Under Fire

By **Richard Parker**
Based on the drama of
Roi Cooper Megrue
Author of
"UNDER COVER"
and Co-Author of
"IT PAYS TO ADVERTISE"

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This is a story of the European war. It is not a story of battles and strategy, but of love, intrigue, plotting and counter-plotting, and secrets; a story human and romantic. It is not a plea for preparedness or for anything else. The great conflict across the water will produce some great literature—such as the American Civil war and the Franco-Prussian war and the Napoleonic wars produced—and much trash. Metropolitan critics smile in saying that "Under Fire" makes a bid for lasting popularity. Read it and judge for yourself.

CHAPTER I.

Just a Hint of Scandal.

Georgy Wagstaff sauntered into Miss Ethel Willoughby's dining room, and settled in the daintiest and fluffiest of summer costumes. Georgy was the daughter of Sir George Wagstaff of the British aristocracy. She found the room deserted, except for her father's admirable butler, who was at the moment in the act of placing a tea-tray upon Miss Willoughby's table.

"Oh, Brewster—is Miss Willoughby in?" she inquired.

The correct Brewster immediately straightened himself up in his best manner.

"No, miss! I think not," he replied. Georgy strolled to the window.

"I dare say Ethel's in here directly," she said—as bereft as much as to the butler. "I'll wait."

"Yes, miss." Brewster acquiesced. He knew that the duties of his profession to be went out, closing the doors softly behind him.

Georgy Wagstaff stood idly looking out of the window upon the view of the Thames. It was an August afternoon and the river shimmered alluringly in the sunshine manifold. But Ethel had asked her to meet a few friends, and Georgy was fond enough of Miss Willoughby not to be regretful for having forgone the delights of a perfect summer evening out of doors. As she stood there in the window her governess entered.

"Oh! Hello, Georgy! Am I late or are you early?" Miss Willoughby called as she saw that one or the other of them was already waiting.

"Both!" said Georgy with a smile. "I did want two minutes with Ethel before you came."

"Is it a confidence?" Ethel cried, forgetful of her governess's presence. "Can you carry secrets?"

"Can I carry secrets?" Georgy exclaimed, with an air of relief in spite of herself. Her feelings had, as a matter of fact, been somewhat crushed by Ethel's remark. She was prepared for being brave enough to defy the conventions, but her father would not.

"But I haven't defied conventions," Ethel protested. "I've only asked you to see Georgy's au fit to emphasize the fact that you're chaperoning."

"Just as well Georgy with a smile. "I did want two minutes with her before I met the others."

"Of course!" the elder girl replied. "But it's no hardship"—she assured her. She sat down on one end of a long settee and began to remove her gloves, whereupon her younger charge perched herself at the other end of the seat.

"It's about your past," Georgy began in deadly seriousness.

Ethel laughed at her tragic manner. "Have I—a past?" she asked lightly.

But the romantic Georgy was not to be diverted from her mood.

"That's just the question," she commented. "You know I shouldn't mind in the least if you had. I believe in people living their own lives, in their own way." Georgy prided herself that she was "advanced." She considered the ordinary hamlet of tittle-tattle toward what is termed morality to be stodgy and Victorian. Indeed she quite fancied the more free-and-easy continental view of life.

"What on earth are you talking about?" Ethel demanded. "I've been in love since childhood—but I'm not uncomfortable beneath the frank stare of her young friend.

"You remember a month ago, when Mr. Fairbank went to Brighton?" Georgy continued relentlessly.

"When I said I went to Brighton? When I went to Brighton," Miss Willoughby repeated in a thoughtful manner.

But the chill of her remark was lost upon her patient pupil—whose governess Georgy was too intent upon uncovering the romance that she thought she had stumbled upon to be so easily disconcerted.

"Well, today at lunch Hugh Middleton said you couldn't have been in Brighton that week—" she paused to watch the effect of her bombshell.

"Did he? Really?" Miss Willoughby replied with well-bred indifference. But beneath her cool calm her heart was beating furiously. She felt for all the world like some wild thing caught in a net. Georgy's eyes were fixed in little bird eyes that she feared must reveal her every secret.

"Yes! He was in Paris also, he said."

"Paris!" Ethel echoed with a faint gasp.

Youth is ever cruel; and Georgy had no thought of sparing her companion. Her sole idea was that if Ethel were in love with some secret lover she wanted to share the romance with her.

"Yes!" she went on remorselessly. "And he saw you there twice that week, and both times with Cyril Streetman."

"But that's impossible!" Ethel protested.

Mr. Middleton seemed very positive," the younger girl said some-what triumphantly.

"It's too absurd!" Ethel cried, forgetful that Georgy was a flirtatious, and can very easily prove!"

