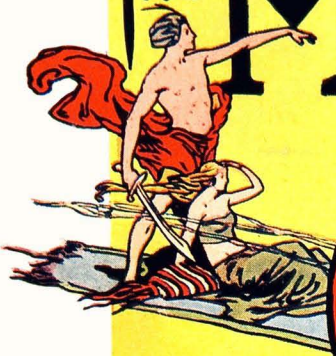


JANUARY - 25¢

The **MAGIC** **CARPET** MAGAZINE



SPEED PLANES FOR MOSCOW
By S. GORDON GURWIT

THE MAGIC CARPET MAGAZINE




Registered in U. S. Patent Office.

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EVERY STORY COMPLETE—NO SERIALS!

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"One of the men tapped Olga on the shoulder."



Speed Planes for Moscow

By S. GORDON GURWIT

A thrilling tale of the Russian Five-Year Plan and a romance that was surrounded with perils and death

STODDARD turned to the window with a growing fascination. The semi-oriental splendors of Moscow stretched away, following the banks of the Moskva. The city was crowned with a diadem of gold and blue domes and minarets like ivory lace against the lapis lazuli sky. Farther up the banks of the river, the ramparts and bastions of the Kremlin rose against the heavens; and beyond that, the lonely leagues of mel-

ancholy steppes stretched to the far horizon.

Somewhere, a great bell was vibrating dimly. The American grinned. He thought of Napoleon, Tchaikovsky, the 1812 Overture.

Behind him, there was a knock on the door.

"Come in," called Stoddard.

The door opened and a young man entered; a handsome young man, with a

fair, Circassian face, dressed in the Russian worker's blouse and boots. He smiled.

"*Dubra utra!*" he greeted; and as Stoddard shook his head, he continued in English: "Good day! You speak no Russian? But I speak the English, so we will be able to talk, *n'ei?* I am Kazanovitch. You are *Tovarish* Stoddard. Welcome to Russia!" He extended his hand.

"Thanks!" smiled Stoddard, shaking the proffered hand. "Glad you speak English. Russian's rather difficult for me, though I've been studying it. I've just been admiring the view here from the window."

The other nodded, smiling. "It gives one to think, not?" he answered. "Moscow is truly Muscovite. I am engineer, *Tovarish* Stoddard. I am to bring you to the *Tovarish* Direktor, then to take you to the technician's quarters. I was not told"—he looked around the room swiftly—"you have brought a wife with you?"

"No. I'm not married."

"Not? Many of the foreign engineers bring their wives with them. You will like the technicians' quarters. There are other American engineers; also English and Italian and German. I think, me, all the young engineers are come to help us with the *Piatiletka*. Thanks! I enjoy the American cigarette so much—they are very good. You are one of the American comrades?"

"No," smiled Stoddard. "This is just a job to me. I needed it. Conditions are rather slow back home."

Kazanovitch nodded knowingly.

"The capitalist world is destroying itself," he announced, inhaling hungrily at his American cigarette. "When the *Piatiletka* is finished, we will overthrow it with its own weapons." He was tre-

mendously sincere; his eyes fairly sparkled with a misty fanaticism.

Stoddard said: "Never had time to think about it. I'm merely an aviation engineer. I came here to build high-speed planes. The first one, I understand, is to make a good-will flight—non-stop—to Tokyo."

Kazanovitch nodded. "Come," he smiled. "I take you to the *Tovarish* Direktor. He do not speak the English, so I will tell you what he will say; then I take you to the technicians' quarters. I do not live there, but I go often to be with the men."

"You are an engineer?"

"Oh, yes! I am aviation engineer. We all work together for the *Piatiletka*. But I live in another place. I have the girl." He smiled.

"Oh, you're married?"

"Married? Oh, no. I live in free union. My Olga she do not believe in marry. But it is just the same. My sister, she live with me. She is young. She member of party too, division of education. She is—what you say?—detail by bureau to be guide for you." He chuckled. "Our *Tovarish* Direktor do not like that, but he can not change executive ukase. It is nothing. You come one day too soon, and she can not come today. So I come instead."

"I see!" said Stoddard. Free union! Well, this was Russia, and there wasn't any use in marriage anyway, when either party to a marriage could appear before the proper authority and get a divorce in a few minutes by simply asking for it.

THEY walked along the busy streets, Stoddard avidly examining the crowds. This was a new world, started from a new beginning; this was the proletariat, engaged in the greatest social experiment in history. *Piatiletka!* The

Five-Year Plan! He saw it emblazoned everywhere.

He scanned the strange Slavonic faces, Tartar faces, Mongol faces. Nearly all were dressed in workers' blouses, the women in short, knee-length skirts. Stoddard grinned. It was all so foreign, so different, it might have been a scene on a different planet. Since his arrival in Russia, he had moved as if in a dream. Lucky break to get this job, just when he was desperate for money.

"My sister she speak the English," Kazanovitch was saying, "and she will show you everything."

"Look here," said Stoddard, "why can't *you* do that? I'm not much of a hand with women; I'd rather have a man."

"In Russia, women are the same as men," interrupted Kazanovitch. "How you say? The same status? Nadine, she knows the English, that is why. I have much work and Nadine is division of education."

