



FLYING MAD

by DONALD E. KEYHOE

They called him "The Sheik" until he took the air and danced his crazy crate. And then they dubbed him Dizzy Jim. Nobody knew where he came from or why, but he came a-roaring . . .

THE STRANGEST PART is that nobody ever suspected the truth about Dizzy Jim Boyd, though there was a lot of guessing when he first showed up at Western Airways Field. I'd almost forgotten about that, however, until the day when Harvey Masters came through and stopped for gas.

I was standing on the ground, watching Boyd barrel-roll a Hornet at two hundred feet—which was his way of getting warmed up—when I saw another ship. It was another Hornet.

For a second I thought it was Gil Budwig, chief government inspector, who had warned Boyd he'd ground him if he didn't quit breaking all the traffic rules.

But in a minute I saw it wasn't a government ship. It was painted blue and silver, just like the bus that Boyd was kicking around. The pilot wasn't pulling any fast stuff, which was queer, because the Hornet is just

a plain temptation to raise hell. But this fellow was coming in slow and straight like a brand new student.

Boyd must have seen him just then. He did a fast split-S and dived on the other bird's tail, looking for a dog-fight.

Nothing doing. The other ship kept on gliding.

So Boyd dived underneath him and came up in front, just to let him know he was friendly. The stranger kicked off to one side, and I could see him shake his fist at Boyd. But he wouldn't fight.

Boyd made a last attempt and then turned his tail in the other fellow's face, blowing him around somewhat before he dived off to one side and went on stunting by himself.

"The blamed idiot," I growled to Buck Rogers, who was standing near me. "Why can't he lay off people he doesn't know? Last time he did that I was writing Washington for two months."

The visitor didn't waste any time in landing. He

came in so fast he bounced three times and ground-looped all over the place. Then he cut the switch and jumped out.

HE WAS a dark-haired man, with a sharp, white face—just then unusually white, so that his little black mustache stuck out as though it were pasted on.

“What’s the matter with that fool up there?” he shouted at me. “He might have killed me—I’ll have him arrested for that.”

I stick close by my outfit, and anyway I didn’t like this fellow’s looks.

“Arrested for what?” I drawled. “As far as I could see he wasn’t within three hundred feet of you.”

Three hundred feet was the minimum legal distance, though there’s plenty of the boys whose sight seems to be bad when they meet each other.

“You’re crazy,” howled the stranger. “Why—he bumped his wing against mine.”

“How about it, Buck?” I said.

“Wasn’t nearer’n five hundred feet,” he replied, yawning. “Kinda looked as though Boyd gave him the right of way, anyhow.”

The other fellow got purple at that.

“Why—you bunch of crooks—” he sputtered, but stopped in a hurry when he saw Buck’s eyes narrow up. He glared for a second and then looked back at Boyd, who was slipping in like greased lightning from five hundred feet. Boyd pulled out at fifty, fishtailed once and set her down without even raising the dust.

The dark-haired fellow started over toward him when Boyd climbed out, but he must’ve changed his mind when he saw him full length. Boyd was a big, husky chap.

A little ways off, with that handsome face of his and his light-wavy hair, he just looked sort of big and easy-going. But ever since he came he’d had a hard, mad expression, though nobody knew why, and after one or two experiences we all knew that mad look went clear down inside.

The stranger probably thought so, too. He stopped short. Boyd gave him the once-over, then he came over to me.

“The ship’s all right for the show tomorrow,” he said. “The new jets are fine.”

We’d had special carburetors put on the Hornet so it could be flown upside down without having the engine cut out. Boyd was scheduled for some trick stuff the next day, when the usual Sunday crowd would be out.

The dark-haired fellow was staring at Boyd.

“Haven’t I met you somewhere?” he said, dropping his peevishness. “Back East, probably?”

Boyd’s eyes flickered just once, but when he spoke his voice was harder than ever.

“I think not,” he answered coldly, and went on to the flight office.

The stranger shrugged his shoulders.

“Who is he?” he asked me.

“Dizzy Jim Boyd,” I told him shortly.

