

## CHAPTER I

### BLACKMAIL FLIGHTS

NEARLY three years before the kidnapping of his child, Colonel Lindbergh and the Morrow family had reason to know of the menace which threatens wealthy or prominent figures in American life. In April of 1929, Miss Constance Morrow, sister of Mrs. Lindbergh and subsequently one of her wedding attendants, was the central factor in a blackmail plot involving a demand of \$50,000, which was frustrated largely through the personal efforts of Colonel Lindbergh.

Miss Morrow, a student at the Milton Academy, at Dedham, Massachusetts, received on April 24, just prior to the wedding of Colonel Lindbergh and Anne Morrow, a sinister message roughly written on cheap paper. She immediately informed the school authorities and within an hour defensive measures were in progress involving the school, the family, the police throughout Massachusetts and the United States Secret Service.

The message, sent through the mails and addressed to the Academy, was as follows :

"You read this and keep your mouth closed. Don't open your trap to a living soul or it will be your last talk.

"Your father has plenty money. Do as you are instructed and no harm will come to you. The Smith girl received a message like this and her father got a guard, but you see how she dropped out of the picture. Just so if you talk to anyone about this note. The Corbit Girl—Arnold all had detectives on the lookout but you see what happened to them. If you act and say nothing you are safe. Going away will not help you as you are marked. You write at once to your father to send \$50,000 to you at once. Tell him if he in any way tries to set a trap then don't send you the money for you will certainly go as sure as the sun rises and the sun goes down. The Corbit, Smith girls father tried to lay a trap. You see what became of them.

"So it will happen to you. You write your father tell him to have Morgan and company send you the cash in \$5—10—20—50—100—500—1,000 bills.

"Don't send this note. Destroy it immediately tell him not to come or send anyone if he does it means Death to you. If you are worth that much to him he will send the money now instead of to the police. So tell him this in your letter. You

need not fear one bit while you are waiting for the money. No matter where you go after the time is up you will be captured and taken for the ride. Impress this on your father. He has plenty. You have till the tenth of May to get the money. You will receive another letter before then giving directions don't worry unless you mention this."

This apparently stupid suggestion that the young woman tear up the letter of demand, write to her father and turn over the \$50,000 sent on her request, was so fantastic that at first the authorities considered the note the work of a crank. But with investigation the immediate provision for the protection of Miss Morrow proved fully warranted.

The references in the blackmailing communication to the Corbett, Smith and Arnold girls meant the disappearance of Dorothy Arnold on December 12, 1910, and the more recent disappearances of Miss Alice Corbett and Miss Frances St. John Smith, students at Smith College. No clue to the Arnold girl's disappearance has ever been found, the body of Miss Smith was recovered from the Connecticut River just before the demand on Miss Morrow, and Miss Corbett is still missing.

Immediately every effort was made—and the effort was long successful—to keep the entire story

from the Press. Agents of J. P. Morgan and Company were immediately in charge of the case with every local, state and federal assistance.

The letter had been postmarked in Dedham, and since a time was set for further communication before May 10 a most intent watch was kept for any development at the little Dedham Post Office.

But the second letter did not arrive until May 12; it was in no way similar in appearance to the first note and it was duly delivered at the Academy, having been placed in a mailbox in Milton.

Assuming that the sixteen-year-old girl had obtained the \$50,000 promptly, the writer, in an infinitely more threatening and offensive communication than his first effort, instructed her in detail by what means of transportation and at what time she was to proceed to Westwood, Massachusetts, where she was to put the money inside a stone wall at a designated spot on the estate of the late General Clarence R. Edwards, famed commander of the "Yankee Division."

The most exact calculations were obvious in the letter and there was no longer the slightest disposition to consider the plot the result of a disordered mind. The blackmailer had arranged a plan by which he could at any time observe the girl and note if she were accompanied in any

of the changes of transportation or long walks set forth in his letter.

The beginning of the trip was scheduled from Hathaway House, the dormitory in which Miss Morrow lived, at seven o'clock on the night of May 18. Promptly at that time one might have seen a graceful and well-dressed young woman emerge from the dormitory, carrying, aside from a purse, a neatly wrapped package, dark in colour.

There was no money in that package nor was the young woman Miss Morrow. But so careful had the detectives been in the selection of a double that the most careful observation—at the distance usually kept by blackmailers in observing their prey—would have revealed neither of these major disappointments to the miserable plotter. In the middle of the night previous Miss Morrow, adequately guarded, had left by motor direct for her home at Englewood, N. J. Utmost secrecy attended all of these manœuvres, only three persons, including Colonel Lindbergh, being aware of the substitution when it occurred.

Over the entire route detectives of every size and description and apparent occupation were soon placed.

The girl would proceed wholly alone at all points and during all strolls designated by the

blackmailer but not for an instant would she be out of sight of two or more armed men of the carefully arranged and most un-uniform collection of types. Every person over the entire route was an automatic suspect, to be watched closely.

