

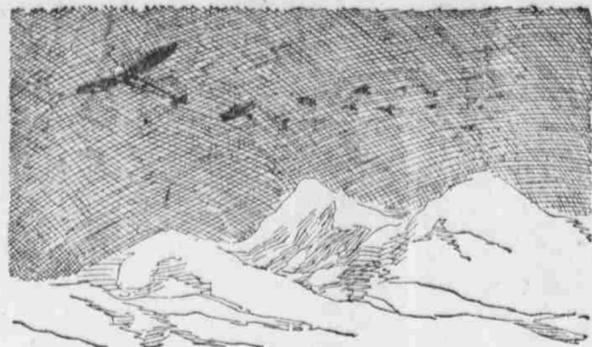


The Flying Man

by Harry Irving Greene

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

Copyright, 1912, by Harry Irving Greene



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 mechanical 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, suitors 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 \$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 outmaneuvered by the flying man. Artillery proves futile. A business in 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. March and Tolliver pursue the dragon. The way leads through high canyons and over mountains. Tolliver, driven insane by the strain, shoots March.

CHAPTER XII.—Continued.

Uncanniness. It lurked about him upon every side, in the malformed pile, the creeping shadows, the dead air, the brooding silence. As well might he have been a newly created being suddenly finding himself alone upon a world which he knew to be inhabited only by one other human and an evil spirit which he must meet in deadly combat. The thought aroused him. He must creep like a lynx around the outer edge of the plateau, taking advantage of every rock which might screen his form, narrowing his circle with every step until he had found them. In this systematic way he could so cover the ground that there would be no possibility of his overlooking them, and if his caution was keen he could take the dragon unawares, and take him unawares he must else the flying one would be off with her again and once more the maddening chase would have to be resumed. He drew his pistol and stole off among the rocks, his eyes flicking them as closely as a prowling animal's, his ears preternaturally acute. Behind the shelter of every pile he paused to peer and listen, while across the bare places he flitted as silently as a specter. One complete circuit of the plateau he made amidst the utter desolation and silence without results, then narrowing his circuit by a hundred yards began again. He would close in upon them like a contracting noose until at last he had found them.

The sun sank behind the range and dusk fell upon him still crouching, crawling and darting across the un-screened places. In the uncertain shadow of a rock pile his foot tripped against a stone and he fell upon his face, remaining as motionless as a watching lizard as he listened for an answering sound. None came and he slowly raised himself. Clearly enough it would be folly for him to attempt to pursue his search for the night-eyed dragon in the darkness. He might miss them, overran them, be ambushed himself or eluded in the darkness. There remained but a few moments of even semi-daylight, and taking advantage of it he crept into a niche in one of the rock piles and composed himself to watch and wait with the cunning of the mad.

The darkness thickened. Fold by fold it fell upon the peaks and settled dense in the valleys, while minute by minute the glitter of the stars grew brighter, harder, more scintillant. From his narrow retreat he watched them blazing in their brilliance. Never had he seemed so near to them as now, when bruised, torn and unutterably weary of body but burning of brain he stared up at them with throbbing eyes. The cold of night came rattling down from the nearby snow clad peaks, and countless and damp he shivered beneath its touch. Fuel there was none upon this rock littered waste, nor would he have chanced a fire had there been lest the one for whom he sought might see or smell it. A new thought flashed through his mind. Undoubtedly the flying one now thought himself safe from his day-long pursuers, and if he possessed the skill of making fire, as did races of the earth no matter how low their order of intellect, then tonight of all times after his labors of the day he would beyond doubt seek to warm and cheer himself beside a blaze. And to creep upon an enemy who sits beside a fire at night is the very A B C of stalking. Halving with the cold he crept forth.

Across the eastern peaks the moon arose and flooded the mountain top with its shimmer, and keeping in the shadows of the piled masses and pursuing his way with the stealth of a marauding Apache he crept on. Twice he climbed to the top of piles

that commanded an exceptionally wide outlook across the waste, and from their summits scanned the plateau through the misty light. Nothing but the broad expanse with its cluttered fragments met his view, and each time he crept softly down again to steal through the shadows as he resumed his quest, alternately shuddering with cold and burning with fever. Above him the snow peaks glowed phosphorescently, on every hand the rock shadows lay like squat, fantastic monsters, while below was an abyss filled to the brim with solid blackness. Benumbed of limbs but with eyes and ears acute as those of a prowling beast of the night he crept along.

