GHOST PLANE

By ARTHUR STRINGER

W.N.U. SERVICE

THE STORY SO FAR: Although he suspects him of being up to something, Alan Slade agrees to fly a "scientist" named Frayne and his assistant, Karnell, to the Anawotto river in search of the trumpeter swan. Frayne pays them enough to enable Cruger, Slade's partner in Norland Airways, to buy a Lockheed plane. But while Slade is away the plane is stolen. When he starts out to find it, Slade is aided by an eskimo named Umanak and by two old prospectors, Zeke and Minty. He returns to Frayne's camp, where he learns that Frayne has the Lockheed and that an outcast pilot named Slim Tumstead is flying something out of the country for him. But when Slade attempts to examine the plane's cargo he is knocked unconscious by Karnell. Tumstead saves him but abandons him later on a deserted island. Umanak, the eskimo, succeeds in getting a sample of Frayne's cargo, which turns out to be pitchblende, a valuable source of power. Now Zeke and Minty, who found Slade's plane and are guarding it, have been joined by the "flying Padre" and his daughter, Lynn. Knowing that Slade would not have left his plane unguarded, they realize that something has happened to him. Lynn has gone off alone in her father's plane to find him.

Now continue with the story.

"Yes, it's Lynn," she told him. "I've found you. —17—

CHAPTER XVII

A lowering sun and a quick glance at her gas gauge told Lynn that her cruising had carried her farther afield than she had first intended. Tired and dispirited, she set her ship down on a many-armed lake that met a series of limestone ridges on one side and merged into scattered islets and muskeg on the other. And after eating and noting the thinning light about her she decided that enough flying had been done for one day.

So she slept that night in the plane cabin, as she had done often enough before. Her sleep, for all her weariness, was both broken and troubled. When she awakened, in the gray light of morning, it was oddly like awakening to a call. She sat up and looked about, wondering as to the source of that ghostly summons.

She smiled when she heard it repeated. For what had come to her over the lake water draped with its morning mists was the echoing call of a trumpeter swan.

Lynn quietly opened the cabin-hatch and studied the lake's surface.

A moment later her eyes coasted the nearer shoreline and through the scrub spruce she saw a bear crawl down to the water's edge and drink.

She thought, at first, that it was wounded, its movements were so slow and uncertain. Then the bear, with an effort, stood up on its hind legs. And the staring girl saw it was not a bear, but a man.

Lynn clambered down from the plane and hurried ashore. She coursed over gravel beds and gullies and pushed her way through a tangle of briars, her breath coming in shorter and shorter gasps as she ran. She did not call out. But gladness and anxiety swept through her in interlocking waves as she hurried on. For even before she confronted that squatting figure she knew it was Slade.

She dropped to her knees, in front of him.

"Alan," she cried.

His gaze remained empty and unresponsive.

"It's not a dream, Alan," she panted as she crowded closer to him and brushed back the tangle of hair from his face. She could see a little of the vacancy go out of his eyes.

"Lynn?" he mumbled, still incredulous.

"Yes, it's Lynn," she told him, encircling his ragged body with her arms. "I've found you."

Lynn noticed, for the first time, the gauntness of his tremulous body. She supported him as he sank to the ground, where he sat staring at his worn and battered flyer's boots.

"I lost my knife," he muttered.

"That doesn't count now," she told him. "There's food and everything we need in the plane. But I'm wondering if you can walk that far."

He laughed again, less harshly.

"I guess I could still walk a hundred miles for a meal," he said as he once more got to his feet. "It's what I've been doing . . . walking . . . walking!"

She eased him to the ground, along a slope of moss-covered rock, when she reached the lake arm where the plane was resting. Then she hurriedly made a fire and brought canned milk and coffee from her cabin stores.

He remained as passive as a child in a hospital ward while she tugged and turned and rid him of his tattered clothes. She bathed his bruised body, noting the cuts and scratches, which she later anointed with witch hazel. Then she dressed him in the Padre's denim shirt, which was too small for him, and in the Padre's denim overalls, which were too wide in the waist.

"And now," she said, "we've got to get you looking less like a bear."

He smiled a little as she lathered his face and bent over him with her razor.

"How'd you find me?" he asked as the razor blade scraped clean his hollowed cheek.

"The swans wakened me," she said as she scraped. "I might have slept on, if it hadn't been for them, and not seen you."

He blinked down at the plane wings in the lake cove, surrounded by its sheltering ridges.

"What is it?" asked Lynn.

"I've got to go back," cried Slade, struggling to his feet.

"Back where?" asked Lynn, startled by the look of hate that darkened his face.

"To where they're hiding with that Lockheed. I've got to find Tumstead and Frayne." His voice shook with passion. "I've an account to settle with them."

