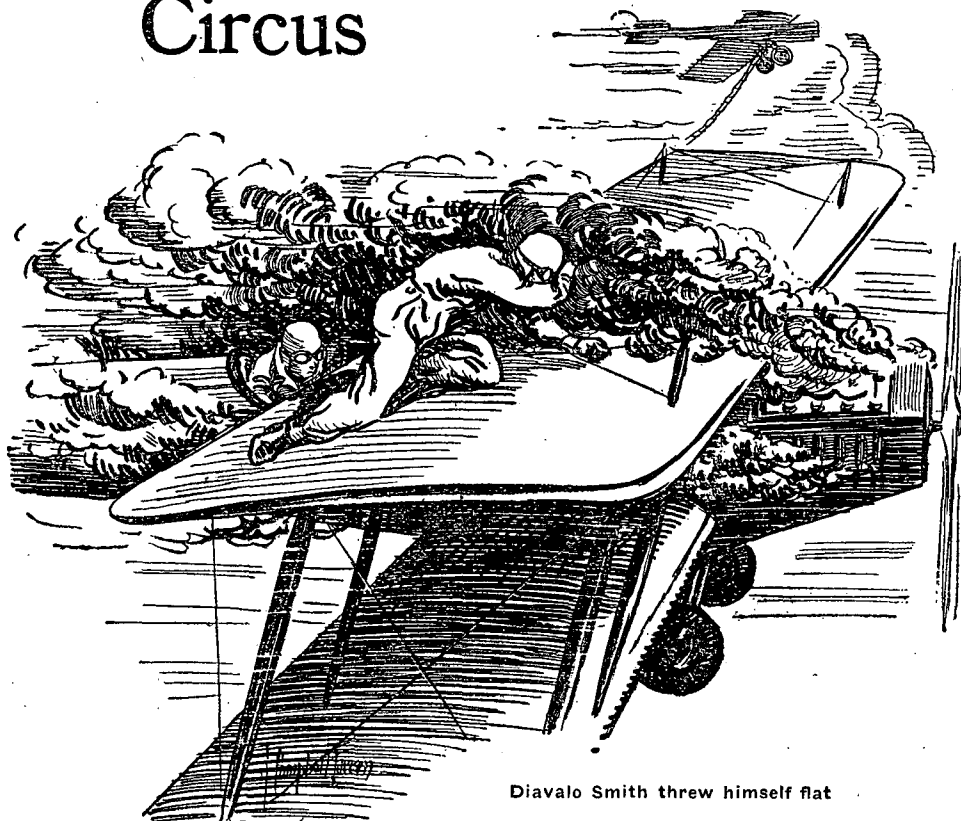


# Flying Circus

By  
GEORGE BRUCE



Diavolo Smith threw himself flat

*One thing about the Ace Flying Circus: It kept its schedules  
—even if it burned up while doing it*

## FOREWORD

## CHAPTER XIV.

SPRINGFIELD, ABOUT 1925.

**I**MMORTALS OF THE AIR was the title those intrepid aviators of the Ace Flying Circus gained for themselves when, in 1919, they set out from San Francisco to tour the country.

A dozen of them, headed by Ken Morey, the manager, barnstormed in every section of the land, in hamlets and cities, under any and all conditions. One rule Morey insisted upon: The schedule must be kept.

A note of discord entered when Buell, one of the pilots, turned sour. He was suspected of causing the death of Jinx Jones, young stunt artist, but it could not be proved on him. He was expelled from the Circus, but promised trouble later.

**T**HE office of the *State Record* was on the west side of a broad street. A very beautiful tree-bordered street in a very beautiful city. The State House blocked the north end of the street. Running south from the Capitol was a very busy business section with imposing stores on both sides of the street. Farther south the street became a boulevard flanked by private residences.

This story began in the *Argosy* for November 30

It was a two way street, divided by a forty foot space in the middle given over to grass, flower beds, and the street car tracks. The trolley wires were suspended from ornate poles, and made a net above the middle of the street traversing its entire length.

There was a forty foot lane for northbound traffic and a forty foot lane for southbound traffic.

Springfield was justly proud of its principal thoroughfare.

The *State Record*, the most powerful paper in the State outside of Chicago, was sponsoring the appearance of the Ace Flying Circus in Springfield. For six days its front page had been given over to thrilling pictures and more thrilling word accounts of what the good people of the city could expect. People squinted at this staid daily which had suddenly taken on the guise of a circus poster . . . and waited for the big show.

Among those who waited were the Governor of the State and members of the State Legislature. The Legislature was in session, which meant that the Governor was in his office.

"At noon sharp the droning of motors over the heads of the people of Springfield will herald the advent of the most famous flying organization in the world," shouted the *State Record* on its front pages. "A thrill a minute! Beginning with the sensational free exhibition over the roof of the *State Record* Building. A man will change from airplane to airplane, in mid-air, the most sensational spectacle of the century, proudly brought to the people of Springfield by the *State Record*! See Diavolo Smith! See Loop King Bones, Barrel Roll Early, Upside-down Taylor! See the performers and performances which have stunned millions of Americans. THE WORLD FAMOUS ACE FLYING CIRCUS IN ACTION OVER SPRINGFIELD!"

