



THE SKY-HIGH WITNESS

Sarah Ickes

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Historical Mystery | Action and Adventure | Clean Story

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The characters in this historical mystery novel are
fictional and any resemblance to real people
is coincidental.

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author's website.

Martin turned around to see the blur of Margaret dashing back to where her father was still chatting with Kathleen in the lobby, and shook his head in jest.

“That would be Miss Everton, who was a witness to the bank robbery earlier today. Her father, Thomas, also has a statement to make.”



THANK YOU...

to my Beta Reader, Sherry, for taking time out
to help me make this book the best it can be.

A SPECIAL NOTE...

Many of the references to the historical objects and events in this book, have real research to back them up. If you are interested in taking a peek behind the writer's curtain, to glimpse into the works I used for inspiration, you can check out three bullet points included in the back of this novel, as well as visit my website for a more indepth look.

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Some words in this novel are older, and are not spelling errors. Definitions can be found at my website.

Thank you for trying out my story. And I hope that you enjoy the trip into a time when the world was just as crazy as it is today.

and don't miss out on all the action!

Murial Robertson Mysteries

The Serpent's Star

Angled for Revenge

A Counterfeit of Death

An Ancient Poison (coming soon)

Vectra Tillerman Adventures

Written Wings

The Fall of Time (coming soon)

Vectra and Murial Cross-Over

The Nation's Grief (coming soon)

A Family's Masterpiece Series

A Family's Masterpiece (coming soon)

Cybil Lawson Mysteries

The Ghost of Christmas Pastel (2024)

In Plein Air Sight (coming soon)

As Always, For G.

To Rev. Joseph A. Murray D.D. and Rev. Thorn,

*Whose contributions to preserving the historical accounts
of Carlisle, made my research ever more achievable, and
that much more interesting! You may no longer dwell in
this life, but you are not forgotten.*

And to Chris M.,

Whose support of my writing is not taken for granted.



CHARACTERS

Margaret Everton..... Eleven-Year-Old Young Lady

Thomas Everton..... Margaret's Father, General
Store Owner

Nancy Everton..... Margaret's Mother, Runs the
General Store with Thomas
Coon..... Friend of the Evertons, Used
to Work for the Stagecoach

Kathleen McKnee..... Nancy's Childhood Friend

Martin McKnee..... Kathleen's Husband, Owns A
Company That Makes Safes

John Wise..... Aeronaut

Reverend Thorn..... Local Reverend

Rebecca..... Little Girl at the Ascension

Bobby..... Little Errand Boy

Mr. Arnold..... Bank Manager

Wilfred..... Bank Teller

Bank Teller..... Wilfred's Co-Worker

Gerome Wellington..... Law Student

James Guthrie..... Silversmith and Clockmaker

CHARACTERS

Gene Moore..... Hotel Manager

Mr. Adler..... Hotel Employee

Frederick..... Hotel Employee

Charles Thurber..... Hotel Guest

The Sheriff..... The Sheriff

Ace Highsmith..... Candidate for Sheriff

Donald Sutherby..... Candidate for Sheriff

And of course, the bad guys...

CHAPTER 1



Margaret Everton looked disappointed at the sky far above the window in her bedroom. Today was the day she had been looking forward to, ever since she saw the advertisement in the May 10th issue of the *Carlisle Herald*. The same issue, in point of fact, that unexpectedly sealed her fate come the first of September. How could she forget that cringeworthy date of doom for which she would dreadfully leave, all that she knew, in order to travel southeast toward the town of Chambersburg. According to the Seminary and Boarding School for Young Ladies, their area was touted as being “one of the healthiest in the country.” However, Margaret was not convinced that their quality of air heavily differed from that of Meyer’s Bend.

Despite her constant refusals to go, and Margaret’s insistence that her help was invaluable to her parents’ general store, the decision had been made. Her mother already sent word to the school earlier in the week, and there was nothing Margaret could do about it. While the idea of traveling to an unknown place sparked her curiosity with intrigue, she could not keep the fear of leaving their small village out of her mind. *I will not be able to conduct any new experi-*

ments while I am away either.

