

# THE SKY RAIDER

## WHAT HAS HAPPENED SO FAR:

DICK TRENT, young aviator, has just joined the Air Mail Service. On his first trip he carries an important letter from the owner of the field, Old Man Rand, to his son, Tommy. Through a blinding snowstorm he negotiates a narrow pass in the Rockies, locates young Rand drinking in a gambling resort and flies him back to his own field to save him from dismissal. The Superintendent, Carmichael, warns Dick he has violated regulations, but Old Man Rand thanks him for the service.

Dick falls in love with lovely Mary Rand and saves her from fatality by flying to her disabled plane in mid-air.

Dick tells Lawson, a fellow aviator, of his invention for a skywriting signal code. Lawson informs Dick he is leaving the service to be married. On his last trip Lawson goes missing. Dick finds his plane burned and Lawson murdered. A package containing \$250,000 is missing. Lawson's skull is crushed in and after a careful search Dick finds a heavy Luger pistol.

Returning to Rand field he meets Carmichael and Mary Rand. Thoroughly shaken by the discovery, Mary identifies the pistol as one her father carries! She asks Dick to drive home with her. On the way he tells her of his love and is happy when she says she loves him. A moment later there is silence between them when she says her father has been away all morning . . .

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NOT SOON was Dick to forget that day. Of all the days in his life it was to stand out as sharp and strange.

They had reached the house, the big Rand house that stood on the hill overlooking the swarming city. A thought made Dick's pulses beat rapidly.

Once in that shadowy hallway, he would seize Mary, hold her fast in his arms, and know rapture with the first and only kiss that had ever mattered.

But the plan was destroyed by circumstances unforeseen. There were certainly shadows in the hallway, and he had entered with her. But, as he put his fingers on her arm, a sudden shyness came over her, and she tore herself free and ran up to the landing, turning to look down on him with shining, happy embarrassed eyes.

"Dick! Go to the library and read a book. I'll be down quite soon."

But there was truth in neither statement. Dick read no book, and it seemed to his impatient mind that it was hours before she appeared.

Now and then as he wandered back and forth, his hands in his pockets, his brows drawn down in concentration, there flashed across his present happiness the thought of poor Lawson and the problem of Lawson's death.

Then he heard a step. He went to the doorway. She had reached the hall, and he noticed she had changed her frock, done something mysterious to her hair, was looking her most beautiful—for him!

But before he could cross to her, the faint sound of the doorbell

echoed through the house. A servant came through the hallway and opened the door. From the threshold a hard, quiet voice said unhesitatingly:

“Want to see Mr. Rand.”

“He’s not home.”

“I’ll wait.”

A man stepped inside with another one behind him. It took no detective to see that they were detectives.

Mary Rand walked across the hall.

“My father’s not at home, didn’t you hear?”

“When do you expect him home?”

“I don’t know.”

“Where is he?”

“I don’t know.”

“When did he leave the house?”

“You can ask my father yourself. I’ll let you know as soon as he arrives.”

The man in charge assumed an almost paternal air. “My dear young lady, were not calling for tea. We’re investigating a murder. And we’re not going. We’re staying.”

Mary turned to Dick with an exquisitely feminine gesture that transferred the entire problem to his shoulders.

“See here,” he began, but before he could finish the door again had opened and Old Man Rand strode into the hallway.

He looked upon the tableau with puzzled eyes. His face seemed drawn. Dick thought, as if he were deathly tired.

“Mr Rand?” It was the detective in charge who spoke.

“That’s my name. What do you wish?”

“I’m Police Inspector Grahame. I’m covering the case of this man, Lawson, in your employ, who was murdered this morning some thirty miles from your field.”

“Murdered!”

“That’s right”

“But he couldn’t be!”

“He was murdered, and the two hundred and fifty thousand dollars he was carrying have disappeared.”

Rand put out his hand in a fumbling gesture. Almost in that moment he looked old and helpless. He glanced around, saw Dick and then his eyes rested on his daughter.

“Mary, what’s this?”

“It’s true, father. He was killed. Mr. Trent here found him.”