Nadine. Stoddard shrugged. The boy—he could not be more than twenty-four—was fair and good-looking; very much wrapped up in his work and his party. If the girl, his sister, looked anything like him, Stoddard thought, he wouldn't mind. He asked:

"Where do you live, *Tovarish* Kazanovitch?"

"It is on the Tverskaya, near the Triumph Arch. I will show you after you are settled. You shall come to us in evening, with Nadine, and we will smoke and drink the *chai*—the tea. I have much to ask you about the America. When starts the revolution there?" he finished, with ingenuous seriousness.

"Haven't the faintest idea," replied Stoddard. "Is there one going to start?"

"But, of course! In your agricultural areas the proletariat defy the capitalist

holders of mortgages. In some states, they have captured the government. It was in the newspaper—the *Izvestia*. We have lecture which tell us that soon a great army of ex-soldiers marches on your Washington!"

Stoddard grinned. "That so?" he said. "Sounds bad, the way you tell it. You see, I've been working in England for two years and haven't been home."

Kazanovitch snorted with a fine scorn.

"The capitalist regime is over," he announced; "the day of the proletariat is here. This—what you say—depression?—is collapse of capitalist system!"

"It's something, all right!" agreed Stoddard.

IN A huge building, on the Kouznetsky Most, they entered to find the executive office of the *Tovarish* Direktor. While they waited in an anteroom, Stoddard asked:

"Is the Direktor an engineer, too?"

"Oh, no. He is an ex-worker, sent here to direct; but he is not a technician. He is appointed by and answers directly to the Gosplan. The foreign and Russian engineers work under him."

Just then the door opened and several American engineers came out whom Stoddard had met the day before. They were all frowning and sober-faced. When they saw Stoddard, they walked over and shook hands.

"Hello, Kazanovitch," said Dean, the senior engineer. "I see you've got Stoddard in tow. Well, Stoddard, what do you think of it all?"

"Haven't had much time to think," grinned Stoddard. "I've only been here a few days, and I haven't seen much; but it's a tremendous thing, isn't it?"

"Yeah!" growled Burch, the younger American. "Tremendous hooley! These guys get all tied up with red tape and

there's nothing done! Hell—how can we keep up the schedule when we don't get any of the raw material to work with? That damned factory in Tiflis is behind so far——"

Dean's signal plainly indicated caution. Burch stopped. Dean turned to Stoddard and said:

"They talk too much here. We came over to lodge our protest against the trial of the Englishmen. See you at quarters tonight, Stoddard—and I wish you'd sign the protest, too."

"What protest? I haven't even begun to work here, you know——"

"That makes no difference. You're one of the foreign engineers and your name should be on the protest. They're trying four English engineers on charges of sabotage and espionage, and we're protesting. They'll railroad those guys sure as shooting——"

Campbell, the third engineer, who had heretofore been a listener, waved his hand and remarked:

"Cut it out! We'll talk to Stoddard at quarters tonight. Kazanovitch will be getting the idea that we're trying to interfere with the *Piatiletka*. See you tonight, Stoddard. Come on, let's go!"

The three American engineers left and Stoddard sat where he was. He looked at Kazanovitch. That young man's expression was stony.

"They are not tolerant, your Americans," he said. "They forget that we are building a completely new world." He brightened suddenly. "Come—we will now see the Direktor."

THE Direktor sat behind a paper-littered desk. Dressed in the usual worker's blouse, there was nothing of the executive about him. One look at his porcine face, topped by the stiff hair, brushed so that it stood up, was enough

for Stoddard. A typical Slav; a *mujik*—an ignorant serf—bewildered by his duties and dangerously vain with his own importance.

He shook hands with Stoddard, eyed him shrewdly, smiled mechanically and said something in Russian. Kazanovitch translated:

"He wishes you welcome to the U. S. S. R., and hopes great things from you. We have heard about the speed plane you built in England, and he says you will have a free hand to build speed plane here. He says he will see you again at my rooms tonight. Come, we go now."

Again they all shook hands, Kazanovitch leading the way out.

"We go to eat," he informed Stoddard. "We will go to the workers' restaurant of our section."

Outside, they boarded a tram-car and went to the edge of the city.

And again Stoddard stared about him when he reached the restaurant. One corner was a lounge, or club. A corner, draped in red, was dedicated to Lenin; in the center was the anti-God demonstration with the inscription: "Religion is the opium of the people." Vivid posters covered the walls. Stoddard had now learned to make out the word "*Piatiletka*," and he saw it everywhere. Portraits of Lenin, Karl Marx and Stalin were thickly hung in every available space.

One of the German engineers joined them as they sat smoking, and Kazanovitch introduced him.

"Comrade Stoddard, this is Comrade Hoering. He works with us in the drafting division."

The German grinned and answered in excellent English:

"How do you do? We heard that you were coming, Stoddard. Glad to have you with us. I spent a couple of years in

Detroit, which accounts for my English. Hope to see you again." He departed and Stoddard again faced Kazanovitch.

"Well, what now, *Tovarish* Kazanovitch?" he asked.

Kazanovitch grinned boyishly. "I like for you to call me *Tovarish*. It is a good word—comrade. But for you I will be called Sergei. That is my name."

