

Under Fire

By RICHARD PARKER

Based on the drama of
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of "It Pays to Advertise"

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SYNOPSIS.

Georgy Wagstaff, daughter of Sir George, of the British admiralty, hints at a liaison between her governess, Ethel Willoughby, and Henry Streetman. Ethel denies it. Henry Streetman calls on Brewster, Sir George's butler, who is a German spy, about his failure to get at admiralty papers in Sir George's possession. He phones to German secret service headquarters, Streetman, the German spy, and Roeder (alias Brewster, the butler) are discussing the possibility of war. When Ethel appears he tries to force her to get from Sir George knowledge of the sailing orders to the British fleet. Though she believes him a French instead of a German spy, she refuses until he threatens her. She begs him to announce their secret marriage, as Georgy is suspicious, but he puts her off. At tea Georgy and her lover, Guy Falconer, tease Sir George. Streetman makes an awkward attempt to talk politics. Streetman, the German spy, Sir George Wagstaff, British naval official, Ethel Willoughby, secret wife of Streetman, and others are having tea at the Wagstaff home. The party is discussing a play. Charlie Brown, newspaper man of New York, entertains the tea party with his views on the threatened war in Europe.

If you recall your history lessons, you'll remember the hard time the North had to get enough soldiers during the Civil war, and how finally conscription was adopted. You know, too, that the English have had to use conscription to get enough men in the present conflict. Patriotism is a queer thing with most of us. We wave flags and enjoy Fourth of July oratory, but many of us are inclined to shy at real sacrifice. An interesting discussion of the subject comes up in this installment.

An English tea party at the home of Sir George Wagstaff of the British admiralty, includes Charlie Brown, American newspaper reporter, and Streetman, a German spy. The group is discussing a possible European war.

CHAPTER VI—Continued.

"You do talk like a German," he told Streetman after he had blown out a cloud of smoke.

"That is a matter of opinion," the other replied stiffly.

"Yes, I think he talks like a German, too," Georgy Wagstaff chimed in. "But as we know he isn't one, does it really matter? . . . Go on, gentlemen! Argue!" Sir George's daughter was having the time of her young life.

"Here's one thing I'd like to know," Guy put in—"where on earth is all the blooming money to come from?"

"My dear boy, there's nothing so elastic as national credit," his friend from the States replied with a calm assurance that came partly from the speaker's having, at one time in his career, conducted the financial page for his newspaper. "Why, down in that two-by-four affair in Mexico, one of their week-end presidents ran out of money; so he issued an order for fifty thousand dollars, stuck a gun in the other gentleman's chest, and said, 'That is worth fifty thousand dollars'—and it was."

Mrs. Falconer felt that it was hardly proper that the men should monopolize all the conversation.

"I can't believe there will really be a war—a great war," she announced. "Think what it would mean—absolute barbarism! And this is the twentieth century."

"It would put us back a hundred years," Sir George declared wearily. He both realized and dreaded the horrors that he knew must inevitably attend such a titanic struggle as seemed imminent.

"It's too horrible to think of," Ethel Willoughby exclaimed with something approaching a shudder. "It doesn't seem real that we're sitting here quite calmly talking over even the possibility of such a thing."

"And this won't be a war like other wars," the American pointed out. "There'll be no personal heroes—no charges up San Juan hill—no bands playing or flags flying. It's going to be a cold, deadly thing of mathematics and mobilizations, of big guns and submarines, of aeroplanes and ammunition, of millions of little mites called men, who will be only little, unimportant cogs in the big machine. It's going to be brutal, cruel, barbarous murder, conducted on the most modern scientific basis."

"And afterwards what'll we do for

men?" Georgy Wagstaff inquired thoughtfully, as if the death of males that threatened the world were a calamity almost too great to face. "Not that I really care so much about that personally," she added, with an insinuating glance at Guy Falconer, who always dogged her footsteps, "for men bore me."

