

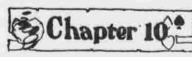
By ROBERT W. CHAMBERS, Author of "THE FIGHTING CHANCE," Etc.

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SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS.

Char, 1—Returning from Manila, Captain Selwyn, formerly of the army, is welcomed home by his sister, Nina Gerard, her wealthy busband Austin, and their numerous came, ren. Elleen Erroll, ward of Nina and Austin is part of their household. Selwin has been divorced, without guilt on his part, by his wife, Alixe, who is now the wife of Jack Rathven, with whom she ran away from Selwyn, H—Elleen who is your load of health of the control of the Northern Carallal descriptions. wife, Alixe, who is now the wife of Jack Ruthwen, with whom she ram away from Sciwyn, II—Elleen who is yerr ind officiation, II—Elleen who is yerr ind officiation, III—Elend despite the young man's neglect of ner, makes friends with Selwyn III—Gerald is worried about young Erroll's mingling in the fast set. Gossid is corpleyed by Julius Neergard, a reale state operator in a large way. Selwyn promises Elleen he will look after her brother. He tells her about Boots Lansing, bis army chum in Manila, who is coming to New York. In the park Elleen and Selwyn ride past Alixe. IV—Elleen's deceased father was an archaeologist, and she has inherited some of his scholarly qualities. Selwyn helps Gerald to settle a gambling debt and determines to undertake his reformation. V—Alixe and Selwyn meet and discuss their altered relations. He is introduced to Mrs. Rosamund Fane, leader of the fast set and Alixe's closest friend. He appeals to Alixe to help him keep Gerald from gambling. VI—The friend-selig of Elleen and Selwyn progresses. VII—Gerald promises Selwyn he will stop gambling. Neergard discloses to Selwyn, who is interested in his office, a plan to control the Siowitha Country club by buying up farms essential to the club's existence. The plan does not appeal to Selwyn, and he consults Austin, who demounces Neergard and his methods. VII—At night in his room Selwyn answers a knock at his door. IX—The caller is Alixe, who is very unbappy with Ruthyen and wants to talk with Selwyn. For a moment their old love flashes up, but at the mention of Elleen he knows that it is past resurrection.





ENT had gone and with it the last soiled snow of winter.

"Spring, with that nameless fragrance in the air Which breathes of all things fair."

sang a young girl riding in the park. And she smiled to herself as she guided her mare through the flowering labyrinths.

Behind her, powerfully mounted, ambled the belted groom. She was riding alone in the golden weather because her good friend Selwyn was very busy in his office downtown, and Gerald, who now rode with her occasionally. was downtown also, and there remained nobody else to ride with; also the horses were to be sent to Silverside soon, and she wanted to use them as much as possible while the park was at its lovellest.

It was near Eighty-sixth street that a girl splendidly mounted saluted her wheeling, joined her, a blond. cool skinned, rosy tinted, smoothly groomed girl, almost too perfectly seated, almost too flawless and supple in the perfect symmetry of face and

"Upon my word," she said gayly, "you are certainly spring incarnate. Miss Erroll, the living embodiment of all this!" She swung her riding crop in a circle and laughed, showing her perfect teeth. "But where is that faithful attendant cavalier of yours this morning? Is he so grossly material that he prefers Wall street, as does my good lord and master?" "Do you mean Gerald," asked Elleen

innocently, "or Captain Selwyn?" "Oh, either," returned Rosamund air-

ily. "A girl should have something masculine to talk to on a morning like this. You are continuing to astonish the town, I hear."

"What do you mean, Mrs. Fane?" "Why, first it was Sudbury, then Draymore, and now everybody says that Boots"-

"Boots!" repeated Miss Erroll blankly, then laughed deliciously. "Poor, poor Boots! Did they say that about him? Oh, it really is too bad, Mrs. Fane. It is certainly horridly impertinent of people to say such things. My only consolation is that Boots won't care, and if he doesn't why should

characteristically amusing, sailing blandly over the shoals of scandal, though Eileen never suspected itwittily gay at her own expense as well as at others, flitting airily from topic to topic on the wings of a self assurance that becomes some women if they know when to stop. But presently the mischievous perversity in her bubbled up again. She was tired of know where I stand and what I will being good. She had often meant to not stand." try the effect of a gentle shock on be in the unpleasantly persistent rumor of the girl's unannounced engagement to Selwyn.

