

"The Great Air Robbery"

Read the Story Now; See the Picture Tuesday at the Lyceum

"Wait a minutes, Jones, I want to see that plane."

The young aviator to whom Larry Cassidy addressed the words looked around in surprise.

"I like your nerve!" he exclaimed. "What for? I've just got it ready to use myself."

For answer Larry grasped his arm and pointed to where a huge airship fluttered aimlessly in the air, like a disabled bird.

"Look!" he said in a tone of subdued excitement. "That's the fast mail. I'm going up to bring it down. Captain's orders. Better come with me."

Instantly the man turned and ran with Larry toward the hangar. "Who's the pilot?" he asked anxiously. "Mason."

"Yes."

"He's your pal, isn't he?"

They had clambered into the cockpit and Cassidy was ready to hop off.

"Yes," he replied again, as the plane shot forward and gracefully rose in the air. "We trained together, went overseas together and brought down Boche planes together. But Wallie's gone all to pieces, lately."

He added in a louder tone, as conversation became increasingly difficult.

"I told him this morning that he was in no condition to make the mail trip. Something's gone wrong already."

It was no easy task to overtake the mail ship. It's erratic twistings and turnings carried it ever just beyond the other plane, now up, now down, now poised for a moment as if to zoom to earth, then suddenly veering off to east or west and just as suddenly doubling back to its former position. Cassidy's anxiety increased.

"Wireless Mason to set down the ladder," he shouted to his companion.

"Tell him to try to hold the plane steady till I come."

"If he doesn't he's doomed," was the reply, as the man grasped the sending key to transmit the message.

Apparently Mason was still capable of receiving and obeying instructions. Cassidy flew nearer, and experienced a sense of thanksgiving at sight of the rope ladder swinging in place under the mail ship.

Swiftly he maneuvered for a position that would enable him to grasp the swaying, fluttering, ten-foot fragment of hemp. He fully realized the frightful chance he was about to take of being dashed to death on the ground, thousands of feet below, when he made the leap from plane to plane his life would literally be in his hands. It would hang by a thread. He wondered, vaguely, if his strength would prove equal to the tremendous strain on nerve and muscle when the test came.

Twice the dangling rope was so close that Cassidy could almost have touched it. But the position of the two ships was not favorable for the leap. A third time he noed his ship downward and came up, smoothly and evenly, directly under the mail ship. For the merest instant the rope ladder swung above him. With outstretched arms Cassidy sprang forward, eyes fixed, teeth set, muscles taut. Then the wings of the plane upon which he had been standing drifted away from beneath his feet and he swung out into space.

The jar and sudden tension was terrific. For what seemed an eternity to Cassidy he swung there in mid-air, before he could steady himself for the perilous climb upward. Then, swiftly, rung by rung, he mounted the trembling ladder until, at last, he found himself going over the top of the mail plane and descending into the forward cockpit.

Mason was ill. Even the captain realized it when, under Cassidy's skillful guidance, the two fliers were safely back at the mail station.

Some days later, Cassidy and Mason, each on a two weeks' furlough, were comfortably settled at the Aero Club House for rest and recuperation. From there they communicated with Beryl Caruthers, the beautiful young mistress of Mission-Oaks, whom each secretly adored and who showered her favors impartially upon both. Beryl, herself, was much interested in aviation. At the Mission Oaks hangars several planes of the most approved type were always kept ready for use. A frequent guest at the Oaks was Chester Van Arland. He also had a room at the fashionable club house.

No social event was considered complete without Van Arland's presence. He always was plentifully supplied with funds and was supposed to be wealthy. From the first time Cassidy met him, however, he had distrusted the suave social leader. When he and Mason unexpectedly encountered Van Arland at the club Larry instinctively resented and questioned the latter's sudden cordiality toward his friend. He was still more mystified when Van Arland, apparently by accident, pulled from his pocket the Croix de Guerre bestowed upon Wally for heroism in battle.

