

The BALL of FIRE

By GEORGE RANDOLPH CHESTER
and LILLIAN CHESTER
ILLUSTRATED BY C.D. RHODES

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SYNOPSIS.

At a vestry meeting of the Market Square church, Gall Sargent listens to discussion about the sale of the church tenements to Edward E. Allison, local traction king, and when asked her opinion of the church by Rev. Smith Boyd, she is apparently a lucrative business enterprise. Allison takes Gall riding in his motor car. When he suggests he is entitled to rest on the laurels of his achievements, she asks the disturbing question: "Why?" Gall finds cold disapproval in the eyes of Rev. Smith Boyd. At a boisterous party Allison tells Jim Sargent that his new ambition is to conquer the world. He starts a campaign for consolidation and control of the entire transportation system of the world. Gall becomes popular. Allison gains control of transcontinental traffic and arranges to absorb the Vedder court tenement property of Market Square church. Gall tells Boyd that the cathedral Market Square church proposes to build will be out of profits wrung from squalor. At a meeting of the seven financial magnates of the country, Allison organizes the International Transportation company. Rev. Smith Boyd undertakes Gall's spiritual instruction and Gall unconsciously gives Allison a hint that solves the Vedder court problem for him. She goes on an inspection trip in Allison's new subway.

CHAPTER XII—Continued.

Out in the open, where the sun paled the electric lights of the car into sickly yellow, up into the air, peering into third-story tenements and down narrow alleys, a flutter with countless flapping pieces of laundry work, then suddenly into the darkness of the tunnel again, then out, on the surface of country fields, and dreary winter landscape, to the terminal. It was more cozy in the tunnel, and they returned there for lunch.

Suddenly there came a dull, muffled report, like the distant firing of a cannon; then an interval of silence, an infinitesimal one, in which the car ran smoothly on, and, half rising, they looked at each other in startled questioning. Then, all at once, came a stupendous roar, as if the world had split asunder, a jolting and jerking, a headlong stoppage, a clattering, and slapping and crashing and grinding, deafening in its volume, and with it all, darkness; blackness so intense that it seemed almost palpable to the touch!

There was a single shriek, and a nervous laugh verging on hysteria. The shriek was from Arly, and the laugh from Lucile. There was a cry from the forward end of the car, as of someone in pain. A man's yell of fright; Gregory the general manager. A strong hand clutched Gall's in the darkness, firm, reassuring. The rector.

"Don't move!" It was the voice of Allison, crisp, harsh, commanding. "Anybody hurt?" Tim Corman, the voice of age, but otherwise steady.

"It's me," called Tom, the motorman. "Head cut a little, arm bruised. Nothing bad."

"Gall?" Allison again. "Yes." Clear voiced, with the courage which has no sex.

"Mrs. Teasdale? Mrs. Fosland? Ted? Doctor Boyd?" and so through the list. Everybody safe.

"It is an accidental blast," said the voice of Allison. He had figured that a concise statement of just what had happened might expedite organization. "We are below the Farmount ridge, over a hundred feet deep, and the tube has caved in on us. There must be no waste of exertion. Don't move until I find what electrical dangers there are."

A match flared up, and showed the pale face of the engineer bending over.

"No matches," ordered Allison. "We may need the oxygen." He and the engineer made their way back into the parlor compartment. They took up the door of the motor well in the floor, and in a few minutes they replaced it. From the sounds they seemed remarkably clumsy.

"That much is lucky," commented Allison. "The next thing is to dig." "In front or behind?" wondered the engineer.

"In front," decided Allison. "The explosion came from that direction, and has probably shaken down more of the soil there than behind, but it's solid clay in the rear, and further out." Gall felt the rector's hand suddenly leave her own. It had been wonderfully comforting there in the dark; so firm and warm and steady. He had not talked much to her, just a few reassuring words, in that low, melodious voice, which thrilled her as did occasionally the touch of Allison's hand, as did the eyes of Dick Rodley. But she had received more strength from the voice of Allison. He was big, Allison, a power, a force, a spirit of command. She began, for the first time, to comprehend his magnitude.

