

# VIRGINIA OF THE AIR LANES

A New Romance By Herbert Quick

"I discover," said Mr. Craighead, as they walked back to the hotel, "that our young conqueror of the upper seas is not here. Confoundly odd of him to remove to his plantation, now! Mechanical reasons, eh, Mr. Waddy?"

"I guess so," said Mr. Waddy; "an' o' course you don't know where the plantation is, an' we'll have to wait some more! Hey?"

"Papa!"

"Don't know?" said Craighead. "Don't know? Well, wait till morning. Steamer up Fish River at nine—plantation at noon—long chase over. I fear one thing only: that he has completed the aeronef, and flown north to keep his trust on the front lawn. That would amount to something like a complete joke, wouldn't it?"

"Huh!" grunted Waddy. "Don't worry; you bet he ain't flown none."

If Craighead's easy flow of speech was somewhat impeded by his sense of the uncertainties, not to say dangers, of his position, it was worse when they returned from the plantation, having elicited from the reluctant Chloe the information that Mr. Theodore, his niece, and his niece's companion, were at Harrod's camp on the beach, which was "off thatterway." They just went down the river, through a canal across some land, and then they tar. She didn't know about an aeronef, but Mr. Theodore was a-projektin' around with some flyin'-machine. She reckoned the canal at Palmetto Beach was the one; but she didn't know. This information, Mr. Craighead declared, made everything clear; but on returning to the Inn, Mr. Waddy hired a local officer to guard Mr. Craighead's room, and began taking thought of having a warrant issued against him for something—Mr. Waddy was not quite clear for what.

Craighead was trapped, lost, betrayed. He sat in his room chewing a cigar, and calculating the distance to get down. It looked feasible to get down a pillar of the veranda and into the woods. Carson was an impostor, there was no guilty of fraud, there was no aeronef, and the Air Products Company would collapse at Mr. Waddy's detection. Life might be sustained on shell-fish alongshore, though the hermit-crabs were not tempting. Lifting the sash softly, he put out a foot, determined to run for it. His bluff had been called, and he had no cards. He had put too much realism into his description of things down here, nothing was to be gained by awaiting arrest. The world was wide. The weather was warm. His foot touched the roof, when—

Ting-a-ling-ting-ting-g-g-g!

His telephone rang. Was his good angel on the wire? She was. "Is this you, Mr. Craighead? You know who this is?"

"Know these tones?" he gushed. "Why, were I in deepest hades, through geological depths of burning marl and lignite, and other carboniferous deposits, I'd know them! What is it, fair one?"

"Oh, nothing! Only I have just learned at the postoffice that Mr. Carson is back a few miles, through a canal and a lagoon and winding passages; and the man will get you a guide with a boat to take us through those narrows in the morning. Is that all right—or have I made a mess of it as a woman always does?"

"You are—my God, Caroline, you have saved me from you know not what! I shall love you, love you, love you—"

And the telephone was hung up. Mr. Waddy saw Craighead himself again; so much so that he lectured Mr. Waddy on the old kitchen-mid-shell banks.

"These piles of shells," said he, "are neither Indian remains, in the ordinary significance of the term Indian, nor Aztec, in the proper sense of that. I have made a specialty of these things. They are—"

"The boat is waitin' suh," said the man with the launch.

They went through the canal in great style, Craighead descending on the influences of canals in general, and this one especially. It was Craighead who leaped out, pushed the launch through a tight squeeze in the narrows, and leaped in like a track-meet man, fitted Mrs. Graybill's lap with lilies, and tried unsuccessfully to engage her in conversation—she being unusually pensive. He was the life of the party once more. Fate smiled; the cards again ran his way, and all was well—save for the Graybill pensiveness. Perhaps his declaration over the wire—but pshaw! She had saved him, and the logic of their lives was plain.

They skimmed the black waters of Freshwater Lake, and landed at the shelly hummock. While the boatman searched for the path to the Gulf Beach, they sat on the shell mound, fascinated by the strange landscape. The expanse of black pools and reedy marshes between them and the line of surf, which they could hear roaring beyond the dunes, was dotted with clumps of tall pines, and speckled with scrub-oak thickets.

"Those pines," said Mrs. Graybill, "are like palms on coral islands, so tall, so slender, and—why, what's that?"

"Well, might she speak thus; for, rising from beyond the dunes, as if from the sea, there soared a great something which moved like a bird. With enormous wings steadily outstretched, it made in-

and, like a foraging hawk. It swelled like a magic ship as it neared them, sailing low and dominating the sky like a cloud. It came with the most amazing speed, like an eagle in mid-swoop, so swift, so light, so facile that all impression of weight was abolished, and the huge thing filled the mind with the notion of levity—like a hummingbird. It swerved, as it neared the lake, and sheered round as swings a gull to pick up food. The whir of machinery came down to them like the rush of a thousand quail bursting from covert; as, with a wide graceful curve, it departed as suddenly as it had come, leaving them gazing after it, spellbound, almost struck dumb.

