

**EDITH LAVELL**

LINDA

CARLTON'S

OCEAN FLIGHT

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**Linda Carlton's Ocean Flight**

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# Linda Carlton's Ocean Flight

## Chapter I *In the Fog*

"My girl, you are in perfect physical condition," announced pleasant-faced Dr. Ginsley, who had served as the Carlton family physician for years. "I can't picture anybody in more radiant health."

"I thought so," smiled Linda Carlton, the pretty aviatrix who had been flying her Arrow biplane for the last three months. "But Aunt Emily wanted to make sure, before I go any further with aviation."

"Yes, of course, she's right. And what are you planning now?"

"A thorough course at a good ground school, so that I can get a transport license – that ranks the highest, you know. I – I haven't decided on any particular school yet, because Aunt Emily still opposes the idea. She wants me to have a coming-out party instead, like the other girls in Spring City. So I'm waiting for Daddy to come home."

"And if I'm a judge your daddy will let you go to the school," said the doctor admiringly. "I heard all about how you saved his life with your plane!"

"Oh, no!" protested Linda, modestly. "It was that wonderful surgeon – Dr. Lineaweaver – who did that. I was merely lucky enough to be able to get him in time."

The doctor chuckled.

"Well, luck or no luck, you made a long flight alone at night. I think it was marvelous. You can't tell me anything bad about the young people today. To my mind, they're finer and braver than they were in my day! And that's something from an old man..."

"Well, good-by, Linda, and good luck! I suppose you're not flying anywhere today?"

"Oh, no! It's too foggy."

She opened the door of the waiting-room that led to the porch, and it seemed immediately as if the fog rushed right into the house. It was damp and penetrating, and so dense that it hid the doctor's gate from view.

Linda stepped out on the porch, and almost bumped into a woman with a small child in her arms. The stranger seemed almost to appear from nowhere, out of the obscurity of the fog.

"Oh, you must excuse me!" she cried, excitedly. "I'm that worried I can't see where I'm headed!"

"It was just as much my fault," replied Linda. "Or really, it wasn't either's," she added. "We'll blame it on the fog."

But the other did not seem to be listening, and looking closely at her, Linda saw how deeply distressed she was. Evidently she was very poor, for her worn blue serge dress hung about her ankles, as if it had been bought for someone else, and her brown straw hat looked about the style of 1900. But she evidently had no concern for her own appearance; she kept her gaze fastened on the doctor's face, and her eyes were filled with terror. Was it possible that the baby was dead – or dying? Linda paused and waited, wondering whether she might be of any help.

"Doctor!" gasped the woman, frantically. "My baby swallowed a pin! And I'm sure it's in her lungs now. She breathes so queer."

"When did this happen?" asked Dr. Ginsley, gently taking the child in his arms, and motioning Linda to come back into the house.

"Last week." The woman started to cry, and sympathetically, hardly realizing what she was doing, Linda put her arm about her.

"But why did you wait all this time to come to a doctor?" inquired the elderly man, trying to soften his disapproval by a kindly tone.

"Because," stammered the other, between her sobs, "because my mother thought it would be all right. One of my brothers swallowed a tack when he was little, and nothing happened. And – we live out in the country, and we're so awful poor!"

"I'm afraid it's too late now," sighed the doctor. "I'll make an examination, of course, but if the pin is lodged in the child's lung, there is nothing I, or anybody else – except that surgeon in Philadelphia – could do. And he's too far away."

The tears rolled down the woman's face, and the tiny little girl – about two years old, Linda judged – seemed almost to realize the death sentence, for she opened her blue eyes and uttered a pitiful little moan. And, strangely enough, she reached out her tiny hand towards Linda.

"You precious baby!" exclaimed the tender-hearted girl, touching her hot little fingers. "You are so sweet!"

It seemed almost as if the little girl tried to smile, and at this pathetic effort the distracted mother broke out into convulsive sobs, hiding her head on Linda's shoulder.

"She's my only girl!" she moaned. "I have three boys, but this baby has always been nearest to me... My – my little bit of Heaven!"

Silently, sympathetically, the doctor laid the child down on his table in the office, and got out his instruments, while Linda drew the heart-broken mother to a chair near-by.

"It is as you feared," he said, finally. "There is nothing I can do."

"But – this doctor in Philadelphia – ?" began the woman, seizing the one ray of hope he had mentioned. "Is the carfare there very much? Oh, sir, if you could only lend me some money to go, I'd work my fingers to the bone to pay you back!"

Dr. Ginsley shook his head sadly.

"I'd be glad to lend you the money, my good woman," he said, "but it wouldn't be a bit of use. The journey would take too long; the child can't live more than a few hours."

A shiver of horror crept over Linda as she saw the baby's pitiful breathing, and the mother's utter despair. Turning to the window she glanced out at the fog, thinking rapidly... Should she offer to take them, when it was only a chance at best – a chance in more ways than one? A few hours, the doctor said, were all that the baby had to live... Suppose Linda could get through the fog with her Arrow, would the trip be all in vain? Would she be risking her own life, to watch the child die in her mother's arms?.. Yet something inside of her compelled her to offer her services; she would be less than human if she didn't try to do something.

"I will take you and the baby in my plane, Mrs. – " she said.

"Beach," supplied the woman, unable to grasp what Linda meant.

"Oh, no! No, my dear!" protested Dr. Ginsley, immediately. "That would not be wise. It would mean risking two good lives to save one that is almost past hope... No, you mustn't do that – in this fog."

"I – I don't know what you mean," faltered Mrs. Beach. "An airplane?"

"Yes, yes," explained Linda, hastily. "I am a pilot, and I have a plane of my own. I will take you and the baby to Philadelphia."

"You mean that?" cried the woman, hysterically.

"Yes, of course I do. Come over to my house with me while I get ready."

"Linda, I don't approve of this," interrupted Dr. Ginsley. "This fog – your father – your aunt – I thought you had too much good sense to take foolish risks."

"Not when it is a case of life or death," answered the girl, quietly. "Come, Mrs. Beach! There isn't a moment to be lost."

She managed to smile at the doctor, who stood in the doorway, watching their departure, torn between his feeling of fear for Linda in the fog, and his admiration for her brave, generous spirit.

"Then good luck to you!" he called, as they went cautiously towards the gate.

"My husband is here in the buggy," said Mrs. Beach to Linda, as they reached the street. "I must stop and tell him."

"You are sure you are not afraid?"

"No! I believe in you, Miss! And, oh, I'd risk anything to save my little girl... Besides, I've always wanted to go up in an airplane."

After a word of explanation to the astonished man in the rickety old carriage, Mrs. Beach followed Linda across the street to the girl's lovely home. It was a charming colonial house, much too large for two people, as Miss Carlton, Linda's aunt, always said. For the girl's father was scarcely ever there, except for over-night visits.

Mrs. Beach, who under ordinary circumstances would have been impressed with its splendor, now hardly noticed the lovely house, or the beautiful room where she waited while Linda changed into her flyer's suit and helmet, and scribbled a hasty note to her aunt, who happened to be out shopping at the time. In an incredibly short interval she reappeared, her arms laden with woolen clothing – a scarf for the baby, a cap and coat for the mother.

While the gardener rolled the plane from its hangar, Linda fastened the parachutes on herself and her companion, and explained how to use them.