"What have we to dig with?" The voice of Rev. Smith Boyd, and there was a note of eagerness in it. "The benches up in front here," yelled McCarthy, and there was a ripping sound as he tore the seat from one of them.

"Pardon me." It was the voice of the rector, up in front.

"The balance of you sit down, and keep rested," ordered Allison, now also up in front. "McCarthy, Boyd and I go first."

The long struggle began. The girls grouped together in the back of the

car, moving but very little, for there was much broken glass about. Up in front the three men could be heard making an opening into the debris through the forward windows. They talked a great deal, at first, strong, capable voices. They were interfering with each other, then helping, combining their strength to move heavy stones and the like, then they were silent, working independently, or in effective unison.

Tim Corman was the possessor of a phosphorescent-faced watch, with 22 jewels on the inside and a ruby on the winding stem, and he constituted himself timekeeper.

"Thirty minutes," he called out. "It's our shift."

The men crawled in from outside, but they stayed in the front compartment. The air was growing a trifle close, and they breathed heavily.

"Good-by, girl," called the gayly funereal voice of Ted Teasdale. "Husband is going to work."

Another interminable wait, while the air grew more stifling. There was no further levity after Lincoln and the motorman and McCarthy had come back; for the condition was becoming serious. Some air must undoubtedly be finding its way to the car through the loose debris, but the carbonic acid gas exhaled from a dozen pairs of lungs was beginning to pocket, and the opening ahead, though steadily pushing forward, displayed no signs of lessening solidity.

They established shorter shifts now; a quarter of an hour. The men came silently in and out, and as silently worked, and as silently rested, while the girls carried that heavy burden of women's hardest labor; waiting!

Gregory was the first to give out, then the injured motorman. When their turns came, they had not the strength nor the air in their lungs. Strong McCarthy was the next to join them.

The shifts had reduced to two, of two men each, by now; Ted and old Tim, and Allison and the rector; and these latter two worked double time. Their lips and their tongues were parched and cracking, and in their periods of rest they sat motionlessly facing each other, with a wheeze in the drawing of their breath. Their stentorian breathing could be heard from the forward end of their little tunnel clear back into the car, where the three girls were battling to preserve their senses against the poisonous gases which were now all that they had to breathe. Acting on the rector's advice, they had stood up in the car to escape the gradually rising level of the carbonic gas, stood, as the time progressed, with their mouths agape and their breasts heaving and sharp pains in their lungs at every breath. Arly dropped, silently crumpling to the floor; then, a few minutes later, Lucile, and, panic-stricken by the thought that they had gone under, Gall felt her own senses reeling, when suddenly, looking ahead through eyes which were staring, she saw a crack of blessed light!

There was a hoarse cry from ahead! The crack of light widened. Another one appeared, some four feet to the right of it, and Gall already fancied that she could feel a freshening of the air she breathed with such tearing pain. Against the light of the openings, two figures, the only two which were left to work, strove, at first with the slow, limp motions of exhaustion, and then with the renewed vigor of approaching triumph. She could distinguish them clearly now, by the light which streamed in, the stocky, strong figure of Allison and the tall, sinewy figure of the rector. They were working frantically, Allison with his coat off, and the rector with his coat and vest both removed, and one sleeve torn almost entirely from his shirt, revealing his swelling biceps, and a long, red scratch. Gall's senses were numbed, so that they were reduced to almost merely optical consciousness, so that she saw things photographically; but, even in her numbness, she realized that what she had thought a trace of weakness in the rector, was only the grace which had rounded his strength.

The two figures bent inward toward each other. There was a moment of mighty straining, and then the whole center between the two cracks rolled away. A huge boulder had barred the path, and its removal let down a rush of pure, fresh air from the ground above, let down, too, a flood of dazzling light; and in the curving, dizzying of the opening, stood the two stalwart men who were the survival of the fittest! The mere instinct of self-preservation drove Gall forward, with a cry, toward the source of that life-giving air, and she scrambled through the window and ran toward the two men. They came hurriedly down to meet her, and each gave her a hand.

CHAPTER XIII.

