

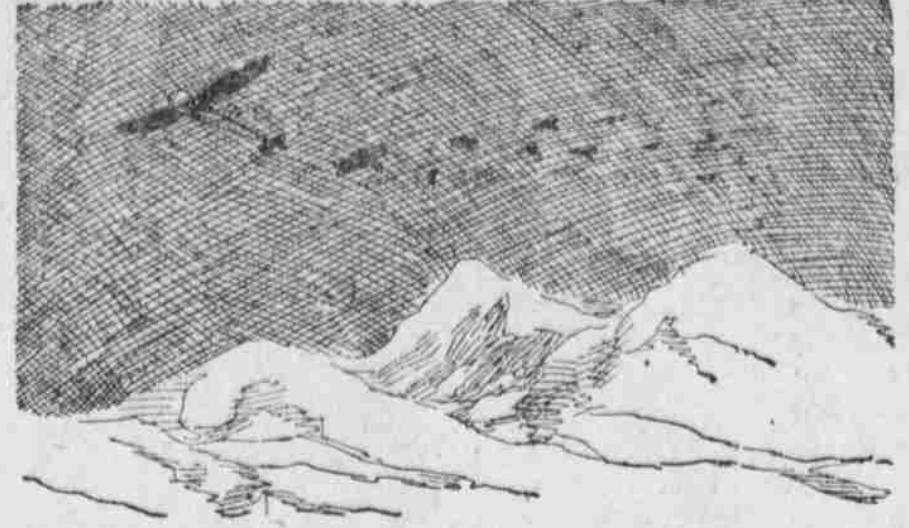


The Flying Man

by Harry Irving Greene

Author of "The Lash of Circumstance," "Barbara of the Snows"

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SYNOPSIS.

Professor Desmond of the Peak observatory causes a great sensation throughout the country by announcing that what appears to be a satellite is approaching at terrific speed. Destruction of the earth is feared. Panic prevails everywhere. The satellite barely misses the earth. The atmospheric disturbance knocks people unconscious, but does no damage. A leaf bearing a cabalistic design flutters down among the guests at a lawn party. It is identical in design with a curious ornament worn by Doris Fulton. A hideous man-like being with huge wings descends in the midst of the guests. He notices Doris' ornament and starts toward her. The men fear he intends some harm to Doris and a fierce battle ensues, in which Tolliver and March, saviors of Doris, and Professor Desmond are injured. The flying man is wounded by a shot from Tolliver, but escapes by flying away. A farmer reports that the flying man carried off his young daughter. People everywhere are terror-stricken at the possibility of evil possessed by the monster. The governor offers a reward of \$50,000 for his capture, dead or alive. Putnam is the first of the aviators to respond. After a thrilling chase in the air he is thrown from his machine by the flying man and killed. Doris tells March of awakening in the night to see the face of the monster at her window.

CHAPTER VII.—Continued.

"And you saw—"
"HIM. Yes, I saw him as plainly as I did that night on the lawn when he fell from space, only now he was a hundred times more hideous. And he was making mouths at me or trying to say something or—Oh, I don't know what he meant, but anyway I jumped out of bed and ran to father's room. He came back instantly with the gun he has just bought, but there was nothing in sight then. Why is he haunting me? What can it be? The first night on the lawn he seemed to single me out from everybody else, and now again in the midst of all these horrible things he is doing he comes to my window at midnight. I am frightened, dreadfully frightened and do not want to be alone a moment. I had to call up some protector to be with me this afternoon, so I rang you. Can you imagine what the creature means?" A cold, prickly chill had enveloped March, a nameless fear at the thought of the monster's apparently strange fascination for the sweet woman at his side, but while his voice was more or less serious as he answered her he tried to present the matter in as light a form as possible. "I am inclined to think like this. It is probable that your trinket with its peculiar likeness to a leaf with which he was familiar in his own world and which may have some symbolic meaning among his people, first attracted his attention and curiosity to you. And so having noticed you—March had to start his love making at the first opportunity—"and your sweetness and prettiness—" She checked him.

"As if a monstrosity like him could appreciate what we are pleased to call prettiness among ourselves, even assuming that any of us possess it. Why, we must look as grotesque to him as he does to us, with our wingless bodies, earth-bound forms, clumsy looking limbs, queer flapping garments and small-like gait."

"Very well. We will assume then that you, personally, were a secondary consideration and that he was merely fascinated by the trinket. That should relieve your mind, and nothing is simpler than to leave him the ornament outside as a peace offering. Also, you must remember this house is the place where he received his first introduction to human beings, and last night in his prowling he probably chanced this way and stopped for a moment merely out of curiosity."

