

# CEDAR SWAMP

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EDISON FORBES, a young resident of Scottdale with an inherent craving for liquor is held for the death of a woman who has been killed by a bootlegging truck. Circumstantial evidence points to Forbes and rather than tell the truth of the episode, he stands trial, which results in a long prison sentence. He is soon pardoned, however, but back in Scottdale he and

PATSY JANE, his trusting wife, agree that public sentiment against him is too strong so they migrate up north to some land that has been in the family for years. While there they form the acquaintance of

ISAIAH SEALMAN, a shifty neighbor who is anxious to buy their land. Eddie learns that the back taxes amount to over eight hundred dollars but as he has five months to pay he decides to refuse Sealman's offer of \$1200 and try and get final title to his property—Sealman's offer having led him to think it very valuable. But things do not go well. Eddie drinks heavily from some bootlegger's potions, is forgiven by Patsy, but soon after falls in with the same gang gets drunk, and wakes up in a freight car in Chicago—many miles away. Stricken with remorse he returns to his cabin but finds his wife has left and in her place a ruffian who orders him out. A fight ensues in which Eddie finally knocks his opponent out stone cold.

After ejection the intruder finding that he seems to be in league with Sealman, Eddie goes to Long Portage and sees Patsy, who is working for Kinnane, a lawyer. She announces that she will not join him until he definitely quits drinking. Determining to comply, he finds a job with Davenant, a rancher, and for several weeks abstains from the bottle that cheers. But one Sunday, Eddie walks on the beach, and encounters a series of truck smugglers. He is recognized by them and they take him to Chicago—notwithstanding, Forbes halts them in greeting.

After a few preliminaries Eddie is convinced of their present good will and then accepts a bottle of booze. Putting it away, he plunges through a dense underbrush, suffering the tortures of temptation, which he manfully overcomes. Arriving back at the ranch house, the battle is won; he has not touched the liquor and he rejoices at his fortitude.

### CHAPTER XVII

#### An Old Sweetheart.

"Well, Forbes, are you ready to sell this place yet?"

It was Sealman who asked the question on the following Sunday morning.

"It's not on the market."

Sealman combed his sleek beard with plump fingers as he leaned against the garage and watched Eddie sharpening an axe on the grindstone. "I thought perhaps with you working over to Davenport's and your wife not here—" He paused significantly.

"I'll hang on, just the same."

"My last offer was fifteen hundred. Things are going pretty well with me. I might be able to borrow a little more at the bank. Suppose we say two thousand?"

Eddie ceased operations on the axe to look the sleek one sharply in the eye. "With the taxes, that's more than twenty-eight hundred you're willing to pay. That's seventeen dollars an acre. Why is this worth so much?"

The blue eyes flickered away. The combing fingers, sifting through the glossy beard, did not change their cadence. "It isn't, Forbes. But it adjoins my property." I could use it to advantage.

"Why not sell out and buy some where land is cheaper?"

Sealman smiled. "I might ask you the same thing," he replied, and Eddie secretly acknowledged the justice of the thrust. "This is my home. I have an affection for it. I don't want to live somewhere else."

"I suppose that's true," said Eddie slowly. "But I'm not selling; that's final."

"You may lose it on the taxes—" "The taxes will be taken care of when the time comes," retorted Eddie. "By the way, they tell me you have some young pigs. Wonder if I could deal for one of them? Bull offered to let mine run with their hogs till fall. A good, thriving pig should make me some money."

When Eddie left for the ranch that evening, a chubby young porker scrambled ineffectively in a gunnysack in the tonneau of his car. The little animal had cost five dollars. But his new owner could see his value multiplied by four against the day of tax-reckoning.

The perspective of a little distance from Sealman made the man unconvincing. His explanation of why he wanted the Forbes tract did not explain. He was not the type of man

who would let sentimental consideration stand in the way of his making a dollar. Home was a house that sheltered him, to be abandoned without regret if the abandonment would bring money.

"I feel, somehow, that Sealman was mixed up in those two rum-runners feeding me drugged whiskey," mused Eddie. "They had no reason of their own for getting me out of the country. I was sent out by freight so the motor-tramp could come in and jump my claim. He was to keep me off with his gun. It wasn't an accident that he was talking to Sealman on the road that day after I drove him out."

"The long and short of it is that Sealman wants my place. He wants it badly, because it has a greater value, somehow, than appears on the surface. I wonder what it is?" He pondered fruitlessly. "Well, no matter. I'll hang on tighter. The reason will come out."

