

AROUND THE WORLD IN NINE HOURS

A Modern So-Called Humorous Short Story

By PETER, THE AVIATOR

[Of an Urban Robinson]

Sketches by JOE SHEARD

I WILL go back three years in my life as an aeronaut and inventor, to the evening before my wedding day. We were sitting—Abbie and I—on her Pa's verandah, and we were not isolated from each other by any means; in fact, we were very much likethis. It was August the third. In the East—yes, I am quite sure it was in the East—the harvest moon (how appropriate and perfectly lovely it was that it should have been the harvest moon, for was this not the culmination, the harvest, of our courtship?) was doing her very biggest to expose us. But what did we care for exposure? There wasn't a blamed thing to be ashamed of: Her pa knew it; her ma knew it; Tom, Dick, Harry, Rose, Jean, and Mary knew it; Abbie herself knew it; and I knew it—so did the Reverend Mr. Whipperin, and a few others.

Abbie was a dear girl and no one knows how I longed to take her away on a prolonged honeymoon trip after the ceremonies on the morrow. But I simply could not do it, don't you know. I was as poor as Job's turkey (if you can tell me just how poor that was), for I was an inventor. You know that until an inventor invents something that will kill more folks than it benefits, he is always of necessity a poor man. I knew it; Abbie knew it; they all knew it. But I was living in high expectation. I had been working for a whole year on an invention which I had so far perfected that it wouldn't quite work; but I was confident; I was sanguine; I was—oh, for a fitting climax just here!

"My dearest Abbie," I whispered to her, as we sat together ensconced in a big deep red rustic rocker, "you know how dearly I would like to take you on an extended wedding tour—it will not seem like a wedding without it—but I simply can't do it, don't you know. I haven't much more of the wherewithal than would take us for three rides on the merry-go-round; but when I get this air-ship perfected—which won't be but a few months now—I will take you on the jimmidiest bridal tour you ever, you ever—had."

Abbie was a sensible girl, a "deuced fine girl with none of your biggod nonsense about her," and she drew in a long, joyful breath and exclaimed:

"Oh, Peter dear, do you really mean it?"

"I mean it, Abbie dear."

"And in your airship?"

"Yes, in my airship."

"And where will we go?" to Europe?"

"Yes, to Europe—and, perhaps, around the world."

"Oh, my!"

NOW that's my introduction to the story. (You will observe that I haven't even intimated one blamed thing about the "plot"; but I don't believe in plots; there's altogether too much plotting in life as it is, don't you think?) Here goes for the "development."

As I said before, three years have passed away since that "fatal" day, and all that I prophesied—and even more—has come to pass. Only last night we returned from our belated honeymoon trip around the world in my airship—and we did it in just nine hours.

Who would have dreamed, even a decade ago, that airships would be skylarking around through the atmosphere by this time? Of course, these so-called aviators who have been making hash of themselves by the scores for the amusement of folks terrestrial, these past two or three years, haven't got hold of the secret of flying. Only the Wright brothers and my humble self have cracked that nut—and I may add that I found the kernel long before those Wright brothers had ever conceived of such a thing. Why, I've been working on my motorless biplane for four years, and more than that, I've got her perfected.

Wow! wasn't I mad when I first saw in the paper, a few months ago, that Orville Wright had gone up in the teeth of an fifty-mile-an-hour gale in his motorless biplane, and had remained motionless at a height of nearly two hundred feet, for ten minutes? Even that very day I had been trying my own machine on my own aviation grounds—and with disastrous results. But I was never the fellow to become discouraged by a little thing like that. It only drove the spurs into me. I simply could not accept defeat. I got mad, and say, for the next

two or three days I did more thinking than Thomas A. Edison ever thunked. I was almost afraid my head would "bust."

But no! Excelsior!

One week from that day I had a machine that would fly as gracefully as a swallow.

"Who wants a machine that will go up in a fifty-mile-an-hour gale and remain motionless, stationary, I'd like to know," I thought, and said, as I hugged myself. "What good would that do me? I want a machine that will go, and go like the very—old Harry—as mine does."

Of course I was elated at my success. I danced; I pranced; I charged like the grand entry at a circus; I ran into the house like a thing possessed;



"She took the air like a live thing."

