

# The Sky's The Limit

## Lawrence M. Schoen

I am sitting with two prominent citizens in a booth of a Philadelphia restaurant where they serve a piece of prime rib as big as your head and I tell you this is not a thing I normally do, not just because I am rarely of an inclination to visit this city of brotherly love, but also as the price of this dinner represents the better part of my rent back in New York. But this is not concerning me as one of my dining companions, Joey Morlock, is also my host and his potatoes will be paying for my beef. Most nobody knows the reason, but Joey Morlock is called this on account of his peculiar reading habits in which he is having no time at all for the hard news or the racing form or the society page. Joey does not peruse the newspaper at all, saving his eyes, which look big as peaches behind his thick-as-soda-bottle-bottoms eyeglasses, solely for the reading of scientific romances.

I do not judge a man by the stories he favors, though personally I can find no use for tall tales of time machines or trips to the moon and guys know that I lose my patience with Joey on more than one occasion as he wants not just to read these stories but to talk of them too. His eyes pop open wide and glaze over like some bum who is sleeping one off in an alley and snaps up wide awake from some nightmare born of bad hootch. When this happens to Joey Morlock there is no stopping him and whosoever has the misfortune of being nearby can either rush for the exit or groan and endure the latest synopsis. But most times Joey is aces, a sport and a generous friend to have around. He is also the luckiest man I know in all forms of wagering and propositions, and I know more than a few. I am knowing Joey Morlock to wander up to Belmont on a whim with just a few dubs and leave there at the end of the day holding fifty large, and this is not an unusual circumstance for the guy. He is in fact so lucky that he is barred from most establishments and he is usually at a loss to find a track or crap game or card house that will let him in more than twice.

So when I hear word from Beans McAllister of a special card game that is forming in Philly, one in which there is to be no limit on the wagering, I immediately think of Joey Morlock and make mention of this development to him. Joey is delighted at this news and he insists I join him in Philadelphia as his guest, but this is also to his advantage as I can then introduce him to Beans and gain his admission to this friendly game whereat he plans to leave with as many potatoes as he can carry out. Joey is also kind enough to stake me to a seat at the game, which is entertaining for me but no loss to him as he will take all those potatoes back too, hand by hand. So knowing this now you should find no surprise that the third guy chowing down on the prime rib with Joey Morlock and me is none other than Beans McAllister who is making the acquaintance of Joey Morlock and enjoying a pricey bit of beef on his nickel.

Beans clearly favors the grub, but he looks on edge, nervous like, and the way he hunches over reminds me of a dog who gets beat six out of seven days as a pup and now is always flinching when you make to pet him. Not that I want to pet Beans, not even close. He is a little guy in a suit that looks like he slept in it under a bridge. But that is not why I do not want to be sitting with him; I am not the kind of guy who looks down on a Joe because he does not know how to dress. No, I do not much want to be sitting with him because he is an accountant for a group of Philadelphia lawyers and I like bean counters only slightly less than I like shysters, and when I look over at Joey Morlock I can see he is of the same opinion. But Beans knows people in this town, and he knows where the game is, and I have explained this to Joey Morlock before we come to the restaurant so for the sake of the game he stakes Beans to the best meal of his bean counting life, confident that this will lead to many potatoes in the end. All through dinner Joey Morlock talks, but he does not talk of games or bets or propositions for fear of putting Beans more on edge and instead yammers like a doll at the cosmetics counter of Wannamaker's, on and on about giant bugs and invisible men. Finally, as Beans wipes his plate with the last bit of bread Joey switches over to

the business at hand.

"Beans, our friend here tells me you can get me into a game," says Joey Morlock and he glances my way and I nod. "We are talking high stakes, right?"

"Highest you have ever been in," says Beans McAllister, and he laughs and gives me an elbow in the side, which I do not much appreciate on account I have just filled myself to bursting with some of the city's finest prime rib.

The look on Joey Morlock's face must be telling Beans that we do not get the joke because right then he leans over the table, giving me a closer look at his rumpled lapels and says to us both. "You ever been on an airship before?"

