



Fools Fly High

By LOUIS C. GOLDSMITH

ALVIN NAGEL hated DAN MOORE because the latter knew no fear, and that hate brought Moore to disaster. Fixed with the responsibility for a crackup, accused of striking Nagel, his superior officer, Moore was court-martialed. The decision of the court was not then announced, but Moore knew his career in the Air Service was finished.

Two people believe in Moore and need him, JULIAN HOYT and his sister, THERESA, called Trick. Hoyt's dream is to make instrument flying safe—a wild dream in those early post-war years; his immediate scheme is to organize an air circus, with Dan Moore, legendary World War ace, the feature attraction. Moore is sick of flying, sceptical of Hoyt's theories about safety in the air; but eventually TRICK HOYT wins him over.

THE first recruits of the air circus are CAPTAIN PATRICK, pilot, and MIKE DENISKI, mechanic—both old friends of Moore's. Other pilots join—among them Alvin Nagel, still savagely eager to teach Dan Moore the meaning of fear. At first all goes well, and thousands flock to watch the daring maneuvers of the flyers, so brilliantly coached and led by Dan Moore. But soon trouble arrives, with Nagel behind it.

Towns visited by the Moore Aerial Circus report the depredations of pickpockets, the sale of poisonous liquor. It's easy to link this with one HOKE GIFFORD, a racketeer who is Alvin Nagel's friend and his pupil in the science of cards. Furiously angry, Dan Moore publicly threatens Nagel's life. That is a mistake.

NAGEL having deliberately broken up the formation maneuvers at one show, Moore relegates him to taking up passengers. Then, from the sky, Moore sees Nagel's plane falter, go crashing down. Landing swiftly, Moore finds the wrecked plane about to catch fire with the passengers trapped in it. And Nagel, who has climbed free, is



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shouting to the crowd that Moore filed the control-horn bolts to cause the crackup. Someone remembers how Moore threatened Nagel.

Captain Patrick gets Moore away from the lynch-crazy mob and forces him into a car. Left behind are Trick Hoyt and the blacksmith, JIM LOGAN, who have climbed up on the wing of the wrecked plane. But Dan Moore manages to break free from Patrick; he throws himself from the car and rushes back toward the crackup. Quickly he's recognized, and one of the crowd yells: "Here he comes! Get a rope and we'll hang him!" . . .

CHAPTER XXIX

VULTURES WANT SOUVENIRS

THE mob sounds were beaten down by a greater voice. Jim Logan had pulled himself up onto the wing beside Trick Hoyt. His tremendous weight had broken through the fabric, smashing the frail ribs. He had wrenched the control horn from the aileron where it had hung, dangling uselessly, the retaining bolts sheered. He held it aloft.

"Listen, you blasted fools!" he roared. "You all know me; Jim Logan, the blacksmith. Nobody filed these bolts. They crystallized." He pointed to the girl. "Good thing there was somebody with brains enough to look."

Dan Moore slowed from his limping run. Al Bibbs had whirled the Packard and was returning. "Climb on," he ordered Dan.

"I must of busted some ribs," Moore muttered, stepping painfully onto the runningboard.

It was a strange thing that had happened. A moment before that crowd had been a mad, unthinking beast, eager to kill. In that short space it had dissolved into its component parts; individual human beings who could be reasoned with.

Logan's hoarse, booming voice challenged them. "You're a bunch of crazy fools! Tom and his kid ain't hurt much. And Moore didn't file these bolts. Nobody did. They crystallized."

Bibbs moved slowly through the crowd, pounding the rubber bulb of his horn to clear a path.

Moore looked around. He could see now that the front cockpit was empty. And Nagel had disappeared. A man stood on the crumpled left wing, trying with a savage violence to wrench a strut from its fittings. A wide streak of blood gleamed scarlet down his left cheek.

"What's the idea?" Moore demanded. "Where're those passengers?"

"I'm one of 'em. Me an' my kid," the man answered, belligerently. "I want this stick here for a souvenir of our wreck. An' I'm gonna have it too."

A voice caught that up. "Let's get a souvenir from it!"

There was a dry rasp of tearing cloth. A man on the other side of the fuselage raised and triumphantly waved a long banner of doped fabric. "I got some of the silk," he shouted.

It was like a signal. The crowd poured over the wrecked plane. Women, men and children fought with each other to get a part of it.

Trick Hoyt and Logan had joined Dan, near Al's car.

"They'll ruin the Standard!" Trick cried.

"Not much left to ruin," Dan told her, ruefully.

"But why do they do it! What good are those things to them?"

He looked at her. "Blessed if I know, Trick." His voice echoed her wonder. "Once I flew out to a ship that'd crashed and burned. Not a gasoline fire; not enough to burn the pilot's skeleton. The people were stealing his bones, for souvenirs. That's God's truth."

Dan turned on Bibbs. "You're hired, Al," he told him. "You and Logan cut that Hall-Scott free and you haul it to Riverport, other side of the Cascades. We'll establish a base field there." He put his hand on Logan's massive shoulder. "Much obliged, partner," he said. "I think maybe they'd have strung me up, if it hadn't been for you an' Al." He added: "And if Trick hadn't thought to look at that control horn."

"Hell, we wasn't tryin' to save your

life," Bibbs grumbled. "We—come on, Jim let's get that motor 'fore they swipe it."

Trick called after him. "Sometime somebody's going to catch you doing a good deed, Al. Won't you be embarrassed!"

She faced Moore. "Well, Dan?" she questioned, her voice subdued.

