

by **RALPH OPPENHEIM**

*Red terror of anarchism—a hurricane—and  
one of Uncle Sam's birdmen in a grim,  
ruthless battle with Doom!*

**G**EE, BUT THAT BABY CAN FLY!" exclaimed Sergeant Carson. "I'll say that for him!" His glance followed the swift little scout plane as it dipped and rose, coasted and swerved above the grounds of the Army Arsenal, whose innocent-looking buildings housed enough T.N.T. to blow up a fair-sized city.

"Sure he can fly," replied Nielson, chief mechanic of the air station connected with the arsenal. "That's something we all admit. Them other two aviators are like amateurs when you look at Lootenant Edwards. But just the same he's cuckoo."

"Cuckoo?" echoed the sergeant, with a laugh. "Well, I never noticed that."

"Well, your powers of observation couldn't be so keen, then. Ever see him alone with that plane of his? You'd think it was his baby, or his horse. He croons to it. 'Nice old fellow, you'll make 110 per for me, won't you? You're all right.' That kind of sob-stuff. By God!" the mechanic's eyes assumed an expression of incredulity, "I swear, he's married to that damned machine of his! That's why he has nothin' to do with women. The plane's his wife!"

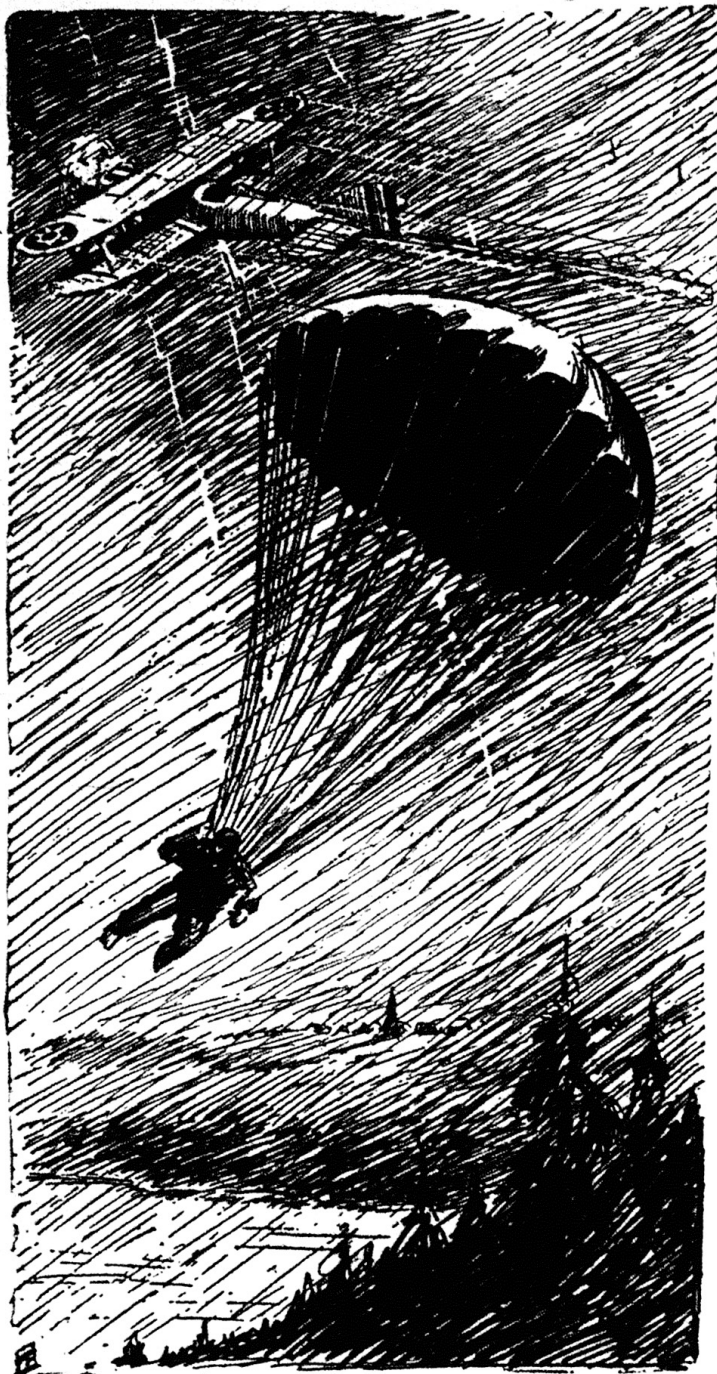
"Can't blame him," said the sergeant. "Didn't he practically build the ship himself? At least, from what I heard, he took an ordinary scout plane and doubled its efficiency and resisting powers, whatever that means."

