

BAUM LYMAN FRANK

THE FLYING GIRL AND HER
CHUM

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The Flying Girl and Her Chum

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L. Frank Baum

The Flying Girl and Her Chum

CHAPTER I

THE GIRL WITH THE YACHT

Perhaps they call them "parlor" cars because they bear so little resemblance to the traditional parlor – a word and a room now sadly out of style. In reality they are ordinary cars with two rows of swivel seats down the center; seats supposed to pivot in every direction unless their action is impeded by the passenger's hand baggage, which the porter promptly piles around the chairs, leaving one barely room to place his feet and no chance at all to swing the seat. Thus imprisoned, you ride thoughtfully on your way, wondering if the exclusive "parlor car" is really worth the extra fee.

However, those going to San Diego, in the Southland of California, are obliged to choose between plebeian coaches and the so-called "parlor" outfit, and on a mild, sunny morning in February the San Diego train rolled out of the Los Angeles depot with every swivel seat in the car de luxe occupied by a passenger.

They were a mixed assemblage, mostly tourists bound for Colorado, yet quite unknown to one another; or, at least, not on speaking terms. There was a Spanish-looking gentleman in white; two prim, elderly damsels in black; a mamma with three subdued children and a maid, and a fat man who read a book and scowled at every neighbor who ventured a remark louder than a whisper. Forward in the car the first three seats were taken by a party from New York, and this little group of travelers attracted more than one curious glance.

"That," murmured one of the prim ladies to the other, "is Madeline Dentry, the famous heiress. No one knows how many millions she has just inherited, but she is said to be one of the richest girls in America. The stout lady is her chaperon; I believe – she's a distant relative – an aunt, or something – and the thin, nervous man, the stout lady's husband, is Madeline Dentry's financial manager."

"I know," replied the other, nodding; "he used to be her guardian before she came of legal age, a month or so ago. His name is Tupper – Martin J. Tupper – and I'm told he is well connected."

"He is, indeed, to have the handling of Madeline's millions."

"I mean in a family way. The Dentrys were nobodies, you know, until Madeline's father cornered the mica mines of the world and made his millions; but the Tupperes were a grand old Baltimore family in the days of Washington, always poor as poverty and eminently aristocratic."

"Do you know the Tupperes?"

"I have never met them. I strongly disapprove of their close association with Miss Dentry – a fly-away miss who kept Bryn Mawr in a turmoil while she was a student there, and is now making an absurd use of her money."

"In what way?"

"Haven't you heard? She has purchased Lord Tweedmonk's magnificent yacht, and has had it taken to San Diego harbor. I was told by the bell boy at the Los Angeles Hotel – bell boys are singularly well-informed, I have observed – that Madeline Dentry is to take her new yacht on a cruise to Hawaii and Japan. She is probably now on her way to see her extravagant and foolish plaything."

"Dreadful!" said the other, with a shudder. "I wonder how anyone can squander a fortune on a yacht when all those poor heathens are starving in China. What a pity the girl has no mother to guide her!"

"Tell me about the beautiful girl seated next to Madeline."

"I do not know who she is. Some stranger to the rich young lady, I imagine. They're not speaking. Yes, she is really beautiful, that girl. Her eyes are wonderful, and her coloring perfect."

"And she seems so modest and diffident."

"Evidence of good breeding, whoever she may be; quite the opposite of Madeline Dentry, whose people have always been rapid and rude."

The fat gentleman was now glaring at the old ladies so ferociously that they became awed and relapsed into silence. The others in the car seemed moodily reserved. Mr. Martin J. Tupper read a newspaper. His stolid wife, seated beside him, closed her eyes and napped. Madeline Dentry, abandoning a book that was not interesting, turned a casual glance upon her neighbor in the next chair – the beautiful girl who had won the approval of the two old maids. Madeline herself had a piquant, attractive countenance, but her neighbor was gazing dreamily out of the window and seemed not to have noticed her. In this listless attitude she might be inspected at leisure, and Madeline was astonished at the perfect profile, the sheen of her magnificent hair, the rich warm tints of a skin innocent of powders or cosmetics. Critically the rich young lady glanced at the girl's attire. It was exceedingly simple but of costly material. She wore no jewels or ornaments, nor did she need them to enhance her attractiveness.

Perhaps feeling herself under observation, the girl slowly turned her head until her eyes met those of Madeline. They were gloriously blue eyes, calm and intelligent, wide open and fearless. Yet with a faint smile she quickly withdrew them before Madeline's earnest gaze.

"Will you have a chocolate?"

"Thank you."

The strong hand with its well-shaped fingers did not fumble in Madeline's box of bonbons. She took a chocolate, smiled again, and with a half shy glance into her neighbor's face proceeded to nibble the confection.

Madeline was charmed.

"Are you traveling alone?" she asked.

"Yes. I am to meet my brother and – some friends – in San Diego."

"I am Miss Dentry – Madeline Dentry. My home is in New York."

"And mine is in Los Angeles. I am not straying very far away, you see."

Madeline was piqued that her hint was disregarded.

"And your name!" she asked sweetly.

The girl hesitated an instant. Then she said: "I am Miss Kane."

Mr. Tupper looked up from his newspaper.

"Kane?" he repeated. "Bless me! That's the name of the Flying Girl."