"But why come to my window?"
"Probably through coincidence pure and simple. Perhaps he merely wished to see what was inside. He sees like a bat in the dark, you know."

"She removed her hands from her face and once more sat composedly. "Of course it may be that what you have said is true, since all any of us can do is guess. However, I think differently. I think it was a desire for revenge that brought him here, for that he is malevolent and revengeful there can be no doubt. And it was here, remember, that he was first attacked, attacked before he had offered violence to us. You know Clay started it by shooting him, and Clay was here for several days afterward while he was getting well. It is possible that the creature knew that to be so, does not know that Clay has left and came here looking for him. And then again perhaps he was after me once more. Oh, I don't know, but I am terribly worried."

"Doris!" he cried almost fiercely. "Fathers are all right enough as far as they go, but what you need above all other things is one who can be at your side in the darkness as well as the light, someone who can guard you, protect you and comfort you in times of distress like this as no father can—"

"Which I suppose means that I need a husband," she broke in quietly.

"You have guessed marvelously."
"And therefore that the husband should by rights be you."

"Unquestionably."
A faint smile rippled across her face.

"Very well, sir. I will file this application among the others, and a little later if I find I have need of such an

assistant I will be pleased to communicate with you further," she responded in a monotonous, businesslike voice. She leaned forward, looking down the street. "There comes Clay," she announced.

Displeasure amounting to anger, and disappointment approaching disgust pervaded Alan's being. After ten days of not seeing her and now, just when they were getting started on the right conversational track to have an exceedingly disagreeable third person who had just left her house after staying there constantly for days appear upon the scene was somewhat more than irritating. He would rather Clay had been the Flying Man himself, for being armed now he could have resented the intrusion of the other with vigor, whereas he must now tamely submit. However, he would ascertain if this was Doris' bringing about.

"Did you not expect him?" he inquired casually. Her head shook.

"No. It is entirely of his own motion."

"Have you told him of your experience of last night?"
"I have told no one but father and you."

"And are you going to tell him?"
"I do not know—not at present at least. He might infer that the Flying Man was searching here for him and be worried because of its worry to me. I shall say nothing to him about it at present." She arose and went to the head of the steps to greet him, smiling, her hand outstretched. He bowed over it, muttering something inaudible to March's ears, then nodded to him.

"Hardly expected to see you again so soon," he said drily to the latter with one of his queer looks. The whole affair exasperated March. But a few hours before he had confessed to the other man that he had not heard from Doris for days, and it must look to Tolliver as though his rival, not daring to compete with him face to face, had kept out of his sight until his back was turned, when he had at once rushed to her upon the first information that there was nobody upon the field to dispute with him. Doris, however, relieved the situation somewhat.

"Yes, I sent for him and he was good enough to come. We had not had a little visit for some time—we have both been rather busy, you know." Clay did not seem in the least disturbed at the possibility that he had interrupted a tete-a-tete.

"It was frightfully lonesome to be by myself after the delightful society of the past week, so I just absent-mindedly followed up my thoughts until I found myself here," he laughed. "Beastly the way that flying animal is misbehaving himself. Too bad I did not get him that first night and save all this commotion."

"If you had not attacked him it is quite possible no commotion would have arisen," she suggested mildly. He seemed a trifle put out at that view of it.

"I don't think that is quite appreci-



"He Was Making Mouths at Me."

ative. He was after you, reaching for you, and of course I could not permit anything like that from man or beast if the advance was repellent to you. You did not wish him to touch you?"
"Most certainly not. But diplomatic treatment might have been more effective."

"Miss Doris, when it comes to protecting our women folks from the creatures of this or any other world, I believe in the gunpowder treatment first and the diplomatic afterwards—if there is any afterwards. But if you think I was hasty—"

"I am not criticising, and you know how much I appreciated your motives. But let us talk about something else."

Before them the mountains rising almost as straight as a wall, vast, brooding, tumbled as an angry sea stretched away and away into the distance to where the everlasting snow-crowned peaks glistened marble white in the sunlight. Lazily the three upon the porch talked along in the warmth of the sunny afternoon, the girl seeming to forget her misgivings and laughing as lightly as had been her wont before the coming of the strange creature from another sphere to haunt her. In fact, the spirits of all three arose and for once all friction between the rivals for the time disappeared and Alan even condescended to accept the cigarette that Clay condescended to proffer him. Then in the midst of their light chatter a grotesque thing happened. Across the mid-afternoon sun a black cloud came floating, sprawling, malformed, a cloud which had huge batlike wings and a lean, outstretched arm that ended in a grasping hand. And as their tongues stopped as they stared at this apparition of the sky its shadow fell black upon the lawn, approached them with silent stealth, ran snakelike up the porch until the claw mounting to Doris' waist held her for an instant in its grasp, then releasing her passed on beyond the house. So startling and realistic was it all that March half arose to his feet with hands clenched as though to do battle, while Tolliver muttered a fierce imprecation beneath his breath and the girl grew pale as death. For a moment they looked at each other with startled eyes, then Tolliver forced a laugh.