"Oh, it's the best little machine ever. And he'll win that Air Meet next Saturday. That's what he's testing it out for now. Got his leave of absence and everything. Nothing else in his head but that Air Meet. He expects to cop about all the prizes there is."

"Wish he'd come down," muttered the sergeant, suddenly remembering his mission. "The old major'll get sore as hell if he doesn't hurry. Wonder what the old boy wants with Edwards anyway. Looks like trouble's brewing."

"Maybe he's gonna call him down," suggested the mechanic. "You know, he's been so nutty with that plane of his that I'm afraid he's forgotten that his duty's to be the lookout around here. Ah," he said suddenly, "here he comes!"

Carson looked up again. The little plane swooped



# DOOM'S PILOT

down with the grace of a swallow and came bounding along the ground toward them. They rushed up to meet it.

Lieutenant Bob Edwards, almost bursting with exhilaration, snatched off his cap and goggles, exposing a big, bronzed face with powerful features. The mechanic seized a wing of the plane.

"Easy there, easy there!" warned the pilot. "If you hurt my plane I'll smash your jaw! No funny business!"

The sergeant saluted.

"Lieutenant, the major wants you."

"All right. . . ." The big man climbed out of the cockpit. "Wait until I get this little fellow into his house. Wouldn't trust it to these rough guys around here."

"Don't worry," said the mechanic. "We wouldn't harm a hair of its head."

"Never mind the razzing," growled the lieutenant. But then he beamed, "How does she fly, boys?"

"Fine!" chorused the other two.

"I thought so!" Edwards spoke with triumph. "I knew the old bird could do 110 per. And now I know also that she can stand the wind. There's wind up there now. Bet we'll get a squall some time tonight. And yet she stuck right to her course, even when I let go of the controls. Yes, sir, that's my baby!"

"I was telling the Sarge here you ought to win that Air Meet," said the mechanic, pleasantly.

"Ought to, hey? Going to. I defy any plane to beat this. Oh, she's all right!" He stroked the canvas side, and his voice grew as tender as a mother's. "This fellow's not going to fail me, are you baby? No, sir!"

The mechanic smiled sardonically and, catching the sergeant's eye, tapped his shaggy head with a forefinger.

"Cuckoo!" he sang softly. "Cuckoo, cuckoo, cuckoo!"

"Aw, shut up!" said Edwards. "You give me a pain. You don't know what it is when you love a plane, when you've shaped it with your own hands, and when it flies just like you want it to. I swear if anything was to happen to this little machine, it would bust my heart!"

"Speaking of busting, sir," said the sergeant, with sudden anxiety, "you'd better go over to the major. He seemed mad as the dickens anyway, and when he's mad— Well, there's one squall you can't weather, airplane or no airplane."

"All right . . . Let's get this plane in, Nielson."

Aided by the mechanic, he maneuvered the little machine into its hangar. For several moments he stood looking at it with mingled longing and pride. Then he

turned and went out, leaving the sergeant to chat with Nielson.

Dusk closed about the big buildings of the arsenal as Edwards walked in their direction. An ominous stillness filled the air; not a leaf stirred. Huge dark clouds, silent and foreboding, moved slowly and relentlessly across the sky. Suddenly Edwards felt the influence of this depressing atmosphere. He remembered the strong wind he had met with above, and repeated to himself that there would be a mean squall tonight. He smiled, trying to suppress the uncanny sensation that passed through him, but even then he was entering the main building, where the major kept his office, and he could not help thinking of the rows and rows of huge shells stored therein, shells that could fly miles and raze stone and steel to the ground. . . .

Nodding to the sentries, he walked unceremoniously into the unobtrusive office, its white walls covered with various maps and photographs. The major, a small, wiry man with sharp features and iron-grey hair, sat at his desk, directly under the glare of a naked electric bulb, which hung from the ceiling. As the officer looked up from his papers, Edwards noted the harried expression on his stern face, an expression which seemed to waver between rage and anxiety. At first this surprised him, but, on second thought, it did not seem so strange. A man responsible for the safe-keeping of so much T.N.T. certainly had a right to worry.

Lieutenant Edwards saluted.

"You sent for me, sir?"

"Sit down," snapped the major.

Edwards pulled up a chair and seated himself, crossing his legs. The major cleared his throat.

"Want your opinion," he went on, in the same terse tone. "What do you think about changing our location?"

"Sir?" The question was so startling, so unexpected, that Edwards was at loss for words.

