

Around the World in Eighty Hours



*An
Adventure
Story*

by

**WILLIAM
WALLACE
COOK**

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CHELSEA HOUSE

79 SEVENTH AVENUE

NEW YORK CITY

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CHAPTER I

AIR LINE TO PARIS

WHITLEY and the other passenger were squeezed into a cabin two feet wide by four feet long. They were vis-à-vis in their green leather seats, with a narrow table between them. On left and right were windows through which, by merely turning their heads, they could enjoy an unobstructed view of the Kent countryside, unrolling far below in the loveliest of panoramas, splashed with the green of June and drenched in June sunshine.

The other passenger was a man of rather ample proportions. He had edged awkwardly to his green leather seat, and the green arms of it had bulged to the fuselage walls as he lowered himself down. Facing forward, he loomed very large in the eyes of Whitley and seemed to fill all the after part of that hat-box cabin.

Evidently he was keenly enjoying the experience. When not looking at his watch, or peering overside, he was beaming joyously at his fellow traveler. On "hopping off" at Hounslow airdrome he had consulted the time and had yelled at Whitley something that sounded like:

"One o'clock sharp! Now watch our pilot hang up a record between here and Le Bourget."

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The stout man was an American. Although Whitley had never seen him before, he was as sure of it as he was that he himself had come from Detroit, U. S. Undeniably he was a man of great means. His appearance suggested it, his manner proclaimed it, and the atmosphere of a Napoleon of finance entirely surrounded him. He chewed on an unlighted perfecto girdled midway of its length with a vivid band naming a brand that sells at a dollar each in box lots. Whitley could not have mangled a cheap cigarette with less concern.

The broad face was heavy-jowled. A double chin folded itself over a narrow collar of the sort affected by stout men. Below the collar was a neatly tied scarf, skewered with a pin in the shape of a pair of flying wings joined by a large blue-white diamond.

Those wings appealed to Whitley, for they had long been his insignia on the western front. A close-cropped, iron-gray mustache ornamented the stranger's upper lip—a thin, determined lip entirely in keeping with an aggressive chin. The eyes, back of their nose glasses and cupped in fleshy lids, were steel-gray. They were twin gimlets, those eyes, and filled with a snap and sparkle that indicated commercial shrewdness and daring.

The stranger was absorbedly watching terra firma, two thousand feet below. Whitney, peering downward from an opposite window, saw that the airplane was just crossing the shore of the Channel. A jumble of words reached his ears. The other passenger was trying to talk to him again, but the din

of the engines made his remark unintelligible. Giving up the attempt at conversation, the stout man drew a pencil and pad from his pocket, spent a few moments scribbling, and then passed the pad to Whitley.

"From Hounslow airdrome to the Channel between Folkestone and Romney is sixty-five miles," ran the message, "and we have done it in twenty-six minutes—two and one half miles a minute or one hundred and fifty miles an hour. Going some for a passenger bus—what?"

Whitley smiled and nodded. The other grabbed the pad and wrote again.

"I promised the pilot a tip if he'd hang up a record," announced the second message, "and he's making good. Great business! But the time is near when three hundred, four hundred, or five hundred miles an hour will be nothing unusual on the air lanes."

Whitley read this and shook his head. The stout man roared out an emphatic "Yes!" and slammed his pudgy fist down on the table. After that, both passengers watched the rough waters of the Channel.

They were fifteen minutes in doing the thirty miles of water. Here was a falling off in the speed that caused the stout man to shake his head gloomily. They came over France a little west of Boulogne, nosed out of an air pocket and flung away toward Paris at a better pace. With one eye on his watch and the other on rural France as it rushed rearward under the spreading planes, the stout passenger by

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degrees recovered his jubilant mood. "Just passed Abbeville cathedral," he wrote, "and going like an E Pluribus Unum eagle with firecrackers banging at its tail. Our pilot is making history, believe me!"

No one knew better than Whitley, airwise as he was, how well they were doing. He studied the flow of the flat country under the rushing machine, noted the tree-lined roads, rivers, canals, and little checker-board fields sweeping into their wake below, and he was touched by something of the other passenger's thrill. Then, almost before he realized that they were close to their journey's end, Paris was on their right, Le Bourget airdrome on their left, and the propellers were slowing down. In a very leisurely way they came safely to their landing, laid hold of their grips, and unpacked themselves.

"Here's five hundred in good old United States' dough," said the stout man, passing a roll of bills to the smiling and grateful pilot. "Two hundred and seventy miles in one hundred minutes!" he added. "Some speed, son! Buy pounds sterling with that wad of dollars, and when the pound gets back to where it belongs you'll make a little extra velvet. Good-by."

He was off through the crowd that had begun piling into the airdrome.

"Thank you, Mr. Morning," the pilot called after him.

"Morning!" exclaimed Whitley. "Was that John Morning, of Chicago?"

"The same, sir," said the pilot. "Didn't you

know? Well, fancy! Why, he's the biggest fish I've caught in this De Haviland for a month. Your own countryman, king of the rails, emperor of motor-dom, and would-be boss of the air lanes! And you never knew that——"

But Whitley, swinging his hand baggage, was away in pursuit of Mr. John Morning. It was a vain chase, for Morning had vanished in a cab before Whitley could overtake him.

"Whit, old scout, what's the rush?" inquired a hearty voice. "You look as if you'd lost ten dollars and found a plugged nickel. I'm here to give you the glad hand, but you don't seem to be in a receptive mood."

Whitley dropped one of his bags and gripped the palm that was pushed toward him. He laughed.

"Pink," he said, "I've an appointment at Claridge's at four this afternoon, with no less a person than John Morning, of Chicago——"

"Why," interrupted Pink, "he just dropped out of the sky with you. You were together all the way from dear ol' Lunnon. Didn't you know who that fat party was?"

"No," said Whitley. "Morning made the appointment by letter, and I never saw him before. Well, thunder! We might have been paper-talking about business all the way across instead of just watching the scenery and holding the stop watch on that Airco bird. And we sail to-morrow," Whitley grunted. "Well, Pink, let's go."

CHAPTER II

PROPHET OR DREAMER

AS he would have told you himself, John Morning was an American, "from the drop of the hat." He had garnered his great wealth in the fields of transportation. He began his business career at a tender age as understrapper in a railroad office, and in thirty years he owned the railroad. In ten years more he owned several railroads and a choice assortment of trolley lines.

Then he gave his attention to the automobile industry and made his name one to conjure with in that particular field. "Speed and more speed" was his slogan. Lopping off minutes and hours from a schedule in getting from one place to another with passengers and freight was a Morning hobby.

Civilization and progress, John Morning contended, were synonymous with knitting the world together by means of speedy communication along direct routes. An hour wrested from travel between Chicago and New York, a voyage shortened by a day between New York and Liverpool, or a week saved between San Francisco and South Africa meant more, according to John Morning, than, say, canning the solar heat of July for a winter's warming of the

temperate zone. His heraldic device, if he had had one, would have been a magic carpet.

The wonderful development of the airplane during five years of war had caused Morning to lift his eyes from terra firma and fix them speculatively on the empyrean. What a host of possibilities unfolded before his prescient gaze! No rivers to bridge, no mountains to tunnel! A veritable king's highway suddenly placed at the disposal of man by the magic of wings and a gasoline motor! What might not the pioneers of the air accomplish for the people of this planet by exploiting this new element which waited upon daring enterprise to deliver the *n*th degree of speed!

So John Morning had been giving attention to air travel. He had been very busy—only he and his trusted lieutenants knew with what far-flung projects. But his big hour, on that day in late June, was almost at hand.

Whitley and Pinkney Croffut found the Napoleon of high finance occupying a suite of rooms that was always at the service of the King of Belgium, the Prince of Monaco, and other great notables. He was in his shirt sleeves and pouring a torrent of correspondence into a dictating machine. With the click of a spring, he shut off the flow of words.

"Which of you is Captain Dave Whitley, ace of aces and master flyer?" he demanded, boring into the pair of callers with his gimlet eyes.

Whitley identified himself modestly and introduced his friend. Morning roared.

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"And we made the passage from London together!" he said, as his mirth died down. "Well, I figure I have lost a hundred minutes."

He floundered to his feet, pushed his fingers through his iron-gray hair, and reached for a box of the luxurious perfectos. This he passed hospitably, and with three cigars comfortably going he at once struck the keynote of the interview.

"Whitley, I want to present you with fifty thousand dollars for two weeks in the air. For every day under two weeks I'll add a thousand dollars. And if you can make it in seven days"—he rubbed his hands, and enthusiasm struck sparks from his eyes—"if you can do that glorious but perhaps impossible thing, you'll pull down an even hundred thousand of my money. And that, good as it is, is not the best of it. You'll be made for life—and you're young yet. Twenty-five?"

"Twenty-seven," answered Whitley, in a half daze.

Pink was completely dumfounded. His wildest ideas of compensation balked at mention of a hundred thousand dollars for a week in the air. Could this be John Morning, the matter-of-fact business man who had turned over a flock of railroads to the government? He blinked, and the rich aroma of the dollar perfecto seemed to penetrate his intelligence and scramble his wits. But the maker of destinies held calmly on.

"I want three past masters in this flying game. A chief pilot, an assistant pilot, and a mechanic who knows flying machines up and down and across; and

there'll be a fourth man as navigator and wireless operator—but I've got him. One of the big ideas—not the biggest, but next to the biggest—is to beat Holabird." The heavy-jowled face grew ominous, and a set of strong teeth clenched on the cigar. "If you don't beat Holabird," Morning added, "there'll not be a jitney in that round-the-world race for you."

"Round the world!" said Pink.

"Did you say round the world, Mr. Morning?" inquired Whitley. "In two weeks?" he added. Intensely practical, he began to feel that this spell worker in tractions was having a brain storm. "Do you know, sir," he went on, "that Captain Ross Smith was twenty-eight days flying eleven thousand five hundred miles from England to Australia? And that Captain Alcock and Lieutenant Brown were sixteen hours and twelve minutes in the air between Newfoundland and Ireland, a distance of only——"

"Ancient history, Captain Whitley," cut in Morning, unimpressed by the quoted figures.

"Captain Smith made his great flight seven months ago," the flying ace commented. "You wouldn't call that ancient history?"

"Why not, when aviation is hanging up new records every day? We are taking the sky lanes by storm, Whitley. The altitude record for last week is surpassed this week, and this week's ceiling is under the one to be reached next week. A year in other sciences is as a day in aviation. So it is entirely reasonable to state that you are going to cir-

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cumnavigate the globe for me in a plane that is the very latest word in flyers, supplied with equipment as far ahead of what you are familiar with as a Caproni machine is ahead of a glider. And you'll do the job in two weeks or less. The purely material factors are all provided for. I want now the brains and the ability that will take a lifeless chunk of up-to-the-minute material and hurl it around this little planet in two weeks or less.

"That's why I'm after you, Whitley," Morning went on. "I've had my eye on you ever since you resigned from the government service, and I've caused it to be known that you were my meat. You came over here three months ago on the invitation of the London, Paris & Hongkong Air Express Company, Limited, the idea being that you were to act as master of transportation for the aëro buses and freighters at fifteen thousand a year. Well, that fell through. Didn't it?"

The face of John Morning was pleasantly touched with satisfaction. He looked down his fat nose at the evenly burning tip of his cigar, and his manner radiated a great contentment.

David Whitney frowned. Over what, to him, had been a bitter disappointment, John Morning seemed pleased. The victor over twenty airplanes and eleven balloons, all marked with the black enemy cross, had resigned from his government's service to take this job at fifteen thousand a year. He was young, none too well off, and needed to get ahead. It was not the ambition to kill or be killed that had spurred him to

action on the western front. Since the armistice, he had met Natalia Burnett, "Tascha" Burnett, and all the world had changed for him. His ambitions were now forged in the flames of his heart, and life had become a wonderful thing under Tascha's inspiration. But he had wasted three months between London and Paris. Some influence had been against him. Now he was called home by cable and was returning empty-handed.

"Tetley and Dubois, with whom you have been dickering," went on Morning, "are under my thumb. It was hard for me to make them drop you, Whitley, but they need my good American dollars in their enterprise. Merely a threat that I would withdraw if they got you was enough. When I had it cinched I got your Paris address and cabled you from Stockholm to meet me here this afternoon. I reached London just in time to catch that flyer for Paris. And, by gorry, if we didn't make the passage together without knowing it! A good omen as omens go. Eh?"

"You interfered with my private affairs and kept me out of fifteen thousand a year?" flashed Whitley.

"Steady, now," said the other soothingly. "I did that to give you your big chance at fifty thousand for a fortnight's work, and to open to you a big future, with more fame in peace than you ever won in war. I want you in the biggest undertaking of the century. Anybody will tell you," he finished with a snap of his fat jaws, "that John Morning always

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knows what he wants—and always gets what he wants.”

Whitley smothered the anger that rose within him. John Morning had used a little of his power to shatter hopes that meant nothing to him but everything to Whitley. Was he now a prophet or a dreamer? But whether one or the other, it was far from certain that, by killing Whitley's chances in England and France, he was going to secure him for this wild scheme of girdling the earth.

“What is the schedule you have planned for me, Mr. Morning?” inquired Whitley. There was just a tinge of irony in his voice, but only Croffut detected it.

“The course you will follow in the big flight will hover around parallel fifty, north latitude,” said Morning, warming up. “That means sixteen thousand miles, roughly, against twenty-four thousand plus at the equator. For six months Holabird and I have had agents getting landing places and supply stations in readiness. We're about due for the hop-off. That will come on July Fourth, from a field near Detroit, no matter what the meteorological sharps have up their sleeves. Neither wind nor weather will set us back.

“The *Eagle* will have the last tap done to her at my private plant near Chicago on the night of July second. You will meet me in Chicago on that day, and pilot the plane, with her full crew and two newspaper men as passengers, to Detroit on July third. On Independence Day you'll be off, Whitley. HOLA-

bird and I are backing men, and not machines particularly. If you, flying east, are first back to Detroit from the west, Holabird pays me half a million dollars. But if his man Trossac leads you back to the starting point, the shoe is on the other foot, and I hand him the money. That's about all, except that I've got your history and haven't a thought of losing."

"Not Ben Trossac?" spoke up Pink Croffut.

"He's the one—Holabird's star aviator. Know him?"

Pink drew in his breath and glanced uneasily at Whitley. "Say!" he muttered. "Say, man!"

"What's the idea?" demanded Morning.

Whitley was frowning again and throwing restraining looks at his friend. "Never mind," he said; "we know Ben Trossac, and the fact that he's for Holabird makes me keen for you. But I've other work on hand, Mr. Morning."

"Other work?" said Morning testily. "What other work is privileged to hold you back from such an undertaking as I offer you? Nonsense, Whitley! Don't talk about other work."

"I'm sailing for home to-morrow," Whitley went on, "called by personal affairs—affairs that may mean more to me than even this epoch-making flight of yours. I'm sorry, sir, but I'd suggest Croffut here for your master aviator. He has six enemy machines to his credit and can show you several decorations."

"Oh, say!" grunted Croffut, flushed and embar-

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rassed, but with a hungry light in his pale eyes, for all that; "oh, say, Whit!"

"You can have him for your assistant," said Morning. "How about a real mechanic—one that can assemble a machine with his eyes shut and climb around the wings five miles up, a pair of pliers in his teeth, and a spool of piano wire in one hand and a Stillson wrench in the other?"

"That will be Lightning-that-strikes!" exclaimed Croffut. "Wouldn't that tickle Chaské right?"

"Hire him," ordered Morning; "offer him ten thousand dollars for the trip. I'll leave the selection of the crew to you, Whitley, except the navigator and wireless man; as I said, I've already got him."

Whitley was annoyed by the easy way in which Morning overrode his objections. "Croffut will go," he averred, "and he'll do as well or better than I."

"Come off!" Croffut protested.

Morning got to his feet and walked to an English kit bag near the four-poster, silken-canopied bed. From inside the bag he took a long envelope which he turned over to Whitley.

"I'm counting on you," he said with finality. "Study those maps at your leisure. Meet me in Chicago on July second, and bring Croffut and the mechanic with you. I've got to finish up a raft of correspondence now, and you'll have to excuse me. Good-by. July second, mind."

He flung aside the end of his cigar and settled down to the dictaphone. A flood of words was pour-

ing into the mouthpiece as Whitley and Croffut left the room. Later, over an apéritif in front of the Café de la Paix, the two friends talked about John Morning as they might have discussed Scheherazade and one of her thousand and one yarns.

"My first duty is to Holway Burnett, Pink," said Whitley, through the dancing smoke of his cigarette. "I can't understand what has happened in Detroit, but I'm afraid it's pretty serious. Not a word from Tascha for more than two months!" A worried light filled his eyes.

"Pack up your troubles in your old kit bag, and smile!" chirped Pink. "You'll know the worst inside of ten days, Whit, and here's hoping it won't be so bad."

"You'll be the one to put Morning's dream across—if it can be done," continued Whitley. "You'd better take this map."

"No, buddie," objected Pink. "You freeze to the chart, and we'll study it on the way across. But Ben Trossac, that cold-blooded fish! Say, I'd rather have a rattlesnake on my tail than this Black Ben of Holabird's!"

CHAPTER III

FORTUNES AT THE EBB

THE boat on which Whitley and Croffut took passage from Havre ran into rough weather in mid-Atlantic. There was an accident to the machinery, and for two days the big steamer pitched and rolled with little more than steerageway while repairs were being made. Instead of nosing into her North River berth on June twenty-seventh, as her schedule demanded, it was the last day of the month before the liner docked.

Whitley throttled his impatience as best he could. The cablegram from his Detroit friend, Alfred Dickson, had called him home by the first boat. "Burnett in serious trouble," the message had stated, leaving Whitley's direful imaginings to center upon Tascha, whose long and inexplicable silence had filled him with wonder and alarm.

Tascha's last letter, posted in San Francisco the middle of April, had told of an important mission she had undertaken for her father. She wrote that she expected to be back in Detroit by the first of July at the latest, and, if Whitley did not hear from her for a long time, he was not to worry. If Whitley's business in England and France met with success, he was to return to America and make

preparations for a lengthened stay abroad. "Undoubtedly," Tascha had written, "I shall be back in Detroit before you are, and then, *lubesnoi*, our own bright plans will be carried out, but, everything, my father's fortune, no less than my own life's happiness, depends upon this work I am doing."

Yet she had not explained about the work, nor how it chanced that her letter had been posted at the western edge of the continent. Whitley felt that she had failed in this because she knew that information regarding her work would have caused him more apprehension than the uncertainty that shrouded her plans. He had cabled Dickson, but that astute lawyer had answered by letter that he was bound by a promise and could not go into details. So Whitley had been left to his apprehensions, with no further word from Tascha to ease his mind and with Dickson's last cablegram to whet his fears.

The first train out of New York brought Whitley and Croffut into Detroit in the early afternoon of July first. Whitley at once took a taxi to Dickson's office, and on the way dropped Croffut and the baggage at a hotel. The lawyer was just back from luncheon and greeted his friend cordially.

"Don't you care about that failure across the pond, Whit?" said Dickson. "There's plenty doing in aviation in this country, and a man with your record can get anything he wants. You——"

"What's Burnett's trouble, Alf?" Whitley broke in. "I've been in a fret ever since I got your cable. Tascha is concerned in it, isn't she? How?"

Dickson closed the door of his private room, tendered Whitley a cigar, lighted one himself, and then dropped into a chair. "There's the deuce to pay, Whit, and no mistake," said the lawyer. "Burnett is a client of mine, as you know, and for that reason I am pretty well informed. Frankly, there isn't a thing to be done, but I knew well enough you'd never forgive me if I didn't get you home in short order and lay all the cards on the table. Tascha is gravely concerned in the troubles, but you cannot understand her position until I tell you of Burnett's business complications. He——"

"But where is Tascha now?" broke in Whitley. "Isn't she here in Detroit, out at Grosse Pointe?"

"The house at Grosse Pointe has been sold," returned the lawyer. "It was heavily mortgaged, and the equity is all that keeps Holway Burnett going. Burnett is a sick man, Whit, and has been in bed for three weeks in a little flat on Helen Avenue. I haven't shown him the cable from Orloff; if I did, it might—finish him."

"Orloff?" echoed Whitley; "who's Orloff?"

Dickson leaned forward and dropped a friendly hand on the aviator's knee. "Old man," he went on, "you must let me get at this in my own way. There's a good deal to explain, and I don't want to get the cart before the horse. Just be patient and let me get at the explanation logically. You are familiar with some of the things I'll tell you, but never mind that; I shall have to go into the past in order to make the present deplorable situation clear to you.

"Burnett left Detroit for Russia twenty-five years ago. He was an engineer and went abroad in the interests of a big construction company that had a contract for railroad work. He found opportunities in Russia, after the contract was finished, and remained there. He went into partnership with an Englishman, Lloyd Raynham, and Burnett & Raynham did a good deal of work for the czar's government. Burnett married Raynham's sister in Moscow, and Natalia was born there. When the Great War broke out, the business of Burnett & Raynham went to smash, and Burnett and his wife and daughter left Russia and went to England. There Mrs. Burnett died, and Burnett and Tascha came to this country—here to Detroit—and made their home at Grosse Pointe. You know more about all this than I do, Whit; but be patient.

"Burnett had made a good deal of money in Russia, but when he left he was able to bring only a small part of it with him. Raynham remained behind to close up the business and save what he could. Burnett's share, even though greatly depleted, would have been enough to keep him and Tascha in comfort, but the problem was to get the money out of that seething caldron into which Russia was presently plunged. Raynham was shrewd and clever, but he had a tough job cut out for him. It took time; and while Nickolai Orloff, an honest Russian and the right-hand man of Burnett & Raynham, was adjusting the firm's business affairs, Raynham helped

his own country by joining the armies of the czar as captain in an engineer brigade.

"Then came the revolution, and again the counter-revolution. The czar's government was overthrown, and later the government of Kerensky went the same way. A price was set on Raynham's head, and he had to flee. His flight was eastward, toward Vladivostok; but he was overhauled, captured, and imprisoned. A letter from Orloff, smuggled out of the interior and mailed in Vladivostok, was received in April, just after you left for England and France. Orloff told how Raynham had been stood up before a stone wall and shot by a firing squad. Orloff himself was wounded and ill, and was lying almost helpless in a small town called Yerma, in eastern Siberia. He had with him all that could be saved from the wreck of the firm's fortunes, and he begged that Burnett come to him before he died and salvage what was left before it should be too late.

"This was a hard blow to Burnett. He had counted upon receiving enough funds from Russia, through his brother-in-law, to finance a speculation which he had undertaken. Considering the uncertainty of all the circumstances, Whit, it was an ill-advised speculation. I told him as much, and tried to argue with him, but he was thinking of Tascha—and of you. It is not necessary to go into the details of that speculation now. Burnett's initial investment was twenty-five thousand dollars. Seventy-five thousand more is to be paid on July twelfth, week after next, or the contract will be null and void.

Not only will the money already paid be lost, but the chance to clean up several hundred thousand dollars will be lost, as well. You will understand, from this, how terribly that letter from Orloff dealt with Burnett's affairs.

"Burnett, as I said, was far from well. To go to Russia himself was out of the question. So—Tascha volunteered."

"Tascha!" whispered Whitley.

"She didn't want you to know," went on Dickson, "and she made me promise that I would not write you about it. But now," he added, tossing his hands helplessly, "I feel that I am absolved from that promise. Tascha reached Vladivostok safely, and with the aid of Cummings, the American consul, she got through to Yerma—ordinarily a two days' journey by train from Vladivostok, but consuming five or six days, as railroad schedules are at present in Siberia. Tascha speaks Russian, French, and English, is familiar with the customs of the country, and had confidence that she could make the trip to Yerma and back before July twelfth and bring funds to see her father's speculation through safely with quite a nest egg left over. I believe she figured correctly, for she was in Vladivostok twenty-eight days after leaving San Francisco, and her return passage was booked on a steamer leaving Vladivostok June first." Dickson lowered his eyes and studied the glowing tip of his cigar. "That steamer made the passage to Vancouver in record time, Whit," he added, "and Tascha was not aboard."

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"What happened to her, Dickson?" Whitley asked, foreboding gripping at his heart.

"Somehow Orloff managed to get a message to Vladivostok and have it cabled. Yerma had been captured by a small force of renegades, and Tascha is being held a prisoner. The amount of her ransom is one thousand rifles and ten thousand rounds of ammunition, and the Allies have until next week, Saturday, July tenth, to turn over the war material. It is something the Allies couldn't do if they wanted to."

The aviator's face went white. "What will——" he began, but his voice choked in his throat. After a moment he got himself in hand. "What will happen to Tascha if the rifles and ammunition are not delivered?" he queried hoarsely.

"I wish to Heaven we knew," answered his friend, "but we don't."

Whitley got up from his chair and drew himself a drink at the water cooler; then he paced the floor and finally paused at a window overlooking the stream of afternoon traffic in Woodward Avenue. The roar of the street was deadened in his ears, and he saw nothing of the crowds of people and endless lines of automobiles. A vision of Tascha, blue-eyed and flaxen-haired, was before his eyes, and he heard her voice as out of a great silence: "I shall be back in Detroit before you are; and then, *lubesnoi*, our own bright plans will be carried out." He closed his eyes as the wrench at his heart twisted deep lines in his face. Tascha, a prisoner in Siberia! It was as un-

real to him as a disordered dream. A friendly hand was laid on his shoulder, and he looked around into the sympathetic face of his college chum and old-time friend.

"The American consul is doing what he can, Whit," said the lawyer, "and his efforts are ably seconded by the British representative. There is plenty of ground for hope."

"With the funds Orloff has Tascha might buy her freedom, Dickson," hazarded Whitley.

"Orloff may have been stripped of the funds," the other answered; "if not, would it be like Tascha to turn over funds so sorely needed by her father? You can answer that question better than I. All we can do, old chap, is to wait and hope for the best."

"Wait?" repeated the aviator sharply. "In Heaven's name, Dickson, do you think I can content myself to wait at a time like this?"

"What else is there to do?" asked the lawyer. "Siberia is halfway 'round the world. What are you thinking about, Whit?"

Across the gloom and discouragement in Whitley's face suddenly there had flashed a ray of hope. It was a forlorn hope and desperate, but it was enough to inspire his enterprising soul and release within him all the springs of action. He was like a man transformed.

"Look here, Dickson," he said, his voice athrill with plans suddenly formed; "it may be that, by a sort of seven-day wonder, I shall be able to do something for Tascha. It sounds too much like a

fairy tale for me to gamble on it—and yet some of the fairy tales of yesterday are coming true to-day, and more of them will find a basis in fact to-morrow. This idea has all the worth of a lucky coincidence, but I'll not tax your credulity with it. Later—by Sunday, perhaps—you'll know what's doing. Meanwhile, get together all the facts you can about Yerma, about Tascha and Orloff and Burnett, and be ready to deliver them at an hour's notice, night or day. It's one chance in a hundred, maybe a thousand, or perhaps a million. I'm going to take it, though, and work for success as never a man worked before."

With that he whirled and bolted from the office, leaving the lawyer wide-eyed and gasping. By a stroke of fortune he found Croffut in the lobby of the Hotel Statler.

"Have you got a room, Pink?" he asked.

"Rooms aren't so plentiful as that, Whit," said Croffut. "We're on the waiting list and will probably have one by to-night. What's the big idea? You seem to be in a flurry."

"Where's my grip? Get hold of it, Pink."

Croffut rushed away and returned with the bag. Whitley opened it up and took out the maps turned over to him by John Morning. Side by side on a settee the two friends studied the chart dealing with western Siberia, Manchuria, the Sea of Japan, and the islands of the mikado. A red line crossed all the maps, following roughly the parallel of fifty degrees north latitude. Yerma was almost under the crimson streak in eastern Transbalkalia, a little off

the railroad, perhaps a thousand miles from Vladivostok and not far from the Manchurian border. Whitley drew a long breath, folded the map, placed it with the others, and dropped the little packet back into the traveling bag.

"Take our names off the waiting list, Pink," he said, "and get the rest of the luggage. We're off to Chicago by first train."

"Oh, boy!" murmured Croffut in a joyous mood. "Morning was right and you're his meat. But what brought about the big change?"

"A forlorn hope, that's all; but I'm going to play it for all it's worth—if John Morning will give me a little leeway. It's up to him, now. Wait till we're on the cars, Pink, and I'll give you all the details."

"Ben Trossac just loafed through the lobby," Croffut confided, "and I think he was looking for somebody, and that the somebody was you. He gave me an icy eye and then rushed away."

"Hang Trossac!" grunted Whitley. "I have real business on hand now, and no time to think of that windjammer. While you get the grips I'll see about a taxi."

CHAPTER IV.

A DESPERATE CHANCE

WHITLEY found that he had two hours before train time. He was glad of this, because it gave him half an hour with Holway Burnett. Getting the Helen Avenue address from Dickson over the phone, he had the taxi driver set him down in front of the modest flat building to which Burnett's ebbing fortunes had driven him.

Mrs. Trowbridge, a widowed sister of Burnett, was in charge of the apartment. A cry of relief and joy escaped her at sight of Whitley, and she gave him an almost hysterical greeting and led him into the little front room of the flat.

"We have been waiting very anxiously for you, David," said Mrs. Trowbridge, a quiver in her voice. "Have you seen Mr. Dickson?"

He told her that he had, and that he knew all about the troubles that had come to Burnett. Mrs. Trowbridge pressed a handkerchief to her eyes and remained silent a moment while getting control of her emotions.

"It's not money matters, David," she went on finally, "that makes this so hard for Holway, but the uncertainty regarding Tascha. He could bear anything but that." She lowered her voice. "We

haven't told brother about the cable from Orloff—we don't dare. All he knows is that the steamer on which Tascha was to return has reached Vancouver—and she was not aboard. He imagines all sorts of things, and the worry of it all is killing him by inches."

"You know best, of course," said Whitley, "but it seems to me Mr. Burnett ought to be told about the cable message and kept informed of everything just as it happens."

"It wouldn't do," declared Mrs. Trowbridge brokenly. "Holway is not the man he was when you left Detroit, David. I can't begin to tell you how he has changed."

Whitley's own fears for Tascha were giving him a hard fight, but he was staking all on a desperate chance and realized that he must keep a clear head and steady nerves. He informed Mrs. Trowbridge that he was on his way to Chicago, had only half an hour at his disposal, and asked to be taken to Burnett at once.

He was not prepared for the great change in his friend. Burnett was fifty-five, but he had been an outdoor man nearly all his life, and, up to the last few months, his years had touched him lightly. But now he was emaciated and broken, his iron-gray hair had turned white, his mood was querulous, and his once robust voice was thin and unsteady.

He was glad Whitley had come back, but he ought to have returned long before. If he cared as much for Tascha as he professed, and as she thought, then

nothing should have kept him abroad at such a time. Tascha had insisted on going to Siberia, and Burnett cried out that he had been a fool to let her. What did Orloff or the money he had on the old account of Burnett & Raynham matter when compared with her safety? The sick man babbled on and on, now inveighing against fate, and now hugging the delusions of hope. When he had exhausted himself with talk, Whitley took his hand and leaned over him.

"Holway," he said tensely, "I am leaving in an hour to carry out the first step in a plan to find Tascha. You ought to know that I couldn't rest easy a minute at a time like this. If all goes well, I should be back here in two weeks—and bring Tascha with me."

For Burnett's sake, he spoke with a confidence he could not feel. Time and distance, all against him, were balanced in the scales against the judgment and enterprise of John Morning. If that pioneer of the air lanes proved a true prophet, all might be well; but if he turned out to be a dreamer, then Whitley's forlorn hope would go glimmering. Yet the aviator had this satisfaction: His assumed confidence was heartening to Burnett. The latter brightened, for none knew better than he how practical and capable Whitley was in all his undertakings. Mrs. Trowbridge, too, gathered fresh courage, and when Whitley rode on with Croffut he left behind him the first real cheer the father and aunt of Tascha had known for many gloomy days. In truth, whom could Tascha's next of kin trust more completely than they

did David Whitley? Tascha wore Whitley's ring and was pledged to him.

Whitley sat with bowed head during the long ride from Helen Avenue to the railroad station. He was contrasting in his mind the beautiful home at Grosse Pointe with that small, meagerly furnished flat; the strong-souled Burnett he had known with that wreck of a man from whom he had just parted; and the circumstances surrounding Tascha in Detroit with the circumstances of a helpless little prisoner in far-off Siberia. One fact was very plain to Whitley. If Tascha were brought back soon to Detroit, then her father would live. Money difficulties could be borne, at some expense of pride, and Whitley could make enough for all of them.

Much depended on Whitley, but even more hung upon the business shrewdness of John Morning. If that wizard of finance was adept in working a modern miracle of the air, it was possible—the aviator dared hardly think of it—that Tascha might be saved at Yerma, and Burnett's fortunes recouped in Detroit. And Yerma and Detroit were half a world apart, with but eight days from the fourth to reach the former town from the east and to regain the latter city from the west! Sixteen thousand miles in eight days, including all necessary landings for supplies and repairs! To help Tascha he must be in Yerma by the tenth of the month!