Summer advanced inexorably. The fund in the Long Portage State bank mounted surely, though much too slowly. Almost every cent of his wages from Davenant went into it. He could not possibly, of his own efforts, earn all of the tax-money. But he was reasonably sure that the deficit would be made up from one of two sources.

One source was Davenant, and his confidence seemed justified. The city man, big, incisive and iron-gray, acid-tongued in reproof and treasuring his words of commendation as though they were jewels, nevertheless showed that he approved of Eddie. The latter worked hard and intelligently. In July Davenant raised his pay five dollars a month. This, from Davenant, was the essence of eloquence.

In the unthinkable event that Davenant failed him, there was the

other source.

It was not so worthless as he had deemed it. Seeding, cultivating and the prevention of further burning-over by forest fires would build it up. He could raise stock upon it, which would support them while it enriched the land. There was more depth to the soil than he realized. All this would take work, and plenty of it, but he was willing to work and to wait. He felt that his future, his and Patsy Jane's, was somehow bound up with this scraggly oblong in the wilderness.

The liquor which the bootleggers had given him remained in his bag. It was a trophy of victory, the scalp of a vanquished enemy. Sometimes he took the bottle out to look at it quizzically, to shake it until it gurgled sullenly. There was still spells of longing. But the "No" of a bronze-hard resolution drove the beasts of appetite speedily to their lair again.

Things were moving, if not happily at least with sober satisfaction the Sunday morning that Nance Encell drove to the door of the wilderness cabin. He was squaring the uneven walls of the living room, preparatory to giving them a coat of paint, when the imperious blast of a motor-horn called him to the door.

The girl left her car and advanced to meet him, hand outstretched.

"Hello, there, Eddie!" she called joyously. "Gee, but it's good to see you."

"Nance!" There was more of surprise than pleasure in his manner, which she noted with a humorous grimace. "Where did you come from?"

"Just as glad to see me as though I were the smallpox," she commented. "Oh, well, once it wasn't so. Where did I come from? Our place on the North Fork."

The Encells had, he recalled, a lodge in the pleasant country due north of Long Portage, perhaps twenty miles from where his cabin stood. It was not a long drive, even for sandy wilderness roads. Only, he wished that she hadn't come.

"Well, aren't you going to ask me in?" she rallied him.

"Of course; I want you to see the improvements I'm making."

She stood in the center of the floor and looked smilingly about her. Nance Encell was a superb and striking figure, vividly blonde. Her blonde hair was rough, not from lack of care, but from an excess of the owner's energy, apparently. She wore whipcord riding breeches that fitted with revealing perfection and a thin, brown silk shirt, its collar femininely rolling, cut low and held loosely in place by a flowing red tie. She looked a daughter of the Vikings, but sophisticated, modernized and raised from Viking stolidity by a complex modern civilization.

"Eddie, as a housekeeper and carpenter and landscape gardener you're the antelope's ankles," she announced flippantly. "I remember stopping at this old cabin last summer. It was deserted then, and certainly forlorn enough." She sat down.

It seemed good to see someone

from home, though Scottdale belonged to a past epoch in his life. She told him the news of the little town, flavored with a humor slightly embittered, slightly ironic. "Now tell me your troubles, buddy," she ordered, when Scottdale as a topic of conversation was exhausted.

"None to tell," he smiled. "Everything's fine. I'm working at Davenant's."

"Don't you think I'm too old a friend to be kept on the outside, looking in?" she shot back, with smiling earnestness that was impressive. "Come across, now; tell your name."

### CHAPTER XVIII

#### Patsy Sees

"Nothing to tell, really," he reiterated.

"Bunk!" The word was freighted with contemptuous impatience. "I know what I know, Eddie. You know I'm interested. I've been inquiring around. You've had trouble over this place. There is a lot of tax-money nearly due. You've been putting on some bouts with old John W. Barleycorn and losing spectacularly. And Patsy's left out."

"You astonish me," he said lightly, though the red crept up in his tanned cheeks. "Really, it's all in the way you say it. Those things are so—and they aren't so. Mr. Barleycorn and I did do considerable scragging and I got mused. But I've licked him. He's out for keeps. There is some tax money due. But I'll have it before the redemption period closes. As for your other assertion—well that's quite wide of the mark, too, Nance."

Miss Encell rose from the long, log, slab chair with the ease and grace of a leopard uncoiling. She strode over to where Eddie was sitting. The slender hands, with amazing strength in their fragile-looking roundness, closed on his shoulders. They confronted each other, her

eyes, "it won't do, I know what you're talking about. We'll admit booze is out. But that doesn't help you much. There's a lot of money due on your land, aside from this year's taxes. You haven't enough to meet it, and you won't be able to get enough. Tell the truth now. Will you?"