"I've asked the other two aviators," snapped the major. "You fellows ought to know. You know exactly how the location is, flying above it as you do." He rose and pointed to a large map, pinned on the wall behind the desk. "Dangerous location here, I think. Forests all around, lots of inflammable material. Thick villages on either side, twenty thousand people. If anything were to happen—" He paused significantly.

"But major, why should anything happen? Every safety device known of has been installed. We've never had any trouble."

"Quite recently," the major pursued, wetting his

lips, "a naval arsenal caught fire—lightning. Scores killed, scores injured. Yet every safety device, every protection against lightning, had been installed. The government investigated; there was dissatisfaction over the location of the place. It must not happen again. I think we ought to move. If the forest caught fire down there, or we caught fire—" Again he paused significantly.

"But," argued Edwards, frowning, "I don't see why you worry about it, major. This is the best arsenal going, the safest. Besides, we don't keep as much ammunition as the naval place—"

"Ah, that's just the point . . ." The major leaned forward, his voice softening to a tense whisper. "Just now, we have more than the naval arsenal. Seven trucks came today. The stuff will remain here for three days, and then will be transferred to the border, owing to some new trouble in Mexico. This, of course, I have tried to keep strictly confidential, but—" the muscles of his face grew taut—"but I fear it has gotten out."

"Gotten out?" echoed Edwards, with sudden alarm. "What do you mean, major?"

"If you read this letter, I know you can be trusted, you will understand." Edwards seized the white sheet from his outstretched hand, and scanned the typewritten message.

*Dear Major:*

*For a long time we have been trying to think of a way to deal a decisive blow that will hurt hundreds instead of one or two. The naval arsenal catastrophe gave us our lucky inspiration. Because I am the only man who dares to go to such lengths, I have been chosen upon to deal the big blow that will carry our Cause so much further ahead, towards the goal of righteousness. You are helping me, major dear, by storing in that new ammunition. Before those three days are up, you and your whole stinking outfit, and as much of the surrounding villages that your excellent shells can reach, will be in hell where you belong. I have to go with you, for I must remain on the spot to see that everything goes right, but I shall know that I have died doing my best to bust this damned country.*

*Best regards, major, from one who will soon have the pleasure of dying with you.*

*The Fearless One.*

The terrible import of this cool and ironic message, bearing, as it did, so few traces of the insane malice, the extreme fanaticism which had inspired it, cast an icy chill over the genial young lieutenant. He turned

momentarily pale as something tightened about his heart.

"Well . . ." He tried to speak with ease. "Of course, it's probably some crank."

"Maybe," the major conceded, but then his face darkened again, "and maybe not. The government's been having lots of trouble with anarchists lately. Now," his tone grew very confidential, "I have spoken of this to only two persons. One is the Secret Service man in Washington. Called him up. Spoke in code of course. He'll be down tonight and will stay until the ammunition is removed. The other is yourself. I picked on you, Edwards, because I know you have enough strength of mind to stand the strain of this suspense. Because, finally, you'll help me check any suspicious movements.

"There was no sense spreading an alarm here," he went on. "The thing might not happen; if it does, we don't know when to expect it. To tell the boys of this letter might have the effect of creating panic, and thus detract from their fighting efficiency. Doubtless that's just what the writer of the letter desired. I don't mean the boys aren't brave, or that they won't stick to their guns until the last ditch, but— Well, every man has nerves, and nerves are pretty powerful. I didn't know it until I got this letter. If, however, something should happen unexpectedly, they will jump up without having time to think or fear, and we'll all be so much the better for it."

"I understand you, sir," said Edwards, softly. "The same, I suppose, applies to the villagers. Still, couldn't you warn them to leave?"

"I thought of that," responded the major dryly, "but abandoned it very soon. If they left, and nothing happened, can you imagine our position? But that is not the real reason. Certainly if this man, this anarchist, means business, he will perform his foul machinations immediately if he sees them leaving their homes. The confusion, then, would be all the more disastrous."

"That's true," Edwards frowned. "I suppose you have taken plenty of precautions against—"

"Indeed I have. I've doubled the sentries, and told everyone to be on the lookout, though I said nothing about this message. The other two aviators have been ordered to fly about all tomorrow. It would, of course, be useless tonight. The same applies to you. I suppose you were up today?"

"Yes, sir." The old smile returned as Edwards thought of his beloved plane. "I tested my new scout

plane today, sir. Great results, too. Can go much faster than any of the others, and has a wonderful resistance against the wind. Expect to cop the medal in the Air Meet with it, sir."

"I have no doubt but that you will," answered the other, with warm sincerity. "But now to get back to my first point. I intend to apply for a change of location. I wanted your opinion—"

"Well, of course with that forest nearby, and these—well, if they are anarchists—it might be better—"

"I thought you'd agree . . ."

