

*An Aviator's Fatal Encounter  
With the Monsters of the Air*

# EXHIBIT "A"

By ANNE HARRIS HADLEY

"THE wreckage of the 'plane has all been cleared away and disposed of according to orders, sir," continued Lieutenant Gorham. "It was undoubtedly Captain Rowell's 'plane, although this is a thousand miles from where the flight started; and it is very evident that he broke the altitude record as he had been trying so hard to do. Now, sir, if you will read this—" Lieutenant Gorham extended a small black notebook. "I found it in the breast pocket of his leather outside jacket. I can not imagine why the 'plane did not take fire in falling from such a terrific height. And you will perhaps be interested to know, sir—" he hesitated—"that that same queer odor you can still detect on the book was quite noticeable as we were clearing up."

The Major sniffed the book.

"Um—odd," he said. "All right, I'll look it over."

Lieutenant Gorham saluted and went out. The Major opened the little book and read, at first casually, then intently:

"I am writing this" [ran the words written in Captain Rowell's familiar, irregular handwriting] "in the hope that it may fall into the hands of human beings and reveal the things I have found up here. It now seems improbable I will be able to return and report personally my amazing experiences.

"It is impossible to measure accurately the lapse of time, as my watch has stopped, but I broke the altitude record more easily than I had hoped for the continued mounting. The cold was intense, breathing became increasingly difficult. I must have become dizzy, for the next recollection I have is of a sensation of lightness, as if my body were about to rise out of the still mounting 'plane and soar ahead of it. I assume I had then reached a point so distant from the earth that the attraction of some other heavenly body about counterbalanced the earth's pull. My life belt, however, held me securely, and I lapsed again into unconsciousness.

"The next conscious moment found me lying prone on the softest, most restful substance I can conceive of. I had

a sensation as of gentle zephyrs puffing into my face and I opened my eyes. There was an indefinite, shapeless mass above me. As I watched it, I became convinced that it was endowed with intelligence and that its actions were the source of the pleasant, revivifying puffs of air I felt.

"Observing more closely, the mass above me looked somewhat like a huge oyster about the size of a man and of a cloudy semitransparent substance. Its outline was not clearly defined. Imagine my sensations when I realized that it appeared able at will to put forth from any portion of itself streams of its substance which remained connected with the main body and performed the functions of arms! Think of it! An extra arm or two or three—any number of them projected at will from any part of the body! The unnaturalness of it, the slimy horror the formless gray mass induced made me shiver. Though its actions appeared friendly, though it made no effort to harm me, yet an icy sweat broke out all over my body as I gazed fascinated at the unearthly being.

"I found afterward that it transported itself from place to place without apparent bodily movement and by means of some interior energy instead of by the use of legs, of which in fact the creature had none. It was just as if an aeroplane could glide along without movement of the propeller, driven by sheer inner impetus of its engine.

"As my mind became clearer I realized that the strange creature was projecting a portion of itself into an apparently stationary object, and then gently waving the part so transported over me, thus puffing the currents of air which were reviving me. The eerie, creepy sensation this gave me is indescribable. I felt it must be part of some fantastic dream, and yet I knew all too well that I was awake, that no sudden, grateful earthenoise would jar me back to the realm of familiar things.

"Somehow, by what strange trick of Fate or machinations of this pallid, semitransparent creature I know not, but while I sat unconscious, my swiftly

mounting 'plane had passed from the realms of the known to this ghostlike region, the borderland between the earth and the moon, that thin portion of space where the gravity of the earth is almost exactly counterbalanced by that of the moon. And I, a human being, a dweller on old Mother Earth, was here in this unutterably strange place—and one of the beings who dwell in it was reviving me. Doubtless he recognized me as earthborn and knew my inability to live comfortably in the thin atmosphere of the place, hence he was pouring air in my face as a man on earth might pour water in the face of one who had fainted.

"As my senses revived my amazement knew no bounds. I sat up, very awkwardly to be sure, for the least effort moved me much farther than I anticipated.

"How do you do?' I said, by way of showing I was ready for whatever might be in store.