"Oh, of course," said Craighead, his hands trembling, his face white, "this man Carson is a fraud! Oh, yes, we knew it all the time! But you see that his aeronef has gone through the empty form of eventuating all the same. Flying like a frigate bird! Shayne, charge. Roll over, Silberberg! And don't dare move till I say so! Oh, this is rotten, rotten! I've got to kiss someone! Hooray!"

Mrs. Graybill was running along the path after the guide, who was straining every nerve to attain the beach where the view would be unimpeded. Craighead ran after her, Mr. Waddy puffing along behind, hopelessly unplaced.

"Did you see Carson?" said Craighead. "Am there was a girl with him. Some confidence, to risk a lady on board, no?"

"Oh, let us hurry!" said she. "It's the most marvelous thing in the world."

Emerging from the dunes, they saw the air-ship skimming off along the line of beach foam, growing smaller with a rapidity that spoke eloquently of her speed. Down the beach stood Mrs. Stott and Captain Harrod, looking after the air-ship in amazement and delight. It was the day of the first trial. The prophecy of the night before was fulfilled. They "had her in the air."

Perhaps two miles she sped from them, then turning like a frightened heron, she swept seaward about to the line of the outer bar, and came down the wind like an arrow, Virginia waving an American flag over the rail, and Theodore swinging his hat. In all three groups was joy. The wonderful creation of Carson's genius was a-wing, as he had promised, her every movement under perfect control.

Suddenly, as she passed them, with a maneuver so astounding for aerial craft that they could scarcely believe their eyes, she stopped. The sharp whir of the beating wing sections told of the sudden reversal of their stroke, and of the unprecedented phenomena of the almost instant arrest of such a machine in mid-air. It was an unnecessary strain, thought the captain—Theodore ought not to have done it.

He saw the reason, however, a moment later. A black, slimy nose—the nose of the Stickleback—poked itself above water right ahead of the Virginia. A boat that looked stove and sinking, drew away from her, with a struggling, gesticulating figure in it waving a signal of distress. The slimy nose sank; and the apparent castaway was left as if to perish, unless rescued by the Virginia.

Accepting the humane task, she reversed with that boiling whir that had reached the ears of those on land. Lower, lower, lower sank the aeronef, until its car appeared almost to touch the waves. The man in distress seemed to throw something like a lasso over the nacelle of the air-ship; and the great bird rose slightly, as if to be safe from the billows. The Stickleback again peeped above the waves, her manhole opened, the castaway of the stove boat went down into the submarine.

It was absolutely beyond the power of anyone looking on to guess what was taking place. Why had the man made the signals for help, if the submarine was standing by? If the coming of the submarine to his rescue was unexpected, why had he not cast off the line from the aeronef? Why—and suddenly they all felt something sinister, something devilish, was taking place. They heard a shout from Theodore, a scream from Virginia. The submarine had come awash again; and from her open manhole came the crack of a pistol—a pistol aimed at the air-ship. Then she sank again and the air-ship was drawn downward by the fatal thread, like a trapped bird, she strained at her tether, while the grim submarine, like a devil-fish which had thrown a tentacle about a water-fowl, made seaward, out into the Gulf, out into deep water, with a purpose as manifest as it was deadly.

CHAPTER XIII. Devil-Fish vs. Bird.

When the aeronef was run out on her ways by the long shed in which she had been built, there was a flutter of expectancy among those so deeply concerned in her flight. Captain Harrod forgot his periodical visits to the hillock to scan the offing for the erect periscope of the fishlike back of the mysterious lurking submarine, which, like a shark awaiting the dropping of a man or other morsel, had haunted those waters since the day Wisner had been driven from the camp as a

spy. The captain was a moving kit of oil-cans, wrenches, spanners, extra parts, odd cells of battery, plugs, screws and the like, which in his excitement he kept carrying about long after the machine was ready for her flight.

Mrs. Stott excitedly took repeated snapshots at the Psyche, and from time to time noted down her thoughts on this crisis in history with a stylographic pen, with which she made careful carbon copies, the usefulness of which was impaired by their being on the backs of the originals, on account of Mrs. Stott's having agitatedly reversed her carbon sheets.

Virginia was a close second to the captain in the matter of aiding the inventor, whose conscience was therefore more tender for the sin of having assumed on very small justification the relation of uncle to his Psyche, thrown under her protection by a perverse fate. She called him "uncle" with a frequency that assumed an insistence on the avuncular relationship; in memory maybe of the tumultuous disturbance of atmosphere and heart-beats at the indoor trial of the aeronef. She moved levers, tried sparks, and made herself useful about the machine in so many ways that Theodore promoted her to the position of first mate on the spot.

"The first mate always sails with the ship, uncle," she suggested.

"I thought you had had enough of aeronefs," said Theodore, "in the wreck of Wisner's helicopter. Please throw in the gyroscope gear. Thank you. Don't they spin beautifully?"

"But that was only what Captain Harrod calls a chicananthy thing. This is as stable as the Roc herself."

"Would you really go on the trial trip?" he asked.

"Try me," said she; "I want to."

