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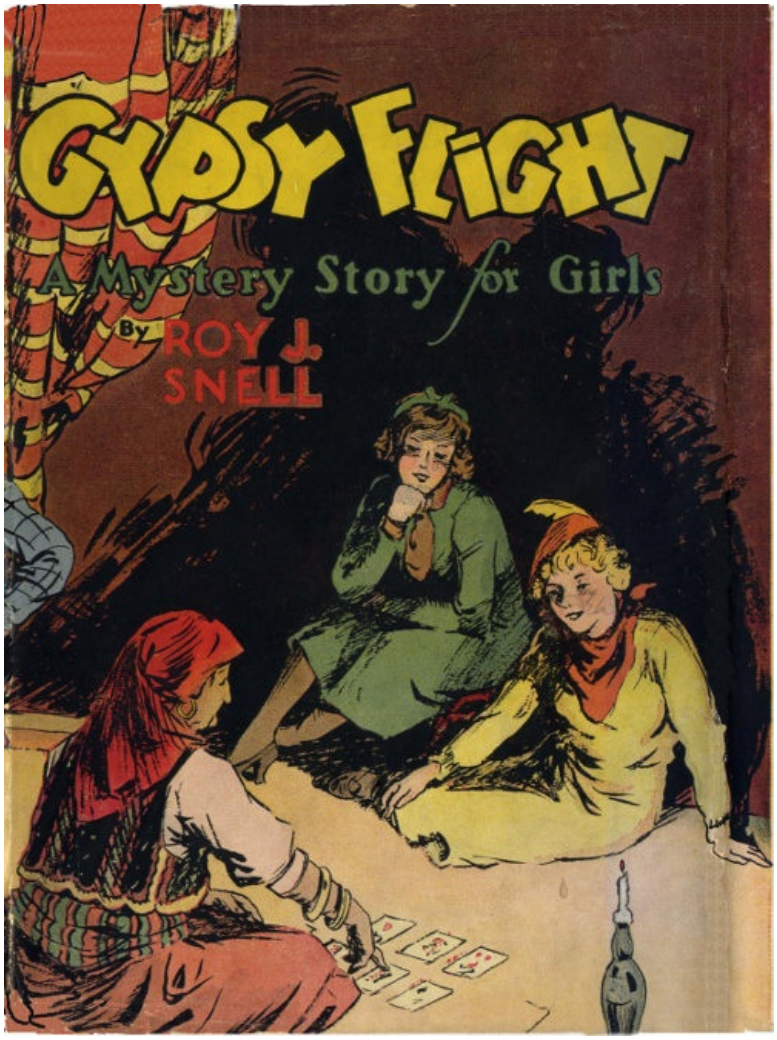

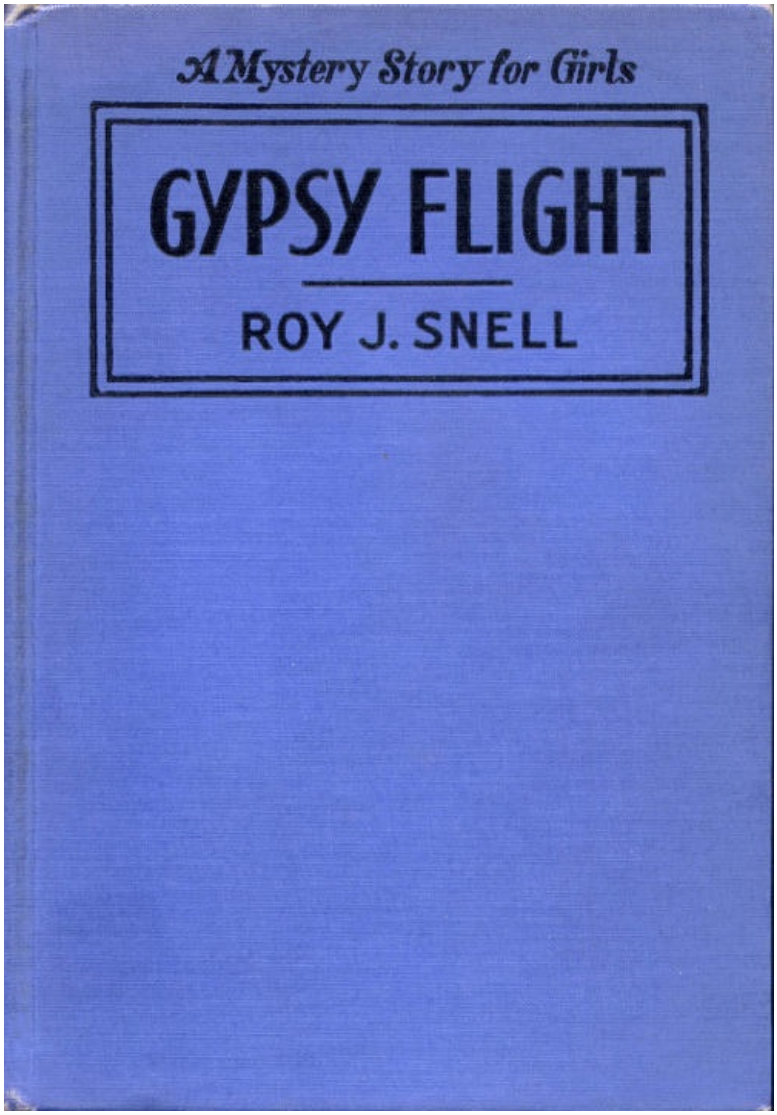

A Mystery Story for Girls

GYPSY FLIGHT

By
ROY J. SNELL

The Reilly & Lee Co.
Chicago

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GYPSY FLIGHT

CHAPTER I
THE DARK LADY

Rosemary Sample adjusted her jaunty cap carefully, smoothed out her well-tailored suit, then lowering her head, stepped from her trans-continental airplane.

Oh yes, that was Rosemary's plane. Rosemary was still young, and she looked even younger than her years. A slender slip of a girl was Rosemary, rather pretty, too, with a touch of natural color and a dimple in each cheek, white even teeth, smiling eyes of deepest blue.

Strange sort of person to have a huge bi-motored plane with two 555 horse-power motors and a cruising speed of one hundred and seventy miles per hour. It cost seventy thousand dollars did that airplane. Yet this slip of a girl was its captain, its conductor, its everything but pilot, as long as it hung in air. Rosemary was its stewardess—and that meant a very great deal.

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Rosemary stepped across the cement runway with a buoyant tread. "Life," she thought with a happy tilt of her head, "is just wonderful! It is perfection itself."

Rosemary loved perfection. And where may one find perfection of high degree if not in a great metropolitan airport? Those giant silver birds of the air, their motors drumming in perfect unison, wheeling into position for flight—how perfect! The touch of genius, the brain and brawn of the world's greatest has gone into their making. And as to the care of them, Rosemary knew that the most valuable horse in the world

never received more perfect treatment.

The depot, too, was perfect. Its hard white floor was spotless. The ticket sellers, the loitering aviators, even the black-faced redcaps somehow appeared to fit into a perfect picture.

"The travelers and their luggage," she whispered, "they too fit in. No shabby ones. No drab ones. Per—"

She did not finish for of a sudden, as if caught and banged against a post, her picture was wrecked, for a young man apparently unsuited to the place had dashed through the depot's outer door and, grasping her by the arm, said in a low hoarse whisper: **[13]**

"I must speak to you personally, privately."

For a space of ten seconds there was grave danger that Rosemary would deviate from the path of duty, that she would smash Rule No. 1 for all airplane hostesses into bits. "Courtesy to all," that was the rule. And in the end the rule won.

Getting a steady grip on herself, the girl glanced about, noted that the small room to the right was at that moment vacant, motioned her strangely distraught visitor—who, if appearances could be trusted, must have slept the night before in an alley and fought six policemen single-handed in the morning—inside, after which she closed the door.

"Than—oh thank you!" the young man gasped.

Then for a period of seconds he seemed quite at a loss as to what he might say next.

This gave the girl an opportunity for a swift character analysis. She was accustomed to this. She had flown for two years. Four hundred thousand miles of flying were down to her credit. Passengers, usually ten of them, flew with her. It was her duty to keep them comfortable and happy. To do this she must know them, though she had seen them but for an hour. **[14]**

"He's not as bad as I thought," was her mental comment. "He's not been drinking. He needs sleep. There's a lot of trouble somewhere. But it's not *his* trouble—at least not much of it. He needs help. He—"

As if reading this last thought, the youth gripped her arm to exclaim:

"You must help me!"

"All right." Rosemary displayed all her teeth in a dazzling smile. "That's my job. How shall I help you?"

"You're flying west to Salt Lake City. Plane leaves in half an hour. I must have a place in that plane."

"I'm sorry." Rosemary truly was. She had seen most of the other passengers. They promised to be rather dull. But this young man—"I'm sorry," she repeated. "The trip was sold out forty-eight hours ago."

"I know—" The young man's tone was impatient. **[15]**

“But—but it must be arranged. Here!” He crowded a small roll of bills into her hand. “You can fix it. I can’t. You know who they are. There must be no fuss. No one must know. You find one. You know folks; you can pick the right one. Surely there’s one of them that will wait until the night plane. That’s not sold out yet.

“Be-believe me!” His eyes were appealing as he saw her waver. “It’s not for myself. If it were, I’d never ask it. It—it’s for a thousand others.”

“No,” Rosemary was saying under her breath, “it’s not for himself. And so—”

“All right,” she said quietly, “I’ll try.”

She went away swiftly, so swiftly he could not catch at her arm to thank her.

On entering the main waiting room of the airport, the young stewardess looked quickly about her. Twenty or more people were in the room. Which were passengers, which mere sightseers? She knew some of the men who were to be with her on this trip. They were old-timers, mostly traveling men. She would not dare suggest to one of these that he sell his reservation.

Her gaze at last became fixed upon a youth. **[16]**
“Must be about twenty,” she told herself. “He’s going. First trip. Nervous, and trying not to show it. He’ll welcome a delay, like as not. Have to try.” She took in his ready-to-wear suit, his $5.99 variety of shoes, wondered vaguely why he was going by air at all, then plunged.

“You mean to tell me,” he was saying slowly three minutes later, “that some man will give me fifty dollars just to wait six hours for the next plane? Say! I’d wait a week. Where’s the money?”

“Here! Here it is.” Rosemary felt a great wave of relief sweep over her. She wanted to ask this youth a dozen questions, but there was not time.

“What’s the name of the man that’s taking your reservation?” the ticket seller asked of the ready-to-wear youth.

“Why I—”

“I’ll have that for you right away, Charlie,” Rosemary broke in.

“O.K.” Charlie turned to other matters.

Ten minutes later Rosemary received the second **[17]**
shock of the day and from the same source. Someone touched her on the arm. She wheeled about to find herself looking at a young man in spotless linen, faultless gray suit and traveling cap. In his hand he carried a dark brown walrus-hide bag.

“I—I—why you—” she stammered.

“Quick change artist.” He smiled broadly. “Got hold of my bag, you see.”

It was the young man who only a brief time before did not fit into her picture of perfection.

“Di-did you get it?” he asked. There was a slight twitch about his mouth.

She nodded. “Step over here.”

“You’re a marvel!” he murmured. “I can’t tell you—”

“Don’t,” she warned.

“You’ll have to give your name and address here,” she said in a brusque tone. Then, “Here Charlie. This is the man.”

“Name and address, please,” said Charlie.

“Danby Force, Happy Vale, Connecticut,” said the young man promptly.

“Goodbye,” said Rosemary, “I’ll be seeing you.” **[18]**
And indeed she should—many times. The power behind all things, that directs the stars in their courses, that keeps all the little streams moving downhill and notes the sparrow’s fall, had willed that their paths should cross many times and in many curious places.

“There is time,” Rosemary told herself, “for a stroll in the open air before we take to the air.” Then, of a sudden, she recalled a curious sort of plane that had landed but a short time before. “Wonder if it’s still here.” She hurried out to the landing field.

“Yes, there it is! I must have a look.”

Speeding over the broad cement way, she crossed to a spot where a small plane rested. Truly it was a strange plane. It had been painted to represent a gigantic dragon fly. Its planes seemed thin and gauze-like. This, she knew, was pure illusion.

“But how beautiful!” she exclaimed.

“Yes, it is beautiful.” To her surprise, she was answered by a blonde-haired girl who had just stepped round the plane.

“Is—is it yours?” she asked in surprise.

“But yes.” The strange girl spoke with a decided **[19]**
French accent. “I am the one they call Petite Jeanne. You have heard of me. No? Ah well, it does not matter.” She laughed a silvery laugh. She was, Rosemary noted, a slender girl with beautifully regular features and dancing eyes. “Dancing feet too,” she whispered to herself. “They are never still.”

Unconsciously she had been following the girl round the plane. There, on the other side, she met with a surprise. Seated on bright colored bundles, close to a small fire over which a small teakettle steamed, was a large, stolid-looking gypsy woman and a small gypsy girl.

“So the gypsies are taking to the air!” she exclaimed. “And you—” she turned to the blonde girl, “are you a gypsy too?”

“As you like.” A cloud appeared to pass over the girl’s face. It was followed by a smile. “Anyway,” she said, “I am flying now. And you, since you are flying always, you may see me again in some strange new place.

“Indeed,” she added after a brief silence, “Madame Bihari here, who is my foster mother, was telling my fortune with cards.”

“Your fortune?”

“But yes.” The girl laughed merrily. “What would a gypsy be if she did not tell fortunes?

“And in my fortune,” she went on, “I was to meet a stewardess of the air. This meeting was to lead me into strange and mysterious adventures. And now here you are. Is it not strange? It is very wonderful, truly it is, this telling fortunes with gypsy cards. You must try it.” **[20]**

“I will,” replied Rosemary. “But now it is almost time for my plane. I’ll hope to be seeing you. I—”

“One moment please!” Bending over, the blonde girl picked up three small sticks. “Wherever I land,” she went on, “I shall put two sticks so, and one stick so, close to the door of the airport depot. If you see it you will know that I have been there and may be there still.”

“I get you,” Rosemary laughed, “but what do you call that?”

“It is our gypsy *patteran*,” the girl explained soberly. “It is a custom older than any of your country’s laws.”

“Good! I’ll be seeing you!” Rosemary hurried away. She was not soon to forget this blonde-haired Petite Jeanne, whom so many of you already know well. Nor was she to forget that even the gypsies had taken to the air.

After casting a practiced eye over the interior of her ship, adjusting a chair and looking to her supply of newspapers and magazines, Rosemary stepped down from the plane into the sunlight of a glorious day. **[21]**

A porter was wheeling the baggage cart into position, the chain was being dropped. In an even tone through a microphone the announcer was saying, “Plane No. 56 leaving for Omaha, Cheyenne, Salt Lake City and points west, now loading.”

“We’ll be in the air soon,” Rosemary whispered to herself. The faintest possible thrill ran up her spine. For this very-much-alive girl, even after two years of flying, could never quite still the joy and thrill of flight.

Then the sound of an excited voice reached her ears.

“I must take the bag with me in the cabin,” a woman’s voice was saying.

“But that is contrary to the rules,” the attendant at the gate replied politely. “The cabin is small. A brief case is quite all right. But bags, no. If everyone took a bag inside, there’d be no getting about. We will give you a check for your bag. It will be locked in the baggage compartment. Nothing can happen to it. In case of loss, the Company’s millions insure you.”

“But I want—” The tall, dark-complexioned owner of the bag cast a sweeping glance over her fellow travelers who stood awaiting their turn at the gate. She appeared to suspect them, one and all, of having designs on her bag. **[22]**

The much-traveled commercial passengers smiled indulgently, two ladies gave the dark-

complexioned one a half sympathetic glance. But the young man who had, through Rosemary's good offices, so recently acquired a place on the plane favored her with not so much as a look. He appeared to have become greatly interested in a small yellow plane that was just then taking off.

"He just *seems* to be interested in that plane." The thought leapt unbidden into the young stewardess' mind. "He's more interested in that woman than he'd like anyone to know. I wonder why?"

"Oh well, if you insist!" The dark-complexioned lady dropped her bag, grabbed impatiently at the check offered for it, then hurrying past Rosemary without affording her so much as a look, climbed aboard the plane to sink into the seat farthest to the rear. **[23]**

"As if she proposed to watch the others all the way to Salt Lake City," was Rosemary's mental comment, although she knew the thought to be unwarranted and absurd.

Ten minutes later, with all on board, they were sailing out over the city. Rosemary settled down to the business of the hour. She loved her work, did this slender girl. Hers was an unusual task. She performed it unusually well. She was in charge of the "ship" while it was in the air. She was hostess to the ten passengers entrusted to her care. At once her alert mind took up the problems of this particular journey. She smiled as two of the four traveling men launched forth on a discussion of the country's economic problems. "That settles them," she told herself. The third traveling man buried himself in the latest newspaper, and the fourth dragged out papers from his brief case to pour over figures. Two rather flashily dressed young men, who had not slept the night before, asked for pillows. They were soon checked off to the land of dreams. Two middle-aged women began discussing the feeding and training of children.

All this left to Rosemary's care only the dark-complexioned woman in a rear seat and the young man of great haste. "A very quiet trip," she told herself. In this, as all too often, she was mistaken. **[24]**

"What can I do for you?" She flashed a smile at the dark-complexioned woman. She received no smile in reply.

"Nothing."

"Magazine? A pillow?"

"No. Nothing." The woman's black and piercing eyes were fixed upon her for a full ten seconds. Then they shifted to the world beneath the swiftly gliding plane.

Rosemary was neither dismayed nor disheartened. There were many such people. All they wanted was to be left alone with their thoughts. Perhaps flashing through the air thousands of feet from the ground brought serious and solemn thoughts to some types of mind. She rather guessed it did.

But how about the young man of great haste? He intrigued her. Perhaps he was the kind who liked to talk. If he were, then perhaps he would tell **[25]**

secrets. Men often told her secrets. She always guarded them well. “He may tell me why he was in such great haste,” she thought to herself.

Some people like to talk, some to listen. It is the duty of an airplane stewardess to talk or to listen as occasion demands. Rosemary was prepared in this case, as in all others, to do her duty.

“Strange sort of profession, yours,” the young man said, smiling.

“It’s wonderful work!” Rosemary knew on the instant that she would do most of the talking.

For half an hour he asked questions and she answered them. His questions, never very personal, were about the life an airplane stewardess leads. She answered them honestly and frankly. “He honestly wants to know,” she told herself. “He is the type of person who absorbs knowledge as a sponge does water. Delightful sort. I’d like to know him better.”

“But look!” he exclaimed suddenly. “The propeller on this side is gone!”

“Oh, no!” She laughed low. “It’s not gone. Just going around so fast you can’t see it.”

“But I saw it revolving when we started.” **[26]**

“We were going slowly then.”

“So it is really still there, producing tremendous power, helping pull us along—tons of people, mail and steel—at a hundred and seventy miles an hour! And yet we cannot see it. Marvelous! Unseen power!

“Do you know,” he said, “that’s like God’s influence on our lives. You can’t see it, you can’t feel it as we feel things with our hands; yet it is there, a tremendous force in our lives.”

“Yes,” she agreed soberly, “it must be like that.”

At that moment she found herself liking this strange young man very much. It was, she believed, because of his deeply serious thoughts.

Having discovered that the two traveling salesmen had settled all the nation’s problems and were looking for reading material, she excused herself, gripped the seat ahead to steady her, then moved swiftly forward.

With all her passengers happy once more, she dropped into the one vacant seat to indulge in a few moments of quiet meditation. Into this meditation there crept, as she closed her eyes, a slim girlish figure. Blonde-haired and smiling, she stood beside a plane that resembled a dragon fly. **[27]**

“The flying gypsy,” she whispered. “But is she a gypsy?” To this question she found no answer.

That this slender girl was an interesting person she did not doubt. She found herself hoping that the gypsy woman’s fortune telling might prove a success—that they might meet many times.

“Mystery and adventure, those were the words she used.” Mystery and adventure. Well, this day had not been without its mystery. There was the strange man, Danby Force, and his urgent need

for going somewhere. Then too there was the dark woman with the bag which she had all but refused to trust away from her, even in the locked compartment of a trans-continental plane. What could she have in that bag? The girl thought of one instance when it had been believed that high explosives carried in a bag on an air-liner had brought disaster to a score of persons. “But of course it would not be that,” she told herself.

Rising from her place, she moved back to where the dark-faced one rode. She seemed fast asleep. But was this only a pose? She could not tell. Someone forward beckoned to her. Routine duties were resumed. **[28]**

The hours passed quietly. At five o’clock they were over the Rockies. Marvelous moment! The golden sun was sinking over the distant prairies. The mountains, half white with snow, half green with forests, lay beneath them. They were beyond the timber line.

Suddenly the co-pilot’s light blinked at the back of the cabin.

“Signaling for me. I wonder why.” She moved swiftly forward.

“A storm roaring up the mountains from the west.” Mark Morris, the young co-pilot, spoke in short jerky sentences. “Going down here. Landing field of a sort. Laid out on the plateau. Hunting lodge below. No real danger. Get straps hooked up. Usual stuff.”

Rosemary understood. She passed swiftly along the aisle. A word, a whisper, a smile, that quiet, care-free air of hers did the work.

“Forced landing. What of that?” This was what the passengers read in her face.

What indeed? They swooped downward, bumped with something of a shock, bumped more lightly, glided forward, then came to a standstill. **[29]**

The tall dark woman sprang to her feet, threw open the door, then swung herself down. She was wearing low shoes and sheer silk stockings. She landed squarely in eighteen inches of snow.

“Wait!” Rosemary cried in dismay. “Give her a hand up, some of you men. I’ll fix you all up right away.”

There were, of course, neither high boots nor leggings in the airplane cabin, but Rosemary was equal to the occasion. Tearing up a blanket, she was soon busy fashioning moccasins for the ladies.

“Tie these cords about the bottoms of your trousers,” she said to the men. “Yes, we’ll go down to the hunting lodge. Be three or four hours anyway.”

“Where’s the trail?” She spoke now to the young co-pilot.

“See that big rock?”

“Yes.”

“Blazed trail starts there. Easy to follow. About half a mile. Fine place. Been there three times. **[30]**

Big fireplace. Bacon and other things to eat. You'll enjoy your stay," he chuckled.

"All airways are beaten trails to our pilots," Rosemary murmured.

A cold wind came sweeping up the mountain. Sharp bits of snow cut at their cheeks. They were impatient to make a start when, as before, the dark-faced lady held them up.

"My bag!" she exclaimed. "I must have it!"

"Safe enough here," said Mark. "All locked up. We're staying, the pilot and I."

"But I insist!" She stamped the ground impatiently.

Five minutes of chilling delay, and she had it. Nor would she relinquish its care to the most courteous traveling man. She plunged through the snow with it banging at her side.

"Queer about that bag," Rosemary murmured to Danby Force, who marched at her side.

To her surprise he shot her a strange—perhaps, she thought, a startled look.

"As if I had discovered some secret," she thought to herself. "Well, I haven't—not yet."

After floundering through the snow for some distance, they came at last to a spot where a trail wound down the mountainside. Ten minutes of following this trail brought them to a long, low, broad-roofed building that, in the gathering darkness, seemed gloomy and forbidding. **[31]**

"Fine place for a murder," Danby Force whispered to Rosemary.

"Don't say that!" She shuddered.

Stamping their feet on the broad veranda, they pushed the door open and entered. Danby Force struck a match. Directly before him, at the opposite side of the room, was a fire all laid in a broad fireplace. The young man's second match set a mellow glow of light from the dancing flames searching out every dark corner. For the time at least, the place lost its forbidding aspect. Indeed it might well have been the banquet hall of some ancient British hunting lodge, of long ago.

Nor was the banquet lacking. Rosemary Sample was from Kansas. And in Kansas mothers teach their daughters to cook. Fragrant coffee, crisp bacon, candied sweet potatoes, plum pudding from a can, steamed to a delicious fineness—this was the repast she prepared for the guests of her trans-continental airplane.

All thoughts of the dark-faced lady's mysterious bag, of Danby Force's urgent need, and of the gypsies' fortune telling were forgotten in the merriment that followed. One of the college youths, who had slept all the day, discovered an ancient accordion and at once began playing delirious music. The rough floor was cleared and all joined in a wild dance—all but the dark-faced one who sat gloomily in a corner. **[32]**

From time to time as the music died away, Rosemary listened for the sounds that came

down the chimney. There was a whistle and a moan, the sighing of evergreen trees and then a rushing roar as if a giant were blowing across a mammoth bottle.

“Be here all night,” she said to Danby Force at last.

“Guess so. Fine place for a murder.” He smiled at her in a curious way as he repeated that weird remark of a few hours before.

“Strange place for a—” Rosemary could not make her lips form that remaining word as, two hours later, staring into the dark, she whispered that line. She was in the bunk room at the back of the lodge. The women of the company were all sleeping there. The men had cots before the fire in the main room. **[33]**

The dark lady had dragged her traveling bag into the farthest corner and had crept beneath her blankets after very little undressing. A very strange person, this dark lady. Rosemary did not exactly like her, but found in her a certain fascination. Even now, as she turned her face toward that corner, she fancied that she could see her eyes shining like a cat’s eyes in the dark. Pure fancy, she knew, but disturbing for all that.

Just when she fell asleep she never quite knew. She was always definite about the time of waking—it was just at the break of dawn. She was startled out of deep sleep by a sudden piercing scream. Instantly Danby Force’s words came to her. “Fine place for a murder.” But there had been no murder.

[34]

CHAPTER II
THE VANISHING BAG

“My bag! It is gone! My traveling bag! It has been stolen!” The young stewardess knew on the instant that the dark-faced lady was the one who was screaming. That the bag was truly missing she did not doubt.

“Well, it’s happened,” she thought to herself as she tumbled from her bunk.

