

AFRICA FLIGHT

By VAL GIELGUD

CHAPTER IV
"EVEN IF YOU WERE PLAINER"
 "I don't think you've met my daughter Carol before, Larrimore," said Sir George.
 He spoke abstractedly, being apparently engrossed in something on the cap of his suitcase. He certainly did not notice the singular likeness to his own first meeting with Rupert Larrimore in the way in which his daughter now faced the airman's sardonic eyes.
 As for Carol, herself she was profoundly careless of the presence of her father and uncle, she sat on the desk, went close up to Larrimore and held out her hand.
 "Would you mind," she began a little breathlessly, "if I told you that I thought you'd had rotten bad luck?"
 "Thank you," said Larrimore, "though, as a matter of fact, it was all perfectly all right."
 Saying which he was amazed at a little of Carol's manner. He had not had a word that little he had resented acutely the blatant way in which she had thrust herself into her father's office for the sake of an introduction to himself. And together with the report of his own martial life he had read a story in a morning paper which had not tended to improve his opinion of the girl.
 And yet—though quite determined to be rude to her—he had accorded her sympathy, and taken her hand. Was he going soft? He looked at her again uneasily, and found her eyes fixed unblinkingly upon his. And in that instant he knew that an unmisgivable sensation, partly a physical shock partly a dramatic "staring contest" conviction, that he had bought it.
 And, oddly enough, Rupert Larrimore had never bought it before. Women had made a fortune out of him, cheered him, even made love to him. The sheer cussedness which was such a large part of his make-up had driven him to the almost like an anchorite. And now this slim-limbed girl with the clear, rather scornful grey eyes and fair hair, had taken his heart from him with a single glance and in the face of most of his pet prejudices! He swore soundlessly to himself, and found that he was thanking Sir George for his cheque at needless length.

"You'll let me know where the trials of the machine are to be held?" he concluded lamely.
 "Sir George stooped thrust his cheque-book back into the drawer, without locking up."
 "There was a tiny breathless silence."
 "Hendon!" gasped Carol suddenly. "Daddy! You can't mean Mr. Larrimore to go to Hendon?"
 "Why not, Miss Manson?" interrupted Larrimore curiously. He made a little bow, and walked out quickly.
 "Daddy, didn't you remember that his crasn was a Hendon?" she demanded accusingly.
 "I would think you'd mind your own business, Carol."
 "Which is a nice morning greeting to your only daughter!"
 "You know I was busy this morning. I've told you dozens of times I don't want you to be in the office. Can't you use the telephone?"
 "You wouldn't have liked me to ring up Mr. Larrimore without an introduction surely, Daddy?"
 "What on earth are you talking about?"
 "If I must put it into words of one syllable, Daddy, I wanted to meet Mr. Larrimore."
 "Hubert?" Sir George inquired why in his gentle weary voice.
 "The man's something of a celebrity, my dear Hubert," said Sir George, "but I don't want you ever read use newspapers?"
 "O I see," murmured the Professor. "For a moment I thought you meant that you'd done something really worth doing."
 "Carol lied up."
 "I think the first solo flight across the South Pacific was extremely worth going," she said indignantly.
 "Worth doing!" snapped Sir George. "I don't know what you two are talking about. It gives his name value from the point of Associated Airways. That's important. It's also a fact that if he could get across from Valparaiso to Sydney, he's likely to be able to get from Timbuctoo to Tokyo."
 It was clear that Sir George meant to close the discussion summarily, but the Professor had his own share of his family's stubbornness.
 "George, tell me," he said. "Is this expedition just one of your stunts, or are you genuinely keen to do science—and me—a good turn?"
 Sir George's thick neck flushed. Carol answered for him.
 "If you really want to know, uncle, it's a little bit of both."
 "In that case," began Hubert, "I'm not at all sure."
 Of what was to be left to the imagination, for the Professor's wife chose that moment to leave a discussion she had been having with Cynthia Wright, agent of Women in Politics, and enter the office.
 Janet Manson at forty-seven preserved the relics of extremely good looks though her cheeks were drab, and her complexion as nature had left it. She stood in the doorway, looking at the little group by the desk with a somewhat comprehensive gaze, embracing Hubert affectionately, her niece suspiciously, and Sir George with a mixture of admiration and contempt.
 "Are you discussing the flight?" she asked. "You should have waited for me. You knew I was coming. How are you, Carol? I haven't seen you for some time."
 Sir George explained with a certain ponderous sarcasm that Hubert seemed to be objecting to the stunt aspect of the scheme.
 "Rubbish!" said Janet Manson decisively. "Why not combine his business with your pleasure?"
 "Dear heart!" from Carol.
 "Thank you, Carol. Don't you think it's about time you started combining business with pleasure too? And found something to do?"
 Carol lighted a cigarette. "I think I've done rather a lot for my age, Aunt Jane."
 "Oh do you? Because you've been everywhere, met everybody" and done a couple of London seasons? But I forgot—you have done one other thing, see that the Mercury has given you a front page half-column this morning."
 And she laid a folded newspaper on her brother-in-law's desk. Carol wrinkled with exasperation, but said nothing.
 Sir George banged his fist down on the paper. "I've told you before, Carol, that I will not have you mixed up in vulgar affairs of this kind," he said angrily.
 "O do you? Daddy," retorted the girl. "It was a perfectly harmless sort of party. Jerry and his crowd couldn't do anything wrong if they tried. They haven't the brains or the nerve! I'm sorry about the headline, but it doesn't really do me any harm you know."
 Sir George had unfolded the paper and spread it out on his desk. As he read the half-column through, the corners of his heavy mouth twitched ominously.
 "I'm not saying that it does you any harm," he muttered. Carol was on to the opportunity for counter-attack like a hawk.
 "I see," she said unkindly. "you like to keep the headlines for yourself and the noble pioneering schemes of Associated Airways. It's your reputation I'm ruining—no, my own!"
 But Sir George Manson, fond though he was of his only child, was too good a business man to be deflected from a principal point at issue by a palpable red herring. "Your aunt's quite right, Carol," he said. "You want some occupation to keep you out of mischief."
 The girl shrugged angrily and moved across to the window. "If you talk like that, I shall get married," she threw back over her shoulder. "I could quite easily you know." She looked out at the sea, the wheels easily above the river, at the Air Force Memorial rising over the plane trees. She thought again of Rupert Larrimore, of the success of her schemes for meeting him personally. How unimportant seemed her father's nobility mania, and her aunt's Pietarian fussiness! She had almost recovered her temper, when a remark of Janet Manson's, little more than half heard, wined the dawn into her from her lips.
 "Larrimore, Carol," her aunt was