"All right, Sergei! I like that better, too. It's a bit easier to say. What do we do now?"

"I show you to your quarters, where you will live. Tonight, you shall come to my rooms and we shall have the party. I shall ask other engineers to come and to bring their ladies. Do you like that?"

"Whatever you say, old man."

2

NADINE KAZANOVITCH proved to be about twenty-one years old. And she took Stoddard's breath away. She was more than pretty, she was beautiful; even in her worker's blouse and her knee-high skirts. She looked like a Circassian, he thought. She was naïvely young, fanatically proud of the fact that she was an executive party member of the educational wing, and was doing her share in the *Piatiletka*.

About twenty people were crowded into Sergei's small rooms, engineers from the various sections; and some had brought their wives. Several of the American engineers had brought their wives along from the States. Hoering came alone; the Russian engineers had feminine companions. Stoddard wondered which were orthodox wives and which were free union.

He met the young and pretty girl with whom Kazanovitch lived in his free union and was freshly surprized. The girl was sweet, modest-looking, and met his eyes

with a frank directness. She felt no shame in her union with Sergei. Stoddard shrugged. These younger people had grown up after the revolution. All their standards and their entire philosophy of life were different.

"Taught them," Stoddard told himself amusedly, "by disillusioned skeptics who dream of creating a Utopia with fallible human material."

The air was thick with cigarette smoke; both men and women sat on chairs, on the floor, on a couch, talking eagerly. A huge samovar was doing constant duty, as was a large plate of *alvah*—a candy some preferred to sugar. On the table were delicacies brought by the foreign engineers from the finely stocked bazar reserved for the foreign technicians.

Dean came over to Stoddard's side and handed him a paper.

"Sign that," he requested. "That's our protest against the arrest of the English engineers. Sign it now, before the *Tovarish* Direktor comes here—they expect him, I hear—and we'd rather not have him see it. Nadine's a good scout and she won't repeat anything I say."

"But I don't know anything about it," protested Stoddard. "Maybe——"

"Sign it! The charges against the Englishmen are all hooey—trumped up. We know it. I'll tell you about it later."

Hoering came over and reached for the paper.

"Let me sign it," he said. "I haven't had a chance to and I want to be with the rest of you." He signed, grinned and walked away. Dean eyed him briefly and handed the protest back to Stoddard, who shrugged and signed. Nadine watched him through half-shut eyes.

"That is foolish," she said. "The protest will do no good. The *Piatiletka* must go on—and we can not allow anything to stop it."

"Do you believe those English engineers were really guilty?"

"The Soviet does not lightly accuse. Judges will examine the evidence and render a just verdict."

Strong undercurrents were evident in the air. They were all technicians, working in the same section; but the foreigners were alined against the arrest of the English engineers, and the Russians, for the most part, were so full of the history-making *Piatiletka* that they desired to go to any fantastic length to further it.

"Tell me," said Stoddard, watching the girl, "something of yourself. You are not married?"

She laughed. "No—I do not believe in marry. We live in free union with those we love—like Sergei and Olga. That is more fine."

"But if a man and girl are genuinely in love——"

"Love? That is a pathological necessity, but we Russians do not allow it to become a psychic obsession. Marry is, after all, bourgeois."

He smiled at that. The youth in him stirred under the topaz fire of her eyes, the allure of the firm contours of her resilient young body.

"You are to be my guide for a few days," he said. "I like that. To simplify matters, would you call me Jim instead of Stoddard?"

"Jcem? I like that more better. Jcem. And you will call me Nadine."

"And I like that a lot better," he smiled, looking at her. For all her equipoise, a slow fire mounted under the peach-tint skin and she looked away.

"Tell me of yourself," she ventured.

"There's nothing much to tell. I'm just an aviation engineer, interested in speed planes."

"What else you do?"

"Fight and swear," he said, hopefully.

She smiled. "How old you are?" she asked, naïvely.

"Thirty. It's a wonderful age. One begins to be observant." He proved this immediately by an admiring glance at the golden hair and the contrasting dark-brown eyes. She eyed him briefly.

"You are young for to be so famous for the speed plane. Oh, yes, we have heard much of your new kind of plane."

LATER, on the way to his quarters, Campbell edged up to him while Dean and Burch walked ahead.

"Let me tip you off," he said quietly. "Be careful what you say and whom you say it to. You're a bachelor, so they detailed that pretty little Nadine to show you the ropes. But remember, that's a trick—they do it to all the bachelors—give 'em a good-looking guide like that. The idea is that if you fall for them, it ties you tighter to the job, and the girls are supposed to engender loyalty to the cause."

"I've seen a lot of women," said Stoddard, "but I'm still single."

Campbell nodded. "Yeah. But be careful. This whole thing is a dynamite mine—it might go off any minute. Don't talk too much to Nadine about your ideas regarding the administration. She's a swell youngster, but you never can tell who is Gay-Pay-Oo."

"What is that?"

"It's the secret police. The place is full of 'em. Don't ever mention the name. It's hell on wheels. They got those Englishmen."

"What for?"

"Sabotage and espionage."

"Anything to it?"

"Nothing! The Englishmen are fine, clean chaps—came here to work; but they'll get a prison sentence sure, unless England intervenes."