What she said to the dark-faced lady was done in a more official manner:

“I’m sure it can’t be far away. Someone has moved it by mistake. We’ll dress, then we will have a look.” Her tone was calm enough, though her heart was not.

They did dress and they did have a look—several looks, but all to no avail.

To Rosemary this was distressing. The whole affair had gone off so extremely well until now. Of course no one had wished to be delayed on the journey, but the evening in the lodge had been a delightful one. She had planned waffles with real maple syrup and coffee for breakfast. And now came this. It was disheartening. **[35]**

Here in the gloom of early morning was the dark-faced woman claiming that her traveling

bag had been taken. And who, in the end, could doubt it? It surely was not to be seen in the bunk room. Everything was turned over there except the dark one's bunk which had been made up. And of course in a bunk flat as a pancake one does not look for a sizable traveling bag stuffed with all manner of things.

It was not in the large outer room either. When they went outside to see if some person might have crept in and taken it, or, as the dark-faced one insisted, "crept out to hide it" there was the clean white snow with never a track save the half-buried one of Mark Morris coming to report on the progress of the storm some hours before.

"It's the strangest thing!" said Rosemary, for once finding herself quite out of bounds. "It can't have gotten away. It just can't!"

"I insist that every person in the place be searched!" the dark woman demanded.

"What! Search our pockets for a traveling bag?" A rotund drummer roared with laughter. **[36]**

"Not for the bag, but for the valuable papers I carried. The bag, more than likely, has been burned in the fireplace."

"Absurd!" exclaimed one of the middle-aged ladies. "Leather creates a terrible odor when burned."

"Who said it was leather?" snapped the inquisitor. "It was, I believe, fiber."

In the end, for the good of her company's reputation, Rosemary persuaded them to submit to a search of a sort. The men emptied their pockets, then turned them inside out. The dark-faced woman went over the other women with hands that suggested they might have been used for that same purpose often, so deft, precise and cat-like were her motions.

It was while the men were going through their part of the performance that the young stewardess noticed a curious thing. The woman watched them all with what appeared to be slight interest until it came the turn of Danby Force who had paid so high a price for his reservation on this plane. Then it seemed to the girl that veritable sparks of fire shot from the black eyes of the woman. That she took in every detail was evident. That a look of grim satisfaction, seeming to say, "Ah ha! It is as I thought!" settled on the woman's face at that moment, the girl could not for a moment doubt. **[37]**

"But why?" she asked herself. "Why?"

To this question she could form no sensible answer for, as in all other cases, the woman said in a low tone: "None of these are mine."

Just then the airplane pilot came in to tell them that the storm was at an end and they might resume their journey. In the rush of preparation, the hurried brewing of coffee, the hasty eating of a rather meager breakfast, the dark-faced woman and her vanished traveling bag were pretty much forgotten.

When at last the travelers were on their way, walking single-file up the steep incline, Rosemary found herself standing quite

unexpectedly beside the strange young man, Danby Force.

"Wonderful place, this lodge!" he was saying. "Wouldn't mind coming up here for a week sometime."

"Nor I!" Rosemary spoke with unfeigned enthusiasm. And who would not? They were standing on a broad ledge. Above them, seeming to melt into the fleecy clouds, was the mountain's snowy peak. Below, a sheer drop of a thousand feet, was a very narrow valley all covered with the dark green of pine, spruce, cedar and tamarack. The air was rich with the fragrance of the forest. **[38]**

"One of the high officials in our company is a member," Rosemary said, nodding back at the lodge. "That's why we are free to use it."

"I fancy I shall be coming back." The young man spoke slowly. He looked her squarely in the eyes. Then turning, he followed swiftly after the others.

"What did he mean by that?" Rosemary asked herself. A strange thought leaped unbidden into her mind. "Supposing the young man took the missing bag and hid it somewhere about the place?

"Nonsense!" she whispered. "Where could he have hidden it? No one had been outside, absolutely no one. And if he did take it, surely he would not tell me he hoped to return."

Then a strange fact struck her—the look on this young man's face had changed. When she first saw him he had the appearance of one who had gone through much, who was still haunted by the thought of some great loss. Now his face was as bland and cheerful as an early spring morning. **[39]**

"What am I to make of that?" she asked herself.

The answer in the end appeared simple enough, "One good night's sleep." This, she knew full well, was capable of working wonders on a young and buoyant spirit.

It is strange the manner in which a single incident may change the whole course of thought for an entire group. As they resumed their journey to Salt Lake City, no one in the plane discussed economic conditions or child welfare. No one read. No one wrote or figured. When they spoke it was in low tones just above the roar of the motors. And Rosemary, though she heard never a word, knew they talked of the dark-faced woman and her missing bag. "And those who do not talk are thinking of it," she told herself. "And it *is* strange! What can have become of that bag?"

As if reading her thoughts, Danby Force leaned across the aisle to say in a low distinct tone: "I fancy Santa Claus must have come down that broad chimney and carried it off."

Those were the only words spoken to her until they were nearing their destination. Then that strange young man leaned over once more to say: **[40]**

"Curious sort of job you've got here! Necessary

enough, though. And you fit in very well, I can see that. I am no end grateful for what you did back there in Chicago. You saved the situation for me, you surely did! Hope I may travel with you often. This is my first trip by air, but not the last—you may be assured of that. I enjoy being carried along by this—this invisible power." He chuckled. "And I—I like the company, if you don't mind my saying it."

"Not in the least. I've enjoyed knowing you." Rosemary was vexed at herself for saying so trite a thing. Truth was, her mind was still filled with that missing bag. That the dark-faced woman would report the loss to the office and that there would be no end of fuss about it, she did not doubt.

"I—I'd like to know you better," she added as a kind of after-thought, as she favored Danby Force with a smile.

"You will," he prophesied, "Oh yes, I am sure you will." **[41]**

"And if I don't," she told herself a moment later, "I shan't know much except that he says his name is Danby Force and that he fancies, at least, that he can be of service to a few thousand people. Well—" she sighed, "that's really something, if it's not pure fancy."

The landing field at Salt Lake City seemed hot after their rapid gliding down from the lands of perpetual snow. In spite of this, Rosemary Sample breathed a sigh of relief. Her journey was over. From this point the party would break up. She would rest for a few hours, then go soaring back to home base where she was to have two whole days to herself.

"Guess we'd better stick around for a bit," suggested the pilot. "That woman will be putting in a complaint. We'll have to tell what we know.

"For that matter, though," he added, "I can't see that we have much responsibility in the matter. She refused to leave the bag locked in the plane where it would have been safe. Took the matter in her own hands. The bag was in her possession when it disappeared. So—o!" He smiled. "That about lets us out. We— **[42]**

"Look there!" he exclaimed suddenly. "Even the gypsies are taking to the air."

At that moment a stout dark-faced woman, wearing the typical gypsy garb, broad, bright-colored skirt and dazzling silk scarf tied about her head, was alighting from a small cabin-type monoplane. The plane was like a huge dragon fly. It had a bottle-green body and silver wings that glistened like glass in the sun.

The stout, dark woman was followed by a girl of some eight years. And after her, in a pilot's garb, came a golden-haired girl who did not look a day over eighteen.

"It's strange!" Rosemary's tone expressed her surprise. "I saw those same people in Chicago, just before we took off. And now, here they are right with us."

"Not so strange," replied the pilot. "That giant bug of hers may be quite speedy. They probably

took off later than we did and just in time to miss the storm.

“But look!” he exclaimed, “If that sort of thing is allowed to go on, what is to come of this bright new thing we call aviation? There’ll be a crack-up every day in the week. The papers will be full of them and no one will dare to travel by air. And all that because of rank amateurs and lax regulations. I’m starting an investigation right now.” **[43]**

“Nice plane you have,” he said to the golden-haired girl.

“Oh yes, but perhaps a little too small.” The girl spoke with a pleasing foreign accent.

“You’re not a gypsy?” The veteran pilot smiled in spite of himself.

“But no.” The girl smiled back. “Not entirely. I am French. People call me Petite Jeanne. I was adopted by gypsies in France. Oh so good, Christian gypsies! This lady is Mrs. Bihari, my foster mother.”

“I suppose,” said Mark with a laugh, “that you traded a flivver for an automobile, the auto for a better one, the better one for a poor airplane, the poor plane for a good one?”

“But no!” The golden-haired girl frowned. “A year ago my own people were found in France. I had inherited property. This is my very own plane. And see!” She held out a paper. “This is my license to fly.”

“Mind if I take your ship up for a little spin?” Mark said bluntly. **[44]**

“But no.” The girl spoke slowly. “That is, if I may go, and if she will go with us.” She nodded her head toward Rosemary.

Rosemary had little desire to fly in a small plane. She had always traveled in the magnificent big bi-motored transportation planes which, she believed, were safe as walking. She had it on the tip of her tongue to refuse, when the girl cast her an appealing look that she could not well disregard.

“Yes,” she said, “yes, surely I will go.”

Three minutes later they were in the air. Ten minutes later, with a sigh of relief Rosemary found her feet once more on the solid earth.

“You’d be surprised!” Mark whispered enthusiastically. “Never saw a better equipped plane, nor one in finer condition. That motor is a joy! The radio is perfect. Everything, just everything. If all the amateurs were as careful this world of the air would be one great big joy.”

“Wonderful little plane!” he exclaimed, gripping the little French girl’s hand. “And how wonderfully cared for!”

“But why not?” The girl showed all her white teeth in a smile. “We gypsy people have a saying, ‘Life is God’s most beautiful gift to man.’ This is true, I am sure. Then why should anyone do less than the very best that he might keep that gift?” **[45]**

“Why indeed? And thanks for the good word.”

“Do you travel much?” It was a new voice that asked this question. The rather mysterious Danby Force had come up unobserved.

“Oh yes! We are gypsies. All gypsies travel much,” was the girl’s reply.

“Where will you go next?”

“Over the mountains to Cheyenne.”

“Ah, then you will be going part way back the way we came,” Danby Force said. There was an eager note in his voice. “I wonder if it would be possible for you to take a passenger and to pause for a brief time at a safe landing field?”

Rosemary started. So Danby Force meant to return. He was going back to the lodge. Had he, after all, taken the dark-faced lady’s bag? Had he hidden it there? Would he return and carry it away? If so, why? Why? Such were the questions that crowded her mind. And she did not like them. She *did* like Danby Force. She wanted to believe that he was incapable of doing a thing dishonest or dishonorable. She had not forgotten his delightful words about God’s invisible power in our lives. **[46]**

But the little French girl was speaking. “If it will help someone,” she was saying. “We will take you over the mountains and stop at this safe place you speak of.”

“It will help—help a great deal, I assure you!” Danby Force exclaimed. “It may help three thousand people.”

“There it is again,” Rosemary thought. “Always speaking of thousands.”

“We might as well get over to the airport,” Mark, the pilot, suggested to Rosemary. “The dark lady has had ample time to lodge her complaint.”

They went, but much to their surprise found that no complaint had been filed. What was more, the dark lady had vanished. No one about the place could tell them how she had gone, nor where.

“It’s the strangest business I ever had anything to do with!” Mark grumbled. “Loses her bag, valuable papers and all, and still no complaint. But believe me!” he exclaimed, “we’ve not heard the last of this!” Nor had they. **[47]**

[48]

CHAPTER III
THE “FLYING CORNTASSEL”

The evening after her arrival in Salt Lake City, Rosemary Sample, the young airplane stewardess, overheard a conversation that interested her greatly and at the same time strengthened her faith in the rather mysterious young man, Danby Force.

She might have thought of herself as an eavesdropper had not the incident occurred in

that most public of all public places, the lobby of a large hotel, the Hotel Temple Square. Not that she was staying at so expensive a place. Far from that, she occupied a room in a clean, modest-priced rooming house. But Rosemary had a weakness for large downy chairs, soft lights, expensive draperies and all that and, since at this time of year this hotel was not crowded, she could see no reason why she might not indulge these tastes for an hour or two at least.

She was buried deep in a heavily upholstered chair, thinking dreamily of her home in Kansas, of her mother, father, and the young people of the old crowd back home. She was smiling at the name they had given her, “The Flying Corntassel of Kansas,” when, chancing to look up, she beheld a vision of beauty all wrapped in deep purple and white. To her astonishment she realized that this was none other than the flying gypsy’s adopted daughter who called herself Petite Jeanne. She wore a long cape of purple cloth trimmed with white fox fur. **[49]**

At the same moment someone else caught the vision, Danby Force. And Danby Force had something to say about it.

“What a gorgeous cape, and what marvelous color!” he exclaimed. There was in his tone not a trace of flattery. He spoke with the sincerity of one who really knows beauty of texture when he sees it.

“Yes,” the little French girl agreed, “it is very beautiful. It was sent to me only last month by my gypsy friends in France. Since I have had a little money I have helped them at times. Their life is hard. These days are very hard.

“The cloth,” she went on after a time, “was woven by hand from pure sheep’s wool taken from the high French Alps.” **[50]**

“And the color?” Danby Force asked eagerly.

“Ah-h—” the little French girl smiled. “That is a deep secret that only the gypsies know. There are those who say the kettle of color only boils at midnight and that then the color is mixed with blood. That is nonsense. These are good gypsies, Christian gypsies, just as the great preacher, Gypsy Smith was. But they have their secrets and they keep them well.

“Perhaps,” she added after a moment’s thought, “this is the royal purple one reads of in the Bible. Who can tell?”

“That,” said Danby Force, “is a valuable secret.” He motioned the little French girl to a seat and took one close beside her.

“I know a man,” he said after a moment of silence, “who made some valuable discoveries regarding colors. He could dye cloth in such a manner that it would not fade, yet the process was not costly.

“This man had spent his boyhood in a town where textile mills had flourished. After his remarkable secret discoveries he returned to that town to find the people idle, the mills falling into decay. The weaving industry had moved south where there was cotton and cheap labor— **[51]**

pitifully cheap!”

Danby Force paused to stare at the pattern of the thick carpet on the floor. He appeared to be making a mental comparison between that carpet and the cheap rag rugs on the floors in that forgotten town.

Rosemary stole a look at the little French girl’s face. It was all compassion.

“And this little forgotten town?” suggested Petite Jeanne at last.

“It is forgotten no longer.” Danby Force smiled a rare smile. “The man who possessed those rare secrets of color gave them to his home town. Since they were able to produce cloth that was cheap, and better than any other of its kind, the mills began to flourish again and the people to work and smile.

“But now,” he added as a shadow passed over his interesting face, “their prosperity is threatened once more.”

Then, as if he had been about to divulge a forbidden secret, he sprang to his feet. “I must be going. We leave at eight. That right?” **[52]**

“It is quite right,” agreed Petite Jeanne.

Rosemary Sample went to her rest that night with a strange sense of futile longing gnawing at her heart. What was its cause? She could not tell. Had she become truly interested in that strange young man, Danby Force, who talked so beautifully of God’s unseen power, who spoke of doing good to thousands, and yet who might have—. She would not say it even to herself, yet she could not avoid thinking. Could she become seriously interested in such a young man? She could not be sure.

“That charming little French girl is carrying him away in the morning,” she assured herself. “I may never see him again.

“He is going back to the hunting lodge. I wonder —”

She tried to picture in her mind the bit of life’s drama that would be enacted by Danby Force and the little French girl after they had landed and gone down the narrow trail to the lodge. In the midst of this rather vain imagining she fell asleep.

She awoke next morning prepared for one more journey through the air, one more group of passengers. “Wonder if there will be any interesting ones?” she whispered. “Wonder if that dark-faced woman will return with me?” She shuddered. “She’s like a raven, Poe’s raven. Wonder if she’s filed a complaint about her missing bag. And if she has, what will come of it?” **[53]**

After oatmeal, coffee and rolls eaten at a counter with the capable and ever friendly Mark Morris at her side, she felt well fortified for the day’s adventures, come what might.

We advertise our occupation in life by the posture we assume. The barber has his way of standing that marks him as a barber. The clerk of a department store puts on a mask in the

morning and takes it off at night. The posture of an airplane stewardess is one suggesting the jaunty joy of life pictured by a blue bird on the tiptop of a tree, seventy feet in air.

"Safe?" her posture says plainer than words. "Of course it's safe to fly. Look at me, I've flown four hundred thousand miles."

Rosemary Sample was an airplane stewardess to the very tips of her fingers. Her task was a dual one, to inspire confidence and to entertain. She did both extremely well. Yet she too must be entertained. She must receive a thrill now and again. Riding in a plane brought no thrill to her. Only her passengers could bring her the change she craved. **[54]**

"There's always one," she had a way of saying to her friends, "one passenger who is worth five hours of study."

She was not long in finding the "one" on this journey back to Chicago. Strangely enough, he took the seat vacated by the dark-complexioned lady. Yet, how different he was! He was young, not much over twenty, Rosemary thought.

"Hello, little girl!" were his first words. "What's your name?"

"Rosemary Sample." She smiled because she was saying to herself, "He'll do the talking. That's fine. I'm too tired to talk."

"So you're a sample." He laughed. "I'd like a dollar bottle of the same."

"A sample's all there is and all there can be," she replied quickly.

"What! You mean to say you couldn't grow?"

"Exactly. Five feet four inches tall, weight a hundred and twenty pounds. Those are the regulations for a stewardess. You can be smaller, but no larger. You see," she laughed, "they couldn't make the airplane cabins to fit the stewardesses, tall, short, thin or thick, so the stewardess must be picked to fit the cabin." **[55]**

"Oh!" The young man's grin was frank, honest and friendly. "Well, this is my first trip in these big birds. I've got a little ship all my own, only just now she's busted up quite a bit."

"Cracked up? Too bad!" Rosemary was truly sorry. She was going to like this passenger. Besides, to one who sails the air a crack-up is just as true an occasion for sorrow as a shipwreck is to a mariner on the high seas. "What happened?" she asked quietly. "Bad storm?"

"No." He laughed lightly. "Couple of struts got loose. I nearly lost control two thousand feet up. Cracked up in a corn field. Shucked a lot of corn." He laughed rather loudly.

Rosemary's face was sober. She had seen his kind before. They went in for flying because it promised thrills. They neglected their planes. If they crashed and were not killed, they turned it into a joke. The whole thing made her feel sick inside. She loved flying. She thought of it as one of God's latest and most marvelous gifts to man. She knew too that nothing very short of **[56]**

perfection in care, equipment and piloting could put it in the place in every man's life where it belonged.

"So you laugh at a crash that results from carelessness?" Her lips were white. "That's the sort of thing that makes life hard for all of us who are trying to make flying seem a safe and wonderful thing. Nothing but selfishness could make one laugh at a tragedy or a near tragedy that is his own fault. It—"

But she stopped herself. After all, she was a stewardess, being paid to be pleasant.

Springing to her feet, she moved up the aisle to see that the airplane load of traveling salesmen forward had the papers, pencils, magazines and pillows they needed.

"So you're a sample," said the youth as she returned to her seat. "Don't know as I want a full bottle after all."

"In the end you'll take it." She was smiling now. "Or someone will be setting up a marble marker where little Willie lies. And that," she added slowly, "would be too bad." **[57]**

She spoke, not of herself, but her attitude toward aviation. He knew this. She could read it in his eyes.

"Tha—thanks for these few kind words," he replied rather lamely.

Five minutes later this young man, who went by the name of William VanGeldt and whose family evidently were possessed of considerable wealth, was speaking in glowing tones of his mother. He had, the young stewardess discovered, beneath his thin coating of indifference to the serious things of life, a warm heart full of appreciation for the ones who had given of their best that his life might be well worth living.

"He'll take the full bottle," she whispered to herself. "And he'll get to like it." She was to learn the truth of these words in days that were to come.

[58]

CHAPTER IV
WITH THE AID OF PROVIDENCE

To the little French girl, Petite Jeanne, each day dawned as a bright new adventure. Mysteries might come and go, as indeed they often had, but adventure! Ah yes, adventure was always with her.

Nor had her new treasure, the airplane with its gauze-like wings, lessened her opportunity for adventure. Indeed it had increased it tenfold. To Rosemary Sample one might say, "Well, you're off to another airplane journey," and she undoubtedly would answer with a sigh, "Yes, one more trip." Not so Petite Jeanne. She was not reckless, this slender child of the air. Her motor

was inspected often, each guy and strut tested, her radio tuned to the last degree of perfection. For all that, each day as she took to the air it was with such a leaping of the heart as comes only with fresh adventure.

[59] And so it was that, as she climbed into the cockpit, with Madame Bihari, Danby Force, and the tiny gypsy girl at her back, she touched the controls of her perfect little plane for all the world as if never before had her fingers known that touch. And as, after skimming along the air above the foothills, she began climbing toward one lone snowy peak among the Rockies, her heart was filled to overflowing with a fresh zest for living.

"Just to live," she whispered, "to live, to love, to dream, to hope and sometimes see our hopes fulfilled! To see the dew on the grass in the early morning, to hear the robins chirping in the early evening, to watch children play, to feel the wind playing in your hair, to feel the warm sunshine kiss your cheeks, to watch the red and gold of evening sky. Ah yes, and to watch that snowy peak just before me, watch it grow and grow and grow—that is *life—beautiful, wonderful, glorious life!*"

The airplane, which might have seemed to one far away a giant silver insect, went gliding about the white capped mountain to drop at last with scarcely a bump upon that landing field that had at other times been a pasture above the clouds.

[60] How convenient it would be if at times one's spirit might, for a space of a half hour or more, leave the body that, closing about it, holds it in one place, and go with the speed of light to distant scenes. The spirit of Rosemary Sample, speeding away toward Chicago, might for a quarter hour or more have been spared from the great trans-continental airplane. No one surely would have begrudged so faithful a worker such a short period of recreation. And surely Rosemary would have been thrilled by the opportunity of following our little company on the mountain crest as they left Jeanne's plane and followed the trail winding down to the hunting lodge.

[61] Had the spirit of Rosemary truly been with them, she must surely have been asking herself, "Why is Danby Force here? What does he expect to find at the lodge? Did he take the dark lady's traveling bag? Is it hidden there? Will he find it? And if he does, what will he take from it? 'Valuable papers' were the dark lady's words. Were there such papers? There is some relation between this fine-appearing young man and that lady. What can it be?" So the spirit of Rosemary Sample might have spoken to itself had it followed down the mountainside. But the spirit of Rosemary Sample was not there. Rosemary Sample, body, soul and spirit, was in the trans-continental plane speeding on toward Chicago. And beside her, now talking loudly and boastfully of his dangerous exploits as an amateur aviator, and now speaking in kindly and gentle tones of his mother, was young Willie VanGeldt.

"I should not care for him at all," Rosemary told herself. Yet there was something about him, his light and good-natured views of life, his smile perhaps, something about him that claimed her

interest.

“As if the stars had willed that for a time our lives should run together, like trains on parallel tracks,” she whispered to herself. Little did she guess the part that this youth with his wealth and his reckless ways would play in her life, nor that which she would play in his.

In the meantime Jeanne, Danby Force and their gypsy companions were wending their way down the trail that led to the hunting lodge.

“I shan’t detain you long,” Danby Force was saying to Jeanne. “It’s just a little thing I want to look into up here.” **[62]**

Jeanne, whose curiosity had not as yet been aroused, scarcely heard him. She was awed and charmed by the grandeur and beauty of the mountains. To look up two thousand feet to the snow-clad rocks that were the mountain peaks, then to look down quite as far to the tree-grown canyons far below—ah that was grand!

When at last they came in sight of the rustic lodge, flanked as it was by massive rocks and half covered by overhanging boughs of evergreens, she stopped in her tracks to stand there lost in admiration.

“Ah!” she murmured, “What a grand solitude is here! Who would not wish to return many, many times!”

She was soon enough to learn that it was not solitude the interesting young man, Danby Force, sought. For, contrary to Rosemary Sample’s suspicion, he had not hidden the dark lady’s traveling bag. He had returned to seek it. How did he hope to succeed when, on that other occasion, all others had failed? Well may one ask. Yet Danby Force did not lack for hope. He believed in a kind Providence that sometimes guides an honest soul in its search for hidden things. With the aid of this Providence he might succeed where others had failed. **[63]**

[64]

CHAPTER V
DANBY’S SECRET

Before leaving Salt Lake City, in accord with the customs of all gypsies, Madame Bihari and Jeanne had laid in a supply of provisions. Having come upon them while in the act, Danby Force had added a few luxuries to the stock. They were therefore prepared for a stay of some length if need be.

In spite of this, Danby Force said as he entered the lodge, “We won’t be here long I hope. I came to look for that bag.” He favored Jeanne with a smile.

“Oh, a mystery!” she cried. “A missing bag. Was it yours? And how was it lost?”

“Oh! Of course!” he exclaimed. “You don’t know a thing about it! How stupid of me! Sit down and I’ll tell you about it. At least—” he hesitated, “I’ll

tell you some things."

Madame Bihari had kindled a fire in the huge fireplace. The glow of it lighted up the little French girl's face. It made her look extraordinarily beautiful. Danby Force took in a long breath before he began. **[65]**

That which he told her after all was not so very much—at least he did not tell her why he was so intensely interested in that traveling bag. He did tell her all that had passed in that cabin on the previous day.

"So you see," he ended, "that the bag must be here somewhere. You don't carry away a leather bag a foot high and two feet long in your mouth, nor inside your shoe either." The little French girl joined him in a low laugh.

"But no!" she exclaimed. "And yet I cannot see how it could matter so much."

"It's the papers in that bag," he explained. "She did not steal those papers, that dark lady. She is no common thief. They are hers in a way. And yet she could use them to ruin the prosperity and happiness of three thousand people."

"But why would she do such a terrible thing?" The little French girl spread her hands in horror.

"There are reasons. She is a truly bad woman," he said briefly.

