

C A P T A I N A L A S K A

by Daryl Henry

FADE IN:

MOUNTAIN WILDERNESS VIEWED FROM ABOVE

Relieved only by the Porcupine River, a narrow braid of silver reflecting sunlight far below.

CLOSER ON THE RIVER

A tributary of little consequence, the Porcupine carries melted snow downhill from Canada and pours it into the mighty Yukon across the border in Alaska.

NOT TOO FAR ABOVE THE RIVER

A patched and faded 1929 Swallow BIPLANE, trailing cigar smoke, flies serenely.

CLOSE ON THE SWALLOW

One hand on the stick, the other holding a copy of the recent novel, *Tobacco Road*, young CASEY TEAJACK flies, reads and smokes contentedly. Meanwhile:

BELOW ON THE PORCUPINE

A small STERNWHEELER that's seen better days coasts downstream. The faded name *Porcupine Queen* is barely legible on her unpainted wheelhouse as she glides along, nudging an EMPTY SCOW in front of her.

CLOSER ON THE QUEEN

Leaning from the wheelhouse is her captain, BELA MAGUNDI, a grizzled gypsy. He scowls up as the biplane RATTLES past overhead.

On the foredeck is his only CREWMAN, a missionary Eskimo named KEETOK. He glances up at the disappearing Swallow, then at his skipper, then makes the sign of the cross.

IN THE AIR AGAIN

The OPENING CREDITS are rolling, and the engine of the Swallow is PURRING. Then the credits stop and so does the engine.

Teajack drops his book and stares at his cluster of engine instruments-- all inert. Alarmed, he clamps down on his cigar and looks over the side of the cockpit for a place to land.

HIS POV BELOW

There is no place to land.

(CONTINUED)

VIEW AHEAD

Except just possibly a small GRAVEL BAR at a bend in the river, mostly awash in the muddy Spring runoff, wedged between the spruce trees on either side.

INSIDE THE SWALLOW

Teajack chews grimly on his cigar as he concentrates on a dead-stick landing on the gravel bar. An integral part of his procedure is at first a mystery-- he reaches under his seat for a long-barreled .38 REVOLVER.

ON THE GRAVEL BAR

The plane touches down, rolls too quickly toward the end, heading for deep water. Teajack leans out of the cockpit, cocks his revolver and takes aim at the left tire. Just as the Swallow is about to plunge into the Porcupine, he SHOTS.

The tire goes suddenly flat, the airplane pivots to the left in a furious ground-loop and pitches to a halt inches from the river.

Teajack climbs down, extracts a match from the pocket of his woolen shirt, relights his cigar stub and inhales with satisfaction. Optimistic, he flips open the cowling and begins tinkering with the Swallow's liquid-cooled Curtis V-8 engine.

Almost at once a loud steam WHISTLE startles him-- he looks upriver.

PORCUPINE QUEEN

The run-down steamboat rounds the bend, nestles up to the gravel bar, stops. For a long time nobody comes out. Teajack waits. Finally the captain emerges onto the bridge, pushes his battered blue cap to the back of his head, looks Teajack up and down, and:

ALTERNATING

MAGUNDI
Where were you headed?

TEAJACK
Alaska.

MAGUNDI
Big country.

TEAJACK
Is it much farther?

MAGUNDI
The other end is. The near end is behind you.

(CONTINUED)

TEAJACK

I'm here?!

MAGUNDI

To stay, by the looks of it.

Teajack couldn't be happier.

MAGUNDI (CONT'D)

If you want a ride as far as Burnt Paw, climb on.

TEAJACK

Burnt Paw?

MAGUNDI

The only town on the river.

TEAJACK

... What about my Swallow?

The gypsy throws a dirty look at the airplane.

MAGUNDI

If you mean that bunch of spare parts parked close together, take my advice, burn it.

Teajack looks the steamboat up and down.

TEAJACK

If it ever comes to that, I'll know where to find the biggest pile of firewood in Alaska.

MAGUNDI

(grudging smile)

At least she's got an engine that still makes noise.

Teajack returns to his tinkering.

MAGUNDI (CONT'D)

Well, are you coming or not?

TEAJACK

Not without my airplane.

MAGUNDI

When a little more snow melts, you and your airplane is both going to sink.