A bugle sounded outside, blowing *Tattoo*. Both men glanced out of the window, and became aware of the dense blackness of the night, a night without stars or moon. In the extreme stillness, that bugle call seemed like some signal of attack, as though a silent host waited to charge suddenly upon the arsenal.

"Time to bunk up," said Edwards softly. "Shall I go, sir?"

"No . . . Want you to wait here until the Secret Service man arrives. I may need you. Glad the fellows are going in—it makes it easier to keep this thing in the dark. I'll feel better when *Taps* blows."

"Yes, sir . . ."

For several moments the two sat in silence, shifting uneasily from time to time. Once more came the clear call of the bugle, playing *Taps*. Then stillness again, a stillness in which such trivial incidents as the ticking of a dock assumed gigantic proportions.

Suddenly the major jumped up with a start.

"What's that noise?" he asked.

Edwards strained his ears. A high-pitched, continuous whistle rose in the distance.

"Wind," he responded. "We're going to get a squall, sir . . ." He spoke with rough consolation. "I wouldn't get so wrought up, sir. Probably won't be anything doing tonight. We have three days yet . . ."

"Three days," repeated the major, in a tense voice. "And I don't get a minute's rest until they're past. If those shells were to start shooting out in every direction—!" he cut himself off with a gesture of speechless horror.

The whistling sound was rising to a roaring crescendo. A sudden gust of wind shot through the half-open window, sweeping papers off the desk and scattering them about the room. Edwards picked them up, while the major slammed the window shut. The squall was now full upon them, shaking trees, rattling window-panes, banging doors.

"Damn wind storm," said the major. "Great night

for a forest fire." He pulled himself together. "Got to cut this out, don't I? Well, Edwards, I know I'm a fool, but when you're in charge of tons of T.N.T.—"

"Yes, sir, I know," said Edwards, sympathetically. "But I wouldn't worry. Just remember we're not alone. There's sentries all around here."

And, as if to corroborate this statement, there was a sound of shuffling feet out in the hallway. Then a man's voice saying:

"Yes, the major's in his office, sir. Yes, sir, come with me."

The major rose, and mopped his forehead.

"That's the Secret Service man," he said, with visible relief.

Sergeant Carson entered the room, carrying a large, brown valise. He was accompanied by a tall thin man whose shaggy black hair and large black eyes, in which there appeared a snake-like flicker from time to time, fitted ill with his pale, sensitive features. He carried himself with an air of superciliousness which, to Edwards, was extremely irritating. From the start the lieutenant felt an unreasonable antipathy for the stranger.

The major came forward and waited for the visitor to speak.

"2X," the man said, in a low voice. "All right," responded the major. He turned to the sergeant, who stood waiting with the valise. "Take this man's grip up to the room I told you to fix for him."

Carson took a step for the door, but the visitor stopped him with an imperative gesture.

"No, leave it here," he ordered. "I may need some stuff I brought along tonight. I want to speak to the major."

"All right," the major said. "Then you may go, Carson."

The sergeant saluted and left the room.

"Quite some storm outside," the major resumed. "Guess you got caught in it."

"Guess I did."

"Won't you sit down Mr.—"

"Smith," supplied the stranger, taking a chair. He shot a questioning glance toward Edwards.

"Oh, he's in on this too," the major explained. "He knows all about it. Name's Edwards, Lieutenant Bob Edwards, Aviation Corps. Best aviator there is. He's going to win the Air Meet with his own little scout plane—"

"Very well," said Smith, with an indifference which served further to increase Edwards' dislike of him. "My credentials," he went on. Drawing some papers

from his pocket, he laid them before the major. The latter turned them over in his hands, scrutinizing them carefully. The squall outside howled and roared with relentless fury. The major was wholly satisfied with the photograph and description, and returned the papers to Smith.

"Good. Now let me see the letter."

The major handed it to him. He gave it merely a single glance, and his eyes flickered.

"I see. Same old story. Any suspicions?"

"None as yet," said the major. Though we have been sharply on the lookout."

"I suppose you warned your men," Smith suggested.

"No. I do not want to spread panic . . ."

"Oh," Smith coughed. "Well, that part's up to you. But don't worry. No one is going to do anything over my head."

Edwards smiled.

"Let's hope not, anyway," he said.

"Hope not?" snorted Smith. "Don't worry. I know my oats." He turned again to the major. "What was that dope about dangerous location?"

"On account of the two villages and forests. We're four miles from the lake. If a fire started anywhere near here, a real fire, we'd be in danger. Especially on a windy night like this. And if it started here, hell would let loose."