"I will help you." On Petite Jeanne's face was written a great desire. "And these others I will help if I can. **[66]**

"To do something for others—" she spoke slowly. "To really do things and to love doing them! Ah, there is the key to all true happiness! In the terrible times that are passing, if we have learned this, then it is worth while."

"Yes," said Danby Force, taking her slender hand in a solemn grip. "It *is* worth it."

"But come!" Jeanne sprang to her feet. "We must find this so important bag.

"Where," she asked a moment later, "did this lady sleep?"

"In here." Danby Force led the way to the bunk room.

"In which bunk?" Jeanne insisted.

"I think that one. I can't be sure." Danby Force pointed to the darkest corner.

"When we gypsies are camping in tents," said Jeanne, "when we are afraid of thieves, we put the things we treasure most at the bottom of our bed where no one can touch them without touching our toes."

After casting the gleam of a flashlight upon the bunk Danby Force had indicated, she seized the blankets and threw them back.

At once an exclamation escaped Danby's lips: **[67]**

"The bag!"

It was true. There, well flattened out beneath the blankets, lay a flexible leather traveling bag.

When he had seized upon it, the young man found it unlocked and empty.

“She tricked me,” he murmured. “The bag was not lost. It was hidden. She put on the extra clothes she carried and wore them beneath a long coat. She carried the papers in some concealed pockets. By pretending that the bag was lost she has thrown me completely off her track.

“I was not sure—” He was speaking slowly, calmly now. “I could not be sure that she was what we suspected her of being. I had been away from our plant when she was employed there. I did not believe she knew me, so I followed her. This act, this hiding of the bag proves that she is the person we thought her and that she did know me. Now she has escaped me. She is gone. Who can say how or where? The trail is old by now. I cannot follow her.”

Moving slowly, like one in a dream, he retraced his steps to his place by the fire, then sank gloomily into a chair. For a long time he sat staring into the fire. **[68]**

“Do something for someone else,” he murmured after poking the fire until it glowed red. “Yes, that’s the thing. That should be the slogan of our generation—do something for someone else. But when there are those who block all your efforts, what then?”

He looked up for a moment. By chance his gaze fell upon a broad window. Through that window one’s eyes beheld a magnificent sight—the topmost peak of the mountain’s jagged crest, rearing high in all its glory.

For a full moment the young man’s gaze remained fixed upon this crown of beauty. Then in a voice mellowed by reverence, he murmured:

“‘I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills
From whence cometh my help.
My strength cometh from the Lord
Which made heaven and earth.’

“I am going to tell you,” he said, turning to the little French girl. “Perhaps you can help me.”

“I can but try,” Petite Jeanne’s tone was deep and serious.

“I told you of the man who made priceless discoveries regarding color.” **[69]**

Jeanne leaned far forward to listen. In the corner the gypsy woman sat stolid in silence. The child was playing with some bright feathers in a spot of sunlight on the floor. The place was very still.

“Yes—yes,” the little French girl whispered.

“Perhaps I told you he returned to his home town to find it in desolation and that he gave his precious secrets to his town, and how it prospered after that.”

“You have told me,” replied Petite Jeanne, “but you have not told all. Were you the discoverer of these rare colors?”

“I—?” The word came in shocked surprise. “No, it was not I.”

There was a period of silence. Then in a voice raised scarcely above a whisper he said:

“It was my father.”

“Oh!” the little French girl breathed.

“He made these discoveries while serving as an industrial chemist in the Great War,” Danby Force went on after a time. “The war was terrible for him. He was gassed. He did not live many years. There—there’s a library in his town now, a splendid tribute to his memory.

“And I—” he spoke slowly. “I, his only son, have tried to guard his secrets well. But now it seems I am about to fail.” **[70]**

“But you have not. Not yet?” The little French girl’s tone was eager.

“No, perhaps not yet.”

“Then you shall not!” Petite Jeanne sprang to her feet. “I shall help you. We all can help. This young lady, this stewardess you have told me of, she travels far. She can watch. But tell me,” she demanded eagerly, “tell me of this dark-faced woman. One must know much if one is to be truly helpful.” She sank back into her chair.

“That woman!” Danby’s tone became animated. “I am convinced that she is an industrial spy.”

“An industrial spy?” Jeanne’s eyes opened wide.

“Yes. An industrial spy is one who makes it his business to spy out the secret processes of his fellow workers, then to sell these secrets to others.

“Sometimes he is one of your fellow countrymen. More often he is from another land. In these days of extreme difficulty and great struggle to make goods cheaply and to sell in many markets, there are many, many spies. **[71]**

“At first we trusted this woman. For three months she was employed in our factory. And to think—” springing to his feet, he began pacing the floor. “To think that all that time she was spying out secrets that rightly belong to our people!

“These spies!” he exclaimed bitterly. “They fasten cameras beneath their jackets. A tiny lens is concealed as a button. They take pictures, hundreds of them. They make drawings. If they may, they carry away secret receipts.”

“Did that woman do all this?” Jeanne asked.

“I am not sure that she has the secret formula. If she has not, then all may not be lost. And yet, she may have all the information needed. If she has, she will carry it back to her own country and we are ruined, for hers is a land where the poor slave long hours for little pay.”

“We must find her!” the little French girl exclaimed. “We shall, I am sure of that.”

“Yes, we must find her,” Danby agreed. “It is known that she is an alien in this country without passport. If only she can be found, she may be sent back to her own country with pockets empty as far as industrial secrets are **[72]**

concerned."

Then, as if he wished to forget it all for a little space of time, that he might revel in the comfort and natural beauty of his surroundings, Danby Force shook himself, glanced away at the snow-capped mountains, then dropped into a chair to sit musing before the glowing fire.

The little French girl had wandered to the back of the cabin. Presently he heard her light footsteps approaching. Looking up suddenly, he caught a vision of pure loveliness. Jeanne had slipped over her shoulders the purple cape with its faultless white fox collar. Just at that instant she was standing by a window where the light turned her hair into pure gold.

"How—how perfect!" he breathed. "But why so pensive?" he asked as he caught a glimpse of her face.

"I was thinking," said Jeanne slowly. "Wondering. Should you lose your precious secrets, then perhaps I might coax the secret of this royal purple from my gypsy friends. That would help you. Is it not so?" **[73]**

"Yes, yes," he agreed eagerly. "It would help a great deal!"

"But would it be right?" Jeanne's brow wrinkled. "In France there are many poor gypsies, thousands perhaps, who weave cloth and dye it too. If the secret were lost to them, then perhaps they would go hungry."

"That," said Danby Force, "requires much thinking. We must do no wrong. And we *must* find that woman!" He sprang from his chair.

"Yes," Jeanne agreed. "We must! But first we must eat." She laughed a merry laugh. "See! Our good Madame Bihari has prepared a gypsy feast. I am sure you will enjoy it."

Danby Force did enjoy that feast. A meat pie filled with all sorts of strange and delicious flavors, a drink that was not quite hot chocolate nor quite anything else, thin cakes baked on the coals, and after that fruit and bonbons. What wonder they lingered over the repast—lingered indeed too long, for, when at last they stepped from the doorway all the mellow sunshine had vanished and in its place dark clouds, like massive trains with huge silently rolling wheels were moving up the mountainside.

"Good!" Jeanne clapped her hands. "Now we shall remain in this most wonderful place all night. And Madame Bihari, she shall tell your fortune." **[74]**

"My fortune?" The young man stared at her.

"But yes!" Jeanne did not laugh. "You are in trouble. There are many things you wish to know. To be sure you must have your fortune told. And Madame Bihari, she tells fortunes beautifully, I assure you!" She went dancing, light as a fairy across the broad veranda to disappear like some woods sprite along a winding trail.

[75]

CHAPTER VI
THE GYPSY WITCH CARDS

So that evening Danby Force consented to have his fortune told. Being a practical young man who thought in terms of dollars and cents, and seldom found time for dreaming, he was not likely to take the matter seriously. Why did he consent? Perhaps it was because he liked Petite Jeanne and wished to please her. And then again there may have been in his nature, as there is in many another practical person's, a feeling for the mysterious, the thing that cannot be entirely explained. And who can say that this race of wanderers, these gypsies, may not have hidden away in their breasts some secrets unknown to others? Surely, as we have seen, they could make a cape of royal purple such as is known among no other people. Whatever the reason, Danby Force consented to have his fortune told.

That night the great lounge of the hunting lodge presented to Jeanne a setting both weird and wonderful. She loved it. Flames in the great fireplace sent shadows chasing one another from beam to beam of the ceiling. Two candles, one at each end of the long table, casting each its yellow gleam, brought out the handsome smiling face of Danby Force, but left Madame Bihari in all but complete darkness. From the mantel above the fire came the slow tick-tock of a clock. Once, from without, the girl thought she caught the challenging cry of some wild thing, perhaps a wolf. **[76]**

"There," said Madame Bihari, looking up at Danby Force, "are the cards. You shall shuffle them, my young friend. You shall cut them with your left hand. Then you shall place them on the table in positions I shall tell you of." Madame Bihari talked at this moment just as Jeanne had always imagined a wooden man might talk, each word spoken in the same low, slow tone.

"There are the cards," Jeanne thought to herself. Yes, there they were. How many times she had watched Madame Bihari tell fortunes from those cards! As she closed her eyes she could see some rich and dignified dame, at the steps of a castle in France, spread out those same cards, then sit intent, motionless, expectant as Madame Bihari told her fortune.

"And how cleverly she tells them!" Jeanne whispered to herself. "There was the Chateau Buraine. Madame said, 'It will be destroyed by fire.' Two months later it was in ashes. And the gypsies did not set the fire. *Mais* no! No! They were all away at the Paris Fair." **[77]**

"Now—" Madame was speaking once more to Danby. "Now you have shuffled, you have cut the cards. You shall now lay them face-up in rows, six in the first row, then eight in a row for five rows, and last, six in a row."

Jeanne watched fascinated as the cards were turned up. She knew those cards by heart. Each had its number. On each card was a different picture, a serpent, a sun, a moon, children at play, a house, a cloud, a tree, a mouse, a bear; yes, yes, there were pictures and each picture had its meaning, a good prophecy or a bad one.

Health, happiness, riches, love, enemies, failure, deception, sickness, death—all these and many more were prophesied by these pictures.

Most important of all was one card, the picture of a gentleman in evening coat and tall, starched collar. His number was 19. It was this card that, in the next moment or two, would stand for the young man, Danby Force. Would he be surrounded by cards telling of success, love and happiness, or by those telling of dire misfortune? She held her breath as Danby, his fingers trembling slightly, dealt the cards. **[78]**

Did Jeanne believe in all this? Had you asked her, she would perhaps have found no reply. She had lived long with the gypsies, had Petite Jeanne. How could she escape believing? And, after all, who would wish to escape? Who is there in all the world that cares to say, “I know all about these things. There is no truth in them?”

Anyway, here was Madame Bihari, Danby Force, Petite Jeanne. Here were the dancing shadows. There were the cards. And there—Jeanne caught her breath. Yes, there was the man in evening dress. There was card number 19. Every card placed close to him must have a very special meaning. Leaning back into the shadows, she waited. When all the cards were down, Madame Bihari would study them. There would be a silence, three minutes, four, five minutes long, then Madame would speak.

In her eagerness to catch every word, Jeanne moved close up beside Danby Force. **[79]**

Silence followed, such a silence as makes a roar of the wind singing down the chimney. From the mountainside there came the whisper of spruce trees. Torn, twisted, and tangled by storms, those trees stood there like horrible dwarfs whispering of love and life, of hatred and death. Once Jeanne, moved by who knows what impulse, went tip-toeing from her place to press her nose against the glass and peer into that darkness. Then, as if all the gnarled trees had been shaking fists at her, she sprang back to her place close to Danby Force.

When at last Madame Bihari broke the silence, she spoke in a deep melodious tone:

“Ah. The snake!”

“The snake!” Jeanne murmured low. She shuddered.

“But he is not too near.” There was a measure of relief in Madame’s tone. “And see! Between Monsieur and the snake is the Book. Ah! That is good! The Book stands for mystery that shall be solved. And the Eye!” Her tone became animated.

“Oh! The Eye!” Jeanne was smiling now, for well she knew that the Eye betokened great interest taken by friends. **[80]**

“Friends,” she whispered to Danby Force, when Madame had told of the Eye, “Friends, they are everything!”

“Yes.” Danby’s tone was full of meaning. “Friends, loyal friends, they are worth more than

all else in this life! And, thank God, I have many friends!”

“And see!” Madame exclaimed. “Here is the Moon. A very good sign.

“But the fox! Ah, this is bad! This speaks of distrust. There are those, Monsieur, whom you must not trust too much—perhaps some who are very close to you.”

“Yes, I—”

Madame did not permit the young man to finish. “The Sun!” Her face darkened. “The Sun tells of future vexation.”

“I shouldn’t wonder.” Danby Force laughed. **[81]**
“Indeed I have had quite a lot of that already. But come! I shall be having the jitters from all this evil prophecy. Let’s get our little blonde-haired friend to make us a steaming cup of chocolate, and please put in just one spoonful of malted milk and a marshmallow.” He touched Jeanne’s golden locks gently.

“But one moment!” Madame protested. “Here is the pig close at hand. He tells of great abundance.”

“Perhaps that means that I am to have two cups of chocolate.” Danby laughed once more.

“But yes!” Jeanne joined him in the laugh. “Three if you say so.”

“One moment more, I pray you!” Madame’s tone was very earnest. “I read in these cards that there is one who calls himself your friend. He has dark and curly hair. He smiles. He dances. He is very much alive. But ah! He is a rascal! You must beware!”

“I shall beware. Thank you,” Danby said soberly.

“And now!” exclaimed Jeanne, springing to her feet, “Our cup of cheer!”

When their light repast was over, when Madame **[82]**
sat nodding by the fire that had burned low, Jeanne spoke to Danby Force in words of exceeding soberness. “You must not treat too lightly Madame’s forecast with the cards. Indeed you must not! She is old. She has told fortunes since she was a child. The rich and the very great, they have listened often to her fortunes. Truly they have.

“Once—” her voice dropped to a whisper. “Once she said to a man, a very great man who lived in a castle on a hill: ‘You shall die. In two months you will be dead.’ And in two months his heart stopped. He was dead, dead.”

For some time after that she sat staring at the fire. When she spoke again it was in a changed tone:

“But you, my friend, you did not have a bad fortune. Indeed not! There were troubles. They come to all. You will overcome them. There were those you must not trust. You will discover that they are traitors. In the end you shall have honor, perhaps much money, and always I am sure—” her voice dropped, “Always you shall have many, many friends.”

“Ah yes,” he whispered. “Please, dear little French girl, many friends!”

After that, for a long time, with the fire gleaming brightly before them and the murmur of the wild out-of-doors coming down the chimney to them, they sat reading their own fortunes in the flames.

[83]

CHAPTER VII
A STRANGE BATTLE

In the meantime the little stewardess, Rosemary Sample, had made her way back to Chicago. During the time Danby Force was having his fortune told she was thinking at intervals of him. She was in her own small room and, as one will, whose mind is not actively engaged in performing a task, she was thinking of many things. Rosemary was, by nature, romantic. Contrary to general opinion, there are few romances between pilots of the air and their lady companions. Pilots, as a rule, are married men with homes they love all the more dearly because of enforced absence from them. Rosemary had been obliged to find romance, if any, from contact with her passengers. And there had been romances of a sort, though none of serious import. She smiled now as she thought of the great banker who more than once had favored her with a smile; of the movie actor, little more than a boy, who had traveled on her ship, once every week for four months. “Such a nice boy,” she whispered. “He—”

[84]

Her thoughts broke off. She listened intently. Over her head was clamped a head-set for receiving messages. Her radio was in tune with the sending sets of all her company’s great fleet of airplanes. What message did she expect to receive? Often none in particular. She loved the general chatter of the air. “Plane Number 9 taking off from Chicago to New York.” “Plane Number 34 due in Cheyenne at 9:15, twenty minutes late.” “Plane Number 11 grounded by a storm near Troy, New York.” All this was music to her ears, for was she not part of it all, the great air-transportation system, not of tomorrow, but of today?

Tonight, however, she half expected a personal message. To each of six friends, all stewardesses of the air, she had told what she knew of the dark lady. To each she had said, “If she boards your ship, give my call number and let me know. I’ll be listening till time for sleep.”

[85]

The message that for the instant held her attention proved disappointing. It was not for her. So she went on with her dreaming. And in those dreams there frequently appeared two faces—a serious one, Danby Force, and a smiling one, Willie VanGeldt.

“How different they are!” she thought to herself. “And yet, if I am not mistaken each has been, or will be, heir to a large fortune. It seems that even rich people have their own way of living.”

These thoughts did not long hold her fancy. Soon

she was dreaming of trips she would make in the future. No, not trips from Chicago to New York, then New York to Chicago. Nothing like that, but long trips into strange places. She'd collect a pocketful of passes and go wandering. She'd catch a ship across the Canadian prairies to Edmonton, take the north going plane and land at last at the mouth of the Mackenzie River on the shore of the Arctic. There she'd play with brown Eskimo babies and tame seals. She would drive dog teams and reindeer, ride in skin-boats and perhaps—just perhaps—hunt polar bear.

When she tired of all this, she'd go flying south through the air, south to Cuba, Panama, Rio and the slow-moving Amazon. Ah yes, this airplane business was quite wonderful, if only you knew how to make the most of it. And she knew. Ah yes, she, Rosemary Sample, knew. **[86]**

But first there were other matters to be considered. Willie VanGeldt and his badly cared for little flivver of the air; Danby Force and his dark lady. And—and—

Well, what of the rest? Rosemary had fallen asleep.

She awoke a half hour later and remained so just long enough to remove the head-set, shut off her radio, slip out of her day clothes and into her dream robes. Then again she fell fast asleep.

The charming little gypsy child who, in her bright colored dress and purple headdress looked more like an animated doll than a child, played little part in the bit of life drama played at the crest of the mountain by Petite Jeanne and her friends until, after breakfast of bacon, toast and delicious coffee, the members of the party left the hunting lodge to wend their way up the mountainside.

They were approaching the skyline landing field. A sharp, bleak wind, whispering of approaching winter, cut at their cheeks and tore away at the broken and twisted fir trees that made up the advance guard of timberline. **[87]**

The little gypsy girl was in the lead. Of a sudden she paused and, pointing excitedly, exclaimed, "See! Teddy bears! And do look! They are alive! One of them stuck his tongue out at me!"

The older members of the party did not share the little girl's happy animation. To their consternation they discovered two grizzly bear cubs half hidden among the rocks not a dozen paces away.

"Come!" said Madame, seizing the child's hand. There was a quaver of fear in her voice.

"But why?" The child Vida's round face suddenly took on a sober look. "They are pretty bears. And they are alive. I know they are."

Jeanne too knew they were alive, and Danby Force knew. They also realized that bear-cub twins usually had a mother close by, and a mother bear spelled trouble.

"We—we've got to get out of here!" Danby's words were low, but tense with emotion. The airplane was still a quarter of a mile away. **[88]**

“Come!” Madame voiced a sharp command as the child hung back. Next moment the child found herself on Danby’s shoulder, and they were all hurrying away toward their plane.

Jeanne’s heart had gone into a tailspin. Were they going to make it? Was the mother bear close at hand, or had she gone some distance in her search for food?

One glance back gave Jeanne the answer. “Run! Run!” She uttered the words before she thought them.

Instantly they sprang into wild flight.

Bears are swift runners. This mother was no exception. Had someone been standing upon a rock overlooking the scene, he might have discovered that the bear, almost at a bound, had shortened the distance between herself and the fleeing ones by half. He would have opened his eyes in sheer terror as he saw her, mouth open, tongue lolling out, white teeth gleaming, gaining yard by yard until it seemed her breath would burn the sturdy gypsy woman’s cheek.

Jeanne led the procession. Danby Force came next. Madame, unaccustomed to running, lagged behind. **[89]**

Danby heard the beast’s hoarse panting. What was to happen? He had no weapon. Yes, one, if it might be called that—a six-foot stick. This stick was very hard and stout, sharpened at one end. He had used it as an Alpine staff. As Jeanne reached the plane he threw the gypsy child into her hands; then swinging about, he sprang to Madame’s assistance. He was not a moment too soon. The irate beast was all but upon her.

At sight of this one who dared to turn and face her, the bear paused, reared herself upon her haunches and, for a space of ten seconds, stood there, glaring, snarling, frothing at the mouth.

The respite was brief. It was enough to permit Jeanne to drag her foster mother into the plane.

Danby’s thought as he turned to face the bear had been that he might set the stick at such an angle as to bring it into contact with the bear’s ribs as she charged. He had heard of hunters practicing this trick. In the end his courage failed him. Seeing his chance he dropped the stick, sprang for the plane, fell through the opening then slammed the door after him. **[90]**

“Safe!” he breathed thickly. “But is the battle over? Perhaps it has but begun. She—she could wreck this plane.”

“Oh my poor Dragon Fly!” Jeanne groaned. The great beast hurled herself against the stout door with such a shock as set the whole ship to quivering.

Consternation was written on every face but one in that small cabin. And why not? If their plane were wrecked, what then? Danby Force was in a hurry to get away. Every moment counted. The happiness of an entire community was at stake. Then too the breath of winter was in the air. At any moment a wild blizzard, sweeping in from the north, might send snow whirling into every crack and cranny of the mountain. Burying

trails, filling canyons with fathomless depths of snow, it might shut them away from all the outside world.

In spite of this, one face was beaming, one pair of sturdy legs were hopping about in high glee. The gypsy child's joy knew no bounds. "Now there will be a fight!" she screamed. "The big Dragon Fly has knives on his nose. They are very sharp. They whirl round and round. You cannot see them. The big bear cannot see. The big Dragon Fly will bite the big bear. He will roll down dead!" **[91]**

Listening to this wild chatter, Danby Force received a sudden inspiration.

"Jeanne, start your motor," he said in as quiet a tone as he could command. "She may attack the propeller. If she does, goodbye bear and goodbye propeller. I don't think she will. We'll have to risk it."

With lips drawn in a straight white line, Jeanne took her place at the wheel, then set the motor purring.

All prepared for a second lunge at the offending box that held her fancied enemies, the bear paused to listen.

Then, with a suddenness that was startling, the motors let out a roar.

"Good!" screamed Vida, the gypsy child. "The big Dragon Fly shouts at the bear. Now she will run away."

The bear did not run away. Instead, she turned half about to look away to the rocky ridge where her cubs were hiding. Then it was that Danby had one more brilliant idea. **[92]**

"Jeanne," he shouted in the little French girl's ear, "wheel your plane about, then start taxiing slowly toward those cubs."

Jeanne's fingers trembled as she grasped one control after another, to set her plane to do Danby's bidding. "What will be the result?" she was asking herself. Her great fear was that the mother bear would leap at the propeller. She had no desire to kill this mother, nor did she wish to lose her propeller.

To Jeanne the result was astonishing. No sooner had the "giant insect," all made of metal, started toward the rocks than the mother bear, fearing no doubt for the safety of her children, started to beat its time.

"A race!" Vida shouted. "Goody! A race! And the big Dragon Fly will win!"

She was a greatly disappointed child when, after following the bear for a short distance, the plane swung round, increased its speed, went circling about the narrow landing field; then at Danby's shout, "UP!", left the ground to go sailing away among the clouds.

"Well," Danby sighed as he settled back beside Jeanne, "we are out of that." **[93]**

"Yes," Jeanne sighed happily. "We are out, and the big Dragon Fly is safe!"

[94]

CHAPTER VIII
TRAILING AN OLD PAL

That same evening Jeanne's giant dragon fly came drifting sweetly down from the clouds to land at the Chicago airport. After a few words with Danby Force and a promise to meet him before the airport depot on the following day, she taxied her little plane into a hangar, gave the mechanics some very definite instructions regarding its care and general inspection, then went away with her gypsy companions to spend the night in a cozy Chicago haunt of those dark brown wanderers, the gypsies.

It was past mid-afternoon of the following day when a large, rosy-cheeked girl came striding along the path that leads to aviation headquarters. Had you noted her jaunty stride, the suggestion of strength that was in her every movement, the joyous gleam of youth that was in her eyes, you would have said: "This is our old friend Florence Huyler, her very own self." And you would not have been wrong.

[95] Had Petite Jeanne been there at that moment she must surely have leapt straight into her good pal's strong arms. They had been separated for months, Jeanne had journeyed to France. Florence had been adventuring in her own land. Letters had gone astray, addresses lost, so now here they were in the same great city, but each ignorant of the other's nearness. Would they meet? In a city of three million, one seldom meets casually anyone one knows.

But here was Florence. She had come to the airport with a definite purpose. She was, as you will recall, a playground director. She had tried her ability at many things, but this was her true vocation. Times were hard. Playgrounds had been closed. For the moment Florence was unemployed. But was she downhearted? Watch that smile, that jaunty tread. Florence was young. Tomorrow was around the corner and with it some opportunity for work. Just at this moment an unusual occupation had caught her fancy; she wished to become an airplane stewardess. How Jeanne would have laughed at this.

[96] "Oh, but my dear Florence!" she would have cried, "You and your one hundred and sixty pounds! You an airplane stewardess!"

Jeanne was not there, so Florence, marching blissfully on, arrived in due time at the door of aviation headquarters.

"I wonder if I might see Miss Marjory Monague?" she said to the girl by the wicker window. There was a suggestion of timidness in her voice.

"Miss Monague, the chief stewardess?" The girl at the small window arched her brow. "She's frightfully busy. But I—" She hesitated, took one more look at Florence's face, found it clean, frank and fair as a dew-drenched hillside on a summer morning, wondered in a vague sort of way how anyone could keep herself looking like that, then said, "I—I'll call her."

She turned to a telephone. A moment later she said to Florence, “Miss Monague will talk to you. Go right up those stairs. It’s the last office to the right.”

