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Title: Dorothy Dixon Wins Her Wings

Author: Dorothy Wayne

Release date: March 19, 2014 [EBook #45174]

Language: English

Credits: Produced by Roger Frank, Elizabeth Oscanyan and the Online Distributed Proofreading Team at <http://www.pgdp.net>

\*\*\* START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK DOROTHY DIXON WINS HER WINGS \*\*\*

## DOROTHY DIXON Wins Her Wings,

BY  
*Dorothy Wayne*

Author of  
*Dorothy Dixon and The Mystery Plant*  
*Dorothy Dixon Solves the Conway Case*  
*Dorothy Dixon and the Double Cousin*

THE GOLDSMITH PUBLISHING COMPANY  
CHICAGO

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TO  
*My young sister*  
HILDA

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# Dorothy Dixon Wins Her Wings

## Chapter I

### OUT OF THE NORTHEAST

"Hi, there, young lady!"

"Hi, yourself,--what d'you want?"

At the water's edge, a girl of sixteen stopped in the act of launching a small skiff. She straightened her lithe figure and faced about, her brown hair blowing in the breeze, turning a pair of snapping grey eyes inquiringly upon the young man who walked down the beach toward her.

"Miss Dixon, isn't it?" asked the stranger, his deeply tanned features breaking into an engaging smile. "I'm not sure I recognized you at first in the bathing suit--"

"No matter how you were dressed I'm sure I wouldn't recognize you," returned Dorothy, shortly. "I've never laid eyes on you before--that's why."

The young man laughed. "Quite right," he said, "you haven't. But I happen to be a near neighbor of yours, and I've seen you."

"Up at New Canaan?"

"Yes. Dad has taken the Hawthorne place,--bought it in fact."

For a full minute the girl stared at this tall young man with the blonde hair and the jolly smile. Surprise left her speechless.

Then--"Why--why--" she gasped. "Y-you must be the famous Bill Bolton!"

"Bolton's the name, all right," he grinned. "But that famous stuff is the bunk."

Dorothy was herself again, and a little ashamed of her burst of feeling.

"But you *are* the aviator!" She went on, more calmly. "My father told me the other day that you and your father were coming to live across the road from us. And I don't mind telling you we're simply thrilled! You see, I've read about you in the papers--and I know all about the wonderful things you've done!"

"I'm afraid you've got an exaggerated idea--it was all in the day's work, you know," protested the blonde-headed young man, his eyebrows slanting quizzically, "I'm Bill Bolton, but I didn't barge in on you to talk about myself. You're starting out for a sail in that sloop that's moored over there, I take it?"

"Why, yes, I am. Want to come along?"

"Thanks a lot. I've got a business matter to attend to down here in a few minutes." He hesitated a moment, then--"I know it's none of my affair, but don't you think it's rather risky to go for a sail just now?"

Dorothy shrugged. "Oh, I don't know. There's a two reef breeze blowing out beyond the Point, but that's nothing to worry about. I've sailed all over Long Island Sound since I was a kid, and I've been out in worse blows than this, lots of times."

"Maybe," countered Bill. "Storm warnings were broadcast about an hour ago. We're in for a northeaster--"

She broke in scoffingly--"Oh! those weathermen! They're always wrong. It's a perfectly scrumptious afternoon. The storm, if it comes, will probably show up sometime tomorrow!"

"Well," he retorted, "you're your own boss, I suppose.--If you were my sister," he added suddenly, "you wouldn't go sailing today."

"Then it's a good thing I'm *not* your sister. Thanks for your interest," she mocked. There was a hint of anger in her voice at the suspicion that Bill Bolton was trying to patronize her. "Don't worry," she added, resuming her usual tone, "I can handle a boat--Good-bye!"

Their eyes met; Bill's gravely accusing, hers, full of defiant determination.

"Good-bye--sorry I spoke." Bill turned away and walked up the beach toward the club house.

Dorothy chuckled when she saw him throw a quick glance over his shoulder. She waved her hand, but he kept on without appearing to notice the friendly gesture.

"A temper goes with that blond hair," she said to herself, digging a bare heel into the loose shingle. "I guess I was pretty rude, though. But what right had he to talk like that? Bill Bolton may be a famous aviator, but he's only a year older than I am."

She ran the skiff out through the shallows and sprang aboard. Standing on the stern thwart she sculled the small craft forward with short, strong strokes, and presently nosed alongside the *Scud*. As she boarded the sloop and turned with the skiff's painter in her hand she caught sight of Bill getting into an open roadster on the club driveway.

"I guess he meant well," she observed to the wavelets that lapped the side of the *Scud*, "but just the same--well, that's that."

Making the painter secure to a cleat in the stern, she set about lacing a couple of reefs into the mainsail. Having tied the last reef-point, she loosened the skiff's painter, pulled the boat forward and skillfully knotted the rope to the sloop's mooring. Then she cast off the mooring altogether and ran aft to her place at the tiller.

The *Scud's* head played off. Dorothy, as she had told Bill, was no novice at the art of small boat sailing. With her back bracing the tiller she ran up the jib and twisted the halyard to a cleat close at hand.

Then as the sloop gained steerageway, she pulled on the peak and throat halyards until the reefed-down mainsail was setting well. The *Scud*, a fast twenty-footer, was rigged with a fore-staysail and gaff-topsail as well, but Dorothy knew better than to break them out in a wind like this.

As it was she carried all the canvas her little boat would stand, and they ran out past the Point, which acted as a breakwater to the yacht club inlet, with the starboard gunwale well awash. The wind out here stiffened perceptibly and Dorothy wished she had tied in three reefs instead of two before starting. Her better judgment told her to go about and seek the quieter waters of the inlet. But here, pride took a hand.

If she turned back and gave up her afternoon sail, the next time she saw Bill Bolton she must admit he had been right. No. That would never do.

Although the wind out here was stiffer than she had imagined, this was no northeast gale; a good three-reef breeze, that was all. So lowering the peak slightly she continued to head her little craft offshore.

The *Scud* fought and bucked like a wild thing, deluging Dorothy with spray. She gloried in the tug of the tiller, the sting of the salt breeze, the dance of her craft over choppy seas. Glistening in the clear summer sunlight, flecked with tiny whitecaps, the landlocked water stretched out to where the low hills of Long Island banked the horizon in a blur of purple and green.

Now and then as she luffed into a particularly strong gust, Dorothy had her misgivings. But pride, confidence in her ability to handle her boat and the thrill of danger kept her going.

She had been sailing for about an hour, beating her way eastward with the Connecticut shore four or five miles off her port quarter, when all at once, somehow, she felt a change. The sunshine seemed less brilliant, the shadows less solid, less sharply outlined. It seemed as if a very thin gauze had been drawn across the sun dimming without obscuring it. Dorothy searched the sky in vain to discover the smallest shred of cloud.

At the same time the breeze slackened and the air, which had been stimulant and quick with oxygen seemed to become thick, sluggish, suffocating. Presently, the *Scud* was lying becalmed, while the ground swell, long and perfectly smooth, set sagging jib and mainsail flapping. Except for the rattling of the blocks and the creaking of the boom, the silence, after the whistling wind of a few minutes before, was tremendously oppressive.

Then in the distance there was a low growl of thunder. In a moment came a louder, angrier growl--as if the first were a menace which had not been heeded. But the first growl was quite enough for Dorothy. She knew what was coming and let go her halyards, bringing down her sails with a run. Now fully alive to the danger, she raced to her work of making the little craft secure to meet the oncoming storm.

She was gathering in the mainsail, preparatory to furling it when there was a violent gust of wind, cold, smelling of the forests from which it came, corrugating the steely surface of the Sound. Two or three big raindrops fell--and then, the deluge.

Dorothy rushed to a locker, pulled out a slicker and sou'wester and donned them. Returning to her place by the tiller, she watched the rain. Rain had never rained so hard, she thought. Already both the Connecticut and Long Island shores were completely blotted out, hidden behind walls of water. The big drops pelted the Sound like bullets, sending up splashes bigger than themselves.

Then suddenly the wind came tearing across the inland sea from out the northeast. Thunder crashed, roared, reverberated. Lightning slashed through the black cloud-canopy in long, blinding zigzags. The wind moaned, howled, shrieked, immense in its wild force, immense in its reckless fury.

A capsized sloop wallowed in the trough of heavy seas rearing a dripping keel skyward--and to this perilous perch clung Dorothy.

## Chapter II

### TAXI!

The black brush of storm had long ago painted out the last vestige of daylight.

Crouching on the upturned hull of her sloop, Dorothy clung to the keel with nerveless fingers, while the *Scud* wallowed in an angry sea laced with foam and spray. She knew that in a little while the boat must sink, and that in water like this even the strongest swimmer must quickly succumb. Cold, wet and helpless, Dorothy anxiously scanned her narrow horizon, but in vain.

For another half hour she hung on in the rain and darkness, battered by heavy combers that all but broke her hold. She was fast losing her nerve and with it the willingness to struggle. Phantom shapes reached toward her from the gloom. Strange lights danced before her eyes....

With a rolling lurch the *Scud* sank, and Dorothy found herself fighting the waves unsupported. The shock of sudden immersion brought back her scattering wits, but the delusion of dancing lights still held; especially one light, larger and brighter than the others. Surely this one was real and not the fantasy of an overwrought imagination!

Half smothered in flying spume, the drowning girl made one last frantic effort to keep afloat. Above the pounding of the sea, a throbbing roar shook her eardrums, a glare of light followed by a huge dark form swooped down as if to crush her--and she lost consciousness.

Dorothy awoke in a darkness so complete that for a moment she thought her eyes must be bandaged. Nervous fingers soon found that this was not the case, and reaching out, they came in contact with a light switch.

The sudden gleam of the electrics half blinded her. Presently she saw that she lay on a narrow bunk in a cabin. Presumably she was aboard a vessel, still out in the storm, for the ship pitched and rolled like a drunken thing, and the roar of a powerful exhaust was deafening.

Someone had removed her sweater, had tucked warm blankets about her body. Her throat burned from a strong stimulant which apparently had been administered while she was unconscious.

For some minutes she lay there taking in her surroundings. The charts tacked to the cabin walls, the tiny electric cookstove, hinged table and armsrack opposite. Listlessly she counted the weapons, four rifles, three shotguns, two automatics--and fastened in its own niche was a machine gun covered with a waterproof jacket. A complete arsenal.... The shotguns bespoke sportsmen, but this was neither the season for duck nor for snipe. Men did not go shooting in Long Island Sound with rifles, revolvers and a machine gun.... *Bootleggers!*

It came to her like a bolt from the blue. She was on board a rumrunner, no less, and notwithstanding the exhaustion she suffered from her battles with the waves, she found exhilaration in the exciting discovery.

Dorothy threw off the blankets, sat up and swung her legs over the edge of the bunk. Her bathing suit was still wet and clung uncomfortably to her skin. With a hand on the side of the bunk to support her, she stood up on the heaving floor to catch sight of her face in a mirror screwed to the opposite wall.

"Gracious! I'm a fright," she cried. "I don't suppose there's a vanity case aboard this lugger--and mine went down with the poor little *Scud!*"

Then she spied a neat pile of clothing at the foot of the bunk, and immediately investigated. A dark blue sweater, a pair of trousers, heavy woolen socks, and a pair of boy's sneakers were seized upon and donned forthwith.

Dorothy giggled as she surveyed herself once more in the little mirror. "Just a few sizes too large, that's all. But they're warm, and *dry*, and that's something!"

She rummaged about on a shelf, found a comb and with dexterous fingers smoothed her short damp hair into place, then with a sigh of satisfaction, muttered again to herself, "Much better, my girl."

Her makeshift toilet completed, she decided to leave the cabin and continue her explorations outside.

There were two doors, one on the side and one at the end which evidently led forward. After a moment's hesitation, Dorothy chose the latter. With some difficulty, for the ship still pitched unmercifully, she stumbled forward. Then, summoning up her courage, for she was not without trepidation at the thought of facing her desperado rescuers, she laid a hand on the knob and turning it, swung back the door.

Dorothy found herself in a small, glassed-in compartment, evidently the pilot house. She had hardly time to glance about, when an oddly familiar voice spoke from out the darkness. It was barely distinguishable above the motor's hum.

"Please, Miss Dixon, snap off the light or shut the door. I can't possibly guide this craft in such a glare."

"Why, it's Bill Bol--Mr. Bolton, I mean," she cried in surprise, and closed the door.

"Himself in the flesh," replied that young man.

She could see him clearly now, seated directly before her. His back was toward her and he did not

turn round. So far as she could see he seemed very busily engaged, doing something with his feet.

"Then--then it must have been you who picked me up," she stammered.

"Guilty on the first count, Miss Dixon."

"Please don't be funny," she retorted, now mistress of herself once more. "I want to thank you--"

"You are very welcome. Seriously, though, it is the boathook you have to thank. Without that we'd both have gone to Davy Jones' locker long before this."

Dorothy was nearly thrown off her feet by an unusually high sea which crashed over the pilot house and rolled the vessel far over on her side.

"Whew--that was a near one!" the girl exploded as the ship righted itself.

"We'll weather it, don't worry," encouraged Bill, though he did not feel the confidence his words proclaimed.

"It looks to me," said Dorothy soberly, "as though we'll be mighty lucky if we reach shore at all--and I guess you know it."

"Never say die, Miss Dixon!"

"Suppose we drop this miss and mister stuff, Bill. Sounds rather silly at a time like this, don't you think so?"

"Right you are, Dorothy. I'm not much on ceremony, myself, as the Irishman said when--"

"Look here, Bill!" Dorothy tossed her head impatiently, "I wish you'd omit the comedy--it really isn't necessary. I'll admit I was in a bad way when you dragged me out of the briny deep--and I appreciate your coming to my rescue. But you needn't expect me to faint or to throw hysterics. That sort of thing went out of fashion long ago. Girls today have just as much nerve as boys. They don't very often get a chance to prove it, that's all."

"Please accept my humblest apology, mademoiselle." Bill's eyes twinkled though his tone was utterly serious. "I can assure you--"

Dorothy's merry laugh rang out--her mood had passed as suddenly as it had come. "Don't be absurd. Tell me--why are *you* piloting a rumrunner?"

"Rumrunner? What do you mean?"

"If this isn't a rumrunner, why do you carry that machine gun and the rifles and revolvers in the armsrack?"

"Just part of our equipment, that's all."

Dorothy's impatience flared up again. "Why do you talk such nonsense?"

"Nonsense?"

"Certainly. You don't mean to tell me that you took a boat of this size on long cruises!"

Bill grinned in the darkness. "But you see," he chuckled, "this isn't a boat."

"Well, what is it then?"

"A Loening amphibian. Not exactly the stock model, for Dad and I had quite a few changes made in the cabin and this pilot's cockpit."

"*What?*" shrieked Dorothy. "An airplane--one that can land either on water or on land?"

"That's right. The old crate has the hull of a boat equipped with retractable wheel landing gear which operates electrically."

"You're too technical for me," she said frowningly, and balanced herself with a hand on the back of the pilot's seat. "But if this is an airplane, why keep bouncing along on the water? I'd think you'd fly to land and have done with it."

"My dear girl--" began Bill.

"Don't use that patronizing tone--I'm not your dear girl--not by a long shot!"

Bill laughed outright. "My error once more. However, Miss Spitfire, when you learn to fly, you'll find out that air currents are very like water currents. When it is blowing as hard as it is now, flying a plane is fully as dangerous as sailing a boat--more so, in fact. When the wind reaches a certain velocity, it is impossible to balance your plane. You have to land--or crash."

Dorothy was beginning to understand. "Then you must have taken some awful risks coming out after me."

"I was lucky," he admitted. "But you see, even if we were able to fly in this gale, now, it's quite impossible to take off in such a heavy sea. If I gave the old bus enough gas to get up a flying speed, these combers would batter the hull in--I'd never be able to get her onto her step. Some day, when it's fine, and the water's smooth, I'll show you what I meant by that. Now all we can do is to taxi."

"Taxi?--This is the first seagoing taxi I've ever been in!"

"In air parlance," he explained, "to taxi is to run a plane along the ground or on the water--just now, it isn't all it's cracked up to be."

"I should think it would be easier than flying."

"Not on water as rough as this. Your legs go to sleep with the strain you have to put on the rudder



pedals."

"Oh--you're steering with your feet?"

"Yes."

"Well, why don't you let me help you? I'll drive her for a while," offered Dorothy.

Bill shook his head. "It's terribly hard work," he demurred.

"What of it? I'm as strong as an ox."

"Thanks a lot. You're a real sport. But the difficulty is in shifting places with me without swamping the old bus. She isn't equipped with dual controls. There's only one set of pedals, and as soon as I release them she will slue broadside to the waves, the wings will crumple, and she'll simply swamp and go under."

"And you must taxi either before the wind, or into the wind as we are now, in seas like these?"

"You've guessed it," he nodded.

"But there must be some way we can manage it," argued Dorothy. "You can't keep on much longer. Your legs will give out and then we'll go under anyway."

Bill hesitated a moment. "Well, all right, let's try it--but it's no cinch, as you'll find out."

"That's O.K. with me. Come on--orders, please--and let's go!"

### Chapter III

#### A WILD RIDE

"Hey, not so fast," laughed Bill. "First of all, will you please step into the cabin, and in the second locker on your right you'll find a helmet and a phone-set. Bring them out here. This shouting is making us both hoarse and we'll soon be as deaf as posts from the noise of the motor."

"Aye, aye, skipper," breezed Dorothy, and disappeared aft.

In a minute or two she returned with the things he had asked for. Bill showed her how to adjust the receivers of the phone set over the ear flaps of her helmet. Then reaching for the head set at the other end of the connecting line, he put it on and spoke into the mouthpiece which hung on his chest.

"Much better, isn't it?" he asked in a normal tone.

"It certainly is. I can hear you perfectly," she declared into her transmitter. "--What next?"

"Come over here and sit on my lap.--I'm not trying to get fresh," he added with a grin, as she hesitated. "I've had to make a shift like this before with Dad. There is only one way to do it."

Dorothy was a sensible girl. She obeyed his order and placed herself on his knees.

"Now put your feet over mine on the rudder pedals. And remember--to turn right, push down on the right pedal, and vice versa. Get the idea?"

"Quite, thanks."

"Fine. Next--grab this stick and keep it as I have it. Now, I'm going to pull my feet from under yours--ready?"

"Let her go!"

Bill jerked his feet away, to leave Dorothy's resting on the pedals.

"Good work!" he applauded. "The old bus hardly swerved. Keep her as she's pointed now. We can't change her course, much less take off until we hit one of those inlets along the Connecticut shore, and smoother water. Brace yourself now--I'm going to slide out of this seat."

Dorothy was lifted quickly. Then she dropped back into the pilot's seat to find herself fighting the tenacious pull of heavy seas, straining her leg muscles to keep the plane from floundering.

"How's it going?" Bill's voice came from the floor of the cockpit where he was busily engaged in pounding circulation back into his numbed legs and feet.

"Great, thanks. But I will say that this amphibian of yours steers more like a loaded truck in a mudhole than an honest-to-goodness plane! How are your legs?"

"Gradually getting better--pretty painful, but then I'm used to this sort of thing."

"Poor boy!" she exclaimed sympathetically, then gritted her teeth in the effort to keep their course as a huge comber crashed slightly abeam the nose.

Bill grasped the side of her seat for support. "You handled that one nicely," he approved when the wave had swept aft. "But don't bother about me--you've got your own troubles, young lady. I'll be all right in a few minutes."

"What I can't understand," said Dorothy, after a moment, "is why this plane didn't sink when you landed and picked me up. How *did* you keep from slewing broadside and going under?"

"Well, it was like this. When I left you on the beach, I motored back home to New Canaan. The sky was blackening even then. I was sure we were in for the storm, so after putting up the car, I went out to the hay barn in that ten acre field where we house the old bus. She needed gas, so I filled the tanks, gave her a good looking over and went back to the house and telephoned."

"You mean you phoned the beach club about me?"

"Yes. The steward said you weren't anywhere around the club, and your sloop wasn't in the inlet. It was pretty dark by then and the wind was blowing a good thirty-five knots. I made up my mind you must be in trouble. Frank ran after me on my way out to the plane--he's our chauffeur you know--"

"Yes, I know--" broke in Dorothy--"he drove you and your father to the movies last night. I saw him."

"That's right. Frank's a good scout. He wanted to come along with me, but I wouldn't let him."

"I s'pose you thought you'd save *his* skin, at least?"

"Something like that. A fellow doesn't mind taking responsibility for himself--it's a different thing with some one else. Well, before Frank and I ran this plane out of the barn, I rigged the sea anchor (nothing more than a large canvas bucket with a couple of crossed two-by-twos over the top to keep it open) with an extra long mooring line. The sea-anchor I brought up here in the cockpit with me. The other end of the line was fastened to a ring-bolt in the nose, of course. Well--to get through with this yarn--I took off alone and flew over to the Sound."

"But wasn't it awful in this wind?"

"It was pretty bad. As soon as I got over water, I switched on the searchlight, but it was a good half-hour before the light picked you up. Then I landed--"

"Into the wind or with it?" interrupted Dorothy.

"Getting interested, eh?" commented Bill with a smile. "Well, just remember this then, never make a downwind landing with a seaplane in a wind blowing over eighteen miles an hour."

"Why?"

"Because the wind behind your plane will increase the landing speed to the point where you will crash when you strike the water--that's a good reason, isn't it?"

"Then you landed into the wind when you came down for me?"

"That's right. And as soon as I struck the water, I shut off the motor, opened one of these windows and threw over the sea anchor. Then I fished you out with the boathook."

"It sounds sort of easy when you tell it--but I'll bet it wasn't." She gazed at him admiringly. "You surely took some awful chances--"

"Hey there!" called Bill. "Pull back the stick or you'll nose over."