saying "you would have no difficulty in getting married, considering what young men nowadays are like, and how much money your mother left you—even if you were much plainer than you are."
 Carol turned round. "I wonder why your generation has only to mention the word 'marriage' to become immediately and positively disgusting?"
 "Don't speak to your aunt like that!" snapped Sir George.
 "I'm sorry, daddy. But all this is absolutely ridiculous! Do you really want me to deprive some harmless typist or mannequin of her job, to be sure that I clock in every day at nine in the morning?"
 A LESSON IN TACTICS
 "I don't mean anything of the kind," her father interrupted.
 "Very well then. You didn't bring me up as a wage-earner. It wasn't necessary."
 Hubert Manson observed gently that there were other types of work. But Carol was not to be checked.
 "I haven't got the urge of the scientist, or the inspiration of the artist!" she went on a little breathlessly. "I'm a perfectly ordinary young woman with the luck to have an independent income. I want to enjoy myself while I'm young, and when I meet the right man I want to marry him."
 Sir George felt that the situation was getting out of hand. What had been intended for a mild occasion for disapproval showed signs of developing into a first-class domestic crisis. He began to look about him for a line of retreat.
 "It's only that I'm anxious about your account," he said. "You seem so—re-less. You need a change. Why don't you go abroad for a little?"
 "Deauville? Antibes? The Italian Lakes?"
 "Rubbish!" interrupted her aunt. "Deauville, indeed! What you want, my dear, is a little experience against a background where neither your Paris frocks nor your cheque-book could help you."
 There was a little silence, and then, much to the astonishment of her elders, Carol Manson smiled, enchantingly pretty. She had had the most delicious idea—if only she could pull it off—if on the dear old things didn't see just where their interfering and sermons had led to, in the way of giving her an opportunity.
 "Well," she said defiantly, "Just what do you suggest that I do?"

Climb Everest with the next expedition, or fly across Africa with Uncle Hubert? I suppose that of her way breeches would be the only wear, and that one might as well leave one's cheque-book at home!"
 "Oh don't talk nonsense, Carol!" said Sir George. "Get along home for goodness sake. I've some work to do."
 But Carol had not thrown her hat in vain. Uncle Hubert had never in all her life let her down. And this time, too, Uncle Hubert, albeit quite ignorantly, did just what she had hoped he would do.
 He looked hard at his wife, received an almost imperceptible nod, and took Carol's chin, tilting it up in his beautiful thin fingers so that she had to look straight into his eyes.
 "Will you come with us, Carol?" he asked quietly.

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 eight—" "That has nothing to do with it—" "You wouldn't by any chance be thinking of any possible risks?" 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 in cold blood there seemed really a good deal to be said for the notion. . . . Carol