To the girl beside her this one whispered, “Bet she’s going to apply as a stewardess of the air! Can you e-ee-magine!

“All the same,” she added after a moment’s silence, “I’m sorry they won’t let her. She—she’s a swell one I bet! Regular pal like you dream about sometimes.” **[97]**

In the meantime Florence had made her way blithely up the stairs. “Chief stewardess,” she was thinking, “probably forty, wears horn-rim glasses, sits up straight, stares at you and says, ‘Age please?’”

She was due for a shock. The chief stewardess was not forty, nor yet twenty-five. A slim slip of a girl, she looked in her large mahogany chair not more than twenty.

“I—I want to see Miss Monague,” said Florence.

“I am Miss Monague.”

“You? Why I—” Florence broke off, staring.

The other girl smiled. “There have been stewardesses of the air for only about five years,” Miss Monague explained quietly. “We were all young when we started. Naturally you can’t grow gray hair and get your spine stiff with old age in five years. So—” she smiled a very friendly smile. “So—o here I am. What can I do for you?”

“I—why you see—” Florence began, “I—I’d like to be a stewardess. I—I’ve been a playground director.” She went on eagerly, “That really calls for pretty much the same thing. You try to make people comfortable and happy—show them a good time. That’s what a stewardess does, isn’t it?” **[98]**

“Yes, I suppose so. But—”

“That,” Florence broke in, “that’s just about what I’ve done. Sometimes I taught them to do things, when they didn’t know how—trapeze, swinging rings and all that. But mostly I just stayed around and saw that everyone was busy and happy. Truly, I did love it. But I’ve been away. And now there are no openings. I just thought—”

“Yes.” The little chief of the stewardesses favored the big girl with one of her rarest smiles. She too liked this girl. She wished to help, but—

“I’m truly sorry!” A little up-and-down line appeared between her eyes. “The trouble is, I don’t think you could ever reduce that much. Besides, you’re too tall.”

“Reduce!” Florence exclaimed. “Of course I couldn’t. I’m hard as a rock. I put in four hours in the tank or the gym every day when I can. Why should I want to reduce?” **[99]**

“Because—” a strange little smile played around the chief stewardess’ mouth. “Because our airplane cabins are just so big and we have to

get girls that fit the cabins,—five feet four inches, a hundred and twenty pounds; those are the limits. Can be smaller, but never larger."

"Oh!" Florence stared for a moment, then burst out in good-natured laughter. "I—I guess I won't do."

She was gone before the truly kind-hearted stewardess could tell her how sorry she was.

Florence was still smiling when she left the building. But the smile did not last. It is always hard, for even the strongest hearted to be in a great city alone and with no one near who will say, "You may help me do this."

She walked slowly and quite soberly over the cinder path that led to the airport depot. Arrived there, she walked in and looked about her. There was something about the place that stirred her strangely. "Such movement! Such a wonderful feeling of abundant life!"

She walked through the door that led to the landing field. Once outside, she stood spellbound. A giant silver plane, looking more like a huge sea bird than any man-made thing, came gliding down the runway to wheel gracefully about and into position. From somewhere came the barking notes of an announcer: "Plane No. 43 eastbound for Toledo, Buffalo and New York, now loading." She saw the smiling passengers following redcaps to the plane as they might have to a train, caught the signal, watched the plane roll away, heard the thunder of its motors, then saw it rise slowly in air and speed away. **[100]**

"That—" her voice caught. Experienced as she was in the ways of the world, a tear glistened in her eye as she murmured hoarsely, "That is what I wanted to become a part of. And they won't let me be—because I'm too big."

She turned about to hide that tear. Next instant she was staring fascinated at three tiny objects lying close to the wall, three tiny sticks, two parallel and one crossing them at a sharp angle. "Jeanne! Petite Jeanne!" she all but cried aloud. "Jeanne has been here, not long ago either. That is her gypsy *patteran*!"

"Listen!" In her excitement she grasped the arm of an attendant. "Was there a slim blonde-haired girl here a little while ago?" **[101]**

"Plenty of them," the attendant grinned good-naturedly, "mebby twenty."

"No, but one you would not forget. One who dresses in bright clothes like a gypsy. Perhaps there was a gypsy woman with her."

"Oh, you mean that gypsy pilot!" The attendant began to show a real interest. "Yes, she was here. She went away with Rosemary Sample and a couple of men."

"Who—who's Rosemary Sample?" Florence could scarcely speak for excitement. Jeanne! She had found her good pal Jeanne—that is, almost.

"Rosemary Sample is a stewardess," the attendant explained.

"Wh—where did they go?"

“I don’t—yes, come to think of it, I heard Rosemary say they was goin’ to Little Sweden.”

“Little Sweden? Where’s that?”

“How should I know?” the man drawled. “You might ask in Norway. That’s close to Sweden, ain’t it?

“Yes!” His voice rose suddenly. “Coming!” He hurried away, leaving Florence hanging between the heights of heaven and the depths of despair. [102]

[103]

CHAPTER IX
LITTLE SWEDEN

Little Sweden, strange to say, is not in Europe, but on the near-north side in Chicago. It is a place to eat, a unique and interesting place. There buxom maidens in white aprons and quaint starched caps do your bidding. It is a place of marvelous abundance. You do not order food. It is there before you on a long table. You pay for a meal, then help yourself. On the long board tables are great circles of chopped meat—beef, veal and chicken cooked in the most delicious manner. Salads, also done in circles, and luscious fruits, strange cakes and curious loaves of brown bread. It is as if all that is best in Sweden had been carried across the sea and reassembled for you and for your guests.

Our four friends, Rosemary, Jeanne, Danby and Willie had been whisked away from the airport to this remarkable place. A half hour after Florence had asked the question, “Where is Little Sweden?” they might have been found shut away in a small private dining room of the place, holding a conference over cakes and coffee. [104]

Rosemary was on a forty-eight hour rest period. This is a regular thing for all stewardesses when they arrive at their home port. During the past twelve hours Rosemary had seen much of Petite Jeanne, and she had found her to be a very charming person. Simple in her tastes, modest, kindly, ever ready to serve others, Jeanne was, she thought, altogether lovely. During that twelve hours Danby Force had kept the wires hot in a vain search for some clue that might lead him to the dark-faced woman who had so mysteriously vanished.

Willie VanGeldt had been admitted to the conference because, as Rosemary had discovered, beneath his apparently happy-go-lucky and altogether haphazard nature there was a foundation of pure gold. He liked folks and was ready to help them, to “go the limit,” as he expressed it, if only they would tell him what might be done. He had been quite entranced with the company of the little stewardess and was more than ready to aid her friends.

“First of all,” Rosemary was saying, “I want you all to keep in touch with me as far as that is possible. I have a radio in my room. You have radios on your airplanes. We will see that they are in tune. When I am here I’ll be in my room [105]

from eight to eleven in the evening. Should you have anything to report or be in need, call the numbers 48—48, give your location if you can, then deliver your message. I'll not be able to reply by radio, but I'll help in any way I can."

"And I'll take you round the world in my plane if need be," said Willie.

To this he received a strange reply from the little stewardess: "You'll not take me off the ground, no matter what happens."

"Why? Why won't I?" He stared in unbelief.

"I'll answer that later." She cast him a half apologetic look. "Mr. Force has something to show us."

"This," said Danby Force, "is a picture of the lady who threatens to ruin our happy community." He held the photograph before them.

"She appears to prefer air travel, and she will travel again," said Rosemary. "We have a hundred and fifty stewardesses in the air. Why not have a picture made for each of these? If they all keep watch, we may find her quickly." **[106]**

"Grand idea!" Danby exclaimed. "I'll have them made at once."

"I'll be wandering about, as gypsy people have a way of doing," Jeanne said with a fine smile. "If I catch sight of that dark lady, I'll whisper 48—48 into my receiver and things will be doing at once." Little did Jeanne dream of the strange circumstances under which that mystic signal 48—48 would slip from her lips.

"But tell us—" Jeanne leaned forward eagerly. "Tell us of these so terrible spies. Shall they be shot at sunrise?"

"No." Danby Force smiled. "We don't shoot industrial spies. In fact I'm afraid it would be difficult to so much as get them put in prison. An idea, however valuable, is not easy to get hold of and prove. You may steal it, yet no one in the world can prove that you have it. That sounds rather strange, doesn't it?" He laughed a jolly laugh.

"And by the way!" he exclaimed suddenly. "Just this morning I received a message that proves we still have spies in our plant. A scrap of note-paper with plans drawn on it, picked up off the floor of the mill, proves that. And this," he added rather strangely, "gives me fresh hope." **[107]**

"Hope! Hope! Hope!" the others cried in chorus.

"To be sure," said Danby, "if they are still with us, then they have not yet secured all the secrets needed for their selfish and cowardly plans. You see—"

He broke short off. There came a movement at the draperies of the door. A head was thrust in. A smiling face looked down upon them. A pair of lips said:

"Jeanne, I have found you!"

Ten seconds later Jeanne was in someone's arms. It was her good pal Florence. They were

together once more.

“This,” said Jeanne, turning a smiling face to her friends at the table, “is Florence Huyler, the best girl friend I have ever known. And,” she added, eagerly nodding at Danby Force, “she’s a fine solver of mysteries as well.”

“Ah!” Danby’s eyes gleamed. “Come and join us, Miss Huyler.” **[108]**

“I shall be back very soon.” Jeanne popped out of the little dining room to reappear in an incredibly short time with a heaping plate of food.

“This,” she exclaimed, “is Little Sweden, the place where everyone eats all he can.”

“And now,” said Danby, nodding to Jeanne, “tell me about your friend. Why do you think she is a solver of mysteries?”

“Because,” Jeanne replied, “she has solved many.” At once she launched into a recital of her friend’s many achievements. She spoke of the mysterious “Crimson Thread,” of the “Thirteenth Ring,” of the “Lady Cop and the Three Rubies.”

“I am delighted,” said Danby Force. “But then—” his voice dropped, “no doubt you are permanently employed and cannot join us in our search for this dark lady and her companion spies.”

“On the contrary,” Florence smiled a doubtful smile, “I am very much unemployed.”

“How fortunate!” Danby extended his hand. “And you are a social worker of a sort, a recreation lady. I have been promising myself for a long time that we should have a social secretary at our plant. I shall appoint you at once and you shall have a double duty—to serve our simple, kindly people, and to search for a spy. What do you say?” **[109]**

“What can I say but yes!” The large girl beamed. “What a day!” she was thinking to herself. “I go blundering into a place looking for a job that’s several sizes too small for me. And now I fall upon one that is just exactly my kind.”

“Life,” she said aloud, “is beautiful.”

“Yes,” Danby Force agreed, “life is beautiful at times, and should always be so. When we are selfish or unkind we mar the beauty of life for someone. When we are suspicious or unjust, when we lay heavy burdens on the weak, we are destroying life’s beauty.

“Yes,” he repeated slowly, “life must be beautiful.”

“Listen!” Rosemary Sample held up a hand. “What was that?”

“A horn,” said Jeanne. “There’s another and another. This, why this!” She sprang to her feet. “This is the night of Hallowe’en! And this is the last night of the Great Fair, that most beautiful Century of Progress. Florence,” she cried, “do you not remember the ‘Hour of Enchantment’? We must go there tonight. We truly must!” **[110]**

“We shall all go,” said Danby Force. “It will

prove a never-to-be-forgotten night, I feel sure." He spoke the truth, but he did not even so much as dream the half of it.

[111]

CHAPTER X
ONE WILD NIGHT

A half hour later the little company had joined the merry mad throng that, combining the enthusiasm of Hallowe'en with a farewell to a beloved play spot, was making the most of one wild night.

Never had any of them seen anything quite so tremendous, for Chicago, like some young giant, has never learned how big it really is. When a crowd of three hundred thousand persons descends upon one narrow park, things are sure to happen. And even now they were happening fast.

Already the "Battle of Paris" was on. In the Streets of Paris someone had thrown a bottle through a mirror. At once a hundred bottles were dying, a hundred windows crashing. With wild abandon the throng surged back and forth along the narrow streets.

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All this was quite unknown to our friends. They had not come to revel but to bid a fond farewell to a spot they had learned to love. The Sky Ride, the shimmering waters of the lagoon, Hollywood, Rutledge Tavern—a hundred little corners had played a part in the lives of Florence and Jeanne.

For all this, the spirit of the mob gripped them and, grasping one another by the shoulders that they might not be separated, they surged on through the crowd.

"One wild night!" Florence screamed.

"And it's not yet begun!" Willie, who was in the lead, called back.

The Streets of Paris was not the only spot where revelers, getting out of bounds, were rushing shops and collecting souvenirs.

"Come down from there!" shouted a policeman as a large fat man climbed to the top of a shop-keeper's shelves for some treasure.

"Come and get me!" The fat man brandished a cane. The crowd roared applause.

Three burly policemen marched upon him. One seized his cane, the others caught him by his massive legs, and down he came. Once again the crowd roared. On this night of nights, one moment you were a hero and the next you were forgotten.

[113]

Like great armies of rats, this human throng burrowed in everywhere. A barrel of rootbeer was turned half over, glasses seized and a toast drunk to the departing Fair. When the barrel was drained a long, lank individual sat astride it. Three men gave the barrel a push. Barrel and man went rolling and bouncing down a steep

incline and on into the lagoon.

They were crossing the lagoon bridge, Willie, Danby, Florence, Rosemary and Jeanne, when of a sudden Danby Force exclaimed in a hoarse whisper, “There! There she is! The dark lady, the spy! See that split ear? I’d know her anywhere by that. There can be no doubt of it. Her ears have evidently been pierced for ear-rings, and one of the rings at some time must have been torn through the flesh, leaving a disfigurement. Yes, that’s the spy, I’m sure of it.”

“The spy! The spy!” came from the others. Could a moment more thrilling and more impossible be imagined? Here they were not twenty feet from the one they sought. And that twenty feet packed tight with writhing, twisting, screaming revelers of Hallowe’en, the end of the Fair!

Then, as if to redouble the suspense, someone threw a great switch. As if by magic, the entire grounds went dark. **[114]**

“Oh! Oh! Oh!” came the murmurs of surprise, thrill and horror, from the streets many miles long, all packed with humanity.

The effect was strange. In a crowd of many thousands each individual feels very much alone. Florence felt Rosemary’s grip tighten on her shoulder as she, in turn, clutched at Willie’s coat. Danby Force alone did not lose his poise.

“Don’t lose her,” he whispered. “This is midnight. The lights will be on again soon. Then we must get her.”

He was not mistaken. Like the sudden dawn of a tropical day, the lights flashed on. The Sky Ride towers turned to tall stems of light. Masses of red, orange and green shone on every side. From the loud-speaker came the notes of a bugle, the high clear notes of “Taps.” For the moment, so great was the feeling that came welling up from the very center of her being, Florence forgot the spy. Then, with lips that quivered, she whispered to Willie:

“Where is she?” **[115]**

“There! There! Just ahead! I’ll get her.” Willie lunged forward.

But the crowd still surged about them. He moved slowly. And the dark lady, apparently unconscious of the fate that lurked so near, also moved on with the throng.

“Pass the word back,” Willie whispered. “Tell them to get a good grip on the fellow’s shoulders just ahead and then shove. Flying wedge. See?”

Florence passed the word back. Next instant, urged on by a great push from behind, she sent her solid one hundred and sixty pounds against Willie’s back.

It worked. They moved forward. A foot, two feet, three, four, five, ten.

“I’ll get her!” Willie hissed. “You’ll see!”

She might have heard. Perhaps she did. She turned half about. No matter now, for, just as Willie’s outstretched hand all but touched her, a second flying wedge composed of college boys

struck their line at the very center. The result was rout and confusion. Like beads when the string is broken, our friends were scattered far and wide.

And where was the lady spy? **[116]**

For a space of time, no one knew. Then Willie spotted her, farther away and moving rapidly.

After that things happened so fast that even to Florence's keen mind they remain a blur. Willie sprang forward. A cleared space just before him was closed as if by magic. Four policemen and a score of revelers closed it. There came the sound of thwacking clubs. Willie tripped and fell. He was up on the instant, but minus his hat. No matter. Someone jammed a hat on his head. Whose hat? He did not know or care. But for the instant after that he cared a lot. It was a policeman's hat. He wore a dark blue suit. In the crush he was mistaken for an officer.

He had just sighted the dark lady once more when three strong men seized him, lifted him on high, lunged forward, then tipped him neatly over the rail. As he shot down, down, down to the icy waters of the lagoon, the crowd let out a roar of approval.

"Crowds," he grumbled as he swam for the shore, "psychological mobs never have any sense of humor."

When he had clambered to the embankment, he turned to see his four friends waving at him from the bridge. **[117]**

"Goodbye folks!" he shouted, "I'm going home for my dress suit."

Then, realizing they could not hear, he grasped his damp coat tail, gave it a wringing twist, threw up his hands, pointed to the spot where city lights gleamed, and marched away. "Forty above!" he was grumbling again. "No night for a plunge."

Then as his mood changed, he began to sing, "Goodbye Fair! Goodbye Paree! Goodbye boys! Goodbye girls! Goodbye everybody! I'm going home to my Mom-ee!"

As for the lady spy, she had lost herself for good and all. In a crowd of three hundred thousand you might hope to meet anyone once, but never twice.

[118]

CHAPTER XI
GOODBYE FAIR

Rosemary, Florence, Jeanne and Danby did not leave the Fair grounds at once. Indeed they could not because of the crush. They did turn their faces toward the exit.

As they pressed their way out of the dense throngs to a spot where there was at least space for breathing, their eyes were greeted by strange sights.

Off to the right a group of thoughtless revelers were tearing up a hedge. Some were carrying away the shrubs as souvenirs, others were using them as mock-weapons for beating one another over the back.

From a village where imitation towers reared themselves to the sky came cries of laughter and screams of distress. Presently a throng broke through the flimsy walls and came pouring out. They had gone too far in their vandalism. The firemen had thrown a cooling stream of water on their heated brows.

"They'll have time enough to cool off now," Danby Force laughed. **[119]**

"But how sad to think that those who so often have come to this place to find beauty and happiness should, on this last night, remain to destroy!" There was a look of distress on the little French girl's face.

"Come!" said Danby Force, "There are some things we must try to forget. This is one of them. Let us always think of the great Fair as it was in the height of its glory."

As they moved on toward the Aisle of Flags, they came to a spot that, like an eddy in a stream, even on this night of turmoil was at rest.

"Goodbye." A boy was clasping a girl's hand. "Goodbye Mary. See you at the next Fair."

Jeanne knew these two a little. They had worked side by side selling orangeade and ice cream cones. Now it was "Goodbye until the next Fair."

"And when that comes," she murmured, "their hair will be gray. Goodbye until the next Fair."

As they passed an apparently deserted hot-dog stand, Jeanne caught sight of a figure crumpled up in a dark corner. A young girl, perhaps not yet eighteen, she sat with head on arms, silently sobbing. **[120]**

Jeanne was gypsy enough to read that girl's fortune. All through the bright summer days and on into the glorious autumn, the great Fair had offered her means of making a living. Perhaps she was helping to support her parents. Who could tell? Now it was all over—the last hot-dog sold. "Goodbye Fair," Jeanne whispered, swallowing hard.

Stepping silently back, she slipped a bit of green paper into the girl's hand, then disappeared too quickly to be seen.

"Life must be beautiful," she said to Danby Force, "but how can it be, for all?"

"It must be increasingly beautiful for all." The young man's face set in hard lines of determination.

Jeanne thought of the work he had done for his own little city, thought too of those industrial spies who threatened to destroy it all. "I must help," she told herself almost fiercely. "I must do all I can. Life," she whispered reverently, "Life *must* be beautiful."

As for Florence, her mind all this while was so full of the morrow that she had little thought for **[121]**

the passing hour. “Tomorrow,” she was saying to herself, “I shall be speeding through the air with Danby Force on my way to a new field and fresh adventure. I am to help the children, yes, and the grownups, of a small city—to enjoy life. At the same time I am to search for a spy.” She wondered in a vague sort of way what that search would be like and how successful she would be as a lady detective. She was wondering still when Danby Force said:

“Time for a hot drink before the clock strikes one.”

“Yes. Oh yes!” Jeanne’s voice rose in sudden eagerness. “I know the very place. It is run by some English gypsies. At this time of night only gypsies will be found there. But, ah my friend, such good tea as they brew! You never could know until you have sipped it.”

“Ah, a gypsy’s den at one in the morning! Show us the way.” And Danby hailed a taxi.

Ten minutes later they were entering a long, low basement room such as only Jeanne had seen before. It was finished as the inside of the ancient gypsy vans were finished, in a score of bright colors, red, yellow, orange, blue, silver and gold. There were few lights. Some were like ancient lanterns, and some were mere glimmering tapers. Trophies of the hunt hung against the walls—the head of a deer, the grinning skeleton of a wild boar’s head. **[122]**

There were no chairs. Instead all sat, true gypsy fashion, on rugs. Strange rugs they were too, woven of some heavy material and all brightly colored.

In one corner a group of dark foreign looking people in bright costumes sat smoking long-stemmed pipes and sipping tea. A cloud of smoke, hanging close to the ceiling, created the illusion of low-hanging clouds and the out-of-doors.

“Perfect!” Danby murmured.

At sound of his voice, a solidly built woman, wrapped in a bright shawl, turned to look up at him. In her eyes was a dreamy look. Before her on the floor were cards. On the cards were pictures—a snake, a house, a fountain, a lion, a mouse, a burning fire.

“Madame Bihari!” Florence exclaimed, delighted. “And you have the gypsy witch cards. You shall tell my fortune, for tomorrow I am to begin a splendid new adventure.” **[123]**

“You shall find beauty and happiness.” Madame smiled a glad smile. She did not look at the cards. “You have learned a great secret. Health, strength, sunshine, the wide out-of-doors—they are your great joy. With these alone anyone may find happiness. You are a true gypsy at heart, my splendid Florence.”

“Thank you. That is kind.” Florence favored her with a rare smile. “But Madame, please, my fortune! You have never told it.”

“There is no need,” the gypsy woman murmured. “It is written in your face.

“But sit you all down upon my rug. Order me a

good cup of black tea and you shall have as good a fortune as I can bring you. But beware, child! You have insisted. If the cards turn up wrong, do not blame your poor old Madame Bihari. It is you who shall shuffle, cut and deal—not I."

When tea had been brought on a silver tray, Florence shuffled the cards, cut them with her left hand, then placed them one by one in their proper positions. Then Madame, bending forward, began to study them. The four friends, forgetting their tea, sat upon their feet, waiting in eager expectation. Moving in from their corner, the gypsies too watched in silence. **[124]**

Over one who has seen them often an indescribable spell is cast by the gypsy witch cards. The serpent striking at some unseen object; the eye, gleaming at you from the half darkness; the fire leaping from the hearth; the mouse; the clasped hands; the lightning—all these and many others appear to take on a special meaning. And so they do in very truth to the teller of fortunes.

When at last Madame began to speak, an audible sigh rose from the little group of watchers.

"You have friends." Her voice was low and even as the murmur of a slow moving stream. "Many friends. It is well, for there shall be perils. There is one you may wish to trust, even to love a little; but you must not, for that one is a traitor."

"The spy!" Jeanne whispered in her companion's ear.

"The spy!" Florence shuddered.

"You shall serve and shall be served," Madame went on. "You shall travel—high in air." **[125]**

"Tomorrow," Danby laughed a low laugh.

"You are entering upon a fresh adventure. Will you succeed?" Madame stared long at the cards. "It is not written here. The cards are silent. Perhaps another time." She looked up with a slow smile on her face.

"And now, Jeannie, my little one, my tea."

A long sighing breath from every pair of lips, a light nervous laugh, then the spell was broken. Florence knew her fortune. They might all drink their tea, then scatter to their homes for a short night of repose. To Florence, at least, the coming day would bring new scenes and fresh promise of adventure.

[126]

CHAPTER XII
FLYING THROUGH THE NIGHT

Just twenty-four hours after she had stood disconsolate before the airport depot, watching giant man-made birds sail away into the blue sky, Florence stood, traveling bag in hand, all radiant, waiting for her silver ship to wheel into

position for flight. Beside her stood Danby Force and the little French girl. Danby too was going. It was to be a night flight. “All the more thrilling!” had been Jeanne’s instant prediction. “Flying by night! Seeming to play among the stars! Ah, what could be more delightful!”

Rosemary Sample, whose plane did not go out until the following morning, was there to see them off. So too, quite dried out from the previous night’s adventure, was Willie VanGeldt.

Florence found herself thrilled to the very tips of her toes. As a blue and gold plane with three motors thundering glided away, then with a roar of thunder rose in air, as a small yellow one followed it into the sky, she counted the moments that remained before the number of her own plane should be called and she, walking with all the care-free indifference of the much air-traveled lady (which she was not at all), should march to the three iron steps leading to the plane and climb on board. **[127]**

“You may think it strange,” Danby was saying to Jeanne, “that we should go to so much trouble to catch one industrial spy, and a lady at that.”

“But no!” Jeanne exclaimed. “Lady spies, they are the most clever and most difficult of all. The great and terrible war proved that.”

“Yes,” Danby agreed. “And in this peace-time war of industry, when great secrets are being guarded, secrets that might win or lose another great war—which, please God, there may never be—the ladies bear watching, I assure you.

“And there *are* secrets,—” his tone became animated. “Chemical secrets that have made work for thousands, secret processes for heat-treating steel that have revolutionized an entire industry.”

“And secrets that give us better and more beautiful dresses. Ah!” Jeanne laughed a merry laugh. “This is the most wonderful secret of all. For where there is color there is beauty. Beauty brings happiness. Life must be beautiful. So—o, my good friend—” She put forth a slender hand —“I wish you luck! May you and my good friend Florence catch those so very wicked spies and may they be shot at sunrise! **[128]**

“And now,” her tone changed, “I must say adieu, for see! There is your silver ship wheeling into position. Do not be surprised if some day you see my own little dragon fly coming to light on the top of your flag pole or the landing field nearby.

