

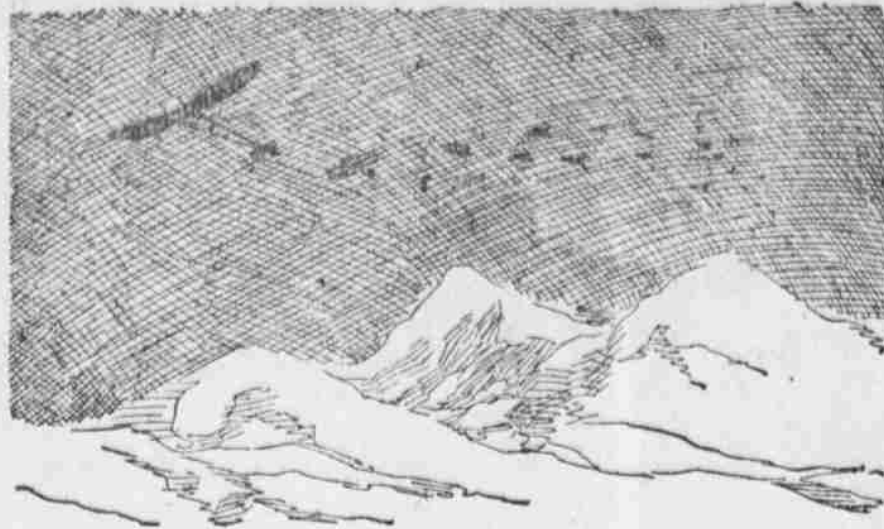


The Flying Man

by
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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, 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 possibility for 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. North and a score of other aviators arrive. The reward is increased to a million. The aviators find themselves outdistanced and outnumbered by the flying man. Artillery proves futile. A negro is the latest victim. The aviators go to the scene of the tragedy, some 20 miles distant. Doris invites March to accompany her on a horse-back ride. They are joined by Tolliver, much to March's disgust. While the men are rounding up the horses, which have become unaccountably frightened, the flying man suddenly swoops down and carries Doris off.

CHAPTER XI.—Continued.

Pausing not at all they went plunging down with the recklessness of despair, stumbled across the boulder-strewn bottom, dragged themselves weak with exhaustion up the opposite slope and staggered to the summit as their foe, invigorated by a half-hour's rest, arose just ahead and continued his flight apparently as fresh as when he had started hours before. Reeling of brain and hopeless of heart, their breath coming in sobs, they followed.

At two o'clock March, suddenly arousing himself, found that he had been struggling on in a daze, a semi-conscious state wherein he had stumbled along as in a dream as he clambered over jagged, upheaved masses and dragged himself painfully up steep ascents that led ever up and up towards distant and towering peaks that receded as steadily as he approached; his eyes ever fastened upon a grotesque flying thing that alternately flapped upward like a mammoth bat or roosted vulturelike upon some eminence as it clutched a form which it was bearing closely and peered with huge, inscrutable eyes at himself toiling on with infinite weariness below. Ahead of him the Flying Man was just in the act of rising once more with his burden. On one side of him towered the smooth shoulder of the mountain that loomed up another thousand feet, upon the other a steep slide that led down equally as far to a torrent, the thunder of whose voice came faintly to his ears. Some miles ahead and rising dizzily was the flat surface of a table mountain with precipitous cliffs surrounding it, wild and desolate, the haunt of no living thing except mountain sheep and wandering eagles. Was it to this inaccessible place, this very heart of desolation, that the enemy was leading them? March could but vaguely wonder. Where was Clay? He looked behind just in time to see the other go down upon his bleeding knees in a stumbling fall and lie motionless. For the first time since the start he halted, hesitated, then with an exclamation of despair hurried back to the fallen one and turned him over. The eyes were half closed, the mouth gasping like that of a suffocating fish and the head rolling limply. Despair seized him. Each breath that he drew pierced his bosom like a dagger and his head swam giddily. His own hands and knees were torn and blood caked and his throat like old parchment. It seemed hopeless, worse than hopeless, to go on alone, yet go on he must to his last breath, his last step, his last crawl, and Clay must take care of himself. He turned to pursue his way and saw that the creature beyond had already settled to the rocks and was quietly watching them. March ran his hand across his eyes to clear them from the sweat. Since the other was not increasing the distance between them, perhaps it would be wise upon his part to rest also. Should he continue on in his present condition it would be but a short time before he would collapse as Clay had done, and then there would be no eye to mark the direction of the monster's flight. On the other hand should he rest for a while he would be able to take up the pursuit with renewed vigor, and perhaps by that time Clay would be able to accompany him. He threw himself upon the rocks.

