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Africa Flight

By Val Gieslard

An attempt by Sir George to begin an explosive protest was firmly suppressed by his sister-in-law. "So long as there's plenty of room in the plane, I think it an excellent idea," she said firmly. "I'd quite like to have another woman to keep me company. And Carol will have so much fun chaperoning me."

"The Star of the East," said Sir George, not without a certain pomposity, "is built to carry eighteen. That has nothing to do with it."

"You wouldn't by any chance be thinking of any possible risk?" pursued Janet Manson maliciously. "You're trusting Hubert and me to the tender mercies of your company's pet machine—or had you forgotten that?"

Sir George pulled himself together. Looked at his cold blood there seemed really a good deal to be said for the notion. Carol safely away from all the vulgar activities of the Season. A really remarkable human interest angle to get the flight publicity. Larrimore and Carol and "The Star of the East"—this was too good to lose.

"If you're really keen on the idea, Carol," he said slowly, "I'll think seriously about it. It might be managed."

"Will you come, Carol?" repeated her Uncle. "I'd like to have you with us."

Carol smiled at him affectionately.

"Just wait a minute," she said. "I'm not going to be rushed off my feet like this—and into mid-air into the bargain. I must think one or two things over."

The telephone buzzer beside Sir George's desk snapped angrily. "I thought I told you, Cynthia, that I didn't want anyone—Oh, Larrimore! Yes—of course, put him on! What are you thinking about?"

In the adjoining room Cynthia Wright gave away her essential humanity by making a face. She would have liked to have sworn. But swearing had come in for her six since her time. She switched the telephone through.

Carol stood, with a smile on her lips, while her father obviously got the worse of an argument over the line. She seemed to be seeing the airman's face at the other end of the telephone; his lean, bony strength, his sardonically twisted unhappiness. How long she was asking herself, would it take her to smooth away that tortured, baffled look? What a strike of luck that the chance to go on the flight had cropped up like that! She had simply not dared to ask her father straight out if she could go. He would have been bound to have smelled a rat.

Sir George put back the receiver and sat down.

"We can talk it out over dinner," he said. "You know, Hubert, I wonder if I'm taking too big a risk in Larrimore. Frankly, the fellow's a type I don't understand!"

He spoke as if with a sense of grievance. Janet Manson asked what he meant.

"Well, if you must know," answered Sir George, looking at her shrewdly, "I don't understand—and I don't altogether trust—a man who apparently doesn't give a hang for anything or anyone in the world."

"I think," said Janet, "that I shall look forward to meeting Mr. Larrimore. It looks as if you've at last failed to get your own way with somebody, George. Good for you. He'll probably be good for all of us—even for Carol."

"But Carol," interrupted Hubert, "hasn't yet told us whether she's coming."

"Hasn't she?" laughed Carol, and perked up her chin. "Of course I'm coming!"

CHAPTER V

SIR GEORGE'S MISTAKE

That same evening, a little after nine o'clock, found Larrimore and Sir George Manson once more alone together. They were in Sir George's study in his flat in Buxingham Gate—a room that somehow looked like a rather absurd copy in miniature of his office in the great Embankment building. They had dined well. Sir George was too old a hand at the managing of men not to leave a business discussion until his opposite number had been duly fed and flattered with good food and better wine. Now he sat in a deep arm-chair, lighting a cigar with that interested deliberation which is the invariable sign of the man who knows all there is to be known about tobacco. His face was placid, his expression unruffled. No one watching him would have dreamed that in actual fact Sir George Manson was more than a little worried; that behind his hospitality lay the firm intention to "take the temperature of that fellow Larrimore."

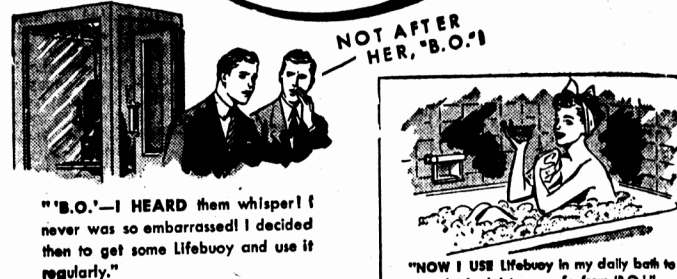
Meanwhile "that fellow" fidgeted with his shoulder-blades against the mantelpiece of Sir George's fireplace, before ostentatiously lighting a pipe without troubling

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to ask permission to do so. "I can take it," said Sir George abruptly, "that the business end is settled? I'll have the contract drawn up formally to-morrow morning."

"Certainly," said Larrimore. "As business, it looks pretty funny to me—but if you're satisfied—"

He broke off and shrugged his shoulders.

"I'll be frank with you Larrimore. I'm worried by one thing—that you appear to be antagonistic to every aspect of the scheme."

"I'm sorry."

But the airman's apology seemed entirely perfunctory. Sir George knew when to wait. He waited now.

"I'm naturally defensive," Larrimore went on. "It's a weakness. I

was quite needlessly rude to you in your office—"

Sir George swung one leg across the other, and leaned back in his chair.

"Bless you," he said genially, "I don't mind. When people are rude to me I know at once that I've got 'em at a disadvantage. And in business that's the first symptom of victory you know."

Larrimore stiffened. "I don't feel at a disadvantage with you, Sir George." (To be continued)

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