"The creature emitted a queer, whistling noise, which I found afterward is the manner of speech of these creatures who inhabit the zone at the point and near where the gravity of the earth and that of the moon neutralize each other. On account of the small density of their bodies and the great power of their interior means of locomotion, which for lack of a better name I will call engines, these creatures can go a considerable distance on either side of the plane of neutrality and return, but are careful not to go far enough so that the gravity of either earth or moon can exercise on them a pulling power greater than their engines can resist. Later on I made an effort to find out if any had ever done so, but on account of the difficulty I had in making myself understood, I could get no satisfactory information.

"They have great intelligence and have perfected antigravity screens, though I do not understand fully for what purpose they are used. I do know, however, that they are used as resting places for such as are disabled in any way, especially when trouble is experienced in their locomotive apparatus.

"It was on one of these screens that I was lying when I regained consciousness. This screen was a huge affair, in appearance like a thin layer of rose-tinted cloud, yet it bore the weight of myself and my machine, which I rejoiced to see close by.

"I stood up, feeling quite light-headed and dizzy, but the creature, who had revived me and whose captive I apparently was, indicated to me that I should keep still, then he placed near me the object into which he had been dipping. This object was oval in shape and reminded me of a semisolidified cloud.

"The creature made queer noises and wavings of those surprisingly out-thrust portions of his body. At last I understood that I was to make use of the cloud-bowl. I discovered that it was filled with air, breathable by a human being—containing real, life-sustaining oxygen.

"Whenever the thin atmosphere around became too devoid of oxygen and breathing became difficult, I would dip my hands into the bowl and dash oxygen in my face. The effect was quite lasting. The oxygen (or whatever the oxygen-containing substance was, for of its exact nature I am uncertain) permeated surrounding space as perfume does the air, and for many minutes I could breathe comfortably.

"Seeing that I understood what was expected of me, my captor began making mysterious motions near the edge of the cloud mass which was in reality a gravity screen, and I watched, wondering what would happen next. After a minute or so I moved over to my 'plane, carrying the oxygen-bowl along.

"The sensation of moving about was extremely odd, and that of carrying the bowl was no less so. Nothing seemed to have any appreciable weight. This was due at least partly to the gravity screen, which was adjustable to counterbalance part of the pull of either earth or moon as need might be and thus make the attraction of the two bodies practically equal at a given spot. The result of the use of such screens is that the neutral zone, instead of a plane a hair's thickness, becomes for their purposes portion of space perhaps some miles in depth.

"I examined my machine, which seemed to be in good condition, although the gasoline was quite low. The being watched me curiously, then suddenly attached itself to the gravity screen by a tentacle put out, and started hurtling through space drawing the screen which bore me and my 'plane behind him. This dissipated the oxygen around me and I

found the only way I could breathe was by dipping my head into the bowl. Then I managed with fair comfort. After some time I felt the speed decrease and raised my head to look around.

"All about me were numbers of beings of all colors and sizes, but fundamentally similar to my strange captor. Among these strange creatures color apparently denotes rank or occupation. Their voices or whistles, which more accurately describes what they have in place of voices, are all in a very high key and vary from the sweetest fairy notes of dreamland to the siren note of a factory whistle. I noticed that those of dark, indistinct color had the siren-whistle voices, while some of the orange and pink and blue bodies gave forth extremely sweet sounds.

"My appearance caused great excitement among them; and I can not begin to describe my own sensations as I stood on that soft, cloud-like screen and leaned for companionship against the only familiar thing in sight—my 'plane. All about me was a confusion of these extraordinarily high-pitched whistle voices, and everywhere these indistinct, variously-colored bodies put forth most surprisingly the tentacles that served for arms and as surprisingly drew them back. And I was the subject of the hubbub. Evidently there was a difference of opinion as to what to do with me and my 'plane.

"And while the discussion went on, they observed due regard for my person. Not one of them touched me, but their long tentacles came darting out here and there touching, investigating the 'plane and its mechanism. They recognized and respected me as a sentient being. The 'plane was a created object as were their gravity screens. As I realized their consideration, I could not but wonder, even in the midst of this strange scene, if a crowd of human beings coming suddenly upon one of these unearthly creatures would show equal courtesy.