The detective looked up, and his grey eyes surveyed Dick.

“Your name, Trent?”

“That’s right.”

“Good. We’ll need you.”

“But what is this?” Rand demanded “I don’t understand. Lawson was murdered? By whom?”

“That’s what we’re here to find out.” The detective’s voice had a sudden rasp to it.

“But I can tell you nothing,” Old Man Rand declared. “I didn’t even know this horrible thing had happened.”

The detective took a step forward. He put his hand into his pocket and drew out a black object.

“Ever seen this before?”

“Why—why that’s my Luger pistol.”

“It’s the pistol that clubbed Lawson to death,” said the detective quietly.

The veteran flyer looked around at the faces that were turned towards him.

“But,” he faltered, “surely you can’t think that I—but of course, you don’t. I ought to explain that I gave that pistol myself to Lawson early this morning. Just before he took off. He had all that money with him. It occurred to me it would be a good thing if he were armed. Our pilots usually aren’t.”

Mary gave a little laugh of excitement.

“Do you see now?” she asked the detective “Do you see now how it happened? Now will you go away?”

But he did not answer her. Bluntly, he continued to question her father.

"You gave this pistol to him yourself, did you?"

"Yes."

"Anyone see you?"

"Why, I don't remember. There might have been. I don't think so," Old Man Rand suddenly flared up. "Before you go on, just what does all this questioning mean? Are you accusing me of anything as ridiculous—"

"We're accusing you of nothing. We're trying to find out the facts. We want all the help we can get. If you don't want to help, we'll make a record of that too."

"Of course, I want to help, only I suggest that you alter your tone, or else tell me pointblank that I'm under suspicion."

"I'll tell you this," said the Inspector "Everybody is under suspicion. All we know is that this is your gun by your own admission, and further that this is the gun that killed him."

He cast one final glance around the room "This will do for the present. We'll get in touch with you later. Come on, Marks!" The man with him threw the door open. For an instant the Inspector paused.

"I might tell you I'm leaving my assistant outside," he said "We want to know everyone who comes in here today."

"And everyone who leaves?" said Mary with sudden sarcasm.

"No one is going to leave!" returned Inspector Grahame. And clapping his hat on his head, he slammed the door behind him.

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AS THE DAY DEEPENED it seemed to Dick it possessed a kind of nightmare quality.

His nerves were rubbed raw from all that had happened. In addition, he had gone without sleep, though he was scarcely conscious of this.

In the confusion of his thoughts, he could pick no course clearly. He had told Mary Rand he loved her, she had admitted she cared for him, too. But now it seemed as if they were separated by the strange calamity that had come upon the airport, and its many consequences.

Through the windows they saw the guard at the gate, a guard that told them they were in reality prisoners. Old Man Rand had retired to his study. He was busy phoning. There was enough on his mind that day.

As for Dick, he kept as close to Mary as could be, but she was too worried, too upset, for him to plead his case any further at the moment.

And indeed Dick himself had little wish to do so. His one immediate desire was to see Old Man Rand cleared promptly of any suspicion in the matter of Lawson's death.

Guarded though they were, it seemed to him that all day long there came a steady stream of interruptions.

In the late forenoon, young Humphries and his pal, O'Connor, came to the house, asking in rather hushed, solemn voices if there was anything they could do. Good pilots both, they were out of their depth now, facing a problem for which they had neither understanding nor equipment. But their sympathy was evident, as was their indignation

that Old Man Rand should be a suspect. Mary thanked them, and sent them away. Rand himself remained locked in his library.

At one o'clock, luncheon was served—a ghastly meal. Mary, Dick and Rand, himself, made futile attempts at conversation, while an elderly butler served them with the air of a disapproving executioner.

Through the French windows, they could see a little knot of men gathered, talking to the guard. Newspaper men in all probability! The story would be in the evening papers. It was after an unending luncheon had finally ended that the one cheering interruption came.

This was in the form of a visit from Carmichael, with him was a tall, grey-haired man, whom Rand almost sprang forward to greet.