Gall Dodges the Spotlight. Immediately after Gall had reached home from the accident in the subway, and had been put to bed and given tea, and had repeatedly assured

the doctor there was nothing the matter with her, they brought, at her urgent request, copies of the "extras," which were already being yelled from every street corner and down every quiet residence block.

The accounts were, in the main, more or less accurate, barring the fact that there had been one hundred in Allison's party, all killed. Later issues, however, regretfully reduced the number of dead to forty, six, and finally none, at which point they became more or less coherent, and gave an exact list of the people who were there, the cause of the accident, and a most appreciatively accented history of the heroic work of the men. Although she regretted that her picture had by this time crept into the public prints, grouped with the murders and defalcations of the day, she was able to overlook this personal discomfort as one of the minor penalties which civilization has paid for its progress, like electric light bugs and electric fan neuralgia, and the smell of gasoline.

In the meantime, the representatives of the gay and care-free and absolutely unscrupulous metropolitans, were by no means discouraged by the fact that they had not been able to secure much, except hectic imaginings from the exterior of the Sargent house. They were busy in every other possible direction, with the same commendable persistence which we observe in an ant to drag a grasshopper up and down a cornstalk on the way home.

Little Miss Piper of the Morning Planet, a somewhat withered and puckered little woman, who had sense enough to dress so as to excite nothing but pity, quietly slipped on her ugly little bonnet with the funny ribbon bow in the back, and hurried out to the magnificent residence of Mrs. Phyllis Worthmore, who loathed publicity and had photographs taken once a month for the purpose.

The result of that light-hearted and light-headed interview, in which Mrs. Phyllis Worthmore, by special request, was not quoted, suddenly sprang on the startled eyes of Gall, when she leaped through the Sunday Morning Planet at eight o'clock next morning. An entire page, embellished in the center with a beautifully printed photograph, was devoted to the sensational beauty from the middle West! Around her were grouped nine smaller photographs: Allison, Dick Rodley, Willis Cunningham, Houston Van Ploon, Rev. Smith Boyd, a sawly youth who had danced with her three times, a count who had said "How do you do?" and sailed for Europe, and two men whom she had never met. All these crack eligibles were classified under the general head of "Slaves to Her Witching Smile," and a big, boxed-in list was given, in extremely black-faced type, stating, in dollars and cents, the exact value in the matrimonial market of each slave; and the lively genius who had put together this symposium, by a toweringly happy thought conceived in the very height of the rush hours, totaled the whole, and gave it as the commercial worth of Gall's beauty and charm. It ran into thirteen figures, including the dollar mark and the two ciphers for cents.

When Lucile Teasdale and Arly Fosland arrived at Jim Sargent's house at ten o'clock, and had been left in at the side entrance, they found Gall dabbling her eyes with a powder puff, taken from a little black traveling bag which stood open at her side. Arlene was a second later than Lucile in clasping Gall in her arms, because she had to lift a traveling veil. The two girls expressed their condolence and their horror of the outrage, and volubly poured out more sympathy; then they sat down and shrieked with laughter.

"It's too awful for words!" gasped Lucile. "But it is funny, too." Gall's chin quivered.

"There should be a law against such things," she broken-heartedly returned, in a voice which wavered and halted with the echoes of recent sobs. "I'll put the Planet out of business!" stormed Jim Sargent, stalking up and down the library, with his fists clenched and his face purple. "I'll bankrupt them!" and he paused, as he passed, to reassuringly pat the shoulder of poor Aunt Grace, who sat perfectly numb holding one thumb until the bone ached.

"The press is the palladium of our national liberty, Uncle Jim," drawled the soothing voice of Ted. "You can't do a thing about it," counseled Gerald Fosland, a stiff-looking gentleman who never made a mistake of speech, or manner, or attire. "Shucks, Gall!" suddenly remembered Lucile. "The Big Faulkner reception is this week, and your gown was to be so stunning. Don't go home!"