"I haven't all of it," he admitted. "I know where I can borrow if I have to."

She nodded and went on: "Patsy has left you, Eddie. All Long Portage knows it. She's a stenographer in old Kinnane's office. She's living at their home. So—"

Again the red flowed into his cheeks. "And you're still off on the wrong foot, Nance. Everything is all right, really."

She shook him impatiently. "Can it, Eddie; I know it isn't. Now, what I came here to say was this: I— and then she stopped as if quite unable to go on. But she shrugged and plunged bravely ahead. "I have money enough to wipe out those taxes and never miss it. Won't you—"

"No, Nance. Thank you just the same, but it isn't necessary. I can get it all right."

It was now his turn to stop, embarrassed, for the eyes into which he looked were slowly filling with tears. "I'd like to do a little something—"

She began, again. "Sure you can get it, Eddie?"

"Sure, Nance. But I'm mighty grateful to you, just the same."

A smile broke through. "All right, old independence," she said, with hard gaiety. And before he realized what her next move might be, she leaned forward and kissed him on the mouth.

It was Nance who realized first, a shade before Eddie did, that there was someone in the back yard, someone who saw them through the open door. He could feel her grip tighten as she laughed loudly and maliciously. "Come soon," she said, raising her voice.

He turned his head. Patsy Jane had come up in the Kinnane car, and had stopped it in the driveway near the garage. She had seen the kiss, heard the words of invitation and the laugh. She turned on the instant, her head high, got into the car, swung it swiftly and was off on the road she had come.

Eddie was confused, resentful, indignant. He was angry with Nance. Yet good taste kept him from saying many of the things he yearned to say. "That wasn't just fair, Nance," he managed, at last.

She tossed her head. "I knew you before she knew there was such a person in existence as Eddie Forbes. If she has any sense, this won't make any difference. Hang it, I don't see the harm in kissing an old friend, so long as it's open and aboveboard! If she hasn't any sense—" Uplifted eyebrows finished the sentence.

Eddie's anger grew. Nance had come from a generous motive. She had heard that he was in difficulties; she wanted to relieve those difficulties. Yet the result of her visit had

been to widen the rapidly closing chasm between Patsy and himself. She had thrown in that invitation to call as a deliberate and gratuitous barb.

"You didn't play fair, Nance," he said coldly. "What you've done is to make things a little more difficult for me."

"I'm sorry," she replied, simply, and contrition came into her lovely eyes. She sighed. Her hands dropped from his shoulders. "I think I'll be going. But if you need money, or—or—me." A lovely red swept over her face. She turned swiftly without another word and ran to her car, which was standing in front of the house. There came the roar of its powerful engine as she, too, drove toward Long Portage.

Eddie tried to busy himself with his task of smoothing and planning. But the work had lost its savor. He wanted to get to Patsy Jane as soon as possible, to explain Nance's visit and her impulsive kiss. Yet for several hours, pride held him back. For, he told himself, Pat had taken too much for granted and had run away without giving him a chance. He should let her get over her huffy fit, that's all. He should let her come to her senses—

By three o'clock he deemed that she should have come to her senses, for he drove toward, taking the curves of the sandy road at a reckless speed. His visit was fruitless. Mrs. Kinnane came to the door of her home in answer to his ring. She said briefly that Mrs. Forbes was away.

"Do you know when she'll be back?" he questioned, disappointedly.

"No, Mr. Forbes. She said to tell you not to wait."

Summer reached its crest, and the little, sheltered valleys about Long Portage and out through the wilderness were alive with huckleberries. It was a good fruit season, for the rains had been plentiful, and had come

at the right time. The rich, purple berries, each as large as the end of one's little finger, grew in prodigious profusion. The sturdy vines were bending beneath their weight.

Fortunately for Long Portage the crop was a failure elsewhere, and the berries brought a good price in Detroit and Chicago. The village was depopulated, for all those who could, left for the harvest. Skilled pickers made big money.

Many went out a dozen miles to camp in the more extensive patches. Others drove forth and back, morning and evening in their cars, the tonneau laden with the spoils when they returned with the setting sun. Even horses and wagons were not despised, for some of the best berry patches were found on bumpy side roads, trapped with deep sand, where four-footed motive power was surest and safest.

The huckleberries gave Eddie a chance to earn extra money. He grasped it eagerly. Davenant was an enlightened rancher. He demanded except in cases of seasonal emergency, only eight hours daily. Eddie and some of the other hands rose at five and before, to get in a good two hours picking before breakfast. Then there were two hours in the evening, after which Eddie drove through the beautiful reluctant northern twilight to the buyer at the railroad express office, with his pick. The fast night train delivered the berries, the dew of secluded valleys still on them, at the city markets next day.