I give him a laugh back and say, "Oh sure, we come down from New York in one of them zeppelins. We had to leave it across the river in Jersey on account of high winds."

"No, really," says Beans. "You know what an airship is?"

"I have seen one," I says. "About eighteen years ago the Brits landed one in New York."

And just like that Joey Morlock's eyes pop wide and glaze over like they do when he is talking about them books he likes to read so much. He reaches out to grab my hand and begins pumping it like I just mentioned I went to school with the kid brother he ain't seen since the war. "You saw the R.34 dirigible," he says, but his voice is soft as a hush and almost reverent and does not sound the way you expect to hear him talk. "I have only seen the American Navy airships, and only two of them, the Shenandoah and the Macon."

I have no idea what he is talking about so I just smile and retrieve my hand and pretend to take a sip from my water glass. Beans McAllister breaks into a grin but does not look like he knows what all is going on any more than me. I am still trying to understand why Beans asked about airships at all, and then it clicks and I roll my eyes because sometimes I can be dumber than a mortician's daughter.

"Your card game is on an airship," I says, and even I am not sure if I am asking a question.

"Yup," says Beans McAllister. "The game is on an airship. Only it ain't my game. It is Manhole McGovern's game."

When he says that name I can feel the ice water running in my veins and almost count the time it takes for my heart to freeze. I do not want to say even one bad word about Mr. Manhole McGovern. I do not want to say even one because I most firmly believe that am I to do so there is a very good chance that somehow, someday, Manhole will know and the very next day I will wake up that morning to find I am dead in my sleep of the night before. This is the kind of fellow Manhole McGovern is, and I know this only by reputation for he lives in Philly and I live in New York and if he ever decides to move to New York that is when I decide to move away, pausing only to tell my seven best friends to likewise move, and sparing no more time to warn anyone else. I have heard stories that Manhole McGovern is usually very methodical and precise in all he does, but that he has a temper like a volcano and when he is losing it even delights in inflicting pain in great quantities just to hear the effect it creates. This is not a natural way for a man to be, even such a man as rubs other fellows out, but this is what I hear from everyone about Manhole McGovern and now maybe you understand why I am saying these things and not saying them too. This is not a man I want to cross, and this is not a man I want to beat at cards, no matter how many potatoes may be involved.

I turn in the booth to explain all this to Joey Morlock and I am thinking if we hurry we can still catch the

late train out of Union station back to New York when I stop dead. For if I am of the opinion that Joey Morlock's eyes are aglaze before then he is even worse off now and I know I am lost.

"An airship," he says. "I have always wanted to ride on an airship. What a tremendously perfect idea."

Perfect. This is what I think to myself. Perfect that I am going to play cards with Manhole McGovern flying in the sky. Perfect because if I start winning it will be easy for him to shove me out a door or a window. And I will not be able to hold onto the door or window because Manhole McGovern will first take the time to break each of the joints in each of my fingers before aiming me to the outside. Perfect.

So it is the next morning that Beans McAllister and Joey Morlock and I are standing on the air field and we are looking at an airship which I must tell you is at once both an amazing thing to behold and also very silly looking. I think of fat fat birds when I look at it, and I feel my stomach begin to go queasy. Now to be fair, part of this may be from the scrapple which I eat with breakfast not an hour before, but scrapple is what they eat in Philadelphia and so I give it a try and hope I am not to be regretting it later, but which I am now. Joey Morlock does not appear to share my discomfort, for he is gazing upon the airship and he has that look in his eyes again. You will believe me I am sure when I tell you I am weary to death of seeing this look of his.

"Who owns it?" says Joey Morlock, for he explains to me over breakfast that the navy is ever making only three airships and each of these crash one by one, a fact which though interesting does not fill me with confidence in the mode of travel. "It is the property of a private concern," says Beans McAllister, and then he gives us a wink.

"How is it that Manhole McGovern can hold his card game there?" I says.

"He has a controlling interest in the private concern," says Beans.

"How controlling?" I says.