He shrugged. "We'll go on to Everett and Bellingham. Curt's already posted those towns. There's an airplane factory in Seattle where we may be able to pick up repair parts. That is, if you and Red still want to go on with this craziness."

"We're just starting," she assured him. "If necessary we can sell our home to keep going." Her determined voice softened. "Dan, I saw you jump out of the car and start back here. Did you do that because of—because you were afraid they would hurt me?" A slow flush mounted in her face. Her hand, on his arm, was trembling.

His eyes were puzzled. "What difference does it make?" he asked. He patted her shoulder. His voice changed, and with it the quality of his smile. "Trick, you oughta know by this time that all flyers are crazy as bedbugs. I don't know why I do things."

DAN MOORE stood outside the rough-board hangar that Al Bibbs and a gang of carpenters had erected on this field, east of Riverport. In the distance the irregular skyline of the Riverport business district was painted with the golden, dreamy light of late Indian summer. Dan had a letter in his hand that he'd brought out with him from the hotel. It was from Major Antai, commanding officer of the army training field in Florida.

The letter was personal, and quite long. Dan re-read one of the paragraphs, his eyes squinted in thought:

General John Marks, artillery, overseas, is now a staff officer of the department and happened to be the officer reviewing your case. He refused to endorse the findings of the court-martial and has written, asking that I use my influence as your commanding officer to have a re-trial of the case.

Confidentially, I believe the general is remembering an instance in the late war when a certain combat flyer shot down a

line of observation balloons near Lens, saving from complete destruction a battalion of artillery under Marks' command.

At least the general mentioned that in his personal letter to me and also your landing from that flight, badly wounded and with the wings almost shot off your plane.

Dan was smiling broadly. "I'll say they were almost shot off," he muttered, his memory omitting the agony of the explosive machine-gun bullet that had struck his thigh. That flight seemed to have happened a century ago. "Landed her on the parados of the Limey frontline trench. Both wings fell off as those crazy Scotchmen came swarming toward me. And did I get drunk before they got me to the first dressing station!"

He laughed outright. "A kilty followin' on each side of my stretcher, with a bottle: 'Ha' another wee drap, Yank, for-r tha gr-rand show ye gie us.'"

"That's the first time I've heard you laugh in ages," Trick said, coming up behind him. "Good news in the letter?"

"No," Dan told her. "No. It's from Major Antai. I may get a re-trial for striking Nagel, if the major and another officer can put it over."

Unconsciously her eyes moved to the group who were playing cards, on the sunny side of the hangar. Nagel was dealing. Pat had a thick sheaf of bills near his right hand, weighted down with some silver dollars.

Her eyes came back to Moore's face. "Why isn't that good news, Dan? This new trial may clear you."

He made a gesture of impatience. "Don't you see, Trick, that I don't mind getting court-martialed for striking Nagel? It's that other stuff that they got into the records of the trial. Nagel's claim that I caused Best to crash, and everything that supports that claim. That's why those officers at McCulley's field wouldn't even speak to me, after they found out who I was."

"Then you won't go back for a new trial?"

He shrugged. His voice was bitter. "I may have to. But there's no new evidence

to bring out. Just a rehash of the old. Days and days of it. And the best I can hope for in the end is a minor change in their findings. That's not going to clear my name."

"I suppose not," she agreed. Again she glanced over toward the card game. Nagel had gotten in that morning with his Elly cabin plane that Mike Deniski had had repaired and left for him at Craig Point. Pat had told her that he was going to make his try that afternoon, with his marked cards.

CHAPTER XXX

ALL ACES CAN'T FLY

SHE could hardly keep the excitement from her voice. That big stack of currency by Patrick meant that their plan might succeed. "Dan," she asked, "if Nagel admitted, before witnesses, that he hadn't told Best—that would be new evidence, wouldn't it?"

"What do you mean?"

She hurried on. "It would show that Nagel had lied in that one instance; that his evidence was perjured. It would break down the whole case. It would support your claim that he said those things that caused you to strike him."

Nagel's voice reached them. "Patrick, you're having the luck of the devil today."

Dan was smiling at her, as though she were a child. "Now, Trick, why in the world would Nagel make any admissions like that?"

Young Jackson sauntered up, his helmet in one hand, slapping his boot. "How's to get one of the T.M.'s. for a little flyin', Dan?" he asked.

"They're all grounded for overhaul, since that farce air show we put on at Bellingham," Moore said, distastefully. "All but Pat's."

Jackson pointed to a ship, tumbling above them in the clouded sky. "You let Jack Muter fly whenever he wants to," he complained. "You're sore at me about something, Dan."

Moore rubbed his eyes. It was a gesture of weariness. "I'm not sore at you, kid.

But we've only got five of those scouts left. And you're pretty reckless, kid."

Jackson's face tightened with anger. "I don't fly any more reckless than you do."

"Maybe not," Dan agreed, reasonably, "but I've been at it quite a bit longer than you, kid. And as far as Jack Muter's concerned, he's testing out these LaRhones as Mike gets them overhauled. That's the only reason he's flying."

"Pat'll loan me his crate," Jackson snapped. "You're playing favorites with Muter. I can fly as good as him an' I'll show you."

Trick watched Jackson approach the card game. She heard Charley Wentworth's voice: "By me. Did you pirates bring your horse pistols and cutlasses?"

Pat was riding high. "Sure," he told Jackson, heartily. "Take her up. But if you groundloop or pull her outta riggin' I'll skin you alive, kid."

Al Bibbs came out and swung the prop for Jackson.

"I wish Pat hadn't loaned him that ship," Dan complained.