Extreme care was necessary at the most vital spot of all—the area in which the girl had been directed to deposit the money behind the wall. It was a rather deserted section, presenting a real problem in surveillance. At last the owners and dwellers in one of the few houses in the vicinity were approached and agreed to aid the police in a matter which remained a complete mystery to them. Three detectives, arriving at different times and in various guises, were finally on duty in the house, with a clear view of the point designated for the placing of the money.

There had been no mistake in the selection of a substitute for Miss Morrow; she was an excellent actress with a demeanour indicating reserve, intelligence, natural nervousness but determination to go through with a necessary ordeal. In fact, dressed in Constance Morrow's clothing and greatly resembling the girl now safely guarded at New Jersey, she was in every action all that a fearless, undisturbed girl of Miss Morrow's type should be under the circumstances. At regular intervals she very guardedly inspected the map which

had been enclosed in the blackmail letter on which both time and details of route were set forth. It was dark as the end of her journey came near—she required, and had, courage.

The watchers, who apparently never saw her along the route, were elated by her skilfulness, and as she walked along the final stretch of this dramatic journey six sharpshooting eyes peered intently at her final task under a designated light bordering the Edwards estate. She looked around nervously—and well she might actually—dropped the package over the wall and then hurriedly, half running, went back as she had come. Never for an instant did the eyes in the distant house waver from the spot at which the package had been left.

Minutes stretched into hours. No one approached the wall.

It was assumed possible that the blackmailer knew Constance Morrow well enough by sight to detect the substitution. Perhaps, however, he was waiting for an hour when he would not be a lone figure against a revealing background.

It occurred to some of the executives and detectives in charge of the case that any gesture toward Miss Morrow in New Jersey at this juncture would be particularly terrifying. They communicated this suggestion to Colonel Lindbergh

and early the next morning a giant amphibian plane took off from New Jersey with Mrs. Morrow and her daughters, Constance, Anne and Elizabeth. Colonel Lindbergh was at the controls and their destination was the Morrow summer estate at North Haven, Maine. This estate is on an island and, properly guarded, at once removed the menace of the pending criminal activity.

During the day following the placing of the package two or three incidents developed which gave promise. Two different cars moved slowly along the wall while the detectives, fearing undue haste would leave them without definite evidence, waited for some positive, overt act. None came, although the situation indicated that the blackmailer had made a survey.

But Colonel Lindbergh, modest enough to carry letters of introduction when he made his fabulous flight across the Atlantic to world attention, had again failed in his effort to move secretly. Although he had avoided the use of his own planes or usual landing field, the fact that the women of the Morrow family—including Miss Constance—had unexpectedly arrived at North Haven, appeared in the newspapers. It would require no great ability at deduction to assure the blackmailer in Massachusetts that he had been tricked.

Then, in Maine, began one of those ordeals which have made Colonel Lindbergh and efficient newspaper men impatient with each other. Guards everywhere! Secrecy! Obviously the effort was to conceal details of the tremendously interesting wedding of the "Lone Eagle." Nothing could be explained.

Everyone involved had reason to be irritable—not excepting the slinking blackmailer. Mystery increased as the late Dwight W. Morrow, then Ambassador to Mexico, suddenly left his post to join his family, though there had been no indication that the wedding date had been set. Colonel Lindbergh and the Morrow family, surrounded by the cream of the newspaper talent of the country and in a veritable state of siege, refused to make any statement whatever.

The situation was a national disappointment, so intense was the interest in every possible movement or plan of the prospective bride and groom. Nor did the newspapers or the public get the drift of a *most* unusual incident at North Haven. A Mexican, found prowling about, was arrested in feverish fashion and put under heavy guard in the little North Haven centre hall. It was the first arrest made at North Haven in two hundred and twelve years! It developed that the man had sought to see Colonel Lindbergh with a

mechanical invention in mind that he thought might be interesting to the famed flier. It was soon established that he had nothing to do with the blackmail plot.

It was clear that the marriage of Colonel Lindbergh and Anne Morrow, once announced, would relieve this dangerous pressure of curiosity and interest. The amphibian plane took off suddenly for New Jersey with its identical group of passengers on a return trip. An elaborate system of guarding the Morrow home at Englewood had been perfected to keep out the army of correspondents who gathered there at once after every airport in the country had been watched for the destination of the newest Lindbergh seclusion flight.

With the situation in no wise improved, announcement was made on May 27, 1929, that Anne Morrow had become Mrs. Lindbergh and that the world-famous couple were already on their honeymoon. Thus ended the newspaper siege at the Morrow home.

Subsequently the private detectives who remained active in the case involving Constance Morrow believed themselves, because of certain developments in Boston, close to a solution.

Several women in the Back Bay section of the city received threatening letters followed by a

communication to Mrs. Larz Anderson of Brookline, wife of the former Ambassador to Japan.

There was a similarity in method—which is not unusual in this miserable field—but after circumstantial evidence had seemed to engulf the suspect, a former army officer, circumstances fortunately provided him with belated proof of his innocence.

The writer of the terror-inducing letters to Miss Morrow has not been found.