"Thanks!" Guy remarked. If Georgy had a fault (a possibility he was seldom willing to admit, even to himself) he felt that it consisted of a caustic tongue. And occasionally the thought of living with her, facing her across the breakfast table, for instance, put a vague fear into him. Up to the present time, however, he had always succeeded in ridding himself of such misgivings.

"And who do you think is going to win, Mr. Brown?" Sir George put the question abruptly. He, as well as Streetman, perceived that their somewhat bizarre guest from the other side of the Atlantic had gathered unto himself a surprising fund of information during his short stay in their midst.

Before Charlie Brown could reply, the spy Streetman threw himself into the conversational gap.

"I'm sure from what Mr. Brown has said he agrees with me that the Germans have the best chance," he interposed.

Mr. Brown himself merely smiled at the interruption. He may have thought Streetman a cad—a lobster, he would probably have termed him. But whatever his feelings might have been, he concealed them admirably.

"Well, I'll tell you—" he said, as he turned his back squarely upon Streetman and faced Sir George. "When I was drinking Munich beer, I was rather pro-German. But now that I'm switched to tea, I've sort of swung over to the allies."

A burst of laughter, punctuated with cries of "Bravo!" greeted the answer.

Turning to them all again, "You see," he explained, "I like the English as individuals, and I like a lot of their general ways, too. I admire the easy-going fashion in which they do business. I commend the fact that they won't talk shop over a luncheon. I like their afternoon tea." He smiled at Miss Willoughby as he said that. "I like the fact that knights and ladies, clerks and shopgirls take their half-hour off for it. I like the way they respect their own laws—when they decide to make one they decide at the same time to keep it. But, collectively, the English irritate me, because they're so blamed sure they're a little bit superior to all the rest of the world. That's annoying, personally, but I can and I do admire it as a great racial quality that's made 'em win out a thousand times. If England goes to war, I'll take the English about a year before they realize they have a war—they really are slow, you know—but once they wake up to it they'll raise the deuce, and I think they'll win."

Sage noddings of various heads and the exchange of approving glances on the part of the members of the little party—or of all but Henry Streetman—set a seal of appreciation upon Charlie Brown's views.

"Please God, you're right!" Sir George Wagstaff cried fervently, with a show of emotion that was, for him, most unusual.

"Please God, he is!" Mrs. Falconer agreed.

"I do hope so! The Germans are so aggressive!" Ethel Willoughby observed.

"And so rude!" Georgy added. She could not forget—much less forgive—having been shouldered off a sidewalk in Berlin by the kaiser's haughty officers.

"Ah! But I fancy that pride in one's country is a universal trait in every nation," her more moderate father said.

"Exactly! And as Mr. Brown has pointed out, we English have a tendency to be somewhat superior also." As he spoke, Streetman rose. He was becoming restless under the galling of that one-sided discussion of the merits of the nations.

"Well, I hope there isn't any war!" Guy Falconer said fervently. "If there is, you can bet your boots I'm not going near it."

"Guy!" Sir George turned upon him with incredulity writ large upon his fine face.

"Oh, I mean it, Sir George," Guy insisted shamelessly. "If it comes to war, this will be a war of millions. If there are a thousand men killed in a battle or only nine hundred and ninety-nine, what difference does it make except to the thousandth man? None! But if I happened to be he, it'd represent a deuce of a lot to me, and, with my luck, I'd be the first man shot anyhow. . . . No, sir! Military service is not compulsory in England, thank heaven! And if there is a war, I'm going to sit home at my club and discuss very harshly the mistakes of the war office."

Guy's mother regarded him with no less amazement than did Sir George.

"My son—you're not serious?" she exclaimed, scarcely believing what she heard.

"Of course he is!" said Georgy. "I never saw a man who thought as much of his own precious hide—so much more than anyone else thinks of it!"

"If you're quite in earnest, Guy, I am positively ashamed of you," Sir George Wagstaff told him. As a man who was high in the councils of his country, Sir George did indeed hear the young man's declaration with something bordering upon alarm, as well as mere disapproval. If other English youths should take the same attitude as Guy's, he foresaw endless trouble for the recruiting stations.

