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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK JANE, STEWARDESS OF THE AIR LINES ***

JANE,
STEWARDESS OF THE AIR LINES

Jane Stewardess of the Air Lines

By
RUTHE S. WHEELER

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Jane, Stewardess of the Air Lines

11

CHAPTER ONE

Graduation Night

JANE CAMERON looked breathlessly around the room where seventeen senior nurses of the Good Samaritan hospital at University City sat primly awaiting their diplomas. It was graduation night and Jane was among the seventeen who had completed all of the requirements for a certificate in nurses' training.

Delayed half an hour by an emergency case on third floor surgery, Jane had just slipped into the room and taken the remaining chair on the end of the line.

Dr. Albert Anthony, trim, energetic young head of the staff, was speaking. Beside him was the little white stack of diplomas, all of them rolled and tied with blue and white ribbon. Doctor Anthony's sharp voice was informing the student nurses that they were about to embark on careers of their own. Jane smiled a bit grimly.

She wondered just what career was ahead of her. The girl next in line turned and a fleeting suggestion of a smile hovered about her lips. She was Sue Hawley, friend and companion of Jane through the long, arduous months of training.

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"Here's hoping he'll tell us where we can get jobs," whispered Sue, the words so close-clipped that it was almost impossible to detect her lips moving.

Jane nodded. That was the one big problem facing most of the girls who were graduating from nurses' training at Good Samaritan. As for herself, she had no idea what she would be doing after the following noon when she stepped through the doors of the great hospital.

Doctor Anthony finished his speech and the nurses applauded politely. He picked up the diplomas and called the roll of graduates. As her name was called, each girl stepped forward, her stiffly starched skirts swishing, and received the tube of paper.

Queer shivers chased themselves up and down Jane's back. For three years she had been working toward this moment and now that it was at hand she suddenly felt cheated. Perhaps it was because she was grasping so desperately for something to do after she left the hospital.

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Sue's name was called and she stepped forward and received her diploma. Jane was the last and she walked slowly toward the rostrum. A mist clouded her eyes and her hand shook as she accepted the diploma. It meant cutting loose from the old routine, leaving the firmly established and venturing out alone.

Jane wouldn't have admitted, even to Sue, that she was *scared*, for she was far too proud.

Then the program was over. Parents hastened up to congratulate their daughters and Jane and Sue drifted away from the others. Their homes were in a neighboring state and it had been too far for their own fathers and mothers to make the trip.

Sue looked down at her diploma. She was slender, blond, with sparkling blue eyes and peach-bloom complexion.

"Wonder if I'll ever have this framed?" she sighed. "Right now I've just exactly \$2 and I'm not going to send an SOS home for money unless I get down to my last penny."

"I've a little more," confessed Jane, tucking a wisp of wavy, brown hair back under her prim little cap. "To be exact, there's \$4.23 in my purse and I don't want to ask the folks at home for anything if I can help it."

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Jane was a bit taller than Sue and her brown eyes matched the color of her hair. They had stuck by each other through all of the tribulations of nurses' training; now, though both hesitated to mention it, each feared that graduation would terminate their close companionship.

Miss Hardy, the supervisor of nurses, broke away from another group and joined them.

"Drop in at my office before you go to the dorm for the night," she said. Before she could explain what she wanted, an interne stepped into the room and called her away on an emergency case.

Rules had been lifted for graduation night and a kindly theater manager, realizing how little

spending money most of the girls had, sent up passes for his show.

Jane and Sue slipped out of the assembly room, diplomas in hand. Hurrying to the dormitory on fourth floor back, they changed from their uniforms into street clothes and a few minutes later were on their way down town, the towering bulk of Good Samaritan with its scores of shaded lights behind them.

The show proved entertaining and they passed a pleasant two hours at the theater. On their way home, Sue slackened her pace in front of a drug store and looked longingly at the gleaming soda fountain inside.

"Feel the urge of a chocolate soda?" asked Jane, who knew her friend's weakness.

"It's practically irresistible," confessed Sue.

"Then let's celebrate. The treat's on me for I'm at least two dollars richer than you."

The sodas were delicious and the newly graduated nurses sipped them in luxurious leisure.

"My, but it's going to seem good not to have to jump every time a bell clangs," said Sue.

"I don't know about that. I'm so used to bells I'm afraid I'll miss them just a little bit," Jane said.

"What do you suppose Miss Hardy wants?"

"Maybe it's about a job."

"Don't worry. If there was anything like that in sight, she'd give it to one of her pets. We'd never have a chance," said Sue bitterly.

Jane and Sue had steadfastly refused to court the favor of the supervisor of nurses and as a result many unnecessary little tasks had been heaped on their shoulders. It had been just enough to arouse their determination, and they had finished near the top of the class despite the apparent prejudice of the supervisor.

It was nearly midnight when Jane and Sue pushed open the double doors of Good Samaritan. Only the night lights illumined the halls and the strained quiet which pervades a hospital at night had settled down over the building.

The elevator boy had left his post half an hour before and they walked the four flights of stairs to fourth floor back where the nurses lived. Most of the girls were in the dormitory and the hall was almost deserted as they neared the office of the supervisor. The door was closed and they knocked discreetly. An irritated, tired voice bade them enter. Jane opened the door.

Miss Hardy's cold, blue eyes held little welcome for her visitors as she peered up at them through steel-rimmed spectacles.

"You asked us to stop here before we went to bed," Sue reminded her.

"Oh, yes. So I did. It's a pity you couldn't have come in a little earlier."

"It isn't often that we have a night off and passes to see a show," replied Jane tartly.

Miss Hardy made no comment, but shuffled through a pile of papers at one corner of her desk. She selected a letter and scanned it rapidly.

"Either one of you girls decided what you'll do when you leave tomorrow?" she asked.

"I haven't been able to learn of a single job," said Jane, "and Sue has been no more successful."

"Then here is something that might interest you."

Miss Hardy tossed the letter across the desk. Jane looked at the letterhead and her eyes blurred. It bore the name of the personnel manager of the Federated Airways.

CHAPTER TWO

Opportunity Knocks

THE pulses of the young nurses quickened as they read the letter and they hardly heard Miss Hardy saying, "Of course, I haven't had time to fully investigate this company and it seems a little foolhardy for any young woman of common sense to seek such work."

That was typical of Miss Hardy. She was so conservative that anything new seemed foolish.

Jane read the letter rapidly and Sue, looking over her shoulder, kept pace with her. It was from Hubert Speidel, personnel manager of Federated Airways.

"My dear Miss Hardy," the letter began. "For some time Federated Airways has been considering a plan to improve its service to passengers and to provide even further for their welfare and comfort while they are guests aboard our transport planes. We have come to the conclusion that the addition of a stewardess to our flying crews is essential and at present we are contacting young women who might be interested in this work. Our first requirement is that the prospective stewardess be a graduate nurse. Hence, this letter is directed to you."

"I have consulted a number of eminent physicians and they have highly recommended the nurses' training school of Good Samaritan hospital for the high calibre of young women who are graduated. I will appreciate your contacting any of the girls who might be interested in joining our air line as stewardesses. On your recommendation, we will provide passage for them to come to Chicago where they will undergo the necessary examinations. Girls who weigh more than 120

pounds or who are more than five feet four inches tall can not be used.”

Sue looked expectantly at Jane when they finished the letter.

“Well, what do you think of that?” she asked.

“I think it’s a great opportunity,” replied Jane. “It’s a real chance to get into a new field for girls. Air travel is developing rapidly and perhaps we can grow with it.”

Jane handed the letter back to Miss Hardy.

“It seems to me like a very dangerous type of work,” the supervisor of nurses said.

“I don’t think it would be any more dangerous than the everyday things we do. I’ve noticed advertisements of the Federated Airways. Their planes have flown thirty-five million miles without a fatal injury to a passenger. If I can go that far without getting hurt very seriously, I’ll consider myself lucky.”

“You’ve always been lucky,” retorted Miss Hardy, as a seldom-seen smile flickered over her face.

“I guess both of you have thought me pretty much of a tyrant,” she went on, removing the spectacles and smoothing back her straight, grey-streaked hair. “I’ll admit I’ve been unnecessarily harsh with you on occasions, but it was all a part of my system. Some day you’ll thank me for it for you are the best young nurses Good Samaritan has turned out in many a year.”

“But, Miss Hardy,” protested Sue, “we thought you had a grudge against us. Usually we had all of the mean little things to do.”

“I know, but I was just testing the kind of spirit you had. You came through fighting a hundred per cent and even now, when I spoke discouragingly of this possible work with the air line, you showed your determination. I am convinced that this is a real opportunity and I should have been greatly disappointed if you had not shown a keen interest in its possibilities.”

Miss Hardy’s eyes were twinkling and Jane and Sue were astonished. Behind the hard, outer shell of the martinet they had known beamed now a very warm and friendly personality. For the first time in three years they felt they really knew Miss Hardy and each was a little ashamed of the harsh things they had said about the supervisor.

“Are you both interested in going to Chicago and personally applying for positions with the Federated system?” asked the supervisor.

Jane and Sue replied in unison and Miss Hardy picked up the telephone directory and after ascertaining the number of the local field of the Federated line, dialed the airport.

The night operations manager answered and Miss Hardy informed him that she had two graduate nurses who needed transportation to Chicago for an interview with the personnel officer.

“When do you think we’ll go in?” Sue whispered to the supervisor.

“That will depend on when there is space,” replied Miss Hardy. “I expect that since you will be traveling on passes it will be a day or two.”

Sue thought of the small sum in cash she had and wondered just how she would subsist in Chicago if she failed to get the job as stewardess.

Miss Hardy jotted several notations on the pad beside her phone, thanked the operations manager, and looked up at the girls.

“The first plane eastbound for Chicago with room for you will be through at three o’clock this morning. That will get you there shortly after seven. Can you get ready by that time?”

“We can be ready in half an hour,” gasped Jane.

“I thought you could. That’s why I told the operations manager to arrange for your passage on the three o’clock plane.”

“I’ll have to finish packing,” said Sue.

Miss Hardy looked at the clock.

“It’s midnight now. If I were you I’d go to the dorm and go to bed. Sleep until two o’clock. I’ll come in and call you in plenty of time to get dressed and get to the airport. Don’t pack anything except what you’ll need for a night or two. If you secure the positions with Federated Airways, you can write to me and I’ll have your things sent in.”

“That’s kind of you. Thanks so much,” said Jane.

“I’m just making up, a bit, for the grind I put you through in the last three years. Now get along to bed and don’t wake the rest of the girls by talking. A couple of hours of sleep will be the best for both of you. I’ll call you in plenty of time.”

Jane and Sue left the supervisor’s office and hurried down the hall.

“What do you think of it?” asked Sue.

“First of all, I think Miss Hardy’s an old dear, and as for the chance to become a stewardess, my vote is unanimous.”

“So is mine, but I’ve never been up in a plane before. I’m going to be just a little nervous.”

“I’ve never been up, either,” confessed Jane, “but it certainly won’t be any worse than riding in an express elevator. Why, the pit just drops out of my stomach every time I get in one of those things.”

They entered the dormitory and went quickly to their own beds. They undressed in the dark and

hung their clothes in the lockers which stood at the head of each bed.

Jane slipped between the cool, crisp sheets and closed her eyes. But sleep did not come readily. She was too tense, too excited at the events of the last few minutes.

Earlier in the evening she had been wondering, a little desperately, just what she would do. Now there was a fair chance that she would become one of the pioneers in this new profession for girls. And Sue was going with her. That was what made Jane supremely happy. It would have been tragic to disrupt the bonds of friendship that had grown so close through the trying days of their training.

Then there was Miss Hardy. What a revelation she had been. Jane smiled as she recalled the friendly look in Miss Hardy's eyes. After all, the supervisor had been doing the best thing for them even though many of the tasks she had placed on their shoulders during training had been extremely disagreeable.

Jane wondered what her father and mother would say if she got the job in Chicago. It might take more than a little diplomacy to win them over to her side. 25

In the next bed, Sue was breathing regularly and deeply and a little later Jane's tensed nerves relaxed and she slept. It seemed as though she had been asleep for only a minute when Miss Hardy shook her gently and whispered, "It's two o'clock and I have lunch ready in my office."

Sue was already dressing, and Jane hurried into her clothes.

Jane had a pretty brown suit with beret to match while Sue wore a two-piece dress of heavy blue crepe. She had a spring coat of similar material and a close-fitting toque, also of blue crepe.

They tip-toed to the door of the dormitory and looked back for just a moment. This had been their home for three long years and there was just a touch of heartache as they stepped into the hall and Sue pulled the door shut.

Miss Hardy was waiting for them in her office. Spread on top of her desk was an appetizing lunch which the supervisor had prepared in the tiny kitchen which adjoined her office. There was a large plate of sandwiches and cups of hot chocolate. 26

"You shouldn't have gone to all this trouble," protested Jane.

"It wasn't any trouble. I wanted to do it for I want you to have pleasant memories of Good Samaritan."

"We're going to take away a very pleasant memory of you," promised Sue, as she finished a sandwich.

"I have written my own recommendation and a letter of introduction for you and I am also enclosing Mr. Speidel's letter," said Miss Hardy. "This should insure your seeing him tomorrow morning in Chicago. I'll be anxious to know the outcome."

"We'll telegraph," promised Sue. Then, remembering how little actual cash she had, she added, "That is, we'll try to telegraph you."

Miss Hardy smiled for she knew how little money most of the girls had when they left training school.

They finished the lunch just as the horn of a taxicab squalled in the street below.

"There's your cab. It's a fifteen-minute ride to the airport. You'll have to hurry." 27

Miss Hardy handed the letter of recommendation to Jane, who folded it and placed it in her purse. They hurried downstairs, the girls carrying the small week-end bags with them.

Miss Hardy walked to the cab with them. Farewells were brief.

"I know you'll both make good," said Miss Hardy. Then she turned and hurried back inside the sheltering walls of Good Samaritan.

The cab lurched ahead, gaining speed rapidly as the driver headed for the airport.

Jane and Sue settled back on the worn leather cushions. In another half hour they would be aboard an eastbound transport plane, speeding toward Chicago. Their hospital days were definitely behind them and new careers, holding the promise of great adventure, were ahead.

CHAPTER THREE

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Adventure Ahead

THE cab sped through the sleeping city. The business district was soon left behind and the paved road bordered the Wapsipinicon river, which skirted the south edge of University City. The road swung across the river and ahead of them gleamed the red, green and white lights which marked the boundary of the airport of Federated Airways.

The taxi slowed and drew to a halt in front of the administration building. The driver helped Jane and Sue from the cab. Jane opened her purse to pay the fare from her slender funds, but the driver waved the money away.

"Miss Hardy at the hospital said to charge it to her account," he said, and Jane and Sue were given another glimpse of the warm heart which beat beneath the grim exterior of the supervisor of nurses.

The driver led them into the waiting room and left their bags there. Jane looked around. It was her first visit to the administration building, although she had been at the field a number of times.

The waiting room was furnished with modernistic wicker pieces. Soft tan drapes were at the windows and a rug of tan and black squares covered the floor. At a large table in the center was a neat stack of magazines while at a buffet along one wall was a silver tea service.

The ticket office opened to the right and Jane stepped up to the window. The night manager looked up from his desk.

"We are the nurses from Good Samaritan that Miss Hardy phoned about. We're to go out on the eastbound plane for Chicago," she explained.

The night manager swung around to his ticket rack and made out the passes for their transportation to Chicago. He was efficient but pleasant.

"You'll have to sign permits releasing the system from liability in case of accident. Of course this isn't required from regular passengers, but you are traveling free."

Both Jane and Sue signed the papers he placed before them.

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"I'm making out round trip passes," he said. "In case you don't get the jobs, you'll be able to get back here."

Jane wasn't sure there was much consolation in that for there was probably more chance of getting a job in Chicago than in University City.

The night manager stepped into the dispatcher's office to inquire the position of the eastbound plane.

"Your ship will be here in about nine minutes. How about baggage?"

"We have small pieces," replied Sue.

The baggage was weighed, checked and placed on a small cart to be wheeled into the hangar when the plane arrived.

The dispatcher stuck his head out of the operations room.

"Charlie Fischer wants the flood light," he said.

Jane wondered who Charlie Fischer was and just why he wanted the flood light, but to the field manager that message appeared important for he hurried into the hangar. A moment later a flood of blue light illuminated the field and the drone of engines could be heard.

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Lights flashed on in the hangar and Jane and Sue left the waiting room. Two stars appeared to be descending out of the west and the hulk of a great tri-motor biplane drifted into the brilliant light of the field.

The plane settled gently and rolled smoothly along the crushed-rock runway. Its motors boomed as the pilot swung it into the hangar.

Jane and Sue looked at the big ship apprehensively. It didn't seem possible that the three motors could lift the great plane off the ground and hurl it through the air at two miles a minute.

The ground crew wheeled the portable steps up to the cabin and the pilot and co-pilot came down. They were young, clean-cut chaps.

The pilot hastened into the operations room to obtain the latest reports on the weather between University City and Chicago while the co-pilot supervised the refueling.

Jane saw the baggage cart wheeled alongside the plane and their bags disappeared into the forward hold. Then the night manager was at their side.

"You have seats eight and nine, which places you together on the right side of the ship. This way, please."

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The girls followed him across the concrete floor and into the spacious cabin. Lights inside were turned low for several of the passengers were dozing.

Jane was amazed at the roomy interior. Along the right side was a double row of comfortable reclining chairs, very much like those in a railroad coach. There was a single row along the left side, with the aisle running the length of the cabin. Overhead were baggage racks for parcels and wearing apparel and there were individual lights for each chair.

A shaded light in the bulkhead ahead revealed two dials, one marked air speed and the other altitude. A door led forward to the baggage and pilot's compartment while a door at the rear opened onto a tiny pantry and a lavatory.

Jane counted the seats. There was room for fourteen in the cabin and counting themselves, twelve passengers were now aboard.

Chairs eight and nine were almost at the rear of the cabin and Jane and Sue settled into the seats. The night manager handed them each a small, sealed envelope.

33

"Here's your traveling packet of gum and cotton. Better put the cotton in your ears. The noise is a little bad the first few minutes. If you think the altitude will affect your ears, chew gum while you're going up. Will you want a blanket so you can sleep?"

"I should say not," replied Sue. "I'm going to see everything there is to see."

The pilots re-entered the plane and walked up the aisle to disappear through the forward door. The cabin door was closed and made fast and the three motors came to life with a thundering roar. The big ship vibrated strongly as one motor after the other was tested until the chief pilot

was sure they were ready for the four-hour flight to Chicago.

The huge biplane moved slowly as the pilot taxied it out of the hangar. Then the tail was flipped around and the plane headed down the long runway.

The night was shattered with the powerful beat of the engines and blue tongues of flame licked around the exhausts of the wing motors.

Sue, who was next to the window, reached over and gripped Jane's hand. Both girls had stuffed cotton in their ears and both were chewing energetically on the gum. 34

With rapidly increasing speed the plane rolled down the smooth runway. The ground flashed by at an amazing speed and before either Jane or Sue realized it, the transport was winging its way over the edge of the field.

The flood light below came on, outlining the entire airport with its penetrating brilliance. The pilot banked the great biplane gently and headed away into the east.

The roar of the motors filled the cabin but, by leaning close, Jane and Sue were able to talk.

"Scared?" asked Jane.

"Not now, but my heart was in my mouth when we started. How about you?"

"I guess I felt the same way, but now it seems as though flying was the most ordinary thing in the world."

The lights of University City faded and the transport bored east into the night. Jane watched the dials on the bulkhead. The indicator for air speed pointed to 110 miles an hour while the altimeter showed they were now 1,200 feet above ground.

In a pocket at the rear of the chair ahead was a folding map which showed the route of Federated Airways from Chicago to the west coast and Jane and Sue scanned this with intense interest. Each city and emergency landing field was marked, with a brief description printed on the map. 35

CHAPTER FOUR

36

An Emergency Case

DAWN came as the tri-motor sped over the level farm lands of Iowa. Passengers who had been dozing roused themselves to watch the sun shoot over the horizon.

The night mists were dispelled and the fresh greenness of the corn belt in spring was unfolded below them. Wisps of smoke rose from the chimneys of farmhouses as breakfast was prepared and Jane and Sue, looking down, saw farmers about their chores in the farmyards.

There was a brief pause at Bellevue for refueling and then the big ship sped away on the last leg of the flight to Chicago. In another hour and a half Jane and Sue would be in the Windy City.

An elderly man two seats ahead and on the aisle had caught Jane's attention and she watched him closely. His face was pale and he appeared slightly ill. Perhaps the motion of the plane was unsettling, she thought. The flight would be over in a short time. 37

Jane's attention went back to the panorama below and for several minutes she paid no attention to the man ahead. When she looked at him again, she felt genuine alarm and she leaned close to Sue to speak.

"Unless I'm badly mistaken, the man two seats ahead is mighty sick."

Sue looked ahead and her eyes widened.

"He's pale as a ghost. Can't we do something?" Jane nodded and rose from her chair. It wasn't any of her business, really, but there might be something she could do. She stepped forward and leaned down.

"You look ill," she said. "I'm a trained nurse. Is there anything I can do?"

The stricken man managed to smile and his eyes spoke his thanks. Jane bent low so he could speak directly into her ear.

"Appendicitis, I fear. I've had it before, but never an attack as severe as this. How long before we'll be in Chicago?"

"Not long," replied Jane. "I'll see if I can't find something to make you more comfortable."

Jane hastened back to Sue. 38

"It's appendicitis," she said. "Let's see if we can find anything in the pantry to make into a compress or fix up an ice bottle. That may help check the inflammation until we get to Chicago."

While the other passengers looked on a little startled, the girls went back to the pantry.

"Here's a bottle of cold water," said Sue.

"I've found some towels. We'll make some cold compresses."

Some one tapped her on the shoulder just then and she turned around to look into the stern face of the co-pilot.

"Passengers are not allowed here," he said. "You'll have to go back to your seats."

Sue started to make a sharp reply, but Jane silenced her.

"The man in No. 4 is suffering from an attack of appendicitis," she explained. "We're trained nurses and thought we might find something here we could use to relieve the pain until we get to Chicago."

The grim expression on the co-pilot's face vanished.

"Why didn't you say so?"

"You didn't give us a chance," retorted Sue.

"Do you think his condition is serious?" the flyer asked Jane.

"He's pretty sick right now and he's not a young man by any means. If you can send word ahead some way to have an ambulance waiting at the field, that will help."

"I'll get a radio off at once. Is there anything I can do?"

"No, we'll do everything possible," Jane told him.

"The other passengers seem to be a little alarmed," said Sue. "I'm going to tell them just what's up."

"Good idea. I'll have the compresses ready when you come back."

Sue went along the cabin and stopped to tell each passenger just what was the matter with the elderly man in No. 4. Everyone was sympathetic, but there was nothing they could do to help.

The girls made the stricken man as comfortable as possible and changed the cold packs frequently. It seemed to Jane as though the engines were droning along at a higher pitch and a glance at the air-speed indicator revealed that they were traveling 135 miles an hour.

They passed over Aurora and Jane knew they would soon be in Chicago. The co-pilot came back.

"How's he getting along?" he asked Jane.

"He's much more comfortable. Did you get a message through?"

"An ambulance is waiting at the field right now. Gosh, but I'm glad you girls were along. You ought to apply for jobs with the company. They're going to put on a bunch of girls as stewardesses."

"That's just exactly why we're on this plane."

"Then this bit of first aid won't hurt you in getting a job," grinned the co-pilot.