He told her, briefly, of his capture and abduction, of his escape from the island, of his loss of strength as he tried to fight his way down to the coast.

"And if you hadn't come," he concluded, "I'd have gone out the way they wanted me to."

"Then you mustn't go back," she maintained. "You've faced danger enough. We know what those men are now. They'll stop at nothing. And I don't want you killed."

He shook off her hand and faced her.

"Who knows what those men are?" he demanded.

She told him of Umanak's discovery and of the Flying Padre's flight that brought him to the two embattled old sourdoughs from the Kasakana.

Slade's eyes narrowed as he listened.

"Then my hunch wasn't wrong," he cried out as his face darkened with a newer hostility. He looked at the spruce ridges that stretched away to the south. Then he looked at the faded blue wings of the plane. "Let's get going," he announced with a brusqueness that brought her gaze about to his face.

"Not yet," she said, realizing how remote from her he stood in his man's world of conflict.

"What is it?" he questioned, puzzled by the intentness with which she continued to study him.

"If you go back there," she told him, "it will be like going into battle. It will—"

But he cut her short.

"It'll be battle all right," was the bark that came from his dry lips.

"We can't tell what will happen," she went on. "We can't be sure of anything. But before we go I want to be sure of one thing."

"Of what?" he asked, his eyes on the plane.

But after another look at his gaunt face, she knew there was no room for life's subtler hungers in that tired and broken body of his. And pride, coming to her rescue, kept her from answering his question.

"Let's go," was all she said as she stooped to gather up her scattered possessions.

Slade, at the controls, arrowed southward with his throttle wide open. Lynn, from time to time, was conscious of the grimness of his face. Yet she smiled as she realized that a part of his grimness was due to the assiduousness with which he was chewing dried beef as he flew. He had been hungry, she remembered, for a long time.

Then he stopped chewing and scrutinized the country under his floats. The emptier rock ridges had given way to more closely watered terrain, to a region of lakes and streams interspersed with dolorous stretches of muskeg and marshland.

"We must be getting there," he called over his shoulder as a still larger lake floated under them and was left behind.

"There should be smoke," Lynn told him. "Father said a fire would be kept going."

"Where?" asked Slade.

"Where you left your ship," she explained, already searching the blue-misted ridges before her.

But Slade was the first to catch sight of the far-off plume of signal-smoke. He could see the gray drift above the furred darkness of the spruce slopes. His jaw hardened as he changed his course a point or two and droned down on the many-armed lake that more and more took on an aspect of familiarity. His memories of that district clearly were not palatable ones.

"Where's my plane?" he demanded as they dropped lower.

"It should be here," said Lynn, busy searching the shoreline.

But it was not there. All Slade could see, after drifting into the lake arm between the ridges, was a ragged old figure with a rifle, watching them as they came. Behind him burned a huge fire of spruce boles, sending a drift of smoke up the air.

"It's Minty," cried Slade as their pontoons grounded on a gravel bar.

Lynn was the first to clamber down and hurry ashore.

"Where's Father?" she questioned.

But the ragged old sentinel with the rifle was watching the long-legged figure with the mooring gear in its hand.

"So they found you, Lindy," he exulted. "And you're back in the nick o' time, son. For there's hell let loose in these hills."

"Where's Father?" persisted Lynn.

Minty, finally conscious of her questioning, inspected her with a reproving eye.

"He's out scoutin' for you, lady. And he sure lost sleep wonderin' what'd happened to you. Where'd you find this puddle-jumper?"

"That can wait," said Slade. "What I want is that swan-hunter."

Minty spat and squared his shoulders.

"Then you've sure come to the right quarters, son," he asserted. "For he's barricaded over at that lake end o' his and he's slingin' lead at anything that comes within half a mile o' his hide-out."

"And that flyer of his, Tumstead?" questioned Slade.

"I ain't seen no flyer," answered Minty. "And I ain't seen no plane come and go. What he's tryin' to do, I'd say, is hold us off until a plane can swing in and pick him up."

Slade turned to his ragged old friend.

"Let me have that rifle," he said.

But Minty promptly backed away.

"Not on your life," he retorted. "I got use for this old girl."

He pointed toward the widening vista of muskeg country that stretched away into the north.

"Zeke's out there stalkin' that swan-hunter's side-kick. And I'm goin' to help him run down that human gorilla."

"You mean Karnell?" cried Slade.

"That's jus' who I mean, Lindy. The slinkin' louse tried to outflank us in the night. But Zeke's got him cut off from his camp-mate out there, dodgin' lead like a coyote. And I'm goin' out to back up my bunkie."