"I see. You say the ammunition is in this building here, the new ammunition?"

"Yes. Got in today."

"I see." Smith rose and went over to the map. "Let me examine this layout."

Edwards watched him as he did so, and saw those dark eyes flicker again. In the silence they became aware once more of the terrific gale outside, which abated from time to time only to recommence with renewed fury. The window-panes rattled so violently that one wondered what kept the glass from shattering to bits.

Then, suddenly, the telephone on the major's desk rang out, shrill and insistent. The major reached for the receiver, and at the same time Smith started and glanced up at the clock on the wall. The hands pointed to half-past nine.

"Hello," the major was saying. "What? Yes, this is the Arsenal—"

Smith glanced toward the door.

"Somebody's sneaking around out in the hall," he whispered, pulling out an automatic. "Stand by the door there, and keep your eyes open." And he walked swiftly from the room.

Edwards was certain he had heard no sound. Nevertheless he obeyed Smith, and hastily took up a position at the door. He reached there just in time to see the tall, thin spy disappear around a turn in the corridor.

Meanwhile, the major was having some difficulty on the phone.

"Yes, this is the Arsenal," he repeated. "What? I can't understand you. Speak a little louder—this, squall. 2X? What about 2X? Yes, he got here all right. What? Speak louder, damn you! Hey! What the hell?" He clicked the receiver vigorously. "Hello, hello! Damn it, something's wrong."

Edwards heard footsteps down the hall, and the next moment Smith came rushing around the corridor.

"I saw him!" he exclaimed, as he entered the room. "He's cut the wires, major. No use phoning."

"What?" the major roared.

"I almost got a shot at him," Smith went on. "But he got away. We must be careful . . . Might as well hang up the receiver."

The major hung up, his face crimson with fury.

"What the devil's the matter with those sentries?" he yelled. "Wait until I get hold of them. Letting a man cut the wires! Why—" the awful realization dawned upon him, and his eyes widened—"that means that anarchist is here tonight, on these grounds! Good God!"

"Come, come, major," Edwards roughly consoled him. "Keep calm. Nothing's happened yet. I'm sure Mr. Smith will keep us from trouble." But there was not much conviction in his tone.

"Don't worry," said Smith. "He might have cut the wires, but that's as far as he'll get." He coughed indifferently, then glanced again at the clock. Twenty-three to ten. His thin lips twisted into an enigmatic smile.

"Well, I'll call in those damned sentries," said the major.

"No," Smith told him. "They did their best. I saw to that. And I gave them directions, so they could be on the lookout. Now just leave everything to me. In a couple of minutes we'll go into the storeroom back there; if we can keep that big storeroom safe I'm sure nothing will happen. I have some new burglar alarms in my valise here, and we'll hook them up . . ."

"There are burglar alarms there already," said Edwards, casually. "The best there are to be had."

"Well, we'll see," Smith told him.

"Good God!" The major clutched one hand with another. "Can't we do something to stop that man? If he cut wires—"

"Don't worry," repeated Smith. He rose, picking up the valise. "Let's go back into the storeroom now."

At that moment, however, the sound of hasty footsteps issued in the outer hall, and Sergeant Carson, accompanied by a small, thickset man in civilian clothes, entered confusedly. The newcomer was gasping for breath; it was evident that he had been running.

Smith's face darkened for a second, but after glancing at the clock again, and finding it twenty to ten, he sighed with visible relief.

"Well?" demanded the major.

Carson saluted.

"This man has an important message, sir."

"Let him wait in the office," snapped Smith. "We want to get those alarms hooked up first."

"No waitin'," blurted the stranger. He turned back his coat lapel, exposing a shining badge. "I'm the sheriff down town. Found a man unconscious in the bushes on the main road. Purty bad knock-up. When he came to, before they took him to the hospital, he told me to get a hold of you as soon as possible. He said to tell you—"

"He said to tell you, major—"

Smith suddenly interrupted, in a clear, calm voice, as he set down the valise.

"He said to tell you—" He paused, a savage gleam appearing in his eyes.

Then he snapped, "2X NQPR."

"What?" the major gasped.

The sheriff's eyes widened with incredulity.

"Danged if that ain't just what he said!" he exclaimed. "2X NPQR."

The major turned ghastly pale, and stood rooted to the spot, trying to piece his confused thoughts together. Edwards, Carson and the sheriff shifted uneasily.

"2X NPQR," repeated Smith, with studied irony. "Which is very simple to understand. 2X? Why, that's the man you sent for. NPQR? Well, that means that he has been ambushed, and somebody's stepped into his shoes. Now I wonder who that somebody could be."