He ducked back into the forward compartment and a few minutes later the plane swung over the municipal airport, Chicago headquarters of the Federated Airways.

Word had been flashed around the field that the incoming plane was bringing in a sick man, and the ship was given the right of way over all other planes.

Jane and Sue were too much interested in their patient to feel the slightest discomfort as the plane landed and rolled along the concrete ramp.

Sue hurried the other passengers out and an ambulance backed up to the plane.

"I'm deeply grateful," whispered their patient, as he was lifted from the plane to the ambulance.

A white-garbed interne waved to the driver and with its siren clearing a path, the ambulance sped away.

Jane smiled at her companion.

"I wonder who he was? I forgot to ask his name."

"I was too busy to think about that," confessed Sue. "Perhaps we'll see him again if we are fortunate enough to secure positions on the air line."

The chief pilot of their plane paused beside them.

"That was fine, level-headed work," he said. "You girls did exactly the right thing. I'm mighty glad the line is going to add a trained nurse as stewardess on all of the passenger runs. The co-pilot said you were going to apply."

"We hope to see Mr. Speidel, the personnel director, today," said Jane.

The chief pilot glanced at his wrist watch.

"It's just seven-thirty. Mr. Speidel won't be here for another hour. Tell you what. Let's have breakfast together here at the field and then I'll see that you have an interview with Mr. Speidel as soon as he reaches the field. Believe me, I'm grateful for what you girls did on the flight in."

Jane hesitated a second, but Sue accepted enthusiastically.

"That's fine. I've got to see that the ship is berthed properly. I'll meet you in the waiting room."

The lanky flyer hurried away and Jane and Sue went into the waiting room.

"Do you think we ought to have accepted the invitation?" asked Jane.

"Yes. If we get on as stewardesses, we'll have to know all of the pilots fairly well. Besides, think what a free breakfast means to our slender purses."

Jane smiled. "You would think of that."

A few minutes later the pilot of their ship rejoined them.

"Say, I forgot to introduce myself," he chuckled. "I'm Charlie Fischer."

"And I'm Jane Cameron and my friend is Sue Hawley."

"Now that everything's in order and we know who's who, let's eat."

The flyer led the way into the modernistic restaurant which adjoined the waiting room and they sat down at gleaming black and silver tables.

"The sky's the limit," advised their new friend and Jane and Sue added bacon to their usual breakfast of toast and fruit.

"Do you know very much about the plans for using stewardesses?" asked Jane.

"Only the talk that's heard along the system. With passenger traffic getting heavier all of the time, some step must be taken to have a member of the crew in the cabin where the needs of the passengers can be looked after. I think selecting trained nurses is a mighty good idea."

"Have any girls been hired?" Sue wanted to know.

"Not yet. I think today is the first on which Mr. Speidel is to have interviews with candidates."

"Is he nice?" persisted Sue.

"He's not half bad and I'm certainly going to give both of you the best possible recommendation. Have either of you flown much before?"

"This was our first trip," said Jane.

Charlie Fischer whistled softly. "Well, you certainly are a cool pair. I hope you're assigned to my crew."

They finished breakfast and the chief pilot walked with them to the near-by administration building.

The field was roaring with activity. Planes were at the ramp being loaded with mail and express, ready for swift dashes to almost every point of the compass. Passengers were saying hasty farewells to friends, and porters, laden with baggage, hurried from taxis to the planes. It was a fascinating picture and Jane knew that she would thoroughly enjoy being a part of it.

CHAPTER FIVE

With Flying Colors

CHARLIE FISCHER took Jane and Sue up to the second floor of the administration building. They entered a broad hall with chairs ranged along each wall and in every chair was a girl.

Jane's heart sank for she knew instantly that every one of them was there to apply for the position of stewardess. Sue looked at her and somehow managed a brave smile.

"There's going to be plenty of competition," she whispered.

Charlie Fischer glanced at the double row of girls waiting to be called into the office of the personnel director.

"Wait here," he told Jane and Sue. "I'll see if we can't manage to slip through ahead of the rest."

Jane and Sue sat down in the last two chairs along the hall and Jane looked at their competitors. The girls were all about her own age, most of them very attractive to look upon. They were trim and capable and had the calm bearing which their training had instilled.

A secretary came down the hall, taking the names and addresses of each girl. Finally she reached Jane and Sue and they gave their names.

"What is your Chicago address?" she asked.

"We just arrived," explained Jane, "and hope to see Mr. Speidel this morning."

"I'm afraid you won't be able to see him today. There are all those girls ahead of you," the secretary advised.

Jane's spirits ebbed but she went on determinedly.

"I have a letter here from the supervisor of nurses at Good Samaritan hospital at University City," she said. "Mr. Speidel wrote to her asking that she recommend several girls for this work."

"Yes, I know. Mr. Speidel wrote to a number of supervisors. Almost every girl here has her recommendation from a supervisor, but I'm afraid you'll have to wait your turn."

The secretary returned to her desk at the head of the hall and several minutes later the first two girls at the head of the line were called into the office of the personnel director.

"Looks like our flying friend has forgotten all about us," said Sue when half an hour had elapsed and there was no sign of Charlie Fischer.

Jane nodded a bit dismally.

Slowly the girls were called into the office and Jane knew that there was little chance she and Sue would have an interview that day.

It was nearly an hour later when Charlie Fischer reappeared and instead of coming out of the personnel director's office, he came up the stairs which led to the ramp. In his hand was a typed report.

"Think I'd forgotten all about you?"

"We had almost given up hope," conceded Jane.

"I had quite an argument with Mr. Speidel about seeing you girls out of turn. He's a stickler for detail and fair play and is afraid that if you are taken in ahead of the others they may feel he is playing favorites."

Jane nodded. She could understand that and she didn't want to start work, if they secured the positions, under a handicap of resentment by the other girls.

"I didn't argue long enough to make him mad," said the flyer, "but skipped out the back way and went down to get a complete report on our flight in. I also checked the hospital to find out about your patient. He's getting along fine, thanks to the emergency treatment you were able to give him. Now I'm going to hand these reports in and we'll see what happens."

The lanky flyer hurried down the hall and went into the personnel director's office. In less than five minutes he opened the door and beckoned for Jane and Sue to join him.

The young nurses smoothed their dresses and gave their hair a final pat as they hurried down the hall.

The office of the personnel director was large and, like the entire administration building of Federated Airways, was furnished in a modernistic style. One whole wall was of glass, giving a wonderful view of the entire field.

The personnel director looked up from the typed report he had been scanning. He was short and stocky, with dark, close-cropped hair and a heavy face, but his eyes were pleasant and he greeted them warmly.

"I've just finished reading the complete report of the fine piece of work you did coming in on trip No. 6 this morning. Charlie tells me neither of you had flown before."

"It was our first trip," admitted Jane.

"Then I must say you were remarkably cool-headed under the circumstances. Do you have a letter from your supervisor?"

Jane handed him the envelope from Miss Hardy and he read the letter of commendation thoroughly.

"Your supervisor thinks rather highly of you," smiled Mr. Speidel when he finished. "Do you really think you'd like flying?"

He shot the question at them unexpectedly.

"There's danger, there's a lot of responsibility, and there's a great deal of work at times," he went on. "You may be trapped in almost any kind of weather—rain, snow, hail, sleet, fog. You must be calm and resourceful and courageous. We demand a great deal of loyalty."

"We've thought the whole thing over," said Sue, "and decided we'd like the work. Now, after the trip in from University City, we are certain we are making no mistake."

"How about you, Miss Cameron?"

"I am sure I would like it," said Jane.

"Very well. We'll put you down on the tentatively accepted list. Final acceptance will depend on your ability to qualify under our physical requirements. You'll find the office of Dr. Emma Perkins at the other end of the hall. Give her this card and she'll put you through the routine. If you pass, return here at three o'clock." When they emerged from the office of the personnel director, a little breathless and flushed, it was nearly lunch time.

"I'd like to treat you to lunch," said Charlie Fischer, "but I've got to get down town."

"Thanks a lot for all you've done," said Jane. "We'll do our best to pass the rest of the examinations."

"You'll come out all right," prophesied their new friend.

Jane and Sue went down to the restaurant on the main floor where they ate a leisurely lunch. Outside planes were landing and taking off and a constant crowd swirled along the ramp and through the waiting room.

Already the tempo of the whole thing had gotten deep into their blood.

"I'll be terribly disappointed if we don't pass the physical tests," confessed Sue.

"Don't worry about that. We're in perfect health."

At one o'clock they reported at the office of Dr. Perkins and were taken into the examination room at once. Doctor Perkins, small and business-like, put them through the regular routine.

"Humph," she said as she checked the results. "If all girls were as healthy as you two, there would be little for doctors to do."

"Then you mean we've passed all right?" asked Sue anxiously.

"Your physical report will be 96 per cent, which is unusually high. Take your cards back to Mr. Speidel's office."

When Sue and Jane returned to the other end of the hall the line of girls had thinned. They presented their health cards to the secretary and were admitted almost at once to the office.

"It looks like I'm about to sign two more stewardesses," he smiled as he took their cards. His eyes widened as he read the final report. "Why, this is rather remarkable. Doctor Perkins is pretty much of a stickler for detail. A 96 mark from her is about 99 from any other examiner."

The personnel officer took two blanks from a pile at one corner of his desk.

"Now we'll get down to the serious business of enrolling you for the stewardess service," he said.

"You mean we've really got the jobs?" asked Jane.

"You certainly have. Your pay starts today with a salary of \$125 a month and uniforms furnished by the system. Does that sound attractive?"

"It's more than attractive," smiled Sue.

In less than ten minutes they were formally enrolled as members of the Federated Airways' stewardess service.

"We've signed a dozen girls, including you two, and are sending them all west to Cheyenne tonight aboard a special plane. Uniforms are being made here. Take a company taxi and go to the Barclay Tailors on North Michigan Avenue. They are outfitting all of the girls. Be back at the field at five o'clock. Miss Comstock, who is chief of the stewardess service, will be here. Report to her at this office."

"Thank you very much, Mr. Speidel," said Jane.

"We'll do our best," promised Sue.

They were in a cab and speeding toward the loop before they relaxed, for the strain of the last few hours had been terrific for both girls.

Sue's eyes filled with tears and Jane felt her own throat choke up. With their funds so low, securing the positions with the Federated Airways had been essential and now that it was no longer a dream, it was hard to believe.

"Would you mind pinching me to see if I am awake?" said Sue, dabbing at her eyes with a handkerchief.

"We're awake all right," said Jane as the cab struck a bad bump and threw them to the ceiling. The meter was clicking up an astonishing taxi bill and Sue stared at it questioningly.

"Maybe we'd better get out and take a street car down town," she suggested.

"Don't be silly. This is a Federated Airways cab. It won't cost us a cent and the driver will come around and take us back to the field when we're ready."

"How do you know?" Sue asked suspiciously.

"Because I took the time and had the good sense to inquire at the ticket office. When I told them we were new stewardesses they gave me a card entitling us to round-trip transportation to the loop in a company cab."

"I didn't see you do that," protested Sue.

"No, you were too busy watching the plane coming in from the west."

At the tailors they were measured for trim serge suits of a smoke-green. Berets of the same material and color were furnished.

The fitting required an hour and the tailors promised to have the suits in Cheyenne within the week.

"What do you think of the uniforms?" Jane asked as they left the tailors.

"I love them. They're so trim and business-like, yet feminine at the same time. What a contrast to a nurse's uniform."

Jane was willing to admit that the neat, serge suits would be much more comfortable than the primly starched outfits they had been accustomed to wearing.

They had to wait a few minutes until the cab arrived and then they were whirled rapidly toward the field on the outskirts of the city.

When they reached the airport, Jane went straight to the waiting room and sat down at a writing table.

"Going to write home?" asked Sue.

"First of all I'm writing to Miss Hardy back at Good Samaritan. After all, it was because of her interest that we managed to get these positions. Then I'll dash off a letter home. There's half an hour before we report to the chief stewardess."

"I wonder if the folks will object?" mused Sue as she sat down at the other side of the desk and picked up a pen.

"I'm going to tell mine that Miss Hardy felt it an excellent opportunity. They have great faith in her and I'm sure they'll not protest."

CHAPTER SIX

Westward Flight

IT WAS shortly before five o'clock when Jane and Sue reported to Miss Comstock at the office of the personnel director. By five o'clock all of the girls who had been signed for the stewardess service were in the office and Miss Comstock spoke to them briefly.

"When we arrive in Cheyenne," she explained, "you will go through a two weeks' training course

which I will conduct. The purpose of this is to thoroughly familiarize you with your duties and to acquaint you with the special geographical features of the line for, as stewardesses, you must not only care for your passengers but be qualified to answer their questions. I can assure you that they will ask a great many. While in training at Cheyenne, you will make trips over the routes to which you will be assigned. Since the stewardess service is to become effective June 10th, you understand that we have much to do for I am counting on you girls making a fine record on the line."

57

As Miss Comstock finished speaking, a huge tri-motor rolled up on the ramp and Charlie Fischer stuck his head out to look for his passengers.

"Our plane is waiting. We'll have a late lunch in Omaha," said Miss Comstock. "I suggest that on the way down you girls introduce yourselves to one another."

With the chief stewardess leading the way, the girls trooped downstairs. Just ahead of Jane and Sue were two girls about their own age.

They turned around and introduced themselves. The taller one was Grace Huston while the shorter one, a red-head, was Alice Blair.

"We took our training here in the county hospital," said Grace. "Are you from Chicago?"

"No," replied Jane. "We flew in from University City this morning. We graduated just last night from the training school at Good Samaritan there."

"Well, that's certainly fast work," smiled Alice. "In less than twenty-four hours you're starting on a new career."

58

"Twenty-four hours ago we didn't have any idea what we would be doing," confessed Sue.

"I'm excited about this position," said Grace. "Think of the thrill of flying day and night through all kinds of weather!"

"I've thought all about it," replied her companion, "and it may be too thrilling once in a while, but it's a job and a good paying one. How do you like the uniforms?"

"They're fascinating," said Jane. "I can hardly wait until they are delivered at Cheyenne."

"Which reminds me," put in Alice, "that I'd like to know what Cheyenne is like."

Her question went unanswered for they had reached the tri-motor and Miss Comstock hurried her charges inside. Jane and Sue were fortunate to find a double seat and Grace and Alice sat directly behind them. The last of the girls' baggage was placed aboard and the cabin door closed and locked. The big ship trembled as Charlie Fischer opened the throttle. Then it rolled smoothly down the ramp.

Other planes were being wheeled from their hangars and made ready for the overnight runs. The great airport was almost at the height of its daily rush.

59

Jane, next to the window, saw the dispatcher in his tower signal their pilot to go ahead.

The motors roared lustily and the plane shot down the long runway, lifted smoothly into the air, and started westward, boring into the setting sun in a slow climb.

Chicago faded behind them as they sped over the fertile farm land of Illinois.

Jane relaxed in the comfortable chair and closed her eyes. The nervous strain of the last few hours had been terrific and she welcomed the opportunity to rest and relax. Sue, likewise tired by the day, closed her eyes and both girls dozed.

They were over the Mississippi at dusk with the lights of Clinton, Iowa, visible to their right. Then the plane sped on above the rich acres of Iowa. Below them the headlights of automobiles dotted the highways and an occasional cluster of lights marked a village. Then a field blazed into blue-white incandescence and the beat of the motors slowed.

60

Miss Comstock came down the aisle and Sue asked her their location.

"We're landing at Iowa City to refuel. We'll stay there about ten minutes. You can get out and walk about the hangar if you like."

There were only a few people at the airport when the tri-motor rolled into the hangar and the girls stepped out of the cabin.

"I'm getting hungry and Omaha is a long distance ahead," said Grace Huston.

"There's a restaurant just a block away, by that old hangar," pointed out Alice. "We could get a chocolate bar there. That should keep off the wolf until Omaha."

They agreed that chocolate bars would taste good and Alice, collecting a dime from each of her companions, hurried away toward the restaurant. When she returned, the candy bars were welcomed eagerly and when the girls stepped back into the plane they felt refreshed.

The floodlight opened up the night with its blue-white brilliance and the tri-motor rolled across the field and soared westward again. Miss Comstock came down the aisle with an armful of the latest magazines.

"This will be one of your duties," she said as she offered them to Jane and Sue. The girls made their selection but Jane found her eyes too heavy for reading. She changed places with Sue and dozed again while her companion read.

61

At the end of another hour, the plane started bucking sharply and sleep became impossible for any of the girls.

Miss Comstock came along the aisle and spoke to each girl.

"There's a bad cross-wind. See that your safety belts are buckled securely."

The plane continued to bounce up and down, sometimes dropping for what seemed to Jane hundreds of feet only to bound upward again with a jarring shock.

Sue was white and perspiration stood out on her forehead.

"I hope we won't have many trips like this," she gasped. "Oh, I wish I hadn't eaten that candy!"

Jane looked around to see how Grace and Alice were faring. Grace looked like a ghost, but Alice seemed unaffected. One of the girls at the rear of the plane became violently nauseated but Miss Comstock, cool and undisturbed by the rough weather, cared for her.

62

One thing Jane realized; they were all getting a thorough test of their weather ability on their first long flight.

The weather was rough all the rest of the way to Omaha, but after the first half hour, Sue recovered her equilibrium and managed to smile at the white face and tight lips of some of the other girls. Poor Grace was in agony most of the way.

"Lunch is ready at the field restaurant," Miss Comstock announced when they rolled into the hangar at Omaha.

Various replies greeted her announcement. Some of the girls were ready to eat, while several could only groan at the thought of food.

Charlie Fischer climbed down and spoke to Jane and Sue.

"A little rough the last hundred and fifty miles," he grinned.

"It was more than a little rough," retorted Sue. "It was terribly rough."

"Say, that was smooth compared to some of the weather we strike west of here. You've got lots of surprises ahead."

"I've had enough for one night," replied Sue, "but maybe I won't notice it from now on."

63

"Some people are all right after the first time and others never get over air sickness," replied Charlie cheerfully.

"What a great help you are," countered Sue.

"I'm leaving you here. This is the end of my run tonight. Maybe you'll be assigned with me when you go into active service."

"If flying with you means weather like this, I hope not," smiled Jane.

Miss Comstock, anticipating that some of the girls might be air-sick, had ordered a light supper and only one of them, Pert Meade, who had been ill aboard the plane, was unable to enjoy the attractive meal.

It was eleven o'clock when they re-entered the cabin, ready for the flight over the windswept Nebraska country. A new pilot, an older man than Charlie Fischer, was at the controls.

The girls took their places, fastened the safety belts, and the big ship roared away again.

The weather was still rough as they followed the Platte River valley, riding high above country along which the pioneers had struggled in the early days of the West. They were following the U. P. trail, but were covering in an hour a distance it had taken the first settlers weeks to traverse.

64

Jane looked at the air-speed indicator. They were traveling only a little more than a hundred miles an hour and she knew that the wind outside must be blowing a gale. Below them one of the department of commerce emergency landing fields, outlined with red, green, and white border lights, drifted by. She looked at the route map. The field must have been Wood River, just west and a little south of Grand Island. They were still another hour out of North Platte.

It was well after midnight and most of the girls were dozing. Jane looked around and saw Miss Comstock in the last of the single seats on the left side of the cabin. The chief stewardess was looking out the window, staring with a sort of desperate intentness into the night, and Jane wondered if there was anything wrong. She listened to the beat of the motors. They were running smoothly, with whips of blue flame streaking from the exhausts, and Jane concluded that she had been imagining things when she decided Miss Comstock was upset.

65

Several minutes later the chief stewardess hastened up the aisle and disappeared along the passage which led to the pilots' compartment. She returned almost immediately and snapped on the top light, flooding the cabin with a blaze of brilliance. Just then the motor on the left wing stopped and Jane knew that something was decidedly wrong for the chief stewardess's face was pale and drawn.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Crash Landing

66

JANE shook Sue into wakefulness, and, cupping her hands so that only Sue could hear, said, "Get the sleep out of your eyes. Something's gone wrong. One motor has stopped."

Sue, thoroughly aroused at Jane's words, rubbed the sleep from her eyes and sat up straight. Miss Comstock hurried down the aisle, shaking the girls into consciousness. Then she returned to

the front of the cabin. The two other motors had been throttled down and by speaking in a loud tone, she could be heard by every girl.

"We are about to make a forced landing," she began and as she saw quick looks of alarm flash over the faces of the girls, hastened to add, "There is no need for undue alarm. I am sure no one will be injured for one of the most experienced pilots on the line is at the controls. Please see that your safety belts are fastened securely. Try to relax your muscles if that is possible."

67

The plane heeled sharply as a vicious gust of wind caught it and Jane looked out, hoping that lights of one of the emergency landing fields would be visible. Only a solid mass of black greeted her eyes and she knew that their situation was indeed dangerous. Had Miss Comstock only been talking bravely, attempting to reassure the girls?

Jane looked at her companions. Apprehension was written on the face of each one, but none of them was flinching, a tribute to the fine courage which their nurses' training instilled. They were accustomed to emergencies, even though this one was more than they had bargained for on their first long flight.

Jane tried to analyze her own feelings, but found that there was a peculiar lack of emotion. There was nothing she could do to ease the situation. She looked at her companion.

Sue smiled back bravely and reached over and took Jane's hand. It made them feel a little closer.

"How far above ground are we?" asked Sue.

The needle on the altimeter dial was jumping crazily and Jane shook her head. The air speed was down to eighty miles an hour and they seemed to be drifting into the wind.

68

Miss Comstock started to turn off the top light, but one of the girls asked her to leave it on. It was much easier sitting there with the light on than waiting for the crash in the dark.

Miss Comstock walked down the aisle and Jane marveled at her ability to remain so calm in the emergency. She admired the chief stewardess immensely for her control of her nerves, for Miss Comstock didn't appear to be more than three or four years older. She was a little shorter than Jane with a tinge of auburn in her hair and she was dressed in the natty smoke-green suit which was to mark the stewardesses of the Federated Airways.

Dozens of thoughts raced through Jane's mind. She wondered what Miss Hardy would say when she heard about the accident and what her own folks would do.

Then Miss Comstock was beside her, speaking loud enough to be heard by all of the girls.

"We are almost down," she told them. "Please remain calm."

Jane wondered what Miss Comstock would do when they struck. There was no safety belt to keep her from being tossed about, for the chief stewardess remained in the aisle.

69

The landing lights on the wings were trying to bore into the night, but the air was filled with dust and Jane knew that the pilots were feeling their way down blind, hoping for a good landing.

Every girl sensed that the crash was near and Sue leaned her head over on Jane's shoulder and closed her eyes. She had always looked to Jane for the final decision and now she turned to her for comfort and protection.

The plane lurched heavily and something ripped against the undercarriage. The lights in the cabin went out and Jane felt Miss Comstock pitched into her lap. In a flash she wrapped her arms around the chief stewardess and held her as tightly as possible.

There was the sensation of falling blindly into a great abyss and then came a jarring crash that seemed to split the cabin apart. After that there was a silence, broken only by the sobbing of the wind.

Jane felt the chief stewardess struggling to free herself from her arms.

70

"Let me go," gasped Miss Comstock. "We've got to get out of here."

Jane released her hold and spoke to Sue.

"Are you all right?" she asked.

"Except for still being scared half to death."

Other girls were moving about, unfastening their safety belts and trying to get to their feet.

"The cabin's on a sharp angle," Miss Comstock told them. "Take off your belts, get down in the aisle on your hands and knees, and follow me to the rear."