"You mean they're innocent and will get a prison sentence anyhow?"

"Something like that, Stoddard. Whenever the *Piatiletka* falls behind, the executives and the administration must have a goat. I'm tipping you off to do your work, say nothing, see nothing, and don't make a confidant of any woman here. A lot of Russian women are Gay-Pay-Oo."

"I see! And that protest we signed?"

"Won't do any good. They manufacture evidence here so fast you can't keep track of it. It's just a form we put through, simply to go on record. This is a great game, Stoddard." He lowered his voice. "Get this: We Americans know something about it. We investigated on our own—but we don't dare say anything because we can't actually prove anything. There's a German here—an engineer named Hoering. Remember him? Well, there are several German engineers working here. We believe they framed the Englishmen."

"But—good Lord, why?"

"Don't you see? It isn't the tempest in the teapot that it looks. There's Japan playing roughhouse in Manchuria and taking big hunks of the map. They're playing merry hell with the Soviet's railways and possessions. Some think they want Vladivostok."

"Even so—so what?"

"Well, don't you see? If the foreign engineers here get in trouble, their native countries will protest; and there's liable to be some trouble—trade embargoes—severance of relations—even the threat of war. If Russia is kept busy in the west and is made to embroil herself with England and France and Italy and America, she will be less likely to think about what's going on in Asia. That gives Japan a free hand to get what she wants—

and we believe Hoering and his pals are working for Jap pay."

Stoddard stared. "Do you actually mean that?"

"Certainly! You're new here—be careful. Don't do or say anything that will get you hauled in by the Gay-Pay-Oo, get it? Look out for Hoering—and be careful what you say to Nadine!"

3

THE airplane factory was a huge affair, not unlike American factories constructed solely for mass production. Weary-faced workers flitted about the whirring mazes of machinery. The factory also turned out engines for tractors.

Stoddard threw himself enthusiastically into the work of turning out his first model speed plane, constructed on somewhat revolutionary lines; it was to look like a huge bat. It was to be very fast, and he thrilled to the joy of creation, the feel about him of beloved tools and familiar machinery.

The two great Russian flyers, Kriloff and Dushoff, were to fly the plane, non-stop, from Moscow to Tokyo on a goodwill trip.

Stoddard caught the sense of huge forces working blindly, groping for system and failing through the lack of concrete, comprehensive leadership. And he found himself almost helpless against the eternal red tape that tied every one's hands.

By almost superhuman efforts, his tireless energy managed to have the new plane ready in a month; then he waited for the engine to be installed. It wasn't bedded down until a month later.

He had seen much of Nadine, of Sergei and Olga. These four had formed the habit of gathering together around the samovar in Sergei's rooms, talking eagerly and drinking tea.

Nadine's beauty, her cool, direct topaz eyes, gradually penetrated Stoddard's reserve. Tacitly, they had gravitated toward one another until Stoddard now saw her every evening.

One Sunday, they journeyed to the Sparrow Hills, behind Moscow; and there, from the terrace of the hotel, they looked down on the semi-asiatic splendors of the old mother city of the Russians, stretched out on the steppes below.

After their meal, they strolled to a seat under a tree far below the gay terrace; and Nadine sat down, dreamily watching the plains and the winding, shining Moskva below her. She had brought a guitar along, but she laid it aside. Around them, other couples sat or stood or walked. All the world seemed gay, with summer plumage on tree and bush and ward.

"I love our Russia," she murmured, her eyes on the vast panorama. "It is big—vast with promise—the hope of the proletariat world."

Stoddard's eyes were on her face. He wondered what it would be like to take her in his arms and rain kisses on that cool cheek.

"It's strange, Nadine," he said. "You and Sergei do not look like the other Russians—you are both so very fair of skin; and then, both of you have light hair and dark eyes. Are you natives of Moscow?"

"For centuries," she said, dreamily. "We have lived in Moscow for long time, my family. Sometime, I show you the house where my people lived. But long ago, they come from Kazan. There—before the revolution—they are Graf—what you say? Baron?"

He raised his eyebrows. "Oh, aristocracy? I might have guessed it!"

In the old order of things this exquisite young girl would have been a Graf-fene. It fitted her, he thought. She held

herself with a royal grace, and had, at times, the stateliness of a queen.

"We are of the old Boyar and Circasian races," she was saying; "but all that is past. Class distinctions belong to the world of capitalism and monarchy. It has no place in Russia."

"But I'm surprized that the party makes room for you and your brother, knowing that you belong to the hated aristocracy."

"There is no more aristocracy. The past is dead. The present recognizes only workers, who strive for the advancement of the *Piatiletka*; who will be the torch-bearers for all the world of workers. And Sergei and I are ardent workers."

He nodded. The cause had no more enthusiastic workers than these two. He shrugged. He was beginning to understand Russia better.

"Still, I'd imagine that you'd have trouble with the Gay-Pay-Oo——"

"That is bad talk," she cautioned, leaning forward suddenly. "You must not say that name, Jeem, never!"

"Why? Every one knows that they're the secret police—is it a crime to mention them?"

"It is not good, Jeem. They know—they see—everything—everywhere."

"Well, suppose they do? I'm sure that anything you might say is safe with me; and you wouldn't tell them if I expressed any uncomplimentary opinions, would you?"

