Virginia of the Air Lanes

A ROMANCE OF FLYING

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CHAPTER IIL

CARSON'S LANDING. T has always been a point of genealogical dispute as to whether or not Theodore Carson's father was of kin to the founder of the old Carson place up Fish river.

General Carson in his lean years used to sell turpentine to his namesake at the dingy ship chandlery on the wharf near the Eslava street ovster dock. On these commercial occasions the general, when mellowed by juleps, with his foot on the brass rail and his elbows on the bar, used to call the ship chandler "cousin." At other times, however, he made no bones of his opinion that the Mobile Carsonses were dashed common people and branded as impudent any fool claim of kinship between the humble tradesman and the Carsonses of Marengo county. Theodore was a little bitter sometimes as he recalled the phantoms, the pursuit of which had ruined two successive owners of the estatethe general's breeding maggot and his father's curious pride in a mere namewhereupon he gave chase to a phantom of his own, with what success we shall see, and followed what his friends called a rainbow with such true Carson enthusiasm that when he left Virginia Suarez on the dock at Strong's bayou, on that sandy, deliclously dreamy, southern shore of Mobile bay, he steered through the night for a house very nearly dismantled, on an estate growing up to persimmon thickets, dewberry beds and palmetto slashes, the very title to which was about to pass to his creditors. His ignis fatuus was in the cabin among the gulf beach dunes, but neither that nor the precarious state of his fortunes could account for his alternate joy and gloom as he fared north in the night. The sky maiden was the thing that really mattered.

He wondered whether her people knew of the chance by which he and Captain Harrod had rescued the fair castaway. Probably they believed her lost. The helicopter had scarcely paused when she struck the dune, but had shot out over the gulf like a flying gull. They must mourn the girl as

The Roc came coasting back in the same tardy dawn that lamped that young somnambulist to his home. Mr. Silberberg lighted and smoked countless cigarettes. Mr. Shayne nervously walked the deck and debated the question of letting Mrs. Shayne know of her piece's tragic death at once or of waiting for a personal interview. For the Roc had had no word of either the belicopter or the girl, and they saw no gleam of hone for her. She was a dependent and something of a problem for Mrs. Shayne. Any ordinary circumstance that would have separated the aunt and niece would not have been mourned inconsolably by either of them. In fact, Mrs. Shayne had expressed to her bushand some wonder as to what Silberberg saw in the girl. But to lose her like this, with all the unpleasant publicity of the terrible affair!

"Marie will never get over it," said Shayne. "What the devil alls that fellow aft?"

The fellow aft was Wizner, inventor of the lost helicopter, discoursing to the crew in pure assorted maledictions, which he heaped on all concerned in the loss of his machine.

The light found them far down toward the lagoon, flying high for safety in the darkness. The long, straight beach lay white, cold looking and solitary in the pure light, which touched the great gas holder to silver while the earth and sea were still in gloom. Away south in the offing were two steamers, and from the wireless over head could be heard the discharges by which the operator was making a last despairing effort to obtain news of the lost girl.

The buzzer from the engine room was sprung with a sharp rattle. Mr. Shayne went to the speaking tube

"We all think, sir," said the engineer, "that we've about reached the place where the young lady went out to sea."

"Mr. Silberberg thinks so, too," replied Shayne. "But I think it was

west of here." "There's a man on the beach, sir."

said the engineer. "Shall we speak him?"

"Do," replied Shayne, "He may know something."

The Roc circled about like an alighting swan, all the time descending. The man seated himself on a log to await her libration. Mr. Shayne spoke, Had he seen anything of a flying ma-

chine which went out to sea yesterday? "It was right close byah, suh," replied Captain Harrod. "Did you see the young lady?" asked

Shavne. "Yes, suh."

"Was she still clinging to the helf-

copter when you last saw her?" "No. suh. She wasn't clingin' to



'SHE'S ABOUT BO'DIN' THE BOAT F'R MO-

nothing-with the han' to'ds me-when Ah lost sight on huh, suh." "Let down the lift," commanded Mr.