All Whitley's experience with aircraft rose up within him to fight against the idea as chimerical. Then the heart intervened where cold reasoning,

born of experience, was shaken with doubt. John Morning's quixotic enterprise offered the one slender hope for helping Tascha. Whitley, ace of aces, was harnessed to it as firmly as ever he had been to his fighting plane.

On the train Whitley took his buddie fully into his confidence. Pinkney Croffut had tied his wagon to Whitley's star ever since that time, over the Argonne, when six enemy flyers would have done for him had not Whitley dropped out of the clouds to the rescue. Croffut snatched at Whitley's hand and gave it a fervent grip. "Count on me, pal," he said earnestly. "I think I know how you feel, so enough said."

Next forenoon they waited two hours for John Morning in a La Salle Street skyscraper. He had returned from abroad only the day before, they learned, and the luxuriously furnished anteroom in which they waited impatiently was comfortably filled with mature men, all bearing the earmarks of personages. But when Morning arrived on the stroke of eleven, a leviathan of business plowing through the thick of his callers, he paused, and his heavy-jowled face lighted up at sight of Whitley and Croffut.

"I'll see you gentlemen right now," he said, "and the rest will have to wait. Knew you'd be right here when I showed up. Come on with me."

In the big man's star chamber they held their consultation. Whitley spread out on a desk the map section that held the town of Yerma. "If I pilot the

Eagle for you, Mr. Morning," he observed, "I must insist on making a landing at this point."

Morning studied the lonely-looking point through his glasses. "Our representatives haven't made that a supply station," he returned. "Of course, you may not always be able to land just where we have everything ready for you, but why take unnecessary risks in coming down purposely at a town like Yerma?"

Whitley explained about Tascha. Morning looked annoyed when he began, but presently the explanation captured his interest. When Whitley had finished, the traction king leaned back in his chair and pursed his lips reflectively.

"Suppose some lawless band shoots up the *Eagle* and makes a wreck of it?" he inquired. "That would be a fine kettle of fish! I can see Holabird—confound him—laughing over such a fool move."

"I shall do everything in my power to keep the *Eagle* from meeting with any such mishap," said Whitley. "It may easily chance that our lives will depend on it."

"And there is the time lost!" grunted Morning. "You're turning aside from a speed flight to mix up with the devil knows what. It doesn't sound good to me, Whitley. Who is this girl whom you call Natalia now and then, but Tascha most of the time?"

Whitley flushed. "Tascha," he answered, "is the Russian diminutive for Natalia. She is the lady I was to marry this month and take back to France and England with me."

"Ha!" exclaimed Morning, electrified. His face

cleared, and he put out his hand. "The one thing has happened which means more for the *Eagle's* success than any other circumstance that could possibly come our way. I beg your pardon, Whitley, for looking at this distressing affair of yours in what may seem like a mercenary spirit. But if your heart is bound up in the business you are going to make a gamer fight than would otherwise be possible. All right, drop in on Yerma. Both you and Trossac will have to land at Vladivostok and be identified and registered by duly accredited agents, so you'll probably have quite enough of Russia before you get over the Okhotsk Sea and head across the Pacific."

Morning removed a long black wallet from his breast pocket and took from it three folded papers. One of these he handed to Whitley and one to Croffut. "Where's that mechanic you told me about?" he inquired.

"He lives in Pierre, South Dakota," said Whitley, "and Croffut wired him from New York to be in Chicago to-day. I expect to find him at our hotel when we get back there."

"Then take this for him and have him sign it before two witnesses. You and Croffut might read your agreements and sign them now."

Whitley studied the paper that had been given to him for his own signature. From the moment he put his name to it until he girdled the earth in the *Eagle*, or crashed to the ground with the airplane, or sank fathoms deep in the sea, he was John Morn-

ing's chief pilot and shackled to Morning's thrilling enterprise by all the terms of a carefully drawn contract. Unless he finished the sixteen-thousand-mile race ahead of Holabird's man he would not be entitled to any financial reward, although success or failure in this respect made no difference with the remuneration to be paid the rest of the *Eagle's* crew. Also the long flight must be accomplished in two weeks if the chief pilot was to receive any money return at all in keeping with the greatness of the project over which he had charge. By circumnavigating the planet in a fortnight of elapsed time—the day gained at the international date line when traveling east to west excluded—Whitley was to receive fifty thousand dollars; and in the glorious event that he roofed the world from Detroit to Detroit in seven days, the magnificent prize of one hundred thousand dollars was to be his.

Whitley leaned back in his chair and fixed his steady gaze on John Morning. "I don't know anything about this remarkable airplane you have built," he said, "but I am banking on this: You are altogether too shrewd a man to spend your time and money on an impracticable scheme. Since speed is the essence of this contest, and an absolute necessity so far as my intimate personal affairs are concerned, would it not be possible to begin the long flight from Chicago to-morrow instead of losing a day and starting from Detroit on the Fourth?"

"No," answered Morning decidedly. "Holabird and I have put our names to a writing which settles

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all that. Half a million dollars is at stake, Whitley, and you can see what I am already conceding to you in this Yerma business. But I believe in you and your ability, just as I believe in Jimmie Fernald and his chartograph and in Luke Evarts and his vacuum car. Master flier, master inventor, and master constructor—the three terms of my own proposition on which I pin my faith. At three o'clock this afternoon I'll take you and your two friends out to the works in my automobile. You can stay there and study the *Eagle* until we hop off for Detroit tomorrow afternoon. Where shall I pick you up?"

Whitley and Croffut were signing the agreements in duplicate. The former gave the name of the hotel where Morning was to call at three o'clock, and the original agreements were returned to Morning, while the aviators retained the duplicates. As the two friends left the skyscraper Croffut was like a man under a spell.

"What ails you, Pink?" Whitley asked.

"You and John Morning have put my imagination down for the count, Whit," Croffut answered, "and I'm just struggling to bring it to. By glory! Is this old world really so small as all that?"

CHAPTER V

STORM SIGNALS

CHASKÉ WAUKON, of Pierre, South Dakota, was not at the hotel when Whitley and Croffut returned there. He had not answered the telegram sent from New York, which he could have done readily enough in care of Dickson at Detroit. But that was like him. He was a man of few words, written or spoken.

At a quarter to three, while the aviators were sitting in the lobby, a boy started the rounds paging Whitley. He led the ace to a square-jawed, youngish man who was smoking a cigarette and studying a pink sporting sheet by the news stand.

"Here's Mr. Whitley," announced the bell hop.

"My name's Murgatroyd," said the stranger to Whitley, "and I'm from Pierre, South Dakota. That red pal o' yours couldn't make the grade, so he sent me in his place. Do you guess I'll do?"

Whitley measured the man, but could feel no confidence in him. "What's the matter with Chaské?" he asked.

"He's tied to a Pierre garage on a contract, and they wouldn't let him go. But I'm as good as he is on this aircraft stuff. Liberties, Hispano-Suizas, Rolls-Royces—any old motor you got I'll take it

down and put it together again with my eyes shut. Didn't get across durin' the war, but I was down at Kelly Field bossin' a gang of government mechanics. Got a hatful of recommends. Want to look at 'em?"

"Show them to Mr. Morning," said Whitley, less and less impressed with Murgatroyd as he talked with him. "I can vouch for Chaské, but not for you."

Croffut came at that moment and announced that Morning's car was out in front. When the two friends moved toward the street entrance with their luggage, Murgatroyd followed them. A big, high-powered machine stood at the curb. Morning sat in the tonneau, his keen eyes on Murgatroyd as he crossed the sidewalk.

"Our friend from South Dakota didn't come, Mr. Morning," Whitley explained, as the three grouped themselves at the running board, "but this man showed up"—he indicated Murgatroyd—"and tells us that our friend sent him."

"It's all one to me, Whitley," returned Morning, "if you're satisfied."

"But I'm not satisfied," said Whitley. "I never saw this man before, or——"

Whitley did not finish. The throng of passers-by on the walk was broken suddenly by a rattle, and across the human tide charged a tall, lithe figure that fell upon Murgatroyd with silent fury. Every pedestrian immediately forgot where he was going and halted to witness what promised to be a fight. Mur-

gatroyd gave vent to a startled oath and struck out wildly with his fists.

"By glory," cried Croffut, "here's Chaské now! Hey, sky-walker, let up on that! Do you want to get pinched?"

Whitley forced himself in between Chaské and Murgatroyd, separating the two by main force. "You're in the city now, Chaské," he said sharply, "and this won't do. What's wrong?"

Morning leaned out of the tonneau. "Get in here, Whitley, and let's be moving," he called; "this has gone far enough."

Whitley pushed Chaské into the car. Croffut hurried to load the hand luggage and then jumped to a place beside the driver. Meantime, Murgatroyd had disappeared in the crowd. Whitley climbed into the tonneau and closed the door, and the machine pulled out into the moving traffic.

Morning peered curiously at Chaské Waukon. The latter was perhaps thirty years old and had the old bronze complexion, black eyes, straight black hair, and high cheek bone of his people, the Ogalla Sioux. He was a magnificent specimen of physical manhood, and from his Panama hat to his neat brown Oxfords he was, sartorially speaking, up to the minute.

"Mr. Morning," said Whitley, "this is my friend, Chaské Waukon, one of the real Americans and as good an automobile and airplane mechanic as you'll find anywhere. He has a croix de guerre and a D. S. C. for bringing a German armored fighting

plane into our lines, under fire, from No Man's Land."

"Pleased to meet you, Mr. Morning," said Chaské, putting out his hand.

To meet a native American of Chaské's type was a refreshing experience for John Morning. "You had a bone to pick with that fellow Murgatroyd," observed the man of wealth as he shook the swarthy, well-shaped hand of the Indian. "What about?"

"More than an hour ago I was at the hotel," said Chaské. "I was looking for Whitley and Croffut. They weren't around. This Murgatroyd showed up and said Whitley was waiting for me over on Wabash Avenue. I went with him to a house below Sixteenth Street. Two toughs were waiting for us. All three of them jumped me. From what they said I got next to their game. I was to be sidetracked and Murgatroyd was to go back to the hotel, meet Whitley, and tell him I couldn't come. Murgatroyd was to get the job in my place. He left." A ghost of a smile crossed Chaské's face. "Then I danced the medicine and went on the warpath," he continued. "The room in that boarding house looked like a trench after an enemy raid. But I got away and reached the hotel just in time. My grip is at that Wabash Avenue place yet," he finished.

He talked with staccatolike crispness. Plain words and short sentences were characteristic of this Ogalalla.

"By George!" muttered John Morning, and he clamped his teeth hard on his black cigar. "The

deviltry in that is aimed at me. Somebody wanted a spy on the *Eagle*—if I'm any hand at making a guess. Can you take us to that Wabash Avenue place, Chaské?" he asked.

"Wherever an Indian goes once he can go again," said Chaské.

"Go up Wabash Avenue, Amos," called Morning to his chauffeur, "and when you get past Sixteenth Street travel slow and wait for orders."

Fifteen minutes later the machine was halted in front of a dingy old landmark of that section, a brick-and-stone house that had fallen upon evil days. Whitley, Croffut, and Chaské moved on the front door while Morning trailed them curiously. A sharp-featured woman answered their ring, and when she saw Chaské she berated him bitterly. He had gone through one of her best rooms like a cyclone and left it in ruins. Where were his three friends? And who was going to pay for the damage?

The landlady was impressed, and her feelings underwent a change when Morning pushed to the front and began interrogating her. A man calling himself Murgatroyd had rented a room of her that morning, she said. Two men had come with him. About noon all three went out. At that point she had lost track of the party until a terrific commotion in the room drew her attention. She saw Chaské leaving at a run. The two he left behind were picking themselves out of a ruck of scrambled furniture in the room rented by Murgatroyd. They cursed at her when she reproached them, and when she went to

call the police they limped clear of the house and disappeared. The only piece of personal property left in Murgatroyd's room was a suit case. This proved to be Chaské's suit case, and he rescued it and carried it off.

"These rough events in which Chaské was involved are storm signals, Whitley," averred Morning as the car bore the party on into the South Side. "I've had to have this plant of mine out near Hammond guarded night and day. Epoch-making developments have been going forward there, and any number of schemers would like to get information about them. You're beginning to understand, I guess, just what a responsibility you have shouldered. Holabird and I are backing men, not machines particularly."

It was plain enough that the job of chief pilot for John Morning was to be no sinecure. And to these duties was added a supreme effort on behalf of Tascha. Whitley was preoccupied and thoughtful during most of that ride toward Hammond. He roused himself at the announcement, from Morning, that "there's the place, just ahead of us."

What Whitley saw, in the distance, was a private landing field, a huge, squat building where the main work was evidently going forward, and a smaller structure in which the workers were housed and fed. The two buildings were surrounded by a high fence ingeniously protected with barbed wire. Before a gate leading into the stockade stood an armed guard.

Only when Chaské had signed the agreement that made him an employee of Morning's was he allowed

to accompany his friends through the gate and into the mysterious precincts where the *Eagle* had been assembled.

A sort of ecstasy filled the face of the big man of affairs. Not until that moment had Whitley fully realized how close to John Morning's heart was this project, designed to bring opposite sides of the world within days instead of weeks of each other. Whitley experienced a thrill as he passed the guarded gate. To what new wonders was he about to be introduced? And would they suffice for the great enterprise upon which they were soon to be tried?

The spell of the moment hovered over Croffut as well. His face was flushed, and his eyes roved about the inclosure. Chaské, however, was a phlegmatic person. His emotions were at all times under stoical control. He had still to be told about the plight of Tascha and about the plans Whitley had laid for the work in eastern Siberia. He might think the plans farfetched and impossible, but, no matter what he thought, Whitley knew that wherever he led the way Chaské would follow.

"Come on to the workshop," said Morning, and he laid a course toward the great, sprawling structure that housed the airplane.

CHAPTER VI

A FLYING MARVEL

OF the following twenty-four hours David Whitley slept about four, the rest of the time being given up to a study of John Morning's remarkable biplane. As the flying ace was introduced to wonder after wonder—each new device having been submitted to numberless severe tests and pronounced practicable—his first thrill on entering the stockade grew into an enthusiasm that equaled that of John Morning himself. Pinkney Croffut could not find words to express his amazement and delight; and even the stoical Chaské was betrayed into occasional remarks that evidenced an agitated state of mind.

Luke Evarts, the eminent airplane engineer who had collected all the equipment but the chartograph and had housed it aboard the cabin air cruiser, was nothing short of a genius. For months he had gone from one capitalist to another, seeking the wherewithal to make his dream craft come true. Chauncey Holabird had turned him down. This was Evarts' best recommendation to John Morning, and the latter forthwith extended to the engineer his full co-operation.

The *Eagle* had a multiple motor equipment, which provided insurance against the risks of forced land-

ings, and likewise contributed to speed, endurance, and economy of operation. It also had a starting device—a single compact unit, inclosing both hand and electric starting, which provided against any failure of the storage battery. Another invention made use of was called a “supercharger.” This, allied with some devices evolved by Evarts, gave the motors the same reliability and power in the rarefied air of high altitudes that they had nearer the earth. A new synthetic fuel, too, was to be used, doubling the miles per gallon over ordinary gasoline and making it possible for the plane to remain fifty hours in the air at maximum speed.

The plane was designed to travel at an altitude of thirty thousand to forty thousand feet, where the thermometer is something more than forty degrees below zero, where the air pressure is only two and two thirds pounds to the square inch, and where blood vessels of the human body are liable to burst if the body is exposed to the air. In order to guard against the dangers of such tremendously high flying, Evarts had contrived a sort of vacuum-bottle cabin, strongly braced against pressures and supplied with oxygen tanks. The pilot's quarters were separate from the main cabin and could be completely shut off by means of a sliding bulkhead door. And so soundproof was the cabin that the noise of the motors was completely deadened. Evarts declared that conversation could be carried on easily when the plane was in full flight.

Four chairs of wickerwork in the cabin were so

ingeniously constructed that by touching a spring they could be transformed into couches for the men of the "watch below."

To the usual accessories of the pilot's "office" was added a light standard topped with a contrivance that resembled a ship's binnacle. But it was more than a binnacle, for it housed perhaps the greatest achievement of latter-day flying inventions. It was Jimmie Fernald's chartograph. John Morning was backing Fernald for a half interest in the chartograph, which was to revolutionize aviation and make clear the lanes of the air.

Not even Evarts knew the secret of the chartograph. But it was there, and so uncanny in its workings as to seem well-nigh magical. Fernald was an old radio man and, in some manner, had bent Hertzian waves to his will in developing the chartograph. An arrowhead of burnished copper, rigidly attached to the under part of the *Eagle's* fuselage and aimed downward, registered the exact point of earth or sea the plane happened to be over; more than that, by a cunning mechanism a finger of steel plowed the exact course of the plane through a film of wax coating the under side of a thin glass slab. To the upper side of the slab was pasted a map, printed in black upon transparent paper.

"All that's necessary," Fernald explained, "is to set the finger to the map at the point of the take-off, then lock the glass in the slides. The maps are divided into fifty-mile squares, and the rapidity with which the finger passes through the squares gives us

our rate of speed. The best chartographer in the country has prepared a series of maps that covers our whole course. They're there"—he indicated a locked case—"and they are easily the most important part of our equipment."

Fernald was thirty-five and a mere slip of a man, undersized, and so thin a stiff breeze could almost have blown him away. But he was big-souled, and volcanoes of energy burned in his eyes.

Luke Evarts was of another type. He stood more than six feet in his shoes, despite the pronounced stoop to his shoulders. In a day of smooth-shaven men he ran to long hair and whiskers, like an old-time Populist.

"Tests have shown," he explained to Whitley, Croffut, and Chaské that night in the bunk house, "that the higher air strata are moving at a tremendous velocity. The *Eagle* will nose into the higher altitudes hunting a swift current that sets in the right direction. A machine that can do a hundred miles an hour, if aided by a current traveling two hundred miles an hour, will cover three hundred m. p. h. Get the idea? Now, our bus will climb ten thousand feet in ten minutes, and in horizontal flight she'll do a normal two hundred miles an hour. The Frenchman, Lecointe, did two hundred and twenty-five miles an hour, but our craft, five to six miles up in the blue, will easily do three hundred miles plus per hour. At thirty thousand to forty thousand feet I'm expecting the *Eagle* to strike an air current of one hundred to two hundred miles an hour or better,

and to hustle eastward at not less than five to eight miles a minute."

Evarts spoke seriously, and as one who merely states a fact while trying to be conservative. Whitley, although impressed with Morning's airplane as he had never been impressed before in his life, was frankly incredulous. Chaské puffed unemotionally at a cigarette. Croffut started to his feet and walked up and down the room, breathing hard like a swimmer in deep mysteries coming up for air.

"The ceiling, in this matter of airplane speed," went on Evarts calmly, "is probably a thousand miles per hour. It will come, and New York and London will be only three hours apart. Then," he added, "the people of this planet will really be annihilating distance."

"I should think, Evarts," remarked Whitley, "that after all your work on the plane, you'd want to be with it on the big trip."

The strong face with its tangle of beard went suddenly pathetic. "I'd give ten years of my life to go with you!" exclaimed the constructing engineer wistfully. "But I've got a bad heart. Trying to live in a cabin with oxygen tanks and atmosphere compressors would be too much for me. I've made up my mind, though, to travel with you as far as Detroit and witness the great hop-off. I'm entitled to that, I think, no matter how much it pulls me down."

"You ought to be a half portion like me, Evarts," piped Fernald, "and you wouldn't know you had a heart. Your sudden decision to make the flight to

Detroit has cut out Harrington, one of the newspaper men. They say he's pretty sore."

Evarts laughed. "If you knew what newspaper men did to me while I was hunting for a man to finance my vacuum-bottle dream," he said, "you'd understand just how sorry I am for a representative of the press."

"You'll have a sweeter revenge than that," went on Fernald. "From now on until we crash or sink in the sea or drop out of the skies into Detroit from the west, the papers will be full of you and John Morning."

A glow lighted the deep-set eyes of the engineer. "And of you, Jimmie," he supplemented in a voice tinged with affection. "Mostly, I have assembled the ideas of others, but you struck out a new line with your chartograph."

Until two o'clock next morning Whitley prowled around the workshop and studied the plane outside and in under the glow of a hundred electric lights. When he finally darkened the incandescents, carefully locked the little side door, and passed the guards posted around the building, his hopes of reaching eastern Siberia in time to be of help to Tascha were high. John Morning, he felt assured, had built his far-flung fancies on a solid foundation. Barring accident, the *Eagle* would hang up a world's record.

In his dreams, that night, he saw the girl of his heart, reaching out appealing hands to him across a gulf of space and time; and in the upper skies he saw the great airplane annihilating distance like a

meteor and rushing him to the rescue. A great peace pervaded his soul. Success at Yerma was up to him, for fate had given him the means and made him captain of the *Eagle's* destiny. And in that destiny his own fate was wrapped up with Tascha's.

He was up with the next day's sun, helping Evarts and Chaské fill the fuel tanks. A full load of fuel and oil was not taken on, for enough had to be left off to counterbalance the weight of additional passengers, but sufficient was pumped through the leads to cover the distance from Chicago to Detroit half a dozen times over.

The busy morning passed quickly, and by noon nothing remained but to push the airplane into the field and get aboard. The weather could not have been better, for the day was bright and sunny, and only a gentle wind was blowing.

By half past one, when the men from the bunk house had finished their dinner and were moving on the workshop to stow their small supply of luggage, a battery of moving-picture cameras was getting into position around the field. Automobiles filled with curious people were parking in the most advantageous places for viewing the get-away. The crowd of sightseers was swiftly attaining the proportions of a mob. Up to that moment, John Morning had fought against publicity, but now all the bars were down, and the Saturday morning papers had published a lengthy interview in which he had told of his hopes and his plans.

'At two o'clock the whole front end of the work-

shop was folded back in sections, leaving room for the wide planes to go through in the clear. Evarts, Fernald, Whitley, Croffut, Chaské, and four or five mechanics pushed and hauled the huge machine out into the open and then across the field to a spot directly in the wind's eye. The cameras clicked, and half a dozen photographers were allowed to come close and make their pictures. Snapshots were taken of the engineer and the radio man, of the chief pilot and his crew, individually and in a group. Reporters plied all of them with their questions, and in the midst of the excitement of picture-taking and interviewing the big automobile arrived with John Morning and the representative of a press association—Arden Oswald, Chicago's best bet in the newspaper world.

It was not the day of John Morning's triumph in his new field of transportation, but it was an event heralding the day. He was like a man wrapped in a cloud of glory, and he talked constantly, laughed a great deal, and had his chauffeur pass box after box of cigars to the gathered throngs. Evarts, Whitley, Croffut, and Chaské climbed a short flight of steps to the cabin door and vanished inside, Whitley to take his place at the controls, study the clear-cut map in the binnacle and cast a reassuring glance at his compass, altimeter, and other accessories.

Fernald entered the cabin in the wake of Oswald, then Morning stood at the top of the steps, bent over in the low doorway and almost filling it. He waved his hand.

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"To-morrow," he called, "this airplane leaves on its round-the-world flight, and in two weeks or less it will be back in America, an American machine manned by Americans. Watch it hang up a record and open a new era in transportation and commerce. Good-by friends!"

"How about Holabird?" came a voice faintly across the field.

"His pilot will be an also ran!" shouted Morning.

Chaské pulled up the steps and closed the door.

"All ready, Whitley!" Morning called.

The propellers began to turn, to put, to roar, and the airplane taxied across the field and took the air.

CHAPTER VII

SKY SPEEDWAYS

WHITLEY was never happier than when on the wing. For him the "joy-stick" was exactly what its name implied. Even now, with the uncertainties regarding Tascha gripping at his heart, he found exhilaration in the perfect response of the *Eagle* to his every touch. The plane was fulfilling the extravagant claims made for it by John Morning and Luke Evarts. Therein lay a golden promise of success—success in reaching eastern Siberia in time to be of help to Tascha as well as in belting the earth according to the wishes of John Morning. Whitley grew jubilant as he hurled the machine skyward.

His orders were to hunt for a swift current setting toward the east, and to climb until he found it. Evarts was no less insistent on this than was the man for whom he had constructed and assembled that winged opener of the new sky roads. The engineer sat doubled up in one of the wicker chairs, now peering through the unbreakable glass of a small window beside him, and now staring toward the pilot's quarters. He was soul hungry for a taste of the triumph that was to be his as well as Morning's.

Arden Oswald had already begun writing messages

to his press association, passing slips of paper to Fernald who sat at his wireless in the farther end of the small cabin. Fernald could "send," if circumstances were favorable, to a distance of three hundred miles; and he could receive, through helmet and ear phones in the sound-proof cabin, from a much greater distance. But his principal work on that trip was to send.

The bulkhead door was open. Croffut occupied the chair nearest the door, and leaned through to follow Whitley's work with closest attention. Morning chewed amiably at his unlighted cigar, talking just to show how easily it could be done in this new craft of his. Only the faintest murmur of sound came from the roaring engines. Chaské hovered around the oxygen tanks, awaiting orders to close the ports at ten thousand feet altitude.

Whitley watched his clock, his indicators, and gauges, but the chartograph held the greatest fascination for him. A thin streak of light followed the moving steel finger across the map plate. The horizontal swing of the climb had already carried the plane over the lake.

"Ten thousand feet!" he called.

"Ten minutes and fifty-two seconds!" jubilated Morning. "She's running true to form, Evarts."

The engineer was breathing hard. "She'll do all that I've said she'll do," he answered, his voice a bit unsteady. "Close the ports, Chaské."

Steel protectors were shoved across the small win-

dows. Arden Oswald laughed delightedly and handed a few written words to Fernald.

"She's a world's wonder—I'll tell the world!" he cried.

The next ten thousand feet were won practically at the same speed, the superchargers gradually coming into play. The stratum for open planes might be said to have been crossed. Whitley announced the height.

"Keep climbing, Whitley!" panted Evarts, his eyes burning and his cheeks white to the edge of his thick beard.

The moving steel finger traced its fiery line farther across the lake. The chartograph was now the sole eye and guide of the *Eagle*. There was no need of compass or drift indicator, for that marvel of Fernald's showed every foot of the way.

"Thirty thousand feet!" called Whitney in a voice tense with excitement.

Evarts had turned his chair into a couch and was lying at full length. Morning and Fernald bent over him anxiously.

"Keep—keep climbing!" gasped the engineer.

The peak was reached at thirty-five thousand feet when Whitley flattened out in an eastern moving current of high velocity. And the miracle of it was this, that the motors functioned as perfectly at that altitude as at sea level.

Then it was that the moving steel finger began to write the wonders of speed. Through one of the fifty-mile squares it traveled in twelve minutes!

Could Whitley believe his eyes? They were over land now, and the next fifty miles were reeled off in ten minutes, or at the rate of three hundred miles an hour!

Every one in the cabin was breathing hard, but there was not even a chill to the air. Morning had dropped the black cigar and was pressing a hand to his heart. His face was pale, but wreathed with pleasure and satisfaction. Oswald was not having a languid moment. Among the first to fly at that altitude, he was now filling sheets with his impressions and experiences, only breaking off now and again to pass a brief message to Fernald. Realizing that Croffut itched to be at the controls, Whitley yielded the pilot's seat to him.

"Wonder if I'm asleep in the bunk house and dreaming all this?" muttered Croffut.

Whitley addressed a remark to Evarts, but received no answer. He bent over the engineer and then straightened, with a sharp exclamation.

"He's unconscious!" he announced.

"He would come in spite of his bad heart," said Morning. "The altitude is getting me, too. Let's get down where we can open the ports."

Croffut nosed earthward. They were nearing Detroit, and the steel finger was creeping closer and closer to the landing field.

At ten thousand feet Chaské snapped off the electric lights and unshuttered the ports. Whitley opened the bull's-eye directly over the engineer and fell to chafing his forehead and hands. A gale of fresh air

was rushing into the cabin, bearing with it the roar of the engines. Fernald was getting signals and motioned for Whitley to shut out the noise for a minute. Presently he penciled something on a pad, tore off the sheet and passed it to Morning.

"Here's a message for you," he said.

Morning caught the message out of Fernald's hand and read it aloud:

"'You are doing well, but not well enough—Holabird.' Bluff," grunted the adventurer in the air lanes. "If this had been a thousand-mile jump instead of one of less than three hundred, we'd have done better. But I'm satisfied."

"Holabird's machine will have to go some to beat this, take it from me!" Oswald declared.

Evarts stirred suddenly and sat up. "I couldn't hold out," he said faintly. "What was our best time at the peak, Whitley?"

When he received the information an exultant smile crossed his wan face. Reaching over, he shook hands with Morning.

"How do you feel, Evarts?" Whitley asked.

"The way the average man feels when he sees his life work accomplished," the engineer returned.

Fernald was reeling in his aerial and Croffut was working levers that unfolded the landing gear which had been tucked up against the bottom of the fuselage. This was something else in Evarts' new bag of tricks. Another device Croffut tried as the plane touched the ground was braking two of the four wheels under the traction motors. The brakes worked

perfectly, and the *Eagle* came to an easy halt in less than one hundred feet.

Instantly there was a rush of people from all directions toward the car. A cordon of policemen, flung hastily around the plane, was put to it to keep the frantic mob at a distance. Chaské opened the door and lowered the steps into position. Morning was first to leave the cabin.

"We left Chicago at two thirty, friends," he called from the top of the steps, "and our best time was fifty miles in ten minutes. Ask Holabird if that isn't going some."

A bedlam of cheers greeted this statement; but the record was not news, for already it had been received by wireless and posted on bulletin boards. Evarts, a little unsteady, followed Morning out of the cabin. Behind him came Oswald, and pressed a sheaf of copy into the hands of a waiting messenger. The messenger leaped to a motor cycle and was away like the wind.

Mechanics were on hand to help get the plane into its hangar, and not until Whitley had the *Eagle* safely in its berth and under guard did he give any thought to his own affairs. He was hurrying to a phone to call up Dickson when he almost collided with that beaming lawyer friend.

"Great guns, Dave!" Dickson cried, grabbing the pilot's hand. "So this is what you had up your sleeve? Here is a man you'll be glad to meet—Mr. James Trainor, formerly in the Red Cross service and only recently back from Siberia. He was sta-

tioned at Yerma for a while and can tell you all about the place."

Here was wonderful luck. What Whitley needed was first-hand information regarding the Siberian town.

"Dickson, this is better than I had hoped for!" he exclaimed.

He shook hands with Trainor and would have dodged newspaper men and made for a quiet spot with the former representative of the Red Cross had not Croffut suddenly rushed to his side.

"Come on and call off Chaské, Whit," begged Croffut. "He's trying to kill Trossac, and says he was back of that Wabash Avenue deal in Chicago. You're the only one who can do anything with that Ogalalla, and he'll be pinched sure if you don't hurry."

CHAPTER VIII

A BITTER RIVALRY

BEFORE Whitley could reach the scene of Chaské's trouble with Trossac, Chauncey Holabird had appeared and taken his star aviator in hand. Whitley was just in time to see Trossac getting into Holabird's automobile at the edge of the field and driving away.

"If you don't cut out this scrapping, Chaské," said Whitley to the Ogalalla, "Mr. Morning will pull the pin on you and start me off with another mechanic."

"You know 'Flip' Trossac as well as I do," Chaské growled. "He's a coyote. I'd like to stave in his fuselage for him. He was backing Murgatroyd in that dirty work at Chi."

"How do you know?"

"Hunch," said the Ogalalla, and shrugged.

"Well," admonished Whitley, "don't play your hunches like that. The public will get the idea you are trying to 'crock' Trossac in order to keep him out of the race."

He rejoined Dickson and Trainor, motored with the two to Dickson's office, and had a long talk with the former Red Cross man. Yerma, Whitley was told, was some two hundred miles east of Chita, a place to which many notable exiles were sent in the

old days of the czars. Between Lake Baikal and the Amur River the Trans-Siberian Railway crosses the crest of the Yablonoi Mountains at a height of thirty-four hundred feet, the greatest altitude on the line. From Chita to the Manchurian boundary the railway descends the Pacific slope through one of the wildest and most romantic tracts ever pierced by railway engineers.

As to Yerma, it was not on the railroad, but was ten versts to the north. A place called Olskaya was the nearest railway town to Yerma and was a small community of only a few hundred inhabitants. The town in which Whitley was interested was on the old Siberian highroad. Trainor drew a plan of Yerma, showing it to be hemmed in on all sides by rough country. Whitley studied the diagram with troubled eyes. There did not seem to be a hand's breadth of level ground where an airplane could land. He put the problem up to Trainor.

"Between Yerma and Olskaya," said the ex-Red Cross man, "there is a plateau as flat and free from obstructions as a billiard table. I have seen airplanes from Chita alight and take off at the plateau, for I was looking after a camp of refugees that had been established there. I hate to discourage you, captain, but if Miss Burnett is in Yerma, a prisoner, I am afraid you have cut out an impossible task for yourself. The renegades will have the roads into the place carefully guarded. There are only two ways to get into the town, and each way is a small Thermopylæ in itself. You'll surely be caught if you

alight on the plateau and take the road leading from the railway into the interior. And that road is your only hope."

