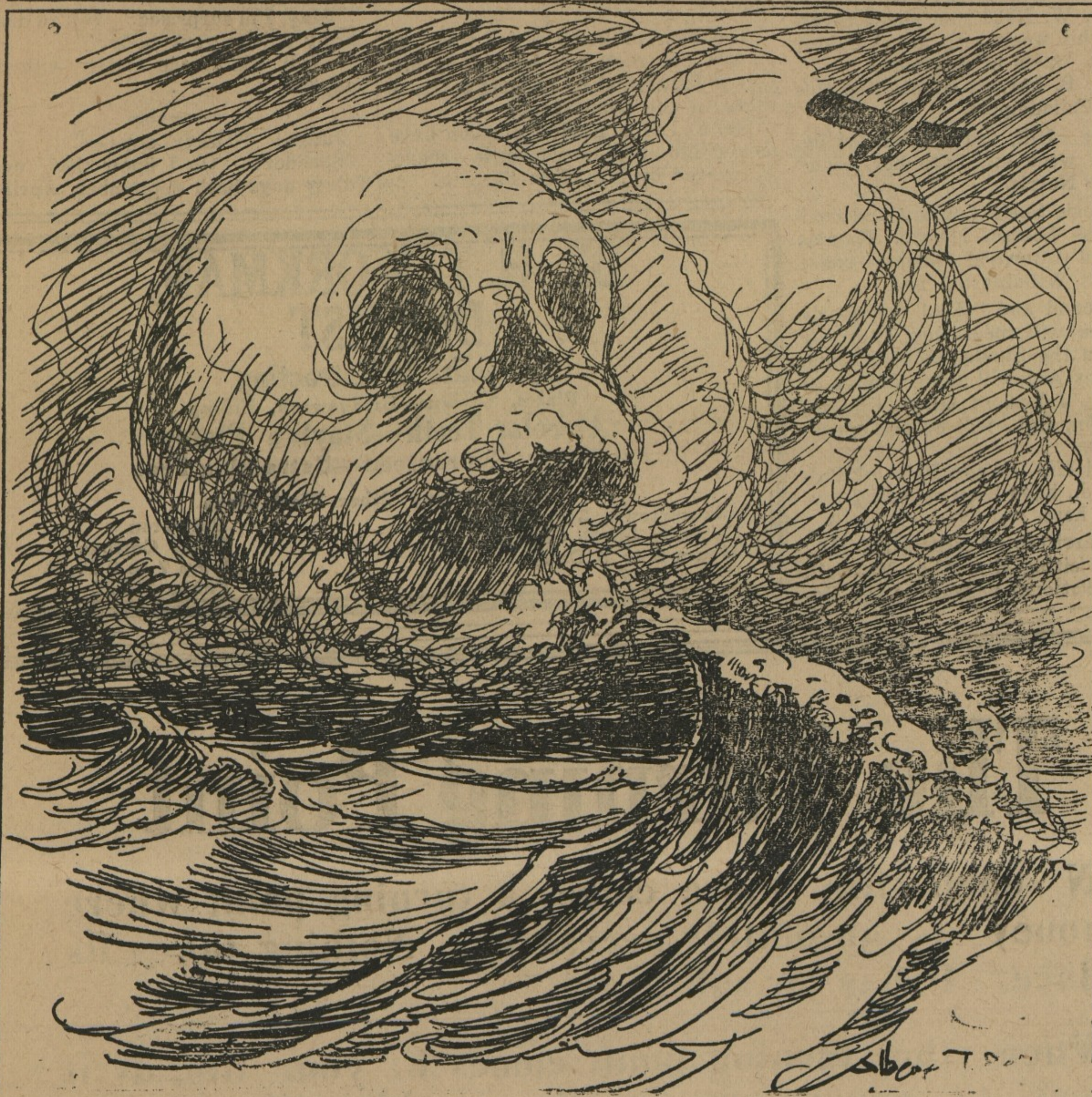


Stunt Flying

By Albert T. Reid



CEDAR SWAMP by Michael J. Phillips. Illustrations by Henry Jay Lee. Released thru Publishers Autocaster Service.

THE LEADING CHARACTERS EDISON FORBES, a young resident of Scottsdale...

PATSY JANE, his trusting wife, agree that public sentiment against him is too strong...

ISAIAH SEALMAN, a shifty neighbor who is anxious to buy their property. Eddie learns that the back taxes total over eight hundred dollars...