"So it is," admitted Miss Kane, with a little laugh.

"But flying is not in your line, I imagine," said Madeline, admiring anew the dainty personality of her chance acquaintance.

"At present our train is dragging, rather than flying," was the merry response.

Mr. Tupper was interested. He carefully folded his paper and joined in the conversation.

"The idea of any girl attempting to do stunts in the air!" he remarked disdainfully. "Your namesake, Miss Kane, deserves to break her venturesome, unmaidenly neck – as she probably will, in the near future."

"Nonsense, Uncle!" cried Madeline; "Orissa Kane, so far as I've read of her – and I've read everything I could find – is not at all unmaidenly. She's venturesome, if you like, and manages an aëroplane better than many of the bird-men can; but I see nothing more unwomanly in flying than in running an automobile, and you know *I* do that to perfection. This Flying Girl, as she is called, is famous all over America for her daring, her coolness in emergencies and her exceptional skill. I want to see her fly, while I'm out here, for I understand there's to be an aviation meet of some sort in San Diego next week, and that Orissa Kane is engaged to take part in it."

"Flying is good sport, I admit," said Mr. Tupper, "but it would give me the shivers to see a girl attempt it. And, once a machine is in the air, you can't tell whether a man or woman is flying it; they all look alike to the watcher below. Don't go to this aviation meet, Madeline; you've seen girls fly. There was Miss Moissant, at Garden City – "

"She barely got off the ground," said Miss Dentry.

"And there was Blanche Scott – "

"They're all imitators of Orissa Kane!" declared Madeline impatiently. "There's only one real Flying Girl, Uncle, and if she's on the program at the San Diego meet I'm going to see her."

"You'll be disappointed," averred the gentleman. "She's a native of these parts, they say; I presume some big-boned, masculine, orange-picking female – "

"Wrong again, sir! The reporters all rave about her. They say she has a charming personality, is lovely and sweet and modest and – and – " She paused, her eyes dilating a little as she marked the red flush creeping over Miss Kane's neck and face. Then Madeline drew in her breath sharply and cast a warning glance at her uncle.

Mr. Tupper, however, was obtuse. He knew nothing of Madeline's suspicions.

"Have you ever seen this dare-devil namesake of yours, Miss Kane?" he asked indifferently.

"Yes, sir," she answered in a quiet tone.

"And what did you think of her?"

Madeline was powerless to stop him. Miss Kane, however, looked at her questioner with candid eyes, a frank smile upon her beautiful face.

"She has a fine aëroplane," was her reply. "Her brother invented it, you know. It's the Kane Aircraft, the safest and speediest yet made, and Stephen Kane has taught his sister how to handle it. That she flies his Aircraft successfully is due, I am sure, to her brother's genius; not to any especial merit of her own."

Mr. Tupper was staring now, and beginning to think. He remembered reading a similar assertion attributed to Orissa Kane, the Flying Girl, who always insisted on crediting her brother with whatever success she achieved. Perhaps this girl had read it, too; or, perhaps —

He began to "put two and two together." Southern California was the favorite haunt of the Flying Girl; there was to be an aviation meet presently at San Diego; and on this train, bound for San Diego, was riding a certain Miss Kane who answered to Madeline's description of the aërial heroine – a description he now remembered to have often read himself. Uncertain what to say, he asked haltingly:

"Do you call it 'aviatrix' or 'aviatrice'? The feminine of 'aviator,' you know."

"I should say 'aviatress,' now that you appeal to me," was the laughing reply. "Some of the newspaper men, who love to coin new words, have tried to saddle 'aviatrice' on the girl aviator, and the French have dubbed her 'aviatrix' without rhyme or reason. It seems to me that if 'seamstress,' 'governess' or 'hostess' is proper, 'aviatress' is also correct and, moreover, it is thoroughly American. But in – in the profession – on the aviation field – they call themselves 'aviators,' whether men or women, just as an author is always an 'author,' regardless of sex."

Mr. Tupper had made up his mind, by this time. He reasoned that a girl who talked so professionally of aviation terms must be something more than a novice, and straggled to remember if he had inadvertently said anything to annoy or humiliate Miss Kane. For, if the little maid so demurely seated before him was indeed the famous Flying Girl, the gentleman admitted he had good reason to admire her. Madeline was watching his embarrassment with an expression of amusement, but would not help him out of his dilemma. So Mr. Tupper went straight to the heart of the misunderstanding, as perhaps was best under the circumstances.

"Your first name is Orissa?" he inquired, gently.

"It is, sir."

"Won't you have another chocolate!" asked Madeline.

Orissa took another chocolate, reflecting how impossible it seemed to hide her identity, even from utter strangers. Not that she regretted, in any way, the celebrity she had gained by flying her brother Stephen's Aircraft, but it would have been so nice to have ridden to-day with these pleasant people without listening to the perfunctory words of praise and adulation so persistently lavished upon her since she had acquired fame.

"I knew Cumberford some years ago," continued Mr. Tupper, rather aimlessly. "Cumberford's your manager, I believe!"

"Yes, sir; and my brother's partner."

"Good chap, Cumberford. Had a queer daughter, I remember; an impossible child, with the airs of a princess and the eyes of a sorceress. She's grown up, by this time, I suppose."

Miss Kane smiled.