“And now, Florence!” She gave her good pal a merry poke. “Shoulders up, eyes smiling, the good and jaunty air. Tell the world that this is nothing new. And *bon voyage* to you both. I shall be seeing you. And I shall be watching, always watching for that dark lady, the most terrible spy.”

Smiling, Florence touched her lips to Jeanne’s fair brow, then putting on her very best air of indifference, which was very good indeed, marched to her plane, climbed the steps, then sank into a soft low seat to let forth a sigh that was half relief and half deep abiding joy. **[129]**

Having seen them off, Jeanne went in search of

her flying gypsies. They had planned to join in a reunion of their tribe a hundred miles away. Jeanne was to fly them there.

“Now,” said Willie VanGeldt when he and Rosemary were alone, “You said last night you would not fly with me. Why not?”

“Because—” an intent look overspread Rosemary’s usually smiling face. “Because you are grown up, and yet you insist on playing about, on making life a joke and because flying with you is not safe.”

“Not safe!” He stared. “I’ve a pilot’s license. Didn’t get it with a pull either. Earned it, I did.”

“I’m not questioning that,” she went on soberly. **[130]**
“All the same, it’s flyers like you who are spoiling this whole aviation business. Look at me —I’m a worker. Being a flying stewardess is my job. I work at it every month in the year. The pilots and their helpers, the mechanics in our shops, the radio men on duty all day, every day, depend on it for their living and the support of their families. Together we hope to make our transportation safe, comfortable and inexpensive for all. We—”

“Well, I—”

“No! Let me finish,” she insisted. “Look at our planes. Sixty of them, cost seventy thousand dollars apiece. Multiply that and see what it comes to. Shows that men with money believe in us.

“See how those planes are cared for. Looked over in every port. Least thing wrong, out they go. Motors taken off and overhauled every three hundred hours. Always in perfect condition.

“And you—” there was a rising inflection in her voice. “You go round the world proclaiming to all the world that life is a joke and that airplanes are grand, good playthings. You flirt with death. And in the end death will get you. Then thousands will say, ‘See! Flying is *not* safe!’ See what I mean?”

“Well, I—”

“Tell you what!” she exclaimed. “It’s a safe guess you don’t even know when your motor was last overhauled and cleaned.”

“No, I—” the play-boy was not smiling now. **[131]**
“Well now, Miss Sample, you see this crack-up has cost a lot of money. So I—”

“So you ask me to risk my life flying with you. And I say ‘No!’

“I—I’ll have to be going.” Her tone changed. “Got a report to make out. I’ll be seeing you. And I only hope it won’t be under a high bank of cut flowers.”

She was gone, leaving Willie staring.

“Queer sort of girl!” he grumbled after a time. “But I—she sure is a good one!

“She might be right at that,” he murmured as he left the building.

For Florence, speeding away through space with

the stars above and the earth below, that was a never-to-be-forgotten night. First the broad expanse of the city's gleaming lights and after that, in sharp contrast, deep, sullen blue below that suggested eternity of space.

"We're over the lake," Danby Force smiled. "Way over there is the light of a ship."

"And still farther there is another," Florence replied. "How rapidly we leave those lights behind! How strange to be speeding along through the night."

Soon the deep blue below changed to varying shadows. They were over land once more. The panorama that passed beneath them never lost its charm. Here, faintly glowing, were the lights of a tiny village. Were they asleep, those people? Probably not. Too early for that. Some were reading, some studying, some playing games, those simple kindly people who live in small villages. **[132]**

The village vanished and only a single light, here and there, like reflections of the stars, told where farm houses stood. A city loomed into sight, then passed on into the unknown.

"It's like life," Florence said soberly. "We are always passing from one unknown to another.

"And speaking of unknowns—" her voice changed. "Do you think the industrial spy who is still in your employ is a man or a woman?"

"We have no means of knowing." Danby spoke soberly. "To find this out if you can, this is to be part of your task."

"If I can," Florence whispered to herself, after a time.

So they rode on through the night. Danby Force seldom spoke. This riding in an airplane appeared to cast a spell of silence over him. Perhaps, at times, he slept. Florence could not tell. She did not sleep. The experience was too novel for that. Twice she caught the gleam of colored lights and knew they were meeting another plane. She tried to imagine what it would be like when everyone traveled by air. But would that time come? Who could tell? **[133]**

It was still dark when Danby Force, after looking at his watch, said:

"We'll be there in ten minutes. You shall go to my house for ten winks of sleep."

True to his prediction, the plane went roaring down to a small landing field. They disembarked, were met by a small man in a green uniform and were led to a powerful car. Having taken their places in the back seat, they were whirled away to at last mount a hill by a winding road and stop before a tall gray stone house surrounded by very tall trees.

"My mother and I live here," Danby said. "I should prefer greater simplicity, but a beautiful old lady you call 'mother' must always be humored." Florence could have loved him for that speech.

She understood more clearly what he meant when, once inside the wide reception room, they **[134]**

were met by a butler and a white-capped maid whisked her away to a spacious bedroom all fitted up with massive furniture.

Sleep came at once. Before she realized it a rosy dawn ushered in another day. “What shall this day bring forth?” she murmured as, with a chill and a thrill, she leaped from her bed to do a dozen setting-up exercises, and at last to dress herself in her most business-like costume.

“Mademoiselle the detective,” she laughed as she looked in the mirror. “I surely don’t look the part.”

[135]

CHAPTER XIII
SUSPECTS

The small city—scarcely more than a large village—that Florence found herself entering that morning was, at this season of the year, a place of enchanting beauty. Half hidden by the New England hills, its white homes surrounded by trees and shrubs turned by the hand of a master artist, Nature, into things of flaming red and gold, it seemed the setting for some marvelous production in drama or opera.

“It—it seems so unreal,” she whispered to herself. “The hillside all red, orange and gold, the houses so clean and white. Even the women and children in their bright dresses seem automatic things run by springs and strings.”

Finding herself half-way up a hill, on one side of which a whole procession of very small houses, all just alike, appeared to be struggling, she paused to stare at a sign which read: “Room for rent.”

“How could they rent a room?” she asked herself. “The house is little more than a bird’s nest.” **[136]**

Consumed by curiosity, she climbed the narrow steps and knocked at the door.

A small lady with prematurely gray hair appeared. “I came to ask about the room,” Florence said in as steady a tone as she could command.

Next instant she found herself in a house that made her feel very large. The hall was narrow, the doors low, the rooms tiny.

“This is the room.” She was led to what seemed the smallest of the four rooms.

“But this is already occupied.” She looked first at the display of simple toilet articles on the dresser, then at the half-filled closet.

“Oh yes, our daughter Verna has it now,” the little lady hastened to explain. “But she—she’s to sleep in our—our general room.”

“The one they use for parlor, living room and dining room,” Florence thought to herself. “How terrible!”

She was about to say politely, “I guess I wouldn’t be interested,” when a young and slender girl of surprising beauty stepped into the doorway.

“Here is Verna now,” her mother said simply. **[137]**

“Yes, here she is,” some imp appeared to whisper in Florence’s ear, “and you are going to take this room. You will have to now. You are going to buy a small bed and share the room with this beautiful child. You will cast your lot with this little family. You have seen her. It is too late to turn back now.”

Perhaps if he had been a very wise imp he might have added, “This step you are taking now will bring you into grave danger, but that does not matter. You will take the room all the same, and like it.” But the imp, being of a very ordinary sort, did not say this.

Florence *did* take the room. She *did* buy herself a very narrow bed and she *did* share this small room in this canary-cage of a house with the beautiful girl. And, strangest of all, she became very happy about it almost at once.

The life into which she found herself thrown was strange indeed. She had lived in a small mid-western city where there was no mill or factory. She had lived in a great city. In each place she had found companions of her own sort. But here she was thrown at once into a community of small homes owned by people whose incomes had always been small and who looked out upon the world beyond their doors with something akin to awe. To Florence all this was strange. **[138]**

Her task, that of finding the industrial spy, she believed to be an easy one. In the privacy of his inner office, she said to Danby Force, “Most of these people have lived here all their lives. You could not make a spy of them if you chose. All I have to do is to find out the ones who have been here a short time. It must be one of these.”

“You are probably right,” the young man agreed. “Not so many of them either, perhaps a dozen. I shall see that you have their names tomorrow.”

On the morrow she had the names. And, after that, one by one, in the most casual manner she looked them up. There were, she found, two middle-aged, dark-complexioned sisters named Dvorac, expert weavers who lived in a mere shack at the back of the city. Miriam, the taller of the two, appeared to be the leader. “Might be these,” she told herself. “They resemble the one who escaped.”

There was a little weasel-faced German who excited her suspicion at once. He was an expert electrician of a very special sort. He was in charge of the hundreds of motors that ran the looms and spinning machines. He was, of course, all over the place. “Finest chance in the world,” she told herself. “And he appears to be always prying about, even when nothing seems wrong.” This man’s name was Hans Schneider. **[139]**

There was a girl too, one about her own age, who came in for her full share of suspicion. She worked in the dyeing room. The very first day Florence caught her slipping out with an ink bottle. The bottle was filled with dyeing fluid. “I only wanted to dye a faded dress,” the girl

explained reluctantly. “You’d want to do that too if you hadn’t had a new dress for four years.”

Florence guessed she would. She wanted to accompany the girl home, but did not quite dare. So she suggested that the bottle be taken to the floor supervisor and permission obtained for its removal.

The girl, who called herself Ina Piccalo (a strange combination of names) flashed Florence a look of anger as she obeyed instructions. **[140]**

“Her eyes are black as night,” Florence told herself. “She’d look stunning in a gown of deep purple and the dye is just that. I’ll be looking for that gown,” she told herself as a moment later, with a flash of her white teeth, Ina passed her, the bottle still in her hand.

This was the only instance in which Florence interfered in any way with the actions of the employees of the mill. She was, to all appearances, only a young welfare worker whose business it was to make everyone happy, with special interest in the children of the city.

This part she played very well. Long hours were spent in the mill’s gymnasium and social house, and upon its playgrounds. Not a week had passed before this stalwart, rosy-cheeked girl was known to every child of the city, and nearly every grown-up as well. “That’s her,” she would hear them whisper as she passed. “That’s the Play Lady.” Yes, she was the Play Lady; but much more than this, she was the Lady Cop, the detective who, she hoped, in time was to free their happy little city from the dark cloud that, all unknown to the greatest number, hung over them.

Yes, this truly *was* a happy city. Florence grew increasingly conscious of this as the days went by. The mill she found enchanting. The little city with its clean white homes, surrounded by the golden glow of autumn, was indeed a place where one might long to linger. **[141]**

“Just now,” she said to herself, “I feel that I could love to live here forever.”

This mood, like many another in her strange, wandering life, she knew all too well, would pass. “And I must not allow myself to be lulled into inaction by it all,” she told herself. “There is the spy. I *must* find the spy. Even now he may be gathering up his stolen secrets and preparing to carry them away to some other city, or even across the sea.”

But how was one to catch a spy? Every moment of each day she was watching, watching, watching. And yet, save for the rather simple matter of Ina Piccalo’s carrying away a bottle of purple dye, nothing unusual had caught her eye.

“I may fail,” she told herself, “fail utterly.” Yet she dared to hope for a turn of the wheel of fortune—“the lucky break” as the smiling Willie VanGeldt would have called it.

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CHAPTER XIV

GYPSY TRAIL

If life, for the moment, had been robbed of its adventure for Florence, the little French girl Petite Jeanne had not fared so badly. To her life had come one more thrill. It happened in a strange and quite unexpected manner. Having left the gypsy child with friends in Chicago, she and Madame Bihari had gone on a true gypsy tour of the air. Their destination was anywhere, their home the landing field that appeared beneath them at close of day. Never had Jeanne been so buoyantly happy as now. And who could wonder at this?

One evening just at sunset they came soaring down upon a landing field in the open country. Many years ago some great lover of trees had planted here a long row of hard maples. These now formed the farthest boundary of the landing field. The most glorious days of autumn had arrived. Never had there been such a gorgeous array of colors. Here red, orange, yellow and green were blended in a pattern of matchless beauty.

The light of the setting sun presented all this to the little French girl in a manner that delighted her very soul. As if attracted by some great magnet, her little plane taxied toward them. The planes were all but touching the leaves when at last the ship came to a halt. **[143]**

“Madame,” Jeanne said, all but breathless with delight, “this is where we stay tonight.” Her tone became deeply serious. “Why do men from Europe say America is ugly? Nowhere in the world is there a moment more beautiful than this!” She took up a handful of golden leaves, lifted them high, then sent them sailing away into the breeze.

“Here is a little pile of wood,” she said a moment later. “There is a bare spot just out from the trees. We shall make a little fire and boil some water for tea. We shall dream just this once that we are back in our so beautiful France on the Gypsy Trail.

“And Madame!” she exclaimed joyously, “Why shouldn’t all gypsies travel in airplanes? How wonderful that would be! When the frost comes biting your toes in this beautiful northland, when the trees lose their glory and stand all bleak and bare, then they could fold their tents to go gliding away to the south. One, two, three, four, five hours racing with the wild ducks in their flight, and see! there you are! Would it not be wonderful?” **[144]**

“Quite wonderful.” Madame Bihari beamed. Already she had the fire burning, the water on to boil.

They had traveled far that day. Jeanne was tired. Dragging out the pad to her cot, she spread it beneath one of those ancient maples. Stretching herself out upon it, she lay there looking up into the labyrinth of red and gold that hung above her.

“Oh,” she breathed, “if only heaven is half as beautiful as this!”

“Madame,” she said after a very long time, “why is there always trouble? Why do people struggle so much, when all this beauty may be had without asking?”

“If I could answer that,” Madame said soberly, “I should be very wise. But this you must remember, my Jeanne: wherever you go, whether you succeed or fail, you will find people ready to drag you down. Shall you let them? Surely not, my Jeanne. We must fight, my Jeanne.”

“Always?” the little French girl asked as a wistful note crept into her tone. **[145]**

“Always, my Jeanne.”

For a time after that they sat staring dreamily at the fire. Then, seeming to recall half forgotten words, Jeanne murmured softly, “Does the road lead uphill all the way?” Then, as if answering her own question, “Yes, my child, to the very end.

“Trouble,” Jeanne whispered. At once she thought of her good pal Florence, then of Danby Force and the problem they were trying to solve.

“Madame,” she whispered, “do you suppose Florence has found her spy?”

“Who knows?” Madame’s words were spoken slowly. “Spies are hard to find. Some, I am told, went all through the great war and were not captured.”

“We should help her,” Jeanne decided quite suddenly. “We shall go to that little city. Perhaps tomorrow we shall go.”

At that moment some wood sprite might have whispered, “No, Jeanne, not tomorrow.”

With the lightning bugs flashing about them and the song of tree toads in their ears, they drank their tea, munched some hard crackers, and felt that life was indeed very beautiful. **[146]**

“Shall you sleep now?” Madame asked a half hour later. “The tent is ready.”

“No. Not yet.” Jeanne wrapped herself in a blanket, then stretched out beneath her canopy of gold. “How wonderful autumn is!” she sighed. “It makes you wish that life were all like this and that one might go on living forever. But this we cannot do, so it is best to sing.

“‘Dance, gypsy, dance.
Sing, gypsy, sing,
Sing while you may, and forget
That life must end.’

“I should go in,” she told herself after a time. But she did not go. Dry leaves, rustling in the breeze, seemed to whisper, stars, peeping through the trees, appeared to wink at her. The whole world seemed at peace. Even the dog that barked from some place far away appeared to be singing in the night.

“How like it is to one of those lovely nights in France,” she thought to herself. “I was only a small child. There were many gypsies, sometimes fifty, sometimes a hundred. They sang and they danced. Their violins! Ah yes, how **[147]**

sweetly they sounded out into the night!

“And yet—” her mood changed. “Would I go back to that? Perhaps not. This is America. This is a new day. There are exciting things to do. There are mysteries to solve, people to be helped. I shall solve those mysteries. I shall help those people. I—the little French girl they call Petite Jeanne!” She laughed a low laugh.

“I should go in,” she said again. She took in three deep breaths of the pure night air, yet she did not move. Very soon after, had one been passing, he might have said, “She is asleep.” He would have spoken the truth.

When she awoke some time later, a sense of strangeness filled her mind. A spot of light in the sky caught her eye. An exclamation escaped her lips. “I am still dreaming,” she murmured. She pinched herself hard. It hurt. She must be wide awake, yet, up there in the sky, gleaming as a white tower gleams when a hundred spotlights are upon it, was a silver ship—an airplane.

“Angels!” she murmured. “They too must have taken to the air in planes.” This, she knew well enough, was pure fancy. What could this silver ship be? And what kept it glistening like a star? That there were no spotlights near, she knew well. And if there were, their beams of light would stand out against the darkness. **[148]**

The silver ship began to circle as for a landing. Jeanne shuddered. What if this strange visitor of the night should land close to her own tiny plane! She was about to spring up and dash for the tent, when a vision of extraordinary beauty caught her eye. The plane, having arrived at a point directly above her leafy bower, formed a gleaming white background against which the red and gold of maple leaves stood out like the colors of the most costly tapestries.

So lost in her contemplation of this was the little French girl, she did not miss the plane when it was gone. The after-image lingered on the picture walls of her mind.

“It is gone!” she cried softly at last, “Gone!” So it was. As if swallowed up by the night, the silver ship had vanished.

“Perhaps it has gone over to the depot,” she told herself. “I may see that mysterious ship in the morning.” **[149]**

Then, as if in need of companionship and protection, she rolled up her thin mattress and disappeared within the tent.

“There is a plane by the depot, a silver plane!” Jeanne exclaimed excitedly the moment she thrust her head from the tent next morning. “I must see it. There was one that glowed white all over last night. Is this the one? I must know.”

Since it was some distance to the depot Jeanne, using her plane as another might an automobile, warmed up the motor and went taxiing over.

To Madame’s vast astonishment, ten minutes later as the silver plane went gliding over the field to at last rise in air, Jeanne’s dragon fly went speeding on its trail and, in an astonishingly short time, both planes were lost

in the blue.

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CHAPTER XV
LADY COP OF THE SKY

But we must not forget Florence. At Danby Force's request, she had arranged for a dance in the Community House. "Call it a waltz night," he suggested. "All these older people love the old-fashioned dances and the waltz is the best of them all."

"Yes," she agreed, "there's nothing quite like a waltz."

She took great pleasure in arranging for this simple social affair. She sent a bevy of girls into the hills to gather branches of maple and sumac. These, all afire with colors of autumn, turned the rather drab social hall into an elfin grotto. High in one corner she hung a cardboard moon. Behind this was a powerful electric lamp.

"For the last waltz," she whispered to Verna who was helping. "We will turn off all the other lamps and waltz by the light of the golden moon."

"That," said the happy girl softly, "will be grand." [151]

Their waltz night came and with it such a crowd as the Community House had never before known.

From the musicians of the community Florence had managed to assemble an excellent orchestra.

To the swinging rhythm of "The Beautiful Blue Danube," Danby Force and Florence led the merrymakers away for the first dance.

"They're happy," Danby Force said as a pleased smile passed over his face. "Truly, peacefully happy. This waltz night idea is going to be fine. We'll have several of them, have them all winter long."

"Has he forgotten?" Florence asked herself. "Has the spy and my mission here slipped from his memory so soon?" It surely seemed so, for here he was planning her social service work for the distant future.

"Some day," she told herself with a little shudder, "there will be a big blow-up around here. The spy will be found. Perhaps I shall find him. And then there will be no more social work done by little, big Florence."

She resolved to forget all this and, for one night at least, enjoy life to its full. [152]

The fourth waltz had come to a close with a glorious swing. She was seated on the side line with Danby Force when, of a sudden, a figure appeared on the narrow platform. A jolly-faced young man he was. His dark eyes were sparkling, his bushy black hair tumbled about his ears. His was a face to charm the world. From some woman's gown he had snatched a

broad belt of red cloth. A fantastic, romantic figure he cut indeed as he stood there waving his hands. “Well now, that was wonderful!” he shouted. “Beautiful! Artistic! Entrancing! Marvelous!

“And now—” his face became animated like a thing glowing with inner fire. “Now let’s have a little jazz.”

The orchestra leader beckoned. He bent low to listen. Then,

“No music? Bah! Who wants music? It goes like this!”

Like a clown in the circus, he produced a saxophone from nowhere at all, put it to his lips and began a series of strange sounds which everyone knew was jazz.

“Now!” He beckoned to the orchestra. His body swayed. His eyes shone. “Now!” **[153]**

Who could resist him? Whether they could or not, no one did. The orchestra followed his lead. Dancers swarmed out upon the floor. Soon the place was a mad house of wild, hilarious dancing. Only Florence and Danby Force did not dance.

“Who is he?” Florence asked as a puzzled frown overspread her face.

“Hugo?” Danby Force said in a tone of surprise. “Haven’t you met him? Well, of course you might not. He’s an inspector, works in a back room. But in a place like this he’s what’s known as the life of the party.

“In fact,” he added, “that’s why I employed him. I thought, with his saxophone and his high spirits he’d stir things up. We’re a bit dull in this old town. Well—” he laughed an uneasy laugh. “He’s done it all right. He’s stirred us up. See for yourself. He’s only been here three months and he practically runs the town. Jolly fellow, Hugo.”

“Three months,” Florence was thinking to herself. “Then he’s one of the newcomers. He might be—”

Her thoughts broke off suddenly. Had she caught some movement behind her? A door stood ajar. Her keen eyes caught sight of a figure that vanished instantly. It was the little hunchback German, Hans Schneider, one of her suspects,—she was sure of that. **[154]**

As if he had read her thoughts, Danby said: “The German people are the cleverest dye makers in the world. While the World War was on and we could not get their dyes, we made some very poor cloth I can tell you. But now—”

He did not finish. She knew what he would have said: “Now if we can but find this spy, if we can protect our interests, we shall lead the world and our little city may become the center of a great industry.”

“You don’t dance to that sort of music?” he said, nodding his head toward the squealing, squawking, sobbing orchestra.

“Is it music?” Florence smiled.

"I wonder!" He did not smile. He was watching the younger people in this mad whirlpool of motion and sound. "Sometimes I wonder," he repeated. "I've been told that this jazz started in the dark heart of Africa, or perhaps in the black Republic of Haiti. That it used to be practiced as a wild, frenzied dance, mingled with a sort of madness, by the Voodoo worshippers before they performed something terrible—perhaps human sacrifice. [155]

"Anyway—" his voice changed, "this wild revel does things to our people. There's sure to be things happen tomorrow, a whole batch of color spoiled perhaps, or bolts of cloth ruined, perhaps valuable machines wrecked. People are nervous and jumpy after just one wild night. You can't trust them to be themselves.

"Last time we had a revel like this," he laughed low, "one of the girls was working near a vat of indigo blue coloring matter. She—she tried a new jazz step, I believe,—and—fell in! She was blue for a week after that." He laughed aloud. Florence joined him and felt better. Her night of waltz music was spoiled, but here at least was amusement. "She would have been blue for life," Danby went on, "only the coloring material wasn't in its last stages.

"Well—" he rose. "I'll be going. Got a lot of work to do. No more waltz tonight."

"No—no more waltz!" Florence looked up at her imitation moon. She was disappointed and unhappy. She had pictured that last dance as something unusual and beautiful. [156]

"Your Hugo is attractive at any rate," she said to Danby.

Just at that moment Hugo went whirling by. He was dancing with Ina Piccalo, the dark-eyed girl who had carried away the dye.

"She's wearing a purple dress," Florence said to herself, "the very shade that was in the ink bottle. I wonder—" she was to wonder many times.

It was not many hours after Florence had returned to her small room in the bird-cage cottage, when Jeanne, in quite a different part of the country, started on her strange flight following the small silver plane.

"What can have happened?" Madame Bihari asked herself in utter astonishment as she watched the two planes, like homing pigeons, rapidly disappearing into the distance.

That which had happened was truly very simple. As Jeanne, after taxiing down the field, came in sight of that silver plane, she caught sight of a tall dark figure just entering the plane. One look was enough. Her lips parted in sudden surprise as she hissed under her breath: "The dark lady! The spy!" [157]

She was about to spring from her place when the silver plane, whose propeller had been slowly revolving, started gliding away. There was nothing left but to follow.

Jeanne followed, not alone on the ground, but in the air. And did she follow? Miles and miles the

two planes roared on. Perhaps some early milkman, looking up at the sky, wondered where they were going. Jeanne wondered also, but not once did she think of turning back. In her mind's eye, she could see the earnest look on Danby's face. She could picture his happy little city and her friend Florence working there.

"I'll catch that so terrible spy," she told herself. "Somehow I *must*!"

We feel certain that she would have accomplished her purpose, but for one thing. She and Madame had traveled far on the previous day. Their supply of gas was low. Just when Jeanne fancied that the silver plane was slowing up for a landing, her motor gave an angry sput-sput-sput, then went quite dead.

"No gas!" she exclaimed in sudden consternation. **[158]**

Wildly her eyes sought the earth beneath her. There were plowed fields to the right and left of her, very soft and dangerous, she knew. Directly before her were corn shocks, hundreds of them. There were wide spaces between the shocks. Could she land between them?

With a little prayer to the god of the air, she set her plane to go gliding in a circle and land as nearly as possible in one particular spot.

She missed the spot and the space between the shocks completely. With a sudden intake of breath, she saw herself headed for an endless row of shocks.

"God take pity on one poor little gypsy girl!" she whispered.

The plane bumped softly. A brown bundle shot past her, another and another, five, ten, twenty. The earth and sky turned brown. Then, her plane quite buried in brown, she came to a standstill.