Trick spoke, her eyes still on the card game. "Dan, if your name should be cleared in the Army—what would you do? I mean, would you go back in?"

"It's not going to be cleared," he said, bitterly.

"But let's just say it will be."

He was thoughtful. "I don't know, Trick. This air circus has been grief, from start to finish. But—"

"But what, Dan?"

He grinned. "I think maybe I've gotten a kick out of being in full charge of it. Big frog in a little puddle, eh?"

"There are smaller frogs in smaller puddles."

"Well, in the Army, Trick, you never are complete boss. Always somebody higher up. You're like a kid, hanging onto the trailing ends of the lines, trying to make yourself think you're driving the horses . . . Look at that Chandelle! I've told Jackson never to Chandelle those T.M.'s. By the lord Harry, he's grounded for the rest of the season. An' if he don't like it he's fired."

A BLACK Haynes limousine shoved its long hood up to the corner of the repair hangar and stopped.

Pat's voice was raised: "An' up you two thousand dollars for a look, Nagel, you yellow belly."

Nagel's voice was smooth. He was smiling, despite his heavy losses. "Why call me names, Patrick, while you're winning? I haven't the money to cover that raise. And you know it."

"I'll call you all the names I want to. The only courage you have is in a card game. An' I'm wondering if you have it then. Enough of it for a *real* bet."

Nagel sat up straight, on the other side of the improvised card table. "Just what do you mean by that, Patrick?" he asked, his voice deadlly.

Trick clutched Moore's arm. "It's coming, Dan," she said, her voice quavering. "Pat's getting him angry on purpose."

But Moore's eyes were lifted toward the two planes that circled above. He had been oblivious to all but them. "That damned Jackson is going to try combat with Muter!" he said, in a harsh, strained voice. "And Muter's already sore at him."

"I mean," Patrick told Nagel, "that if it came to betting all you had—*everything*—you'd turn yellow."

Trick left Moore's side, moving toward the card game.

Nagel's lips were twitching with that cold, insane anger. "Name your bets, Patrick."

A dark, handsome young man in golf clothes had gotten out of the big Haynes. He came over to Moore. "Can you tell me if Theresa Hoyt is out here?" he asked.

Moore was silent, not hearing the question. The newcomer frowned. His eyes lifted to the airplanes. "What's wrong?" he asked, sensing Moore's tenseness.

"Here's your bet, Nagel," Pat said, over at the card game. "All I've got here against one thing—the truth from you about Best's crackup, in Florida."

Nagel's face muscles jerked involuntarily. He moistened his lips; quick, darting movements of his tongue. "The truth about

Best's crackup," he repeated in a brittle voice. "You mean—"

"I mean, did Dan Moore influence Best in any way that caused him to crash that night?"

Nagel's voice was scarcely above a whisper. "I see, I see," he repeated. A small smile twitched the corners of his lips. "That would be a real bet, Patrick."

"Yeah," Pat said contemptuously. "Too big for your nerve."

"But how," Nagel inquired, "would you know that I was telling you the truth?"

"That's the only decent thing about you. You pay your gambling debts."

Nagel's eyes never dropped from Patrick's hard gaze. "How much have you got there?" he asked, nodding at Pat's winnings.

"I came here with thirty-two hundred dollars. The rest I won from you."

"Yes. Yes, that's right. You know, Patrick, there's something funny about this game. I mean, it's queer you happened to have such a wad with you." His voice slowed. "It looks just a little bit like a plant to me."

Above them an airplane engine ripped out a burst of sound.

"Then you're goin' tuh back down, huh? I thought you would!"

"No, Patrick. I'm not going to back down. But I'm afraid you are, because I'm going to make you bet every damn thing you own against the truth on Best. It's that or no dice."

Pat waved his hand at the pile of currency. "There it is. That's all and more than I own."

"You own that Thomas Morse scout you bought from the Hoyts."

Pat looked beyond the hangar, forgetting for a moment that he had loaned his plane to Jackson. He raised his eyes then. Jackson had just pulled out of a tight loop around Jack Muter.

"All right," he agreed. He shoved his money out toward the jackpot. "That Thomas Morse goes along with it. Remember! The truth of whether Moore had anything to do with Best's crash."

"You'll get the truth, all right. If you win."

BOTH men were smiling, now that the bet was made. Trick, certain until this moment that Pat would win, felt a sudden shock of alarm, a premonition of disaster.

Very carefully, one by one, Nagel arranged his hand, face up on the table. Ace of hearts; king of hearts; queen, jack, ten—of hearts.

Pat looked at them in stunned silence. He placed four eights on the board, still staring at Nagel's royal flush.

Nagel watched him. There was a quick movement of his tongue over smiling lips. "You didn't know it, Patrick," he said, "but we stopped playing with your cards on the last deal." He laughed outright. "If you'd only had brains enough to check the backs of your own cards, or the discard!"

Patrick started to his feet, his face working.

With a sudden movement Nagel raked the money over with his left hand. "I have a gun here in my pocket," he said, coldly. "It would be self-defense."

In the dead silence that followed Moore's voice came to them, catching their attention with its urgency.

"Al, help me get the FG started! Muter won't stand for any more monkey business from that damned kiwi."

Trick's eyes lifted to the airplanes above them. One of the ships was in a dive, seemed headed straight down toward the other.

The lower plane dove suddenly, came back in an Immelmann turn.

"That's Jack Muter," Wentworth said carelessly. "He won't hurt the kid."