"If I can get into Yerma," averred Whitley, "I can get out again; and I believe I have a method that will land me right in the middle of the town."

He secured from Trainor a sketch map of the wagon road leading through the hills and across the plateau, and made a memorandum of all the other information. After finishing with Trainor, Whitley had another talk with Dickson. There were no new developments, the lawyer told him, and the black uncertainties regarding Tascha's fate were just as they had been. But Dickson was of the opinion that no news might be considered good news. Whitley's plan, as he presented it to the lawyer, was simple enough: If the *Eagle* reached eastern Siberia there would be a landing on the plateau, and somehow Tascha would be rescued.

"Suppose you lose two or three days at Yerma," remarked Dickson, "wouldn't that give Holabird's pilot his chance to win?"

"No matter what happens to me, Dickson," Whitley declared, "Holabird's pilot is going to have the fight of his life. John Morning knows what I am up to, and he has been more than white with me. I intend to see that he does not lose anything by it."

The aviator had dinner, that afternoon, at the little flat in Helen Avenue. He could not tell Burnett about his hopes and plans, but he took Mrs. Trowbridge into his confidence. After he had done

so he feared that he had made a false move. Mrs. Trowbridge could see nothing encouraging in Whitley's prospect, and she was torn with the conviction that Whitley, fighting a single-handed battle with "Russian outlaws," as she called them, would be killed out of hand. So when he left the flat, after making his farewells, so far as Mrs. Trowbridge was concerned, the hope he had aroused on his previous visit had been shattered.

Whitley met Croffut in the lobby of a downtown hotel, and they proceeded together—according to previous instructions from Morning—to the quarters of the Flyers' Club in Griswold Street.

The clubrooms were crowded with aviators, airplane enthusiasts, and newspaper men. For John Morning was there, as well as Chauncey Holabird. Each of these big men of affairs was to turn over his personal check for four hundred thousand dollars, supplementing two other checks for one hundred thousand dollars each which, long before, had been posted as a forfeit.

Nothing of greater import had ever before happened in the circles of world aviation. Wealthy men, rivals in everything since they had first attained places of power in the business world, were backing a tremendous—some said an extravagant—proposition to the tune of half a million dollars each. And this was only the wager. How much these multimillionaires had thrown into the pot for preparations only the public could guess. Their rivalry had reached

a point where it had become the sensation of the hour.

Since that time when John Morning had begun to expand his transportation interest, the rock upon which he struck again and again was Chauncey Holabird. They fought each other like gladiators in the arena of high finance, and up to this moment honors had been even. Now they were stripped for a finish fight in the air, and there could be no half-way success. One was to win, and one was to go down to defeat.

Morning, delighted with the performance of the *Eagle* on the short flight from Chicago, was consuming cigar after cigar, beaming upon all around him and radiating supreme confidence in the outcome of the race. Holabird, a wisp of a man with gray side whiskers and a prominent Roman nose, was the center of another group. The "Little Gray Fox," as the papers called him and pictured him in their cartoons, seemed every whit as confident as the "Octopus"—Morning's humorous designation in the public press. Both the Fox and the Octopus had battened unduly on the World War, shamelessly admitting this in their income-tax returns. But Morning had worked for the government for one dollar a year and had made princely contributions to war charities. Holabird, on the other hand, had attended strictly to his own knitting during the war period, and had kept his purse strings comfortably tight. Miserly in most of his expenditures, he was nevertheless a

spender with both hands in any scheme that was calculated to get John Morning on the hip.

"I'll win Chauncey's half million and break his heart," confided Morning, from the depths of a big leather chair to those who hovered in his vicinity.

Almost simultaneously Holabird was remarking to friends within sound of his voice: "It'll be good night for John Morning when my *World Beater* gets through with his *Eagle*." Holabird took a stick of peppermint gum from his vest pocket and proceeded to unwrap it. "The *Eagle*!" He sniffed. "Morning calls his plane that, after himself, I guess, because he is so fond of spreading himself."

"If Morning wins," spoke up some one at Holabird's elbow, "he says he'll turn over what he gets from you to found a national training camp for army pilots."

Holabird paused as he was about to tuck the gum between his jaws. Then he laughed softly. "He knows he can't win, so it's perfectly safe to spread himself, as usual. We're backing men more than we are machines; and where'll you find the equal of Trossac, there?"

He indicated his chief pilot, standing a little apart and talking with a man in uniform who wore the insignia of the double wings.

Benjamin Wilde Trossac was a handsome, devil-may-care sort of person whose record in war and peace-time flying was an open book—almost. There was a chapter of the record not for the public eye, but which was well known to Whitley, Croffut,

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Chaské, and a few others. At the "long recon," by which was known an extended trip behind the enemy's lines for information, "Flip" Trossac had won an enviable reputation for courage and success. No matter how long the chance, Trossac in his single-seater fighting plane had always been found ready. He had not so many official victories to his credit as Whitley had, but he claimed more—unofficially. He was dark, almost swarthy, built like an Apollo and as quick in his movements as a cat.

"There's Morning's pilot," said the man who had mentioned Morning's plans for Holabird's half million if it was won; "that gray-eyed chap, over there, who just came in."

"Take his sizing," suggested Holabird, "match him up with Trossac, then tell me if I haven't picked the winner."

Whitley, it could be seen, had not the dashing air of Trossac, but to a keen eye he showed greater depth and more solid powers. Just at the moment his face was set and troubled, for his thoughts were far away in Siberia and trying to deal with the uncertainties of a situation that constantly haunted him. He did not look as fit for a supreme effort, it may be, as Ben Trossac—but that would have been merely a shallow estimate of his abilities. Holabird was too shrewd a reader of character to be deceived, unless his own desires fathered the deception.

Whitley looked around the room and then, with Croffut, moved in the direction of John Morning. The latter got up, shook hands with both aviators,

and presented them to those with whom he had been talking. Whitley's record was also an open book, but with no chapters suppressed. Being a Detroit product he was a general favorite in that town and needed no introduction to many around him. Morning drew him aside and pushed some papers into his hand, chuckling as he did so.

"There," he said, "is all the information to be had about Holabird's *World Beater*. An agent of mine got it from one of Holabird's mechanics for a thousand dollars. Post up, Whitley. The knowledge might come in handy. Holabird knows all about the equipment of the *Eagle*; in spite of Evarts' precautions there was a spy at the Hammond workshop. Now we're starting even. Come on over to Holabird with me."

"Just a moment, Mr. Morning," interposed Whitley, slipping the papers into the breast pocket of his coat. "You are backing men, as I understand it. That is, if I am first to girdle the world within two weeks you win."

"That's the idea, Whitley. And if Trossac comes in first, Holabird wins."

"Let me suggest," the aviator went on, "that you change the terms of your wager a little. In other words, back two of your men instead of one. If either Croffut or I come in first from the west—put it that way. If I bog down in eastern Siberia I want Croffut to go on without me. You are giving me square treatment, and I am going to do my utmost to

see that you win, no matter how I come out at Yerma."

Morning studied his chief pilot's face shrewdly for a moment, and then his face broke into an approving smile.

"That is straight talk," he said, "and I'm obliged to you for the tip. I'll arrange it, Whitley; but please understand that you're the man I am counting on. Just use your head, and whatever happens will be O. K.'d by me."

Thereupon Whitley and Croffut followed Morning to Holabird's end of the room.

"Well, Chauncey," said Morning genially, "we may as well finish the preparations for driving the nails in your aerial casket. Here are my pilots, Captain Whitley and Lieutenant Croffut. If either of these gentlemen beat your outfit around the globe in two weeks or less, I pull down the money."

"You're ringing in a double-header on me, John," commented Holabird, and paused a moment to chew his gum industriously and consider this change in the original terms. "If you are backing both your pilots, I shall have to have the same privilege. It will be Trossac and Rufus against Whitley and Croffut. Oh, well, whatever you wish, John. If you're afraid of your chief pilot I'm willing to let down the bars for the new arrangement. Colonel," he added, turning to a military figure close at hand, "just note that change in the agreement. And here's the rest of my money, colonel."

He gave up a certified check somewhat lingeringly.

"And here's mine," said Morning, offering his own certified paper.

"All set, gentlemen," returned the colonel, putting away the checks. "Excuse me while I go to the writing room."

He left to add a clause to the agreement. John Morning reached out a hand toward Holabird.

"It's a friendly contest, Chauncey," said he, "and means a lot for aviation whichever way it goes. Why not begin it in a friendly spirit?"

Holabird looked at the hand and deliberately put his own hands behind him.

"I haven't shaken hands with you, John," he answered, "since you double crossed me with the Gulf & Southern, and I don't think I'll do it now. But our pilots may as well start in on a pleasant footing. Trossac, show you're a good sport."

Trossac's hand went out toward Whitley.

"No," said Whitley calmly, a touch of white running into his face, "this is something I can't do. I have my reasons—and they are valid."

Holabird scowled. "Anything goes in this race, then?" he demanded.

"Show us anything you've got, Chauncey," returned Morning, seemingly pleased, "and we'll take care of it."

Arden Oswald, who happened to be present, turned to a fellow newspaper man. "It will be some race, Comstock," he remarked, sotto voce, "take it from me. I'd give an arm to be in that speed bus of Morning's all the way around with Whitley!"

CHAPTER IX

THE SUPPRESSED CHAPTER

CHAUNCEY HOLABIRD would not shake hands with John Morning. This was because of something that had happened to Gulf & Southern twenty years before the magnates met one evening in Detroit to post their wagers. The Little Gray Fox knew how to nurse a grudge, which was an element of weakness in an otherwise masterful character.

As a sort of Roland to Holabird's Oliver, Whitley had refused the offered hand of Flip Trossac. This pleased John Morning and, at the same time, made him curious. As soon as the business with the colonel was finished, Morning drew Whitley away to a quiet corner of the library.

"What's the row between you and Trossac, Whitley?" he inquired.

The pilot flushed. "Some things are best left unexplained, Mr. Morning," he answered, "and this is one of them. I hope you'll excuse me."

"Oh, sure, if that's the way you feel about it."

Whitley went off to play a game of billiards with Oswald. A moment later Pinkney Croffut strolled into the library and began looking at the framed pictures on the walls. A painting of the Sopwith machine in which Hawker and Grieve had made their

plucky attempt to cross the Atlantic was holding Croffut's attention when he heard his name called and made his way to a chair side by side with Morning's.

"What's this trouble between Whitley and Trossac, Croffut?" inquired the man of big business. "I think I have the right to know about it."

Croffut looked around uneasily. "I guess you have, Mr. Morning," he returned. "Whitley did exactly the right thing, though, in refusing to shake hands with Trossac. I'd have done exactly the same, even if you had ditched me so far as this round-the-world flight is concerned."

"It's as bad as that, is it? Give me the facts, Croffut." Morning's tone was not that of a request but of a command.

The assistant pilot threw away his cigarette and leaned across the arm of his leather chair. "This happened during the war, Mr. Morning," he said. "The headquarters of our escadrille was near L'Estrée. There was a little French girl—Suzanne—whose father had been killed at Mons, whose mother had died while fleeing from the Germans, and whose brother, Albert, had been blinded by a shell explosion at the Marne. Suzanne had another brother, Maurice, who was fighting in Flanders. But in L'Estrée Suzanne was taking care of Albert. She used to make little cakes and come over to our camp and sell them by the basketful. She was the pet of the escadrille, sir, and every man of us had a tender spot in his heart for her. Whitley and I used to go

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over to the town and visit with Albert and the girl. One evening we saw Trossac there.

"Now Ben Trossac is a dare-devil. He doesn't know what fear is. But he isn't so fine on his moral side. When Whitley and I left we hung around the main street until Trossac came out of the house, and then Whit read the riot act to Trossac. They had a fight, and Trossac got the worst of it. Well, that's where the bad blood started.

"We found out, when Trossac had left, that he had asked Suzanne to marry him. Blind Albert came groping alone to the camp asking for Trossac. There was a gun in his pocket, for he had just learned that Trossac had a wife in the States. It's an ugly story, sir, and Whitley will never talk about it. This is a sketchy little explanation, but I guess you can understand why Whitley wouldn't shake hands."

John Morning clipped the end from a perfecto with a little gold knife that swung from his watch chain. "Odd," he mused, "that Holabird should have picked Trossac while I took on Whitley! It's a situation that spells trouble. Holabird has given Trossac a free hand, and the crew of the *Eagle* will have to keep their eyes skinned from the time they leave Detroit, heading east, until they get back from the west. 'Anything goes,' as Holabird says; and no matter what happens, short of actual homicide, neither he nor I can very well squeal. See that Whitley is on his guard every minute, Croffut."

"He doesn't need any tip from me, Mr. Morning,

because he knows Trossac. Spare yourself any worry on that score."

It was very late that night when Whitley and Croffut got back to the flying field, but, late as it was, the chief pilot and his assistant went to the hangar and examined the plane to make sure she was in readiness for her twelve-hundred-mile jump across country to Newfoundland. Chaské had already seen to the equipment and supplies, and he was sleeping out the night curled up in a blanket under the plane's wings. Three mechanics were also on guard, but Chaské did not know the mechanics, and he was taking no chances.

Before Whitley finally went to bed he examined the papers turned over to him by Mr. Morning. Holabird's plane, he discovered, was tri-motored, like the *Eagle*, with two tractor propellers and a pusher; and there was an ingenious device for keeping the plane on a straight course if one of the tractors should fail. There was no soundproof cabin, but a roofed-in fuselage of flimsy construction. For flying at high altitudes each member of the crew was supplied with a sort of electrically heated armor with oxygen helmets. The navigator was to get his bearings with a sextant, compass, and chronometer, and check them by wireless. The same synthetic fuel Morning had adopted for the *Eagle* was used also in the *World Beater*. And there were superchargers and other appliances to make the motors function normally in the rarefied air of great heights.

But Holabird's machine had no chartograph. And

in this, Morning's machine had a tremendous, almost a decisive, advantage. But the *World Beater's* wireless equipment was a marvel. The antennæ were attached to one of the upper planes, and messages were received from an extraordinary distance by sight and not by sound. The signals flashed by dots and dashes in a sort of camera obscura. This was a necessity in an open car where the roar of the engines would have made the work of earphones impossible. When Whitley rolled into his blankets he was in a comfortable frame of mind so far as Trossac and the *World Beater* were concerned. Plane for plane and equipment for equipment, there was no doubt that Morning had infinitely the better of his rival.

With the coming of daylight there was a bustle of preparation around both hangars. The force of John Morning ate a hurried breakfast. Only a limited supply of food was stowed aboard the *Eagle*—a few sandwiches and half a dozen thermos bottles of hot coffee.

"Four hours after the start," said Whitley to Croffut, "we should drop down on the four-wind field Morning has made ready for us near Trepassy. Then we can have a hot meal at noon. Hot coffee and a hand-out will do for us between landings."

Already, despite the early hour, throngs had begun to gather at the edges of the field. Moving-picture men, newspaper men, and sightseers repeated the experience at the take-off near Hammond on the preceding day.

The Holabird machine was already in the field, and

Chaské was just having the doors of Morning's hangar folded back. The roar of the *World Beater's* engines, tuning up, drifted across the level ground. When Whitley reached the *Eagle's* hangar he found Morning there, watching with interest the operation of running the plane into the open. He turned to shake hands with his chief pilot. Somebody at that moment exploded a salvo of giant firecrackers, less in celebration of Independence Day than of the beginning of that epochal flight.

"How are you this morning, captain?" Morning inquired.

"Never more fit, sir," said Whitley.

"By George, you look it. At all the landings, Whitley, you and your crew will be taken care of with supplies, repairs, or whatever else you need, and you won't have to pay out a cent. But there are double-eagles in the secret locker—gold that's good in any man's country—as a safeguard against the unexpected. Keep in touch with me by wireless as well as you can while on the wing, and, of course, I want a short report by telegraph and cable from every landing. And look out for something crooked."

"I'm not expecting anything crooked," said Whitley, "but I'll be on my guard. I hope to keep so far ahead of the *World Beater*, Mr. Morning, that the only person who might attempt anything crooked won't be in any position to put over his schemes."

"In the cabin you will find four of the best automatic pistols money can buy," Morning told him. "And I want you to expect something crooked, Whit-

ley, because it's on the cards. Holabird has a lot of crooked tricks up his sleeve, and Trossac will put them across. I've known for a long time there's sly deviltry brewing, but haven't been able to get a line on it. Particularly I want you to look out for the unexpected between here and Newfoundland. After you land there, I want you to proceed personally to the telegraph office in Trepassey and send me a reassuring message with your own hand. You'll do it?"

"Certainly, if that will relieve your mind any."

"It won't be any small thing that Holabird has Trossac pull off," continued Morning, "but it will be spectacular and smashing. Holabird insisted from the first that we let down the bars for anything our pilots might see fit to do. I knew then that he was laying his wires for some second-story tactics. When he begins to gumshoe around and talk about 'playing a man's game in a man's way,' I know he's hiding in the brush and getting ready to soak me from behind."

"If that's the way Holabird feels," said Whitley, "then he's got a good leader for his gang of thugs."

"What I want," pursued Morning, "is to make this plain to you, right here at almost the last minute. I am taking the time to impress it firmly upon your mind. Old Chauncey is ruthless. If he manages a big coup and, through underhand work, gives his man Trossac an advantage over you, there must be no complaints from our side. We are in this to beat him at his own game, if necessary. I don't

mean by that, Whitley, that you're to be a crook and a thug because Trossac happens to be one; what I do mean is that you're to meet Trossac's moves in your own way, and found your counter moves on your own judgment. I guess that's about all." The man of large affairs laughed softly. "If it hadn't been for the extra weight," he added, "I'd have equipped our plane with a machine gun."

The *Eagle*, by that time, had been brought up into the faint wind and was in readiness to taxi across the field to the take-off. With the wheels blocked, Croffut was warming up the engines.

Morning looked at his watch. "Nearly seven," he announced. "Now give the photographers a chance, Whitley, and then you can start."

These preliminaries were not to Whitley's liking, but he was a man under orders.

Trossac and his crew, in their patent flying gear, were like so many hobgoblins, or beasts from the pit, in view of the hard character just given them as creatures of Holabird's black purposes. These ungainly flyers crawled into their machine, and the *World Beater* presented a beautiful sight as she surged across the field, spurned the earth like a huge bird and started for the higher air levels. Lusty cheers broke from the onlookers.

It was exactly seven o'clock. Trossac was starting in the lead, anyway, no matter how he was to fare during the rest of the race.

"Come on, Whit!" called Croffut impatiently. He hated to see Holabird's machine secure even such a slight advantage.

The camera men finished their work, and Whitley was free to leave.

Once more he shook hands with John Morning. "If I don't win this race for you," he said, "Croffut will. Whatever happens in eastern Siberia, Mr. Morning, will not be allowed to endanger your chances."

"That's all right, captain, but I'm counting on *you*," the other answered. "Get that straight right here at the start."

Whitley turned to take Evarts by the hand. "You'll have no cause to worry about the way the plane is handled, Evarts," he said reassuringly.

"I'm as sure of that, Whitley," the engineer returned, "as I am that I'm alive. Best o' luck!"

Croffut and Fernald had already made their adieus and entered the car. Chaské finished tightening a turnbuckle of one of the wire guys. He turned from this to climb the steps and disappear through the small door. Whitley followed him, waved his hand, and shut himself and his crew from sight of the crowd. The blocks had been removed, and the propellers once more began to whirl. Faster and faster they went, and the plane glided away, rose gracefully, and began nosing skyward.

Already the *World Beater* was a mere speck in the northeast.

"That's the way my plane will lead yours all the way around, John," called a voice when the bedlam of cheering had died down.

"Guess again, Chauncey," said John Morning.

CHAPTER X

MR. HARDLUCK

BEFORE the *Eagle* had been an hour in the air after the jump-off at Detroit, Croffut declared that they were carrying an invisible and very unwelcome passenger, one whom he referred to as Mr. Johnny Hardluck. The plane had been thirty minutes in finding a high velocity current setting in the right direction at something less than thirty thousand feet; then, with the machine shooting like a comet through the fifty-mile squares of the chartograph, there developed a lateral unsteadiness with the whole fabric constantly nosing to the left. Something was wrong with the tractor motor on that side of the car.

Whitley dropped down to five thousand feet, and while the *Eagle* fought with cross air currents over the wide reaches of Lake Ontario Chaské opened a manhole in the top of the cabin and crawled out between the left-hand planes to investigate and make repairs. He discovered that the fuel-supply system was at fault. Before he could clear away the obstruction in the small tube connecting the fuel tank with the motor an hour had passed—an hour during which the plane had covered less than one hundred miles!

“How could a thing like that happen,” Croffut

fumed, "unless some spy of Holabird's put sand in the tank? All the fuel had been strained three times."

Chaské had returned to the cabin and closed the manhole. "No one did any dirty work," he asserted. "I watched the machine from the time we landed until we took off. Filled the tanks myself. It's just one of the things that couldn't be helped," he added philosophically.

Fernald, out of touch with Detroit, was filling the air with radiograms, hoping to have them picked up and relayed to John Morning. He swore softly as he sat back in his chair; then, suddenly, he leaned forward with closest attention and pressed two handkerchiefs over his earphones. Presently he started up and snatched off the helmet, exploding wrathfully as he did so.

"What's to pay back there?" demanded Whitley.

"Just caught a report from Trossac," explained Fernald. "The Holabird bus is over northern Maine and going strong. Maine!" he yelled, and grabbed at a chart. "That means he's at least six hundred miles from Detroit. I wish to thunder we had a wireless set as good as Trossac's!"

"Take it easy," came the calm, unruffled voice from the office. "We'll do well enough from now on."

The *Eagle* was again booming along at the high altitude. Whitley watched the steel finger dig its glowing line across the lake and into northern New York. They were doing better than three hundred

miles an hour and were in a fair way to make up some of their lost time.

Once more everything was working perfectly. The plane was like a ship borne along by the unfailing trade winds and there was little to do but hold a steady helm. The revolution counters showed that each propeller was doing its utmost. Whitley yielded his place to Croffut and dropped into the chair back of the pilot's seat. Fernald passed him the log book, and he uncapped a fountain pen and made some entries:

"Weather fair. Gentle wind from the s. e. Took off at 7:20 a. m. Found brisk current setting e. by n. at 29,000 feet.

"8 a. m. Larboard tractor develops trouble. Descended to 5,000 feet. Chaské climbed out on lower plane and cleaned fuel pipe. Made 96 m. in one hour with crippled engine.

"9. a. m. Back at 29,000 feet. Everything lovely. Reeling off 310 m. p. h. Picked up wireless from *W. B.* Trossac claims over Maine and going strong.

"9.20 a. m. Clipping corner of northern Vermont. Approximately 500 miles on our way."

Whitley recapped the pen and sat back. Fernald looked over his shoulder. "Five hundred miles!" muttered Fernald; "and two hours gone! There are nearly nine hundred miles between us and our four-wind field near Trepassey, captain, and that means three hours more if nothing else happens."

"That is good enough," Whitley answered. "That will bring us to our landing at twelve twenty—half

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past two Newfoundland time. If we turn the trick as well as that I shall be perfectly satisfied."

Another hour passed. The plane continued to hurl itself through space at the rate of five miles each minute. Whitley had wondered how he and his companions would stand a lengthened flight at the tremendous altitudes which the best speed demanded. The cabin was an electrically heated, oxygen-fed chamber carrying a quartet of human beings through the frigid, rarefied air more than five miles above the earth's surface. Whitley was surprised at the lack of physical discomfort which he experienced. Croffut and Fernald reported having a slight headache, but they averred it was so slight as not to be worth mentioning.

Chaské had orders to economize on the oxygen, but to carry the economy too far would have been as disastrous as it would have been to release too much. Whitley had the flow increased slightly, and Croffut's and Fernald's headache vanished.

At half past ten the *Eagle* was over New Brunswick, and at half past eleven she was winging across the Gulf of St. Lawrence. Fernald got out the glass slab that held the accurately drawn landing map and made ready to slip it into the chartograph.

Morning and Holabird had established landing fields and stations in common along the fiftieth parallel of north latitude except in Newfoundland. There, for some reason, they had chosen separate fields. The topography of the country was such that good airdromes were difficult to locate, but Morning's

representative had selected a large area of level ground a few miles west of Cape Race, near Trepassey. Holabird's field was only a few miles away, in the direction of St. John's. Fernald leaned over Croffut, his sharp eyes on the moving finger of the chartograph.

"Better get down, Croffut," he advised. "We're close to St. Mary's Bay, and I'll have to slip in the landing map before long."

Croffut began a downward course. In a few minutes Fernald deftly removed the chart and pushed the landing map into the slides. The ports were opened, and the electric lights snapped off. Newfoundland unrolled beneath the plane and, by degrees, the landing field began to take shape. It was marked with a great white arrow which pointed in the direction of the wind. There was a tent at the side of the field, an automobile was drawn up near it, and half a dozen dotlike figures could be seen moving around.

Croffut effected a beautiful landing, bringing the plane to a halt directly opposite the tent. Whitley looked at his watch. It was half past twelve, Detroit time, or about half past two by Trepassey clocks. Chaské lowered the steps, and Whitley opened the door and stepped clear of the cabin.

There was no crowd of sightseers, which seemed a little odd in view of the publicity the newspapers had given the flight. The six men Whitley had seen from aloft were hurrying toward the machine.

"Mr. Hartley?" the pilot asked, descending the

steps and facing a man who seemed to be in charge of the field.

"My name," answered the man. "You're Captain Whitley?"

Whitley nodded and allowed his hand to be grasped and warmly shaken. "What about Holabird's plane?" he inquired.

"It's down—arrived half an hour ago. Somehow the news got out that you were to land on Holabird's field, and about everybody on the island is over there to see the show. When will you take the air again?"

"Just as soon as we can get our fuel and oil aboard and give the plane a going over. You have everything here, oxygen tanks and all?"

"Everything, captain. My men will ship your supplies while you and your crew eat dinner. There's a hot meal ready for you in the tent, and a car is waiting to take you to Trepassey to file a message for Mr. Morning."

"I'll not leave the machine," said Chaské. "Bring my chow to me out here, please."

Whitley, Croffut, and Fernald made their way to the tent and sat down to a hearty meal. Some of the food was sent to the Ogalalla, who was watching four of Hartley's men fill the tanks. Whitley hurried through his meal and then got up from the table.

"If Chaské finds the plane in good order, Pink," he said to Croffut, "we ought to be on the wing again by half past three, or four at the latest, Tre-

passey time. Push things along, old man. I ought to be back in half an hour."

He left the tent. On his way to the waiting automobile he threw a glance in the direction of the plane. Chaské was carefully examining the feed-pipe which he had cleared during the flight. Oxygen tanks were being loaded into the cabin by Hartley's men.

"How do you find her, Chaské?" called Whitley.

"Fresh as a daisy!" called back the Ogalalla, a note of exultation in his voice.

Whitley jumped into the car and was rolled and bounced over some bad roads. Finally he reached the town and filed this message:

MR. JOHN MORNING, Chicago.

Reached Trepassey five hours ten minutes actual flying time. Leaving four Trepassey time at latest. Will cable from Europe to-morrow. *Eagle* is delivering the goods. Congratulations to you and Evarts.

WHITLEY.

A roar from overhead drew his attention as he left the telegraph office. "Trossac is away on the Atlantic jump," he thought as he turned his eyes skyward. The next moment a startled exclamation escaped his lips. Circling over Trepassey and mounting higher and higher into the air was a plane. But it was not the *World Beater*. A man on the sidewalk was gazing upward through a pair of field glasses. Whitley borrowed the glasses for a clearer

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view and to resolve his last amazing uncertainty. There was no doubt. The machine he saw was the *Eagle*! And it was vanishing into the blue in the direction of the Atlantic!

Whitley gave up the glasses and stood gazing into vacancy. What did that mean? Suddenly he drew himself together and sprinted for the automobile. "Get me back to the field in a rush!" he shouted to the driver, and leaped into the tonneau.

CHAPTER XI

THE FIGHTING CHANCE

WHITLEY found plenty of people at the landing field when at last he got back to it. During the rough ride from town he had succeeded in getting the whip hand of his surcharged feelings. His bronzed face was calm, but there was a touch of white in it and a steely gleam in his gray eyes. For the moment he was profoundly curious; and he was anxious about Croffut and Chaské, the *Eagle's* mechanic. Fernald, the wireless operator, he did not know so well, and his case was one for suspended judgment. Shouldering his way through the crowd in the direction of the tent, Whitley called for Hartley, a representative of Morning at Trepassey. Croffut answered the call, appearing suddenly in the tent opening and lifting his voice excitedly.

Croffut's clothes were in disorder, one of his eyes was swollen and discolored, and he was nursing a set of skinned knuckles. The attention he gave the knuckles was involuntary, for it was plain that one idea alone filled his mind and fanned his temper to a white heat.

"What happened, Pink?" asked Whitley.

"Trossac and his gang"—Croffut's voice was pitched high and the wrath in him rose and smothered

it. "Come in here, Whit," he added, backing into the tent and away from the gaping crowd.

There were several in the tent, all strangers, and among them was Chaské. The Ogalalla sat in a folding chair, tying a reddened handkerchief about his left wrist and drawing it taut with his teeth. It was evident that he also had been in battle. Croffut turned to a stocky person who was carrying a black-thorn cane.

"This is Constable Lucas, Whit," said Croffut. "He got here with the rest of the crowd when it was all over."

"We understood both machines were to land at the other field," the law officer explained.

"Where's Fernald?" queried Whitley, glancing sharply at the others in the tent.

"Trossac took him along," replied Croffut, relieving his inward pressure with a few lurid words. "His own wireless man was knocked cold, so Trossac dragged Fernald into the car. It was the rawest deal ever pulled off anywhere!" the assistant pilot stormed. "Trossac framed this up and had everything set before we left Detroit."

"What's become of Hartley?" Little by little the situation was opening out and showing more desperate with every moment. But Whitley held himself well. "What were Hartley and his four men doing while you were fighting Trossac and his crowd, Pink?" he demanded.

A stranger moved forward. "I'm Hartley," he said, "and here are my four men."

"You're not the man I know as Hartley and I never saw these other men before."

"Look at this, Captain Whitley," went on Hartley, and handed the aviator a telegram.

Our plane lands Holabird's field. Leave with your men for other camp at once. Do not move supplies. Arranged with Holabird to use his supplies.

MORNING.

"That's a fake message, Whit," asserted Croffut, "and it was never on the wires at all. But it fooled Hartley."

The telegram was so palpably a forgery that it was hard to understand how Hartley had been gulled by it. "When did you get this, Hartley?" Whitley asked.

"A little after twelve o'clock," the other answered. "Two men drove up in a large machine and one of them handed me the message. I piled into the car with my four mechanics, and one of the men who had come with the car stayed here to watch our camp. That machine, sir, never took us within a dozen miles of Holabird's field, but went knockin' around the hills. I made up my mind then it was all cut and dried to get us out of the way; and there wasn't any doubt when, in a lonely place, the car halted and two men bobbed up out of the brush with guns and held us where we were under their gun muzzles. We saw Holabird's machine falling across Newfoundland to its landing field, and later we saw Morning's dropping into the berth where we

had everything set for it. Some time later, the two men with the guns got into the car with the driver and all of them drove off and left me and my crowd to get back here as best we could. We got a lift on the road, but it didn't help much, for we only got here just before you did."

"You were so easy, Hartley," scowled Croffut, "that it looks as though you had a hand in the frame-up."

This blunt remark aroused Hartley's wrath, and a scene threatened between him and Croffut.

"Cut that out, you two!" ordered Whitley sharply. "Who's this?" he added, stepping to the side of a man who was sitting up weakly and rocking back and forth with his head in his hands.

"That's Trossac's wireless man," Croffut answered. "Chaské laid him out with a monkey wrench. Trossac thought it was for good, I guess, for he hauled Fernald into the *Eagle* to look after his radio business."

Whitley lifted the man to his feet and helped him out of the tent. "This way, Pink," he called, "you and Chaské."

Whitley made his way to the automobile that had taken him to Trepassy and hoisted the wireless man into it. There was a gleam in the eyes of Dave Whitley that Croffut had seen in them before. It meant fewer words and more action. The assistant pilot and the Ogalalla piled into the car.

"Get us to the other field," said Whitley to the

driver, "and don't waste any more time than you have to."

"Just a minute!" shouted a man, waving his arms and pushing through the crowd toward the machine.

"Don't bother, Whit," spoke up Croffut; "he's one of these newspaper chaps, and only wants to consume our time to add a few frills to our hard-luck story."

"Hustle," said Whitley to the driver, and they sped away, leaving the "newspaper chap" milling around in the road.

Whitley was sitting in the tonneau with the wire-less man, examining his injury. It consisted of an ugly bruise over his right ear and, although Chaské's blow must have given him a tremendous shock, the hurt was plainly nothing serious.

