

# AFRICA FLIGHT

By VAL GIELGUD

## LAW WON'T RECOGNIZE

It seemed to Carol as if endless years passed before she heard her father stuttering out, "I won't believe it." Though she had suspected the thing to be true, she thought the fear that her aunt suspected it also had been her nightmare; though the barrier the secret made built between Rupert and herself had been a daily increasing agony, now that the murder was literally out in the words of every day, she could not persuade herself that they told the truth. And looking round the group of scared bewildered rather foolish faces, she saw the same incredulity stamped upon each of them. It was left to Nigel Kerr to say what each one of the expedition did at that moment. It was most genuine for their leader. "None of us believe it," Larrimore said firmly. "You know we'll all stand by you, just as we know who pulled us out of that mess in the Sahara."

Larrimore achieved a smile, as he looked at the young pilot. "Very good," he said. "But one of you believes me, I know." And he looked at Janet Manson. "You know, Carol, don't you?" he said. "That's why you've been so quiet and unhappy since we been back. In your heart you know all the time 'Why have you stuck to me, as you have?'"

"I told you, Rupert, that I loved you," Larrimore laughed. "To the sailors' foot and after? It's no inhuman nature. And Larrimore had the grace to look away."

But Sir George Manson remained persistently undecided. He had been that his move was not unconnected with the fair fame of Ascania Airways. It may have been that he was genuinely touched by the misery on his daughter's face.

"The whole thing's utterly absurd and preposterous," he said with a fine face. "I refuse to hear another word about it tonight. If the charge is pressed, Larrimore, I must meet you in my solicitors in the morning, and we'll get you the best man at the Bar. All this spinning about—any attention to this superb example of the Englishman not knowing when he is beaten."

"Why did you kill him?" Janet Manson asked gently. "I confess," added her husband, "I would be interested to know the exact reason leading up to the act."

And Larrimore told them. He told the whole story of that journey, as it had never been told in the office report, or in his letters to Sir George Manson. He made that worthy—who had never been uncomfortable in his life—the ultimate of fear, of thirst, of heat, of dust, of the torture of imminent and agonizing death. He told them the toiling marches under the merciless sun, across the limitless expanses of the desert. He made them see Southern pines and ammunition bandolier plodding wretchedly in the rear—and occasionally very frequently taking a furtive swig at his water-bottle, at first just moistening his cracked lips, then slowly increasing the amount, gulp by gulp, till the fatal oasis was reached, and he realized that he must get at Larrimore's water, and face the consequences of his madness.

He told them of that dreadful whispered quarrel under the palm-trees with the shadows from the moonlight all about them, and Carol sleeping in peaceful ignorance on the farther side of the little group of trees. He showed them how he took map and compass and water-bottle, and made off in the night; and his own primitive walk—the hunt for his own life and the life of his woman for whom he was responsible—which had led to the end in the other man's death.

"Yes! Had to die," George! Can you face that? I had to!" said Larrimore quietly. "I killed him, and I was dead right to the end, and you, you, Carol, and the other, and myself—or Anthony Southern. And in circumstances when it was the survival of the fittest, and the law, and Southern had broken the rules, and proved himself unfit to survive. I was right, I know it. But the law won't recognize that rightness. And I don't expect you people to—not here, with civilization and soft-cushions all round you!"

There seemed nothing more to be said. Janet Manson whispered to her brother-in-law, and they all moved awkwardly towards the dining-room door, leaving Carol and Rupert Larrimore alone by the piano. Only Nigel Kerr suddenly broke away to go back and wring Larrimore's hand hard.

Larrimore looked up suddenly, and held out his hand. "Out along, Carol dear. Wish me luck!"

"I want to talk to you, Rupert." "Your dinner'll get stone cold." "I still want to talk to you." "He moved heavily. If you can do any good, Carol? I've had rather a brilliant day of it already."

"You wouldn't be scared of me, would you, Rupert?" "The fat is not rising," he said. "I'll be frank, Carol. We've nothing more to say to each other. Good-bye."

## ADVENTURE PLANNED

Carol did not show any sign of following the others in to the dining room. Nor did her glance waver even momentarily. "You really mean," she said slowly, "that we're all washed up?"

