AFRICA FLIGHT

By VAL GIELGUD

"My dear, there's none! And I wouldn't stand that much of 'as it was in the beginning is now and ever shall be'! I don't want to be taken for granted myself—and I won't marry anyone who wants to be taken for granted! There you have it!"

Antony Sothern picked up his wasted spray of flowers, made as if to shake hands, moved to the door. He opened it and turned on his heel. "Perhaps you didn't waste your trouble in getting dressed up after all," he said savagely. "No one's been able to take Rupert Larrimore for granted yet!"

At that moment Carol felt sorrier for him than at any other moment during the whole difficult little scene. He looked so young, so pathetically ingenuous beside the memory of the man who had roused his jealousy.

"I think you were in love with me," she said softly.

"Just why?"

"You've forgotten to be a gentleman twice in the last ten minutes. She smiled at him. "Oh, I didn't mind at all. But don't do it again!"

"I apologize," said Sothern, stiff as any poker.

"That's all right, Antony."

He took a step forward. "Won't you reconsider, Carol, please? It's not going to be much fun on this trip if we leave things as they are now!"

She shook her shining head. "I'm afraid it's no good, Antony. And I don't believe in leaving things in a muddle. Besides, we're not going on this trip just for fun, either of us, are we?"

"I don't know about you," burst out Antony Sothern, "but I'm not! And you might remember it!"

The door slammed behind him. But the theatrical gesture was wasted as far as Carol Manson was concerned. Antony had already slid into the farthest background of her mind. She walked up slowly to her bedroom, and sat down in front of her triple mirror on the dressing-table with its battery of silver and ivory.

Reflected in the righ-hand panel of the mirror was the wall to he right of the big photograph of Rupert Larrimore. He leaned against the 'plane in which he had landed at Valparaiso after his Pacific flight in the grimiest of overalls, his face greasy and unshaven, his eyes hollowed, his flying-helmet pushed on to the back of his head. His hair was wind-tossed, and there was a desperate sort of self-conscious grin showing his teeth . . .

Carol slipped out of her frock and stood up, her hands clasped behind her head.

"I'm so glad that I'm really rather exceptionally good-looking," she said to her reflection.

And then she realized with a certain fear, that she felt quite wildly, quite unreasonably happy.

CHAPTER VIII

CAROL'S DECISION

Sir George Manson had his faults, but when he set his heart on a scheme, that scheme was automatically halfway to being carried out. "The Star of the East," its four great engines duly tested, its huge metal wing-span glittering, its silver star gleaming symbolically on the nacelle, its luxurious inside fittings complete to the last cushion and cooktail-glass, was duly delivered on schedule.

Hubert Manson's personal and surveying kit was listed and secured by the combined labours of his wife and Antony Sothers, in the intervals of getting their own. Otto Flesch, the camera-man, who had worked for so many years at the studios near Berlin made a daily pilgrimage into the depths of Soho to get genuine sauerkraut and salted gherkins, revealed himself as the most agreeable type of intelligent Jew. Cynthia Wright practically took down telephone messages in her sleep. Sothern tried to practise the old theory that hard work alone can stifle a hopeless love—and failed dismally. While Larrimore and Carol and Nigel Kerr the reserve pilot—a young man with a broken nose, who had played Rugger for Fettes and Cambridge, and regarded Larrimore as a demi-god—proceeded to the flying trials of the machine.

Sir George began by objecting to his daughter's going up on those early trial flights. But the Press, needless to say, got wind of what was happening, and were even more anxious to photograph Carol Manson in flying kit than the "Star of the East." And when Sir George realized just how much publicity he would lose if he put his food down, he took care to keep it up.

So day after day Carol was not only in close physical proximity to this man who fascinated her so queerly, but also in a position to see him at his best. She soon learned, however much of a fluke that first big flight had been, that he was of the stuff of the really great pilots. She learned his uncanny quickness of hand and eye and judgment; his "feel" for the idiosyncrasies of a plane, as a good rider feels for his horse's mouth.

It was almost as if in the air he could cast off a skin. He seemed younger, and the harsh lines went out of his face. Larrimore had for winds and clouds and the blue spaces of the sky that feeling which the mountaineer has for crag, and snow-slope, and glacier: a feeling which has about it something next door to the mystical; an instinct which in some men comes very close to religion . . .

She wondered what he thought about her—if indeed he thought about her at all. He spoke to her so little that she was forced to the conclusion that either he was in love with her or else profoundly uninterested in her. Only one day, when she gave him no peace until for a few moments he let her handle the controls, was she certain that after all he was not indifferent. The hands which had closed over hers at three critical moments had not been those of a professional pilot. And when they landed, he had walked away with hardly a word . . .

And so the days went by, and the headlines increased in number and inches; and Sir George gave interviews, and luncheons, and made speeches; and Larrimore grew gayer, and Antony Sothern grew more silent and morose; and Hubert Manson mislaid one thing after another for his wife to find.

Carol began to find difficulty in getting to sleep from sheer excitement, just as though she were still a little girl who knew that Santa Claus would never come until she did sleep. And at last she made up her mind that she must push the matter to an issue. She felt she must know—one way or the other. And if it was the other—well, there was still time. She could back out. And back out she would, unless she and Larrimore could start on the trip as acknowledged lovers before the world.

(To be Continued)

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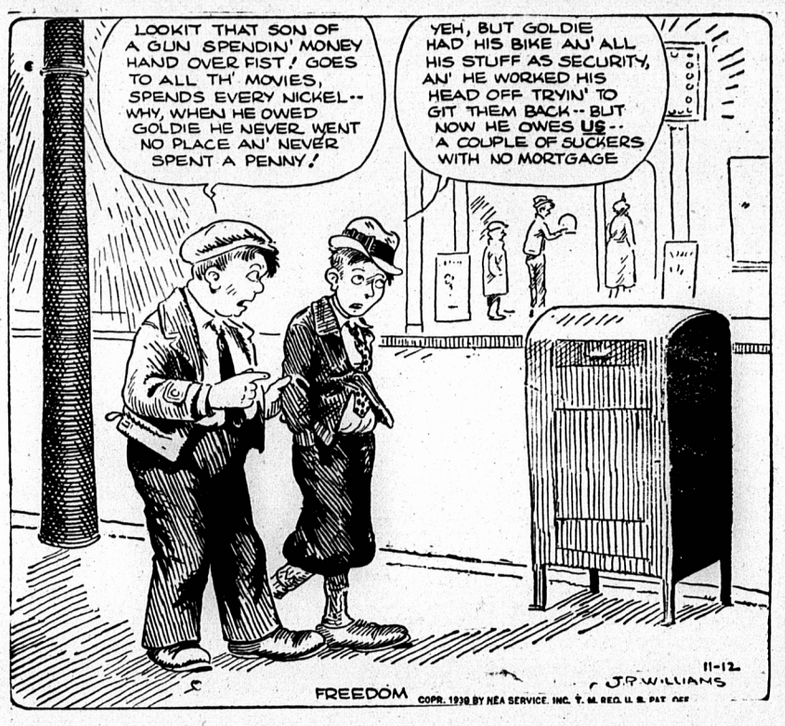
OUT OUR WAY — — By J. R. Williams



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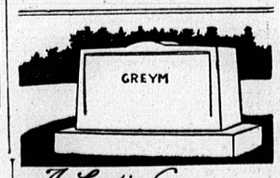

A Lasting Tribute

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