"Your name?" demanded Whitley.

"Harkness," was the answer.

"Why did Trossac put over this high-handed piece of business, Harkness?"

"Smashed his landing gear when he came down, and he thought there'd be less delay taking over your bus than fixing up his own."

"His conversation is mainly through his hat, Whit," commented Croffut. "The deviltry wasn't planned on the spur of the moment. It took hours, and more likely days, to get all the wires laid here and ready to pull."

Whitley was sure of that, but he had trained himself to deal with conditions and not theories. The cause of what had happened was rooted deep in the

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ruthless rivalries of Morning and Holabird. Anything to win! Both had agreed to that principle in this their latest competition with aircraft. The events of the afternoon proved at least one point conclusively: Morning had the better airplane. Holabird and Trossac, in spite of their camouflage of confidence in their own machine, both knew this. So, instead of committing some depredation that would have crippled the *Eagle* and put it out of the contest, Trossac had chosen to take it over and make use of it.

John Morning, back in Chicago on the evening of the Fourth, was in a comfortable frame of mind. He had gathered in the wireless fragments relayed from the *Eagle* before leaving Detroit. His fliers had met with trouble, but the trouble had been overcome. What if Holabird's machine was leading? The race was long, and this was only the start.

At his palace on Lake Shore Drive he found a telegram waiting for him. It was the report which he had insisted on Whitley's making in person from Trepassey.

Reached Trepassey five hours ten minutes actual flying time. Leaving four Trepassey time at latest. Will cable from Europe to-morrow. *Eagle* is delivering the goods. Congratulations to you and Evarts.

"Nothing to it, Ida," John Morning remarked to his wife. "I've got the fox lashed to the mast in

this flying game and he knows it. Oh, he can bluff; but that's all the good it'll do him."

"He'll do something more than bluff, John," said Mrs. Morning, shaking her head apprehensively. "You ought to know from experience that it is the unexpected you are to look for from Chauncey Holabird."

Next morning, on his way to the office, John Morning realized that his wife was right. There was a startling story in the early papers under a big scare head. The man of large affairs was a little "grouchy" when he made his way to his business quarters in the skyscraper. Evarts was in the anteroom, pacing up and down with a wild look in his bushy-bearded face.

"Come in, Luke," grunted Morning as he passed on to his private office; "but don't," he added testily when they were by themselves, "act like a man who ought to be put in a cage."

"It's all up!" groaned Evarts, slumping into a leather chair. "You saw the papers. The *Eagle* captured by this piratical gang of Holabird's! A high-handed outrage, Mr. Morning. If there wasn't proof that it had happened, I should call that newspaper account incredible."

"Clamp down your feelings, Evarts," advised Morning. "It won't help matters any by going all to pieces. Holabird has always had a Jolly Roger at his masthead; he's always been a buccaneer. But the world will keep on turning just the same even if Trossac has cut up rough with our pet airplane."

The engineer was shaking from the excess of his

emotions. "The *Eagle* is no more than a toy for you," he complained, "but for me it is a life's work."

"All right, Evarts, then get off on the other foot. Your life's work will stand to win no matter whether Whitley or Trossac describes the earth's circumference with it."

"Holabird turned me down before you took up with me," the engineer went on, "and, brutal outlaw that he is, I don't want him to have any credit through exploiting my ideas." He leaned toward Morning tensely. "Cable the other landing fields!" he cried. "Have this airplane thief, Trossac, arrested. That will plug his game."

Morning looked at the engineer in pained surprise. "Register a sob, eh, because Holabird got the better of me at the start-off of the race?" he returned. "Not so you can notice it, Evarts. The only way to get Holabird on the hip is to beat him at his own game. Either that or nothing. 'Anything goes'—that is in our agreement. Did you notice, in reading the newspaper account, that Whitley and his crew took possession of the *World Beater*, repaired the landing gear and got into the air at six o'clock last evening? My money is on that flying ace, and I have faith that he'll bring home the bacon."

"Have you heard from Whitley?" inquired Evarts, calmed in a measure by the sheer force of Morning's confidence in the chief aviator.

"Only this," and he showed the engineer the telegram from Trepassey. "He didn't think it worth while to send any further word. Mark what I tell

you: He'll cable me from Europe some time to-day, just as he said he would before Trossac mixed the cards on him. Whitley is straight and Trossac is crooked. But in whipping the devil around a stump, Evarts, it takes a square man to make the best job of it. Possess your soul in patience and wait for the next news from the flyers! It will be all you hope for, and more, take it from me."

CHAPTER XII

A DARE TO FATE

THE newspaper account of the happenings in Newfoundland on the afternoon of July Fourth was substantially correct, but it could not do justice to the determination, the industry and the "never-say-die" spirit of Captain David Whitley, Assistant Pilot Croffut, and Mechanic Waukon.

If Whitley could not use the *Eagle* in circumnavigating the globe, he would do the next best thing and use the *World Beater*. The only time he had ever seen the Holabird plane had been for the few minutes preceding its take-off at Detroit. This survey had been from a distance and, very naturally, failed to give him much of an idea regarding the capabilities of the machine. He had a detailed description of it, however, and this he had studied to good purpose.

On arriving at Holabird's landing field, Whitley and his two companions made their way directly to the *World Beater*. A guard rope had been stretched around the plane to keep the crowd from interfering with it. Whitley ducked under the rope, and was immediately confronted by a shock-haired, middle-aged person who ordered him to keep his distance.

"I'm Whitley, John Morning's chief aviator," the

ace shot at the man, "and if you think you can keep me from taking over this bus just go ahead and try it. Chaské," he ordered, "fix up that landing gear. Pink, see that the tanks are filled and that all necessary supplies are put aboard. We're going to make the Atlantic jump in this mill of Holabird's, if it will hang together and get us into the air. And I guess you know how much time we have to lose."

Like the *Eagle*, the *World Beater* had a cabin. The door, just back of the wings, was open, and Whitley climbed a short ladder and got inside. Instead of chairs there were cushioned benches, and the only comfortable seat was the pilot's. There were oxygen helmets on the benches, and electrically equipped gloves and cloth armor for keeping the crew warm in the higher altitudes. In the rear of the cabin was the wireless set, with a boxlike receiving apparatus from the interior of which a ribbon emerged like ticker tape and fell into a small wicker basket. Here was a marvel in the way of a wireless receiver, for inside the box the dots and dashes were photographed, developed, "fixed," washed and dried, all accomplished while the tape with its message was unwinding. The cabin of the *World Beater* was not soundproof, and hence the necessity of some such arrangement for "receiving."

Whitley carried his examination forward to the pilot's cockpit. Everything there seemed to be in perfect order. He emerged from the cabin to find Croffut engaged in a spirited altercation with the shock-haired person. Croffut had hauled a wheeled

gasoline tank inside the rope and was making ready to lay his hose and pump the fuel supply aboard.

"Get in my way and I'll put you down for the count," the tow-haired pilot was saying. "Take your troubles to the police; we didn't, but that's no bar on you."

"Go on, Pink," said Whitley, "I'll see that he doesn't bother you." He whirled on the waspish individual who was trying to bother. "What's your business here?" he demanded.

"I'm Holabird's man and in charge of this field and this machine," was the answer. "My name's Kennedy, and if you try to take over this airplane I'll have you juggled."

"I want to find all of Holabird's men that I can," Whitley told him, "for every one of you were in the conspiracy to steal Morning's machine. Get the police; then bring them here and I'll do a little talking myself."

The sympathies of the crowd were with Whitley; and one of them, a big, square-set Newfoundlander, had volunteered to take charge of Harkness and see that he didn't run away. Kennedy was at a disadvantage and knew it.

"I'll have the law on you if you lay a hand on any of the stores or supplies!" Kennedy barked, and then took himself off in a hurry.

Half a dozen young fellows were helping Chaské. Many more were waiting to do what they could for Croffut. Whitley left the plane and walked to one side of the field, where there was a boiler-plate

shanty. The door was closed and secured with a hasp and padlock. He smashed the padlock with a stick of wood, pushed open the door and stepped into the hut.

Here, in orderly array, was a vast number of accessories—propellers, struts, coils of cable and piano wire and almost a junk shop so far as spare nuts, bolts, turnbuckles, and other parts were concerned. A portable forge stood in one corner, with a fire of charcoal glowing dully in the half gloom of the four windowless walls. On the bed of coals was a huge coffeepot, boiling furiously and filling the place with an odor that fought against a stench of oil and grease.

On a workbench was spread a clean cloth heaped with a great supply of freshly made ham sandwiches. Half a dozen quart thermos bottles, uncapped and ready to be filled, stood beside a large tin box. A grim smile crossed Whitley's face. Trossac and his men had not waited for that supply of food and drink, but had proceeded at once to carry out their nefarious designs upon the *Eagle*.

Whitley filled three of the thermos bottles, corked and capped them and stowed them in the tin box. The sandwiches he wrapped in the cloth and packed them in the box with the bottles. As he finished, he turned to see Chaské just entering the hut. The Ogalalla's eyes brightened at sight of the spare parts and he began a search.

"What was the damage, Chaské?" Whitley inquired.

"A steel tube strut bent and a wheel smashed," he answered. "I've straightened the tube, Whit. Now if there's a wheel here——" He broke off with a wild whoop of joy as he bent over and rolled a thirty-six inch wheel out from behind a pile of canvas. "An hour is all I need," he added. With that, he left the hut at a trot, rolling the wheel beside him as he went.

His face, hands, and overclothes were covered with grease and dust, but back of all the grime burned the unconquerable spirit of a man accustomed to doing things. Croffut hurried in a few minutes after Chaské left.

"Barometer says storm, Whit," he announced, "and I'm told it has been saying it for some time. But this two-wind field has the breeze in the right direction; and that's luck, even if it does mean a gale."

Two men had followed him. He handed each of them a can of lubricating oil and sent them back to the *World Beater*, then picked up a third can for himself.

"There's only one thing now between us and the grand flip," he said, pausing in the door with a worried and ominous look—very ominous because of his discolored eye.

"What's that, Pink?"

"I can feel a sure-enough vertical breeze whenever I think Trossac may have done something to put the engines out of commission."

"We'll cross that bridge when we get to it," said Whitley. "Better put one of your volunteer helpers

on guard here to watch these supplies—there's no telling what Kennedy might do."

"Righto," Croffut answered. "Every man in the crowd here is with us and anxious to do what he can. I never saw a more accommodating lot."

The man arrived presently, and Whitley took up the tin box and returned to the plane. A little search enabled him to locate the chart locker, and he brought out the map for the jump across the Atlantic and fastened it with thumb tacks to a table beside the wireless equipment. Finally he emerged from the cabin once more and went to the place where he had left Harkness.

This wireless man was thin and undersized, but he must have had a wiry constitution, for he was recovering finely from Chaské's blow with the wrench.

"Who was Trossac's navigator, Harkness?" Whitley inquired.

"I was to do the navigating, figure our dead reckoning, shoot the sun and all that," Harkness answered, "but now I reckon I'm out of a job."

"That's where you are wrong, Harkness," Whitley assured him. "You are going with me. Trossac made off with our wireless man and navigator and you'll have to take his place." He narrowed his gray eyes as he added: "What's more, you are going to play fair."

Harkness grew uneasy at this, and absently stroked the bruise at the side of his head.

"There's a devil of a storm brewing," he remarked, looking at the ragged streamers of cloud

overhead, "and you surely won't make a start in the face of it?"

"We surely will, Harkness," was the answer. "Trossac started, didn't he?"

"Blame it," cried Harkness, "Trossac is in better shape for bad weather in that plane of yours than we'll be in this machine of Holabird's."

"What's the matter with Holabird's machine?" queried Whitley. "Its performance was fine from Detroit to this place."

"Great!" agreed the wireless man, with a touch of enthusiasm; "but," and here his face fell, "your mill has it all over ours, at that. You'll see, after you get at the controls."

The capture of the *Eagle* had been no difficult matter, as Whitley had learned. The five men at the other field were all Holabird's hirelings. They had worked like beavers in getting the *Eagle* ready for its first long water jump; and then, when Trossac and his crew arrived, there were nine in the fight against Croffut, Chaské, and Fernald. Whitley's greatest regret was that Morning's insistence that he should personally file his report in Trepassey had kept him out of the battle. He might not have changed the result if he had been in the mêlée, but it would have been a satisfaction to him to have Trossac within reach of his fists.

Whitley took Harkness to the *World Beater* and had him go over, detail by detail, every part of the equipment. He had no more than finished when Chaské announced that repairs had been completed.

The wheels were securely blocked; and, in addition to that, the machine was moored with guy ropes as a protection against heavy winds. Whitley manipulated the compressed-air starters, and the "wind sticks" began to whirl, faster and faster, with a clamor that was echoed and reëchoed by the neighboring hills. Croffut threw his hat into the air and gave vent to a cheer that was drowned in the deafening roar.

Somebody brought water and soap and towels, and Chaské was getting the grime off his face and hands just at the moment an automobile, loaded with men and coming with speed, poked its nose through a dust cloud.

Whitley had shut off the engines. Through the windows from the pilot's seat he watched the approaching car with some apprehension.

"It's Kennedy!" shouted one of the crowd around the plane; "he's back, and bringing a mob with him."

Whitley left his seat and hastened to the door. "Scatter!" he called to the crowd; "get back of the red flags! Croffut, cast off the guys! Chaské, get that guard rope out of the way!"

The assistant pilot and the mechanic were not slow in grasping the situation. It was better, they knew, to avoid an argument with the police and a possible delay by getting into the air. The guys were cast off and the guard rope torn from its stakes. Chaské paused to kick the blocking from the wheels before he tumbled into the cabin in the wake of Croffut. The door was closed. Already Whitley

had started the engines once more and the plane began to move.

The automobile had halted, and its load of men had scrambled out and rushed across the field, Kennedy in the lead and tossing his arms. Faster and faster moved the *World Beater*, bearing down on the storming party and causing every man to turn in his tracks and beat a hasty retreat. The plane lifted clear of the ground, and the bubble in the clinometer dropped down its hemisphere of frosted glass as the Holabird machine zoomed upward in the gathering gale and cleared the Newfoundland hills.

Whitley flashed a look at his watch. It was just six o'clock, Trepassey time. Ahead of the *World Beater* lay twenty-six hundred miles of open sea, with storm warnings flying all along the western littoral. But Whitley's mind was on a wagon road tangled among the Yablonoi Mountains and running down toward the River Amur!

CHAPTER XIII

SOMETHING WRONG

THE plane climbed exceedingly well, almost as well as the *Eagle*, but the noise of the engines after the quiet aboard the *Eagle* when in full flight was a decided disadvantage. Conversation was out of the question, and this was particularly hard on Croffut, as he was full of talk and yearned to get it out of his system. The pilot could signal by means of a push button on the instrument board and the flash of a red light in the cabin behind him, and after that he could write out his orders or give them by signs.

At ten thousand feet, over the Newfoundland banks, a gray, driving fog surrounded them. The wind was quartering to their course and the drift so strong as to make it difficult to follow the compass bearings. There was only one way to correct this, and that was by rising into higher altitudes where there would be clear weather and a strong current of air setting in the right direction.

Whitley flashed the red signal. When he caught Croffut's eye, he motioned to the electric armor and the helmets equipped with the oxygen nose-and-mouth pieces. Croffut and Chaské proceeded to get into the clothes and to make the electrical connections. Each also laid hold of an oxygen bottle, ready to

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start the life-sustaining flow when he should find it necessary.

Harkness had taken a message, and he delayed getting into his own high-altitude costume until he could transcribe it. He passed it to Croffut, who turned it over to Whitley.

"The wireless station at Mount Pearl wishes you luck," the message ran.

"Thank them," wrote Whitley on the back of the sheet, "and tell them our middle name is Luck."

The powerful apparatus got the message through. This demonstration of efficiency by the plane's wireless was a source of gratification. In the absence of the chartograph it would help Whitley to locate their position and check against information to be obtained in other ways.

Croffut took Whitley's place at the controls and Whitley proceeded to crawl into the electrically heated garments that belonged to Black Ben Trossac. Before putting on the gloves, he wrote out a rather lengthy caution for the rest of his companions:

Be careful of the oxygen. Too much is as bad as not enough. We must economize with it. There are thirty-two bottles—eight for each of us—enough for about eight hours in the upper levels. These bottles form a heavy part of our equipment since they weigh around fifteen pounds each. When one container is exhausted, drop it overboard. By doing this, and as we use up our oil and fuel, we will lighten ship and increase our speed. But take no chances

with the oxygen. If you have headache, or if your eyes begin to blur, let me know at once.

He handed this note to Chaské, who read it, nodded, and passed it on to Harkness. Whitley was carrying it forward to Croffut when he suddenly halted, knelt on a cushioned bench and peered from a window. The fog had suddenly vanished, and in the west he saw a wonderful sunset. Old Sol was dipping under the ocean's edge, accompanied by a sundog all framed in gorgeous pinks and yellows. Whitley called the attention of the others to the spectacle, and they watched until the afterglow mantled the skies and dark shadows rolled toward them out of the east. Then they began climbing again.

Whitley was being pleasantly disappointed in the *World Beater*. With a capacity load, she was booming up the aerial incline in a manner to delight his heart. What was wrong with the plane to inspire that act of lawlessness at Trepassey Bay? That something was decidedly wrong Whitley knew very well, or Holabird would never have permitted Trossac to exchange the craft for the *Eagle*. Whitley made an offhand guess that it was Fernald's wonderful chartograph that had aroused the envy and the itch for possession on the part of Holabird and Trossac.

As the plane mounted an odd phenomenon presented itself. They saw the sun again, still setting! This sight they had with them until, at twenty-nine thousand feet, they came under a clear sky with a

strong current driving them on along their compass course. In this favoring wind Croffut straightened out the machine and they were hurled onward in the direction of Europe. Then, finally, the sun vanished and they drove straight ahead into the gathering dark.

Night brings great loneliness in these immensities of space. Stars were showing themselves overhead, clearer and brighter through that attenuated atmosphere than when seen from the earth under most favored conditions. The howling of the demons of power as they rode on the wind and ground their way into the east only served to make the loneliness more noticeable. Under the glowing incandescents of the cabin, Chaské and Harkness in their hoods and oxygen masks looked like two of the fiends that science has bottled up in the latter-day gas engine. They were mute, ungainly, and sat with only a slight swaying movement—for all the world like lay figures—gargoyles.

Whitley jerked himself roughly backward on the upholstered bench. His lungs were under a strain, he felt a weird oppression through all his body and his head seemed to be increasing in size and whirling in dizzy spirals. He turned on more oxygen. By degrees his wits straightened themselves out and he ceased imagining things, but a sensation as unpleasant as it was unreal remained with him.

He believed he knew now why Trossac was so anxious to exchange the *World Beater* for the *Eagle*. An equipment of electric armor and oxygen masks

was not practicable for a sustained flight of hours at great heights. Evarts with his vacuum cabin and his more rational method of controlling the oxygen supply had outmaneuvered Holabird's construction engineer.

Whitley wrote on a scrap of paper: "How do you feel?" and passed it to Chaské. The latter penciled underneath, "First chop," but his gloved hand shook as he wrote. "Keep experimenting with the oxygen," scribbled Whitley; and with the pencil the Ogalalla answered grimly, "We've got to get used to it."

In a few minutes Whitley leaned over the back of Croffut's seat and held this under his eyes: "Our own bus has this one skinned a mile on the oxygen arrangement." Croffut looked around and nodded emphatically.

At seven thirty, three useless oxygen containers were dropped overside. Fresh bottles were tapped. Croffut figured their speed at better than three hundred miles an hour. "But the *W. B.*," he wrote, "is faster than the *E.*, even though she is lame on the oxygen supply."

The gas turbines and centrifugal compressors, gathering their power from the motors' hot exhausts, were as efficient in Holabird's machine as were similar superchargers in Morning's craft. The *World Beater* was giving a wonderful performance in the matter of speed. Whitley was certain of that.

At nine o'clock, Trepassey time, there was a newcomer in the skies—the most beautiful full moon

that Whitley had ever seen. Its light filled all the upper sky with mellow radiance. Below, where the earth whirled under an envelope of clouds, all was a black gulf, but overhead there was nothing but brightness and beauty.

Whitley relieved Croffut, and motioned that he was to lie down and get what rest he could, but Croffut shook his head and staggered as he took the few steps necessary to reach one of the cushioned seats. Whitley asked no questions, but as soon as he reached the controls he pointed the plane downward. At five thousand feet he straightened out the machine, masks were removed, windows opened, and every one in the cabin gasped his lungs full of the cool night air.

The *World Beater* encountered an adverse wind at that low altitude, and the normal speed dropped. Directly under the plane was a cloud carpet, apparently as level as a floor. Harkness opened a locker and removed a sextant.

"A good cloud horizon," said he to Whitley with paper and pencil, "and I'm going to try to figure out our position by the stars. If I come within fifty miles of it, though, I'll be doing well."

He stood on the wireless table, opened a trap in the cabin roof and pushed his arms, head, and shoulders through. There was an excellent chronometer to help him in his calculations. After he had descended and closed the trap he spent several minutes figuring, and then stuck a pin in the chart. He drew a long breath as he studied the position of that pin.

"Roughly, nine hundred miles," he scratched on a scrap of paper, "but call it eight fifty. Some traveling!"

He corrected the course, gave Whitney his compass directions, and then tried to get some ship by wireless in order to check his figures. Although the plane was directly over the steamship lane across the Atlantic, yet no craft answered his call and he finally gave up.

After half an hour at that low altitude, Whitley once more pointed the plane skyward. This time, with the motors roaring smoothly, they remained for three hours at thirty thousand feet, with a velocity current hurling them on toward the south of England—and toward the sun; then Whitley dropped downward as before, but this time through bumpy clouds until the Atlantic unrolled below them. Estimating that the plane had done another nine hundred miles and had covered thirty degrees of longitude, Whitley added two hours to the twelve o'clock midnight registered by his watch. It should be, he judged two o'clock in the morning, since, traveling eastward, four minutes were lost for every degree crossed.

Croffut and Chaské had taken their "watch below," and had secured what rest they could. Harkness had also dozed at the wireless table. Croffut now took Whitley's place, and Whitley turned in. The radio man was fortunate with his wireless and picked up a ship that gave him latitude and longitude.

Whitley's final instructions to Croffut before he

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let his tired limbs relax and his dreary brain seek rest were these: "We'll not land at the field near Galway unless we learn that Trossac is there. As we near the Irish coast Harkness ought to be able to pick up some news regarding our own bus—whether she is in the air, in the bottom of the Atlantic, or winging on toward France. Everything is going too well, Pink, to cut it short. The idea is to get on the trail of Trossac and run him down—if we can."

Whitley slept, but not for long. It was nearly one by his watch when he was aroused by Chaské, who displayed an excitement not at all customary with him. He pushed this information under Whitley's eyes:

In touch with East Fortune, Clifden. That station reports that the *Eagle* passed the Irish coast at one twenty-three, Clifden time, and was reported from France to have been forced down by engine trouble an hour and a half later. *Eagle* now undergoing repairs at an old air-drome near L'Estrée.

The *Eagle* had left Trepassey hours before the *World Beater* had been ready and taxied to the hop-off, and yet Holabird's machine had steadily gained on her during the flight across the Atlantic.

"Swell news for Evarts, Whit!" said Croffut in a wild scrawl; "but that mutt, Trossac, didn't know how to handle our plane. Engine trouble! What has he done to her? And L'Estrée—our old field! There's fate in that."

Both machines, it seemed, were tearing leaves from the book of to-morrow, so far as aviation was concerned.

"And we're for L'Estrée!" wrote Whitley, and underscored the words. "If we can get there before Trossac effects repairs——"

Whitley broke off his words just there. The look in his eyes was enough for Croffut. If luck was with them, he knew pretty well what was to happen at L'Estrée!

CHAPTER XIV

WHEN OVERTAKEN

A TRAMP steamer gathered in the plane's wireless on a Marconi spark set and gave her position as latitude fifty-one degrees ten minutes north, longitude eleven degrees thirty minutes west. Since the spark set had a range limited to twenty-five or thirty miles, the *World Beater's* position was located with tolerable accuracy. Three hours had been gained on the sun, and the banners of dawn were unfurling themselves in the direction of—L'Estrée! It would be four o'clock on the Irish coast.

The tin box was opened and strong, hot coffee and sandwiches were passed around, the plane descending to an altitude where the oxygen masks could be removed. There was plenty of fuel in the tanks and more than enough oxygen left for continuing the flight to L'Estrée. After hours in the air the Holabird machine was still functioning perfectly. With a smile of exultation on his tired face, Whitley leaned over to give his hand to Chaské. The latter gave a Sioux war whoop by way of seconding his chef's jubilant mood.

Harkness was now in touch with many wireless stations, and his messages were flashing in all directions. He seemed genuinely enthused himself. This

man of Trossac's, in fact, had played fair with Whitley during the whole voyage. Naturally it was good business for him to do so in the interest of the general safety while making the big water jump; and there was always a distrust and a threat in Chaské's eyes whenever he looked at the little radio man which left little doubt that a square deal was safest. Nevertheless, Whitley was disposed to be pleased with Harkness for making no trouble, although he wondered if this message, which he wrote out with care, would be correctly sent:

James Fernald, care John Morning's airplane,
L'Estrée Airdrome, L'Estrée, France.—Due to
arrive L'Estrée this morning. Hold *Eagle* until
we get there. WHITLEY.

Harkness pursed up his lips as he read the message, and for a moment turned his gaze speculatively to a cabin window; then, with a shrug, he faced his instrument and got busy.

All hands were refreshed by the coffee and sandwiches and by their half hour in the lower air levels. The spirit had fed on hope, too, and this did not a little to soothe tired nerves and quiet worried minds. It was a different crew that went back into the higher sky and pushed on toward L'Estrée.

The agents of Morning and Holabird had established a landing field near Galway, Ireland. Another had been secured for possible use near London. But neither of these was to perform the function for which it had been created. On the

other hand, L'Estrée was not one of the chosen landing grounds, but a field near Wassigny had been selected and made ready. Trossac, no doubt, had been making for Wassigny when forced down, some miles short of his objective. There was no map in the *World Beater's* chart locker that took account of L'Estrée, but neither Whitley nor Croffut needed such a map. Once on that part of the old western front and the landmarks, never to be forgotten, would guide them infallibly; just as, no doubt, Trossac himself had been guided.

It chanced, however, that fortune, which had smiled so brightly on Whitley and his crew since leaving Trepassey, underwent a change of mood. Croffut punched the electric button and Whitley caught the red flash and went forward. Croffut indicated the revolution counter of the starboard engine. That particular engine was dropping revolutions, so that it maintained no more than fifteen hundred with the throttle wide open.

The plane came down closer to the English Channel and the steady-nerved Chaské climbed out of the cabin and examined the engine. He did what he could, and the revolutions ran up to sixteen hundred, but the trouble, although lessened, still remained. Trusting to luck, the *World Beater* went higher again and nosed into a favorable slant of wind. For perhaps an hour the crippled engine performed its duty, and then a piston gave out, a cam rod broke, and the engine cover slammed through the fuselage. All the work was now thrown upon the two remaining

engines, which gallantly met the emergency by speeding up to eighteen hundred revolutions.

"That's one trouble Trossac found with this machine," Harkness wrote for Whitley's benefit; "he was afraid it wasn't staunch enough to stand a grueling test of sixteen thousand miles and possibly two hundred or three hundred hours in the air."

This was enlightening. Every angle of Trossac's disappointment in the Holabird machine was being uncovered. However, just such an accident as this had been provided for in the plane's equipment; and the device which distributed equally the power of the two working engines was brought into play. It gave results that were most satisfactory, for there was no difficulty at all in keeping the *World Beater* on her compass course. Yet it naturally followed that the speed of the plane was greatly diminished.

"Keep her moving toward L'Estrée, Pink," were Whitley's instructions: "we'll make it."

And they did make it, keeping straight eastward at fifty degrees north, crossing the length of the English Channel from Land's End, England, to Dieppe, France, almost three hundred miles of tumbling water. By seven o'clock in the morning, local time, they were over the historic Department of the Somme; and at seven ten they passed Amiens, flying low and picking up well-known landmarks. Whitley, in the pilot's seat, turned south by east from the River Somme in the direction of Laon. Beyond Hourges, and leaving Moreuil on his right,

he banked and circled over L'Tstrée and got his first view, since the war, of the old airdrome.

L'Estrée and the landing field were bathed in bright morning sunshine; and there, hauled up in front of the dismantled hangars and waiting for them like a loyal friend, was the *Eagle*! A yell broke simultaneously from Croffut and Chaské, shaking the cabin with its din as Whitley shut off the engines. A crowd of people from L'Estrée had gathered at the field, and as the *World Beater* dropped downward there began a great scattering to clear the way. Whitley maneuvered with the utmost care, and the repaired gear took the ground in a manner that did credit to Chaské's hurried work on the Newfoundland field. After a bit of taxiing, the *World Beater* came to a halt almost abreast of a motor truck that was drawn up by the *Eagle*. Chattering excitedly, the townspeople began crowding in for a closer look at the second of the two airplanes in which those wonderful Yankees were trying to girdle the earth in a fortnight.

"Pardieu," said Popotte, the blacksmith, to Bassinet, the lock maker, "and they'll do it or break their necks! I am told, Bassinet, that both those cuckoos left Detroit only yesterday morning!"

"Name of a wonder!" muttered the lock maker; "but where is this Detroit?"

A great pity because of such ignorance crossed the face of Popotte. "It is on the Illinois prairies of the United States," he explained loftily, "and is the capital city in the Department of Indiana. These

machines, Bassinet, have crossed the Atlantic Ocean to France since yesterday morning!"

"But it is a great lie," gulped the lock maker, lifting his shoulders and tossing his hands. "I will not believe it; *c'est incroyable!*"

Meanwhile, Whitley and his companions had doffed their flying clothes and emerged from the cabin of the plane. They were looking around for Fernald, but he was nowhere to be seen. Whitley passed around the end of the truck and came to where three men in khaki overclothes were working at one of the *Eagle's* motors. A red-haired individual stepped in front of Whitley.

"I reckon you're the boss of the Morning crowd, eh?" he said. "Well, I'm Chet Bingham, Trossac's mechanic."

"Oh, I'd know you, Chet," spoke up Croffut. "This eye you gave me is a gentle reminder of the last time we met; and I see you are still wearing my souvenir—under that piece of court plaster on your chin. How's tricks, Chet?" he jeered.

Bingham scowled. "Well, you overhauled us," he growled, "but if we could have got the old mill in shape, believe me we'd have been on the way to our next stop before you dropped in on us. Don't start any trouble, Whitley. You'll delay the game for all hands if you do."

"Where's Trossac?" Whitley inquired crisply.

"Search me. He and Rufus skipped out somewhere shortly after we reached here."

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"Where did that truck come from?" Whitley went on; "and those mechanics?"

"From Wassigny. Trossac phoned over and had the crowd there load up supplies and spare parts for the *Eagle* and get them here p. d. q. The mécanos are Holabird's and Morning's men."

Chaské was already among the mechanics, taking charge and making an examination of his own. Whitley turned to Croffut.

"I'll leave you here with Chaské, Pink," he said. "Find out what overhauling there is to do and how long it will take." He whirled back again to Bingham. "Where is Fernald?" he demanded.

"Trossac and Rufus took him along with them," Bingham answered.

"Well, there's your bus over beyond the truck. You and your crowd will keep away from the *Eagle* from now on. Get that right, Bingham. Circumstances are different here from what they were at Trepassey. Croffut and I have more friends in L'Estrée than Trossac has."

Whitley started off to find Trossac, but had no more than reached the road that led toward L'Estrée than he came face to face with Fernald. The latter's joy was intense.

"I can't believe you're here," he babbled, grabbing Whitley's hand; "last night seems like a dream to me more than anything else. Oh, this is great, captain, simply great! In that mill of Holabird's you overhauled the robber gang and have recaptured the *Eagle*! But how the deuce could you do it without the chartograph?"

"We were at a disadvantage, Fernald, but we made it," Whitley told him. "The next thing is to hustle repairs and push on. Did you get the wireless message I sent?"

Fernald's face went blank. "No," he said. "How could you send a wireless message while I was traveling with the other crowd?"

Whitley explained about Harkness. Also he repeated the message he had instructed Harkness to send. Either it had not been sent or Trossac had intercepted it. But that made little difference as the matter turned out. Trossac's men had not been able to effect repairs in time to get away before Whitley reached L'Estrée.

"Trossac has been close-herding me ever since we landed," Fernald explained, "and he hasn't let me out of his sight a minute until a short time ago. He and Rufus had me at the Inn Cheval Blanc, over in town. As soon as we saw you in the air, Trossac told me to come to the field and tell you that, if you had any business with him, you'd find him at the inn."

"Yes, I have got a little business with him." Hours of work and worry in the thundering cabin of the *World Beater*, following the flight from Detroit and the trying experience near Trepassay, had left Whitley's temper as ragged as his nerves; but he smiled as he announced that he had some business with Trossac, and all his weariness seemed to fall away. "At the White Horse, eh?" he added, and started on.