"You would have a hard time," she said, "with the baby." (She did not say impossible, though she believed that herself.)... "But perhaps we could strap her to you, with this extra belt, here, if an accident occurs... But don't let's worry! Probably nothing will happen, but we must be prepared at all times."

After a hasty examination of the gas, the compass, the oil gauge, and the other instruments, Linda started her engine, and listened to its even whirl. Sound and steady as an ocean-liner, thank goodness! So she put Mrs. Beach into the companion cockpit beside herself, and with a heart beating faster than it had ever beaten, even on that occasion when she made her first solo flight at school, she took off into the thick grayness all about them.

As the plane left the ground, she carefully pointed it upward in a gradual ascent, hoping that perhaps she could get above the clouds. She must fly high – it would be dangerous crossing the Alleghenies. She hoped she could depend upon her instruments; they had never failed her yet.

Up, up they climbed, but always within the veil of gray that closed upon them so completely. No horizon was visible, it seemed as if they were floating inside a gray ball, with nothing to tell them where they were going. The child was asleep in her mother's arms, and Linda glanced questioningly at Mrs. Beach. But her expression was all maternal love; no fear of danger for herself seemed to have any part in her feelings.

Everything about the experience seemed queer, so detached from the world, so unreal. A mysterious journey that was no part of everyday life. More than once Linda wondered whether they were not flying unevenly, perhaps upside down! Oh, if she only had a gyroscopic pilot, that marvelous little instrument that would assure an even keel!.. She would ask her father to give her one for Christmas – if she lived till then! She smiled in a detached way; she thought of herself almost as another person, in a book or a play.

The plane was evidently dipping. Suddenly, with that sixth sense with which every good pilot is equipped, she felt a stall coming on. It was a sort of sinking sensation; then the ailerons on the end of the wings failed to function. She pushed the stick frantically from side to side – with no response! In that brief moment she glanced again at her companion, so absorbed in her child, and she knew that the mother would not mind going to her death if the baby could not live.

But Linda meant to do everything in her power to save them all. She had been in difficulties before, and she knew how to overcome them, if it were humanly possible. Fortunately she was flying high, so she immediately pushed the nose of the Pursuit forward and dropped the plane three hundred feet to regain speed. And then, oh, what a gorgeous feeling of relief swept over her, as she succeeded

in coming out of that stall! The plane was now flying evenly. Her gasp of thankfulness was audible, but the woman beside her did not even notice.

"Maybe I'm not glad Daddy bought me an open plane!" she thought, as she flew steadily onward. "If I couldn't feel the wind in my face... Oh, you dear Arrow, you have never failed me!"

And then, miraculously, the fog lifted. Everything was clear in the sunlight; all her fears were gone – now she could make speed. Onward they went, over the mountains, and the rivers, through Pennsylvania, flying low enough to see the wonderful beauty of the early autumn in that lovely part of the country. At last they came to Philadelphia, and flew straight to the airport at the southern end of the city, and landed in safety.

"The baby is – breathing!" she asked, as she watched the attendant who came forward to welcome them.

"Yes," replied Mrs. Beach, rapturously. "Oh, I think you must be an angel, Miss Carlton!"

"If we are only in time!" returned the girl. "We taxi from here."

"But I haven't much money – "

"I have. Come! There isn't a moment to be lost!"

Linda left her plane with the attendant, and helped Mrs. Beach with her baby into the waiting taxicab. In half an hour they were at the hospital.

"You – you will stay with me?" questioned the woman, trembling.

"Of course."

The great surgeon was kindness itself. Mrs. Beach, who had feared that he would be brusque, was delighted. A nurse took the baby immediately into the operating room.

Linda was intensely hungry; it was long past her lunch-time, but she said nothing of it, while they waited tensely in that outer room. She had not failed the poor woman yet, and she would not now, at her most difficult hour.

At last the doctor appeared, his face beaming with smiles.

"Your baby is fine!" he announced. "And one of the sweetest little girls I have ever seen... The nurse is putting her to bed now."

Mrs. Beach burst into tears of happiness, and rushed forward and clasped the surgeon's hand in rapture.

"Oh, I can never thank you enough!" she cried. Then, drying her eyes, she added, "And how much do I owe you, Doctor?"

The great man had been taking in the woman's appearance, her poor clothing, her work-hardened hands.

"Five dollars," he said, not making the mistake of saying "Nothing," for he realized that she would resent charity.

"The Lord be praised!" she exclaimed, reverently. "Two angels I have met today – you and Miss Carlton! Two utter strangers who do things like this for me!" She buried her head in Linda's arms and wept hysterically in her joy.

After the bill was paid, the doctor told them that they might stop in to see the baby. Following the nurse, they tiptoed down a corridor and into a children's ward, where they found the little tot in a white crib, breathing naturally, sleeping the dreamless sleep of childhood.

"She had better stay here for a few days," advised the nurse. "You can find a cheap room a couple of doors away from the hospital." And she handed Mrs. Beach a card.

It was then, and only then, that the happy mother realized that she had not eaten since the night before.

"We'll get something to eat first," she said to Linda as they left the hospital together. "And then you will want to fly back home?"

"No," replied the girl. "I think I'll stay over night – to get a good rest, and fly by daylight. And besides, you will not be so lonely."

So, after sending her aunt a telegram to that effect, Linda Carlton treated her grateful friend to the best meal she had ever eaten in her life.

## Chapter II

### *Kitty's Party*

Linda and Mrs. Beach slept soundly that night, in the cheap but comfortable beds in the neat little room not far from the hospital. But both awakened early, the woman because she was longing to see her baby, the girl because she was anxious to fly back to Spring City.

"Do you think that you have enough money, Mrs. Beach?" asked the latter, as they left the house together, after paying the landlady. Linda had insisted upon taking the room for the week, in order that the child might remain at the hospital as long as was necessary. "Hadn't I better give you some for your ticket home, and for a telegram to your husband?"

"Thank you, Miss Carlton, you have done so much already! But if I could borrow a little?"

"Of course you can," replied the girl, realizing that the other would prefer that arrangement.

"I don't know how soon I can pay it back, but I'll try hard!" promised Mrs. Beach.

"Your husband has a farm, hasn't he?" suggested Linda. "Why not drive in once a week with vegetables? My aunt would be glad to take them from you."

"The very thing!" agreed the woman, joyfully. It seemed as if all her cares had vanished as completely as the fog of the previous day.

After a hearty breakfast together, Linda said good-by and went back to her plane at the airport. She found it in perfect condition, inspected and filled with gas, ready for her flight homeward. How she would enjoy it today! How good the clear sunlight would feel, how bracing the air that held the crispness of autumn! She was glad, too, to be alone, after yesterday's nerve-racking experience.

Nor was there any reason for hurry this time. She could land at Pittsburgh, or some other convenient half-way airport, and have a good lunch. And still arrive home long before dark.

It was just about four o'clock when she finally brought her plane down in the field behind her house at Spring City. Gathering her things together, she made her way slowly to the porch, singing as she went along. Her aunt – her father's sister who had taken care of her ever since her mother's death – was nervously waiting for her on the steps.

"Linda!" she cried, as soon as the girl was within hearing distance. "Do hurry up and tell me what you have been doing!"

"Didn't you get my telegram, Aunt Emily?" she asked, kissing the older woman.

"Yes. But – alone in Philadelphia! I do hope you had a chaperon! You didn't go with any of the boys?" Miss Carlton was old-fashioned and strict; she had done everything in her power to bring up her niece in the most correct manner.

