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FARNSWORTH WRIGHT, Editor.



WEIRD TALES ISSUED 1st OF EACH MONTH



"His head began to turn on his stooped shoulders—to turn slowly, slowly. And of a sudden I thought I was going mad."

The High Places

By FRANCES GARFIELD

A ghost story of aviation

. . . the high places of our air are swarming full of those wicked spirits, whose temptations trouble us.

Cotton Mather.—*The Devil Discovered.*

WE WERE still arguing as Swithin parked his car in the gloom at the edge of the airport — arguing gently. Everything about Swithin was gentle, even his ar-

guments. For a moment we sat together in the snug dim light of the car's interior. Swithin's lean gloved hands rested slackly on the wheel, and his soft gray eyes regarded me thoughtfully, studiously.

"Here we are, Katharine," he said, "but I still have that premonition about the danger of your flying. For the last

time, please let me take you to the railroad station."

"And for the last time," I said firmly, "I've got to budget my hours. I want to spend the week with my brother, not on trains."

It was true. I could spare only a week from my job, and my brother Bill was getting married, a thousand miles away in Chicago. A plane was the only answer, and Swithin at last bowed his brown head in token of defeat. We got out together, went through a gate, and across the wide, flat field.

The long hangar was dimly illuminated at one end, with only three or four men in sight—mechanics, I supposed. Floodlights illumined a cemented patch, with strange shadows clustered around. No other passengers; I would be alone on the spur hop to Wichita, where we met the TWA.

Swithin put his arm around me.

"Wire me at once when you land," he whispered, and kissed me. It soothed, that kiss, if it did not galvanize. "And now I'll go. I hate to see a loved one sail away from me."

We parted, and I turned to meet an attendant who took from me my two suitcases. The plane was already buzzing, like a huge dragon-fly ready to skim off above oceanic ponds and immense reeds and lily pads. And now I thought, as I tried not to think, of Enic Graf, who had done things to my heart I had never thought possible, who had hurt and dazzled me, whom I was to have married when, a year ago, he fell out of the sky, aflame in a flaming ship.

Dead now, his body ashes where other bodies were dust, he could still make my heart stop, my feet falter, my lips grow dry. Even now I had not wholly escaped his compelling, crude grasp; not even though Swithin and I had found each other, had settled into

a tender and peaceable relationship of understanding happiness.

THE pilot was before me, saluting as though I were a superior officer.

"You're the passenger for Wichita, lady?" he asked in a high, cheerful voice. "We're ready if you are."

"Thank you," I said. Who had said that all pilots resembled each other, with piercing, narrow eyes and square jaws? This was a thin-faced young man, stooped in the shoulders and as anxious to please as a waiter. Not much about him of Rickenbacker, Lindbergh, Corrigan, nothing at all of Enic Graf. "What sort of a journey will we have?"

He shook his head dubiously. "Lots of clouds off there," he said, and for the first time I realized that the moon should be shining.

He helped me into the cabin of the plane. It was all of brown paneling and wide glass panes, like the inside of a station wagon, and had room for only three passengers. I took the seat behind his, and he drew a safety belt of strong webbing across in front.

"Maybe we'll have bumpy weather," he explained.

And then we were off, off and up. A glance sidewise showed me the lights and the hangar dropping and dwindling. Dew seemed forming on the pane beside me, and the upward slope of the ship made me slide down into the angle of the seat.

I had never flown before—strange, since I had known and loved Enic. I would not be flying now, if Swithin had had his way. I sought for novel impressions, but it all seemed as if I had done it before. Perhaps too many friends had talked to me of the joys and thrills of flying.

The light in the cabin was too dim to

read by, and in any case a humming vibration of the craft would make reading uncomfortable. I leaned back and closed my eyes, thinking of Bill and his approaching happiness, of the gift I had brought for the Mrs. Bill to be—a Zorinos cape, one I would have loved to keep. It was stowed behind me, in one of the suitcases, all of brown skins sewed together in little bands that displayed in a succession of patterns, like the graining of fine wood, the pelt-markings. She would like it, no matter what type of woman she might be. The thought came, and I dismissed it, of the day when my own wedding had been at hand, and the news of Enic's crash came like a heavy door slamming against my face. And then I was asleep. I dreamed the plane was falling.

