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An Elopement

It Occurred In 1935

By F. A. MITCHEL

My father was born in 1915, when the great European war was raging and when his parents talked nothing but war, read nothing but war and dreamed nothing but war. The consequence was that he imbibed war when he was a baby, and when he was four years old, hearing the rattle of a drum, he attacked his nurse with a carving knife and slashed her cheek, leaving a scar that she carried all her life.

When he became a man he entered the army, which had grown from the 100,000 men composing it when he was born to 5,000,000 regulars and 10,000,000 reserves, and he was stationed at one of the thousand steel and flint forts protecting the Atlantic coast, his particular fortress being where Long Branch formerly stood.

He met my mother, then Miss Belle Ostrander, at a garden party held at her father's home in New Hampshire, which state by that time had been given over to multimillionaires for country seats. My father, Luther Muchmore, was a member of the aviation corps and thought nothing of 150 miles between the fort and Miss Ostrander's home, after 5 o'clock dress parade, for dinner at 7.

Lieutenant Muchmore was very versatile, being eminent in all the various corps of the army. It was said of him that he had flown higher in the air and dived deeper under the sea than any other man.

But aviation was his specialty. He was the inventor of those combination aeroplanes that in these days may be seen like winged cocks climbing mountains by means of sapping wings and digging their toes into the crevices of rock or into the snow. Some of them have been fitted with an apparatus which enables them when they have reached the summit to flap their wings and crow. One of these immense chautauqueers has recently been fixed on the top of Mont Blanc and at dawn breaks the slumbers of the inhabitants in the valley by its vociferous crowing.

My grandfather Ostrander was much concerned to see that Lieutenant Muchmore and Belle were falling in love with each other, for the young officer had but a paltry \$100,000 a year, whereas my mother to be would inherit an income of \$2,000,000. Mr. Ostrander forbade the suitor entering the house and warned his daughter that if she married him clandestinely he would cut her off with a beggary million. But, not content with this warning, he placed her under strict surveillance. He even deprived her of her runabout aeroplane, which she was accustomed to drive herself, restricting her air outings to a clumsy "air cutter," a type of machine that had been left far behind by other types and needed to be manned by an experienced aviator. But she seldom used the latter.

In olden times they had a saying, "Love laughs at locksmiths." When my mother was a girl this had changed to "Cupid rules in air as well as on the earth." One fine afternoon when Belle Ostrander was driving her duplex machine—an auto that by means of wings was enabled to fly over low obstructions—looking up in the air, dotted with the aeroplanes of country gentlemen, she espied one making directly toward her. Within a few minutes it had descended to the road before her and out stepped Lieutenant Muchmore.

"Choose between me and your family," he said. "If you are theirs, I will never see you again; if you are mine, fly with me."

"Oh, Luther, what will we do with only the million my father will leave me if I marry you and your little hundred thousand a year? We will sink out of the social world entirely."

"Decide!" he cried.

"I cannot." He decided for her. While he was taking her from her duplex he heard the sound of that peculiar b-r-r-r made by these machines and, looking back along a straight road, saw one of them coming at full speed. "Heavens!" exclaimed my mother to be. "It is father! He forbade my going out in this machine. He must have seen me leave, taken another duplex and followed me."

Muchmore, without reply, put her back into the machine, turned on the power, and it shot forward like an arrow. His own aeroplane, which he had left in the middle of the road, blocked the way, but by elevating the steering fan the duplex cleared it with a bound, and the lovers were off at a seventy mile gait. My grandfather, who was a timid man, had been following his daughter at a slow pace—some fifty miles an hour—but when he saw what had occurred thereupon he turned on all the power his machine possessed.

