

The Flyer's Trophy

By HAROLD SINCLAIR

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"I'm afraid that pretty sister of yours will never see my much vaunted trophy," said Elwyn Moore, airman.

"She's got to. I promised her. I wrote her all about it, and you. So brace up, old man. Take your pick. The long stick—south. The short stick—east. Choose."

It was an impressive scene and an unusual one. Upon a broad plateau in the heart of the North Carolina mountains rested the monoplane Victor. The two expert birdmen had just carried off the honors in an aero meet at Savannah. They designed a trip to the home of Nelson Barton, in Delaware, where his father and his sister awaited them. Now, in a flight over a desolate, well nigh uninhabited country, the "juice" had given out and the Victor was "stalled." Gasoline must be found or the machine abandoned.

Barton hid all but the ends of two twigs in his hand. Moore drew the long one—south. Barton started east with the laughing boast that he would be back first with the needful fuel for the engine.

It was nightfall when Barton toiled slowly down a winding valley—lost. "This is getting pretty desperate," decided Barton. "Ah, at last—a light." Suddenly loud shouts and then shots in the distance attracted his attention. Following the same a great lurid glow sprang up across the eastern horizon.

"A fire!" exclaimed Barton, and he started toward it. A terrific hubbub increased as he advanced.

A woman, clasping a little babe close to her breast, and holding her by the hand dragged a little girl sobbing pitifully with fright and weariness.

"My good woman," spoke Barton, "what is the trouble?"

"Oh, sir, we are lost! The Dollivars are making a raid. They have burned our houses."

Barton got the three refugees into a cove and saw a party of a dozen rough men armed and carrying torches pass them by. Then there were more shots and shouts and a new lurid glare crossed the sky.

"It is our home," mourned the woman. "Oh, sir, help us."

"My husband and his band are in a refuge camp twenty miles south of here," explained the woman.

The woman, carrying the babe and leading the way, Barton with the little girl in his arms, they started on a forlorn tramp.

"We are almost there," announced the woman nearly four hours later as they started down a tortuous gap in the mountains. "There is the glow of their camp fire. Oh, I am so glad, so thankful to you." And then with the words she sank to the grass and swooned dead away.

Twenty steps brought the aviator in full view of the outlaw camp. A vivid picture halted, appalled him. A group of men were gathered near a camp fire, and over a branch of a great tree close at hand ran a rope. One end encircled the neck of a man with arms and feet tightly bound.

"Why! Why! Why!" shouted out Nelson Barton in three tones of rising horror, "it is my friend, my partner, Elwyn Moore! Stop! Stop!" he screamed, rushing forward and waving his arms wildly.

Half a dozen rifles covered him. "What's this?" fiercely challenged the outlaw chief.

"This is my friend," proceeded Barton, pointing to Moore.

"Oh, maybe you're another detective, eh?" demanded the outlaw.

"Detective? Why, we are airmen." Suddenly the outlaw turned. The little girl had followed Barton.

"Mary, little Mary!" gasped the outlaw. "How did you come here?"

"I brought her," said Barton quickly; "your wife and baby, too. They are back near the spring. The Dollivars have raided your homes, and—"

A cry of rage went up from the rough crowd. The strangers were for a moment forgotten.

The outlaw chieftain came back to the camp fire with tears in his eyes, and gentle as a lamb. Instantly Moore was released. He overwhelmed Barton with thanks. He learned the real mission of the aviators in that forbidden district.

"Four of you," he shouted to his men, "get to Shelbyville as fast as you can, and bring back fifty gallons of gasoline."

"Ask him to give me my trophy," whispered Moore to his friend.

"Your trophy?"

"Yes, it's been a target fastened to that tree yonder."

The trophy, plus one deep bullet dent, was returned to its owner with apologies.

The airship made a brilliant non-stop flight, almost beating the record. A guest at the Barton home, Elwyn Moore had the coveted chance to present himself and his trophy to pretty Mabel Barton.

She admired it, and its owner as well. The result was natural. The trophy became a family heirloom. It was not only a reminder of the skill of its owner, but of that weird hour when the moonshiner's camp when the loyal Nelson Barton arrived "just in time!"

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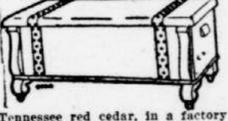
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