"No, no, Auntie!" She smiled affectionately. "I went with a woman named Mrs. Beach – to rush her baby to the hospital. And I stayed all night with her."

"Oh!" exclaimed Miss Carlton, in relief. "I should have been more worried than I was, except that I didn't find out that you had gone off in your plane until I got your telegram. And by that time the fog had lifted... But come inside and have some tea and sandwiches, and tell me all about it."

Linda followed her into the house and briefly related her story, not mentioning the stall at all, for she made it a point never to worry her aunt unnecessarily, because the latter was so timid about airplanes that she had never even gone for a ride in the Pursuit.

"Now I must call Dr. Ginsley," the girl concluded, as she finished the last sandwich on the plate.

"No, dear – I'll call him for you. You must go right upstairs and take a nap. Don't forget that Kitty's dinner is tonight, and Harry is coming for you at half-past seven."

Linda smiled; of all the boys she knew, she admired Harriman Smith most, although he was the poorest financially of her select social group at Spring City. He belonged to perhaps the finest type of young men in America today – the class who are working their own way through college.

Handsome, clean-cut, ambitious, bound to make his mark in the world! And he was head over heels in love with pretty Linda Carlton. But, unlike Ralph Clavering, another of the girl's admirers, he did not often speak of his infatuation. It wasn't fair to a girl to talk love, he believed, until a man had something with which to back it up.

"What will you wear?" inquired Miss Carlton. "Your white chiffon?"

"No," answered Linda, thoughtfully. "I don't think that would be fair to Kitty. It's Kitty's big party, and of course she'll wear white – with her pearls, so I think all her friends ought to wear colors, to sort of set her off, like a queen... I believe I'll wear my daffodil."

"All right, just as you say. But do run along."

Never in her life had Linda attended such a gorgeous party as this début of Kitty Clavering. The Claverings were millionaires several times over, by far the richest people in Spring City, and they gave this function in a lavish style. The huge house shone with brilliant lights, the flowers reminded Linda of a flower show; the caterers had been brought from Chicago, and the music was by Paul Whiteman himself, with his famous jazz orchestra.

It was all so dazzling, so bewildering, that Linda felt as if she were lost in some tropical island, among strangers. It was some time before she recognized anybody she knew, and she clung tightly to Harry's arm. He pressed her hand gently; it was wonderful to have a chance to protect Linda Carlton, who usually was so fearless.

"I wish we could find Lou," she remarked, mentioning her chum, her dearest friend who had gone through school with her, and graduated in the same class the preceding June. "Lou is so much more at home at this sort of thing than I am."

They were seated at a little table now – there were tables of every size in the dining-room and conservatory and library – and a waiter was serving them with the most delicious food.

Linda ate hers almost in awe, wondering whether this was the sort of thing her aunt was planning for her. The expense of it! Why, it would cost as much as a whole year's course at a ground school! And where would it get you in the end? It would only lead to more parties – more expense. Linda sighed.

"Why the sigh, Linda?" inquired Harry, sympathetically.

"I guess it wasn't very polite," replied the girl, flushing. "But I'm afraid my mind is on other things."

"Well, try to bring it back. Here comes our host – with another man. An army officer!"

"I'm not interested in army officers," she whispered, but when she saw from the stranger's insignia that he belonged to the Flying Corps, she changed her mind.

"Hello, Linda," exclaimed Ralph Clavering, Kitty's brother who had taken a course with Linda at the Spring City Flying School a few months before. "Been looking all over for you. You too, Harry!.. I want to introduce Lieutenant Hulbert, of the U. S. Air Service."

Ralph went on to explain what a marvelous little flyer Miss Carlton was, until Linda's eyelids fluttered in embarrassment, and she wished he would stop talking so that she could hear some of the Lieutenant's experiences. But the music had started, and Ralph was impatient to dance.

"We mustn't keep Lieutenant Hulbert," he explained. "He's to have Kit's first dance."

With a gracious bow the young officer withdrew, and Ralph turned to Harry.

"Do me a favor, Harry, old man?" he said.

"Did you call him Harriman?" asked Linda. "Why all the dignity?"

"No. 'Harry – old – man!'"

"So long as you don't call me 'the old Harry,'" laughed the other. "Well, what is it?"

"Lend me your girl friend for this dance. I have something very important to tell to Linda."

"All right," agreed the other, pleasantly. "At least if you'll find me another girl."

"Sure I will," said Ralph, and in another minute he came back with Louise Haydock, Linda's chum.

Louise was just the opposite in type to Linda. Though not exactly pretty, she was extremely striking-looking; her hair was clipped close, after the manner of Kay Francis, the actress, and she always wore earrings and bright colored dresses. Tonight her dress was a new brilliant shade of green, with trimmings of silver, and silver slippers to match.

"Hello, darling!" she exclaimed, joyfully. "Who'd ever think I'd find you! It's almost as impossible to locate anybody here as on the beach at Atlantic City!"

"I know. And I've been dying to see you!" returned Linda.

"All your own fault. Where have you been these last two days?"

"Why – "

"Please have your visit later," interrupted Ralph, who still preserved much of the spoiled child in his make-up. "The dance is half over now."

"All right," agreed Linda, with a wink, meaning, "See you later," to her chum.

Off they started; the floor was perfect, the music excellent, and for a minute or two they both gave themselves up to the joy of the dance. But time was precious; Ralph might not have another dance with Linda all evening. Besides, nobody cut in during the first dance – that was an unwritten rule with their crowd.

"Who is this Lieutenant?" asked Linda, as they happened to pass him dancing with Kitty.

"A fine fellow. The kind you girls fall for – uniform, and all that," replied Ralph, somewhat enviously. "But don't you fall for him! He belongs to Kitty!"

"Kitty! But I thought she was practically engaged to Maurice Stetson?"

"That's all off. Stetson made one wisecrack too many, and it cracked Sis's dream of happiness. He isn't even here tonight."

"I can't say I'll miss him a whole lot."

"I always liked the fellow. But I'm rooming with another chap this year. You'll probably meet him at Thanksgiving."

"What's your big news, Ralph?" asked Linda, wondering whether it had anything to do with flying. "You must have had some reason for taking me away from Harry."

"You're reason enough yourself, my angel," he replied. "You look divine tonight."

"Thanks, Ralph. But that's not quite fair to Harry, is it?"

"All's fair in love and war... But lest you think too meanly of me, I did have another reason. One that will knock you cold: Kit is taking up flying!"

"Kitty! No! Never!"

Linda could not imagine anyone less likely to care for aviation than pretty, petite Kitty Clavering, who never had an idea in her head beyond her parties, her pearls, and her boy friends. Besides, she was so timid. Why, she was even nervous about taking her car into traffic, and almost always used the chauffeur.

"Of course there's a reason," explained Ralph.

"You mean Lieutenant Hulbert?"

"Naturally."

"But what has that to do with me, Ralph? I'm not supposed to teach her, or anything like that, am I?" Linda had often thought it would be a simple matter to teach Louise, who was naturally air-minded, but Kitty Clavering would be difficult. And she'd simply die if Kitty ever sat at the controls of her Arrow!

"No, of course not. Dad has a big idea – you know how he longs to get me into business? Well, he jumped at the chance of launching Kit. She's to start a Flying Club. You know about them?"