When he came to Muchmore's machine, which was so light of structure that it looked like a great gauze winged beetle, not seeing it till he was within a hundred yards of it, he came very near wrecking it and his own. There was barely time to make the jump, grazing its wings, which were scattered in the air, powdered to a puff of smoke. The first formidable obstruction the lovers encountered was a

church around which the road bent. Muchmore, seeing that at the pace he was going he could not go round it without flying off at a tangent, depressed the tail fan some 250 feet before reaching the obstacle.

The machinery responded splendidly, and the duplex made a remarkable jump of some sixty feet, but just as it passed over the steeply rising part of the machine carried away a cross, which went tumbling to the earth. Fortunately the duplex was not injured, but struck the road at an acute angle and glided on its way. It was fortunate for my grandfather when he reached the church that the cross had been carried away, for his machine, which grazed the top of the steeply rising part of the machine, would have collided with the cross.

My father, who has often told me of this flight, described it as the most exhilarating of his life. He succeeded in getting ninety miles an hour out of his machine, a speed that could not have been maintained on a road filled with obstructions had he not been driving a duplex. He said that while passing over other machines he felt like a boy playing leapfrog. My mother, on the contrary, was filled with terror and shrieked at every leap. She has declared that she felt like a goose running from a farmer's boy and flying over the fence.

Several miles from a point where the road was crossed by a railway my father saw a train coming toward the crossing. He estimated that it would reach the point at the same time as himself. Beyond the track was a depression into which he could not see. If he jumped he might come down to be wrecked; if he waited for the train to pass he would lose the race and the girl he loved. Putting on every bit of power the engine would stand, he endeavored to reach the crossing before the train. He failed. Elevating the tail fan, he made the leap, my mother clinging to his arm in such fashion as to impede his efforts. However, he cleared the rails by a good thirty feet and found himself on the other side of it—over a lake which stretched before him for several miles.

Had it not been that the duplex was really a triplex I would have never been told by some one else. Fortunately the bottom of the machine was built in the shape of a boat and made to go in water as well as on land. But this Lieutenant Muchmore did not know.

"Cling to me, darling," he said, in folding my mother to be in his arms. "I will save you."

"My father!" exclaimed Belle. "He will drown!"

"Perhaps not!" cried Muchmore.

"Ours is best shaped. It is the only triplex machine on the place. Father is using a simple duplex. We must save him!"

"Not much!" cried my father.

By this time they had descended to the surface of the lake, which they struck with a ricochet, then glided onward, plowing the foam on each side. Presently a splash was heard behind them, and, turning, they saw my grandfather, struggling in the water. His machine had sunk to the bottom.

"Turn about!" cried my mother to be.

"Not if I know myself!" replied my father.

"Save him or I will never be yours!"

This was the first introduction of my father to my mother's will, which he afterward learned, to his cost, was not to be despised. He slowed up, turned and reached the place where my grandfather was struggling in the water just as he sank for the third time. Jumping from the car, my father dived and after some twenty seconds' submersion brought my grandfather to the surface in an unconscious condition. He was got into the triplex with great difficulty and at the risk of upsetting it. Then it was put toward the shore.

The usual methods for resuscitating a drowning man were resorted to, and my grandfather came to his senses, not only physically, but in respect to chasing his daughter according to the methods of his time. My father called for one of the more roomy aeroplanes, flying about over his head, and the whole party were taken to the Ostrander home. My grandfather could not deny that the lieutenant had saved his life, though he had jeopardized it by running away with his daughter. Besides this consideration, the old man recognized the fact that so many more avenues of escape were in his day open to eloping couples than when they fled to Gretna Green that the difficulty of catching them had increased a hundredfold. He consented to the wedding, settling upon his daughter an income of a million.

The wedding was celebrated with great splendor, the bridal party going by aeroplane to Europe, a fleet of the largest airships carrying the bride and groom and their guests. The party left the Ostrander country place at 9 o'clock in the evening, reaching London at 8 o'clock the next morning, being the quickest trip made up to that time.