Shayne. "I'm going down." The three men, Shayne, Silberberg and Wizuer, gathered about the fisherman on the beach.

"Do you think," queried Silberberg 'that there is the slightest chance for her to-to be saved, my good man?"

"Ah'm slow spoke, an' it would take a half hough to tell all Ah knows, gen'ly speakin'. But if it's jist about the young lady, she tumbled out on the sand in fair shape, an' if she's made good weathah she's about bo'din' the boat f'r Mobile. We was raght proud to hev hub as ou' guest."

"There!" shouted Wizner triumphantly. "Didn't I tell you that machine would stand grief? Struck the ground"-

"Keep out of this!" commanded Mr

Shayne. "Was she burt seriously?" "But, I say, Mr. Shayne," protested Wizner, "don't you see that with my machine you've got the business coopered? Put your money on the heli-

copters and you'll"-"Ab you Mr. Shayne?" inquired the

"Yes, yes," replied Shayne. "What bave you done with her?"

"A gentleman Ah'm employed by." replied the captain, "bas done carried huh ove' to the inn. Axin' yo' pandon. ah you the Mr. Shayne that's called the prince o' the powers of the ainh?"

"I reckon I am," replied Mr. Shayne irritably. "But tell us of the rescue of this dear girl. Tell us!"

While Silberberg and Shayne lislost, and he had the girl's name to tened Wizner began scouting up and down the beach. At once they signaled the Palmetto Beach wireless station, and in a moment the news came in that Miss Suarez had sent mes sages to Mrs. Shayne that morning and had taken an early boat for Mobile. Mr. Shayne grasped the hand of Mr. Silberberg, who sat on a log, bury-

ing his face in his handkerchief. "I know how you feel, old fellow." said Shayne. "And I want to say to you, my good man, I can't repay you. you know but so far as money can go I hope you will ask, or, rather, accept"-

"Ah couldn't accept anything, suh." said the captain. "Thank'ee kindly. But maght Ah ask whar you all's go-

in' now?" "Straight to Mobile." replied Shayne. "Ab unde'stand," went on the captain, "that you ab int'rested in all

sohts of tlyin' craft." "Well," answered Mr. Shayne, laugh-

ing, "got a machine that solves the problem? Most every one has." -"No, sub, but a friend o' mine raght on yo' way Ab'd pow'ful well like to hev you stop by an' see. He's got

something. It's Mr. Theodo', my employah." "The gentleman who took my niece to the beach?"

"Yes, suh." "We are in a hurry," urged Mr. Shayne. "We are about starting for Chicago. Won't any other time do?" "It's raght on yo' way, suh." persisted the captain, "an' it's all the favo' Ab'll ask of you all. Ab leave it to

you, suh, of co'se, but"-"Will you go and pilot us to the place?"

"Ah eain't ve'y well leave byah, suh," replied the captain, "but if yo' pilot knows these piny woods as well as he orto do, sub"

"Come and ten arm the pince," said Shayne in isiyes "Well go Par I tell you, my triend your man might have spent a lot of our fure reaching Finley Shayne"

"Ah reckon that's so sun," replied the captain, stepping into the lift. "He's been a stad in ve'y heavy about

the martan, sub, to a rong tahm." The discovery of the methanose mixture, with ten times the explosive force of gasoline, had made ascensional and depressive screws an efficient adjunct of the aeronaut with its barely buoyant gas bag and, with the improved propellers which followed, made the old fashioned "dirigible" a fairly dependable craft in ordinary weather. It was along this line rather than by way of the heavier than air aeropefs that development had marched, to the enormous enrichment of Finley

Theodore Carson often thought of Shayne, Carson's barren estate lay dies-Psyche and Mrs. Shayne. The under the lane between Pensacola and ladies vanished into the cabin with Mobile, and above this ran the sparser Silberberg.

methanose marshes.

