

THE WORLD WITH A FENCE

Chapter 42
DECISION

CAROL took his hands and pulled them down into her lap. "Listen, Blake, and look at me. It won't make any difference unless we let it. I told you I was willing to fight it out beside you; that even a triangle didn't have to be too disgraceful. I've been expecting this from the beginning."

The muscles of his face relaxed slowly, until he smiled, wonderingly. "Lord, what a baby you make me feel! You're a man, aren't you? I'll ever be, and why on earth you should love me like this is beyond me. All I can do is marvel—and worship you!" "Idiot! You're pretty well worth loving, since you ask me." Be casual, she was commanding herself; make him think it isn't important enough even to talk about. . . . She stood up and held out her hand to him. "Let's get a drink and see if that won't change the color of the world."

He extracted ice cubes with unsteady fingers, half drunk with the knowledge that she was willing to stand by him. He saw the situation now as she had tried to paint it; painful and bitter, perhaps, but sweetened by a belief in ultimate success.

He put down his glass and smiled at her. "I haven't even asked about your trip home. How was it?" "Almost perfect, considering the circumstances."

"How was Pat?" "Fine." She flushed. "I finally broke down and told him about you: I had to talk to somebody!"

His face glowed. "Did he approve?" "Heartily. He says I'm to bring you to see them as soon as possible, and that you sound like a grand guy."

"Then maybe I'd better not go." "Nuts to you!"

Their lightness was false and perilous, with a throbbing undercurrent that might come to the surface in a breath. Because he realized that, Blake glanced at his watch.

"Dinner time, precious. Get your hat." Before he devoured her, he added in his heart.

But when dinner was over and they were back again in her living-room the lightness failed them. For all his discipline Blake felt the old hunger—more insatiable than ever, and because the waiting seemed endless now he had no hope to restrain him. He kissed her hotly, and knew that she understood his hunger. His hands were caressing her and she made no move to withdraw.

She made her choice then, clearly and honestly. This is no way for us to live, she realized, feeling him tremble against her. A few months of this can destroy us. And I can't go away and leave him alone.

She sat up. "Blake. . ."

LONG afterwards, when he had gone, she sat at her dressing table with her chin in her hands, staring at her own reflection.

She probed her mind for a feeling of guilt or regret, and failed to find it. Irma was incapable now of dealing them a mortal wound.

She rose and went to open the windows, and stood looking at the black star-dusted sky. Blake would be at home by now, and perhaps looking at the same sky—unless he had gone straight to sleep! She tried not to think of the time when he would not have to leave her, and to cling instead to all that she had of him now.

A quick, icy wind struck her, like a breath from the world of darkness, and she shivered and turned from the window. And then she stopped short. Someone was knocking softly upon her door.

She snapped on a light and hurried to the door, and Blake stumbled into the room and stood, swaying. She thought incredulously: he's gone home and gotten drunk. What a queer thing to do. . . .

He spoke finally, shaping each word with great care, like a mute who has learned to talk.

"Irma—has—killed—herself. . . . The icy wind swept her again, straight from the world of darkness. She put up her hand as if to shield her face, while an unfamiliar voice whispered:

"No, Blake, no. . . ."

"She must have done it this afternoon. Long distance has been trying to find me since five o'clock. . . . He rubbed a hand across his eyes as if to blot out a visual horror, and shuddered once.

Five o'clock. Then all the time they were together Irma had been dead—because of her. . . . She laughed, and the sound was queer and mad.

"She chose the only possible way to keep us apart, didn't she? Really, it was terribly clever of her. . . ." The sound faded and she heard her own teeth chattering.

She sat down, staring at the floor. He leaned his weight against the table and looked at nothing.

"I have to go down there," he said to the floor. "There's a train in three hours."

"How—what did she do?" "Does it matter?"

He wanted to spare her whatever horror he could. He didn't want her to see Irma as he would always see her, slashing her wrists with a razor blade, and perhaps smiling a small, secret, triumphant smile.

Their thoughts were stumbling along the same black path. Because the suit was filed this morning, they knew. Because she must have wired or phoned his lawyer to know if he had been in earnest, and found that he was. Because she had to defeat them, even with her life; she had to have the center of the stage—the last word. . . .

Blake moved restlessly, like a man struggling to escape the toils of nightmare, and looked at her.

"She left a note," he muttered, "but thank God she put all the blame on me. I made them read it to me. . . ."

Irma had been content, then, to take half her revenge in secret. Her vanity had lived as long as she; had forbidden her to tell an avid world that another woman had beaten her.

Blake made a heroic effort to pull himself together. "I'll have to go now. Have you—any sort of sedative here?"

She lifted her head as if it carried a great weight. "No. It doesn't matter. . . ."

"Will you phone a drug store and have them send you something?" "Yes. . . ."