Mason, himself, gazed at the emblem in Van Arland's hand with wide horrified eyes. He could not believe his senses. Only the day before he had sent that bit of treasured bronze to Beryl Caruthers, with a letter telling of his love. It seemed incredible that Beryl would have treated its receipt so lightly. Yet how, he questioned, could it have come into Van Arland's possession if Beryl had not given it to him?

"How—where did you get that?" he faltered, pointing to the decoration.

"That concerns a lady," replied Van Arland as he replaced it in his pocket, "and therefore is not to be discussed in public."

Van Arland's tone and manner confirmed Wally's suspicions. His nerves, already overstrained, gave way completely. Impetuously he demanded the return of the croix de guerre.

"It's mine. You have no right to it," he reiterated.

"So?" sneered Van Arland, tauntingly. "Then suppose we cut for it?"

In vain Cassidy remonstrated. Van Arland would not yield and Mason would not listen. They gambled. Wallie lost. More drinks were poured. Again Cassidy sought to interfere and was again repulsed. Angry and disgusted he turned away.

"When you are tired of making a fool of yourself," he said to Wallie at parting, "you will find me in our

rooms. I'm going to bed."

Left alone with Van Arland and plentifully supplied with liquor, Mason was soon incapable of resisting the former's baleful influence. He watched, helplessly, while Van Arland sealed the croix de guerre in an envelope and stamped it for the midnight aerial mail.

"Now," Van Arland said, as he finished, "you'll get your cross back and your money, too, if you do as I tell you. I'm going to make you a member of our squadron." And he exhibited the dread insignia of the notorious and blissing band of air pirates known as "The Death Head Squadron."

Half an hour later Van Arland conducted his involuntary recruit to the secret hangars and rendezvous of the members of his band. There, camouflaged, beyond all chance of discovery, were moored the dark, evil-looking ships of the air in which these society bandits were accustomed to dart through the heavens in search of their prey.

Wallie, with his hands pressed to his aching head, did not hear the low conversation which passed between Van Arland and the latter's second in command.

He told me the route the express usually takes," Van Arland said, nodding in Mason's direction. "The hop-off for Washington will be made at mid-night and there'll be twenty-thousand dollars in gold aboard. We'll have to hold her up just before she crosses the Rockies."

"What about him?" The questioner indicated Wallie.

Van Arland shrugged his shoulders. "Frame him," he replied. "After the trick is turned, disable his plane and let him go. We've got all we want out of him."

They separated and Van Arland went to keep try-out Mission Oaks. The woman who met him under the redwood trees, however, was not Beryl Caruthers but Viola Matthews, the dark-haired, vindictive guest at the Oaks who was generally believed to be Van Arland's half-sister.

What words passed between the two at that meeting none ever heard. It was only when Viola screamed and a shot rang out that Beryl, walking with her maid and favorite colie, ran toward the secluded spot whence the cry came. Just as they reached the bottom of a flight of steps leading to the bridge over a tiny stream, a man darted swiftly past them and disappeared into the shrubbery.

Midnight. Like will-o'-wisp, the light from the great, aerial mail station flashed about the heavens. The deep, purple dome of the night furnished a wonderful amphitheatre for the evolutions of the gigantic, comet-like ships of fire which flitted about; now here, now there, leaving long trails of sparks in their wake. The mid-night express was getting ready for its trans-continental flight to the nation's capital.

At the same time, down under a brooding canopy of vines and flowers, a sinister squadron of vulture ships, each branded with a death's head that gleamed, white and ghostly, against its black background, made silent preparations for a night of terror. In one of those ships of death sat Wallie Mason.

Once more the searchlights from the aero station sent out long fingers of flame across the sky. They were searching in vain for marauders. The next instant the giant mail ship, with its cargo of gold, glided out from its moorings and rose, majestically. Simultaneously, and with ominous silence, the weird, death-bearing ships from under the screening foliage, made off into the night.