Ken Morey cursed softly to himself and regarded the four airplanes which had limped to a landing on the Fair Grounds outside Springfield. He regarded glower-

ing, gray skies, out of which a thirty mile wind whistled. He regarded rolling masses of cumulo-nimbus piling up on the north-east horizon.

"Four ships!" he choked. "Four ships . . . and we're scheduled to open in Springfield in twenty minutes. Four lousy ships to give a show! That's the kind of co-operation I get." He glared at Taylor, Early, Bones and Monk Russell.

"It wasn't exactly a picnic making the jump here," said Taylor quietly. "That wind is blowing plenty upstairs. Headwind all the way. Scattered us to hell and gone. Half the time you couldn't see the ground . . ."

"Eight ships . . . scattered to hell and gone over the cockeyed countryside," moaned Morey. "Eight pilots, picking wild flowers somewhere, loafing on the job . . . and a show to give in twenty minutes. With the Governor of the State and every big shot in the State waiting to get a load of the Ace Circus!"

There was an awkward silence.

"Well, we'll give the show!" snarled Morey. "You guys get in there and fly so fast nobody will be able to count how many ships. Give 'em something to look at."

TAYLOR'S face was dubious. "I just managed to crawl in here," he told Morey. "For a while I thought I wouldn't make it. I came in with ten pounds oil pressure on the clock. I probably got a couple of loose bearings and the motor is pumping oil, losing oil pressure."

Morey's nose was a little red spot in the center of his face.

"Don't tell me your troubles!" he barked at Taylor. "You're supposed to keep these lousy crates flying. I don't care if you've got five pounds oil pressure. That show has to go on. You're flying one of the plane change ships. You and Early are the plane change team. That change is going to be made, over the *Record* Building, at noon, if I have to tear up every crate in the outfit. Now get going—you got fifteen minutes."

He piled into the red Stevens and took off for the center of town.

A mechanic changing the oil in Taylor's ship looked up with grave eyes. He was feeling the oil between his fingers.

"The damned oil is full of babbitt metal," he told Taylor. "The bearings are gone. We have to change this motor. Jerk this one out and bolt another in place."

"No time," said Taylor grimly. "Due over town."

"The con rods will go through the crankcase as sure as hell," warned the mechanic.

"Maybe it'll hold up until I can get back. I'll take it easy."

The mechanic poured oil into the motor, shook his head, twisted the prop, and Taylor climbed into the ship. With him climbed Diavalo Smith. Jack Early, flying the top plane in the plane change, took off, the plane change ladder fastened to his right wing, waiting to be dropped.

One after another the four ships on the field fell into the formation, whined in over Springfield.

The streets were black with people. They stood shoulder to shoulder in the streets. Capitol Avenue was a seething mass of people. The street was choked from curb to curb in front of the *State Record* office.

A knot of spectators crowded the Capitol steps. The Legislature and the Governor and his staff.

The droning of motors sounded over the city, and four red ships, flying fast, pounced upon the roof tops, diving down, faster and faster, pulling up with a screaming of motors and a drumming of wings.

Looping, rolling, twisting, wings brushing the roof tops, they cavorted for ten minutes.

Then two of the ships made a wide turn, went down wind, dropped to bare flying speed, and a dull roar went up from the crowd. A white figure appeared on the top wing of the lower ship. At the same instant an almost invisible ladder dropped from the lower wing of the top ship.

THE two ships jockeyed with infinite care, the top ship coming in slowly and carefully over the bottom ship. The ships were close now, not more than four hundred feet over the crowd. The spectators could see every move. They saw Diavalo Smith reach out to clutch the dangling rungs of the change ladder.

And then there was a shocking, ripping sound, and a smear of black smoke from the lower ship. It staggered, lurched, and Diavalo Smith, his foot braced around the cabane strut on the top wing of that stricken ship, threw himself flat on his face on the wing to escape being shaken off onto the heads of the crowd below.

There was an instant of stunned surprise in which no one moved or made a sound. The faint whistling of gliding wires came down out of the sky. The top ship, with the ladder still dangling from under its wings, drew away slowly.

The ugly black column of smoke poured from the nose of the lower ship, and the ship was settling. The thousands in the streets waited for that black smoke to gush with red flame. And as they waited they kept eyes fixed on the white shape, still out on the wing tip; a white shape, crawling, an inch at a time, over the surface of the crippled ship, toward the center section, clawing at the smooth upper wing surfacing with finger tips.

Ken Morey erupted. The red Stevens was standing in front of the newspaper office. Close to it were parked half a dozen motorcycles belonging to the official escort provided by the city—policemen. He shrieked at them as he yanked open the fire siren on the front of the Stevens.

"Clear the streets! Shove these people up on the side streets. He has one chance—to land in the street! Hurry!"

The sirens on the half dozen motorcycles blended with the siren on the red Stevens. The policemen rode into the crowd, bullied it, shouted, implored, while Morey wheeled the Stevens forward, added his labors.

At first the movement of the mass was stubborn, stupefied, until they understood that the smoking red thing overhead had

no place to go but down, and one chance to make a landing—in the street. The movement became a rush. The thousands poured into the side streets. A miracle was taking place. An opening was being made on the street, it was emptying.