Even as he spoke the sound of a repeated rifle shot, thinned by distance, came to them.

"I'll go with you," announced Slade.

Lynn could see his gaunt face once more darken with hate. Then he turned to her.

"Stay here with the plane," he told her. He pointed to the fire. "And you'd better keep smoke showing until the Padre gets back."

She was able to forgive the peremptory note in his voice as she moved closer to him. He stopped, for a moment, to study her face. But he failed to fathom the source of her anxiety.

"You'll be safe in the plane," he told her. "If you're in doubt, or there's any threat of danger, you can take off."

"I wasn't thinking about myself," she said with reproving quietness.

"Then what's worrying you?" he asked matter-of-factly.

She caught at his sleeve.

"I don't want you to go, Alan."

His eyes remained preoccupied as he freed himself.

"Don't worry about me," he said. "I've got to go."

"But what good will it do?"

"I don't know yet," he retorted. "But Karnell tried to kill me. And I'm going to do what I can to round him up."

She knew enough of frontier life to realize there were times when women figured small in men's scheme of things. And this was another occasion, she remembered, when there was no room for tenderness in life.

"All right," she said, well-schooled in quick decisions from others. "I'll be here with the plane. When Father gets back I'll tell him which way you went."

She wanted to say more, but she knew it was useless.

(TO BE CONTINUED)

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ASK ME ANOTHER
A General Quiz

The Questions

1. Is sterling silver the same as solid silver?
2. Who said genius is 2 per cent inspiration, 98 per cent hard work?
3. Do trees die of old age?
4. What city is built on seven hills?
5. What king of England couldn't speak English?
6. What is meant by "eminent domain"?
7. Did Washington wear a wig?
8. What civilized country, about 40,000 square miles in area, has no railroads?

The Answers

1. No, sterling is but 92.5 per cent silver and 7.5 per cent copper.
2. Thomas A. Edison.
3. Almost never. Invariably, if not cut down, they are blown over by the wind or struck by lightning.
4. Rome.
5. George I.
6. The right which the government reserves to take private property for public use.
7. Washington powdered his hair and tied it up in a queue, but he never wore a wig.
8. Iceland.

Tomorrow Beyond

When another day has arrived, we will find that we have consumed our yesterday's tomorrow; another morrow will urge on our years, and still be a little beyond us.—Persius.

Public-Spirited Woman Encounters a Little Boy

Something about the appearance of the begrimed little chap on the street halted the lady, who inquired, "Little boy, haven't you any home?"

"Oh, yes'm, I've got a home."

"I'm afraid you don't know what affection really is. Are your parents bringing you up to be a good and helpful citizen?"

"Yes'm."

"Will you tell your mother to come and hear me talk on 'When a Mother's Duty to Her Child Begins' at two o'clock next Monday afternoon at Lyceum hall?"

"What's the matter with you, Ma," shouted the little fellow, "I'm your little boy."

When you hear a Marine called a "Leatherneck," it has nothing to do with the epidermis of his neck. Years ago the Marine uniform was equipped with a high stiff leather collar supposed to give a more military carriage. From that time on, "Leatherneck" has been the word for a Marine. The word for his favorite cigarette is "Camel"—the favorite cigarette also of men in the Army, Navy, and Coast Guard. (Based on actual sales records from service men's stores.) So if you want to make a hit with your friends or relatives in the service, send a carton of Camels. Your local dealer is featuring Camel cartons for service men.—Adv.

What Causes Your Constipation?

The super-refined foods we eat these days too often do not give us enough "bulk food." And medical science tells us that lack of sufficient "bulk" is one of the commonest causes of constipation!

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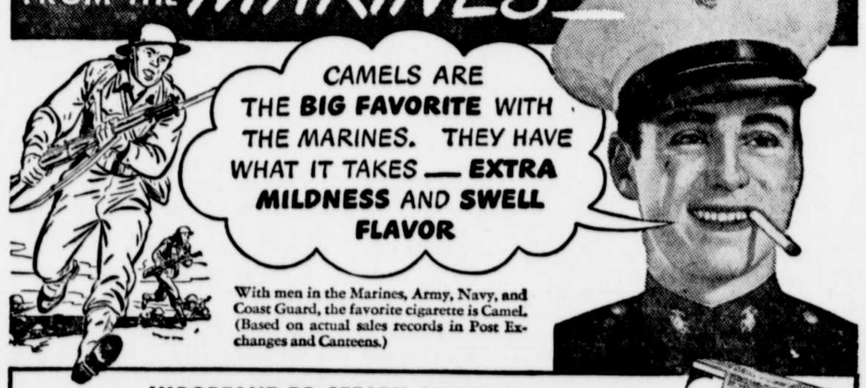

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