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***DEATH
OF AN AIRMAN***

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Death of an Airman

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CHAPTER I

ARRIVAL OF A BISHOP

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A young woman with a reddish face and horn-rimmed glasses appeared suddenly out of a door marked “Manager, Baston Aero Club”.

“Well, young man, what do you want?” she asked sharply.

The middle-aged man in grey flannels who was standing in the club hall looked round to see who was being spoken to, and then perceptibly started when he realized that it was he who was being addressed.

“Are you the manager of the Baston Aero Club?” he asked.

“Manager and secretary. In fact, I run the place,” she answered.

“I see.” The speaker, though obviously not shy, had not quite recovered from the surprise of being addressed as “young man” by a woman some years his junior.

“The fact is, I want to learn to fly. That is,” he added diffidently, “if I am not too old for that sort of thing.” His diffidence contrasted with a certain deep richness of voice—the kind of voice which inevitably suggests public speaking.

The young woman beamed. “Don’t you worry! We’ll teach you if it kills us—or you.” She rummaged over a table in the hall which was littered with papers and picked out a form.

“We’d better make you a member before you lose your nerve. Are you a British subject? We’re not particular, but if

you aren't British we don't get a subsidy for teaching you, so we charge you more."

"I am an Australian."

The red-faced young woman peered at him anxiously from behind her glasses. "I hope you don't get fighting drunk? Our last Australian smashed every glass in the place the day he went solo."

The stranger cleared his throat deprecatingly. "I think it unlikely that I should do the same. I am the Bishop of Cootamundra."

For the first time the girl looked a little disconcerted. "Well, I'm ... I mean how odd!" She looked at him critically. "You have got a *bishopry* air now one looks for it, and that sort of creamy clerical voice. But why haven't you a doodah round your neck and the obbly-gobblies on the legs?"

"You refer, I fancy, to the Roman collar and episcopal gaiters." The Bishop's stiff manner was contradicted by a twinkle in his clear blue eyes. "I am at the moment on leave. In any case we are less rigid about these formalities in the Commonwealth. The spirit quickeneth, you know."

"Talking about spirits," said the young woman vaguely, "I must close the bar. It's gone three. Those damned soaks will lose me my licence if they can. Excuse my language, by the way. We haven't many bishops here."

"Don't let me detain you."

"That's all right," the girl answered with quiet determination. "I'm going to get your signature on the dotted line before I leave you!"

While she spoke, the manager was rapidly filling up the form, and now she handed it to him. He signed it and took

out his cheque-book. "I see the entrance fee is two guineas and the subscription another two guineas; that is four in all. To whom shall I make out the cheque?"

"My dear old soul, nobody takes any notice of the entrance fee—only the disgustingly rich ones. Make it out for two guineas to the 'Baston Aero Proprietary, Ltd.' "

"Oh, thank you." The Bishop completed and signed the cheque.

The manager glanced at the firm clear signature.

"Edwin Marriott," she read. "I thought you signed yourself 'George Canterbury', 'Arthur Swansea', and so forth."

The Bishop smiled. "I'm afraid not. Edwin Cootamundriensis sounds a trifle unconvincing, don't you think?"

She folded the Bishop's cheque with a caressing gesture. "This ought to be a good cheque—for a change," she said with an air of relief. "We should christen it with a quick drink really, shouldn't we? Oh, of course, I was forgetting. You probably don't drink. You know it will take a bit of getting used to, your Bishop line," she went on confidentially, "but it will be first-rate publicity when you take your 'ticket'. *Exchanges mitre for flying helmet*, you know."

The Bishop shuddered perceptibly at this remark.

The girl handed him a booklet and some leaflets and made a shooing gesture. "Pop out on the tarmac, there's a dear, and have a squint at the flying. I'll join you in a jiffy, and introduce you to your instructor and so forth."