"Yes. They're run something like Country Clubs, aren't they? Only flying is the sport, instead of golf and tennis."

"Exactly. Dad's financing it, and Kit is to take charge. Sell thousand dollar bonds, get members, arrange about instruction. And she's supposed to run it like a business, and pay interest to Dad."

"Well, of all things!" cried Linda. Nevertheless, the idea was delightful. Just as flying was ten times better than any other sport, so a flying club would be that much nicer than a country club.

"Of course I don't need to tell you that Lieutenant Hulbert is in on this," continued Ralph. "He and Kitty are working hand in hand. He's even hoping to be the instructor for a while, if he can get a short leave from the army."

"So that he can be near Kitty," concluded Linda. "But suppose Kitty drops him as she did Maurice, then what will happen to the poor people who have invested their money in the club?"

"She can't drop it. There'll be a board of managers to see to that. Besides, Dad'll be back of it. Nobody need worry much, as long as he's behind it."

"That's true," admitted Linda.

"Of course I'll be at college, but I think I can persuade Dad into giving me a plane of my own, so that I can fly home every week-end. Doesn't it sound thrilling?"

"It surely does. We'll have to get together and talk the whole thing over soon."

"I'll tell the world! I'm going to get the bunch over here tomorrow afternoon. Can you come? It's my last day home."

The music had stopped, but Ralph showed no signs of letting Linda go back to her escort.

"And will you promise me tomorrow night, Linda?" he begged. "In case I don't get another dance with you tonight?"

"I don't know," she replied, thoughtfully. "I'm sort of expecting Daddy home this week-end, and I must see him."

"But you can see your father any time!"

"That's just what I can't do! Why Ralph, I see you lots oftener than Daddy. I haven't laid eyes on him since Field Day at Green Falls – three weeks ago!"

"You may not see me for three weeks!"

"And then again, I may... Here come Lou and Harry... No, Ralph, I can't promise. If I come tomorrow afternoon, that's all I can say."

"Oh, all right," returned the young man sulkily. He never could get used to Linda's independence – when he – and everybody else – regarded himself as the biggest catch in Spring City. He'd invite Louise, for spite.

"Lou, will you go riding with me tomorrow night, and paint the town red, because it's my last night home?" he asked.

"O.K.," replied Louise enthusiastically. "But why be so stingy about yourself? Let's make it a crowd!" She turned to Linda.

"I prefer your society alone," interrupted Ralph, peevishly, and with a wink at her chum, Louise accepted his invitation to dance.

Linda and Harry started the next dance together, but scarcely had they gone around the floor when Lieutenant Hulbert cut in. Linda was both proud and delighted; he was an older man, probably twenty-four or five, and she found him most interesting. She made him talk about the army and about flying, and finally of the club. She was keenly disappointed when Joe Elliston cut in and took her away.

She did not dance with the Lieutenant again, although she stayed until midnight. Then she told Harry she wanted to go home.

"But your aunt isn't even thinking of leaving so early, and she's as strict as they come. Besides, I hear that the breakfast we're going to get will put the supper to shame!" Harry was just as anxious as Ralph to have a good time before college opened.

"I know, Harry, and I don't want to be a poor sport. But I'm really awfully tired. I flew to Philadelphia yesterday, and back again today." She didn't say why; Linda Carlton was not a girl to boast of her good deeds. "Besides, tomorrow is a big day for me. If Daddy comes home, we have some momentous questions to talk over – which will decide my whole future."

"Flying?"

"Yes... So, Harry, please take me home, and then you can easily come back again and stay for breakfast."

The young man did as he was requested, but he did not go back. Somehow, the party no longer interested him.

So while her friends still danced far into the night, Linda Carlton slept soundly, that she might retain that radiant health upon which the doctor had complimented her the day before.

## Chapter III

### *The Flying Club*

When Linda came down to breakfast the following morning, she found her father already at the table. He had a way of arriving early in the morning, for he preferred traveling in a sleeper.

"Daddy!" she cried, happily. "Just the person I want to see!"

"Well, that's nice," he said, kissing her affectionately. "I wouldn't want it otherwise. Now sit down and tell me all about your latest experiences while you eat your breakfast."

"No, first you must tell me how you are! Are you all well again after that terrible accident?"

"Much better, but not quite all well," he replied. "I have to stay away from horses, I guess, for the rest of my life. I'm selling the ranch."

"Daddy!" There was the deepest sympathy in her voice; she knew how her father loved his outdoor life, almost as much as she loved flying.

"Well, it wasn't paying anyhow. But sit down, dear, and tell me about yourself. I know you were at a party last night – the servants told me, for I haven't seen your Aunt Emily yet."

"Everything's just fine with me," Linda told him, as she sat down beside him and took a bunch of grapes. "It isn't the past I want to talk about, Daddy – it's the future."

"Of course, of course," murmured her father. "It's always the future with you... Well, what's on your mind now?"

"I want to go to a ground school. I want to be a commercial pilot – maybe even a 'transport pilot,' the highest of all, you know. And a licensed mechanic." She tried to keep her voice calm, but her blue eyes were shining with excitement.

"What for?" inquired her father, smiling at the idea of a girl with ambitions like these.

"So that I can earn my living in aviation. I want to go in for it seriously, Daddy. Not just play!"

"You're afraid I won't be able to support you, later on?" he asked, half teasingly.

"No, no – not that – "

"Of course such an event is possible. In fact, Daughter, it was that very thing I especially want to talk about to you... I have decided to go into business."

"Into business?" repeated Linda, in amazement.

"Yes. I want something to do, now that I am selling my ranch. Besides, I have lost a good deal of money in stocks, and I think it's time I made some."

"But what?"

"Importing some very lovely lace-work, and selling it wholesale to the better stores all over the country. This needle-work is made in a convent in Canada, and has never been sold before. But I have been able to persuade the Mother Superior to sell it, because they really are dreadfully in need of money."

"But how did you happen on such a thing as this?" asked Linda, incredulously.

"Two years ago – the summer you went to camp with Louise in Maine, you remember – Emily and I visited you and went on into Canada. One day your aunt stopped at this convent – it's near Montreal – and one of the nuns took such a fancy to her that she gave her a handkerchief of this work. When we got home, your aunt sent a contribution for the convent, and really the letter of gratitude was touching."

"And they've actually agreed to sell this to you?"

"Yes. All they have. And they are making more. If I hadn't come along, they would have had to give up their convent."

"Of course it's expensive?"

"Yes, and there's nothing like it in America. Nobody in our country would ever have the patience to do it. Of course I have to pay a tax, besides, on every piece. But the stores are enthusiastic, they ordered all I had. Except – " he dug smilingly into his pocket – "except this handkerchief I saved for you."

Linda opened the small package eagerly, and disclosed the daintiest, loveliest thing of its kind that she had ever seen. Filmy net-work, made with infinite patience, probably as the nuns had learned from their sisters in France. It was exquisite.

"Oh, Daddy, I adore it!" she cried.

"Rather a queer present for a girl who wants to be a licensed mechanic," he remarked, whimsically.

"But I love things like this, too!" she hastily assured him. "And I can appreciate its value. Why, all my friends will be green with envy!"

"Then they can easily buy them in New York," he said. "If you show it to your rich friends, you'll help my business..."

"Now, another thing, Daughter, while we're on this subject. As I told you, I've lost some money, and my expenses are pretty heavy. So I'm just taking a precaution, in case I should fail in this business, of putting thirty thousand dollars in bonds aside in your name. Just so you won't be penniless."