"Uncanny that! Too realistic by half to be comfortable. But of course it was nothing but a fool cloud, and thank goodness we are not superstitious. Listen to that!" From overhead there came the peculiar clanking whistle of aerial propellers and stepping quickly to the lawn they gazed up. Two new aeroplanes were speeding towards the little treeless playground park a little way beyond which has been set aside for their use.

"It is North and Luther arriving," March told them. "I saw in the paper that they were expected to arrive today. North is an old friend of mine. Suppose we go down and see him. Doris quickly assented, and walking on at each side of her March and Tolliver passed out of the gate and wandered towards the alighting place of the planes. Her head uncovered, her glossy hair glinting opalesque in the sunlight, exceedingly fair of face and faultless of form in her perfectly fitting gray gown, no man passed her without a second admiring look, few women without secret envy. And proud of her indeed were the two who walked so erectly at her side.

They found North busy about his machine, tightening this, loosening that, testing everything. He was a good-looking young fellow of about twenty-five, determined of face and snowy of form and an aviator of the foremost rank, although almost the antithesis of the ill-fated Putnam. For where the dead man had been boastful North was modest, where one had been reckless the other was merely brave, and where obstinacy had been predominant in the former in the man they now saw cool determination held sway. He greeted March enthusiastically.

"Mighty glad to see you again, old man. Remembered that this was your home and have been thinking of you off and on all day. Maybe we won't have a good old time together once more when I get that million. Be good enough to introduce me." He removed his cap.

"Delighted to meet you, Miss Fulton." He gazed at Doris with frank admiration. "Don't know as I blame Alan and the Flying Man for making their headquarters here." He saw the shadow that flitted across the girl's face and hastened to apologize. "Beg pardon for mentioning such a disagreeable beast in your presence, Miss Fulton—I mean the Flying Man, not March. He isn't half bad when you get to know him. Glad to know you, too, Mr. Tolliver." He turned to Alan.

"I wonder if your friends will excuse you for just half an hour while you show me a decent place near here where I can get a bite to eat—merely for half an hour, you know." Doris bowed.

"If you will both promise to return at the end of that time—"
"It is a contract." He took Alan by the arm. "We have got to hurry to make it, and these are busy days with me, you understand. Somehow I always did have a hankering desire to be a millionaire and this is my first chance at it, he rattled on. Off went the loiterers the two friends went rapidly, leaving Clay and the girl to ramble about by themselves until they should return. For fifteen minutes thereafter, and very contrary to his usual manner, Tolliver seeming to be thinking deeply seldom spoke and she finally began to wonder mildly as to the cause of it.

"You are feeling quite recovered by now?" she inquired at length. He laughed with an uneasy note in his voice that caused her a slight perplexity.

"Yes, Miss Doris, that is, physically speaking. But mentally—"

He halted and seemed to be seeking the words he wished—"I am very much disturbed." She glanced at him quickly.

"May I ask about what?"
"You may. It is about yourself, Doris. Those six days at your house brought my mental disease to a climax, that is, if it be true that love is a disease, as some psychologists would make us believe. I restrained myself from speaking to you about it while I was at your house, although you may be very sure it was ever uppermost in my mind. Yet the time comes when love, like murder, must out. In my case that time has come, and now you must listen to me for a few moments before making me very



The Claw, Mounting to Doris' Waist, Held Her for an Instant in Its Grasp.

happy or very wretched." She averted her face that he might not see the warmth of her color, while he proceeded in a voice that was low and passion filled.

"It is impossible that you with your keen perception have not read my feelings towards you, for no woman could remain oblivious to such a patent state of mind as mine has been towards you. Doris, have you not known?" Her face still remained averted, her voice unchanged.

"I have realized that you have been kind, courteous, considerate. No woman could desire a more gallant admirer, since you assert that you have been such."

"You suspected nothing more than admiration?"
"I think I am by nature unsuspecting."