"Sybil Cumberford is my best chum," she replied. "The description still applies, so far as the airs and eyes are concerned; but the child is a young lady now, and a very lovable young lady, her friends think."

"Doubtless, doubtless," Mr. Tupper said hastily. "If Cumberford is in San Diego I shall be glad to renew our acquaintance."

"You are bound for Coronado, I suppose," remarked Orissa, to change the subject.

"Only for a few days' stay," Madeline answered. "Then we expect to make a sea voyage to Honolulu."

"That will be delightful," said the girl. "I've lived many years on the shores of the Pacific, but have never made a voyage farther to sea than Catalina. I'm told Honolulu is a fascinating place; but it needs be to draw one away from Coronado."

"You like Coronado, then?"

"All this South Country is a real paradise," declared Orissa. "I have had opportunity to compare it with other parts of America, and love it better after each comparison. But I am ignorant of foreign countries, and can only say that if they excel Southern California they are too good for humans to live in and ought to be sacred to the fairies."

Madeline laughed gayly.

"I know you now!" she exclaimed; "you are what is called out here a 'booster.' But from my limited experience in your earthly paradise I cannot blame you."

"Yes, we are all 'boosters,'" asserted the younger girl, "and I'm positive you will join our ranks presently. I love this country especially because one can fly here winter and summer."

"You are fond of flying?"

"Yes. At first I didn't care very much for it, but it grows on one until its fascinations are irresistible. I have the most glorious sense of freedom when I'm in the air – way up, where I love best to be – but during my recent exhibitions in the East I nearly froze making the high flights. It is a little cold even here when you are half a mile up, but it is by no means unbearable."

"They call you a 'dare-devil,' in the newspapers," remarked Mr. Tupper, eyeing her reflectively; "but I can scarcely believe one so – so young and – and – girlish has ventured to do all the foolish aerial tricks you are credited with."

Mrs. Tupper had by this time opened her eyes and was now listening in amazement.

"Yes," she added, reprovingly, "all those spiral dips and volplaning and – and – figure-eights are more suited to a circus performer than to a young girl, it seems to me."

This lady's face persistently wore a bland and unmeaning smile, which had been so carefully cultivated in her youth that it had become habitual and wreathed her chubby features even when she was asleep, giving one the impression that she wore a mask. Now her stern eyes belied the smirk of her face, but Orissa merely smiled.

"I am not a 'dare-devil,' I assure you," she said, addressing Mr. Tupper rather than his wife. "I know the newspapers call me that, and compare me with the witch on a broomstick; but in truth I am

as calculating and cold as any aviator in America. Everything I do is figured out with mathematical precision and I never take a single chance that I can foresee. I know the air currents, and all their whims and peculiarities, and how to counteract them. What may seem to the spectators to be daring, and even desperate, is often the safest mode of flying, provided you understand your machine and the conditions of the air. To volplane from a height of five or ten thousand feet, for example, is safer than from a slight elevation, for the further you drop the better air-cushion is formed under your planes, and you ride as gently as when suspended from a parachute."

Madeline was listening eagerly.

"Are you afraid?" she asked.

"Afraid? Why should I be, with my brother's wonderful engine at my back and perfect control of every part of my machine?"

"Suppose the engine should some time fail you?"

"Then I would volplane to the ground."

"And if the planes, or braces, or fastenings break?"

"No fear of that. The Kane Aircraft is strong enough for any aërial purpose and I examine every brace and strut before I start my flight – merely to satisfy myself they have not been maliciously tampered with."

Then Madeline sprung her important question:

"Do you ever take a passenger?"

Orissa regarded Miss Dentry with a whimsical smile.

"Sometimes," she said. "Do you imagine you would like to fly?"

"No – no, indeed!" cried Mr. Tupper in a horrified voice, and Mrs. Tupper echoed; "How absurd!" But Madeline answered quietly:

"If you could manage to take me I am sure I would enjoy the experience."

"I will consider it and let you know later," said the Flying Girl, thoughtfully. "My chum, Sybil Cumberland, has made several short flights with me; but Sybil's head is perfectly balanced and no altitude affects it. Often those who believe they would enjoy flying become terrified once they are in the air."

"Nothing could terrify Madeline, I am sure," asserted Mrs. Tupper, in a rasping voice; "but she is too important a personage to risk her life foolishly. I shall insist that she at once abandon the preposterous idea. Abandon it, Madeline! I thought your new yacht a venturesome thing to indulge in, but flying is far, far worse."

"Oh; have you a yacht?" inquired Orissa, turning eagerly to the other girl.

"Yes; the *Salvador*. It is now lying in San Diego harbor. I've not seen my new craft as yet, but intend it shall take us to Honolulu and perhaps to Japan."

"How delightful," cried Orissa, with enthusiasm.

"Would you like to join our party?"

"Oh, thank you; I couldn't," quite regretfully; "I am too busy just now advancing the fortunes of my brother Stephen, who is really the most clever inventor of aëroplanes in the world. Don't smile, please; he is, indeed! The world may not admit it as yet, but it soon will. Have you heard of his latest contrivance? It is a Hydro-Aircraft, and its engines propel it equally as well on water as on land."

"Then it beats my yacht," said Madeline, smiling.