Margaret's thoughts soon began to wander as she stared into the angry weather. When her father knocked on the door to her room, however, she snapped back to the present as he waited a heartbeat for her to respond. "Hey Teacher, you up already?"

"Unfortunately." His daughter's brown hair bounced against her rounded face as she plopped upon her bed in the blue dress she planned to wear. 'Teacher' had been her nickname since her first spoken word at eleven months old: book. Given that her mother was an avid reader, and custodian over the two-shelved library housed within their store, the word was in her blood. In the prior two years, she had read more books than everyone in their village had over three decades; so it was only natural that she wanted to become a school teacher. But for now, all she wished for were the clouds to dissipate and the storms to head north. "This weather sure has been upset as of late."

Mr. Everton observed the bags under his daughter's eyes from the sleepless night she'd just endured; kept awake by the loud peals of thunder and brilliant flashes of lightening from dusk to dawn. He gathered by the way her hands refused to be still, that Margaret feared the worse for the day's festivities. Though they were to be held later in the afternoon, the current outlook was not promising.

Margaret suddenly turned around to see her father coming over to sit beside her on the bed. "Do you think they will defer the ascension?"

"Perhaps. However, the sun has barely risen above the horizon, and his flight is not scheduled until two o'clock. That leaves plenty of time for the weather to clear before he is to lift off from the square." Lightly tapping his rough index finger on the tip of his daughter's nose, Mr. Everton

was able to crack her weary face into the pleasant smile he knew and loved. “Who knows? Maybe even *you* will be able to teach Mr. Wise something new today.”

“I highly doubt I could tell Mr. Wise anything he does not already know about aerial travel. He has flown far into the sky thirty-nine times, and I’ve merely lifted ten feet above the ground in my own experiments.” Margaret’s smile quickly faded back into disappointment while her father rolled his eyes.

“You say that as if everyone has accomplished that much in their own lives as a daily chore, rather than the achievement it truly is.” His hands messed up her hair in a playful manner, attempting to brighter her mood. But Margaret hastily moved out of his reach and asked for him to stop ruining her perfect curls. “I apologize, My Lady. Did not realize you were so careful as to your appearance, all of a sudden.”

Her father had grown accustomed to his daughter’s normally dirty hands, face, and feet, she’d obtain from tinkering on her flying machine. As her hair was often frizzy from the summer’s humidity, and frozen solid in the winter’s arctic cold, he often joked that she looked more like a wild animal than a civilized girl of the 1840s. His wife had even once threatened to remove the machine if their daughter did not keep herself looking more presentable; to which, Margaret retaliated by sleeping in the barn with the other “animals” like her. Of course, according to his wife, their daughter’s stubborn attitude came from his side of the family.

“I just want to look my best for when we go into Carlisle. That’s all. It is not every day, or every month even, that we get to venture somewhere else.” Margaret’s fingers instinctively went for the top of her head to inspect the damage that had been done. “You would not wish for me to appear

shameful, now would you?

“No. No. We certainly would not want that to happen.” He chuckled half to himself, and half to the air, as he saw her trying to act years older than her true age. “I am sure the local newspapers will be in attendance, and looking for public commentary to publish. One must look her best, in case she were to be asked.”

Margaret stuck her tongue out at her father, just as her mother’s voice could be heard at the door. They both turned to find her peering inside to the see them sitting by the window, and she sighed with exasperation. “There you are. After I searched all over for you, only to find that you are hiding from Coon in Margaret’s room.”

“He saw me?”

Mrs. Everton’s head slowly nodded. “I swear that man has been sitting outside our store for longer than a moon cycle. He was asking about that...”

“Order I placed for him last week?” Her husband’s head swung from side to side. “I told him that the bullets would not arrive until the first week of June at the earliest. The ones he purchased are coming down from Boston.”

“Well, I realize that, Thomas. But you know how worried he becomes until those boxes are sitting in his hands. Especially after he received a new gun from...that company he likes...Thurber and Allen.” Margaret’s mother gave her classic stern look that promptly suggested he head downstairs to tend to the matter himself. It was the same glare she used on Mr. and Mrs. Brown’s children whenever they tried sneaking a few jelly beans from the glass candy jars, and Margaret hoped to use it as the perfect weapon against her future students.