His dark face clouded with a slight displeasure. "Believe me, I am far too serious to jest. "Doris, I have been in love with you with a love that has increased with each passing moment since the day I first met you. I have tried to make you understand it in many ways, and I am convinced that you have known it for months. And always your uniform kindness, and often your apparent pleasure at seeing me have fanned my hope until I have sometimes thought I would not be over-presumptuous in speaking to you as I am doing now. And your solicitude—I might almost say tenderness in caring for me during those days when I was disabled determined me to out with it. Therefore I came this afternoon to tell you that I love you better than all else, that I would sacrifice my life for you—and I want you to remember that phrase if the time should ever come when I shall be put to the test—and that above all other things earthly I wish to marry you." His eyes had brightened, his face grown pale with suppressed emotions, his rather sharply cut features seemed to have softened and the girl, glancing quickly sideways at him, thought him handsome indeed. She answered him quietly, half seriously, half lightly.

"It would make almost any woman proud and gratified to feel that so honorable a man so highly esteemed her. But I had not thought seriously of marrying—as yet."

They walked a dozen steps in silence. "Time," said he at last, "need not be considered the essence of this contract, should there be a contract between us. I will be content to await any length of time if I may only continue to hope. May I have that hope, Doris?"

"I will answer you tomorrow." "Today, now," he begged. But she only shook her head and he walked beside her with downcast eyes and moody face until presently he spoke again.

"I am going to ask you what you

may consider to be an impertinent question. Of course you may ignore it altogether, evade it or answer as you please without fear of offending me. Is there—are you—"

"No," she interrupted quickly. "I am not promised to anyone else, if that is what you are about to say." Instantly his face grew lighter and he even laughed a bit.

"Then to every cloud there is a silver lining after all. I was dreadfully frightened for a few moments and the relief is unspeakable. I beg your pardon for hinting at such a possibility. Until tomorrow at least I shall continue to cherish hopes—yes even after that no matter what the answer may be. Tonight, even though it be for the last time, I shall revel in my dreams."

"I think we had better turn back now," she said quietly.

Back at his machine after his lunch North was testing the motor, March watching him with mild interest. Suddenly the aviator clutched his friend's arm with a grasp of steel, his face down bloodless, his eyes staring, his voice coming in an awed whisper.

"Great Maker of Miracles! Look up there!"

CHAPTER VIII.

The Pursuit of the Planes.

March raised his eyes and an exclamation burst from his own lips as well. Just rising from the nearby range, where he had doubtless been roosting as he watched, swinging wide over the plain perhaps two miles distant and two thousand feet up, marvelously distinct in the tenuous mountain air, the Flying Man was floating and soaring with occasional sweeps of his thin pinions. Alan had witnessed his fight with the ill-fated Putnam, but North, now seeing him for the first time, was fairly awed at the wonderful poise and ease of the enemy's flight. For perhaps five seconds he gazed at him in fascination as he continued to squeeze his companion's arm with an undiminished grip, then released his hold and gasped:

"Shade of Darius Green! Now that's what I call flying!"

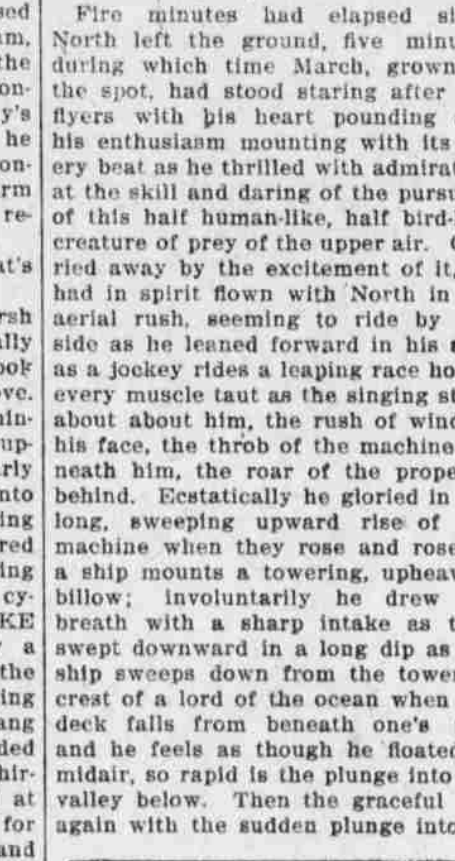
He was speaking in a fierce, harsh whisper, already working frantically at his engine. "Don't you dare look up—don't you dare make a move. They will all see him in another minute and then things will be turned upside down. I want to get away early and avoid the rush. He sprang into his seat and grasped his operating gear. "Make way, there," he roared at the stragglers about. "I am going to start, and when I do I'll be a cyclone on wheels. Make way, MAKE WAY!" Like sheep charged by a raging wolf, they scattered before the great monoplane, and North, throwing on the power, shot forward and sprang lightly into the air like a bounded rubber ball. With his propeller whirling at topmost speed he turned at a dizzy slant and as a bee goes for its hive so did he head onward and upward for the marvel beyond that floated so buoyantly in the limpid air.