The squadron leader did not fly with them. At the last moment Van Arland had rushed, excitedly, to his second in command and ordered him to take charge of the expedition.

"I've made a fool of myself," Van Arland explained angrily, when questioned. "I've shot someone. We've got to get out of the country. As soon as you get hold of that gold make a landing—I don't care where—and get it all into one ship. Hop off in that, then blow up the hangars. I'll send up a flare, so you'll know where to pick me up."

But at Mission Oaks Viola Matthews, moaning with the pain of a gunshot wound in her side, whispered the story of her wrecked life to Beryl Caruthers.

"Van Arland is not my half-brother," Viola declared. "He promised to marry me. Now he wants to marry you. He's jealous of Mason and plans to get rid of him. To-night Van Arland's Death Head Squadron is going to wreck the midnight mail express and make Mason suffer for the crime."

Though Beryl's head reeled, the earnestness of Viola's words convinced her of their truth. Running to the telephone, she summoned Larry Cassidy. Though surprised and horrified at what she told him, Larry was nevertheless happy at the confidence Beryl showed in his skill and ability to avert the threatened disaster. Not until after he had reached the Oaks and started, in one of the Caruthers



FRANCELLA BALLINGTON THE GREAT AIR ROBBERY UNIVERSAL-JEWEL DE LUXE PRODUCTION

where lay the dead body of a man. "It is one of Mr. Van Arland's men, sir," explained the mechanic, in answer to Cassidy's questions. Van Arland's plane went out of commission and he was taking one of ours. I heard someone at the hangars and went to investigate. He slugged me. I think I finished him. Then Miss Beryl came running out and—Mr. Van Arland seized her. He put her into the cockpit with him. She fought hard but—"

Cassidy waited to hear no more. For the third time he must fly to make a rescue in the air. With the mechanic's aid another of the Caruthers planes was quickly taken from its hangar and made ready for the chase after the pirate kidnapper.

Faint streaks of dawn now made it easier to keep the fleeing craft in sight. Larry, breaking all speed records, was soon near enough to see Beryl in the observer's seat, her hair streaming in the wind, her arms pleadingly outstretched toward him. He signaled to her to drop the ladder. She understood his gestures and contrived to do so without Van Arland's detection.

A few minutes more and Cassidy was again climbing, like a cat, out on the top of one of the wings of the plane, now being piloted by the mechanic. This time his task was doubly difficult, for Van Arland was flying at high speed. Cassidy did not think of his own danger now. The face of the girl he loved was looking down upon him like a star of hope. He would not fail.

Closer and closer Cassidy's plane came to that of the one piloted by the bandit. Now it was directly underneath. The rope ladder swayed, for the merest instant, above Larry's head. It was enough. He made the leap, grasped the lower rung safely and once again climbed over the side of the ship, traveling at a hundred and fifty miles an hour, thousands of feet in the air.

Van Arland, ignorant of what was transpiring, was amazed to suddenly be confronted by the muzzle of Cassidy's revolver. During the descent Larry continued to keep the villain covered and compelled him to pilot the ship safely. As they approached the earth a startling scene was enacted near them. Two Federal officers in a swift scout plane, were in pursuit of a ship bearing the mark of the Mission Oak hangars and piloted by a man in the garb of the Death's Head Squadron.

"It's Wallie!" cried Beryl, as the fugitive stood up, glanced back, waved his arms despairingly, then crashed to the ground his car in flames.

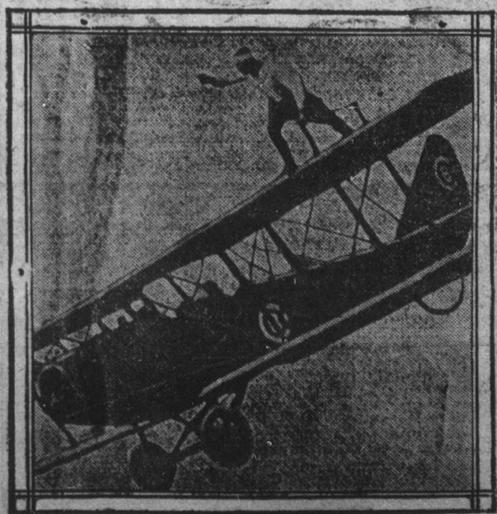
"Quick! The parachute," shouted one of the officers in the pursuing government plane, to his companion.