The desire to sleep fell upon his eyelids as a dead weight. Fatigue denuding as an anesthetic, so benumbing as to require the utmost efforts of his will to keep it from stupefying his senses, possessed him from brain to toe. The pain was gone from his limbs, but in its place was the numbness of paralysis. His head, too, had ceased to reel, but it was humming like a hive. Fighting uncon-

sciousness with all his strength of body and will he raised himself to a sitting position and again looked ahead. The enemy was squatting where he had alighted last, his head drooping forward and his hand resting on the form of the girl whom he had laid at his feet. That he was not asleep a slight uneasy movement now and then indicated, but that he was very weary his sunken attitude gave strong evidence. Although his body was not unprotected by that of his captive, the distance was too far to precipitate matters by a pistol shot which if it hit either of them might almost as likely strike the girl.

Again slumber, so nearly overmastering that for a moment the world swam darkly before his eyes, surged down upon the watcher, and again March was compelled to painfully beat himself to keep from unconsciousness. He forced his eyelids apart, threw back his head and breathed to the bottom of his lungs. His respirations grew more regular, less frequent. He felt his head begin to clear and fresh strength surge through his limbs. Strong, active and in perfect health his recuperative powers were unusually good, yet the last three hours of incessant scramble and run, slide and climb, stumble and fall, had been severe enough to sorely tax the most hardened mountaineer. But he had rested for fully half an hour now and once more felt capable of resuming the grind. The first grisly horror which had gripped him had given way to cold desperation. He arose, stretched his stiffened limbs and walked awkwardly to Tolliver, shoving him with his foot. "Get up," he roughly commanded.

The eyes of the prostrate one opened, gazed at him for a moment blankly, then filled with a wild light. He struggled painfully to his feet, gazed about, saw the crouching form ahead and shambled onward without speaking, March close at his heels. For a short distance they proceeded with no indication upon the part of the roosting creature ahead to evidence that he either saw or heard them, and a wild beast glare came into Clay's eyes as he drew his pistol. Then as an awkward foot sent a stone rolling the Flying Man glanced quickly around, saw his peril and with one sweep of his arm swung the girl between himself and those who were closing in on him. Doris had evidently seen them as well, for she raised her head for an instant, almost immediately letting it fall as she became limp again; while her captor launching himself from the point where he had rested bodily into space flew heavily along the mountain side that he was nearly as distressed as themselves. March felt convinced. Perhaps he had flown far that day before picking her up, perhaps her weight was too great for him to bear by the hour.



Reeling of Brain, and Hopeless of Heart, They Followed.

perhaps he had been wounded by the men of the flying machines and was gradually losing his strength—the possibility of one or more of his conjectures being correct stimulated Alan like a glass of strong wine, and his legs becoming more limber again with use he pressed forward nearly as rapidly as he had upon the beginning of the pursuit. Tolliver, also greatly refreshed by his short slumber and working the stiffness from his muscles with every step also again ran almost lightly. Close upon each other's heels they raced over the uneven rocks.

They passed across a treacherous slide of shale rock where a misstep

would have brought half a mountain side down upon them in a roaring avalanche, then entered upon a narrow passage where upon one side the mountain rose sheer to the swimming sky, while upon the other it dropped into a sickening abyss. This meant way they traversed with the recklessness of mountain sheep, and soon leaving it behind found themselves upon a broader way. Before them sank a gorge, slant and deep, a good mile wide; beyond it arose the towering heights of the table mountain towards which they had been stumbling since the beginning of the pursuit. Across the gorge the flying thing was already beating his way, and with but an instant's pause in order to pick out their path the pursuers went scrambling down. Dislodged rocks flew from beneath their feet and with leaps of ever increasing length clattered to the bottom far below where they landed with echoing roars. In their slides their clothing was ripped to picturesque rags and their bodies raked and skinned pitifully. They reached the bottom, scrambled across and faint and dizzy once more began the steep ascent. Climbing, dragging themselves from rock to rock, often upon their hands and knees, blinded by sweat, gasping, they slowly mounted until a steep field of jumbled masses split from the peaks by the erosion and lightnings of untold ages lay before them, and over this ghastly field of unutterable desolation and brooding silence they went in a last heart-breaking scramble until they reached the base of the final cliffs that arose as sheer as a wall for hundreds of feet to the broad, flat surface of the mountain's summit. Clay staggering to the face of the cliff pointed despairingly upward. His face was that of an old man, furrowed and drawn, ghastly pale, his mouth open, his eyes wild and rolling. Alan's glance followed the raised finger. Two hundred feet above them and struggling desperately, sometimes striking the cliff with his pinions, sometimes falling back a few feet, but always recovering himself and mounting higher, the one whom they had chased throughout that awful day was bearing his prey yard by yard to the height above. Then with a last desperate effort he reached the summit, hovered a second at its edge and then disappeared, a smothered cry of triumph falling like a knell upon the ears of those who gasped below. Horror-stricken and utterly spent both of the pursuers sank upon the stones with the soul sickness of despair upon them.