Realizing the danger from fire, she leaped from the plane to begin dragging at the bundles of corn fodder that covered her motor. To her surprise, she discovered that someone on the other side was engaged in the same occupation. When at last the motor was quite clear, a freckled youth, with two front teeth gone, came round the side to grin at her. **[159]**

"Now you'll have t'set 'em all up ag'in, I reckon." He cackled a merry cackle.

"Oh no; you set them up." Jeanne joined him in the laugh. Then, digging deep in her knickers pocket, she dragged forth a new five dollar bill. "You take this and get me some gas. You can keep the rest. Just enough gas to take me to the landing field. Where is the nearest one?"

"Thanks! Er—" the boy paused to cackle again. "Them shocks was just husked. I husked 'em. Weren't tied none. If they wasn't husked you'd might nigh cracked up, I reckon.

"I'll get the gas," he added hurriedly. "Sure I will. Landin' field over thar." He pointed north. "Ten miles. How come you all didn't stop thar?"

"No gas." Jeanne smiled a happy smile. "But say! You hurry!" she put in as he moved slowly away. **[160]**

“I’m a lady cop of the air. I was chasing a spy.”

“Gee Whillikins! A spy!” The boy was away on the run.

[161]

CHAPTER XVI
A SUSPICIOUS CHARACTER

Jeanne had lost her spy. She had lost herself as well. Only after much flying and four landings was she able to find her way back to the spot where Madame Bihari patiently awaited her. When she arrived the sun was setting once more and it was again time for tea.

As on the previous night, Jeanne lay long beneath her canopy of red and gold. But no silver plane came to shine down upon her.

“Marvelous plane,” she murmured. “Wonder if I shall ever see it again, or learn the secret of its shining beauty?”

On the day following the dance, Florence took a forenoon off to climb to the crest of a hill that overlooked the city. She sat herself down upon a heap of fallen leaves, then proceeded to indulge in an occupation quite unusual for a girl. Selecting a fine smooth stick that had lain long enough upon the ground to become brittle and all sort of “whitty,” she began to whittle. A boy cousin had long ago introduced her to the joyous art of whittling. What did she make? Mostly nothing at all. She just whittled. And as she carved away at the brittle wood, she thought. Long, deep thoughts they were too. Ah yes, there was the charm of whittling—it made thinking easy.

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“If it wasn’t all so tranquil and beautiful, I’d leave it,” she thought as her eyes took in the scene beneath her feet. Yes, it surely was beautiful. The red brick factory, built beside a rushing stream, quite old and all covered with vines, had a quiet charm all its own. Beside it, reflecting the golden glory of autumn trees, was the millpond. Beyond that the water flowing over the dam, sparkled like a thousand diamonds.

“Yes,” she murmured, “it is beautiful. I did not know that old New England could be so entrancing. And yet, it is not the city, the factory, the hills, the trees that hold you. It’s the people.”

[163]

This was true. There was the little family in the canary-cage house who had taken her in. The room she and Verna occupied was so small. There was hardly room to move about. Yet they were happy. Verna was obliging, kind and generous to a fault. More important than that, she was eager to know about everything. And she, Florence, knew so many, many things about which this child of a small city had scarcely dreamed. They talked at night, hours on end.

Strangely enough as she thought of this flower-like girl, a sudden mental image gave her a picture of Hugo, the idol of last night’s affair. She could see him now as plainly as she might if

his picture had been thrown upon a screen before her. His dark eyes were flashing, his tangled hair tossing, his white teeth gleaming, as he exclaimed: “That’s fine! Now let’s have a little jazz!”

She shuddered. Somehow, she did not wish to think of Verna and Hugo at the same instant. And yet if asked why, she could not have found a sensible reply.

“Surely,” she said to the trees, the hills and the city before her, “he is handsome, gallant and popular. Who could ask for more?”

And the hills seemed to echo back, “Who? Who? Who?” **[164]**

Ah yes, who? For all this, Florence was experiencing a feeling of unhappiness over the whole affair. “Why?” she asked herself. “Why?”

She did not have high social ambitions, of this she was certain. Happiness, she knew, could not be attained by sitting close to the head of the table at a banquet, nor of being intimate with great and rich people. Happiness came from within. And yet this had been her first little social venture. Always before she had worked in the gymnasium or on the playground. This time she had planned something different, planned it well. She had dreamed a new dream and the thing had not turned out as she had expected. The thing she had planned would, she had hoped, be beautiful. Had this affair ended beautifully? She was to be told in a few hours that it had been wonderful. Just now she was thinking, “There was plenty of noise.” Once Hugo had dumped out a whole bank of flowers to seize the tub that had held them, and beat it for a drum. Everyone had laughed and shouted. There had been no beautiful moonlight waltz at the end, only a wild burst of sound.

“Probably I’m soft and sentimental,” she told herself. “And yet—” she was thinking of Danby Force. “Our people,” he had said, “seemed a little dull, so I hired Hugo. Thought he might stir them up with his saxophone.” **[165]**

He *had* stirred them up—some of them. Some remained just as they had been. Her little family in the canary-cage house were that sort. They lived simply, quietly, snugly in that tiny house. They did not ask for a bigger house. They had no car. They did not crave excitement. Their lives were like small, deep, still running streams.

Once those streams had been disturbed, horribly disturbed. That was when the mill shut down four years before. It was Tom Maver, father of the family, who had told her about it. Tom was a small, quiet sort of man.

“I’ve worked in the mill since I was sixteen,” he said. “Always tending a bank of spinning wheels. Never did anything else. We were happy. Had our home, our garden, our little orchard all snug and cozy.

“Then,” he had sighed, “mills down south where labor is cheap, child labor and all that, cut in on our trade. The mill shut down. I had to find work. I went to a farm. They set me cutting corn, by hand. The corn was taller than I was, and heavier. I lasted three days. My face and hands **[166]**

were cut, and my back nearly broken. I was sick when I came home." A look of pain overspread his honest face. "I tried ditch-digging and, in winter, putting up ice. That was terrible. I fell in and was nearly drowned. After that I—I just gave up.

"Well," he sighed, "we didn't starve, but we didn't miss it much.

"But now," he added brightly, "the mill is running and we are happy."

"Yes," Florence thought to herself, "they say they are happy, and I believe they are. And that's what counts most—happiness." Yes, that was it. They did not need jazz and a saxophone, a grinning Hugo and his roaring tub to make them happy. They had something better, a simple, kindly peace.

"Jazz," she murmured. "It seems to get into people's very lives." She was thinking now of a friend, a beautiful girl not yet twenty. Her life was a round of jazz dances. Her doctor had ordered her to an island in Lake Superior for her health. She had been taking drugs for hay fever. This was affecting her heart. On this island there was no hay fever. She had escaped hay fever, but there was no jazz and her cigarettes ran out. "In another week I should have died—simply died," she had said to Florence. And Florence knew she had spoken the truth. "How terrible to become a slave to habits that are not necessary to our lives!" she whispered. "And yet, I must not judge others. I only can try to select the best from both the old and the new for myself." **[167]**

As she sat there looking down upon the city, thinking of its joys and its sorrows, its successes and its perils, she was like some brooding Greek goddess dreaming of the future.

Suddenly she stood up straight and tall. Flinging her arms wide, she remained thus, motionless as a statue. She was beautiful, was this girl of strong heart and a strong body, beautiful as heroic Greek statuary is beautiful. Standing there, she saw the sun come out from behind a cloud to bathe the hillside with its glory of light. Racing down the hill, this narrow patch of light appeared at last to linger lovingly over the little city.

"It is a sign," the girl whispered. "In the end troubles shall be banished!" For the moment her face was transfigured by some strange light from within. Then she turned to walk slowly down the hill. **[168]**

As she entered the grounds that surrounded the mill, she was startled to see a strange figure half hidden by a wild cranberry bush at a spot near the gate. At first she believed him to be hiding there and thought swiftly, "This may be the spy!" Next instant she realized that he was raking dead leaves from beneath the bush.

A strange, rather horrible sort of person he appeared to be. His hair was kinky and cut short, his dark face all but covered with a short curly beard. His bare arms were long and hairy. As he rested there, bent over, clawing at the leaves, he resembled an ape. He grinned horribly at the girl as she passed, but did not speak.

“One more newcomer to the community,” was her mental comment. “But of course, since he works about the yard he does not enter the mill. He could scarcely be the spy. And yet—” she wondered how strong the locks and bolts of doors and windows were and whether it were possible, after all, for the spy to come from without, at night. [169]

On enquiry she was to discover that at night the plant was guarded by a watchman, one of the oldest employees of the place, and entirely trustworthy.

For the moment, however, she was bent on entering the mill. She liked its din, loved to see the speeding shuttles and feel the movement of life about her. Besides, she had not forgotten what Danby Force had said: “Things often happen in the mill after a jazz night.” She thought of the girl who had fallen into a vat of blue dye. “Has anything happened today, I wonder?” she whispered to herself.

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CHAPTER XVII
A SURPRISE VISIT

To Florence with her interest in mechanical things and her love for the glorious throb of life, the cotton mill was a place of great enchantment. As she entered now she was greeted by the crack-crack-crack of a hundred shuttles and by the boom-bang of weavers’ beams.

“It sounds like a battle,” she told herself. “And so it is—a battle against depression, cold, hunger and despair.” She looked about her. Everywhere hands were busy, faces bright and hearts light.

“And to think,” she whispered, “all unknown to these honest, happy ones, there hangs above them a shadow like some great bombing airplane, a shadow that some day may drop a bomb as if from the sky upon all this glorious harmony of noise and still it forever. Unless—” she was thinking of the spy who, all undiscovered, lingered in their midst. He was a thief. No, he did not take their money, nor their other trifling treasures. He took their means of living—or would if he could.

“And who is he?” she asked herself. “Who?” She thought of the hunchback German who tended the motors, of the two dark-faced silent sisters who so resembled the spy that had escaped. “That one too may come back,” she told herself. Danby Force had said that he was sure they had not discovered all the secrets. “It’s a complicated process. Each secret is known by only one or two workers.” These had been his words. “No one of them knows all of it.” She thought of the black-eyed girl she had seen carrying away the bottle of dye stuff. “She may have wanted to analyse it,” she thought. “More likely that she merely used it to dye that dress she wore last night.” She laughed in spite of herself. Then she recalled the little ape-like man working out there among the shrubbery. He [171]

might know a great deal. Who could tell?

“No one knows now.” She clenched her hands tight. “But we shall know!”

That evening after working hours she was favored with a surprise visit. She had entered her tiny room in the canary-cage house. Weary and perplexed, wondering uneasily whether she had as yet been of any real service to this unusual community, and wondering too in a disturbed sort of way whether she should not tell Danby Force there was no use of her staying longer, she threw herself on her bed and had fallen half asleep when a touch like the brush of a feather awakened her. **[172]**

At once she sprang to a sitting position.

“It is I, Verna.” There followed a low laugh. “You have a caller. And such a romantic one! You’d never guess.” Verna laughed a low, happy laugh.

“Danby Force is not romantic,” said the big girl, fumbling at her hair.

“And it’s not Mr. Force,” said Verna. Her cheeks, Florence saw, were flushed. “It is Hugo, Hugo!” There was a note of deep admiration in her tone as she repeated the name a second time softly: “Hugo.”

“Oh, Hugo?” Florence started. Hugo, the one who had stolen her act, was here to see her. She wondered why. And, what was more, this lovely school girl admired him greatly.

“Did you see him?” she asked. **[173]**

“No. Oh! I wish I had!” Verna clasped her hands. “Mother opened the door. She seated him, then called me from the kitchen to tell you. Aren’t you thrilled? You are not hurrying at all.”

“No,” Florence said quietly, “it isn’t wise to hurry—at least not for a man.” She smiled at this, then gave the girl a pat on the cheek.

She found herself considerably disturbed as she stepped into the little parlor.

“Ah!” Hugo, the magnificent, sprang to his feet at sight of her. And he was, in his own way, magnificent,—bright blue suit, orange colored tie, a flower in his buttonhole, a smile showing all his white teeth. “Ah, Miss Huyler. I came to congratulate you, to tell you how wonderful the party was last night. You certainly are a marvelous hostess. We of the mill—”

He broke short off to stare at something on the wall. He stood there for a count of ten, then he murmured, “How exquisite! How charmingly beautiful!”

He was looking at a picture. It was indeed beautiful. Done by a very great artist who had chanced to visit the little city, it was carefully done,—a picture of a very beautiful face. **[174]**

“Yes,” Florence said quietly, “that is a picture of Verna, the daughter of this house.”

“Do you mean to say she lives—that she is real!” The man’s astonishment was genuine.

“Yes,” Florence replied.

“I must meet her.” Hugo smiled a dazzling smile.

“She’s only a child in high school.”

“High school,” he murmured low. “Ah, that is the age of romance, of exquisite grace and beauty. I must meet her,” he repeated.

For just no real reason at all Florence wished to say, “I hope you never do,” and there came also a temptation to emphasize her thought with two or three words that do not often appear in print. What she did say was, “Won’t you have a seat? You wanted to see me about something?”

“Yes—yes—ah—” Hugo appeared to dance toward a chair. He sat down with the flourish of an expert rider mounting a horse. “Yes,—er—” He was on his feet again, circling about that picture. At last, like a bee that has circled a flower, his gaze came to a center close to the picture. “Ah yes,” he murmured. “A very great artist. A priceless thing!” Heaving a sigh, he tore himself away. **[175]**

“Yes, Miss Huyler.” His change of poise and tone was fairly stunning. As he wheeled about he was once more the social conquistador, seeking, the girl knew not what advantage. “Yes, Miss Huyler, we admire you. In fact we enjoyed the party so much we wish you to organize another within a week, a truly wonderful party, a harvest ball. A thing to be done in costume, a masked ball.”

Florence might have reminded him that she had started her little social meeting as one sort of affair and that he had ended it in quite a different manner. She might have told him that if he wanted any sort of party at all, he was quite free to get it up as he chose. She did nothing of the kind. Instead, she said: “And does Mr. Force approve?”

“Oh, Force!” Hugo made a dismissing gesture. “He doesn’t mind. He wants this dead old town wakened up!”

“Does he?” Florence said quietly.

“Does he?” Hugo stared. “Isn’t that why you’re here?”

Florence started. “Yes, yes, I suppose that is why I’m here,” she replied hurriedly. It would never do for any of these people to guess why she was here. “Yes. And I am sure the party will be all right. I can count on your assistance and—and all the others?” **[176]**

“Absolutely! Absolutely! That’s the spirit!” Hugo sprang forward to grasp her hand. For Florence that was a disturbing handclasp. Hugo’s hand was hot and trembling. After holding her hand ten seconds too long for her comfort, he suddenly dropped it to do three more turns about the room. Then, making a grab at his hat, and snatching a look at his watch, he exclaimed: “Must be going!” At that he bolted out of the room.

“What a remarkable person!” she thought a trifle wearily. “He’s a living impersonation of jazz.” He was a great deal more than that, but this she was to discover at a later date.

In the meantime she went to her room for a look

at her mail. This was followed by a few moments of thinking. Those were very solemn thoughts indeed. “How,” she asked herself, “is this affair to end? Shall I discover the spy? If so, how and when? Will the spy be a man or a woman? Will there be a struggle, a trial perhaps?” She shuddered. “After all,” she thought, “perhaps I should have accomplished more by attempting to follow the dark lady’s trail.” [177]

In time her thoughts began to wander. She thought of Hugo. “At least,” she told herself, “he has good taste in art. That is a lovely picture of Verna.”

Drawn by this thought, she left her room to wander into the small living room. Instantly her lips parted in a suppressed cry of surprise. *The picture was gone!*

“But then,” she thought, “why raise an alarm? I have been out of the room for some time. Perhaps a member of the family has carried it away.” She decided at last upon a course of watchful waiting. “I’ll find it in another room,” she told herself. But would she?

[178]

CHAPTER XVIII
THE RED DEVIL

Has the little airplane stewardess been quite forgotten? Such vivid personalities as hers are never long forgotten. These were busy days for her. A trip to Boston and return; a day of rest; a sudden call for a special trip to the Arizona desert—she was ever on the wing.

With all this she had not forgotten her promise to Danby Force. Pictures of the dark lady with a torn ear were made and quietly distributed among her fellow-workers. She was surprised at the results. Ladies resembling this suspected one began, it seemed to her, to travel by air in whole platoons. She heard from one in Dallas, another in Boston. One was seen boarding a plane in Seattle and another in Portland, Maine. One and all were investigated and found lacking in one particular or another. So, at the end of a week the missing lady was still missing.

One day the chief stewardess said to her, “I have a very interesting request for your services. You’ll want to go, I’m sure. A group of very learned people are to visit a little city down east called Happy Vale. Ever hear of it?” [179]

“Happy Vale.” Rosemary said the words slowly. Then with a sudden start she exclaimed, “That’s the home of Danby Force. That’s where the industrial spies are supposed to be at work. I wonder—”

She broke off to stare out of the window.

“Of course,” she said in a changed tone. “Surely, I’ll be glad to go.”

“Danby Force,” she thought as she left the room. “He must have requested that I come with the party. I wonder if it has anything to do with the dark lady. Wonder if he’s found her, wants me to

identify her, or—or something.

“Anyway,” she concluded, “he’s a fine young man. It will be a real adventure to visit his city.”

Then, as if Fate had whispered some word of warning in her ear, she made her way slowly toward a certain hangar.

Arrived at the hangar she sought out a certain airplane, then called: **[180]**

“Jerry! Oh Jerry! Come here!”

“At your service!” said Jerry, a bright young mechanic, grinning broadly as he extended a greasy hand.

“Thanks, Jerry.” The girl gripped his hand.

“Jerry,” she said, “have you time to look over this motor a bit?”

“Sure, Miss Sample. But what—why that plane belongs to Willie VanGeldt, the rich young bum. Why—”

“Jerry,” Rosemary smiled, “curiosity once killed a cat. Will you look it over while I go in and make my report?”

“Sure, Miss Sample.”

Fifteen minutes later when Rosemary reappeared, Jerry made a wry face.

“Terrible, Miss Sample, just terrible! Carbon in the cylinders, oil in the spark plugs, everything wrong! Wonder it runs at all.

“It’s a shame!” he went on. “It really is! Here we are keeping everything perfect. Motors dragged out and overhauled every three hundred hours, everything just perfect. And these amateurs!”

“I know, Jerry,” Rosemary broke in. “But tell me, have you a couple of mechanics who’d like to earn some overtime by overhauling this motor?” **[181]**

“That motor? Willie VanGeldt’s? You pay for it? Honest, Miss Sample, he’s not worth it! He ain’t worth much of anything. That’s my guess.”

“Everyone is worth something,” Rosemary replied soberly. “I don’t want to see him get himself killed. It will be bad for aviation in general. And besides, Jerry, I’ve a feeling about that airplane—one I can’t explain. So you just get that motor fixed up, and I’ll pay the men, pay them tomorrow.”

“All right, Miss Sample. But—”

Rosemary had vanished.

So Rosemary Sample, still dreaming of her approaching visit to Happy Vale, crossed the airport grounds, and entered the low depot to order a sandwich and cup of coffee, and to sit staring absently at the wall until the coffee was cold.

At the same time, in a far away city coming events were casting their shadows before them, and in that very city the little French girl Petite Jeanne was preparing for a visit to a great concert hall. This visit was to have the most astounding results. So, like some famous stage **[182]**

manager, Fate was getting ready to assemble the cast for the final scenes in our little drama.

Even while Rosemary Sample sat staring at the ceiling, Florence was saying to Danby Force: “I think the Harvest Dance would be a fine thing. Not that we harvest anything but bright prints,” she laughed. “But these golden days surely call for glorious good times. Only—” she hesitated.

“Only what?” He urged her on.

“I wish we could lay out a plan and stick to it, in —in spite—”

“In spite of our good man Hugo,” he laughed. “Well, this time we’ll do just that. We’ll arrange an attractive printed program. On the card every other offering will be an old-fashioned dance. The last shall be a waltz in your artificial moonlight. And I—” he laughed low. “I speak for that last dance right now.”

“Oh!” Florence flushed in spite of herself. “And I —I accept.

“Do you know,” she said a moment later, “I’ve thought of something that might be done. The floor, you know, is very large. Why not send out in the country and get a dozen corn shocks and set them up about the room?” **[183]**

“A dance among the corn shocks!” Danby Force exclaimed. “A great idea! We’ll do it. We’ll have the place lighted with imitation jack-o-lanterns. That will be a grand ball indeed.”

And it was, even for Florence, up to a certain point. Then something happened, as things have a way of doing, that for a time at least spoiled her fun.

The mixed program of modern and old-fashioned dances served to hold the hilarity to a moderate level. More than once a man in a red devil costume, whom Florence recognized as Hugo, attempted to bribe the musicians into changing the program, but it was no go. They had their orders. They would follow them.

It was this same red devil who caused all of Florence’s trouble, which in the end turned into quite a joy. She was standing on the side line between dances when the red devil peeked round a corn shock, then as he approached her whispered, “I am told that this beautiful child who lives at your house is here. Do me the favor to tell me how she is dressed.” **[184]**

“I—I really don’t know.” Florence was both surprised and frightened. She had not known that Verna was to be there. Indeed she was under the impression that her parents had forbidden her coming.

“Oh yes you know!” the red devil hissed in her ear. “You know well enough, but you won’t tell. It’s all right. I’ll find out. I take what I want!” There was a serpent-like hiss in his voice. Then he was gone.

Florence stared at the corn shock behind which he had vanished. Her mind was in a whirl. Was Verna truly here? If she was, she must find and warn her. The words of Rosa, tragic words, came to her: “He is a bad, bad man!” His own words still rang in her ears: “I take what I want.”

“Does he?” she asked herself fiercely. “Perhaps he does.” Strangely enough, she saw in her mind’s eye at that moment the picture of Verna.

Florence had developed an unusual gift. She had discovered long ago that she could recognize friends, even at some distance, by their habitual movements. If they were walking, rowing or playing a game, it was all the same. She had developed this gift until now she could recognize people instantly under any circumstances. “I must find Verna,” she whispered, gripping at her heart to still its wild panic. **[185]**

A dance began. Her partner came to claim her. It chanced to be a waltz. As she floated about among the corn shocks, she was looking, looking, looking.

And then she saw her. “A fairy!” she whispered to herself. “Verna is dressed as a fairy, all in white, with wings. How exquisite!”

She wanted to break away and warn her at once. This might make a scene. She would wait until the dance was over. She lost sight of her entirely.

Never before had a waltz seemed so long. She glided in and out among the corn shocks, in and out, in and out, until it seemed to her that dawn must come and a new day begin.

When at last the music stopped she fairly tore herself from her partner and was away on her quest. But where was that white fairy? Ten minutes of frantic search convinced her that she was too late. Verna was not there. Neither was the red devil. **[186]**

Sick at heart, she crept away to the dressing room. There she sank into a chair to surrender herself to despair. But not for long. Before her was a wooden bench. On this bench lay a large suit of rough coveralls, a pair of cotton gloves and an ugly mask. This was a corn husker’s outfit abandoned by one of the masqueraders. Ten minutes later Florence had vanished; so too had the coveralls, mask and gloves.

Fifteen minutes later the red devil and the exquisite fairy might have been seen walking along a narrow bridle path, lined on either side by tall bushes. The red devil, if observed by some old, wise person, would have been said to be in the act of practicing his art. He was doing, at that moment, nothing that might be called reprehensible. He was in the act of beguiling the exquisite fairy. That was all.

Surely no more perfect setting could have been found for a love tryst. The moon, full and golden, hung over great masses of dark foliage. The air was filled with faint noises, the chirp of a cricket, the rasping of a katydid, the call of some bird in his sleep, the distant bay of a hound. The air touched the fairy’s cheek like a faint caress. **[187]**

“You are beautiful,” the red devil murmured low.

“Oh!” the fairy breathed.

“More lovely than a flower, more delicate than a rose, more graceful than—”

The red devil broke off suddenly to listen. “Thought I heard a sound.” His voice took on a

sudden gruffness.

A moment later he was his own sweet devil of a self again, murmuring: “If I had all the flowers of this beautiful world I would not look at them, but at you. If I might touch the stars I would touch your hand instead. Your lips—”

They had by this time all but reached the end of the lane. One moment more, and they would have been in the open woods, when something quite terrible occurred.

A figure that loomed large in the half darkness leaped at the red devil. Startled, the red devil swung out with both fists. He missed. Something very like a sledge-hammer struck him on the side of the jaw. With one wild scream, the exquisite fairy was away. But not the red devil. [188]

[189]

CHAPTER XIX
THE FIRE-BIRD

Strange as it may seem, it was at this very hour that Petite Jeanne received one of the most unusual thrills of her not uneventful life. She and Madame Bihari were back in Chicago. The Ballet Russe, too, was in that city. And to Jeanne who, as you may know, was one of the finest of gypsy dancers, anything like the Ballet Russe was a call which, if need be, would draw from her purse the last silver coin.

“The Ballet Russe!” she exclaimed to Madame. “We must go. And ah yes, tonight we must go! This is the last performance.”

“Impossible, my pretty one,” Madame said with slow regret. “I have promised to say farewell to our good friends of Bohemia. They are leaving tomorrow for their native land.

“But you, my child, you must go. Put on your bright gown of a thousand beads and your purple cape with the white fox collar, and go. Surely no one, not even the Fire-Bird, shall outshine my Petite Jeanne.” [190]

So Jeanne went alone. She secured a seat at the side of the gallery where she might look almost directly down upon the dancers. And was that an hour of pure joy for Jeanne! Not for months had she witnessed anything half so charming. The lights were so bright, the costumes so beautiful, the dancers so light-footed and droll, and the music so entrancing that she at times believed herself transported to another world.