"Seize that man!" roared the major, his face suffused with rage. Instantly Edwards and Carson held Smith in a vice-like grip. The latter made no effort to release himself. Indeed, he appeared rather amused about the whole matter.

"I rushed right here," the sheriff was saying. "They

said they'd try to git you on the telyphone, but they was purty sure the wires would be cut, so—"

"Yes," Edwards put in, with a furious glance at Smith. "Damned clever of you, cutting the wires!"

"No, no," Smith corrected, smiling blandly. "Stupid, I call it. I should have thought of that the first thing—not waited until they called up. No," he repeated, "that was not so clever. But what was clever was my effecting this disguise to get in here. Luckily I am good at deciphering. I cut in with a little receiver on your wire this morning, major, and understood every thing you communicated to the Secret Service office. Then I laid for my man, and got him. It was easy to erase his description and typewrite one of myself. It was still easier to substitute my photograph for—"

"Damn you!" shouted the major. "You'll be shot for this!"

"Rather say I'll die for it. And so will you, gentlemen."

Some ominous note in his voice brought a momentary shudder to the group of men. The words were spoken with such surety, in such a matter-of-fact way, that everyone seemed to feel the hand of death clutching for him. The howling wind outside served to increase this growing sense of uncanniness.

Suddenly Edwards' eye fell upon the valise, standing where Smith had left it, in the center of the room.

"Better search that valise," he suggested.

"Open it up!" commanded the major. Edwards, leaving Carson to take care of Smith, whose passive attitude made it unnecessary to use force, went over to the valise. The lieutenant started to unbuckle the straps. But then he stopped, as if paralyzed, for Smith was looking at him with a hideous leer, the leer of a madman. A rancorous snort rose from the anarchist's throat.

"Go ahead, open it!" he said, defiantly.

"Not so fast," Edwards retorted. "I'll open it when I'm sure something's not going to explode if I do."

These words brought everyone's attention to the dark brown grip, which now become something of tremendous importance. The sheriff, who, unhardened to real danger, did not possess the iron grit of these soldiers, backed cringingly toward the door. Perspiration broke out on his forehead.

"Explode?" the major was saying. "What do you mean, explode?"

"You will remember," Edwards explained, "he wanted to take that grip into the storeroom. He must have a reason. That's why—" He broke off abruptly, for he noted again that Smith was glancing at the clock. It

was twelve minutes to ten. The sudden truth dawned upon the lieutenant. "Why!" he exclaimed, "This man has a time bomb in here. He's waiting for a certain timer—he's been looking at the clock all evening."

The anarchist cackled.

"You're not as dumb as you look!" he admitted.

"It's safe to open it all right," said Edwards. "We've got to take a chance. If it weren't safe, he might have opened it himself long ago. The sooner we get that bomb, the better. Well, here goes. He unhooked the metal lock.

"Wait!" the major ordered, thinking hard. Then he said, "all right open it."

Edwards gave the top a sharp pull, and then jumped back instinctively as the grip came open, and its strange contents was revealed. Packed very carefully, protected by a padding of newspapers, lay a big, oblong box, apparently made of some very heavy metal, and painted black.

There was a brief silence, broken by a cry from the major.

"Take that thing and put it in water! Snap into it!"

Again the hideous leer was on Smith's lips.

"If you think water will hurt it," he said, "you have another guess coming!"

"Send for the chief chemist!" yelled the major.

Carson dashed out to perform the mission. Edwards keeping Smith covered with his automatic. "We'll beat your game yet, you damned scoundrel!"

"Oh, will you?" The anarchist's voice held a note of blighting malice. "Don't you believe it, major. It's too late now. I've got you, every damned one of you! I wanted to have that bomb explode right in the storeroom, but this is just as good."

"We'll destroy it! We'll take it away!"

"In ten minutes?" the man taunted, with diabolical mockery. The group looked at the clock. It was exactly ten minutes to ten. "No you won't, major. First of all, when Drackton made that bomb—"

"Drackton?" echoed the major incredulously. "Not the famous chemist—"

"Formerly of the U.S. Army," completed Smith.

"But now with the Cause. And that bomb, the child of his own inventive brain, has been welded together in such a way that you can't do a damned thing. Not in such a short time anyway. Take it away?" He snorted. "Where? How far from the grounds could you get it in ten minutes? Into the forest? Liquid fire, shooting out when the bomb explodes, will make kindling wood of those dry trees. The wind will do the rest!" He paused,

drawing in his breath sharply. His face was terrible to behold. The eyes bulged in their sockets, the mouth contorted into horrible grimaces.

