

**THE BOY AVIATORS IN
RECORD FLIGHT OR
THE RIVAL AEROPLANE**

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The boy aviators in record flight or The rival aeroplane by Wulbur Lawton

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WULBUR LAWTON

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CHAPTER I.

THE BIG PRIZE.

"PHEW!" exclaimed Billy Barnes as he reported for work on the New York *Planet* one broiling afternoon in late August, "this is a scorcher and no mistake."

"I should think after all your marvelous adventures with the Boy Aviators that you would be so used to heat and cold and hardship that you wouldn't kick at a little thing like a warm day."

The remark came from a young fellow about twenty-one years old who occupied a desk beside that of the stout spectacled youth of eighteen whom our readers have already met as Billy Barnes.

"Why, hullo, Fred Reade!" said Billy, looking up

with a good-natured grin from the operation of opening his typewriter desk, "I thought you were off covering aviation."

"I was," rejoined the other, with a near approach to a sneer, "but since we printed your story about the recovery of the treasure on the Spanish galleon I guess they think I'm not good enough to cover the subject."

If the good-natured Billy Barnes noticed the close approach to outspoken enmity with which these words were spoken he gave no sign of it. Any reply he might have made was in fact cut short at that minute by an office boy who approached him.

"Mr. Stowe wants to see you, Mr. Barnes, at once, please," said the lad.

"There you go, the managing editor sending for you as soon as you get back. I wish I was a pet," sneered Reade as Billy hastened after the boy and the next minute entered a room screened off from the editorial department by a glass door bearing the words "Managing Editor."

At a desk above which hung "This is my busy day," and other signs not calculated to urge visitors to become conversational, sat a heavy-set, clean-shaven

man with a big pair of spectacles astride his nose. He had a fat cigar in his mouth which he regarded as he spoke with far more intensity than he did Billy.

"Afternoon, Barnes," was his greeting.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Stowe," returned the young reporter, "you sent for me——"

"Sit down," said the other brusquely, indicating a chair.

Billy sat down and waited for the next words of his managing editor.

"The *Planet*, as you know, has made a specialty of featuring aviation," continued Mr. Stowe, gazing fixedly at his cigar.

Billy nodded, the remark did not seem to call for a more definite reply.

"We have offered prizes for flights from time to time, and in this way have obtained a reputation as an authority on aviation and a patron of what is bound to be the vehicle of the coming ages."

Again Billy nodded at the managing editor's rather florid way of putting it.

"For instance, the \$10,000 Albany-New York flight and the \$30,000 New York-St. Louis flight. The \$100,000 offer for a transatlantic flight as yet re-

mains unchallenged for, but I have no doubt that in time some daring aviator will make the attempt."

"It should be possible," once more agreed Billy, wondering what was coming next.

"In the meantime," Mr. Stowe continued, "the *Despatch* has declared itself our rival in this field by also devoting great attention to the subject, and offering prizes for flights in opposition to our original idea. The owner of the *Planet* has therefore decided to eclipse all previous offers and be the first in the field with a prize of \$50,000 for a flight from New York to San Francisco, or as far in that direction as possible. The air craft that travels furthest will get the prize."

"Across the continent?" gasped Billy.

"Exactly. We are going to publish the conditions and date of starting in our to-morrow morning's issue. And the offer incidentally means a great chance for you."

Billy gave a questioning glance.

"I intend to have you follow the racers in an automobile and send dispatches from the various points along the route concerning the progress of the cross-country aerial racers."

The young reporter's face beamed.

"That's mighty good of you, sir," he said earnestly.

"Not at all. It's simply the selection of the best man for the job; that's all. You have far more knowledge of aviation than Reade—or at least you ought to have after your long association with the Boy Aviators—and therefore we have selected you."

"As to the conditions of the race, Mr. Stowe—how about stops, gasoline and water stations, and so on?"

"Each contestant will be expected to arrange those details for himself," was the answer. "This newspaper simply offers the prize to the first aeroplane to arrive in San Francisco, or go furthest in that direction. Also, of course, we claim the privilege of getting exclusive accounts of the doings of the *Planet* aeroplanes. That's all. Simple, isn't it?"

"Very," agreed Billy as he took his leave. "By the way, sir, does any one else know of your offer?"

"Nobody; not even Reade. I guess he's pretty sore that we took him off aviation on the eve of making the prize offer, but it can't be helped."

"Why, I—you see, sir, I'd rather not take it, if it is blocking Reade in any way. I don't want to take the assignment at all if it's going to hurt Reade with the paper."

The managing editor gave an impatient wave of his hand.

"Let me attend to Reade," he remarked impatiently, "you go and get out a story for to-morrow about possible contestants. Of course your friends, the Chester boys, will enter?"

Billy looked dubious.

"I don't know," he replied. "I rather think they were planning for a rest and to continue their studies, and this cross-country flight won't be any picnic. However, I hope they do enter," replied Billy.

"I had no idea that there would be any doubt about it," said Mr. Stowe impatiently, "well, do the best you can. Anyhow, get interviews with Blewitt, Sharkness and Auldwin. They will be sure to enter their machines, and let's have a good, live story for to-morrow. By the way, not a word of this to anybody but the aviators you may see till we publish the offer. The *Despatch* would be quite capable of offering a similar prize to-morrow morning if they learned what was in the wind."

Billy nodded as Mr. Stowe once more gave a sign of dismissal, and hastened from the room. So hurried was his exit, in fact, that he almost bumped into Reade

as he made his way out. The editorial room was deserted, except for the dark-haired, slender young fellow with whom Billy had almost collided. The other reporters were all out on their assignments.

"Well?" were Fred Reade's first words.

"Well," rejoined Billy, adjusting his spectacles, which had narrowly escaped being jarred off his nose in the bump, "isn't there room enough in the place without your getting so near that door that you almost upset my slender form?"

"Never mind that," replied Frank Reade; "what I want to know is, how do I stand in there?"

He motioned with his head toward the managing editor's room from which the boys were by this time several paces removed.

"I don't understand you exactly," was Billy's reply. He noticed that Reade's face bore an angry flush and he seemed excited.

"What I mean is this: Am I going to continue to do aviation for the *Planet*?"

"Say, Fred, old man, I'm awfully sorry——"

"Oh, cut that out. You don't mean it, and you know you don't. You wanted to grab off the job for yourself, and I can see by your face that you have."