“He’s dizzy, all right,” he agreed. “Well—let’s forget that. I’m Harvey Masters. I’m on my way to Brent’s Ranch, and I want some gas and oil.”

TOM BRENT was an old friend of mine, who had quit hard work and started a dude ranch. During the summer the place was thick with people from the East, a lot of them friends of Brent’s daughter, who had grown up to be a beauty. That’s what I’d heard, anyway—I hadn’t seen her since she was a kid.

We gave Masters what he wanted and he took off for the ranch, which was about sixty miles away. What he said about having seen Boyd in the East made me remember how little any of us knew about him.

He had appeared one day dressed like a fashion plate and looking as though he had stepped right off a movie screen. That fooled most of the boys, and they started calling him “the sheik” and “handsome” behind his back, besides making some wisecracks when he was around.

Looking back now, it’s a wonder somebody didn’t get a big surprise right away. Boyd did seem to be a little soft at first. His clothes hid those muscles of his, and he wasn’t sunburned like the rest of the outfit.

But I noticed that dead serious manner of his, and that hard look that didn’t fit the rest of him. He said his name was James Boyd, and he wanted to learn to fly, and he’d live at the field. But he turned down the offer to stay at the pilots’ hangout—he wanted separate quarters.

That made the hoys sore, and they naturally thought he was being high-hat. So they gave him a few rough minutes in the air at the start. But he had a cast-iron stomach and wouldn’t scare, so they let up on him.

He learned to fly faster than anyone I ever saw. He was at it night and day, piling up time, trying something new every day, and always in dead earnest. By the time he had his transport license he was better than men on the field with five hundred hours, and

he was going in for trick stuff that even the old timers weren't crazy about.

I raised a kick the first time he did one of his slow rolls over the top of the hangars—not so much about him, because it was his own neck—but it was my ship. However, he gave me a full bond on it, so I let him go ahead. He always paid me on time, but I had a hunch he wasn't any millionaire, but was putting all he had into the game.

Finally, when he got to be so good, I offered him a job on the field. He took me right up. I found it was a fine bargain, for on Sundays he always put on a good show, and then the women were crazy about him. They all wanted to ride with him, and he carried more moon-struck girls than anybody else.

But he never gave them a tumble, wouldn't pose for pictures, and kept his goggles over his eyes whenever there was a crowd around.

THEN one day something happened that warmed him up a bit. Before he came a pilot named Chesty Lewis had been the flying fool of the outfit.

But when Boyd landed one day out of a glide upside down—rolling out so close he almost cut the grass with his wings—they told Chesty he was a past number. Next day he stood the gang's kidding as long as he could and then he swore he'd show up "the sheik."

Boyd was in the air. The first thing he knew of what was coming was when Chesty slipped across in front of him and thumbed his nose at him. Up to that time Boyd hadn't ever played around any other ship in the air. He sheered off this time—just once. Chesty took a fast dive and looped around him. And then hell broke loose!

Boyd kicked around and went after him like a maniac. He missed Chesty's wing by less than three feet, and rolled his wheels right along his ailerons. That's what it looked like from the ground, anyway.

It sounded like a whole army, with the two of them roaring around like lunatics, forgetting it wasn't a war and all set on bumping each other off. Boyd was on top when they got to one thousand feet.

Chesty dived and then tried to pull an Immelmann—but he lost his nerve when Boyd cut straight across the top at him. He fell off and lost three hundred on that, with Boyd squatting on his tail so close that his prop was all but nicking the rudder.

It was the fastest and shortest scrap I've ever seen. Chesty didn't have a chance—he'd been only a little

bit sore, whereas Boyd was getting rid of a grouch he'd been holding for a whole year.

Finally Chesty quit and landed—he was so close to the ground all he had to do was cut the gun, anyway. Boyd zoomed up to a thousand, spun back to five hundred, yanked her out and put his ship down right alongside of Chesty.

Chesty was waiting—foaming at the mouth. He started on a dead run for Boyd. I guess he never really noticed that look in Boyd's eyes, or he'd have slowed down to a trot, at least.