"It is more adaptable – more versatile – to be sure," said Orissa. "Stephen has just completed his first Hydro-Aircraft, and while I am in San Diego I shall test it and make a long trip over the Pacific Ocean to exploit its powers. Such a machine would not take the place of a yacht, you know, and the motor boat attachment is merely a safety device to allow one to fly over water as well as over land. Then, if you are obliged to descend, your aircraft becomes a motor boat and the engines propel it to the shore."

"Does your brother use the Gnome engines?" inquired Mr. Tupper.

"No; Stephen makes his own engines, which I think are better than any others," answered Miss Kane.

By the time the train drew into the station at San Diego, Madeline Dentry and her companions, the Tupperts, knew considerably more of aeroplanes than the average layman, for Orissa Kane enjoyed explaining the various machines and, young and unassuming as she appeared, understood every minute detail of their manufacture. She had been her brother's assistant and companion from the time of his first experiments and intelligently followed the creation and development of the now famous Kane Aircraft.

At the depot a large crowd was in waiting, not gathered to meet the great heiress, Madeline Dentry, but the quiet slip of a girl whose name was on every tongue and whose marvelous skill as a bird-maid had aroused the admiration of every person interested in aerial sports. On the billboards were glaring posters of "The Flying Girl," the chief attraction of the coming aviation meet, and the news of her expected arrival had drawn many curious inhabitants of the Sunshine City to the depot, as well as the friends congregated to greet her.

First of all a tall, fine looking fellow, who limped slightly, sprang forward to meet Orissa at the car steps and gave her a kiss and a hug. This was Stephen Kane, the airship inventor, and close behind him stood a grizzled gentleman in a long gray coat and jaunty Scotch cap. It was Mr. Cumberland, the "angel" and manager of the youthful Kanes, the man whose vast wealth had financed the Kane Aircraft and enabled the boy and girl to carry out their ambitious plans. This strange man had neither ambition to acquire more money nor to secure fame by undertaking to pilot the Aircraft to success; as he stood here, his bored expression, in sharp contrast to the shrewd gray eyes that twinkled behind his spectacles, clearly indicated this fact; but a little kindness had won him to befriend the young people and he had rendered them staunch support.

On Mr. Cumberland's arm was a slender girl dressed all in black, the nodding sable plumes of whose broad hat nearly hid Orissa from view as the two girls exchanged a kiss. Sybil Cumberland had no claim to beauty except for her dark eyes – so fathomless and mysterious that they awed all but her most intimate friends, and puzzled even them.

And now an awkward young fellow – six feet three and built like an athlete – slouched bashfully forward and gripped Orissa Kane's outstretched hand. Here was the press agent of the Kane-Cumberland alliance, Mr. H. Chesterton Radley-Todd; a most astonishing youth who impressed strangers as being a dummy and his friends as the possessor of a rarely keen intellect. Orissa smiled at him; there was something humorous about Radley-Todd's loose-jointed, unwieldy personality. Then she took her brother's arm and passed through the eager, admiring throng to the automobile in waiting.

Beside Mr. Cumberland's car stood a handsome equipage that had been sent for Miss Dentry's party, and as Orissa nodded to her recent acquaintances Sybil Cumberland inquired:

"Who is that girl?"

"A Miss Dentry, of New York, with whom I exchanged some remarks on the train. She has a yacht in the bay here."

"Oh, yes; I've heard all about her," returned Sybil, indifferently. "She's dreadfully rich; rather snubbed New York society, which was eager to idolize her – says she's too young for the weary, heart-breaking grind – and indulges in such remarkable fancies that she's getting herself talked about. I hope you didn't encourage her advances, Orissa?"

"I fear I did," was the laughing reply; "but she seemed very nice and agreeable – for a rich girl. Tell me, Steve," she added, turning to her brother, "what news of the Hydro-Aircraft?"

"It's great, Orissa! I put the finishing touches on it night before last, and yesterday Mr. Cumberland and I took a trial spin in it. It carries two beautifully," he exclaimed, his eyes sparkling with enthusiasm.

"Did you go over the water?" asked Orissa.

"Nearly half a mile. Then we dropped and let the engine paddle us home. Of all the hydro-aëroplanes yet invented, Ris, mine will do the most stunts and do them with greater ease."

They were rolling swiftly toward the ferry now, bound for the Hotel del Coronado, a rambling pile of Spanish architecture that dominates the farther side of San Diego Bay. Presently the car took its place in the line of vehicles on the ferry and Mr. Cumberford, who was driving, shut off the power and turned to Orissa.

"You are advertised to exhibit the new Hydro-Aircraft the first day of the meet – that's Monday," he announced. "Do you think you can master the mechanism by that time?"

"Is it the same old engine, Steve?" she inquired.

"Exactly the same, except that I've altered the controlling levers, to make them handy both in the air and on water, and balanced the weight a little differently, to allow for the boat attachment."

"How did you do that?"

"Placed the gasoline tanks in the rear. That makes the engine feed from the back, instead of from directly overhead, you see."

Orissa nodded.

"I think I can manage it, Mr. Cumberford," she decided. "Will Steve go with me on Monday?"

"Why – no," returned the manager, a trifle embarrassed. "Our fool press agent had an idea the event would be more interesting if two girls made the flight out to sea, and the trip back by boat. Sybil has been crazy to go, and so I let Chesty Todd have his own way."

