Oh," said the aged jester, a little disconcerted, "I'm caught talking out what can be done, but if he were in church, I see! It was only a harmless little fun, Howard."

"Do you mean you saw me?" asked what to say, what to try to do. And Quarrier, pale as a sheet. "You are in

> Belwether, crestfallen under the white menace of Quarrier's face, nodded and essayed a chuckle without

Sylvia, at first listless and uninterested, looked inquiringly from the ma-But Sylvia, dry eyed, dry lipped, jor to Quarrier, surprised at the suppressed feeling exhibited over so triva collar like Agatha's for her, what of it? But as he had not, on his own statement, what did it matter? Why was accustomed and whose inability to refrain from prying was notorious

Turning disdainfully, she caught a glimpse of Plank's shocked and althe usual inert expression, and a queer, vade her. What had happened to stir up these three men? Of what impor-Then Ferrall came, and, hearing his tance was an indiscretion of an old gentleman whose fatuous vanity and consequent blunders everybody was Kemp, when you take Grace?" she familiar with? And, after all, Howsked.
"Of course. I don't know where fany's. He said so himself. But it on the collar that Belwether thought

he saw somebody else examining. She turned and looked at the dead white neck of the girl. The collar was wonderful-a miracle of pale fire: And Sylvia, musing, let her thoughts run on, dreamy eyes brooding. She was glad that Agatha's means permitted her now to have such things. It had been understood for some years that the Calthness fortune was la rather an slarming condition. Howard had been able recently to do a favor or two for old Peter Caithness. She had heard the major bragging about it. Evidently Mr. Calthuess must have improved the chance if he was able to present such gems to his daughter. And now omebody would marry her. Perhaps Captain Voucher, perhaps even Alderdene, perhaps, as rumor had it now



Elleen Shannon.

and then, Plank might venture into the arena. Poor Plank! More of a mau than people understood. She under-She-

And her thoughts swung back like the returning tide to Siward, and her heart began heavily again, and the slightly faint sensation returned. She passed her ungloved, unsteady fingers across her eyelids and forehead, looking up and around. The major and Howard had disappeared. Plank, beside her, sat staring stupidly into his empty wineglass.

"Isn't Mrs. Ferrall coming?" she said wearily.

Plank gathered his cumbersome bulk and stood up, trying to see through the entrance into the ballroom. After a moment he said: "They're in there, talking to Marion. It's a good chance to make our adleus."

As they passed out of the supper room Sylvia paused behind Agatha's chair and bent over her. "The collar is beautifui," she said, "and so are you, Agatha." And, with a little impulsive caress for the jewels, she passed on, unconscious of the delicate flush that spread from Agatha's shoulders to her hair. And Agatha, turnof Plank, moving ponderously past on Sylvin's heels.

"If you'll find Lella, I'm ready at any time," she said carelessly and resumed her tete-a-tete with Voucher, who had plainly been annoyed at the interruption.

Ferrall and his wife and Sylvia were making their adieus to Marion and her mother when Plank came up, and

he, too, took that opportunity. Later Sylvin, passing through the great hall, shrouded in silk and ermine, furned to offer him her hand, saying in a low voice: "I am at home to you. to you understand? Always," she added nervously. He looked after her, with an unconscious sigh, unaware that anything in himself had claimed ber respect.

(To be continued.)

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