Jane and Sue obeyed, with Sue directly behind Miss Comstock. Then came Jane with Grace Huston and Alice Blair following and the other girls behind them. No one appeared to be hurt except for minor bruises and bumps.

When they reached the door, which had been torn from its hinges by the impact, Miss Comstock cautioned them again.

"It's about six feet to the ground. Slide over the edge and hang by your hands until your feet are on the ground. Then each girl wait until the next is down and we'll form a chain of hands so that no one is lost. Count as you come and we'll know when everyone is out."

71

Jane was the first one out and she cried, "No. 1 out," in a loud voice. Girl after girl called out their number as they scrambled down out of the wreckage until every one was outside.

Still holding hands, Miss Comstock led them away from the plane as Jane wondered about the pilots. The wreckage was at least fifty yards behind when Miss Comstock paused.

"You girls wait here. I'm going back and find the pilots."

She started back alone, but Jane slipped out of the group and joined her.

"You can't go alone," she said. "If they're trapped, maybe I can be of some help."

"Go back, Jane," ordered the chief stewardess. "There's the gasoline. Smell it? The wreckage may catch on fire at any moment."

"That's just why you need me," insisted Jane.

Miss Comstock hurried on. Jane was determined and there was no time to waste in argument.

The tri-motor had landed on a hillside, first striking a fringe of trees which had wrecked the undercarriage and then skidding along the hillside until the nose had dug into the ground, flipping the tail into the air at a crazy angle. 72

The pilots' cockpit appeared badly smashed, but as Miss Comstock and Jane approached, a man crawled out of the wreckage. It was the co-pilot, badly battered and only half conscious.

"Slim's in there," he gasped, pointing back at the smashed cockpit.

Miss Comstock lunged ahead, tearing at the wreckage, hunting for Slim Bollei, the chief pilot. The smell of gasoline was doubly strong and Jane realized their grave danger, but she never wavered in following the chief stewardess.

They found the chief pilot jammed behind the control wheel.

"You take his shoulders while I try to free his feet," ordered Miss Comstock. Working swiftly, they managed to lift the pilot clear and Jane was thankful that he was slight in stature. It would have been impossible for them to carry a heavy man.

They staggered away from the wreckage just as a tongue of flame leaped along the remains of the right wing. 73

"Hurry," gasped Miss Comstock. "We've got to get farther away."

The co-pilot tried to assist them, but he was too weak to help.

"Take care of yourself," Miss Comstock told him. "We'll get Slim away."

The flames spread rapidly and by the time they reached the crest of the hill, the wreckage was an inferno of fire with roaring, twisting flames leaping into the heavens. Jane shuddered and closed her eyes and the other girls huddled close together.

"This is no time for anyone to have hysterics," said the steel-nerved Miss Comstock. She turned to the co-pilot. "Did you get a message out that we were crashing?" she asked.

"Yes, but I don't know whether it got through. The static has been terrific for the last hour."

"Where are we?"

"Somewhere between Wood River and Kearney and a little south of the line. The Platte can't be far south of us."

"I don't care where the Platte is. I want to get to a phone and find a doctor for Slim and report to the line," snapped Miss Comstock. She turned to Sue and Alice. 74

"You girls take charge here. Do what you can for these men while Jane and I start out to see if we can find a farmhouse with a telephone."

Leaving the other girls on the hilltop, Miss Comstock and Jane plunged away into the night. The chief stewardess strode rapidly, and Jane found it difficult to keep up with her,

"Perhaps a farmer will be attracted by the flames," she gasped as they topped another hill.

"It's not likely. If the co-pilot was right, we're in a rather desolate spot just north of the river. We'll keep going and see what we can locate."

For half an hour they plodded steadily ahead until they struck a dirt road running at right angles to their own course.

"We'll turn to the left. At least we'll be going toward Kearney," said Miss Comstock.

They trudged a mile down the road before they came to a farmhouse. A dog greeted them with lusty barks and the farmer threw up a window on the second floor.

"What's going on out there?" he cried. 75

"We're stewardesses on the Federated Airways," Miss Comstock shouted. "Our plane crashed about an hour ago in the hills over toward the Platte. We've got to get to a phone so we can call a doctor and inform the line about the accident."

"Come right in. I'll be down in a minute."

A light flashed in the room upstairs and the farmer, dressing hastily, hurried down.

Miss Comstock almost rang the telephone off the wall in trying to arouse the operator on the rural line, but at last got her call through to the field at Kearney and told the night man there what had happened.

The farmer supplied them with directions for the field relief crew and the Kearney men promised to arrive with a doctor within the hour. The farmer's wife hastened down and insisted on making coffee and sandwiches.

"Was anyone badly injured?" she asked.

"The chief pilot is hurt, but I don't know how seriously," replied Miss Comstock.

"But isn't it dangerous for girls like you to be flying in those airplanes?" asked the farmer's wife.

"It was tonight," smiled Miss Comstock, "but as a rule it is as safe as riding in a railroad train and much safer than traveling in an automobile. What do you think about it, Jane?"

"I think it's thrilling, but the crash tonight will be enough to last me for the rest of my life," she replied.

"It will probably be the first and last one you'll ever have. Flying is getting safer every day. You certainly had your baptism under fire the first night out."

CHAPTER EIGHT

Winning Their Wings

THE crew from the Kearney field arrived in a large truck and trailing them was an ambulance with a doctor and two nurses. The farmer joined the party and helped guide them to the shivering group on the hilltop north of the Platte.

The wreckage of the tri-motor had long since ceased to glow and the wind whined dismally through a low growth of underbrush. Sue was the first to reach the truck and Miss Comstock fairly leaped after her.

"How's the pilot and co-pilot?" she asked, anxiety making her voice sound unnatural.

"They'll come through all right," said Sue. "I think the pilot has a slight concussion and his right arm is broken. The co-pilot is only suffering from shock and bruises."

"And the girls?"

"They're all right. When the fire died down a bit, several of them even tried to get close enough to salvage some of the mail, but the flames leaped up again and forced them back."

The flyers were carried to the waiting ambulance and that vehicle soon lurched away over the uneven ground.

The crew from the Kearney field had brought powerful electric torches and with these they made a thorough survey of the tri-motor. It was a charred mass of twisted steel tubing, little resembling the proud ship which had bucked the storm a few hours before.

"The company can write about \$80,000 off the books," growled the manager of the Kearney field. "I wonder how it happened?"

"The left wing started to flutter," said Miss Comstock. "I could tell from the vibration of the ship something was wrong and when I went up into the cockpit Slim Bollei told me we were in a jam. He was afraid the wing was going to tear loose so he cut the left motor. With the wind bad and the wing loosening up more every second we were in the air he had to hunt a place to set down quick."

"Well, he sure put this crate down for keeps," grunted the manager. "Guess we might as well start back to the field and I'll write up a report of the accident."

The girls piled into the big truck, Jane and Sue sitting at the very end with their feet hanging over.

"What a night," said Sue as the truck moved away from the scene of the accident. "For a while I was afraid I wasn't going to live through it."

"I'm still shaky," confessed Grace Huston, who was just behind them.

"It wasn't pleasant," admitted Jane, "but we're all lucky to be out alive and with the pilots only slightly injured. However, as Miss Comstock says, this will probably be our first and last crash and it might as well come early."

When they reached the Kearney field, Miss Comstock got in touch with the operations manager at Cheyenne and informed him that another plane would be needed to take her charges to Cheyenne.

It was daylight when Cheyenne finally came back with flying orders. A special plane was being ordered out of Omaha to take the girls the remainder of the distance.

"We'll have several hours here," Miss Comstock informed them, "so I've chartered several cabs to take us uptown for breakfast. We'll go to the hotel, clean up and relax. Lunch will be in Cheyenne."

They were about to leave the field when a young man hurried up.

"I'm the Associated Press correspondent here," he explained, "and I'm looking for the stewardess in charge."

Miss Comstock stepped forward. "What can I do for you?" she asked.

The reporter grinned. "Just tell me all about the accident. I've got the pilots' names from the hospital and a few details, but I'd like to have all of the facts."

Jane was surprised when Miss Comstock told him everything about the accident.

"Please say that the new girls were especially calm and cool-headed in their first emergency," she said. "If it had not been for the assistance of one of them I fear the pilot would never have been pulled out of the wreckage before the plane caught fire."

The reporter insisted on having Jane's name.

"This will make a great human-interest story," he exclaimed as he hurried away.

Miss Comstock turned to the girls.

"That's a little lesson in public relations," she said. "The policy of the line is to tell the newspaper people the truth. If you try to hide or distort facts, the reporters will learn part of them in some other way and it is much better to have the truth sent out in the first place."

After breakfast at the hotel, Jane and Sue went into the writing room.

"I'm going to write my parents about everything that happened last night," said Sue. "Then they won't worry when they read the newspaper stories."

Jane agreed that it was a splendid idea and they passed half an hour at their letter writing before Miss Comstock came in to inform them that it was time to return to the field.

As they reached the airport a tri-motor swung in from the east. It swooped low over the field and an arm was flung out of the cockpit in a friendly greeting to the girls who were standing beside the hangar. The tri-motor nosed around into the wind and dropped down to an easy landing.

When it stopped in the hangar, the pilot stuck his head out of the cockpit.

"Hi, there," he called to Jane and Sue. "I hear you won your wings last night." It was Charlie Fischer, who had flown them from Chicago to Omaha the night before.

"You mean we had them clipped and singed," retorted Jane.

Charlie climbed down from the cockpit.

"How's Slim Bollei?" he asked.

"Just a slight crack on his head," said Sue. "I hear that they select men with hard heads for pilots."

"Ouch!" grinned Charlie. "I'm going to wear armor the next time I talk to you."

"You needn't. I don't even bite."

The pilot turned to Miss Comstock.

"Get your cargo aboard," he said, "and we'll take off in about five minutes. They routed me out at Omaha and started me west before I had time to get anything to eat. We'll start as soon as I can rustle a cup of coffee and a sandwich at the shanty across the road."

By this time the girls had become fairly well acquainted and already little groups were being formed. Jane was pleased that Alice and Grace had personalities that fitted in so smoothly with her own and Sue's. There would be much to learn and much to do in the coming weeks and it would be much pleasanter getting accustomed to the new environment if friends were near-by.

The air was cool and sweet. The wind had subsided and there was no trace of the terror it had wrought the night before as the girls took their places and fastened the safety belts around their bodies.

Charlie Fischer, still munching a sandwich, hurried into the hangar, signed the gas and oil record book, climbed into his cockpit and gunned the motors. The big biplane rolled smoothly ahead, turned its nose into the wind, and started climbing skyward. They were off on the last lap of their trip to Cheyenne.

CHAPTER NINE

At Mrs. Murphy's

JANE had secretly wondered just how she would feel when the plane soared into the sky. After the experience of the night before she feared that a numbing fright might grip her and she was greatly relieved when there was no feeling of apprehension.

Instead, she thoroughly enjoyed the smooth upward flight, the pulsating power of the great motors, and the panorama unfolding beneath. She turned to look at Sue. Her companion was gripping the arms of her chair tightly, her eyes bright and staring straight ahead. When Jane started to speak to her, she shook her head, but Jane watched Sue closely for the next few minutes.

Gradually Sue relaxed and a little later she leaned over and spoke to Jane.

"I was fighting down a little bugaboo of fear," she grinned. "I knew if I didn't conquer it all by myself, I'd never be able to do it. Now I'll never be afraid to fly anywhere and anytime."

Jane thought that statement was a little bold, but she hoped it was true.

Keeping to the right of the broad Platte, they sped westward with the speed indicator wavering between 115 and 120 miles an hour for there was only a slight head wind dropping down from the far-away Rockies.

North Platte appeared ahead and Jane consulted the map of their route. North Platte was a regular passenger stop, but they were running as a special, and the plane dropped over the southwestern Nebraska city. Here the Platte forked, one branch swinging northwest while the South Platte continued almost straight west.

The shining steel of the Union Pacific rails caught the sunlight far below and Jane saw the smoky plume of a transcontinental limited threading its way westward. The plane soon overhauled the train and left it far behind. They were too high for any of the girls to wave. The country became rougher, more desolate, and the few farms looked drear and beaten down by the buffeting of the elements.

They passed north of Sidney and not long afterward Jane knew they were in Wyoming.

It was just north of Pine Bluffs that Jane got her first glimpse of the Rockies. The air was clear and the visibility excellent. Far away to the west and south she saw the snowy summit of what she was later to know as Long's Peak and other lesser mountains reared their heads into view.

Jane touched Sue's arm, and called her attention to the beauty of the distant scene. Together they watched, breathlessly, the great vista of the mountains.

It was not long after that until a good-sized city came into view to their left and Jane, looking at the altimeter, knew the plane was nosing down. This, then, must be Cheyenne, the chief operating base for Federated Airways' transcontinental line and the city which was to be the headquarters of the stewardess service.

The tri-motor swung over the sprawling, one-time pioneer city and dropped down on the airport, which was a little more than a mile north of the city.

Jane was astounded by the size of the field and the largeness of the hangars which flanked the side nearest Cheyenne. At first glance it seemed almost as large as the field at Chicago.

They rolled into an immense hangar, behind which towered the brick building which housed the administrative offices of the Federated Airways. It was here that Jane and Sue were to go to school before they went into active service.

Miss Comstock led them through the waiting room, into the administration building and down to a new, one-story wing which had just been completed. Drawing a key from a pocket, she unlocked the door and turned to the girls.

"This new wing was built especially for the stewardess service. There is a classroom, a complete kitchen and commissary, lockers, lounging room and shower. I'm sure you'll like it."

Jane stepped into the lounging room. It was delightfully furnished in wicker and the walls were a soft grey with rose-colored drapes at the full-length windows which looked out upon the field.

The commissary, lined with cupboards for the storage of supplies, was in silver and blue, and arranged to gladden the heart of any girl. The sinks were of stainless steel and the large tables at which the lunches would be prepared were of a similar material.

They went on to the classroom, which reminded Jane of a similar room she had attended so many times at Good Samaritan. A score of study chairs were in the room and one whole wall was given over to a blackboard while on another wall was complete map of the entire Federated Airways system.

"We'll have our first class right now," said Miss Comstock, "since I want to give you instructions on obtaining rooms in Cheyenne."

The girls sat down, Sue, Alice and Grace grouped around Jane.

"As you know, headquarters of the stewardess service will be here," went on Miss Comstock, "and you are to regard Cheyenne as your home. It will be necessary for you to find suitable rooms and you will be required to pay for these out of your regular salary. However, when you are at the other end of your trip, the line will see that you are properly domiciled."

She paused for a moment as she picked up a sheet of paper from her desk.

"I have made a survey of rooms in Cheyenne," she continued, "and have approved all of the rooms listed below. They are in excellent homes, the rates are reasonable and I am sure you will find any of them pleasant. I want you to take the remainder of the day to locate your rooms and see something of Cheyenne. We'll start actual classwork tomorrow morning at nine o'clock. Now, if you will consult me individually, I will make room recommendations. Cars owned by the line will take you into the city."

Jane turned toward Alice and Grace.

"I think it would be nice if we could obtain two large rooms and you two would live with Sue and me. It might cut down our room rent and with four of us living together, some one would be home most of the time."

"My vote is yes," replied Grace.

"You can make it unanimous," smiled Alice. "I only hope we'll be assigned to about the same runs so we can be at home at the same time."

When Miss Comstock called her name, Jane stepped forward and explained their plan.

"Of course I have no objections," said the chief stewardess. She looked at the list of prospective rooms on the sheet of paper in her hand.

"I think I have just the rooms for you. Mrs. Dennis Murphy has two fine rooms and a sleeping porch adjoining. She is a widow and anxious to get roomers."

Miss Comstock wrote Mrs. Murphy's address on a slip of paper.

"Go there first. If you don't like Mrs. Murphy's, telephone me here and I'll give you some more suggestions."

The girls found a field car waiting outside the main entrance of the administration building and

the driver sped them toward the city.

Mrs. Murphy lived on a side street in a square, two-story frame house. The yard was well kept and a broad, shady porch ran the full length of the front of the house.

"I'll wait until you know whether you're going to stay," said the driver.

Jane seemed to be the self-appointed leader of the group and she hurried up the walk and knocked at the screen door.

"Come in," called a cheery voice from somewhere in the interior. Jane hesitated for a moment.

"Go on in," Sue urged, so Jane opened the door and crossed the porch.

"I'm in the kitchen with me hands in bread dough," explained the voice, in a rich, heavy Irish brogue and Jane knew that Mrs. Murphy in person was at home.

A long hallway led past the living room and the dining room into the kitchen, a large well-lighted room.

Mrs. Murphy, buxom and ruddy of cheek, looked up as Jane entered. Her hands were deep in bread dough.

"Well, goodness sakes alive," she exclaimed when she saw Jane. "If I'd known it was a stranger, I'd have answered the door. I thought it was Mrs. McGillicuddy down the street, come to borrow something, for she's always running in of a morning, being short of this or that, and having to have a bit to get along until the delivery boy gets around."

"Oh, that's quite all right, Mrs. Murphy," smiled Jane. "I'm one of the new stewardesses for the Federated Airways. There are three other girls here with me. We're looking for two double rooms and Miss Comstock at the field recommended you."

"Now that's right nice of her. She was here last week looking at my rooms and seemed to like them real well. If you'll wait a bit until I finish kneading down the bread, I'll take you right up. Just make yourselves at home on the porch."

Jane rejoined her companions and informed them that Mrs. Murphy would be out as soon as the bread was safe.

Sue looked around the porch. Everything was well-worn but comfortable.

"After three years in a hospital this is luxury," she said, sinking down into a broad rocker.

"From the little talk I had with Mrs. Murphy in the kitchen and the smell of things cooking in her oven, I think this will be a grand place to live," said Jane.

"Maybe we'll be lucky enough to get some fresh bread and have bread and sugar," suggested Grace, looking longingly toward the kitchen.

In less than five minutes Mrs. Murphy, wearing a fresh apron, appeared from the dim shadows of the hallway. Jane introduced each of the girls.

"I'm happy to know you," Mrs. Murphy told them, and they felt that she really meant it. There was something homey and warm about Mrs. Murphy that touched the heart of each one.

She led the way upstairs and to the rear of the house where two adjoining rooms opened onto a large sleeping porch. The rooms were large and airy, the beds were comfortable and the furnishings, though plain, were adequate.

From the porch there was an excellent view of the distant mountains. Mrs. Murphy explained that the bathroom was just down the hall and that her only other roomer was the cashier of a downtown department store.

The telephone, ringing insistently, summoned Mrs. Murphy downstairs and gave the girls an opportunity to talk about the rooms.

Jane went back to the sleeping porch to enjoy the view of the mountains. Her mind was made up and she was quite willing to stay with Mrs. Murphy.

"There isn't a whole lot of closet room," said Grace, "and the furniture is rather plain."

"But the rooms are large and pleasant and the sleeping porch will be grand," said Sue.

Alice, who had been exploring the bathroom, brought back good news.

"The bath is fine. Lots of room, a huge tub with a shower, and two lavatories with plate-glass mirrors."

"Then I call for a vote," said Sue.

"Mine is yes," said Jane, returning from the porch. Grace, Alice and Sue added their approval as Mrs. Murphy came puffing upstairs.

"We like the rooms," Jane told her. "How much is the rent?"

"I've been getting \$40 a month," said Mrs. Murphy, "but times as they are, I'll rent them now for \$32. That would be \$8 apiece and, of course, there's the privilege of doing your laundry in the basement."

"How about meals?" asked Alice.

"I haven't been taking boarders for a year, but I guess I haven't lost my hand at setting a good table. It could be arranged."

"Then I think the price for the rooms is fair enough," said Jane. "A driver with a field car is outside. We'll bring up our bags and our other luggage will have to be shipped in later."

By the time they had unpacked their bags, it was well past lunch time and the delicious odor of freshly-baked bread floated upstairs from the kitchen.

"That makes me realize that I'm really hungry," confessed Sue. "I wonder how far it is to the nearest restaurant."

From below came Mrs. Murphy's pleasant voice.

"Lunch is on the table, girls. It's not much, but it will save you a trip down town."

They trooped downstairs to find the dining-room table set with appetizing food. There was a large plate of bread, so fresh from the oven it was still warm, and a bowl of honey. Wisps of steam ascended from a large platter of hash at one end of the table while at the other was a bowl of fresh cottage cheese. A glass of milk was beside each plate and a platter filled with fruit centered the table.

"This is grand of you, Mrs. Murphy," said Sue.

"I'm going to have bread and butter and sugar," cried Grace. "It's been ages since I've had a treat like that."

Mrs. Murphy eased her motherly bulk into the chair at the head of the table and smiled happily at the evident relish with which the girls ate lunch. There was no question about their having found pleasant quarters for their home while in Cheyenne.

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CHAPTER TEN

Jane's First Call

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THE following days were busy ones for Jane and her companions. Long hours were passed at the field in the classroom and in the commissary where the girls underwent an intensive period of training.

Miss Comstock was an exacting teacher, but a fair one and she was almost universally popular with the girls. Only one, Mattie Clark, seemed to resent the strict discipline which the chief stewardess imposed.

Mattie, a black-haired, dark-eyed girl, answered Miss Comstock sharply on several occasions. Once the chief stewardess reprimanded her recalcitrant pupil before the entire class. Later Mattie vowed that she would gain revenge.

"What do you think of Mattie's attitude?" asked Sue as she stood outside the administration building with Jane, Grace and Alice.

"It's only going to cause trouble for Mattie," replied Jane. "Miss Comstock is fair. She's got a hard job in preparing a bunch of new girls for this work, but I think she's doing it well."

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"She gets pretty cross at times," put in Alice.

"You would, too, if you were asked as many dumb questions as she is," retorted Jane.

Just then Mattie joined them. She was still resentful over the reprimand from the instructor and was grumbling to herself.

"That skinny piece of baggage isn't going to bawl me out in front of the class and get away with it," she told them, her black eyes snapping. "I've got some pull in the Federated Airways front office and I'm going to use it. Maybe Miss Comstock will be working for me some day."

"Well, what do you think of that?" asked Sue as Mattie left them.

"Mattie's partially right. That is, she has some influence in the Chicago office. Her uncle is publicity director for Federated, but I don't believe she'll ever be able to cause Miss Comstock any real trouble," was Jane's opinion.

"Mattie has dreams of being chief stewardess," explained Grace. "She told me the other day that she could certainly do a better job of handling this group than Miss Comstock."

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"Well, I'm putting Mattie down as a thorough trouble maker and the less I see and know about her the better I'll like it," said Jane firmly.

"I'll paddle right along with you," added Grace. "Mattie isn't headed in the direction I like."

The girls had been too tired at night to even think of attending a show before but that evening they walked down town and enjoyed a movie. On the way home they stopped for sodas and it was late when they reached Mrs. Murphy's. Jane was surprised to see their landlady waiting for them.

"It's about time you were getting in," she exclaimed. "The field has been calling every fifteen minutes. Miss Comstock wants you to telephone her right away. Next time you go to a show, let me know where you're going."

"Oh, I'm sorry it was so much trouble," said Jane.

"'Twas no trouble," smiled Mrs. Murphy, "but the field has been very anxious to locate you."

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Jane hastened to the telephone and put in a call for the airport. A summons at that time of night was puzzling for class work was over hours before and none of the girls had been assigned to regular duty. That was to come day after tomorrow, when the final minor alterations on their uniforms had been completed and the last test passed.

The other girls crowded near the telephone, all of them anxious for the news from the field.

The operations office answered promptly and Jane gave them her name. The night manager poured his message into her ear in a staccato too fast for the other girls to hear. Jane tingled all over as she listened and her reply was mechanical.