"It would be amusing, wouldn't it?" she asked, with guileless frankness.

report of their reconciliation."
"Whose reconciliation?" asked Miss

Erroll innocently. "Why, Alixe Ruthven and Captain Selwyn. Everybody is discussing it,

you know." 'Reconciled!" I don't understand," said Eileen, astonished. "They can't

be. How can"-"But it would be amusing, wouldn't ft? And she could very easily get rid

of Jack Ruthven. Any woman could. So if they really mean to remar-The girl stared, breathless, astound-

ed, bolt upright in her saddle. "Oh," she protested, while the hot

blood mantled throat and cheek, "It is wickedly untrue! How could such a thing be true, Mrs. Fane? It is—is

Miserably uncomfortable, utterly unable to comprehend, the girl rode on in silence, her ears ringing with Rosamund's words. And Rosamund, riding beside her, cool, blond and cynically amused, continued the theme with admirable pretense of indifference.

"It's a pity that ill natured people are forever discussing them, and it makes me indignant, because I've niways been very fond of Alixe Ruthven, and I am positive that she does not correspond with Captain Selwyn. A girl in her position would be crazy to invite suspicion by doing the things they say she is doing."

"Don't, Mrs. Fane, please don't!" stammered Elleen. "I-I really can't listen! I simply will not! If you knew him as I do, Mrs. Fane, you would never, never have spoken as you have!"

Mrs. Fane relished neither the naive rebuke nor the intimation that her own acquaintance with Selwyn was so lim-Ited, and least of all did she relish the implied intimacy between this red haired young girl and Captain Selwyn.

"Dear Miss Erroll," she said blandly, "I spoke as I did only to assure you that I also disregard such malicious gossip.

"But if you disregard it, Mrs. Fane, why do you repeat it?"

"Merely to emphasize to you my disbelief in it, child," returned Rosamund. 'Do you understand?"

'Y-es. Thank you. Yet I should never have heard of it at all if you had not told me."

Rosamund's color rose one degree, "It is better to hear such things from a friend, is it not?"

"I didn't know that one's friends said such things, but perhaps it is better that way, as you say, only I cannot understand the necessity of my knowing-of my hearing-because it is Captain Selwyn's affair, after all."

"And that," said Rosamund deliberately, "is why I told you." "Told me? Oh, because he and I are

such close friends?" "Yes. Such very close friends that I"-she laughed-"I am informed that

your interests are soon to be identical." The girl swung round, self possessed, but dreadfully pale.

"If you believed that," she said, "it

was vile of you to say what you said. Mrs. Fane.' "But I did not believe it, child!"

stammered Rosamund, several degrees redder than became her and now convinced that it was true. "I n-never dreamed of offending you, Miss Erroll.' "Do you suppose I am too ignorant

to take offense?" said the girl unsteadily. "I told you very plainly that I did not understand the matters you chose for discussion, but I do understand impertinence when I am driven to it."

"I am very, very sorry, that you believe I meant it that way," said Rosamund, biting her lips.

"What did you mean? You are older than I; you are certainly experienced: besides, you are married. If you can give it a gentler name than insolence would be glad-for your sake, Mrs.



Rosamund nodded, crossing her crop. A girl splendidly mounted saluted her. For awhile as they rode she was Fane. I only know that you have spoiled my ride, spoiled the day for me, hurt me, humiliated me and awakened not curiosity, not suspicion, but the horror of it, in me."

Her voice became unsteady again, and her mouth curved, but she held her head high, and her eyes were as fearlessly direct as a child's.

"And now," she said calmly, "you

If Rosamund had anything left to Miss Erroll, and, besides, she wonder- say or any breath to say it there were ed just how much truth there might no indications of it. Never in her flippant existence had she been so absolutely flattened by any woman. As for this recent graduate from fudge and olives, she could scarcely realize how utterly and finally she had been si-"But, of course, it is not true—this lenced by her. Incredulity, exasperation, amazement, had succeeded each other while Miss Erroll was speaking; chagrin, shame, helplessness, followed as bitter residue, but in the end the very incongruity of the situation came to

> "I'm certainly a little beast," she said impulsively, "but I really do like you. Will you forgive?"