"That's better," he approved as she obeyed his order. "Keep it well back of neutral. Sorry I yelled at you," he grinned.

Bill got to his feet. "I'm O.K. now," he went on, "and you must be pretty well done up. I'm going to take it over."

Seating himself on her lap, as she had sat on his, he placed his feet upon hers. A minute later, she had drawn her feet back from the rudder pedals, slipped out from under and was seated on the floor, rubbing life back into her feet and legs, as Bill had done.

"Why is it," she inquired presently, "that the plane rides so much smoother when you're guiding her?"

Bill smiled. "When I give her right pedal, that is, apply right rudder, I move the stick slightly to the left and vice versa. In that way I depress the aileron on the side I want to sail. It aids the rudder. You got along splendidly, though, and stick work when taxiing needs practice."

Dorothy got to her feet, rather unsteadily. "Look!" she cried. "Lights ahead. We must be nearing shore, Bill."

"We are. There's a cove out yonder I'm making for. And better still, the wind is lessening. Just about blown itself out, I guess."

In another ten minutes they sailed in through the mouth of an almost landlocked inlet and with the motor shut off drifted in comparatively smooth water.

"Any idea where we are?" inquired Dorothy, when Bill, after throwing out the anchor, came back to her.

"Somewhere between Norwalk and Bridgeport, I guess," he replied. "There are any number of coves along here. I'll take you ashore, now. We've got a collapsible boat aboard. Not much of a craft, but it'll take the two of us in all right. We'll go over to one of those houses, and get your father on the phone. He can come down and drive you back to New Canaan."

"Drive us both back, you mean!"

"Sorry--but it can't be done. I've got to take this old bus home as soon as the wind dies down a little more."

"How long do you suppose that will be?" asked Dorothy quietly.

Bill glanced up at the black, overcast sky and then turned his gaze overside and studied the water toward the inlet's mouth.

"Oh, in about an hour I'll be able to take off."

"Then I'll wait and fly back with you."

"You certainly are a sportsman," he applauded and looked at his wrist watch. "It's only ten to six--though anyone would think it was midnight. I'll tell you what--suppose I shove off in the dinghy. I'll row ashore and telephone your Dad from the nearest house. He will be half crazy if he knows you were out sailing in that blow and haven't reported back to the club. In the meantime, you might scare up something to eat. There's cocoa, condensed milk, crackers and other stuff in the cabin locker nearest the stove. You must be starved--I know I am!"

They were standing on one of the narrow decks that ran from amidships forward to the nose of the plane below the pilot house.

"The very thought of food makes me ravenous," declared Dorothy, starting for the cabin door. "Give Dad my love and say I'm all right--thanks to you!" she threw back over her shoulder--"Tell him to put back dinner until seven-thirty--and to have an extra place laid. In the meantime I'll dish up a high tea to keep us going."

Within the cabin, she set water on the two-burner electric stove to boil. While it was heating she let down the hinged table and set it with oilcloth doilies, that she found, together with other table necessities in a cupboard next the food locker. She discovered some bread and a number of other eatables stowed away here, as well as the things Bill had mentioned.

Twenty minutes later, Bill returned to find the table set with cups of steaming cocoa and hot toasted sandwiches spread with marmalade.

"I'll say you're some cook, Dorothy!" He pulled up a camp stool, and seated himself at the table. "This is a real party!"

"There isn't any butter--" began Dorothy doubtfully.

"Don't apologize. It's wonderful--do start in or I'll forget my manners and grab!"

Dorothy helped herself to a sandwich and handed the plate across the table. "Were you able to get Dad?"

"Yes. Just caught him. He'd only got home from the bank a few minutes before. One of the maids told him you'd spoken of going sailing, so he phoned the club about you. He was just leaving the house to drive down there when I rang him up."

"Did he say anything else?"

"Oh, naturally, he was glad you were all right. He didn't seem so pleased when I told him I was flying you back. He asked me if I was an experienced pilot."

"He would." Dorothy chuckled. "What did you tell him?"

Bill laughed as he helped himself to another sandwich. "I wanted to get out here to your high tea, you know, so I asked him if he smoked cigarettes."

"*Cigarettes?*"

"Yes. 'If you do, Mr. Dixon,' I said--you know the old slogan, 'Ask Dad--he knows--' and I'm sorry to say I rang off."

"I'll bet he goes over and asks your father!"

"Very probably. Dad's rather touchy when anybody questions my rating as a pilot. I'm afraid your father will get an earful."

Cocoa and toast had disappeared by this time so the two in the cabin set about clearing up.

"You must'nt mind Daddy's crusty manner," she said with her hands in a dishpan of soapsuds. "He's always like that when he's upset. He doesn't mean anything by it."

Bill, who was stowing away cups and saucers in the locker, turned about with a grin. "Oh, that's all right. I had no business to get facetious--my temper's not so good, either. But there's no hard feeling." He held out his hands. "If you're finished with the dishpan I'll throw the water overside. The storm has broken and there's practically no wind. So if you're ready we'll shove off for New Canaan--and I'll give you your first hop."

THE FIRST HOP

"How about giving me my first flying lesson now?" Dorothy suggested as Bill hauled in their anchor.

"You really want to learn?"

"Of course I do--I'm crazy about it!"

Bill coiled the mooring line, looping it with practiced skill. "And I'd be glad to give you instruction. But you're a minor--before we can start anything like that we must get your Dad's permission."

"Oh, that'll be all right, Bill," was the young lady's cool assurance. "But how about right now--"

"Every student aviator is a watchful waiter the first time up. You stand behind me this trip and I'll explain what I'm doing as we go along."

"That'll be great! I'm just wild to fly this plane!"

Bill smiled. "But you won't get your flight instruction in this plane, Dorothy."

"Why not?"

"This amphibian is too big and heavy, for one thing; for another, she isn't equipped with dual controls."

"But what does that mean?"

"I see we'll have to start your training right now, Miss Student Pilot--Controls is a general term applied to the means proved to enable the pilot to control the speed, direction of flight, altitude and power of an aircraft.--Savez?"

"You sound like a text book--but I get you."

"All right. Now, unless we want the bus washed up on the beach, we'd better shove off."

Fastening the door to the deck after them, they passed through the cabin and into the pilot's cockpit where head-phone sets were at once adjusted. The amphibian bobbed and swayed at the push of little waves. The sun's face, scrubbed clean and bright by wind and rain was reflected in the rippling water; whilst wet surfaces of leaves, lawns, tree trunks and housetops bordering the inlet gleamed in a wash of gold.

Little gusts of fresh air blew in through the open windows filling the cockpit with a keen sweet odor of wet earth.

Dorothy drew a deep breath. "My! the air smells good after that storm!"

"You bet--" agreed Bill. "But I'll smell brimstone when your father comes into the picture, if we don't shove off pronto for New Canaan."

"Oh, that's just like a boy--" she pouted.

"Shush! student--Listen to your master's--I mean,--your instructor's voice, will you?"

"Instructor's better," she smiled.

"Here beginneth your first lesson." Bill slid into the pilot's seat. "Stand just behind me and hold on to the back of my seat," he ordered.

Dorothy promptly did as she was told. After all, was not this the real Bill Bolton the famous ace and midshipman she had read about?

"All set?"

"Aye, aye, sir."

"Good enough! Here we go then. I'll explain every move I make, as I make it. Look and listen! First--I crack the throttle--in other words, before starting the engine, set your throttle in its quadrant slightly forward of the fully closed position. Next, I 'contact'--that's air parlance for 'ignition switch on.' After that, I press the inertia starter to swing our propeller into motion--" the engine sputtered, then roared.

"It is most important," he went on a moment later, "to see that the way ahead and above is clear at this point. Safety first is the slogan of good flying."

"Yes. But really, Bill, you don't have to explain every thing you do. I'm watching closely. When I don't understand, I'll ask--if it's all the same to you?"

"Good girl. Don't hesitate to ask me, though."

"I won't."

With that she saw him widen the throttle and with his stick held well back of neutral to prevent the nose dipping under the waves, he sent the big seaplane hurtling through the water toward the inlet's mouth. The wind had changed since the storm and now, as they raced into the teeth of the light breeze, Dorothy tingled with that excitement which comes to every novice with the take off.

Six or eight seconds after opening the throttle, she saw him push the stick all the way forward.

"Why do you do that? Won't that raise the tail of the plane and depress the nose?"

Bill shook his head. "In the air--yes. But we're moving at some speed now on the surface--and the bow cannot be pushed down into the water. Our speed is gradually forcing it up until--now--we're skimming along on the step, you see."

Dorothy nodded to herself and watched him ease the stick back to neutral and maintain it there while they gathered more and more speed.

"Now I'm going to talk some more," said Bill. "Don't blame me if it sounds like a text book.--In order to fly, certain things must be learned--and remembered. Do not take off until you have attained speed adequate to give complete control when in the air. Any attempt to pull it off prematurely will result in a take off at the stalling point, where control is uncertain. Understand?"

"I think so--but how does one know when to do it?"

"That comes with practice--and the feel of the ship. As flying speed is gained, I give a momentary pressure on the elevators (like this)--and break the hull out of the water--so--easing the pressure immediately after the instant of take off. Now that we are in the air our speed is only slightly above minimum flying speed. Any decrease in this would result in a stall. That is why I keep the nose level for six or seven seconds in order to attain a safe margin above stalling point before beginning to climb."

"There's certainly a lot more to it than I ever dreamed!"

"You bet there is. I haven't told you the half of it yet. One thing I forgot to say--you must always hold a straight course while taxiing before the take off. Also, never allow a wing to drop while your plane is on the step.--We've got enough speed on now, so I'll pull back the stick and let the plane climb for a bit."

"But you're heading for the Long Island Shore directly away from New Canaan--" she protested, "why don't you bring her about--not that I'm in any hurry, but--"

"This is an airplane, not a sailboat, Dorothy. All turns must be made with a level nose. If I should try to turn while in a climb like this, a stall would probably result, and with the wing down the plane would most likely go into a spin and--"

"We'd crash!"

"Surest thing you know!"

"*Oh!*"

"But the altimeter on the dash says one thousand feet now. We're high enough for our purpose. So I push the stick forward, like this--until the nose is level--so! Now, as I want to make a right turn, I apply right aileron and simultaneously increase right rudder considerably."

Dorothy saw one wing go up and the other go down. She was hardly able to keep her feet as the plane's nose swung round toward the Connecticut shore.

"Isn't that called banking?"

"Right on the first count," replied Bill.

"Why do you do it?"

"Because in making a turn, the momentum of the plane sets up a centrifugal force, acting horizontally outward. To counteract this, the force of lift must be inclined until it has a horizontal component equal to the centrifugal force. The machine is therefore tilted to one side, or banked, thus maintaining a state of equilibrium in which it will turn steadily. No turn can be made by the use of the rudder alone. The plane must be banked with ailerons before the rudder will have any turning effect.--Get me?"

"I get the last part. Guess I'll have to do some studying."

"Everybody has to do that. But I'll lend you some books, so you can bone up on the theory of flight. What I said just now amounts to this: if you don't bank enough you send your plane into a skid."

"Just like an automobile skids?"

"Yes. But of course the danger doesn't lie in hitting anything as in a car. A skidding plane loses her flying speed forward and drops into a spin. On the other hand, if you bank her too sharply, you go into a sideslip!"

"And the result in both cases is a crash?"

"Generally. But I think you've had enough instruction for today."

"Oh--but I want to know how you ended that turn. We're flying straight again now--and I was so interested in what you were saying, I forgot to watch what you did!"

"Well, after I had banked her sufficiently, I checked the wings with the ailerons and at the same time eased the pressure on the rudder. Then I maintained a constant bank and a constant pressure on the rudder pedal throughout the turn. To resume straight flight, I simply applied left aileron and left rudder: and when the wings were level again, I neutralized the ailerons and applied a normal amount of right rudder."

"My goodness!" exclaimed Dorothy--"and that is only one of the things I have to learn. I thought that flying a plane wouldn't be much more complicated than driving a car."

"Oh, it's simple enough--only you have to balance a plane, as well as drive it."

"Do you think I'll ever learn?"

"Of course you will. It takes time and practice--that's all."

"I wonder how birds learn to fly?" Dorothy glanced down at the wide vista of rolling country over which they were traveling. The dark green of the wooded hills, the lighter green of fields, criss-crossed by winding roads and dotted with houses, all in miniature, seemed like viewing a toy world. And here and there, just below them, there was the occasional flash of feathered wings, as the birds darted in and out among the treetops.

"Birds have to learn to fly, too. They get into trouble sometimes."

"They do?"

"Certainly--watch gulls on a windy day--you'll see them sideslip--go into spins--and have a generally hard time of it!"

"Oh, really? I'd never thought of that. But of course they can fly much better than a plane."

Bill shook his head. "That's where you are wrong. No bird can loop, or fly upside down. Reverse control flying and acrobatics--stunting generally is impossible for them.--But look below! Recognize the scenery?"

"Why, we're almost over New Canaan. There are the white spires of the Episcopal and Congregational churches--and there's Main Street--and the railroad station!"

"And over on that ridge is your house--and mine across the way," he added. "Well, here's where I nose her over. Hold tight--we're going down."

TROUBLE

After releasing the retractable wheel landing gear, which turned the big amphibian from a seaplane into one which could land on terra firma, Bill brought his big bus gently down to the ten acre lot behind the Bolton residence.

As the plane rolled forward on its rubber tired wheels and came to a stop, two men came walking in its direction from the trees at the edge of the field.

"Here come our respective fathers--" announced Bill, stripping off his headgear. "Remember--I take all responsibility for bringing you back in the plane."

"You--do nothing of the kind!" Dorothy's tone was final. She handed him her head-phone and running back through the cabin, vaulted the low bulwark to the ground.

Bill hurriedly made things secure in the cockpit and followed her.

"And so you see, Dad," he heard her say, as he approached where they stood, "Bill not only saved my life--he took all kinds of chances with his own, flying in a gale like that. And--oh! I forgot to tell you that he warned me *not* to go out in the *Scud* this afternoon!" she ended with a mischievous look toward Bill.

Mr. Dixon was a tall man, whose tanned, rugged features and searching gaze suggested the sportsman. He turned from his excited daughter, with a smile and an outstretched hand.

"I'm beginning to realize, young man, that I owe you an apology for my shortness over the phone. Judging from Dorothy's story, I can never hope to express my gratitude for what you've done today."

Bill mumbled an embarrassed platitude as he shook hands, and was glad when Mr. Bolton broke into the conversation.

"The Boltons, father and son, were probably born to be hung," he chuckled. "It's a family trait, to fall into scrapes--and so far, to get out of them just as quickly. Now, as nobody has been polite enough to introduce me to the heroine of this meeting--I'm the hero's fond parent, Miss Dorothy. We are about to celebrate this festive occasion by a housewarming, in the form of a scrap dinner at the hero's home--what say you?"

"But I thought you were coming to our house--" cried Dorothy. "I--"

"But me no buts, young lady. Your father has already accepted for you both and we simply can't take no for an answer."

Dorothy glanced at Bill, who stood rather sheepishly in the background. Then she laughed. "Why, of course, if you put it that way--I'd love to come; that is, if the *hero* is willing!"

"Say, do you think that's fair!" Bill's face was red. He didn't think much of that kind of kidding. "I think it would be great, that is, if you mean me," he ended in confusion.

Amid the general laughter that followed, Dorothy uttered a cry of disgust. "But I can't come like this--" she pointed to her clothes, which were the things that Bill had laid out for her in the big plane's cabin.

"You look charming--" Mr. Bolton bowed, and Dorothy blushed. "However--"

"Make it snappy, then, dear." Mr. Dixon drew out his watch. "You have just fifteen minutes. And Mr. Bolton won't keep dinner waiting for you, if he's as famished as I am!"

"Oh, give me twenty!" she pleaded.

"All right--hurry, now!"

With a wave of her hand, Dorothy darted away.

"I'll look after the plane, Bill," said his father, as she disappeared among the orchard trees. "I want to show Mr. Dixon over it, and that will give you time for a slicking-up before dinner."

It was a jolly, though belated meal that was eventually served to them in the cool, green dining room of the Bolton's summer home that evening. Mr. Dixon, with the finesse of an astute business man, drew out Mr. Bolton and his son, and the two told tales of adventure by land and sea and air that fascinated the New England high school girl. It all seemed unreal to her, sitting in the soft light of the candles. Yet the Boltons made light of hairbreadth escapes in the world's unmapped areas--just as if these strange adventures were daily occurrences in their lives, she thought.

"It certainly is a shame!" she burst out suddenly. Coffee had been served and they had moved to the comfort of low wicker chairs on the terrace. The air was filled with the perfume of June roses.

"What's a shame?" Bill, now spick and span in white flannels, settled back in his chair.

"Why, all the wonderful times you and Mr. Bolton have had--while Dad and I were sticking around in New Canaan. I'd love to be an adventurer," she finished.

"I dare say you'd find it mighty uncomfortable at times," observed her father. "How about it, Bolton?"

"Like everything else, it has its drawbacks and becomes more or less of a grind when one 'adventures' day in and day out--" that gentleman admitted. "I'm only too glad to be able to settle



down in this beautiful ridge country for a few months--to rest and be quiet."

"There you are, Dorothy." Her father smiled in the darkness. "And who would there be out in the wilds to admire that smart frock you're wearing, for instance?"

"Gee, Dad! You know I don't care half as much about clothes as lots of the girls--and that hasn't anything to do with it, anyway."

"I think we ought to break the news to her," suggested Bill, a white blur in the depths of his chair.

Dorothy sat up eagerly. "What news?"

"But perhaps we'd better wait until tomorrow. Tonight, she wants to become an explorer--and give away all her best dresses. She might not take kindly to it." This from Mr. Dixon, between puffs of aromatic cigar smoke.

"You're horrid--both of you. Don't you think it's mean of them to make such a mystery of whatever they're talking about, Mr. Bolton? Won't you tell me?"

"Of course, I will, my dear. What do you want to know?"

Dorothy choked with vexation. "Oh!"

"Let's tell her now--right now--" said Bill, his voice brimming with laughter.

"I don't want to hear."

"Yes, you do--all together: one--two--three! You--are--going--to--learn--to--fly!"

Dorothy sprang to her father's chair and caught his arm. "Will you really let me, Dad?" she cried in delight.

"Mr. Bolton says that Bill is an A-1 instructor--and he claims that flying is no more dangerous than sailing twenty-footers in a nor'easter, so I suppose--"

"Oh--you *darling!*" Dorothy flung her arms about his neck.

"Here--here--" cried Mr. Dixon. "You're ruining my collar, and my cigar--"

"Have another," suggested Mr. Bolton. "I'd willingly ruin boxes of cigars if I had a daughter who'd hug me that way!"

"Aren't you nice!" She turned about and bestowed a second affectionate embrace on that gentleman. "That is because you aren't quite as mean as your son--he's the limit!"

"Never slang your instructor," sang out Bill. "That's one of the first rules of the air."

"Seriously, Dorothy," her father interposed. "This is a big responsibility Bill is taking--and I want your word that you'll do just as he says. No more running off and smashing up a plane as you did the *Scud* this afternoon!"

"All right, Dad. I promise. But what am I to learn in? Bill says that the Amphibian is too heavy--and she's not equipped with dual controls."

Mr. Dixon lit a fresh cigar. "I see that you've already started your flight training."

"Bill explained the procedure to me on our way up here this afternoon. But what are we going to do for a plane?"

"Bill has some scheme, I believe."

"Oh, I know," she decided. "Bill shall pick me out a nice little plane and--"

"I shall pay for it," said her father grimly. "Nothing doing. When you have won your wings--well--we shall see. Until then, you and Bill will have to figure without financial help from your fond parent."

"That's fair enough," agreed Mr. Bolton.

"O.K. with me, too," echoed Bill. "I happen to have an old *N-9*, a Navy training plane, down at the shipyard near the beach club, that will do nicely. I was down there this afternoon having her pontoon removed. I want to equip her with landing gear so I can house her up here. The Amphibian uses up too much gas to go joy-hopping in."

A maid appeared on the doorstep.

"Mr. Dixon wanted on the phone, please," she announced, and waited while that gentleman preceded her into the house.

A moment later Mr. Dixon was back on the terrace.

"The bank's been robbed!" he cried. "Sorry, gentlemen, but I've got to hustle down there just as soon as possible."

"This way!" called Bill, springing down the steps to the garden. "My car's out here--come on!"

"That young chap can keep his head," thought Mr. Dixon as he ran beside his daughter and Mr. Bolton. "It would take a lot to fluster him."

Then they came upon him, backing slowly up the drive, both doors swinging wide so they could jump in the car without his stopping.

"Which bank, Mr. Dixon?"

Bill had the car in the road now and was racing toward the village.

"First National--Main Street, next the Town Hall. I'm president, you know."

"I didn't know. But I'm glad to hear it."

"How's that?"

"You should have a drag with the traffic cops. We are doing an even sixty now--and it would be a bad time to get a ticket."

Mr. Dixon grasped the door-handle as Bill skidded them into a cross road with the expertness of a racing driver. "Just get us there, that's all," he gasped. "The chief himself phoned me. I didn't wait to hear details--but from what I gathered, the hold up men got clean away before the police discovered the robbery. But time is always a factor in a case of this kind, so don't worry about traffic rules."

"I won't," said Bill and fed his powerful engine still more gas.

Along the straight stretch of Oenoke Avenue they sped, with Bill's foot still pressing the accelerator. They flashed past the white blur of the Episcopal Church and on down the hill into Main Street and the little town.

The car's brakes screamed and Bill brought them to a stop on the edge of the crowd of pedestrians and vehicles that blocked further progress.

"D'you want us to wait here?" asked Mr. Bolton.

"No--come along," returned his friend, jumping to the sidewalk. "We'll learn the worst together."