"I'll be there right away," she promised.

"Where are you going right away?" demanded Sue.

"Chicago," smiled Jane, turning from the telephone and dashing upstairs two steps at a time.

The other girls raced after to find Jane in her room already pulling off her dress.

"Sue, get my uniform out," begged Jane as she struggled with her dress, "and Grace, see if you can find those new smoked-grey hose in the top drawer of the dresser. Alice, run some water in the tub. I've got to be at the field in twenty minutes."

"But what's it all about?" Sue insisted as the girls rushed to help Jane.

"There's a special plane from the west coast going through to New York with Mrs. Van Verity Vanness, who is worth a billion or so, aboard. It's on a fast schedule for she is rushing to New York to the bedside of a son who is seriously ill. Salt Lake radioed that Mrs. Van Verity Vanness was anything but comfortable and the general manager has ordered a stewardess aboard to see what can be done to make her happier the rest of the way to Chicago."

"How lucky!" exclaimed Sue. "Why, you're getting the first assignment and you'll be flying nearly two days ahead of any of the rest of us."

"I'm not so sure I'm lucky," replied Jane as she splashed vigorously in the tub. "Any woman who has as many millions as Mrs. Van Verity Vanness is bound to be mighty particular. It would be just my luck to have her sick all of the way in and have a complaint lodged against me."

"But if she likes you and the service, she'll probably give you a real compliment," said Sue.

"And maybe a present," added Alice.

"Now you're all getting too far ahead," protested Jane. "I've got to get to the field first of all."

When Jane returned to her room, the girls had her uniform all ready for her to step into. The smoke-green serge fitted Jane snugly and the beret perched at a pert angle on her brown hair. She adjusted the seams of the new hose and slipped into dark grey pumps which were a part of the uniform. With deft fingers she centered the green tie of her shirt-waist and stuck a fresh handkerchief in her left coat pocket. Quick touches with the powder puff removed the shine from her nose and she gave her hair a final pat just as the horn on one of the field's cars blared outside.

"Stand still a minute," begged Sue. "I want to get a good look at you."

"There's no time for a dress rehearsal," smiled Jane, but she turned around slowly so the others could see her in the complete outfit.

"You look grand," whispered Grace. "Every pilot on the line will be in love with you before morning."

"I won't see every pilot," retorted Jane.

"Maybe not, but they'll hear about you," Grace insisted.

In the smoke-green uniform Jane was indeed an attractive figure. The coat was cut smartly and there were fashionable box pleats in the skirt. The beret, set at a jaunty angle, had only one ornament, a pair of silver wings. Shoes and hose to match the suit completed the ensemble.

Jane took a final glance in the mirror. What she saw there was pleasing and she ran downstairs, the others following her closely.

"I'm off on my first trip," she called to Mrs. Murphy, who was reading in the front room. "I'll be in Chicago tomorrow morning."

"A safe trip, bless you," called Mrs. Murphy, who had taken an exceedingly motherly interest in the girls.

"Will you bring us back if we go to the field?" Alice asked the driver of the airport car.

"Sorry, Miss, but I'm through in fifteen minutes. This is my last trip to town."

"Just our luck," grumbled Alice. "You'll have to start off on your first trip without an audience," she told Jane.

"I'd like to have you there, but maybe I won't be quite as nervous if I am alone," admitted Jane. She entered the cab and the driver closed the door.

Sue stuck her head through the lower window.

"When will you be back?" she asked.

"I haven't the slightest idea. Not until day after tomorrow at the earliest."

The cab lurched ahead and with the goodbyes of her friends ringing in her ears Jane started for the field and her first assignment.

THE airport was ablaze with light when the car pulled up at the administration building, which meant that Mrs. Van Verity Vanness' special plane was about to land.

Jane thanked the driver and hastened into the operations office on the first floor. A teletype was clicking out the latest weather reports and the radio operator was busy giving the pilot of the special plane final information on the wind and visibility at Cheyenne.

Miss Comstock, who had been talking to the night chief of operations, turned to Jane.

"I was afraid we weren't going to locate you," the chief stewardess said, visibly relieved at Jane's arrival. "This is an important trip and I knew I could count on you to make a good impression."

The night operations chief joined them.

"This special is going through ahead of everything," he told Jane, "and we can't have it delayed if Mrs. Van Verity Vanness gets air sick and they have to slow the schedule or set the ship down at some field to wait until she feels better. In other words, it's up to you to see that she is so comfortable from now on and so busy she won't have time to think about complaining."

"Is she ill now?"

"Salt Lake said she looked like a ghost and Rock Springs just cussed when I asked him how she looked. One thing, we're going to get that special off this field and from then on it's up to you to see that Mrs. Van Verity Vanness holds together until we land in Chicago."

Charlie Fischer strolled in and glanced at the weather report coming in on the teletype.

"Plenty of visibility and a good tail wind. I'm going to take that three-engined demon up where there's plenty of room and ride it for all it's worth. You can put me down for about 160 miles an hour from here to Omaha," he told the night operations chief.

"If you can do that, you'll whittle better than half an hour off the schedule we've worked out," said the night chief.

Charlie turned to Jane.

"You going along?" he asked.

"It's my first regular trip."

"Means extra ballast," grumbled Charlie.

"Extra ballast nothing," retorted the night chief. "Our billion-dollar passenger is air sick and unless we put a stewardess aboard and get Mrs. Van Verity Vanness feeling better pronto, this flight will be a washout and about \$10,000 will fly out of this airway's sock and you can imagine how the general manager would like that."

"You mean we're getting \$10,000 for this trip across the country?" asked Charlie incredulously.

"She paid before she started the trip in 'Frisco, but if we don't land her in New York on time she'll stop payment on the check. So when you're in the air tonight just bend an ear to whatever this little lady has to say, for if you do some rough flying and the G. M. hears about it, one Charlie Fischer will have a lot of explaining to do."

"The special's coming in right now," called the radio operator. They turned to the full-length windows which looked out on the field. The wing lights of the plane were swooping down and a moment later the big ship rolled down the runway and nosed toward the hangar.

"I've got a complete kit ready," Miss Comstock told Jane. "There's plenty of salad and hot coffee, fresh fruit, and I put in an extra thermos bottle of bouillon. I imagine your passenger is nervous and scared as much as anything. Make her comfortable and talk to her. Remember that the reputation of the stewardess service may depend on your work tonight."

Almost before the tri-motor had stopped rolling the ground crew, enlarged to speed the refueling of the special, was swarming over the plane. Only five minutes had been allowed for the Cheyenne stop and it meant fast work on the part of every man.

Jane and Miss Comstock hastened toward the cabin. As they reached it the co-pilot threw open the door.

"For heaven's sake, hurry," he begged. "I'm afraid this woman is going to faint."

Jane got a glimpse of the white, drawn face of Mrs. Van Verity Vanness and she knew that she was going to be in for some busy minutes. The landing stage was wheeled up to the plane and Jane hurried into the cabin. The one passenger aboard the special was clinging to the co-pilot and Jane gently disengaged her arms and placed them about her own shoulders.

Mrs. Van Verity Vanness was sobbing softly. "I'll never be able to go on. I'm too ill."

Jane didn't argue with her, but with the aid of Miss Comstock, helped the passenger out of the plane and into the cool, sweet night air. It was then that she got her first good look at the woman she was to care for on the trip to Chicago.

Mrs. Van Verity Vanness was between sixty-five and seventy. The cheeks were still full and bore few wrinkles, but the hands gave away the fact that Mrs. Van Verity Vanness was well past middle age.

"I can't walk. Don't make me," she begged.

"We'll only take a few steps," said Jane, her own strong arms supporting the older woman.

"Breathe deeply and enjoy the air. Don't think about flying."

"But I've got to get to New York." There was a sob in the older woman's voice, and she shuddered as she looked at the hulking tri-motor. Even a thought of returning to the plane struck terror into her heart.

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Jane turned to Miss Comstock and whispered a suggestion.

"Don't let them start the motors until I give the signal," she said. "It may take quite a while to get her calm, but once she's back in the plane I think I'll be able to manage."

Miss Comstock nodded and hurried away while Jane guided her elderly passenger toward the stewardess' quarters. There, well away from the rush and confusion of the hangar, she made her comfortable while she put a pot of tea on the electric grill in the commissary. Within five minutes Jane had tea and wafers ready on a silver tray. She talked gaily about everything except flying and Mrs. Van Verity Vanness began to show a new interest in living. The tea was delicious and the wafers were appetizing. The wealthy passenger of the special drank two cups of tea and ate five of the wafers.

Jane heard a tap on the window and looked up to see Charlie Fischer making horrible faces at her and pointing toward his watch. The tri-motor was at least seven minutes late now. Jane must do something at once.

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She picked up the tea tray and started for the commissary.

"If you could go with me, I might attempt to continue the journey," said Mrs. Van Verity Vanness. "I can't bear the thought of going on alone."

"But I am going with you," replied Jane. "Didn't they tell you?"

"No. Those pilots only flew faster and faster and I got sicker and sicker."

"We'll let them fly as fast as they want to," smiled Jane, "just as long as they have smooth weather. There's a delicious lunch, late papers and some magazines aboard the plane now. We'll return to the hangar, make ourselves comfortable in the plane, and tell them to go ahead. We'll be almost ten minutes late leaving here."

"I'll go on," agreed the woman of millions, "but only because you are going with me."

Without showing too much haste, Jane shepherded her passenger into the tri-motor. Charlie Fischer, still looking at his watch, gave her a black look as he climbed into the cockpit.

Jane made Mrs. Van Verity Vanness comfortable in chair No. 6, and then stepped back to the door where Miss Comstock was peering in. "Everything all right?" asked the chief stewardess.

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"She's perfectly calm now," replied Jane. "I'm sure we'll make Chicago all right."

"The general manager is fairly burning up the radio trying to find out about the delay here."

"You can tell him that it took us the extra time to persuade Mrs. Van Verity Vanness to continue the trip," said Jane.

"Good-bye and good luck," said Miss Comstock as she closed the door. Jane made sure that the door was latched securely, stowed the hamper of food away in the pantry, and then hastened up to take a seat beside her passenger.

The motors roared and the plane quivered to the pulse of their power. Mrs. Van Verity Vanness paled as the plane rolled forward, but Jane took the hands of the elderly woman and held them in her own. Almost before they knew it the plane was in the air, streaking away into the east in the race to make up the lost time.

CHAPTER TWELVE

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Alarming News

THE lights of Cheyenne faded rapidly as Charlie Fischer gunned the big transport hard. Jane, watching the air speed indicator, saw it climb from 110 to 130. It hovered there for several minutes and then started climbing again. In less than fifteen minutes they were up 7,000 feet and with a good tail wind boomed along at better than 150 miles an hour.

Jane looked at her elderly companion. Mrs. Van Verity Vanness had her eyes closed tightly and Jane spoke to her reassuringly.

"It's a long ride to Chicago," she said. "Suppose we look through some magazines. Then we'll have a cup of bouillon and sandwiches just before midnight and after that I'll tuck you in for the night."

"Tuck me in for the night?" asked Mrs. Van Verity Vanness. "Why, I'll never be able to sleep."

"I think you will. You can unfasten your safety belt now and I'll see what I can find in the way of magazines."

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Jane returned a minute later with half a dozen copies of the latest magazines. She adjusted the reading light for her companion and Mrs. Van Verity Vanness, seeing Jane so calm and casual, forced herself to overcome the fear of flying which had sickened her. She selected a magazine from the armful Jane offered and settled herself comfortably in her seat.

"I'm really commencing to enjoy it," she smiled, "but there's a bit of a draft around my feet."

Jane hurried back to the compartment where a supply of warm, woolly blankets were kept. Selecting a pretty grey and pink one she wrapped it around the elderly woman's legs. With Mrs. Van Verity Vanness comfortable and apparently satisfied for some time, Jane opened the Cheyenne paper.

She halfway expected to find a front page story on the dash across country of Mrs. Van Verity Vanness in a special plane for almost any activity of this multi-millionaire widow was worth a half column of space. Instead, Jane read the alarming news that a mail plane had been robbed early that morning by aerial bandits. The ship, a Bertold single engined plane, had been shot down in southeastern Iowa on the Kansas City to Chicago run and more than a hundred thousand in currency taken from the registered mail pouch which it carried. The pilot had been seriously wounded by the two bandits, who had used a machine gun to force the mail ship down.

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Jane resolved right then and there to keep all of the papers away from Mrs. Van Verity Vanness. If aerial bandits were operating, it was entirely within the realm of possibility for them to attack a special chartered by a woman as wealthy as her companion.

The tri-motor hurtled through the night, the speed increasing as Charlie Fischer pushed it up another thousand feet to benefit by an even stronger tail wind at that altitude. They roared along at between 165 and 170 miles an hour, nearly 50 miles above the usual cruising speed of a plane of that type.

Below them winked the revolving beacons which lighted the transcontinental airway at night. Occasionally they sighted the dim gleams from some prairie town.

Mrs. Van Verity Vanness let the magazine drop into her lap as she closed her eyes, now thoroughly relaxed and without fear of anything happening to the plane. It was 11:30 and Jane leaned over and spoke to her companion.

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"I'll bring the bouillon and sandwiches right away. Then you can go to sleep."

Mrs. Van Verity Vanness nodded contentedly and Jane went back to her pantry.

The bouillon, golden brown, smelled delicious as it gurgled out of the thermos jug and the sandwiches were almost paper thin with a tasty filling of olives and salad dressing.

Jane put the lunch on a silver tray and carried it into the cabin where she placed it on a small portable table which she had put between the seats.

"Several hours ago I thought I'd never be able to eat again," smiled the woman of millions, "but this actually appeals to me."

Jane agreed, for Miss Comstock had personally prepared the lunch and it should be delicious. The bouillon was expertly flavored and the sandwiches were the kind that made even the daintiest eaters hunger for more.

When the last sandwich had disappeared and the second cup of bouillon was only a memory, Mrs. Van Verity Vanness leaned back in her chair and smiled happily.

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"You're a wonder," she told Jane. "I think I'll ask the company to send you clear through to New York with me."

"Our division only goes to Chicago," replied Jane, "but I'd be delighted to go on if the general manager approves."

"I think he'll approve if I ask it. After all, I'm paying almost enough for this trip to buy one of their planes."

Jane removed the luncheon dishes, brought another blanket, adjusted the seat at a reclining angle and tucked Mrs. Van Verity Vanness away for the night.

"We'll land at North Platte, Omaha, and Iowa City," she said, "but there'll be no need for you to disturb yourself. I'll inquire for messages at each stop and waken you if there is any news."

In less than five minutes Mrs. Van Verity Vanness was sleeping soundly and Jane went back to her pantry to stow away the dishes she had used for their midnight lunch.

The flasher which signaled that the chief pilot wanted to talk to her came on and Jane walked ahead, careful not to disturb her passenger. The stewardess made her way past the baggage compartment and stuck her head in the pilots' cockpit.

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Charlie Fischer looked down at her.

"How's our famous passenger?" he asked.

"Sound asleep," replied Jane, "and she'll stay that way until morning if you'll use a little care in landing and taking off."

"I'll drop this crate down like we were carrying eggs," promised Charlie, "but don't you let her out of the plane. Next time we may never be able to get her back on board."

Jane returned to the cabin where the only light was the one over her seat at the rear. Her passenger was sleeping soundly and Jane sat down and relaxed.

The last two hours, from the time she had received the call to rush to the field, had been filled with a nervous tension. Handling Mrs. Van Verity Vanness had required real tact and patience and Jane had been so busy she hadn't had time to remember that this was her first trip as stewardess. Up until now she had rather looked upon herself as a trained nurse called in to care for a nervous, irritable woman.

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At better than 8,000 feet the air was chilly even in the summer and Jane got a blanket and wrapped it around her shoulders. She didn't dare sleep for fear Mrs. Van Verity Vanness would

waken and call her.

Jane had hardly settled down to rest when the lights of North Platte appeared far ahead and the throbbing of the motors eased off. Charlie Fischer set the plane down without a bounce and they rolled into the hangar.

Mrs. Van Verity Vanness roused slightly and Jane told her they were in North Platte. The stop there took just a little better than four minutes and Jane learned that there were no messages for her passenger. Then they were booming east again with the next stop at Omaha.

Jane settled down in her chair, wondering if her passenger had been serious when she mentioned taking her on to New York. What a lark that would be and how the other girls would talk. Jane could just imagine Mattie Clark turning almost green with envy.

The pilot found the favoring wind again and they sped from North Platte to Omaha in record time for the big tri-motor. At the Omaha field reporters were waiting for the plane and Jane was forced to go to the waiting room and answer their questions, for Mrs. Van Verity Vanness refused to see them,

For five minutes she fended off the questions of the newspapermen, answering those she was free to.

"Better look out for the aerial bandits," they warned her. "Think of the ransom they could demand if they captured your passenger?"

"Haven't they been captured?" asked Jane.

"No. They vanished after bringing down the mail plane in southeastern Iowa. The last report said that they had been heading west. Of course, that was early yesterday. They've landed at some out of the way field."

Jane thanked the reporter and turned back to the tri-motor, glad to get away from her questioners lest she show them how much she was disturbed. With the newspapers now broadcasting the cross-country dash of the wealthy Mrs. Van Verity Vanness, Jane knew that the special was not safe with the aerial bandits still at large.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

The Black Plane

JUST before the tri-motor wheeled off the ramp at Omaha, the radio operator at the field hurried up with a message. It was from New York, informing Mrs. Van Verity Vanness that her son was slightly improved and was looking forward to her arrival at his bedside.

The little woman of the many millions looked at Jane through tear-dimmed eyes.

"He's my only son," she said. "He means so very much to me."

Jane nodded. She could understand, for in her years of training at Good Samaritan she had seen mother love put to many a severe and heart-breaking test and she knew how deep in a human soul it penetrated.

Reassured that her son was not losing ground, Mrs. Van Verity Vanness dozed again as the plane raced over western Iowa.

Jane went ahead to the pilots' cockpit and leaned close to Charlie Fischer.

"The airplane bandits are still at large," she told him.

"I know it," he said. "We got a special warning at Omaha. A strange ship was sighted over the Des Moines field half an hour ago and it answered the description of the bandit craft. Two army planes that were making an overnight stop at Fort Des Moines have gone up to see if they can trace it."

"Keep a close watch. I've got nearly a billion-dollar piece of humanity in the cabin."

"Orders are to land if we run into trouble."

"But that would mean the capture and holding of Mrs. Van Verity Vanness for ransom," protested Jane.

"That's better than having us all shot down," snapped Charlie. "You just mind things in the cabin and I'll run this end of the ship."

"Well," said Jane with finality. "If I were a pilot and a bandit plane attacked me, I'd give them a real race before I landed."

Charlie started to reply but the co-pilot grabbed his arm and pointed over to the right. The lights of a plane, coming rapidly toward them, were plainly visible.

Charlie looked at them for a second and then snapped off the wing lights of his own plane. "Get back into the cabin and turn off the lights there," he roared at Jane. "Here comes trouble."

"How do you know?" asked Jane.

"There's no other ship but our own on this division tonight and those lights coming toward us aren't the riding lights on a night hawk."

Jane departed on the run, and snapped off the light in the cabin. It would be dawn in another half

hour, but for the coming thirty minutes the tri-motor, running without lights, had a chance of escaping the other plane.

The motors labored under a full charge of gas as the big ship rocketed along at 170 miles an hour. Once or twice the needle on the speed dial mounted above the 170 mark, but Charlie couldn't hold it there.

Jane watched the lights of the other plane. They didn't appear to be any nearer. Perhaps the bandits, after spotting their quarry, would be content to wait until dawn and then make a quick thrust.

The stewardess wondered if the pursuing plane was radio equipped for even as she left the pilots' cockpit, the co-pilot had been pouring out a warning of their danger. 124

It was nerve-racking business as Charlie Fischer piloted the tri-motor with all of the skill of his big hands. In and out of clouds they dodged, now at 8,000 feet, and again at 6,000, but always the relentless pursuit was with them. The sky lightened and Jane knew that the crisis was near. She wanted to go ahead and talk with Charlie and the co-pilot, but she didn't dare leave her passenger.

Mrs. Van Verity Vanness yawned and threw off the blanket which had shielded her shoulders. She sat up and looked out into the gray light. Jane answered her summons.

"We're having company," said Mrs. Van Verity Vanness, pointing toward the other ship, a black biplane, which had drawn near.

Jane didn't dare tell her the truth about the other plane.

"Just some pilot up early," she said lightly, but her heart was far from feeling that way.

Their own plane dove sharply, and Mrs. Van Verity Vanness gasped and clutched the arms of her seat.

"The morning air is a bit rough at times," explained Jane reassuringly, but she knew all of the time that the quick dive had been a maneuver of Charlie's to give them more time. She wondered about the army planes which had taken off from Des Moines. If their radio was working, they should arrive soon. 125

"The pilot of that plane's acting queerly," said Mrs. Van Verity Vanness. "He seems to be waving at us."

The light was better and Jane looked at the black biplane. Mrs. Van Verity Vanness was right. They were being waved down and Jane's heart went sick as she saw the snout of a machine gun sticking over the nose of the other craft. If Charlie refused to comply with the order, it was plain they would be the target for machine-gun bullets.

Jane looked at the altimeter with sinking heart. They were down to 7,000 feet and dropping lower steadily. She scanned the country below for some sign of a city. There were plenty of small towns within range, but no large ones where an adequate police force could be assembled to aid them.

Mrs. Van Verity Vanness did not appear alarmed. Charlie stalled at 5,000 feet and Jane saw the pilot of the other plane wave at them angrily. 126

It was agonizing, for Jane knew that once they were on the ground there would be no chance of escape. Her passenger would be whisked away in the black plane, to be held for a fabulous ransom and a desperately ill man in New York would be without the sympathy of his mother at his bedside to help him through his illness.

They were down to 3,000 feet and Charlie Fischer was hunting a good place to set down when death roared down out of the sky.

Two army planes, their machine guns spitting flame, hurled themselves at the black biplane.

Motors roaring wide open, pilots tense at the triggers, the avenging army craft arrived just as Charlie nosed the tri-motor down for a landing.

Mrs. Van Verity Vanness watched the scene with startled eyes and Jane's heart pounded doubly fast.

The bandit plane was trapped between the army ships. Bullets ripped through the wings of the black craft as the pilot tried desperately to maneuver into position where the gunner in his forward cockpit could get his weapon into action. 127

"What does it mean?" gasped Jane's passenger.

"It's a bandit plane that shot down a mail ship early yesterday in southeastern Iowa," explained the stewardess.

"But why was it following us? This plane had no mail."

"It had you, which was vastly more important."

"Ransom?"

Jane nodded.

"How long have you known we were in danger?"

"Ever since we caught sight of the black plane. We had a description of it at Omaha and were warned by radio to be on the lookout."

"But you didn't say a word to me."

"There was no need to alarm you."

The army planes were closing in on their quarry, darting in and out as the pilots directed blasts of fire at the bandit craft. The aerial desperadoes knew that they could hope for no quarter and they made one final attempt to escape, heading their plane in a mad dive toward one of the army ships.

But the dive laid them open to the fire of the second army flyer, and he plunged down from above, his machine gun spitting flame. Bullets traced through the wing of the black biplane, shattering the propeller. Then the left wing of the biplane tore loose and the ship fluttered aimlessly for a moment before nosing down for the final plunge.

Mrs. Van Verity Vanness cried out in horror and Jane placed her hands over the older woman's eyes. Finally the passenger turned from the window and looked at Jane.