"Completely controlling. It being a gift from his cousins," says Beans and he smirks in a way that tells me he is doing some book work for Manhole McGovern on the side, which goes to explain how a guy like him has the inside word on a high stakes game like the one we are about to join. This, and because it is well known to me that Manhole acquires "cousins"™ the way other men acquire neck ties, though no doubt he squeezes the cousins for far more potatoes than a new tie costs.

A car arrives and when the passenger door opens a doll steps out and time seems to stop like in one of those scientific romances that Joey Morlock talks about. This is no ordinary Judy, believe me, and I am not such a one as tends to lose his head over a doll. But this is the kind of doll whose kisser launches ships, and lots of ships, several hundred at least, though not usually of the lighter than air variety. I am still staring at this doll when I hear Joey Morlock asking who she is, which impresses me because myself I cannot put two words together to ask a question.

"That is Miss Caroline Carrock," says Beans, and even coming from this guy the name sounds like music. "But you can put your peepers back in your heads the both of you as she is Manhole's girl and I am advising you not to forget this distinction."

Manhole and his doll come over to us then and Beans McAllister makes with the introductions. While we are doing this, another car arrives, carrying the three other players in our little game but Joey and I barely notice them for we are still staring at the doll who is now on Manhole's arm and strolling with him across the airfield. We follow after, aiming for what looks like a tiny house which attaches to the bottom of the airship. Beans rushes on ahead, scurrying just behind Manhole and the doll, and the other three players

are behind him. Joey Morlock and I are bringing up the rear, which is when he leans into me and says right in my ear, "I think I am in love."

Well this makes me stop in my tracks and I haul him to a stop too because there is something which I need to say and which he needs to hear. "Joey," says I, "you are the luckiest guy I know, and you have always been straight with me. On account of this I will return the favor and remind you of what you should already know. Namely, that a palooka is lucky enough to be lucky, he is lucky in cards or he is lucky with love, but no guy can be so lucky as to be lucky with both. Any guy who has a sweet-looking Judy like Miss Caroline Carrock on his arm is lucky in love, and you my chum are already known to be of the card-lucky persuasion."

I am saying all of this with my most sincere tone, but if Joey Morlock really hears any of it then I am a baboon smoking a Havana cigar. Instead he gives me this moon calf smile, sighs, and says, "I guess it is my lucky day."

This is when I am sure that the sinking feeling in my stomach is due to more than just Philadelphia scrapple. I am about to be in a card game with Manhole McGovern, staked by a pal who is hearing chirping bluebirds for a Judy who does not know he is alive, in an airship that I fully expect will crash if its owner does not throw me out an open door first after breaking my fingers. What can possibly happen to make this a worse day?

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Understand, that while I know quite a bit about one Mr. Manhole McGovern, I do not know these things from direct observation, but have built up my knowledge from first hand accounts of a number of prominent citizens. Nor do any of these tales venture into the area of what games of chance Mr. Manhole McGovern favors. I know only that we are in a fancy room that does not look like what I am expecting to find under an airship but is instead bigger than any two rooms at a boarding house but more opulent and regal like. There is a fancy brass door at one end of the room that is our entrance, and another fancy brass door at the other end which leads to the second and less ritzy room. I come to know this because Joey Morlock is asking to see everything in the airship and Manhole McGovern very graciously obliges him, and looks to be taking an instant liking to Joey because he is getting to show off his fancy airship. In this way we learn that the other room is where the crew what pilots the airship sits and they are all decent guys who also like answering Joey Morlock's questions until finally Manhole McGovern pulls us all back into the main room. I am not such a guy as knows much about decor, but the room is pretty swell and reminds me of a posh hotel back in New York with all its dark polished wood and fancy upholstery with shiny brass buttons everywhere. Both long walls are overflowing with windows, the lead glass kind that must be murder to replace, and as he leads us back across the room I can see the air field on either side, and I am thinking that it is wholly unnatural for a pair of rooms to leave the ground and fly around, even for something as important as a high stakes poker game. We pass a tiny bar with three stools nudging up against one of the windows, and I am wishing for a drink to settle my insides but Manhole hustles us past the bar, closer to the first door that soon will lead to open air, where I spy two dolls what are just setting up chairs and a collapsible card table with lush green felt and no small amount of polish on the wood.

