

RESCUE

OR ROYER GOLDHAWK'S
REMARKABLE JOURNAL

Excerpt:

“The crowd’s too thick to pass here,” Benjy said. I marveled at the thousands of people marching, wondering how many were risking their jobs to be there. Benjy pointed back towards the theater. “Let’s go wait for America with Mercy,” he suggested. I was pleased for any excuse to spend more time near Miss Winner and nodded my head.

Benjy and I entered the alley next to the theater. Up ahead, Mercy waited at the back door, fighting to keep her extravagant hat from blowing off in the breeze that swept through the alley. Benjy called out and she turned to wave. A great shadow fell over the alley and I became acutely aware of a rumble overhead.

I placed my hand on the rim of my hat to keep it from falling off as I looked up at the sky. Overhead, a great dirigible loomed. The rigid airship was being steered directly over the alley and had slowed to linger above us. “Brooker & Bedloe Steam Industries” was painted on the side in a text style that resembled a circus poster. I marveled at the great airship, wondering if it was part of the parade. Surely a great company like Brooker & Bedloe did not want to encourage their workers to organize, but there was no other reason for the great ship to fly so low over the city.

As I watched, something dropped from the back of the gondola. It landed in the alley before I could identify it and exploded in a cloud of grey smoke. I fell back, my body automatically throwing me away from the source of danger.

There was a zipping noise, metal quickly grinding against steel cable. A cluster of figures appeared in the smoke, and I could see bodies moving through the cloud in the direction of Mercy Winner. Her scream was cut off by a fit of choking coughs. One of the figures in the smoke turned and looked at me and I could see that his face was covered by a long, black mask with great glass eyes. I had seen drawings of similar apparatuses in the journals my father subscribed to; it was a gas mask.

I sprang to my feet as fast as I could and ran back into the cloud, untucking my ascot from the front of my vest and holding it over my nose to filter some of the smoke. A ladder had dropped down from the dirigible and one of the men was pulling Mercy Winner, now unconscious, towards it. I grabbed for her, but a third figure stepped out of the thick smoke and

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struck me with something hard. The object hit me just above my eyebrow and the sharp blow stunned me.

The ladder began to rise up evenly, as if pulled by a mechanical crank. It was out of reach by the time I recovered from the blow, so I grabbed the ladder from the theater's fire-escape and began to climb frantically. I could hear Benjy behind me, calling my name, but his voice had receded to the background. Quickly, I scaled the fire-escape and made my way to the top of the roof. I rose above the cloud of slowly dissipating smoke. From the roof of the theater, I was almost level with the gondola. The door was open and someone was reaching out to help the kidnappers haul Miss Winner inside.

The man in charge— I assume this because he was dressed in a finely embroidered tailcoat that indicated that he likely had too much money to answer to anyone— took Mercy Winner by the arm. He was a handsome older man with thick, pepper-gray hair and a small, neatly-kept mustache. His features were long and his black eyes were sharp. He looked like a wolf in rich clothing. He wore a white silk opera scarf and a red fez. A machine-rolled cigarette hung out of the corner of his mouth, its smoke mixing with the fog rising up from the alley below. He looked at me, his cold eyes locking with my own, and I was stricken by a sense of familiarity. I had met this man before. He smiled and turned back to his business, as if I was a mere observer and clearly no threat to his plot.

I ran. I ran straight up to the edge of the roof and jumped, reaching for the ladder. They would have to knock me off or kill me to stop me. My jump fell short and I grasped desperately, trying to grab something to hold on to. The richly attired man had a leather tube hanging from a strap around his shoulder, and I managed to grab it. I swung from the strap and held on tight. He desperately grabbed the ladder so that I would not pull him down with me. I hung there for a moment, an almost immeasurable instant, before the leather strap stretched and snapped.

Still gripping the tube, I plummeted towards the ground. My fall was broken by the awning over the theater door. It, too, broke and in seconds I was on the ground. I strained to breathe. My side burned. A striped piece of canvas covered my face. It was a moment before I could think to move, to free myself from the broken awning. When I uncovered my own face, Benjy was standing over me in a thin fog and the airship was rising up into the sky. They had gotten away.

www.amyleighstrickland.com/royergoldhawk