"You're a brave, sweet girl," she said. "Now I think I'll rest again."

Neither one mentioned the aerial duel they had witnessed as the special roared on to the pace of its quickened motors.

Jane prepared breakfast and while her passenger sipped the hot chocolate, the stewardess went up to the pilots' cockpit.

"Some dog fight," said Charlie Fischer. "Those army boys showed up just in time."

"I suppose I should say it was terrible," said Jane, "but knowing what those bandits would have done to my passenger, I feel they got just what was coming to them."

"They had time to repent all of their sins on the way down," admitted Charlie. "Say, we're skipping Des Moines. Got plenty of fuel to take us to Iowa City."

When they landed in the eastern Iowa city, another message from New York reassured Mrs. Van Verity Vanness and she read most of the way into Chicago.

When they rolled up to the ramp of the Chicago field, Jane suggested that her passenger step out and walk a bit.

"You'll feel much better," she assured her.

Mrs. Van Verity Vanness agreed and Jane assisted her out of the plane. Reporters were clamoring at the gate, but a cordon of police kept them from the field.

Charlie Fischer grinned as he went by.

"I'm going over and be a hero," he chuckled, nodding toward the cameramen and reporters, who were hungry for the story of the escape from the bandits.

The short, stocky figure of Hubert Speidel, personnel director of Federated Airways, emerged from the crowd and came toward them. He beckoned to Jane and she left her passenger for a moment.

"Everything all right?" asked the personnel chief anxiously.

"She seems to be enjoying the trip now," replied Jane, "but she wants a stewardess to continue with her."

Just then Mrs. Van Verity Vanness took matters into her own hands.

"I presume you are a company official," she said, addressing the director. He nodded.

"Please inform your general manager that I insist upon this young woman accompanying me to New York. She has done everything possible to make me comfortable and without her assistance I would have been unable to continue from Cheyenne."

"But Miss Cameron's division ends here," protested the personnel chief. "We'll have to put another stewardess aboard here."

"I don't care a snap about divisions," said the woman of millions. "I want this stewardess. Remember, there are other lines east of Chicago."

The personnel director promised to do what he could and hastened away. He was back in less than five minutes.

"It's a little irregular," he said, "but Miss Cameron can go through to New York with with you."

Fresh supplies were brought out and placed in the pantry, Jane checking each item, for they would have lunch at noon aboard the plane and possibly a light supper just before they reached New York.

A new crew of flyers took charge and exactly fifteen minutes after landing, the special roared away, with an entire nation watching its progress, for newspaper presses were spewing out extras by the thousands, telling the story of the attempt to abduct Jane's passenger.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Page One News

THE day was clear and warm, a beautiful June-time, and the special was soon speeding over the flat country of northern Indiana. There was only one stop scheduled between Chicago and New York, that at Cleveland, where the tanks would be filled with fuel.

Jane prepared an appetizing lunch and Mrs. Van Verity Vanness ate it with evident relish as they

skirted the south shore of Lake Erie. That over, she insisted that Jane explain how she had happened to join the air line.

The elderly woman was a good listener and Jane told in detail of her last day at Good Samaritan and how Miss Hardy had recommended her for the position with the Federated Airways.

"I'd never heard of stewardesses on the planes until you came aboard at Cheyenne," said Mrs. Van Verity Vanness. "Have you been flying long?"

Jane smiled for her passenger was going to be in for a surprise.

"This is my first regular trip," she confessed. "All of the girls go into service tomorrow."

"Then I predict a fine future for you. Why, I thought you were a veteran of hundreds of miles of flying."

It was a sincere compliment and Jane glowed inwardly. She had been so anxious to make a good impression on her first flight.

At Cleveland another message from New York reassured Mrs. Van Verity Vanness and again she was shielded from reporters. No one was allowed out on the ramp, but cameras clicked as Jane stepped out of the cabin for a breath of air. Then they were racing eastward again, with the next stop the Newark airport.

They flew high over the rugged Alleghenies and then dropped down over Jersey toward the metropolis. The end of the long flight was near and Jane felt greatly relieved.

Mrs. Van Verity Vanness summoned her as they swung over the Newark airport.

"Wouldn't you like to join me, traveling as my nurse and companion?" she asked.

It was a question that left Jane speechless. She had never considered such a possibility.

"As soon as my son is well, I plan to leave on a round-the-world trip. We would be gone a year."

It was a tempting offer, almost irresistible, but the zest of flying was deep in Jane and she shook her head.

"I don't believe I would be happy leaving the air line now," she said. "There seems to be a real future for girls in aviation and I want to make the most of my opportunity."

The other woman sighed. "I was afraid that would be your answer and you are probably right. But I've grown dreadfully fond of you. If there is anything I can do at any time, don't hesitate to call on me."

"Thank you," said Jane.

The plane rolled to a stop in the Newark hangar of the Federated line and a huge limousine with two motorcycle officers flanking it, drew up to the cabin door.

"Goodbye, my dear," said Mrs. Van Verity Vanness as she stepped into the limousine to be whirled away toward New York to the tune of screaming sirens.

Jane was a little breathless. It had been such an exciting trip all the way from Cheyenne. Now she wondered just when she would start back. An official hurried toward her.

"Reporters are almost tearing the waiting room to pieces," he said. "They couldn't see Mrs. Van Verity Vanness but they insist on talking with you. You'd better tell them what happened this morning."

"But I don't know what to say," protested Jane.

"Just answer their questions."

In the waiting room a dozen men of assorted ages, and three women, awaited Jane. The moment she entered they started firing questions at her.

"How had Mrs. Van Verity Vanness acted when the bandit plane swooped down on them? How had Jane felt? What had she served her passenger at mealtime? Had Mrs. Van Verity Vanness commented on the financial situation?"

It was a steady barrage and Jane's head whirled as she tried to answer them all. Finally she threw up her hands and sank down in a chair in despair.

"Can't you see I'm all tired out?" she cried. "Please let me alone."

She buried her head in her arms and her body shook with the sobs of nervous exhaustion for the strain of the long flight and caring for the wealthy passenger had been more than Jane had realized.

"She's a plucky kid," she heard one reporter say as the newspaper people trooped out of the room.

In a few minutes Jane felt more composed and she went into the operations office.

"What time do I start west?" she asked the chief dispatcher.

"All of the space is taken until the 8:18 west in the morning. You'd better take a cab to a hotel and get some sleep."

Then Jane remembered that she was without funds. It was their first pay day in Cheyenne, but she was hundreds of miles from there.

"I guess I'll just wait here until the plane goes," she said.

The dispatcher was busy and failed to notice Jane's fatigue or he might have guessed that she was in an embarrassing situation. Jane washed her face and hands and walked outside to watch

the sun go down behind the Jersey hills.

She was hungry, but the tri-motor she had come in on had been trundled away to a distant hangar and there was little chance that she could find it and rummage through the pantry for anything to eat.

Jane skimmed through the magazines in the waiting room and selected one on aviation. She had hardly settled herself when a young woman burst into the room.

"Where's Jane Cameron?" demanded the newcomer.

"I'm Jane Cameron," replied the stewardess.

"What a break! I'm Ruthe Harrigan, special writer for the *New York Globe*. Late as usual in getting my assignment. Afraid I had missed you. How about your story? Sold it to anyone yet?"

"Why, no," stammered the surprised Jane. "I talked to a number of reporters but they didn't say anything about paying me."

"They wouldn't," snorted the newcomer. "Let's hop outside and get a bite to eat. Then we'll make a deal for your first-person story of the battle with the bandits."

Ruthe Harrigan led Jane to a comfortable restaurant only a block from the hangar and after sizzling steaks had been served, plied Jane with questions.

"I'm after a first-person story of what happened on your trip in," she explained. "We'll pay you well for permission to use your name above the story."

"But what would Mrs. Van Verity Vanness and company officials say?"

"I'll call the Federated publicity office," said the energetic Ruthe. Jane talked to the New York publicity head of Federated, and he approved of the story. Another call to Mrs. Van Verity Vanness brought her consent.

"Make them pay a good price," she advised Jane.

Dinner over, they hastened back to the Federated hangar where the reporter borrowed a typewriter. "Now tell me everything that happened and how you felt."

"But we haven't agreed on a price," said Jane.

"How about \$50?"

"That doesn't seem enough. Won't this be front page news?"

"I should say it will. Every other New York paper will probably turn green with envy."

"Then \$50 isn't enough."

"I might be able to get \$100," urged the reporter.

"Don't take less than \$500," advised the night dispatcher. "If the *Globe* won't pay it, call some of the other papers. They will."

In desperation, Ruthe Harrigan called her editor and before Jane gave her a line of copy, a check for \$500 was in the hands of the stewardess.

It was more money than Jane had ever had before and she fingered the check carefully. Now she could go to a hotel, have the finest room, enjoy the choicest food, and still have what to her was wealth.

For two hours Ruthe Harrigan plied her with questions while she beat a heavy tattoo on the typewriter. When she was through she had nine pages of copy to send to her office.

"It's a good story," smiled the reporter, "even if you did make us pay through the nose for it."

Jane cashed her check at the field and had it converted into travelers' checks of small denominations. Then she took a taxi to a recommended hotel and by 11 o'clock was sound asleep, while across the river in New York the presses of the *Globe* were rolling out her own story of the encounter with the aerial bandits.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

"Hello Heroine"

JANE was up at seven the next morning and a few minutes later, went down to breakfast. In the lobby she purchased copies of all of the morning papers and went into the grill for breakfast.

An excellent picture of herself stared up from the front page of the *Globe* and underneath the picture was a two column headline informing *Globe* readers that they were about to read Jane Cameron's own story of the battle with the bandits.

Jane flushed and looked up to make sure no one had recognized her. But there were only a few at breakfast at that hour and she read the story from opening paragraph to the final dash. Jane had to admit that Ruthe Harrigan had done an excellent job of writing. The story was thrilling, from start to finish.

After breakfast Jane bought half a dozen copies of the *Globe*, paid her hotel bill, and took a taxi to the field. A pass was ready for her and the 8:18 was on the line, warming up for the trip west.

A messenger approached Jane with a message and she signed for it. Inside was a brief note from

Mrs. Van Verity Vanness expressing her appreciation and with it a check, "a little token of my gratitude," wrote Jane's passenger. The stewardess' eyes blinked as she looked at the check. It was for one thousand dollars!

Jane's knees felt weak and she grasped a nearby handrail for support. A thousand dollars! Why, it didn't seem possible. But it was possible, for a thousand dollars was only pin money to the millions which Mrs. Van Verity Vanness controlled.

Jane felt almost uncomfortably rich. There had been \$500 for selling the story and now the thousand dollar check. She had spent less than \$10 for her room, breakfast, taxi fare and the papers. Why she would have at the very least \$1,490 when she returned to Cheyenne. It seemed unbelievable but she had the checks.

The day chief of operations at Newark came up.

"There's a sound crew from a news reel outside. They want you to pose and say a few words. It's good publicity for the line."

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Jane was glad that it was almost time for the plane to depart, for facing a movie camera was a real ordeal. Her mouth went dry and chills ran along her back as the sound man held the microphone close. Somehow she managed to say a few words, and then she hurried back to the 8:18. Two minutes later the big tri-motor was roaring west, and late that night Jane would be back at Cheyenne.

There was a strong headwind and they seldom got above a hundred miles an hour, with the result that they were more than an hour late when they reached Chicago.

Jane changed planes there and had a lunch at the field. Then the tri-motor sped westward again. There was a light passenger list, only nine aboard the fourteen-passenger craft, and none of them recognized Jane, for which she was grateful.

Night came as they roared over the rich farm lands of Iowa and from Omaha west, Jane dozed, lulled by the rhythmic beating of the three great engines.

The wind increased in force as they neared the Rockies, and the speed was well under a hundred an hour. As a result, it was nearly three o'clock when the lights of Cheyenne showed far ahead, under the left wing. Jane roused herself and straightened her uniform. She wondered if the girls would be at the field.

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The big plane glided noiselessly out of the night into the glare of the floodlights. When it rolled into the hangar Jane peered anxiously toward the waiting room. Sure enough, Sue, Grace and Alice were there, all of them fairly dancing in their anxiety to greet her.

The young stewardess was first out of the tri-motor, and she ran to meet her friends.

"Hello heroine," said Sue, as she threw her arms around Jane in an affectionate embrace.

"Welcome home," added Alice, while Grace added, "let's see what the New York papers said about you."

Miss Comstock, who had been in the background, came up and greeted Jane warmly.

"You've done a wonderful piece of work for the stewardess service," she said. "Mrs. Van Verity Vanness sent the general manager a long telegram today, highly recommending the service and especially complimenting you. I'm sure that as a result of your outstanding work, we're all assured of jobs for a long time to come."

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"But I didn't do anything unusual," protested Jane. "I simply did my job as I had been trained to do it, in the hospital and here at the field. It was nothing more than what will soon be routine to every one of us."

"Not every one of us will have bandits attack our plane the first time we're out, nor will we be carrying a woman who can sign her name to a check for a million dollars and know that she can cash it," put in Grace.

Jane looked at her wrist watch. It was just three o'clock.

"We'd better hurry home if we plan to get any sleep tonight," she said.

"You can go home," said Grace, "but Alice and I are ordered out on the eastbound mail. It's coming through in two sections from the coast this morning, and will be here in another fifteen minutes."

"Then I'll stay and see you off," said Jane. "Fifteen minutes, more or less, won't make much difference at this time of night."

Miss Comstock was busy in the commissary, checking supplies which were to go aboard the eastbound planes and the girls all lent her a hand.

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They plied Jane with questions about the trip, the encounter with the bandits, and how she had gotten along with Mrs. Van Verity Vanness.

"She's an old dear," said Jane. "I don't care what the newspapers say about her, she certainly treated me splendidly, and just as we got to New York she invited me to accompany her as nurse and companion. She's planning a round-the-world trip as soon as her son recovers."

"And you turned that down?"

"I should say I did. Why, I wouldn't trade this job of mine for almost anything else in the world. You'll feel the same way before you're half way through your first regular flight as stewardess. There's a thrill to flying that can't be found in anything else."

"I'm willing to be shown," said Grace.

The planes from the west came in on time, both of them loaded to capacity. New crews took over the controls at Cheyenne and Grace and Alice stowed the food away in the pantries. They checked their passenger lists and when the planes were refueled, called their passengers aboard.

"Good luck," called Jane and Sue as they stood on the ramp and watched the big ships wheel out of the hangar. Then the planes roared away into a greying sky, which heralded the coming of another dawn.

A field car was available to take them to town and Miss Comstock joined them.

"Are you going to come out and see every ship off?" asked Jane.

"I should say not, but with all of the girls assigned to go out within the next 24 hours, I want to see that they get started right. After that, they'll be on their own."

"What assignment do we get?" asked Sue.

"You will be on the *Night Flyer* while Jane is to take the *Coast to Coast Limited*. You'll go out tonight, while Jane's first trip is tomorrow morning."

"Then I'll plan to do plenty of sleeping in the next few hours," said Sue. "The *Night Flyer* means a slow trip to Chicago for it stops at every airport."

Mrs. Murphy heard them come in, and appeared with her hair done up in curl papers and a faded kimono wrapped around her ample bulk. She insisted on going down and fixing a lunch, and over the kitchen table Jane spread out the New York papers. They read the stories, in great detail, and Mrs. Murphy appeared immensely pleased at the great publicity given to Jane's fine work.

"I could tell the minute I laid eyes on you, that you'd be a winner," she said proudly. "Now you'd best both be off to bed, for it's circles you'll be having under your eyes if you don't."

They thanked Mrs. Murphy for the lunch and hurried upstairs to undress and crawl between crisp, cool sheets just as the sun came over the horizon.

Mrs. Murphy came in later and adjusted the curtains on the porch, and the girls slept until mid-afternoon.

Sue, about to make her first flight alone, was nervous and excited. She fussed over the way her uniform fitted her trim figure and worried about what she would do if any of the passengers became ill.

"Just forget you're in a plane and think about ward duty back in Good Samaritan, then you'll know what to do," advised Jane.

They had supper with Mrs. Murphy and then a car from the field called for them. The *Night Flyer* was due at ten o'clock, but Sue had at least an hour's work in the commissary and she wanted to have plenty of time.

Miss Comstock, looking rather worn and tired, was still on duty and Mattie Clark was also at the field, looking very neat and business-like in her uniform.

"There's two sections tonight on the *Flyer*," Mattie informed Sue. "I'm going out on the first section and you'll take the second."

"Sue is assigned on the first section," said Miss Comstock, who resented Mattie's infringement of her authority. "You take No. 2."

"But I want to be in Chicago early," protested Mattie.

"Both ships will be there within five minutes of each other. Besides, Sue is to be on the *Flyer* regularly, and she might just as well get acquainted with the regular pilots who are on that run."

Mattie was silent, but it was obvious that she was anything but pleased at Miss Comstock's decision, and Jane knew more than ever, that Mattie was going to cause trouble for everyone else in the ranks of the stewardess corps.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Through the Fog

THE first section of the *Night Flier* came in from the west three minutes ahead of schedule and with a capacity load. While the passengers stretched their legs and visited about the flight over the mountains from Salt Lake, Sue stowed her kit away in the pantry.

With departure time at hand, she forgot the nervousness which had gripped her earlier and became a calm, self-contained nurse.

"The best of luck," whispered Jane as she squeezed her friend's hand.

Sue herded her passengers into the cabin and closed the door. The landing stage was wheeled away and the *Night Flyer* lumbered out of the hangar on the first lap of the long flight to Chicago.

Jane watched the lights of the plane until they were pin-points in the east.

It was Sue's task to make her passengers comfortable for the night and she went along the aisle, adjusting seats, turning off lights, and bringing out the thick, warm blankets from the supply closet. In half an hour she had the task completed and only one passenger, an elderly man, had

elected to read, selecting a Cheyenne paper with the latest news.

As they sped east, Sue wondered at her own nervousness which had been so evident before the flight. Now everything seemed so matter-of-fact. She felt as though she had been flying for years.

A woman who had come through from 'Frisco was getting off at North Platte and Sue roused her just before they swooped down on the field. In ten minutes they were away again, with a radio order to stop at Grand Island to pick up a passenger for Chicago and another coast passenger would disembark at Lincoln.

The *Night Flyer* made most of the local stops, and as a result was anything but popular with the pilots. Most of the new men on the line drew the thankless job of piloting the *Flyer*, and the crew of Sue's ship had been on only a little more than a month.

With a fair tail wind, they kept on time despite all of their stops, and they soared away from Omaha and over the muddy Missouri a few minutes after two a.m. with a new crew of pilots up ahead. The stewardesses made the entire trip from Cheyenne to Chicago, but the pilots changed at Omaha, unless piloting a special.

It was over this stretch of the line that Jane had encountered the thrilling experience which had brought her front page fame in every newspaper in the country and Sue looked out, halfway in the hope that something unusual enough to bring her fame, would happen.

But her hopes were doomed, and they went into Des Moines on time. The only field they missed was at Iowa City, and they sped over that one shortly after sunrise.

East of the Mississippi, they lost the sun in a murk of smoke and fog.

Sue's light flashed, and she went forward to answer the call from the chief pilot.

"Weather around Chicago's bad," he said. "We may not be able to get through, so stall the passengers off if they get anxious about the time we're due in Chicago."

"But what will I tell them?" asked Sue.

"That's your job. All I do is run this crate."

Like Jane, Sue was finding out that pilots who on the ground were the pleasantest and most friendly flyers, were more than likely to be martinets when they were at the controls of a big passenger plane.

Sue took the rebuff good naturedly. Of course it was her job to keep the passengers from being alarmed.

Franklin Grove was the last of the emergency landing fields she saw, before the "soup" swallowed them and they looked out into a solid wall of rushing grey, so thick it almost hid the wings.

Passengers looked anxiously toward Sue, and one or two of them summoned her. To their questions, she replied as truthfully as she could that they had struck a bit of bad weather, but that the radio beacon was guiding the pilot and they expected to soon be out of the fog and into clear weather.

That explanation satisfied them for the first half hour, but after that Sue found herself in trouble and a rising fear gripping her own heart. The questions the passengers asked were more difficult to answer.

Why weren't they out of the fog? They were late now getting into Chicago. Did the pilot know where he was? Why couldn't they land and wait for the bad weather to clear?

Sue answered them as best she could and tried to remain calm, putting on the best professional manner of a trained nurse.

Her signal light glowed again and she went forward. The chief pilot looked years older.

"We're in trouble," he told her frankly. "I've lost my radio bearings and the gas is getting low. Have your passengers fasten their safety belts and see that there is no smoking. If we crash we don't want any extra risk of fire."

Sue returned to the cabin, hoping desperately that her face would not give away the gravity of their situation when she asked the passengers to put on their safety belts. She went from one to another, adjusting the belts, and informing them that they were about to land, but she didn't add that it was likely to be a crash landing. When everyone was fastened to the seats, Sue reported to the chief pilot.

"Get back in the cabin. We're going down," he said curtly.

Sue watched the altimeter.. The needle dropped gently from the 3,000 feet at which they had been flying, but the wall of fog still enveloped the earth.

They nosed through it carefully, the air speed cut down to a hundred miles an hour. Even that speed was a terrific one at which to crash into the ground. Sue was too busy thinking about her passengers to sense her own emotions.

For five minutes the pilot groped his way down and suddenly the nose of the big ship shot through the fog. The plane flattened out 200 feet above the ground and skimmed along over farmhouses with the motors roaring heavily.

Suddenly the ship heeled over and for a sickening instant, Sue thought they were crashing until she caught sight of an airport and knew the pilot was sliding in for a fast landing.

As the plane touched the ground the motors sucked the last fuel from the tanks. The tri-motor rolled up to the hangar and Sue looked at the name painted above the large doors. They had

come down at Joliet, nearly thirty miles south of their course.

The pilot came back.

"Weather's still bad around Chicago," he announced. "We'll have taxis here in a few minutes to take you in."

Sue helped her passengers collect their hand baggage and shepherded them into the taxis. In half an hour the last one was safely away for Chicago, and Sue had time to sit down and have a little cry all by herself.

They remained at Joliet until mid-afternoon, when the fog cleared and they hopped the short distance to the field at Chicago. It was then that Sue learned that the second section of the *Night Flyer* was down at Sterling, Illinois, with the weather west of Chicago still foggy and little chance of it clearing before mid-evening. Sue could imagine the wrath of Mattie Clark, who had been anxious to reach Chicago that morning.

Sue went to the office of the personnel director to be assigned quarters while in Chicago and learned that the line had leased two apartments nearby which would accommodate eight girls. They could cook their own meals there or go out to restaurants as they preferred, since the line's only obligation was to domicile them while at the Chicago end of their runs.

"I talked with some of the passengers who came as far as Joliet with you," said the personnel chief, "and they gave me some fine reports of your calmness. I feel that I owe Miss Hardy at Good Samaritan a letter of real appreciation for the girls she recommended."

After leaving the personnel office, Sue looked at the bulletin board. The *Coast to Coast Limited* with Jane aboard would be in at five o'clock and she decided to wait for her.

Sue enjoyed a late lunch at the restaurant and then walked out on the ramp to watch the arrival and departure of the planes.

A crimson monoplane was being loaded for a run to Kansas City, while a trim, blue biplane was waiting for four passengers for Detroit. It all seemed so matter-of-fact, and Sue knew that after her flight through the fog that morning she would never again be afraid of flying.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

An Ultimatum to Mattie

SUE met Jane when she stepped off the *Coast to Coast Limited* and together the girls went to the apartments which had been leased by the air line. They were in Chicago for the night. Sue booked out early the next morning and Jane later in the day.