"Listen, sheik!" he snarled when Boyd hopped out. "Nobody sticks a prop that close to me and gets by with it. I'm going to smear up that pretty face of yours—girlie!"

He let drive a fast one for Boyd's jaw. What happened next wasn't anything short of a miracle.

Boyd stopped that punch with one hand, grabbed Chesty's arm and jerked him up off his feet. And the next second Chesty went flying in a way he'd never flown before—just like a sack of meal for fifteen feet through the air right into the time-keeper's stall. He hit like a Martin Bomber spinning in, and stayed there.

"Listen here, Lewis," said Boyd, calm as though he was asking the time, "there'll be no more of this 'sheik' business. I'm willing to settle that right now—if necessary. Otherwise it's over—but I'll fly combat with you any time you wish."

THEN he climbed back into his ship and went on practicing his everlasting stunts.

"Hell's bells!" muttered Tex Morgan, an older pilot. "That guy must have had a job moving houses all by himself. Think you'll live, Chesty?" Chesty was feeling himself cautiously.

"Mebbe so," he said sourly. Then it struck him funny, and he grinned. "Holy smoke—and I called him 'girlie!'"

"He must not have heard that," I said. "He'd have heaved you clear through a hangar."

Something seemed to have been changed in Boyd from then on. He was more friendly. Even Chesty forgot the row, and made up. The gang figured he wanted to mind his own business about what brought him into flying—and with that exception he was just like the rest, only a man without any nerves at all.

That's the way things stood on the day when Masters dropped in. They might have stayed that way if he hadn't come back about two weeks later. When he landed he asked to see me alone.

"I'm here to make an offer," he said, jerking at his mustache with his fingers.

"But it's confidential, whether you accept or not."

"Shoot," I told him.

"I'm interested in a young lady at Brent's Ranch," he said. "But there's a lot of competition. She's strong for he-man stuff, heroics, and all that. I thought my flying out there would help a lot, but just as things were coming my way, somebody decided to stage a rodeo.

"I don't cut a good figure on a horse, and there's at least one who does. If he does a lot of brilliant riding next Saturday it will put him ace-high with this young lady."

He stopped and yawned languidly. "So I thought I'd kill his act with a stunt hop right after he gets through. That's why I'm here."

"I get you," I nodded. "You want us to put you in good shape. That's easy—"

"Wait a minute," he interrupted. "I'm not going to do these stunts. I don't mean ordinary loops and spins at high altitude. I mean the things that fellow Boyd was doing at two or three hundred."

"I don't get you," I said. "If you're not going to do them, who is? And how would it help you any with the girl?"

"Boyd is going to do them," he said calmly. "My ship looks just like his.

"I'll take off, after telling them I'll climb up high and stunt all the way down. Then I'll get up in the clouds. There's almost always a mass of clouds around Ranger Pass. If there aren't any clouds I'll cut around into the pass where they can't see me.

"Boyd will be there—or above the clouds. I'll signal him, and he'll dive down and do his stuff. And the lower he does them—those tricks he was doing the other day—the more I'll pay him. How's that sound?"

"Great," I said sarcastically. "Nobody will know that your ship is 8512 and Boyd's is 9001 on the license list. They won't be able to read the number at two hundred feet, because the letters are only five feet high."

HE FROWNED at me. "You needn't talk like that, for I've thought over all the details. You can paint out your number for that day and use mine."

"Nothing doing," I snapped. "I don't break the licensing law for anybody."

"Then I will," he said carelessly. "I'll tell the people at the ranch I've just been given a new number. I'll give you fifteen hundred for the performance."

I sent for Boyd and Masters told him the story. Boyd turned to me when Masters finished.

"The flying part is all right, but I don't like the rest. Do you want me to do it?"

I hesitated. I'll admit it wasn't a nice trick to play on the girl, but there didn't seem to be much harm in it, and cash was a little scarce just then.

"Not unless you want to," I answered after a second.

"I'll make it two thousand," said Masters.

Boyd was looking at me.

"All right, I'll do it," he said suddenly, though I knew he wasn't stuck on the idea.