THE HOLD UP

With Bill at her right and Mr. Bolton at her left elbow, Dorothy pushed her way through the crowd behind her father to the entrance of the Bank. The policeman at the head of the short flight of steps to the doorway stood aside at a word from Mr. Dixon. The four passed inside and the heavy door swung shut behind them.

"Rather like locking up the barn after the sheep vamoosed, isn't it?" Bill nodded over his shoulder toward the police guard.

"Never mind, son--this isn't our party," rebuked his father.

A fat man in a dark blue uniform, rather tight as to fit and much be-braided, came bustling up. "Who are these men, Mr. Dixon?" he inquired pompously. "Can't have strangers around the bank at this time--"

"From what I hear, Chief, you and your men let some strangers get away with about everything but the bank itself a little while ago." Mr. Dixon's tone showed his annoyance. "These gentlemen are friends of mine. What's actually happened? Give me some facts. Anybody hurt? Anybody caught? Just what has been taken?" Questions popped like revolver shots.

"Well--it's like this, sir--" The Chief seemed pretty well taken down.

"Thunderation! You and your sleuths are enough to tempt any man to law breaking. There's Perkins! Perhaps I'll learn something from him."

Mr. Dixon strode toward the rear of the bank.

"You mustn't mind Dad," Dorothy said consolingly. "Just now he's half crazy with worry, Chief.--These gentlemen are Mr. Bolton and his son. They've bought the Hawthorne place, you know."

Chief Jones mopped his perspiring face with a red bandanna and then shook hands all around. "Terrible warm tonight--terrible warm. Well, let's go over and find out what's what. I was over to a party at my daughter Annie's--only just got in here myself. Annie--"

"Yes, let's find out what has happened." Dorothy cut in on this long-winded effusion, and led the way behind the tellers' cages to where her father and several other men were standing before the open vault.

"Ah, here's the watchman now!" cried Mr. Dixon as a man, his head completely covered with bandages, came toward them and sank weakly into a chair. "Now, Thompson, do you think you can tell us exactly what happened, before Doctor Brown drives you home?"

"Yes, sir. Glad to." The man's voice, though feeble, betrayed excitement. "He sure knocked me out, that bird did--but I'd know him again if I saw him. I c'd pick him out of a million--"

"That's fine," Mr. Dixon interrupted gently. "But start at the beginning, Thompson, and we'll all get a better idea of him."

"That I will, sir, and 'right *now!*' as that French guy says over the radio.... Well, it was about eight o'clock and still light, when the night bell buzzed. I was expecting Mr. Perkins. He'd told me he'd be back after supper as he had some work to do. I'd been readin' the paper over there by the window, so I got up and opened the front door. But it wasn't Mr. Perkins. A young fellow in a chauffeur's uniform stood outside."

"'I'm Mr. Dixon's new chauffeur,' he said. 'Here's a note from him. He tried to ring you up, but the phone down here seems to be out of order. He said you'd give me a check book to take back to him. Better read this.' He passed over a letter--"

"Have you still got it?" asked Mr. Dixon.

"I think so. Yes, here it is, in my pocket." Thompson handed the missive to the bank president, who read it aloud:

"Dear Thompson:

'Please give the bearer, my chauffeur, a blank check book and oblige

'Yours truly,  
'John Dixon.'"

"Looks like my handwriting," sighed Mr. Dixon when he had finished, "but of course I didn't write it!--What happened after that?"

"Well, sir, he asked me if he could step inside and take a few puffs of a cigarette, seein' as how you didn't like him to smoke on the job. So I let him in. Then I goes over to one of the desks for a check book and--I don't remember nothin' about what happened next, until I found myself in the far corner yonder, with Mr. Perkins near chokin' me to death with some water he was pourin' down my throat--and a couple of cops undoin' the rope I'd been bound up with. I reckon that feller must have beaned me with the butt of his revolver just as soon as I'd turned my back. Doc here, says as how the skull ain't fractured--but that bird sure laid me out cold. If I hadn't had my cap on, he'd of croaked me sure. Of course, I shouldn't of let that guy inside, but--"

Mr. Dixon's tone was abrupt as he silenced Thompson with a word. "Thank you, Thompson," he said.

"You are not to blame. If you hadn't let him in, he might have shot you at the door. Doctor Brown is going to take you home now. Lay up until you feel strong. And don't worry."

He patted the man on the shoulder and Thompson departed, leaning on the doctor's arm.

"I guess you're next on the list, Harry." Mr. Dixon nodded to Perkins. "How did you happen in here tonight?"

The cashier, a slender young man, prematurely bald, and dapper to the point of foppishness, removed his cigarette from his mouth and stepped forward.

"Had that Bridgeport transit matter and some other work I wanted to finish," he said crisply. "Told Thompson I would be back about eight-thirty. Matter of fact, it was twenty to nine when I rang the night bell. I rang it several times, no answer; then tried the door and found it unlocked. I thought something must be wrong--and was sure of it when I stepped in and saw Thompson lying on the floor, his arms and legs bound. Saw that he was breathing, and went to the phone. It was dead--couldn't raise Central. I didn't waste much time then, but ran out and hailed Sampson, the traffic cop on the corner. Told him there'd been a holdup here, so he blew his whistle, which brought another policeman and we three raced back here."

"You brought Thompson to and cut his bonds--then what?"

"I went to the vault. The door was ajar, with books and papers scattered all over the place. Haven't had a chance to check up, but it looks as though everything in the way of cash and negotiable securities has been taken."

"But the door hasn't been damaged--they couldn't have blown it open!"

The cashier shook his head. "No," he admitted, "they opened it with the combination. Must have used a stethoscope or the Jimmy Valentine touch system--"

"Not with that safe, Perkins. But how about the time lock?"

"It is never put on, sir, until we have no more occasion to use the vault for the day. I notified the Protective System people that I would be working here tonight and would set it when I was through."

"Humph!" growled the president in a tone that boded ill for someone. "So the time lock wasn't set!"

"It is the usual practice, sir," explained Perkins nervously. "I--"

"Never mind that now. Anyone else know anything about this robbery?"

"Yes, sir. Sampson, the traffic policeman saw the car."

"Well, let's hear from Sampson, then, if he's here."

The officer came forward rather sheepishly.

"I was directin' traffic at the corner of Main Street and East Avenue, sir, when I seen your car run down Main and stop in front of the bank here."

"My car!" exploded Dorothy's father.

"Yes, sir--least it was a this year's Packard like you drive--and it had your license number on it--AB521--I ought to know, I see it every day."

"Yes, that's the number--but--well ... did you notice it further?"

"Yes, sir, I did. That was about eight o'clock. The chauffeur got out and rang the bell at the entrance to the bank. Then I seen him speak to Thompson and pass inside."

"Did you investigate?"

"Why, no, sir. The man came out almost directly and the door swung shut behind him. Then he jumped into the car and drove up the alley at the side of the bank. You always park your car there, sir, so I thought nothin' of it. About twenty minutes later, out he drove again and up Main Street the way he'd come. And that's the last I've seen of him."

"There was only one man in the car--the chauffeur?"

"I only saw one. If there was anybody else, they must've been lying down, in the bottom of the car."

"Very likely." Mr. Dixon turned to the chief of police. "And what has been done toward catching the thieves--or thief?"

"Nothing, as yet," the Chief confessed. "But I'll get busy on the wire with descriptions of the man and the car right away. You see, I only just--"

"Never mind that--get along now and burn up the wires. That car has had over an hour's start on you. I'll look after things here for the present."

The head of the local police force waddled off with much the air of a fat puppy who had just received a whipping, and Mr. Dixon walked over to Mr. Bolton.

"You can do me a great favor, if you will," he said.

"Name it, Dixon."

"Thanks. Go to the drug store down the block and call up the Bankers Protective Association in the city. You'll find their number in the directory. Tell them what's happened--that will be enough. I want you to call their New York headquarters. That will start them on the job through their branches in short order."

"Right-oh!" his friend agreed. "And when I get through with New York, I'll see what New Canaan can do to fix your phone here."

"Thanks. I'll appreciate it."

"Anything I can do, Mr. Dixon?" inquired Bill.

"Nothing here, thanks. But if you will take my daughter home and see that she doesn't get into any more trouble today, I'll be much obliged to you."

"Oh, *Dad!*" Dorothy, threw him a reproachful look, then stood on tiptoe and kissed her parent's cheek. "There, there. I know you're worried. Phone me when you want the car. I'll have sandwiches and coffee waiting when you get home."

Mr. Dixon gave her an affectionate hug. "You're a good little housewife," he praised, "but run along now--both of you. There are a million-odd things to be done before I can leave."

He beckoned to the cashier and disappeared with him into the vault.

"Not that way, Bill--" Dorothy's voice arrested Bill as he started for the door. "Come out the back way."

"What's up?"

"I don't know yet. But I've found something that the rest seem to have missed. It may be important--come and see."

"You're on, Miss Sherlock," he said. Catching her arm, he hurried with her toward the rear of the bank.

GROUND TRAILS

Bill unlatched the back door of the bank, pushed it open and stood aside for Dorothy to pass through.

"Wait a minute." She put out a restraining hand. The full glare of the arc light in the alley fell on the damp ground at their feet. "Right over there are the tire marks of the holdup car. It's lucky it rained this afternoon. The prints are perfect in this mud."

"Well, that's interesting, but--"

"Oh, no. Of course they won't solve the mystery. That's what you were going to say, isn't it?" Dorothy's voice was mocking as she looked up at Bill. "But here--see these footprints? From this door to the car?" Her tone was triumphant now. "They ought to help just a little, don't you think?"

But Bill seemed unmoved at her discovery. "Probably hoofmarks of the cops," he said rather disparagingly.

Dorothy laughed. "If those footprints were made by policemen I'll eat them. Where are your eyes, Bill? The cops in this town wear regulation broad-toed shoes. When I heard the traffic cop tell Dad that he'd seen the robbers' car go up the alley, I dashed out here to have a look around. And as soon as I saw these prints I knew they were not made by broad-toed boots. Let's examine them closer."

Taking care to avoid stepping on the well defined trail that led from the door to the tire marks of the car, the two studied the line of footprints.

"One fellow wore rubber soled shoes--I guess you're right, Dorothy," acknowledged Bill, squatting on his heels. "The pattern on this set of prints could have been made by nothing else. But what do you make of these tracks here? Just holes in the mud with a flat dab right ahead?"

"High heeled shoes, Bill. One of this gang is a woman, that is clear enough. What bothers me is the third set--look!"

Bill stared at the footprints to which she pointed. "The right-hand one was made by a long, narrow shoe, but I'll swear that boot last was never made in America. It's too pointed," he said finally. "The shoe that made that imprint was bought in southern Europe, I'll bet--Italy, probably. But those queer looking marks to the left are beyond me," he frowned. Then he cried--"No, they're not! I have it--the man who made those prints was club-footed!"

Dorothy disagreed with him. "A club-foot couldn't make that mark. It is too symmetrical--straight on both sides and kind of rounded at the back and front. It wasn't made by a wooden leg, either, Bill!"

"No. That would simply dig a hole in the mud."

"Oh, I know! Why didn't I see it at once!" she exclaimed excitedly--"The man was lame!"

Bill snorted. "And he had long pink whiskers which he tied round his waist with a green ribbon!"

"Don't be silly--I know what I'm talking about."

"How so?"

"I *know* that a lame man made that set of marks."

"Very well. May Doctor Watson inquire on what Miss Sherlock Holmes bases her astounding deduction?"

"On those queer marks, of course, stupid!"

"Thanks. The clouds have vanished. You make everything so lucid." Bill stood erect once more.

"But, Bill--did you ever see a lame man--whose left leg was shorter than his right?"

"Maybe I did. But I can't swear at this distant date which leg was the shorter."

"Well, I can tell you that in this case, the left was!"

"Maybe--"

"Maybe nothing! Why am I sure of it? Because the man wore a lame man's boot--the kind with a very thick sole. My grandfather wore one. He twisted his hip when he was a boy and that leg didn't grow as long as the other. What is more, he always walked on the *sole* of his big boot--the heel never touched the ground!"

"I believe you *are* right," mused the young man, studying one of the queer footprints again.

"I know I am, Bill. That kind of a shoe would make exactly that print. Not such a bad hunch to take a look out here, was it?"

"You're a swell sleuth, Dorothy. Let's see. Now we know there were three in the gang this evening. The chap who played chauffeur and wore sneakers, a woman, and a lame man--probably an Italian."

"Yes. But that doesn't solve the mystery, does it?"

"No, but it helps a lot. How about the tire tracks?"

"Not our car. Daddy uses Silvertowns and those were made by some other kind."

"Goodyears, I should say. How about going in now and telling your father what we've learned?"

"I'd rather not, if you don't mind?"

"Why!"

"Well, you see, Bill, Dad hasn't much confidence in girls' views on what he calls 'the practical side of life'--mine especially. There'll soon be a bunch of detectives on this case. If they find out for themselves, it's O.K. with me--but I shan't tell them."

"You want to work up the case yourself?"

"That's exactly it. If you'll help me?"

"Certainly I will. But we may get into trouble--I mean it is likely to be dangerous work."

"Does that bother you?"

"I'd hate to have you get hurt--"

"I won't do anything on my own without telling you first. We'll work together. Does that suit your highness?"

"You bet! Where do we go from here?"

"Back to my house. We'll go down the alley and hop in your car. I want to ride up to our garage. I've got another hunch."

"The kid's clever," remarked Bill admiringly. "Want to tell me? I haven't a glimmer."

They turned out of the alley into Main Street before Dorothy answered.

"Suppose you guess," she suggested teasingly as she stepped into the car. "Or, better still, now that you've become my aviation instructor, I'll even things up and give you a short course in sleuthing."

"That's a go, teacher," grinned Bill. The car rolled up the hill past the white Memorial Cross on the village green. "But to a mere amateur in crime it looks as though you had barged into a pretty good mystery, no kidding."

"Sh--" commanded Dorothy. "Sherlock Holmes is thinking."

"Don't strain anything," Bill advised as he stepped on the accelerator.

Dorothy did not retort to this thrust, but remained wrapped in her thoughts for the remainder of the ride. Bill turned the car into the Dixon's drive before she spoke again.

"Keep on to the garage, please."

"Right-oh! Still sleuthing, I take it?"

"Yes."

"What *is* the big idea?"

"Wait and see."

He drew up under the arching elms with the glare of their headlights focussed upon the closed garage doors. Dorothy sprang out and ran forward.

"Locked," she affirmed, giving the handle a tug. "Wait a minute, Bill. I'll be right back." She disappeared in the direction of the house.

Bill shut off the engine and clambered down to the ground. Presently he saw her coming back, accompanied by a woman in maid's cap and apron.

"All right, Lizzie," her young mistress said, "I want to look at something first. Then you can tell us exactly what happened. That's right, give me the key."

She swung open one of the wide doors.

"The Packard's there, just as I told you, Miss Dorothy," volunteered Lizzie as the three stepped inside the garage. "It's your car that's missing."

"I left it at the beach club--" Dorothy cut herself short. "The license plates are gone from the Packard!"

"Wasn't that to be expected after what the cop told us in the bank?" There was a hint of mockery in Bill's voice.

"Of course. But the point is--were they taken this afternoon while Daddy had the car parked behind the bank--or later this evening after he drove home? He would never remember whether he drove from the bank with the plates still attached or not. He never notices details like that."

Bill seemed amused. "Perhaps not--but what's the difference?"

"Wait a minute. You'll soon get another slant. Now, Lizzie--start from the very beginning."

Lizzie spoke up eagerly. "Yes, miss. Cook and me was havin' our supper in the kitchen, miss--"

"Where was Arthur?--He's our chauffeur-gardener," explained Dorothy to Bill.

"It's Arthur's night off, miss. He went to the movies--said he'd get a bite at the lunch wagon in the village, though why a man should want to eat hot dogs and such trash with honest-to-goodness vittles waiting for him at home is more than--"

"Never mind that now, Lizzie.--You and cook were eating supper--?"

"Yes, miss. We was just finishin' when we heard a car pass the house on its way out to the garage. I thought it might be Arthur, back in the Ford for some supper. Cook said--"

"Oh, Lizzie, please! What happened then?"

"Why, a man came to the back door and asked for the key to the garage. Said as how he had orders to fix the Packard."

"What time was that?"

"About five minutes after we heard the car drive out here, miss."

"No--I mean the time of day."

"I couldn't rightly say, Miss Dorothy. The kitchen clock is down to Whipple's being mended. But it was just after you'd gone over to Mr. Bolton's for dinner."

"What did the man look like, Lizzie?"

"Like any young man, miss."

"But was he tall or short?"

"Kind of medium-like--"

"Dark hair or light?"

"I can't seem to remember--he had a chauffeur's cap on and was in his shirt sleeves, that I do know."

"Did you notice if he limped?"

"No, he didn't, miss--but the other fellow did--him with the big boot."

"Bull's eye!" cried Bill. "You're sure some detective, Dorothy!"

"Keep still?" ordered that young lady. And then to the housemaid: "We'll take up the man with the big boot in a minute, Lizzie. Now then, you gave the other one the garage key, I s'pose?"

Lizzie snorted. "That I didn't, miss. I took the key off the hook and walked out to the garage with him. Mr. Dixon wouldn't be thankin' me to let strange men fool round in the garage by theirselves!"

"Then how in thunder did they cop the license plates without your seeing them?" exploded Bill.

"Do shut up and let me talk!" Dorothy stamped her foot impatiently. "Now, Lizzie, what happened next?"

"Well, miss, I unlocked the doors and he started tinkerin' with the engine of the Packard there. Then all of a sudden he went out to the other car and spoke to somebody inside."

"What car was that?"

"The one he'd drove up in. It was parked out on the drive where the young gentleman has his'n now."

"Another Packard, was it?"

"I couldn't say, miss. I didn't pay much attention to it, except that it was a closed car--and there was a man and a woman in back."

Dorothy exchanged glances with Bill. "And then?"

"Then the young feller comes back and says as how the lady in the car was feeling sick, and could I fetch her a glass of water with a teaspoonful of bicarbonate of soda in it. I knew we had some in the medicine chest upstairs, so--"

"So you went back to the house and got it?"

"Yes, miss."

"And *that's* when they copped the plates!" declared Bill, the irrepressible.

"Bull's eye!" derided Dorothy. "How'd you guess it?"

"Form of genius some of us have."

Dorothy ignored this last and turned again to the maid. "What happened when you brought back the bicarb, Lizzie?"

"I give it to the young lady in the car, miss."

"Young, was she?"

"I couldn't get a good look at her face, for she was dabbin' her eyes with a handkerchief like she'd been cryin'. But she was dressed in some of those new-fangled pajamas like you wear to the beach, they was--sort of yellow-green color--and a wisp of her hair that had got loose from the bandanna she wore was red--the brightest red hair I ever see. She turned her head away when she drunk the medicine, but she thanked me prettily enough when she handed back the glass."

"Have you washed it yet?"

"No, miss. You see, I--"

"Then don't. I want that glass, just as it is. Was the lame man sitting beside her?"

"No. When I brought her the soda he was comin' out of the garage with the other fellow. He was carryin' a package wrapped in newspaper and he says as how he was takin' some part of the engine back to the shop. He spoke kind of funny, like a foreigner, I thought. And all dolled up in a light suit and a cane. Why, he'd even got lemon colored gloves on for all his lameness and the big boot he wore!"



"Did the girl and the other man wear gloves?"

"The man put them on when he started to tinker with the car, I remember. But the girl had no gloves on."

"You're sure?"

"Oh, yes, miss, because I noticed her shiny pink finger nails, particular. I thought at the time that washin' dishes couldn't be no part of her life."

"That's fine, Lizzie. You make a splendid witness."

"Thanks, miss. I got a good look at the lame man, too. He had a funny little black mustache like they wear in the movies and little gold knobs in his ears--what do think of *that!*" Lizzie paused dramatically as she gave this choice bit of information.

"Earrings?"

"Earrings, miss--and--"

"Thank you, Lizzie. You may go now."

"Remember those earrings, miss. And I'll keep the glass for you, and won't let cook touch it either, never fear!" Lizzie's slight figure faded into the darkness.

"So you've got pretty good descriptions of the gang *and* the lady's fingerprints!" Bill summed up. "I've got to hand it to you, kid. Reckon you'll have to let your father know about it though. Those fingerprints will have to be examined by the police."

Dorothy nodded. "Guess you're right. I'll tell him what we found out."

"What *you've* found out, you mean. As I think I told you before, when it comes to detective work, I'm a ground hog!"

"Nonsense! But that reminds me, Bill. Do I get a lesson tomorrow?"

"Do you think you can take time enough from your life work?"

"Don't be ridiculous. You may think I've finished fooling with this robbery when I turn over the dope to Daddy--but I haven't. I want a flying lesson, just the same, in the morning. Shall we go up in the *Loening* again?"

"No. I'll drive you down to the shore and we'll take the *N-9* out. Don't wait for your father to-night. Tell him what you want to at breakfast."

"But I've got to--"

"This is your flight instructor speaking, Dorothy. No lesson in the morning for you, young lady, unless you go straight to bed now and get a good night's rest. A clear head and steady nerves are the first requisites for flying."

"All right then. I'll turn in directly. Good night."

Bill was already seated behind the wheel of his car. "Good night, Dorothy. By the way, *I've* got a hunch about this bank business. After you've had some flight training we'll investigate together--and the plane will be a great asset," he added mysteriously. His foot pressed the self-starter.

"Don't be so vague--spill the news like a good fellow."

"Sh--" mocked Bill. "'Sherlock Holmes is thinking!'" His laugh rang out and the car disappeared in the deep shadows of the drive.

"He's not so dumb as he pretends," mused Miss Dixon. "What can he have up his sleeve?"

Slowly she moved off toward the back door of the house.