The Bishop, hazy as to what the "tarmac" might be, walked out through the door in front of him and came out on

to a concrete expanse. Chairs and tables were scattered *al fresco*, and to the right of the wooden club-house from which he had emerged was a gaunt shed which he supposed housed the club's aeroplanes. Before him, obviously, was the aerodrome, for even as he watched an aeroplane was running rapidly across it.

"Taking-off," he murmured with satisfaction.

The manager joined him later, looking still more reddish and dishevelled. Evidently this was the effect of attempting to close the bar.

"I'd better introduce myself first," she remarked briskly. "Sarah Sackbut, but everyone calls me Sally—or worse."

"How do you do?" said the Bishop politely.

"I suppose you're a lordship?" she went on. "I'm a little vague about the Australian Church?"

"I'd rather not. Few of my flock in Australia do so, and when I hear it over here it always makes me feel not quite real. I prefer Doctor Marriott. Or, as a fellow club member, call me Bishop—American, perhaps, but more familiar to me."

The Bishop's gaze wandered to a slim figure in white overalls and flying helmet which was standing near them. The portion of face which the Bishop could see was very attractive, and it was also faintly familiar, but he could not see enough to put a name to it.

A word from Sally made the girl turn. "This," Sally told her, "is our new member—the Bishop of Cootamundra. No nonsense about him—hail-fellow-well-met—the world's Bishop." Sally smiled at Dr. Marriott. "I suppose you recognize *her*? Face creams, you know. '*Lady Laura*

Vanguard, Society's leading beauty, uses Blank's Skinfude exclusively,' and so forth. She's worth pounds to us in publicity, aren't you, Laura?"

"Well, why are you always worrying about my silly account?" asked Lady Laura plaintively.

"Hard cash is more than coronets," answered Miss Sackbut grimly.

"How too right!" Lady Laura flashed a smile at the Bishop. "Appallingly pleased to meet you. Is it one of Sally's silly jokes or are you really the Bishop-thing?"

"I really am," admitted the Bishop, feeling more unreal than before.

"What do you want to learn to fly for? Nearer my God to Thee sort of thing?"

"Don't be blasphemous, dear," said Sally.

"Better than being profane," replied Lady Laura. "I am sure you've terrified the Bishop with your language already."

"My ambition is quite earthly," interrupted the Bishop hastily. "It takes several weeks to travel from one end of my diocese to the other by the present primitive means of transport. The diocese has offered to buy me an aeroplane, but funds do not permit me to employ a pilot. I propose, therefore, to pilot myself."

Lady Laura murmured something, but her attention was on the aeroplane now climbing steadily into the blue afternoon sky.

Miss Sackbut strolled forward and the Bishop followed her. His attention was attracted by a woman in a black leather flying-suit who was standing in the attitude of

determined isolation adopted by well-known persons in public places.

The features, pretty at a distance but on closer inspection somewhat aged and battered, were still more familiar to the Bishop than Lady Laura's classic profile.

"Bless my soul!" he exclaimed. "Isn't that—yes, surely it's Mrs. Angevin, the transatlantic flyer! Dear me, quite an honour for the club!"

Miss Sackbut laughed sardonically, and the Bishop wondered whether his remark was inappropriate.

"Transatlantic flyers!" The girl snorted contemptuously. "The place is lousy with them! That tall fellow over there talking to our ground engineer is Captain Randall. He's flown both Atlantics both ways now. Having a crack at the Pacific this year. He's giving Dolly Angevin a bit of a dirty look, isn't he? They're as jealous as chorus girls, half these famous pilots. Still, he's a pilot and she isn't."

"I don't understand?" ventured Dr. Marriott. "Surely she flew the machine to New York? Wasn't she alone?"

"Oh, she can fly from A to B all right," admitted Miss Sackbut unenthusiastically, revealing the depths of disdain of the flying world for its public heroes, "as long as her engine turns round, but she's hamhanded."

"Poor girl! What a deformity!"

"Good lord! I only mean it figuratively," exclaimed Sally. "It means she's clumsy, if you follow me. And then didn't you see her *rumble* into the aerodrome just now? She always does."