Mrs. Helen Davies cast on her feather-brained daughter a glance of severe reproof. "Have you no sense of propriety, Lucile?" she warned. "Gall, very naturally, cannot remain here under the circumstances. It does great credit to her that, immediately upon realizing this horrible occurrence, she telegraphed to her mother, without consulting any of us, that she was returning."

"I just wanted to go home," said Gall, her chin quivering and her pretty throat tremulous with breath pent from sobbing. "I'll blow over, Gall," argued Uncle Jim, in deep distress because she was going so soon. If she had only stopped long enough to pack up, they might have persuaded her to stay. "Just forget it, and have a good time."

"Jim," ordered the stern voice of

Aunt Helen, "will you be kind enough to see if anyone is out in front?"

"Certainly," agreed Jim, wondering why his wife's sister was suddenly so severe with him. "It's time to start," called Ted with practiced wisdom allowing ten minutes for good-bys, parting instructions and forgotten messages.

The adieux were said. Aunt Grace, clasping Gall in her arms, began to sob, out of a full heart and a general need for the exercise. Gerald Fosland took the hand of his wife and kissed it, in most gallant fashion. "I shall miss you dreadfully, my dear," he stated.

"I shall be thinking of you," responded Arlene, adjusting her veil. Mrs. Davies drew Arlene into the drawing room.

"It was so sweet of you to agree to accompany Gall," she observed. "It would be useless to attempt to influence her now, but I look to you to bring her back in a week. Her prospects are really too brilliant to be interrupted by an unfortunate episode of this nature."

One could readily see that no deviation from his routine confronted Gerald Fosland this morning. He had had his plunge and his breakfast, his mail and his paper laid before him, and yet there was something ghastly about the feel of the house. It was as if someone were dead! Gerald Fosland made as radical a deviation from his daily life as he ever had done. He left his mail unopened, after a glance at the postmark; he left his paper unread; he picked up his hat and gloves and stick, and started to leave the room. As he passed the door leading to Arly's apartments, he hesitated, and put his hand on the knob. He glanced over his shoulder, as a guilty conscience made him imagine that a servant was coming in, then he gently turned the knob, and entered. A tiny vestibule, and then a little French-gray salon, and then a boudoir, all in delicate blue, and sweet with a faint, deli-

cate, evasive fragrance which was like the passing of Arly. Something made him stand, for a moment, with a trace of feeling which came to awe. He did not notice, until afterwards, that he had tiptoed on to the dainty blue boudoir, and looked earnestly about it, then he went back to the boudoir and seated himself on the stiff chair in which he had, on rare occasions, sat and chatted with her. He remained there perhaps half an hour. Suddenly he arose, and called for his limousine, and drove to Teasdale's. They were out, he was told. They were at Mr. Sargent's, and he drove straight there. Somehow, he was glad that, since they were out, they had gone to Sargent's. He was most anxious to see Lucile.

"Just in time to join the mourners, Gerald," greeted Ted. "We're doing a very solemn lot of Galling."

"I'll join you with pleasure," agreed Gerald, feeling more at home and light of heart here than he had anywhere during the day. Lucile seemed particularly near to him. "Have you any intimation that Gall expects to return soon?"

"None at all," stated Aunt Helen, with a queer mixture of somberness and impatience. "She only writes about what a busy time they are having, and how delightfully eager her friends have been about her, and how popular Arly is, and such things as that."

"Arly is popular everywhere," stated Gerald, and Lucile looked at him wonderingly, turning her head very slowly towards him. "What do you hear from Arly?" she inquired, holding up her hand as if to shield her eyes from the fire, and studying him curiously from that shadow.

"Much the same," he answered; "except that she mentions Gall's popularity instead of her own. She had her maid send her another trunkful of clothing, I believe," and he fell to gazing into the fireplace.

"I am very much disappointed in Arly," worried Aunt Helen. "I sent Arly specifically to bring Gall back in a week, and they have been gone nine days!"

"I'm glad they're having a good time," observed Jim Sargent. "She'll come back when she gets ready. The New York pull is something which hits you in the middle of the night and makes you get up and pack."

"Yes, but the season will soon be over," worried Aunt Helen. "Gall's presence here at this time is so important that I do not see how she can neglect it. It may affect her entire future life. A second season is never so full of opportunities as the first one."