She stood up and held out his coat, as if she passed it across a chasm, and he took it without a word. He made no move to touch her, but his eyes were sick with pity and love. He said brokenly:

"Carol—you won't go away? You'll be here when—I get back?" "She realized that fight would surely damn her if she was not already damned. Only the guilty fled before they were accused. "Yes, I'll be here. But you can't come and see me."

"I'll arrange it—somehow."

His eyes compelled her, and she met them finally, and read in them all the things he could not tell her. The measure of his own suffering pierced her so that she went to him and gave him her hands.

"I'll be there, Blake, every minute. If that helps any."

He lifted her hands and kissed them slowly. "It's the one thing that will help. It's what I've been praying to hear and couldn't ask you to say."

He went out, closing the door softly behind him.

SHE made herself read the morning paper, and realized that it had been kind. The story was relegated to the inside pages. Mrs. Thornton, the account said generously, had been in bad health; she was in Florida for that reason. . . .

She dropped the paper and went to make coffee. Her mind was mercifully numb, so that she felt nothing—not even misery. The only sensations of which she was conscious were a dull headache and a strained feeling about her eyes that came from sleeplessness.

The telephone clattered and she looked slowly towards it, wondering if she could bear to answer it. And then she knew she had to.

The voice over the wire was Cornelia's; crisp and matter-of-fact. "Carol?"

"Yes. . . ."

"I wondered if you'd have dinner with me tonight? Either at home or uptown?"

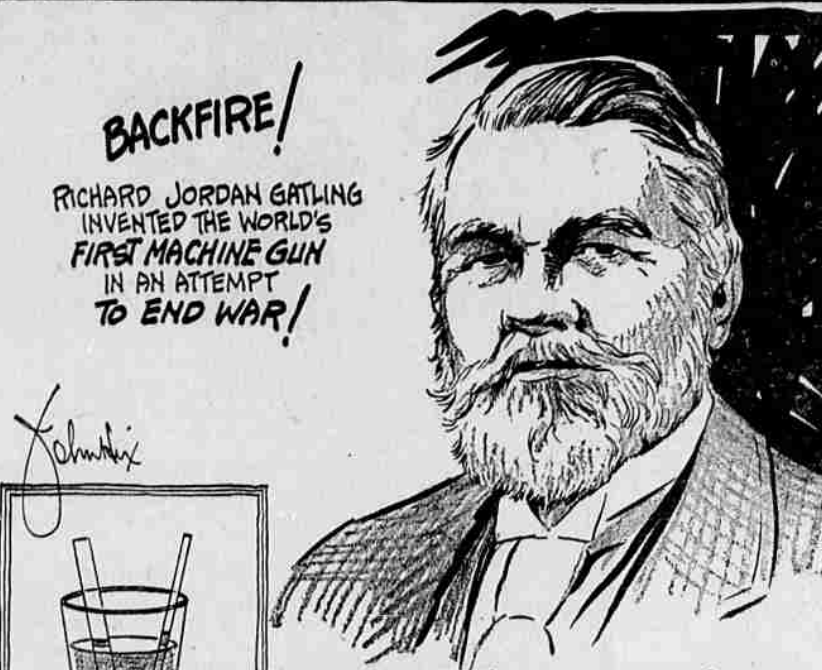
She knew then that Cornelia had read the paper, and that Cornelia's swift mind had grasped a great deal that had been unsaid. And she knew that Cornelia's interest was far more than morbid curiosity; Cornelia's contempt for gossip and personalities amounted almost to loathing.

She said: "I'd love it—but please come here instead." Where I won't have to see people, and wonder if they know. . . .

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STRANGE AS IT SEEMS—By JOHN HIX

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BACKFIRE!

RICHARD JORDAN GATLING INVENTED THE WORLD'S FIRST MACHINE GUN IN AN ATTEMPT TO END WAR!

WATER RISES HIGHER IN A NARROW TUBE THAN IN A WIDE ONE

THE EEL HAS SCALES INSIDE ITS SKIN...

UNDER PENALTY OF DEATH WOMEN OF THE SAN BLAS INDIANS ARE FORBIDDEN TO LEAVE THEIR NATIVE LAND...

—Northern Panama Coast—

Backfire. With the horrors of war indelibly impressed in his memory by the sight of wounded soldiers returning from early battles of the Civil War, Richard Jordan Gatling became an ardent pacifist.

In search of a plan whereby he might help to end all wars, Gatling was struck with the idea of making war so horrible that nations would outlaw it. The result was his invention of the world's first machine gun, the Gatling gun.

In 1865 the weapon was adopted by the United States Army, and since then, in revised form, it has developed into the death-dealing machine gun modern warfare knows today.

Strange as it seems, the world's most destructive explosives were invented by another pacifist, Alfred B. Nobel. Laboring under the same supposition as Gatling, Nobel, a Swedish chemist, devoted much of his life to the creation of complex explosives that would assure peace among nations by their destructive powers.