NANCE ENCELL, his former sweetheart calls, finds him alone, offers to pay the deficit but is rebuffed.

Eddie discovers that two men, one of them the youth who deserted him the night of the truck accident...

A week slips by and just before the fatal days on which his property will be forfeited...

CHAPTER XXIII SAVED

"Eddie!" He started quickly at his name, called in those soft tones...

closed the door behind him. "I've been watching for you all the afternoon," she said...

"I know, Mr. Kinnane is attorney for the bank. He knew about the raised check and warned me your account would be held up here."

She thrust a roll of bills into his hands. Amazed to the point of speechlessness, he took it automatically. He saw that the dear little face was pale; that the warm little fingers were stained purple.

"It wasn't exactly necessary," she went on, giving time to recover.

"Come on outside, Patsy," she commanded. When they were alone in the vestibule she placed both her hands on the other girl's shoulders...

"I suppose you believe with stupid old Scottsdale that I was with your husband the night that woman was killed?" She paused for a reply...

"Now this quarter-section of yours, Forbes. We've been paying on an average around sixty dollars an acre, and that's more than the stuff is worth."

"The dark youth waited patiently in the outer office. When Eddie and Malone came out, he approached the former sulkily.

"I didn't care about the gossips, but I knew if I were talking to him it would make the care worse. And well, Pat, I was a little nasty, too. You'd come in and taken him on the wing. I felt sometimes as though I wanted you both to suffer. That's all the clinic stuff. Do you know who was really with him that night?"

"You know I don't," returned Patsy. Nance tilted her head toward the room they had just quitted, and the other girl's eyes widened in surprise.

"I'm acting as his agent," he pointed with his penholder toward the dark, scowling young man, "just as I was for Mr. Brower." It was plain that he did not share his principal's ill-humor over the turn affairs had taken, markedly plain.

Nance rose from her chair, sauntered to Patsy Jane, who stood with averted eyes by her husband. She linked her arm through Patsy's. There was a motion of aversion and resistance, but the smile on Nance's willful, attractive face only deepened.

He had liquor illegally in your possession. You had been drunk before. In the circumstances, I consider the statement quite justified. "All right," replied Eddie, easily. "I wanted to get your ideas on the subject. But I came for something else, really. You own—"

CHAPTER XXIV THE JUDGE "When I saw there weren't any pieces to pick up—That kiss you saw was goodbye. The 'Come soon' I threw in was just pure cussedness. That finishes that. No, you know, Patsy, the mending idea is like any other. When you set your heart on picking up pieces and making over into a better model—So I'm going to marry—"

"I'm glad, Nance," the girl went on with her astonishing frankness. "But the difficulty makes it all the more fascinating. Did you know Eddie thrashed him the other day?"

"That was a forward step. That young gentleman thought for awhile he was going to take your land away from you. He bought the tax title from the Browns, you know. But I wouldn't have permitted him. If you two hadn't found the money, I'd have paid it myself."

"You're good, Nance," said Patsy, gratefully. "Get out!" she scorned. "It's better fun to shoot straight. That's all."

"Yes, Sealman!" The other spat out the name scornfully. "Maybe you're surprised we're out in the open, and Sealman's the answer. We tried to do it under cover, so we wouldn't be held up. He was our agent. But we found out he was taking about half the options in his own name. He was to be his own holdup man."

"Some of the land he had to buy outright. He needs quite a wad of money, quick, and he ran in a cargo of liquor to raise the wind. That was his booze the state police captured today. So he fell down, and I've been over to the jail and gotten released out of him."

"Ouch—You're certainly careless with your language, young fellow."

"But you have to have it. That's my price. It's a little high, but it'll compensate for some of the things that crook agent of yours did to me. By the way, I reserve that mound on the southwest corner. It must be above your proposed water-line."

"The judge permitted himself a grim and appreciative smile. "That was considerate. Because, when Randolph made his report, I shall certainly have had to look you up. Apparently we are to be rather closely associated. Mr. Forbes. Had you thought of any basis of doing business; say a sale of this mound outright to us?"

"Not an outright sale, Judge. I'm getting some money to play with. I yearn now for a steady income. I've set my heart on a royalty—say a certain percentage of the price of every bottle sold."

The Forbes family occupied the one large and comfortable chair in the cabin on Portage creek. It was night; and outside the northern lights were putting on a show with half the sky as their stage. Bars and pennons and lances of white radiance, the greatest of them in dimension like Lake Huron set on end, blazed from horizon to mid-heaven.