"Really? I must say I heard no noise," answered the Bishop in surprise.

Miss Sackbut laughed. "Surely you understand English, Doctor Marriott? To 'rumble' is to sneak in near the ground with bursts of engine until you reach the aerodrome. Then you flop in. What you should do, of course," she added in lofty explanation, "is glide in from a height without using your engine. Rumbling is fine until the engine refuses to play. Then you drop into the street and they scrape you up."

The Bishop was a little staggered at this explanation, which made matters considerably more obscure.

"Dear me, how unpleasant! I must remember to avoid *rumbling* at all costs when I come to fly." The Bishop laughed. "Really, the word is quite apposite when one comes to think of it. What a lot I have to learn! You seem almost to speak a different language."

"Talking of language," said his informant, "what in hell's name is Furnace doing with that babe Vane?"

Miss Sackbut was staring at the aeroplane which the Bishop had seen take off a little earlier. He followed her gaze.

The gay red-and-silver aeroplane looked quite steady to the Bishop. It seemed to be climbing steeply and effortlessly, with the tail low down. But as he watched it, something terrible happened. It was all so quick that the Bishop found difficulty in grasping what really occurred. The aeroplane tilted sideways with a flick, the front dropped, and the contraption was whirling like a devilish top earthward, while the tail beat the air violently in a giddy spiral.

Miss Sackbut's voice rose in irritation. "Furnace is spinning. He oughtn't to do that on the kid's fourth lesson.

Particularly with Vane, who's qualifying as our worst pupil. It'll scare the life out of him."

It was only now that the Bishop understood that this alarming manoeuvre was intentional. Rotating with the attractive precision of a top, the aeroplane still fell. Its wings flashed alternately silver and red as now the under and now the upper surface caught the sunlight. The Bishop could see in the cockpits two black heads, absurdly small, which appeared and disappeared as the aeroplane revolved.

The spin ceased abruptly; the tail seemed to drop, and there was the machine flying again as before. He heard a rising drone, and the aeroplane climbed. Then the drone died down again, and the aircraft glided over the hangars, landing in front of them with a swinging swish of the tail.

It stopped, turned rockingly and lolloped over the aerodrome back to the hangar. Sally walked up to it when it arrived and the Bishop followed her.

Furnace jumped out of the front cockpit. He was flying without goggles or helmet, with a pair of ear-phones and speaking-tube mounted on a headpiece. The Bishop looked at the instructor with curiosity.

Furnace seemed to be near the forties and might have been a handsome man had not a scar run diagonally across his face from one temple to the opposite jowl. Each feature was distorted where the scar traversed it and his mouth was twisted in a perpetual lopsided grin, which made his real expression enigmatic.

"An aeroplane fire. He got chucked against a red-hot wire," whispered Miss Sackbut, as she saw the Bishop's eyes rest on the scar.

The propeller stopped suddenly and a muffled object crawled clumsily out of the rear cockpit. This, the Bishop gathered, was the pupil. He was dressed in a bulky leather coat, enormous scarf, and large woolly gloves. He wore a flying mask, usually only adopted for high altitude or winter flying, which gave him a sinister appearance. The man looked portly, but when the coverings were peeled off he revealed himself as one of those lanky jockey-like youngsters, who might be any age between thirteen and thirty-five. At the moment there was rather a depressed expression on his peaky white face.

“All right, George,” said Miss Sackbut to Furnace, “XT can be put away. There’s no more instruction to-day.”

“A good job too,” answered Furnace irritably. “In my young days we used to go solo in two hours. Now everyone seems to want about twelve hours. In another ten years they’ll take a fortnight. By that time I’ll be in a lunatic asylum.”

He shouted to a thin red-headed man in dirty and tattered overalls: “Here, Andy, put XT away.” He muttered something to Miss Sackbut that the Bishop could not catch.