"Oh, I know!" he went on, with rising excitement. "I know. I've studied your map. In a few minutes this whole place will be a No-Man's-Land. The villages will be bombarded, razed to the ground. You will all die. So will I!" He laughed hysterically. "Thought you had me, eh? Ah, look, eight minutes more!"

A whimpering sound rose in the brief silence. It was the sheriff, huddled in a far corner of the room, trembling from head to foot.

"Dang it, why did I let myself in for this?"

"Shut up!" Edwards told him. "Are you thinking of yourself when hundreds of lives are imperiled? Fool!"

"Yes, hundreds of lives!" echoed the anarchist, with maniacal glee. "I can see it? *Wham!* The whole place in flames. *Bang!* A shell going off. Then another. Then another. Falling on houses. All through the night! Killing families at a time! The Cause victorious!"

The major groaned and clutched his desk for support. It was not fear, but the torturing sense of his own impotence in preventing this wild dream of a fanatic from becoming realized. His eyes never left that big, black box in the valise, unless it was to glance up at the clock, whose hands seemed to move so swiftly and relentlessly.

The chief chemist came rushing in.

"See if you can do something with that bomb!" the major told him. "Quick! Break it open! We have only eight minutes. No, seven minutes!" he corrected, with horror.

The chief chemist, without any sign of fear, lifted the metal box from the valise and scrutinized it hastily. He shook his head.

"It's been welded together . . . It would take me fifteen minutes at least to break it apart with a strong acid." He put an ear to it "Yes, an electric time bomb. It would be too late."

"God man! But don't stand still! At least try!" The major wrung his hands, and then shouted frantically, "take it away! Take it out in the woods! Anywhere! What are we keeping it here for, damned fools that we are!"

Then Edwards spoke, his face lighting up with a new hope.

"Major, that lake four miles from here—three miles if you make a beeline. No one will be out there on a night, like this. If the bomb were dropped in the water, several hundred feet from land, it could explode without doing any damage."

"Admitted," said the anarchist, waving his arms wildly. "But who's going to get it there in six minutes?"

"I am," replied Edwards, calmly. "In my scout plane, which will do sixty for me, wind or no wind."

The major stared at him.

"Edwards, are you crazy? You'll be blown to smithereens. You won't make it. You can't fly in this gale!"

"If I'm killed, I'll see that others won't be," said the lieutenant, simply "Now there's no use wasting time. Quick. Get this bomb back in the valise, so the boys won't suspect. Come on!" The chief chemist laid the box in its place again, and Edwards strapped it up. "I'm off!"

"Edwards—" the major stammered. "Edwards—you crazy fool!"

But Edwards was already out of the building, his hand clutching the valise. The cold, bitter wind rushed upon him, it chilled him to the bone through his heavy flying togs. It swept against his cheeks and stung them painfully. He staggered against the wind with shut teeth, and finally gained the hangar.

"Nielson!" he shouted. "Snap it up. Help me get out the old scout!" Nielson, who had been sleeping in the corner, opened his eyes and blinked them dazedly. "Come on!" Edwards ordered, as he adjusted his helmet and goggles. "My parachute!"

Nielson, still dazed, brought it to him and mechanically helped him strap it on.

"Going out in the squall?" he asked incredulously. "What's the big idea? I wouldn't be doing things like that—"

Edwards forced a laugh from his dry lips.

"Don't worry. My old boy'll carry me. There." He glanced at his wrist watch. Four minutes left. "Hurry up. Get the plane out."

The astonished mechanic helped him take the machine from its hangar. The little plane rocked in the wind. One marveled that it was not swept from the ground and tossed about like a feather. Edwards climbed into the cockpit. "Hand me that valise . . . no, don't throw it at me. Easy . . . And hurry!" He took the valise and stood it upright beside him. "All right, wind 'er up, and we'll be off!"

The roar of the motor mingled with the howling wind. Slowly the plane moved forward, steadying itself as the whirling propeller gathered up speed. A few hundred feet, and then it took the air. Lieutenant Edwards guided it, every muscle alert, every nerve taut. Now and then a gust of wind threw him off his course,

but he urged his plane forward again with strong hands.

"Come on, old bird!" he crooned. "Gotta make sixty . . . Faster . . . Faster . . . That's right . . . If we don't hurry we'll be blown to smithereens. There's hundreds of people who'll thank us for this if we can do it. Come on, show 'em what you can do!" He glanced at the luminous, radium figures of his wrist watch. It was three minutes to ten. He leaned over the side and looked down. At first his eyes could not penetrate that inky blackness, but then vaguely he distinguished the tree-tops of the dense, dry forest. If the bomb should go off now. If that damned anarchist had lied about the time! Well, he wouldn't think of that now. He had to make the lake.