Almost as he spoke the other dived over the side of the ship, the parachute opening as he fell. Down he drifted, the white silk parachute looking like a bit of thistle down, blown by the breeze. With marvelous exactitude, the man alighted within a few feet of the crumpled and blazing airplane. He was there in time to drag from the ruins the crushed and lifeless form of the youth who had given his life, his love and his honor for the croix de guerre.

"But it wasn't Wallie I loved," whispered Beryl, as Larry led her, weeping, from the scene, after the officers had taken Van Arland into custody. "I liked him—only—because he was a friend of yours."

Then, for the first time, Larry took her in his arms and kissed her.

Sunday morning of last week three men attempted to burglarize the store of Wm. Bambridge, Thamesville. In attempting to frustrate the plans of the thieves, Wm. Pickard, Chief of Police, was shot in the leg. Mr. Pickard was taken to Chatham hospital. Blood poison set in and he died. The men, three Indians, were captured after considerable difficulty and landed in Chatham jail. They will be indicted for murder.



THE GREAT AIR ROBBERY UNIVERSAL-JEWEL DE LUXE PRODUCTION

SPECIAL ENGAGEMENT -- LYCEUM

MONDAY, MAY 8th

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'Way Down East'

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Volume

LOCAL

For used cars Watford. Mr. H. C. Car weekend in town New Homespun suits or coats. Miss Malone, of Mrs. R. G. K. Four dozen left. Swift's. Mrs. Lowry's day after spending Clair, Mich. Mrs. Harold C. Sarnia, are visiting and Mrs. Restori Don't miss next Monday's Griffith's big picture Abraham Lincoln see a man proud in." So do your Mr. and Mrs. C. spent the weekend Mr. and Mrs. W. Mr. Theodore F. Cozad, Nebraska former's sister, M. Men's Gabardin week—smart mode. After close of club that the mi family of five can provider happens Gingham, 5 Swift's. Mr. and Mrs. V. Mr. and Mrs. E. J. (ren, Sarnia, spent and Mrs. F. Restori Cut Flowers of Sunday, May 14th der early. Carnati—Siddall's Drug S. Rev. A. C. Tiffin number of old V. Friday. He was ca ate at the funeral W. Lucas. The regular mee 149, I.O.D.E. w home of Mrs. Ver street, on Tuesday p.m. sh. Mr. and Mrs. Peabody Lodge, 1. Toronto, paid a Peabody Lodge, 1. day evening and instructive address the Order. Borsalino Hats, just as good in Brown & Co., Sole The Lord meant horrible warning doesn't seem to m ference when an comes along. Mr. and Mrs. I. Regina arrived he will likely make th ario having dispos ests in Saskatchewan. You'll certainly East." The story everyone. Monday eum. Mrs. J. Y. Kinca auction sale of the her house on the street, on Saturd 2:30 p.m. Terms c auctioneer. Entries for the in connection with Agricultural Societ before Friday, Ms can be given to the Mary, or any of the New Summer M opened this week. Members of Society are busy i Square and laying flower beds. In less Watford will have Beauty spots of any All the membe Lodge, No. 99, I.C. quested to attend t ing on Monday, Ms sharp. Initiation an ness.—L. H. Aylesv At the meeting Diocesan Synod hel week, Rev. S. P. Irv delegate to the P Among the lay dele pears the name of of Mt. Brydges. Stop press item- vertise in our re Boys' Suits. Pro Manufacturing Co., sell at proper figur day morning at \$6. Come early. All be minute styles. Clot prise you, sizes 26 proportion to size. Co.