Grace and Alice, also in Chicago, had been down town shopping that afternoon, but they all met at the apartment. There was an attractive kitchenette, but the girls were tired and they had dinner at a nearby restaurant. Later they walked to a neighborhood movie where they enjoyed the feature program.

When they returned to the apartment, Mattie Clark was there, still mad at the long delay which had kept her away from Chicago.

"Imagine having to stay out at the emergency field at Sterling almost all day," she stormed. She turned on Sue angrily.

"If you hadn't been so pig-headed back in Cheyenne, I'd have been on the first section and at least arrived during the daytime."

"You can thank me you weren't on the first section," replied Sue calmly. "We got lost and were coming down for a crash landing when the fog cleared at Joliet and we sneaked down there. I was scared to death."

Mattie looked at Sue skeptically.

"You don't seem to believe me," said Sue.

"Well, it's a good story," said Mattie.

Jane's anger had mounted steadily and it got away from her.

"That's enough, Mattie. We might as well have it out right now. I think you're mean and small. You're doing everything you can to make it unpleasant for Miss Comstock, and now you're insulting Sue, because you know Sue is too even-tempered to fight back. Now just get out of here and after this keep out of my way."

Mattie was furious and her face flamed with anger, but before she could reply, Alice stepped in.

"What Jane said goes for Grace and me," she said. "The less we see of you, the better."

"You'll all be sorry for this," flared Mattie as she slammed the door and went into the apartment across the hall.

"I'm sorry this had to happen," Jane told the others, "but Mattie is out for trouble and she's going to get it. From now on keep your eyes open, for she'll trick you if she can."

The stewardesses soon settled into the routine of the flights from Cheyenne to Chicago and return. It was interesting, pleasant work.

Jane banked the money she had received from the New York paper and from Mrs. Van Verity Vanness and when Charlie Fischer asked her if she'd like to take lessons in flying, she had the money necessary.

Charlie had a biplane at Cheyenne and between flights with the huge Federated planes, amused himself by hopping around the countryside and giving lessons to whatever pupils he could pick up. Of the stewardesses, Jane was the only girl who decided to take lessons.

Whenever she and Charlie were at Cheyenne, he took her up for flights, explaining the principles of aeronautics and letting her get the feel of the plane. One afternoon they flew to Denver and back, and on another occasion, went to Laramie.

Jane was blessed with air sense. When she had her hands on the control stick, she could almost anticipate every movement of the plane and Charlie praised her aptitude warmly. 162

The days rolled into mid-summer and July in Cheyenne was hot. It was refreshing to seek the coolness of the upper air in the late afternoon and Jane spent as much extra time aloft as she could afford. Then came the afternoon for her solo flight. The government inspector arrived and took his place in the rear cockpit.

Charlie Fischer looked up and grinned.

"Just forget the guy back there," he said, "and you'll get along fine."

Jane's throat tightened. Going up with a government inspector was quite different from going up with Charlie,

She opened the throttle and the biplane shot across the sun-baked field. Jane was glad the other girls were out on the line, for it would be embarrassing to come down and face them if the inspector should turn her down.

She lifted the biplane into the air and got altitude in easy circles over the airport. Then she started through the routine. As the thrill of the flight got into her blood, she forgot the inspector in the rear cockpit and gave her every energy to piloting the plane. With grace and skill, she directed the maneuvers until the inspector reached ahead, tapped her on the shoulder, and nodded toward the ground. 163

Jane cut the motor and they drifted down. Charlie Fischer was the first to reach the plane.

"How about it?" he asked the inspector.

"Just about perfect," smiled the government official.

"Then I'll get my license?" Jane asked breathlessly.

"There's no question about that. I'm giving you an exceptionally high rating. Your license will be through shortly."

It was another ten days, before the precious card with her license arrived from Washington and Jane showed it proudly to her roommates.

"It's nice," admitted Sue, "but what on earth will you do with it? You haven't a plane and you can't afford to rent Charlie Fischer's."

"I honestly don't know," confessed Jane, "but I wanted it. Some day I'll be glad that I have the license and the ability to fly a plane." 164

Mattie Clark was still causing trouble. Any other girl who so rankly showed her insubordination would have been fired within a week, but the fact that Mattie's uncle was a company official saved her time and again. She knew she was treading on thin ice, but she seemed to take whole-hearted enjoyment in making Miss Comstock and the other girls miserable. Jane was her special hate.

Jane was still on the *Coast to Coast*, the crack run of the line, and summer had slipped over into August. A burning wind swept down out of the mountains and it was hot that morning when the eastbound *Coast to Coast* drifted in.

Mattie had been assigned to a westbound plane for the day, and was in the commissary while Jane checked over her supplies. As usual, Mattie made as many caustic remarks as possible, but Jane refused to answer.

Jane finished preparing the supplies to place aboard the plane and went out to call a field boy to help her carry the large hamper. When she returned with the boy, Mattie was still in the commissary and Jane looked at her sharply. Mattie flushed, but Jane thought nothing more of the incident.

The *Coast to Coast* was loaded and Jane sat on the jump seat at the rear of the plane. It was the usual crowd—a second-rate movie actress, several New York traveling men with flashy clothes, an elderly lady called east by a death in the family and the rest business men and women who had taken the plane to save time on their trip east. 165

Jane made sure that everyone had traveling kits, answered several questions about the weather ahead, and checked over her passenger list to see that everyone was in the proper seat.

The ship rolled out of the hangar and swept away into the east. Jane picked up the magazines and went along the aisle, offering them to passengers who cared to read. Most of them preferred to gaze at the landscape below.

They were east of Grand Island when Jane prepared lunch, serving sandwiches, a cool salad and an iced drink she had brought in a large thermos jug.

It was early afternoon when they cleared Omaha, with a stop scheduled ahead at Des Moines, the

last one until Chicago. Council Bluffs had barely dropped out of sight when Jane began to feel ill. Just then a woman called her. She was feeling uneasy and Jane gave her a soda tablet.

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She had hardly returned to her seat when everyone appeared stricken at the same moment. Her passengers became deathly ill and Jane herself was so sick she could hardly move. She managed to stagger ahead to the pilots' cockpit and told them of what had happened. The big ship was turned about at once, roaring back for Omaha, while the co-pilot sent out a rush call for ambulances and doctors to meet it at the field.

By the time the tri-motor reached the Omaha field, Jane was too ill to move and everyone in the cabin was carried out and taken to the hospital for treatment.

Just before she left the field, Jane spoke to the chief pilot.

"Save the lunch," she whispered. "It must have been that."

He nodded and hurried away to see what he could find in the pantry.

Somehow the Omaha papers got hold of the story, and printed it on their front pages. As a result Hubert Speidel, the personnel chief, hurried out from Chicago on the first plane to make an investigation, and it was at Jane's request that he had the food analyzed. Shortly after that he ordered an investigation to be held at Cheyenne and Jane, still weak from her sudden illness, wondered what he had learned.

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CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

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Sue Plays Detective

JANE, who had been the most seriously ill of those aboard the *Coast to Coast Limited*, was in the Omaha hospital three days. She was far from well when she boarded a westbound plane for the inquiry at Cheyenne. The incident had brought unfavorable publicity to the line, and the personnel director was determined to get at the bottom of it.

The investigation was held in the administration building of the Cheyenne airport. In addition to Mr. Speidel, Miss Comstock was there, the pilots who had been on the plane, and Sue.

Jane was questioned first.

"Did you prepare the food which was placed aboard the plane that day?" the personnel chief asked her.

"Not all of it," she replied. "The salad was supplied by the caterer, but I made the sandwiches and prepared the iced tea."

"Did anyone else touch the food?"

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"Not that I know of."

"Was anyone else in the commissary while you were working?" continued the personnel director.

Jane was about to reply that she was alone when she remembered that Mattie had been there.

"Mattie Clark was there," she said, wondering just what Mr. Speidel was attempting to learn from her.

"You know what caused the illness aboard the plane?" he went on.

"It was a strong irritant of some kind," she replied, "but I wasn't told at the hospital just what it was."

The personnel director switched to another track.

"You wouldn't have had any reason to place anything in the food, would you?"

Jane's face flushed, and it was a struggle to keep from showing her intense anger, but she finally managed to reply "no," in a calm voice.

"Do you know anyone who would do it as a grudge against you?"

"That question is hardly fair," retorted Jane. "If I mention any names I might unjustly throw suspicion on someone who is not guilty."

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Through her mind, though, raced thoughts of Mattie and her promise of revenge. Mattie had been alone in the commissary long enough to dope the sandwiches or the salad, and she was capable of stooping to such a low trick. No matter what happened, as a result of the investigation, Jane resolved to see Mattie and have a talk with her.

"What do you know about this, Miss Comstock?" asked the personnel director, turning to the chief of the stewardess service.

"Very little, but I am sure that Miss Cameron is being treated very unfairly if anyone thinks she deliberately planned such a distressing incident as the one which took place aboard the *Coast to Coast* the other day."

"But isn't it true that Miss Cameron is one of your favorites?"

"I am no more partial to her than to the other girls. It happens that she is a most efficient and personable stewardess. I only wish that all of the girls were as capable as she."

The pilots also spoke a good word for Jane, but she knew she was in a tight spot. Someone had

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prejudiced the personnel director against her and she strongly suspected the fine hand of Mattie Clark, working through her uncle.

Then Sue took a hand in the proceedings.

"I've been doing a little investigating on my own account," she said. "It may interest you to know that a member of the stewardess staff bought the drug which was used to cause the illness aboard the plane."

"What do you know about this?" demanded Mr. Speidel.

"Enough to clear Jane of any part in it," replied Sue. "I have a sworn statement from the druggist who made the sale. He knows the stewardess who made the purchase and named her in the affidavit."

Sue waved the paper and the personnel chief seized it eagerly.

"I think this investigation is over," he said as he finished reading the affidavit. "I am sorry, Miss Cameron, to have caused you any embarrassment."

Once outside, Jane hugged Sue enthusiastically.

"You were a peach to do that piece of sleuthing," she said. "For a while it looked like I was in a tight place." 172

"But you haven't asked me who bought the drug," said Sue.

"I don't need to. It was Mattie. I remembered seeing her in the commissary the other day. Honestly, I hardly thought Mattie would stoop to such a trick. Why, think what would have happened if the pilots had eaten any of that lunch."

"I did," replied Sue, "which is one reason why I went sneaking around the drug stores in Cheyenne. Mattie was pretty sure of herself for she bought it in the store where we usually go for our sodas. The druggist didn't want to give me an affidavit, but when I threatened to swing all of the stewardess trade to the store across the street he decided to sign."

They were having dinner that night at Mrs. Murphy's when Alice, just off a run from the east, came in.

"Guess who I saw leaving the field?" she said.

"Mattie Clark," replied Jane.

"You're a mind-reader. It was Mattie and she was going as a passenger. What's up?"

Sue told Alice briefly what had taken place during the afternoon. 173

"Serves Mattie right," said Alice. "Everything will be smoother now that she's gone. But I've got some news none of you will guess."

"Don't keep us waiting too long," smiled Jane.

"Roscoe James, the famous film director, came out on the plane from Chicago."

"That's nothing. Frederic March flew east with me the other day and never even looked at me," said Sue.

"Yes, but Roscoe James stopped here."

"Which means what?" asked Jane.

"His company, the Mammoth, is going to film an air story with the Cheyenne field for the background."

CHAPTER NINETEEN 174

Needed—One Pilot

JANE and Sue looked at Alice incredulously.

"Do you mean to stand there and tell me that Roscoe James and the Mammoth Film Company are going to make a motion picture here at the Cheyenne field?" demanded Sue.

"I'm not going to stand and tell you," sighed Alice, dropping into a chair. "I'm going to ease my weary legs, but at the same time, I'll repeat that the local field is going to be used for the background of the next Roscoe James feature production."

"Maybe we'll get a chance to work as extras," gasped Sue.

"About all we can hope to do is to be on the sidelines looking on," said Alice. "Mr. James was talking to the operations manager when I left the field. The company will be here next week to start work on the outdoor scenes, all of which will be filmed here."

"What luck for me," put in Jane. "I've only one round trip to Chicago scheduled. That means I'll have most of the week here, where I can watch the company at work." 175

"And if they need a cook, maybe it will be my chance to get in the movies," added Mrs. Murphy as she hurried in from the kitchen. Little of the girls' conversation escaped Mrs. Murphy and she had kept an ear finely tuned to their talk about the coming of the film company.

Jane was scheduled east the next morning on the *Coast to Coast*. Just before the ship came in from Salt Lake City, she saw the famous film director in conference with the operations manager.

With them was Charlie Fischer. After a time he ambled over to talk with Jane.

"Going to be great doings here," grinned Charlie. "I'm in the movies already."

"What are you going to do?"

"They've got to have some stunt flying and they can't afford to have the leading man risk his neck. I'm elected to pilot the ship. Means a lot of fun and quite a few extra shekels."

"Try and get me a job as an extra," urged Jane.

"I'll do my best, but the star might object."

When Jane returned from Chicago a part of the technical crew had arrived and equipment was being set up at the field. Every girl in the stewardess corps was hopeful that she might be selected for some extra role for all of them secretly cherished the desire to be a film star.

Grace, coming in from the west on a late plane, rushed in and woke them.

"Who do you suppose came in with me?" she gasped.

"Probably Gary Macklin," said Sue, naming the latest Hollywood favorite.

"Good guess," said Grace.

"Do you mean Gary Macklin is going to have the leading role in the picture here?" demanded Alice, now thoroughly awake.

"That's just what I mean, and his leading lady is going to be Claudette Barrett. She came in on the same plane."

"My favorite combination," breathed Sue. "I think I'll ask for a leave of absence."

"Not much chance of your getting that, for business on the line is picking up every day," said Jane.

"You should comment, with only one trip scheduled next week. How about trading schedules?"

"I should say not. I'm just as anxious as you are to see how a film is made," smiled Jane.

"Does anyone know what the story is about?" Alice asked.

"I heard Mr. Macklin and Miss Barrett talking about it when we stopped at Rock Springs. Miss Barrett is going to have the role of a stewardess and Mr. Macklin plays the part of the ace pilot of the line."

"Charlie Fischer should have that role," put in Sue.

"Charlie's going to do the stunt flying," said Jane.

"If Miss Barrett's going to be a stewardess, we ought to see quite a bit of her," Alice said hopefully. "If there's anything dangerous to be done, we might even get a chance to double for her."

More members of the cast of "The Sky Riders," as the film was tentatively titled, arrived over the week-end and on Monday morning the company was ready to start shooting the scenes.

The Cheyenne airport had been given a thorough cleaning and everything from fences and lights around the border to the wind sock on the beacon tower had been touched up.

Jane, due out on the *Coast to Coast*, watched the company assembling. Roscoe James, the director, was a giant of a man, well over six feet in height and broad of shoulder.

A taxi rolled up and Claudette Barrett, the leading woman, stepped out. She was a trifle taller than Jane, with brown hair and brown eyes, and Jane was surprised to see the film star wearing the uniform of a Federated Airways stewardess. It was perfectly tailored and Miss Barrett even had the jaunty little beret fitted snugly over her carefully marcelled hair. She had a pleasant smile and spoke to several members of the company.

Another cab arrived and Gary Macklin, tall, dark and strikingly handsome, jumped out. He gave Jane the impression of always being in a hurry and of having an abundance of energy.

A camera crew had its equipment ready and when the *Coast to Coast* came into view, started grinding away. The big plane landed smoothly and rolled into the hangar.

Jane forced herself to turn to her duties and she went forward to relieve the stewardess who had come in from Salt Lake City, taking over the passenger list and making sure that her own supplies were placed aboard the plane. She was stowing the lunch away in the pantry when someone spoke to her and she turned to face Claudette Barrett.

"I hope I won't bother you," said the film star, "but since I'm supposed to be a stewardess, I've got to learn something about the business." She had a pleasant smile and Jane felt an instant liking for this attractive girl of the films.

"I'll be glad to show you whatever I can. I'm Jane Cameron."

"Why, I've read lots about you. You were the stewardess who was with Mrs. Van Verity Vanness when bandits tried to abduct her. I was in New York at the time and read all about it in the *Globe*. What a thrilling experience that must have been."

"I wouldn't want very many of them," confessed Jane.

"Go ahead with your work. I'll just watch and ask questions." Jane stowed the contents of the large hamper away in the pantry and looked at her watch.

"We've only three more minutes here. It's time now to get the passengers back into the plane."

Jane led the way outside. Over in front of the commissary Sue, Alice and Grace were watching

the proceedings enviously.

"My roommates are all anxious to meet you," Jane said, "and they'll be glad to give you any assistance possible."

"I'm going to need it," smiled the film star.

The girls were almost overwhelmed when Jane brought Miss Barrett to meet them, but they found her so natural and interested in their work that they were soon conversing with her freely.

The last Jane saw of them as the *Coast to Coast* roared away, they were taking Miss Barrett into the stewardess headquarters.

When Jane returned on Wednesday, the film company was in the midst of active shooting. Two of the big tri-motored transports had been chartered for use and were landing and taking off for special shots of the field while camera crews on the ground photographed them.

At dinner that night, the girls told Jane how they had been drafted as extras for a crowd scene in the hangar.

"It was thrilling," said Alice. "Just think, actually in the movies."

"We even got paid just for standing around. I'd almost have been willing to pay them," put in Grace.

"The worst of it is," mourned Sue, "more crowd scenes are scheduled for shooting tomorrow and we're all scheduled out."

"All except lucky Jane, who's in for the rest of the week," said Grace.

"I'll try and skip around in the crowd scenes and take the places of all of you," Jane consoled them.

"Mrs. Murphy's going to be the Cheyenne star in the picture," chuckled Sue. "The director saw her at the field and he drafted her for a comedy role. It was taken this morning and was as funny as could be. They dressed Mrs. Murphy up in an old-fashioned outfit with a bonnet and a parrot in a cage. She was taking her first trip by plane and all she had to do was to look flustered and talk about her fear."

"Yes, and Mrs. Murphy's never been up," added Grace. "When she started toward the plane she forgot all about being in a movie and began to get scared. By the time she reached the steps, she wasn't acting and Miss Barrett and Mr. Macklin had to almost force her into the ship. Mrs. Murphy's brogue was so thick you could cut it and the whole film crew laughed until they were just about worn out. Mrs. Murphy got a hundred dollars for the scene and she's tickled to death."

All the girls were scheduled out on early ships the next morning and Jane went to the field with them. Even at that hour, Director James was on hand making plans for the day's schedule.

After the early planes had cleared the field, Jane saw him talking to Charlie Fischer, who had been given a leave of absence to do the stunt flying. A few minutes later Charlie came over and joined her.

"This is my big day," he said. "If I do all of the tricks they want me to, I'll go crazy."

"What do you have to do?"

"They're practically re-enacting the scene of the bandit plane attacking us, and I've got to fly the bandit ship. They had a chap from Denver slated to come up and do that while I flew the army plane which arrived just in time. Now I'll have to fly the bandit plane through a lot of maneuvers and then come down, get another ship which will be painted like an army plane, and do some more stunts all around one of the tri-motors."

"But that won't seem like an aerial battle."

"The director says they can cut the film in the laboratory so it will look all right. Of course he'd like to have both the bandit and the army ships up at the same time, but he's short a pilot and the scene must be filmed this morning. Hiring these big tri-motors is cutting heavily into his expense budget."

"Why not let me fly one of the ships?" suggested Jane. "If you were in the other one, I know I'd get along all right."

Charlie looked at her sharply.

"Golly, Jane, I never thought of that. Say, my ship is the one that's been painted up as the bandit plane. You could fly that with your eyes shut and I could take the army plane."

"I know we could do it," said Jane.

"Then here goes. We're on our way to see the director right now."

CHAPTER TWENTY

Down in Flames

DIRECTOR JAMES was giving orders to the camera crew which was to go aloft in one of the tri-motors. He appeared tired and worried and his greeting to Charlie Fischer was short.

"I'm not looking for any more extras," he growled as he saw Jane with the flyer.

"Sure, sure," agreed Charlie, who had a soothing and persuasive way, "but you do need an extra pilot and you need one in a hurry. This girl can handle one of the planes. I know, I trained her to fly."

The director stared at Charlie.

"Tell me another one," he snorted.

"Listen," said Charlie, "I'm not kidding. This is straight from the shoulder. You let this girl go up in my plane and she'll do all of the tricks your cameras can catch and a few more thrown in. She's a natural flyer, knows the feel of a plane, becomes a part of it from the second she gets into the cockpit."

Director James looked thoughtful. "We do need another pilot," he admitted, "but I hate to think of a girl trying all of those stunts."

Jane decided it was time to say a word.

"If I fly Charlie's plane, I know I can handle the assignment," she said eagerly. "With Charlie in the other ship there'll be little chance of anything going wrong. I'd like to have the opportunity to try it."

The director looked at his watch.

"We start shooting in half an hour," he decided. "We'll take a chance."

"Come on, Jane. We've got to work fast," said Charlie, seizing her arm and almost pulling her after him. "Get into boots and breeches. You're going to wear a chute. If anything should happen you'll be ready for it."

"But, Charlie, I've never used a chute," protested Jane.

"There's always a first time," said Charlie darkly. "Now mind what I tell you."

Jane hurried into the stewardess quarters where she kept her flying clothes in a locker. Miss Comstock came in while she was changing.

"What's this I hear about you piloting one of the planes for the movie people?" she asked.

"I'm going to be a bold, bad bandit," smiled Jane. "They're short a flyer and can't wait for another man to come up from Denver."

"But don't you think it's rather dangerous? I don't want to lose my star stewardess."

"Nothing will happen," promised Jane. "I'll be flying Charlie's ship and I could do that blindfolded."

She pulled her boots on and tied a scarlet scarf around her bobbed hair. In brown boots, white breeches, a soft white silk shirt open at the neck and the flaming scarf around her hair, Jane was a striking picture.

"Look out," cautioned Miss Comstock, "or the film people will be offering you a contract."

"No chance. You've got to be able to act." Jane dabbed a bit of fresh powder on her cheeks and hurried out to greet Charlie Fischer. The tall pilot was wearing one chute pack and he carried another in his arms.

"Just about time to start," he said. "The ships are over on the ramp warming up."

Jane looked at Charlie's plane. The speedy old biplane had been repainted and now was shining black. Just beyond it was a smaller and faster biplane painted to represent an army pursuit craft. It was this ship that Charlie was to handle.

Director James was waiting between the planes. He eyed Jane approvingly as she approached for she looked cool and business-like.

"You're to fly as though attacking the No. 1 transport," he told Jane. "Keep away from the second ship with the camera crew. Make it look good. We've got a machine gun mounted on your plane and when you dash in, pull the trigger and send bursts of blanks at the transport."

While he was giving his instructions, the first transport roared into the air. As soon as the drone of the motors faded, he continued.

"On signal from the camera plane, Charlie will drop down on you. I want you two to make it look like a good aerial dog-fight. Twist and turn and do plenty of power diving. When you see a red flag waved from the camera plane, go into a dive and jerk the smoke pot lever that's been rigged into your plane. That will release a cloud of smoke and make it appear that you're going down in flames. All of this must be done above 3,000 feet. At 1,000 feet you level off for we won't try to follow you with the cameras below that point. Think you understand everything?"

"I'm sure I do," replied Jane.

"Don't you worry," put in Charlie. "This is going to be the best air action your cameras ever caught."

Jane adjusted the straps of her parachute and Charlie boosted her into the cockpit of his biplane.