The wind whistled against the canvas; there were times when the steel wires strained shrilly, as if they must snap.

"Hold together, old scout!" urged Edwards. "Come on, damn you! Nobody's going to be killed!"

A sudden swerve of the plane tipped the valise, so that it leaned against his leg. He pushed it back with nervous haste. He did not want to be reminded of the fatal cargo he carried beside him, the terrible device which, if treacherous to the clock, might blow him to bits any moment.

Looking down again, he saw that he was approaching a dark, greenish surface, upon which white crests, stirred by the wind, danced and broke. It was the lake. The little hands of his watch told him there was just about a minute and a half left. Could he make it?

"Come on, boy. Snap into it . . . Gotta go faster!"

The plane shot forward, headed straight for the lake. But, near the outskirts of the forest, the wind swooped down with sudden, overwhelming strength and held the machine in its gripping force. Edwards struggled, body and soul, against that powerful element, the wind, and the plane bobbed about, trying to make headway.

He glanced at his watch. No more than half a minute left. Thirty seconds. He counted them while he fought. He must make the lake. That single thought kept running through his mind like a refrain . . . Ah, now he was going slowly forward again.

"Nine . . . ten . . . eleven . . . twelve . . ."

Time was dwindling with alarming rapidity. He held on, gritting his teeth . . . Now he was going a trifle faster . . . He could see the dancing waves, right ahead. If only he could make it before—

"Sixteen . . . seventeen . . . eighteen . . . nineteen . . ."



Slowly the plane fought the wind, and went on toward the lake. A conflict was going on in Edwards' mind, while mechanically he counted the seconds. Should he take a chance at sacrificing himself, so that he could be sure the bomb exploded on the lake, or should he trust his little scout plane to do the trick?

"Twenty-two . . . twenty-three . . ." He spoke to his plane now as though it were as much alive as himself, as though it possessed a real soul. "Little plane, old boy, I'm going to trust you. You held your course today without my help. Now repeat it—and save my life and others!"

He had reached his decision . . . Deftly and swiftly, with the skill of experience, he adjusted the control sticks, ascertaining that the plane was headed straight for the lake, at a slight incline. Then he stood up.

Below him, between his machine and the ground, were hundreds of feet of inky space. But he hesitated only to see that the valise was secure in its position, and that the plane held to its course . . . Then he jumped . . .

A dizzy, breath-taking fall of some twenty feet. Then a sudden lift under his armpits as the parachute fluttered open. The wind seized it instantly, and carried it back over the forest. Edwards turned his head so that he could see his plane. At first the machine wavered, but then it darted forward, victorious over the gale. Ah, it was coming to the lake now. It was above the lake. It—

A deafening crash, thundering through the squall, stopped his thoughts. The plane was no more. It had disappeared in a gigantic cloud of black smoke. Now, out of this heavy vapor, which hung in the air, shot a hissing stream of fire. But it could not wreak its terrible destruction, for its range did not take it off the lake. For awhile the burning liquid floated on the water; then, with a sputtering protest, the flame sank and died . . .

And now, with the danger past, with the bomb safely out of the way, a cruel realization dawned suddenly upon Edwards. His plane, the little plane he had created with his own hands, and which he loved so fondly, had been blown into a thousand pieces. True, he could build another, but this one, to which he had become so attached that he considered it a living part of himself, was gone forever. Sobs choked him as he drifted down over the forest. The man who had mocked at death, was crying, crying like a kid who had lost a precious toy . . .

He landed safely, in a tree-top. Untangling himself, he climbed down and walked slowly and listlessly toward the main road, where he knew they would be looking for him. He did not have to wait long. In a few minutes the incessant purr of the major's high-powered motor car became audible, and then two bright headlights loomed before him, dazzling his eyes.

The major, a very relieved major, and several others, were out of the car, shaking his hand, patting his back, congratulating him. It all seemed so vague. He was thinking of his plane . . .

"Saved the Arsenal . . . Such courage . . . Never saw anything like it . . . Anarchist safe in prison . . . Congratulations . . . He heard them faintly.

"Why!" exclaimed the major, "you'll be put up in the ranks for this!" Edwards stared at him stupidly.

"But my plane," he began, "my poor plane, that baby scout plane! And Saturday it was going to cop the medal!"

"Medal?" snorted the major. "Why, you poor prune, you'll be decorated with a medal by the president himself. This was the greatest stunt you ever pulled off!"

"So it was." Edwards laughed suddenly, for he knew no one would understand. "So it was . . ."