Overhead, taut, white-faced, alert, Up-side-down Taylor understood what was going on down below. He knew that the street was being cleared for him. He knew that it was the street . . . or a housetop. He nursed that four hundred feet of altitude. Time after time the crippled ship stalled, tried to spin and he beat it to the punch. The acrid, choking smoke from the ruined motor swirled about his head, blinding him, suffocating him. At any instant that motor might burst into flame.

A white shape dropped in front of his face. Diavalo crawling down into the front seat after the perilous trip across the top wing.

**T**HE ship stalled fast. It was hanging over the roof of the *Record* Building.

Taylor eased it around in a bank, he pointed the nose to the street. He leveled off over the tops of the trees, slipped quickly to the left to escape branches, back to the right to get in under those branches . . . and the wheels touched the pavement, and rolled.

And he was down. Down in a space of a hundred yards which had been cleared of spectators. Down amid a sea of people, a welter of trolley wires and poles, under a canopy of trees. He sat there for a long moment in the cockpit, his legs suddenly weak and trembling, his vision clouded.

The red Stevens rolled up in front of the plane. Morey's white, strained face looked out of the car.

"Nice going," he said quietly. "Nice landing! Hurt?"

Taylor shook his head. He had no voice.

"Well, let's go!" barked Morey. "Let's get that motor out of there."

Taylor stared at him.

"Jeez! We can't let a ship stand in the street, can we?" demanded Morey. "Block

traffic, raise hell in general—and besides we've got a show at the field at three o'clock, and we need this ship!"

He whirled on a motorcycle policeman. "Beat it out to the field and tell the boys to haul me a motor in here on a truck," he commanded.

The policeman took off, his siren shrieking.

"Get me a wrecking car with a chain hoist from a garage!" he ordered a second policeman. "And tell the guy to bring a tool kit along with all sizes of wrenches."

That policeman took off.

"Keep this street clear," he barked at the rest of the policemen. "We need elbow room."

The wrecking car came from a garage with two excited mechanics on the front seat. There was a crane extending over the back end of the wrecking car, a crane and a heavy chain.

"Perfect!" gloated Morey. "Let's get to work."

They unbolted the motor from its mount. Taylor took down the fuel lines, uncoupled the instruments. The chain went around the four hundred pound motor in a lifting hitch. The mechanics cranked on the crane.

The motor came out of its cradle, swung clear, was dropped into the body of the wrecking truck.

The faint sound of a siren grew louder and louder. A motorcycle came into the street leading the red crash wagon of the Circus. A crew jumped out of the car as it drew abreast of the plane in the street. There was a motor in the crash wagon.

"Move, damn it, move!" drove Morey.

The sling went under the new motor, lifted it out of the crash wagon into the nose of Standard. The motor mounting bolts were pushed home, buckled down. The gas lines were connected, the instruments coupled. The radiator went on, was fastened down, connected. Then a prop from the crash wagon was bolted onto the crankshaft of the motor.

"Stand clear!" ordered Morey.

Taylor stared at him.

"Get in!" shouted Morey. "What the hell are you waiting for!"

TAYLOR got in. The crash wagon crew cranked on the propeller. After the third attempt the motor hit, swung the prop. Taylor ran it up, giving it the throttle carefully. The ship trembled. Men braced themselves against the wings, holding the ship from moving forward on the smooth street. The policemen were clearing the street, pushing the crowds up the side streets.

Taylor cut the gun. He looked at Morey.

"Now what?" he asked.

"Now what?" yelled Morey. "You flew it in here, didn't you? Well—fly it out! We've got a plane change to do!"

And Taylor flew it out with Diavalo Smith in the front seat. Roaring down the street, under the trees, hemmed in by trolley wires and light poles. He lifted the tail of the Standard off the ground, took the wheels up a foot, waited until he came to a street intersection two squares down the street, and pulled the Standard up in a screaming chandelle, clearing the copings of the buildings with only inches to spare.

Upstairs Jack Early cruised around with the plane change ladder still dangling below his wings. He was trying to make up his mind what to do and where to go. Any attempt at a normal landing with that ladder dragging meant a complete washout.

Then he saw Taylor coming up over the roof tops, and Taylor was signaling with his arm. He saw Diavalo Smith going out on the top wing. What he said was unprintable, but he went down, flew low over the top of Taylor's ship, jockeyed into position, put the ladder in Gordon Smith's hands—and Smith swung off into space, climbed the ladder, pulled it up after him, crawled into the cockpit, grinning like a monkey.

The two ships flew back to the Fair Grounds.

On the granite steps of the State Capitol the Governor of a great State stood as if in a trance and mopped his brow with mechanical movements of his hand while he

stared with blank eyes at the now empty heavens and listened to the receding droning of the two motors.

After a moment his mouth moved. "My God!" he half whispered to himself. "My God!"

At the same instant Ken Morey was pounding his fist on the desk of the managing editor of the *State Record*. Morey's jaw jutted and his eyes blazed.

"When the Ace Flying Circus contracts to do a plane change for a newspaper, it does the plane change!" he thundered at the editor. "Hell or high water, we make good!"

And the managing editor, his eyes dazed and his brain dizzy, was saying over and over: "Yes, Mr. Morey."