From these facts even Beans McAllister's mother can determine that we are here to play cards, and this woman is dead for some years may she rest in peace. I will go further though and say that even this posthumous mother of an accountant knows we are not present for just any game of cards, but specifically those variants which men of character know as poker. It does not enter into my mind even once that we will play canasta nor gin rummy nor bridge, though I confess in some circles they are recognizing me as being no slouch at this last game.

But no, we are here to play poker, and when Joey Morlock and I sit down it is poker I expect us to

play. I am no stranger to high stakes games, and I know there are rules of the house and I am expecting there are rules of the airship too. This should be no problem I think, as high stakes games are simple and direct, and maybe there will be some slight quirks that are new to me but little other surprises. I am expecting draw poker and stud poker and maybe a hand or two of seven-toed Pete or the occasional wild card, just to keep it interesting. And in this I soon find I am mistaken. Manhole McGovern does not play traditional poker and he makes this clear to us. It is not enough for him that a Pair beats a high card, or a Full House beats a Flush which beats a Straight, or any of the usual objects of play in poker. For I discover as he explains the rules of the house that Manhole McGovern plays with a complexity of shades and special hands that I have only heard tell of here and there, by ones and twos for flair, but never all together in a single game.

This is not a problem though as Manhole takes from the inside pocket of his coat a small book which any of us can see is a copy of Hoyle and the final word on the rules of the game. I will confess that I am never reading this book, learning all I know about cards and dice and horses from friends and other acquaintances, and I say this to Manhole, hoping he will not take it the wrong way. But Manhole is patient and it is only when he is reviewing all these special hands for the third time, pointing out each special hand in his book, that I detect a growl in his voice as he distinguishes a Big Tiger from a Flush, a Little Dog from a Straight, a Skeet from a Blaze, and a Skip Straight from a Round-The-Corner Straight. I am making notes to myself to keep them all clear and I fear I am not doing so well and I ask if I can borrow his book, just to review while we play at cards and he is most agreeable on this point. I offer to share the book with Joey Morlock, but he merely nods and winks, and looks like he knows all these things which have never come up in any game of poker in which I have the pleasure to participate before. He knows them, but from his wink he is telling everyone that they are not for him, or so I think his wink means, but it is only a wink and so there is no telling for certain.

Or maybe it is just that he is remembering the most basic rule of poker, which as any card player will tell you is that in the showdown "the cards speak for themselves"™ even if you do not know what your hand is worth. When I think of this I find it very encouraging and decide I will not worry so much about looking up every hand in Hoyle over and over again and this is when I return Manhole's book to him. Also because beating Manhole at cards is a foolish proposition; no matter how much I might win here and now I am losing some time soon after the game is complete.

We begin to play, and there are six of us around the table. Manhole introduces two upstanding citizens from the great city of Chicago, and though he gives their names as Little Douglas and Cinnamon Bob, I am recognizing them as members of the mob and know that back in Chicago they go by Rob Roy and the Cologne Kid. Any doubt that might be in my noggin does not linger as in the closeness of the room it is clear how the Cologne Kid gets his name, and it is not cinnamon that I am smelling. The third fellow I also recognize and he recognizes me right back as we have sat with some of the same people in the same restaurants back on Broadway and I only nod when Manhole introduces him as the Duke of Paris. I know him by another name, but it is not a name I will be using here. It is a private game and I am thinking perhaps it is a game that afterwards no one will say ever happened because Manhole introduces Joey Morlock and me as H.G. and Arturo the Hungarian. I am thinking he must have some funny sense of humor with the way he is making up names, but it is his game that we are crashing so I do not make my comments out loud but keep them inside of my head where they will not offend or do me harm. Also in the room with us are Beans McAllister who does not have the potatoes of his own to play, and Miss Caroline Carrock who at the start is still hanging on Manhole but soon moves to a chair behind him and against the window as the game commences. The couple of dolls turn out to be bar hostesses and at Manhole's nod they go about making sure everyone has plenty to drink. Once all the introducing is over Manhole has one of the hostesses pass word to the crew flying the airship and soon after I get this feeling in my stomach like riding a Ferris wheel at the world's fair and we leave terra firma behind and venture into the sky. From my chair I can turn my head to look out the windows on either side, but there is

nothing much to look at but the empty blue sky. I do not mind telling you that I am feeling a bit of apprehension, but also admiration as well for Mr. Manhole McGovern discovers a sure way for his card game to avoid a raid by the cops and this is most definitely a good thing as many a high stakes card game has seen shady cops bust in and take away all the potatoes for themselves.

