



The Flying Man

by Harry Irving Greene

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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 man fears he intends some harm to Doris and a fierce battle ensues in which Tolliver and March, authors 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 possibilities for evil possessed by the monster. The governor offers a reward of \$200,000 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. North and a score of aviators arrive to enter the campaign. The reward is increased to a million.

CHAPTER VIII.—Continued.

He felt the bottom drop from his stomach as she fairly leaped across dead air pockets where all below was like a vacuum, covering the gap as a great runner upon skees sweeping down a mountain-side hurled himself by momentum alone over broad reaches of space. He felt himself bounding from invisible air crest to invisible air crest with the lightness of one who dances upon a rope, he felt the weight of momentum pressing against his side and pushing at him like a strong hand as a swerve to right or left took them a moment from their direct path. He looked down. Far below, so far that the trees looked like the toy trees upon the blocks which children play with, the people like toy men two inches tall, the beasts of the field like the beasts of a toy ark, the earth was rushing backward as the film of a moving picture speeds and vanishes. He looked up. Space, yawning and infinite, hazy, gauzy, mystery filled; the moon barely distinguishable and thin as a ghost floating far above like a bubble. He gazed to the west. The sun, copperish and vast, glowed as through a thin mesh. They were a mile above the point of starting—two miles above the level of the sea and almost even with the lower reaches of the eternal snows of the peaks. The chill of upper space pervaded him and he drew himself closer together as he heaved a quick glance at the man at his side. The aviator's face was drawn and deeply lined, his eyes glowing, his teeth clenched and his iron finger delicately fondling the wheel as his body swayed rhythmically to the slow roll of the machine. He looked ahead once more. Speeding in front of them as the shadow of a bird speeds was the horizontal form of the one whom they were pursuing, his body stretched straight as a shaft from a bow, his protean face turned over his shoulder, his huge eyes glowing with malevolent hate, his ape mouth working hideously. They heard his cry sweep past them in the hiss and whistle of the wind.

He rubbed his eyes and awoke as one from a dream. The hat of the specks had disappeared and he was gazing into empty space. He shook himself and smiled. Voices were buzzing excitedly all about him, the crowd surging restlessly about, yet so realistic had been the flight of his imagination that for the last few minutes he had been as oblivious of their presence as had they been upon one of the far distant bodies of space. But now finding himself upon earth once more he began peering about. Where was Doris? He must hunt her up immediately. In the scattering of the aviators he had for an instant felt a slight worry as to her safety, but the knowledge that Tolliver was with her and that his rival was fully competent to protect her had eased his mind. Now, however, he would search her out.

A hand fell upon his shoulder and he turned in his tracks. Professor Desmond was beaming upon him, and March took the proffered hand with genuine pleasure. "Ah, Professor! Quite able to be around once more, I see. I am glad. So you, too, were lucky enough to witness the pursuit of your unclassified mongrel of space by the wholly human flying-men." Desmond's eyes were still sparkling with excitement.

"Yes, I was fortunate enough to be rambling around the grounds when their ascent took place. It was stirring—almost exorcising. It thrilled me like a life and drum regiment marching away to do battle for my country. I longed to accompany them, to join in their dangers, to smell the powder of my own rifle and share the brunt of the shock. So today did I thrill with desire to sit beside one of them and hear the whistle of the wind. In fact, in spirit I did soar with the air fleet, closed my eyes and experienced quite vividly what I imagine are the sensations of our vanished

aviator friends. But I fear I am super-imaginative and that I am laying myself open to ridicule. Ah, I see you are smiling already. I had feared so." March's smile grew broader.

"I presume we were all carried a little beyond ourselves by our enthusiasm. But tell me what news you have." The astronomer tugged thoughtfully at his mustache.