"You see, Miss Kane," added Mr. H. Chesterton Radley-Todd, who was seated beside Mr. Cumberford, while Stephen and the two girls rode behind, "the management of the meet couldn't get another aviatrix to take part, because you had been engaged to fly. The other air-maids are all jealous of your reputation and popularity, I guess, so the management was in despair. The dear public is daffy, just now, to watch a female risk her precious life; it's more thrilling than when a male ventures it. So, as they're paying us pretty big money, and Miss Cumberford was anxious to go, I – er – er – I – "

"It is quite satisfactory to me," announced Orissa quietly. "I shall enjoy having Sybil with me."

"I knew you wouldn't object," said Sybil.

"The only thing I don't like about it," observed Stephen, reflectively, "is the fact that you have never yet seen my Hydro-Aircraft. It's safe enough, either on land or water; but if the thing balks – as new inventions sometimes do – there will be no one aboard to help you remedy the fault, and the invention is likely to get a black eye."

"Give me a tool bag and I'll do as well as any mechanician," responded Orissa, confidently. "And your Hy is not going to balk, Steve, for I shall know as much about it as you do by Monday."

CHAPTER II

THE GIRL WITH THE AËROPLANE

The morning following Orissa Kane's arrival, which was the Saturday preceding the meet, she went with her brother Stephen to his hangar, which was located near the Glenn Curtiss aviation camp on a low bluff overlooking the Pacific. There the two spent the entire forenoon in a careful inspection of the new Hydro-Aircraft.

As she had told Madeline Dentry, the Flying Girl never wittingly took chances in the dangerous profession she followed. The remarkable success of her aërial performances was due to an exact knowledge of every part of her aëroplane. She knew what each bolt and brace was for and how much strain it would stand; she knew to a feather's weight the opposition of the planes to the air, the number of revolutions to drive the engine under all conditions and the freaks of the unreliable atmospheric currents. And aside from this knowledge she had that prime quality known as "the aviator's instinct" – the intuition what to do in emergencies, and the coolness to do it promptly.

Stephen Kane, who adored his pretty little sister, had not the slightest fear for her. As she had stood at his side during the construction of his first successful aëroplane and learned such mechanical principles of flying as he himself knew, he had no doubt she could readily comprehend the adaptation he had made to convert his Aircraft into the amphibious thing that could navigate air and water alike.

"It seems to me quite perfect, Steve," was Orissa's final verdict. "There is no question but the Hydro-Aircraft will prove more useful to the world than any simple aëroplane. If we could carry gasoline enough, I would venture across the Pacific in this contrivance. By the way, what am I to do on Monday? Must I carry Sybil in any certain direction, or for any given distance?"

"I'll let Chesty explain that," said Steve, turning to the youthful press agent, who had just then entered the hangar in company with Mr. Cumberford and Sybil.

"Why, er – er – a certain program has been announced, you know," explained Chesty Todd; "but that doesn't count, of course. We'll say that owing to high winds, contrary air currents, or some other excuse, you had to alter your plans. That'll satisfy the dear public, all right."

Orissa frowned slightly.

"You mustn't compromise me in such ways, Mr. Todd," she exclaimed. "The Kane-Cumberford Camp has the reputation of fulfilling its engagements to the letter; but if you promise impossible things of course we cannot do them."

The young man flushed. In the presence of Orissa Kane this big fellow was as diffident as a schoolboy.

"I – I didn't think I promised too much," he stammered. "There are two or three islands off this coast, known as the Coronado Islands. The big one – you can see it plainly from here – is named Sealskin. No one knows why. There are seals there, and they have skins. Perhaps that's the reason. Or they may all be related, and the seals' kin play together on the rocks."

"Be sensible, Chesty!" This from Mr. Cumberford, rather impatiently.

"I'm quite sensible of Miss Kane's annoyance," resumed Mr. Radley-Todd, "but I hope she will find her task easy. She has merely to fly to Sealskin Island, a dozen or fifteen miles – perhaps twenty – and alight on the bosom of the blue Pacific. Mighty poetical in the advertisements, eh? Then she'll ride back in motor boat fashion. When she approaches the shore she is to mount into the air again, circle around the hotel and land on the aviation field before the grand stand. If any part of this program seems difficult, we can cut it out and tell the reporters –"

"Steve," interrupted Orissa, "can I rise from the water into the air?"

"Of course. That's my pet invention. While skimming along the water you lift this lever, free the propeller, then point your elevator and – up you go!"

"Run out the machine. We will make a trial and you shall show me how it is done. The rest of Chesty's program seems easy enough, and if I master this little trick of rising from the water we will carry out our contract to the letter."

"All right. Your costume is in that little dressing room in the corner, Ris."

While his sister donned her short skirt, leggings and helmet, Stephen Kane called his mechanics and had the Hydro-Aircraft rolled out of the hangar and headed toward the ocean. For himself, he merely put on a sweater and his cap and visor, being ready long before Orissa appeared.

The inventor seldom flew his own craft, for an accidental fall had lamed him so that he was not as expert an aviator as his sister had proved to be. He was recovering from his hurt, however, and hoped the injured leg would soon be good as new. Meantime Orissa was doing more to render the Kane Aircraft famous than any man might have done.