He had made two circuits of the plateau without discovery and for the third time turned to constrict the circle. His physical weariness was such that he seemed to move upon wooden limbs, and all pain had left him save the burning of his brain. He thought of the strange premonition of the day before which had told him that he was about to depart upon an unknown journey of mysteriousness, a premonition which he had not dared mention before March for fear of ridicule. Was this, then, the journey of which he had been so subtly warned by that mystic sense which at times he had seemed to possess—this pursuit into these wild heights where tradition said no human foot had ever stepped beside his own. He wondered as he paused for a moment in a strip of moonlight and fixed his eyes upon the next point which he must seek in his ever narrowing search.

Then from above came a sound that thrilled him as an electric shock and he threw his glance upward. Close above him and falling with the speed of a pouncing hawk was a great black shape with enormous wings and huge, bulbous eyes that glowed phosphorescently. With a rabbit like spring to one side he attempted to raise his pistol, only to fall headlong upon the stones beneath a heavy weight. For a moment he struggled desperately, but an instant later his weapon was torn from his hand and he found himself encircled by an arm that held him as in a vise. Then slowly but surely he felt himself being borne upward, up and up through the cold shimmer until the black throat of the canyon yawned bottomless below. From afar, as though traveling through infinite distance he seemed to hear a cry, the cry of a woman who is filled with a nameless horror, and once more he struggled fiercely against the iron grip that held him. Then the grip seemed to loosen and he thought himself falling—falling endlessly into an interminable abyss through a great and roaring darkness.

CHAPTER XIII.

The Search.

March lying flat upon the rocks first stirred uneasily as a sleeper who gradually awakes, moaned and then slowly pushed himself to a half



"He Attempted to Raise His Pistol."

upright posture, sitting in the dazed manner of one just recovered from an anaesthetic. He looked around and above. Beating cliffs and ragged mountain tops surrounded him, a deep gorge lay at his feet, the dropping sun was sending its horizontal rays into his eyes. He looked himself over. His clothing was torn, his hands and knees lacerated, his head humming like a taut wire vibrating in the wind. He tried to recall, struggling to compel his memory to yield its secrets as one might attempt to drive his limbs to some great physical effort, but his brain, partially paralyzed by the bullet which had raked his hand, respond-

ed but feebly. Bewildered he tried to think it out step by step.

Where was he? He cast his eyes over the jagged mountain crests that arose on every side like the waves of a tempest lashed sea. He had seen them before—he was sure of that—but where? Strive as he would he could not recall. Who was he? Vainly he tried to remember, but his personality had wholly escaped him—even his name and place of abode were blank in his mind. Why was he here in the midst of this jumbled chaos of barren mountain peaks? Not a glint of recollection answered him. He was as lost as one would be who suddenly born of full growth found himself adrift in space possessed of his full faculties but with no past and therefore with nothing to remember. He looked at his hand, one finger of which was encircled by a heavy seal ring. It looked familiar to him—surely he had seen that ring before—but where? Mechanically he searched his pockets and found therein an envelope addressed to Alan March. The name was as familiar to his eyes as was the ring and hand, yet he was totally unable to place it. He thrust the paper back into his pocket and arose. Unquestionably he was upon a great height and instinct told him that he should get down as quickly as possible. Automatically he began the descent, his unfeeling legs finding the way clumsily, his brain benumbed, his throat dry as the waste that lay about him.

He went as one in a dream, sliding, scrambling, sometimes for minutes lying prostrate as a stone rolled from beneath his feet and tripped him into a fall. Eventually he reached the bottom of the canyon and there he found a stream, clear, musical, cold as ice born of the everlasting snows of the great peak which had fathered and mothered it. He plunged into it as a seal leaves a rock, wallowing in its icy coolness, drinking deeply, submerged himself. Its liquid coldness washed the haze from his brain and he crawled forth refreshed and invigorated. In a twinkling he remembered.