The time was set as four o'clock Saturday afternoon, which would give Boyd time to hop to the ranch, half an hour's stunting, and plenty of gas left to get back home.

But by Thursday I began to feel uneasy, knowing that Boyd was doing it more for me than anything else. It was too late to back out, but I decided that night I would check up on Masters' story.

It occurred to me that he might be cleaning up, by betting on himself, and that the girl business was only imagination. If it turned out that way, I'd wait till he started his show and expose him.

I told Boyd I was going to Chicago, and to be careful on Saturday. Then I headed for Brent's Ranch in a roundabout way. When I got there I saw Tom Brent and told him I'd heard there was to be a rodeo next day and I thought I'd drop in to see it. "It'll be a good show," he said.

"Just wanted to check up," I said. "I'll go on into the village and be out tomorrow for the circus."

"You'll stay right here," he contradicted me. "I haven't seen you for two years. Plenty of room—and the chow is as good as ever—even if the old place is a dude ranch now."

He sighed. Then he grinned at me, and led me on into the house. There was a crowd there—young fellows and girls. I didn't see Masters at first, but he came in after a while with the prettiest girl of all, a dark-eyed youngster with a smile that would have made any man shaky.

After a minute I leaned over toward Tom Brent.

"Who's the queen?" I said in an undertone.

He looked around and then laughed. "Why, you old devil," he said, "don't you remember Helen? That's my daughter."

IF I'D felt uneasy before I felt downright mean now. But Brent was taking me over to meet the girl. When Masters saw me he gulped a couple of times and got as scared as he was the time when Boyd chased

him in. I shook my head to let him know everything was all right.

Helen Brent was a nice kid—in fact, when she turned those big eyes on me I felt kind of weak and wobbly.

“This is fortunate,” she said, turning around toward Masters. “Mr. Wilson can explain all those stunts while you are flying tomorrow.”

“I’ve heard you were going to do some trick flying,” I told Masters when she introduced us. “And I thought maybe I’d be able to pick up a few pointers.”

“Ah—glad to have you be there,” he said lamely.

But he hurried off with the girl as soon as he could. I didn’t see her again till after dinner. Masters was not there. Another girl was talking to Helen, running idly through a magazine.

Suddenly she stopped and stared at a picture. Then she looked over at Helen.

“Read this,” she exclaimed. “It’s about Lee Darcy.”

Helen got a little pale, then the color came back into her cheeks with a rush. She took the magazine and glanced at the page with the picture. For a minute she just sat and gazed at it, then she stood up quickly and almost ran out of the room.

“Don’t mind her,” said the other girl to me. “It’s a chap she once—well, cared a lot about. But he was only a dancer, and she’s always been crazy about people who really do things.”

Someone came in just then and she went on talking to him. I picked up the magazine Helen had dropped face down. And the next second I let out a yelp that made everybody jump. It was a picture of a man holding a girl up in the air by one arm. And the man was Dizzy Jim Boyd!

I made some awkward apology for the disturbance and then got out of there, still holding the magazine. Underneath the picture was this:

‘What Has Become of Lee Darcy?’

Another mystery has been added to Broadway’s long list by the disappearance of Lee Darcy, considered the best adagio dancer on the American stage.’

Jim Boyd an *adagio* dancer! I took another look to be sure I wasn’t clear crazy.

But it all fitted in. It explained that mad look, and that powerful body of his. No wonder he’d been able to heave Chesty Lewis around like that.

Then I thought of the trick Masters had fixed up for the next day, and it made me so mad I could have kicked myself for saying yes.

Jim Boyd—nerviest pilot I knew—masquerading before the woman he loved to boost another man in her favor.

I WAS still grinding my teeth about it when Masters took off the next afternoon. He made a grandstand play or two before starting, and it was plain to see he was after Helen Brent—and maybe her money.

There were clouds at about seven thousand, and Masters got into them as fast as he could. Nothing happened for a bit, and I was thinking how funny it would be if Boyd had slipped up and this spineless Masters would have to put on his own show, when I heard the whining roar of a Hornet and saw Boyd come straight down out of the clouds.