“I want you to meet a new pupil,” said Miss Sackbut, introducing him to the Bishop.

“I am afraid I shall fulfil your worst fears,” remarked the Bishop diffidently. “I know in advance I shall be a bad pupil.”

The malicious grin widened. The Bishop gathered that this time Furnace was really smiling. “Oh, don’t be frightened by my remark,” the pilot said more graciously. “Some of my best pupils are your age. You won’t learn quite so quickly as a youngster, but you’ll be all the sounder as a

pilot. I don't mind slowness in learning; but I've come to the conclusion, Sally, that Tommy knows what he ought to do and is just too lazy to do it."

The Bishop supposed that the muffled figure was Tommy.

Furnace bent the headpiece of his ear-phones backwards and forwards with a nervous gesture.

"I put him into a spin suddenly, and he got the machine out of it, and competently too. I'll swear he knows more than he pretends."

"How odd," remarked the Bishop politely.

Furnace stared at him gloomily. "Pupils are odd. I taught a certain transatlantic flyer to fly. I was amazed at her aptitude. Honestly, I thought she was a miracle. I used to go everywhere boasting about it. Then Tarry Bones, of Aberdeen, came down here one day, and it all came out that she had already learned to fly up there with him under an alias."

The Bishop was baffled by this elaborate mystification, and Furnace saw it.

"Don't you see the idea? It would have appeared in all the papers: 'Woman learns to fly in two hours.' Good publicity! She's never forgiven me for spoiling it."

The Bishop had seen Furnace's eyes rest malevolently on Mrs. Angevin while he said this, and guessed she was the woman referred to. He began to feel sympathetic towards her.

Furnace pulled off his ear-phones. He seemed exasperated. The Bishop might have taken it for a normal mood of the man, but he saw that Miss Sackbut was looking at him a little anxiously.

Tommy Vane now joined the group, having got rid of his outer garments after a prolonged struggle.

The young man smiled oddly at Furnace. "I say, Major, I don't like this flying business at all! What was that quick one you pulled on me just now? I didn't know whether it was me or the earth?"

"Is that the first time you've been spun?" asked Furnace suspiciously.

"You ought to know," answered the youth. "All the flying I've ever done has been with you. And just now I thought we should die together. 'They looped together and they span together and in death they were not divided.'" The youth chuckled happily to himself.

Furnace's expression was hard to fathom.

"You put on opposite rudder quick enough when you saw you had to get her out yourself."

"I saw that in an article," announced Tommy cheerfully. "'How and Why in a Spin.'" He prodded Furnace in the stomach. "Anyway, you old devil, if you wanted to scare me you did all right. My tummy heaved about like an oyster. A large brandy is what I need—quickly. I think you ought to speak to him about it, Sally."

Throwing one end of his gaudy muffler over his shoulder, he started to walk off, a queer little figure with rounded shoulders and trailing trouser-legs.

"The bar's closed," shouted Miss Sackbut after him.

Tommy turned and placed one rather dirty finger beside his nose with a wink. "This is illness. What's wrong with the first-aid chest? I know where it is."

“If he does pinch the brandy out of my office again, I’ll wring his dirty neck,” muttered Miss Sackbut fiercely.

“What does Dolly want?” she exclaimed a moment later.

It appeared that Mrs. Angevin had had enough of splendid isolation. She now walked over to the party, a welcoming smile on her face.

She looked appealingly up at her former instructor and slapped Furnace gently on the arm with her gauntleted gloves. “Well, Instructor mine, what have you been doing? Poor Vane looked positively green. You’ve probably frightened him off flying for life. You didn’t let *me* spin until after my first circuit.”

Furnace turned to her. He still smiled his artificial grin, but the Bishop noted that the hand in which he held his ear-phones whitened at the knuckles.

“Kindly keep your observations about my instructing to yourself before strangers,” he said in a shaking voice. “They may not realize what anybody in aviation knows, that you’re the worst woman pilot in this age and country, which is saying something. One day you may make as good a pilot as Sally here. But not until you stop making every decent person’s gorge rise by turning yourself into a cheap circus.”