"Hey, captain!" Fernald called; "maybe I'd better go along and show you how to find the inn?"

Whitley paused and turned, shaking his head. "I've been there dozens of times, Fernald," he answered.

"But I think this Black Ben is figuring to start something," the radio man urged; "and Rufus is with him. I might come in handy."

Whitley smiled again as he looked at the wisplike figure of Fernald. He weighed even less than Harkness.

"Croffut and Chaskée need you more than I do, Fernald," said Whitley, and moved on along the old familiar road to L'Estrée.

He had not gone far before he met a small party of four, making their way in the direction of the airdrome. Three of the party were men, and the fourth was a very pretty young woman. Pleasure shone in Whitley's face as the girl gave a cry of joy and ran to him with both her hands outstretched.

"Monsieur Dave!" she cried.

"Mademoiselle Suzanne!" exclaimed Whitley, taking the small hands in his own. "I thought it would not be long until I saw some one I knew."

Suzanne blushed prettily. "Ah, eet is 'madame' now," she said. "So many changes since the war, *n'est-ce pas?* My 'usband, plees, Monsieur Dave—Monsieur Picot."

Whitley took the hand of Monsieur Picot, the husband of the little Suzanne, a tall, upstanding chap in civilian clothes. Then he greeted the blind

Albert, brother of Madame Picot, and was introduced to the third man, who wore a red cap and a horizon-blue uniform and had the green ribbon of the Croix de Guerre pinned to his breast. This was Maurice Lecompte, Suzanne's brother, who had served his country from beginning to end of the war and was now a captain in the service.

Whitley had to excuse himself, pleading urgent business in L'Estrée. "When one is flying around the world and fighting against time," he said in French, with a laugh, "one has to hurry. But I shall try and see you again, Madame Picot, if only for a few minutes. Monsieur Pink is with the airplane, and you know how delighted he will be to see you all."

"One moment, monsieur," put in Captain Lecompte, and drew Whitley aside. "I have a small account against this man Trossac, but until now he has evaded me. Can you tell me where he may be found?"

Under the visor of the red cap were eyes that smoldered fiercely. A Frenchman's memory is long. Whitley's face went grave. Here, had he been constituted differently, was where he could have made plenty of trouble for Ben Trossac. But it was not best, even for Captain Lecompte himself.

"Trossac, *monsieur le capitaine*," Whitley answered, "is my rival in this race we are making. I cannot give any information about him."

"Pardon!" murmured Lecompte. He saluted and turned away.

CHAPTER XV

HOODLUM TACTICS

EVERY man has a spot in his character that may be considered a weakness. So with Monsieur Henri Lefebvre, mine host at the Cheval Blanc. He was Paris born, and had been a driver of cabs until an uncle died and left him the inn at L'Estrée. Coming on to take possession, he wore his high hat with the cockade and his brown coat with great silver buttons. It was a matter of pride with him and not one of weakness, thus to flaunt the badges of his previous calling in stepping from a cab owned by a company into a hotel owned by himself. As he had been a good cab driver, so he made an excellent boniface.

Whitley knew him well, having had many a meal at the inn tables. Monsieur Henri was a little stouter now and a little grayer, and his brown coat and beaver were a little shabbier, but since he was a native of Montmartre he would be all his life long what is called a good sport. He welcomed the aviator noisily and imprinted an explosive kiss on each of his cheeks; then he would have opened a bottle for monsieur l'aviateur, a grand bottle that had lain for years in a secret cellar and so escaped the Ger-

mans, but monsieur l'aviateur had to excuse himself and ask for Trossac.

Monsieur Henri pushed out his chest, settled his head on one side and studied the caller for a moment. "*Que diable!*" he muttered. "Is it that you think I have forgotten the bad blood—oui, the combat—between you and Monsieur Trossac when the skies here were filled with fighting cuckoos and the old airdrome swarmed with flyers like a hive with bees? Mais non, my old!" He leaned forward and whispered behind his hand: "There is another with this Black Ben, and I will listen and be on the alert. If it is that you need assistance, Monsieur Dave, then whistle me up with a bar from the 'Marseillaise.' Zut!" he chuckled, "but I will match you against a dozen Black Bens. *Allons!*"

He led the way to an entresol room, tapped on the door, announced the caller to those within and winked at Whitley as he withdrew. In response to an invitation from Trossac, Whitley stepped into a small apartment where Holabird's aviators were sitting at a table with glasses and a tall bottle between them.

Parke Rufus was a sallow-faced man with a squint. He squinted at Whitley now with an insolence which he tried to make as irritating as possible. Trossac pulled himself around in his chair.

"So you *have* got business with me, eh?" he remarked.

"Yes," said Whitley, "and I'll make it short. Neither of us has much time to spare, Trossac.

What I want to tell you is this: If you've made up your mind to pull the rough stuff all the way around to Detroit, I'll meet you half way and give as good as you send.

"Our landing fields are in common from here on and we may be thrown together more or less. You can try every stunt in your bag of crooked tricks, or you can forget all that and give your attention to flying. One will mean a fight and the other will mean peace and honest work. Which do you want? It's up to you."

Trossac got out of his chair, turned a key in the door, and then pushed the key into his pocket.

"One of us," he announced coolly, "is going to stop his little round-the-world tour right here. I thought I had you buffaloeed at Trepassey, but you are clever at hitching out of difficulties." He grinned malevolently. "Here in L'Estrée, a long time ago, you and I had a fight. Croffut was with you then. Now you're alone and Rufus is with me. I guess that between us we can do it. Dave Whitley, I'm going to put you in the hospital for a few days."

Trossac was cool and unflurried. He had deliberated upon his course and come to a hard and matter-of-fact conclusion. He disliked Whitley intensely; but, apart from this personal animus, there was a matter of cold-blooded policy—eliminating a dangerous rival with vast financial profit to himself. He had acquired considerable notoriety, during the war, for his rowdy methods.

Whitley flashed a look at Rufus and then around

the room. There was a high window in the rear wall, open, and with an apple tree growing in front of it. Whitley had no designs on the open window, but Trossac, noting the glance toward it, drew a wrong inference.

"Mind the window, Parke," said he, shedding his khaki jacket; "he's got a notion of using it for a get-away. Strip, Whitley," he added.

Whitley did not strip. "You are making a fool of yourself, Trossac," he said. "Instead of wasting your time here, you and Rufus ought to be looking after your plane. When we get through with this flight we can settle our differences in Detroit, and I'll give you all the satisfaction you want. Just now I'm not falling for your hoodlum tactics! Unlock the door!"

He flung up his right hand and looked at Trossac along the short barrel of his automatic pistol.

"Put it down!" ordered Parke Rufus, from his place at the window, suddenly showing an automatic of his own. "You can't run this in on us, Whitley. Lay the gun aside and come to the scratch!"

Whitley backed away a step and tossed a look at Rufus. It wasn't the weapon in Rufus' hands that impressed him so much as the sight of a man swinging from a branch of the apple tree to the window sill. Whitley looked away thoughtfully. There was nothing to do, at the moment, except allow events to drift.

The man outside the window was working so quietly that neither Trossac nor Rufus, wrapped up

in what was taking place in the room, had the slightest intimation of his presence. Whitley pushed his automatic back into his pocket.

"That's better," approved Trossac. "Now look to yourself!"

Before he could launch an attack, however, a form leaped from the window sill to the head and shoulders of Rufus. The latter stumbled forward and fell. The newcomer threw him aside, picked up the pistol Rufus had dropped and tossed it out of the window. Then he turned and bowed apologetically to Whitley.

"I ask your pardon, monsieur," he said in French, "but Monsieur Croffut told me you had come here to meet Trossac; and when I got here, Monsieur Lefebvre informed me that you were all in this room. I deemed it best to come by way of the window. Monsieur," he went on with a certain dignity, "you realize that I have rights; and, being a chivalrous American, I know you will not stand in my way."

He turned to Trossac. "I will mention no names, monsieur, but one—my own. I am Maurice Lecompte. I understand that you are in L'Estrée for a few brief hours only, so we can hardly make of this an affair of honor. I say you are a dog! *C'est tout!*" and he jerked off his red cap and struck Trossac across the face with it.

Trossac ripped out an imprecation. Rufus, on his feet again, started for Lecompte. Whitley laid hands on him and there was a scuffle. But there was more than a scuffle so far as Lecompte and Trossac were

concerned. The two met with a vicious impact, then recoiled after a sharp exchange of blows.

"The key, Trossac!" demanded Whitley, his automatic leveled. "This business is yours and Captain Lecompte's, and I'll leave you to finish it alone, if that is agreeable to you, Lecompte."

"It is," said Lecompte.

Trossac flung the key to the floor. Whitley picked it up, unlocked and opened the door, dragged Rufus out of the room and closed the door behind them.

"Your idea of fair play doesn't appeal to me, Rufus," said Whitley, "so I'm taking you away. You'll come peaceably, too!"

"What's the trouble between them, back there?" Rufus inquired, jerking his head backward in the direction of the door Whitley had just closed.

"Never mind about that," Whitley answered; "the Frenchman has his rights and I'm seeing that they are upheld."

With a firm hand on the arm of Rufus, Whitley proceeded to the front of the inn, where he encountered Lefebvre.

"*Grace à Dieu!*" murmured the keeper of the inn; "but where is the captain, Monsieur Dave?"

"He has some business to transact with Monsieur Trossac and does not wish to be disturbed."

"*Très bien,*" murmured Lefebvre, who was well informed. "My poor place is honored. Now for the bottle, monsieur?"

"Sorry, Henri, but I have not the time. Make

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ready your best meal for two and have it waiting in half an hour."

"It will be ready, monsieur."

Whitley took Rufus with him while he sent a message to John Morning, Chicago. It ran:

Arrived L'Estrée seven thirty this morning.
Leaving in *Eagle* by noon. All well.

WHITLEY.

As Whitley and Rufus walked back past the inn toward the road leading to the airdrome, they saw Captain Lecompte talking with Henri Lefebvre. The captain was smiling and the innkeeper was rubbing his hands delightedly. Lecompte, his face a bit flushed and his right hand swathed in a handkerchief, turned to Whitley.

"Monsieur Trossac requires some attention, monsieur," he said; "if that man is a friend, perhaps he will look after him."

"That's your cue, Rufus," remarked Whitley.

Holabird's assistant aviator hurried into the hotel, and Whitley strode on toward the landing field. Captain Lecompte was an officer and a gentleman; also, Whitley said to himself, "he's a bearcat!"

The captain was as trim and fine as when he had met Whitley on the road to L'Estrée. And the only souvenir he had acquired in setting his "small account" was indicated by the handkerchief in which he had bound his hand.

CHAPTER XVI

THE POLISH FRONTIER

BY the time Whitley got back to the landing field the crowd surrounding the two airplanes had diminished considerably. The motor truck had started on a return trip to Wassigny to load up with supplies for the *World Beater*. Chet Bingham had taken the three mechanics over to the Holabird machine, and they were all working with feverish haste to effect repairs. Chaské and Croffut had just done the last tap on the *Eagle*. They reported that the plane was "in the pink," and as fit in every way as when she had made the hop-off at Detroit. This was a remarkable record, and a fine tribute to the genius of Luke Evarts, who had designed the sturdy framework. Oil, fuel, and oxygen tanks were aboard, and the start for the eastern frontier of Poland could be made whenever Whitley gave the word.

But at this point Whitley believed in making haste slowly. He ordered Croffut and Chaské to proceed to the White Horse Inn and take their time over a late breakfast that was waiting for them there. They demurred, but Whitley stood firm.

"This machine of Evarts' is standing the strain in good shape, Pink," he said, "but the human machine

is a different proposition altogether. We've got to keep a wary eye on ourselves. Monsieur Henri is waiting for you. Take the tin box along and have it filled with hot coffee and chow. And, by the way, Pink!"

He drew Croffut aside and told him about Lecompte and how he had paid the family reckoning in the matter of Trossac. "Flip and Rufus are at the inn, and mind this: Don't trouble them and don't let Chaské try to pay off any old scores."

Croffut's eyes widened as the affair at the Cheval Blanc was sketched for his benefit. Then he laughed softly.

"Trossac never thought of the Lecomptes when he was forced down at L'Estrée, I'll bet a picayune," he murmured. "Oh, boy, but that must have been some fight! Wonder what sort of shape Trossac is in now?"

When Croffut and Chaské had left, Whitley climbed into the cabin of the *Eagle*. There he found Fernald, sitting at his wireless table and doing some figuring with a pencil and pad. He sat back from his calculations and surveyed Whitley with popping eyes.

"A week!" he cried; "why, by glory, we ought to get all the way around in five days! Look here, captain: When you dropped into L'Estrée at seven thirty, this old mill was only nineteen hours and ten minutes out of Detroit, actual time, or twenty-four hours and ten minutes, so I dope it out, by the L'Estrée clocks. We have done eighty-six and one

half degrees of the whole three hundred and sixty; or, roughly, thirty-eight hundred miles of the sixteen thousand miles ahead of us on the fiftieth parallel of north latitude. That's a quarter of the trip, nearly, and not much more than a day gone." A glow filled his face and his eyes sparkled. "Are you too busy to realize what a brain-staggering performance this is?"

"No, Fernald," said Whitley; "but I think we'd better wait till we get back to Detroit before we pat ourselves on the back. A great many things can happen, you know, between here and Detroit. What sort of a time did you have with Trossac and his crowd?"

"Tame. This old supergadget of a bus didn't seem to care how big a villain had hold of her, and just humped along in the higher levels as sweet as you please. She was as easy to pilot as an automobile on a boulevard, and everybody snoozed except the man up front. I had a notion," Fernald added, "that I'd plug the chartograph. I could have done it easily; but on second thought I concluded that it would be poor business. I had a hunch that you'd be hot after us with the Holabird camel, and that if I worked for delays it ought to be at Wassigny. When the port engine began to go wrong, and we were forced down at this place, it struck me that we'd linger long enough here for you to catch up. I kept trying to get you by wireless, all the way over, but couldn't make it. Right then I wondered what you'd do for a wireless man. I thought about

Harkness, of course, but was afraid he'd been killed at Trepassey, or had made his get-away. He and I had a talk fest, a while ago, and he told me about your trip. He says the *World Beater* is speedier than the *Eagle*, but that on every other point Morning has Holabird lashed to the mast. Seems a pretty decent sort—Harkness."

"Did he say anything about the Trepassey trouble?" queried Whitley.

Fernald half closed his right eye significantly. "He hinted that the scheme was all cut and dried before we left Chicago," he answered. "It's an awful drag on a man, he said, trying to keep the *World Beater* going five miles up. Then, too, that plane owes her speed to her lighter construction—which is bad for her staying powers.

"There's one thing I found out while I was with Holabird's gang," the radio man went on earnestly, "and that is that Trossac intends to be just as crooked as he can. He made his brags that he'd have your scalp before we saw Detroit again. That man, captain, is as venomous as a rattlesnake. 'Anything goes,' he says, and it's in the agreement. No matter what happens, neither you nor Morning can squeal."

"That's about what one could expect from Black Ben Trossac," Whitley commented, "but we'll keep right on playing a square game. Did he tamper with the gold in the locker?" he asked.

Fernald laughed. "He nosed around a little and tried to pump me," he said, "but it's a secret locker,

and I wasn't saying a word, so he didn't come within a mile of the gold."

The sudden worry cleared from Whitley's face. He was planning on using some of the gold at Yerma, reimbursing John Morning for what was taken on private account, later on.

"Our next jump," Whitley observed, studying a chart, "is a short one, compared with the flight across the Atlantic—Svinowski, on the Polish frontier and next to Russia—about a thousand miles. After that," and he frowned thoughtfully, "comes the big test for the *Eagle*—something like four thousand miles, Fernald; and if anything goes wrong and we're forced to land, the chances are we'll all see the inside of a jail in some country town with a revolution. That would wind up our ball of yarn *tout suite*."

Thoughts of Yerma and Tascha Burnett rolled in upon Whitley like a flood. Tascha was always before him, but when his mind was charged with the responsibilities of the flight he had no time for brooding. Now, with nothing to do but wait for Croffut and Chaské, he got out of the cabin and sat down on the turf under the shadow of the plane's big wings and considered the work ahead of him at Yerma. His reverie was interrupted by Madame Picot and her husband, and blind Albert and Captain Lecompte.

He enjoyed a chat with this little group of friends, and lived over with them some of the old days in L'Estrée when the war was on. The captain was in

a very comfortable frame of mind, and his brother was smiling. Whitley guessed that neither Madame nor Monsieur Picot would ever know what had happened at the inn of the White Horse, but that Albert had been informed, and that he was as much pleased over the paying of the family debt as was the captain.

It was eleven o'clock when Croffut and Chaské got back to the field, bringing the tin box, with its supplies of food and drink; and by eleven fifteen all was in readiness for the start. The *Eagle* was shifted about with her nose to the faint breeze, and farewells were said to the Picots and Lecomptes. Croffut, at the top of the cabin steps, waved a hand toward the grimy Bingham, working industriously at the *World Beater's* starboard engine.

"See you in Detroit, Chet, if you ever get there with that rickety old bus!" he yelled.

"Go chase yourself!" snorted Bingham.

"Nobody else will be chasing us," caroled Croffut, and ducked out of sight and closed the door.

It seemed good to Whitley to be in the office of the *Eagle* once more, and to have under his eyes the chartograph with the old war zone, Germany and the little nations carved out of Austria-Hungary ready to be pierced by the moving steel finger. He started the engines, and their welcome roar echoed across the field and drowned out the cheers of the crowd and the hearty cries of "Bon voyage!" In a few moments the *Eagle* had leaped clear of the soil of

France and was climbing toward the high regions where the marvel of speed was awaiting her.

"Lecompte," Croffut whispered in Whitley's ear, "did a beautiful job! I saw Trossac, and he looks like a horrible example. He can travel, whenever Bingham gets the Holabird bus in shape, but Rufus will have to serve both tricks with the joy-stick between here and our next port of call."

Although the words were spoken under the breath, Whitley heard them distinctly. What a difference between that quiet cabin and the roaring, smashing inferno of the other plane! The *Eagle* found the right air current at thirty-two thousand feet, and smoothly as a canoe on a duck pond she wafted herself across the southern tip of little Belgium and on over the disorganized territories of the once militant Central Powers. Croffut and Chaské slept in their chairs. Fernald had taken his rest during the night and was wide awake and tinkering with his wireless. After an hour, Croffut insisted on relieving Whitley.

"You haven't had any breakfast, Whit," he said. "M. Henri sent you a roast capon with his compliments. Get on the outside of as much of it as you can and then take a snooze. I'll call you Svin—Svin—whatever the Poles named the place where we're to come down."

Whitley ate his meal and enjoyed it; then stretched out in one of the chairs and dropped off in a sound sleep. He awoke only when the *Eagle* had the firm earth under her landing gear.

"Svinowski," Chaské chirped; "all out!"

"Eleven hundred and seven miles from L'Estrée," called Croffut, as the brakes slowed the plane to a halt, "and by L'Estrée time we have three thirty on the dot. Two hundred and seventy-six miles per hour, captain. Our high velocity current wasn't as strong as usual, but it was good enough."

"We have covered twenty-five degrees of longitude since leaving L'Estrée," announced Fernald, "and that is one hundred minutes. The time here should be five ten p. m."

Chaské pulled open the door and lowered the steps. Four men had hurried to the plane from a tent hangar that stood at one elge of the flying field. These four men were all excited, and chattering wildly in Polish.

"What's wrong?" demanded Whitley, rubbing the sleep out of his eyes as he came down the steps.

A big fellow in a cap and tattered blouse and blue overalls pushed to the front. He could talk English, and introduced himself as Stanislaus Bjoric, a naturalized American, who had worked in the rolling mills of South Chicago and had come to Poland to help his native land attain its independence. But this information was by the way and hastily given; the big thing in Stanislaus Bjoric's mind was the recent theft, by raiding bandits from the Carpathians, of every gallon of airplane fuel there was in the camp.

Here was a blow, as unexpected as it promised to be disastrous. Croffut began to mill around in a circle and to call their luck by hard names. Chaské

went back into the cabin to see how much fuel remained in the tanks. Whitley stepped farther out into the field to get a clearer view of the surroundings.

A great, flat meadow met his gaze, surrounded by a pine forest notched on north and south by a wagon road that crossed the grassy plain. There was no sign of a town, and the only structure resembling a habitation was the canvas hangar. Svinowski, Bjoric explained, was on the railroad four miles to the north. There were a dozen of raiders on horses escorting a half dozen carts. Each cart had loaded up with a steel drum of the "juice" and departed along the south road.

"What the dickens can a bunch of bandits want with all that synthetic dope?" fumed Croffut. "It's another frame-up, Whit!" he declared. "Trossac must have wired instructions to the gang about the time we left L'Estrée."

Chaské emerged from the cabin just then. The synthetic fuel yielded so much mileage per gallon that he believed they might have enough to see them through to Vladivostok. But Whitley, with the maneuvers he was planning at Yerma in mind, was not disposed to take chances. For the supreme test ahead of the *Eagle* every fuel tank must be filled to capacity.

Leaning against one of the hangar's guy ropes was a bicycle. It was not more than fifteen minutes, according to Bjoric, since the last cart had left the

field. Whitley ran to the hangar. As he laid hands on the bicycle, he saw a Mannlicher rifle leaning against the canvas wall of the wide tent. He paused to gather up the rifle and swing it across his shoulders by the strap; then, taking a short run with the wheel, he vaulted to the saddle and pedaled for the south road. Chaské charged after him on foot, but was waved back.

"Overhaul the plane, Chaské!" Whitley shouted.

The Ogalalla turned away, muttering to himself.

"What can he do?" grunted Bjoric, spreading out his hands. "If he overtakes that cutthroat gang he'll be killed."

"You don't know Dave Whitley as well as I do," said Croffut. "If an army corps was escorting those carts he'd go after 'em just the same. He is——"

"Hey, look up there!" cried Fernald, in a startled voice, pointing aloft. "Is that the *World Beater*?"

All the others followed the radio man's pointing finger with their eyes. In the north, swinging against the blue of the cloudless sky, was an airplane. But it was not Holabird's machine, as Croffut could easily make out even at that great distance.

"Looks like a Noah-Cæsar bus," he said, bewildered. "No," he went on a moment later, "it's a single-seater Nieuport, Rhone engined, with a wing span less than a third that of the *World Beater*. Now where in Sam Hill did that quirk come from?"

"It's a Polish machine, mister," returned Bjoric. "A lot of Americans have come to fly for Poland

and fight for her. We've been seein' 'em half a dozen times a day."

"Wish to thunder he had a bomb and would drop it where it would halt that crowd with the carts!" murmured Croffut. "By thunder," he added, "he's coming down!" And, with that, he rushed off across the field waving his arms.

CHAPTER XVII

GETTING THE FUEL

THE idea Whitley had in mind, when he started after the fuel thieves, was to buy back a barrel of the improvel petrol. Morning's money was as good as Holabird's, and Whitley guessed that if he would bid high enough he'd get what he wanted. The surprising part of the affair was the discovery of the thoroughness with which Trossac had seemingly peppered the whole round-the-world route with his crooked schemes. Morning had made a mistake in establishing joint landing fields with Holabird. This had made it possible for Trossac to center his underhand work at certain known points. But these circumstances were as they were, and it was now too late to make any changes.

The road through the pine forest was rutted and poor. Whitley made the best time he could and judged that he must be going two or three times as fast as the loaded carts. The country was perfectly flat, but for some reason that was not apparent the road wound back and forth as it forged on through the pines. As he came around one of the masked turns he found himself suddenly face to face with a bit of luck. The last cart, an ungainly two-wheeled affair drawn by one horse, was at a

standstill, and the driver was on the ground pounding on a loose tire. In the cart was a steel barrel containing more than enough fuel to replenish the *Eagle's* tanks.

Whitley dismounted, left his wheel and the rifle at the roadside, and moved quietly through the timber. By the time he came to a point abreast of the cart, the driver had finished with the tire and had climbed to his seat and picked up his lines. Unseen by the man, Whitley ran into the road, climbed over the rear of the moving vehicle, and grabbed the thief from behind. The struggle was brief. Taken by surprise, the driver was not able to put up a very stiff resistance; and when he toppled backward, his head hit the steel cask, and all his muscles went limp, and he gurgled wearily and went to sleep.

None of the others of the raiding party could be seen. Probably, Whitley reasoned, they were far in advance and were leaving the last cart to trek onward and take its own time. This, if true, was a very agreeable state of affairs. It was now Whitley's aim to get back to the landing field with the steel barrel and fill the plane's fuel tanks before the mounted men discovered that part of their booty was missing. This was a whole lot better than spending part of John Morning's money as a bribe.

Backing the cart around, Whitley headed the horse the other way. Halting for a moment at the point where he had left the bicycle and the rifle, he jumped down and put them aboard. At about this moment,

the driver pulled himself together and sat up, staring blankly at the man who had captured his outfit.

"Get up on the seat," ordered Whitley, looking at the driver over the muzzle of the rifle, "and do the driving. Sharp's the word!"

The driver shook his head; but if English was a dead letter to him, the sight of that Mannlicher was not. He scrambled to his seat, mumbling Austrian or Polish or some other language and showing himself to be badly scared. The cart moved on, bobbing forward and aft in a way that made it difficult for Whitley to keep his footing. Then luck took a shift for the worse, and a thud of hoofs could be heard along the road beyond the wooded turn. Some of the mounted men were coming back to look for the missing vehicle, and by that time it was too late to negotiate for the fuel.

"Faster!" called Whitley, pushing the point of the gun into the driver's back; "*Mach schnell!*" he added, in the hope of making himself plainly understood.

The driver barked something at him wildly and used a gad on the horse. The result was a painful trot, with the cart tossing like a ship in a storm, and the heavy barrel beginning to roll as the bottom of the vehicle pitched forward or rearward. Whitley, in order to get out of the barrel's way, hoisted himself to the driver's seat and, with his face to the rear, watched for the oncoming horsemen to show themselves. He had not long to wait.

One rider plunged into sight and was followed

quickly by another, and another. A single glance was enough for these mounted men. There went up a furious yell, crisply punctuated by a roar of rifles. Most of the bullets went wild, since shooting from a horse at full gallop at a target as unsteady as the cart did not make for accurate marksmanship. Nevertheless Whitley got a bullet through the slack of his coat while others sang past his ears like angry bees. Then he tossed the Mannlicher to his shoulder and returned his compliments in kind.

The rider in the lead dropped his rifle and reeled in his saddle, grabbing at his right arm. This dampened the ardor of the pursuers, and the three hung back, evidently waiting for reënforcements.

"Mach schnell!" roared Whitley once more to the driver.

It was best to take advantage of the lull in the firing, and the man at the reins appeared as anxious at Whitley was to get safely away before that rain of bullets came on again. So well did he ply the gad that the horse broke into a feeble gallop; and thus, rolling and bounding, the cart emerged from the timber and bore down on the landing field.

Five horsemen hot-hoofed it after him, but they had no more than shown themselves against the background of pine woods than a brisk tat-tat-tat awoke startled echoes across the meadow. A burst of machine-gun fire! The mounted men faded back into the timber again, and the astounded Whitley faced around to see where that protecting fusillade had come from. His amazement continued to grow,

for off to his right was a single-seater Nieuport at rest on the field; and standing in the cockpit was a strange aviator working a machine gun, mounted to fire over the top of his propeller. The aviator had removed his helmet.

"Take it easy, Dave!" he yelled; "this old Lewis'll hold 'em off."

Bjoric, bleating joyfully, half in Polack and half in English, ran to the cart and caught the horse by the bit. Whitley and the captured driver jumped down from the seat.

"Is that Billy Nugent, Pink?" demanded Whitley. "Where in blazes did he come from?"

"Why," cried the overjoyed Croffut, climbing up on a wheel and caressing the big tank of sublimated petrol, "a lot of our friends have joined a Polish squadron, Whit, and Nugent is one of them. He was out scouting, hoping to meet up with us and get a look at our round-the-world bus, and dropped in at just the right time to cover your retreat. Go over and talk with him. Chaské and I will get this juice in the tanks. Bully work, old sport."

"Take charge of this man, Pink," said Whitley, indicating his prisoner. "Pump him, and see what you can find out about the gang that raided the camp." He hurried on to the fighting plane, and reached up to take the hand of the pilot he had known on the western front. "Nugent," he went on, "this is surely a happy surprise!"

"Almost anything is liable to happen on this frontier, Monsieur Dave," answered the blond airman.

"Wait a minute till I strafe the woods over there, and then I'll come down."

He sprinkled the pines in the vicinity of the woods with bullets, by way of completely discouraging the baffled raiders, and then hopped out of his machine and slapped Whitley on the shoulder.

"Up to your old tricks of doing the things that can't be done, eh?" he said with a laugh. "I'm staggered for fair. Pink says you were in Detroit, old U. S. A., yesterday morning; and here in Poland this afternoon!" Nugent caught his breath. "I'll say that's making the world pretty small. Show me this wonder bus of yours; let me see how she does it. Man, man, I can hardly believe what I hear!"

"I'm so close to this tremendous business, Billy, and have so much on my hands that I can't realize yet what a record we're making." Whitley looked contemplatively at Chaské, who was busy with Bjoric filling the fuel tanks. Bjoric, as he worked, paused now and again to translate the remarks of the captured driver as they were developed by Croffut's quizzing. "What happened this afternoon is a sample of what we have to contend with," Whitley proceeded. "I never know where the lightning is going to strike next. The main thing is to keep our super-gadget in the air; and then, after we get home, we can think about her wonderful performance. I'll have Pink mind the Emma-G and keep an eye on the woods," he added; "you come on over, Billy, and spend a few minutes with the *Eagle*. You'll read a new page in the science of aviation."

CHAPTER XVIII

OFF FOR YERMA

WHEN Croffut made his way to the Nieuport in response to Whitley's call, he brought the prisoner with him.

"Get anything out of him, Pink?" inquired Whitley.

"A peck of imperial paper rubles," said Croffut, "and Bjoric says they're worth twice as much as any other kind. Also a sort of pass from military headquarters in Moscow."

"Then the man's a Russian?"

"Look at him, Whit. I thought Luke Evarts had the prize collection of whiskers, but his crop isn't in it with this Ivan Kachewsky's. Sure he's a Russian, and one of the inner circle. His paper talk from the main works requires every countryman he meets to give him the glad hand and to throw a guard around him if there's a chance of his being shot up. Bjoric says he's a propagandist, and has merely slid across the border to kick up a rookus in Poland. Interesting, if true. But why is a Russian propagandist helping a gang of holdup men to aid Trossac?"

"I guess this is where I come in, Pink," spoke up Nugent. "Give me the rubles and the letter, and

I'll take Ivan back to headquarters and hand him over to the Polish intelligence department."

"Take the prisoner and the rubles, Billy," interposed Whitley, "but I want the letter. It's just possible that it's a big find for me, and that it may be very useful."

"A copy of the letter will do for my purposes," acquiesced Nugent; "Bjoric will make it."

The prisoner was bound hand and foot and lashed across the fighting plane just back of the pilot's seat. Croffut was left with him, ready to use the Lewis gun at the first sign of a renewed attack by the fuel thieves. Whitley and Nugent made their way to the *Eagle*.

"The secret of this machine, Billy," Whitley explained, "is its ability to fly at great heights without danger to the crew and take advantage of the reduced friction of the atmosphere and of the tremendous velocity of the air currents. That's the whole thing in a nutshell."

Nugent's attention was called to the vacuum cabin, the oxygen tanks, the air compressors, the superchargers, and finally to the triumph of ingenuity as exemplified in the Fernald chartograph. This last device came as a climax to the fighting pilot's mounting enthusiasm.

"Why," he exclaimed, "up to now we have only tapped the marvels of aviation, Dave! John Morning has blazed a glittering trail with your help and this high-flying speed bus. Breakfast in New York and luncheon in London—that's what it's coming to.

Compare this mill with my little Nieuport, over there. My gun isn't even synchronized to shoot through the propeller; but, apart from that, the little fighter comes near being the last word in war machines. Nevertheless there is a century between that mill and this, and Morning has bridged those hundred years at a jump!"

He drew a leather wallet from the breast of his coat, took out a post card, addressed it with a fountain pen to an uncle in New Haven, Connecticut, and wrote for a few moments.

"Read it, Dave," he said.

What Whitley read was this:

This card is written near Svinowski, Poland, and forwarded by John Morning's round-the-world airplane on July 5th, through courtesy of Captain David Whitley, of the *Eagle*. Well and happy.

BILLY.

"I want to be the first man to send a piece of mail at three hundred miles an hour, Dave," remarked Nugent. "Will you mail that for me when you get to Detroit? It will be a souvenir for my folks in New Haven."

Whitley laughed. "It's a small thing to do, Billy, when I owe you so much for the aid extended to us this afternoon," he said, taking a wallet from his pocket and stowing the card away in it.