## CHAPTER XV.

"BLOODY WILLIAMSON COUNTY"—1926.

SPLATTERED with blood, black with a record of violent years, of machine gunnings, shotgun slayings, bootleg murders, labor wars. Torn and rent by internal strife so that brothers went armed against brothers and mothers heaped curses upon sons. Highroads, coal stipples, speak-easies, private homes, city streets, splashed with the blood of men who had died during the black days.

Imported gunmen walking the streets, patrolling properties, enlisted as deputy sheriffs. Two sets of officials, elected by the fighting factions, both elected illegally, neither interested in the preservation of law and order, but interested only in the extermination of the "enemy" under the cloak of quasi-legal measures.

Bootleg gangs out of Chicago fighting a vicious war for control of the product in Bloody Williamson. Trucks, convoys, black touring cars racing over the roads at night, to tumble into ditches, smashing themselves, becoming funeral pyres for drivers and guards in the face of machine gun fire out of ambush. Pitched battles along the State roads, with crumpled bodies lying in the roads to greet the dawn.



Pitched battles between miners and imported gunmen at mine shafts.

Pitched battles in the dead of night as "posses" of armed raiders crashed into houses and murdered inmates in bed.

Pitched battles between crusading Prohibitionists and anti-Prohibitionists.

Day after day, month after month, year after year it all raged within the borders of Bloody Williamson. Until newspapers printed maps showing Williamson County in jet black. Until State Militia patrolled the streets with fixed bayonets and set up machine gun nests at street corners.

When the militia came, a brooding, ominous peace settled over Williamson County. The vicious fighting broke out anew before the pound of the marching feet of withdrawn soldiery ceased to echo in the streets.

A short, stocky, bigoted, fanatical murderer by the name of Vance Dalton, posing as the savior of Bloody Williamson, appearing from somewhere outside the State, with two guns strapped down on his legs, the light of a sadist in his eyes, appointing himself an arm of the law, conducting bloody raids without authority, placing himself at the head of his group, inundating Bloody Williamson under new waves of terrorism, murder, and arson.

Vance Dalton swaggering into court to answer charges, his guns in plain sight, backed by a score of his armed thugs, sneering at the judge, swaggering out again because no judge or jury dared to convict him. Vance Dalton, telling the people of Bloody Williamson, "I am the Law," and murdering his enemies in cold blood in the name of the law.

The smoke pall of destruction, the lightning flashes of violence, the writhings of murder hung over Bloody Williamson, and in the midst of it all, the Ace Flying Circus scheduled an exhibition at Herrin.

**W**HEN Morey rolled through the main street of Herrin, his practiced eye told him that something was very, very wrong. Ordinarily people do not go about the streets with guns bulging in

shoulder holsters, under coats, or in plain sight. Neither do they sit eternally on curb stones with Winchester 30-30s draped over knees. All towns have sound—but Herrin had a queer, hushed silence. The silence of fear and of breathless expectancy.

On both sides of the street, men sat with those Winchesters draped over their knees, staring blankly at men who sat on the other side of the street in exactly the same manner. If a firecracker had exploded in the middle of that street, there would have been a quick, searing line of flame from those Winchesters, a pitched battle in the streets of Herrin.

Here and there little groups of men in khaki hurried along the streets, seemingly bent upon mysterious and dangerous errands.

And those blank, tense, unsmiling faces and hostile eyes followed the red Stevens all the way to the hotel.

At the hotel the clerk seemed to be in a state of hypnosis. It was necessary to speak to him twice to attract his attention. His eyes were looking out the plate glass windows of the hotel, toward the street. A street strangely empty of automobiles, of carriages, of all traffic and all people. Excepting for those armed men sitting on the curbs, Herrin might have been an abandoned city, abandoned in a breath, its people having fled an invisible terror.

"What the hell is the matter with this joint?" demanded Morey angrily of the clerk. "Sleeping sickness?"

The clerk didn't smile. He merely looked at Morey's face.

"Vance Dalton is in town," he said tonelessly as if that explained everything.

"Well, so is the Ace Flying Circus. Show some life."

Ken Morey checked in at the hotel. He went out to the field to await the coming of the Circus ships. The ground trucks were already on the field, the barbed wire was strung, the concession tents were up, the gas drums were piled up.

At eleven the planes came in, flying the tight formation, circling the city before landing. They taxied to the line. Just

as the last of them pulled into position, four automobiles halted at the side of the road bordering the field. Out of the four cars stepped a dozen men. They were carrying Winchesters. One man, dressed in khaki riding breeches and a khaki shirt, a campaign hat on his head, boots on his feet and legs, and two .45 Colt automatics swinging in tied-down holsters as he walked, led the procession.

THEY crawled under the wire. They came silently. They spread out a little. The men with the rifles stood, barrels resting in crooked arms, right hands gripping stocks.

The silence grew static, jagged, dangerous.

The little man with the two guns looked about him, looked at the men of the Circus.

"Just what do you expect to do here?" he demanded of Taylor.

"I'm the manager of this Circus," said Morey. "If you have questions to ask, ask me."

Two cold eyes, ice flecked with little spots of red, passed over Morey's face, looked him over, up and down. A white face, bleak, without expression, looked out from under the shadow of the campaign hat. The face of a killer. A ruthless face. The face of a man drunk with his own power and his ability to enforce his dictates.