"That's awfully sweet of you, Daddy! But can you afford it?"

"Yes, certainly."

"Then – then – instead of a trust fund could I have the money for two purposes?" she asked excitedly. "To pay for my course at a ground school, and – and – " She stopped and flushed; her heart beat so fast with excitement that the words choked her. She was almost afraid to tell her father, for fear of his refusal. It was her most cherished dream, her secret which she had confided only to Louise, her greatest ambition!

"And what, Daughter?"

"Can't you guess, Daddy?"

"No. I never know what you're up to. A new plane? One of those new-fangled autogiros?"

"No – that is, not exactly... Oh, Daddy, don't think I'm crazy. But if I do well at school, next spring I should like to have a special plane – and – and – " She took a deep breath before she finally blurted out her desire. "And fly the Atlantic! Without a man!" she said.

"All alone?"

"No. With Louise. It's never been done by two girls alone. Amelia Earhart did it, but she took a man as co-pilot. But look at Amy Johnson!"

"Where is Amy Johnson?" he asked, glancing at the door.

"*The* Amy Johnson! Daddy, you must know about her! Don't tease me! She flew alone from England to Australia."

"Yes, of course. I remember now. But don't expect me to recall all the aviatrixes, and their stunts. I usually skip the flying news."

"But you won't soon!"

"Not if my little girl is going to do public stunts like that! But, seriously, dear, I don't know what to say. It seems too hazardous. Think how many planes have dropped into the ocean, never to be heard of again."

"But planes are being made safer every minute!"

"True. Still, I don't know – I wouldn't like to decide a question like that off-hand. I'll have to think about it."

"But you are willing for me to go to the ground school?"

"Yes. And you can have the money in your own name, invested in bonds that can easily be sold. I know I can trust you not to try the flight without my permission. You'll promise that?"

"Certainly," she agreed. "And by the way, Daddy, don't tell anybody of my plans about the ocean flight – not even Aunt Emily!"

During this whole conversation Linda had not even touched the fruit that was on her plate, and she realized all of a sudden that her aunt might appear at any minute, and would instantly jump to the conclusion that she was sick, so she resolutely began to make up for lost time. She was just finishing her bacon and eggs when Miss Carlton came downstairs.

"Linda!" she exclaimed immediately. "What happened to you last night?"

"I got Harry to bring me home early. I was tired."

"No wonder, after that awful trip to Philadelphia." Miss Carlton turned to her brother. "Did Linda tell you about it?"

"No, we haven't had time yet. But she must tell me all about it after breakfast."

"It wasn't much," remarked Linda, evasively. She was thinking of Louise now, wondering whether she had succeeded in persuading her parents to let her go to the aviation school too, for the chums wanted to be together.

The first chance she had, she called her on the telephone, and learned that Louise too had been successful. They arranged to go to Kitty's together that afternoon.

They reached the Clavering home about four o'clock, and found the others already there, gathered together in the charming library, about a cheerful open fire. Kitty, her pale face lighted up with unusual color and excitement, was seated on the davenport between Lieutenant Hulbert and an older girl, whose homeliness was increased by the stiff, masculine attire which she wore. The hostess introduced her as Miss Hulbert, the lieutenant's older sister.

All the old crowd were there. Sara Wheeler, Sue Emery, Dot Crowley, Jim Valier, Harriman Smith, Joe Elliston, Ralph and Kitty, and half a dozen others whom Louise and Linda did not know so well. Everybody seemed to be talking at once.

"Now do quiet down!" commanded Kitty, bringing down her little fist upon Lieutenant Hulbert's knee. "We must get to work! We're awfully lucky, girls and boys, to have Miss Hulbert here. She's been flying for three years, and has won two big derbies, and organized flying clubs, and – and –"

"Been in the movies," added the young woman herself, with a smile. "Only that really wasn't worth while," she said, condescendingly. "It's not nearly so wonderful after you have been in, as it looks to the outsider!"

There was something about her manner which made Linda feel very small, very inexperienced, very young. But naturally, she thought, the girl had a right to be proud, with all those records!

"Mr. Clavering is very kindly donating the land – two hundred acres north of Spring City, isn't it, Kitty?" she continued, turning to the girl beside her. "And my brother will write to the Government for a charter. Then we will ask each of you to put in a thousand dollars – or more, if you can afford it – and we will buy a plane or two, and put up a hangar and a rough sort of club-house."

"And will you belong to the club?" asked Kitty, as if it were too great an honor to be expected, as if she were asking Amelia Earhart, or Laura Ingals, or Amy Johnson. "Oh, it will be so wonderful to have your name, Bess!"

"I guess I could work it in," replied the other. "Though I'm usually pretty busy with my own flying. I happen to be out of a job now, but don't forget I'm a working girl!"

"Of course. But just having your name would mean so much to us! If you'd only consent to be president!"

Louise coughed irritably; this wasn't her idea of a business meeting. She had taken an instant dislike to Miss Hulbert, with her conceited manner.

"I'm afraid I couldn't do that," replied the latter. "I might accept a minor office, like secretary or treasurer, just so that you could have *one* experienced flyer on your list. But hardly president – I haven't time."

"*One*, indeed!" repeated Louise, scornfully. "I want to tell you, Miss Hulbert, that Miss Carlton is a wonderful aviatrix!"

"Oh, is that so?" smiled the older girl, as one might smile at a child. "I'm sorry, I'd forgotten Kitty did mention that one of you, besides her brother, had been flying a couple of months."

Linda blushed and Louise opened her mouth to make an angry retort, but Kitty spoke first.

"Two months seems a lot to us, but of course it's nothing to anybody like Miss Hulbert, who has handled all sorts of planes for the last three years. And has actually had instruction from men high up in the Flying Corps!.. Now, suppose we elect officers – two boys and two girls."

"I nominate Kitty Clavering for president," said Miss Hulbert, with an affectionate smile.

"And I move the nominations be closed," said the lieutenant. "It was Kitty's idea to have the club, and Kitty's father is making it possible, so I think Kitty is the only person for president."

Everybody seemed to agree with him; the election was unanimous.

Joe Elliston was then made vice-president, and Ralph secretary.

The latter, who had been waiting for a chance to nominate Linda for an office, spoke up at last, when it was time to choose a treasurer. But she declined.

"I'm afraid I can't stand, Ralph," she said. "You see, Lou and I decided definitely this morning to go away to school."

Miss Hulbert raised her eyebrows.

"But aren't you the young lady who's supposed to be so interested in aviation?" she asked, cuttingly. "If you really cared, I should think you'd give up finishing-school, or college, or whatever it is, for a chance like this. You get a great deal of experience from a flying club."

"Linda has had plenty of experience!" interrupted Louise, sharply.

"Really? And you got your license when, Miss Carlton?"

"In July," murmured Linda, in embarrassment. "But I am going to a ground school, Miss Hulbert, to qualify as a mechanic."

"How interesting! But really, Miss Carlton, let me tell you, it's a waste of time. There's no more reason for a girl to learn the engine of an airplane, than for her to know the engine of an automobile. You can't often fix things up in the air anyway."

Linda shrugged her shoulders; she had no desire to get into an argument. But neither had she any intention of giving up her cherished ambition. Ted Mackay, that wonderful young pilot who had taken her for her very first flight, and who had later rescued Louise and herself from the wilderness, was firm in the belief that this was the next step for her to take.