Bjoric wrote out a translation of the letter a few minutes later, and Whitley put the original paper in the purse with Nugent's post card. Chaské, mean-

while, had been crawling all over the plane, tightening wires and cables and carefully examining every part of the fabric.

"This machine is as stanch as a man-of-war, Whit," he declared, "and she's ready for the long jump."

Whitley had set his watch back one hour and forty minutes to correspond with Svinowski time, and it was now six twenty p. m. He wrote a message to John Morning, announcing the hour of arrival at Svinowski field and the time of departure, and gave it to Nugent to forward from his airdrome; then all hands said good-by to the American fighter and climbed into the cabin. The propellers began to thrash the air, and the *Eagle* glided across the field and arose from the historic soil of Poland. Croffut was at the controls; and Whitley, looking from a side window, saw two motor cars speeding from the woods on the north side of the meadow. They were military machines, and the one in the lead carried a general and part of his staff, while the one behind was loaded with an armed escort.

"Great guns!" exclaimed Fernald; "that's a welcoming party, captain, but it's a little too late. All those soldiers ought to have been on the ground when Trossac's bandits showed up."

The general got up in his car and saluted the mounting airplane. Whitley opened a window, pushed an arm through and acknowledged the salute by waving the Stars and Stripes.

"Those soldiers can take charge of Nugent's pris-

oner," observed Whitley, as he drew back into the cabin and closed the window. "We appreciate the kindness of the Polish government, but we're in too big a hurry to stop for any ceremonies." He looked at the bullet hole through his khaki jacket and thoughtfully pushed a finger into it. "If that chunk of lead had gone a little farther to the right," he commented, "the general's escort would have had a chance to fire a volley over a new-made mound in that big meadow."

"It couldn't happen," said Chaské. "You proved to everybody when we were fighting in France that you are bullet proof."

Whitley laughed and began working on the *Eagle's* log. After he had finished with the record he dug up the sketch maps given him by Trainor, the former Red Cross man, and proceeded to refresh his memory with details regarding Yerma and the surrounding country. He was under no illusions regarding the desperate character of his undertaking at Yerma. The difficulties that had so far been met and conquered were insignificant as compared with the trials to be encountered in that inaccessible, mountain-walled town. Ataman Semenov, head man of the Cossacks in nominal control of Transbalkaila, had perhaps already besieged the renegades and won their stronghold. In that case, it was possible that Tascha had been rescued. Or, if this had not happened, Tascha may have been removed from the town by her captors.

It was impossible for Whitley to know just what

the situation in Yerma might be. He could only plan his work along lines of the information furnished by Dickson, and hope that good fortune would be with him.

The old reliable velocity current racing eastward was waiting for the plane at thirty thousand feet. It bore the craft along through the fifty-mile squares at a fraction over three hundred miles an hour. Whitley looked at the map on which Fernald was moving forward his red-headed tacks. There lay eighty-nine and one half degrees of longitude between Svinowski and Yerma, or a distance of more than three thousand nine hundred miles. This was a matter of thirteen hours for the *Eagle* in that dependable eastward-flowing current of air which experience had proved was constant at about thirty thousand feet altitude. Only in the event that something went wrong could this schedule fail; but the machine had proved so sturdy and so dependable that Whitley was confidently expecting a nonstop flight to the plateau between Yerma and the Trans-Siberian railroad. The next day, at noon, he was counting upon reaching the town about which all his plans for Tascha had centered.

No wireless messages were to be sent. This was a precaution for keeping dark the position and the progress of the *Eagle*. Hostile airplanes were not to be feared at that high altitude, but Whitley did not want his arrival at Yerma to be heralded in advance. Fernald understood this, and confined his wireless work to "listening in." He removed his

glittering helmet to lean back in his chair and remark:

"The air is full of Russ talk, captain. Or I suppose it's Russ; anyhow, the signals are too many for me. By the way," he added, "I've been thinking of something. If we have this three-hundred-mile-an-hour current at ten thousand yards, would it not be possible to find an even swifter current if we went higher?"

"Tests have proved that the higher a machine travels the lower the air pressure and the swifter the air currents," Whitley answered. "Between forty thousand and sixty thousand feet above the earth there is supposed to be an eastward moving air stratum, with a probable velocity of three hundred and fifty to four hundred miles an hour. This might run up our speed to five hundred miles an hour, but what would be the effect on us, the human factors in the experiment, at such a height? Even at this altitude, Fernald, our blood vessels might burst if we were exposed to the air in an open car. It is best, I think, to let well enough alone. Our present performance is giving the world a sensation, and we can well afford to leave some of this high-altitude pioneering to others."

"A test balloon, without passengers, has reached a ceiling of better than one hundred and twenty-six thousand feet, and there the outer strata of the atmosphere is traveling with the earth at the rate of more than a thousand miles an hour." Fernald

knitted his brows thoughtfully. "Human beings will probably never be able to travel in that terrific current," he added, "but the chartograph would show the way even at such an altitude."

"Your chartograph will revolutionize flying," said Whitley, "and all you need to do, from now on, is to spend your wealth and enjoy yourself."

Fernald laughed. "I'm hooked up with John Morning," he answered. "That long-headed financier is going to use the chartograph in getting a grip on the air transportation of the planet. By backing Evarts and me it looks as though he was going to make good. But he is one monopolist that is on the square, captain. That's why I went to him instead of to Chauncey Holabird. Morning told me that you are to make a landing this side of Vladivostok, but he didn't tell me why. It strikes me that you are juggling with your chances of beating Trossac. That's your business, though, and not mine. It may be that already Trossac has been hopelessly distanced."

"No, Fernald," returned Whitley, "Trossac is what is called a stayer. His character is badly warped, but for all that he has courage and resourcefulness and determination. He'll make this a race; and I shall protect John Morning, so far as my personal business at Yerma is concerned. I'll make this point clear to all of you some time to-morrow."

"Morning was after you from the very first," the radio man remarked. "He told Evarts and me that

you were the one skipper for this bus, and that he'd have you no matter what the cost. His big desire is to beat his old rival, Holabird. The expense he has been to for this flight hasn't made much of a hole in his pile; and if you win Holabird's half million for him, he will turn the money over to charity—he has already promised that. Morning agreed to your stopping at Yerma; and if he would do that when he is so anxious for you to defeat Trossac, then he must have had a weighty reason."

"The reason was this," Whitley explained; "I would not have been his skipper unless he had agreed."

Then, briefly, he informed Fernald about Tascha Burnett. Fernald listened with rapt interest, although with growing anxiety.

"If there are only two roads leading into Yerma and both of them guarded," he inquired, "how do you expect to land in the town?"

"I have a very good plan for that part of it," said Whitley.

"How will you get out of the town if you are fortunate enough to get into it and do what you have in mind?"

"That part is not so clear, but I have faith to believe I shall succeed. If I do not, Croffut will go on with the *Eagle*."

"What do you mean by that?" demanded Chaské.

"Wait until we're near Yerma," answered Whitley, "and I'll explain that part of the program."

Croffut looked around. "Don't fret, Chaské," he called; "when this mill hits Detroit again Dave Whitley will be aboard."

"I hope so," said Whitley, "but you never can tell. John Morning has been square with us, and I'm going to see that we play square with him."

CHAPTER XIX

A LEAP INTO SPACE

TO those in the hermetically sealed cabin of the *Eagle* there was no difference between day and night. Their watches told them how the black hours sped, and the chartograph informed them of their speed and their progress. There was not a slip in the work of the wonderful engines, and hour after hour, steadily, unfailingly, they delivered their power. Whitley's heart swelled with hope. With everything working in his favor, how could it be possible that he alone should fail?

The pilots worked in two-hour shifts, Whitley relieving Croffut at nine, and Croffut taking the controls again at eleven. At two in the morning, Svinowski time, the plane was crossing the mountain border of Mongolia, and at four o'clock the position was south of Lake Baikal. Here Croffut insisted on doing the piloting for the rest of the course to Yerma, and Whitley went to sleep after giving instructions that he was to be roused when they had reached a point directly south of Chita. His slumber was sound, and it seemed to him as though he had scarcely closed his eyes when he felt a hand on his shoulder and looked up to see Chaské's grave face bending over him.

"Here you are, Whit," announced the Ogalalla, "and it's time to change the course."

Whitley arose immediately and adjusted his chair. "East by north, Pink," he called, "and drop to two thousand feet over Olskaya. If the visibility is good that will be far enough down. Here's Trainor's sketch map," he added, passing a sheet of paper to Croffut. "At Olskaya follow the wagon road north, across the plateau. Take a good look at the plateau so you can land there after dropping me at Yerma."

"Dropping you at Yerma?" Croffut demanded.

"By chute," the other explained. "It's my only way to get into the town."

Fernald's eyes widened and Chaské turned away muttering. Whitley opened the money locker and removed fifty bright double eagles from the bag of gold. These he stowed away in his money belt. After making sure that his automatic was loaded, he dropped a handful of cartridges into his pocket.

"I'll go with you, Whit," suggested Chaské, an ominous look crossing his face. "If there's going to be shooting it might be well to have me along."

Whitley shook his head. "You'll be needed with the plane," he said. "What's the local time, Fernald?"

"Nearly noon."

Chaské turned off the electrics and opened the windows. Whitley got out the life pack and placed it where it would be in readiness; then he watched the country unfolding below. It was a clear day, fortunately, and the visibility was good. They

crossed a river that cut a bright, crooked line through jumbled hills.

"That must be a branch of the Amur," said Fernald.

A few minutes later the railroad came into sight. Sprawling on either side of the track was a clutter of houses surrounding a church with a bright-blue roof. People stood in the streets staring upward at the passing plane.

"Olskaya seems interested," Croffut remarked. "There's the road to the north, Whit," he added.

"Follow it to Yerma, then bank and return to the plateau, Pink. And study that plateau. Planes have landed there, Trainor tells me, so I don't think you will have any trouble if you get the place pretty well mapped in your mind."

The road followed a devious course through the hills, and then suddenly emerged upon a wide area where the rough country flattened into a level and unobstructed plain. Croffut dropped very close and studied the topography carefully.

"We can clear the hill crests and make a landing easily from any direction," he averred. "It's a natural airdrome, Whit. We can do all our worrying on your account—the *Eagle* will be safe enough."

"We may—or you may—have to get away from that plateau in the dark," said Whitley, swinging the pack over his shoulders and buckling the harness. "As I figure it, I can have until midnight, local time," he went on, doubling one knee on a chair and watching the unfolding Yerma road below. "If I'm not

back to the plateau by midnight, you are to proceed without me."

"Hang it, Whit," demurred Croffut, "we can give you until morning. You've got a lot to do."

"Exactly," Whitley told him, "and if it isn't done by midnight it won't be done at all. Those are my orders—clear away from the plateau and start for Vladivostok at midnight. Set your watches with mine, on this meridian. Time, Fernald?"

"Twelve ten."

All watches were set. "I shall have nearly twelve hours," Whitley remarked.

"We'll fire a rocket before we leave," put in Chaské. "If you're on the way, set off this one. Then we'll know, and can wait for you."

He pushed a small rocket in through the harness webbing.

"We'll wait fifteen minutes after we fire the rocket before we make the hop-off," said Croffut, "in case we don't see your flare in the direction of Yerma. If we do see it, of course we'll wait until you reach the plane."

"Correct," Whitley agreed. "Opposition may come from Olskaya or from Yerma. If it does, then take to the air. Don't run any chances with the *Eagle*. Remember that. Your first duty is to John Morning and not to me."

The narrow wagon road, after leaving the plateau, became suddenly choked with cavalry traveling north. Here was a considerable body of troops, and it seemed a fair surmise that the force belonged at

Yerma and had been on a foray. If this theory was correct, then the strength of the irregulars in the mountain town must have been sufficient for all sorts of lawlessness. Fortunately, the mounted men did not open fire on the airplane.

The road wound onward, looping its way through the hills and finally pitching off abruptly into the town. Yerma, judging from a bird's-eye view as the plane swept over it, was a large place. The road from Olskaya was the great Siberian road, and entered the basin from the south and left it on the west. There was a swarm of people in the streets, and a party of mounted Cossacks was grouped in a large, open square.

The wind, there in the lower levels, was from the northeast. Croffut, as he banked, came into it, planning to cross the town at its eastern edge so that Whitley might not be blown too far.

"Give me twelve hundred feet for the drop, Pink," requested Whitley, taking his friend's hand in a quick and fervent grip. He turned for a handclasp with Chaské and Fernald. "Good-by, all!" he said.

"Wish I were going with you," cried Croffut. "Good luck, old friend."

Whitley pulled open the door and stood in it, tense and ready for the spring. As the plane came soaring back over the town, rifles began to volley from below and spit out their little jets of smoke. The cabin was filled with the roar of the engines. Whitley waved his hands to his companions, then pulled

at the ring over his right shoulder and leaped far out into space.

Chaské closed the door and peered with apprehensive eyes from a window. He saw the parachute open, while the form below the bellying silk swung and gyrated dizzily as it rode earthward. The puffs of smoke continued to rise from the muzzles of the Cossack guns in the square.

Chaské turned from the window, his face strained, his hands clenched. "They'll—they'll kill him before he gets down!" he exclaimed.

"They will not!" returned Croffut sharply. "You've seen Smiling Dave land in a blazing plane, you've seen him come down with half a wing shot away, you've seen him take more chances than any other man in our escadrille—and get away with it. Don't talk such stuff, Chaské. Dave Whitley's luck hasn't gone back on him, and you know it. Now for the plateau and wait till he comes!"

When the parachute opened, Whitley's fall through the air was caught up easily by a patent shock-absorbing vent in the silken fabric. He was worrying less about himself, at the moment, than he was about the plane. The *Eagle* flung onward, apparently unscathed, and Whitley's concern over the shooting took a more personal turn. If the Cossacks kept up their firing they would probably get him as he fell nearer the earth and became a better target. The wind carried him toward the west, and his angle of fall seemed destined to land him in the square. The

men with the guns were quick to grasp this fact and, much to Whitley's relief, held their fire.

By swinging his body, Whitley tried to steer a course that would land him on the rooftops, but in this he was not successful. His feet touched earth within a dozen yards of the Cossacks. By an ingenious device designed for just such an emergency, the aviator instantly released himself from the parachute and so prevented himself from being dragged. Caught in the wind the chute went booming across the square, so frightening the Cossacks' horses that Whitley had a minute or two in which to adjust himself to the situation, while the animals were being brought under control.

There was no way for him to get out of sight; and, even if there had been, such a proceeding did not fall in with his plans. He stood quietly while the men galloped up and formed a cordon around him. They were a bearded, slatternly lot, their long cloaks ragged and dirty and their high hats in various stages of disrepair. But they were well armed with rifles, sabers, and dirks. Their ferocious appearance was somewhat tempered by the ludicrous astonishment expressed in their faces.

Whitley's peculiar manner of entering the mountain stronghold had caused a small sensation. Soldiers were pouring out of huts, all up and down the main street, and running toward the square. And not many of these soldiers were Cossacks. A number were plainly Mongols, but by far the greater

proportion was of a nondescript character clad in dingy gray uniforms. Tunics were unbuttoned, caps were awry, and they were the most unsoldierly soldiers Whitley had ever seen.

A dozen or more retrieved the parachute and began hacking at the cords and fighting for the Shantung silk. A Cossack who seemed to have some authority jumped down from his horse, faced Whitley, and hurled at him a volley of strange words.

Whitley shook his head. "Americansky," he said, pointing to himself. "Where's your general? I want to see your general."

"Americansky!" cried the swiftly gathering throng. "Koroshoh, Americansky!"

Thereupon they roared with laughter, pushed in past the restive horses and began slapping Whitley on the back with a vigor that almost threw him off his feet.

"Zdarova, Americansky!" A pair of rough hands snatched the cap from his head. Another pair grabbed the rocket out from under the webbing of the chute harness and tossed it into the air. "Spa-seebo vam!" howled a man, undoing a belt buckle and grabbing away the harness.

If this were allowed to continue, Whitley knew that in a short time he would be stripped to the skin. No one interfered to stop the looting, and Whitley took desperate measures for his own protection. Striking out left and right with his fists he managed to clear a small circle around him, and then jerked

the pistol from his pocket and backed against one of the horses.

"Keep off!" he shouted.

By fanning the automatic back and forth in the grinning faces in front of him he succeeded in holding that part of the crowd at bay; but some one dropped under the horse, behind him, and caught his shins and pulled him down. This fellow got very much the worst of it, for the mettlesome horse rolled him in the dust with a kick and then bounded away. The mob would at once have piled upon Whitley before he could stagger to his feet had the Cossacks not encircled him again with their drawn sabers.

Thus given a brief respite, Whitley brought out his leather purse and took from it the note secured from the captured raider near Svinowski. He tried to look impressive and important as he handed the note to the Cossack who seemed to have a little authority. That grizzled warrior turned the paper around and around in his hands and squinted at it from all angles. Evidently he could not read it, nor was any one else in his vicinity able to do so. He gave an order to one of the Cossacks, who immediately hurried across the square toward a two-story house with an ornately carved front.

On the other side of the square was a building with many bulbous cupolas roofed with green and yellow tiles. On yet another side of the square was a huge, solid stone structure, very old and chipped and battered. The street which came to an end at

the square was bordered with log huts, all of the same size and built on the same pattern.

By the time Whitley had finished this brief survey of the surroundings, the Cossack who had been sent away was hurrying back, and with him came a man who was plainly an officer. This officer had a shrewd face, and his appearance was a vast improvement upon that of the crowd by which the aviator was surrounded. The officer looked the stranger over with interest, and then he read the note. This writing evidently surprised him. Again he studied Whitley.

"American?" he queried. Whitley nodded. "Then why the devil are you showing a pass given to Ivan Ivanovich?" the other demanded in perfectly good English.

"There are a lot of Americanized Russians," said Whitley.

"That have forgotten their native language?" The officer laughed. "I lived for years in America, but came back to Russia after the revolution. I didn't forget the language. I am Captain Rodetsky of General Gourko's staff. You dropped from an airplane?"

"Yes."

"What for?"

"To do my work for the cause," said Whitley.

Rodetsky smiled, drew a hand across his forehead, and went on, lowering his voice. "This pass is the worst thing you could have pulled in this camp. Gourko is a renegade, and this is a bandit outfit.

They're neither for soviet Russia nor for any other kind of Russia. I'm the only man in Yerma who can understand or talk English, and I'm here for a purpose that's about ready to come to a climax. You can't repeat what I'm telling you, so I can say what I please. You're an American, and for that reason alone I'd like to get you out of this; but this note must be shown to Gourko, and what will happen after that it's hard to say. Come on with me."

Here was talk that surprised Whitley. He wondered if he had really found a friend in Rodetsky; and he tried to guess what purpose was in the officer's mind and about to come to a climax. Rodetsky took him by the arm and led him through the crowd and toward the house with the ornately carved façade.

"Which direction did your airplane come from?" Rodetsky asked.

"Olskaya," said Whitley.

Rodetsky paused and bent a pair of steady, searching eyes upon the American. "Did you see any soldiers on the Yerma road, soldiers coming this way?" he demanded.

"A lot of them."

"Where?"

"They had just crossed the plateau."

A look of exultation crossed Rodetsky's face. "Then it won't be long," he muttered, "before this nest of trouble-makers is cleaned out. It can't happen any too soon for you, little brother."

Again Whitley was plunged into puzzled thought.

What was it this staff officer had at the back of his head? Was he traitor to Gourko?

Two armed guards lounged at the entrance to the two-story house. Here the Cossacks and the rest of the trailing crowd were kept back, while Rodetsky led Whitley through the door. The two were presently in a comfortably furnished room. A table with a samovar, bottles of vodka and glasses stood at one side of the large apartment. A Russian stove, with bunks for sleeping arranged above it, bulked against the opposite wall. In between the stove and the table were half a dozen men, talking and smoking cigarettes. One of these six was a very large, swarthy person in a soiled tunic, Russian boots, and Prussian-blue trousers.

CHAPTER XX

AGAINST THE WALL

ALL eyes were on Whitley. The large man was the general, it seemed. While he surveyed the prisoner he fired questions in Russ at the captain. The captain answered categorically. Finally he showed the note. The hard eyes of the general flashed with anger. He pointed to Whitley and said something. The captain spread out his hands and grew apologetic. Gourko's eyes grew even more menacing, and he stamped the floor with his boots. Thereupon the captain turned to Whitley and began searching his pockets.

First he brought out the automatic, and next the handful of cartridges. The general appropriated both weapon and ammunition. Next, the captain extracted the purse from Whitley's pocket, and the general grabbed it excitedly and explored its contents. There was forty dollars in good American bank notes in the purse, and the general gloated over them and pulled them caressingly through his fat fingers. Rodetsky explained the value of the paper money in imperial rubles, and the general stuffed the bills into the breast of his tunic and then patted the tunic delightedly. His next find in the purse was the post card of Billy Nugent's. He frowned over this

until the captain translated the message for him. Thereupon the general exploded wrathfully and struck the arm of his chair with his fist.

"Your name is Whitley," said the captain to the aviator, "and Gourko is not pleased. He is pretty sure you are a spy from Chita or Moscow, and you are in for a rough time. What's this?"

Rodetsky was still searching, and his prodding fingers had come in contact with the belt about Whitley's waist.

"That's my money belt," Whitley answered.

"Take it off," was the order. "If there's anything in it, maybe Gourko will be pleased enough to give you a lease of life. All we need is an hour at the outside."

Whitley removed the heavy belt and the captain passed it to the general. The sight of the gold pieces caused a tremendous sensation. The staff officers crowded around Gourko with greed shining in their eyes, but the overjoyed general allowed not so much as a coin to get away from him.

"Is there a man in Yerma named Nicholai Orloff?" queried Whitley, by way of taking advantage of the general good feeling. "My business is with him."

The mention of Nickolai Orloff caused another flurry. All the general's staff began talking at once. The general got up, moved heavily to a table and poured himself a glass of vodka. He tossed it off. Then he poured himself some more and tossed that off. Wiping his lips with the back of his hand, he

whirled around and returned to his chair. He spoke to Rodetsky and the latter turned to Whitley.

"Nickolai Orloff was shot two days ago," said Rodetsky. "He was having messages smuggled out of Yerma and was caught at it. The man who helped him was shot at the same time. Orloff was half dead, anyway. He was a sick man when Gourko captured the town and established headquarters here."

Whitley's hopes were falling. He dared not ask about Tascha, nor indicate in any way that his object was to find her. To mention Orloff was as near as he cared to venture on the subject.

"Gourko wants to know what your business is with Orloff," went on the captain.

"Orloff, before the war, worked for an Englishman named Raynham," said Whitley, "and Orloff could have told me something about Raynham, couldn't he?"

Once more all the staff officers began to chatter. The general, jingling the money belt on his arm, went over to the table and helped himself to some more vodka. Then he roared an order to Rodetsky. The latter's face was grave as he turned again to Whitley.

"That last dash of vodka did the business, Whitley," said the captain. "I am told to stand you up against the prison wall and let the Cossacks drill holes in you."

The stars in their courses seemed definitely to have turned against Captain David Whitley. He

accepted the pronouncement without a change of countenance or the flicker of an eyelash. He was not thinking of himself, but of Tascha. Was all his work to come to such an end? A firing squad of men, branded as outlaws by every faction struggling for the mastery in Russia, was to close his account!

"You are a brave man," muttered Rodetsky, "and for such there is always hope. Come!"

Whitley walked out of the room with the captain and through the guarded door. Rodetsky gave a sharp order. Nine Cossacks, eight in a ragged double file with the ninth leading, formed around the prisoner and moved at an angle across the square. Their course took them to the huge, battered stone building.

The great entrance to this structure was flanked with guards. These men were leaning on their guns, or against the wall, watching curiously the maneuvers of the firing squad and of Rodetsky and the prisoner. The crowd that had waited at the door of the headquarters flocked along in the rear of the grim procession.

Forty paces from the wall of the old prison the nine Cossacks halted and began looking to their guns. Rodetsky led Whitley to the wall.

"Don't try to make a break, Whitley," counseled the captain, "but stand fast as you are. I'll try to gain time until something happens. Soviet Russia has made some mistakes," he went on, "as every new government is bound to do, and as Moscow is now, those in power there would never stand for this.

The gang here at Yerma is out for itself—and its time is going to be mighty short."

But for the apparent friendship of Rodetsky, Whitley would have attempted some desperate measure that might have given him a chance for life. He could not understand Rodetsky, but he had perforce to trust him.

Walking back to the nine Cossacks, Rodetsky began taking their rifles one by one and making a thorough inspection of them. He did this slowly, which assured Whitley that he was striving to gain time, just as he had said. His eyes, now and again, wandered off along the one long street of the town toward the break in the hills where the wagon road led toward the plateau and Olskaya. He was expecting something to happen in that direction, Whitley guessed, but what?

The aviator was not kept long in doubt. Rodetsky was busying himself with the last rifle of the firing squad when a crackling of sharp reports broke from the gap in the mountain wall. The attention of every man in front of the prison was instantly drawn toward the farther end of the street and the road. Silence had followed that first round of shots, a tense, uncertain silence in which the men of Gourko stood breathlessly and seeking to grasp the cause. Then came a roaring volley, and the sight of a horseman careering into the farther end of the street from the Olskaya road and spurring madly toward the square. As he came curiously on he shouted wildly and waved his arms.

The thrall of inaction in which Gourko's men had been held gave way abruptly. Gourko and his officers rushed clear of the headquarters building. The aides sprang to their horses and darted away in different directions. A bell in the church set up a wild clamor. The crowd in front of the prison faded away, units of armed men were hastily forming, and Rodetsky ordered the firing squad back to its company at a double-quick.

Whitley had ceased to be the center of attraction. Only Rodetsky gave him any attention now. There was a look of triumph in the officer's face, entirely out of keeping with the expression of amazement reflected by the faces of the hurrying soldiers in the square.

"The surprise has been sprung," said Rodetsky, "and it's a good thing for you, Americansky! Take this"—he thrust a huge key into Whitley's hand as he spoke—"and go into the prison and open the cell with the yellow door that——"

"Wait!" interrupted Whitley. "You have shown yourself a friend, and I want to ask you this: There is, or was, an American girl held in Yerma by Gourko. Where can I find her?"

"Ha!" exclaimed Rodetsky grimly, "so that's your game! Well, do as I tell you, and then do as the prisoner tells you. This little surprise party happened just right for you, Whitley, and you can thank luck for that. I have been in this nest of cut-throats for three weeks, just for this job that's being

pulled off to-day. Don't bother me any longer, for I've got my hands full!"

A Cossack had brought him a horse. The firing, by that time, had become intense, and there was a shock of battle midway between the square and the end of the street with Gourko's men yielding ground before a massed attack of many Cossack riders. Rodetsky vaulted to the saddle and put spurs to his horse. Whitley turned and ran through the great doorway and into the prison. All the guards had left to take part in the fight.

Whitley found himself in a long, dim corridor. He hurried along it looking for the yellow door. When he came to it, he thrust the big key into the lock and pulled the door wide. A slender figure in a long, Cossack coat and wearing a high, Cossack hat ran from the cell. The released prisoner came to a pause, staring.

Whitley was like a man dazed. Could he believe his eyes? The clanging bell, the hoarse shouts of the fighting men, the roaring of distant rifles—all these sounds faded from his attention. The sense of sight alone held him.

"Why—why, Davy!" gasped the figure in the Cossack cloak.

"Tascha!" he cried, and took the girl in his arms.

CHAPTER XXI

THE MOUNTAIN WALL

RODETSKY'S had been the guiding hand in this wonderful mystery. How or why was still beyond Whitley. Yet here was Tascha, for so fate at its kindest had worked for him.

"Where did you come from Davy?" the girl whispered brokenly as she clung to him. "You—here in Yerma!"

"I have come for you, Tascha," Whitley answered. "There is a hot fight going on in the town and——"

"Yes, yes, I know about that, Davy. Captain Rodetsky told me it was to happen. But you! Am I dreaming?"

"We have no time for dreams, my dear. Action is called for now. While this fighting is going on we must get away."

That Tascha should be stunned by surprise in thus meeting one whom she thought to be half a world away was to be expected. Whitley's wonder did not run so deep, for to realize that supreme moment had been his aim ever since he had left Detroit. The marvel for him lay in the web of favorable circumstances which fate had woven for him and Tascha, in Yerma, at that telling hour. His coming had not been heralded to Tascha by so much as a rumor; it

was a happiness which did not dawn, but had burst suddenly out of skies cheerless with doubt and misfortune.

But the flaxen-haired, blue-eyed girl had the power to put aside her emotions and consider immediate dangers and the plans they made necessary. All else could wait until a happier, safer hour.

"Yes, Davy," she said, drawing away from him but still clinging to his hand, "escape is what we must think of now. Rodetsky will help us further, but he cannot do that until the Gourko forces have been killed or captured. He told me what to do when he sent a messenger to let me out of the cell; but that you were to be that messenger, *lubesnoi*, is the thing I am finding it so hard to understand. We will go," she added, and led him along the corridor and farther and farther from the great doorway through which Whitley had entered the prison.

The rear wall was pierced with a smaller door. By this exit Tascha and Whitley came out into the stockade behind the ancient bastile. The high fence, festooned with tangles of barbed wire, had a small section broken away. They fled through this gap and made straight for the mountain wall to the south of the buildings of the town.

The fighting was at its height by this time. The attacking force had divided into groups, and each group was storming houses in which the rebels had taken refuge. A particularly bitter contest was being waged in the vicinity of the church.

Tascha had been told by Rodetsky just what she

was to do, so she continued to lead the way. When close to the precipitous wall of the basin Tascha turned to the east and, in a few minutes, brought Whitley to a sort of cavern formed by an overhanging shelf of rock.

"We are to wait here, Davy," announced the girl.

"What is there to wait for?" Whitley asked. "If the road to Olskaya is open, it seems to me that now is the time for us to get through the mountain wall."

"But it is not open, Davy. It is guarded by some of Rodetsky's party from the railroad."

They crawled in under the lip of outthrust rock and crouched there side by side in the half gloom.

"I am trying to convince myself, Davy," Tascha murmured, "that you are really here at my side." Her hand groped for his and clutched it convulsively. "How did you come so quickly? How did you learn of what had happened to me?"

"Dickson told me——"

"But he promised not to tell you!"

"He told me after that cablegram came from Orloff, Tascha; told me in Detroit last week."

The girl relapsed into puzzled silence. Then: "Davy, I can't understand. Last week you were in Detroit? And this week you are here in Siberia? How can that be?"

Briefly as he could he told her of the round-the-world flight, and how he had agreed to pilot John Morning's airplane solely on condition that he be allowed to land near Yerma and attempt Tascha's rescue. He had left Detroit on the morning of the

fourth, and he had dropped into Yerma by parachute a few minutes after noon on the sixth. Tascha, who had consumed twenty-eight days between Vancouver and Vladivostok, drew a quick breath and brushed a hand across her forehead.

"And the plane," Whitley added, "is waiting for us on the plateau between here and Olskaya." He paused, smiling softly at the startled look in her face. "Tell me about Rodetsky, Tascha. Who is he and what is he trying to do?"

"He has been here for several weeks, Davy," the girl answered. "He was told by men in Moscow to come here and clean out this nest of rebels. Gourko was at one time a member of the staff of Ataman Semenoff, at Chita; but he fell under Semenoff's displeasure, for some reason, and fled from Chita. A force from Harbin joined him, and these men with his personal following of Cossacks, captured and took possession of Yerma. Rodetsky says they are bandits, and that they settled down in Yerma because they thought it would be easy to hold. From time to time since the town was captured reënforcements have been coming to cast their lots with Gourko—all the criminal element of the country, Rodetsky says. It wasn't difficult at all for Rodetsky to find a place here, and ever since he arrived he has been planning Gourko's overthrow. Twenty or thirty men drifted in to help him. Some of those men were to-day helping to guard the road from Olskaya; and they were to turn on the other guards and help clear the way into Yerma when the force arrived from the

railroad. It was fortunate, Davy, that this happened at just the time you came to Yerma looking for me!"

"It's a sample of the luck that has been with me ever since I started the big flight," Whitley told her. "Rodetsky has been your friend for a long time?"

"He knew my father and Mr. Raynham in Moscow. And when he found me here he did everything he could to help me. He even confided his plans to Orloff and me, so I might not worry if the ransom in guns and ammunition was not paid. The time for that payment expires Saturday of this week, Davy."

Whitley drew the little cloaked figure close. "You will not have that to worry about any more, Tascha," he said gently. "What happened to Orloff?"

"Poor Orloff!" whispered the girl. "They caught him trying to send a message to Olskaya. He had done it before successfully with the help of the doctor, Dmitri Gallitzin, who looked after him during his sickness. They killed Gallitzin; and along with him they shot Orloff, taking him from his sick bed when he could hardly stand, with his back to the wall. Rodetsky tried hard to save both of them, but Gourko would not listen. We had been living in one of the huts, closely guarded, but after Orloff was murdered I was taken to the prison. Rodetsky came to me there, yesterday afternoon, and said that he expected the attack would be made on the town to-day. He left this Cossack hat and cloak for me, and said he would send a messenger to let me out of the cell when the fighting began. I was to come to this place and wait patiently until I heard from

him. So that is what we must do, Davy, for Captain Rodetsky has proved that he is a man to be trusted.