He looked back at the tremendous slide which he had just come down, crowned by its inaccessible top which arose steep as a wall and to the eye as unscalable to the foot as the side of a giant bastle. Yet Tolliver had said that he had once been to its top and would now go again. But Tolliver was now insane and little dependence could be placed upon his statements. Yet Doris was undoubtedly somewhere up there and at the mercy of that merciless flying thing that had led them all day long in that fearful pursuit. Desperate and despairing though he was he forced himself to reason calmly. To return to the bottom of the cliff and beat blindly about it as a beetle attacks a window pane would be a waste of time, each minute of which was priceless. He must return, wire the aviators and with their help assail the height from the air. It would take at least a day's time to do this, twenty-four hours of maddening suspense to be endured, yet it seemed his only hope of eventually rescuing her in case she remained alive. As to what might happen to her in that interval he dared not think, but perhaps after all Tolliver might reach the summit, and Tolliver loved her also and despite his madness might be depended upon to protect her to his last gasp. Perhaps for the task in hand his madness was even in his favor, since it might give him additional strength, desperation and cunning. Drenched and shivering from his icy bath, he went scrambling off over the boulders.

The sun sank and the darkness became intense. Guided by instinct alone, he scaled the opposite side of the canyon, often dragging himself upward by pure strength of limb, more than once sending loosened rocks crashing downward to the bottom in leaping flight, their roar accentuated by the darkness. He reached the summit of the ridge and found himself standing in the glow of the moon, another deep plunge before him, but with light once more to serve him. Again he scrambled down the trail.

An hour later from the mountain side he paused as he fought desperately for breath. He looked backward. Miles behind him across canyon and ridge the desolate top of the table mountain loomed uncannily. The moon seemed to hang directly over it. What was happening there, what unspeakable tragedy in that dizzy land of desolation inhabited by an uncanny flying thing, a madman and a more than likely half senseless girl? He bit his lips until they bled, crying aloud in his impotence, his voice as cracked and broken as the voice of a raven. Then of a sudden as he gazed he became frozen to the spot, staring across the waste and upward with eyes which were dilated by horror. For against the face of the rounded moon he had seen a grotesque, bat-like shape arise, hover and then release a squirming object that shot downward as an arrow falls. He pressed his hands x

his head, closed his eyes, then looked again. The forms had vanished, and uncertain whether he had really seen this gruesome thing or had been the victim of an apish trick of his imagination he once more plunged onward.

He came to the narrow trail which led around the shoulder of the mountain and where with a blank wall upon one side and a sheer descent of hundreds of feet upon the other he had involuntarily closed his eyes when he had traversed it hours before in the pursuit, guiding himself along it now solely by the sense of touch. The darkness was deep here and he was more thankful for it than otherwise, since it concealed and rendered less unnerving the death which he knew must come from a false step aside. Over the delicately poised slide of shale he crept on hands and knees, feeling his way with his fingers, testing each rock before putting his faith upon it, until reaching its further side and finding the going fairly good and the light sufficient, for a short space he broke into a shambling run. Intermittently, seemingly through ages, he struggled on with all sense of time lost and all distance but a dream. Yet gradually and despite his efforts to ignore it the consciousness was forced harder and more insistently upon him that he was reaching the limit of human endurance. His strength was leaving him as water rushes through a gap, draining the reservoir of his endurance to its dregs, and more than once he was awakened by the shock of a fall to find himself lying prostrate after his legs had given out beneath him and he had tumbled with no recollection of the mishap remaining. But before him and but two or three miles away, black and serrated against the sky, loomed the summit of the great chain that arose abruptly from the plain, and there he would find the head of the canyon that led to the level ground and the city beyond with its horde of brother men who upon his tale would leap to the chase of the monster of the table mountain as hounds run down a mortal and natural enemy. Somehow he must make those miles, and somehow he would. He struggled on with the choking desperation of a drowning man who founders towards a life line.