Larrimore winced at the latent scorn in her voice. "Nothing," he retorted. "Nothing's been the same since El Fayoum. You began to suspect me—why on earth couldn't you have put-

it into words? It might have given us the ghost of a chance! Now you've bulldozed a wall a hundred miles thick."

"No Rupert—be fair! How could I face such a beastly idea? And it was you who said, 'I know what you went through on that march. No one else knows. No one else can ever know!'"

Larrimore made her a little stiff bow. "You know Carol, because you did your share. So you had to know. I can imagine how you stuck it out as you did."

"Yes," said the girl quietly, though there was a choking sob in her voice. "I thought we'd proved that we were the right people to adventure together after all. We'd done it. I'd learned the realities of an adventure, as you wanted me to, Rupert, you ought to have told me the truth."

Larrimore shrugged helplessly. "Well, didn't tell you—and you wouldn't accuse me of it. And here we are as separated as if the Atlantic was between us. Better face it, Carol, and let me go back to the only thing I can't face, Rupert, is that you haven't admitted to the truth even now."

Larrimore's hand came out of his pocket, as if by a spring. "What do you mean, Carol?" "You want me to put it into so many words, as you wanted me to?"

"Very well, I can understand poor Tony's shooting. I can't forgive you for killing him for the reason you told."

"Then," said Larrimore coldly, "you've not learned your lesson either. I should get off quickly if I were you."

The girl flushed, but kept her voice steady. "You were still jealous of him," she murmured. "You admitted as much in the plane. You took your chance, and your excuse, in my presence."

She broke into a amazement at the sound of Larrimore laughing. It was noisy hearty laughter, but there was singularly little mirth in it.

"So you haven't learned your lessons, Carol," he said at last. "You still reduce everything in an adventure to the personal. Now get this into your pretty head once and for all! I didn't give you a thought when I shot Anthony Southern down, except as a mouth that needed so many words of water. His relations with you never entered my head. He had committed an unforgivable crime. That was all. The man who stabs a man in a desert march has to die. There's no choice."

With a glad to have the chance of having to fight him, he would not even have taken that much gamble. If I'd caught you at that water-bottle, I'd have killed you just as cold-bloodedly. I told you you didn't begin to know the first thing about adventuring. Carol's adventure means dealing with circumstances where there aren't any laws or police to keep the necessary rules for you. What is called 'the law' in the world is a mere obvious simple necessity in the middle of the Sahara. That's the beginning and the end of it."

"With any movement Carol held out her hand. "I'm sorry Rupert," she said. "I've been a fool."

But Larrimore made no move to take it.

"What are you going to do with yourself?" she asked. "What's necessary and obvious?" "But what did they say at Scotland Yard?"

"Very little. They're only making inquiries; you see, I rather gathered they weren't really very keen to help the French extradite me, and—er—quillotine me, I suppose it will be?"

"Rupert!"

"They're got to communicate with the French again—I gather it's a rather complicated. In fact it's good as given a hint that if I took myself off and left no address—"

"And you're going, of course."

Larrimore grinned. "I'm afraid I am. It's not heroic, I know. But then I'm not a hero. I never was except in my imagination, my dear. And the hospital doesn't chance his spots at my age. I shall just save everyone a good deal of expense, and our hour in particular—by quietly fading out."

"I see," said Carol slowly. "Another adventure?"

"Put it that way if you like—it sounds better than saving one's skin," said Larrimore carelessly. "I shall take 'plane from Heston tonight. There are still quite a lot of countries where an extradition warrant doesn't run: Turkey I believe, and some of the South America States."

Carol went close up to him and put both hands on his shoulders. "I'm coming with you," she said a little breathlessly. "This is serious, Carol."

"I don't think," she said, "that I've ever been serious before in all my life."

Larrimore put up his hands and gripped her wrists. "Listen, my dear," he began, "you don't know—"

"I know everything at last. Tell me honestly. If you can, that you don't want me to come!"

"I told you I wasn't a hero, Carol. I'm a normal human lonely man. And I happen to love you. I won't lie about that even to save you from yourself. Of course I want you. But I won't take you into this—"

"You will if I can convince you that my eyes are open!"