Mrs. Angevin flushed brick-red. For one moment the Bishop, embarrassed beyond all words, and yet unable to get away inconspicuously, thought she was going to strike Furnace across the face with her gloves. Perhaps she was. But at that moment a clear and languid voice interrupted them. Lady Laura was behind him.

“I really think that instructors should never meet their pupils again, don’t you, Bishop?” she murmured. “They’re so

used to cursing and swearing at them while they're learning to fly that they can't get out of the habit afterwards. You wouldn't believe the things George says to me when he forgets himself."

Furnace looked at her for a moment with an oddly hurt look in his eyes. He seemed about to speak, then he walked abruptly away without another word and disappeared into the club-house.

"Well, I never!" gasped Miss Sackbut. "He'll be terribly sorry about this to-morrow, Dolly. I simply can't understand what's come over him."

"I can," said Mrs. Angevin violently. "These unsuccessful pilots who think they ought to be at the top of the tree, and aren't, all go the same way. Drink. Drink and jealousy. The man's hardly sane."

She dragged on her gloves with a snort, nodded to Lady Laura, looked curiously at the Bishop, and walked away.

"Bitch!" remarked Lady Laura, directly she was out of earshot—or, the Bishop thought, probably a little before. "Still, I've never heard George flare up like that before."

She turned to the red-headed man in tattered overalls, who was climbing into the cockpit of XT preparatory to taxiing it into the hangar.

"Get my Leopard Moth out will you, Andy? I'm going back to Goring this afternoon."

"Oke," said the ground engineer.

Miss Sackbut, accompanied by the Bishop, strolled thoughtfully back to the club-house.

"I'm most awfully sorry this has happened," said Sally dismally. "What will you think of our club? Mrs. Angevin was

right; George oughtn't really to have given Tommy practice in getting out of spins. Tommy's very slow, and he's still on straight and level flying after two hours' instruction. Still, George probably had some good reason. What I can't understand is his losing his temper like that. He's always been a peaceable cove."

"Mrs. Angevin had an explanation," said the Bishop dryly. He looked at Miss Sackbut with a steady gaze which she found a little disconcerting.

"Oh, that was a beastly thing she said! He's never been at all like that. It certainly is galling for a man of his war record—and his piloting ability, for they don't always go together, guts and skill—it must be infuriating to be instructor at a low-down joint like our club, and to see people like Dolly and Randall making fortunes. But it's all luck, that kind of thing, and George has always laughed at it. He's always been as cheery as anything, and awfully popular with his pupils."

"He struck me as not at all the type to lose his temper," admitted the Bishop.

"He's one of the best," said Sally warmly. "But, to be perfectly frank, something has been getting him down during the last fortnight. He's been brooding and quite different to his usual cheery self. I'm afraid he's got a crush on Lady Laura, poor fellow, and if so I'm sorry for him. The Lord knows why I'm rambling on, telling you all this."

"The experience is not strange," said the Bishop. "Evidently there is something in my face, of which I am unaware, which invites confidence. Well, I should like to start my instruction, if it is convenient, at noon to-morrow."

“Certainly. I’ll book it. Get fitted up with a helmet, goggles, and ’phones in town if you can. Merrivale’s are the best people. It’s better than borrowing them, although we can lend them to you if you haven’t time. I’m glad the scene to-day hasn’t put you off.”

“Good gracious me, no! I’ve taken quite a liking to Furnace. Is that Lady Laura who took off so gracefully just now?”

“Yes, she always takes off in a climbing turn. And that means she won’t die in bed,” added Miss Sackbut grimly.

CHAPTER II

CREATION OF A CORPSE

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“Good morning, Miss Sackbut.”

“Good morning, Bishop. You look magnificent in your flying helmet. At the same time, I shouldn’t wear it when you are not flying.”