"If anything goes wrong," he told her, "just bale over the side and after you're clear, jerk the ring. Don't worry about the ship. I made the movie people sign a guarantee to replace it, if anything should happen."

"Nothing's going to happen," said Jane firmly.

"Atta girl. Let's go."

Charlie ran to the other plane and hoisted his long legs into the cockpit. Jane opened the motor of

the biplane, waved to Miss Comstock, who was standing nearby, and then sped across the field.

It was a glorious summer morning and to the north and west the peaks of the majestic Rockies reared their heads above the clouds which obscured their lower levels. Jane tingled with the zest of her adventure. She was actually in the movies. Of course she was just doing a stunt, but when "The Sky Riders" came to Cheyenne she would have the pleasure of knowing that she had piloted one of the planes in an important piece of action.

Above Jane the first tri-motor, the plane she was to attack, was climbing steadily while the second of the big ships, with the director and main camera crew, was wheeling off the field. Charlie was already in the air, following her fast.

It took them fifteen minutes to get into position for action and at a signal from the director in the second tri-motor, the first plane lined away west, simulating a transport in regular flight. Jane, who was a thousand feet above the transport, jammed the throttle on full and dove for the big plane.

The wings of her biplane trembled under the crashing dive, but she knew the plane's capabilities and her heart thrilled as she roared down on the big ship.

The machine gun spouted flame and smoke as she pulled the trigger. She flashed past the tri-motor, nosed up, and poured another volley of fake bullets at the big ship. Now the chase was on in earnest, the pilots of the tri-motor making every attempt to elude the pursuer and Jane was astounded at the tricky flying which could be done with one of the big transports.

Back and forth they roared through the sky, twisting and turning, until it became a real game. Then the roar of another motor came to Jane's ears and she looked back to see Charlie dropping down on her. That was her cue to stop chasing the tri-motor and attempt to save herself.

She dropped her own plane into a quick, twisting dive, that caught Charlie unawares and he missed her the first time, but he came fighting back, his own machine gun spouting blanks. For twenty minutes they twisted and turned, first Charlie gaining the advantage and then Jane. Then she saw a red flag waving from the camera plane. It was the signal for the dive on which she was to release the smoke pot.

Charlie was well above her, diving again. Jane waited until his plane was almost on her. Then she spun her own ship into a twisting plunge and tripped the trigger of the smoke pot apparatus.

Almost instantly a cloud of thick, heavy smoke rolled out of the fuselage behind her and Charlie's plane disappeared for a second in the smoke screen.

Jane watched the altimeter. She had been up 3,100 feet when she released the smoke pot. At a thousand feet above ground she was to level off and scoot back to the Cheyenne field.

She had been too busy warding off Charlie's attack to watch just where they were and was surprised to find herself just north of the home field. For all Jane knew they might have been thirty miles away.

The biplane spun down dizzily, the speed increasing until the wing wires screamed in protest. But it was good action and Jane knew the movie cameras would catch every bit of it as the smoking plane thundered toward the ground.

She felt remarkably cool as the speed increased. She had every confidence in the sturdy old biplane and at 1,800 feet she pulled the stick back a bit to see how the plane responded. To her horror there was no lessening in the angle of the dive and she turned quickly. The controls had jammed and the tail of her plane was ablaze, set afire in some way by the smoke pot.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

Too Much Action

FOR a moment sickening panic gripped Jane. Then she remembered that Charlie had insisted that she wear a parachute and there was plenty of time for her to bail out of the falling plane.

Jane looked back. Charlie's ship sped out of the trail of smoke and she saw his tense face peering over the cockpit. Behind him boomed the camera ship, recording every movement of the planes.

The flames, whipped by the wind, mounted and Jane knew there was little time to lose. They were down to 1,200 feet and she steeled herself for the leap from the plane.

It was her first jump and she hesitated for a moment. Desperately she tried the controls again but there was no hope there. The plane was falling at an alarming rate of speed.

Jane crouched in the seat, making sure that the chute was clear of any obstructions. It took nerve and a cool head to do what was ahead. At 1,000 feet she shot out of the plane, doubling over twice as she tumbled through the air.

The blazing biplane roared past her and she pulled the chute ring, using both hands. Behind her the pilot chute cracked out and then the great silken umbrella filled with air. Her plunge downward was stopped suddenly and she found herself drifting 800 feet above the ground.

The leap from the plane had been so sudden Jane had no time to analyze her feelings while she fell, but now, swinging below the parachute, she felt weak and sick.

The biplane spun downward, smoke and flame shooting from the fuselage. Close behind it

followed Charlie, riding it to the ground, while above hovered the camera ship.

Jane was swinging under the chute in a wide arc. That would never do for she would be slapped hard against the ground. Pulling on the lines above, she checked the swinging. There was a slight wind from the north that would take her down on the Cheyenne airport.

Jane watched the biplane closely as it neared the ground. It struck, nose first and then disappeared in a volcano of smoke and flame.

Jane closed her eyes and when she opened them she had drifted past the scene of the wrecked plane and was coming down over the north boundary of the airport. A car from the main building was racing toward her. Jane recognized the ambulance trailing after it. They were taking no chances.

She tried to relax as the chute neared the ground. She knew that tense muscles might result in a broken bone for landing in a parachute was anything but a lark.

Three field mechanics jumped from the car and ran to catch Jane as she landed. One of them managed to reach her in time to ease the shock of the fall, but she got a severe jar.

They helped Jane out of the chute harness and she stepped clear just as Miss Comstock arrived aboard the ambulance.

"Are you hurt, Jane?" she asked anxiously.

"Just scared a little," confessed Jane, who now felt trembly all over.

"I was so afraid you weren't going to jump in time," said the chief stewardess. "I'm about ready to go to the hospital myself."

Just then Charlie Fischer pan-caked in for a quick landing, leaped from his plane and ran toward them.

"All right, Jane?" he asked.

"Yes, but your plane's a wreck," she replied, pointing beyond the north boundary of the field where flames were licking around the remains of the biplane.

"Forget about the plane," growled Charlie, "just as long as you came out all right."

Jane entered the field car and Miss Comstock accompanied her, the mechanics remaining to fold up the parachute. While on their way back to the administration building, the camera plane landed. As soon as it reached the hangar, the director leaped out and hurried toward Jane.

Before he could reach her, Charlie, who had taxied his plane across the field, cut in. He was raging mad at the slipshod work of the movie men who had made the installation of the smoke pot in the ship Jane had flown.

"You ought to be kicked clear off the field," he shouted at the director. "There wasn't any danger in the stunt until we had to depend on the work of some of your men and then everything went wrong. I've a good notion to sock somebody."

"It was a regrettable accident," admitted the director, attempting to placate the angry Charlie, "and the company is willing to pay Miss Cameron handsomely for her work."

"Fat lot of good that would have done her if she hadn't got down all right," snorted Charlie.

"I'm very sorry the smoke pot set the plane on fire," said the director turning to Jane. "As you know I was hesitant about having you fly at all."

"I don't blame you for the accident," replied Jane. "We did so much twisting and turning up there that the smoke pot was probably dislodged. I hope it didn't spoil your film."

The director smiled. "I think we've probably the best airplane shots ever made for the cameramen were able to follow your ship until it crashed. Of course we'll have to cut a few feet where you jumped, but that can be done very easily."

Jane's work was over and she wanted to get away and be alone for a time. Perhaps she'd even cry a little for the tension had been terrific. She slipped away and went to Mrs. Murphy's where she undressed, took a refreshing bath, and went to bed. It was early evening when she wakened and went down stairs.

Mrs. Murphy emerged from the kitchen.

"A gentleman called a time ago and left this letter for you. I think he was from the film company."

Jane looked at the letter. The return address was that of the leading hotel in the city. She opened the envelope and drew out a crisp check. It was made payable to Jane Cameron in the amount of \$250 and was signed by Roscoe James for the Mammoth Film Company.

Jane's eyes blurred. Why that check would more than equal all of the money she had spent learning how to fly, but she decided that she wouldn't want to do film stunts for a living.

There was a note with the check and Jane read it eagerly.

"Dear Miss Cameron: We are showing early shots of the film tonight at the hotel at eight. The scenes taken this morning will be included and we would like to have you present. The check is in appreciation of your fine work. Cordially, Roscoe James."

Jane's heart leaped. She wouldn't have to wait until the picture was completed and released. She could see the pictures of the airplane action that night.

"Mrs. Murphy," she called, "we're going to the hotel at eight o'clock. They're showing scenes of the picture which have been taken at Cheyenne."

"What a pity the other girls aren't here," said Mrs. Murphy. "I'm all in a bustle I'm that excited. Do you suppose I took well?"

"I'm sure you did."

"But did they invite me to see the pictures?" asked Mrs. Murphy anxiously.

"Well, they didn't exactly mention you by name, but I know they won't object. You get your hat and we'll go along. We've only a little more than time enough to get there now."

"But you've had no supper, Jane."

"I'm not hungry. I'm too excited."

"Well, you're going to eat," said Mrs. Murphy firmly, who believed that food was necessary at regular intervals. "There's several sandwiches and a glass of milk in the ice box. You eat that while I'm fixing my hair."

When they reached the hotel, Charlie Fischer and Miss Comstock were waiting in the lobby.

"This is going to be a real treat," smiled Miss Comstock. "I never thought I'd be in a movie, even as an extra in a crowd scene."

"And I never dreamed that I would pilot a plane with cameras recording the scene," admitted Jane.

"You might add that you never dreamed you would have to take to a chute to get down," put in Charlie.

"You're right and once is enough," said Jane firmly.

The pictures were to be shown in the ballroom. While they waited, Miss Barrett and Gary Macklin came out of the dining room. They paused to visit, awaiting the arrival of the director.

"I hear I missed some unusual action by staying in bed this morning," smiled Miss Barrett.

"It was too much action," said Charlie.

"How did you ever have the nerve to jump?" the film star asked Jane.

"It wasn't nerve," replied Jane, "it was just a case of necessity."

The director arrived and they went into the ballroom where a screen had been erected at one end and a portable projector placed at the other.

"We're going to run through everything we've taken," explained the director as the company, including cameramen and technicians, gathered. Turning to the Federated Airways people, he explained, "Of course there is no sound on the print we're running tonight. The noise of the airplane engines will be produced in the home studio and worked into the sound track later."

They found seats and the lights were turned off. There was no title to precede the start of the actual picture, the first scene being of the Cheyenne airport with the *Coast to Coast Limited* coming in from the west. Jane started as she recognized the familiar action which had taken place only that Monday morning. She saw herself walking across the concrete floor to speak to the incoming stewardess. Then she entered the cabin and a few seconds later another stewardess walked across the hangar.

Jane smiled for the second girl was Claudette Barrett, looking exceedingly attractive in the uniform of a Federated Airways stewardess. Then there was a shot of the plane taking off, and, after that, pictures of Miss Barrett and Gary Macklin talking in the shadows of one of the great tri-motors, several shots showing the leading man at the controls of one of the big planes, and a number showing him in the cockpit of the army plane which Charlie had flown that morning.

Pictures of the planes coming in at night, especially, thrilled Jane. In the crowd scenes she saw Sue, Alice, Grace and Miss Comstock. Then came the unforgettable scene, with Mrs. Murphy trying to make up her mind about getting aboard the plane, and the efforts of Miss Barrett and Gary Macklin to convince her that flying was safe. The entire group burst into hearty laughter and the director leaned back to speak to Miss Barrett.

"That's one of the best bits of natural comedy I've seen in years," Jane heard him say.

The picture swung into the air action which had been taken that morning, showing the departure of the tri-motor. Then Jane saw the black plane which she had piloted bearing down on the transport and she leaned forward in her chair. This was her part of the picture. Her mouth felt dry and her brow was hot as she watched the black plane dart toward the unsuspecting tri-motor.

Smoke and flame shot from the gun on her plane as she maneuvered to force the transport down. The camera range had been too long to get a glimpse of Jane's face and reveal that a girl was flying the plane, but her scarf, which had been wound around her head, trailed over the edge of the cockpit, whipping in the wind.

The director turned to an assistant. "Make a note that when we take the close-up shots in the studio there must be a scarf tied to the helmet of the pilot of the bandit plane."

Out of the clouds dropped Charlie Fischer in the army plane, roaring down upon Jane and the black ship. For the next few minutes Jane was almost breathless as she watched the maneuvers in the air. It was more thrilling than she had dared to imagine, and the cameras had caught every twist and turn of the plane. Then came the last dive by Charlie and the puff of smoke from the black biplane, which fell away in a twisting dive.

Jane, watching intently, saw flames lick out of the fuselage and seconds later she catapulted from the burning plane. The cameras, following the blazing ship, failed to show her chute open, but they kept the focus on the plane until it smashed into the ground, a flaming mass of wreckage.

The film sputtered out of the projector and the lights in the ballroom came on. Director James turned to Jane and Charlie.

"Congratulations on some exceptionally fine flying," he said. Then, aiming his question at Jane, he asked, "How would you like to come to Hollywood? I'm sure we could find some small roles for a girl who has your coolness and nerve."

Jane shook her head firmly.

"Once was enough. I've had all of the movie experience I want."

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

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Promotion for Jane

"WHAT'S this I hear about your turning down an offer to go to Hollywood?" demanded Sue when she reached Mrs. Murphy's the next morning after a night flight from Chicago.

"Did you really do that?" asked Grace, who had just arrived.

Jane smiled at their insistent questions.

"I did something like it," she confessed. "At least I recall that Mr. James mentioned something about going to Hollywood. He said he thought he could find work there for me in minor parts."

"And you turned that down?" gasped Sue.

"I certainly did. I'm no actress and I know it. Perhaps I could get by for a time on my ability to do aviation scenes, but that wouldn't last long and then I'd be looking for a job."

"But think of all the romance of going to Hollywood," Sue insisted.

"There wouldn't be much romance in going hungry," replied Jane. "I'm satisfied."

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"I think you're smart," put in Grace. "In Chicago the last trip, I heard that with business picking up, the line was going to put on more girls. That means Miss Comstock will need an assistant and I wouldn't be a bit surprised if you were appointed."

"I'd like that if I could keep on flying," said Jane, "but why do you think I have a chance?"

"Easy," smiled Grace. "For one thing, you're the best-known stewardess on the line. You've got a pleasing personality, all of the girls like you, and you certainly know your work. What more is needed?"

"Nothing," confessed Jane, "but your specifications don't fit me."

"Just wait and see," predicted Grace.

The motion picture company remained at Cheyenne the rest of the week, but the shots did not require extras although the girls often saw members of the company at the airport.

"There go my hopes of a film career," smiled Sue a little ruefully, as she watched the director, and the leading man and lady board a westbound plane Sunday morning. "Guess I wasn't cut out for an actress after all."

"But you're in the picture as an extra, like the rest of us," Alice consoled her.

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"We'll be lucky if they don't decide to eliminate the scenes we're in," said Grace cheerfully. "Of course I've written my folks all about the picture and they'll need a microscope to find me."

During the next week word came out from Chicago that six more girls were being recruited and would be sent to Cheyenne to take the training course. Soon after that, Miss Comstock summoned Jane to her office.

"You've heard the service is to be enlarged?" she asked and Jane nodded.

"It will mean considerable additional work in training these girls, while I am supervising the regular routine," she went on. "I have asked the company for an assistant and they have given me permission to select one of the girls in the ranks." She paused and Jane's heart leaped hopefully.

"I should like to have you help me," went on Miss Comstock and Jane felt her face flushing. "Your salary will be advanced to \$140 a month, but at present I would prefer that none of the other girls know about this salary arrangement. What do you think about it?"

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"I'm delighted," said Jane. "Of course I'll be glad to do anything that I can, but I don't want to go out of active flying altogether."

"You won't," promised the chief stewardess. "After these girls are trained, you'll go back on the *Coast to Coast*. I'm going to take you off regular assignment next Sunday for the girls will arrive early Monday morning. I shall plan to turn over most of the work in the classroom and the commissary to you."

When Jane told her companions of the good news, they were almost as pleased as she.

"I wonder who is going to get your place on the *Coast to Coast*?" mused Sue.

"You are, my dear. I saw Miss Comstock making out your transfer card just as I left."

"Then you'll have to watch your laurels," warned Sue, "for I've always wanted the *Coast to Coast* and I'll do my best to make such a fine record they'll decide to keep me on that run. Most of the celebrities pick the *Coast to Coast*. It's got the fastest and most convenient schedule."

"And the prettiest stewardesses," added Alice.

The new girls arrived at 9:30 o'clock Monday morning and Miss Comstock greeted them. They were all from Chicago hospitals, pretty, as well as efficient. Jane catalogued them mentally, looking for the possible troublemakers, for after the departure of Mattie Clark, the routine had been pleasant and they wanted to keep things that way. None of the new girls appeared to be inclined toward a "know-it-all" attitude, for which Jane was grateful.

Miss Comstock introduced her and turned over the routine of helping the girls find rooms. Jane knew Cheyenne so well by now, that she was in an excellent position to advise them, and immediately after lunch they plunged into the routine of classes, which was to prepare the newcomers for permanent positions in the service.

The girls were eager and alert and Jane found the class work pleasant. There was nothing of the nervousness and drudgery about it that she had feared.

When it came time for Miss Comstock to put the girls through the final examinations, they passed with flying colors, much to the credit of their young instructor.

Some weeks later big news sped along the line. New planes were being made in the company's plant at Tacoma. The old tri-motors which had braved the elements through winter and summer for four years were to be retired. The new ships would have two engines, of 600 horsepower each, and would speed along at 180 to 190 miles an hour, with a top speed of 210.

Jane asked Charlie Fischer about the planes, but Charlie professed to be in almost complete ignorance.

"We've got to go to school and learn how to handle them," he said. "I'm starting for Tacoma tomorrow night. I hear they're all metal with the latest do-dads the inventors can stick on them. Pretty soon we'll have to have an expert along to tell the pilot what to do."

All of the ace pilots of the line were called to Tacoma at various intervals to see the new planes. Charlie returned enthusiastic.

"They're the greatest ships ever built," he told Jane and Sue, the first time he saw them after his return. "Why we'll be able to outrun the lightning. They carry ten passengers, two pilots and a stewardess, although I don't know why they want the latter tagging along."

"Seems to me, Charlie," interrupted Sue, "that once or twice you've been mighty glad to have a stewardess on the ship."

"Must have been some other fellow," grinned Charlie. "Just wait until you see your pantry. The whole thing's done in the latest stainless metal. My instrument board looks like an inventor's paradise, but I guess I'll be able to figure out what all of the gauges and dials are for."

Interest in the new planes ran high and the first test flight across the entire system was set for October 2nd. According to the tentative schedule, they would clip at least eight hours off the coast to coast time.

Jane hoped that she would get the first assignment, for she was back in active service, but Grace drew the coveted slip, which gave her the right to care for the passengers on the initial flight of the new queen of the air.

They watched the progress of the swift craft from the moment it left the Golden Gate. As many of the Cheyenne crew as possible grouped about the radio in the communications office. With a favoring tail wind, the pilots west of Cheyenne kept the average at better than 190 miles an hour, including stops. It was fast enough to make them almost dizzy.

"I'll bet I never get a deep breath from here to Chicago," smiled Grace, as the silver monoplane settled down on the Cheyenne field.

The new craft was a thing of beauty, all metal, with one low wing. The propellers were set ahead of the wing and the wheels folded into the body when it was in flight. The fuselage with the pilots' cockpit and cabin for the passengers was like the body of a wasp, long and gracefully stream-lined to reduce wind resistance.

Jane and Sue accompanied Grace to the plane, anxious to see what the interior was like. It was not as roomy as the hulking tri-motors, but the seats were more comfortable and the pantry which the stewardess used was complete to the latest detail. The lights were soft and easily adjustable. Each passenger could control the ventilation of the individual windows. The interior was in black and brown, pleasingly harmonious.

There was a full passenger list, and Grace was busy checking over the list and making sure the necessary supplies were aboard. Then the sleek craft was away, Jane and Sue waving, as the monoplane rolled out of the hangar. Grace waved back as the night swallowed the plane.

For two hours Jane and Sue remained at the field, listening to reports of the speeding ship, which was setting a new record for air passenger travel in the United States.

"What fun it would be aloft tonight," said Sue a bit sadly, "and to know that you were setting a new speed record."

"We shouldn't begrudge Grace that trip," Jane replied. "We've had plenty of good things since we joined the service."

Before winter set in, the entire fleet of new planes was operating on the transcontinental line and the sturdy old tri-motors were wheeled into the hangars where dust soon stood thick on the valiant wings.

Winter flying was to be a new experience for the girls, and they were issued trimly tailored coats,

heavily lined. Fortunately the new planes were well insulated and there was a splendid electric heating system.

Extreme cold failed to slow up the schedules, the planes stopping only for snow, which swirled down from the peaks of the Rockies. Christmas eve found Jane roaring toward Chicago on the *Coast to Coast*, but she had planned for it and brought a tiny Christmas tree aboard at Cheyenne. There were only eight passengers aboard and she had shopped in the dime store for small gifts which would be appropriate for almost any group. She copied the names from the passenger list on gift tags and then carried the tree and her armful of presents to the front of the cabin, placing them in the two forward chairs.

The passengers were delighted, for Christmas eve away from home, even at 5,000 feet in the air and speeding along at 180 miles an hour, could be a little dreary.

Jane was gay, and her good humor cheered up her passengers. One by one she called their names and they opened their presents with evident curiosity and enthusiasm. There was a nice handkerchief for the elderly woman who was hurrying to Chicago, a tube of shaving-cream for the clean-shaven New York traveling man, and a picture book for the little girl of seven who was traveling with her mother.

Gifts for the other passengers were appropriate. Then Jane opened a basket of popcorn balls she had made at Mrs. Murphy's and a box of delicious home-made candy. All in all, it was as gay and pleasant as Christmas eve could be away from home.

With the turn into the new year, winter descended on the Rockies in all its fury. Blizzards raged for days and the passenger schedules were practically abandoned. Whenever the storm let up, the planes, with only the pilots and the mail aboard, dashed across the continental divide, but for more than a week, Jane and her companions remained snowbound at Cheyenne.

Then reports of sickness and misery in isolated mountain towns began to creep in. Doctors were running short of supplies in villages where the flu had appeared. Unless the blizzards abated soon, there would be serious trouble.

Jane was scheduled to go out on the *Coast to Coast*, coming through from the west for the first time in three days. The plane was hours late and she reported at the field just as the early January night closed down. Miss Comstock was in the operations room. So was Slim Bollei, one of the veteran pilots.

"You might as well go home, Jane," said Miss Comstock. "I phoned, but you had started for the field. It's snowing west of here and the *Coast to Coast* won't get out of Rock Springs before dawn."

Slim Bollei, who had been looking out the window, shrugged his shoulders.

"You're optimistic," he grinned. "It's snowing thicker and harder than at any time this winter."

The weather had turned bitter cold with the wind lashing around the big hangar in a chilling overture.

When Jane started back to the city, she found that the field car which had brought her was stalled. She telephoned for a taxi, but was informed that no machine would be available for at least an hour, so she made herself comfortable in the waiting room which adjoined the office of the night operations chief.

Sue called to learn if they were going to try to get the *Coast to Coast* through and Jane informed her that she was marooned at the field.

"Maybe I'll be home by morning," she concluded hopefully.

It was half an hour later when the phone on the night chief's desk rang. Jane was near enough to catch most of the conversation for the man on the other end of the wire was shouting.

"Sure, I know there's trouble," the night chief said, "but we aren't moving any of our mail planes. It would be suicide to attempt to fly tonight."