I knew it was Boyd. Masters didn’t have the guts to hold a ship in that dive. He never touched her till she reached three thousand. Then he eased out and pulled some loops, a falling leaf, and dropped off into a spin. The real circus began at five hundred when he got out of the spin.

The Brent girl had hold of my arm.

“It’s thrilling,” she cried. “But I’d never have thought he had the—”

“The nerve,” I said, when she broke off. “Neither would I.”

Boyd came shooting in with screeching wires. He leveled off at two hundred, rolled onto his back and left her there till he passed the crowd. When he rolled out he shot down and kissed the ground with his wheels.

Then he did a snappy zoom up to a thousand feet, just enough to get speed again in a mad dive to three hundred where he pulled up and did a fast loop and another dive at the ground.

He kept it up for fifteen minutes and I was getting nervous as a cat, for every time he came in a little closer. Once Helen Brent gasped when he did one of his grass-cutter turns with his wing straight up and down.

“He’ll kill himself,” she said. “What if he makes a mistake?”

I forgot myself for a moment.

“Don’t worry—Boyd doesn’t make ’em.”

“What?” she said, staring at me.

“I said that boy doesn’t make mistakes,” I stammered, and I could feel myself getting red.

Just then Boyd came down in the most terrific dive he’d made that day. Gun on, he flashed down till he wasn’t more than a hundred feet when he leveled off, making one-hundred and eighty miles an hour as he

went over on his back. This time it was a slow roll—I could see Boyd’s head as he hung down on the belt.

And then it happened.

Suddenly black smoke shot out of the engine. There was a deafening roar as engine and prop let go at once. The engine burst into a mass of flames that streaked back to the pilot’s cockpit.

It was then that Boyd proved himself a super-pilot.

In the same instant the nose of that roaring inferno went up, shooting the ship up to two hundred feet just as Boyd jerked open his belt and dropped headlong.

A woman screamed somewhere—and then in a flash of white and one loud crack Boyd’s parachute was snapped open by the fierce windblast his speed had made. The ship hit with a terrible crash, throwing flames high in the air.

With one swoop, Boyd swung in a wide arc toward the ground. I closed my eyes but they opened in a fascinated horror in time to see him land on the first full swing of the chute and roll over on the ground. He stayed there, motionless.

I dashed toward him, followed by the crowd.

“Boyd!” I cried as I reached him. “Boyd—old man—are you hurt?”

He groaned and opened his eyes dazedly.

“Breath knocked out,” he whispered painfully.

“Sorry—busted up—ship.”

“Never mind that,” I said. “It’s insured against fire. But I thought you were a goner.”

We had forgotten the crowd entirely. As Boyd sat up, holding to my arm, he pushed up his goggles.

I heard an exclamation and looked around.

“Why—it’s not Masters—what on earth—” began Tom Brent, astonished. He shook his head helplessly. “Wilson, am I crazy—or what is this all about?”

Before I could answer I heard Boyd make a queer sound. I saw him staring over my shoulder.

THEN I saw it was Helen Brent, her eyes as wide as though she’d seen a ghost. She ran forward suddenly and knelt beside him.

“Lee—I must be dreaming!” she said wonderingly. “It can’t really be you—-for—”

“For I’m only a dancer,” he said grimly.

“No—no,” she cried. “I knew I was wrong.—I tried to find you—I wrote, but you were gone.”

I decided to fade away—seeing I wasn’t needed as first aid any longer. But Brent stopped me.

“Will you please explain something to me?” he said plaintively. “Where’s Masters—and who is this?”

“He’s up there behind that cloud waiting for Bo—for Darcy to come back,” I said bluntly. “Then he could come down and take his bow.”

Two red spots flamed in Helen Brent’s cheeks.

“He’ll get more than he ever expected—the sneak!” she exclaimed. Then she turned to Boyd. “I guess I’ll always call him that. Lee—can you ever forgive me—dear?”

I’ve already mentioned what happened to me when she looked at me with those big eyes. And Boyd was already a bit shaky, so—

Well, that’s how I lost the best pilot I ever had.