"Oh, nonsense," laughed Jim. "You're a fanatic on matchmaking, Helen. What you really mean is that Gall should make a choice out of the matrimonial market before it has all been picked over."

Lucile watched Gerald with intense interest. She could scarcely believe the startling idea which had popped into her head! Gerald's only apparent deviation from his normal attitude had consisted in abstractedly staring into the fire, instead of paying polite attention to everyone.

"You scare me," said Lucile, still watching Gerald. "I'm not going to leave Gall out there any longer. I'm going to have her back at once." Gerald raised his head immediately, and smiled at her. "Splendid," he approved. "Fact of the matter is, and he hesitated an instant, 'I'm becoming extremely homesome.'"

Even Ted detected something in Gerald's tone and in his face. "It's time you were waking up," he bluntly commented. "I should think you would be lonely without Arly."

"Yes, isn't it time," agreed Gerald, studying the matter carefully. "You know, both having plenty of leisure, there's never been any occasion for us to travel separately before, and, really, I miss her dreadfully."

"I think I'll have to get her for you, Gerald," promised Lucile, removing her hand from in front of her eyes, and smiling at him reassuringly. She could smile beautifully just now. The incredible thing she had thought she detected was positively happy! Gerald Fosland had been in love with his wife, and had never known it until now!

"If you can work that miracle, and bring Gall back over the place," declared Jim Sargent. "It's been like a funeral here since she went home. You'd think Gall was the most important section of New York. Everybody's blue—Allison, Doctor Boyd; everybody who knew her inquires, with long faces, when she's coming back!"

"What do you propose?" inquired Mrs. Helen Davies, with a degree of interest which intimated that she was quite ready to take any part in the conspiracy. "I have my little plan," laughed Lucile. "I'm going to send her an absolutely irresistible reminder of New York!"

Kill Nerves to Cure Neuralgia. Severe neuralgia can be cured by injecting alcohol into the nerves, but the cost is terrible, for the price is the death of the nerve, with paralysis as the result.

Such, in brief, is the conclusion which Dr. Williams B. Cadwalader reports to the Journal of the American Medical Association after experiments made at the Laboratory of Neurophysiology of the University of Pennsylvania.

The alcohol kills not only the nerves of sensation, but the motor nerves as well. In a nerve like the sciatic this would be serious. For the nerve may remain paralyzed for a year after the injection of the alcohol.

In trifacial neuralgia, which is caused by a purely sensory nerve, this action is of little importance. The cure is not permanent, however, but affords freedom from pain for several months, perhaps as much as a year. The nerves regenerate just as they do when severed.

The Unwelcome Truth. "Miss Braddon, the English novelist," said a publisher, "made \$500,000 out of her books, her publisher's share being \$1,500,000."

"Miss Braddon's great success, she once told me, was due to her avoidance in her books of truth. Truth, she said, is the one thing the average novel reader doesn't want. For truth, you see, is unpleasant."

"She illustrated her point by a wife who asked her husband: 'George, how do you like the new shade I've had my hair done?' 'Well, my dear,' George began, 'to tell you the truth—'

"Stop right there, George," his wife interrupted. "Stop right where you are. When you begin like that I don't want to hear you." — Washington Star.

An Almanac Monopoly. The sale of almanacs was once a lucrative monopoly. Queen Elizabeth granted the sole right to publish "almanacs and prognostications" to the Stationers' company, and James I. extended the privilege to the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge, but for centuries only these three bodies were permitted to issue printed calendars.

The monopoly ended when the claim of the king to the privilege of granting or withholding permission to issue calendars—a survival, perhaps, from days when kings asserted their right to regulate all things, including even the times and seasons—was definitely disproved and proclaimed nonexistent. Now anybody can say who's who anywhere.—London Chronicle.

A Practical Thought. "Do you know," said the amateur astronomer, "that it takes the light of certain stars millions of years to reach the earth?"

"Why no," answered the ordinary citizen. "I hadn't heard of that, but since you mention it, I'm glad we have an arc light on our corner."

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