THE BALL OF FIRE

By GEORGE RANDOLPH CHESTER and LILLIAN CHESTER

ILLUSTRATED BY C. D. RHODES

(Copyright, 1916, by the Bell Book Corporation.)

SYNOPSIS.

At a merry meeting of the Market Square Social Club, Jerry Simpson, a Providence drummer about the size of a fat dachshund, is introduced to Edward E. Allison, local manager of the Eastern Shoe company. One of the girls present, Miss Grace Darrow, is apparently a lonesome bachelor girl, while Allison takes Gail riding in his motor car.

CHAPTER II—Continued.

Gail, too, was disturbed. While she had laughed to cover the excitement of her self-betrayal, she had been quite collected enough to thank Allison for his ready aid; but she had felt the thrill of that tensed arm, and it had awakened in her mind an entirely new vein of puzzled conjecture.

Gravity with a man invariably leads him back to the consideration of his leading joy in life, business; and the first thing Allison knew he was indulging in quite a unique weakness, for him, he was bragging! Not exactly flat-footed, but, with tolerably strong limitations, he gave her to understand that the consolidation of the immense Hamilton Interests of New York with what as tremendous an undertaking as she could comprehend, and that, having attained so dizzy a summit, he was entitled to turn himself to lighter things to enjoy life and gayety and frivolity, to rest, as it were, upon his laurels.

Gail was amazed, as she always was when one of strong achievement let dropped into the weakness to interest girls. She did appreciate and admire his no doubt tremendous accomplishment; it was only his naivete which amused her, and to save her she could not resist the wicked little impulse to settle him. To his suggestion that he could now lead a merry life because he was entitled to rest upon his laurels, she had merely answered:

"Why?"

He dropped into a silence so dense that the thump was almost audible, and she was contrite. She had probed him deeper than she knew, however, and had not understood how gigantic the man's ambitions had been, nor how vain he was of his really marvelous power of persuasion. After all, why should he pause, when he had such power to him? She did well to speak slightingly of any achievement made by a man of such proved ability. Here was bitumen sprang up in him. The next time he talked business with her he would have something startling under way, something to compel her respect.

CHAPTER III.

The Change in the Rector's Eyes.

The grand privilege of Mrs. Jim Burgess's happy life was to worry all she could. Just now, as she sat on the seven chairs and the four benches of the mahogany panelled library, and had a wealth of nervous-minded sculpins and petulant and rare old prints and was bathed in a new ecstasy of painful enjoyment, she was worried about Gail! It was six-thirty now and Gail had not yet returned from Lorlie's.

Mrs Helen Davies, dressed for dinner with as much care as if she had been about to attend one of the most fashionable Mrs Worsterly-Gaither affairs, came sweeping down the stairs, her entire air the calm aplomb of one whom nothing can disturb and, apparently, had turned into the library. "I'm so glad you're going to take breakfast Mrs Sargent, with a sigh of relief. "I'm so worried! Gail hasn't come home from Lorlie's—"

Mrs Helen Davies sat beneath the statue of Minerva, presenting wisdom to the world, and arranged the folds of her gown to the most graceful advantage.

"You shouldn't expect her on time, coming from Lorlie's," she observed with a smile of proper pride. She was a handsomely fond of her daughter Lorlie, but she preferred to live her own life. "I have a brilliant idea, Grace. I'll telephone," and without awaiting assent herself to the least, she glided to the silver plectrum Plain-backed Flemish chair, and sat at the library table and drew the phone to her, and secured her daughter's number.

"Hello, Lorlie," she called, in the most friendly of tones. "You'd better send Gail home, before your dear Grace develops wrinkles."

Mrs Helen Davies listened to the answer, a sparkle in her black eyes.

"Where is she?" interrupted Mrs Burgess, holding her thumb.

"Out driving," reported sister Helen. "Have you sent your invitations for the house party, Lorlie?" and she disregarded that important subject until Mrs Sargent's thumb acted.

"With whom is Gail driving, and where?" asked sister Grace, anxious for detail.

Mrs Helen Davies touched all of her fingertips together in front of her on the library table, and beamed on Grace.

"Don't worry about Gail," she smilingly advised. "She is driving with Edward E. Allison. He is the richest bachelor in the New York, though not so really prominent. No one has ever been able to interest him. I predict for Gail a brilliant future," and she snored ever contentedly to her favorite contrast with Minerva.

"Gail would attract anyone," retorted Mrs. Sargent complacently and with a little cough came to her brow. "I wonder where she met him."

"At the weekly meeting, Lorlie said."

"Oh," and Mrs. Sargent's brow cleared instantly. "Jim introduced them. I wonder where Jim is?"

The door opened and Jim Burgess came in, wiping the snow from his mustache before he distributed his customary hearty greeting to the family.

"Where's Gail?" he wanted to know.

Out driving with Edward E. Allison," answered both ladies.

"Still!" inquired Jim Sargent, and then he laughed. "She's a clever girl. Smart as a whip." She nearly started first in the world."

"Was Willie Cunningham there?" inquired Mrs. Burgess interestedly.

"Took me in a corner after the meeting and told me that Gail bore a remarkable resemblance to the Pratell Madonna, and might be rich."

The telephone bell rang, and Sargent, who could not train himself to wait for a servant to sift the message, answered it immediately, with his characteristic explosive-first-a-word

Rev. Smith Boyd Cans Gut With His Usual Vestryman.

found the most enchanting roadhouse in the world and was going to take breathed Mrs Sargent, with a sigh of relief. "I'm so worried!" Gail hasn't come home from Lorlie's—"

"Hello!"

"Is it you, Lorlie Jim," called a buoyant voice. "Mr Allison and I have

"Lorlie!" shouted Sargent, and then he laughed. "She's a clever girl. Smart as a whip. She nearly started first in the world."

"Was Willie Cunningham there?" inquired Mrs. Burgess interestedly. "Jim introduced them. I wonder where Jim is?"

The door opened and Jim Burgess came in, wiping the snow from his mustache before he distributed his customary hearty greeting to the family.

"Where's Gail?" he wanted to know.

Out driving with Edward E. Allison," answered both ladies.

"Still!" inquired Jim Sargent, and then he laughed. "She's a clever girl. Smart as a whip."