No genuine appeal to the young girl's generosity had ever been in vain. She forgave almost as easily as she breathed. Even now in the flush of just resentment it was not hard for her to forgive. She hesitated only in order to diest matters in her own mind.

Mrs. Fane swung her horse and held out her right hand: "Is it peace, Miss Erroll? I'm really ashamed of myself. Won't you forgive

"Yes," said the young girl, laying her gloved hand on Rosamund's very lightly. "I've often thought," she added naively, "that I could like you, Mrs. Fane, if you would only give me a chance."

"I'll try, you blessed innocent. You've torn me into rags and tatters, and you did it adorably. What I said was idle. half witted, gossiping nonsense. So forget every atom of it as soon as you can, my dear, and let me prove that I'm not an utter idiot if I can."

"That will be delightful," said Eileen. with a demure smile, and Rosamund aughed, too, with full hearted laughter. for trouble sat very lightly on her per-



strength and youth. Sin and repentance were rapid matters with Rosamund; cause, effect and remorse a quick sequence to be quickly reckoned up, checked off and canceled and the next blank page turned over to be ruled and filled with the next impeachment. There was in her more of mischief than of real malice and unfeigned liking and respect for the turning

"And, my dear," she said, concluding the account of the adventure to Mrs. Ruthven that afternoon at Sherry's. "I've never been so roundly abused and so soundly trounced in my life as was this blessed morning by that red headed novice. Oh, my! Oh, la! I could have screamed with laughter at my own undoing."

'It's what you deserved," said Alixe, intensely annoyed, although Rosamund had not told her all that she had so kindly and gratuitously denied concerning her relations with Selwyn, "It was sheer effrontery of you, Rosamund, to put such notions into the head of a child and stir her up into taking a fictitious interest in Philip Selwyn which I know-which is perfectly plain to me, to anybody-never existed."

"Of course it existed," retorted Rosamund, delighted now to worry Alixe. "She didn't know it: that is all. It really was simple charity to wake her up. It's a good match, too, and so obviously and naturally inevitable that there's no harm in playing prophetess. There is the youthful brother of our red haired novice now. He sees us, and he's coming to inflict himself with another moon faced creature. Shall we bolt?"

who came up boyishly red and im-

"How d'ye do, Mrs. Ruthven? Did you get my note? How d'ye do, Mrs. bring him to my house?" one? Awf'lly folly to colli way. Would you mind if"-

to be downtown unless you've concluded to retire and let Wall street go to smash. What are you pretending to do in Sherry's at this hour, you very dreadful infant?"

"I've been lunching with Mr. Neergard, and would you mind"-

"Yes, I would," began Rosamund promptly. But Alixe interrupted, "Bring him over, Gerald." And as the boy thanked her and turned back: "I've a word to administer to that boy, Rosamund, so attack the Neergard creature with moderation, please. You owe me that at least. Here he is now, and don't be impossible and frighten him, Rosamund."

The presentation of Neergard was accomplished without disaster to anybody. On his thin nose the dew glistened, and his thick, fat hands were hot. But Rosamund was too bored to be rude to him, and Alixe turned immediately to Gerald:

"Yes, I did get your note, but I am not at home on Tuesday. Can't you come- Walt a moment. What are you doing this afternoon?"

"Why, I'm going back to the office with Mr. Neergard.

"Nonsense! Oh, Mr. Neergard, would you mind"-very sweetly-"if Mr. Erroll did not go to the office this afternoon?"

Neergard looked at her-almost-a fixed and uncomfortable smirk on his round, red face, "Not at all, Mrs. Ruthven, if you have anything better for him"-

"I have-an allopathic dose of it. Thank you, Mr. Neergard. Rosamund. we ought to start, you know. Gerald!" with quiet significance. "Goodby, Mr. Neergard. Please do not buy up the rest of Long Island, because we need a new kitchen garden very badly."

Mrs. Ruthven's motor moved up from its waiting station. Resamund was quite ready to enter when Alixe said cordially: "Where can we drop you, dear? Do let us take you to the exchange if you are going there."