drift from Atlantic and Appalachian forest points to the Mississippi sound resorts. He knew the type of every airship. Most of these huge objects fromping like swifts into the chimney of the aerial harbor at Mobile were Shayne's Condors, of which the Roc was the type, modeled after the early creations of Count Zeppelin. The smailer, quicker, low flying ones with out the gas holders were the still unsuccessful aeronels of the Wright and Farman types. The scene was varied by an occasional orthopter with flapping wings or by helicopters. The problem of life was in these various vessels, and he studied them wistfully. so wistfully that the Roc's wild bonk sounded thrice before he heard it. He stepped out upon the Rermuda grass, saw a retractile telephone spinning down from the great silver fish balanced in the calm sky, caught it and put it to his ear.

"Ch. Aunt Chloe!" cried he, running n for his hat and cont. "Here's some one above the house asking for me, and who do you suppose it is?"

Chloe, "I'm whah he is an' de way he blow dat ho'n, but Ah reckon it's jes' some triffin' sky hooter. Who is

of," cried Theodore. "Where's that new parachute? Never mind, I've found it."

Mr. Theodore ran out, stepped into the lift and was whisked up to the Roc's polished deck with his new parachute over his shoulder.

CHAPTER IV.

A LEAP INTO SPACE. R. SHAYNE met Carson with something less than the steely coldness with which he was wont to freeze the vitals of the man representing an undeveloped business opportunity.

"I am under great obligations to you, Mr. Theodore," said he, "for your service to my niece. To be entirely frank. I should not have appropriated the time to call on any business account." Mr. Carson feit repelled. He traced the "Mr. Theodore" to Captain Harrod's mode of referring to him.

"I am sorry," said he, "that you have gone even an inch out of your way on account of any fancied obligations. I

prefer the basis of business," "By Jove," said a voice at his elbow, 'you ought to be able to meet him on

that basis. Shayne." Carson's ear was affronted, bis nerves tautened by the voice. Shayne

waved the man away. "But," went on Silberberg, "it seems to me, old chap, we'd vastly better put the whole thing on a basis of breakfast first. Send this good man aft and let's fall to."

Carson wheeled round and stared Silberberg in the face curiously, with the impersonal disfavor of one studying the picture of some noxious thing. like a Glia monster or a feast of vultures.

"Thank you," said Theodore. have breakfasted, and in good com pany.

"By glory, my man," shouted Silberberg, "if you say another word"-Carson turned upon him, and Silberberg sank into a seat. Carson walked back to the engine room, saying that

he would look the craft over and see Mr Shavne after breakfast. Silberberg conceived himself vastly insulted by this fellow they had picked up and gave his host rather a bad half

"We owe it to him to allow him to be a little nasty," said Shavne, "Think what he did for Virginia, you know.

Silberberg." "By Jove," cried Silberberg, "I would rather she had-er-that is, I would

not allow any service even to her to atone for such an insult. I don't allow any one to- He must leave the Roc, Shayne, or I will." "But his machine may be worth while," urged Shayne, using what he

judged would be a valid argument with his guest. "An idea is an idea, Max, and this art of flying needs improvement."

"No idea," insisted Max, "is worth that much. Suit yourself, Mr. Shayne, but as for me"-

Silberberg waved his hand, closing the debate. As they rose they detected Wizner standing behind them, hat in hand, as if awaiting a word with them, or envesdropping, as the case might have been.

"Well," said Shayne rather angrily. "I just wanted to say," replied Wizner, "that I know what this young fellow's proposition is. And if you don't find him reasonable to deal with come to me. I've seen his model. It ain't protected, of course, and I can build one like it in a few weeks-with money enough. I'll learn him to butt

"When inventors fall out," began Shayne. "Monopolists get their books in."

in and take a customer from me!"

supplied Silberberg. "Let's take the fool north and see what he's got." "Most sensible thing you've said," replied Shayne

Carson waited in glum silence until the second descent of the lift, refusing to occupy it along with Silberberg. Shayne urged him to stay aboard for the night trip to Chicago.

"The weather north," said Shayne, is the mildest known for March. We can discuss your project, Mr. Theodore, over our highballs going up Come with us."