In his exhaustion both mind and body worked mechanically and he pursued his way as thoughtlessly, yet as unerringly as the needle points the magnetic pole. He seemed to have been traveling forever. Perspective both of time and space was lost and he was wandering in an endless dream through wastes of rock that towered about him to incalculable heights, hanging over him suspended by a hair and threatening to crush him at every step. He no longer wondered that Tolliver with his latest streak of madness had at last succumbed beneath the fearful strain upon body and mind. Tolliver! He felt not the least animosity towards him despite that raking wound across his skull made with murderous intent—in fact, he mumbled a prayer for his safety—yet who else could it have been that he had seen whirling downward in that awful fall? During some moments he doubted whether he himself really lived, as with slow desperation he forced his way along steep inclines, sought the bottoms of gulches and dragged himself again from the darkness below into the misty light of another summit. An hour more and he had reached the crest that rising abruptly from the plain contained the canyon from which he had started in the chase the morning before. He had been traveling for twelve hours now almost without a pause, his brain was exhausted and the driving power of his will, which had for so long forced him on, was no longer dominant. It was miles yet to the city, and with the realization that it would be impossible for him to traverse it without a respite he sank upon the ground with his face buried in his arms. He would rest for an hour, then pursue his way, summon North and his comrades and then neither rest nor sleep until they had hunted down their quarry, saved Doris and rid the world of a creature not intended for it.

Irresistibly the stupor of exhaustion enveloped him. His head swam, his form relaxed, darkness engulfed him. He slept.

CHAPTER XIV.

North.

March awoke, sat up and looked about in the befogged manner of one who finds himself suddenly transported from the depths of utter oblivion into the broad light of day, the instantaneous transition of the unconscious brain to the fully conscious, the dead into the living. Where the moon had hung when he threw himself down in a weariness of soul and body that could not longer be combated, the sun was now poised half way up in its morning flight. For ten hours he had lain prostrate, dreamless, unmoving, senseless as the unborn—then hours through which he

had existed only in absolute unconsciousness. Slowly he gathered his scattered faculties.

No sensation was in his limbs. Had they been made of wood they could not have been more unfeeling, yet automatically they obeyed the command of his brain. He propped himself up on his arms and gathered his legs under him. Slowly, carefully, testing himself like one who arises after a heavy fall and knows not whether bones have been broken, he got upon his feet, felt the first warm rush of blood through his body and in a flash was coherent of mind once more. Doris! He turned his head towards the dizzy plateau of the table mountain miles behind. Tolliver! The Flying Man! God—what was happening there—what had happened—what was to happen? His throbbing temples seemed about to burst as remembrance of it all surged through his memory—the coming of the unknown body through space, the night upon the lawn, the appearance of the winged monster, the fight, the duel in the air, the death of Putnam, North and the pursuit by the aeroplanes, the awful chase of the day before, the madness of Tolliver, the falling of the whirling body through the moonlight! And now for twenty-four hours Doris had been in the possession of the superhuman creature of the murderous mind and unguessable instincts, while more hours must elapse before he could hope to have the air craft once more upon the scene. He looked down into the depths of the canyon which he must traverse before he reached the level land which led to the city, thought for an instant of the weary, muscle-racking miles that lay before him, then turned for the descent.

He slowly became cognizant of a sound, sibilant, thin as the barely audible ringing of cut glass when rubbed gently, yet insistent and shrilling louder with each moment until it had grown into a penetrating whistle. Then with a flash of understanding he looked up. Far above him and coming from out of the southwest with the speed of a homing pigeon was an aeroplane, broad as the wings of the Flying Man himself, riding the air with the grace of floating thistle-down. Weakness seized him, the weakness which sometimes comes to strong men in the reaction from fierce emotions. For a moment he was sickened by the fear that he would faint and be passed over unnoticed, then his strength surged back to him in full flood and he drew his revolver. Yes, it was North—there could be no mistaking the blue wings of the "Dragon"—North returning through some inscrutable human reason or by Divine direction—he knew not which, nor in his wild rush of hope did he care. Twice his heavy revolver sounded its thunderous command, and



A Squirming Object Shot Downward as an Arrow Falls.