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

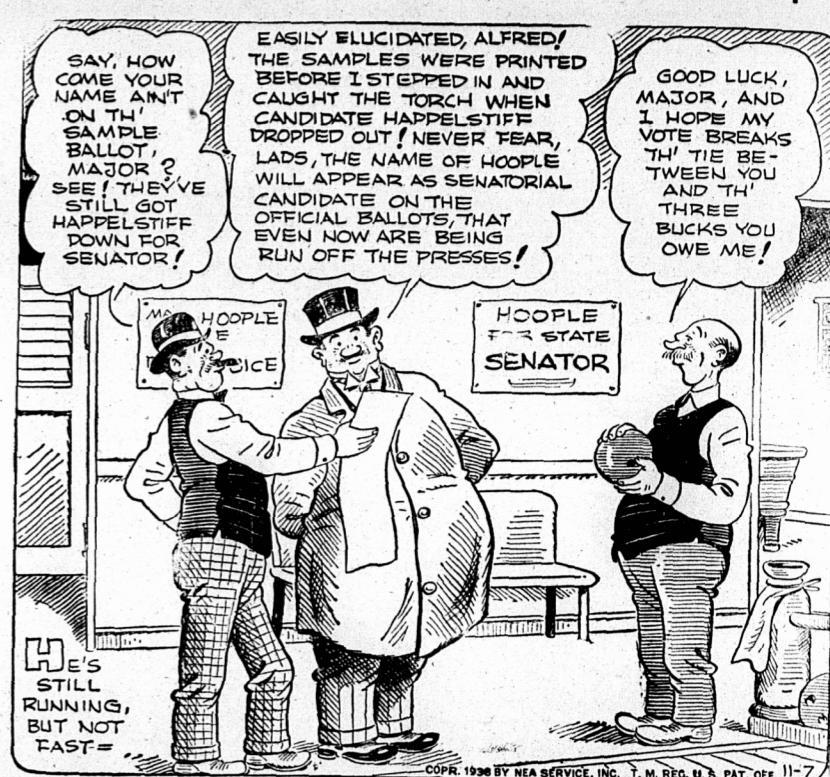
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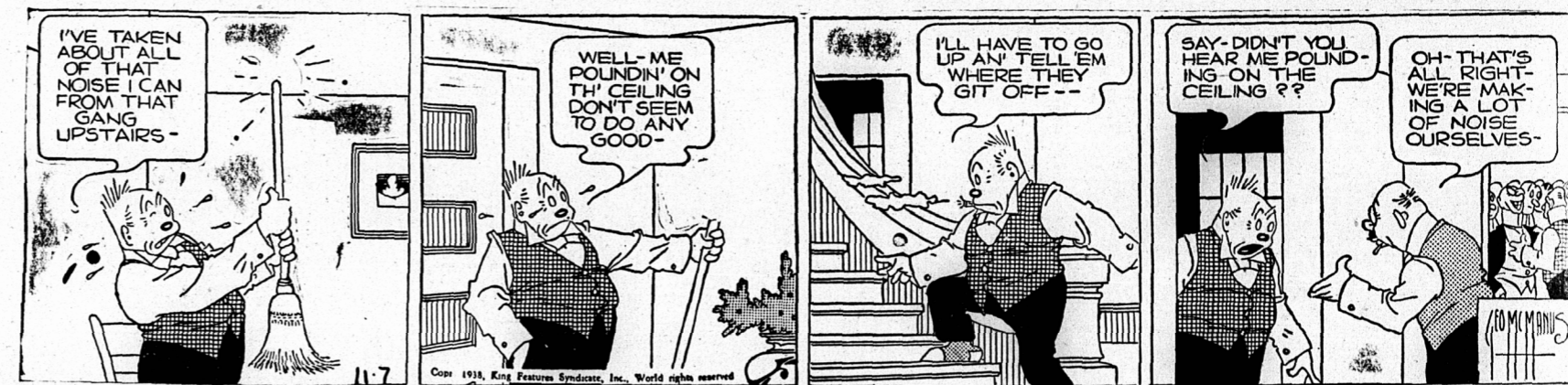
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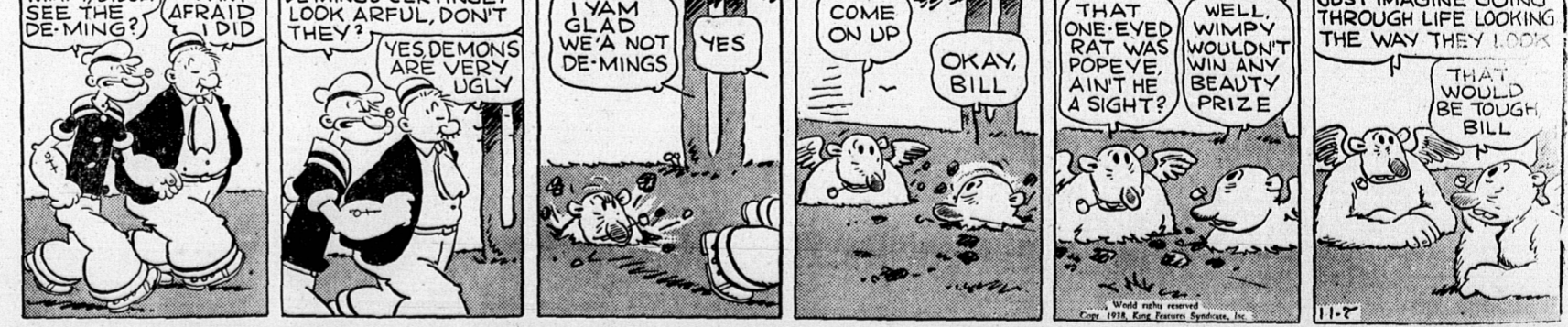


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