Larrimore wrenched away from her savagely. "They're not open!" he said violently. "They can't be! You can't know what this is going to mean. I've next to no money. I shall have to take a job flying, probably military flying, in one of those tuppenny-halfpenny republics with a filthy climate. We shan't have a friend in the world. We shall never be able to come back to England. Do you realize that? The people who might just sympathize with me with things as they are,

will curse me for a coward once I bolt, and doubly for taking you with me. We shall be up against everything in the world for the rest of our natural lives, and nothing but our wits and our hands to use for capital."

"I thought that we loved each other Rupert."

"We do, Carol. Do you think it will last, against all that amount of handicap? Our tempers will shorten. We shall treat each other worse and worse. We shall quarrel. And because we can get away from each other, we shall come to hate each other. Just because we shall be so hideously dependent upon each other for everything—"

He broke off, and looked at the girl with eyes grown touchingly and desperately haggard.

"I'm still coming," said Carol. Behind them a door opened quietly.

ly, and Cynthia Wright came in. "I'm sorry to interrupt you," she said, "but Sir George wants you to come and have some dinner, Miss Manson."

Carol laughed a little uncertainly. "Did you hear what we were saying?" she asked.

"I'm afraid I did," said Miss Wright. "I couldn't help it. I meant to cough—but I was too interested." Larrimore turned towards the secretary. "Tell her it's madness, Miss Wright," he said. "On why not suggest that she tells my father—that I put a stopper on me." Carol cried.

There was a little silence, then, "I should get off quickly if I were you," said Cynthia Wright. Larrimore stared at her incredulously. "Do you mean that?" he exclaimed. "Women beat men! If you can take what's coming to you, so can I."

ing forefinger, looking quite extraordinarily like a schoolmistress, she widened windows and the sweep of downland of her school where she had first pinned a cut-out portrait of Rupert Larrimore beside her bed.

"Mr. Larrimore," said Cynthia Wright, "you've been talking a great deal about adventure, as if only men knew anything about it. That's great nonsense, if you don't mind my saying so. We may not fly the Pacific or go to the Poles—but the ordinary woman's life is an adventure from the hour she is born to the moment she dies. It has to be a woman's life is simply one of long adventures. Men have to learn about it by bits and ends. It isn't so surprising if they get the point of view of a little blurred, if you can take what's coming to you, so can I."

Miss Manson." She stopped and coughed. "I'm sorry, I've said far more than was my business," she concluded.

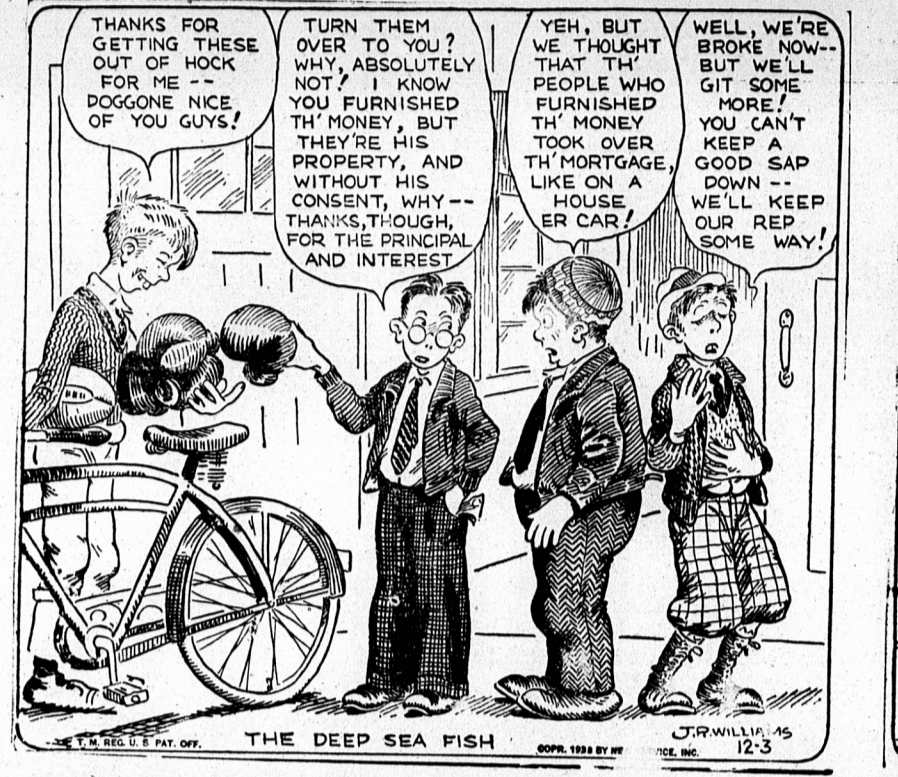
Carol crossed the room and put her arms round Miss Wright's slim shoulders. "No wonder," she said, looking back at Larrimore over her shoulder. "That you're the best secretary in London."