"What's the matter?" asked Slim Bollei.

"It's the governor at Laramie," replied the night chief. "There's been a bad outbreak of diphtheria at Lytton, a village up against the Montana line in the country that God forgot. The doctor there is out of serum and a couple of the youngsters are desperately ill. There's plenty of serum here and the governor wants us to get a plane through."

The night chief turned back to the telephone.

"But I tell you, governor, it can't be done. You can't see a hundred feet through this storm and the temperature's down to five below zero and dropping fast."

"Wait a minute," cut in Slim Bollei. "Find out what's the least possible time the serum can be used and do any good."

"They've got to have it before tomorrow night," said the night chief when the governor's reply came to him. "Everything else that's tried to get to Lytton has failed. It's a plane or nothing at all."

"Tell him we'll get through some way," snapped Slim. "We can't let kids die without trying."

"But we can't afford to wreck one of the new ships," protested the night chief.

"I'll take one of the old tri-motors. Tell the governor we'll get through."

The flyer turned and walked toward the radio room.

"Get Chicago," he snapped, "and have them put the operations chief on the wire."

Less than a minute later Slim Bollei poured his story over the short wave radio and into the ears of the operations chief at Chicago. He wanted one of the old tri-motors and he got it with the chief's blessing. After that he left on the run to route out a ground crew to get the plane ready for the flight.

Miss Comstock, who had listened gravely, turned to Jane.

"Slim can't go alone," she said. "A nurse will be needed there. I'm going. You take charge here."

"But you're needed more than I am," protested Jane. "Let me go."

Miss Comstock shook her head.

"There's too much danger. Slim and I will go."

"One nurse won't be enough," insisted Jane. "Think what two of us could do, think what it will mean to those youngsters."

Miss Comstock smiled. "You win, Jane. We'll both go."

Outside the shadowy bulk of one of the tri-motors was being wheeled into the hangar. As soon as there was the slightest break in the storm, they would be away on their errand of mercy.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

White Madness

MISS COMSTOCK, with Jane at her heels, hurried into the commissary. Supplies must be made ready and food placed aboard the tri-motor. Out in the hangar a crew worked desperately over the big plane, tuning up the motors and checking in the gas and oil.

Slim Bollei, in a sheepskin, appeared to be everywhere, orders cracking from his thin lips.

In half an hour Jane and the chief stewardess had two large hampers ready, one filled with medical supplies and bandages and the other containing food. There was more than a chance that they would be forced down and food might become very much of a necessity.

A car struggled through the storm, bringing the serum out from the city, and Slim Bollei returned to the operations office.

"Everything's ready," he informed the night chief. "How's the weather?"

"Not so good. It's still snowing hard in the mountains and the mercury is eight below now, but it won't drop much further."

"We'll wait another hour and see if we can get away then," decided Slim.

Jane and Miss Comstock sat down in the waiting room, drawing their coats around them, for at eight below zero the heating plant was functioning none too well.

The pilot came in with two fleece-lined coats.

"Better put these on," he advised. "There won't be much heat in the cabin and I don't want to drop down at Lytton with a couple of frozen stewardesses on my hands."

They accepted the coats gratefully and waited for the next reports on the storm.

It was dismal waiting there, with the wind howling around the hangar and the snow driving against the windows. At midnight it was still storming hard and they delayed their departure another hour. But the storm held on and the sky was greying before Slim Bollei decided to make the attempt.

The motors of the huge biplane roared lustily in spite of the cold, the hampers and the precious serum were placed aboard, parachutes were adjusted under their coats and the trio, the chief pilot and the two stewardesses, struggled out to the plane.

The cabin was cold and it would take some time before heat from the motors warmed it. Miss Comstock and Jane kept moving about and looking out at the storm. It was still snowing, but the fall was not as thick as it had been during the night. Reports from the west indicated the end of the blizzard was near.

Slim Bollei came back into the main cabin.

"All ready?" he asked.

Miss Comstock nodded.

"See that your chute packs don't foul. If I signal three times on your light you'll know we're in trouble. Four sharp flashes will mean you've got to unload."

"What about yourself?" demanded the chief stewardess.

"I'll get along all right," said Slim. "You get out of the cabin if I signal for a jump."

The radio operator ran out with the final weather report and the tractor rolled the big doors away. The biplane quivered as the full strength of the wind whistled through the hangar. Then the ship rolled ahead, flame spitting from the three long exhausts. The runways had been swept clear of snow by the wind and Slim Bollei opened the throttle. In no time at all they were in the air, turning north for the 160-mile flight to Lytton.

With a quartering wind from the Rockies, the plane pitched badly and Miss Comstock and Jane

fastened their safety belts. Even then they were thrown around sharply.

The cabin warmed only slightly, for the older ships had been poorly insulated. Jane beat her hand together to keep the circulation flowing. The air speed indicator hovered around the 90 mile an hour mark. At that rate it would take them nearly two hours to make the trip. The ground disappeared in the drifting haze of snow and Jane knew the pilot was flying blind. She was glad that Slim was rated one of the best flyers on the system, for he would have need of every ounce of the skill in his capable hands.

For an hour they bored through the storm. Then the middle motor started to sputter and the light flashed three times. They unfastened their safety belts and stood in the aisle.

"I'm going ahead to see what's wrong," said Miss Comstock.

She hurried forward and Jane listened intently to the uneven firing of the motor.

When Miss Comstock returned Jane could see that the chief stewardess was worried.

"Slim says the motor seems to be freezing up. It's only a question of time before it will quit altogether."

"Does that mean we'll have to try for a landing?" asked Jane.

"He thinks he can keep going on the wing motors. He's going to try but he said to be ready to jump if one of them stops."

Standing in the aisle of the cold cabin, with the wind rocking the plane and the snow hiding the ground, Jane felt a chilling of her heart that was caused by something beside the sub-zero winter. The serum they carried was so desperately needed in the isolated town. Lives of children depended on the success of their trip. They must win through; the wing motors must continue their rhythmic beating.

Five minutes later the center motor quit firing altogether and the wing engines growled as the added burden came upon them. The wind seemed to have slackened slightly, but the mantle of snow still enfolded them in its fleecy whiteness.

The minutes crept on endlessly. They must be nearing the village if the pilot's calculations were correct and the wind had not drifted them too far off their course.

Jane went to one of the windows and peered down. There was only the snow and the wind swirling it below them. Then they started down, feeling their way through the blizzard.

It was tricky work, a task that required the hand of a master pilot, for at any moment they might smash down out of the sky in a crash landing.

With nerves taut, the stewardesses watched the needle of the altimeter. The light flashed three times. It was the warning of trouble ahead.

The plane lurched upward and a resounding shock rocked the big craft. Jane caught a glimpse of something black and rugged underneath the left wing. Miss Comstock cried out in alarm.

"The landing gear's smashed," she shouted.

"We must have struck a rock ridge," replied Jane.

They zoomed upward and the light flashed four times. That was the signal to jump. Jane looked at Miss Comstock. The chief stewardess shook her head.

"I'm not jumping," she cried.

"Neither am I," replied Jane, hurrying ahead to the pilot's cockpit.

Slim Bollei was clinging to his controls.

"Jump," he yelled. "We've washed out the landing gear."

"We're not jumping," Jane told him firmly. "If the storm will only clear you may be able to skid in for a landing on the snow."

"That's what I'm hoping for, but I can't stay up here forever."

Jane remained in the forward cockpit while the pilot sought a break in the storm which would enable him to get his bearings and land. For fifteen minutes they cruised in great circles.

"The storm's breaking away," cried Jane.

Slim nodded hopefully. It did seem as though the snow was thinning. For another fifteen minutes the motors droned steadily and at the end of that time, the snow lessened to a fine cloud. Objects on the ground came into view. "There's a village!" cried Jane, pointing to the right.

Slim Bollei swung the tri-motor in a gentle circle, for he lacked the power for steep climbs and banks. As the plane roared over the snowbound town, men appeared, waving their arms frantically.

"I guess that's the place," grinned Slim. "It's the only town within thirty miles. Now we've got to find a place where we can do a little skiing."

Beyond the village he found a field nearly half a mile long. It was sheltered in a valley with what wind still remained sweeping the length of the field.

"Get back in the cabin and hang on," shouted the pilot. "I'm going to cut the motors and see what kind of a snowbird this is."

"We're starting down," Jane told Miss Comstock when she returned to the cabin.

The plane tilted forward and the motors eased down to a whisper. The snow-covered ground leaped toward them, then seemed to pause in its mad rush as the biplane leveled out there was a

sharp bump, the sound of tearing wood and fabric, and a series of jolting shocks before the tri-motor came to rest with its nose in a deep drift.

Slim Bollei staggered back into the cabin, a deep gash over his right eye.

"Get the serum out of here. The gas tanks have given way and the fuel may explode any second."

Jane clutched the package of precious serum and threw open the cabin door. Miss Comstock came after her, tugging the hamper loaded with medical supplies while Slim carried the hamper of food. The snow was eighteen inches deep, and they floundered through it, gasping for breath. They stopped a hundred yards away from the big plane and Slim eyed it ruefully.

"That's a good job for a salvage crew," he said, "but I guess the line won't kick a whole lot. That ship paid for itself many a time."

Strangely enough, even with the fuel flowing out of the split gas tanks, the big craft did not take fire and the flyer and the stewardesses turned to greet the villagers, who were hurrying to meet them.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

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Dangerous Passengers

MISS COMSTOCK and Jane remained in the village two days, ministering to the needs of the stricken children and playing first assistant to the over-worked village doctor. Then another Federated Airways plane, one of the old tri-motors, dropped down on them and whisked them back to Cheyenne. From the governor came a personal note of appreciation for what they had done.

After that the winter tapered off. The storms were less severe and the flying schedules were maintained, almost without interruption. Jane and her companions found their routine duties pleasant, for no two days were alike. The weather varied, passengers changed and there was always the element of the unexpected injecting itself into their work.

Spring arrived in a shroud of rain and fog, but with the improvement of the radio beacons, the planes were seldom delayed. The end of their first year as stewardesses neared and it was late in May when Jane, aboard the eastbound *Coast to Coast Limited*, swooped down on the field at Omaha.

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To her surprise, the first passenger to step aboard was Miss Hardy, the supervisor of nurses at Good Samaritan. Jane was genuinely glad to see her, for it had been through Miss Hardy she had received the opportunity to join the stewardess service.

The *Coast to Coast* was five minutes ahead of schedule and Jane and the supervisor had a chance to visit. Miss Hardy explained that she was going to Chicago for a part of her vacation and had finally managed to make up her mind to fly.

"Perhaps I'd better say my brother convinced me," she smiled. "I've been in Omaha a week. He's a regular aviation fan and comes out to the field two or three times a week to watch the night planes come in. After he dragged me along, I began to feel that I wasn't afraid to make the trip."

"You'll enjoy every minute of it," Jane assured her, "and I'm especially delighted that your first trip is with me. Slim Bollei, one of the most skilled pilots on the line, is at the controls today. That means you'll have a smooth, comfortable trip. Once in a while a cross wind gives the passengers a little trouble, but travel is unusually comfortable today."

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"You've certainly attracted national attention," said Miss Hardy. "I've read of your exploits on several occasions, once when the bandit plane tried to abduct that wealthy New York woman and again when you flew to some small town with a supply of much needed serum."

"It wasn't done for publicity's sake," said Jane, "but the public and the newspapers aren't used to stewardesses on planes and when they do anything out of the ordinary, that's news."

Departure time came and Jane saw that Miss Hardy was settled comfortably, in a chair next to a window, and halfway back on the right side of the plane. Miss Hardy looked older and her eyes appeared tired. She must have had a hard year with the new classes of girls at Good Samaritan, thought Jane.

They roared off the field, flashed over the muddy Missouri, and then struck out across the rolling farm land of western Iowa. The country was fresh, with the green of the pastures contrasting sharply against the black of the corn fields, in which the first spears of the new stalks were starting to peep through the top soil.

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Several times on their swift flight over Iowa, Jane stopped to talk with Miss Hardy, who appeared to be enjoying the trip immensely. It was a non-stop hop from Omaha that afternoon and almost before they knew it, the graceful craft was settling down on the Chicago field.

"I've enjoyed the trip so much I'm going in and make my reservation for the return flight," said Miss Hardy, as Jane helped her out of the plane.

"Then I'll look forward to having you booked on my plane," said Jane. "Thanks so much for your recommendation last year. It helped a great deal in getting jobs for Sue and me."

Sue arrived the next morning on the slower *Night Flyer* and found that she was booked out that night for the return to Cheyenne. Business eastbound had been heavier than the westbound

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traffic, and as a result there were more girls at the Chicago airport than needed. Jane was assigned to fly back with Sue, resuming her regular schedule from Cheyenne on the *Coast to Coast* on the second day.

When Sue got her passenger list, there were only four, all of them going through to the coast.

"Looks like an easy trip," she told Jane.

Two traveling men were the first aboard and they were followed a few minutes later by a woman of about forty, who was accompanied by a curly-haired boy of seven or eight.

Sue nudged Jane sharply.

"Those people are down as Mrs. Henry Smith and son, but that boy looks like Jackie Condon, the famous movie star."

Jane looked again. The boy certainly resembled the lad she had seen on the screen so many times in the last two years. His salary was reported to be fabulous, his weekly pay so large the figures dazzled.

Two minutes before starting time, there was a jam at the gate and two men, well dressed, with dark, smooth faces, hurried forward, waving tickets.

"You're just in time," said Sue, taking their tickets and assigning them to forward chairs.

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They nodded and entered the plane. Jane standing beside the landing stage saw something that alarmed her, as the second man passed. His coat slipped open just as he bent to go through the door and she caught a glimpse of a gun in a shoulder holster. Guns were not unfamiliar sights to the stewardesses, for each pilot went armed, but a gun on a passenger was a different thing.

"What were the names of those men?" she asked Sue.

"Anton Mellotti and Chris Bardo. Why?"

"The last man, Bardo, is carrying a gun."

"We'd better tell Charlie Fischer. He's flying us west tonight."

They hurried ahead and caught Charlie just before he climbed into the cockpit.

"So we've got a gunman aboard," said Charlie, when the girls informed him of what Jane had seen. "We'll see about that."

Charlie entered the cabin and tapped Bardo on the shoulder. Jane couldn't hear what he said, but when Charlie returned he didn't have the gun.

"He flashed a deputy sheriff's badge and there wasn't anything I could do," explained Charlie. "You kids have let your imaginations run away with you. It's time to go."

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Sue and Jane went aboard and Jane gave her friend a hand in strapping the passengers into their seats. Then they sped westward as though racing to overtake the sun.

Jane picked up a movie magazine from the pile aboard the ship. On the fifth page was a large picture of Jackie Condon. Jane looked at it sharply and then at the boy passenger. There was no mistake. Sue was right.

She looked ahead at the passengers who had arrived just before their departure. Mellotti was heavy set, with black hair and beetling brows. Bardo was taller, lithe and quick of action. His eyes, so dark a brown they were almost black, shone with animation and when he looked at Jane she felt a queer chill creep along her spine. There was something sinister in his manner.

The trip westward was uneventful and they left Omaha on time. It was near Kearney when Jane, who had been reading an Omaha paper, looked up to see one of the passengers standing in the aisle. She started ahead to tell him that it was against orders when she saw something glinting dully in his right hand. Other passengers were raising their hands.

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It was Mellotti, gun in hand. Bardo, also carrying a weapon, was hurrying toward the pilot's cockpit and Jane knew that the suspicion which had gripped her in Chicago was a reality. They were abducting the young film star.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

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On Desperate Wings

THAT night was timeless for Jane. Always she would remember the stark horror of it as the plane roared through the darkness with the gunmen in control.

Mellotti remained in the cabin, guarding the passengers. Up ahead Bardo forced Charlie Fischer to swing the plane off the transcontinental airway. They were flying north. That was all Jane knew.

The hours slipped away with aching slowness. Jackie Condon and his mother remained calm and the traveling men started a card game. When the sky finally lightened, they were over a great, flat expanse of country with a chain of mountains barely visible in the west. Jane guessed they must be somewhere in Canada, just east of the Rockies.

Fifteen minutes later the plane landed and taxied across a weedy field to a lonely road that wound across the prairie. A truck, laden with barrels of gasoline, was waiting. Jane and the

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others were not permitted to leave the cabin while Bardo forced Charlie Fischer and his co-pilot to help fill the wing tanks. When that task was done, Bardo entered the cabin.

"Get out," he told the traveling men.

"Hey, you can't maroon us like this" the older one protested.

"Get out," repeated Bardo, his black eyes snapping, and they hastened to obey.

Jane and Sue started to follow the traveling men, but Bardo's soft voice stopped them.

"Stay here. We want you to take care of this youngster. His mother gets off here."

Mrs. Condon's protests were to no avail and she was shoved roughly from the plane.

Bardo disappeared up ahead and presently the motors started. Mellotti locked the door and the plane swung around for a dash across the field. Jane's face blanched as she saw Charlie Fischer and the co-pilot standing on the ground. Bardo was flying the plane. She and Sue and Jackie Condon were alone with the kidnapers.

Bardo appeared to be a flyer of above average ability for he handled the large plane easily. They sped westward, climbing over what Jane was sure were the snow-crested Canadian Rockies. Then they dropped down the other side, and a great expanse of water loomed ahead.

The plane turned northward, skimming over the coast line. For fully an hour they went on and then Bardo brought the transport down on a long shingle of sand. It was an easy landing and Jane admired his skill.

Moored nearby was a seaplane and in a clump of trees a hundred yards from the beach were two cabins. It was an ideal hideaway and Jane knew that unless a miracle happened, there was little chance of searching parties finding them.

The girls and Jackie were ordered to the larger of the two cabins.

"You take care of the boy. It'll be just too bad if anything happens to him," said Bardo darkly. They had been joined by a third man, evidently the pilot of the seaplane. Like the gunmen who had captured the transport, he was dark and swarthy.

Jackie was a delightful youngster and Jane and Sue admired his calm courage.

"Of course I was scared," he said, "but I didn't dare let those fellows know. I guess we'll just have to wait until someone comes along and rescues us."

He was brave about it, but Jane knew that no one was going to come along and rescue them. They would be held until Jackie's mother paid the ransom demand or---. But Jane couldn't think of the other possibility and she set her mind to working on some plan of escape.

There was plenty of food in the cabin and the girls and Jackie were given the freedom of the beach. That first night Jane couldn't sleep much, turning and tossing as she tried to evolve some plan of escape. To attempt to flee in the transport was impossible for she didn't know the first thing about piloting one of the big ships. But the seaplane. That was different. Of course she had never flown one, but it looked like a common biplane only instead of wheels it had pontoons. Certainly the operation must be the same.

Jane was up with the dawn. The seaplane was still moored a few yards from the beach, the canvas cover shielding the motor.

Throughout the day she waited, hoping the men might leave the beach for a few minutes, but her hopes were unavailing. Night came and they were locked in the cabin.

When she was sure that no one was within earshot, Jane told Sue and Jackie what she hoped to do.

"If I can get out to the seaplane and get it started I'm sure we'll be able to get away," she whispered, "but first we've got to get out of the cabin."

They tried the windows, one by one, and the third appeared loose. Working quietly with a kitchen knife they finally slid the window aside.

The darkness was heavy and Jane slipped through the window first. Jackie was second and finally Sue. The lights were out in the other cabin and they moved swiftly down to the beach. Little waves lapped the sand.

"Do you think the water's deep?" Sue whispered.

"I've got to chance it," replied Jane. "The rowboat's padlocked. Here goes."

She plunged in boldly. The bottom fell away gradually and the water was only a little more than waist deep when she reached the pontoons and pulled herself aboard.

Turning, she called softly to Sue.

"Wade out with Jackie. It isn't deep."

A minute later Sue, holding Jackie in her arms, was beside the seaplane and Jane helped them aboard.

"Get into the forward cockpit," she said. "I'm going to cast off the mooring line."

Once free of the line which held it, the seaplane started drifting along parallel with the beach. Jane scrambled back to the pilot's cockpit after pulling the canvas off the motor. Guardedly she turned on the light over the dash. Some of the instruments were unfamiliar, but it was a standard control plane. Her heart leaped for she knew she would be able to fly it.

"What are we going to do now?" asked Sue.

"Wait for dawn."

"But that will be hours."

"We can't risk a takeoff in the night," replied Jane. "Make yourselves as comfortable as you can. At least we're on our way."

Through the night they drifted, the current keeping them just offshore. With the first light, Jane saw they were at least three miles from the cabins. In a few more minutes their absence would be discovered. 243

"Wake up," she told Sue and Jackie. "We're starting home."

Jane primed the motor and snapped the starter switch. The motor failed to catch and she primed it again, this time successfully. The trim plane shook as the propeller spun in the early morning light.

In order to take off into the wind, Jane was forced to turn the plane toward the cabin. Then she opened the throttle, gritted her teeth and held the stick hard. The seaplane leaped forward, skimming the tiny waves. It shook itself free and Jane knew they were a step nearer home.

They passed close enough to the beach to see Bardo and his two fellow kidnapers run from the cabin. Then Jane banked the seaplane and sped southward. Where they were headed she could only guess, but they were one their way.

Sue yelled and pointed back. Jane turned. The kidnapers were getting the transport ready for flight, but it would be at least another five minutes before they could get into the air.

They rounded a rocky headland and Jane dropped the seaplane low, barely skimming the water. They would be harder to follow down low. 244

The top speed of the seaplane was 110 an hour and Jane knew that the transport, capable of almost double that, would soon be upon them. They must find shelter soon.

Fifteen minutes later the transport, coming low and fast, roared into view. Not more than five minutes was between the planes now and still no village had been sighted. The distance between the planes was vanishing like magic when Jane caught sight of a trail of smoke out to sea. It was a desperate chance but worth it.

Banking the seaplane sharply, she sped away from the coast with the transport diving at an angle to cut her off. It was going to be close, but Jane pushed the throttle wide open and somehow the little craft found an added ten miles an hour.

The outlines of the ship appeared. It was low and rakish and painted grey, but whatever it was, it looked like a haven. A cry from Sue drew Jane's attention from the pursuing plane.

"The coast guard!" shouted Sue and Jane's heart leaped. She dove for the ship, waving frantically. Above her the transport circled, afraid to follow. 245

Jane, too elated to worry about the hazard of landing the seaplane, made an almost perfect descent and taxied alongside the coast guard vessel, which had been brought to a halt. Officers and men lined the rail for it was seldom that two girls and a boy appeared in a seaplane.

Jane stood up and cupped her hands.

"Can you take us aboard? We've got Jackie Condon, the missing film star."

"You've what?" roared the amazed commander.

Jane repeated her message and a boat was dropped by the destroyer. It came alongside the seaplane handsomely, took the mooring line, and towed the plane up to the destroyer. Jane went aboard and told her story to the astounded commander. The radio cracked out the good news that a whole nation had been waiting to hear. Then followed directions intended to bring the apprehension of Bardo and his band of kidnapers.

The destroyer, en route to Alaska, turned about and with funnels trailing heavy ribbons of oily smoke, sped toward Seattle under forced draft. Jane and Sue looked over the rail at the mountainous coast line of British Columbia. In less than a week, they would be back on the transcontinental, settling into their routine work. 246

"Know what day this is?" asked Jane.

"Our first anniversary," smiled Sue. "We joined the airways just a year ago. Think how much has happened?"

"Just think how much more can happen in the coming year," replied Jane, wondering vaguely what new adventure might be ahead of them.

THE END

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK JANE, STEWARDESS OF THE AIR LINES ***

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