"Then I nominate Miss Hulbert," said Kitty, immediately. "Now don't forget, Bess, you said you'd consider it!" She looked imploringly at the older girl; it was plain to be seen that she admired her tremendously.

Without further discussion the nomination was made unanimous.

Jim Valier suddenly stood up and stretched. He was so tall and thin that he had been nicknamed "String Bean," and everybody said he was the laziest member of the crowd.

"I'm all tired out with this hard work," he announced. "Let the president do the rest – appointing committees, and what not. Now Kitty, when do we eat?"

Everybody roared. Intimate as they all were with Kitty Clavering, Jim was the only one who would have asked such a question.

"We ate everything they had in the house last night at the party," snapped Dot Crowley.

"Where are your manners, Jim?"

Laughingly, Kitty rang the bell and the usual refreshments appeared. While they were eating, Linda and Louise had drifted off to a corner of the room, away from Bess Hulbert, whom they both disliked, and Linda was showing her handkerchief to several of the girls and telling where her father had gotten it. Turning about to put her tea-cup on the tray, she saw Bess beside her, listening intently to her explanation.

"May I see it?" she asked, rather abruptly.

"Certainly," replied Linda, surprised that a girl like Miss Hulbert would care for such a dainty thing.

"You said outside of Montreal, didn't you?" she inquired. "I believe I know the convent you mean. 'Our Lady of Mercy,' isn't it?"

"Yes, I believe it is," answered Linda. "Why?"

"Oh, nothing. Only I've been there – I know Canada pretty well."

"Fortunately you don't have to go to Canada to get one. My father is buying them for the finer stores all over the country. You can get them almost anywhere – in any of the big cities."

Miss Hulbert raised her eyebrows.

"Quite an idea," she remarked. "Nobody ever would think of making money from nuns!"

It was an insult, of course, to her father, and Linda would have replied, but just at that moment Lieutenant Hulbert clapped his hands for silence.

"Ladies and gentlemen!" he shouted. "May I say something?"

"If we can go on eating while we listen," said Jim.

"You've had enough, String Bean!" put in Dot. "Go on, Lieutenant Hulbert. All the important people are listening."

"I have an exciting piece of news," explained the young officer. "A wealthy woman by the name of Mrs. Rodman Hallowell has just offered a prize of twenty-five thousand dollars to the first girl, or girls, who fly from New York to Paris, without a man's accompanying them. You know, of course, that this has never been done. Maybe such an undertaking is beyond this club, but anyway it's something to keep in mind. You can never tell how fast you'll progress, once you start flying."

"Oh, Bess!" cried Kitty. "Why don't you do it?"

"I would," replied the girl, coolly, as if she were sure of her ability, "if I had a suitable plane. But there's no use attempting it in the poor old boat I fly."

"Everybody says nobody but Sis could make it go," put in Lieutenant Hulbert, proudly. "It's one the Army gave up."

"I understand its temperament," explained his sister. "It's a Jenny – but somehow I manage her. And I never went to a ground school, either," she added, to Linda.

"Maybe the club could finance you," suggested Kitty. "Think of the honor it would mean to us!"

"That's awfully sweet of you, Kitty dear. But we'll talk about it later. Nobody will be trying for the prize over the winter, and by spring we'll see how our finances are."

Linda sat perfectly still, drinking in every word. Oh, if she could only win that prize! She and Louise! But how could they hope to, against such an experienced flyer as Miss Hulbert? What a bitter pill it would be to swallow, to watch her money going towards helping a girl like that to win! If it were even Dot, or Kitty – any one of her real friends!

Scarcely knowing what she was doing, she said good-bye to her hostess, and followed Louise out of the house.

## Chapter IV

### *The Ground School*

"I certainly don't care for that woman!" announced Louise emphatically, as she got into Linda's roadster.

"Miss Hulbert?" inquired her chum.

"Yes. You might think she were the one and only queen of the air! And it's all so silly. Imagine Lindbergh or Amelia Earhart talking like that!"

"Still, she has a lot of experience on all of us," admitted Linda. "But I don't believe what she says about ground schools. Why, Ted Mackay –"

"Have you heard from him lately, Linda?"

"About a week ago. He wants us to go to a school in St. Louis, where he says they give a most thorough course."

"Sure it isn't because that will be near Kansas City – where he is?" teased Louise.

"Oh no, I wouldn't believe that of Ted. He is seriously interested in my career – yours too, for I told him that you might go with me."

"Might!" repeated Louise, settling back in her seat to enjoy the ride, for it was a lovely day, and there was no top over the car. "Nobody could stop me now – after this afternoon! We're going to beat Bess Hulbert to it, and get that prize!"

"Lou, if we only could! You know how I've talked of flying the ocean before. Are you still game?"

"Absolutely! But we wouldn't dare take a chance in your Pursuit, would we?"

"No, of course not. What I'd like to get is a Model J Bellanca – it's made especially for that purpose. Take off early next May – the very day Lindy flew, if the weather happens to be right."

"Where would we ever get the money for such a plane?" asked Louise, incredulously. "It would cost thousands of dollars."

"Yes, I know. I talked to Daddy this morning, and if he decides to let me try it, he won't mind the money. But don't breathe a word of this to anybody! I wouldn't want Miss Hulbert to hear of it; she'd only make all manner of fun of us."

"Suppose she should get that prize," remarked Louise. "Can you imagine her in Paris, Linda? Representing American Girlhood! Why, it might start a war with the French!"

"Now, Lou, you're exaggerating too much. She isn't as disagreeable as all that."

"She is. She's even worse. But of course I won't say a word about our plan, except to mother and dad. And maybe I won't work hard at school, to get my own license!"

"That's the spirit!" approved Linda, as she stopped the car at her chum's house.

"Linda! Look how low that plane's flying!" exclaimed the other, as the girls got out of the car. "And look at the way she's tilting!"

"The pilot must be crazy! Why, that's only a few hundred feet up. Come on, Lou, something is likely to happen! Let's get into the house."

Instinctively Linda pushed Louise towards the porch, but with a quick glance about, she saw her chum's brother in the next yard, playing with a group of children. Unmindful of her own danger, and the velvet dress she was wearing under her lovely fall coat, she dashed over the hedge and dragged the children into the house.

Nothing happened, however; when she came outside she noticed that the plane was climbing again. With a sigh of relief she went back to Louise.

"That was our friend Miss Hulbert," announced the latter, scornfully. "Doing some stunts for our benefit."

"No! Not really?"

"Absolutely. She waved to me!"

"She certainly doesn't show much judgment. Besides, it's unlawful."

"Let's sue her!"

"Now, Lou! You are positively vindictive. And all because she made fun of my flying." But Linda gave her chum a hug; it was so comforting to feel her entire loyalty.

"All right, then let's forget her... Can you stay for dinner, Linda?"

"No thank you, Lou – I'm afraid not. Daddy's home, and he may leave any minute. You know I told you he's in business now in New York."

"Yes, it seems funny, doesn't it? I never could imagine your father in business. What do you suppose made him do that?"

"Restlessness, I think, and the fact that he can't ride any more. Besides, he told me the ranch doesn't pay, so I guess he has to try something else."

"Well, if you will have airplanes, and expensive courses – " teased Louise.