"You heard me," he said slowly. "Just what do you expect to do here?"

Something flared up in Morey. The tone of the man's voice flicked him on a suddenly raw surface, his eyes narrowed and the flanges of that little round nose flared.

"You read the newspapers, don't you?" he asked. "You can read the name on those airplanes and trucks. This is the Ace Flying Circus, and we're giving a show in Herrin today."

"I was not consulted," said the hard, thin lipped mouth.

Morey stared at him. "You were not consulted?" he repeated. "Who in the hell are you that we should consult you?"

For a long moment death trod very lightly on the sod of that field. It raged in

the man's eyes. It was in the tightening of hands on the stocks of Winchester rifles. It was in the sudden starkness of standing bodies. Morey stood there, his hands hanging, his eyes fixed on the cold eyes in front of him.

"I'm Vance Dalton," said the khaki-clad man. "People usually consult me about things like this."

"We're in this town under the auspices of the local paper. We have a lease on this field, legally executed. We pay our way where we go, operate inside the law, and pay graft to nobody. So, why should we see you, Mr. Dalton?"

Every man in the Ace Flying Circus knew the name Vance Dalton. Every man knew his record. It had been spread over the front pages of newspapers for weeks. They stood there, behind Morey, silent, tense.

"Just a matter of policy," informed Dalton in the same cold voice. "In times like this Williamson County is suspicious of all strangers. I know nothing about you. I do not think it good public policy to give such an exhibition, at a time like this—an exhibition which would probably gather a large crowd—and out of which serious trouble might occur."

He stopped. He looked at Morey as if that settled the matter.

Morey looked at his watch. "Get going, boys," he told the pilots quietly. "It's just about time to take off for the noon show over town."

DALTON'S eyes were suddenly glinting. "I said, Mr. Morey, that I thought it would be better if you cancelled your Herrin exhibitions!"

Morey took a step forward. He stood very close to Dalton. A contemptuous laugh broke out of his hard mouth.

"Listen, Dalton, get this," he said, and his teeth clipped the words short. "In this neck of the woods, you're supposed to be some kind of a big shot. Just what you are I don't know, and I don't give a damn. To me, at the present moment, you look like a Boy Scout gone sour, running around with

a lot of stooges armed to the teeth. You've got a reputation as a trouble maker, and as being dynamite. Maybe you are—as I said, I wouldn't know—and I don't care.

"But get this straight. The Ace Flying Circus never broke a date in its life. It never has been bluffed by anybody. It has never cancelled a show, and it never will! We're going to show in Herrin, on this field, on this day and date.

"I don't know what your racket is in coming here, but if you have any idea of making trouble for this outfit, let me remind you that every pilot you see in front of you is an ex-army officer. They've all seen men with guns before—machine guns—and licked hell out of 'em. They eat trouble, they live on it, and they love it. More, every man in front of you is a national figure, known to millions and millions of Americans who never heard of Williamson County or Vance Dalton. Now—if you want to begin the trouble—*begin*—only I promise you, *we'll* finish it! And if we can't the Federal government will finish it for us!"

Dalton stood there. He listened without a sign. The expression on his face never changed. That terrible, jagged tautness hung over the field.

Then suddenly, Dalton smiled, a white, thin smile which merely moved the corners of his mouth.

"I have every respect for a man with sufficient courage to fight for his rights, Mr. Morey," he said. "My idea in coming out here was to prevent trouble which may occur on this field this afternoon." He paused. The smile expanded a trifle. "After talking with you I am convinced that you will be able to handle the situation. I withdraw my suggestion that you cancel the exhibitions. In fact—I'll stand by to render you every assistance in case of trouble."

"That's fine," said Morey in the same growling voice. "But we won't have any trouble."

Dalton offered his hand. Morey took it. "I'm glad to have talked with you, Mr. Morey," said Dalton.

Morey said nothing. Dalton walked away, twenty steps or more, with his armed guard following. Then he stopped, retraced his steps.

"**B**Y the way," he said casually. "Do you happen to know a flier by the name of Buell?"

Morey jumped at the name. Then he held himself in iron restraint. The men behind him crowded forward.

"Yeah, I know him," admitted Morey.

"Would you—strictly off the record—mind telling me what kind of man he is?"

Morey was silent for a minute. Then his voice broke from between his teeth, grating.

"He's a murdering rat," he told Dalton.

Dalton nodded thoughtfully. "Good pilot?"

"One of the best."

Another thoughtful nod. "Capable of night flying?"

"Certainly."

The bleak smile came back over Dalton's mouth. "I thought so," he said. "I had an idea this Buell was responsible."

"For what?" demanded Morey.

"In the last two weeks there have been three cases of bombing from the air at night," explained Dalton. "A single plane, just appearing in the sky over certain points, dropping bombs, disappearing—losing itself. Night before last, at a cross road near here—fifteen miles out on the State highway, in fact—a roadhouse was bombed, five people were killed and several more shockingly wounded by the bombs. The roadhouse burned to the ground after the bombings. One of the wounded burned with it—alive. That was the work of an expert flier . . . someone mentioned the name of Buell to me. Well, thank you."

He turned on his heel and strode off the field.