March staring with sunken eyes across the broad gulch which they had last slid into and with infinite toil worked their way out of, could from the height at which he sat see miles of the tortuous course along which they had lashed themselves by pure strength of will. Yonder was the mountain side with its devil's trap of inclined shale across which they had crept as one might creep the steep side of a roof, hitching themselves along with the slow painfulness of wounded men upon a battlefield. There, also, was the narrow trail along the ledge of overhanging rock where a stumble would have landed them in shapeless masses hundreds of feet below. Back of that, dim in the distance, was the huge boulder by the side of which he had fought his bitter battle against the stupor of exhaustion as he panted himself back to life while Tolliver had slept, back of that again and interminably away the ragged crest over which they had staggered as they arose from the other gorge with its chaotic bottom of fallen rock masses. What a distance they had come—what incredible efforts they had put forth with all the world swinging in a blood red mist before their glazed eyes; what tortures of mind and body they had endured—and all to now be baffled by a mere matter of hundreds of feet! And Doris still in the hands of that foul monster who now safe in his eyrie no longer need be held back by the restraint of fear. Doris! Doris! Great God, what could he do! It seemed as though he must go mad in his agony. His hands clenched until they were white and bloodless and he bit his lips until the blood came to keep from crying outright to the brooding cliffs. The nausea of horror gripped his stomach until he became deathly ill and shivered as one with the ague, the cold perspiration bursting from his brow, weak as a cat. He rolled over upon his face with his fingers buried in his hair, fighting back the deadly faintness with all his powers of resistance. It was too horrible to be real—therefore it must be a nightmare from which he would presently awake, or failing in that lose his senses to a verity. Human reason could not long withstand such agony.

A noise at his side brought him to a sitting posture. Clay had regained his feet and was staring about in a bewildered way, his clothing in rags and his lacerated hands twitching convulsively. "I have rested and now I am going to get her," he said in a strange voice. "I told her that I loved

her better than all else and that I would sacrifice my life for her if it should come to the test. Well, the test has come and I am going to her, come what may." He started off upon a hobble and March, struggling to his feet, called after him:

"Clay!"

He paused and faced about, his brow wrinkled, staring at Alan as though at a stranger. His tense face though deeply drawn by fatigue and suffering was no longer distorted as it had been earlier in the day, but his eyes, deeply sunken and circled by rings as dark as though made by blows from a fist, glowed unnaturally. "Yes," he said after a moment. "I know you now. You are March. What are you doing here?" Alan, who had often thought as he looked into the other's eyes that some latent disorder slumbered there, now knew that the man was unmistakably mad. Yet undoubtedly some reason remained, and such as it was he would try and appeal to it.

"Where are you going?" he asked quietly.

"Going?" He passed his hand swiftly in front of his eyes as though to sweep something from in front of them—"why, I am going to get her, of course. Where else should I be going at such a time?" He turned as if to start away again, but once more Alan halted him.

"Do you know if there is a way up?"

"Most certainly, else how would I know where to go? I scaled it once three years ago when I was hunting sheep. There is a way, an awful way, and I nearly lost my life upon it. But I climbed it once and I shall again." March watching him closely knew not what to think. Mad as the other undoubtedly was, there was a calm conviction in his manner that left the listener greatly puzzled as to whether his disordered mind but imagined the prior feat, or whether the remnant of his orderly intellect still remembered it as a fact. Be that as it might, he well knew that Clay was an enthusiastic and daring hunter who had spent many weeks among these cliffs, and it was not at all improbable that he was speaking of actualities. At any rate it would do no harm to accompany him. The cliff was hopeless of ascent where they stood, and even though his companion was laboring under a delusion they might stumble across some place where they could drag themselves up. He once more nerved himself to physical effort and stepped forward, but at his first pace the face of the other underwent a violent change. Once more the features worked and the mouth twitched, while his eyes blazed like an angry wildcat's.