NEXT MORNING

"You've done splendidly, my dear. I'm proud of you. This information you've dug up will be a lot of help in tracing that gang, I'm sure."

Dorothy and her father were seated at the table, taking their morning meal in the breakfast porch, just off the dining room. Although the bond of affection uniting father and daughter was a strong one, especially since the mother's death some years earlier, neither was particularly demonstrative. And Dorothy was not used to receiving unstinted praise of this sort from her father. The colour in her cheeks deepened, and she said off-handedly:

"I'm awfully glad, Daddy. You haven't had your second cup of coffee, have you?"

Mr. Dixon smiled, and passed his cup to her. His shrewd glance took in her evident embarrassment.

"No need to dissemble, daughter. Fact is, I keep forgetting you're no longer a child; and I don't mind telling you how valuable you are to me."

Dorothy smiled back at him. "Thanks a lot, Dad." She returned his filled cup. "Did the gang get away with much?"

"Plenty. A number of easily negotiable bonds, what currency we had on hand, etc. Of course, we're well covered by insurance--but the worst of it is, they took Mrs. Hamberfield's diamond necklace!"

"What! The Hamberfields, of Canoe Hill?"

"The same. They bought the old Adams place two years ago and keep it for a summer residence. More money there than--er--taste, I believe. Mrs. H. goes in for jewels on a big scale."

"Wears diamonds at breakfast, I'll bet, Daddy. She came to the Country Club last Saturday night, dressed up to the hilt and beyond it. I've never seen so much jewelry! Doug Parsons suggested that she'd been robbing Tiffany's. A regular ice-wagon with her diamonds!"

"Well, she's lost a lot of them, now. That gang evidently knew she had a habit of keeping some of them in her deposit box at the bank, for it was the only one they raided."

"That's interesting."

"In what way?"

"Never mind now. Tell me some more."

"Well, naturally, I phoned the lady last night--and well--she was most unpleasant--"

"The nasty cat! Serves her right to have them stolen!"

"Hardly that, dear. But the bank is responsible for her necklace and other gewgaws. And her husband is a power in the financial world."

Having breakfasted sufficiently for one day, Dorothy was busy with an orange lipstick.

"More unpleasantness for you, Daddy?" she asked through pursed lips, her eyes on the small mirror of her compact, open on the table before her.

"He is in a position to do the bank considerable harm--By the way, Dorothy, are you as efficient at manicuring as you are at making up your mouth?"

"P-perhaps. Why?"

"Good. Then, after this I'll get you to do my nails while I have my second cup of coffee each morning!"

"Aren't you horrid!"

"Aren't you the cheeky kid, using that thing in front of me?"

"You really don't mind, Daddy?"

"Do you think it an improvement over nature?"

"I know it isn't."

"Why use a lipstick then?"

"But--why do you wear that curly mustache?"

"More cheek?"

"Not at all. But it adds dignity to your face--what's more, your mustache is becoming and you know it."

"Nonsense!" Mr. Dixon's tone was derisive but there was a twinkle in his keen gray eyes.

Dorothy nodded decisively. "While my lipstick, properly used, is also becoming," she went on. "And it gives your daughter a sophisticated appearance otherwise lacking--" she broke off with a giggle as she saw her father's expression.

Dorothy snapped her compact shut and rose from the table. Going round to his side, she gave her father a hug and kissed him lightly on his mustache. "There!" she laughed. "Now I've added sophistication to your dignity, Daddy. You'll be able to run both the bank and that ritzy Mrs.

Hamberfield like a charm today. So long! Bill is coming for me and we're going down to the beach. I'm to have my first real flight instruction this morning, you know."

"From all accounts you did pretty well yesterday, young lady. Don't you think you'd better come down to the bank and tell the story of your sleuthing to the Bankers' Association detectives? They'll be up here from New York this morning."

From the doorway, Dorothy shook her head. "Nothing doing!" she cried. "I love you a lot--but you have the story down pat yourself--and I've got a date I can't break. That glass with the fingerprints on it, you'll find nicely wrapped up on the hall table. 'By--" She was through the door and across the lawn before Mr. Dixon could reply.

He folded his napkin and laid it on the table with a sigh. "Heigho!" he murmured. "I wonder what her mother would say to that? Still, Dorothy grows more like her every day. The youngster has brains if she only uses them in the right way. She certainly has been a help on this robbery--and she is a comfort to me--but a great responsibility at that."

Then, carefully lighting his after-breakfast cigar, Mr. Dixon walked into the house.

Shortly after Mr. Dixon had left for the bank, Bill's horn honked in the drive.

Dorothy appeared presently, wearing a boy's outing shirt open at the neck and a pair of fawn-colored jodhpurs. She noticed as she approached the car that Frank, the Bolton's chauffeur, was seated in the rumble.

"I've got to run into New York and buy some flying clothes," she announced as she seated herself at Bill's side.

"Don't bother about clothes, for heaven's sake. They won't help you to fly. I've got several extra helmets and some goggles and those things you're wearing now will be just the thing. All you need are overalls--and I bought you those in the village this morning."

"Aren't you nice," she beamed. "But I do need a leather coat, don't I?"

"What for?"

"Didn't you tell me the cockpits of your N-9 were open--that they didn't have windshields?"

"Yes--but what of it?"

"Won't it be cold?"

"Not at this time of year. We're not out for an altitude record. Of course, when you get a couple of miles or so above the earth you have to bundle up--but the old OXX motor in my N-9 would never get you there. She's not built for that kind of work. Later on, you can order a monkey suit or a leather coat from the city."

"Yes, I'll get one of those sporty knee-length coats--" decided Dorothy gleefully.

"Not if I know it!"

"But why not? They're so goodlooking!"

"And more dangerous than a broken strut!"

"They are?" Dorothy's tone was horrified.

"Certainly. If you buy a coat, get a waist-length model. Anything longer not only hampers a pilot, it catches the wind and is likely to get caught around your stick or other controls and crash the plane."

"Oh!" said Dorothy disappointedly.

Bill slanted his eyes from the road and smiled at her. "Not everyone who wears a yachting cap is a yachtsman! You'll have plenty to think of during your flight training without bothering about such things."

"I guess you're right," she agreed. "How long will it take to teach me to fly, Bill?"

"It all depends upon your aptitude, Dorothy. Ask me again after ten hours of dual instruction. But no matter how apt you prove to be, flying is not learned in a day. I've mapped out a forty-hour course for you. Want to look it over?" He handed her a typewritten sheet.

She studied the paper interestedly. It was titled.

"Course of Flight Training.

*I. Dual Instruction.*

First hour	Taxiing Straight flying Turns Glides
Second	Take-offs Climbing S-turns

	Breaking Glide and leveling off Slow motion landings by instructor
Third	Flying at leveling-off height (seaplanes only) Slow motion landings Normal landings, use of elevators only
Fourth	Cut-gun landings, under three feet, elevators only
Sixth	Normal landings Cut-gun landings Spirals Use of ailerons, rudder, throttle Approaches Elementary forced landings
Ninth	Stalls and spins

## II. *Elementary Solo Flying.*

First solo: Five minute flight, necessary turns, one landing

First 5 hours: Take-offs, turns, landings

Instruction flight: Instruction as necessary, including spins; power stall landings (seaplanes only)

5 to 10 hours: Take-offs, turns, spirals, landings

Instruction flight: Instruction as necessary, including spins

10-15 hours: Same as 5 to 10 hours

## III. *Advanced Flying.*

Instruction flight: Reverse control turns and spirals, side-slips, power spins

15-20 hours: Take-offs, turns, spirals, landings; reverse control turns and spirals

Instruction flight--Acrobatics

20-25 hours: Acrobatics, with 20 minutes of each hour on elementary work

Instruction flight: Precision landings, forced landings, figure-eight turns, wing-overs

25-30 hours: Precision landings, forced landings, figure-eight turns, wing-overs

Final instructions flight: Review; instruction as necessary."

"Looks pretty complicated to me," sighed Dorothy, handing back the paper. "Gee, but there's a lot to learn!"

"More than the average novice has any idea of. But don't imagine that this course will make you or anyone else an experienced pilot. Additional time must be spent in the air before you can get an interstate commercial pilot's license. But after the instruction I've outlined here, your knowledge of flying should be sufficient to enable you to go on with your training yourself."

"I hope so," said Dorothy, but there was little confidence in her tone.

Bill brought the car to a stop beside an open field.

"Cheer up!" he encouraged. "Flying is like anything else worth while--troublesome to learn, but easy enough when you know how. Hop out, kid. There's the N-9, with her new landing gear, over there. Frank will take the car back. We'll fly up to my place now and I'll give you your first real instruction over our own flying field!"

AIR TRAILS

Dorothy donned her overalls while Bill spoke to the mechanic who was waiting by the plane. Then the man got into a car and drove away, and Bill beckoned her to him.

"All set?"

"All set."

"Then we'll begin. First of all, you must know the names of the different parts of the plane. Some you know already, but we'll go over them just the same. That hinged movable auxiliary surface on the trailing edge of the wing is an aileron. Its primary function is to impress a rolling movement on the airplane. Got that?"

"Yes."

"Then repeat what I just said."

Dorothy did so.

"Good. Now this is a drag wire."

After twenty minutes of this kind of thing he asked her to point out an aileron and explain its use.

"K.O." he said at last. "We'll go over parts each day for a while and the book work you must do at home will help to refresh your memory. Now nip into the forward cockpit and I'll explain the working of the controls."

He gave Dorothy a hand up and when she was seated, swung himself on to the cowl of the cockpit.

"First of all--and let this become habit--" he ordered, "adjust your safety belt. Yes, that's the way. Now we'll go ahead. That's the stick there. Take hold of it. You'll notice it is pivoted at its base. Forward movement of the stick increases the angle of attack of the elevators and depresses the nose. Backward movement decreases angle and raises the nose. Lateral movement of the stick operates the ailerons, movement to the right depressing the right wing, and to the left, the left wing."

When she was sure she understood the functions of one thing he explained the next.

"Now tell me just what I have told you--" he commanded.

Fully an hour had gone by before he was satisfied that she understood thoroughly.

"Tired?" he asked at last.

"Not a bit," she smiled. "I'm afraid I'm kind of dumb--but all these gadgets, as you call them, are a little confusing at first."

"Oh, you're catching on in first rate order," he told her. "Nothing but practice will make you letter perfect. And that comes soon enough when you handle the plane yourself. Now I'll fly us home. All I want you to do is to fold your arms and listen. Keep your eyes in the cockpit and watch the movements of the stick and rudder bar. My cockpit aft is equipped with similar controls. When I move my stick--yours moves--and vice versa. All right?"

"You bet."

He reached in his pocket and drew forth a small leather-bound book which he handed her.

"Here's your Flight Log Book, Dorothy. Write it up after every flight. There are columns for the date, type of plane, duration and character of flight, passengers or crew carried (if any) and remarks. A commercial pilot should have his log book certified monthly by an official of the company. For a student it is a good thing to commence during training. Stick it in your pocket," he advised as she thanked him. "And put on this helmet. It's a Gosport, with phones in both ear flaps, connected by a voice tube to this mouthpiece. I'll use that end of it to coach you through during flight."

"But this helmet is hard and stiff," objected Dorothy. "I'll bet it isn't nearly as comfortable as that nice soft leather one you're wearing."

"Possibly not. But until you're through with your instruction I want you to wear a 'crash' helmet. They're a lot of protection for the head in case of minor accident. No instructor worth his salt permits a student to use a soft leather helmet until you've had a lot of experience."

"Oh, very well then," she said, adjusting her heavy headgear, "you're the boss!"

"You bet I am when it comes to this kind of thing. If I weren't sure you were willing to give me strict obedience, I'd never propose teaching you. And please remember that this isn't a joy hop. The more attentive you are to instruction--the quicker you'll learn."

"I'm your willing slave, sir," she mocked good-humoredly, and drew the helmet strap tight beneath her chin.

Then as the engine roared and the plane rolled forward she felt the same thrill she had experienced the afternoon before when she and Bill had taken off in the amphibian. The same tightening of her muscles and beating throb of the pulse in her neck. They were soaring upward now and the sensation of smoothness became apparent after the jars and bumps of taxiing over the rough field.

The sting of the wind on her face was exhilarating, but her eyes were streaming. Realizing that she had forgot to adjust her goggles, she pulled them down from the front of her helmet.

"I've been wondering how long it would be before you did that," came Bill's voice through the headphones. "Never mind--it's a grand thrill while it lasts--you'll lose it soon enough."

Dorothy, for the first time in her life, found a retort impossible to make.

"Now that we've got enough air under us," Bill's voice continued, "I'm going to fly straight for home. Remember what I said about watching your stick and rudder bar. Also keep an eye on the bank-and-turn indicator as well as the fore and aft level indicator and inclinometer."

Dorothy shifted her gaze to the instrument board before her. Unconsciously she ticked off the other instruments. There were the two Bill had just mentioned; a magneto switch, oil pressure gauge, earth inductor, compass indicator, altimeter, 8-day clock, primary pump and tachometer. It pleased her that she could so readily recall their names and uses. Then she heard Bill's voice in her ear again:

"The reason that I keep pulling the stick back slightly so often, Dorothy, in level flight, is because the old bus is a bit nose heavy. You'll notice it when you handle her later on. It's nothing to worry about. Very few planes are perfectly balanced."

Dorothy turned her eyes guiltily on the stick again. She had been caught napping that time! One really needed half a dozen pairs of eyes for a job like this. And--how different Bill's manner aboard an airplane, she thought. He was certainly all business. But she respected and admired his knowledge and his ability as an airpilot which left no opening for argument.

"You can look overside now," came his voice again interrupting her thoughts. "We're going to land."

Below them she saw the Bolton's house. The nose of the plane dropped suddenly as the stick went forward and they shot down to land on the field near the Bolton's hangar.

Bill spoke again from the rear cockpit. "If you're ready for more flight instruction, hold up your right hand."

Dorothy held up her right hand.

"Good. Then we'll practice taxiing," came back the even voice. "Remember that a land plane with engine idling will remain at rest on the ground in winds of normal force. That means that all movement of the plane must be made by use of the engine. When your bus begins to move you control it primarily by using the rudder. In a wind as strong as the one blowing now, you'll notice the plane's tendency to turn into it. That's due to the effect on the tail. It tends to swing like a weathervane until the nose is headed directly toward the point of the compass from which the wind is blowing. Your experience in sailing is going to be a great help.

"Now, just one thing more and we'll shove off. While taxiing, you must hold the stick well back of neutral. That will prevent any tendency of the tail to rise and cause the plane to nose over. Grasp the stick lightly with your fingers. Never freeze onto anything. If you feel me wiggle the stick sharply--let go at once. I may or may not have my hands and feet on the controls, but you cannot know that. Act just as if you were alone in the plane. Got all that?"

Dorothy raised her hand again.

"Then snap on the ignition and get going."

For the next hour she taxied the *N-9* around the field while Bill issued commands from the rear cockpit. So interested was she in her lesson that it seemed no time at all before he told her to shut off the engine.

"Take off your helmet and get down," he said as the plane came to a stop. And he helped her overside.

"Gee, Bill, it's wonderful!" she cried, jumping lightly to the ground beside him.

"You did splendidly," he encouraged. "This field is pretty rough in spots--makes it bumpy going. How are you--stiff?"

"Not a bit!"

"You need a rest, just the same."

"But I'm not in the least tired. Can't I go up now?"

Bill looked at her and shook his head. "Nothing doing," he said with pretended sternness. "That is--not for the next fifteen minutes. Here comes Frank with something cold to drink on his tray--horse's neck, probably. There's nothing like iced ginger ale with a string of lemon peel in it when you're real thirsty!"

"My, you're thoughtful!"

"Don't thank me--it's all Frank's idea."

They sipped their drinks in the shade of the old barn that had been turned into a hangar for the Bolton's planes.

"While you're resting, I want you to study this paper, Dorothy. It's a routine I want you to follow in preparing for every flight you take--with me, or soloing," he explained, handing it over. "When you've got it by heart, repeat it to me and then we'll carry on. Your first job for the next hop will be to do exactly what I've written there."

For perhaps ten minutes both were silent and Bill closed his eyes and turned over on his back.

"Asleep?" asked Dorothy presently.

"No--just relaxing. Got that dope down pat?"

"Sure. I mean, yes, instructor."

"Give me back the paper then, and shoot!" he said, sitting up.

"Preparations for flight:" recited Dorothy. "First, inspect the plane and engine as necessary. Second, observe the wind direction. Third, observe the course direction (if a course is being flown). Fourth, set the altimeter. Fifth, see that helmet, goggles and cushions are properly adjusted. Sixth, see that cloth to wipe goggles is handy. Seventh, give the engine a ground test. Eighth, see that the gas valve is properly set. Ninth and last--Buckle the safety belt!"

"One hundred per cent! Good work, Dot. Now come over to the plane and show me how you do it."

He grinned, awaiting a quick retort--but Dorothy, intent on the business of learning to fly, walked at his side in a fit of concentration.

"She sure is keen," he said to himself. "I never got a rise--and 'Dot,' to Dorothy, is like waving the American flag at a Mexican bull!"

Dorothy continued to prove her aptitude for she went through the flight preparations with but one mistake. She entirely forgot the matter of the cloth to wipe her goggles!

Presently he took her up again and started in with his coaching.

"You now have thirty-five hundred feet registered on your altimeter," he announced through her phone. "Enough air below to get us out of trouble if we should happen to get into it. The higher one flies, the safer one is. Now you are going to get straight flight instruction. I am moving the stick backward--now forward--now backward--now forward. See how the nose of the plane rises and falls in response? Watch closely--I'm going to do it again. There, now--take the stick and do it yourself."

Dorothy did as he bade her. It was thrilling to feel the huge plane respond to her will.

Then followed instruction in moving the stick successively right and left by which means the right wing and then the left are correspondingly depressed. After that came rudder instruction. First Bill pushed the right and left sides of the rudder bar successively, forward, thereby swerving the nose first to the right and then to the left.

Dorothy, of course repeated these movements after him.

Then he explained that to hold a steady course, to fly straight, constant right rudder must be maintained to overcome the torque, or drag of the propeller blades tending to swing the nose to the left. While to fly level longitudinally, some point on the engine is kept in line with the horizon. That to fly level laterally, up aileron and opposite rudder are applied whenever a wing drops. He told her numerous other things, such as that when flying straight, the nose should frequently be dropped momentarily, or the course changed a few degrees in order to look ahead. Otherwise, an approaching plane may be hidden by the engine.

"Good night!" thought Dorothy as she strained her ears to catch every word, while she watched the controls and saw how the plane reacted to their manipulation by her instructor. "If it takes all this detail to fly straight and level, I'll get the heebie-jeebies when it comes to acrobatics!"

"Take over controls," came Bill's voice. "Fly straight for that white church tower on the horizon."

Dorothy's body stiffened, but she took hold of the stick again bravely enough, and placed her feet on the rudder bar at the same time. She could feel her temples throbbing, and her heart was beating faster than the clock on her instrument board. At last she was actually flying an airplane--all by herself. But was she? Suddenly there came a check in the forward speed of the plane and Dorothy felt it start to slew off sideways as the nose dropped.

Then before she knew exactly what was happening, the stick in her hand seemed to spring back, then to the right, while right rudder increased considerably without help from her foot. Up came the nose, followed by the left wing, and down went the right. The slewing stopped as suddenly as it had begun. Then she felt left aileron and left rudder being applied--and once more the N-9 was flying straight and level.

"Forgot what I said about checking a skid just now, didn't you?" said Bill's voice in her ear. "Here's the news again. Any swinging of the nose to the left can be promptly recognized and checked--but,--and here's where you went wrong--the nose cannot be swung back to the right without applying a small bank. Any attempt to do so will cause your plane to skid. That naturally results in a loss of flying speed forward and the heavier end drops. If not checked at once, it means going into a spin. Carry on again now, and please try to keep your wits about you. This is not a kiddie-car. Mistakes are apt to be costly!"

Dorothy bit her lips in anger. More than ever did she regret the lack of a mouth piece on her head phone. Her temper flared at his sharp tone, and what seemed to her unfair criticism so early in the game. But she took over again as he ordered and gradually her vexation disappeared in her effort to concentrate every faculty on the job of flying the plane and keeping to her course. She was gradually gaining confidence. She made the same maneuvers which had caused the skid before, and carried through perfectly.

Bill told her so in no stinted terms, and the last shreds of her anger disappeared.

"The man who put *me* over the bumps," he added, "always said: 'when a student aviator makes a

mistake, give him blazes--make him mad. He'll remember what he should have done all the better--and live longer!' That advice applies to either sex, Dorothy. Naturally, I hope you'll live to a ripe old age."

Dorothy liked him for this apology. She wanted to thank him but of course that was out of the question.

"I'll take her over now." She heard his even tones once more, above the engine's roar. "Time for lunch. This afternoon, if you like, we'll take up another end of this business. And you can get even by teaching me how to become an honest-to-goodness sleuthhound!"



THE MEETING

After lunch Dorothy and Bill established themselves comfortably in the shade of the terrace awning back of the Bolton's house, and Dorothy's ground training began.

"First of all," said her instructor, "you must learn the signals for maneuvers, such as when the stick is shaken laterally, one hand held up, it means control of the plane is resumed by the instructor. Opening the throttle in a glide means resume level flight. There are eight of these signals to memorize. Then there are eight correction signals as well."

"I'll get them down soon enough," his pupil assured him. "Is that all?"

"I should say not. That's just a starter. Your ground training will consist of three parts: theoretic training, which takes up principles of flight; aircraft construction, aviation engine construction; and the elements of meteorology. Next, practical training, which embraces the maintenance and repair of aircraft together with maintenance and repair of aviation engines. Then comes aviation procedure, which takes up air commerce regulations; instruction procedure (signals come under that) and precautions and general instructions."