The first piece was a bit of exquisite nonsense. But when the time came for that entrancing story, “The Fire-Bird,” to be told in pantomime, music and dancing, Jeanne sat entranced. Once before, as a small child, she had seen this in Paris. Now it came to her as a thing of renewed and eternal beauty.

As the lights of the great Auditorium went dark and the orchestra took up an entrancing strain, Jeanne saw at the back of the stage a tree that seemed all aglow with light. And before this tree, dancing like some enchanted fairy, was a

creature that, in that uncertain light, seemed half maiden, half bird.

“The Fire-Bird!” Jeanne’s lips formed the words they did not speak. [191]

Soon the beautiful, glimmering Fire-Bird began to seem ill at ease. The shadow of a young man appeared in the background.

“Prince Ivan,” Jeanne whispered.

The Prince pursued the Fire-Bird. Round and round they danced. How light was the step of the Fire-Bird! She seemed scarcely a feather’s weight. How Jeanne envied her!

And yet there were those who would have said, “Petite Jeanne is a more splendid dancer.”

The Prince seized the Fire-Bird in his arms. She struggled in vain to escape. She entreated him. She attempted to charm and beguile him. He released her only, in beautiful and fantastic dance rhythm, to capture her again. At last, on being given one of her shining feathers as a charm against all evil, he granted her the freedom she asked.

The Fire-Bird vanishes. Day begins to dawn upon the stage. The music is low and enchanting. Then a bevy of dancing girls emerge from a castle gate. These are Princesses, bewitched and enslaved by a wizard.

As the thirteen Princesses danced upon the stage, Jeanne received a momentary shock. One of these, the third from their leader, had about her an air of familiarity. Jeanne was a dancer. She had learned to recognize other dancers by their movements. But this one— [192]

“Where have I seen her?” she whispered.

Closing her eyes, she attempted to call forth upon the dimly lighted picture gallery of memory some scene of other days, some open air arena, some stage where this one had danced.

“No, no!” She tapped her small foot. “It will not come. And yet I *have* seen her!”

Then again she gave herself over to the story unfolding so beautifully before her.

In the story played out for Jeanne, Prince Ivan falls in love with the most beautiful of the enchanted Princesses. There follows a marvelous dance done by the maidens. Jeanne as she watched had eyes for but one dancer, the mysterious person she felt she should know, but could not recall.

Dawn comes. The enchanted ones disappear through the gate of the castle. Prince Ivan, in the abandon of love, follows. There comes the unearthly din of gongs and bells. A host of weird creatures come out to attack him. They are powerless because of the magic feather, gift of the Fire-Bird. Ivan is not afraid. [193]

Then comes the terrible wizard who, if he could, would destroy Ivan with his very breath.

For the time Jeanne forgot the mysterious dancer who had once more appeared upon the scene. Carried away by the story, Jeanne had

eyes only for the brave little Prince and the terrible creature who seeks his destruction. As the wizard approaches step by step, his hand trembling with rage, his small hard foot stamping the floor, Jeanne actually trembled with fear. Then, as Prince Ivan waved the magic feather and called upon the Fire-Bird to aid him, when the splendid dancing Fire-Bird appeared upon the scene, Jeanne wanted to scream for joy.

Such enchantment passes rapidly. When at last Ivan had triumphed and the wizard been destroyed, Jeanne thought again of the mysterious dancer who had, she was sure, played some part in her past life.

"If you please—" she spoke to her nearest neighbor whose opera glass dangled idly from a ribbon. "Just for one moment, may I borrow it?" **[194]**

"Certainly." The lady smiled.

Strangely enough, as she put the glass to her eyes, the little French girl found herself all atremble. "Coming events cast their shadows before them." Scarcely had the glass been focussed upon the mysterious dancer than her hand dropped limply to her lap.

"It cannot be!" she murmured aloud. "But yes! It is she! It can be no other. There is the dark face. Even beneath her make-up one feels it. There is the torn ear. I can't be wrong. It is the dark lady! It is the spy!"

Twenty seconds later the opera glasses were in their owner's hands. Jeanne had vanished.

[195]

CHAPTER XX
SOMEONE VANISHES

Poor red devil! He surely was in for it!

What a pity that anyone so jolly, so full of the froth and bubble of life, should find any hard spots on his joyous glide through life! Pity or no pity, he was in for it!

He was soft from too much eating, too much drinking and too many good times. There was jazz in his blood, plenty of it. But one cannot defend one's self with the jittering rhythm of jazz. Hugo, the red devil, went down and came up again. He went down and was soundly beaten by this mysterious intruder. He roared for help, but there was no help near. He had chosen a lonely spot for his promenade. In the end he began whimpering like a baby. Then the intruder left him. And as he left, Hugo fancied he heard him mutter, "You take what you want." He was, however, too dazed and befuddled to tell truly whether he had heard aright or no.

When Danby Force came to claim Florence for the last dance of the evening, he was surprised to find an unaccustomed wealth of color in her cheeks. He fancied too that she seemed agitated and quite unusually excited. Her breath seemed to come with a little catch. **[196]**

He said nothing about it and soon they were floating across the floor to the music of the old but ever beautiful waltz, “Over the Waves.”

“Ah,” Florence whispered as, like light row boats on moonlit waters they glided on and on, “how beautiful! Nothing could be more wonderful. I wish it might go on forever.”

Danby Force did not answer. A slight tightening of the hand was his only reply.

“But look!” he exclaimed suddenly. “Your knuckles are bleeding!”

“It’s nothing,” she laughed. “I can’t make the silly things stop.” Deftly she twisted her handkerchief about the offending knuckles. Then the dance went on.

“I fell upon something rather rough and bad,” she said after a time in quite an absent-minded manner.

“Have you found our spy?” Danby Force asked, after thanking her for his good time when the dance was over. **[197]**

“Not yet.” Suddenly Florence felt very weary.

“I’m working on it. There’s a hunchback German and two dark-faced ladies and a little fellow like an ape who rakes leaves. It must be one of these.”

“But may not be,” he said quietly. “You will do well to keep right on looking.”

“Now what did he mean by that?” she asked herself after he was gone. “Does he suspect someone else, someone who has not even caught my attention? Perhaps I’m not much good as a lady cop after all.”

With that she entered the little cottage that for the time was her home.

The instant she entered her room she shot an anxious look toward Verna’s bed. Then she heaved a sigh of relief. Verna was sleeping peacefully. A single tear that glistened on her cheek detracted not one whit from her beauty.

The big girl smiled as her eyes fell upon the crumpled fairy’s wings that lay upon a chair. “Wings all crumpled but the fairy’s safe, tha—thank God!” She choked a little over these last words.

For a long time after her light was out, she lay in her bed looking at the moon shining through her window. Had one been present who could see in the dark, he might have found her lips smiling. Florence was large, too large and strong for a girl. Many a time she had shed bitter tears over this. Many a time too she had looked upon her slim and willowy sisters and felt her heart burn with envy. But tonight as she stirred beneath the covers, as she sensed the glorious strength of her arms, her limbs, her whole superb body, she was filled with such a warmth of gladness as one does not soon forget. **[198]**

“Thank you, God!” she whispered. “Thanks for making me big and strong!” At that she fell asleep.

And tomorrow was another day.

Back in Chicago the night was not over for the little French girl. To her unutterable surprise, she had discovered among the dancing girls of the Ballet Russe the dark lady who she believed was the industrial spy. At once Jeanne had stepped from her place and vanished.

How she managed to make her way unchallenged to the wings of the stage, she will never quite know. Enough that she at last was there, nor, unless carried away by the heels, would she budge from the place until she had gotten one good look at that mysterious lady. **[199]**

“And after that,” she told herself, “I shall call the police.”

By the time she had made her way to the wings of the stage, the last production of the evening, “The Beautiful Blue Danube,” had begun. Nothing ever done by the Ballet Russe is more charming than the Blue Danube. The music and dancing were so lovely that for a space of time Jeanne quite forgot her mission. But not for long. Soon her eyes were upon the dancing girls. As, swinging and swaying, rising on tip-toe, seeming to float in air, they approached her, she caught her breath, then whispered: “It is this one. No, that one—or that one.”

In the end, to her great disappointment, she discovered that it was not one of them all. They all had perfect ears.

What had happened? Had she been mistaken? Impossible. Had she been tricked? This was possible. **[200]**

“But no,” she thought to herself. “That dark lady will come on later. In this picture she has a separate part.”

So, standing on tip-toe, longing every second to throw away her purple cape and join the dancers, she watched and waited—waited in vain for, when the curtain fell, no dark lady with a torn ear had appeared upon the stage.

Then of a sudden someone said, “Well! How did you get here?”

“I am a dancer,” Jeanne replied quick-wittedly. “Perhaps after a while I shall be given a chance to try my skill.”

“Perhaps, and again perhaps not.” The tall, dark man looked at her doubtfully. But Jeanne, in her gown of many silver beads and her purple cape, was very charming. Few could resist her. So she stayed.

“But tell me!” she exclaimed. “There was one of the dancing girls I have known. She was third in the Fire-Bird. Where is she?”

“Ah yes.” The tall, dark man shrugged. “Where is she? She is gone.”

“Gone?” Jeanne felt her knees sink. “She is gone?” **[201]**

“Ah yes, Mademoiselle. She came as a substitute to this country with us. She has been away. Tonight she comes back. She asks that she may

dance. She is very clever, that one. We say, 'You may dance.' You have seen, she danced very well. And now she is gone." He spread his hands wide.

"But where has she gone?" Jeanne demanded eagerly.

The tall, dark man spread his hands wider still. "Who knows? Not one among us here. We are through at this city. She will not come back here. Shall we see her again? Who can say? She is a queer one, that dancer."

"Yes," Jeanne murmured low, "she is a queer one."

At that she made her way from the fast clearing house out into the cool, damp night. She had wanted to dance on that broad stage. She wanted to dance no more. The dark lady had appeared before her very eyes. Now she was gone. She, Petite Jeanne, had failed.

[202]

CHAPTER XXI
AN ASTONISHING DISCOVERY

When Jeanne returned from the Ballet Russe she found Madame Bihari seated by a low table. Before her, spread out in rows, were her gypsy witch cards. So intent was her study of these cards that she did not so much as notice the little French girl's entrance. When Jeanne had put away her cape, she pressed one cold hand against Madame's cheek to whisper:

"And what do the cards say tonight?"

Madame Bihari started. "Many things," she murmured low. "Always they speak of many things, hunger, happiness, sickness, sudden death, great riches, love, hate, despair. The cards tell of life, and this, my child, is life.

"But my Jeanne—" her tone changed. "You have often spoken of a visit to Florence and Danby Force in their so beautiful city. It is well that we go tomorrow."

"Do the cards say this?" Jeanne demanded.

"I say this." There was a solemn note in Madame's reply, like the deep tolling of a bell. **[203]**

"All right." Jeanne went skipping across the floor. "Tomorrow we shall go, very early, perhaps at dawn."

Jeanne was happy once more. The dark lady had escaped her. What of that? Had that not happened an hour, two hours before? Was it not already of the past? Was not tomorrow a new day? On with tomorrow! She did a wild gypsy dance. At last dancing out of her dress of a thousand beads, she danced into dream robes and then into the land of dreams.

It was on the evening of the next day that Florence went for a long walk, and made a

startling discovery. These evening walks were a source of real joy to her. She loved the cool damp of falling dew on her check; the smell of wood smoke from a hundred chimneys brought back pleasant memories of days spent in the woods along the shores of Lake Huron and on Isle Royale. She derived a keen satisfaction from looking in at open windows where little families sat smiling over their evening meal or reading beside an open fire.

"These are *my* people," she would whisper to herself. "It may lie within my power to do them a great good. Perhaps tomorrow, or even tonight within the very next hour I may discover the spy who is threatening their happiness." **[204]**

She was in just such a frame of mind when, on passing one of the few truly modern homes of the town, a rather gaudy Spanish bungalow, she stopped dead in her tracks. The house stood quite near the street. In one room the shades were up and the lights on. She could see every object within. The chairs, the fancy spinet desk, the bed covered with a silk spread of brilliant hue, all stood out before her as if arranged for inspection. None of these, however, interested her in the least. The thing that held her attention was a small picture on the wall.

"It can't be!" she breathed. "And yet it is!" She moved a little closer. "Yes, it is the picture of Verna, that matchless painting by a truly great artist."

At once her mind was in a whirl. What had happened? Had Mrs. Maver sold that picture? Impossible. She had said that, whatever happened, they would never part with that picture. Had she loaned it? This did not seem probable. **[205]**

"And yet," Florence asked herself, "if it had been stolen, would she not have told me?"

Strangely enough, at that moment a cold sweat broke out on her brow. Perhaps the Mavers had missed the picture. Perhaps they believed she had taken it. Perhaps for days, all unknown to her, they had been watching her movements.

"How terrible!" she murmured. "And I an amateur lady cop!

"It *was* stolen!" she concluded. "And I know who took it." Words spoken only last night came back to her: "I take what I want."

Like a flash she was up on the steps and ringing the bell.

"Does the person they call Hugo live here?" she asked the lady who came to the door.

"Oh yes," the woman replied. "But he's not here just now. We expect him back any time. Would you care to wait?"

"No, I—I'll come back later." Florence turned away to mutter under her breath, "Only I won't."

For some time after that, in the shadow of a great elm, she stood watching that room and that one small picture. Hugo did not appear. In time the woman of the house opened the door to snap off the light. **[206]**

“Oh!” Florence drew in a long deep breath. Her moment had arrived. She moved swiftly. Screens had been removed from the house. The window was not locked. To lift it noiselessly, to step within was the work of seconds. Moving slowly in the pale moonlight, she crossed the room. Her hand was on the picture when a footstep sounded outside. Her heart stopped beating. What if it were Hugo! Supposing the moonlight were strong enough to expose her?

She thought of the night before, and gained courage. “But tonight I am not dressed as a man.” Her heart sank.

The footsteps continued. The person did not turn in. For the moment she was saved.

Swiftly she re-crossed the room, sprang through the window and was once more her own free self walking in the cool damp of night. The picture was safely hidden under her jacket.

“He takes what he wants.” She laughed low as she hurried along. “Well, so do the rest of us—sometimes.” **[207]**

For all the laugh, she felt depressed. Hugo a thief! She had not thought this possible. For all he had interfered with her plans, she had for this dashing young man a certain admiration.

“Well,” she sighed at last, “we must take people as we find them. We—”

Her thoughts broke off suddenly. Some small object bumped against her leg as she walked. Putting down a hand she grasped a small rubber bulb. The bulb was attached to a tube. She gave a slight pull and it came free from the picture, behind which it had doubtless been hidden.

“That’s queer!” she whispered. “One of Hugo’s little secrets.”

At the other end of the tube was a small cube of black material. The thing did not interest her overmuch. Perhaps it was a small atomizer or an affair for spraying perfume. That Hugo was fond of costly, quite faint perfume, she knew well. She dropped it in the pocket of her jacket and there it remained until the following afternoon when, at Danby Force’s request, she motored up to the stately old mansion where Danby lived with his mother.

She found the young man seated with his mother in an out-of-doors pavilion. The sun was bright. It was a rare autumn afternoon. **[208]**

“This is my mother,” Danby said simply. The beautiful white-haired woman smiled her a welcome. “Danby has been telling me of you. We are going to have some tea,” she said, motioning Florence to a chair.

“It is beautiful up here.” Florence took one long deep breath. It was, just that. The broad-spreading elms, the wavering shadows, the bright crimson flowers, all this was marvelous.

“Yes,” Danby Force spoke quietly, “life has always been beautiful up here. My father and his father before him worked to make it so. But life down in our little city has not always been beautiful for all. It should be so.”

At that moment Florence caught some movement in a tree, a whisk of gray.

“A squirrel,” Mrs. Force explained. “There must be hundreds of them. We feed them, place boxes for them in the trees. The gray ones are brightest, most friendly. Life is always beautiful for them.” [209]

Just then Florence put her hand in her pocket. Feeling something cold and hard, without thinking what it might be, she drew it out and held it to view.

“Where did you get that?” Danby exclaimed on the instant. It was the curious affair Florence had unintentionally carried away from Hugo’s room the night before.

“Why—I—I—” the girl stammered.

“Do you know what it is?” Danby broke in.

“No, I—”

“Then I’ll tell you.” He was smiling now. “It is a very small camera, the sort spies use in taking pictures. If you look closely you will see that the front is shaped like a button. The tiny lens is in the center of that button. You put that in a button hole and draw the bulb up under your arm. Each press of your arm takes a picture.”

“Where did you get it?” he asked a second time.

“Oh please!” Florence was horribly confused. She did not feel ready to tell the whole story. “Please. I did not know it was of any consequence. Shows how good a lady cop I am! But I—I got it under very unusual circumstances. I—I’ll tell you. I’ll have to, but not—not just now, please.” [210]

“Oh that’s all right.” Danby’s tone was kindly. “Would you mind letting me have it for a time?”

“Of course not.” Florence held it out to him.

Just then the butler appeared. “James,” said Danby, “give this to Oliver and tell him to deliver it at once to Mr. Mills at his photo shop. If there chances to be a film inside, have him instruct Mills to develop it with extraordinary care, then to make enlargements of all the good exposures.”

“And now,” he said, turning to the ladies, “we may have our tea.”

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CHAPTER XXII
THE SILVER SHIP

Early on the following morning two planes left the airport. One was small. It resembled a dragon fly. In it rode Jeanne and Madame Bihari. The other was a great bi-motored cabin plane. It carried as its stewardess our good friend Rosemary Sample. Her passengers were as interesting a group as you might hope to meet.

They were destined, these planes, for the same

little city, Happy Vale. Both Jeanne and Rosemary were ignorant of this fact. So it is in life, two congenial souls travel for years along the same path, all unconscious of one another's nearness.

Rosemary's interest in her passengers increased as she became better acquainted with them. They were, she discovered, from the University —sociologists, teachers of ethics, psychologists —all delightfully simple, kindly people who laughed and joked about the long strings of letters Ph.D., LL.D. and the like, attached to their names.

She was not long in discovering that a tall thin man with long hair and thick glasses named H. Bedford Biddle had chanced upon what he spoke of as a "rare find" in the field of sociology. They were all, it seemed, going for a look at his "find." **[212]**

The "find," she knew in advance, was Danby Force's cotton mill and his little city of Happy Vale. She was thrilled at the thought of seeing him once more.

As she listened to these learned men discussing the "find" she realized there was much she could tell them about it. Not being asked, however, she kept silent. She smiled from time to time at their curiously learned remarks about a thing that to her had seemed quite simple and very beautiful, a group of common people, working together to make their little city the happiest, most contented in all the world.

They landed on the outskirts of a beautiful little city. A bus carried them to the factory. There they were met by Danby Force who had a very special message for the little stewardess.

"I wanted you to come." It was a rare smile he gave her, something quite special that warmed her heart. "I felt you were interested and would truly understand." **[213]**

"And is—have you—"

"No." His voice was low. "We have not found her. We have no true notion of the harm she may have done. We can only hope." He was speaking, Rosemary knew, of the spy.

It was an hour later when, after a frugal repast wonderfully prepared, they were ready to enter the mill.

Rosemary had dropped modestly to the rear of the group when of a sudden she noted some stranger joining their party. With a quick eye for faces she already knew all her party well. "He is not of our party, and yet," she told herself, "there is something familiar about him. He gives me the shivers. I wonder why."

A little later she was thinking to herself, "Wonder if he has been invited to join us. None of my affair—but—" But what? She did not know.

Invited or no, the youth did join this group. He did go with them. To Rosemary his attitude was disconcerting. A part of the time he seemed quite indifferent, the rest of the time he was like one on tip-toes. Drinking in every word that was said, at the same time he went through strange motions, fumbling first at his vest, then at his **[214]**

pockets.

Their journey through the plant was half over.

“No,” Danby Force was saying, “this is not Utopia. We have made mistakes and been criticized. Members of our group have complained and claimed unfair treatment. Some have moved away. This is human. But we are trying to live up to our motto: ‘Do something for someone else.’ We—”

For the first time, with no apparent reason, the mysterious stranger looked Rosemary square in the eyes. His black eyes flashed a dark challenge. Instantly she knew this was no youth. This was the mysterious dark lady! By the gleam of an eye she had made this discovery. This woman had changed her complexion and her disguise. She had returned for more facts, perhaps for the secret formula. And what was she, Rosemary Sample, to do about it? Inside her a tumult was raging. Externally she was calm. “I must think,” she told herself, “think calmly. And then I must act.” **[215]**

In the meantime Jeanne too had made a discovery. Was it important? Who could tell? An hour after Rosemary’s party left the small landing field at Happy Vale, Jeanne’s dragon fly came circling down to at last taxi to a position close beside a small silver plane.

“That ship,” Jeanne said to Madame, “looks familiar. And—” she clapped her hands. “I know where I saw it before.”

Her heart skipped a beat as, making a dash for it, she peered within. “Oh!” she breathed out her disappointment. “She is not there!” This was the luminous silver ship that one night had hovered over her golden tree, the very one she had followed so far next day. She was sure of that. A young man sat at the wheel. He seemed about to start the plane.

Throwing open the door, he said, “Howdy, sister. What can I do for you?”

“Wh—where is she?” Jeanne asked breathlessly.

“She?” He appeared not to understand.

“The dark lady.”

“Which one?” He laughed. “I’m told there are several in America.” **[216]**

At that Jeanne decided to give him up. “Only one more question,” she thought.

“How do you make it shine all over at night?” she asked.

“There are ten thousand holes in the fusilage and the planes,” he explained in a friendly tone. “Neon tubes made of a special kind of glass run everywhere inside the plane. When we light these tubes they shine out through all the little holes. Simple, what?”

“Very simple,” Jeanne agreed.

A moment later she saw him go bobbing across the field to rise at last and soar away.

“All the same,” Jeanne told herself, “he *did* once have that dark lady, the spy, as a passenger. Wonder if he has her still?” She concluded that plane would bear watching if it ever returned.

[217]

CHAPTER XXIII
THE GYPSY’S WARNING

When Rosemary Sample discovered that the person who had attached herself to the learned party being conducted through the textile mill was none other than the spy, she found herself in a tight position. This visit of the wise men, she realized from the look on Danby Force’s serious face, was an occasion of no small importance. “A group of University professors do not charter a plane every day in the week in order that they may be conducted through a factory or mill,” she assured herself. “If I cry ‘WOLF!’—if I let them know there is an industrial spy in their midst, everything will be thrown into confusion. The charm will have been broken, the entire effect lost.

“I’ll keep an eye on this spy,” she thought, “I’ll see that nothing is taken from the mill. When the tour is over I will see that she is taken into account and made, at least, to explain why she is here.” That the matter would go much farther than that, she did not doubt. Would there be a struggle? She shuddered.

During the half hour that followed, though no one would have guessed it, Rosemary heard not a word that her good friend Danby Force was saying to the learned professors. **[218]**

And then, at the very end, Danby did something that commanded her attention in spite of herself. The guests were passing one at a time through a narrow door. Danby was working levers on a peculiar instrument.

“Perhaps you would like to know—” there was an amused look on his face. “All of you might like to know what I am doing. I am spraying you with the light from an X-ray lamp.

“In your case I am sure it is quite unnecessary. But it is a precaution we take with all those who pass through our mill. In these days of keen industrial struggle there are spies everywhere seeking to secure advantages through trickery. They often carry tiny cameras concealed upon their persons. Should there be one such among you, the X-ray light would entirely ruin his negatives. His picture-taking would be without result.”

As he made this explanation Danby caught and held the little stewardess’ interest for a brief interval. Fatal interest. Ten seconds later, when she gripped his arm to whisper, “Danby Force! There—there is your spy!” she found herself staring at empty space. The spy had vanished. **[219]**

Danby stared at her in amazement. “What? You don’t mean—” He was apparently unable to finish.

“Yes, yes! She was here. She was dressed as a young man. But it was a woman. I saw her fumbling at the back of her coat, as only a woman would. And now—now she’s gone!”

“Quick!” He whispered low, that the professors might not hear. “Run outside. Perhaps you can see her. If you do, ask any man about the plant to seize her. He’d do it at the risk of his life.”

There was no demand for such heroism. The spy had vanished. Look where she might, call others to her aid as she did, the little stewardess could find no trace of her.

When, disappointed and downhearted, she returned to the office of the plant, Danby Force only smiled and said quietly, “Forget it. We will catch up with her yet. You’ll see!

“And now,” he added briskly, “come with me. We are to take this group of learned men for a tour of our little city. Then, I regret to say, we must part once more. You are to start them back to Chicago in just one hour.” **[220]**

What Rosemary saw in that hour’s ride through shady streets and narrow, beautiful lanes more than once caused her throat to tighten with pure joy at the realization that here at least was one community where happiness and simple prosperity reigned. The streets were clean, the narrow lawns well cared for, the small homes painted, and the people, for the most part, smiling.

Yet, even as her heart swelled with admiration for those who could bring such a state of affairs into being, her mind was filled with misgiving.

“It doesn’t seem possible that one selfish person could spoil all this,” she said in a low tone to Danby.

“Yet it *is* possible.” His brow wrinkled. “Once the secrets of our new processes are in the hands of unscrupulous persons, they will be exploited. And that will bring ruin to us.

“We have not tried to expand,” he said a moment later. “Perhaps we should have done so. But it has seemed to us that much of the unhappiness of the world has been brought about by the desire of honest but misguided men to tear down factories and build bigger, to cut costs, to sell cheaper in every market. Our aim has been an honest living, and simple contentment for all.” **[221]**

“Simple contentment for all,” the girl whispered to herself. “What would that not mean if it were realized by every person in this great land of ours!”

Yet, even as she thought this, an imaginary colossal figure appeared to loom above her, the figure of a dark-faced woman who never smiled, and she seemed to be saying:

“My bag! My traveling bag! It is gone!”