They were invited to dine with the king and queen of England, but declining, royalty in England having lost its former commanding position, though at that time the king and queen had not given place to the wax figures of the sovereign now to be seen in the Tower of London. Wealth having become all powerful in England, as in America, the party accepted, on invitations, except from the Duke of Devonshire, who still held his title as a form, and such other persons as possessed the means to entertain them. They found Europe still impoverished from the war of 1915 and after a brief stay returned to America, where they found a more cheerful atmosphere, for our people had learned a lesson from the results of that great struggle and insured themselves against a like calamity by adequate preparation.

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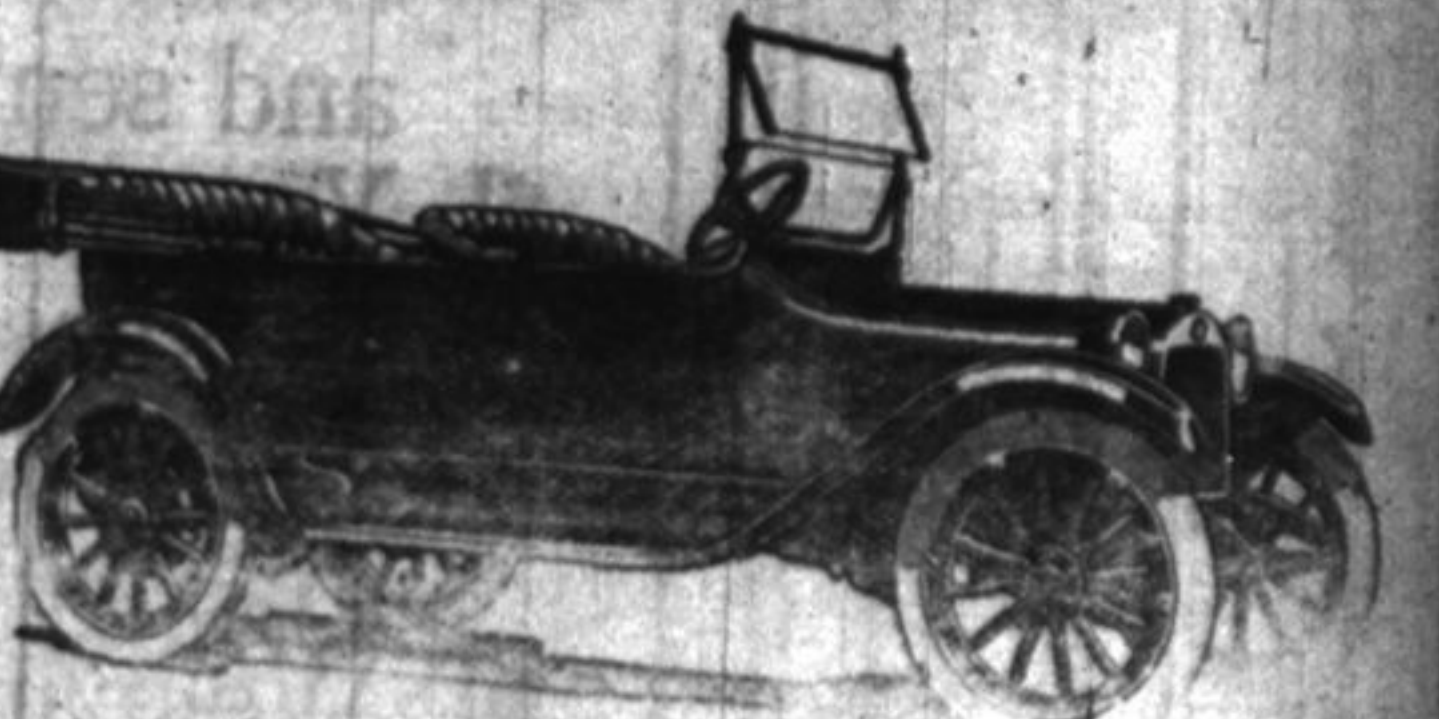
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