A wire fence encircled the Kane-Cumberford Camp for some distance, except on the ocean side, where the bluff protected it from invasion. There was an entrance gate adjoining the beach road, and while the assembled party awaited Orissa's appearance Steve noticed that a motor car stopped at the gateway and a man and woman alighted and entered the enclosure, leisurely approaching the spot where the Hydro-Aircraft stood.

"Oh!" exclaimed Sybil, whose dark eyes were far-seeing; "it's that girl who owns the yacht, Madeline what's-her-name."

"Dentry," said Steve. "I wonder if Orissa invited her here. Go and meet them, Chesty, and find out."

Mr. Radley-Todd promptly unlimbered his long legs and advanced to meet Madeline and Mr. Tupper. The press agent had an unlimited command of language when driving his pen over paper, but was notably awkward in expressing himself conversationally. He now stopped short before the visitors, removed his hat and said:

"I – er – pardon me, but – er – was your appointment for this hour?"

"Is Miss Kane here, sir?" asked Madeline, unabashed.

"She is, Miss – er – er –"

"Dentry."

"Oh; thank you."

"Then I will see her," and she took a step forward. But Chesty Todd did not move his huge bulk out of the way. So many curious and bold people were prone to intrude on all aviators, and especially on Miss Kane, that it was really necessary to deny them in a positive manner in order to secure any privacy at all. The press agent, in his halting way, tried to explain.

"We – er – Miss Kane – is about to – er – test the powers of our new Hydro-Aircraft, and I regret to say that – er – er – the test is private, you know."

"How fortunate that we came just now!" cried Madeline, eagerly, as she flashed her most winning smile on the young man. "Please lead us directly to Miss Kane, sir."

"Yes; of course; please lead us to Miss Kane," echoed Mr. Tupper pompously.

Chesty succumbed and led them to the group surrounding the machine, just as Orissa emerged from the hangar. Recognizing her recent traveling companion, the Flying Girl ran up and greeted her cordially, introducing her and Mr. Tupper to the others present.

"I'm going to try out our new Hy," she said, with a laugh. "'Hy,' you must know, is my abbreviation of the Hydro-Aircraft – too long a word altogether. If you will promise not to criticize us, in case we fizzle, you are welcome to watch our performance."

"That will be glorious," returned Madeline. "We have been to the bay to inspect the *Salvador*, my new yacht, but being anxious to see your new Aircraft and hoping to find you here, we ventured to stop for a few minutes. Forgive us if we intruded."

She spoke so frankly and was so evidently unconscious of being unwelcome that the entire group accepted her presence and that of her uncle without murmur.

Steve took his place in the "Hy" and Orissa sat beside him.

The motor boat attachment, which took the place of the ordinary running gear, was of sheet aluminum, as light and yet as strongly built as was possible for a thing intended to be practical. Adjustable wheels, which could be folded back when the boat was in the water, were placed on either side, to give the craft a land start. The huge engine was beautiful in appearance, while the planes – a crossed arrangement peculiar to the Kane Aircraft – were immaculately white in their graceful spread.

"This upper plane," said Steve, proud to explain the marvels of his latest mechanical pet, "is so arranged that its position may be altered by means of a lever. If you're on the water and want to save gasoline you adjust the plane as a sail and let the wind drive you."

"Clever! Very clever, indeed," observed Mr. Tupper. "I had no idea these flying machines had been improved so much since I last saw an aviation meet, some six months ago."

"The art of flying is still in its infancy, sir," replied Mr. Cumberland. "It is progressing with wonderful strides, however, and young Kane is one of those remarkable geniuses who keep a pace ahead of the procession."

Even as he spoke Steve started the engine, and as the first low rumble of the propeller increased to a roar the machine darted forward, passed the edge of the bluff and, rising slightly, sped over the placid waters of the Pacific, straight out from shore.

He did not rise very high, but half a mile or so out the aviator described a half-circle and then, as gracefully as a swan, sank to the surface of the ocean. Instantly a white wake of foam appeared at the rear of the boat, showing that the propeller was now churning the water. And now, with speed that to the observers appeared almost incredible, the Hydro-Aircraft approached the shore. A few yards from the bluff it abruptly rose from the water, sailed above the heads of the spectators, and after a circle of the field, came to a halt at almost the exact spot from which it had started.

This remarkable performance had taken place in so brief a space of time that those on the bluff had scarcely moved during the entire period. They now hastened forward to congratulate the inventor. Mr. Cumberland's grim features were for once wreathed in smiles; Chesty Todd capered like a schoolboy and flung his hat into the air as he yelled "Hooray!" while Sybil impulsively grasped Steve's hand in both of her own. As for Madeline Dentry, she eyed the young man wonderingly, asking herself if the marvel she seemed to have witnessed had actually occurred.

"Do you know," said Mr. Tupper, his voice trembling with excitement, "I wouldn't much mind a ride like that myself!"

Orissa was much pleased with this successful test of the new machine's powers. As the men wheeled the Hydro-Aircraft back to its hangar she turned to Chesty and said:

"I forgive you, sir. Really, you were too modest in your promises. Sybil and I will carry out your program to the entire satisfaction of the management and the public, I am positive."

"I can hardly wait for Monday, Ris," exclaimed Sybil. "If father wasn't so afraid, I would learn to navigate the Hy myself."