“Alright. I shall go and have a chat with him. Why he is up at this hour, I have no idea.” Thomas stood up from his

daughter's bed, passing his wife as she walked in to make sure Margaret had everything she needed for the day's trip ahead.

"Yes, Mother. All is packed in my bag and ready to go!" Margaret sometimes felt as though her mother would never treat her like the mature eleven-year-old that she was, and crossed her arms in front of her chest out of frustration. "You need not be concerned with me any longer." *Having enrolled me in a boarding school, against my will, is proof enough of that. Apparently my usefulness around here is no longer required.*

"Don't you take that tone of voice with me, Margaret Anne Everton! You are acting more like a child this past week, than I think you ever have before."

Margaret was not about to surrender her stance. "If you would just come to Carlisle with us, to see Mr. Wise take to the air in his marvelous balloon, then you could see why aerial flight is so fascinating to me, and..." She instantly silenced her words at the sight of her mother's raised hand for quiet.

"Someone has to stay behind to manage this place. Besides, no balloon trip is going to change my mind about you attending that boarding school in the fall."

"But Mother, who will look after my flying machine while I am gone? And without it, how can I run anymore experiments?"

"It will be safe in the barn. We can even have Coon check in on it from time to time."

"I suppose..." Margaret's lips pouted like a hungry puppy, feeling the weight of a losing battle resting solely on her shoulders. She had wondered if her wealthy friend could have his staff watch over it for her, but the thought of imposing on him like that, caused her to hesitate. Even

when her mother blocked the window by standing in front of it, she barely acknowledged her with a slight tilt of her head.

“Margaret, why do you see me as the bad one in this? Hmm? The school has better facilities than our local one. You will be able to ask questions of all sorts, read more science books than you can imagine, and obtain a strong footing to becoming the teacher you have always wanted to be.”

“You sound like their advertisement in the paper.” Margaret kept her mouth mute on the fact that she had overheard her parents talking about the school’s cost roughly three nights ago. After they decided on how much more money was needed to save each week, she feared they’d be reduced to eating bread and water for nearly every meal. But like always, her mother had a keen intuition that could tell when Margaret was hiding something behind those inquisitive eyes of hers, and Mrs. Everton squatted down to be at her level.

“We are going to be fine, Margaret. Honest. I know it’s scary to be in a new place without either of us, and in an area that is unlike Meyer’s Bend. However, that just means that it is an adventure, waiting to be explored. You will get to meet other girls from different cities while school is in session, and come home during breaks. We are only a train ride away; so it is not as though you are traveling across the Atlantic Ocean.”

Regardless of her daughter’s unchanged mood, Mrs. Everton was seemingly satisfied with her talk, and popped upright quicker than a prairie dog. “Now then, September is too distant in the future to be worrying about. Today is May 27th, and you have a balloon ascension to attend.”

“NANCY!” Thomas hollered from the first floor where their store resided, trying to keep Coon from sitting down

on an old chair beside the vegetables. “Mrs. Ishmailer needs some bolts of fabric you were supposed to handle!”

Margaret saw her mother’s eyes widened in alarm. “Oh my, heavens! I completely forgot that her daughter is due to come home tomorrow...and...and I was supposed to deliver her order on Thursday!” Mrs. Everton quickly dashed to the door to amend her mistake, leaving Margaret alone in her room once again.

About five minutes later, as the sky was finally beginning to lighten, her father called up the stairs. “Since we are all up, we might as well get a head start. Your chariot awaits, Teacher!”

Margaret found it rather difficult to contain her excitement. She had only visited the bustling town of Carlisle three times before, and each one rewarded her with a chocolate bar from the shop on High Street. Her father, on the other hand, saw this occasion as the perfect business opportunity, after hearing the rumors that everyone was to be present. Yes, Sir. The whole town had arranged a jolly celebration to see Johnathan Wise’s fortieth ascension from the Town’s Square. Even the postal worker told them a band had been hired, according to the man’s cousin who had a trumpet-playing friend. *Today is going to be the best day ever!*

“Coming!” Margaret raced to the first floor with a bag in hand, and followed him out the back door with a larger-than-life smile spread on her face. *No matter what happens, I am going to enjoy every minute of this trip!*