"Halt," he commanded fiercely.

March paused. What insane fear or hatred had suddenly taken possession of the other's twisted mind he had no idea, therefore he must question him quietly, ascertain, and then strive to reason with him. He eyed him steadily. "Well, what is it?" he demanded.

"I am going alone. You must remain behind."

March slowly shook his head. "No, you must not say that. I may be of assistance to you, and is this not a matter for both of us as men?" The question seemed to infuriate the other beyond self control.

"For both of us!" he fairly yelled. "No, it is a matter for me alone—for me who loves her in a way that such as you can no more conceive than you can conceive of pain and agony and weeks of sleepless wretchedness passed in calling aloud to her through the endless hours of torturing nights. And always you stood between us with your silly attentions and school-boy declarations of puppy love. Yet what did it gain you? Nothing but refusal upon refusal. She loves you not at all and you shall not accompany me up the path which I learned at the risk of my own life for she is mine, promised to me by betrothal—my affianced wife. If you go to her find a way of your own, but this way is mine and mine alone."

"Clay," said March sternly as he took a forward step with chin thrust out, his heart sinking nevertheless at the other's words, "I do not believe you. She never promised to marry you."

In an instant the madman had whipped out his pistol and leveled it at his follower's head.

"Fool, for the last time stand back."

Cold as death March faced him.

"You are losing your head. If you loved her as you pretend—if you were engaged to her as you say, you would welcome my assistance. If we rescue her the honor shall be yours and if she confirms your assertion I will never cross your paths again. But until then I yield not an inch in my right to go to her. If you know a way up that cliff I am going up it also, with your permission if you will grant it, without it if you deny me. The knowledge of certain death would not prevent me from going to the last step I am able to take." He stirred forward again with his eyes fixed steadily upon the one before him, seeking to get his hands upon him, disarm him and talk him into a semblance of reason, but

he had underestimated the desperation of the insane mind that lay behind the leveled weapon. From head to foot Tolliver quivered like a wind thrummed reed.

"Then if you will not listen to me you shall die like the fool you have always been." Heavily the weapon spoke, and Alan reeling threw up his hands and came crashing down upon the rocks, while the other crouching like a cat over its felled prey watched him as intently. But no sound came from the fallen one, no movement, and thrusting his revolver back into his pocket he went picking his way over the jumbled mass, his lips muttering and face working as his glowing eyes sought the dizzy way up which he had pulled himself in that desperate hunt of three years before.

CHAPTER XII.

The Ascent.

Rising for three hundred feet as straight up as the side of one of the loftiest skyscrapers built by man the cliffs arose, split from the mountain top by the wedges of the lightnings and guarding the summit by walls of almost absolute perpendicularity. In that hunt of the past he had seen a sheep upon the summit, and therefore knew that there must be a trail leading to the top despite the fact that it was classed as inaccessible to human foot. Determined, therefore, that he should be the first human to tread its top, for miles he had worked his way about it with keenly searching eyes as he sought for the place where the first step must be made if he would attempt the ascent, found it at last, desperate and scanty to the extreme yet barely possible to one of much activity and steadiness. And with little regard for probable consequences he had undertaken it. It had been a supreme test of nerves and poise, but he had conquered it at last, reached the desolate, boulder haunted plateau and killed his sheep, and then had sat for hours upon the sheer edge as he nerved himself for what seemed a descent impossible to human being except at the expense of life or splintered bones. Yet having come up he must go down, and down he eventually and safely arrived—though great good fortune attended him—and at last had stood beside the broken body of his kill which he had been obliged to tumble bodily from the height. That awful ascent and descent had ever since haunted him as an evil dream, a thing not to be attempted again for all the wealth of the world, but now with the woman he loved borne there in the loathsome embrace of that arch enemy of all mankind he sought for the suicidal path again with straining eagerness. Of March lying inert back there upon the rocks where his bullet had felled him he gave scarcely a thought. Obsessed by the idea that he alone could save the woman he sought, he would have regardlessly slain anything, man or beast, that he imagined might in any way impede his progress.