"Oh, but just wait! We'll be ten-thousand-dollar-a-year women when we finish our education, Lou. It's going to be a good investment."

"I certainly hope so... Well, so long. I'll call you up tomorrow and we'll go shopping for our overalls."

Linda drove off, and arrived just in time for dinner. Her aunt, it seemed, had been impatiently awaiting her return, for she had learned from Linda's father that he had given his consent to the ground school course.

"I simply can't understand you, Linda," she said when they were at the table. "When you could be having the time of your life this winter! With all the gayety here – and even this new flying club. Why you should want to go off to a school where you will have to mess up your hands with grease and machinery, and practically live in overalls, is beyond me."

"I know, Aunt Emily – I guess I do seem queer. But to me it's just the *only* thing to do. There's something inside me that makes me feel as if nothing else is so important – for me." Her eyes shone with ardor.

Mr. Carlton watched her admiringly.

"There isn't anything so great in this world," he said slowly, "as a splendid enthusiasm – a purpose in life. If I were a fairy god-mother, and could give a child only one gift, it would be that. Emily, we should bow down before it in admiration, and thank Heaven that Linda is so different from most of the young people today – still in their teens and bored with life."

"Oh, thank you, Daddy!" cried the girl. How wonderful it was to be understood!

"But imagine having her away from home all winter!" moaned Miss Carlton. "Or do you think I should close this house and go and board in St. Louis?"

"No, Emily, that won't be necessary," replied Mr. Carlton. "It would be a shame to take you away from your friends. Besides, Linda will have her Arrow. I see no reason why she shouldn't fly home every week-end, if she isn't too tired, or too busy."

"Yes, that will be lots nicer," agreed Linda. "Because then we'll have real Thanksgiving and Christmas just the same as ever. Can you picture those holidays in a boarding-house?"

Miss Carlton looked relieved, but she still disliked the whole idea. She raised another objection.

"Think of Linda alone in a big city like St. Louis," she said. "She's too young – "

"I'm eighteen now," Linda hastened to remind her. "I couldn't try to qualify for a transport license if I weren't. Besides, I won't be alone, and I won't be in a big city. The school is quite far out of St. Louis, and Louise expects to go with me."

"Well, that is better, I must say," admitted her aunt, rather grudgingly.

"And you could go out with the girls, Emily," suggested her brother, "and see that they are established in some nice home, with a motherly woman who will look after them. I think the Y. W. C. A.'s keep lists like that, of eminently respectable people, who need to take boarders."

"That is a good idea."

"Then it's all settled?" asked Linda, excitedly. "When can I start?"

"Next week, I guess," replied her father. "If that is convenient to you, Emily."

So, with no further opposition, Linda set herself to the pleasant task of getting ready. The next day she accompanied her father to the bank where he deposited the bonds in a safety-deposit box in her name, and opened an account for her. One of these thousand-dollar bonds she reluctantly turned over to Kitty, for although she liked the idea of a flying club for Spring City, she wondered whether she weren't helping to finance her rival on that trip from New York to Paris. But with Harry Smith on the finance committee, she felt somehow safe. He would not willingly allow the club to spend its money for such purposes.

By the tenth of October, everything was in readiness, for Ted Mackay had secured application blanks and mailed them to the girls, and promised to be on hand when they arrived at the school. So, with their suit-cases stuffed with overalls and flyers' suits, they stepped into the Arrow and took off.

The day was so lovely and the country so beautiful that more than once Linda regretted the fact that her aunt had insisted upon going by train. It would have been such a wonderful chance to show her how safe, yet how fascinating air travel could be. Without the faintest disturbance they flew straight to the school where Ted Mackay had also made arrangements for them to keep the Arrow.

He was the first person they saw when Linda brought the plane down. He was standing there near a hangar, his helmet off, his red hair shining in the sunlight, and grinning at them delightedly. Beside him was an older man, probably one of the instructors.

As soon as the girls got out of the cockpit, he was beside them, introducing his companion to them.

"This is Mr. Eckers," he said. "He is crazy to meet two girls who want to be mechanics. He never heard of one before."

"Yet we're quite human," laughed Louise. "Almost normal, I think."

"Well, you see," explained Eckers, "we have several young ladies here who are studying to be pilots – even commercial and transport pilots – but we never had a mechanic of your sex before. But that's no reason why you shouldn't succeed."

"I'm not so good myself," remarked Louise. "And I may not take that course after all, because I'm not even any kind of pilot yet. But I'd like to see a man who knows more about the inside of his car than Miss Carlton does. She takes it apart as easily as most girls make fudge."

"Oh, Lou – " protested Linda, blushing, but Ted changed the subject by asking them about their trip.

After a few preliminaries, such as going into the office and meeting the secretary and a couple of the other instructors, and signing up for their doctor's examination, the girls bade Ted good-by, and took a taxi for the station where they were to meet Miss Carlton.

It was amusing to find that the train was late, whereas they had bettered their own schedule in the airplane. It arrived at last, however, and Miss Carlton hurried anxiously forward, as usual expecting that something had probably happened to her niece. She was relieved to find both girls well and happy.

"We might as well all go to a hotel tonight," she suggested, "and have a good dinner, and take in a picture afterwards. There can't be any rush about your finding your boarding-house, is there?"

"Only that we begin work tomorrow," replied Linda. "We must be there at nine o'clock for our examinations."

"My, but you are in a hurry!" the older woman remarked. "When I was a girl, fun always came first."

"But it is all going to be fun, Aunt Emily!"

"Still, we might as well have the dinner, and take in an early show," put in Louise. "Miss Carlton would rather stay over night, anyway, wouldn't you?"

"Yes, of course. And suppose I look up the boarding-house tomorrow, while you're at school. You'd trust to my judgment?"

"Oh, Auntie, we'd be delighted!" cried Linda, giving her hand a squeeze. "If you don't mind, it would save us a lot of time!"

The evening, therefore, was spent just as Miss Carlton desired, dining at the best hotel in St. Louis, going afterwards to the most expensive theater in a taxi. But the girls got to bed early, and left a call for seven o'clock the following morning.

The school was so much bigger, so much more organized than the little one at Spring City that Linda felt lost at first. After their examinations they made out a roster with one of the instructors, and here they decided to part.

Louise felt that after all, she wasn't particularly fitted to become a mechanic, and she would rather spend her time actually flying, so that perhaps by the end of the term she might win a limited commercial license. Linda, who had always kept an air-log with the Pursuit – a record of her flights and the number of hours in the air – would not need much more time to complete her two hundred hours solo flying that was part of a transport pilot's requirements. And while Louise was taking only the general course about airplanes, Linda would study plane structure and rigging, control systems, motors, and everything that had to do with the repair of aircraft. It was a big program; the thought of it was breathtaking. But, as Linda's instructor informed her, she would go step by step, advancing each day a little.

After that the days flew by all too quickly. The girls liked the house where Miss Carlton had established them, a neat little cottage that was owned by a widow, who lived alone with her two children, and it was near enough to the school for them to walk to and from it each day. They would rise early, eat a hearty breakfast and take their lunch with them, remaining away all day. After supper they were usually too tired to go anywhere; they would sit around the open fireplace in the living-room with the family, Louise reading a novel, Linda continually poring over some book about aviation. Once or twice Ted Mackay flew over to see them, and took them to dinner and to a show, usually bringing one of his friends with him. But they were too much absorbed to be lonely.