And then it is time to play. It is dealer's choice and I win the first deal so start us with draw poker and that first hand sets the theme for me. I am losing, and with hands which I should rightfully win, but Manhole beats my Straight with a Little Tiger in one hand and in another he smokes my two pairs of aces and fives with a pair of kings and queens and a jack which gives him five face cards which according to Hoyle is a Blaze and he is laughing and taking my potatoes.

Joey Morlock is sitting to my left and when the deal comes to him again he deals a round of stud poker and I am hoping I will do better but it is not to happen. I come up with just a single pair but Manhole beats me playing a four flush, and he does this again and again as we play, one special hand after another taking not only my potatoes but also those belonging to the two citizens of the windy city and my longtime acquaintance from Broadway. But this is okay I say to myself, this is just Jake, because I am learning the Dogs and Tigers, Big and Little, and I have almost got it straight and we are going to be playing for some time so though I do not expect to win as I previously mention, I hope to not lose too shamefully.

But as the cards go around and around I realize that my education in poker is not yet done, not when Manhole McGovern has dealer's choice. Again he reaches into his coat and opens the pages of his book and begins reading to us about other kinds of poker and as he is our host and it is his airship we have little choice but to play them. From just Stud Poker we move to Mexican Stud. And then Shotgun. And then Baseball. And then Double-Barreled Shotgun and Midnight Baseball. We play Cincinnati and Anaconda and Cold Hands and Double Dip and several more games which are poker but not the poker I know and love, and the names of which I can not remember because I can barely remember the rules of each and all of Manhole's special hands too, and I am regretting the drinks I take from the hostesses all unknowingly.

And it is not just me who is having trouble but also the guys from Chicago and the Duke of Paris and I am thinking that maybe if I really go by the moniker of Arturo the Hungarian these games might make more sense to me. I am finding no surprise that Manhole knows these games as his copy of Hoyle shows the wear of many careful readings, but Joey Morlock knows them too, and he is matching Manhole McGovern play for play, game after game, until hours go by and the rest of us surrender our potatoes to one or the other and just sit back in awe for never before do two fellows play the game of poker with such verve and style. And it is especially curious because when Manhole wins it is usually with one of the special hands that are making my head swim, but when Joey wins it is always with a regular hand and never a Big Tiger or a Skip Straight, not once, nor ever with a wild card of a winking Jack or a King with a death wish, but only with regular solid hands. I feel like I am watching the giants of the game and all the time when I look out the window at the empty air I am thinking that if either Joey Morlock or I ever hope to see New York again that he needs to start losing soon. But if this thought crosses Joey Morlock's mind it does not stick there but trickles out his ear for he is winning more often than he is losing and bit by bit he is taking all of Manhole McGovern's potatoes.

By this time the boys from Chicago are dozing in their seats and the hostesses are taking away many empty glasses from them. The Duke of Paris is on my right hand side and is giving me significant types of looks which I read to mean that he is thinking what I am thinking but even the both of us thinking it cannot make Joey Morlock think it.

For most of the game Miss Caroline Carrock is sitting in her chair with her nose in a book, a fact which surprises me some because in my experience your brainier dolls are not such sweet Judys but this is a

day for exceptions. During the last hour or so though she is peeking over her pages at Joey Morlock, and usually just after the showdown when he is raking in potatoes that are previously someone else's. I notice this. The Duke of Paris notices this. We notice each other noticing this. Manhole McGovern cannot notice this because Miss Caroline Carrock is sitting behind him and he is not the kind of card player to turn around even if he hears his mother calling fire which is not something you want to hear when you are playing poker onboard an airship. Whether Joey Morlock notices I cannot say though I remember the look he gives her before on the airfield and him saying he is in love. Right now though he looks only to be in love with the cards and the cards are in love with him because he is slowly taking all of Manhole McGovern's potatoes.