I awakened with a sickening jerk. I may have screamed. The pilot turned halfway around.

"What's the matter, lady?" he called above the growl of the motor.

"I had a bad dream," I called back.

"Don't be scared. No danger. Just bumpy weather—clouds. I'm going to get above them."

There was evidently rain, and the windows were thickly misted. The pilot did things with his controls, and again the nose of the craft lifted itself, as though it climbed steep stairs. I could see the hands of the pilot on his instruments. They, at least, were typical, comfortingly so—big, blunt, capable. Enic's hands had been long and sensitive, like a surgeon's or a violinist's, and across the back of his right hand had sprawled a jagged Z of a scar. Again I drove the thought of him from my mind, and lay back for another snatch of the sleep that seemed determined to possess me.

My awakening was calm. The plane flew on a smooth level, and light filled

the abyss outside my window. I mopped with one gloved hand at the glass, and peered out into a sky filled with the light of the great cream-colored moon. Far below were the clouds, or what must be the clouds, a drab continent without visible rent or lump in it. I gasped with the beauty of it, then with the terror of thinking how high we must be.

"What's our altitude, pilot?" I cried out, trying to be gay.

His head began to turn on his stooped shoulders—to turn slowly, slowly. And of a sudden I thought I was going mad.

IT WAS not his lean face that came around, but the face of another, a face that I knew. Square jaw, wide lips with bracket-like lines at their corners, proud broken nose, eyes as deep and dark and shining as two pools by lanternlight—so pale, so stiff, so utterly without the flavor of Enic Graf, yet so unmistakably Enic.

Frost-cold nails of fear dug into my backbone. I reasoned with myself, flatly and a little stupidly, as one reasons with a panicky child. This wasn't Enic—Enic's handful of remains had gone to the grave twelve months before. It was a mask. That was it, a false face, cunningly made but not cunningly enough.

I leaned forward.

"This is a very poor joke," I said, too loudly for dignity. "And it's a cruel one."

And I heard his soft chuckle, as plainly as though the engine had shut off—his soft, deep chuckle, the chuckle with which Enic once maddened and conquered me. The face came all the way around, and, for all its stiffness and dead pallor, the eyes were bright and alive.

"Joke?" he repeated, in Enic's deep voice, and chuckled again. "I don't joke with you, Katharine."

His left hand only remained on the controls. His right elbow hooked over the back of his seat, and its hand came into view—a slender, delicate hand, a hand I knew, and upon its back, shining in the dimness like touchwood, a jagged Z-scar.

All these details wavered before my eyes, like a very old motion picture, but I could not deny that they were definite. The pilot had changed, had melted and run into a travesty of Enic. Reason tried to hold command, frantically and inadequately, like a leader against whom tried old troops had rebelled.

Something dawned in my head, a saving thought: ectoplasm . . . what was it? I had heard of ectoplasm, had read of it in Swithin's books, had laughed over a comedy film about it. The name of the film was *Topper*—but that was hardly important now. Ectoplasm, the spirit-commanded aura that could flow forth, become solid and take shape, to form upon a living body the strange semblance of a dead person—this must be the answer.

"Who are you?" I asked, knowing all the time who it was, and Enic chuckled yet again, with almost honest mirth.

"Why do you ask, Katharine?" he mocked me, in that soft deep voice that I could hear above the roar of the motor. "There's no reason to ask."

"What do you want?" I cried, and marveled at the hysterical ring of my voice in my own ears.

"You," he answered. "You, of course." Dead hand lifted to dead face, long fingers tapped line-bracketed cheek. "Did you think you would ever be quit of me? I died up here, Katharine.

And I waited. You came up, and we're together again."

I shrank back, as though he had moved to seize me. "But you're dead," I protested wildly. "And I'm—I'm alive!"