"Ah, you interest me, my dear," returned her father, blandly; "you do, really. But as your talents will never enable you to rival Orissa it will be well for you to curb your ambitions. I've conceded a lot, to allow you to go with her on that long jaunt Monday."

"You have, indeed," laughed Orissa. "But Sybil and I will have a real joy ride, and be perfectly safe in the bargain. How long a time will the trip take us, Steve?"

"Oh, a couple of hours, or so; it will depend on whether the current is favorable to your paddling back. In the air you can do forty miles an hour, easily."

"We will take some lunch with us," said Sybil. "Don't forget to order it, Daddy."

Mr. Cumberland nodded. Unimpressible as this strange man seemed, his daughter was verily the "apple of his eye" and he was not likely to forget anything that might add to her comfort. Sybil's desire to aviate had been a constant source of disturbance to her father. He had worried a good deal over Orissa, during her first attempts to fly, but was now convinced of the girl's capability

and, although he exhibited nervousness every time she gave one of her exhibitions, he had by degrees acquired supreme confidence in her skill. Still, being thoroughly experienced in all aviation matters, through his connection with the Kane Aircraft, Mr. Cumberland realized that flying is always accompanied by danger, and whenever an aviator met with an accident on the field he was wont to inform Sybil that on no account could she ever accompany Orissa again in a flight. He would even urge Orissa to abandon the dangerous work; but she answered him gravely: "This accident, as well as all others I ever heard of, was the result of carelessness and inexperience. The more flights I make the less liable am I to encounter accident. Perhaps I realize better than you do, Mr. Cumberland, the elements of danger, and that is the reason I am so careful to avoid every hazard."

Flying was an intoxication to Sybil. She never had enough of it and always complained to Orissa that their flights were of too short duration. Each time she was obliged to plead and argue with her father for days, before obtaining his consent to let her go, and even now, when he had given his reluctant permission to Chesty Todd to advertise Sybil as the companion of the Flying Girl, he was frequently impelled to forbid the adventure. His only consolation was that the new invention seemed very safe and practical, and with Orissa's guiding hands at the levers his beloved daughter would be as well guarded as possible under such conditions.

As a matter of fact, protests from Mr. Cumberland had little value, as Sybil possessed a knack of getting her own way under any and all circumstances. She had really no great desire to operate an aëroplane herself, being quite content to remain a passenger and enjoy the freedom of riding, untrammelled by the necessity of being alert every instant to control the machine.

Orissa, excusing herself, retired to the hangar to change her costume, and the young inventor was left to listen to the enthusiastic comments of his friends.

"When will your Hydro-Aircraft be on the market, Mr. Kane?" asked Madeline.

"In the course of the next three months we expect to complete two other machines," he replied.

"I want one of them," she said quickly. "Will you teach me how to operate it?"

"Of course," he answered. "That is part of the bargain. But you have not asked the price, and for all business transactions I must refer you to Mr. Cumberland."

"Madeline, my dear! My dear Madeline!" protested Mr. Tupper; "what in the world are you thinking of?"

"That I would give Mr. Cumberland a check at once," she calmly answered.

"But I – we – that is, I can't permit it; I – I really can't allow it, my dear!" asserted the gentleman, evidently alarmed by her positive attitude.

Madeline's slight form stiffened and her eyes flashed defiantly.

"Mr. Tupper," said she to her uncle, "do I employ you to advise me, or to manage my business affairs?"

That he was greatly humiliated by this attack was evident. His face grew red and he half turned away, hesitating to make reply. Then Mr. Cumberland came to Mr. Tupper's assistance.

"Your – eh – friend – is quite right, Miss Dentry; quite right to oppose your – eh – reckless impulse, if I may put it that way. Your enthusiasm interests me; it – eh – interests me greatly; but for your own welfare and the comfort of mind of your friends, I should advise you to – eh – curb your adventurous spirit, for the present. You have what is known as the 'Flying Fever,' which attacks the most conservative people when on the aviation field. Let it alone and it will dissipate, in time; but if you nurse it you – eh – buy a flying machine and become a slave. We have machines to sell, you know; we are anxious to dispose of all we can; but kindly keep your check for three months, and if at the end of that time you are still disposed to purchase, I will deliver the machine to you promptly."

"How can you do that? The demand will be greater than your ability to build the Hydro-Aircraft, after the exhibition of next Monday," she affirmed.

Mr. Cumberland regarded her thoughtfully.

"I believe you are right," said he. "Anyhow, I hope you are right. But I'll promise to reserve a machine, pending your decision. Young ladies who are seriously determined to become aviators and who – eh – have the means to indulge the fad to any extent, are rare; very rare. Therefore, my dear Miss Dentry, you – eh – interest me, and I'll keep my promise."

Madeline could not refuse to admit the fairness of Mr. Cumberford's proposition, and Mr. Tupper was grateful to him for his efficient support, so harmony was once more restored. Sybil, indeed, smiled derisively as she exchanged a meaning glance with Madeline – a glance that said as intelligently as words: "How clever these men think themselves, and how helpless they really are to oppose us!"

Then Miss Dentry invited them all, including Chesty Todd, to dine on board her yacht the next day, which was Sunday, and the invitation being promptly accepted they all motored back to the hotel.