But Muter's sudden change in direction had confused young Jackson. He pulled out of his dive, trying to jerk it up in a quick loop. He failed to catch the gyroscopic effect of the rotary engine.

From the ground they saw it falling off to the right. Jackson must have booted full left rudder. The plane hung, a little past vertical, stalling.

Suddenly the tail swirled, in answer to

the rudder. The plane whip-stalled. He was in an inverted tailspin.

Al Bibbs was struggling with the big club prop of the FG.

"Lay off, Al," Moore shouted. "The kid's in an outside spin! Nothing I can do."

Muter had jerked his plane into a vertical, trying frantically to get from under the spinning ship.

Trick saw Pat's clenched fists raised above his head in a strange, tense gesture. She looked back at the ships.

The two ships met. One wing of Jackson's crumpled back against the fuselage. A black object parted from the wreckage, gathering tremendous speed in its fall.

"Threw his engine!" Wentworth exclaimed.

All of these things had happened in comparative silence. Now the slow-traveling sound came to their ears; the splintering impact, the ripping of wood and fabric, the high, thin scream of wind through falling wreckage.

Jackson's plane dropped, wings whipping the fuselage.

Muter's followed, more slowly. Both wing panels on his plane seemed intact. But the aileron control rods or elbows must have been jammed.

Jackson's plane struck on the far side of the field, flattening instantly to rags and kindling wood.

None of them moved. Their eyes were held on the awful, heartbreaking spectacle of Muter's struggles.

Twice he flattened out of the uncontrolled dives. But as he lost the terrific speed his nose dropped again, out of control.

The sound of his crash came as an echo to that of Jackson's.

They all stood immobilized with horror. All but the young man in golf clothes. He had seen the Hoyt girl.

"Theresa!" he called and moved toward her.

She saw him then and stumbled forward to meet him. "Dick! Oh, it's horrible, Dick!"

He put his arms around her shoulders

and for a moment she stood, her face tight-pressed against his jacket.

Dan Moore had been watching them, his face wooden. He whirled on the others now. "Mike, throw some crash tools in Al's car! Nagel, drive to the nearest telephone and call an ambulance! They'll be dead. Both of 'em."

CHAPTER XXXI

THE GOLD BLOCKHEAD

"IT'S about the only thing to do," Moore said, facing Trick Hoyt and her brother. "The only sensible thing. Wentworth has an angel backing him in Los Angeles. He'll pay seventy-five dollars apiece for the T.M's., eight hundred for the Sperry wing and he's offered me five thousand for the FG."

"If this is a business meeting," the young man said, "I'd better chase myself along." He had brought them to the hotel in his Haynes, after Jackson's and Muter's bodies had been cleared from the wreckage and loaded into the police ambulance.

Trick grasped his hand, a movement that Dan saw and judged. "No, please stay, Dick!" She tried to smile. "This is Dick Thatcher," she told them. "I forgot to introduce him. We—we're college friends."

"Yes," Dan said, in a leaden voice. That one word carried a depth of understanding.

Red's freckles stood out in his white face. "You'll—this will sound crazy to you, Dan. But I can fly by instruments. For several days now I've been using them almost entirely, except for landings and take-offs."

Moore's lips compressed. "Will you forget that drivell! This isn't small-boy play stuff, Red. We've got some cold facts to face. Whether it was Nagel or whatever it was, this whole circus has been a failure. Now there aren't enough ships left to even make a circus."

Pat was sitting by the window, staring outside. "It was Nagel," he said, beating a fist into open palm. "He knew all the time that I was laying for him with a marked deck. What a fool I was! He kept that other deck with him, that was exactly

the same, except for back design. Then he switched 'em on me."

Dan said, impatiently: "Forget that penny-ante game!"

Pat's anger turned on his friend. "Penny-ante! D'you call losin'—"

"Dan wasn't paying any attention to the card game, Pat," Trick interposed, hurriedly, with a warning in her voice. "About selling those scouts, Dan. I'd favor that. But not the Sperry wing."

"I've got my instruments in that," Julian Hoyt said, stubbornly.

"But Red," Dan protested, "don't you understand that we're broke? That bad weather ruined our tour of Washington. Now winter's almost here. And these few crates we've got wouldn't impress the people in California. Not one bit. They're used to seeing airplanes down there."

Dick Thatcher spoke. He reminded Dan of an eagerly friendly, clumsy Newfoundland dog. He was so big and healthy, so young and enthusiastic. "Here's an idea," he proposed, thrusting fingers through his mop of curly black hair. "There's a gang of ski hounds out at my place. That rain in Washington was snow up in the Cascades. Fine skiing, if it hasn't melted too much. I'll hire you to fly the whole caboodle of 'em up to our lodge."

He over-rode Moore's protests. "There's a big, smooth meadow up there for landings. It'll give you something to do; give you folks time to plan things." His enthusiasm dominated the room. In their present state of dejection he was like a tonic. "Come on, all of you," he commanded. "We'll go out to our shanty and meet the gang."

THE "shanty" was a tremendous, rambling structure of granite, that overlooked the city, that was surrounded by acres of smooth lawn and scrubs.

Servants moved among the bright lawn furniture, serving drinks, and there was the lively, excited chatter of young people. Dan Moore sat in one of the striped canvas chairs and watched and listened in a removed state of mind.

Trick fitted into this scene exactly. It was strange how he had taken her so much for granted, not wondering about her background. Their talk of the campus, of the fraternity and sorority college life, bewildered him. For them it was all fresh, as though it had been yesterday.