Her face hardened all at once; the youthful luminance went out of it.

"I am not sure," she said. "I believe—I would! Nothing must stand in the way of the *Piatiletka*. There is no room in Russia for traitors!"

He eyed her curiously, hurt. "Would you tell if your brother uttered traitorous things?"

Her face was white now, the eyes hard.

"Yes, I would!" she insisted. "Sergei is no exception. We have no exceptions!"

"I see! You have nothing in Russia but the—*Piatiletka!*"

For several heartbeats he watched her face, then he shrugged. Was this cruelty or fanaticism? Under his intense scrutiny, her eyes came back from the landscape to his; and the absurdly long lashes dropped.

"Why should we talk of things like that, Jeem?" she asked, her entire mood softening. "There are so many nice things to say. It is summer and the world is gay. Here"—she picked up her guitar and tuned it swiftly—"I brought this so I could play and sing for you. Maybe some of the songs of the old Russia?"

SEVERAL strolling couples near them turned to look, but they were dismissed with a knowing smile. The others understood. She played and sang several of the fiery Russian folk-songs; homely folk-songs, by authors whose names were lost in the maze of the years; songs that, whatever their weaknesses or their faults, had in their music that echo of human passion and of mortal pain which more ethical composers, with their purer science, had missed.

The guitar became a live thing in her hands, its vibrant strings pouring out their harmony under her touch. When she finished she turned to him brightly.

"You like?" she queried.

He was stirred. She saw the meaning in his eyes and turned her own away.

"Only the Spaniard and the Russian understand the guitar," he said. "I had no idea you were so accomplished a musician, Nadine."

"The guitar," she said, "is but a light thing, but better accompaniment for the voice than piano. I like it. It is all fire. An organ is the music of the spheres; a

violin is the emotion and sorrow of the human heart, but the guitar has passion and tenderness—and——"

"And love," he finished quietly. "Do you know, Nadine, that I love you?"

Her lips trembled for a heartbeat; the direct, cool eyes flickered.

"Yes," she nodded, "I think so. I like you, Jeem—very much. Since first you come. It is strange——"

"I want you to marry me, Nadine," he said, tensely.

He could see a pulse beating hard in the delicate column of her neck.

"Still you have the bourgeois ideology, Jeem, not so?" she murmured. "Very well, I marry you and we can get divorce when your work here is finish and you go home."

Stoddard squirmed. "No!" he snapped, tersely. "When you marry me, you stay married to me; and when I leave, you leave with me!"

The delicate arch of her brows lifted slightly.

"I could not leave Russia," she objected. "Here, we are building a new world. I care not to go to live in an archaic capitalistic bourgeois country, long past its usefulness. Jeem—I do not believe in marry. Why can we not be together—in free union—like Sergei and Olga? That is much more fine——"

"You don't know what you're saying!" He was outraged, angry.

"Why not? I am free to do what I wish. I do not answer to any one but myself——"

"That is not love!"

"Why is it not love? You think a few words mumbled by a third party—a ritual—will consecrate——"

His eyes held her with a species of hypnosis. Her fluent speech stopped. She faltered. A new tenderness crept into the topaz eyes; she reached for his hand and he clasped her fingers tightly.

"You will marry me," he said, savagely, "in the regular fashion, and we'll stay married——"

"*Nitchevo!* But the other foreign engineers live here with the girls they love—in free union—and when they leave, they——"

"Sorry, sweetheart," he said, tensely. "You see, the difference is—I *really* love you."

THAT night, while he and Nadine, Sergei and Olga were gathered around the samovar in Sergei's rooms, there was a knock on the door. On Sergei's call to come in, four men entered. They wore leather jackets, and huge automatics were strapped to their sides.

There was a swift exchange in Russian which Stoddard did not catch; then one of the men tapped Olga on the shoulder. Fiercely, Sergei protested. Olga's face had blanched horribly; Nadine was speechless.

Plainly terrorized, Olga kissed Sergei hurriedly and was led out by the men. There was no further protest. Sergei sat down as one in a daze, white, stunned. Nadine ran to his side.

"What is it?" demanded Stoddard. "Who are those men—and where has Olga gone with them?"

"She is arrested," said Nadine, bleakly. "The Gay-Pay-Oo!"

"But why? Surely, you people are the most loyal—what has she done?"

Sergei shrugged. "Who knows? It is a trick—it must be a mistake. Olga is loyal to the cause. I must see about this immediately——"

Nadine tried to hold him in the chair. "Not now—you know it would be useless, Sergei. Tomorrow, we will go——"

"This is outrageous!" snapped Stoddard. "I wonder that you better-class Russians stand for the Gay-Pay-Oo. This is only a modern Cheka——"

Nadine's eyes warned him as she looked meaningly from him to the door.

"Damn them!" suddenly cried Sergei. "They can't do this to me and my Olga, Jeem! We have given all we have to give. We are loyal. Olga is my wife!" He flung off Nadine's arm and stood up, his eyes blazing. "I go to see what this means!" And despite anything they could do or say, he flung out of the room.

Nadine sat silent, crushed. When Stoddard gently took her into his arms, the high-strung youth in her broke. She suddenly buried her face on his shoulder, clung to him trembling and sobbed convulsively.