Before him there lay a narrow shelf leading upward for a score of feet, broken, insecure and seeming to end in nothing but the blank wall itself, but he recognized it instantly and stepped upon it. Arms extended, flattening himself against the rock as a leech clings, he felt his way upward with infinite caution, his fingers gripping each tiny crevasse with the tenacity of the tentacles of a squid. He reached the end of the narrow shelf and there balanced precariously upon six inches of outcropping, cast his glance cautiously upward and about. Several feet to the right was another foothold equally insecure, but leading upward again, and with the care with which one treads a tight wire he placed his foot upon it, found a shallow finger hold in the cliff and raised himself. For fifty feet more he climbed as a fly scales a wall, periled his life upon the two-inch support of a jutting point, mounted again with the superhuman cunning and strength of the insane and at the end of a half hour's well high miraculous effort found for the first time during the ascent a shelf large enough to rest upon. He was half way up now, and with a hundred and fifty feet of beetling cliff above and as much empty space below he sat down for a moment's heavy breathing.

Through his disordered mind there ran riot a strange medley of the real and the unreal. Well enough he knew that he was scaling this height to save the woman whom he loved, yet he now conceived the Flying Man to be of the supernatural, a winged monster of the inaccessible cliffs, a dragon of the noisome caverns that lay beneath the gorges, and that he was the knight chosen from all others because of his superior strength and valor to go forth and slay him at the portals of his rock bound domain. Well, slay him he would beyond the shadow of a doubt, but already the sun was getting low, the climb was still long and desperate and he must be on his way lest night and certain death should overtake him flattened against the blank wall of the dragon's castle. Once more

he cautiously arose to resume his efforts.

He scanned the cliff. Just above his head was another projection which promised a foothold could he but reach it, and burying his fingers in a crack and finding an inch wide support for his foot he drew himself slowly upward. The slightest slip of hand or foot meant instant death now, and his fingers gripped the stone until they grew white and bloodless from the strain. Slowly he raised himself, found another grip and another tiny support and with an effort that sent the blood surging to his temples brought himself gasping one notch higher. Here again the ascent became a trifle less precarious for a ways and another half-hour found him within a few feet of the summit. Here of all places during the ascent he came the nearest to plunging the whole distance to the rocks below, but a last desperate struggle saved him and weak and trembling from the supreme effort he threw himself down safely over the edge. For a moment he rested, then cautiously arose and looked about.

Upon a far distant western peak the sun was balanced like a broad gold coin poised delicately. Its horizontal rays swept the plateau upon which he stood, but of the heat that had gripped him during that day of frenzied pursuit scarce a vestige remained in the thin air. Oh, that awful pursuit! His brain had seethed as a cauldron, his body reeled like a drunken man's, his numbed limbs responding to the driving power of his will as mechanically as the unfeeling pistons of a machine; the uncanny flying monster bearing the woman of his heart ever close before his glazed eyes, while March, his accursed rival, had ridden upon his back and borne him down like an old man of the sea. At times it had seemed as though he would go mad. March! Had he shot him? Yes, it dimly seemed to him that he had, and had left him dead upon the rocks below. What of it! Had it not been that he had been compelled to carry him on his back all day he would have reached this height an hour before—perhaps would have reached it in advance of the flying one and been prepared to meet him as he alighted. What mattered a dead man or two in a case like this when a dragon was to be slain and a princess—his princess, to be rescued! He laughed quickly, sharply, a single explosive sound more like the bark of a beast than the sound of a human voice. He turned and faced the plateau.

Desolation. It stretched away in a broad sweep on either hand, chaotic, volcanic, lumbered with the left over debris of mountain making—a junk shop of the unuseable fragments of creation. Boulders little as pebbles, huge as houses were strewn on every side, scattered broadcast, grouped in piles, heaped in monuments. Barren spaces lay between them. No living thing invested the solitude save himself and those to find whom he had so desperately risked his life in the ascent. To his disordered mind it



Alan Came Crashing Down.

seemed a battlefield well planned for the combat to come, for around these fumbled masses he could creep like a panther until he could find the dragon, and having found him—

Silence. It invested all, throbbing, pulsating, ringing in his ears like the voice of a sea shell. It hung quivering in the air, lying upon him as a smothering weight and filling all infinity. The rapid exhaust of his lungs was lost in its unechoing vastness, and when he uttered incoherently his voice was snatched from his lips and its volume dissipated in the void until but its whispered ghost remained.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)