"Yes," he nodded, as one who concedes an unimportant item of a discussion. "Anyway, you aren't bringing Swithin into this." His lips widened in a tigerish grin. "You don't love him as much as you think."

"Enic," I said, and paused to govern my voice. I must keep steady, in word and in heart and in mind. "Enic, you're wrong. I love Swithin."

"And you don't love me?" His voice was suddenly plaintive, offering the note that had so often melted my resolve in the past.

"I can't love you, Enic. Not now. You're dead," I cried at him again. "The dead can't love——"

"Can't they, though?" His left hand crawled over his controls, doing something I did not recognize. "I'm dead, but I love you. I'll have you, Katharine. You'll see."

The ship bucked and leaped around us. Suddenly I slid forward in my seat, almost fell out of it but for the safety belt.

"What's happening?" I screamed.

The motor's roar rose high, cracked, and became a terrifying whine.

"We're falling," said Enic, and still his voice could dominate the din. "I'm letting us crash, Katharine."

"No! No!" I begged.

"You'll never feel it," he told me, as though to comfort me. "We're going faster, Katharine—faster—you'll lose your wits, go to sleep—to sleep—and when you awaken——"

That whining wail was the air that tore at the struts, I knew. It was quieter now, or my ears were growing numb.

And the pale, stiff face of Enic Graf was growing dim, distant. Fog shadowed it.

"We'll be together up here in the heights," he was promising me, not loudly, but from worlds away. "Together, Katharine——"

I WAS hanging limp against my safety belt. It was the only solid thing in the universe. And I went deaf, blind. I was swallowed by black silence.

Then a roar, a prickling sensation in my toes, and lurid light in my eyes; it sounded as though the motor was going. And a high, anxious voice was dinning at me: "Lady! Lady, are you all right?"

I pawed at my face, sat up straight. The plane was traveling on a level once more. And the pilot, his heavy hands on the controls, was sitting with his thin face half over his shoulder.

"That was a close call," he told me, striving hard to sound cheerful.

"Was it?" I mumbled idiotically. I knew that I looked unkempt, that my hat must be askew, my rouge smeared. For the moment I did not care. "What happened to us?" I demanded.

"Well, I don't rightly know," he said, slowly and embarrassedly, like a schoolboy unable to recite. "I got up above the clouds, 'way up there, and tried to level her out—and she kept going up."

He shook his head and thrust out his thin jaw. "Nothing jammed or anything, because it's all right now. But she kept going up, up, as if a big hand had grabbed us and was lifting us."

"Yes," I prompted. "And then?"

"Then I seemed to pass out. Maybe the air was thin . . . but I didn't have

any sense of danger. It was more like leaning back while the relief pilot takes the controls. Does that sound crazy?"

"Not very crazy," I assured him. "But you don't remember what happened?"

"Not a thing," he confessed. "Not until we were falling, and I shook it off and pulled us out of the dive."

I gazed at him searchingly. "What's your name, pilot?"

"Alvin Piper." He cleared his throat. "If you're going to make a complaint, lady, that's your privilege. But I got a wife and two kids in school——"

"I won't complain," I promised. "I was wondering, Mr. Piper, if you ever knew a pilot named Graf. Enic Graf."

"Graf? I don't think so—no, wait." He nodded fiercely. "I used to know a Graf who tested for the Stearman people. Had a broken nose, and a big scar on his hand."

"That's right," I agreed.

We suddenly sailed into a dim clearness. Moonlight washed the fogged windows.

"Weather's breaking up already," the pilot informed me with deep satisfaction. "That's Wichita up ahead, where the lights are. . . . But what's Enic Graf got to do with this business, lady? He died a year ago."

"Did he?" I asked, and in spite of myself I laughed shortly.

The pilot looked at me strangely, wonderingly, but I could not tell him why I doubted. I could not tell Swithin, or my brother Bill. I could not tell anyone.

I knew only that I must never fly again, lest Enic be waiting for me in the upper abyss.

