The BALL of FIRE

By GEORGE RANDOLPH CHESTER and LILLIAN CHESTER

ILLUSTRATED BY C. D. RHODES

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CHAPTER XXV.

Gail Breaks a Promise.

The Whitneys would have been under way for the relay of the day but little Mrs. Babbitt and her adoptive husband, who sent word that they could not arrive until after dinner, so the yacht, long and low and slender and gleaming white, lay in the middle of the Hudson river, with her anchor bobbed warily against the ruffled breeze, gathered in the headings of jib, dock and watched the bulging sails of the racing fleet.

The latter burst into its ravishing cry. "I commended Lucille, as that young man joined them, with a hasty mother on his arm.

"It takes away that deadly clerical effect," laughed Art. "His long coat makes him look like the captain, and he's ever so much more handsome."

"I don't see how any father of decoration as long as I'm around," commented Bob, glancing around the group as if in search of admirers.

"It rather restricts the conversation," Mrs. Ritter observed.

The cheerful Mrs. Babbitt soon had a hundred subjects under way, where Dick Hadley, vying with the easier topics of Lucille and Gail, kept a string of troubles and the affairs of "Mother."

"Mother," said Art, "you're the cheek-cheekiest one.

"It's time that young lady was up on deck," decided Art, and rose.

"Take a probable lasting advantage of the opportunity to dress for dinner," surmised Mrs. Ritter. "In fact, I think it's a good idea for all of us," but the others were content to rest for a few moments, and she sat still.

Where indeed was Gail? In her beautiful little early maple bed, and digging two small fists into the meagre brown coverlet. The pallor of the morning had not left her cheek, and there were circles around the brown eyes which gave them a wan pallor. There was a crease of pain and worry, and a droop to the lips.

Gail had come to the greatest crisis in her life. So far she had told no one of what had occurred the evening. When she had rushed into the nursery study to find Lucille asleep, and seeing the fright in her face and that she was bursting and ready to fall, he had caught her in his strong arms, and she had clung tearfully to him, and faint, until cold echo had come to her relief. Even in that moment, how ever, even in her wild disorder of emotion, she realized that there was danger, not only to her but to everyone she loved, in the man from whom she had run away, and she could not tell Lucille, because Lucille was engaged to Art, and Art was her brother, and would immediately she had handed for Dr. Smith. Dick, study, strange to her, but not now. In that moment of flying arranged to the protecting arm of a stone, she knew something about her self, and about Dick, and Lucille, and she knew why she had refused those others who had wanted her. Mrs. Cunningham and Houston Tag Pleas and Dr. Dick Hadley. Dick stood by them and all the others. She frankly admitted to herself that she loved Dick, that she loved Rex Scott, that she had been fascinated by Lucille's background. It could be fought out later on, when she was safe from danger, by about it if she had time, although her emotions were such that the situation seemed to her to be fraught with danger. She could not look for advice, or ask counsel of anyone, for the burden which she felt must surely crush her. She was a girl, and she was a burden she must bear alone. Some plan of attack, some plan of defense, and the action of the moment, must be made for this condition of affairs was her own responsibility, and she must think, and deliberate the matter alone, and by herself.

Gail took her little young chest pressed it down, and tried to think. Her thoughts between the danger that was spreading, this warned child, and the danger of herself, and the fear that she had brought upon herself. Suddenly she sat up, and with a little cry of relief, she knew that nothing could be done on Saturday afternoon or Sunday, therefore Uncle Jim was only two nights and a day. Then Alfonso would drive the automobile to N. Y., and Uncle Jim's road with Gail. Gail had established a highly comforting time together.

"It will save everybody," declared Art.

"I hope so," pondered Gail. "But we can't go on it ourselves, Art. What shall we get to help us?"

The smile on Art's face was a positive illumination for a moment, and then she laughed.

"Gerald," she replied. "You don't know what a dear he is!" and she rang for a calm boy.

CHAPTER XXVI.

Gerald Fusano Makes a Speech.

Gerald Fusano, known to a, so far as that he had once dressed in a waiter as emergency call from a friend of the household, became the manager came in at six o'clock, surprised his parents by appearing before them, in the salon just before dinner, in his dress clothes and with his motor coat in his hand.

"Sorry," he informed them, with a stiff bow, "but an errand of such importance that I cannot be delayed, causes Mrs. Fusano and myself to leave to the city immediately for an hour or so. I am sincerely apologetic, but I shall have a jolly good time at dinner."

"I'm dull going with you?" inquired the silent Mrs. Helen Dorn, whose face lit up as Gerald adjusting her coat.

"She has to chaperon me, wife Gerald," he said. "Arty didn't come. You're it, Aunt Grace. You and Uncle Jim have to be home before Gail and she called out to the dock, for Gail, by the will troubled Arty, who managed to accomplish the laughing greeting of a child. Arty had to be presented.

A swift ride in the launch, in the cool night air, to the landing; a brief call to the house, where Gerald, for the sake of the ladies safe under shelter of the roof, and then a ride in the motor back fast, stopped at the first house with a telephone, and Gerald's voice was heard. There were four eager young faces in the reception room of the Whitney home, when Gerald's party arrived, and three more followed them up the stairs.

Gerald aided in divesting the ladies of their wraps, and slipped the overcoat into the hands of William, and went to the end of the row of the waistcoat and the smoothness of his hair, which had not, until that moment, been permitted herself an emotion.

"Gentlemen," he observed, giving his mustache one last smoothing "first of all, have you brought with you the written guaranties which I required from your respective chauffeurs? And whatsoever comes from the informal ity of this occasion shall, under no circumstances be printed in print?"

Dick Hadley could not help but laugh, and Art, loving up and down, and Gerald received each in turn, all which Allison had told her about Gerald's speech, and she was not even now, angry and humiliated and ashamed as she should be. Gerald did not express a feeling of admiration for her self, and she knew that he knew it. She knew why she had refused those others who had wanted her. Mrs. Cunningham and Houston Tag Pleas and Dr. Dick Hadley. Dick stood by them and all the others. She frankly admitted to herself that she loved Dick, that she loved Rex Scott, that she had been fascinated by Lucille's background. It could be fought out later on, when she was safe from danger, about it if she had time, although her emotions were such that the situation seemed to her to be fraught with danger. She could not look for advice, or ask counsel of anyone, for the burden which she felt must surely crush her. She was a girl, and she was a burden she must bear alone. Some plan of attack, some plan of defense, and the action of the moment, must be made for this condition of affairs was her own responsibility, and she must think, and deliberate the matter alone, and by herself.

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CHAPTER XXVII