It is at this time I believe that the Duke of Paris and I are thinking two things. First, that it is going to end badly for Joey Morlock because Manhole McGovern is surely packing a shooter and will be reclaiming all his potatoes before we are done. And second, that an airship is not the best of places to be in when you are looking to make a quick exit to avoid sharing the lead that is about to be aiming itself at your fellow card player, especially lead from a guy as thorough about such things as I am knowing Manhole McGovern to be.

They are down to playing two card Hurricane and Manhole has put in the last of his potatoes, and the pot is the largest it has been all day. He has nothing left to bet, which is a shame because Joey Morlock does the ungentlemanly thing and raises.

"I find I am short at the moment," says Manhole. "But surely you will take my marker so that we may play out this hand."

"Do not be taking offense at this," says Joey Morlock and I am sweating off all the booze I ever drink in my life and going suddenly sober when I hear this because it is likely Manhole is going to take offense and the lead will begin to fly. "Do not be taking offense at this, but I am not from this city of Philadelphia and so cannot accept your marker in good conscience for I do not know when I might come this way again as I am visiting only to enjoy a quiet game of poker which I am doing, and thank you for inviting me."

"If you will not take my marker, then I cannot see your raise."

"If you cannot see my raise, then you must fold and the hand is over and I win. Unless ... is there something else you have of value here?"

Manhole begins to frown and by now even Beans McAllister realizes what the Duke of Paris and I long since know, and is looking for a place to hide but there is none. But this is when we get ourselves a reprieve.

"I will wager you this airship," says Manhole McGovern, and everyone sighs with relief that the lead is not yet flying, except for the boys from Chicago who are snoring, and Miss Caroline Carrock who by now is no longer even pretending to read her book but is watching Joey Morlock with keen interest and a funny look in her eye. And I am thinking that maybe we will not all die today because at the offer of the airship Joey Morlock's eyes glaze over again and I know he is picturing himself as a character in one of his scientific romances and surely this distraction will make him lose.

"I accept the wager," says Joey, all breathy like.

"Hah!" says Manhole McGovern and he lays down his cards showing a pair of Kings. Now in Hurricane this is a very difficult hand to beat and so it is not surprising to anyone that Manhole is reaching for all the potatoes in the pot to pull them back to his side of the table.

"I do not think so," says Joey Morlock as he turns his cards over revealing a pair of bullets, intending no irony I am sure. He gently disengages Manhole's hands from the pot and rakes the potatoes back to his side leaving nothing at all on the other except Manhole McGovern who is staring down at his pair of kings with astonishment.

"I do not believe I lost," says Manhole.

"It is a very near thing," says Joey, which is a pretty sympathetic thing to say, considering, but will not keep us all from being thoroughly dead if Manhole McGovern is even one tenth the bad sport I hear him to be.

"One more hand!"

"I would, and gladly," says Joey Morlock, "only you do not have anything left to bet."

I notice that Miss Caroline Carrock is looking Joey Morlock's way and her eyes are getting all moist with interest because surely she has never seen anyone take all of Manhole McGovern's potatoes from him in a poker game and for some reason she finds this very attractive.

"One hand," Manhole says again, but Joey shakes his head. Well, this is apparently too much for Manhole and he finally does what the rest of us have been expecting him to do which is to pull a heater from his pocket and aim the business end at Joey Morlock's chest across the table.

Joey is sitting there, his eyes still glazing because now he has his very own airship and maybe does not yet see he is about to own nothing but a funeral plot and maybe a nice new headstone if Manhole McGovern is feeling generous. Or maybe not, because he only shrugs and says, "If you shoot me, you still will not beat me at cards."

This just makes Manhole even madder and he is pounding the card table with the heater now and it is a miracle he does not accidentally spray lead around the room. Instead, he begins to shout. "One. More. Hand."

"What will you bet?"

Which is when Manhole McGovern jumps up from his chair, grabs hold of the arm of Miss Caroline Carrock and hauls her over to the card table and says, "I will bet you my doll here."