"I don't mind letting you know, although I am not advertising it as yet, that is, generally speaking. I have conceived a little idea that the officials are putting into execution, but until it has been tested I am not inclined to speak much of it. However, the idea is this: As you know, we have quite a powerful search light at the observatory, and nights of late I have been in the habit of throwing it about the neighboring cliffs and letting it rest for a while here and there as a matter of experiment. Well, to make the story short, upon two occasions after it had remained stationary for a while I have found the flying creature within the center of the light. I had reasoned that its glare—being something new to him—might attract him as it does almost all night flyers, and it seems that it did, for he put himself before it and for several moments remained motionless and distinct, apparently as fascinated by its brightness as had he been an elk or other wild animal. That gave me my second idea and the authorities adopted it. They are rigging up a rapid-fire gun to be placed immediately over the searchlight and which will move in perfect conjunction with it, the gun to be so sighted that when an object is in the center of the spot light, the weapon will be automatically pointed at him. Then all one will have to do will be to operate the mechanism of the gun and a stream of high velocity bullets will traverse down the center of the lane of light and in all probability riddle the target, be it Flying Man or anything else. While the idea has not been demonstrated practically, I am fairly proud of the suggestion, for being purely mechanical it does away with the uncertainty of human aim. You have only to set your straight traveling light, await until your victim appears before it and then work your straight shooting gun. The bullets follow the central light rays and must of necessity find their mark."

Alan was impressed. "Theoretically at least it seems perfect. Within a mile's range I think it would prove effective upon a target the size of the one we have in mind. Yet how much more satisfactory it would be if we could catch him alive." The eyes of the elder man glistened rapturously.

"Ah, he would be invaluable, absolutely priceless. Science could afford to pay millions for him. Through him a veritable Gordian knot of mystery might be unraveled. Astronomy might leap forward a hundred years in a day and the other sciences advance in proportion. And if we could only learn to communicate with him by word of mouth—the speaker sighed and

stroked his half healed brow—"I would cheerfully forgive this everlasting scar if he would tell me the sights he has seen in his mad flight through space. Even his impressions of our world as he approached it would be of most absorbing interest. If but some lucky shot would break one of his wings and some of our horsemen could rope him as they do a wild steer—what a boon to us, what a boon!"

"Anatomically what would you expect to find from an examination of him?" Professor Desmond's face grew thoughtful.

"Anatomy is a science in which I am but little versed, yet in a general way I should expect to discover these

things: Lungs of great capacity and power. Thin and elastic but exceedingly tough wings compressible within a small compass and operated by tremendous muscles as strong as those of the legs of a horse. Scanty but exceedingly firm flesh. Legs similar to those of a wading bird, all bone and sinew, the bones strong, light and hollow. And while he appears to be fully seven feet tall I should not expect him to weigh as much as an ordinary man." March grinned reminiscently.

"Although he certainly possesses the strength of two, exclusive of his wings, which certainly have at least a one-mile power kick in a forward direction. His blood being partially cold might signify what?"

"That he possesses some of the characteristics of the reptiles, is of a rather low order of intelligence and more or less of a reptilian nature. For instance, there are few reptiles that possess a natural antipathy for man, and on the other hand neither do they fear him particularly. Unless he approaches them too closely they ignore him, if he does threaten them they either move slowly out of the way or prepare to combat him. Unless aroused, they are content to let him pass; if injured they often become exceedingly vindictive and greatly to be feared."

"Therefore, if Clay had not attacked him it is quite probable that he would not have attacked us."

"I so judge from what I saw of him that evening and from my later speculations. However, we must not be too severe on Clay, for his intentions were of the best." The Professor raised his glasses. "Is this not Miss Fulton and Mr. Tolliver approaching?"

Alan glanced in the direction indicated and saw the pair hurrying towards them. Almost upon a run the girl came, and taking the astronomer's hand clasped it warmly. Her cheeks were aglow, her eyes alight, her whole being radiating excitement and enthusiasm. She gave them no time to speak.

"Wasn't it glorious—the way they arose and swept after him! Oh, how I admired them! And most of all Mr. North—his dash and skill completely won me. I hope he wins the prize, for I know he is generous enough to divide a part of it with the others. If I were a man I should certainly be an aviator—although of course I would not permit any man whom I was interested in to be one for a moment. I prefer my friends should live in peace rather than die in pieces. And while you folks were simply staring stupidly after them I seemed to float and soar by their side with the wind in my ears and my whole body thrilling. I wish I could make you understand how exciting it was as we leaped and bounded through the air. But of course men cannot understand such sensations, they are too animalistic. And how is your forehead, Professor?" She stopped for lack of breath.

