UNDER FIRE

A ROY COOPER MELVILLE Mystery of Love and Adventure

By RICHARD BARKER

SYNOPSIS.

George Wakefield, daughter of Sir George, a famous admiralty lawyer, is taken betrayed, her governess, Ethel Streetman, and her maid, Jessie Bell, are left penniless. Ethel's father refuses her aid and while waiting for her cable to Bower-ley, Ethel and Jessie are left to shift for themselves, almost in the streets of London. It appears in Sir George's possession. Sir George's son, Hubert, is in love with Ethel.

A fine young Englishwoman is caught in the net of international plotting and is made the victim of circumstances—tragic circumstances. She becomes innocently involved with an enemy of her country and he proceeds to use her as a tool. How she is cornered and prodded, as boys might tease a wounded wild animal, is told vividly in this installment.

Streetman, the German spy, and Reader Lloyd, the writer, the latter, are discussing the possibility of war.

CHAPTER II—Continued.

"Yes, yes! Of course!" Streetman agreed hastily, as if he would forestall any patriotic exhibition. "Still, our world has to live with the business of life. One day I shall make the trip to Berlin, and then you shall see it all—" He broke off suddenly, for he heard Miss Willoughby stirring on the other side of their closed door. "Good Ta the door."

"Very good, Streetman!" Mr. Streetman said in a clear, firm voice, which he intended to carry well beyond the closed door. "I'll wait here for Miss Willoughby."

And then Sir George's butler bowed and left the room.

CHAPTER III.

A Fox in the Household.

Streetman had hardly closed the doors behind him before Ethel Willoughby appeared.

"Oh, Henry! You surprised me," she said.

"I came before the others," Streetman explained, "because there is something you must do for me at once."

"About the fleet, I suppose," she said, somewhat wearily, as she turned away from him.

"How did you know?" He shot the question at her almost too quickly for caution. But for the moment he interfered something approaching alarm. But her answer reassured him.

"Nowadays it is only of the fleet you ever talk to me. And she regarded him with eyes that were pathetic, if not reproachful. Once it had seemed to her that Henry Streetman was interested in her. But of late she had been obliged to admit to herself that his interest was not in her person. Her discovery had come as a revelation to the strenuous exercise that lay behind the man's every word. Even the tone-of-fact fashion he presented wrought in her fancies that made impression on his mind.

"Don't worry about it now dear, Sir George where the ships at Spithead are going to be on any particular day. "Find out if they sail together, or if they will disperse at once."

As she faced Miss Smith knew the somewhat hard look of her eyes, and the white manner.

"Well, Ethel, what?" she heeded. "Before we go into that, tell me—when are you going to let people know we're married?"

Streetman remembered then that he had a many-sided role to play. And therefore he was not up to the girl, taking one of Ethel's hands in his own. Her fingers were cold, but he looked down at her in a most tenderly fashion.

"Ah, my dear! I'd let them know now—only I can't—can't! I only can't be sure!

"But we must announce our marriage at once!" she insisted, wildly. "Announce our marriage—why?"

"Cousin Willoughby told me, after a few minutes ago that when I said I was in London on business I'd have to see you and me together in Paris," she explained in hasty tones.

"You did not explain?" he asked.

"That we were on our honeymoon? No! I kept my word in you. I said I was in England." She looked at him in a puzzled way as he left her then and proved the floor in a restless fashion.

"Of course, it's simply proved that I was sent to Brighton," Ethel continued. "George would not have me in London now that the fleet is leaving and the town has become lonely. I think she need have thought of that before she sent me away. I think, Henry—" She took upon the settee and shared beside her—for the moment a picture of a pretty bride.

Streetman hesitated and bent over her.

"My dear! We must wait until! I can announce matters with my family."

"Cousin Willoughby is the most provoking man on earth!" she exclaimed. "I've had an air of finality—as if there were really no argument against my going to Brighton!"

"Of course. You have said that for a month!" Ethel reminded him. "You're good to your silence we were married."

"Dear, dear, Ethel," he agreed in desperation. "I promise! And you will leave tonight almost the first?" he added in the same breath.

"But, Henry, if I do ask Sir George and he tells me, isn't it rather a shock by doing to do then to come to you and—"

"No, no, no—as I've often told you!" he interrupted. It seemed to him that her objections were interminable. And under the stress of the moment from his reverses his forbearance was at last reaching the end. To hide his anxiety and his irritation, he stepped to the window and looked out.