The Bishop had rather fancied the figure he made in a black helmet. He bowed his head and accepted the rebuke in Christian meekness.

“I’m a little annoyed with George,” went on Miss Sackbut. “He’s taken XT and he’s still up.” She waved at a shadow fleeting across the thin clouds. “I don’t know why. He knows you are coming. I didn’t see him go up or I’d have ticked him off.”

“Don’t trouble. I can wait.” He dropped into a large chair on the club veranda.

Sally called to the red-headed ground engineer.

“Andy! Did Major Furnace say how long he would be up for?”

The ground engineer shook his head. “Just said he’d sweep the cobwebs out of his head, and then took her up. There he goes!”

The frail shadow nosed up in a loop and rolled off the top of it. It seemed speeding straight for the aerodrome when the wings flashed silver in a vertical turn.

Sally snorted. “Getting rid of that morning-after feeling, I suppose! He must have a thick head! If he doesn’t come

down soon I'll borrow Dolly's kite and wave him down."

"Please, please!" expostulated the Bishop, smiling. "I have all the morning, and this is delightful to watch."

"Oh, you'll be able to do all that after fifty hours," said Sally airily. "Now he's spinning."

Once again the scarlet-and-silver wings flashed and flickered as they had done yesterday, but this time the Bishop was not disturbed.

"I thought the machine was in terrible difficulties yesterday," he admitted. "What a delicate touch it must need to perform those swift evolutions."

Sally laughed. "Good lord, he's not moving the controls! The aeroplane does it automatically."

The Bishop, when she spoke, had turned his head towards her. She looked a little abstracted.

She was nervously tapping the side of the chair in which she was sitting. He suspected that this four-square, self-reliant young lady with the calm eyes and masculine manner was a good deal more nervous than she liked people to suppose. And now there was definitely something on her mind.

The Bishop looked sharply at Furnace's aeroplane again. It had lost a lot of height since they had first seen it. It was flickering down towards a bank of trees. It fell still lower.

The Bishop heard a gasp beside him. Sally jumped to her feet, her face contorted with sudden alarm. "Here, George!" she said in a low, urgent voice. "Don't leave it so late!" Then her face paled. She gave an agonized cry that lived for ever in the Bishop's memory.

"For God's sake use your rudder!"

Separated by thousands of yards of clear air, inhuman, remote, the flickering toy vanished behind the trees. There was no sound, no wisp of smoke, but only the empty air, and the silence....

Sally turned abruptly, without a particle of expression on her face. "Quick, the ambulance!"

But Andy had forestalled her. There was a whir and a clatter, and straight out of the hangar sped the battered olive-green Ford which was at once fire-engine and crash tender.

The Bishop saw the engineer, his face set, clinging on to the wheel as the car bounded over the uneven surface.

The Bishop started to run towards the crash. Sally held him back. "You'll never get there in time. Tommy's with Ness," she said, pointing to the gaudy scarf and huge leather coat of Ness's companion, as the tender plunged across the aerodrome. "They'll get him out. It's no use running and winding yourself. Better come in the car. It's over in front of the club-house."

As they walked hurriedly towards it, the Bishop saw in another corner of the aerodrome a man jump into a low green sports car parked beside a scarlet and yellow hut. The sports car was bumping across the aerodrome almost before the crash tender had vanished behind the trees at the scene of the crash.

"That's Randall, I think," said Sally with forced calm. "He's dashing across in Gauntlett's Alfa-Romeo. He'll know what to do."

The Bishop was not deceived by her matter-of-fact voice. There was a dazed look on Sally's face. It was rigid with self-

control. "George, of all people!" she said, as if to herself, in a profound surprise. She looked at the Bishop. "The controls must have jammed," she went on, almost as if asking his reassurance. "It couldn't have happened otherwise, not possibly!"

"It's no good, I can't stay here! I must do something! Come on. We'll go over." They got into her battered four-seater car.

Lady Laura, her face white, came running out of the clubhouse, and without a word jumped into the back seats.