The "Nobel Peace Prize," a sum of money awarded annually to the person or society doing the most toward creating international peace, was left by Nobel from the huge fortune he

WRIGLEY'S SPEARMINT

THE PERFECT GUM

INEXPENSIVE - SATISFYING

AUTUMN DAYS ARE HARD TO BEAT, SO IS WRIGLEY'S IT'S A TREAT!

San Blas Indians, although in contact with Europeans since the 16th century, remain one of the purest races in the world. Through the centuries they have gone to great ends to maintain their racial purity and even today deem to death any woman who leaves her homeland in the northeast of Panama, for fear of racial contamination.

Water Levels. Capillary action, the strange physical phenomenon that seemingly causes water to violate its law of seeking its own level, is responsible for the heights of water inside tubes of different diameters.

TAILSPIN TOMMY—The Second Warning

EXACTLY AT MIDNIGHT... JUST AS SKEETER FIGURED IT... THE PHANTOM FOKKER GLIDED DOWN OUT OF THE DARK SKY... TO LAND AT THREE-POINT... IN THE CONTROL TOWER, WILSON AND DILLON WATCH IT IN SURPRISE....

IT'S THAT CRAZY CRATE AGAIN!

I'LL SHOW THAT CRAZY NUT... HE CAN'T POKE FUN AT THREE-POINT...

HEY, YOU!

TELL CAPTAIN PAUL SMITH... THIS IS THE SECOND WARNING!

2617

BEN WEBSTER'S CAREER—Mr. Tuttle Acts!

BEN WAS GRACIOUSLY RECEIVED BY THE SUPERINTENDENT OF THE ORPHANAGE, ONE MRS. TUMMAY—

OUR FILES ON GERALD KINLEY? WELL, NOW, LET ME SEE—

HE WAS THE BOY WHO RAN AWAY—MY, MY, THAT WAS ALL OF ELEVEN YEARS AGO AND—

YES, THIS IS MRS. TUMMAY—WHO? OH, YES—

DON'T MENTION MY NAME, MRS. TUMMAY, BUT IF THAT BEN WEBSTER BOY IS THERE, I DON'T BELIEVE I SHOULD REVEAL ANYTHING TO HIM—

1936 by Joe Jerome Williams

THE NEBBS—A Letter

HERE'S A LETTER FOR YOU—I THOUGHT YOU SAID NOBODY KNEW WHERE YOU WAS—Mebbe you wrote it to YOURSELF

IT'S FROM OBIE... GOT YOUR FISH, IT WAS A DANDY. TRYING TO MAKE MYSELF BELIEVE YOU CAUGHT IT—YOUR BROTHER-IN-LAW LEFT A COUPLE OF DAYS AFTER YOU DID EVERYTHING IS FINE. STAY AS LONG AS YOU LIKE...

I SHOULD'NT HAVE SENT THAT FISH—NOW THEY'VE GOT MY ADDRESS... MY VACATION IS OVER—THEY WANT ME BACK... THAT'S THE PENALTY FOR BEING SOMEBODY... THEY'VE GOT A FLOCK OF THINGS ON THE FIRE THAT IT TAKES BRAINS TO DECIDE

WELL, IF YOU GOT BRAINS YOU DIDN'T BRING 'EM WITH YOU—YOU GOT A HEAD THAT JUST LOOKS LIKE A PLACE TO STORE STUFF IN

9-26

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DIFFICULT DECISIONS

By GLUYAS WILLIAMS

WONDERING HOW LONG TO HOLD DINNER FOR GUESTS WHO DON'T SHOW UP AND WHO MAY HAVE GOT THEIR DATES MIXED, THE HEAD OF THE HOUSE HAVING HAD A VERY EARLY LUNCHEON

9-25

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SMATTER POP—

By C. M. PAYNE

POP! IS THAT YOU COMING IN THE FRONT DOOR?

CERTAINLY NOT! I'M RIGHT HERE

BUT IT IS YOUR HAT AND COAT AND SHOES!

AWK

SMATTER?

9-21

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300,000 GERMAN BOYS CALLED TO COLORS BY ARMY INCREASE EDICT

BERLIN, Sept. 30.—A widespread increase was ordered in the German military establishment today as Nazi officials began conscription to raise their fighting force to 800,000 men under the new two-year compulsory service rule.

inducted into the labor service October 1, simultaneously with between 300,000 and 400,000 of their slightly older comrades called to the revitalized Reichswehr—national army—reorganized on the pre-1914 two-year compulsory model.

Hitler, taking a leaf from the Kaiser Wilhelm system, decreed the two-year service August 24 to become effective October 1. The training period previously was one year, in addition to half a year in the spade corps which must be put in prior to being called into the fighting forces. The recruits are 21 and 22 years of age—Germany's war babies—parts of the classes of 1914 and 1915.

WASHINGTON, Sept. 30.—(AP)—The Inland Navigation company was authorized today by the interstate commerce commission to operate by water on the Willamette and Columbia rivers between Portland and The Dalles, Ore.

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