"Mr. Dickson," she went on, "told you why I left Detroit and came to Siberia. My father was faced with ruin; he was ill, and there was no one else to make the long journey. After reaching Vladivostok I had half a month in which to make the round trip to Yerma and get from Orloff what he had for us. It was the middle of May, and I was to sail for Vancouver the first of June. But conditions of travel on the Trans-Siberian railway are frightful, Davy. One has to stand in line for hours waiting to buy a ticket, and then one must fight for a place in the cars. Trains run when they please, but I made what was called a quick journey to Olskaya—six days, when in better times the fastest trains make it in two. On the seventh day out of Vladivostok a droshky brought me to this town."

Tascha paused a moment, listening to the desultory firing and peering out under the overhanging rock to see if Rodetsky might not be coming. There was, as yet, no sign of the captain.

"Yerma," Tascha went on, "is an ancient camp for exiles, as Chita used to be. Only the most troublesome offenders were sent here. That prison could tell many bitter tales, Davy, if the walls might speak. When the revolution came to Russia all the jails in Siberia were opened and the prisoners set free. A few had no place to go and remained here.

"I found poor Orloff very sick, but the honest

soul had guarded with his life what he had for my father. He gave it to me, and I had planned to take him to Vladivostok and to leave for Olskaya on the following day. Then, like a thunderclap, the great blow fell. Gourko and his rebellious Cossacks, and the force from Harbin, captured the town and made it a bandit stronghold.

"I told General Gourko that I was an American girl although born in Russia. When he learned who my father was he believed that I was a person of some importance, and sent out word that I would be liberated for a thousand rifles and ten thousand rounds of ammunition. Gourko was in sore need of such supplies. Those who would have liked to befriend me, however, had no weapons or ammunition to part with. They thought, Rodetsky told me, that the only way to deal with Gourko was to bring the ransom and then shoot him up with it.

"But I have not been treated badly, Davy. I was too valuable to Gourko as a possible source of war material. As I told you, only when Orloff died was I brought to the prison. That is all my story, *milinkoi*, but I have one more question to ask you. I have saved it for the last, dreading what your answer might be. How is my father?"

She looked at him with soulful anxiety in her blue eyes.

"Very ill, Tascha," said he gently, "although it may not be that his condition is critical. Your danger weighed on him, and if we can send him a message from Vladivostok that you are safe and on

the way home, I am sure it will do him more good than all the medicine in the world."

"Oh, if we can," murmured the girl tearfully, "if we can!"

"There is no doubt about it, Tascha," said Whitley, "unless these rebels beat off the regular forces from Olskaya. You have the money Orloff gave you?"

"Here," she answered, and crept off to a corner of the overhang, lifted a flat stone and took from its hiding place a packet wrapped in brown paper. "Imperial rubles and Bank of England notes, Davy," she said.

Carefully she stowed the treasure away inside the long brown coat. Hardly had she finished making the packet secure when a tramp of swift hoofs were heard outside.

"Whitley!" called a voice.

The two fugitives made their way out from under the overhang and found Rodetsky and a stout, florid-faced man in a general's uniform waiting for them. Both officers were mounted, and the captain had two led horses.

"Our general wants to know, Whitley," said Rodetsky, "if the airplane that landed on the road between here and Olskaya is the one that dropped you into Yerma."

"Yes," answered Whitley.

"It's one of the two that are expected at Vladivostok?"

Whitley told him it was.

"Well, the crew has been put under arrest and the plane is being held by a detail of our cavalry," Rodetsky went on. "You flew over our forces on the road and were seen to drop by parachute into the town. The general naturally thought you were carrying word of the surprise attack we had planned, and he sent back the detail to take charge of the craft and all hands aboard."

CHAPTER XXII

MORE THAN EVER

IT was the sort of news that might have struck despair to the heart of the average man; but Whitley had lived and prospered, so to speak, on hard knocks and setbacks. So he merely asked, in a level tone:

"Does that mean another fight?"

Rodetsky smiled. "I am glad to say it does not, so far as our general is concerned. It looked mighty serious for your hop, skip, and a jump around the world until I explained. Now he knows about you and your little flight. He can't speak English, but he wants to shake hands with you, wish you good luck, and give an order releasing the airplane."

"Bully for the general!" exclaimed Whitley. "I want you to thank him for me."

Tascha did the thanking, and the general smiled and bowed to her. He shook hands with Tascha, and then with Whitley, talking rapidly as he did so. When his words failed, the general sat back in his saddle and scribbled an order in a notebook with a pencil.

"The general, Davy," translated Tascha, "regrets the unfortunate experiences I had with the bandits, and counts it a privilege to be of service to two

Americans. They have brought horses for us to ride, and the captain will accompany us and help us past the guards posted in the road."

Whitley assisted Tascha to mount one of the led horses and then vaulted into the other empty saddle. The general tore a leaf from his notebook and handed it to Whitley, with words in Russian which Tascha repeated in English.

"He wishes us both the best of luck on our return to our own country, Davy, and says that the next time we visit Siberia he hopes we shall find it a vast new democracy, as stable and progressive as our own great republic."

"Thank you, general," said Whitley, and shook hands again.

The general clapped spurs to his horse and galloped toward the town. Rodetsky trotted off toward the Olskaya road, followed by Tascha and Whitley.

"Then you have won the town, captain!" Whitley asked.

"It is ours," was the answer. "Some of the rogues fought well, and those who were left surrendered. This plague spot has been wiped clean. I was sent here to make the job easy, and the general has commended me for my work. I set off a rocket last night to let him know that I was ready. He answered with two rockets, from a point this side of the plateau, to let me understand that his attack would be made the next day. Gourko put three Cossacks in jail on suspicion of having fired the rocket that I set off with my own hands"—Rodetsky chuckled—

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"and I had the pleasure of setting them free. I'm sorry, Whitley, that I could not find your purse or your gold; Gourko put your property away somewhere and a search is being made for it. You see, Gourko was killed, so he can't give us any information. The country is well rid of him."

Only an hour, because of Rodetsky's excellent work, had been required to reduce that stronghold of the renegades. It was a mere incident in Russian history, and might not win so much as a footnote in the final written record. Nevertheless the incident had taken on a tragic importance in the lives of Tascha Burnett and David Whitley.

Only at long intervals now was the bark of a rifle heard in Yerma. Rodetsky explained, as he and his two companions pressed on toward the south road, that this desultory firing was caused by the house-to-house search for hiding rebels.

"Then every shot, I suppose," commented Whitley, "means one rebel less in Yerma."

Rodetsky turned in his saddle to give him an odd look. "Not necessarily, brother," said the captain; "these days we are not spreading the doctrine of democracy in that manner. The hot blood of the early revolution has cooled and a sanity born of hard experience has taken its place. Our orders were to take Yerma with as little sacrifice of life as possible. Now, during the mopping up, it's mostly the desperate rebels who crack their guns; our men shoot as a last resort only.

"Gourko, out for loot, gathered around him a choice assortment of brigands when he fled from Chita, captured this town in the hills, and considered himself safe from capture. He carried on with a high hand. Detaining Miss Burnett was a sample of his methods—and of his folly. He would have known, had his wits been bright enough, that his enemies had no guns or ammunition to spare and would bring force against him. But he reckoned that this fastness was impregnable. He did not imagine"—and here Rodetsky smiled grimly—"that there could be any such method as boring from within."

"Disaffected persons were joining his forces every day. Puffed up with conceit, as he was, and guzzling vodka continually, Gourko believed that the fame of his exploits was rallying retainers to his cause. He rarely looked into the character or considered the motive of those who penetrated the mountain wall and joined him. It was so with me, and with a score or more of loyal souls who followed me to Yerma to help in my work. Gourko knew I had been a lieutenant, so he took me on his staff and made me a captain. My designs prospered.

"In happier days I had known Miss Burnett's father, Holway Burnett, and his partner, Lloyd Raynham. For that reason I took an early opportunity to see Miss Burnett and to make it plain to her and Orloff that there was a friend at headquarters. I tried to show Gourko what a mistake he was making by holding Miss Burnett. She was an American, Russian born, and the Americans had

studiously refrained from taking sides in Siberia. I told Gourko all this and tried to persuade him to send Miss Burnett and Orloff to Olskaya. But he was bullheaded and would not listen to me. Then came the time when he found Gallitzin smuggling a message out of the town for Orloff.

"I fought so hard against the execution of those two men that I nearly trapped myself and lost the capacity for the work that brought me here. I could do nothing for Orloff and Gallitzin, nor for Miss Burnett who was sent to the old prison. But the climax of my work was near at hand.

"I had many of my men mixed with Gourko's and guarding the pass on the south road. When the loyal forces waiting at Olskaya marched this way, my guards would overwhelm Gourko's and leave the attackers a clear path into the stronghold. I sent up my rocket, as I told you, to indicate that I was ready.

"There was a fight, of course, when our men got into Yerma. Miss Burnett was better off in the prison, at that time, than she would have been in one of the huts. I was arranging to send a messenger to let her out of the cell—and you were just the person, Whitley. I did not know just how completely you filled the bill, however, until nearly the last moment.

"Gourko was shot, but by one of his own staff officers—Karloff, a friend of Dmitri Gallitzin. Gourko ruled this mountain town for six weeks before he paid the penalty. For a long time we have been groping for the light, here in Russia, and now

we seem to have got our feet under us and to be headed along the right road. There has to be many a stumble, Whitley, when a nation goes groping for the light! Consider France, if you will, and the revolution there. What finally came out of the blood and disorder there? Peace, and a nation of men who knew how to lay down their lives in making the fight for democracy. But here we are," Rodetsky broke off abruptly.

The three riders had turned into the narrow, steep-walled pass through which the road from Olskaya entered Yerma. A file of gray-uniformed guards suddenly flung themselves across the way. Rodetsky rode forward and spoke in Russian to the officer in charge of the men; thereupon they separated right and left, and the road to the plateau was opened.

Rodetsky shook hands with Tascha. "My respects to your father, Miss Burnett," he said. "I did what I could for you in a situation that was ugly for both of us. Now we are well out of it, and you are free to go. I hope that all your memories of Siberia will not be unpleasant."

"I am grateful to you, captain," returned Tascha, "and so will my father be when I tell him all you have done to help me in Yerma."

"That order from the general will lift the blockade on your airplane, Whitley," went on Rodetsky, turning to give the aviator's hand a cordial clasp. "Good-bye, brother, and *bonne chance!*"

Whitley, on his own part, thanked Rodetsky; then he and Tascha galloped southward along the road,

and the captain retraced his course into the captured town.

"I never expected to find a man like Rodetsky in Yerma," Whitley remarked. "It was a fortunate chance, Tascha."

"I knew from the first he was to be trusted, Davy," the girl answered. "I was afraid Gourko would find the Bank of England notes and the imperial rubles, so I told Rodetsky about them. They were not safe in the hut, he said, where Orloff had been keeping them; so, at my request, he put them under the stone at the overhanging rock. Yes, Davy, we owe all our good fortune to Captain Rodetsky. Tell me," she added, "how much time you have lost?"

"I haven't really lost a second, Tascha," he said, "since I have found you. I was counting myself lucky if I should get you and escape from Yerma by midnight. It was twenty minutes after noon when I dropped from the *Eagle*; and now," he continued after a look at his watch, "it is five minutes of two! Only one hour and thirty-five minutes in Yerma!" he exclaimed; "events certainly have moved with a rush. Before six, this evening, we should be in Vladivostok."

"Then your delay in Yerma will not cause you to lose the race?" breathed the girl.

"Trossac must have lost twice as much time at L'Estrée repairing his damaged engine," returned Whitley, "so we are more than even. From here all the way to Detroit we should be showing Ben Trossac our heels!"

CHAPTER XXIII

THE UNEXPECTED

CROFFUT was a bit gloomy as he piloted the *Eagle* back to the plateau. His faith in Whitley's luck was supreme, but nevertheless the dangers and uncertainties of the Yerma venture trailed dismally through the assistant pilot's mind and he could not fight off a black oppression of foreboding. He had no monopoly of this feeling, for Chaské wore an even longer face, and Fernald was plunged into a fit of abstraction. Croffut, however, insisted on talking like an optimist as a foil to the croaking of the Ogalalla.

That force of fighting men in the Yerma road was an added cause for worry. It had been guessed that they were part of the renegade force from the mountain town, and none of the three in the airplane dreamed that the outfit might be a small army marching to the subjugation of a rebel stronghold.

An easy landing was made on the plateau, and hardly had Chaské opened the door and been followed out of the cabin by Fernald and Croffut, when half a dozen riders emerged at a gallop from the hills on the north.

"Now what the deuce has that outfit got in mind?" muttered Croffut.

"We seem to be about all they're thinking about," remarked Fernald. "They're pointing this way."

"Thunder!" growled Chaské. "I'd give a lot if we were in the air."

It was too late to get into the air, however, for the horsemen were coming straight for the airplane at breakneck speed. Their long cloaks fluttered, they yelled huskily and they flourished their rifles as they came on. The spectacle was not at all reassuring. When the six drew rein and tumbled out of their saddles, a tall Cossack with a saber scar across his right cheek ran to the three from the *Eagle* and jabbered violently.

"What's the trouble?" inquired Croffut.

This question was not understood. Croffut tried out a little French. This had no better result. Chaské then did a little jabbering on his own account in his best Sioux. But it was hopeless. So far as language was concerned it was impossible to learn what the Cossacks wanted.

Fernald tried to climb back into the airplane. One of the Cossacks jumped in between him and the steps and raised his gun threateningly. The leader then motioned the three Americans to move off to the right.

"I guess I'm wise to this," said Croffut. "We're prisoners."

"Next thing you know," grunted Chaské, "we'll be in Yerma along with Whit."

"If they try to take away my automatic," declared

Fernald, "I'm going to push the safety catch and turn loose."

"Easy with that," warned Croffut. "We'll not turn on the fireworks until they try to tamper with the bus. That's the only way they can get a fight out of this crowd. Here's a run of luck and no mistake! Whit didn't take all the excitement with him when he dropped into Yerma."

He shook a cigarette out of a package, rolled it in his hands and then struck a light. The leader of the Cossacks drew close with an insinuating smile and stretched out his hand. Croffut gave him a smoke, then passed the smokes to the other Cossacks. Presently captives and captors were all squatting on the ground as amiable as a lot of friends at a stag party.

"They're pretty decent about it, anyway," spoke up Fernald. "I wonder what's the big idea?"

"Probably they were sent back here to hold us until the boss at Yerma makes up his mind what's to be done," hazarded Croffut. "So long as they don't herd us away from the old mill and along the road I guess we can stand it—for a while."

"It's a situation that can't last till midnight," asserted Fernald. "There's bound to be some kind of a change."

"Let's hope it will be a change for the better," said Croffut. "There's the gold in the locker, you know. Maybe we can use some of that on this gang."

"Quarter after one," announced Chaské. "Wonder how Whit's making it about now?"

It was hard for the Ogalalla to pry his thoughts loose from Whitley and the town of Yerma. Croffut, however, was wrapped up in the plateau situation. When Whitley came, the *Eagle* must be ready to clear away for Vladivostok. It was up to Croffut and those with him to make that possible.

"There are six of these boys," he remarked. "In a pinch—but only in a pinch, mind you—do you think we could handle 'em, Chaské?"

"Sure," averred the Ogalalla. "Only two a piece. That's easy."

Croffut looked at the shadowy radio man.

"Don't fret about me," spoke up Fernald hastily; "I'll engage to look after my two."

Just at this point, however, four more Cossacks arrived from the south.

"That makes ten," muttered Croffut, watching the newcomers as they raced across the plateau, "and the odds are too heavy."

The Cossacks with the three flyers got up to meet their comrades from Olskaya. A lot of rapid-fire talk followed, and then the man with the saber scar went to Croffut, tapped him on the shoulder, indicated Chaské and Fernald, and threw out his hands in the direction of the railroad.

"Blazes!" exclaimed the startled Fernald; "they want us to move, Croffut. These other chaps are to take us to Olskaya."

This, evidently, was the program. Croffut's prob-

lem was to keep it from being carried out. Just here, Chaské got an idea. Suddenly he made a dash toward the *Eagle*. The Cossacks took after him and, fortunately, made no attempt to use their guns. Chaské swarmed up the steps, dived into the cabin and closed the door. He was inside and the Cossacks were outside. The next moment the engines of the plane began to roar, but the propellers merely idled.

The crash of the motors frightened every horse on the plateau and there was a wild scramble on the part of the Cossacks to lay hands on their mounts. Four of the animals got away, and the men from Olskaya, who were still in the saddle, had a brisk fifteen minutes catching up the scattered animals.

Chaské had gained a little time but at the expense of the friendly consideration of the Cossacks. They now began to show signs of temper, and the leader walked up to Croffut, scowled, patted his rifle, and pointed toward the plane. The inference was clear. Unless Chaské stopped the engines and came out of the cabin there would be shooting and the *Eagle* might be badly crippled.

The Ogalalla, peering from a window, interpreted the signs. He shut off the power and silence once more hovered over the plateau.

"That was a fool move, Chaské, and you'd better come out," Croffut shouted.

"See what this will do first," the mechanic answered, and tossed a yellow gold piece through one of the open ports.

As the bit of shining metal dropped on the ground, there was a rush toward it by the Cossacks. One of them came out of the scrimmage triumphant, yelling at the top of his lungs as he held aloft the double eagle. Every other Cossack was envious of his comrade's good fortune, and held out his hands appealingly toward the face at the cabin window.

"Tell 'em I'll throw one every hour," Chaské suggested. "If we can keep 'em busy till midnight maybe something will happen to help us."

Croffut, catching the idea, was trying to make the Cossack leader understand that a piece of gold would be thrown from the cabin once every sixty minutes. He used his watch in the effort to get his meaning across. What would have happened is problematical, but there was no chance to carry the scheme through to a conclusion. Two riders suddenly appeared on the plateau from the direction of Yerma.

"Whitley!" piped Fernald. "What do you know about that? Say, here's the captain, and he's nine hours ahead of time!"

The attention of all was focused upon Whitley and his companion. Croffut was as jubilant as Fernald for a moment, and then he experienced a wrench of disappointment.

"Who's the little Cossack with him?" he muttered. "Whit has failed at Yerma—he couldn't find Miss Burnett. This looks like good luck with a black mark against it."

Whitley was bareheaded, but he waved his hand encouragingly as he came on. "All aboard, men!" he

shouted. "I've got something here that will lift the blockade."

He was very close to the plane by that time and the Cossacks were at the bits of his horse and Tascha's. He handed the leader the written order brought from Yerma, and the effect of that order was instantaneous. The Cossack spoke to the others and they fell away respectfully. Whitley slid from his saddle, helped Tascha to alight, and the two hurried on to the *Eagle*.

"Why, Miss Burnett!" gasped Croffut.

"No time for talk, Pink," said Whitley; "we've got to get away from here before there are any further complications."

Chaské opened the door, a smile on his lips and a sparkle in his eyes. Croffut hurried into the cabin and dropped into the pilot's seat. He was all at sea over the sudden turn of events, but explanations could come later. The engines once more began to hum.

Fernald followed Whitley and Tascha up the steps and Chaské once more closed the door. The *Eagle* rolled across the plateau, bumping and swaying, and then, lightly as a bit of thistledown upon the wind, spurned the earth and soared upward.

"Miss Burnett, Fernald," said Whitley; "and Chaské, Tascha," he added, "you know about him. Pink is up front; if I remember, you saw him last at Belle Isle."

"He turned the trick, Tascha!" shouted Croffut exultantly from the office; "got in and out of Yerma

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with nine hours to spare! On top of that, he pulled us out of a hard row of stumps right there on the plateau! How did you ever do that, Whit? Where and how did you annex that order that lifted the blockade for us? You've sure got me guessing good and hard."

CHAPTER XXIV

A BIT STAGGERING

Vladivostok lies well to the south of the fiftieth parallel of north latitude. It was necessary, therefore, to alter the *Eagle's* course. Yerma, a point on the parallel, and Vladivostok might be considered as forming a right-angled triangle, with the Chinese Eastern Railway as the hypotenuse. Roughly, then, the plane had to follow the line of the railway. This deflection from a straight easterly course increased considerably the distance to be traveled. Whitley, as unmoved as though he had not been rubbing elbows with death for a matter of two crowded hours, considered the duplicate chart on the wireless table.

Tascha was talking across the cabin to Croffut. Her face was pale, and now that her desperate trials were behind her she showed plainly the strain she had been under. The silent, watchful Chaské opened the tin box and poured some coffee from a thermos bottle. This he served to both the girl and Whitley. Then Chaské adjusted Tascha's chair to a more restful position.

"It is hard to believe this is not a dream," Tascha murmured. "A compartment in a Pullman could not be more comfortable, Davy. And for the first

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time in six weeks I am rid of those Yerma brigands. I am very thankful and very happy."

"Tell us about it, Whit," Croffut requested. "You had better believe we were anxious about you. What did you do in Yerma to cut down your time from eleven hours plus to two? And where did you pick up the paper talk that got us and the plane out of hock? That's what we want to know."

Whitley sketched his experiences briefly. It was an absorbing recital even in synopsis form. "The men from Olskaya saved the day for us," he finished.

"It looked as though they were going to wind up our round-the-world excursion right there on the plateau," said Fernald. "We had a mighty uncomfortable time of it, but it wasn't a circumstance to what you were going through with. I've often wondered how it would feel to be backed up to a stone wall with a firing squad looking at you over the gunsights——"

"Rodetsky was looking after the firing squad," cut in Whitley, "so I hadn't a chance of getting shot up. It was just a piece of luck that I dropped into Yerma at the very moment Rodetsky's plans were coming to a climax."

Something swished over the arm of Tascha's chair and dropped on the floor. It was the small packet she had taken from its hiding place under the overhang. Whitley picked it up and looked at the tired girl.

The Cossack hat had fallen from her head and she was fast asleep. Then, for the first time, Whit-

ley noticed that her flaxen hair had been shorn close to her head, and that under the dingy long cloak with the V-shaped line of cartridge pockets at the breast she wore a man's uniform of khaki. A lovely picture she made as she lay there, sleeping in peace and security for the first time in weeks.

Fernald leaned forward to lay a hand on Whitley's arm. "I can't blame you for taking the risk you did, captain," he said softly. "Any man would put his head in the lion's mouth for a girl like Miss Burnett."

"She had a hard time of it in that bandits' nest," murmured Whitley, with deep feeling, "but she will not say so. We have lost two hours. That is less time than I had dared to hope we would lose, but we must do our best to make it up."

"Two hours!" jeered Croffut. "What does that amount to, Whit? We've got this race won hands down for John Morning."

"Trossac——"

"Trossac! I'll bet a package of smokes that Flip Trossac is hunting for fuel this minute at Svinowski. If he gets to Vladivostok by the time we reach Detroit I'll miss a guess."

Whitley's only answer was an ominous shake of the head. He brought out the log book, uncapped his fountain pen, and began writing. He was not so tired physically as he was mentally befogged. The many events that had crowded his two hours at Yerma whirled through his memory in a phantasmagoria of confused pictures. He nodded over the log

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book. He could not sleep—his nerves were too tensely drawn for that—and his wakeful mind concerned itself with John Morning and Holway Burnett. He was hoping for the best in the matter of Burnett—for Tascha's sake.

Halfway round the world, at the hour of high noon, John Morning sat in his luxurious private office in the skyscraper chuckling over a message just at hand from the landing field in Poland.

Leaving here six thirty p. m. local time.
Everything lovely. Next report from Vladivostok.
WHITLEY.

Luke Evarts sat at the end of the desk. He was in a most comfortable frame of mind.

"Think of it, Evarts!" exclaimed Morning; "this was six thirty Monday night! Distance has been annihilated! The god of transportation has crowned the king of speed! The whole world is gasping over this performance of Dave Whitley's! And I guess that Chauncey Holabird is doing more gasping than any other man on earth. Whitley has met every crooked move of Trossac's and is coming under the line a winner—the big high boss of the square deal. We've got to let that fellow in on some of the good things in the air-transport line. We——"

A telephone bell tinkled at his elbow. He caught up the instrument and pressed the receiver to his ear.

"Ah, Detroit?" Evarts heard him say. "Why, Chauncey, I thought you were East looking after

Wall Street. No? Going to stay right there till your bus gets back? Well! Looks as if you'd have a long wait. Whitley was tearing across Russia last night. Your man was still at L'Estrée, wasn't he? Say, Chauncey, if you had a little savvy you might pick a winner now and then. . . . What? Kindly remove the gum for a minute and then I can hear you. Trossac beaten up at L'Estrée?" Morning chuckled. "Any old time Whitley has to beat up Trossac in order to beat him flying you'll catch the well-known weasel asleep. Now, Chauncey, did I sob when your crowd got our plane at Trepassey? Not on your life. I'm surprised at you. Take my advice and don't let this get on your nerves so much—Hey? Hello there!" Morning rattled the hook with his thumb and then hung up and put the instrument away. "Holabird wouldn't listen," he said, and fell back in his chair and laughed till the tears came.

"What's he complaining about?" queried Evarts.

"Says Whitley lured Trossac to an inn at L'Estrée and had him beaten up," answered Morning; "and that sounds so much like something Whitley wouldn't do that I called Chauncey a liar. I believe I've got his goat—for the first time since that deal in Gulf & Southern." He pressed a push button, and to the boy who appeared promptly at the door he went on: "Send in that bunch of newspaper sharps. I've got a whole lot to tell 'em."

In contrast with Morning's jubilant mood was a little scene taking place at that precise moment in the Burnett flat on Helen Avenue. Dickson was in

the little front room; with him were Mrs. Trowbridge, her eyes red from weeping, and an eminent specialist who had been called in for consultation.

"I regret," the specialist was saying, "that I can offer little hope. Mr. Burnett's trouble is mental rather than physical, which is even more dangerous to a man of his years than a bodily illness more readily diagnosed. This condition of coma in which he is plunged may continue for two days, possibly three, but the ultimate result is—you have asked me to speak frankly—absolutely certain."

"Is—is there nothing we can do?" asked Mrs. Trowbridge tremulously.

"No; but I believe that his daughter, if she could be here within the two or three days I have mentioned and speak to him—if she could impress upon his sleeping mind that she was safe and had returned—he might regain his senses and recover. Since his daughter is in Siberia, however, of course this one slender hope is impossible of fulfillment. Cases like Mr. Burnett's are rather remarkable in a way, but not unique. I have chanced upon several such patients in the course of my practice."

The doctor bade Mrs. Trowbridge and the lawyer good-by and left the building. Dickson lingered to tell Mrs. Trowbridge what he intended to do, eager to give her something to hope for and look forward to, but the effort was useless. To the sister of Holway Burnett, airplanes were not things to be trusted. Even a superairplane, one whose performances had astounded the world, Mrs. Trowbridge considered as

nothing more than a multimillionaire's plaything and useless for any worth-while purpose, whatever. She had no faith and clung to her hopelessness.

Dickson left the house and proceeded hastily to a telegraph office. There he filed a message for Whitley at Vladivostok in care of the American consul. The grim report of the specialist was embodied in the cablegram.

CHAPTER XXV

A RACE TO THE SWIFT

THE *Eagle*, nearly ten times swifter than an express train and proving itself as dependable, came to a landing in a chosen spot not far from Vladivostok. There was a crowd to welcome the machine, a crowd whose various members reflected the cosmopolitan aspect which the city itself presented at that time. There were soldiers in khaki, Americans, English, Russians, Japanese; and there were refugees from the interior, their only clothes the ragged civilian garments they stood in; and there were some gentlemen of distinguished appearance, a few drawn to that center of interest by business no less than by curiosity. Mr. Archibald Cummings, American consul, was one of these; so, too, was Mr. Pemberton Tallmadge, the agent for John Morning and Chauncey Holabird, there to register the flyers and make certain each machine passed Vladivostok and did not try to circle the north pole and regain Detroit by a short cut from the west.

It was exactly five fifty p. m., Tuesday afternoon.

The huge man-made bird, which had become a topic wherever blew the sixty-four winds of the compass, took the ground easily and glided to a halt. The door of the cabin flew open and a gray-eyed,

capable-looking young man descended nimbly and assisted another, who seemed to be a youth, to come down the steep steps. The crowd cheered in various languages and pressed forward, Cummings and Tallmadge in the van. The consul made straight toward the supposed lad with the blue eyes and flaxen hair and extended a welcoming hand.

"Miss Burnett! Well, this is splendid, and an international episode is brought to a happy conclusion. We received the news by wireless, of course, and so we were in a measure prepared." The consul laughed. "This sort of travel is a bit swifter and more comfortable than the Trans-Siberian, eh?"

"I am back in Vladivostok and I am very happy and grateful for all that has been done for me, Mr. Cummings," Tascha answered. "But," and here her voice quivered, "have you a message for me?"

"I have a message for Mr. Whitley," said Cummings, "but perhaps it contains news for you."

Tallmadge was talking with Whitley, and writing on a card and taking his signature and Chaské's and Fernald's on another card. Cummings, introduced by Tascha, handed to the aviator the message that had arrived in care of the consulate.

Whitley tore it open. "Burnett unconscious. Can live but two or three days unless his daughter reaches his bedside quickly. Tascha, doctor says, Burnett's only hope. Dickson." This is what Whitley read. With sinking heart he turned to Tascha, who was smiling and chatting with the American consul.

"My dear," said Whitley gently, "here is news from Dickson. Be brave—there is hope."

He handed her the slip and watched her while she read the fateful words. She paled, swayed slightly, then caught herself. A mist of tears rose in her eyes.

"What hope, Davy?" she murmured.

"The *Eagle*," he answered. "An airplane that can win fame and half a million dollars for John Morning surely can be depended upon to save the life of your father. Of all the great things it has accomplished, Tascha, that will not be the least." He turned to the agent of John Morning and Chauncey Holabird. "Any news from Trossac?" he asked.

"He arrived at four this afternoon and left at five fifteen, bound for the landing field at Petropavlovsk, Kamchatka," announced Tallmadge.

Pinkney Croffut was stunned. Could he believe his ears? Chaské Waukon's face went hard, and the soul of his fathers flashed in his dark eyes. Fernald turned away to ease his feelings with language which he used only in moments of great stress. Whitley seemed the least moved of the four men from the *Eagle*.

"There's a matter of two hours that has told against us," observed Whitley. "We must get busy at once. Where are the mechanics, Tallmadge? See how soon we can get away, Chaské. This race is to the swift, gentlemen," he added, "and from here to Detroit we shall travel faster than any living man

ever traveled before. Yes," he added grimly, "and we shall be longer in the air with a real plane!"

What was the secret back of this phenomenal performance of the *World Beater*? Holabird's machine was faster than Morning's, that was conceded, but its limitations more than offset this advantage. At least, this was Whitley's belief. He had found it impossible to remain continuously in the *World Beater* at the high altitude which the best speed demanded. Had Trossac some other device to supplement his oxygen masks and electrically heated armor?

And there was the matter of L'Estrée. Whitley had judged that Trossac would be hung for hours at the old war landing field; yet, as a matter of fact, he must have taken to the air very shortly after the *Eagle* had hopped off, and it was certain that he had come down at Svinowski and trailed closely after Whitley at the get-away from that Polish station.

There was some sort of a mystery here, and Whitley had no time for wild guesses. He was faced with the attested fact that Trossac had arrived at Vladivostok, registered, and gone on. To reach the farther side of the Pacific ahead of him was Whitley's business, and he was giving his whole attention to it.

The course mapped by the pathfinders for Morning and Holabird crossed the North Pacific Ocean from Kamchatka to the Aleutian Islands, then proceeded straight to a landing at Vancouver. In view of all the circumstances, however, Whitley believed

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that his only hope for beating Trossac lay in diverging widely from this set route and cutting out the stop at Petropavlovsk.

While Chaské and Croffut, assisted by a force of mechanics, were replacing a cracked propeller, taking supplies aboard, and giving the plane a hasty overhauling, Whitley was busy with Fernald. Luckily the chartograph was supplied with glass sides for an area covering roughly ten degrees of latitude on each side of parallel fifty degrees north. This extra equipment was by way of a factor of safety in the event that the *Eagle* should be compelled to deviate from the course as it had been laid out.

On Fernald's duplicate map of the North Pacific Whitley laid a ruler and penciled a straight line from Vladivostok to San Francisco. "That," he said, "is our route, Fernald."

The radio man drew a sharp breath and did some hasty figuring. "Call it one hundred and five degrees from here to Frisco," he observed, "above and below parallel forty. And we'll call the degrees fifty-two and nine-tenths miles each. That would give us a rough total of five thousand five hundred and fifty-four miles and will consume approximately nineteen hours. This is a trial, captain, such as we have not yet demanded of the *Eagle*. And remember," he proceeded earnestly, "there's no landing, no chance for repairs if anything goes wrong, absolutely no hope if we're forced down. Nineteen hours in the air! I put it to you bluntly: Do you consider it worth the risk?"