"But Sir George trusts me!" Ethel resumed. Streetman stifled a mumbling German oath when he heard her say so. "When he answers my questions," she continued, "he does so because he thinks I'm just silly curious. He never dreams I'd repeat what he says to anyone. It all puts me in a horrid position. Sir George is a loyal Englishman, and if he thought—"

Streetman would not let her finish. He wheeled about and said sharply, to forestall even the merest mention of such a thing as an informer—let alone spy—

"And you are a loyal Englishwoman and I am loyal to—France!"

"Then why do you pose yourself off as a German spy?"

"Because it is the wish of my employers, the French secret service. It, Ethel, for France," he decided on a grand manner, which he intended to carry conviction with it.

"It's all quite beyond me," she said with a hopeless air. They had had many such discussions. And never yet had she been able to understand the reasons that Streetman put forth with unerring silliness. "Why should France wish to know about our fleet?"

"Ah! But I do not know!" he replied. "The secret service gives me their instructions. It is for me to do now, not to question them. It is my work—my France." He drew nearer to her, and his masterful eyes gazed into hers. "It is your future, Ethel!" he cried with apparent ease and fervor.

"But isn't France England's ally?" she asked. "I can't understand why she should need this information."

His tones then drew it in a way each country to know all possible about the other. "I am sorry you should trouble me, dear," he sang to England when you put me the facts I shall have it! If you cared for me at all or if it was just that I caught you on the rebound—"

"What do you mean?" She faced him uneasily. Such scenes were new to her. Trouble, of a sort, she had known. But never anything like this. It had been hard enough to see her innocence dwindling steadily, without the means of replenishing them, now with actual possibility of more than a few. But now Ethel knew that the attraction in which she had seen evidences in which she had seen evidences of her self-control, seemed an absolute brute—that was worse a thousand times, that was more flagrant difficulties.

Streetman did not at once reply to her. For a few moments he regarded her handicap, as if she were already a hostile thing in his eyes.

"I wonder my dear," he said at last, "I wonder if today it is only I that could help you if you have—serious fire."

"Fire—" She protested. "Fire—I'm very fond of you," she said hastily.

"Fond!" The smile that he gave was nothing if not cynical. "Fond, Ethel! Kiss me!" And he attempted to take her in his arms. But she pushed him from her.

"No! All that is over. Not until we can be sure. Why, this secrecy makes me feel as if I were not your wife! George said is enough to disturb make me believe, almost, that it has not been a real marriage ceremony—"

"Nonsense; nonsense!" he scoffed. "If I thought you now that you will not we make our marriage public, will you leave?"

"Yes, Henry! I will!" she said in a voice in which there rang mournful hope.

He stepped quickly to her side again. Henry Streetman was not the sort of man to miss any opportunity that offered.

"But to do that," he acquiesced, "I must secure for France this information concerning the fleet. That's my own promotion for me—honors—much money! And with that I need no longer wait on my family. You understand?" he asked.

"Yes, Henry! I do!"

"Good!" That's settled. And you will take the first opportunity to speak to Sir George? He was always fond of Ethel at the happy turn of affairs. "He will tell you everything. Then—"

"Then?" he persisted.

"Then?" he exclaimed, scarcely believing his ears.

"I understand that for some reason you are trying to bribe me with these promises of yours to get Sir George's confidence. But I'm sick of this deception. I won't do it any longer; and you oughtn't to ask it of me."

"Indeed!" he said, with a vicious show of scorn. "And I'm afraid you'll pass to come to Sir George anonymous—" He checked himself. Evidently Ethel already betrayed his confidence," she went on. "I would rather have left Henry! He withheld harrowing, to see what effect this bombshell might have upon her.

"You wouldn't do that?" she exclaimed, in a sudden fear of his intentions. At of some it struck Ethel that her self-control had indeed become perfunctory. She had not dreamed that she would ever be afraid before the man she loved, at the hands of her husband, of all people.

"I should not like to do it," Streetman said, with a cold, level look. "But I should not hesitate if you force me to it. Young pigs do not make as good sport as old boars, Ethel. But the hogs should not be turned on the rape before they are ready to eat it. Do you understand?"

"Don't worry!" George retorted, "I'll see that you get your proper growth. If I don't see that you get it, I'll see that you get it. If I don't see that you get it, I'll see that you get it. If I don't see that you get it, I'll see that you get it