"It is a certified copy of the confession," Eddie corrected him, quietly. The judge bowed. "So I see. Well."

"It completely exonerates me. I was convicted of a manslaughter in your court because of that accident." "Yes, the evidence—"

"Was mostly prejudice. I was really convicted of taking a drink." "Granted that may be in a measure true. What is your purpose in coming to me? The laughter in your court because of that accident."

You had liquor illegally in your possession. You had been drunk before. In the circumstances, I consider the statement quite justified. "All right," replied Eddie, easily. "I wanted to get your ideas on the subject. But I came for something else, really. You own—"

"He has been trying, because of certain circumstances," said the judge firmly, "to force me to reverse myself on that accident of last spring. He has told me—"

"You sneak!" interrupted the dark young man, passionately, turning on Eddie. "So you had to go come and spill it that I was with you that night. I was coming to tell him myself. We agreed, Nance and I, it was the thing to do. And you spoil—"

"Randolph." His father's hard voice stopped him. "Do you mean that you—you were Forbes' companion—that you were on a drinking bout—"

He paused to stare fixedly at his son, whose attitude confessed guilt. Confused by this blunder, Randolph stood with head bowed and hand on his forehead.

"He told me nothing, sir," resumed the jurist. "He has protected you, as he protected you at the trial. He accepted a prison sentence at my hands while he spared my son." He turned to Eddie:

"Mr. Forbes, I have reconsidered. I shall publish a statement making amends to you. And I shall say in it that my son was with you that night."

"Dad," implored Randolph. "Be silent," commanded his father. "Hold on, Judge," interplated Eddie. "I asked Ran to go with me. I bought the liquor. He wasn't as much to blame, by a long way, as I was. That's why I kept still."

"He shall learn to bear the responsibility of his own acts," replied the judge, implacably. "If he hadn't been a coward and run away, he wouldn't have put me in this—this humiliating position."

"As a favor to me, Judge, please don't mention him—"

The judge raised his hand. "You said there was another matter you came to see me about, Mr. Forbes."

"Yes. I've had the sour earth from that mound on my place analyzed too, Judge. It's precisely the same composition as your supply in Texas, which is about exhausted."

"Do you mean it is a mound of the mound which Randolph discovered near Long Portage is on your property?" The judge's surprise was obviously genuine.

"It certainly is. Ran left a sack when he came to get samples a few weeks ago. The Mineral Medicine Corporation, Austin, Texas, was printed on it. I found out that your mound not far from Austin is about exhausted. That the 'ore' in your mound, known as sour earth by the Indians and settlers, is a sandy matrix containing salts of calcium magnesium, sodium and iron and free acid. That it was overlaid by a solid vein of rock—a sort of cap."

"I discovered that it has a tremendous sale when reduced to solution by boiling to free the medicinal salts, and that is bottled and sold under the trade name 'Mineral Magic.' I know that hundreds of thousands of people regard it as a panacea for rheumatism and indigestion and things like that."

"You've been combing the country for another supply, especially where geologic conditions were somewhat similar. You became, a couple of years ago, principal stockholder in the Mineral Medicine Corporation by the death of your uncle. When the analysis of my stuff proved up well, I thought you might want to see me."

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Eddie sat in the chair and Patsy sat in his lap, her knees well up to her chin. His arms were about her; her head on his shoulder. They were engaged in that most delightful of occupations—the building of air-castles which have a solid foundation of

practicability and possibility. "I want to stay here until after the first deep snow," said Patsy, dreamily.

"The deer season's early November," answered her husband. "We'll get our deer and stick around until the snow comes up to the windowsill. That suit you, Pat?"

"I'll love it," breathed Patsy. "Anyways, till the novelty wears off. Then we'll follow the sun southwest for the rest of the winter."

"Next spring we'll come back here," Eddie pursued the thread, "and I'll study up cattle-breeding with Davenant. He's a good old scout, after all, Pat. He apologized like a man for

threatening to lick me over the bottle that squarehead got. We'll live here—"

"But the dam! Won't this be all under water?"

"They won't start construction until a year from next April. Malone says we may have this house all next ranch from them somewhere near here. They have a lot of acreage they don't need above the new water level."

"Isn't it wonderful?" sighed Patsy Janue, in utter content. His arms tightened about her. "Not so wonderful as you, Pat," he whispered.

THE END

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