On his way home to the technicians' quarters, he turned it all over in his mind. He had grown to like Sergei and Olga. He knew them to be loyal to the cause. Why the sudden intrusion of the dreaded Gay-Pay-Oo? And Nadine. His lips set firmly when he thought of her, alone, silent, promising that she would wait until morning when he could help her obtain information as to the reason for Olga's arrest.

As he neared his own rooms, a burst of liquor-tuned feminine laughter, shrill, high-pitched, cut through the night like a knife. It came from another quarter of the building, where some of the technicians were evidently holding a party.

He paused a moment to look at the shrouded form of his new plane where it stood on the concrete apron, guarded by a sentry. The crack flyers, Kriloff and Dushoff, would fly her to fame—one hop from Moscow to Tokyo. She would make it, he knew. It would establish him in the foremost ranks of aviation engineers; his name would rank with Vickers, Curtiss, Wright.

He was surprised to see a light snap on in his own room as he approached, and doubly surprised to find Hoering, the

German engineer, sitting in a chair and smoking.

"Hello!" he said. "This is a surprize." He did not like Hoering, and the placid, pig-like face, with its high cheek-bones, reminded him of some predatory animal.

"Hello, Stoddard!" Hoering smiled without warmth. "Couldn't sleep—that mixed party is making too much noise. Thought I'd come in here and talk to you."

The calm intrusion irritated Stoddard. The man took too much for granted. He eyed Hoering with a shrewd appraisal, mindful of the warning the American engineers had given him. What was he doing here?

"How's the plane coming?" asked Hoering.

"Fine. Be ready in a few days for her trial flight. We're waiting for some new wire."

Hoering smiled bleakly. "And you'll wait!" he prophesied, shaking his bullet-head sadly. "I know these Russians. Dreamers! This *Piatiletka* is a joke. They'll never make it. They're far behind now—and millions of dollars' worth of expensive machinery rusts, idle, because some peasant forgot an important cog. A little more of this and I'll tear up my contract and quit."

"So?" said Stoddard, non-committally.

"I mean it, Stoddard! It gets disheartening. Millions of miles of red tape, demanded by a vast bureaucracy that interferes with work. The serfs won't stand for it much longer if the food shortage gets worse. Can you imagine, they passed a law that train crews will be shot if they have an accident! That's why all our raw material is late. And now, the trial of the English engineers for economic treason. Pure rot!"

Stoddard lit a cigarette and wondered. Was Hoering trying to draw him out?

Trying to make him commit himself? Hoering was uttering treason himself. It wasn't natural to talk like that to a comparative stranger. His dislike crystallized.

"Surely, Hoering, you didn't come here to tell me all this?" he answered. "You've been here a long time, I understand. You know it all better than I do. If I didn't like it, I'd break my contract and quit."

Hoering eyed him sharply. "Maybe I will," he said, rising. "I see you're in no mood for talk tonight. I'll go to bed. *Spakoinee nautch!*"

"Good-night," echoed Stoddard. "See you again, I'm afraid."

He locked the door and stood for a moment in deep thought. Was it possible? He made a swift search of every corner of the room, of every drawer; he looked in all the pockets of his clothes. He had received only one letter since coming to Russia. It was from an American engineer he had met in England. This letter he drew out of a coat pocket. Inspection quickly revealed that the original contents was missing from the envelope, and in its place was another and strange missive, written in a curious code. The import was plain. Stoddard swore softly. Planted! Hoering had tried to frame him—still, was it Hoering? He couldn't be absolutely positive. He burned the strange letter at once. If the Gay-Pay-Oo came, there would be no manufactured evidence here!

4

IT WAS a white-faced Nadine he encountered the next morning when he went to Sergei's rooms.

"Jeem!" she cried. "They have arrested Sergei!"

"But—what for?" he demanded.

"I do not know. You will help me, Jeem? We will go at once to see if we

can do something." Her face was hard. "The *Tovarish* Direktor was here."

"What did he want? Can he help?"

"He says he may be able to help—but he wants pay." Her face flushed suddenly.

"I—see!" he answered, slowly, his eyes searching hers. "That's how it is, eh? The swine! I'll wring his fat neck for him——"

"Careful, Jeem, what you say," she cautioned fearfully, glancing at the door.

"What did you answer?" he asked.

The calm, topaz eyes, unafraid, looked full into his.

"What could I answer, when I thought of you, Jeem?" And suddenly she was in his arms, clinging fiercely, desperately, with a wild young strength that amazed him. Her eyes were wet with unshed tears, and a high courage came to her aid.

"He is a filthy *mujik*—a barbarian—that Direktor," she whispered. "He hinted that I—I—may be arrested—that I may be under suspicion because I live here with Sergei and Olga! But I would rather die than consider free union with him. We will go to the *Kitia Gorod*—that is ancient Chinese city—where Sergei and Olga are being held for trial. We will see and you will help me, Jeem——"

"I will," he promised, grimly. "I'll do everything I can. How do you know they're in that place?"

"The Direktor told me that is prison for bad case, and I think——"

"There must be some higher powers than the *Gay-Pay-Oo*," he said. "We will go to the higher ups——"

"There are none," she answered. "I do not think they answer even to Stalin. They are a power to themselves!"