"Whew!" whistled Dorothy in dismay. "It *is* a business!"

Bill laughed at her forlorn expression. "Cheer up--the first hundred years are the hardest. But seriously, to become an efficient air pilot, it is essential to know thoroughly this ground work and all of the maneuvers I listed under elementary flying. None of them can be safely omitted. Of those I included under advanced flying, acrobatics are not required for a pilot's license, but they're a grand help in developing ability to handle a plane with confidence. Proficiency in reverse control flying, precision landings with power, forced landings and cross country flying is required for an interstate commercial license--and vital for every pilot."

"Is *that* all?" asked Dorothy, with diminished enthusiasm.

"No. To become a real flyer, you must understand aerial navigation and pass off formation flying and night flying. It sounds like a lot--but it really isn't so difficult. Of course, if you don't *want* to go the whole way--"

"Oh, but I do, Bill," she said earnestly. "It's only that I never dreamed there was so much to be learned. It kind of takes my breath away--"

"You mustn't let that bother you. I'm glad you're going to do the thing up right, though. It will take a lot of your time--but you'll find it worth your while. Let's get busy now. We'll start on signals. Then later this afternoon you can go up again if you feel like it."

For the next two weeks Dorothy worked daily with Bill. By the end of that time she had completed her elementary solo flying and was now engrossed in mastering the difficulties of reverse control.

Bill realized after giving her two or three lessons, that his pupil showed a high degree of aptitude for flying. Their trip home in the amphibian after the wreck of the *Scud*, had proved pretty conclusively to him that this sixteen-year-old girl had an unusually cool and stable temperament. Ordinarily, flight training is inadvisable for anyone under eighteen years of age, and Bill knew that twenty years is preferable. For, ordinarily, the instinctive coordination between sensory organs and muscles, which is necessary toward the control of a plane in the air, does not develop earlier. An airplane must be kept moving or it will fall; and the processes of reason are far too slow to keep up with the exigencies of flight. Flying cannot be figured out like a problem in mathematics. Calculation won't do the trick--there isn't enough time for it.

Of course there are exceptions to this rule. Bill Bolton was one himself, and Dorothy, he knew, was another.

When Mr. Dixon questioned him as to Dorothy's progress, he gave him a list of the maneuvers that had already been mastered, and the approximate length of time she had taken to satisfy him in performance.

"But that doesn't mean a thing to me--" objected the older man. "Look here--I was talking to a friend of mine who is an old Royal Flying Corps man. He said that Dorothy should wait several years before training. How about it? I know your reputation as a flyer, and I've proved my confidence in you by trusting you with my daughter's life. Why is it better for her to start now, rather than later?"

"Do you play the violin, sir?"

"No ear for music." Mr. Dixon shook his head in reminiscence. "My father played well. It was his ambition that we play duets together. But after wasting money for two years on lessons for me, he gave it up. My! the sounds I made when I practiced! It must have been torture to him. I can't tell one note from another--but I remember how awful it was. But what has *that* got to do with Dorothy's flying?"

"A good deal. You couldn't play the violin because you are not musical, and only a musical person can learn to play it well. In some respects, mastery of the violin and mastery of flying, have a common bond. With both the one fundamental requirement is natural or instinctive aptitude. Flying is an art, and without natural ability it is useless to attempt it. And if it isn't inherent, Mr. Dixon, it just can't be acquired. Moreover, the only way to find out if that aptitude exists, is by trial. If Dorothy had the natural ability for the violin that she has for flying, practice and experience would

make her a second Kreisler!"

A smile crept along the corners of Mr. Dixon's mouth. "Ah, but Kreisler is a *man!*"

"I know, sir, but honestly, sex has nothing to do with it."

"So you think she should keep on with her flight training?"

"I *know* she should, Mr. Dixon, if you want her to fly at all. She has all the qualifications that go toward making a really *good* air pilot."

"Well, I'm glad to hear you say it, and glad you're so enthusiastic."

"Of course I am," declared Bill. "She's fearless and alert and she loves the work--she'll do well."

And so Dorothy continued her flight training.

She came down one afternoon from a solo flight and Bill, who had been watching her maneuvers from the shade of the hangar, walked over as the plane rolled to a stop.

"Not so good--" she called out as she sprang to the ground. "I nearly overshot my landing."

"So I noticed," returned her young instructor rather grimly. "Carelessness, you know, that's all. Keep your mind on the job. And here's something else. Remember, when you are making a flipper turn, the nose must first be dropped to level. Otherwise you'll get into serious trouble. Also don't forget that until the wings pass an angle of bank of 45 degrees your controls are not inverted and must be handled as in a normal turn."

"O.K. skipper," she sighed. "I'll remember in future."

"One thing more. Those two 360-degree spirals with an altitude loss of about 1000 feet were well done. But you must bring your plane out of reverse control spirals above 1500 feet altitude--Now we'll put your bus away and call it a day."

Work finished, they strolled over to the terrace where Frank as usual had iced drinks awaiting them.

"You've certainly taught me a lot in fourteen days," observed Dorothy after sipping her ginger ale. "But it's kind of put a crimp into our detective work. By the way, you never have told me what you had up your sleeve with regard to the robbery--something to do with an airplane coming in handy, wasn't it?"

"Your memory is better on the ground than in the air!"

"Pish! likewise, tush! You don't intend to wait till I finish training or anything like that, before coming across with that clue that will help us land those birds in jail?"

"Why should I?"

"I don't know. Thought maybe you might figure my interest in landing the gang would take my mind off flying--"

Bill took a long, refreshing drink of the iced liquid at his elbow. "You're on the wrong track. I'm simply biding my time and keeping a finger on the pulse of the robbery, as it were."

"Do you mean that?"

"I'm in deadly earnest," he assured her, although his eyes twinkled mischievously.

"Then all I can say," exclaimed Dorothy, "is that you're one up on everybody else who is working on the case."

"How come?"

"Why? you know as well as I do that when the Packard rolled out of the alley by the bank, in all probability carrying three people and the loot, it disappeared completely. And it's stayed that way ever since, hasn't it? That's two weeks ago tonight."

"Any new clues lately?"

"Nary a one. The police traced the red-headed girl's finger prints to Sarah Martinelli, better known as Staten Island Sadie. They sent Dad her record--I saw it--believe me, that lady is a ripe egg!"

"How beautifully expressive."

Dorothy raised her eyes from her compact's tiny mirror.

"Well, she must be!--Are you trying to kid me?"

Bill finished his ginger ale. "Come on, tell me the rest."

Dorothy grinned. "That's all there is, there isn't any more, my child. Don't imagine those police are efficient, do you? None of the missing bonds have been found, and as for the money, those chaps have probably spent it by this time. I feel awfully sorry for Daddy, though," she continued in a changed voice, "--that Mrs. Hamberfield is still raising the roof about her diamond necklace. Serves her right for being such a mutt, I say."

"Tough on both parties, I should think."

"Nothing of the kind. Daddy says that her husband, Stonington Hamberfield, made his coin profiteering during the war. What do you think his name really is?"

"You tell me."

"Steinburg Hammerfeld--isn't that a hot one?"

"A Hun, eh?"

"Well, if he isn't--I'm President Hindenburg, San Francisco Harbor and the Statue of Liberty all in one!"

Bill smiled appreciatively at this sally, then changed the subject. "Let's go to the movies this evening?"

"Can't. It's Pen and Pencil Club night."

"What on earth is that?"

"Oh, about a year ago, a bunch of us at high school, girls and fellows, started a club to write short stories. We meet every other Tuesday night at some member's house. Everybody has to write a story at least one a month, or they're fined a quarter. We read aloud and discuss them at the meeting. Come with me after supper and pay my quarter."

"Nothing doing. That kind of thing is my idea of a perfectly terrible evening."

Dorothy slipped the compact into a pocket of her jodhpurs and got to her feet.

"That's where you're all wrong, Bill. Noel Sainsbury, the writer, is our adviser. He makes it awfully interesting--we have lots of fun. He was a naval aviator during the war. You two should have lots in common. Do come along and meet him."

"Why I dined at his place, Little Windows, last night!"

"Oh, you do know him?"

"Naturally. Where would I be if it weren't for him? Look at the books he's written about me. Noel Sainsbury brought Dad and me to New Canaan. We're awfully fond of him and his wife and little girl."

"Yes, Winks is a darling and Mrs. Sainsbury is a peach--" Dorothy agreed. "She comes to our meetings, too. I'm named for her, you know."

"Really? That's interesting."

"You bet. Then you'll come tonight?"

"I'd like to, very much."

"All right. The meeting is at Betty Mayo's, in White Oak Shade. I'll be here about eight in my car and drive you down there."

"I'll be ready--so long!"

"So long!"

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It was nearly quarter to nine before they got started, as things turned out. Mr. Dixon had gone to New York for the day on business, had been detained in town, and Dorothy waited dinner for him.

"Well, we won't have missed much," she explained to Bill as her car breasted the Marvin Ridge Road. "The first half hour is always taken up with the minutes of the last meeting and all that parliamentary stuff. I love driving in the twilight, anyway. Next place on the left is where we're bound. We'll be there in a jiffy."

They rounded a bend and came upon a Packard parked at the roadside. The hood was up and a man looked up from tinkering with the engine as their lights outlined his figure.

"Pull up! pull up!" Bill's tense whisper sounded in her ears. "Where are your eyes, girl?"

But Dorothy needed no second warning. She shot home the brake, for she too had seen the great, misshapen boot that the dapper little motorist wore on his left foot.

FOLLOW THE LEADER

"Need any help?" inquired Bill, as Dorothy drew up opposite the Packard.

"Thanks! This thing has got me stumped. I'm not much of a mechanic," returned the lame man ruefully. "Do you know anything about motors?"

"Making them behave is my long suit," was Bill's glib retort as he alighted from the car and crossed the road. "Let's see if I can locate your trouble. Got plenty of gas?"

"Lots of it. I just looked to see."

"Then let me have your flashlight while I give her the once over."

"Wait a minute--" called Dorothy, "I'll swing this car round and put my lights on the engine. There-- is that better?" she ended, trying to keep the excitement out of her voice.

"Nothing could be sweeter!" sang out Bill without turning his head. "Hold her as you are."

Dorothy's offer had not been quite so altruistic as it sounded, for now her lights brilliantly illuminated the two figures bending over the Packard's engine. While Bill went over the motor with the sureness of an expert, keeping up a desultory conversation with the stranger, Dorothy used her eyes to good advantage.

But after a while she grew impatient. Why didn't Bill capture the man at once so they could haul him off to the police station? Why did he continue to go on with his pretended inspection of the engine? He couldn't really be in earnest, for if he found the trouble and fixed it, the lame man would simply get in his car and drive away. Could it be that Bill wasn't sure of his quarry? Of course, he was clean shaven, although Lizzie had described him as having a small mustache. Naturally, he'd shave it off. By this time he must know that his description had been broadcast. And so far as she could see the earrings were missing too. But that was to be expected. And he spoke good English with a slight Italian accent.

What was the matter with Bill! He was big enough to take care of the man with one hand, when all he did was tinker and jabber. What was the use of that?

"Your engine seems to be in A-1 condition," Bill was saying. "Doesn't look as if you'd been running the car lately."

"I haven't," replied the lame man. "She ran like a charm when I drove down here earlier this evening. Then all of a sudden she stops--and won't go on."

"Ah! here we are!" Bill exclaimed a moment later. "You've got a choked jet. I'll fix that in a jiffy."

"You are very kind," beamed the Italian. "Is that a serious trouble?"

"Not so bad. Buy better gas and have your carburetor well looked over. I'll fix it so the car will move, though."

"Do you think she will run fifty miles?"

"Sure--but there are plenty of garages nearer than that if you want to fix it."

"I'll wait until I reach home. My friend--he will give the engine a thorough going over. He understands very well such things."

"Good enough." Bill straightened his back and closed the hood. "You're O.K. now. She'll run."

"Then thank you so much. You have been very kind."

"Don't mention it." Bill waved farewell and crossed the road as the lame man climbed into his car and drove off in the direction of New Canaan village.

"What ever *is* the matter with you?" Dorothy broke out in a fever of angry disappointment. "Why didn't you nab him while you had the chance? Now he'll get away and--"

"Hush, sister! Likewise calm yourself," cut in Bill. "Move over. I'm going to drive. This business isn't finished by a long shot. It has only just begun."

Dorothy, flabbergasted by his high-handed manner, slid across the seat as he directed, and Bill sprang in behind the wheel. The tail light of the Packard disappeared around the bend of the road.

"What's the idea?" she fumed.

"Wait till we get going, Dot." Bill threw in the reverse and started to turn the car in the direction from which they had come a quarter of an hour before.

"*Don't* call me 'Dot'! You know I won't stand for it. Aren't you the limit--Going to try to trail him, I suppose, when you could have nailed him right here!"

"Don't get peeved!" Bill swung the little car onto the road and switching off his lights brought his foot down on the accelerator. "I know what I'm doing."

"*Well, maybe* you do." Her voice was full of sarcasm. "But we might just as well go back to the Pen and Pencil meeting. You'll never catch up with his bus."

"Shan't try to. There's his tail light now!" They rounded the turn and Bill sent the car streaking along the black road like a terrified cat up a back alley. "There's no need to get snippy," he added.

"You heard what our friend said about *his* friend--who understands all about engines? On a bet, that's the lad who wore the chauffeur's cap and beamed the night watchman. He said he'd let him look over the carburetor when he got home, didn't he? And like as not that ripe egg lady--the one with the red head--will be there too!"

"Staten Island Sadie?"

"Sure thing."

"Perhaps," admitted Dorothy. "The lame man *was* alone in his car. But you stand a good chance of losing him, even if he doesn't see us. We'll have to switch on the lights going through towns."

"But, you see, I'm pretty sure I know where he's bound for."

"You do?" Her surprise drove all petulance from her tone.

"That's what I've kept up my sleeve. If he takes the Ridgefield Road, out of New Canaan, then I'm certain of it."

"Better switch on the glims again," she advised. "We'll crash or get a ticket running without them in this South Main Street traffic--we're nearly in the village now. I can spot the Packard ahead there." Then, contritely, she continued: "Sorry I was peeved, Bill, old thing. I didn't understand. Forgive me--and let's hear all about it."

"Of course--hello!" he cried. "He's slowed down. Confound it, anyway. That comes of talking and not keeping my mind on the job. I'll bet he has his suspicions. Wants to see if we're following--nothing dumb about that bird. I shouldn't have driven so close. He'll tumble to a certainty if we slow up too."

"What are you going to do?"

"Give me time--" he answered grimly. "Confound again! There goes the red light on the Library corner! Now we're in for it."

"P'raps he won't notice us," said Dorothy hopefully as they drew up behind the Packard.

"Not a chance. But we'll fool him yet. Let me do the talking," he whispered as the lame man thrust his head out of the car and looked back at them.

"Hello, there!" cried Bill cheerfully. "I see you've got this far without another breakdown!"

"Good evening, my friend," replied the Italian. "This is a surprise. I thought you were going the other way."

"Oh, no. Just ran down there to leave a message." Bill's tone was affability itself. "You must have come pretty slowly. How's the car running?"

"Nicely, thank you."

"Don't be afraid to let her out. Well--there's the light. Excuse me if I pass you," he said airily. "We're in a hurry. So long."

"Au revoir ..." Dorothy added gaily and waved her hand as Bill swung to the left, then headed up Main Street in advance of the Packard.

"Aren't you smart! You'll get us into a heap of trouble yet with your 'au revvoirs'!"

"Hey, there"--she cried. They were rolling swiftly up the hill past the bank.

"You should have turned right then left, for Ridgefield--back at the last corner!"

Bill laughed. "Old Angel Face did just as I figured," he informed her, still chuckling. "I spotted him making the turn, in the glass."

"Where are we going? Sure you haven't lost him?"

"Listen. That chap is heading for Ridgefield. From there he will run another ten miles up to Danbury. Unless I'm completely wet, his objective is a certain house in the hills on a back road, over toward the New York borderline about twenty-five miles north. It's a rough, wild stretch of country, with Pawling, N. Y., to the west and New Milford, Connecticut, on the east, that he's heading for. Nice riding too, dirt roads, mere trails that haven't had a scraper on them since the Revolution. That house I just told you about is a good ten miles from a railroad as a plane flies--probably twice as far by road."

"Interesting--but why are we heading this way?"

"Simply because it is too dangerous to follow that lad just now. He smells a rat and is sure to park in some dark spot along the way to make certain he's not being followed."

"Then what *are* we going to do?"

"I'm going to run west over to Bedford, New York. Then north from there through Golden Bridge and Croton Falls to Brewster. From Brewster I'll keep to the same state road north toward Pawling. But just before I get to Patterson, there's a dirt road that turns off into the hills to the northeast. That's the one I'll follow. Eventually, I'll get to the house. Angel Face's route is shorter--but I'll get there soon after he does, if he stops along the way to see if anyone's after him. First of all I'll drop you at your house and get myself a gat."

"You'd better get two--for I'm coming with you."

"Sorry, my girl--this is a man's job."

Dorothy turned and stared at him. "Well--of all the consummate nerve--" she began.

"Sorry, Dot--it just can't be. I've got no right to let you run the risk."

"Don't you *dare* to 'Dot' me again!" Miss Dixon was distinctly irritated. "And what's more, if you try to ditch me, I'll phone the police station and spill everything. They'll pick you up at Bedford and horn in, of course--and like as not, they'll gum it all."

"If you talk that way, I suppose I'll have to take you."

"Of course you will. Say, Bill, that was only a bluff, wasn't it?"

Bill smiled. "Perhaps. But it's a risky business."

"No worse than learning to fly, is it?"

"Fifty-fifty, I should say."

"That's settled, then. What I can't understand is why you didn't corral that gang long before this--or at least put the police on to them, if you knew where they were all the time."

"But that's just it--they haven't been in the house since the robbery. I've driven up there several times and reconnoitered from the air as well."

"Then what makes you think you'll corner the gang at the house now?"

The car turned in the Dixon's drive and came to a stop by the side entrance.

"You'll have to wait till the next chapter for that," he laughed. "Time is worth more than money now. I'll tell you all about it when we get going again. Beat it upstairs now and change that light dress for breeches and a dark sweater or coat. I'll run across the road for something more suitable and less conspicuous than white flannels."

"O.K." Dorothy sprang out of the car. "Don't forget our armory."

"Not a chance. Now forget the prinking and make it snappy," he sang out, backing down the driveway.

THE HOUSE IN THE HILLS

"Don't tell me it takes a girl long to change her clothes!" was Dorothy's salutation, as Bill drove up to the side entrance again. "You've kept me waiting here exactly three minutes and a half."

"Sorry," he said in mock contrition. "Fact is, I thought we'd better use my own bus tonight and I had to go out to the garage to get it."

"What's the big idea?" Dorothy sprang in beside him, looking very trim and boyish in jodhpurs and dark flannel shirt over which she wore a thin brown sweater. "Isn't my car good enough for you?"

"This boat has a full tank," he replied tersely. "Can't waste time tonight picking up gas."

They had reversed the car down the drive and were now speeding along the tree-lined road in the direction of Bedford.

"Got my gun?" she asked.

"Surest thing you know!" Bill passed over a small revolver in a holster. "Tie yourself to that! It's a Colt .32 and it's loaded. Know how to use it?"

"Certainly. What do you expect me to do--release the safety catch and pull the trigger to see if it works?" Her tone flared hotly with indignation.

Bill whistled a tuneless air, but the whistle developed into a laugh and the laugh continued until Dorothy snapped:

"Don't cackle like a billygoat!"

"Billygoats don't--" he began but broke off, changing his bantering tone. "Then why do you tie the leg-strap around your waist?" he asked seriously enough.

She swallowed hard.

"Because--well, because I've never used this kind of a holster before, smarty. But I can shoot--Daddy taught me--I can box, too, and I've had lessons in jiu jitsu. Oh, I can take care of myself, if that's what's worrying you!"

"Glad to hear it, Dorothy. Excitement kind of stirs you up eh?"

"It's not excitement that does it, Bill--it's suspense. But I'm sorry I bawled you out."

"Don't mention it. My humble apologies for being so rude--"

"Imbecile! You weren't. But never mind that--tell me about this house in the woods and what it has to do with the gang who robbed the bank."

The car ran into Bedford and taking the turn to the right, he swung on to the northbound turnpike.

"Go ahead with the story," begged Dorothy as they left the picturesque village behind.

"Right-o! Here goes. On our way back from the South last month, I dropped Dad at New Orleans. The old *Loening* needed a thorough overhauling, so Dad left me there with the plane and went north by train. After I saw him off at the L. and N. station, I went back to the St. Charles Hotel and slept for nearly twenty-four hours. I got a touch of jungle fever when I was down in the cypress swamps and was still feeling pretty rocky.

"So for the next ten days I loafed while the amphibian got what was coming to her. When she'd been made shipshape again I flew her north. I was in no hurry to reach New Canaan and stopped off at Atlanta, and at Philadelphia, where I have friends.

"A couple of days before I met you I started on the last leg of the hop. It was raining when I left Philly--a filthy morning, with high fog along the coast. That is why I decided not to follow the New York-Philadelphia-Hartford air route, but cut straight north over eastern Pennsylvania and northern New Jersey, hoping for better visibility inland. Instead, the old bus ran me into even worse weather. The fog grew lower and denser and flying conditions became even rottener than before. You haven't run into fog in a plane, yet, Dorothy--and, believe me, it's no fun.

"I expected to cross the Hudson at about Haverstraw and fly east to New Canaan. I know now that I must have overshot that burg; that the plane was probably nearer Newburgh when we crossed the river and headed east. To make matters worse, a few minutes later, the engine commenced to skip. I began to realize then that I didn't know where I was."

Dorothy had been listening intently, her eyes on the grotesque shadows cast by their headlights upon the stone fences along the road; now she turned and stared at him in astonishment.