Desmond smiled down into her glowing face. "It is painless. You remember you helped cleanse it that night! Well, all the pain and soreness were banished by the magic of your touch and it was practically healed before it was bandaged." She sunk low with skirt spread, curtseying quaintly, old fashionedly.

"If the younger men were only half as gallant as the gentlemen of the generation that preceded them how happy we girls would be. You shall dine with us for that." She turned upon March. "And now your account of yourself, sir—your explanation for not searching me out."

March looked quickly from one to the other of the returned pair. As Doris appeared to be in the highest of spirits, so also did Tolliver, and jealousy stung him to the quick. Why this exuberance? Why Tolliver's unusually light manner and, as the searcher thought, triumphant smile? What had happened in his absence—what had passed between them? He answered her lamely enough.

"North and I had just returned from his luncheon when he espied the enemy. The rest had not seen him and we concealed our emotions until he had made his start. For a few moments following I, also, was absorbed in their flight and an afraid thought of little else, despite my lack of imagination. Anyway I did not know where to look for you and thought I would find you quickest by remaining here. Hope I was not particularly missed." The eyes of the girl danced.

"Did we miss him, Mr. Tolliver?" she challenged, laughing outright at the sight of Alan's face.

"Ahem," returned Clay affectedly. The Professor broke in.

"I am afraid I am to blame for keeping him from you. He had already started away when I seized him and like the Ancient Mariner detained him while I spun my tedious yarn. But I must be returning home. I shall not let you forget the dinner, Miss Fulton." He lifted his hat, bowed and went his way.

"We had better be going also," suggested the girl.

A shout from somewhere in the crowd drew all eyes in its direction, and simultaneously a hundred hands shot upward with index fingers pointing high across the plain. Far away, faintly visible, miles from the direction in which they had disappeared, were the returning specks circling back like a flock of wildfowl, multiplying in numbers, growing larger, more distinct with each moment passed. Three minutes and they were distinguishable as to form, the Flying Man still sweeping along a good half mile in advance, the planes which had fallen behind their fellows now in the lead by reason of the advantage gained in cutting short the broad turn of the pursued as he circled back. Half way back in the column they could distinguish the Blue Dragon glinting in the sunlight and steadily forging its way once more to the front. In the next minute the frenzied clamor of the crowd had lulled to an occasional excited yelp as breathlessly the mob strained its eyes upward. In her excitement Doris clutched a hand of each of her companions and clung to it convulsively.

The Flying Man was leading the sky grayhounds directly over them as though he wished all to see and marvel at his powers. Speeding true as an arrow, his great wings moving with the swiftness of a racing locomotive's pistons, he was heading almost directly for the place from which he had arisen before this wild follow-your-leader chase through the regions of the air began. That he was giving them a test one and all in both speed and endurance that he might hereafter know their powers and limitations and be governed thereby, none who watched the mad race questioned. And a grueling chase he was leading them, a chase where none except the highest skilled, the most iron nerved, the most enduring and the best equipped could have kept even in sight. He was nearly overhead now, perhaps a thousand feet above them, lying flat in the air with hands clasped upon his breast and legs stretched straight behind that his body might offer the least resistance to the atmosphere. To their ears the whistle of his wings sounded like the whistle of a flock of wild geese.

Then from close at hand the below of a mortar arose, jarring the earth, deafening their ears and rending the air with hurtling grape. Like a flash the flying one dodged as the missiles sang about him, and altering his course sharply seemed but a long streak as he cleaved the sky. A second mortar thundered, and at its beehiving the Flying Man, turning a complete summersault in the air, fell a hundred feet like a bird stricken in mid flight. A mighty sound arose from the crowd, a roar, a shriek, a wild scream of "They've got him, they've got him," but as a gymnast of the flying rings makes a complete revolution in his leap, so did the flying one recover himself and with a scream as shrill as their own go speeding once more mountainward. The next instant the air above was filled with the sound of the pursuing machines and the other mortars dared not fire for fear of mowing down their own. The Blue Dragon, now in the very foremost rank, was overhauling its few remaining competitors hand over hand.