"At last the hubbub suddenly quieted and I witnessed another surprising occurrence. The strange forms stood still, expectant, moved by the approach of something unseen by me. Then while I, too, waited, breathless for the next development, I saw coming from the direction toward which attention seemed turned a glowing, orange-colored being, bearing a blue-white sphere that quivered and sparkled. The bearer of the sphere came forward and paused in the midst, then suddenly put forth two tentacles in addition to the ones with which it bore the glowing sphere. With these second two tentacles it separated the

sphere into halves, and a gas strange—a cloud of perfume, the most exquisite I could imagine—came forth. I could think of nothing but the almost divine sweetness of the odor. I drank in all my lungs could hold, and breathed deeply again and again.

"I found afterward that the odor is to them what food is to us, and is distributed at intervals by orange-colored beings. I also noted that the gray and brown ones always shifted the gravity screens and seemed to be most interested in the intricacies of my ship, hence I infer they are the mechanics of this strange community.

"After breathing in that wondrous odor, I remembered nothing more until I found myself alone. Where my strange captors had gone I could not guess. Impenetrable screen masses were above and below me. My 'plane was nearby and undisturbed. The space between the cloud masses had been flooded with oxygen, the source of which is still unknown to me.

"Whether these creatures have homes and gardens and laboratories, I do not know, but certain it is that somewhere beyond what I have seen, there must be abodes, apparatus with which to work, to prepare the oxygen, the heavenly food-odors, to make the intricate gravity screens. I am consumed with a burning desire to penetrate beyond the cloud-screen barriers and learn more of the life and wisdom of these eerie but highly intelligent beings.

"Finding myself alone, I wandered about between the cloud masses, but dared not attempt to force my way through them lest I should impair their ability to counteract the force of gravity and should find myself falling headlong toward earth or moon. No, it is better to wait and wonder. And after a while, worn out by the wonder of it all, I lay down and slept.

"When I awoke, three of the gray creatures had returned and were curiously investigating my 'plane. I rose from the cloud-screen, on which I had been sleeping, and joined them. They were eager to learn about the machine, and I was quite willing to explain, but since we had no common language, no common gestures, not even similar limbs in common with which to gesticulate, we made rather poor headway. . . .

"These things have gone on for some time. How long I cannot accurately tell, as my watch has long since stopped, and the periods of twelve hours light and twelve of darkness of course do not obtain here. I imagine from the growth of beard on my face that about three

days have passed. And now a new and ominous disturbance has arisen—ominous for me.

"More of these beings than I have seen before have gathered and are hurrying about, first in one direction, then in another. Some are quite angry. They swish back and forth like specters in a dream, moving with incredible rapidity and always most unexpectedly putting forth those surprising tentacles. As they mull about, first one and then another, and sometimes several at once, emit those odd, unearthly, whistle-like screeches, my blood runs cold. I am the cause of the disturbance, just how and why I do not understand, but I am the issue at stake.

"Now they are tearing at the gravity screens. Some pull in one direction, some in another. I do not know the strength of the beings or of the screens, but if a screen should break—

"Well, I have my 'plane ready—as ready as I can make it. Possibly the engine will pick up and start when the fall begins. But suppose the fall should be away from the earth and toward the moon—what then?

"I have taken my seat in the 'plane and adjusted the safety belt. There is nothing more I can do. My action seems to have added to the excitement, but there is still dissension among them.

"They are tugging in good earnest at

the screens. They surely cannot stand the strain. The one beneath me is parting. Instead of cloudiness, I see merely space beneath me.

"My engine—"

There the account ended.

The Major sat staring a long time at the little black book and sniffing the odor, faint, elusive, but still delightful beyond anything he had ever encountered. Then he shook his head, sighed, and, picking up a pencil, marked in red letters prominently on the cover "Exhibit A," before he laid the little book carefully in the top drawer of his desk ready to accompany his report to Washington.

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