"Won't you come with us and show us the ropes?" inquired Larrimore, still faintly ironic. "You seem to know them pretty well!"

Carol made a face at him. Miss Wright showed no sign of appreciating the irony.

"Thank you, Mr. Larrimore," she said, "but I've my own adventures to think about, my own. Good luck to you both." The door closed behind her as quietly as it had opened. As the latch clicked Larrimore

## OUT OUR WAY



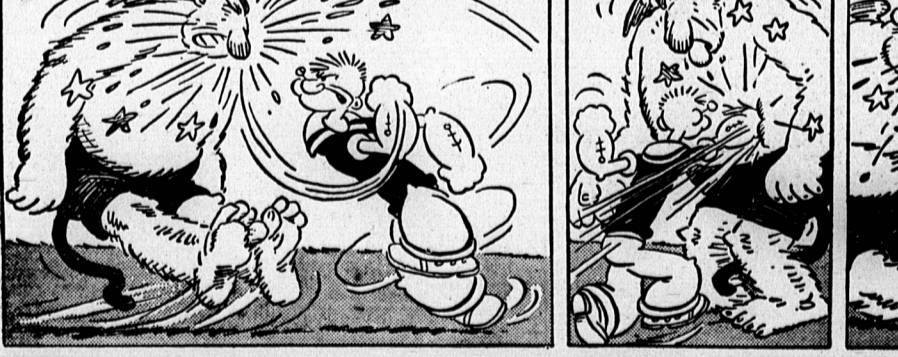
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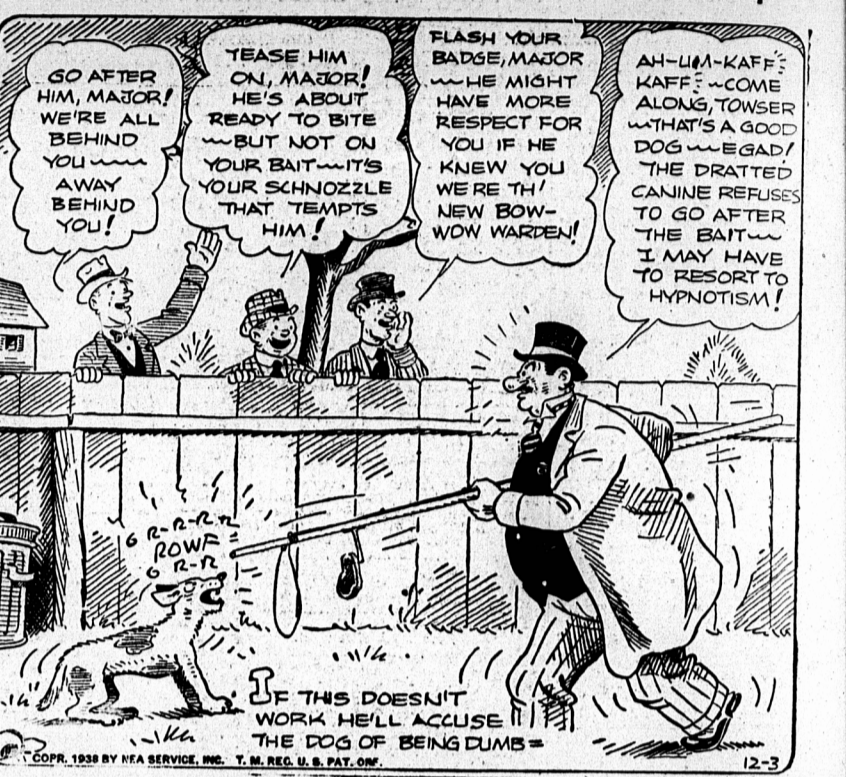
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(Continued on Page 5)

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