Before they scarcely realized it, the Thanksgiving holiday was upon them, and, leaving their overalls and their flyers' suits at St. Louis, they took off in the Arrow for their first visit back to Spring City.

## Chapter V

### *Thanksgiving*

In the six weeks that had passed since Linda and Louise left for the ground school, a great deal had happened at Spring City. Kitty and Ralph Clavering drove over to see Linda the afternoon that she arrived – the Wednesday before Thanksgiving, to tell her all the news.

"Are you a pilot yet, Kitty?" asked Linda, as soon as she had kissed the girl and shaken hands with her brother.

"No, not yet. So far only some of the boys have passed the exam – and Dot Crowley. Dot can do anything, you know. But I'm getting along fine."

"Lou has her private pilot's license," announced Linda proudly. "But do sit down and tell me all about the club."

"There's to be a dance there tomorrow night," replied Kitty, sinking into a chair. "That's the first thing I have to tell you."

"And before the phone has a chance to ring, I want you to promise to go with me," urged Ralph.

"Why, certainly," agreed Linda. Everything was delightful – and oh, it was so good to be home! "Thanks a lot, Ralph... But tell me, Kitty, is the club-house all done?"

"Yes. We have seventy-six members, and the most adorable club-house. Oh, nothing pretentious, like the Country Club, but we like it a lot. And we have one plane – a Gypsy Moth. Lieutenant Hulbert flies over twice a week to give the lessons."

"Did seventy-six people actually buy thousand-dollar bonds?" inquired Linda, incredulously. She couldn't believe there was all that wealth in Spring City, and the surrounding country.

"No. Only about twenty. We couldn't keep to that rule. The people who bought the bonds are on the Board of Directors. We let members in for their dues – a hundred dollars a year."

"And do I have to fork out another hundred?" asked Linda, wearily. She had been spending so much money already; she couldn't begin to live on the interest from her father's gift. Of course she expected to use the principal for her course, but she didn't want it to vanish for trifles.

"I'm afraid you'll have to," said Kitty.

"Well, I'll think it over," replied Linda, slowly. It was amazing, in the few weeks that she had had charge of her own money, what a business woman she had become. "I may not join this year. My expenses are pretty heavy."

"Why, Linda!" Kitty laid her hand affectionately upon her friend's arm. "Forgive me if I seem to pry – but – but – your father isn't having money troubles, is he!"

"Oh, no. It's only that I am running my own expenses now, and I don't want to waste money on things that won't do me any good. While I'm away from home it seems sort of foolish to belong to that club, when I have my own Arrow to fly. Especially now that you have enough members, and really don't need me... I'd rather sell my bond."

"I don't know whether you could sell it now," said Kitty. "Though of course I'll ask Bess – Bess Hulbert, our treasurer, you remember – when she flies back this afternoon. She has our Moth up at Lake Michigan now."

Linda raised her eyebrows. So this was the way the club was run – for Miss Hulbert's convenience!

"Doesn't she have her own plane any more?" she demanded.

"No. She smashed it. It wasn't any good anyhow. And she might as well use the Moth, because the club members only need it two days a week."

That arrangement didn't seem fair to Linda, for the licensed pilots – Dot and Joe and Harry and Ralph – could fly now whenever they wanted.

Noticing that Linda was not at all pleased with the way things were going, Ralph immediately made her an offer.

"I'll be glad to buy your bond, Linda," he said, "if nobody else wants it. No reason why you should hang on to it if it's no use to you."

"That's awfully kind, Ralph. I'll think it over, and let you know tomorrow night at the dance."

At this moment Miss Carlton entered, smiling genially because Linda was home with her again, and because these nice, socially prominent young people were calling upon her niece immediately. She greeted Ralph and Kitty cordially, and rang the bell for tea.

Nothing more was said of the club during the call, but as soon as the guests had left, Miss Carlton questioned her niece about their earlier conversation.

"I couldn't help hearing you, dear, and I couldn't imagine what made you suggest a thing like dropping out of that flying club. Why, it's the only thing about flying that I ever heartily approved of."

"I don't like the way the whole thing is run, Aunt Emily. It's too much Hulbert. Did you know, by the way, that Louise refused to buy a bond?"

"No, I didn't. But maybe her father didn't have the money at the time."

"It wasn't that. She never even asked him! She said it was all too unbusinesslike – bossed just like politics! She hates Bess Hulbert."

"Louise always did have strong likes and dislikes... Of course, I don't know anything about the Hulberts, but I do know the Claverings, and anybody that they like must be all right. Besides, your money is safe with Mr. Clavinging in back of the club. And you don't need it now for anything."

Linda smiled to herself; she still had said nothing to her aunt of her dream of flying across the Atlantic. The older woman could not possibly know how important every dollar would be to her next spring.

But Bess Hulbert was not so unsuspecting. She had returned from her trip while Kitty and Ralph were at Carlton's, and waited in the girl's bedroom for the former to return. While Kitty dressed for dinner, she told her about her call.

The very moment that Bess heard that Linda wanted to sell her bond, she jumped to the conclusion that the other girl was determined to try for that twenty-five thousand dollar prize. Nor was the idea at all pleasant to her. Much as she might belittle Linda's aviation ability in public, she was secretly afraid of her as a rival. The very fact that she took almost a year of her life to study at a ground school, that she meant to qualify as a commercial – perhaps even a transport – pilot, neither of which Bess was, showed how seriously Linda must be going into aviation.

No, Bess did not doubt that Linda was saving her money for this purpose, if she needed that thousand dollars. Fortunate girl, to be able to raise the money thus easily! At the moment, Bess saw no way for her to buy a plane herself, and compete. The club refused to finance her – unless Mr. Clavinging would personally back her up. But, worse the luck, that gentleman didn't seem to care for her at all! Probably he was afraid Kitty would marry her brother; in Mr. Clavinging's eyes, no poor young man was worthy of the beautiful heiress.

While these thoughts raced through her mind, she had been listening with only half attention to Kitty's prattle about the dance. Suddenly she interrupted.

"I think I'd better go back to the hotel, Kit," she said. "I couldn't stay to dinner in this costume."

"You could wear one of my dresses," suggested her hostess.

Bess laughed. "Too small, I'm afraid. It's awfully sweet of you to ask me to stay, but I really need some rest – after that trip."

"But Bess!" protested Kitty. "Some of the crowd are coming over tonight – "

"I'll see them tomorrow, at the dance – maybe. Tell them I thank them for the Moth, and that I filled her with gas, and paid for her inspection." She started towards the door.

"Will you come here and go to the dance with us?"

"Maybe... I'll let you know tomorrow... So long, dear!"

She closed the door, and ran down the steps, knowing that she had not the slightest intention of going to that dance. If Ralph Clavering had asked her, instead of Kitty, that would have been a different matter. But he had invited Linda Carlton! It seemed as if that snip of a girl was going to take everything she, Bess Hulbert, wanted. It was ridiculous! She hated Linda. She even went so far as to wonder whether that were her real name. It would be just like a romantic kid like that to persuade her father to change her Christian name in imitation of a hero like Lindbergh.

Bess hurried back to her hotel, conscious now of the fact that she must do some serious thinking, and that she must do it quickly. She just had to raise some money – or rather, a lot of money! She could never save enough from any foolish little job she might take now. No, she would have to make some, as business men do! If she didn't hurry, Linda Carlton would soon have captured that prize.

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