"What is the game?" says Joey Morlock.

"Simple poker, no draw, nothing wild. Just five cards down, winner take all."

Joey Morlock just nods and reaches for the deck of cards and starts shuffling. Manhole McGovern puts his heater away then cuts the deck, all the while keeping one hand tight on Miss Caroline Carrock's arm and it is clear to all of us that this is one Judy who does not like being a wager in a not-so-friendly game of cards, but at the same time she is making eyes at Joey Morlock as if to say it is not such a bad thing if he wins her. Joey does not even notice though. He deals out the cards but when he is done he does not pick his up. Manhole turns his cards over and I am breathing the proverbial sigh of relief, which echoes from the Duke of Paris and Beans McAllister, for we are looking at a Straight Flush and thinking we are all going to live to see another day.

"What do you have?" says Manhole, but Joey still does not pick up his cards and he does not turn them over. Instead, he stands up and walks across the room and stands by the door where we come in and he lays his hand upon the fancy brass handle.



"What do you have?" says Manhole again, and he is getting up from his chair and bellowing at Joey Morlock. "What do you have?" He reaches across the table and flips over Joey's cards and stares at them. I stare too. So does the Duke of Paris and even Beans McAllister. From where I am sitting, it appears that Joey has a Flush, which is a fine hand to have, though it cannot beat a Straight Flush. But Manhole McGovern must see something different because his face begins to change color, going from red to purple to umber and he is turning and yelling and charging at Joey across the room. And this is when Joey Morlock opens the door and steps lightly to the side. Manhole is moving fast, but the room is not so big and he is moving not so fast that he cannot stop himself from racing out the door. But Joey is standing there with one hand still on the handle and he reaches out with his other hand and grabs hold of Manhole McGovern's lapel and gives such a yank as pulls him forward another couple steps. Now this is unfortunate but still not tragic, as Manhole McGovern's feet are inside the room and all is fine. Except Joey puts his foot out, right where Manhole's foot is about to be, and Manhole trips and stumbles forward another couple steps which is about one step too many and he is gone, out the door, out of the room, and out of the airship, at which point Joey Morlock closes the door again and steps back to the card table.

Beans McAllister is in shock and cannot speak. The Duke of Paris is likewise in shock and cannot speak. The hostesses are feeling the most shock and they are cowering by the other door. Miss Caroline Carrock does not say word one, but I do not believe she is in shock because she rushes to Joey Morlock's side and slips her arm through his and I am thinking she has been wanting and waiting for something to happen to Manhole McGovern for a very long while. I go to Joey and before I can ask him what is transpiring he catches my eye and points to his hand still face up on the card table. I look at it again. It is still just a flush to my eyes, the nine, seven, five, trey, and deuce of hearts. Clearly there is something here I do not comprehend and it shows on my face and the Duke of Paris comes up and points out what I am missing.

"It is one of Manhole's special hands," he says. "It is a Skeet Flush, a nine and five and deuce with two cards in between, which always beats a straight flush."

While we are looking at the cards Joey Morlock is looking at Miss Caroline Carrock and it does not surprise me that he has that glazy look in his eyes again and she is staring at him with the same kind of look. He takes her by the hand and leads her to the other door which he opens and I hear him telling the crew to land the airship as soon as is convenient.

"Excuse me," I says, reluctant to break into my friend's bit of paradise as he seems to have the girl and the airship and all the potatoes, but one thing is still gnawing at me and I know I will not have any peace if I do not get an answer. "You got up and never once do you look at your cards. How is it you know it is the winning hand?"

But Joey Morlock does not answer as he is too busy gazing out the window with his arm around his new doll, and this reminds me again that he is the luckiest guy I know. Instead the Duke of Paris comes up to me and gives out with an explanation which makes no sense to me.

"He knows because of the cards," says the Duke of Paris. "The cards tell him so."

"Tell him?" I says. "How can the cards tell him? Cards do not talk. They do not whisper. They do not so much as yammer or jaw."

"That is not altogether true," says Joey Morlock without turning away from the window. "Any card player will tell you, the cards speak for themselves."

The End