"You'd be worth a dozen of the captain," replied Carson. "He hasn't the faintest idea of the principles of the Virginia, while you could fly her in a week."

"I could now," asserted Virginia. "The Virginia is a simple, manageable thing, like her namesake."

"If she shows all her namesake's sweet traits—," began Theodore. "Then I'm to go."

"Captain," cried Theodore, "here's a girl that wants to ship as first mate."

"Yes, suh?"

"Well," went on Theodore, "she will not be allowed to displace you. Make sail, Captain; we're going."

"Did—did—did you allow for me—for me to go?" asked the captain.

"Why, certainly," replied Carson. "Didn't you expect to go?"

"No, suh," replied the captain. "Ah never allowed to go on any o'-these alah-boats. Of co'se, ef you'all insists, Ah'll go aboa'd on'til Ah fall out, which'll be about fo' fathom high. Ah git dizzy-like, an' can't he'p it. Howsever' hyah goes!"

"Now you must let me go!" Virginia pleaded, with her hand on his arm. "If the captain gets dizzy—"

"Blin', staggerin', drunk dizzy, Ah do," interposed Captain Harrod.

"It would be dangerous and foolish to take him, wouldn't it, uncle?"

Theodore hesitated. The weakness of height-sickness and the horrible vertigo of those subject to it seemed to prove the captain's disability, and yet—

"It would be foolhardy," said he. "Well, I can do it alone, if everything goes well. A little help might be important, but I—"

"I'm going, uncle," said Virginia. "There's no danger. I like it. Think of my thousands of miles in the Roc."

"I can't consent to it," said Theodore, entering the car. "There's a grave theoretical danger. I should be blamed—"

But Virginia was seated beside him, wearing a dress of soft white wool, a close-fitting little cap on her head, and carrying a jacket over her arm. Evidently she had come out with the full intention of doing this.

"My danger is theoretical," said she. "Yours in going alone is quite real. Now, shall I keep the manometer reading? Oh, haven't any! Well, then, the altimeter-statoscope?"

"It's self-registering," said Theodore. "Really, there's nothing to do, except in emergencies, and—"

"And there'll be no emergencies," she cried. "Throw in the clutch, Admiral of the Circumambient Inane! You do the work, and I'll play lady! We're off!"

## FINED FOR SLEEPING IN VACANT LOT

Charles Ratacaski was yesterday fined \$20 and costs for sleeping in a vacant lot near the Northern Pacific depot, and Valentine Calza, who tried to incite a large crowd to take Ratacaski from Patrolmen McCormick and Morrill and Detective Wiley, was fined \$20 and costs for interfering with an officer.

## BIG LOSS BY FIRE IN JAMESTOWN, NEW YORK

(By United Press Leased Wire.) JAMESTOWN, N. Y., March 15.—Eight hundred thousand dollars' worth of property was destroyed, John Hanson, captain of the fire department, and three others are seriously injured as a result of a series of fires that started Saturday night and ended last night.

## PORTLAND MAN GETS CONTRACT

A. G. Long of Portland was the successful bidder yesterday, securing the contract for supplying a miscellaneous assortment of fire apparatus, including nozzles, deluge sets, etc. His bid was \$1,492, being a couple of hundred dollars below the next man.

## LECTURES ON EXERCISE

Dr. Edwin Janes last night at the Y. M. C. A. lectured on "The Philosophy of Exercise" before a large audience of young men and business men. He presented athletics in a sane and interesting manner and greatly pleased his listeners.

## ROYAL DAIRY ICE CREAM

Royal Dairy Ice Cream. Both phones, M. 95, A2195.

# SPRING OPENING AT THE LOU JOHNSON COMPANY

A Showing of Spring and Summer Suits of Finished Elegance.

New York Styles are here in great variety—Ladies' Suits, Coats and Cloaks, Skirts, Underskirts and Shirtwaists—a beautiful showing, and best of all, at moderate prices.

WEDNESDAY, THURSDAY OPENING DAYS

Don't fail to take in this showing of Spring merchandise, it surpasses any previous effort.

We claim the only exclusive Ladies' "correct" styles.

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## IN TACOMA'S THRIVING SUBURBS

Where nearly every resident owns his own home, on his own little plot of ground, where people are comparatively independent, there the Tacoma Times is the favorite newspaper. At Parkland more copies of the Times are delivered every day to regular subscribers than are delivered by both other afternoon papers. At Johnson's station the Times delivers fifteen papers every day and just one copy of just one other paper is delivered there. At Cedar street the Times circulation is larger by three copies than both the other afternoon papers combined. At Fern Hill the Times delivers as many copies every afternoon as both other afternoon papers together. At Spanaway the Times circulation equals that of any other two papers. There's a reason why most everybody reads the Times and every Times' reader knows the reason. If your neighbor doesn't happen to be in the Times' army of readers, just suggest that he is missing something. A phone call to Main 733 or Ind. A1733 will bring the Times to your home every night no matter where you live. The Times employs more carriers than any two other papers. Our delivery system extends everywhere.