"Come on!" he said tersely, with a quirky grin. "Let's go!"

THEY walked the streets to the *Kitia Gorod*—the walled Chinese city that goes back to the days of the Mongol

domination of Moscow. Every now and then Nadine smiled bravely to him; but the fear that clutched at her heart was visible in her fine eyes.

At the arched entrance in the huge wall that led to the Chinese city they were stopped by an armed sentry. They could not enter. No amount of argument would move the stolid Slav. He had his orders. There was no headquarters of the *Gay-Pay-Oo* here; he knew of no prisoners. They would have to go to the Kremlin, to the Administration Building, and see the proper official and get the proper passport to enter here. That was all.

And it was useless. They finally turned away in defeat. Nadine went to her rooms and brooded, and Stoddard saw everybody he could think of; but it seemed as if the earth had opened and swallowed Sergei and Olga. There was no trace of them anywhere. No one knew anything about them. No one would even speak of them.

At length, driven by desperation, Stoddard went to his own *Tovarish* Direktor, much as he hated the man when he thought of the price he had asked Nadine to pay for his good offices.

"Look here, Direktor," said Stoddard directly, motioning to the interpreter, "you said you could possibly help Sergei Kazanovitch and his wife. You know them both to be loyal to the cause. I want something done at once."

The fat-encased little eyes glittered as they swept Stoddard with a blazing hatred. He knew Stoddard was Nadine's accepted cavalier. He had heard that they were actually going to be married, but his desires were bound by no bourgeois scruples. This tall American had robbed him of a woman he coveted; stood between him and the stinging lusts that poured like a torrid fire in his veins.

"I can do nothing, *Tovarish* Stoddard," he announced, through his interpreter. "I

know nothing of them whatever—and any personal aid I may be able to give should be asked for by some member of the family.”

“Tell him,” directed Stoddard to the interpreter, “that I’m going to be married next week and that I desire to break my contract. I want a permit to leave Russia with my wife.”

The interpreter spoke. The Direktor smiled, spoke blandly.

“The Direktor says,” the interpreter reported, “that it is impossible. You can not so soon desert the economic front. You have contract and Russia insists on fulfilment. Besides, if your wife is Russian subject, it is impossible.”

Stoddard understood. The Direktor would do nothing. He was probably in back of the whole business to force Nadine’s hand and freeze Stoddard out. He would demand his pound of flesh—Nadine would buy his intervention on his own terms, or he would be actively arrayed against them. A vitriolic hatred consumed Stoddard for this complacent-looking sot, with his mane of stiff hair and his porcine features. He wheeled and walked out of the room without another word.

THE American engineers shrugged their shoulders. They could do nothing. The United States did not, officially, recognize Russia. They had no accredited ambassador. They warned him to hold his tongue and play a waiting game. When the trial was held, he might be able to help them, not now.

Nadine had sunk into an apathy from which it was difficult to arouse her. She sat, after her hours of work, in her rooms, all alone, deep in thought. Every day, when Stoddard finished his work, he came to her. In his arms, she lay silent,

frozen, all the high fire stricken from her, all the youthful joyance stilled.

They waited for the trial. About a week later the *Isvestia* printed the first news. There had been no public trial. A court martial had decided that Sergei and Olga Kazanovitch were guilty of treason to the party; of sabotage, economic obstruction; certain papers found in their rooms confirmed this without a doubt. As treasonable members of the party an example had to be made of them as a warning to others. They had been shot to death as decreed by the judges. That was all.

Stoddard left his work and rushed to Nadine’s rooms with the newspaper in his hands. She had just returned from her classes and she greeted him with a lighting of her eyes that always caused his heart to flutter for a moment.

“Nadine,” he began; then she saw the paper he carried. Her face blanched all at once, and she reached for the paper. She found the item and read it through to its end. She looked at him once, with stricken eyes; then she, who was as strong as a young tree, swayed and fell senseless at his feet.

He placed her on the couch and did what he could for her. She opened her eyes presently and he talked to her, earnestly, in a caressing whisper. Hard, unyouthful lines were etched upon his face; grim resolve straightened his mouth.

“You see, dear,” he finished, “it’s no use. They didn’t have a chance—no one will have a chance.”

She nodded, mute.

Swiftly he told her of the planted letter in his own room and his suspicion of Hoering; the warning the American engineers had given him. She clutched at him in sudden terror.

"Jeem!" she sobbed. "You are in danger——"

He shook his head. "Not yet," he answered. "You are in worse danger, Nadine. You will do as I say?"

Again she nodded. He bent and kissed her, and then left. The shock of Sergei's and Olga's execution had laid a hard finger upon his heart. Grimly, he returned to his work, tense, silent, tireless.

IT WAS during the afternoon that Burch came to his side.

"Keep on with your work," he said, smiling disarmingly. "Don't let on—smile. I got a tip they're going to pinch that girl, Nadine, in the morning. Smile, you idiot! I don't want any one to suspect that I'm saying anything serious. The joint's alive with spies and watchers. Nice day, eh?"

Stoddard smiled. He lit a cigarette slowly, stared at some blueprints and nodded.