"That's a good one! You've flown pretty much all over the country--and get lost in dear little Connecticut!"

"Oh, I don't know--parts of the state are as wild as the Canadian woods! And just remember that the visibility at five hundred feet was so poor I could hardly see the nose of my plane. And worse luck, I knew that with the engine cutting up the way she was, I'd soon be forced to land."

"What did you do?"

"Nosed over until I got almost down to the trees on the hilltops. Visibility was better there, but for the life of me I couldn't spot a landing place.--Nothing but one chain of hills after another, all

covered with trees. The sides of these foothills of the Berkshires are steep as church roofs--and they run down to narrow, densely wooded valleys. Well, for some time I circled about with the engine acting worse every split second. Then, in a valley a little wider than any I'd come across so far, I saw the glint of water--a little lake. Fifty yards or so away, there was a good-sized farmhouse with a fairly level hay field behind it. I chose the lake, although it wasn't much better than a duck pond--and landed.

"The house was a ramshackle affair, but some smoke rose from the chimney, so I figured someone lived there. While I was fixing my engine, a girl--or rather I should say a young woman--came out of the house and walked down to the little dock near where the plane was floating."

"Of course she had red hair and wore yellow beach pajamas?" said Dorothy.

"She did--I mean, she had. Anyway, when Lizzie described the girl in the car who wanted bicarbonate of soda and got it, I was sure that my er--lady of the lake and she were one and the same."

"Did you talk to her?"

"I did. I told her I was lost and asked her where I had come down. She told me, after a while. That is, she gave me a general idea in what direction Danbury lay and about how far away from town we were. But I thought at the time that she was awfully cagy and tight with her information."

"In other words, she didn't seem especially glad to see you?"

"That's it. Instead of inviting me ashore and up to the house for a meal, she wanted to know how long I was likely to be on the lake--and then she beat it back to the house. Naturally, I thought it queer she should be so inhospitable and stand-offish. People are usually interested anyway, when a plane arrives unexpectedly in their neighborhood--too darn interested, if anything. Still, I didn't think much about her, then. I had the information I wanted, and after changing a couple of sparkplugs, I took off and made New Canaan via Danbury without any more trouble."

"Did you see anyone besides the girl with the red hair?"

"Not a soul."

"And you've been back since the robbery, I think you said?"

"Several times. But the place has been deserted and the house locked up tighter than a drum."

There was a long pause.

"Why do you think the gang are there now?" asked Dorothy. "Simply because we saw the lame man take the Ridgefield road?"

"This is the way I figured." They had passed through the little town of Brewster, heading north, some minutes before. Now Bill turned the car off the state highway and on to a winding dirt road full of deep ruts that he knew ran far into the wooded hill country to the northeast. "It is my idea," he continued, slowing down to a bare twenty-mile pace, "that after the robbery, that gang scattered and laid low for a while. They didn't go to the house, that I do know. After you went to bed that night, I drove up here to have a look-see. Nobody home, as I've told you. But they couldn't have a better place for headquarters. There isn't a house anywhere round that neck of the woods. Sooner or later, they're bound to meet there. The loot has got to be divided. Seeing our lame friend headed in that direction this evening makes me doubly certain. I've kept it to myself, because if that army of detectives who are on this case started camping out near the house on a watchful waiting spree, those crooks would be sure to spot them and never show up."

"I guess you're right," she said.

For some time neither spoke, while their car bumped slowly along the uneven road.

"What do you suppose that lame man was doing on Marvin Ridge?" she inquired presently.

"Search me. How should I know? You certainly love to fire questions at a guy."

"He told us the car hadn't been used lately," she mused, ignoring his remark.

"That only goes to prove we're right in thinking he has been in hiding somewhere."

"But where?"

"Merciful heaven! Another question! That road runs down to Noroton, doesn't it? And from there the Boston Post could bring him from all points east and west. There's no telling where he'd come from."

"But I drove up from the Post Road that way yesterday. It has been freshly oiled to within a half mile of where we met him. Yet that Packard hadn't run through oil. If she had, I'd have seen it with my headlights smack on her."

"Perhaps he came down a side road?"

"Not between that point and the oil--there isn't any."

"Maybe he'd been calling in the neighborhood--"

"Don't be silly--I know everyone who lives along that road."

"You think it out then--I've got enough to do trying to navigate this road. I'm going to switch out the lights, now. We're not more than a couple of miles from the house."

"Do you think they'll put up much of a fight?"



"Good Lord! You don't think I've any intention of trying to capture them?" Bill exclaimed. He was very busily engaged in keeping the car in the middle of the grass grown trail as it rolled, down a steep hillside at a snail's pace. "I'm not taking chances with you along. It would be foolish to attempt anything like that. You'll get into no battles tonight, miss. This is just a scouting party. If the gang have arrived, we'll beat it back to Brewster and get the cops on the job."

"Oh, *dear!*" sighed Dorothy. "And I thought this was going to be the real thing!"

"No grandstand plays for you tonight, young lady. What's more--I'm running this show. If you don't promise to behave, you'll warm a seat in this car, while I mosey up to the house. How about it?"

Dorothy's voice betrayed her disgust and disappointment.

"Oh, I'll promise. But if we are leaving all the fun to the police, why did you bring the guns?"

"Because you seemed to expect them, little brighteyes. But we might as well have left them home, for all the use they'll be--I'll see to that. It's bad enough to be forced into bringing you up here. Your father will certainly raise the roof when he finds it out. I shan't tell him, that's flat."

"You believe in being candid!" with cutting sarcasm.

"You bet. And please remember that if you try to pull off anything you'll probably crab the show. And get us into a good old-fashioned mess besides."

He stopped the car and slipping into reverse gear, backed off the trail.

"There!" He switched off the ignition. "We're all ready for a quick getaway if need be."

"How far are we from the house?" she asked in a tense whisper.

"About a mile. I'm afraid to drive nearer--sound carries a long way up these quiet valleys. Let's get started now. I want you to walk just behind me. Be careful where you place your feet. We'll follow the trail a while farther, but it's pretty rough going. Above all else--don't talk--and make just as little noise as possible."

"What if they have sentries posted?" she asked, coming to his side.

"Aren't you the limit!" Bill seemed really annoyed. "There you go talking again! For your satisfaction, though--if we have the bad luck to come across anyone, I'll naturally do my best to scrag him. You, of course, will act as you think best. My advice is to beat it to the car, as fast as you can. Come along now--and quiet!"

"Aren't you horrid tonight!" she breathed, swinging up the overgrown trail behind him.

But Bill didn't hear her. Anyway, he didn't answer, and she followed in his footsteps while a pleasurable thrill of excitement gradually took the place of her disappointment. It was nearly pitch dark, walking along in the shadow of tall trees that lined the twisting path. Now and then the cry of a night bird came to her from the woods, but except for the dull sound of their steps on the damp earth--the occasional snapping of a twig underfoot, all was quiet in the forest.

Bill was only a blur in the gloom ahead. But she was glad to know he was there just the same. This creeping through the still night to reconnoiter a gang of bank-thieves held a kick all its own. Yes, she was glad that Bill was close by.

There came a movement in the underbrush behind them. Hands of steel caught her arms, pinning them to her sides.

"Sentries, Bill!" she screamed, struggling frantically to free herself. "Look out! *Look out!*"

She heard Bill mutter angrily. Heavy feet crashed in the brush and she heard the sharp impact of a solid fist meeting soft flesh. Several men were shouting now and someone groaned.

Bending suddenly forward and sideways, Dorothy managed to fasten her teeth on the wrist of the man who held her. With a howl, he let go her right arm and at the same time a gun went off. The night was torn with a scream of anguish. But before she could use her free arm someone dropped a bag over her head, a rope was knotted about her wrists and a muffled voice spoke to her through the folds of the sack.

"*Behave, sister! Behave, I say, or I'll crack yer wid dis rod. I ain't no wild cat tamer. Quiet now, or I'll bash yer one!*"

Inasmuch as it was no part of Dorothy's plan to get "bashed" in a bag, that young lady kept quiet.

"That's the girl!" he applauded. Swinging her over his shoulder as though she were a sack of flour, he walked away from the scuffle on the trail.

## Chapter XIII

### TRAPPED

The burlap sack was stiflingly hot. Moreover it seemed impregnated with fine particles of dust which burned her throat and nostrils and set her coughing. Dorothy was frightfully uncomfortable. Breathing became more and more difficult.

"Let me go--I'm smothering!" she gasped.

"And get another piece bit out of me arm?" snorted her captor. "Nothin' doin'."

"But I'm choking to death in this filthy bag! It's full of dust!"

"Keep yer mouth shut, then," gruffed the man. "And stop that wrigglin'. I'll tap yer one if yer don't. What do ye think this is, anyway--a joy ride?"

"But--" she began again.

"Shut up!" he growled. "Behave, will yer? Say, sister, if I had me way youse'd get bumped off right now. Give me more of yer lip and I'll do it, anyway!"

There was a grim menace in the gangster's tone that frightened Dorothy more than his words. Thereafter she spoke no more. She even refrained from struggling, although her head swam and his grip of iron about her knees had become torture.

What had happened to Bill, she wondered, and cold fear entered her heart. She was almost certain that it had been a blow from his fist she had heard directly after her warning shout. But the shot and the scream immediately afterward? Had that been the sound of his automatic--or another's? The thought of Bill lying in the woods wounded--perhaps dead--drove her frantic. Yet she was powerless, with her wrists lashed behind her back. While the man who carried her lurched forward, stumbling now and then over the uneven ground, each step causing his victim fresh agony, Dorothy's conviction of hopelessness assailed and overwhelmed the last shreds of her fighting spirit. She wept.

Presently,--it seemed an age,--she sensed that the gangster was mounting a flight of steps. There came the creak of a board underfoot. Then she knew that he was fumbling with a doorknob. A glow of light appeared through the burlap.

"Here we are, sister!" he grunted, with evident relief. Swinging her from his shoulder, he placed Dorothy on her feet and pulled off the sack.

"Gosh!" he exclaimed, steadying her as she would have fallen, "I thought it was a Mack truck I was carryin'. But you're only a kid! Nobody'd think you weighed so much. Did I make you cry?"

He placed an arm under her elbow and led her to a chair. It was of the hard, straight-backed, kitchen variety, but Dorothy was only too glad to sit down and rest. She kept her eyes closed, for the light, after the dark confines of the bag, was blinding. Her breath came in convulsive gasps.

"Feelin' kind of woozy?" The man's tone was callous, but at least it evinced a slight interest in her condition and she took advantage of that at once.

"Yes, I am," she admitted, keeping her eyes closed, but drawing deep breaths of air into her lungs between words. "You nearly smothered me in that filthy bag. If you want to make up for it, you can bring me a drink of water now."

"You certainly have some noive! Y' don't happen ter want a couple of ice cubes and a stick in it too?"

"Plain water, if you please."

"Dat's all you'll get, kid. But I'm dry myself, so I'll bring you some."

She heard him cross the room, jerk open a door and tramp over an uncarpeted floor beyond.

Dorothy opened her eyes.

A wave of faintness swept over her and the room seemed to whirl before her. As she tried to struggle to her feet she found her roped hands had been securely fastened to the back of her chair. She sank back wearily, her thoughts in wild confusion.

After a moment she turned her attention to her surroundings, conscious of the futility of any further effort to free herself, and resolved to bide her time.

The long, narrow room evidently ran the width of the house for shuttered windows broke the bare expanse of walls at either end. Behind her chair, she knew, was the door through which she had been carried into the room, with shuttered windows flanking it. Facing her were two other doors, one open and one closed. Through the open door came the sound of a hand pump in action, where her captor was drawing water.

The room in which she sat was dimly lighted by an oil lamp, its chimney badly smoked and unshaded. It stood on an unpainted table amidst the debris of dirty dishes and an unfinished meal. Chairs pushed back at odd angles from the table gave further evidence of the diners' hurried exit.

"They must have posted someone further down the road," she mused. "I wonder how he got word to the house so quickly?"

Then she caught sight of a wall-phone in the shadows at the farther end of the room. "Telephone, of course! They must have planted one somewhere this side of the turnpike. The man on watch saw

our car pass and immediately sent word along the wire!"

It suddenly occurred to Dorothy that she herself might find that telephone useful. For a moment she contemplated dragging her chair across the room, but gave up the idea almost at once, for the sound of the pump in the room beyond had ceased and she heard the gangster's returning footsteps.

He appeared in the doorway almost immediately. A broad-shouldered, narrow hipped, sinewy young man, with a shock of sandy hair falling over his ferret-like eyes. The white weal of an old knife scar marred the left side of his face from temple to chin. An ugly, though not bad humored countenance, she summed up--certainly an easy one to remember.

"Here yer are, sister!" was his greeting. "Get outside o' this an' yer'll feel like a new woman!"

He held a brimming glass of fresh water to her lips.

Dorothy gulped eagerly.

"Hey, there! Not so fast," he cautioned. "You'll choke to death and Sadie'll swear I done yer in." He pulled the glass out of her reach. "Tastes good, eh?"

"It certainly does. Give me some more."

"Take it easy, then. I don't want yer to get sick on this job." He grinned and allowed her to finish drinking. "I guess yer ain't used to a dump like this--" he waved his hand toward the litter on the table and included the peeling wall-paper.

"Still, it's a heap better than a hole in the ground out in the woods. You certainly are the lucky girl!" He grimaced, then laughed heartily at his joke.

Dorothy's tone was stern, "What have they done with Bill?"

"Who's Bill? Yer boy friend?"

"Is he hurt?"

"I hope so. He sure gave Tony a nasty crack. A rough little guy, he is--some scrapper. It looked like a battle royal to me when I left an' brung yer up here. But don't get the wrong idea, kid. By this time, one of the bunch has slipped a knife into him--pretty slick at that sort o' thing, they are."

Dorothy said nothing, but he read her feelings in her face.

"Cheer up, sister," he said, heaping a plate with baked beans and sitting down at the table. "Pardon me, if I finish supper. That lad ain't so hot. You've got me now, haven't yer? I'm a better man than he was, Gunga Din!"

"Yes, you are--I *don't* think!"

"How do yer get that way?"

"Well--" Dorothy eyed him uncompromisingly--"why are you afraid of me, then?"

"*Afraid?* You little whippet!" He paused, his knife loaded with beans half way to his mouth. "Say--that's a good one! What are yer givin' us?"

"You keep me tied up, don't you? Why? You're twice my size and you've got a gun--"

"Two of 'em, little one--my rod and yourn."

"Yet you're afraid to loosen my hands."

"No, I'm not--but--"

"Please," she begged, changing her tone. "My face itches terribly from all that dust and I--"

"Well, what do yer think I am? A lady's maid?"

"Don't be silly--I just hate to sit here talking to you, looking such a fright!"

"So that's it," he laughed. "Don't try yer Blarney on me! I'm as ugly as mud and yer knows it. Though I'll say yer need a little make-up--and I'll let yer have it. But just get rid of that idea that you've got me buffaloed--yer haven't!"

He pushed back his chair and coming round the table, untied the rope that bound her wrists.

"Thanks." She began to rub her hands, which were numbed and sore.

"Don't mention it," he leered. "Now yer can doll up to yer heart's content while I shovel some more chow into me. I sure am empty an' that's no lie!"

"Hey, Mike!" called a man's voice from the doorway behind her. "Where do they keep the wheelbarrer in this godforsakin' dump?"

"In the shed out back," returned Mike, sliding his chair up to the table again and picking up his knife. "What yer want it for? What's the trouble?"

"Trouble enough!" grumbled the other. "There's a couple o' guys messed up pretty bad down the line. Need somethin' to cart 'em up here in. Sling me a hunk o' bread, will yer? I ain't had no chow."

"Tough luck!" Mike replied callously, his mouth full, and tossed him half a loaf. "So long."

"So long--" sang out the other, and Dorothy heard him cross the porch and thump down the steps.

She was busily engaged in flexing her stiff fingers. She began to feel better, stronger, quite like her old self again. But the news that two men were badly hurt was anything but comforting. Was Bill

one of them? she wondered.

With an effort, she thrust the thought from her, and drawing forth a comb and a compact from a pocket, she commenced the complicated process of making herself presentable. If she was to make her escape before the rest of the gang arrived she must work fast. But not too fast, for every second brought back renewed strength to her cramped arms and fingers.

"How's that?" she asked a few minutes later, replacing comb and compact in her pocket and getting to her feet.

"Say! You're some looker! I'd never have thought it!"

Mike pushed back his chair and came toward her, wiping his mouth with the back of a hand. "Say! You've got Sadie lashed to the silo!"

"Who's Sadie? Your steady?" she asked, playfully pointing a forefinger at him.

Mike leaned back against the table. "Never mind Sadie," he retorted. "I've got an idea."

"Spill it."

"You wanta breeze--get outa here, don't yer?"

"What a mind-reader!"

"Cut it, kid!" Mike's tone was tense with earnestness. "That guy you been travelin' with is either dead or a cripple. Sposin' you pal up with me. Tell me yer will, kid, and we'll hop it together, now."

"How about the rest of the gang?"

"What about 'em. I ain't a regular--just horned in on this deal to make a coupla grand extra."

"But I'm expensive--" she laughed.

"I'll say you are! What of it? I make good money. I'm no lousy crook. I've got a real profession."

"What is it?"

"I'm a wrestler, kid, and I ain't no slouch at it, either."

For a moment Dorothy paled. For some reason she seemed taken aback.

"What's the matter?" he asked.

Dorothy straightened her lithe figure.

"Not a thing," she shrugged. Then musingly, "So you're a wrestler, eh?"

"Sure--what did yer think I was--a gigolo?"

Dorothy giggled. "Know this hold?" she asked casually.

And then a startling thing occurred--especially startling to the unsuspecting Mike. There was a flash of brown-sweatered arms, a swirl of darker brown hair and Mike felt himself gripped by one elbow and the side of his neck. He knew the hold, had practiced it in gymnasium, but not for some years. To be seized violently thus aroused the man and it brought an instinctive muscular reaction which was assisted by a stab of pain as Dorothy's thumb sank upon the nerve which is called the "funny bone."

Yes, Mike knew the hold, and how to break it and recover; so as Dorothy swirled him backward onto the table with uncanny strength, he pivoted. Then, clutching her under her arms, he clasped his hands just beneath her shoulder blades, bearing downward with his head against her chest. It was a back-breaking grip, but her slender form twisted in his arms as though he had been trying to hold a revolving shaft. An arm slipped over his shoulder, a hand fastened on his wrist and began to tug it slowly upward with the deliberate strength of a low-geared safe hoist. Then the other hand, stealing around him, encircled the middle finger of his clasped hand and began to force it back--a jiu jitsu trick. If he resisted, the finger would be broken. To release his clasp would mean a probable dislocation of the other arm.

Mike realized that he had to do not only with a phenomenally strong girl, but with a skilled and practiced exponent of Oriental wrestling tricks. He was by no means ignorant of this school, and countered the attack in the proper technical way--with utter relaxation for the moment--a supple yielding, followed by a swift offensive. Though he was broader of shoulder and heavier, the two were nearly of equal height, possibly of equal strength, but of a different sort. Mike's was slower, but enduring; Dorothy's more that of the panther--swift, high of innervation, but incapable of sustained tension.

Such maneuvers as immediately followed in this curious combat were startling. Mike felt that he was struggling with an opponent far more skilled than himself in jiu jitsu, one trained to the last degree in the scientific application of the levers and fulcrums by which minimum force might achieve maximum results in the straining of ligaments and paralysis of muscles.

And to give him his due, for all his bluff about striking her with the gun on the way up to the house, Mike had some decent instincts beneath his roughness. Whereas he was striving to overcome without permanently injuring the girl, Dorothy had no such qualms. She was fighting with deliberate intention of putting him out of the running, for at least such time as would permit her to carry out her plans for escape.

But for a time Mike's efforts were purely defensive, his object to save himself from disgraceful defeat. What would the gang say if she bested him, a professional wrestler, and make her getaway?

They fell across the table, shattering the crockery, then pitched off on to the floor with Mike underneath.

He writhed over on his face and offered an opening for an elbow twist which was not neglected. There was an instant when he thought the joint would go; but he broke the hold by a headspin at the cost of infinite pain.

Mike had seen the state in which jiu jitsu wrestlers left their vanquished adversaries. Defeat at this girl's hands would probably leave him helpless and crippled for three or four hours. It was not a pleasant thought. He would have to hurt her--hurt her badly, if he could.

He was flat on his face again when suddenly he felt his automatic jerked from its holster and she sprang to her feet.

"If you move an eyelash," said Dorothy, rather breathlessly, "I'll pull the trigger!"

"If you don't drop that rod at once, I'll blow the top of your head off," declared a dispassionate voice from the doorway.

Dorothy dropped the gun.

THE DOCTOR

"And now, Mike," continued the voice, "I'd like to know how you happened to be caught napping."

Dorothy swung round to see a young woman standing in the doorway. With a gasp of consternation she found herself staring down the barrel of a revolver. For a fraction of a second her heart turned over with a sickening thud. Then she recovered her poise.

"Well, I guess *my* trick's over," she exclaimed as cheerfully as possible.

Mike scrambled to his feet, catching up his automatic as he did so. Instead of answering the girl who leaned against the door frame, he stared at Dorothy in a sort of amazed wonder. She met his gaze, a malicious little smile at the corners of her mouth. Aside from a flush on her cheeks, she showed not the slightest sign of the ordeal she had just passed through, nor the exhaustion it must have produced. His eyes fell rather stupidly to her feet. If Mike had not so recently staggered under Dorothy's material weight, he would not have believed her to possess any at all. He drew a deep breath.

"Who taught you jiu jitsu?"

"A woman professional in New York. She had a class--the others went in for it in a lady like way. But I took it up seriously because I thought I might need it some day."