Low over the top of the nearest ridge they flew straight into the face of the setting sun. One by one the pursuing craft hovered for an instant above the crest and then settled out of sight behind it, leaving those upon the plain gazing into the empty air where they had vanished. Then from the unseen region beyond the tops came the rattle of revolver shots fired irregularly, and for a minute more the crowd awaited breathlessly for some sign that one of the bullets had reached its mark, but another scattered volley faintly distinguishable because of distance, told them that the race was still being run. The sun sank behind the towering horizon, a deep shadow fell upon them and silently they turned and dispersed towards their homes.

The two men and the girl followed slowly after, each silent, each deep in thought. "Anyway it was a wonderful sight and I would not have missed it for worlds," she mused at length. "Why do you suppose he made that remarkable turn in the air? Was he hit?" Clay answered her.

"Probably barely winged. I shot a deer once that did the same thing—turned a complete summersault and then got up and went on faster than ever. He wasn't hurt much at any rate."

"And your opinion of it?" she asked of Alan.

"About the same." He was angry at Clay again and found it difficult not to show it. He had been invited to spend the afternoon with her and Clay had not, yet he had intruded himself with the utmost assurance and had clung closely to her throughout the afternoon—in fact had monopolized her—and what had taken place in the interval when they were alone together only themselves knew. March,

considering that this afternoon with her was rightfully his, had found a little consolation in the thought that his rival would eventually excuse himself and depart, and that he would thereby have the last hour of the day alone with her, but Tolliver showed no intention of departing, keeping his place close by her side and chatting easily and confidentially as they walked and ignoring March as much as he dared in his conversation. Angry and resentful, March spoke but little, and Doris, now that the excitement was over, had grown quiet as well.

At the gate she turned and gave them each a small, soft hand. "Father has returned, so I do not need to keep you longer this evening," she told them with an impartially distributed smile. "It was considerate of you to give me so much of your time, and I appreciate it. You must call again, both of you—soon. Good night." She released her hands and ran up the steps, turning at the door to wave them a last farewell. They touched their hats and turned away, March lighting a cigar and Tolliver a cigarette, and this time neither condescended to proffer a weed to the other. At the first corner they separated by mutual consent, and with a formal "good night" returned to their respective apartments.

That night was another miserable one for Doris. In her sleep she seemed to be suddenly lifted and borne bodily aloft by a powerful arm. Although the darkness was so intense that she could see nothing, she instinctively knew what it was that held her. About her the cold air was rushing, above her great pinions were beating, around her a void of unutterable blackness. Deathly horror and nausea overcame her and she tried to scream, but her voice was paralyzed and no sound issued from her lips. It was too horrible to be endured and she awoke trembling and perspiring from the nightmare. She could sleep no more that night. She turned on the light, and bolstered up by the pillows sat wide awake the long hours through.

CHAPTER IX.

The Story of North.

Some three hours later and by the early moonlight the planes began to straggle back. One by one, in twos and small companies, they arose over the crest again and settled softly upon the ground at the place from whence they had started, until all were accounted for with the exception of North and his big blue flyer. Those of the returned aviators who had stuck the longest in the chase reported that the last they had seen of the missing one he was still in pursuit of the fugitive, flying swiftly and steadily beneath the first pale moonlight and apparently still holding his own. As for themselves, they had at last realized the impossibility of over-

taking the apparently exhausted creature that night, and as their machines were beginning to suffer from divers complaints as a result of the long, gruelling run, they had deemed it advisable to return for repairs while yet they could, and also that they might hold a council of war as to what they should do next. In regard to North they expressed considerable concern, the fate of Putnam being still fresh in their minds. The dead man had been as skillful as the best of them, as well mounted, and had had the advantage of full daylight in his duel with the incomparable flying

