

OUT OF THE AIR

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Out of the air by Inez Haynes Irwin

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TO
BILLY AND PHYLLIS

OUT OF THE AIR

I

“. . . so I'll answer your questions in the order you ask them. No, I don't want ever to fly again. My last pay-hop was two Saturdays ago and I got my discharge papers yesterday. God willing, I'll never again ride anything more dangerous than a velocipede. I'm now a respectable American citizen, and for the future I'm going to confine my locomotion to the well-known earth. Get that, Spink Sparrel! The earth! In fact . . .”

David Lindsay suddenly looked up from his typewriting. Under his window, Washington Square simmered in the premature heat of an early June day. But he did not even glance in that direction. Instead, his eyes sought the doorway leading from the front room to the back of the apartment. Apparently he was not seeking inspiration; it was as though he had been sud-

denly jerked out of himself. After an absent second, his eye sank to the page and the brisk clatter of his machine began again.

“. . . after the woman you recommended, Mrs. Whatever-her-name-is, shoveled off a few tons of dust. It's great! It's the key house of New York, isn't it? And when you look right through the Arch straight up Fifth Avenue, you feel as though you owned the whole town. And what an air all this chaste antique New England stuff gives it! Who'd ever thought you'd turn out—you big rough-neck you—to be a collector of antiques? Not that I haven't fallen myself for the sailor's chest and the butterfly table and the glass lamps. I actually salaam to that sampler. And these furnishings seem especially appropriate when I remember that Jeffrey Lewis lived here once. You don't know how much that adds to the connotation of this place.”

Again—but absently—Lindsay looked up. And again, ignoring Washington Square, which offered an effect as of a formal garden to the long pink-red palace on its north side—plummy treetops, geometrical grass areas, weaving paths;

elegant little summer-houses—his gaze went with a seeking look to the doorway.

“Question No. 2. I haven’t any plans of my own at present and I am quite eligible to the thing you suggest. You say that no one wants to read anything about the war. I don’t blame them. I wish I could fall asleep for a month and wake up with no recollection of it. I suppose it’s that state of mind which prevents people from writing their recollections immediately. Of course we’ll all do that ultimately, I suppose—even people who, like myself, aren’t professional writers. Don’t imagine that I’m going on with the writing game. I haven’t the divine afflatus. I’m just letting myself drift along with these two jobs until I get that *guerre* out of my system; can look around to find what I really want to do. I’m willing to write my experiences within a reasonable interval; but not at once. Everything is as vivid in my mind of course as it’s possible to be; but I don’t want to have to think of it. That’s why your suggestion in regard to Lutetia Murray strikes me so favorably. I should really like to do that biography. I’m in the mood for some-

thing gentle and pastoral. And then of course I have a sense of proprietorship in regard to Lutetia, not alone because she was my literary find or that it was my thesis on her which got me my A in English 12. But, in addition, I developed a sort of platonic, long-distance, with-the-eye-of-the-mind-only crush on her. And yet, I don't know . . ."

Again Lindsay's eyes came up from his paper. For the third time he ignored Washington Square swarming with lumbering green busses and dusky-haired Italian babies; puppies, perambulators, and pedestrians. Again his glance went mechanically to the door leading to the back of the apartment.

"You certainly have left an atmosphere in this joint, Spink. Somehow I feel always as if you were in the room. How it would be possible for such a pop-eyed, freckle-faced Piute as you to pack an astral body is more than I can understand. It's here though—that sense of your presence. The other day I caught myself saying, 'Oh, Spink!' to the empty air. But to return to Lutetia, I can't tell you how the prospect tempts.