"Have you--ever?" He had dropped his east side argot, she noticed.

"Once or twice--but never like this," she smiled.

"I should hope not." Mike was rather pale. He frowned. "Where do you get your appalling strength?"

"Heredit--and training. I come by it honestly. It's not so extraordinary as some people seem to think." Her smile widened. "My father is the strongest man I've ever known. Although you'd never guess it by looking at him. He can do all sorts of stunts. He's trained me--running, boxing, fencing, swimming--"

"I'll say he has! I wouldn't have believed it possible--and you only a kid!"

Dorothy nodded and looked at him with a curious light in her gray eyes.

"Perhaps I'm not so strong as you think--I know a little more about Oriental wrestling than you do, that's all."

"Yes, that's all!" said the woman by the doorway in a mocking tone. She stepped across the threshold and came toward them. "Go over there and sit down." She motioned Dorothy to a chair. "And not another peep out of you--understand?" Her eyes gleamed at Dorothy through narrowed lids with a light more metallic than the reflection from the barrel of her automatic. It was a strange look--combined of ruthlessness and malicious amusement.

"Interesting--very interesting, indeed!"

She turned to Mike, as Dorothy obeyed her and sat down.

"And now that you and your little lady friend have finished your heart-to-heart, perhaps you'll tell me what it's all about--why I find you flat on the floor covered by her gun?"

"Jealous, Sadie?" Mike's tone was tantalizing.

"You *fool!*"

She took a step forward. The expression on her face underwent a startling change. Mockery gave way to an exasperated ferocity. Her eyes opened to their full size. Then the volcano of her wrath erupted. Words poured forth with the sharp regularity of a riveting hammer. Mike was given a description of his characteristics, moral, mental and physical, that brought the angry blood to his forehead.

Whereupon he retorted in like spirit and soon they were going it hammer and tongs, while the fury on Sadie's face froze into livid hate.

It was a wicked face, yet beautiful, Dorothy thought as she watched from her chair in the corner; a strangely beautiful face beneath a coiled crown of glorious red hair. But its beauty was distorted, devilish. Her lips were scarlet, slightly parted, showing the double rim of her even teeth as she hurled insult after insult at the man before her. Like some evil goddess, she stood motionless, the rise and fall of her bosom the only token of the deadly emotion she felt as her even tones poured forth vituperation.

Presently Dorothy's ears caught the sound of footsteps thumping on the porch. The lame man limped into the room and sized up the situation at a glance.

"Stop that scapping, you two!" he commanded. "Stop it, Sadie! Do you hear me? Stop it at once!"

The red-haired girl glared at him, but she obeyed. There was a dangerous finality in his tone that debarred argument. She swept over to the table, and deliberately turning her back upon the others, poured herself a cup of coffee.

"Mike!" barked the Italian. "Go out and give the others a hand. We've got a couple of invalids with us. I've already administered first aid, but they will have to be carried upstairs and put to bed. Hustle, now!"

Mike disappeared through the door without a word. This little lame person seemed to brook no opposition. He was probably the brain and the leader of this gang, thought Dorothy--but he was speaking to her now.

"Good evening again, Miss Dixon! I felt somehow certain we were fated to meet a third time tonight!" His glance snapped from her to Sadie and back again. "Sorry we had to 'bag' you, as it were--hope you suffered no great inconvenience?"

"Oh, I'm all right," she replied coolly.

"But I notice that your sweater is torn in several places. You will excuse me?--but you look rather ruffled. I got the impression that you and the young lady who is at present drinking coffee might have had--a difference of opinion, shall we say?"

"No. These tears in my sweater were caused by accident. Miss Martinelli had nothing to do with it."

"So you know her name! But, of course you would. That bicarbonate of soda proved a boomerang. Too bad she really needed it at the time. It's a lesson to us, to remember that servant girls are likely to be lazy."

"Oh, it wasn't Lizzie's fault," smiled Dorothy. "I caught her before she had had time to wash the glass, that's all."

"You are a very clever young woman."

"Well, I don't know about that--" she drawled. Then she left her chair and took a step toward him. "Tell me--is Bill Bolton very badly hurt?"

"Just a bit frazzled, that's all." Her aviation instructor limped into the room. His coat was gone and his soft shirt, once white, hung from his shoulders in dirty, tattered streamers. One eye, half-closed, was rapidly turning black. Blood streaked his cheeks. Just above his left knee the trouser-leg had been cut away and a blood-soaked bandage was visible. Dorothy saw that his wrists were handcuffed behind his back. At his elbow, a man whose jaw was queerly twisted to one side, stood guard with drawn revolver.

The lame man grinned. "Here's your young friend now. You can take him in the kitchen if you like and wash him off a bit. I'll come in later with some bandages. You'll find matches and a lamp on a shelf just inside the door.--Stick that gun in your pocket, Tony," he added to his henchman. "Come over here. Now that we've proper light, I'll snap that jaw of yours back into place."

Dorothy put an arm about Bill without speaking and led him slowly into the dark room. Then as her hand groped for matches on the shelf, there came a loud click from the other room, followed by a scream of anguish. Dorothy felt her hair rise on the back of her neck. There was a momentary silence, then low, breathless moans.

"What is it, Bill?" she whispered fearfully. "What's happened?"

Bill chuckled. "Tony's dislocated jaw is back in place, now, that's all. Too bad I didn't knock it clean off while I was about it. He's the bird who knifed me a while ago. No fault of his that he only got me in the leg, either. I'm glad to hear he's getting his, now."

"Goodness--" Dorothy found the matches at last and struck one. "Here I stand--and you're badly hurt--don't say you aren't--I know it. Where's that lamp? He said it was on the shelf. It isn't. There it is on the table. *Dash*--there goes the match!"

"Take it easy, kid!"

"Oh, I'm all right. That man's scream kind of set my teeth on edge."

She struck another match, then lit the lamp and carried it to a dresser by the sink.

"Come over here and sit down," she said, drawing out a chair. "I want to swab out that cut in your leg. The rag is filthy--" She pulled out the drawer in the dresser. "Here's luck! Towels--clean ones! Who'd have thought it!"

With deft fingers she unfastened his bandage, then cleaned the wound with fresh water from the pump, using every precaution not to hurt him.

"You're certainly good at this kind of thing," was Bill's sincere tribute as she turned her attention to the bruised cut on his head.

"Part of my high school course, you know. I'm better at this than at Latin," she admitted with a smile. "Tell me what happened in the woods after I got scragged and Mike carted me up here?"

"Who's Mike?"

"I'll tell you about him in a minute. Get along with your story first."

"Not much of a story. I didn't last long enough to make it interesting."

"Tell me about it, anyway."

"Well--I heard you yell and half turned when Tony and another lad jumped me. You know what happened to Tony--"

"Yes, but the shot right afterward? Oh, Bill, I was scared silly they'd killed you! Whose gun was that?"

"Mine. I'd got my gat loose by that time and drilled him through the shoulder. It turned out later that he tripped over a log when he fell, came down with his leg under him and snapped the bone. When I learned the horrid truth, I wept!"

"I'll bet you did! Couldn't you break away then?"

"I could not. Several others had joined the rough-house by that time. For a while--not very long--we played a lively little game of tag, blind-man's-buff, postoffice, dilly-dilly-come-and-be-killed, with me as dilly, until another chap jumped out of a Ford on to the middle of my back and rubbed my face in the cool, wet soil! At that bright moment old Limpy clinched these handcuffs on my wrists and read me a lecture on the error of my ways.

"He's a physician when he isn't bank-robbing, I think. Anyway, the gang call him 'Doctor.' He seems to be running the show. Not such a bad lad if he could be made over again. Tony, you must know, has developed an almost uncontrollable penchant for sheathing his pigsticker in my carcass once more. Strangely enough, I can't see it Tony's way. And fortunately for me, neither can the Doctor! Now, young lady, if you're finished squeezing cold water into my sore eye, I'll sing the doxology!"

Dorothy giggled. "Aren't you funny! I don't believe more than half of that tale is true. I'll wager things were a whole lot worse than you've painted them, sir!"

"Well, you've proved to be a good little guesser quite often--what I'm interested in is what happened to you."

Dorothy told him.

"Nice work!" Bill complimented her as she finished talking. "I know a few jiu jitsu holds, but you must be a wonder at it. It's too bad Staten Island Sadie had to butt in and spoil your show. The more I see of that lady, the less I like her. She was in the woods when the gang jumped us--barged off in a huff later, because the Doc wouldn't let her croak me then and there. She's a nice little playmate. Every one of this gang is a cold-blooded thug--but she's a fiend! But, to tell the honest truth, it's our lame friend who worries me most."

"Yes," agreed Dorothy. "That suave manner of his gives me the creeps!"

"So sorry--" purred the Doctor's voice directly behind them. "But if I were in your position, my young friends, I should undoubtedly be worried, too."

Bill and Dorothy swung round to see him coming toward them. In his hand he carried a small, black bag.

"How is our invalid, nurse?" he inquired, feigning ignorance of their startled surprise, and placing his satchel on the table. "Those who live by the sword--but you are familiar with the quotation, I'm sure?"

Opening the bag, he produced bandages, adhesive tape, a pair of surgical scissors and a large tube of salve.

"Lay these out, so I can reach them easily, please," he ordered as he unwrapped the temporary bandage Dorothy had bound about Bill's leg.

"Ah! I see you have cleansed the wound, but it is safer to be more thorough. Hand me one of the swabs you will find wrapped in cellophane in the bag, please. Strange how the professional spirit will dominate--even though the patient's life may not be a long one!" He glanced smilingly at Dorothy.

"Don't tell me the knife was poisoned?" she cried in horror.

"Hardly anything so melodramatic, my dear. You don't quite grasp my meaning."

"He means," said Bill grimly, "that after he has had the fun of patching me up, I'm to be taken for a ride. But don't let him bluff you. He's only trying to scare us."

"Too much knowledge is dangerous at times--entirely too dangerous," returned the lame man. "Hand me another swab, nurse. But you put it rather crudely, young man--and I am perfectly in earnest, I assure you."

"Oh, you couldn't do *that!*" Dorothy blenched and her hand shook as she passed him the swab.

"Well, you see, it is not entirely up to me," he replied, carefully cleaning the wound. "The matter of your friend's future, shall I say?--as well as your own, will have to be put to vote presently. Of course, if Miss Martinelli has her way--but why anticipate the unpleasant?"

To Dorothy's surprise, Bill chuckled.

"They hang in this state, for murder," he remarked coolly. "It's a nasty death, I've heard. What's more, Doctor, a man of your mentality does not deliberately stick his head into a noose!"

"Perhaps not, my young friend. But you forget that in order to prove murder, there must be a body--or bodies, as the case may be." The Doctor looked up at Bill and smiled again.



STATEN ISLAND SADIE HAS HER WAY

"I believe that I have done all that is necessary," said the Doctor after a few minutes--"and I think the patient will be more comfortable now." Then, with a sardonic gleam in his eye, he added, "Also, I have enjoyed our conversation very much!"

He walked to the sink where he washed his hands and dried them carefully on a clean towel.

"And so, if you young people are quite ready, we'll adjourn for that voting contest I mentioned a little while ago."

He motioned them to precede him, and brought up the rear with his bag as Dorothy helped Bill limp into the front room.

Politely, the Doctor placed chairs for them and bade them be seated. Never once had this black-eyed little man's manner betokened anything but courteous consideration. But his suavity troubled Dorothy far more than bluster would have done. She sensed the venom behind his smooth tones, the purring growl of the tiger before it springs.

Dorothy knew she was losing her nerve. But she looked at Bill and smiled bravely as they sat down.

Bill smiled back at her then shifted his glance with hers to the table, where the members of the gang were seated. The little Doctor headed the board, the others at the side facing the room. Next to the lame man sat the red-haired girl; then came Mike, Tony, who was nursing his jaw, Johnny, the man who had fetched the wheelbarrow, and another whom Dorothy had not seen before. Tony, she fancied, had played the part of chauffeur at the bank.

Then Bill broke into the low-voiced conversation that was going on at the table.

"How about unlocking these handcuffs, Doctor?"

The Doctor shook his head. "No, no, my young friend. Even with your honorable wounds of combat, you are far too active for us to take any chances."

"But what could I do? You are six to one, counting Miss Martinelli--and all armed," insisted Bill. "These things are darned uncomfortable."

Tony shot him a deadly glance. "I'm glad to hear it," he muttered through clenched teeth. "You'll be a lot more uncomfortable by the time I finish with you."

"Shut up, you two!" snapped Sadie. "Now, Dad," she went on in a different tone, addressing the Doctor, "let's finish this business. We can't sit here gabbing all night."

"That's what I say!" This from Johnny. "Bump off the pair of 'em--they know too much. Then we can divvy up and be on our way!"

"You forget that it is our custom to put such matters to vote," interposed the Doctor. "Two of our company are upstairs and unable to attend. Also, another member is expected at any time now. Without his help our little *coup* would have been extremely difficult."

"Chuck and Pete are too ill to vote," argued Miss Martinelli. "As for Perkins--that sap is scared to death! I doubt if he shows up at all."

"Oh, he wants his share," declared the Doctor. "He'll come. We shall give him five minutes--and then continue our business."

He tapped a cigarette on the back of his gold case, struck a match and lounged back in his chair, inhaling the aromatic smoke with evident enjoyment.

Dorothy's eyes met Bill's in astonishment.

He smiled but said nothing.

It was interesting enough that Sadie should turn out to be the Doctor's daughter. But the news that Harry Perkins, her father's trusted lieutenant at the bank, was mixed up in this robbery was simply dumfounding to Dorothy. That was how things had been made easy for the gang--that was how they knew just when Mrs. Hamberfield's necklace would be in her deposit box. And another thing--Perkins' home was on the Marvin Ridge Road, just beyond the Mayo place where the Pen and Pencil Club were to meet! The Doctor had been coming from the Perkins' house when she and Billy had met his car. And that explained the absence of road oil on the Packard's tires!

Johnny's voice interrupted her train of thought.

"How are we goin' to make our getaway tonight with them two lads down and out upstairs?" he grumbled. "Our plan was to separate after we'd divvied up the loot--but them fellers can't be moved."

"Supposing you stay and look after them--" derided Sadie. "When we've made the divvy, as you call it, this bunch breaks up for the time being. We all go our own sweet ways. It's a case of each for himself. If you want to stick here and nurse those boobs upstairs, nobody's going to stop you."

"Not me! I don't know nothin' about--"

"Then keep your mouth shut. Whatever we do, we'll decide later on. How about the time, Dad?"

"Time's up," decided the Doctor with a glance at his watch. "We'll wait no longer for Mr. Perkins."

Now, concerning our two young friends who were so unwise as to join us tonight--what is your pleasure?"

"Bump them off, of course, as Johnny so prettily puts it," yawned Sadie languidly. "I'll attend to the job, if the rest of you are squeamish."

"We will put it to vote," announced the Doctor. "Those in favor will raise their right hands and say 'aye'."

Five hands, including his own, sprang into the air.

"Contraries, 'no'."

"No," said Mike in a firm voice, holding up his right hand.

"The ayes have it," declared the Doctor dispassionately.

"What's the matter with you, Mike?" sneered Sadie. "Got a crush on the girl?"

"No," retorted Mike. "Just trying to stop you from making an even bigger fool of yourself than you are usually!"

"I'm afraid you'll have to pipe down, Mike." The Doctor's eyes gleamed balefully. "Sentence has been passed on Miss Dixon and Mr. Bolton--and that is all there is to it."

"That's where you're dead wrong."

"What do you mean? Don't you realize that these two know too much about us to permit them to live?"

"Have I said they didn't? But Sadie should not be allowed to be their executioner."

"Oh--aren't you considerate!" Sadie's tone was pregnant with sarcasm. "Want the job yourself?"

"Not particularly--none of us should do it."

"Who then, may I ask?"

"Why, Perkins, of course."

"You're crazy! He hasn't the nerve."

"Maybe not--make him do it anyway."

It was the lame man's turn to take a hand. "And why should Mr. Harry Perkins be so entrusted?"

"To keep his mouth shut."

"I'm afraid I don't understand you."

"And I didn't think you could be so dense. Look here, Doctor. I haven't been one of your crowd long, but I'd never have joined up at all if I'd known I was getting in with such a bunch of nitwits!"

"You are forgetting yourself, I think," the Doctor's tone was cutting.

"No. I ain't. Listen--Perkins only came into this because he was up against it proper. How you found out he had speculated, first with his own money and then with the bank's, is none of my affair. What I do know is that when Wall Street put him into a tight place, you put up the extra margin with his brokers upon an assurance from him that he would do--just what he's done!"

"You are very well informed, Mike. And what then?"

"Just this: the bank has been robbed, but it was a crude job at best. Why the bulls haven't fastened on Perkins already on account of that time-lock business, is beyond me. Then, for once in your long and successful career, you were careless, Doctor. You allowed your paternal feeling to out-weigh your natural caution. The result is that the cops got Sadie's fingerprints and a description of you, of her and of Tony. I am simply bringing all this up to show you that we are not out of the mess yet--not by a long shot."

"In other words, you think we have a fifty-fifty chance with the police?"

"Better than that, perhaps. I think, though, that if we do get nailed, we should stop Perkins from blabbing--and stop him effectually."

"I see," said Sadie. "Let him bump off the pair over there--then take him for a ride?"

"Be still, carissima!" Doctor Martinelli was interested. "I see what Mike is driving at. He fears that if things should by chance go wrongly, Harry Perkins would try to save his precious skin by turning state's evidence. And that if he were forced to--er--place these two young people where they will do the least harm, Mr. Perkins will not be in a position himself to turn state's evidence--that is, of course, should it become necessary. That is your reason for not voting with the rest of us?"

"It is, Doctor. Do you wish to vote on it again?"

"Not necessarily. I consider your plan adequate."

"But why make the biggest mistake--of murdering us?" Bill entered the conversation.

Dorothy leaned toward him. "It's no use, Bill," she whispered steadily. "They've made up their minds--and you heard what the Doctor said in the other room!"

Bill did not attempt to reply, for Doctor Martinelli was speaking again.

"And why, in your opinion, are we making a mistake in putting you and Miss Dixon out of the running?" he inquired affably. "Take your time, young man, answer carefully. We are in no hurry--"

until Mr. Harry Perkins arrives."

"He won't arrive," rejoined Bill. "The authorities have got him by this time."

"Bluff!" shot out Sadie and turned fiercely on her father. "What's the use of all this?" she cried. "It makes me sick. Why do you stand for it?"

"Because he knows Bill *isn't* bluffing!" Dorothy's raised voice silenced the woman. "We knew that you had been visiting Harry Perkins this evening, Doctor. And we passed word to the police on our way through New Canaan. The only reason you weren't arrested on the way up is because they want to catch the whole gang together. If you hadn't shown up here, the rest of your people might have got wise and left before the police could make arrangements to surround the place."

"But, you see, my dear," said the Doctor, "I wasn't visiting Mr. Perkins this evening. I had just motored up from the Post Road, and--ah--points east, when I ran into you and your friend Bill."

Dorothy laughed. "Oh, no, you hadn't, Doctor. The road beyond Perkins' place was freshly oiled. There was no sign of oil on your car."

"She got you that time, Doc!" exclaimed Mike. "D'you mind saying why you were foolish enough to drop in on Perkins and put us up a tree this way?"

Doctor Martinelli was irritated. "Because the safest place to park that loot was in Perkins' house," he snapped, "and as he refused to bring it up here himself, I had to fetch it."

"Then all I can say is that you and Sadie have made a pretty mess of things."

"Is that so?" retorted the red-haired young woman. "Was it *my* fault that that fellow over there landed his plane on the lake? That was before the New Canaan deal. He had nothing at all to go on then!"

"That's where you're wrong," broke in Bill. "Your hair and those beach pajamas make a combination not easily forgotten. You wore them once too often, Miss Martinelli."

"And you seem to forget," added Dorothy, "that you've been finger-printed both in this country and in England. The police know all about you and your father and Tony. They probably have the records of the rest of your gang. If anything happens to Bill or myself, you are bound to pay the penalty."

"Say, Doc!" Johnny's excited voice sounded shrilly, "I don't like this--not a little bit I don't. Tie up that pair and let's vamoose. Them cops is likely to be here any minute. I'm tired of all this fool talk. Come on--this place is gettin' too hot fer me!"

Mike got to his feet. "I don't stir from this place until I get my share of the divvy," he declared firmly. "What's the matter with you, Johnny? If Doc lights out with the bag full of kale, it ain't likely the rest of us will ever get what's coming to us."

"But I can't afford to get pinched--" Johnny faltered. "Not after that Jersey City job, I can't. It means the hot seat for me." The gangster shivered and moistened his lips.

"It is my candid opinion that you are all exciting yourselves unnecessarily." The Doctor's voice betrayed no emotion whatsoever. "Miss Dixon and Mr. Bolton are clever young people--but not quite clever enough. They're throwing a gigantic bluff to save their lives. The police won't be here tonight. Why? Simply because if they knew anything about this house, we would have been raided long before this. Those two haven't told the police or anyone else a thing about it. They wanted to pull off their job all by themselves!"

"And how, may I ask, do you figure that?" Bill endeavored to make his tone sarcastic.

"For this reason: if you had reported what you had learned--and guessed--the authorities would never have permitted you to come here tonight. And this proves it!"

There was a light step on the porch and Harry Perkins came in through the open door.

WHAT HAPPENED IN THE WINE CELLAR

"Sorry to be so late," greeted the bank's cashier. "My car broke down. I've had to walk five miles, at least--" He broke off, catching sight of Dorothy and Bill for the first time.

"Hello!" he exclaimed, "what are you two doing here?"

"They are waiting for you to bump them off," replied Sadie with a sneer.

"Why, what do you mean?" Perkins gazed breathlessly around the room.