man-bird, yet the latter had at all times held him at his mercy. For North, therefore, to follow him alone through the uncertain shimmer of the moonlight with a machine that must be suffering for rest, oil and adjustment, and especially when it was known that his enemy had owl eyes by dark, was on every hand conceded to be foolhardiness even by these men whose daily business was the risking of their lives; a foolhardiness not consistent with the missing one's every-day level-headed judgment. It was generally conceded that in the excitement of the chase and dazzled by the size of the reward he had forgotten his ordinary good judgment and had been lured on by the flying devil to unequal combat, and it was promptly decided that if he had not returned by morning a scout should be made for him far and wide.

But return in the morning he did, jaded and weary eyed, and merely shaking his head in a negative reply as to whether he had had any luck he left his machine in the care of a mechanic and went straight to his hotel for breakfast and a nap. At eleven o'clock, however, he arose as fresh as ever and started back for the field. March's office happening to be upon his route, he stepped inside for a moment's chat with his old chum. Alan was delighted at his safe return.

"Tell me about it," he urged.

The aviator laughed barelessly. "Oh, I was compelled to give it up at last and come down on those mountain tops by moonlight. Say, they were not exactly designed for alighting upon by an aeroplane, were they? Bad landing place, bad—shook things up quite a bit but escaped serious damage. Yes, I had quite a night of it." He suddenly seemed to think of something else, changed the subject and became enthusiastic. "By George, old fellow, that was a smashing pretty girl you had with you yesterday, that Miss Fulton, yours?" March sighed and shook his head dolefully.

"No. The field is open so far as I know. Want to enter your name?" North threw back his head and laughed, showing his perfect teeth.

"Fraid they'd scratch me as a ringer. Fact is, I am engaged to another one just about as pretty as she is and fully as sweet. That's the reason I am in this high flying business—not for love of it, I assure you, but for the coin of the realm that is to be made out of it. You see I would not be contented unless I could have Clara—that's her name, by the way—stepping along as high as the rest of them and wearing just as good things, and the only way I could think up whereby I could get the price in a short time was by skyscraping. She set up an awful holler when I told her what I was going to do, but I went at it just the same, because there was no way out of it. And if I land that million do you know the first thing I am going to do?"

"Get married, of course."

"Nope, that would be the second. First thing would be to buy an ax and chop that Blue Dragon of mine into silvers and then burn the silvers. I love the old girl all right, but she's a wanton and a devil when she gets to going and she'll lead me to destruction yet if I don't quit her cold first. So I'd take the ax and put temptation behind me with one fell swipe. Then I'd marry Clara in peace and live happily ever afterwards, and if I ever wanted any more excitement I'd learn submarine diving—I've had enough of being up high. But just because I'm engaged to a girl whom I would not trade for all the rest of them put together, that don't prevent me from appreciating some other thoroughbred high stepper when I see her. It is my innate love of the beautiful cropping out, you know, and besides that I am a normal human male animal. Hope I will meet her again before I leave or get killed." March nodded and turned to the telephone.

"Special 199," he called to the operator. North grew suspicious upon the instant.

"Now look here, March," he expostulated. "I am no Butinski, and if she is yours just say the word and—" "Keep still, you idiot. She is answering now." He faced the phone again and began speaking, evidently in reply.

"Yes, it is I and I am quite well, as usual. And, by the way, I have a friend here in the office this minute—one Mr. North, an alleged aviator. He returned safely this morning. I imagine he has a story to tell, but he will not unfold it to me. However, I think you might coax it out of him. He is quite sentimental about you, you know."

"Oh!" exclaimed Doris from her end of the wire.

(TO BE CONTINUED)

A Word of Regret.

"Women's hats are becoming smaller." "Yes," replied Mr. Growcher, "I'm sorry I ever complained about the big hats. They were something of a protection against the hatpins."



Taking the Astronomer's Hand, Clasp-ed It Warmly.



"They've Got Him! They've Got Him!"