Instantly wild tumult and hoarse uproar burst forth. A hundred voices belted the discovery at once and in half a dozen seconds a score of aviators had leaped upon their seats with fierce shouts of warning to the fleeing crowd. Monoplanes and biplanes streaked the earth as they achieved their momentum for the upward leap. Twenty great propellers were whirling, churning, roaring all at once. Then rising in buzzing flight like a covey of mammoth grouse, they went whistling away in twos, threes and clusters in the wake of North, whose powerful "Blue Dragon" was splitting the air at nearly ninety miles an hour. Betts and Fairfield, the last to rise, collided before they had fairly left the ground and came down with a crash and a snapping of wires, themselves receiving awkward tumbles, but springing to their feet practically unhurt. Their machines, however, were temporarily disabled, and calling down maledictions upon their luck and each other's heads they could only stand rooted to the spot like other men and watch their companions in the mad million-dollar chase, when but for a little ill fortune they would have been close in their wake. The greatest opportunity of a lifetime had gone aglimmering because someone in his frantic haste had blundered. Small wonder that their rage was boundless.

And now once more the Flying Man seemed to have made up his mind to test them out en masse as he had done Putnam individually before he had slain him. For a minute after North had made his start the other remained like a spider suspended at the end of his thread, floating practically motionless in the air, then as the cloud of other planes arose and with his foremost foe more than half way to him he became active. Throwing himself forward upon a horizontal in much the same position as though he was about to swim in water, he gave a mighty beat of his wings. Like a darting fish he leaped forward a hundred feet, and starting in a mighty

circle went whistling out over the plain, his score of pursuers instantly changing their course to a tangent in order to cut him off. And seeing that they bid fair to do so the pursued one straightened his course into direct flight, and with his face turned backward over his shoulder led them straight away. For the next mile the Blue Dragon and about half a dozen of the fastest of the machines seemed to be holding their own with him, while the rest, unable to keep up the terrific pace, gradually strung out behind like a kite's long tail. Whither he was leading them none but himself could guess, but as for the pursuers they cared little provided they could keep him in sight. Whether they ran the race and fought the fight over jagged mountain tops or level ground made little difference to these seasoned sailors of the upper air sea, whose constant close association with death had made them almost contemptuous of it, and as grayhounds course a hare they went whistling on with strained muscles and eyes glued upon the black streak that sped as an arrow before them. Whether the pursued one was doing his best or only trifling with them they could only conjecture, but this much was evident, doing their own best as they were, they were barely holding their own with him. North, still retaining his initial advantage over his nearest competitor, could not see that he had gained a foot upon the enemy. To the spectators upon the ground and now far behind, the ones in the air appeared but distant floating specks. Then one by one even the specks disappeared and a great sobbing sigh of relaxation welled from the bosom of the watching city.

Five minutes had elapsed since North left the ground, five minutes during which time March, grown to the spot, had stood staring after the flyers with his heart pounding and his enthusiasm mounting with its every beat as he thrilled with admiration at the skill and daring of the pursuers of this half human-like, half bird-like creature of prey of the upper air. Carried away by the excitement of it, he had in spirit flown with North in his aerial rush, seeming to ride by his side as a jockey rides a leaping race horse, every muscle taut as the singing stays about about him, the rush of wind in his face, the throb of the machine beneath him, the roar of the propeller behind. Ecstatically he gloried in the long, sweeping upward rise of the machine when they rose and rose as a ship mounts a towering, upheaving billow; involuntarily he drew his breath with a sharp intake as they swept downward in a long dip as the ship sweeps down from the towering crest of a lord of the ocean when the deck falls from beneath one's feet and he feels as though he floated in midair, so rapid is the plunge into the valley below. Then the graceful rise again with the sudden plunge into an



Whither He Was Leading Them, None but Himself Could Guess.

air bank that opposed them with a solidness that caused the light plane to shudder and shiver at the impact, and wherein the machine again seemed a ship wallowing in a sea that had swept her from stem to stern, until shaking herself free she once more raced on, buzzing like a hornet.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Noble Enough for Him.

Miss—"Of course you know, Baron, that my father is not in the remotest degree a nobleman?" He—"Say no more, beautiful one. A man who will give his daughter a dowry of a million is noble enough for me."