"Wonderful weather. Who—the Gay-Pay-Oo?"

"Right! But be careful, Jim. There's nothing you can do, so don't try."

"Is that so? Is the tip hot?"

"Sizzling! One of the bright lights in the *Tovarish* Direktor's office. I've been feeding the little crook American cigarettes—even trade for inside stuff. The way I get it, the Direktor's behind the whole works. He wants that gal, see? Now don't try anything heroic, or they'll put you against a wall and pepper your liver, Jim. Better let the dame go—I'll get you another one—and one's as good as another. This one's got the Direktor's initials on her, so lay off. No use queering a swell chance for recognition on account of just one girl!"

Stoddard nodded, still smiling.

"All right, lunkhead," he said casually,

"See you tonight. Tell Dean I want to talk to him, will you?"

Burch nodded and walked away, a seraphic smile on his impish features.

5

AT SIX o'clock that evening a whistle blew and the next shift of workers dragged wearily in to take up the work of the *Piatiletka* where the last shift had left off. Stoddard went to his room and rested. He lay flat on his back and stared at the ceiling, hour after hour, until the black night came and painted the sky with pin-points of star-fire. As the clock struck ten, he rose and walked out of the building.

He wandered to the concrete apron where his plane stood. The sentry saluted.

"A perfect night, *Tovarish* Stoddard," he said. "You have come to look at your little pigeon?"

"A fine night, Comrade," answered Stoddard, in his halting Russian. "Yes, I have come to look carefully. In the morning, the great Kriloff will want her to fly. Tonight, I must make sure."

"But, *Tovarish* Stoddard—it is orders—no one must touch her after your shift is done."

Stoddard snorted. "Yes, I know. Those are my orders, but they do not apply to me. I work many hours extra for the *Piatiletka*. Tonight I must make sure that all is well. Help me take off the cover."

"But, I can not, *Tovarish!*" objected the sentry. He knew his orders, and yet, he was not sure if they applied to this foreign engineer from whose brain the plane had sprung. "It is a ukase that no one——"

Stoddard laughed. He caught a flash of a shadow moving near the hangar.

"Sorry," he said, as he stepped closer, "but this has to be done!" His right fist

flashed, carrying the weight of his ample bone and muscle. The sentry dropped.

Almost instantly, a dim figure in the garb of a mechanic darted from the shadows to his side.

"All right!" snapped Stoddard. "Pick up his rifle and parade back and forth." He was instantly obeyed by the mechanic. Stoddard took a length of wire from his pocket and secured the sentry; then he ripped the covers from the plane, kicked away the chocks from in front of the wheels and climbed into the tiny cabin.

Here, he leaned forward and snapped on the lights on the instrument board. He primed the motor, switched on the inertia starter, and the engine broke into a sudden roar.

With racing heart, Stoddard warmed the motor and kicked open the door. The mechanic climbed in and sat by his side. Stoddard opened the throttle and the plane moved forward. An alarm rang stridently somewhere; flood-lights suddenly went on, illuminating the huge field. Another sentry came running from across the field, but Stoddard veered the plane directly at him. The man had no stomach for the charging monster with its deadly propeller. He dropped his rifle and fled to one side.

Stoddard laughed suddenly. This was something like it! With the feel of the stick in his hands, he felt the master.

"I got her all ready this afternoon," he shouted to the mechanic. "Some of the American engineers helped me. She's good for five thousand miles without a stop. Look! There goes another soldier. I'll race her across the field to the far end, and they'll think that I'm trying her out. Lord! Isn't she fast?"

The mechanic did not answer, but slumped into the seat, still holding the sentry's rifle. Shouts arose from the lighted field. Stoddard paid no heed. He

raced here and there and made for the concrete runway. A glance at the illuminated "sock" showed him the wind's direction. He selected one of the diverging runways, faced into the wind, lifted the tail, gave her the gun, and the plane rose in the air.

A little prayer came to Stoddard's lips. Unconsciously, he spoke it aloud:

"God! I hope the motor is warm enough to go to work and doesn't conk on us! I'll climb slowly—but I must clear those wires at the end of the field. Can't see 'em! Here we go!"

Swiftly, surely, the little speed plane rose and thundered away through the night skies, headed straight west. Ten throbbing, droning minutes went by. The lights of Moscow had faded behind them, and there was no sign of any pursuit. They were all alone in a tiny world of their own.

"No one can catch us now," exulted Stoddard. "We're doing nearly two hundred! I'll have you in France or England before dawn!" He stole a look at the mechanic. The tear-brightened topaz eyes that met his caused his hand to shake. The ship wobbled, as if striking an air pocket. "Here!" he continued, sternly, "this won't do! A mechanic should be helpful. Lean over and kiss me!"

The mechanic meekly obeyed.

Stoddard laughed. "Tastes like moist rose petals!" he said. "Boy—I can see where you're going to be quite a help."

He looked down at the dark earth, the slim, silver ribbon of the Moskva.

"Good-bye, Russia!" he cried. "To hell with your Gay-Pay-Oo and your *Piatiletka!* We'll go home and get a job—any job—so long as the good old stars and stripes fly overhead! By the way—I could use another helping of moist rose petals. Would you mind, Nadine, leaning over?"