There had been none of that in the stodgy little college he'd attended. And a war had stretched between his college days and the present. A war that had left its marks on him. He felt old and neglected.

A white-haired man with the vigorous stride of youth took a chair beside Dan. "Cigar?" he asked, extending a handsome leather case. "They're five centers," he warned, as Dan took one of them.

"That's about my speed," Dan said, lighting it and holding the match.

But the other had shredded his and was stuffing it into a battered, short-stemmed pipe.

"Look at 'em," he chuckled, motioning toward the others, "Crazy as hoot-owls!" He got the damp cigar tobacco going finally. "Hey!" he shouted to one of the servants, "bring us a *real* drink, Pete."

The servant appeared to understand.

"Yes, sir," he said, blowing out a cloud of rank smoke, "crazy as hoot-owls. An' just about as much use. My kid don't know a cross-cut saw from a peavey. An' don't care. But what t'hell. Jest 'cause I had to pull my breeches on 'fore daylight's no sign my kid's got to."

"Did you want me to bring the bottle, Mr. Thatcher?" the servant inquired, standing with a tray and two small glasses.

"Hell, yes. D'you think this gent's a thimble man?" "Say," he turned on Dan. "Your name's Moore, ain't it? Mine's Block Thatcher—Blockhead, 'cause I can climb a spar tree with a tail-block for ballast, an' ain't got no better sense than to do it."

The servant had brought a bottle, innocent of labels or revenue stamps. Blockhead smacked his lips. "Cougar sweat," he stated. "Drink up. I got six ten-gallon kegs of it down in the rootcellar—the basement."

It was the best moonshine Dan had ever tasted. And he needed a drink, badly. And after the first three he decided that he needed a lot of them.

HE TALKED and Thatcher talked, spinning yarns, bolstering their new friendship with the good moonshine. The difference between flying and logging narrowed and became unimportant. Blockhead told a story of the drive that jammed in the white water of Salmon river, and how he'd ridden a log through the rapids above, a case of dynamite lashed to his back for blasting the key log of the jam.

That reminded Dan of the crazy theory that he and a mechanic observer had about some German mine operations. How he'd tried to convince the G2 that there could be no creek where the air photos showed one. And how, finally, he and the mechanic had stolen three cases of entanglement demolition tubes from a French ammunition dump and bombed that creek with them and revealed it as painted canvas camouflage, that concealed a swarm of German sappers.

Each listened patiently to the other until his turn came.

Occasionally there were interruptions from the others. Pat came, insisting that Dan perform his famous Russian Abdul dance for them. Pat always wanted that, after two drinks.

But it was a barracks dance, a wild thing of handsprings and nose dives, with apparently miraculous escapes from a broken neck. With his present mood of great age Dan felt it beneath his dignity.

Blockhead ordered a fresh bottle of cougar sweat and, each of them clutching a bottle by the neck, they wandered down to the seclusion of the tiled swimming pool.

Sprawled out comfortably on a huge, long rustic bench of logs, they drank and yarned and agreed and disagreed on the meaning of life. And finally they both took their shoes off and they tore the rustic bench apart. They needed the large base log, so that Block could teach Dan how to ride it in the pool.

CHAPTER XXXII

WE KILLED THAT COUGAR

IT WAS almost noon the following day before Dan awoke and let Pat into his hotel room, to keep him from breaking down the door.

"Red's cracked up," Pat told him.

Moore felt cold horror. His first thought was for Trick. "Does Trick—where's Trick?" he said, in a hoarse whisper.

"Take it easy, Dan. He wasn't killed. Just scratched up a bit."

Moore sank down onto the bed, with a great, quivering breath of relief.

"Engine conked on him over the willows. Kid did a fine job of settin' her down in the river."

"The Sperry wing?"

"Yep. Just about ruined. Mike saved Red's instruments all right and he's tryin' to fish out the OX, but that engine's not going to be worth two bits."

Pat sat down then, facing his friend. "Dan," he said, after a long pause, "you haven't been treatin' Red very good. That kid's got a lot on the ball, Dan."

"Who said he hasn't?"

"Well, the way you've been treatin' him about those instruments—it's like he was a two-year-old baby."

"Damn those instruments! That's all I hear. Flyin' when you can't see the ground. Flyin' in all kinds of weather. Regular, scheduled passenger lines—that kind of junk. Even a two-year-old kid should know better."

Pat spoke in a slow, thoughtful voice. "I don't know about that, Dan. I've flown with the kid. He really—"

"Hell's bells! Have you gone soft-headed, too?"

Pat shrugged. "Let's drop that. The thing is, Dan, you've made fun of him so much that you drove him right into Nagel's arms."

"What d'you mean by that, Pat?"

"I mean that he and Trick have mortgaged or sold their home in Craig Point. And this morning, after his crackup, Red bought half interest in Nagel's Elly. Mike's

busy putting Red's instruments into it right now."

Dan went over to the washbowl, examined his unshaven face in the mirror. "Maybe it's just as well," he said, after awhile. "That lets me out."

He sat down in the armchair, staring out of the window. Yes, that let him out. And now what? The Army? That thought was repugnant to him. Even if he could get back into it with his old commission, which was impossible. That re-trial wouldn't cover up the recklessness that was on his record.

And the other things . . .

He reviewed it all and the part that Alvin Nagel had played in it. It was startlingly clear now, how the other had bested him at every turn.

And this was the end of it. Nagel must have been aware, even before himself, that he loved Theresa Hoyt. It seemed now to Moore that he had loved her from the first moment of that meeting outside the operations office on the Florida field. Nagel should be satisfied, willing to leave him alone now that he had separated him from everything worthwhile.

