

Reading the Sky

written by Avi - illustrated by Joan Sandin

Chapter Two : A Daring Heist Is Planned

a breakfast serials story

The Story So Far: It's 1972. Jamie Peters, who is dyslexic, is visiting his grandparents. He loves to stare at the sky and imagine adventures—but something strange is about to happen up there.

For the past fourteen weeks Ed Goddard, a former army parachutist, had kept his eyes on the Winthrop two-engine turboprop Keystone Airlines plane used for Flight 74.

It held ten passengers and darted between cities and small towns such as Philadelphia and Elmira, New York.

As Ed Goddard watched, six men and a woman stepped from one of the long passenger buildings. A mechanic waved them toward the plane. Carrying their own luggage, they climbed up an aluminum ramp that sat close to the plane. At the top of the steps the copilot—no stewardesses on Keystone planes—took their boarding passes and welcomed them.

Goddard shifted his gaze to the right. A heavy green truck moved toward the Keystone area and halted twenty feet from the plane. The driver got out, glanced about suspiciously, locked his door behind him, and walked carefully to the back of the truck. All the time his hand was on the trigger of a partially withdrawn pistol.

The truck's rear door opened. Two men jumped out. One carried a rifle, the other a black leather bag. The bag contained a million dollars in cash: the payroll for the

Jewel Box Company of Elmira, New York. Ed Goddard knew all about that payroll. After leaving the army, he had worked as a security officer at that plant.

The man carrying the black bag moved toward the plane. When he was halfway up the ladder, the copilot took the bag, signed a receipt, and, with the guard looking on through the door, locked the bag in a compartment in the rear of the plane. Then the guard stepped off the boarding ladder and pulled it back from the body of the

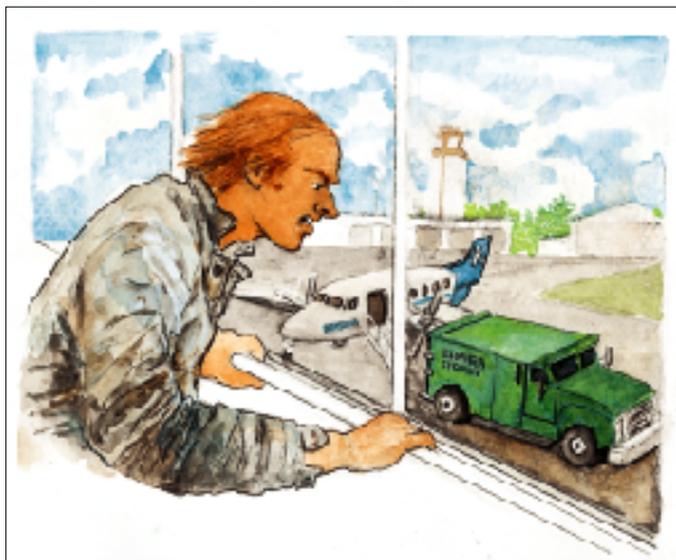
plane. One engine turned, spun, and raced. The second motor did the same. Within moments the Winthrop rolled onto the runway, gathered speed, then leaped into the air.

Goddard watched until the plane was no more than a speck against the sky. He smiled: the way to grab the million dollars was to take it mid-flight. The way to get away with it was to parachute from the plane.

He was determined to do both.

In his apartment he had spread out an enormous map of the Pennsylvania-New York border area. Corning, Williamsport, Binghamton, Elmira—names of cities that Goddard had gotten to know from constant study—appeared as yellow spots on the mass of green countryside. Over the roads, rivers, town streets, and county borders ran a red line: the route of Keystone Airlines Flight 74 from Philadelphia to Elmira.

Most of the flight was over empty farmland. Parachuting down, Goddard could go unseen—and vanish. The way he figured it, nobody would ever know what he'd



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done. Hardly likely that anyone would be staring at the sky. And he'd be richer by a million dollars.

Goddard went back to the map and reviewed the names of the towns he hoped to land near: Canoe Landing. Painted Post. Horse Heads. Jersey Shore. Stoneville. Chumung. Their odd names made them easy to learn. By memorizing them, he'd know where he was when he came down and how to get where he needed to go.

The phone rang.

"Yes?"

"Is this Mr. Robert Lemuel?"

"Yes, it is," said Ed Goddard.

"Eastway Travel here. I have your flight to Elmira confirmed for the twelfth of August."

"The four-fifteen?"

"From Philadelphia International."

"Thank you. Can I send you a money order for it?"

"Sure thing."

"I'll do it right away."

"Have a nice day."

Goddard hung up the phone. He picked up a notebook and turned to the page headed "Ticket Names."

The name Robert Lemuel appeared third from the top of ten names. Even as he crossed off that name, the phone rang again.

"Yes?"

"Am I speaking to Mr. Jeff Oliver?"

"You sure are," said Goddard.

"Atlantic Travel Agency. I have reserved a seat for you on Keystone Airlines to Elmira for the twelfth of August."

"Flight Seventy-four?"

"Yup. Goes at four-fifteen. Be there no later than fifteen minutes before flight time."

"Can I send you a money order for the ticket?"

"Absolutely."

Within three hours, every seat on Flight 74 to Elmira

on August twelfth had been reserved, all by Ed Goddard—yet no one by that name had bought a ticket.

This is going to work, Ed told himself with growing excitement.



Riding his bike, Jamie shot out of his grandparents' driveway and headed for the Luries'. In his mind, his bike was a motorcycle. Twisting the throttle grips, he made it roar.

The hill before the Luries' place was one he knew he couldn't make, so he jumped off and walked to the top. At the crest, he paused to look up at the sky. The clouds were piling up. There was Pegasus, the flying horse. There was Apollo, streaking across the sky.

Jamie grinned. Everything up in the sky was so much better for him than everything down on earth. Because of his dyslexia, kids called him "lame," "dumb," "retard." He took special classes. His parents worried about him. Well, he told himself, maybe he couldn't read, but he could see things in clouds that no else saw. His own private world. It didn't matter that no one believed him. Up in the sky, anything could happen. Anything at all.

to be continued...



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