Very well, said Mr. Theodore, he would go, with many thanks.

He wondered about the niece and Silberberg, but he asked no questions. Shayne, who controlled the Keewatin He strode directly to the lift and went aboard the Roc. It was late in the afternoon when they took on two is

"What do you think of the weather?" asked Shavne of Carson

"The low has reached Omaha," replied Carson, "and has deepened rap-Miy. We ought to get into stiff south winds soon, increasing all the way."

"Let 'em increase," rejoined Shayne. ber of bills. We'll make port quicker. If it should

be northerly weather, now"-"We'd have to moor?" queried Car-

"Naturally."

"What I'm going to talk to you about," said Carson, "is a machine that could make Chicago against the fiercest gale quicker than this flying palace can do it tonight."

"Oh, yes," lightly replied Shayne, T've had 'em offered me that would do it in an hour-in the inventor's mind."

The earth was a concere cup with the setting sun a flaming wick on its his hold on the girl and"rim. To the north was a huge black accumulation of clouds which seemed swelling with startling rapidity, but lightning quickness and with stinging the weatherwise aviators knew it to be their own headlong flight which "Mout be the angel Gab'el," replied brought the clouds nearer with such to him. speed, giving them the swift upheaval which mimicked the approach of a storm. The silence was absolute save for the muiled exhaust of the engines "The greatest luck you ever heard and the purr of the driving screw astern, for the Roc kept pace with the blast, and the light breeze that swept her decks was from prow eastwardly to stern as she edged up into the great cyclonic whirl and outfooted the wind.

Carson walked aft. Looking rather concerned, the engineer was turning his ear downward, listening to the sullen roar that now droned up from the ground.

"A deuce of a wind," said he to Carson, "Hear it howl, and not a leaf stirring up here."

"Yes," assented Carson, listening, "It is blowing. But what of it?" "Oh, nothing," replied the engineer. looking at the manometer, "only-did you ever try to bring one of these gas

bags to in a gale, not to mention nursing her into the boss' Chicago garage? Hey?" "No," answered Carson. "It must

be difficult."

The young man wanted his serious talk with Shayne. So far they had spoken nothing but generalities, and he felt frustrated, held off, played with as a skillful fencer plays with a novice. And he had had no talk with Psyche. This made him irritable.

Miss Suarez stood by the rail looking off into the blackness, her bair heavy with a mist now just becoming perceptible. Mrs. Shayne from the cabin door looked forth at the young woman with distinct displeasure, for Virginia had just said a very naughty thing to Mr. Silberberg in a golf discussion which had unaccountably aroused her temper. And up walked young Carson to make things worse.

Virginia, taking him for Silberberg. turned on him a face hot with anger, stood looking at him a moment. Then all the displeasure faded away. and something quite irreconcilable with it took its place. Because she held out both hands and looked s divine Carson took them and held them close.

"My robber!" she whispered. "Are you a stowaway? Are you escaping?"

"Psyche! Psyche!" he gushed. "Oh, I'm giad! And you are well"-Mrs. Shayne called Virginia. "Please

come in." said she, "It's wet out Mr. Carson gave Virginia his arm, and she swept into the cabin.

"Uncle Finley," said she, "I don't know how he happens to be aboard. but this is-this is my"-

"We know," said Mr. Shayne. "We picked up your deliverer down in the woods, Virginia."

"Oh!" said she. "Then I"-"You were the only one, it seems, in ignorance of Mr. Theodore's presence. We have some business to talk

over. What's up, Willett?" Willett, the pilot, appeared at the door with a salute. "We seem to be breaking records," said Willett. "The distance gauge shows St. Louis nearest, with low variation for headway. Indianapolis is weak, right around a hundred and fifty miles, and we're getting indistinct registry that's either Nashville or Chicago, depending on whether it falls off or increases."

"I want to see you a minute," growled Silberberg and drew Shayne out upon the deck.