Now, Rosamund had meant to go wherever they were going merely because they evidently wished to be alone. The abruptness of the check

both irritated and amused her, "If I knew anybody in the Bronx I'd make you take me there," she said vindictively, "but as I don't you may drop me at the Orchils', you uncivil creatures. Gerald, I know you want out with clumsy sympathy. "you me anyway, because you've promised to adore, honor and obey me. If you'll come with me now I'll play double dummy with you. No? Well, of all Ingratitude!"

And she smiled dazzlingly upon Ger ald, then turned up her pretty nose at him, but permitted him to attend her to the Orchils' door,

When he returned to Alixe and the car was speeding parkward he began again eagerly:

"Jack asked me to come up, and, of course, I let you know, as I promised I would. But it's all right, Mrs. Ruth-

ven, because Jack said the stakes will not be high this time." "You accepted?" demanded Alixe in guick displeasure.

Why, yes, as the stakes are not to amount to anything."

"What?" he said uneasily. "You promised me that you would not play again in my house!" "I-I said for more than I could af-

"No; you said you would not play That is what you promised, Gerald." "Well, I meant for high stakes, Iwell, you don't want to drive me out altogether, even from the perfectly go? There was only one person, and harmless pleasure of playing for nomiaal stakes

"Yes, I do." "W-why?" asked the boy in hurt surprise. "Because it is dangerous sport, Ger-

"What! To play for a few cents a point!"

"Yes, to play for anything. And as

far as that goes there will be no such play as you imagine." "Yes, there will-I beg your pardon-

but Jack Ruthven said so." "Gerald, listen to me, A bo-a man like yourself has no business playing with people whose losses never interfere with their appetites next day. A business man has no right to play such a game anyway. I wonder what Mr. Neergard would say if he knew

"Neergard! Why, he does know." "You confessed to him?" "Y-es; I had to. I was obliged to-to

ask somebody for an advance "You went to him? Why didn't you

go to Captain Selwyn or to Mr. Gerard?"

"I did; not to Captain Selwyn. I was ashamed to. But I went to Austin, and he fired up and lit into me, and we had muss-up, and I've stayed away since."

"Oh, Gerald! And it simply proves me right." "No, it doesn't, I did go to Neer-

gard and made a clean breast of it. And he let me have what I wanted like a good fellow." "And made you promise not to do it

"No, he didn't. He only laughed.

Besides, he said that he wished he had been in the game.'

"What!" exclaimed Alixe, "He's a first rate fellow," insisted Gerald, reddening, "and it was very nice of you to let me bring him over today. And he knows everybody downtown too. He comes from a very old Dutch family, but he had to work pretty hard and do without college. like it awfully if you'd let me-if you wouldn't mind being civil to him once Alixe turned and stared at Gerald, or twice, you know, I'm going to propose him for the Stuyvesant and the Proscenium. Why not?"

"I see. And now you propose to

"If you'll let me. I aske he seemed to think it might be all "You," interrupted Rosamund, "ought right if you cared to ask him to play.

"I won't!" cried Alixe, revolted. "I will not turn my drawing rooms into a clearing house for every money laden social derelict in town! I've had enough of that. I've endured the accumulated wreckage too long-weird treasure craft full of steel and oll and coal and wheat and beaven knows what! I won't do it, Gerald. I'm sick of it all-sick, sick!"

The sudden, flushed outburst stunned the boy. Bewildered, he stared round eyed at the excited young matron, who was growing more incensed and more careless of what she ex-

posed every second. "I will not make a public gambling hell of my own house!" she repeated.

"I will not continue to stand afire. sponsor for a lot of queer people simply because they don't care what they lose in Mrs. Ruthven's bouse! You habble to me of limits, Gerald. This is the limit! Do you or does anybody else suppose that I don't know what is being said about us-that play is too high in our house, that we are easy in our choice of intimates as long as they can stand the pace? Do you think I was educated for thisfor the wife of a chevalier of indus try?"