HE GOT up slowly, and in a hopeless, mechanical way arranged his shaving outfit and put a fresh blade into the razor.

"Say, old man Thatcher's quite a boy, huh?" Pat said. "Remember him sayin' that you'd make the best high-climber in the world?"

Dan nodded, smiling faintly. "I like his kind, Pat. He's a real guy."

"Yeah. An' he thinks you're aces, too. Say, for looks that boy of his could give Valentino a run for his money, huh?"

Dan grunted, dragged the razor savagely down his cheek. Trick wanted a husband with a business that was anchored to the ground. That was what she'd said. Well, the lumber business was certainly anchored to the ground. And with as much money as they had it didn't matter if young Thatcher wasn't interested in logging.

There was a knock at the door. Pat opened it and Dick Thatcher came in, grinning, brimming over with good humor.

"Hear what Red did?" he asked, as though it were a grand joke.

Dan nodded. "And that about winds up the Moore Aerial Circus," he said.

"What of it? We're starting an aerial express and passenger service to Seattle."

Dan gave him a pitying smile. "On what?" he inquired. "They don't sell these commercial jobs for cigar coupons."

"Say," Thatcher protested, "you met his nibs during pleasure hours. Don't let that fool you. Dad's one of the smartest business men on the coast, Moore. And he thinks you're God's gift to aviation."

"You mean, he thought that last night," Dan said, laying the hot towel to his face.

Thatcher's expression changed. "Drunk or sober, my dad is a good judge of men," he stated. "Or at least he *was*."

Pat broke in hurriedly "Don't get hot under the collar, Thatcher. Dan's not saying anything against your father. Just before you came in he was saying what a swell gent he thought he was."

Thatcher's voice warmed. "You bet he is! But before we start the ball rolling on this airline thing, you've got to haul that bunch up for skiing. I've already promised them that."

"My FG only carries one passenger," Dan objected. "It would take a couple of days to fly them all up."

"We'll take the Elly. Red owns half interest in it now. Nagel's off to Seattle to look over a commercial airplane that the Boeing company is putting out."

"Nagel would be in on this airline thing you're talking about?"

"Well, not exactly. I just mentioned it to him this morning. Seems to be a smart man. He agrees with me that—"

"Yeah," Dan interrupted. "Nagel is a very smart man."

Thatcher went on:

"Of course there's nothing definite. His nibs wants to talk it over with you. Hasn't made any promises yet, but—"

"I'll fly your bunch up there," Dan interrupted shortly. "Pat, you tell Mike to get the Elly ready. I'll be out soon's I get some food in me."

IT WAS a forty-five minute trip up to the Thatcher lodge, on the west flank of Mount Taver. Dan made the first trip, carrying only Dick Thatcher with him in the cabin ship. It was the first time he'd flown the Elly and the field up there was at eight thousand elevation, which would mean a fast landing.

But the strip of meadow was, as Dick had said, smooth, and with plenty of length to it. After that he made trip after trip, carrying three each time, boys and girls.

There was a low, heavy ceiling of clouds over the Riverport area. But these broke near the mountain and the sun struck down on a scene of breath-taking grandeur. The snow-covered mountain was a splendid thing of carved alabaster, framed with the dark green of the lower forest.

Each time he returned to the Riverport field Trick had three more people ready and waiting for him. She was dressed in the dark green pull-on sweater, the beret and plaid skirt that she wore so much around the field. From this he judged that she wasn't going on the skiing trip.

He didn't talk to her any more than necessary but he was aware that often she scrutinized him, a small frown of worry coming to her smooth brow. Once she got into the plane, sitting beside him on the small folding seat, her gray, bronze-flecked eyes shadowed.

"What's wrong, Dan?" she asked. The engines were running and she had to lean near to him. "Have I done anything—something that you don't approve of?"

He dropped his hand onto hers. He felt the pressure of slender fingers.

They had often held hands this way, for a short space. It was almost like brother and sister. It was a comforting gesture of friendliness and understanding. But now . . . He cleared his throat. "Of course you haven't done anything, Trick. Anyway, who am I to approve or disapprove?"

She smiled, the thick, dark lashes framing her eyes. "Who are you? You're Dan Moore. I don't know of anybody I'd rather have approve of me. But there's something, Dan. Aren't you going to tell me?"

He shook his head. "It's—there's nothing wrong, Trick. And don't worry about me approving of you. I'll always do that."

Her hand tightened convulsively on his. "Dan, that sounds—it's almost as though you were saying goodbye!"

Yes, it was a farewell to her, he thought, as he taxied out onto the field with another load of young people. That would be the last time that he could allow himself alone with her.

Trick's conception of their relationship must be so different from his. She probably considered him as an older brother. The thought startled him. That was exactly how he had felt toward her. That is, until—but no, he had always loved her. It was just that he was too blind to recognize his true feeling.

Knowing that now he couldn't trust himself alone with her again, he'd say something. He wasn't one of these romantic martyrs; those duffers with their noble promises of being like a brother, of carrying their love silently to the grave. He'd say something and make a fool of himself. And that would hurt Trick. The memory of it might spoil this love between her and Dick Thatcher. Trick's mind ran deep; she was fiercely loyal to her friends and in a way she might feel indebted to Dan.

CHAPTER XXXIII

BETTER TO WALK THAN FLY

DAN was so preoccupied with his thoughts that he had paid scant attention to the passengers on this trip. He was surprised, after landing on the meadow, to have a slender little grayhaired lady crowd up to the seat beside him. She was dressed like the others in sweater and jacket and heavy woolen skirt, with laced hightop boots. Her face gave an impression of youth and a whimsical sense of humor.