"Buell!" repeated Morey silently. "Buell . . . hell, yes . . . he's the guy they've been after . . . nobody else. It's his kind of an assignment, murdering people without giving them a chance, at night. He's made a tie-up with that Chi-



cago bootlegging gang that's trying to mop up on this territory. He's doing the flying and the bombing."

His hands were clenched into fists. His eyes glittered.

Suddenly he whirled on the men. "What the hell are you standing there for!" he snarled at them. "You've got ten minutes to make the show over town. Get going!"

That afternoon was unique in the annals of the Circus. Ten thousand people came out to the field. Men, hard faced, with alert, suspicious eyes, stood around, watching . . . watching. Men with gun bulges under coats, or with rifles in plain sight. Men who hated the guts of other men in the same crowd—hated them to death.

And the pilots of the Circus flew through five hours of tense, subdued excitement, waiting for the bark of a rifle or the crash of an automatic, waiting for hell to break loose on the field, waiting for spurting flame, whining bullets.

The show went on, the motors sounding like machine guns.

And Morey paced back and forth on the field, hard, challenging, ready—for anything.

But Bloody Williamson's guns remained silent that afternoon.

**D**URING that night the men of the Circus were awakened by the sound of a sub-machine gun in action. They leaped up in bed. The gun chattered for only an instant. The instant was punctuated with rifle and pistol shots. Then there was silence, deep, trembling silence.

"What a peaceful little joint!" growled Jack Early, putting his head back on the pillow. "Just a couple of guys having an argument, I suppose."

At seven in the morning, Morey went to a garage on the main street to get his red Stevens out of over-night storage. He walked along, his head down, thinking. He stopped in front of the garage. He looked at the door queerly for an instant. The big door was closed, but the little door, just big enough to admit a man, was swinging open.

He called through the door. "Hey! What's the chance of getting my car?"

There was no answer from inside the garage. He cursed and eased his body through the little door. He walked up to his car in the near darkness. He had parked it himself the night before. He started the motor, switched on the lights. Suddenly he was sitting rigid, his face white, his hands gripping the wheel, sweat breaking out on his forehead.

Across the floor of the garage, under the glare of his headlamps, were six bodies, flopped about, arms outflung, faces contorted with the knowledge of death. Six men, made grotesque by ordinary clothing, shot to death, riddled, and the wall of the garage in back of them was riddled, chipped, gouged by slugs. A wide pool of blood made a sticky red mass about them. The place was a shambles.

Morey climbed out of his car. He opened the big door of the garage. His feet crunched on brass jackets from exploded .45 cartridges. The uncertain light of early morning seeped into the garage. He drove the red Stevens out on the street, back to the hotel.

For the first hundred feet it left the perfect pattern of its tire treads marked on the pavement and on the asphalt. Marked in red.

The bodies were stiff, but no one had touched them. No one had investigated. No one dared.

The mark of Bloody Williamson, countersigned by Vance Dalton.

## CHAPTER XVI.

### DOG FIGHT.

**M**OREY said to the pilots, "Let's get the hell out of here. Get those ships rolling, get moving. This lousy place has me jittering."

And then they all looked up. A familiar sound came down to them. The sound of an airplane motor, flying high. The early morning sun was in their eyes as they looked for the plane.

Morey spoke again. "It's a K6 Oriole," he declared. "That guy is sure getting himself some early morning air. Wonder where he's from."

They made out the ship. They saw it was all black, made a black cross against the still roseate glow in the sky. It flew over the field.

Some one screamed out of a throat suddenly thick with fear, "Look out—!"

The earth in front of them erupted flame, shook, flung them down, drove the acrid odor of high explosives into nostrils, blinded them. There was the sound of splintering wood and ripping linen. Fragments of red planes flew about them, whirling crazily.

There was a second shock and concussion, and a third.

And in the midst of the inferno, Ken Morey reared to his feet, his eyes glaring, his legs buckling under him, and staggered over the reeling earth. He gathered speed out of his own lurching momentum. After a moment he was racing through fire and debris toward one of the red ships, unhurt, standing on the line.

"He belongs to me!" he was yelping insanely. "He belongs to me!"

He threw himself into the cockpit of the red ship. A mechanic came from somewhere, dared explosion, fire and splinters, and twisted the prop. The Hiss hit on the first pull through compression. Without warming the motor, Morey opened the throttle, ruddered the ship around with a vicious blast of the gun, sent it skimming and roaring, cross-wind, over the field, holding it a foot over the ground until he built up a tremendous speed. Then he zoomed in a wild rush of wings.

That was the second time in all the years of the Circus that Ken Morey had flown one of the red ships. The first was the day he flew Buell's ship in Jinx Jones' funeral procession. The men of the Circus had almost forgotten that Morey was a pilot—and a war pilot.

But dazed and shaken by the bombing, they remembered that he was a pilot—a war pilot—as they watched the red Standard snatched off the ground. Fire burned,

sullenly and fiercely, at three of the twelve ships. Two more were reduced to broken wood and torn linen.

Over the crackle of the flame came the angry throb of the motor in Morey's ship as he drove it up and up, after that black Oriole.