"Personally, yes." Whitley's eyes narrowed and his face set firmly. "But," he went on, "I ask no man to take the risk against his own judgment. Make your choice, Fernald."

A tinge of red colored the face of the little wireless man. "Evarts is safe in Chicago," he remarked quietly, "and he can build another *Eagle* if this one is lost; but I'm standing by the ship, captain, and if we all sink in the Pacific then I'm gone and the only chartograph ever constructed is gone. That's all. There's no model, there are no working drawings. The invention that means so much for the science of aviation is blotted out—'spurlos versenkt,' sunk without a trace. That's my excuse for speaking as I did. For myself, I have fought against poverty all my life. Morning tells me that if we make good on this flight I have wealth ahead." He smiled a bit wistfully. "That is an engaging prospect, but I shall toss it into the pot. Your own future and that of the girl you are to marry goes with us. If everything is to be junked, then my small affairs need not matter. That's my choice, captain."

Whitley wrung his hand and turned away. Although he knew in advance what Croffut's and Chaske's decision would be, nevertheless he put up the proposition to them. "You're the skipper," was all they said, "and whatever you say goes." It was not necessary to talk to Tascha. With Whitley at her side, and with her father's life hanging in the balance, she would have scorned any danger.

Whitley wrote out two messages and gave them to

Tallmadge to forward. One was to Dickson: "Tascha safe. Coming by plane with me. Should arrive Detroit to-morrow." To-morrow! And this was Tuesday afternoon! There was another mystery here. The second message was to John Morning: "Leaving Vladivostok seven p. m. Expect us Detroit Wednesday. Don't worry about Trossac's lead."

Promptly at seven, then, the *Eagle* got away, Whitley in the office and driving skyward over the Japan Sea. He watched the special altimeter as its needle crept around the dial. Ten thousand feet—twenty thousand feet—and then thirty thousand, with the high-velocity eastward-moving current welcoming the plane like an old friend. Was such a current swift enough with life and death in the scales in Detroit and with Trossac an hour and three quarters and perhaps five hundred miles in the lead? Whitley held steadily to the upward climb.

There was tense silence in the cabin. It was realized by all that Whitley was on a hunt for a stratum of air setting toward the east of a higher velocity than the one that had already served them so well. Croffut leaned over the back of the pilot's seat and kept his eyes fixed on the moving altimeter needle. Thirty-three, thirty-four, thirty-five thousand feet! That was not a new altitude record for the *Eagle*, for she had reached that height on the trial spin from Chicago to Detroit. But Whitley was still pointing her nose toward the blue of space. Thirty-six thousand, thirty-seven thousand feet! At

Thirty-six thousand and twenty feet, reached in an open machine by the gallant Major Rudolph Schroeder, U. S. A., a temperature of forty-seven degrees below zero had been found, and Schroeder had frozen his eyeballs, became unconscious, and had fallen five miles like a lead plummet, recovering just in time to straighten out his machine and effect, almost mechanically, a safe landing. This flashed through Croffut's mind.

At thirty-eight thousand feet the steel finger of the chartograph scarcely moved. Evidently the plane had entered a stratum of air that was racing westward.

"See that Chaské is giving close attention to the oxygen, Pink," said Whitley. "And watch Tascha. This is so new to her that she may not be able to stand it. She'll not tell you—you will have to determine for yourself. The weight of the outer atmosphere is diminishing rapidly and——"

There was the sound of a fall in the cabin. Croffut looked around. Whitley glanced up, his face gray with anxiety.

"Was that Tascha?" he asked huskily.

"No; Fernald," answered Croffut, his voice faint. "You can't do this, Whit; you'll have to give up. Around thirty thousand feet is best—and safest."

Whitley was already dropping back. He had hoped they might reach an altitude with an even swifter eastward-moving current than the one at thirty thousand feet, and that it was somewhere overhead he knew, but it was not for them. At the old

altitude to which they had become accustomed Fernald gradually revived and resumed his place at the wireless table.

"I began to yawn," he explained apologetically, "and then I had a headache, and then there was a blank. Too bad, captain. Miss Burnett was standing it splendidly. You better drop me overboard and try again."

"No, Jimmie," said Whitley, "we'll do well enough where we are."

"Yes," agreed Croffut. "We all had the pleasure, though, of reaching the real topside, getting higher than any living person ever went before. That's glory enough."

"Somebody may be doing that very thing right now," suggested Chaské. "Don't crow, Pink. Before we get back to Detroit some one may have hit a ceiling of forty thousand feet. You can't be sure of anything in this flying game. To-day's record is put in the shade by the record of to-morrow."

"We're doing our old reliable three hundred m. p. h.," said Whitley.

"That ought to mean San Francisco at two or three o'clock to-morrow afternoon," remarked Fernald, seeking to eliminate the last vestige of fog from his brain by figuring. "The degrees of longitude are longer in this latitude." He laughed. "Frisco for luncheon, friends, although it may be a little late."

Tascha insisted on being given something to do, and finally Fernald allowed her to move the tacks on

the duplicate chart. This, Croffut always maintained, was a waste of labor, since the chartograph registered the course. Nevertheless, Fernald wanted their air progress constantly under his eyes.

Chaské had arranged what he called a boudoir for Tascha. A canvas curtain was strung on a wire directly back of the pilot's seat and, at will, could be drawn around one of the forward chairs. Thus, when she desired to rest, Tascha had a snug little stateroom at her disposal.

For the first time since he had learned that Trossac was leading in the race and how critical Burnett's illness had become, Whitley's mind was at ease. His plan for seeking a swifter current at a higher altitude had failed, but he believed that their old sky lane would give them the victory.

At ten o'clock he yielded the controls to Croffut. Tascha had left her work at the charts, drawn her curtain, and was asleep in her "boudoir." Whitley stole a glance at her and assured himself that she was bearing the altitude well, then he went on and sat down by Fernald.

"I'm trying to guess about Trossac," said Chaské, sitting on a life pack on the floor by the wireless table. "How could he get to Vladivostok ahead of us?"

"We'd have been neck and neck with him at Vladivostok but for the delay at Yerma," returned Whitley.

"But his troubles at L'Estrée! How could he make repairs in such short order? Then the fuel

shortage at Svinowski. How did he get around that?"

"Chet Bingham is said to be a wizard when it comes to mechanics. At Svinowski, of course, the fuel raiders would see that the *World Beater* was taken care of. Oh, we can work out the problem after a fashion, Chaské, even though it still remains a bit mysterious. Trossac is one of the get-there sort. Let's give him his due."

"But his plane!" cried Fernald. "How can he and his crew stand a steady diet of high flying? We had to be up and down in order to get enough breath to live on through those oxygen helmets."

"He managed it somehow," said Whitley. "We have the facts and they speak for themselves. He is doing remarkably well no matter how he does it."

Chaské grunted. "There's a strange thing in it somewhere," he asserted. "Paste that in your hat."

At one in the morning, by their watches, they had luncheon, Chaské placing a table and laying out the supplies brought from Vladivostok. "Now that we have a passenger," he said with a grin, "we must put on a little style."

Tascha pulled back her curtain and joined the rest of them. Her cheeks were rosy, but, apart from this heightened color, she gave no sign that the manufactured air of the cabin was disagreeing with her. After the meal she resumed her work at the chart.

"Every time I move one of these tacks forward, Davy," she murmured, "it means I am a step nearer

home. I believe fate will be good to us, and that I shall reach Detroit in time."

The peril of a mishap to the plane and a descent into the ocean did not seem to be in her mind at all. Her spirit was too hopeful for such dismal forebodings. And yet that danger was ever present. Whitley had it constantly before him. The simple words of the girl, "I believe fate will be good to us," found an answering echo in his heart. She had suffered enough, and surely destiny must be kind to her now.

Hour after hour sped on, superchargers and engines working steadily and perfectly. Of the great unclouded vault overhead the travelers in the *Eagle* saw nothing. Their little world was the lighted cabin, their eye was the chartograph, their breath of life the flow from the oxygen tanks.

With his wireless Fernald picked up a ship and secured the vessel's latitude and longitude. These figures gave him, roughly, a check on the work of the chartograph, justifying in every way that ingenious instrument. About nine in the morning, Vladivostok time, Fernald caught a long message out of the air, an odd look crossing his face as he wrote it out.

"Our wireless is breaking its record for distance work, captain," he said, "and I suppose atmospheric conditions are unusually favorable. Here's news from Pearl Harbor."

"If you can send to Pearl Harbor, Jimmie," said Whitley, "report that we are landing in San Fran-

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cisco about three o'clock this afternoon—if all goes well. What time is that by San Francisco clocks?"

"Ten to-night."

"Ask Pearl Harbor to have San Francisco arrange landing flares for us. Morning and Holabird have a field there for use in an emergency, and we want everybody to know we're coming by way of the Golden Gate and not by the way of Vancouver."

While Fernald got busy with his instrument, Whitley read the message:

Tokyo reports on unquestioned authority that Holabird's round-the-world plane was wrecked on the beach at Patience Bay, Saghalien.

Whitley drew a hand across his eyes and read the message again, this time aloud.

Chaské slapped his hands. "Good!", he exclaimed, his Sioux blood speaking out. "No crocodile tears for me if Black Ben Trossac and his crooked crew have gone to smash with their plane. If I'm sorry for any one it's for Harkness."

"It's a piece of fake news!" declared Croffut.

"Must be," agreed Whitley. "And yet, the charted course would have carried the *World Beater* across Saghalien on the way to Kamchatka. The news is doubtful, and I hope it is false. I could not wish even Trossac such bad luck. I want him to reach Detroit, but I want to be on the field with John Morning to see him land. No, I will not believe this."

There was little more work for a pilot, on the

Eagle, than there is for the helmsman of a schooner hustling along before the wind of the southeastern trades. Every two hours, however, Whitley and Croffut relieved each other in the forward cockpit.

Along toward noon, as his watch had it, Whitley put aside his log book and leaned over Fernald's table. A July calendar by days was hanging there, and it flaunted the legend, "Wednesday, July 7." With his pen Whitley drew lines through the day and date and wrote in, "Tuesday, July 6."

"What's the idea?" demanded Fernald.

"Why," said Whitley, "we crossed the hundred and eightieth meridian hours ago; and there, going east, we gain a day. We have stolen twenty-four hours from the sun, Fernald. In other words, we are having a couple of Tuesdays."

"By thunder," cried the wireless man, "that's right! But it will be Wednesday, regular, bona-fide Wednesday in about five hours, Frisco time."

"And we'll be in Detroit some time that day if all goes well."

At nine p. m., reckoning by Golden Gate time, they were within wireless touch of San Francisco. Everything there was reported in readiness for the *Eagle*. On top of this satisfying news came the mystifying report: "Holabird's machine within an hour of Vancouver. All well aboard. Considerable betting as to which machine will land first on the continent—even money."

CHAPTER XXVI

AN EASY ONE

THE report received by wireless that Holabird's machine was within an hour of Vancouver was not taken without a grain of salt by the party on the *Eagle*.

"What do you know about that?" growled Croffut. "How about that Tokyo report? Plain bunk, Whit; just as we had doped it out. What good could it do Trossac or Holabird to peddle such stuff?"

"That's an easy one, Pink," said Fernald. "If Trossac had been wrecked, he couldn't be in the race; and if he wasn't in the race, then naturally we wouldn't have to be in such a hurry. Trossac, plugging along at his best, would gain on us as our speed let down."

"Not at all, Ferny," objected Croffut. "Look. There's 'velvet' to be had for every hour Whit cuts down the time, no matter whether Trossac is in the race or not. Holabird and Trossac must know that, for mighty little connected with John Morning's business seems to have got away from them."

"Take it from me," put in Chaské, "there's something else back of that Tokyo report. It was raw spoofing and done for a purpose."

Fernald had lifted one earphone while talking with

Croffut; he now dropped it again and squared around to his table, pressing a handkerchief to each side of his head. Suddenly he chuckled and his pencil began traveling over a sheet of blank paper.

"There you are, captain," he said, tucking the message into Whitley's hand.

And this is what Whitley read:

Bully work! Now come with a rush on the
wings of the Morning. J. M.

John Morning was at the Statler in Detroit. Directly across the street, at the Tuller, was Chauncey Holabird. It was Wednesday forenoon, and a very feverish forenoon it was proving to be. The latest fight between the two giants of the transportation world was drawing closer and closer to a tremendously exciting finish.

Telegraph messengers were going and coming between the clicking instruments and rooms on the sixth floor of each hotel.

Occasionally Morning would step to a window and look across at his rival, Holabird. This happened on receipt of cheering news from Whitley, flashed by wireless as the *Eagle* speeded homeward across the continent. And Holabird, now and then, would bob up in his own window with exultant gestures if Ben Trossac registered an advantage.

This boy play was an index of the state of mind of staid, dignified men who could sit through an eleven-inning ball game and never lose their heads.

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Upon this round-the-world flight each had spent money like water, hoping to worst a mighty rival.

With Morning were Luke Evarts and Arden Oswald. Down at the newspaper offices bulletins were being posted as news of the flyers came to hand. Detroit was talking of nothing else but that brain-staggering feat now being accomplished by Whitley and Trossac for Morning and Holabird.

With each passing minute as the airplanes raced across the country the situation grew more and more tense. The very air was surcharged with quivers and thrills.

Evarts could not sit still, but constantly paced up and down. Morning pretended to be calm and collected, yet industriously snipped off the end of one perfecto after another and absent-mindedly forgot to light any of them.

Oswald was at the telephone, or signing for messages, or writing out reports for the press.

"Whitley got away from Frisco at three this morning," said Evarts as he walked. "What the dickens was he doing there from ten to three?"

"Say, Luke," answered Morning, "you can't remember a thing for ten minutes hand running. What you need is a shot of bromide. You saw Whitley's message. He had to stay in San Francisco to overhaul the port engine. Trossac got away from Vancouver in the lead, but had to land somewhere in Wyoming to make a few repairs himself."

"Then Whitley took the lead and passed him," put in Oswald. "Blamed lucky, I call it, that the

flyers are having their troubles over dry land and not during their jump across the Pacific."

"Whitley was forced down again at Omaha," went on Evarts, "and lost more time."

"More engine trouble," said Morning. "What's that message, Oswald?" he inquired, as a boy left after delivering a yellow envelope.

"*Eagle* reported as passing Des Moines," returned the newspaper man.

"Hang it," growled Evarts, looking at a map. "Whitley is too far north to make a bee line between Frisco and here. That's what I call fooling away mileage."

Oswald took in another telegram. "Trossac just cleared Des Moines," he reported.

"It's nearly neck and neck, but Whitley has a shade the best of it," Morning jumped up and went to the window. Chauncey Holabird, across the way, met his rival's grin with a scowl. "The hide of that Little Gray Fox is as good as nailed to the barn," chuckled Morning.

"There's a man downstairs who wants to see you on important business, Mr. Morning," Oswald announced from the phone. "His name's Murgatroyd."

"Don't know him and don't want to see him," snapped Morning.

Oswald sent the word down; then, three minutes later, a square-jawed, youngish man sauntered in. He was smoking a cigarette.

"I'm Murgatroyd," he announced.

"Get out!" said Morning; and then, "Wait a min-

ute." He looked at the caller closely. "Haven't I seen you somewhere before?" he asked.

"Sure, in Chi," answered Murgatroyd. "I'm the guy that tried to get a job as mechanic with Whitley. Get me now? Say, I can peddle some red-hot news straight from Holabird's camp. I need the kale, Mr. Morning, and I'll let you in on it for a thousand bucks. How about it?"

"On your way!" ordered Evarts.

"Hold on," called Morning. "I'll give you five dollars for what you know, Murgatroyd, and twenty more if I think it was worth listening to after you've told it."

"Nothing doin'," said Murgatroyd, and strolled out.

But he had hardly closed the door on himself before he was back again.

"It's about the plane that was wrecked and said to be the *World Beater*," he explained. "Want to be wised up on that for a thousand, Mr. Morning?"

"Twenty-five," answered Morning; "take it or leave it."

"Oh, gee!" mourned Murgatroyd. "Squeezing the iron men out of you capitalists is like getting blood from a turnip——"

"And cut it short, Murgatroyd," broke in Morning fretfully; "this is my busy day."

"Well," said the informer, "that was really the *World Beater* that was wrecked on the beach at Patience Bay. There were three *World Beaters*, one here in Detroit and the other two planted along the

route. Number two was at Vassigny, France. Number one was junked out of L'Estrée, and Trossac and his crew came on in number two. On Saghalien Island he came down and picked up number three, smashing number two on the bay shore. Now, coming from Vancouver, Trossac is using *World Beater* number three, but not a soul can tell it from number one. Why all these *World Beaters*? It's like this: That model was built for speed and was too light to stand the gaff of the big flight. So the extra machines were hidden away, and all Trossac had to do was to scramble the one he had used and jump into another that was brand-new and had only been used on a test flight. Holabird tried his blametest to get a fourth bus manufactured to put in hiding near Trepassey Bay, but couldn't make it. That's why your machine was taken over by Trossac in Newfoundland—he was scared to make the Atlantic jump in anything but a new plane. He intended, as he eventually did, to resume, in France, the trip in a *World Beater*, and he expected that Whitley would once more pilot the *Eagle*."

"Where did you get all this?" demanded Morning, who had listened with deep interest.

"I'm in the know, that's all," said Murgatroyd. "If I could have frozen out that Indian, Chaské, and shipped on the *Eagle* as mechanic, then your bus would have been first aground in a smash. Holabird hasn't done right by me, and that's why——"

"Here's fifty dollars," cut in Morning; "you've surprised me out of the extra twenty-five. Good-by."

Murgatroyd pocketed the money and vanished. Evarts slapped his hands. "Why," he cried, "Holabird had to have three machines to race with ours! He knew we had him right from the start."

"It's a good story," declared Oswald, "and I'm getting right after it."

"Don't play-me up as sobbing about it, Oswald," said Morning. "I expected some ground and lofty juggling from Holabird and Trossac, and it was agreed at the start that each of us could go as far as he liked. And, anyhow, we backed men rather than machines."

"Let's go down and have lunch," Evarts suggested.

"Can't leave," Morning objected. "Have lunch for three sent up here. You order it, Luke. And mind this: When the *Eagle* reaches Indiana we're for the field to welcome Whitley and his bunch with the glad hand."

"Half of Detroit will be at the field," said Oswald, busy with his scoop regarding the three *World Beaters*.

Following luncheon there came a hiatus in Detroit so far as news from the contesting flyers was concerned. A pall of silence seemed to have fallen over both racing airplanes. They were "on the silvery side," as aviators say when above the clouds, and so high they could neither be seen nor heard from below.

"Maybe Whitley has crashed somewhere in the

rural districts," hazarded Evarts, his anxiety taking a morbid tinge.

"Don't be so cheerful about it, Luke," said Morning. "If that's the reason we're not getting any word, then both machines have gone to smash."

"It's my idea," put in Oswald, "that both pilots are playing for advantage. Now that they are getting near the goal, each is keeping his position dark to mystify the other."

"Holabird is starting for the landing field!" cried Evarts, looking from the window; "he's just getting into a car."

Morning jumped to his feet and caught up his Panama. "Maybe he has received some word from Trossac," he said in a worried tone. "We'd better be moving that way ourselves."

All three of them went down and got into Morning's car, which had been parked at the curb since nine o'clock. It was nearly three o'clock when they threaded their way through thousands of machines that were posted about the huge field and left the car to get inside the cleared area and appropriate three folding chairs near the *Eagle's* hangar. Not far away was a small army of reporters and photographers. Half a dozen moving-picture men were running up and down, seeking the best location for their cameras.

The number of people assembled to see the start of the race could have been multiplied by one hundred and the total would have fallen far short of the number assembled to witness the finish. Girdling

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the earth in four days was sufficiently startling to make the broadest appeal.

"It's a red-letter day in the history of aviation," declared Arden Oswald, "and marks the beginning of a great new epoch. A medal ought to be struck in commemoration of this event."

At this moment, Holabird, accompanied by half a dozen friends, came upon the field and started across it toward the other hangar.

"I say, Chauncey!" called Morning; "are all three of your machines coming in or only one?"

Holabird halted with a jerk and looked around. "Just one, John," he answered; "but if I had three, they'd all get in ahead of your bus."

"Pretty punk, that bus of mine, eh?" Morning laughed. "Your man Trossac understood that when he ran off with it at Trepassey."

Holabird, evidently, was in no mood for persiflage—especially when the shafts struck home. He moved on.

Overhead a whole flock of local planes was cutting airy curlicues and awaiting the chance to start westward and escort the victor home. Suddenly these machines ceased their stunt performances and, like a lot of startled birds, whirled and darted away in the eye of the sun. This was the crowd's first intimation that the winner of the race had been sighted.

A few minutes passed and then, high aloft, one of the record breakers could be seen charging out of the west. At first it was a mere speck against a dazzling sky and might have been anybody's plane;

but as it drew nearer and developed lines and bulk, Luke Evarts hurled himself into the air and emitted a jubilant yell.

"It's ours, Morning!"

The tension was over for John Morning. The uncertainty that had tried his veteran nerves was past. He lighted one of his black cigars, hitched his chair into the shade of the hangar wall and smiled with supreme content.

"Once more I've got Holabird's scalp," he remarked to Oswald. "I wish I was close enough to tell him to congratulate me."

Accompanied by the welcoming planes, the *Eagle* came roaring on. It effected as beautiful a landing as any aviator ever made, taxied to within fifty feet of its hangar and came to a halt. A bedlam of cheers went up from the great crowd and there was a tremendous honking of automobile horns. Morning and Evarts moved out to the plane and the former was first to take Whitley by the hand.

"You've done the trick, Whitley," said Morning. "Three twenty," he added, looking at his watch. "Eighty hours! Around the world in eighty hours—to the minute! I guess we've given the world something to think about."

"Where's Dickson?" queried Whitley.

"Here!" called the lawyer, pushing forward.

"Are we too late, Mr. Dickson?" This from Tascha, with a catch in her voice, as she descended from the cabin.

"No, Miss Burnett," answered Dickson, "but we shall have to hurry. Are you coming, Whit?"

"Yes," said Whitley.

"Here, don't be in a hurry!" cried Morning. "What's the——"

"Talk with Croffut, Mr. Morning," Whitley returned. "He'll explain. I'll see you later."

"Well, by gad!" muttered the gentleman of large affairs, staring after the trio of disappearing figures. "He doesn't seem to remember that I owe him more than a hundred thousand dollars—just how much more it will take me some time to figure. In what part of the world did he pick up that boy in the long coat?"

"In Siberia, Mr. Morning," spoke up Croffut. "The 'boy' happens to be Miss Natalia Burnett, and she's hurrying to reach her father, who is critically ill. Whitley isn't thinking about the hundred thousand now—he hasn't time. But here are a Sioux chief and an assistant aviator with a great longing for ten thousand apiece."

"You'll get more than that," averred John Morning. "From Detroit to Detroit by way of Siberia in eighty hours entitles you to something really substantial. But, dash it! I wanted to appear in the movies' current events with my hand on my chief pilot's shoulder, the airplane in the background. Line up here with the Sioux chief. You, too, Fernald. Don't lean on me, Evarts; just smooth out your whiskers and try to look natural. Let 'er go!" he added to the man behind the camera.

CHAPTER XXVII

MAGIC OF A VOICE

MRS. TROWBRIDGE had been told of the rescue of Tascha, and had been shown the message from Whitley stating that she was coming with him to Detroit in the *Eagle*. But the worthy lady, eager though she was to believe it, was nevertheless afflicted with doubts. It had taken Tascha more than a month to reach Yerma from San Francisco, so it was preposterous to think that she could make the return journey in two days.

At five minutes to four, that Wednesday afternoon, the eminent specialist again called at the flat. He was mildly excited, and informed Mrs. Trowbridge that Mr. Burnett's daughter had just arrived in Detroit by airplane and was even then on the way to Helen Avenue.

"How do you know, doctor?" fluttered Mrs. Trowbridge.

"Mr. Dickson called me on the phone a few minutes ago and asked me to be here when he came with Miss Burnett."

"I'll not believe it," declared Mrs. Trowbridge tearfully, "until I see that blessed child with my own eyes!"

This proof was presently afforded her. A motor

car rolled up to the curb and halted. Dickson sprang out, assisted a boy in an aviator's helmet and a long, outlandish cloak to alight, and then these two were followed by Dave Whitley. Mrs. Trowbridge and the doctor were peering from a front window.

"I told you, doctor," said Mrs. Trowbridge brokenly. "My niece has not come. There's David, but he does not seem to have brought Tascha with him."

The bell rang, and Mrs. Trowbridge hastened to the door and drew it open. The "boy" pulled off the aviator's helmet and, with a glad cry, threw a pair of arms about Mrs. Trowbridge's neck.

"Why Tascha, Tascha!" sobbed the aunt, convinced at last. "But why have you cut off your hair?" she asked, after a moment; "and why are you wearing such clothes, my dear?"

"Mr. Cummings, the American consul in Vladivostok, thought it would be best for a woman going to Yerma to go like this," the girl explained. "But father—I must see him at once."

Dickson introduced the specialist. "You and I will go in alone, Miss Burnett," the doctor said.

The two left the front room, and Mrs. Trowbridge turned and gave her hands to Whitley.

"I can scarcely believe that you are back again, David," she said. "It is wonderful to think that you saved Tascha and have so quickly restored her to her father. Almost a miracle, I call it."

"A latter-day miracle," Whitley answered, "worked by science and invention."

"And human enterprise and daring, Dave," put in Dickson.

"Did Tascha bring the money Orloff had for Brother Holway?" went on Mrs. Trowbridge.

"Yes," said Whitley; "thirty thousand pounds in Bank of England notes and twenty thousand in paper rubles. The rubles are not very valuable, but the notes, although worth much less than their face value, can be exchanged for United States money to take care of Mr. Burnett's obligations."

"That means several hundred thousand dollars' profit for Burnett," Dickson put in. "All his troubles are past and gone, Mrs. Trowbridge. Now if we can make him understand that——"

At this moment the doctor reëntered the room. He was smiling.

"What magic there is in a voice!" he murmured. "Miss Burnett had only to kneel by the bed, put her arms around her father and speak to him, and instantly his reason returned and he emerged from the unconsciousness that had held him so firmly for the last few days. His daughter's presence and love were all he needed. Now, with care, I can promise you that Mr. Burnett will recover. He is asking for you and Mr. Whitley, Dickson. But don't stay long."

The lawyer, the aviator, and Mrs. Trowbridge made their way to the sick room. Burnett's thin, drawn face was wreathed with happiness. A new hope had been born in his soul and was reflected in his eyes. He had reached the brink of the other

world, and then Tascha had taken him by the hand and led him back into this one. There was something to live for now.

"We owe you a lot, Dave, Tascha and I," said Burnett in his thin, unsteady voice. "As soon as I am able to leave my bed and give away the bride I want that wedding to take place. Even if you lost out in France and England that need not make any difference. Tascha has brought the money Orloff had for me—and it's enough for all of us."

"In eighty hours, Mr. Burnett," observed Dickson, "Whitley circumnavigated the globe, put his signature on the scroll of fame, and earned a fortune. The best thing that ever happened to him was his failure to get that job across the pond."

Whitley's happiness was complete. So was Tascha's, if her radiant face was to be believed. She got up from the bedside, put her arms around Whitley, and kissed him.

"Do you remember that last time, *lubesnoi*?" she asked. "It was in Yerma just as we were about to leave the prison. My dear father," she went on demurely, "must have his every wish gratified. So when he is ready, Davy, I shall be. Perhaps in two weeks——"

"Two weeks to get married when it takes only eighty hours to go around the world?" Whitley laughed. "It seems a long time, but I'll try and be patient."

He shook hands with Burnett and left the room

with Dickson. On their way through town to the flying field they learned that Trossac had just landed.

He had lost the sixteen-thousand-mile race by two hours and fifteen minutes!

At the Flyers' Club that evening a reception was tendered to John Morning, David Whitley, Pinkney Croffut, Chaské Waukon, Luke Evarts, and Jimmie Fernald. Again the club rooms were crowded with aviators, airplane enthusiasts, and newspaper men. Chauncey Holabird had been invited, but had excused himself on the plea of urgent business in New York. Trossac, Rufus, and Bingham had gone with Holabird. Little Harkness, the radio man, was the only member of the *World Beater's* crew to appear at the reception, and congratulated Whitley upon his success.

Whitley shook hands with admirers until his arm ached, and he talked until his jaws were tired. Late in the evening there was an elaborate banquet served in the big dining hall. The diners sat at three long tables, and the centerpiece of the middle table was a model of the *Eagle* done in roses and smilax. Following the feast, and when cigars were comfortably going, a gentleman arose at the head of the middle table and drummed upon the table top with his knuckles. This gentleman was that erect, military personage who held the stakes and who was called the "colonel."

He made a few witty remarks, after the usual manner of a good toastmaster, and called upon John

Morning, "the pioneer of speed in the new empire of the air," to tell those present something about his superplane.

Talking on his feet was nothing new for John Morning. He did it well. He regretted that his friend Chauncey had been compelled to take a fast train for New York, but it was nothing new. Chauncey always had pressing business somewhere in those occasional moments when he came a cropper.

The one trouble with Chauncey was that he lacked discernment in picking the right men to put over his schemes. He turned down Luke Evarts, the eminent construction engineer, who showed him plans for the superplane; and he had a chance to go after Captain Whitley, the famous ace, but he had gone after Trossac instead. Morning told of the months of hard work put in at the private plant near Hammond; and how, out of that work, the masterful Evarts evolved the *Eagle*. He gave an account of the first real trial trip from Chicago to Detroit, in which the plane had more than fulfilled expectations; then he left the plane on that morning of July Fourth when Whitley and his crew had departed for Newfoundland on the first leg of the long voyage.

"A good deal of criticism has been directed at my friend Chauncey and his chief pilot," Morning went on, "because of unsportsmanlike conduct. Now that is wrong. It was in our agreement that 'anything goes.' That had to be there, because Chauncey had three planes to use in beating our one *Eagle*. He and Trossac distrusted the *World Beater* from the

first. They knew they had a faster plane than ours, but that it hadn't the staying powers for such a long flight. Two of the planes were planted along the course, neatly hidden, and waiting only for Trossac and his crew to happen along and use them. So, gentlemen, the *World Beater* that left Detroit on July Fourth is not the *World Beater* that arrived to-day from the west. I will ask Mr. Harkness if I am correct?"

"You are," said Mr. Harkness.

"But that is all right," continued Morning. "The joke is on me. Whitley played a square game for me, and he won out. But if he had lost you would not have heard John Morning sob. I went into this with my eyes open."

This was the first intimation Whitley and his crew had had that Trossac was using three machines. It was enlightening, and made clear the report from Tokyo which they had picked up in the air.

Whitley was asked by the colonel to talk about the flight. The chief pilot was very brief. It would have taken him eighty minutes to tell all that had happened during the eighty hours, so he flew over most of the adventures and touched only the high points.

Croffut was called on after Whitley sat down, and he was rather more talkative. When he had made an end, Chaské arose and delivered a speech that consisted of eighteen words: "Our skipper told us what to do, and we did it. That's the reason we got in first."

Then Harkness, sole representative of the defeated faction, found his feet and spoke tactfully and like a good sport. He gave honor where honor was due. "The *Eagle* was a better machine than our three, and better handled," was the burden of his remarks, "and that's why she won."

After the speechmaking, the colonel acquitted himself of his duties as stakeholder by passing two checks, drawn for half a million each, to John Morning. Then John Morning handed his personal checks to Whitley, Croffut, and Chaské.

"Fernald," he explained, "comes in on another deal, along with Evarts on the ground floor of a vast new project. And my chief flyer and his crew of the *Eagle* are not to leave my service. It is in my power to offer them opportunities which they cannot think of turning down."

There was applause at this. When he left the table and had a moment to himself, Whitley stole a glance at his check. It was for one hundred and seventy thousand dollars; Whitley realized that the generous magnate had taken a liberty or so with the principles of arithmetic in determining the amount due him. One hundred and seventy thousand dollars! He felt a hand tugging at his sleeve and turned to find Croffut beside him, wide-eyed and jubilant.

"Fifty thou, Whit; that's my draw!" he gulped. "I guess that's some pay for eighty hours' joy-riding! I'm for John Morning; and he can consider the opportunities he's going to throw my way as already bagged in both mitts. And there's little

Chaské Skywalker. He's got a piece of paper worth twenty-five thousand dollars tucked away with the rest of his wampum. It was a lucky afternoon for us, over there in Paris, *n'est-ce pas?*"

"The money end of the proposition, Pink," said Whitley, "is the least of it."

"Sure!" agreed Croffut. "There are the 'opportunities.' Say, I'm tied to John Morning for life."

But this was not what Whitley had in mind. He was thinking of Burnett and Tascha, and of what the *Eagle* had done for them. That would be remembered when science, invention, and daring enterprise had turned more leaves in the great book of aviation, and even the flight around the world in eighty hours had been forgotten.

THE END

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