"Just what I said. You are going to stop their mouths for good--and do it right now. We've been shilly-shallying over this business long enough!"

Perkins' glance took in the others seated at the table.

"Has she gone nuts?" he asked.

"We have decided that you are to do what my daughter has just mentioned," said the Doctor smoothly.

"And I," retorted Perkins angrily, "tell you here and now that I will be no party to murder!"

Sadie drew her revolver.

"Well--if he won't, I will!" she began when her wrist was caught in a grip of steel, then twisted up and backward.

"Drop it, little one--drop it--or I'll break your arm," said Mike.

Sadie shrieked with pain, but she dropt her revolver and Mike pocketed it.

"I'll get you for that!" she screamed.

Her father leaned forward in his chair. "Shut up, you idiot!" he said coldly and deliberately slapped her across the mouth with his open hand. "We've had enough from you for one evening. Mike was perfectly right to stop you. Perkins is going to do this job, and you know *why* he is going to do it. I'll have no more argument from you. Keep still now, until you have my permission to speak."

"But I tell you I'll have nothing to do with it," repeated Perkins, and attempted to light with trembling fingers the half-burned cigar he was chewing.

Doctor Martinelli swung round in his chair. "You'll do as you're told," he said through clenched teeth. "A little persuasion of the kind I have in mind has been known to make braver men than you change their opinions, Mr. Harry Perkins!" He glared at the cashier, who dropped his eyes--and the cigar--at one and the same moment.

"That's the way, Doc," applauded Mike, getting to his feet. "We've been sittin' round this table so long we're all getting stale. What we need's a little excitement."

He pointed to Dorothy and Bill.

"I'll take these two down stairs and stick them in the old wine cellar. They'll keep fine and dandy down there. Later, when Mr. Perkins sees reason he can run down and finish them off. While I'm gone, Johnny, you beat it out to the woodshed and fetch in a length of garden hose." He guffawed--"I guess you know that trick--the bulls have made it pretty popular?"

The lame man smiled and nodded.

"O.K. Doc?"

"It's a good plan, Mike. Go ahead with it."

Mike took a flashlight from his pocket and beckoned to the prisoners.

Sadie pushed back her chair and jumped up. "Tie that girl or she'll get away!" she ordered.

"Pipe down!" thundered the gangster and there was an ugly gleam in his eyes as he glared at her. "Give me any more of your lip, Sadie, and you'll take a trip downstairs yourself. Some day when you ain't got a thing to do fer a couple of weeks, try gettin' outa that place with the door locked. Run along now--murder yourself, if you have to--you red-headed bag of hot wind!"

He turned his back on the furious woman and motioned Bill and Dorothy to walk before him into the kitchen.

"Well, of all the nerve--" Dorothy heard Sadie cry sharply as Harry Perkins broke in with--"Look here, Doctor Martinelli, do you really mean to--"

Mike shut the door, cutting the argument in the front room to a mere mumble of voices.

"Down those stairs to the right and then straight ahead, you two," he directed, pointing the way with his flashlight--"No tricks, either, unless you want your buddie hurt worse than he is now, Miss Wildcat!"

Dorothy, with her arm about Bill's shoulders, stopped at the head of the cellar stairs.

"I think you told me you were getting two thousand dollars for your share in the New Canaan robbery," she murmured.

"That's right--a coupla grand," he acknowledged. "Not much, but when I made the deal, I wasn't as

strong with Doc as I am now."

"If you let us go, my father will pay you ten thousand!"

"Nothing doing!"

"And I promise you he'll use his influence in your behalf, as well. It seems to me a mighty easy way to make a lot of money--"

Mike shrugged his shoulders.

"Maybe it is," he admitted. "But then you see, I've never double-crossed a pal yet, and I'm not going to start at this late day. Cut the chatter now--there's nothing doing."

"You won't regret it, Mike."

The door behind them opened slowly, revealing Doctor Martinelli's slight figure.

"My judgment of human nature is rarely at fault," the little man went on rather pompously. "I believed I could trust you--now I know it. There's a full share coming to you on this deal, Mike. Cut along now, but hurry back. As soon as you've locked them up, I'll need your help with Perkins."

The door closed once more and Mike waved toward the gaping black of the cellar stairs.

"You heard what Doc said--down you go!"

"Over there to the left," he directed when his two prisoners reached the bottom and Dorothy helped Billy to hobble across the damp, earthen floor, in the shifting rays of Mike's torch.

Ahead in the wall of native stone that formed the foundation of the house, they could see a door of heavy wood, at least six inches thick. Mike pushed it fully open. For a moment Dorothy thought of jumping him, but now she saw he carried a revolver in his free hand.

"In you go!" he said roughly, elbowing them over the threshold. But instead of locking them in, he stepped over the sill and gently pulled the door shut behind him.

Bill, anticipating the end, stepped between Dorothy and their captor.

"Let her go, Mike. Her father and mine will give you anything you ask. Shoot me if you must--but let her go. Use two shots, and the others will think--tell them--"

"Quiet, please," whispered Mike fiercely, and Dorothy started, for he spoke now with the voice of a well bred Englishman.

"Neither of you will be shot tonight, if you do as I tell you. Here--take this automatic, Miss Dixon. And listen carefully, both of you. I've only a minute. You'll find a few useful articles under the pile of sacking in that far corner," he went on, pointing into the gloom behind them. "Then, get out of the window as quickly as you can--the bars are sawn through. Your car is still parked where you left it. Go straight home. That, I think, will be all at present."

Bill and Dorothy stared at him in wide-eyed amazement.

"Who are you, anyway?" the girl whispered, peering up at him.

"To ease your minds," he smiled, "I'm not exactly what I pretend to be. And I want to apologize to you, Miss Dixon, for the exceedingly crude game I was forced to play with you. The Doctor had his suspicions of me, until just a few moments ago, I believe, and he has had us watched ever since I brought you here. But now he has proved his judgment to be sound--" he chuckled to himself--"and has ceased his strict surveillance."

He paused a moment then went on, more seriously. "My name is Michael Conway. I am a detective-inspector in the Criminal Investigation Department of New Scotland Yard. I've trailed certain members of the Martinelli gang all the way from London. My plans seem to have miscarried this evening; otherwise, you need not have been put to all this inconvenience. Remember that the house has ears, and be as quiet as possible. Good night--and good luck!"

The door swung shut behind him. They heard him turn the key in the lock and he was gone.

"Gee Whiz!" muttered Bill, "and I thought--"

"Sh--Bill!" cautioned Dorothy. "Never mind now. Stand where you are, or you'll break your neck in this darkness."

Her voice came from farther off now. He knew she was feeling her way across the room toward the corner.

Presently a light appeared and she spoke again.

"I've found the things," she told Bill. "Besides this flash, there's another automatic, a small ax, and a chisel."

"Thank heaven for that," said Bill. "Now I've a chance of getting these handcuffs off!"

"But we can't do it in here," Dorothy objected. "Remember what Mike said about making a noise. We'll have to wait till we get outside. There's the window. It's going to be a tight squeeze."

Her light showed them they were standing in a narrow room, walled like the cellar in native stone. Along the sides, piled one on top of the other were wine casks, which proved to be empty. The damp air was heavy with the fumes of evaporating lees. High to one side was a small barred window.

"Lean against this barrel, so it won't slip," whispered Dorothy, and clambered up to the window. "Yes, the bars are loose!"

She removed the short lengths of rusty iron from the open frame and carefully laid them on the ground outside.

"Now the paraphernalia--" She placed ax, chisel and revolver beside the bars on the grass and descended to Bill's side.

"Guess I'll have to go first," observed Bill. "We'll never make it, otherwise. Give me a boost, will you?"

They were both breathless and nearly exhausted by the time Bill had been pushed up and out of the window. Dorothy was so tired it took every ounce of her waning strength to drag herself through the narrow aperture after him. They rested for some minutes in the long, dewy grass, gathering strength and courage for the waiting ordeal.

As soon as they began to move away from the house, Dorothy realized that Bill was near collapse. Even with her supporting arm, he lurched and stumbled through the tangled undergrowth.

"It's that old hole in my leg," he grumbled in answer to her question. "It's opened up again--been bleeding pretty freely. You'd better leave me here."

He sank wearily to the ground behind a cluster of elder bushes, about two hundred yards from the house, the weight of his body pulling Dorothy to her knees beside him.

"I'll do nothing of the kind!" she whispered fiercely.

"But you must--I can't go any further," his voice trailed off weakly.

With a quick movement she felt for his wound in the darkness and tightened the bandage.

"We'll wait here till you're strong enough to walk, that's all. If I try to run the car up here, they'll hear it from the house. There's no use to try to cut off your handcuffs, either. The least sound will bring that gang down on us."

"Not the car--" he mumbled. "The amphibian--beat it for the Loening--and bring help."

Dorothy bit her lip. With Bill delirious there was nothing she could do but remain with him.

"That's all right," she said, trying to calm him--"We'll stay here till you feel stronger, Bill. Then I'll help you down to the car."

Bill had been lying on his side, his head pillowed on her knees. Now he wriggled into a sitting position.

"I'm pretty well all in," he admitted, "but I'm not off my head--not yet--if that's what you're thinking--Didn't I tell you about the amphibian?"

"You certainly did not--" Dorothy's tone was relieved, yet excited.

"Well, here's the dope, then. She's parked in the next valley--over that hill behind the house. You'll find her under the trees at the edge of a wood lot. I flew up here several nights ago. Wanted a means of quick getaway, if it became necessary. Frank met me over there and drove me home. It's a rotten landing place. You'll find it worse for the take off. You'll be taking an awful chance to do it."

Dorothy got to her feet. "You certainly are the one and only life-saver," she breathed joyfully. "Every time we get really up against it--you've a plane up your sleeve or something. Don't worry--I'll fly it all right!"

"Hop it for Danbury, then. When you get there, land in the fair grounds. Phone the police and tell them to run down in a car and that you'll fly them back here. You can land on the lake. The bus has a searchlight--"

He broke off as the sharp detonation of an automatic came from the direction of the house. This was followed by shouts and the sound of a scuffle. Presently all was quiet once more.

"Something's up!" said Dorothy.

Bill nodded gravely. "I wonder if they haven't found we're not in the wine cellar--if they've charged Mike Conway with our escape?"

"Well, I'm going over to see."

"No, you're not--I'll go."

But by the time Bill had struggled to his feet, Dorothy had run to the house and was peering between the shutters of the side window. She stood there for a moment, then ran back to him.

"The Doctor has been shot," she gasped. "Not badly hurt, I think--evidently took it in the shoulder. But they've got Mike. He's tied hand and foot and bound to a chair!"

"That's bad," said Bill slowly.

"It's awful! They'll surely shoot him before I can get the police here!"

Bill hobbled back toward the shelter of the bushes with Dorothy's arm about his waist.

"Some break!" he said disgustedly, as he sank to the ground. "I'm out of the running and you can't hold up that bunch single handed--"

"I can try it though, Bill."

"Not if I have anything to say, you won't. There are too many of 'em--it's impossible. But what we're going to do now, I haven't the slightest idea!"

THE LOENING

"One thing is clear--" said Dorothy firmly--"and that is, we can't let Michael Conway be butchered by that band of cut-throats. He saved our lives--we've got to save his."

Bill, his head in his hands, did not reply.

"If you were only in better shape so I could get those handcuffs off--and if there weren't so many of them in the house," she went on, speaking her thoughts aloud, "one of us might be able to hold them up from the window while the other went round through the door and took their guns away. But we can't afford to wait till you can walk alone and I can free your hands. What's to become of Mr. Conway, in the meantime? Oh, Bill, you're generally so fertile with ideas--*can't* you think of any thing?"

Bill lay motionless, and still did not answer.

Dorothy stooped over him.

"Bill! Bill!" she called in a tense whisper. Then, daring greatly, she flashed her light on his face, held it there for an instant, then snapped it off.

"Down and out, poor chap," was her summing up after a glimpse of his closed eyes and dead white features. "Loss of blood, probably. He'll come round after while--but when?"

Her heart sank. For several minutes she knelt beside his quiet form, lost in thought. Then she began to act.

"Sorry, Bill, old thing, but I've got to leave you. It's the only way." Her murmured tones were muffled by the sweater she pulled over her head. Stripping free her arms, she rolled it in a ball and placed the soft pillow beneath Bill's head. She gave him a little pat, then started off toward the hill back of the house.

Dorothy crossed the field beyond the farm's overgrown orchard in darkness. It was not until she reached the woods at the foot of the hill that she dared to snap on her flashlight.

Even with its help the climb was no sinecure. The hillside, steep as a church roof and densely wooded, was, moreover, thick with underbrush, which hindered her progress. Rocky outcroppings and huge boulders made frequent detours necessary.

By the time she struggled to the top she was winded and pretty well done up. Her vitality had suffered considerably from strain and worry and violent exercise during the course of the evening. She was quite ready to drop down and have a good cry, and to admit to herself right then that she was beaten. Only the knowledge that a life, possibly two, hung upon her efforts, kept her going. Stopping only long enough to tie a broken shoelace, she hurried over the crest of the hill and plunged down the farther side.

Here, her progress became even more difficult, for she floundered into a berry patch whose thorns tore her clothing and badly scratched her face and hands. Determinedly, she pushed her way through, gritting her teeth in pain.

Presently, after several bad falls over hidden rocks and tree stumps, she found herself on a narrow, grass-grown wood road at the foot of the hill. So far as she could see, the trail wound along the middle of the valley. But she hadn't the faintest idea in which direction lay the field (Bill had called it a wood lot) where the *Loening* was hidden.

Dorothy was totally at a loss. *Why* hadn't she taken more precise directions before tramping over here? This trail *must* lead to the wood lot or near it. Bill said Frank had driven there in the car....

"What a fool I am!" she exclaimed suddenly to the night at large and pointed her flashlight toward the ground at her feet.

There were the tire marks of a car, plain enough. Brewster and Danbury lay far to the left beyond the mouth of this valley which paralleled that of the gang's headquarters. Therefore, Bill's car must have come up the trail from the left. The tracks kept on up the road to her left--the wood lot must be in that direction.

As she trudged on, watching carefully for any deviation of the tire marks, she forgot her weariness for the time being. The winding road ended and she saw an open space ahead. It must be the wood lot. Hadn't Bill said it was the only possible landing place in the valley!

Dorothy hurried across the field, through a tangle of knee-high grasses and wild flowers. She pointed her light higher now and tried to pierce the black of the night for a glimpse of the plane. Then she saw it parked at the forest's edge, directly ahead, and sprang forward with a delighted cry.

As she came close, she saw that it faced the open lot, and silently thanked Bill for his foresight. With a plane the size of the amphibian it would have been impossible to swing round the tail unassisted.

Her preparations for this flight would probably not have met with her instructor's approval. But knowing that time was more important than detail, she cut them to a minimum.

A quick glance at the retractable landing gear sufficed to satisfy her that the wheels were securely

blocked. Then she sprang aboard and gave the engine a short ground test. It was acting splendidly and she shut it off almost directly.

A hurried trip aft to the cabin and she came back to the pilot's cockpit, dragging the plane's machine gun, which, after some trouble, she managed to set up on its tripod which she fastened to cleats in the decking.

Certain now that the gun was secure, she adjusted the ammunition belt as Bill had instructed her. Then she raced aft again and overside. When she returned, she brought the wheel blocks with her. These she dropped in the cabin, saw to it that the door was properly fastened, then took her place at the controls forward.

The night was overcast and starless; the ceiling unusually low, and so far as she could judge there was not the slightest breath of wind. She switched on the plane's searchlight and started the engine.

The trees at the far end of the wood lot were uncomfortably near and high. Yet Bill had judged a take off from such a place to be possible, or he would never have parked there.

The big Loening was moving now--rolling drunkenly over the rough ground, yet gaining speed with every foot. She widened her throttle, steadily, fully--at the same time pushing the stick well forward. Then as the amphibian gained still more speed and she felt the tail lift clear, she eased the stick steadily back to neutral.

They were racing over the field now. She gave the elevators a slight upward pressure. The wheels lifted clear, but the trees at the edge of the lot were perilously near. She knew that when a plane leaves the ground its speed is not far above stalling point. And with these trees so close, to stall now would precipitate a bad crash--and failure.

Dorothy, therefore, kept the nose level for an instant or two, a dangerously short instant, she feared. Back came her stick again. The plane was climbing at last but at a frightfully precipitous angle. Would they make it? Would the throbbing engine continue to function under the unaccustomed strain?

Dorothy bit her lip. She eased off slightly as the motor coughed; but pulled the stick back almost immediately.

They were abreast the treetops now.--They were over. But with a margin so small that Dorothy was certain the wheels had brushed the branches.

She eased their angle of ascent, but still continued to climb. Then when she was sure they were well above the crest of the hill, she leveled off and banked to the left.

Once more she leveled off and turned on the electrical mechanism which raised the plane's landing gear.

Below her she could dimly make out the gangster's farmhouse, the lake and the stretch of ground between them. She closed her throttle, pushing the stick forward as she did so, and at the same time applied right aileron and hard right rudder.

As the plane shot downward she neutralized the elevators. Then did likewise with her ailerons as the proper bank was reached. Left aileron and hard left rudder were next applied until the wings became laterally level. Having completed a beautiful half spiral, Dorothy landed the amphibian on the little lake.

Her next move was an unusual one, but on it depended the success or failure of her plan.

With the airplane headed toward the lake's low shore beyond which lay the farmhouse, she turned the switch which propelled the retractable landing gear downward and into the water. Then she opened the throttle for the last time.

There came a bump and a jar. The tail tilted to a dangerous angle as the plane's wheels struck the shallows. Would they mire in the soft ground at the lake's edge she wondered, and cause the big bus to nose over and crash? But no--the plane, after a sickening wrench, rolled free. It glided over the sandy bank and on to the grass.

Shutting off her engine, Dorothy permitted her amphibian steed to come to a stop at the porch steps, its ugly snout poked almost up to the open doorway of the house.

Dorothy had been too busy guiding her bus to pay any attention to the reception accorded her arrival. A shot or two had been fired from the porch and she had caught a glimpse of dark figures silhouetted against the open doorway.

But now, as the slowing wheels struck the steps, the porch was empty. The way was clear for Mike's release. Together they would find Bill and make a clean getaway in the amphibian. What did it matter if the gang made their escape? Her life and the lives of her two friends were all that counted now.

To speed the departing company she turned the Browning into action and sent half a belt of bullets whipping through the door. But Dorothy aimed high. She had no desire to play the part of executioner.

From her place in the cockpit she got a good view of the front room. Mike, the Scotland Yard detective, still sat bound to his chair, but the others were streaking for the back of the house. She could see them tugging at the doors, which for some reason, seemed to give them difficulty of exit. Huddled at the far end of the room, they clamored and struggled to get out of range.



Dorothy stopped firing and Bill Bolton hobbled up the porch steps.

"Jumping Jupiter! girl, you're a wonder!" he applauded. "Hold the Browning on 'em. They can't get away. I locked those doors from the outside. Crawled through the wine cellar window to do it," he panted. "Thought it might embarrass them some--but this stunt of yours makes it perfect."

He took a step forward and raised his voice.

"Stick 'em up!" he cried. "Stick 'em up--every one of you--that's better. Now line up, facing the back wall--and remember--just one bad break is all Miss Dixon wants to rip off another belt--aimed right, this time--" he added significantly.

As the gangsters scrambled to obey his orders, Bill walked into the room and Dorothy saw that his wrists were still handcuffed behind his back.

"Who's got the handcuff key, Mr. Conway?" he inquired.

"Johnny, I believe," returned Mike quietly.

"Johnny, have you the key?" This from Bill.

"Y-yes, I got it."

"Got a gun?"

"N-no, sir, it's on the table."

"I'll take your word for it. Throw the key over your shoulder, then stick up your hands again."

Johnny complied with these demands, and Bill picked up the key by sitting on the floor and worming over to where it lay.

"Think you can turn this with your teeth, Mr. Scotland Yard?"

Mike nodded. Bill swung round and lifted his hands as high as his bonds permitted. The detective lowered his head and got his teeth on the key. A moment later there sounded a slight snap--and Bill was free.

"Good job!" He worked his cramped shoulders. "That certainly is a relief!"

He limped to the table, snatched a knife and a couple of seconds later Mike was on his feet. Without more ado they turned to, and roped the gangsters one by one.

Dorothy got down from the plane and came into the room.

"Who's going to stand guard while the plane goes for the police?"

"Nobody," was Bill's answer. "We'll pile the bunch in the bus and take them to New Canaan ourselves. Gosh, there'll be some big time in the town tonight, when we arrive!"

"This morning, you mean," yawned Dorothy. "It's getting light. And you two may not know it, but I could go to sleep standing up--and right now!"

"Brace up, kid! You're some aviatrix, even though I did train you!"

"I'll second that--" beamed Mr. Michael Conway, grasping her hand. "I had a splendid view through the doorway--and when that big bus hurled itself out of the water like a hippo--and began to charge the house, I--"

But Dorothy interrupted him with a shake of her head and an involuntary glance at Bill. "All I did was to take some awful chances with Bill's property, Mr. Conway."

"Ah--incidentally--saving my life, and making the capture of this gang possible?" smiled the detective. "You're a modest young lady, indeed. But I suppose we'd better be getting along--" and with a wave of his hand, he added, "it may interest you to know that the loot is in that kit bag under the table."

"O.K. We'll attend to that," said Bill.

Then turning to Dorothy--"I'll say you took some chances, young woman! How about getting a plane of your own to fool with from now on?"

"Oh, Bill! Do you think Daddy will let me?"

"I know he will." Bill was serious now. "After what you've done tonight, you've certainly won your wings!"

Those who have enjoyed this story will be interested in the next book of this series, entitled *Dorothy Dixon and the Mystery Plane*.

THE END

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