I picked up Abbie (who was busy peeling potatoes for dinner) as if she were a rag doll; carried her around the kitchen over my shoulder half-a-dozen times, and then, setting her on the steel range, announced hilariously:

"Abbie, dear Abbie, I've got it at last. All I need to do is to decorate my Bird of Paradise and we're off on our trip around the world to-morrow."

With all the dear girl's confidence in me, she could not, for a moment, but remonstrate in tones of wonderment:

"But it isn't possible, Peter dear!"

"Yes, it is possible; I've just tried her, and she goes at least three thousand miles an hour. We can start to-morrow morning at eight o'clock, take a little circle around our glorious Canada, just to show you how Birdie sails; and then, if you like it, we'll hie away for our twenty-five thousand mile trip. What do you say?"

Now Abbie was always a great girl for adventure. She was always in for sport; but this looked a little too risky, even for her. I thought I detected a slight pallor in her usually rosy cheeks.

"I think I'd like to see how she works first; let's



"Imagine our joyful anticipation as we decided upon our route."

take a little trial spin this afternoon," she suggested. "Abbie, you're a brick," I said. "Come on; I'll take you up right now. Dinner will wait a few minutes."

WELL, sir, the brave girl took me up at my offer, and away we went for the shed where my machine was kept. After running it out, I wound up the clock-work mechanism which controlled the planes or wings, put my foot on the rudder-trip to see that the old girl's tail would rise and dip to suit me, lifted Abbie into her seat, pushed the machine along a few yards to see if everything was working to my complete satisfaction, and then jumped up beside her and grasped the controlling levers.

She took the air like a live thing, and in a second or two we were rising rapidly above the orchard trees. She worked like a charm. But if I was delighted, Abbie was ecstatic. I want you to understand that the nose of my machine was no ordinary pole with a ten-pound bag of sand attached at the end—like that of young Wright's—but rather had I fashioned it more like the neck and head of a graceful flamingo, with a gilded twelve-pound cannon ball inserted in its bill. Then, too, the white planes and "tail" were constructed bird fashion.

"All she lacks is the feathers, Peter dear, and she will be, indeed, a Bird of Paradise," said Abbie, joyfully, as we sailed—or rather whizzed—over the little villages of Brantford, Hamilton and Toronto, and then circled around over Lake Simcoe, Georgian Bay, Grey and Bruce counties, London, Woodstock, Norwich, Teeterville, and then home.

"How long have we been away, Peter?" asked the dear girl, stepping down lightly and embracing me with great ardency.

"Just fifteen minutes exactly," I said, glancing at my watch. "We can easily make the trip round the world in nine hours. Will you go to-morrow?"

"But, Peter, suppose the thing—the Bird of Paradise—would collapse when we were in mid-ocean," she protested mildly.

"She won't do it, Abbie dear," I assured her, "and if she does, why we can use the planes for sails and the bird will float like a swan."

"But suppose the works run down?"

"Can't I wind them up again? They're good for twenty-four hours, anyway, and we won't be gone more than ten at the outside."

"Around the whole world—twenty-five thousand miles?"

"Yes, and a few side-trips thrown in. Will you do it? All you have to do is to say yes, and I go out after dinner to tack on the feathers."

She answered without hesitation:

"Peter, dear, I will never desert you; and, besides, though I haven't mentioned it, I've been just dying to travel, especially on the Continent. I'll fix up the dearest little lunch—but" (and here she looked somewhat dismayed—"what about my trousseau, Peter?"

"Oh, just throw on your sealskin jacket and your harem skirt, and you're all hunkadory. You will not be exposed to harsh criticisms long at any one place, I can assure you."

THAT evening, imagine if you can, our joyful anticipation as we decided upon our route. Not having previously seen any more of Canada than our own Ontario, we decided to first take a swoop over the great North-West, return by Hudson's Bay and Labrador to the Maritime Provinces, cut South into the United States, and then—but pshaw! I don't want to spoil this story; I must keep my readers in a state of expectancy, a state of suspense. I must finish strong.

Did I forget to say "the time was in June when birds hummed a tune?" Well, so it was, and the morning—the tenth—was a Jim-dandy. With not a cloud to obstruct us, we could go right up to glory if we thought fit. The air, too, was soft and still. As we left the house at eight o'clock sharp, Abbie, wearing a neat little blue cap, her sealskin and harem, and carrying in one hand an eight by ten lunch-box, and in the other a Canadian flag and a pair of field-glasses, was in high glee; I, likewise. And why not, I'd like to know. We were about to