"M-Mrs. Ruthven!" he gasped. But she was absolutely reckless now, and beneath it all perhaps lay a certainty of the boy's honor. She knew he was to be trusted-was the safest receptarle for wrath so long repressed. She let prudence go with a parting and vindictive slap and opened her heart to the astounded boy. The tempest lasted a few seconds. Then she ended

as abruptly as she began. To him she had always been what a pretty young matron usually is to a well bred but harebrained youth just untethered. Their acquaintance had been for him a combination of charming experiences diluted with gratitude for her interest and a harmless soupcon of sentimentality. In her partic ular case, however, there was a little something more-a hint of the forbidden-a troubled enjoyment, because he knew, of course, that Mrs. Ruthven was on no footing at all with the

"Dear Mrs. Ruthven," he

mustn't think such things, b-because they're all rot, you see, and if any fellow ever said those things to me I'd jolly soon"-

"Do you mean to say you've never heard us criticised?"

"I-well-everybody is-criticised. of course"-

"But not as we are. Do you read the papers? Well, then, do you understand how a woman must feel to have her husband continually made the butt of foolish, absurd, untrue stories, as though he were a performing poodle? I-I'm sick of that, too, for another thing. Week after week, month by month, unpleasant things have been accumulating, and they're getting too heavy, Gerald, too crushing for my shoulders. Men call me restless. What wonder! Women link my name with any man who is kind to me! Is there no excuse then for what they call my restlessness? What woman would not be restless whose private affairs are the gossip of everybody? Was it not enough that I endured terrific publicity when-when trouble overtook me two years ago? I suppose I'm a fool to talk like this, but a girl must do it some time or burst. And to whom am I to I can't talk to-that one. He-that person-knows too much about me anyway, which is not good for a woman, Gerald: not good for a good woman-I mean a pretty good woman, the kind people's sisters can still talk to, you

"I want you to believe me your friend," said Gerald in the low, resolute voice of unintentional melodrama "Why, thank you. Are you so sure

you want that, Gerald?" "Yes, as long as I live!" he declared, generous emotion in the ascendant. A pretty woman upset him very easily even under normal circumstances. But beauty in distress knocked him flat, as it does every wholesome boy who is

worth his salt. And he said so in his own naive fashion, and the more eloquent he grew the more excited he grew and the deeper and blacker appeared her wrongs to

She was very light hearted that evening when she dropped him at the Stuyvesant club and whizzed away to her own house, for he had promised not to play again on her premises, and she had promised to be nice to him and take him about when she was shy of an escort.

On her way home Alixe smilingly reviewed the episode until doubt of Selwyn's approval crept in again, and her amused smile had faded when she reached her home.





HE house of Ruthven was a small but ultra modern limestone affair, between Madison and Fifth, a pocket edition of the larger mansions of their friends.

but with less excuse for the overelaboration since the dimensions were only twenty by a hundred. Into this limestone bonbon box tripped Mrs. Ruth ven, mounted the miniature stairs with a whirl of her scented skirts, peeped into the drawing room, but continued mounting until

she whipped into her own apartments, separated from those of her lord and master by a locked door.

That is, the door had been locked for a long. long time. But presently, to her intense surprise and annoyance, it slowly opened and a little man

appeared in slip. Into this limestone bon bon box tripped Mrs pered feet. Ruthven

He was a little man and plump, and at first glance his face appeared boyish and round and quite guiltless of hair or of any hope

But as he came into the electric dark eyes very bright and checks light the hardness of his features was apparent. He was no boy. A strange idea that he had never been assailed some people. His face was puffy and pallid, and faint blue shadows hinted of closest shaving, and the line from the wing of the nostrils to the nerveless corners of his thin, hard mouth had been deeply bitten by the acid of unrest.

For the remainder he wore pale rose pajamas under a silk and silver kimono, an obi pierced with a jeweled scarfpin, and he was smoking a cigarette as thin as a straw. "Well!" said his young wife in as-

tonished displeasure. "Send her out a moment," he said, with a nod of his head toward the maid. His voice was agreeable and full-a trifle precise and overcultivat-

When the maid retired Alixe sat up on the lounge, drawing her skirts down over her small stockinged feet. "What on earth is the matter?" she demanded.

ed perhaps.

the while.

"I won't do

"The matter is," he said, "that Gerald has just telephoned me from the Stuyvesant that he isn't coming." "Well!"