"I'm Mrs. Thatcher," she said, "and you needn't tell me who you are because Dad says"—her voice deepened in mimicry—"you're the best damned two-fisted drinker he ever run across."

Dan laughed, his head thrown back, re-

membering that log-rolling contest the evening before. "And you're the handsomest girl I've carried today," he complimented her. "Aren't you and Block ever going to grow up and be respectable?"

She nodded her head, a quick, birdlike gesture. "I like you, too," she announced. "Dad's always right about men."

She laid her hand on his arm, her eyes searching his, studying his face. "This flying is so new though! Remember, Dan, it's not a thing to be taken lightly—the trust of a man like my husband."

Dan nodded slowly in agreement. "You're thinking about that airline talk," he guessed. "Don't you worry, Mrs. Thatcher."

Dan had thought this would be the last trip. But when he got back to the Riverport field Block Thatcher was waiting. And there was a girl with him. A girl in a mink fur coat with a perky little mink hat cocked on one side of her pale, golden hair.

It was the first he'd seen of this particular girl. In some manner she conveyed an immediate impression of wealth and frailty. Like an orchid. Dan corrected this thought. Rather, like a spray of gardenias, still carrying the artificial dew of a florist shop.

She and Trick Hoyt were arm in arm. They were both beautiful, in their different ways. But Trick had a depth, a vital something that paled the other girl's beauty and made her seem almost commonplace.

Trick introduced her. "This," she said impressively, "is Nancy. Nancy Fawn. And before she turns loose on you Dan, I'll explain that she's a flirt, a heartless little nincompoop and that I love every inch of her, just as you probably will before the clock strikes five."

"Five!" Nancy exclaimed in a bell-like soprano, "is it five o'clock, sweetness? And my train was supposed to be in at two! The conductor said so! But he was terribly fat and homely. I might have known."

Trick glanced at her wristwatch. "Ten minutes till five. It usually takes you about one minute to hog-tie them. But Dan's a tough customer."

"He looks tough," Nancy agreed, and

moved up close to give Dan a broadside of dark blue eyes. "Tough and big—and nice."

"And," Trick added a final warning, "he's been overseas—a war ace. Which means that he's probably had a lot of French mademoiselles work on him, than which, I understand, there are none whither. So dust off your best wares, Nancy darling."

"She does that," Nancy complained to Dan. "Treats me like a baby. We roomed together at the sorority. That first night when I was pledged—do you remember, Trick? I sniveled, I bawled, I was a homesick little critter. I wanted to go home, you understand, Mr. Moore—no, I'll call you Dan. And she scolded me and petted me and she rushed out and bought me a bottle of lemon soda."

Her fingers caressed his leather flying jacket; her eyes were lifted to his. "Do you like lemon soda, Dan? You *don't* like lemon soda, do you? Neither do I. I detest it! You see, we already have something in common. Your airplane is *cute*, Dan. But you didn't tell me. Do you or don't you like lemon soda?"

"He likes whisky," Block Thatcher stated, in a positive voice. "Now let's get goin'. I'll ride up an' back with you Dan, if it's agreeable. Want to talk to you."

Dan guessed the subject of this talk and had all his arguments prepared by the time they got back to Riverport.

THEY had made a half-circle trip of the mountain. The hour was late and the slanting rays of the sun cast blood-red shafts over the chiseled, white, unearthly beauty of the rearing giant. Even Dan, so accustomed to sights like this, was a little awed by it.

There was a heavy threat of rain in the air and the clouds were low and thick, so that when they got back to Riverport the city lights were on, making a dull glow to the west. Dan cut his engines and Block helped him tail the ship close to the hangar on the north side. Block watched Dan rope the wing-tips down to anchor-eyes, block

the wheels fore and aft and fix double slats on rudder, elevator and ailerons, to keep them from being whipped by the wind.

"Expectin' bad weather?" he asked.

"Rain, maybe," Dan agreed. "It's getting late in the season."

"Yep, that's so. How much'd that hangar cost you?"

"Sixty dollars, not counting one man's wages."

"We'd need anyway two of 'em, one at each end," Thatcher said. "Kind we'd want would run nearer five hundred dollars. Dick say anything to you about his airline idea?"

Dan lifted his face, felt the dampness of mist on it. "We'd better go inside the hangar," he proposed. "Mike's got a gas lantern in there some place."

They found the lantern and Dan pumped up pressure and held a match under the generating coil.

"In a way," Thatcher said, "this aviation business may prove a Godsend to Dick. The boy's got my restlessness. He's got plenty of git-up-an'-go to him, but the loggin' game's all cut and dried now. No fun to it anymore, 'less you get fun out of just makin' money. Which I never could understand." He paused but Dan let the silence go on, not helping him.

"Well," Block continued, "here's aviation. It's pioneering, an' Dick's got pioneerin' blood in him." His voice changed to defiance. "Maybe you think my kid ain't got no bottom to him?"

"No," Dan spoke slowly, "I wouldn't say that at all. But I think I know what you're afraid of. If you toss Dick into a tough situation he'll fight like hell to keep his head up. But if he rides along easy it won't be long before he's just another rich loafer."

"Son," Block said with feeling, "you'n me think pretty close together."

There was another silence, each man busy with his own thoughts. Dan knew what was coming, but it had to shape up before he could meet it.