They tore across the aerodrome, leaping from bump to bump, through a gap in the hedge that was a rutted cattle track, over more fields, down a long steady slope, until at last they came to rest beside the Ford.

The Bishop saw the golden head of Captain Randall bowed over an outstretched figure beside which he was kneeling. Standing beside him, their heads also bare, were Andy and Tommy Vane. Tommy's hands were bleeding unregarded over the saw he held in them, the saw with which they had extricated Furnace....

Randall placed his handkerchief over the dead man's head. As Sally came towards them he met her and put his hands on her shoulders. There was a deep pity in his regard.

"He was killed immediately, Sally," he said gently. "The safety-belt must have broken on the impact, and his forehead was thrown against the dashboard." His eyes met hers. "He must have died instantly," he repeated. "Almost before he knew what had happened."

They put the limp figure in the ambulance....

“If any of us could choose the manner of our death,” said the Bishop gravely to Sally a little later, “I think it would always be to die in the calling one had chosen—the sailor on the sea, the farmer at the plough, the pilot riding the air he strove to master.”

It was Tommy who dashed into town to get Dr. Bastable. Tommy returned in a dangerously short time, the tyres of his little red sports two-seater screeching as he drew up alongside the hangars.

“Bastable’s out on a case. I’ve left a message,” he said. “Perhaps I’d better get another fellow though? I could go over to Market Garringham for Murphy.”

“No, we’d better wait for Bastable,” answered Sally wearily. “He’s a member of the club and a pal of Furnace’s. I’d rather he did everything. Not that there’s anything to be done, anyway.”

Time passed, but the doctor did not appear. At last he sent a message saying that he was still waiting for a future citizen of Baston. Sally tacitly acknowledged that the claims of life were more important than those of death.

The Bishop, after an hour of this, thought Sally looked dreadfully tired and drawn. But she resolutely kept her vigil, and it was not until the afternoon that the Bishop could persuade her to give up her place and get something to eat.

Then the Bishop passed into the darkened room where lay the mortal remains of George Furnace. Sally rose as he came in, and a moment after the Bishop was left alone. He lifted the sheet which hid the face of the dead man and looked at it silently. In his twenty years of priesthood he had

seen too many of the spent cases of human souls to be much perturbed by the sight of sudden death. But he felt that to gaze on what had once been the mirror of that soul, and still retained its impress, might bring him more closely in touch with the personality that was gone.

Death had been gentle with George Furnace. There was indeed a ghastly wound on the temple, but the scar whose contrast of colour had disfigured the living features now mingled with the livid hues of death. The Bishop bent closer. Was it a trick of the light? No. Death had frozen on the face of the dead man an expression not of horror, or fear, but of melancholy, despairful reproach.

“Strange,” said the Bishop. He meditated for a while, not replacing the sheet. Uncontrollably his thoughts went straying from the inspiring phraseology that should have occupied his mind to more questionable matters. The Bishop was by calling a clergyman, but because of the variety of duties that had fallen to his lot as a clergyman in lonely parishes in Australia, he was by way of being also a physician. And something in the tension of the features, as well as their expression, instantly aroused his curiosity.

At last he leaned over, raised the dead man’s hand vertically, and let it fall. It curled limply on to his chest and slid to his side again.

The Bishop felt a thin shadow of horror, as if for a moment the forces of evil had invaded the room. Reverently he replaced the sheet, covering the dead man’s face. The deepening shadows of the room found a more than answering depth in the sombre reflection of the Bishop’s countenance.

More hours passed. Evening fell. Outside the Bishop heard Bastable's hearty tones, modified by professional concern. "Dreadful, Miss Sackbut! George, of all people! Such a fine pilot. I am so sorry I could not get here before. But he was killed instantaneously I understand, poor fellow!"

Dr. Bastable glanced at the Bishop without speaking, and gave a perfunctory peer at the forehead of the dead man. "Tut-tut! Most certainly instantaneous! Well, well!"