"No, it isn't well. This is some of your meddling." "What if it is?" she retorted, but her breath was coming quicker.

"I'll tell you. You can get up and ring him up and tell him you expect him tonight." She shook her head, eying him all

"You little whippet," she said slowly, "I was once a soldier's wife-the decent thing I ever have been, This bullying ends now-here, at this

want him for? He can't play with the

people who play here. He doesn't know the rudiments of play. He's only

a boy. His money is so tied up that he has to borrow if he loses very much.

There's no sport in playing with a boy

enough. But it was the sudden overwhelming access of fury that weakened him and made him turn, hand outstretched, blindly seeking for a chair. Rage, even real anger, were emotions he seldom had to reckon with, for he was a very tired and bored and burned out gentleman, and vivid emotion was not good for his arteries, the doctors told him.

He found his chair, stood a moment with his back toward his wife, then



very slowly let himself down into the chair and sat facing her. There was moisture on his soft, pallid skin, a nervous twitching of the under lip. He passed one heavily ringed hand across his closely shaved jaw, still staring at her.

"I want to tell you something," he said. "You've got to stop your interference with my affairs, and stop it

now." "I am not interested in your affairs," she said unsteadily, still shaken by her own revolt, still under the shock of her own arousing to a resistance that had been long, long overdue. "If you mean," she went on, "that the ruin of this boy is your affair, then I'll make it mine from this moment. I've told you that he shall not play. and be shall not. And while I'm about it I'll admit what you are preparing to accuse me of. I did make Sandon Craig promise to keep away. I did try to make that little fool Scott Innis promise, too, and when he wouldn't I informed his father. And every time you try your dirty bucket shop methods on boys like that I'll do the same."

He swore at her quite calmly. She smiled, shrugged and, imprisoning her knees in her clasped hands, leaned back and looked at him. "What a ninny I have been," she

said. "to be afraid of you so long!" A gleam crossed his faded eyes, but he let her remark pass for the moment. Then, when he was quite sure that violent emotion had been exhausted within him, "Do you want your bills

paid?" he asked. "Because if you do

Fane, Harmon & Co. are not going to pay them." We are living beyond our means?"

she inquired disdainfully. "Not if you will be good enough mind your business, my friend. I've managed this establishment on our winnings for two years. It's a detail, but you might as well know it. My association with Fane, Harmon & Co. runs the Newport end of it and noth-

ing more." "What did you marry me for?" she asked curiously.

A slight color came into his face. "Because Rosamund Fane lied about you." "Oh! You knew that in Manila?

You'd heard about it, hadn't you-the western timber lands? Rosamund didn't mean to lie. Only the titles were all wrong, you know. And so you made a bad break, Jack. Is that "Yes, that is it." "And it cost you a fortune and me a

-husband. Is that it, my friend?" "I can afford you if you will stop your meddling," he said coolly. "You have made a point of excluding Ger-

"Very well. I'll telephone Draymore.

And"-he looked back from the door of his own apartments-"I got Julius Neergard on the wire this afternoon, and he'll dine with us." He gathered up his shimmering ki-

mono. hesitated, halted and again looked back. "When you're dressed," he drawled,

"I've a word to say to you about the game tonight and another about Ger-

"I shall not play," she retorted scornfully, "nor will Gerald." "Oh, yes, you will, and play your

best too. And I'll expect him next time." "I shall not play!"

He said deliberately: "You will not only play, but play cleverly, and in the interim, while dressing, you will reflect how much more agreeable it is to play cards here than the fool at 10 o'clock at night in the bachelor apartments of your late lamented."

And he entered his room, and his wife, getting blindly to her feet, every atom of color gone from lip and cheek, stood rigid, both small hands clutch ing the footboard of the gilded bed.

The Boston Herald abolishes the comic supplement because it "no longer needs a clown." Many a real clown will feel like abolishing himself after

"So you've said before, I believe, but I'm better qualified to judge than you are. Are you going to call him up?" "No, I am not." He turned paler. "Get up and go to that telephone!"

instant! If you've any dirty work to do, do it yourself. I've done my share, and I've finished." He was astonished. That was plain