"Can I prove?" Georgy exclaimed, with an air of relief in spite of herself. Her feelings had, as a matter of fact, been somewhat crushed by Ethel's remark. She was prepared for being brave enough to defy the conventions, but her father would not.

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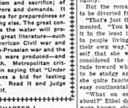

"All That Narrow-Mindedness Is Old Fashioned."

and reminded her admiringly. Miss Willoughby's fair head had just the hint of red in it that was at the same time Georgy's despair and delight. And Ethel was for enough past the schoolgirl age to have her hair waved softly which Georgy still possessed—and inclined to envy. Georgy's own hair showed the healthy glow which comes from much outdoor life, and the abundance of the finest chestnut.

"You see," said Georgy, "I'm afraid I'm going to be a very presuming one—"

"Presume!" Ethel interrupted. "You couldn't be that when you and your father have been so very good to us. Come on! Out with it!"

It was then that Ethel Willoughby felt that she was deeply in the debt of the Wagstaffs—Cyril's father and daughter. Before entering their house in Cyril's company she had known them more than a footing of social equality. But from the moment she had been received by them as Cyril's friend she had been made to feel that she occupied a position of the most delightful intimacy with them. Cyril's father had been kind as well as flattering to her, and the whole of the family had received at her watch exclaimed with surprise.

"However, it's after five. I must have dropped a bit for the party."

But Georgy would not be put off so easily.

"Well, forewarned is forearmed," she said sententiously. It was clear that she did not intend to be repulsed like a child. If Henry Streetman were still in her mind, she saw no reason why she should denounce in order to please Ethel or anybody else.

"There's nothing to be forewarned about," Miss Willoughby observed, as she poured at the door that opened into her bedroom. "You surely have no secrets from me, Georgy?" she added, with a little laugh.

"No, no!" Streetman protested. "We must not criticise the dear boy's nerve us." And as he spoke he went to the telephone in a corner of the room. Picking up the instrument, he paused and turned to the butler with a look of amusement. "Sir George Wagstaff—his George of his majesty's navy—would be rather surprised if he knew that from his home we were communicating with our friends, the Germans," he remarked.

Bellamy, the butler, responded, with a deprecating air of dignity. "Sir George is not at home, sir. He has left orders that he is not to be disturbed on any account."

"Now lucky that does!" Streetman ordered once more. "And now to re-ports to headquarters again!" he exclaimed, whop the butler had turned to the telephone and left the Wagstaff's door. "Hello! City, 4225!" he said in a low tone distinctly.

Meanwhile the butler hovered near at hand.

"You think, mein Herr, there will be war?" he asked respectfully.

"I do not know. But we are ready. And if war does come, it will be the happy-man's-hour—the day at last!" He turned to the instrument, for he had begun speaking into the transmitter. "Hello! City, 4225! Hello! Are you there? Who is speaking, please? Hello! I am there? Who is speaking, please? Hello! I am thirteen seventeen," he said, giving the number which he was known in the German secret service. "Yes! We have no news of the Englishman here; we have tried everything. Very well. Goodby!"

He put down the instrument, and a look of annoyance as well as perplexity was upon his face as he wheeled about.

"What is it, mein Herr?" his companion asked in an anxious voice. "Is the bad news?" He had sung waiters in conjunction with Streetman, and he was anxious to hear the details of trouble upon him.

"I am sorry they must know tonight, without fail, the destination of the Flying Fleet," Streetman replied. He cast a quick glance toward Ethel and Georgy, who, as he knew, had not laughed, but have made much fun of his telephone conversation. "Stones that close!" he ordered. "Ah! that is done. Now I am quite distracted," he said in a relieved voice, when the deft butler had closed the door and started in turning the key silently in the lock. "I must go to the telephone in the house at all hours of the day or night. My George's father had seen to it that such things as bicps and lurker—whether spies, dukes or dress—were well shut. It was his genius for detail that gave him the charge of the assignment to his present duty.

"Now, Bellamy, you must keep Miss Willoughby's setter in an attitude of relaxation that revealed some

"They Say They Must Know To-night."

what the marvelous strain which attends the performance of exploits in the realm of aviation.

"Otherwise, mein eh, Herr Hosier? And your part?" he remarked in a sudden burst of good fellowship. For Streetman had always been popular with the other Hamlet pulled himself together stiffly.

"Mein part is to be ready to fly, here," he answered proudly. "It is my part to see that the Flying Fleet is given to the ships at Spithead—where they are going when this revive to sea—"

"Let my, Hosier, saluted again.

"I have done my best," he said apologetically.

"I am sure you have," Streetman replied. "You know the Willoughbys have not fightly overlook stupidity in those of the family exchequer," he added, with a laugh. And then he motioned toward the telephone