There was a good patch of berries on Eddie's own quarter-section, near the mound. This he saved until the last. When everything on the other side of the creek within easy distance was exhausted he drove, early one morning, over to his own property.

The sand of the narrow road was damp. He noticed with surprise the clear-cut impression of motor-tires which, turning from the highway, also entered the southern field of his

land. He followed the track to the mound, and around the base.

Continued next week

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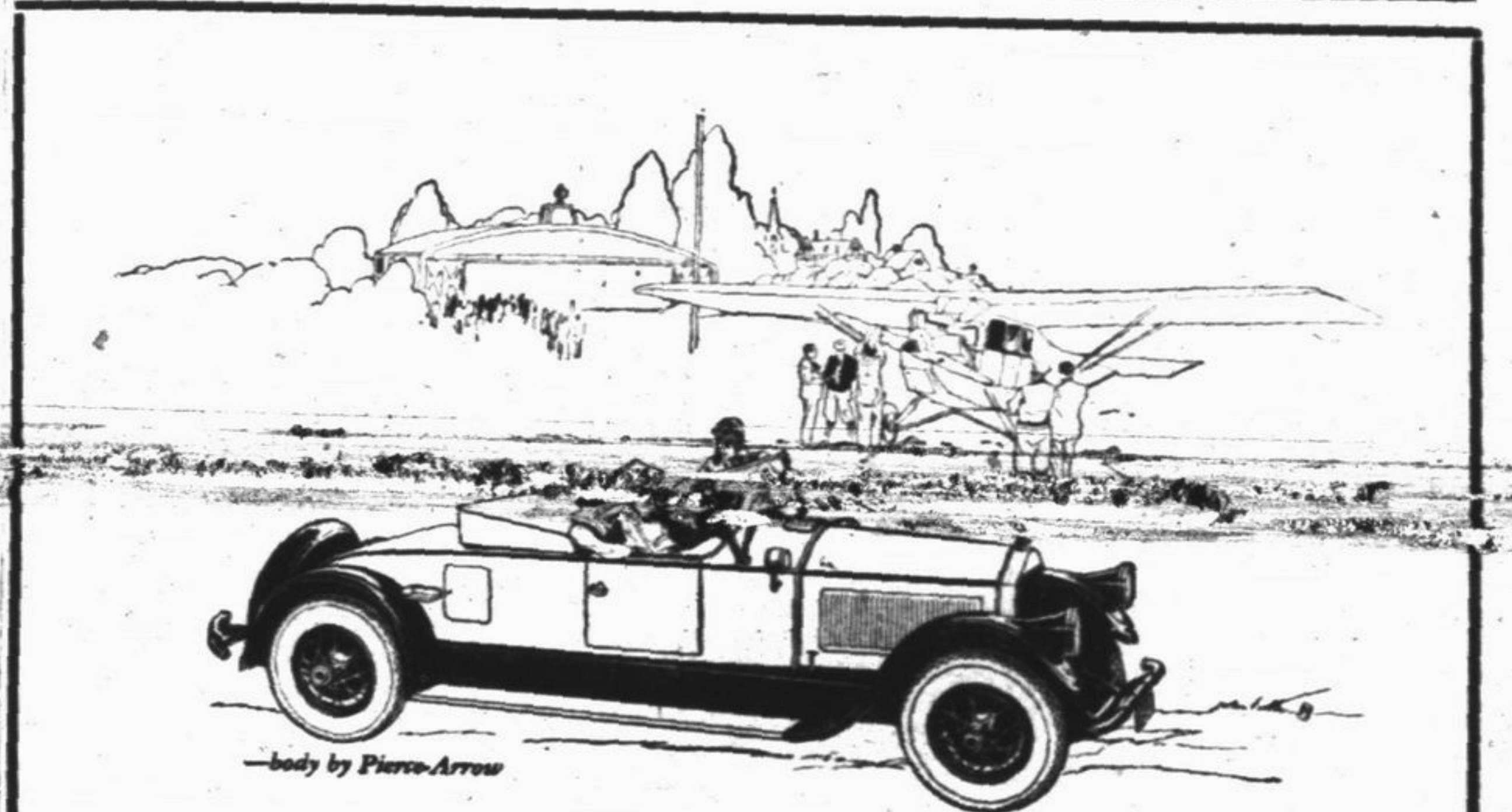
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