The Bishop walked quietly out.

CHAPTER III

INQUEST ON AN AIRMAN

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The Ground Engineer's Evidence.

"I am a ground engineer. My name is Andy Ness. I have been employed by the Baston Aero Club ever since it began ten years ago. I hold Ground Engineer's Licences A, B, C, and D. I passed out the aeroplane XT after its annual overhaul for a Certificate of Airworthiness five days before the accident. Of course I examined the control cables. They had been renewed during the overhaul, and were in perfect condition. The aeroplane had been flown for ten hours after the overhaul by various people without complaint.

"I knew Major Furnace well. No, I know nothing of his home life. I mean I saw a lot of him at the club. I hadn't noticed anything unusual in his manner lately. He seemed quite cheerful before he took XT up. He only took her up to amuse himself for a few minutes, I thought. He often did that first thing in the day. He said it cleared his head. He never allowed his pupils to do acrobatics low down, and I never saw him stunt low myself. I did not actually see him crash. I was working on the tender and had the engine running when Mr. Vane (who was due for a lesson, after the Bishop) rushed in and said Major Furnace had crashed the other side of the aerodrome. We both jumped in and tore straight across. I cannot say what happened. Major Furnace was a first-rate pilot, one of the best. I can't understand it. I don't know any pilot I'd rather fly with. I am sure the cables

or the rudder-bar did not jam. I've never heard of such a thing with this type of machine. It's in use in about a hundred clubs and schools, and is considered the best of its kind for all-round safety."

Captain Randall's Evidence.

"My name is Arthur Randall. I am a pilot. Yes, I knew Furnace well. He was one of our best civil pilots; a better pilot than I am, although he is less known. He ought to have had a much better job, but competition for the good test pilots' jobs was keen after the war. He often said to me, 'Randall, I suppose my trouble is I can't shoot a good enough line about myself.' And that certainly was his trouble—modesty. No, his lack of success didn't seem to worry him much, but it was difficult for anyone else to guess what he was thinking at any time. He might have been a little depressed these last few weeks, but it may have been just a passing mood.

"I should describe him as a most careful pilot. I simply can't imagine why the machine did not recover from the spin. It was too far away to see if he was trying to correct it with the rudder, but a pilot of his calibre would do this instinctively at the slightest danger. The type he was flying has never shown any vice in the spin to my knowledge. I was sitting in the office of Gauntlett's Air Taxis when it occurred. Directly I saw him crash I ran out and got into a car. But I had to go back for the ignition key, and by the time I got there Ness and Vane had done all that could be done and had got him out. It was good work, because one of the longerons had to be sawn to free him, and Vane hurt himself doing it. Furnace must have been dead before they

released him, however. His safety-belt had parted and he must have slumped forward against the dashboard. It had penetrated his forehead and killed him. The throttle was closed, but the engine was not switched off. Yes, that is what one would expect if a pilot span into the ground without realizing it. I can't understand Furnace making such an error. The visibility was quite good—about two miles I should say. His death is a great loss to aviation. Furnace isn't replaceable."

Miss Sackbut's Evidence.

"I am Sarah Sackbut, manager and secretary of the Baston Aero Club. I have managed it ever since it began, and Furnace has always been our instructor. It would be quite normal for him to go up for a short flight by himself. I had a pupil waiting for him on the ground. We have never had any trouble with XT before. The machine belongs to a type used everywhere for instructional and beginners' flights. Our ground engineer has the highest possible qualifications. It is all nonsense to say Furnace was depressed. That was only his manner. He was always perfectly contented and happy. He was a very popular instructor and a most cautious pilot. He would never allow any pupil to spin to within a thousand feet of the ground, and he would never do it himself except at a flying display. I can't understand how the accident happened. He span into the ground, that was plain enough. XT would come out of a spin after opposite rudder and forward stick in a couple of turns. Could he have lost consciousness? I can't understand it at all."

Mr. Vane's Evidence.