far above him the man at the wheel, hearing the roar, peered down at the lone figure that with arms outstretched stood upon that bleak summit like a cross. From his height he could not recognize the upturned face, wondered for a moment as to what he should do, then as the revolver again spoke its deep command he wheeled in a broad circle which would bring him around and close by his challenger. Back he came at his slowest speed as he sought to barely skim the head of the one who had shot, learn the cause of the signal and then decide what to do, for it was an unfavorable place to land and he did not purpose attempting it unless he first knew the reason why. At the distance of a score of yards he for the first time recognized March, torn,

disheveled and wild of face, who, forgetful of what he was doing, clutched frantically at the machine as it sailed close over his head. Wildly he sprang after it as it soared away, shouting hoarsely as he ran, "North—North—it is I—March. In the name of God, come down." Filled with wonderment as to what all this could mean, yet knowing well enough that much lay behind that wild appeal, he shut off his motor, raised his planes obliquely and as his momentum died settled almost as lightly as a feather falls. Scarcely had the wheels of his machine struck the rock than he had leaped from his seat and was hurrying back to the one who was approaching him upon a stiff-legged run. Close before him the aviator stopped and stared.

"March—in the name of all things! What has happened, man? Out with it." Brokenly, almost incoherently, the ragged one made known the most important details of the twenty-four hours last past, the bearing away of Doris by the flying monster and her being in his possession dead or alive that very moment upon the distant table top; of Tolliver gone insane and now probably dead, the awful fall of that squirming body through the moonlight, his own all-night run, which had brought him back to fall exhausted upon the spot. And as he listened North's face grew hard as flint until at last he grasped the speaker vice-like by the arm.

"Got your nerve with you yet?" he demanded grimly. March nodded, knowing what was to come.

"Then come along. That instinct that told me that the Flying Man had only gone to this other place and committed that crime to lure us there that he might double on his trail and come back here was right after all. It haunted me until I couldn't sleep. And I may get the same hunch at the same time, too, and set out along with me. We had it neck and neck for a hundred miles and then the 'Dragon' left him in the lurch. But he can't be far behind. Ought to be along most any time, but we won't wait. Get on there, quick. If you don't look down you will be all right. But remember every minute that it is a case of keeping your nerve or losing your life. Now sit down and freeze yourself to that seat." The starting space was short, but before the powerful motor the car left the ground as a grayhound clears a hedge. Straight over the canyon as boldly as an eagle leaves a cliff North shot, hundreds of feet of emptiness lying beneath him. Then turning towards the east he headed for the mountain that stood like a great, grim bastle at the end of the weary miles that March had stumbled over upon the day and night before.

From his seat and disregarding the injunction of his friend, March gazed down at the speeding earth as it leaped backward like an unrolling film. The sensations of his imaginary flight with North upon the day when the air fleet had pursued the flying one now became actualities, the thrumming stays, the whistle of the wind, the throb and vibrations, the leap of the machine like a thoroughbred beneath him. More and more with each passing moment did it seem like a dream to him, a grotesque unreality from which he must awake to the every-day life that had been his before the uncanny evening upon the lawn. He turned his drawn face towards North. No, there could be no doubt but that he was being whisked through space at the rate of more than a mile a minute and therefore the whole hideous thing must be true—the Flying Man—Doris—he groaned as he thought of her and must have lurched a bit, for North's voice instantly arose in stern command for him to be still. Tenaciously he gathered himself together.

The voice of the aviator came in shortly clipped sentences, seeming to be snatched from his lips by the rush of the wind. "We had better rise up to the top from below and alight in that way. Then we will try and surprise him on foot. If we should fall over the summit he would be sure to see or hear us. Can't tell what he might do then before we could stop him." Already the barren top with its jumbled waste loomed close before them upon a level with their eyes, fearsome in its chaotic desolation. With the slow sweep of a water craft mounting a long swell of the mid-Atlantic the "Dragon" skimmed the summit, circled sharply, tilted and sank upon its wheels. Quickly they were upon their feet and peering about.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Disappointed.
My little niece came home from school rather late the other day. On her mother's questioning her as to what kept her so long, she exclaimed: "Oh, mother, a horse fell down, and they said they were going to send for a horse doctor. And what do you think? It wasn't a horse doctor at all. It was only a man."