Perhaps Buell knew that it was Ken Morey in the Circus ship climbing after him. Or, perhaps he believed it was Jack Early, who once had rolled wheels over his wings and had forced him down. Perhaps with Buell it was merely an exhibition of bravado. Perhaps he *wanted* Morey or Early or anyone else connected with the Circus to climb to the attack.

No matter what the motive, he flew about the field in a wide circle, while the red Standard climbed in rapid sweeping spirals.

AT three thousand feet the two ships came together. Buell in the black K6 Oriole swept out of a vertical bank, released top rudder, went over in a diving wing-over, pushing the throttle open as he dived. The thin scream of his motor knifed down to earth. His black ship was like a winged projectile.

And Morey, in the cockpit of the Standard, his hand gripping the stick, watched him come through narrowed, fierce eyes.

When the Oriole was fifty yards away, ripping down on him, Morey discovered the reason for Buell's bravado. At that distance, Buell was a leather-helmeted, leather-coated figure in the Oriole's cockpit. He seemed to rise a little in the seat. His arms lifted.

Morey snatched at the controls of the Standard, pushed over the stick, kicked on top rudder.

Those leather clad arms of Buell's supported a Thompson sub-automatic machine gun. The muzzle of the Tommy disappeared, dissolved in a red smear of flame.

The space about Morey's head was filled with the sound of crackling whiplashes. Heavy .45 slugs ripped through a panel of the wing. He released the top rudder and the Standard slipped with a rush. Then

he pulled back slowly on the stick, knocked the wings level, and fought for altitude.

His teeth were grinding. That was the answer! Big, bad Buell wanted a Circus pilot to attack after the bombing. He knew Circus ships were unarmed. He wanted the odds of a machine gun against empty hands.

The Standard groaned, threshed its wings at the top of the stiff climb, threatened to stall. Morey's head tilted over the edge of the cockpit. He saw Buell in the black ship, following after him. The Standard could outclimb the Oriole, could outmaneuver it. Morey pushed the stick forward against the firewall and kicked left rudder. The Circus crate went over on a wing, dived, and the propeller spun madly. White flame vomited from the short exhaust stacks of the Hisso. The Standard was a red smear of velocity. It plunged recklessly for the nose of Buell's ship.

It seemed that Buell was alarmed, or he sought to outmaneuver Morey, to get into position for another murderous blast from the Tommy gun. He whirled the Oriole in a right vertical, went diving away from the Standard. Nose down, throttle open, the wind shrieking through wires and struts. The wings drumming, the nose drift wires growing taut. The flying wires singing in fiendish glee.

The two ships plunged earthward. And Morey, veering in quickly, pounced on Buell's tail, roared in behind him, bucked in the way of Buell's propeller, hung on like a bulldog, while Buell swerved and twisted to shake him off.

AND a hammering pulse began a steady beating in Morey's chest. The sense of power. The knowledge that the Standard was outflying and outdiving the black Oriole. Foot by foot it closed on the tail section of the Oriole. A queer coldness filled Morey. A coldness that blew through his brain and made his senses razor keen. A coldness that seemed numbing to the sense of any danger. His eyes, thin slits behind his goggles, were fixed on the flippers and rudder of the Oriole. They

were dead ahead of the Standard's propeller.

Buell twisted in his seat. For an instant he dared to leave his hands off the stick. The Tommy gun came up again. He fired over his own tail. The whiplashes around Morey's head snapped and crackled viciously. A strut frayed from an invisible impact.

But Morey was straining forward in the seat, watching the rudder and empennage of the black Oriole. He scarcely heard the rip and crack of slugs. The rudder was a foot in front of the Standard's nose. He grinned, whitely, his knuckles became a dead white. He banged the throttle forward—hard against the forward post. The Hisso gave another ounce of power, and the red ship dived more sharply, came up fast, seemed to telescope into the tail of Buell's black crate.

There was a rending sound, the sound of something crumpling and tearing free, and the red Standard, zooming like a hunting hawk, climbed straight up . . . and snarled around its spreader bar was Buell's rudder and fragments of Buell's flippers.

Morey's head was thrust over the side of the cockpit. He watched Buell fighting desperately to control a ship without controls. The tail of the Oriole lashed up and down, and wreckage streamed behind it. It veered crazily, lunged to the right, turned over on its back, whirled its wings.

And then Buell left it. He bailed out. He merely opened his safety belt, and fell out of his inverted ship.

Morey saw him going. His eyes left the threshing, writhing Oriole and followed Buell. He saw Buell's hand snatch for the rip cord ring—tug—and a pilot 'chute leaped out of an Irvin back-pack-type 'chute. It dragged the big 'chute out of the bag. It blossomed in space, white, billowing, and Buell's descent was checked. He seemed floating serenely, gently toward the earth, a thousand feet down.

Morey held the Standard poised for an instant, staring. Then the muscles of his jaw bulged and grew hard and his eyes glinted. He dived the Standard at the

parachute. Full gun, roaring down. He could see Buell's white face looking up at him, and Buell's hand dragging at the shrouds to slip the 'chute away from the diving red ship.

The parachute was like a cloud of white silk in Morey's face. It seemed tremendous, and then the wheels and spreader bar of the Standard struck the top of the 'chute—just caressed it, but a prop, its tips sheathed in polished copper, and turning at 2,200 r.p.m.'s, also caressed the silk of the 'chute, just as Morey pulled the Standard out of the dive.