“And yet it was not gone,” the girl told herself.

“There’s a golden-haired French girl,” Danby Force was speaking again. “She travels in an airplane with a gypsy woman and a child. Strange combination,” he mused. Then, more briskly, “They have a secret of dyeing in purple **[222]**

that would be of immense value to us. But it belongs to hundreds of gypsies in France. Dare we ask her to reveal that secret? Have we a right to it? That, for the moment, is a question. I am unable to answer."

"Yes," Rosemary replied, "I too know Petite Jeanne. She is a dear!"

Little did either of them realize that at this very moment Jeanne was close at hand, on Happy Vale's landing field. Rosemary left that very field an hour later without discovering Jeanne's presence.

That afternoon, on wandering across the grounds before the mill, Florence came face to face with Hugo. He appeared quite worried and ill at ease. His attempt to favor her with one of his dazzling smiles was a failure.

"Does he know I took the picture?" she asked herself after he had passed on. "Does he know about the camera? And was it his camera?"

As she closed her eyes and tried to picture to herself the face of the spy she had so long sought, she saw not Miriam Dvorac and her dark sister, not Hans Schneider, not Ina Piccalo and not the curious person who trimmed the shrubs about the grounds. Instead, a very different face appeared, a smiling face she had seen many times before. Startled by this picture, she exclaimed: "No! No! It cannot be!" And yet the picture remained. **[223]**

Yes, as Florence had guessed, Hugo was troubled, so very much troubled that any person with an eye for such things could have told it quickly enough. And he was superstitious. Oh, very much so! Selfish people who think much of their own happiness and very little of others are likely to be superstitious. So, when one of his fellow-workers told him that something very strange had happened—that two gypsies, one very old and dark, and one young, blonde and beautiful, had come flying in from the air, he said at once: "It is Fate. I shall have my fortune told."

Jeanne was not in sight when he arrived. Madame Bihari, seated upon her bright rug before the tent, was shuffling her witch cards. Shuffling, dealing, then gathering them up to shuffle and deal again, she did not so much as look up as Hugo, magnificent in his bright garments, approached. His roving eyes sought in vain for the beautiful young gypsy. His countenance fell.

"But after all," he reasoned, "I came to have my fortune told. The older ones are best for that." **[224]**

"Old woman," he said rather rudely, "tell my fortune."

Madame did not look up. Her face darkened as she cut and dealt the cards.

Hugo appeared to understand, for he said in a quiet tone, "I would like my fortune told."

Madame looked up. Something like a dark frown passed over her face. Madame had lived long and in many lands. There were faces that to her were like an open book in a bright light. She

read them with greatest ease.

“Today,” she said slowly, “we have traveled far.”

Then she shuffled and dealt once more.

Hugo grew impatient. He opened his lips to utter harsh words, when Madame said:

“Cross my palm with silver.”

Carelessly, Hugo threw a silver half dollar on the rug. The frown on Madame’s face deepened.

“Here are the cards,” she said in an even tone. “You must sit down before me. You must shuffle them well. You will cut them with your left hand —this is very important, then you will deal them six in a row, then eight in a row for five rows, after that six in a row once more. All must be face up with pictures toward me. To deal wrongly is sure to bring bad fortune.” **[225]**

Hugo’s hand trembled as he cut and dealt the cards. Darkness had fallen. Only the glimmer of a small fire lighted up the cards and Madame’s dark face. Despite his care, he turned the picture of a snake toward himself.

“Ah!” Madame snatched at the card. “You have redoubled your misfortune.”

“Here! Give me the cards! I’ll deal them again!” Hugo exclaimed.

“What is done is done.” Madame’s voice seemed to come from the depths of a well.

And “Ah!” she muttered after one moment of scrutinizing the cards. “What an evil fortune you have laid out before me!”

At this Hugo appeared to exert all his will to snatch away the cards, but seemed powerless to move a muscle. So he sat there staring.

“The mountain, the broken glass—” Madame was speaking now in a monotonous singsong. “The fox, the dog, the rapier, the lightning, the lion, all clustered about you and all telling of misfortune! My life has been long, but never have I read such omens of evil! **[226]**

“And such a jolly life as you have lived!” She went on without looking up. “Everything has been yours—youth, love, friends, happiness—all that you could ask.”

“And now?” The words stuck in Hugo’s throat.

“Now—” Madame’s voice rose. “Now it were better for you if you were not in your native land. Discovery is at hand. Hate will enter where admiration and love have lingered long. The wealth you have hoped for will never come. You shall wander far alone without a friend.”

After Madame had ended this long utterance of prophecy, she sat for one full moment staring gloomily at the cards. Would she have changed their reading if she could? Who can say? How had she known so much? Had someone told her? Certainly not. Had the cards truly guided her? Again we must reply, who knows? There is wisdom in every land that to us, who think ourselves so very wise, is hidden.

When Madame looked up at last, Hugo was gone. Darkness had closed about the place where he had been. With a heavy high, Madame gathered up her cards. Then, having thrown fresh fuel on the fire, she called softly: “Jeanne! My Petite Jeanne!” [227]

Jeanne peered with sleepy eyes from within the tent. “Jeanne,” Madame said, “tonight I have told a fortune. Ah, such a terrible fortune! Tomorrow, my Jeanne, tomorrow and the day that is to follow, strange things will happen, very strange indeed.”

She did not describe the person whose fortune had been told, nor had Jeanne seen him. She had been asleep in the tent. Perhaps this was unfortunate. But you alone shall be the judge.

[228]

CHAPTER XXIV
48—48

It was rather late on the following afternoon that Florence received a hurry-up call from Danby Force. She went at once to his office in the mill.

As she entered she found him in a fine state of excitement. He had been pacing the floor but, as she entered, he turned abruptly toward his desk. Snatching up a handful of pictures, he held them out to her.

“Look at these!”

Florence looked. “They were taken inside the mill,” she said.

“By a spy!” His eyes fairly shone. “And with the camera you gave me, the little one that is worn in a button hole. Whose is it?”

“I—I truly do not know.” Her head was in a whirl. “But I—per—perhaps I should tell you. Yes, yes I must. Hugo stole a picture, a very rare little painting.”

“Stole it?” He stared.

“Yes. He stole it. Can’t be any doubt of it. I saw it in his private room. I took it for the rightful owner. This—this camera was behind it. Was it —” [229]

“It was his beyond a doubt.” Danby was staring harder than ever.

At that moment the girl thought she caught some stealthy movement about the ivy outside the window. She looked quickly. Did she catch sight of a face? She could not be sure. If so, it was gone on the instant.

“Hugo!” Danby’s voice rose. “Hugo! He is our spy! Who would believe it!”

He pounded hard on an electric button. Mark Sullivan, the day watchman, appeared at the door.

“Mark,” Danby said in a steady tone, “go find Hugo. Bring him here. If he refuses to come, use

force—but bring him!”

But Hugo was not to be found. He was gone. He had flown in the truest sense of the word. Strangest of all, it was the little French girl, Petite Jeanne, who aided in his escape. This may not seem so strange when we recall that Jeanne had never seen Hugo and that Hugo surely had a way with the ladies.

It was late afternoon of that same day. Petite Jeanne sat in the door of her dragon fly airplane. The door faced the sun. She was basking in its warmth. She loved the sun, did this little French girl. She had once heard an aged gypsy say the sun was the smiling face of God. A rather fanciful remark this, yet it had stayed in her mind. “At least,” she told herself, “God made the sun and everything He created is good, so surely He means us to enjoy the sunshine.” **[230]**

All day long, without presuming to call upon the busy Danby Force, or even upon Florence, Jeanne had wandered through the town and had come to love it.

“It is wonderful!” she had said to Madame Bihari. “And to think that any possible harm might come to it! This indeed is too terrible!”

She was thinking of all this when her eye caught sight of a person approaching rapidly. It was Hugo.

“You are Petite Jeanne,” he said. He appeared to be in great haste.

“Yes, I—”

“I am a friend of Florence,” he said, casting his spell with a beaming smile.

“A friend of Florence is my friend.” **[231]**

“Ah!” One might have detected in the man’s deep intake of breath a feeling of great relief.

“Then you will help me!” he exclaimed.

“But yes, if I may.” Jeanne was on her feet.

“If you would but take me a short distance in your plane—it will not require an hour—you will be back before dark.” Hugo talked rapidly as one in great haste.

“What could be easier? Will you come aboard?” Jeanne climbed to her place at the wheel.

Ah, poor Jeanne! Had you but known!

A little thrill ran up the little flier’s spine as her plane took to the air. She felt restless, ill at ease.

“Ah well,” she whispered, “just one more incident in a flying gypsy’s life—nothing more.”

It was more, much more than that, as she was to learn.

Time passed. In Chicago it had been dark for two hours. Rosemary Sample was seated at her desk in her own private room. A radio head-set had been clamped down over her ears for two hours. She was reading a book. At the same time she was listening. She had not forgotten her promise to be on the air listening every evening

she was at her home port, listening for that code number she had given so long ago, but never forgotten.

Of a sudden the book dropped from her nerveless fingers. A message of startling clearness had reached her ears. **[232]**

“48—48! Petite Jeanne! One hundred miles north of Happy Vale, an abandoned farm. You will see my plane. Help! Come quick, or you may be too late!”

“Too late?” Rosemary repeated, springing to her feet.

A moment later she had Jerry, the mechanic, on the wire:

“That motor done?” she demanded. “This is Rosemary Sample.”

“Just finished. But say!—”

Rosemary hung up.

Another moment and she was talking to Willie VanGeldt.

“Willie,” she said, “this is Rosemary Sample. Be down at the flying field in a quarter hour. I’m going to take a ride in your plane.”

“A ride? That’s great! Say—”

Once more Rosemary hung up. **[233]**

When Willie appeared, prompt to the moment, he found his plane oiled, fueled and ready for flight.

“What’s happened?” he demanded. “You said you’d never fly in my plane. You—”

“Hop in,” Rosemary commanded. “I’ve had duplicated head-sets put in. We can talk on the way. We’ll be flying the best part of the night.”

Willie’s mouth dropped, but, be it said to his everlasting credit, he never faltered. Three minutes later they were in the air flying an air-lane in the dark.

Rosemary shuddered as she thought what the outcome of this journey might be. Not that night flying over a regular air route, such as they were to follow for hundreds of miles, is usually hazardous. It is not. The way is “fenced” in by code signals broadcast by radio stations along the way. If the pilot is on the beaten path he hears a series of dot signals. If he swings to the right, this becomes dot-dash, and if to the left it becomes dash-dot, so he never loses the way.

“Unless—” the girl whispered to herself. She had seen to it that Willie’s motor was O.K. She smiled grimly as she thought of the month’s pay it would cost her. **[234]**

“But if I had chartered one of our own planes, it would have taken half a year to pay up.” That, with her mother back in Kansas looking to her for part of her support, was not to be considered. “I just had to come!” she told herself. “I promised. And that little French girl would never call unless there was some great need.”

“Listen to that motor!” Willie chuckled in her ear. “Never heard it rattle along so sweetly.”

“No,” Rosemary agreed, smiling down deep in her soul, “I guess you never did!”

“For all that,” she thought, “he’s a real sport, shooting away like this into the night without asking a single question.”

“Willie!” she exclaimed aloud, “We’re getting dot-dashes! You’re off the course.

“There!” she sighed ten seconds later. “That’s O.K.”

So they zoomed on into the night.

What had caused Jeanne to call for help?

She had flown the hundred miles when, to her surprise, she was ordered to make a landing on a pasture of what appeared to be a small farm. **[235]**

This was a level country. She experienced no trouble in landing and in taxiing her plane up to a spot near the house.

“Wait!” Hugo commanded. “There may be some message to take back.”

There was that about Hugo’s look, the tone of his voice that gave Jeanne a sudden impulse.

“As soon as he’s inside I’ll take a run down that pasture, then go into the air,” she told herself.

As if he had read Jeanne’s thoughts, Hugo turned and looked back. Then it came to Jeanne as a sort of revelation, “He must be one of the spies! And I—I have been aiding him to escape!”

Hugo had disappeared through a door. Like a flash Jeanne leaped for the shadows beneath a window.

There, chilling and thrilling, she listened to strange voices. There were, she told herself, a man and a woman. They spoke in a foreign tongue. But Jeanne, who had lived long in Europe, knew a little of many tongues. She was able to understand enough to know that they were discussing the advisability of flight over the border. **[236]**

“But have you all the papers?” a woman’s voice demanded.

“Yes, all.” It was Hugo who answered. “Pictures, diagrams, plans, everything. They are there in the black bag.”

“If only I had that bag!” thought Jeanne.

But now they had reached a decision. They would come out. She must not seem to have been listening.

To her surprise, as she sprang toward her plane, she saw that it had grown quite dark. The discussion had lasted longer than she had thought.

“Here! Where are you?” Hugo called. “We have decided to ask you to fly us to Canada. We will pay you very well.”

"I—I'll have to see if I have enough gas," Jeanne said in as even a tone as she could command.

This was true. But that was not all. She meant, at the risk of her life if need be, to get off a message. Then it was that, after softly closing her cabin door she had sent the message that reached Rosemary Sample's ears and sent her flying away into the night. [237]

"But what am I to do next?" Jeanne whispered to herself, all but in despair. What indeed?

[238]

Chapter XXV
LOST IN THE AIR OF NIGHT

Petite Jeanne surely was in a tight place. Hugo and the dark lady—for it was she who had been with Hugo in the house—with what they had described as all the material needed to exploit the secret process of the Happy Vale textile mill, were awaiting her. To carry them across the border would be a simple matter. She was close to a "radio-fenced" air-lane. To follow this, even in the night, was a simple matter.

But the little French girl did not propose to follow it. To do this would almost certainly lose for Danby Force his only chance to save his happy little city from ruin.

No, Petite Jeanne could not do that. But what could she do? Should she start her motor and make a try at escape? To do this she realized would be perilous. The spies might be armed. She could not get away on the instant. They might wreck her plane, or even worse.

"And they'd still have their black bag," she told herself. [239]

She decided on flight, on foot, alone. Where to? She did not know.

Opening the door of her cabin, without a sound she slipped away into the night.

She had barely rounded the corner of a low shed when she heard a door swing open, and Hugo called:

"Here! Where are you? Is there gas enough?"

"Yes," Jeanne whispered beneath her breath. "But not for such an evil purpose!

"They'll be after me with a flashlight," she told herself, thrown into sudden panic.

The large red barn of the farm loomed before her. Into its inviting darkness she crept.

At once a pleasing fragrance reached her nostrils—Nature's own perfume, the smell of new cut clover hay. Jeanne knew that glorious perfume. More than once as a gypsy she had slept within the shadow of a haystack.

Next instant, with breath coming short and quick, she was climbing a narrow ladder leading to the loft. At its top she tumbled into the

welcoming billows of sweet smelling hay.

Creeping far back, she burrowed like a rat and was soon quite lost from sight. **[240]**

“Never find me here,” she whispered.

She listened. The silence was complete. Then she caught a low, rustling sound.

“Mice in this hay!” She shuddered. She hated mice; yet nothing could induce her to give up this place of hiding.

From far below she heard Hugo call again:

“Here! Where are you?”

A moment later, through the broad cracks of the barn wall she caught a gleam of light, then heard their sharp exclamations upon discovering that she was gone.

“What will they do?” she asked herself. “Will they finally become angry and demolish my plane? My so beautiful dragon fly!” She was ready to weep.

Would they attempt to fly the plane themselves and wreck it? She could but wait and see.

“Never find me here,” she repeated to herself as she sank deep into the fresh cut clover.

In the meantime Rosemary Sample and Willie VanGeldt were speeding to the rescue.

“Strange business this for a steady going stewardess of the air,” Rosemary was saying to herself. “I suppose there are a million girls who believe that being an airplane stewardess is exciting. Nothing, I suppose, is less exciting. But this—this is different, flying through the night with an amateur pilot in a plane that—” **[241]**

“Willie!” she exclaimed, “We’re on the dot-dash again. Swing over. We’ve got to keep on the dotted line.”

Time passed. An hour sped into eternity, and yet another hour. It was approaching midnight. Rosemary switched on the dot-dot-dot of the directive radio to tune in on her home station and ask for a weather report.

The report filled her with fresh concern. “Willie,” she said in a quiet voice that, after all, was tense with emotion, “we’re headed straight for a thunderstorm. Be in the midst of it in less than an hour if we keep on this air-lane.”

“And if we don’t keep on it,” Willie groaned, “we’re lost, lost in the air at night. I’m for zooming straight ahead. Storm may swing some other way.”

It did not swing some other way. Three quarters of an hour later they were in the midst of it. Lightning flashed from cloud to cloud. The sky was black. Only the steady dot-dot-dot of the directive radio gave them hope. **[242]**

And then, right in the midst of it, when the wind was tearing at their wings, when their struts were singing and the flash-flash of lightning was all but continuous, disaster descended upon them. Their radio went dead.

“I might have known!” Rosemary groaned within herself. “Perfection, only perfection of equipment and eternal vigilance such as a great transport company exercises can save one in the air.

“But I’ll not say a word!” She set her teeth hard. “Have to carry on.” Snapping on a small light attached to a cord, she set about the task of inspecting the radio connections, a trying task in such a moment of sky turmoil.

In the meantime the ones who had been left marooned in that abandoned farmhouse by Jeanne’s sudden flight were discussing their plight.

For a full half hour they had hunted the missing little French girl. Giving this up at last, they returned to the house. **[243]**

“What is to be done?” the woman asked.

“There is little to be lost by waiting,” suggested Hugo. He hated darkness and night. “She can’t have gone far. It is pitch dark. A storm is coming up out of the west. She has no light. If she had, we should have seen it. She will be frightened and return.”

“But why did she leave?” the woman asked. “Did you give her cause for fear?”

Hugo shrugged. “Who knows what a gypsy will do? I should not have trusted her.

“She’ll hardly do us harm before dawn,” he added. “I have flown a plane a few thousand miles. In daytime I would attempt a solo flight, but at night, and a storm in sight? No, it would not do.”

After that, having brewed themselves some strong coffee and gulped it down, they settled themselves as comfortably as might be to await the coming dawn.

And Jeanne? Strange as it may seem, hidden away there in the hay, she had fallen fast asleep. Had you been there to waken her and ask her how she could sleep in such a place, doubtless her answer would have been: **[244]**

“What would you have? I could not be harmed more quickly asleep than when awake. Besides, at heart I am a gypsy. Gypsies sleep where and when they may.”

In the meantime Rosemary Sample and her rich young pilot were battling the storm. Having long since lost the beaten airway, they were flying blind.

The storm was all about them. Now the lightning appeared to leap across their plane wings. Now, caught by a rushing gush of wind and rain, they were all but hurled through space; and now, met by a counter-current, like a ship in a heavy sea they appeared to stand quite still.

All this time, quite unconscious of the tumult, Rosemary was working over the radio. She tested a wire here, a tube there. She pried, twisted and tapped, but all to no avail.

And then, with a suddenness that was startling, they glided from out the storm into a gloriously moonlit world. The earth lay silent beneath them. The whole of it, groves of trees, broad farms, sleeping villages, was bathed in golden glory. [245]

“If only we knew where we were!” Willie sighed.

“But boy! Oh boy! What do you think of my motor now? I didn’t think it would go through that.”

“You wouldn’t,” Rosemary replied drily.

Then of a sudden she fairly leaped to her feet. “It’s working!” she cried. “The radio is working! I’m getting something.

“Willie,” she said a moment later, “turn sharply to the right and keep up that course.”

After that for some time only the zoom of the motor was heard. Then—

“There, Willie! I have it. Dot-dash, dot-dash! Keep straight on. We’ll be on the air-lane in just no time at all.”

And they were.

Dawn found them wide-eyed and resolute, circling the vicinity of that spot where they believed Jeanne’s message had originated.

“Ought to find it,” Willie grumbled. “Getting light enough. Just saw a farmer going out to milk his cows. He—”

“Listen!” Rosemary stopped him. “Hear that! There’s another airplane near here. Yes, yes! There it is over there to the right!” [246]

“It’s strange.” Willie’s brow wrinkled. “They seem to be circling too. Wonder if—”

“They might be looking for Jeanne’s silver-winged plane too.”

“Friend or foe?” Willie’s eyes were fixed for a second on that other plane as if he would read the answer there.

They began making wider circles. The strange plane was lost to view when, with a suddenness that was startling, the girl gripped Willie’s arm to exclaim:

“There! Right down there it is!”

Jeanne had wakened from her sleep in that strange, fragrant bed two hours before. For a long time she had lain there wondering how this affair was to end. She had all but dozed off again when she was wakened by the familiar and, to her at this time, startling sound of an airplane motor.

“My motor!” There was no mistaking that. She knew the sound too well. At once she went into a panic.

“My airplane!” she all but wailed. “My so beautiful big dragon fly! Those terrible people will try to fly it away, and they will wreck it!” [247]

At once she was torn between two desires—the

wish to preserve her choicest treasure and her desire to serve Danby Force and his wonderful little city.

If she went to the spies now and offered to fly them across the border, they would permit her to do so, she was sure of that. But would she do it?

“No, oh no!” she sobbed low. “I must not!” She stopped her ears that she might not hear her motor and be tempted too much.

That was how it happened that when Willie and Rosemary came zooming down from the sky to land upon that narrow pasture, she did not hear them at all, and had no notion that they had arrived.

Hugo had Jeanne’s motor well warmed up and was preparing to fly away when Willie’s airplane came to a standstill squarely in their path.

As Rosemary leaped from the plane, the woman came to meet her. She recognized her on the instant.

“That,” she said with no preliminary maneuvers, “is the little French gypsy’s plane. Where is she?” **[248]**

“If we knew, we would be glad to tell you,” the woman said coldly.

“You know,” Rosemary insisted, “there is no need of covering things up. We know who you are and why you are in America. You need not attempt any violence. My companion is fully prepared to meet you.”

She glanced at Willie who had one hand in his pocket. She hoped he would keep it there. One fears what one does not see. And she believed these people were cowards. There might be a pistol in Willie’s pocket—just might.

Just how the matter would have ended had not a second plane circled for a landing at that moment, no one can say.

Rosemary was astonished and immensely relieved to see Danby Force and two uniformed officers alight from the plane. She was doubly astonished thirty seconds later to see Petite Jeanne, well festooned with clover, spring out from the broad barn door and all but throw herself into the arms of Danby Force as she cried:

“It is saved! My so beautiful big dragon fly is saved! My heart and my happiness, they are saved!” **[249]**

This spontaneous burst of joy brought a smile even to the grim-faced dark lady.

Jeanne’s heart and happiness were indeed saved. So was the heart and happiness of many another. When, confronted with the facts and charged with spying out the secrets of the Happy Vale mill, the strange woman admitted it freely enough.

“But remember this,” she added, “I am no thief. I had a camera. It was mine. I took pictures. They also were mine. I made drawings with my own hands. Surely that which one creates is his

own. I saw things. One cannot be arrested for seeing. And more than this," she added with a touch of sadness, "I did all this, not for myself, but for thousands in my own land who should be as prosperous as your people in Happy Vale."

"I believe this," said Danby Force, "yet that does not justify your action. To rob one community that another may be prosperous gets us nowhere.

"I am willing, however—" he spoke slowly. "I am willing to make matters as simple as possible. If you are willing to surrender the pictures and papers you have in your possession, if you will submit to a search and will leave our land empty-handed, we of Happy Vale will forgive and forget." **[250]**

This the dark lady could not refuse. Her papers were surrendered and were taken over by Danby Force.

"As for you!" Danby Force turned to Hugo. On his face was a look in which was strangely mingled sorrow, pity and scorn. "You are an American citizen. This woman has been doing what she could for her people—doing it in a wrong way, but doing it all the same. You—" he paused. "You have sold out your own countrymen to her for gold. You were given the friendship, love, admiration and loyalty of our people. You sold it for a price. You attempted to steal the labor of another's brain. For this there is no legal penalty. But to know that you have been a traitor, to know that thousands who have admired you will think of you as a traitor, to live all your life remembering that you have been a traitor, that is punishment enough. You may go."

With bowed head, the once magnificent Hugo disappeared from their sight. And at that Petite Jeanne's heart was heavy with sorrow. Why? Who could tell? **[251]**

"And now," said Willie VanGeldt to the little stewardess when they were alone once more, "what do you think of my motor?"

"I think," said Rosemary soberly, "that if I hadn't spent a month's pay having it put in order, we would not be here at all. It would never have carried us through the storm had it not been for that. So—o! Chalk up one big mark for the Flying Corntassel from Kansas."

"What? You?" Willie stared.

"Yes," she smiled. "I did that. But forget it. Only take a solemn vow with yourself and me that you will never, never go into the air again unless a mechanic's seal of 'Perfect' is stamped upon your plane! The little French girl was right—life *is* God's most beautiful gift."

"I will," said the boy soberly, "if anyone really cares."

"God cares." Rosemary spoke soberly, too. "Your mother cares, and I care. That should be enough."

"Yes," said Willie huskily, "it is enough." **[252]**

Next morning there was a gypsy party in Danby Force's garden. Over a brightly glowing fire

luscious steaks were broiling. The aroma of coffee and all manner of good things to eat filled the air. Jeanne was there and Florence, Willie, Rosemary, Madame Bihari, Danby Force and his mother—a very merry party indeed. By the help of all, a cloud had been driven away from the skies above Happy Vale. Why should they not be merry?

“Tomorrow,” Florence said to Danby Force at the end of the glorious evening, “I shall fly away with my little gypsy friend, Petite Jeanne. I shall not return. But wherever I am, whatever I do, I shall not forget Happy Vale.”

“Nor shall Happy Vale ever forget you,” Danby replied solemnly.

And what happened next to all these people who have become your friends? Well, if you watch for a book called *The Crystal Ball* and read it you will hear more about them.

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