Willett went back to his work; Mrs. Shayne bowed grandly to the empty air which her gaze indicated as occupying Carson's position; Virginia, begging his pardon with her eyes, excused herself and followed her aunt, and

Carson was alone, Silberberg was making it unpleasant for Shayne again. This fellow, he said, has been taking liberties with Miss Suarez, and he (Silberberg) would not

"I tell you, Shayne," he urged hotly, "he must be put off: He must be paid and put off. If he isn't"-

"If he isn't." smiled Shayne, "it wouldn't be a serious matter, would it, Max?"

"Yes," spluttered Silberberg. "He insulted me! I tell you, it's all over between Federated Metals and Aerostatic Power if I'm forced to take things like this." Shayne laughed heartily, but he

of a breach to which no obligation to Carson could have forced him and grasped Silberberg's hand warmly. "Max, old man," said he, "you're quite right. We can't go down in this wind to let him land, but we can send

him aft." Theodore was examining his parachute as the pair entered the cabin. "I have decided," said Shayne, "that

your aeronef doesn't interest me." "Very well," replied Theodore. "You are the sole indee of that, of course."

"And you may consider the negotiations off." went on Shavne. "I adopted that theory some time

ago," replied Carson. Shayue took out his purse and ostentatiously removed from it a num-

"I think I ought to pay you for your time," said he, "and your service to my niece. Please take these and be

good enough to go aft with the crew." If Silberberg had not seen fit to indulge in a sardonic laugh at this exigency the explosion would not have occurred, but that sneering chuckle acted as a detonator for Carson's temper. He struck Shayne's extended hand, scattering the bills over the floor. Shayne stood with flaring nostrils and white with rage.

"Don't notice the fellow. Shayne," said Silberberg. "He wants to keep

The speech was cut short by a blow from Carson's flat hand delivered with force. As calmly as though bidding Silberberg good morning Carson spoke

"Be careful how you speak of her," said he, "or I'll throw you over the side. Mr. Shayne, permit me to say that you are a cur. I shall leave this

He started to go on deck, but as if reconsidering he turned and rapped on the door through which Virginia had disappeared. The girl opened it and looked breathlessly into Theodore's

"I am about to leave the Roc," said he. "I could not leave without bid-

ding you goodby." "Going?" said she. "Have we de-

scended?" "Keep away from that man!" screamed Silberberg. "He struck me, and he knocked your uncle's money

all over the ship!" Carson stood aside for her, and they went out upon the mile high deck. She halted, aghast to note that they were still high among the clouds of the storm, plowing on through a wild waste of tossing vapor, while the hoarse growl from the earth was so distant as to admonish her of the gid-



DROPPED OFF INTO THE BLACK ABYSS.

dy height from the ground. Beyond the illumination of the lights it was absolutely dark.

"You must be going aft?" said she interrogatively. "I'll go with you." "No," said he. "I shall never see you again, but I shall never forget

you. Goodby, Psyche! Goodby!" That instantaneous leave taking the trembling girl never forgot. Pressing her hands, he started forward as if to clasp her in his arms. He turned from the embrace already half begun, stepped upon the rail and dropped off into that black abyss of night and tempest. Like a stone be fell, lost in the

mists. The parachute, so far as she could see, had not opened in the least when he vanished, and with pallid face she stood there peering over into the unpeopled space, her soul filled with horrible visions.

CHAPTER V.

THE FALL THAT FOLLOWED PRIDE. UDDENLY Theodore burst from the floor of the cloud like a meteorite and saw a long procession of white and violet lights speeding past and away into the distance, the arc lights of a town set into apparent flight by the speed of his beadlong career before the wind. Far off in the glare of a locomotive firebox he could see a devilish black fireman, weirdly stoking.

The town fled away. The roar of the wind rose about him. He was whipped stingingly by the branches of a tall tree; then a lower one bowed him through its dense top. He laid hold of a slim birch, and, as it bent like a fishing rod under his weight, he let go the sheets of his parachute, the wind spilled from the silken leach, and he tumbled heavily into a mattress-like bridal wreath bush, over an asphalted walk, and, eased down by the shrubheeded. Mr. Shayne saw real danger bery, he rose unhurt, so far as he could feel, to find himself by a rustle seat near a dry fountain. On his left he could make out a long building three or four stories high.