“Jack Kiely! I’m glad you’re here. I’ve been cross-examined by the local police, I was hoping some postal inspector would turn up who knew me.”

Kiely laughed easily and naturally. “I know. It’s all a mistake,” he said “Captain Carmichael here has been telling me about it. Nothing to get riled up about! We’ll have it clear soon enough. Why, I’d as soon think of accusing myself, Mr. Rand, as accusing you!”

His air of quiet confidence was reassuring, as was the friendliness of Carmichael’s voice when he added:

“All the men are with you, sir. I had all I could do to keep them from rows with the police and the reporters.”

Mary, from the corner of the room, gave a little tremulous smile. Dick leaned forward, listening intently. They were with friends now at any rate.

“Only a few things I want to ask,” the Postal Inspector went on in his rather low, matter-of-fact voice. “As soon as you make them clear. I’ll see you’re not bothered any more.”

“I’m not much worried about myself,” Rand confessed “It’s the loss of that money to the Federal Reserve, and most of all, that poor fellow.”

Inspector Kiely’s eyes roved around the room. They had a sleepy look, but under the lowered lids the glance they shot was penetrating and retentive.

“Well, sir, all I want is just to establish the usual alibi. That ought to be easy. Lawson took off this morning after daybreak, I understand.”

“You saw him start, didn’t you?”

“No. I left a little time before.”

“Oh, yes. Of course. You returned to the house.”

Old Man Rand was suddenly silent.

The Inspector repeated his question in the same gentle voice of inquiry.

“As a matter of fact, I didn’t.” Rand said suddenly. “It just happens I’d rather not say where I went.”

There was a pause. “Are you sure you don’t want to?” Kiely asked at last. “It would probably clear up everything—without any further annoyance.”

“I’d rather not.” Old Man Rand’s lips were tight.

“Just as you say. And now I’d like a word with you alone.”

“As many as you like, Jack. I’m sorry I can’t tell you where I was. But I know you know I had nothing to do with the crime.”

“Of course. It would be impossible for me to think you had.”

Rand flung open the library door, and they stepped inside.

Mary rose suddenly to her feet with a nervous gesture. “I want some air. I feel as if I were suffocated, staying inside like this. They can’t keep me out of my own garden, can they?”

“I won’t let them,” Dick assured her, and he followed her through the rear of the house. But she sank down dejectedly on a stone bench, and though he tried to take her mind off her worries by saying whatever came into his head, she scarcely seemed to hear.

When at length they returned to the house, both Postal Inspector Kiely and Captain Carmichael had gone.

The day dragged on slowly. The suspense, this waiting for an incertitude, for a possibility of further news, was wearying. Though Mary’s face looked frightened and unhappy, though she scarcely spoke, she seemed to wish to be near Dick, as she took some comfort from his presence.

It was towards four in the afternoon when they had another visitor

whose loyalty at least they could count upon. This was Tom Rand, arriving as if he had raced to get there. His eyes looked strained, his hair was disheveled, his tie was twisted to one side of his wrinkled collar.

"I've heard about everything. It's disgraceful!" he burst out. "Where's father?"

Mr. Rand had heard his son's voice. His own greeting was a stern one.

"I want to talk with you, Tom, and right now."

For fifteen minutes father and son were closeted together. Dick could hear their voices now and then. Tom's raised suddenly to a high pitch, Old Man Rand's low, gruff tones. Then silence. Then the voices again.

When Tom returned, the excitement seemed to have left him. He looked sullen and furious. He made no answer to Mary when she called to him. He disappeared upstairs.

There seemed to pass, with the unendurable slowness of agony, another hour. Twilight had fallen and the big house was full of shadows. Dick had sat without moving, without speaking, while the grandfather clock ticked out the eternal minutes with mocking precision.

The bell rang, and with such suddenness that he jumped. Mary had risen, too. Old Man Rand had come into the hallway. The door opened and a little group of figures entered, figures that had somehow an ominous suggestion.

The Police Inspector with two of his men and Postal Inspector Kiely stood there.

"Come here, Rand!" said the Police Inspector. His voice had the contemptuous sharpness of an order.