HE looked down. He saw Buell's legs gyrating and his hands working desperately to guide the 'chute. He saw there was a little slice cut in the top of the 'chute . . . a dozen little slices, almost invisible, but with the wind pressure under them they opened like the lips of a white, bloodless wound.

Morey carried the Standard down, went around the 'chute in steep spirals.

One of the little slices in the top of Buell's 'chute suddenly grew larger—split from side to side, and air rushed through the vent. The floating 'chute increased the speed of its fall.

Fifty feet and the slice was a yawning, fraying opening in the silk, and the other little slices were growing. And the descent of the 'chute became rapid.

He saw Buell's face, white, contorted, looking up at him, as Buell's hands still worked at the useless shrouds.

Then the parachute split itself into ribbons. Buell's body fell with the rush of a dead weight, the shrouds snarling around him, the silk ribbons collapsing and blowing like streamers.

He fell faster than the Standard could dive.

Morey leveled the ship, watched, his face set and hard. At the end of an eternity which was not more than five seconds in length, the grotesque, leather clad thing wrapped in white ribbons struck the center of the field, bounced—as Jinx Jones had—and did not move again.

The men of the Circus, standing rooted, watched the fall of the Black Oriole, watched it smash itself against the earth and burst into explosion and flame. Watched Buell follow it, watched the black huddle of his broken, inert body in the center of the field. Watched with such intensity they never heard or saw Ken Morey's return to earth.

They heard him later. He snarled at them. "Come on, let's go. Let's get the hell away from here."

It was then they noticed that the spreader bar on the ship he had flown was broken, the axle bent, and a wheel flattened. Fragments of the black Oriole, like patches of putrid flesh, were still entangled in that spreader bar and wheel.

But Morey never so much as glanced at what was left of the K6 Oriole, nor at what was left of Buell. He abandoned the burned and bombed red ships of the Circus on the field. He touched a match to the gas tanks of the two ships which had been wrecked but had not burned.

And the Circus flew out of Bloody Williamson in the glare and roar and crackle and thick black smoke of flame.

## CHAPTER XVII.

NEW YORK CITY, 1927.

THE end of the path of glory. It came to an end with the abruptness of a well marked road which suddenly runs over the edge of an abyss.

In one instant, at the height of its fame and fortune, the World Famous Ace Flying Circus came to an end. Big business took over flying. Big business, with stockholders and boards of directors and big business methods. There was no place in the scheme of big business for a Flying Circus. No place on its roster for men like Taylor, Early, Bones, Diavalo Smith. No need for names like "Barrel Roll," "Loop King" and "Upside-down." No need for the red Standards.

Ken Morey walked out of the office on the field at Teterboro. Across the river

the canyons of New York City reared mighty heads. He held a telegram in his hand. The telegram was from Washington. It was terse.

You will suspend stunt flying under the provisions of the Air Commerce Rules and Regulations adopted today and made law. You will suspend passenger carrying activities until such time as your planes are inspected and receive a certificate of air worthiness from an authorized inspector of this department. You will not engage in flying exhibitions of any nature without first having the approval of this department.

Morey read the telegram slowly, in a dead voice. The men of the Circus stood around him and after a moment the light went out of their eyes and they were staring stupidly, like men, guilty of no wrong, listening to an edict of banishment, of exile.

"Well, that's that," said Morey. He looked around him, at the men, at the red ships standing on the line. He was trying to remember those untold thousands of hours of flying, those hundreds of thou-

sands of paying passengers carried in those red ships without the slightest accident. A procession of towns, cities, hamlets crossed his memory, with the faces of thirty million spectators rapt, and staring, hypnotized by the drone of motors, and by the sunlight on the sleek hides of the red ships.

Morey turned away from them suddenly. He could not bear to look at their faces. A hard lump in his throat strangled him. His fingers crumpled the telegram. He dived into his office and closed the door.

Out of the window he watched them, turning away, hands hanging, shoulders suddenly sagging, heads lowered, eyes dead. Shuffling over the field. Not even speaking. Just shuffling. And the red ships were suddenly stark and lonely.

Shuffling, dead eyed, like exiles.

Mortals who had lived with the high gods, who had tasted the nectar reserved for Immortals.

That was the hell of it. There was no place in big business for them, and the telegram which hurled them back to earth did not mention Immortality.

THE END

## *On the Up and Up*

THE Alps used to be considered high. They aren't; in fact, they're pretty low down. Mont Blanc, the highest Alpine peak, goes up 15,771 feet. That's nothing, compared to some of the main elevations of the earth.

Mt. Everest, in Indo-China, is 29,141 feet high. That's as far up as man can get on foot. There are many other Asiatic peaks so high up you can't see them—and have never heard of them.

South America's highest point is Mt. Aconcagua, in Chile and Argentine, 22,834 feet high.

North America, third highest of the continents, has Mt. McKinley, in Alaska, 20,299 feet up. Mt. Kibo, in Tanganyika Territory, is Africa's highest, 19,710 feet. Europe can do no better than 18,465 feet—Mt. Elbrus, in the Caucasus Mountains.

—Robert Fuller.