"If I were shot," Guy retorted, "I suppose the fact that I could say, 'Now, Sir George is not ashamed of me,' would ease the pain a bit? . . . No, thank you! I tell you, if worse comes to worst, I shall sail for Cuba."

At that his mother approached him much as she must have when as a small boy he had been guilty of naughtiness. She thought it high time to assert her authority.

"Guy," she said, "I forbid you to talk like that."

"Oh, now, mother—" he remonstrated.

"I think he's spoofing," Charlie Brown told them, as quick to adopt a new word as he was to detect signs of shamming on Guy's part. "If war comes, I bet he'll go to the front. He's like the rest of you English—half ashamed to say what he really feels."

The embarrassed Guy faced him sheepishly.

"Oh, I say—that's all swank!" he remonstrated.

"Swank! That's a good word!" Charlie Brown exclaimed. "I'm going to take that back to America, too."

And then, returning to the subject of their conversation, who was manifestly ill at ease, Mr. Brown continued, "Once you do touch Guy on the raw of his patriotism he'd go through and go through big."

"I think Mr. Brown is right," Streetman declared. "It was only two months ago at the Ritz in Paris that I met a young English officer. We got to chatting. He seemed very down in the month—some trouble over a girl; he'd been jilted, or hadn't enough money to propose, or she'd married someone else—usual sort of thing, so I paid no attention to the incident. But one night, walking along the Champs Elysees, a man ahead of me suddenly turned aside behind one of the trees. Silhouetted against the moonlight I saw his hand go to his pocket, as if to draw a revolver. I ran up to him, and seized the pistol. . . . It was my young English friend. I dare say the moon had gone to his head. He was quite desperate—really started to struggle with me at first. We stood there for an hour talking. I'd taken quite a fancy to him. It seemed such a waste of good material for him to kill himself; but he was quite firm. Finally, I appealed to him as an English officer in his majesty's service. Some day his country might need him—I told him—and he wouldn't be there, because he was a coward—a traitor. . . . That hit him. I pressed the point. And eventually he gave me his word."

They had all listened eagerly to Streetman's vivid recital.

"Did he keep his word?" Ethel asked.

"I don't know! I've never seen him since; but he's the sort of man who would. I merely mention the incident to show that when nothing else counted, his country did. And most men are like that," Streetman added, as he patted Guy Falconer on the back.

Somehow, Guy resented the familiarity. But he merely moved away. So far as he knew, Streetman was a decent enough chap. But he did not relish being patronized by him.

All at once Sir George Wagstaff noticed for the first time that the afternoon light was fast fading. Looking at his watch, he rose hastily.

"By Jove!" he said, "I'd no idea it was so late. I shall have to be getting back to the admiralty."

"I must be leaving, too," Streetman announced.

"So must I," said Charlie Brown.

"Good-by, Miss Willoughby!"

"Oh, don't you hurry off, too!" Ethel protested. "Stay and have one more cup of tea!" In some inexplicable way she felt drawn toward the outspoken American. And she could not avoid the impression that they were destined to know each other better.

"I can't resist you," he said, yielding at once to her cordial urging. And he accepted another cup of tea.

Sir George and Streetman were already at the door when Charlie Brown called after the older man:

"If there's any news of your feet for publication, Sir George, you'll let me know?"

"Surely, surely!" came the good-natured answer. And with that Sir George left them, accompanied by Streetman, to whom he offered a lift in his car.

CHAPTER VII.

Redmond of the Irish Guards.

Charlie Brown had thanked his friend of the British admiralty. And now he said to those who still lingered there in Miss Willoughby's sitting room—

"You know, I think there is going to be news—and mighty soon. You listen to me."

"We have been listening with great pleasure," Mrs. Falconer informed him. "But now we must go."

He sprang to his feet.

"That is a bit of a hint," he exclaimed, albeit with entire good humor.

"But don't forget I told you I loved to talk!"

"You'll come again?" Ethel asked him.