A high wall running back from each end of this structure seemed to him to bound the garden, for a garden be guessed it to be. Back in some crepuscular jungle he heard the throaty bel-

low of a great dog. Following the wall, he found it integral with that of the house. It was blank and high and insurmountable.

He reconnoitered the rear wall to a brick barn into which it was built. He returned to the long house and stole across to one side, where he found a door through the wall, tight shut and impregnable.

Calling up his scattered courage, he went with some steadiness up to a long veranda. A shrill whistle sounding from the top of the porch instantly commanded his attention. Theodore saw a man on the roof just in the act of swinging himself down over the

"Get under here, old sport," said the coice, "and give a liberty loving classmate a leg down."

Theodore reached up and steadied a somewhat bony leg and was about to let his burden down when the liberty toving one collapsed in all his members and came down by the run.

Carson started forward to raise the demoralized fugitive to his feet. But he was already up and seemed to be bowing and kissing his hand to an imaginary audience.

"My celebrated Avernus act," said he. "Special gravitation expert to the crowned heads! But, hist! Let me greet thee! An ye be noble, salute my cheek; an ye be slob, receive my

contemptuous thanks! Hey, old sport?" Carson stood mute, alone with a possible lunatic and a very probable dog in a walled garden into which he had dropped from the night sky.

"From your caput cometh a rattle like a muted castanet," went on the strange personage, "and anon like a battery of telegraph sounders. Stay! is it possible that it emanates from the clattering of your teeth? Caltiff, you are scairt-or in an ague that would reduce a foundry rattler to

matchwood! Art cold, fair youth?"
"A little," replied Carson, "I am lightly dressed." "Then come, come away, tra-la-la,

with me, to a realm of balmy air and breezes of Ceylon. To heel, and if thy heavy hoof but scrape the gravel to betray our flight thou diest, and all thy wad is gobbled by the privy coffer of the emporium. To heel!"

With a swift darting movement the stranger turned and, followed obediently by Carson, went across to a building which Theodore guessed to be a greenhouse. His guide opened the door and stood back with elaborate courtesy that Carson might precede him. Entering, Theodore found himself among beds of flowers which filled the house. "It is too dark," said his guide, re-

joining him, "to make the exchange of cards more than an empty and invisible formality. Yet I would fain know more of you than the bright and snappy technique of your tooth chat-

"I don't understand," answered Carson. "I came here by accident."

"Quite so," interposed his interlocutor. "Let's sit down by the American Beauty bed-there. If we might strike a match, now. I estimate that half us lush logged derelicts go ashore here in a state, to coin a word, of orey eyed wooziness. I may say that I came myself by accident and without meanin to do so-or otherwise. I must have a smoke!" Then came the scratch of the match, and Theodore scrutinized the face by the flare of the match as with nervous, unsteady movements the stranger lighted the weed.

He was a medium sized person, with deep set eyes flickering from their caverns with a blurred sharpness. His face was sallow and colorless, with hollows in the cheeks. His nose was irregularly notched in profile, like the stub of something else broken off his

dore, "and I am from the south, from Alabama, I"-"Craighead is mine," rejoined tha other. "I am from here and elsewhere. There are twenty places where I might vote were there any question under the sun worth voting on. I think I may

venture to give you, sir, as my perma-

nent residence, until further notice

"My name is Carson," said Theo-

only, the Rat Mort, Paris." "I"- began Carson. "The Rat Mort," interposed Craighead. "One deep midnight in the dear, dread past beyond recall I was ejected from the Rat Mort because my conduct was not up to the theretofore undis-



closed standards of the place-from the Rat Mort-actually trun out, to coin an expression! Doth it not open glimpses of a depravity hitherto fabulous? And when I have been graduated from this emporium I shall return,

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