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Man Flies

Nancy Winters

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"This is not a history of flight. Nor even of ballooning. It is the story of one small, courageous, stubborn, stylish, and ultimately tragic man. It is not so much a story of science as a story of dreams" (from the Author's Note). It was for Alberto Santos-Dumont, who could not check his pocket watch because he was using both hands to steer the balloon, that Louis Cartier, in 1901, created the first wristwatch. The youngest son of a Brazilian millionaire, he grew up on an isolated coffee plantation devouring (and believing) the novels of Jules Verne. By the age of eighteen, he was living in Paris, at the height of the Belle Epoque, heir to a huge fortune and determined to make his dreams of flying come true. A renowned playboy, dining at Maxim's nightly and setting new styles in fashion, he at first frequently crashed his yellow silk airships into the trees of wealthy friends, such as the Rothchilds, who would set up champagne lunches for him to enjoy during repairs. But soon he was winning prestigious prizes and being hailed as "the conqueror of the air." Internationally acclaimed as the first man to fly, he was feted for several years in Europe and America--where he was received at the White House by Teddy Roosevelt--before learning that the Wright Brothers, whose early efforts had been discounted, had actually preceded him. "Man Flies" tells the tragic, glamorous story of Alberto Santos-Dumont's career, and later illness, and how this brilliant, colorful, and eccentric pioneer slipped through the cracks of aviation history while his inventions and imagination continue to inspire it. "Man Flies" includes black-and-white photographs throughout, an illustrated chronology of the airships, a chronology of the life of Santos-Dumont, and an illustrated glossary of ballooning terms.

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