"Often, I hope!" he said heartily, as he took the hand she held out to him.

"Good-by, Charlie!" Guy Falconer said with a wink that the others did not catch. "If I don't see you before I sail, drop me a postal. My address will be in care of the General Post Office, Havana, Cuba."

Charlie Brown smiled at him indugently. He knew just how serious Guy was in regard to shirking his duty. But Mrs. Falconer was still troubled by her son's apparent disaffection.

"Please, Guy!" she pleaded. She could not bear to hear her own child brand himself as unpatriotic, if not an actual coward.

"I never knew till now that you were a Spartan mother," Guy told her. "Besides, I didn't think you'd want to see your own little boy all shot to pieces."

They were on the point of leaving when Sir George's butler brought the news to Miss Willoughby that Captain Redmond was calling.

"Captain Redmond!" she repeated, as if the news were almost too strange for belief. "Ask him to come up, Brewster."

At the name, Guy Falconer turned to Ethel joyfully.

"Larry back after a whole year?" he cried. "Isn't that ripping!"

"Oh, we must wait to see Larry!" his mother said.

"Oh, indeed we must!" added Georgy.

In another moment Captain Redmond stood before them. There was certainly no question as to his greeting. Guy Falconer all but fell upon his neck.

"Hello, good people!" the newcomer said with an all-embracing smile. He was Irish. The hint of the brogue even in those few words showed that much, had his dancing blue eyes left any chance of doubt as to his race. Admiration, as well as affection, shone in the faces of his friends as they feasted their own eyes upon him, for the captain was unquestionably a fine figure of a man, in his spruce uniform of the Irish Guards. Ethel Willoughby was the last to greet him. But when the rest had released him she held out her hand to him.

"Larry, I am glad to see you," she said from the bottom of her heart.

He stopped short in his acknowledgments of the others' greetings. And turning abruptly to Ethel, as if he had eyes for her alone, he exclaimed:

"Sure, not as much as I am to see you!" And he fairly beamed his delight at seeing her once more.

"When did you get back, old man?" Guy asked, when they had introduced Larry and Charlie Brown.

"Only this morning," Captain Redmond answered, "but I thought I'd have to come here directly to pay my respects to an old friend—and I meet three old friends."

Georgy Wagstaff pouted at that. She was extremely fond of the dashing officer, and she dearly loved to banter with him.

"I'm not so terribly old," she objected—"or do you think I've aged much?"

"In a year, sure, you've grown younger. You're only a slip of a girl now; and you were getting to be quite a young woman when I left," he told her.

"It's a whole year since you went away," Ethel Willoughby half-whispered to Redmond as he came nearer her.

"And it seems a hundred!" he declared. Charlie Brown, catching his reply to her, knew of a certainty that he was Irish. But underneath the captain's fulsome remarks there often lay a sincerity that was more deeply rooted than a casual bystander might suppose.

Mr. Brown felt that he must really tear himself away from that interesting party.

"Good-by, Miss Willoughby!" he said. "Good-by, captain! I hate to bust up a reunion like this, but I've got to get back and write a piece for the paper."

Still Mrs. Falconer would not let her son's friend escape quite yet.

"Mr. Brown," she said, "for some reason I like you. I fancy it's because you amuse me. Why don't you dine with us? Perhaps if I ask Captain Redmond, Ethel will come."

"Let's dine early," Guy said. "Don't bother to dress. We'll go to the Savoy grill and meanwhile I'll get tickets for the Palace. There's an awfully clever American girl there now."

"We'll pick you up here, Ethel," his mother added—"say in half an hour. We might be able to motor to Richmond for dinner and still see the show."

"Will you pick me up here, too?" Captain Redmond asked.

"In half an hour!" she agreed.

In the doorway Georgy Wagstaff cast a roguish glance back at her pretty governess.

What do you think will come out of this meeting between Redmond and his old sweetheart Ethel Willoughby? Is it likely that the girl will tell him the truth at once?

(TO BE CONTINUED)

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