"It'll be a closed corporation," Block

planned. "Anyway, I can swing this first part. You'll be completely in charge. Absolutely, completely in charge. You'll have a contract to that effect so's you won't be afraid of any monkey business from Dick. Not that the kid's the sort who would butt into things not his business," Thatcher added, with quick loyalty.

"This'll be strictly business," he continued. "You won't get much salary till the thing starts payin'. But you'll get a good big block of stock. If she goes over, you're made. If she don't—well, that's another story. But you mark my words, Moore; the post office department's not going to keep on hauling mail. It'll be private contract. An' we'll be right there to nab one."

DAN picked up a LaRhone tappet rod from the workbench, sighted its length, frowning. He was being given a lot of power here. Power for good or evil. He remembered what Mrs. Thatcher had said. Her husband did trust him; trusted him absolutely.

Trick had once said she would never marry a pilot. He recalled clearly the tone of exasperation she had used in saying it. She wanted a plain, ordinary, stodgy businessman.

He could easily change Dick Thatcher. The boy was the sort who would go off the deep end on flying, if he was given any encouragement. Teach him stunting. Let him experience that supreme intoxication that comes only with the feel of tremendous power and speed at your fingertips. That would be all that was necessary.

"Well," Thatcher said, a tone of annoyance creeping into his voice, "is there something wrong with my proposition?"

Dan put the tappet rod back among the other engine parts. "Yes," he said. "Because airplanes can't fly in bad weather."

Rain drummed lightly on the corrugated tin roof.

"Come out here," Dan invited, leading to the open door of the shed. He pointed. "Can you see anything over there, to the east?"

"Not on a night like this. Of course not."

"Neither can a pilot. And keep this in mind, Block. An airplane is the only human-made machine in existence that must be controlled in three dimensions.

"An automobile you have only to steer to right or left. A bicycle you steer on the horizontal plane and balance on the vertical. But an airplane must be controlled and balanced horizontally, vertically and longitudinally. It's not an easy thing to do when you can see the ground; when you can't see the ground it is impossible."

"Well . . . well, now . . ."

"And there's this: An airplane must be kept going to stay in the air. Regardless of anything else an airspeed of a hundred miles per hour, or some such speed, must be maintained. You can't stop at the side of the road and inquire directions to the next town, or wait till the rain stops."

"Well, hasn't—isn't Red Hoyt flyin' some way with instruments, or something?"

Dan laughed. "Red thinks he is. But a man's sense of balance is a very keen sense, Block. Even though you don't actually look outside, your brain or sense of balance is aware of the brighter light from above and the darker ground below. Just that little bit is enough to steady your senses. But in fog, clouds, heavy rain or heavy snow, you're lost. In no time your senses are reeling."

Block was silent, digesting all this.

Dan lit a cigarette and waited. He wanted these truths to sink in and stay, because he knew that Nagel wouldn't hesitate a moment in taking advantage of the old man and his wealth.

"So you couldn't fly in the winter," Block said, more to himself than to Dan. "That is, you couldn't figure on much flyin'. So that leaves you maybe four months of operation outa the year."

"That's right," Dan agreed. "And there's another thing. People ride in airplanes for their speed; in emergencies. They use air-mail for the same reason. Well, you've heard how, in the winter, a letter sent by train always beats one sent by plane.

That's such a well established truth that it's gotten to be a joke."

Old Thatcher considered these things for a long time, his face slack with disappointment. Then he shrugged the whole thing away in disgust. "Let's go get us a drink of cougar sweat, son. An' tomorrow you'n me's goin'ta drive over to the coast

where maybe I'll need your help with a gent who can't tell his timber from mine, sometimes."

Dan nodded, relieved. He twirled the gas valve shut on the lantern. "Lead on, Block. The way I feel, a good fight would come in handy right now."

And he meant it.

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The Light in the Window



An Argosy Oddity

By **JIM KJELGAARD**

Author of "The Captains Pass", "Water Runs Down Hill", etc.

ONE hollow-cheeked man sat on the bunk. Another, who'd been slumped on a chair, got up and peered listlessly through the window. Eight feet of snow lay about the cabin. Outside, the surly waters of Caribou Lake showed black in the gathering night.

The snow had fallen three weeks ago, in one day and two nights. It had not been warm enough to melt the snow, or cold enough to freeze the lake.

Joe Batts returned to his chair.

"It's a gettin' dark," he announced in a weary, flat voice as if the fact of alternate daylight and darkness was of no portent whatever. "It's a gettin' colder too."

On the bunk Darb Morris stirred. His eyes were a network of tiny red veins, and had more an animal than a human expression.

"What of it?" he snarled.

"Nothin'. Nothin'," Batts said hastily, as if to placate. "'Cept I was thinkin' that

it's past eatin' time an' Ray ain't here yet. I was thinkin' that we might's well eat."

"Might's well."

Morris got off the bunk with alacrity, and walked to the cabinet where they kept their rapidly diminishing store of grub. Batts lit a tallow candle and placed it on the window sill. He stepped back, viewing his work with evident satisfaction.

"There!" he said. "That'll pull him home, given he gets back to where he can see it."

DARB MORRIS ignored him. With a knife he cut six strips of bacon, one as nearly exactly like the other as he could guage them, and laid four of them in a skillet. The other two were placed in a dish on the table. He cut six slices of bread, no two slices varying from each other by more than a fraction of an ounce, and put two of them with the two strips of bacon.

That would be their supper. Caught without snowshoes by the unseasonably early snow, they were marooned here. The third man, Ray, had spent his time since the snow had fallen splitting birch slabs with an ax and fashioning a crude pair