CHAPTER III

A PRODIGY IN AERONAUTICS

San Diego Bay is always interesting, with its shipping from all ports of the world, but on this gorgeous Sunday afternoon there was no prettier sight among the scattered craft than the trim yacht *Salvador*, lying at anchor just north of the ferry path. The Kane-Cumberford party found a small launch awaiting them at the pier, which quickly took them aboard the big white yacht, where Madeline, attired in appropriate sailor costume, cordially welcomed them.

"This affair is fully as great a novelty to me as it must be to you," she explained, as they cast admiring glances over the decks. "I bought the boat of an Englishman several months ago, with the understanding it should be delivered to me here; but I only arrived to claim it the day before yesterday. It has a crew of seven, besides the chef, who, I must admit, is my own selection, as I feared to trust the English taste in cookery. The English crew, however, seems capable and every man jack wants to stay with the boat; so I've agreed to keep them. I'll introduce you to the skipper presently. He rejoices in the title of 'Captain' and has quite awed me with his superior manner and splendid uniform. But I'll introduce you to the creations of my chef, first, for dinner is waiting. Forgive Monsieur Champetre, if he falls down occasionally; he is as unused to the kitchen – or is it scullery? Oh, I know; the 'galley' – as I am to the cabin."

Really the chef needed no excuses, and after the meal they made a thorough inspection of the beautiful craft, peeping into the state-rooms, the men's quarters and even into the sacred galley. Everyone aboard, including the big, bluff skipper, was so proud of the boat that he delighted to have it exhibited, and when it was understood that the slim, beautiful young lady guest was the famous Flying Girl the deference shown Orissa was amusing.

"I had intended to test the *Salvador* to-morrow and make a short run to sea in it," said Madeline; "but I am so eager to witness the aërial exhibitions that I shall postpone the voyage until later. My yacht is permanent, but this Aviation Meet is temporary."

The visitors returned to their hotel early in the afternoon, for Orissa and Sybil had still a few preparations to make for the morrow's trip, while Steve and Mr. Cumberford decided to pay a visit to the aviation field, to which both the Kane Aircraft and the Kane Hydro-Aircraft had been removed by the mechanics in charge of them. Chesty Todd's labors that Sunday evening were perhaps more onerous than those of the others of his party, for he had to meet an aggressive band of newspaper reporters and load each one to the brim with material for a double-header next morning. Having served as a journalist – and an able one – himself, Mr. Radley-Todd understood exactly the sort of priming these publicity guns required.

The home of the Kanes was a delightful orange ranch near Los Angeles, where the blind mother of Stephen and Orissa – their only parent – lived surrounded by every comfort and devoted attendants, while her boy and girl were engaged in the novel and somewhat hazardous exhibitions of the new Kane Aircraft. Orissa had remained at home with her mother while Stephen was perfecting his latest machine at San Diego, and had not left there until it was necessary to prepare for the Meet, in which she had engaged to take part. Mrs. Kane, perhaps because of her blindness, seemed to have little anxiety on account of her daughter's ventures, although at the time of Orissa's first flights her nervousness had been poignant. Assured of her girl's skill and coolness, the mother had come to accept these occasions philosophically, as far as the danger was concerned, and she was naturally interested in Steve's inventions and overjoyed at the financial success which Mr. Cumberford's business ability had already insured the firm.

This Sunday evening Orissa wrote a long letter to her mother, telling how perfectly her brother's new machine worked, and assuring Mrs. Kane of her confidence in winning new laurels for Stephen on

the morrow. "The latest engine, made for the Hy, is more powerful than were the others," she added, "but its operation is practically the same and while the combination of boat and aircraft necessitated a more complicated arrangement of the control, I have easily mastered all the details and could take the whole thing apart and put it together again, if obliged to do so."

The girl slept peacefully that night and neither she nor Sybil were in the least nervous when they went to the aviation field, overlooking the sea, after an early luncheon on Monday.

They found the Kane Hydro-Aircraft reposing majestically in its hangar, in perfect order and constantly surrounded by a group of admiring and interested spectators. The little band of professional aviators present at the Meet welcomed Orissa very cordially, for every one of them knew and admired the brave girl who had so often proved her ability to manage her brother's machines.

The grand stand was packed with spectators, and long rows of automobiles lined the edge of the enclosure reserved for the exhibitors.

The "Kane Event," as it was called, was early on the program of the day, for it was understood that the flight over the ocean and the voyage back would consume much of the afternoon. Many had brought binoculars and other powerful glasses to watch the Flying Girl and her chum during their progress.

Sealskin Island lay a little to the south of the aviation field and was one of a group of barren rocks jutting out of the sea and plainly visible from the mainland. The Coronado Islands, which have little or no value, belong to Mexico, as the Mexican boundary is only twelve miles south of San Diego, and this group, although not appearing to be so far south, is below the line claimed by the United States. Therefore Orissa's flight would be in a southwesterly direction and most of her journey made in plain view of every spectator.

As the "Hy" was run out to the center of the field Steve said to Orissa:

"I've anchored an aluminum chest just back of your seats, at the suggestion of Mr. Cumberland. In it are all the tools you could possibly need in case of emergency, a couple of warm blankets to use if your return trip proves chilly, and enough 'lunch' – which I think Sybil pleaded for – to last you both a week. The chest enables you to carry all this safely and comfortably, and it won't be at all in your way. Personally, I think such a precaution wholly unnecessary, but Mr. Cumberland is a good deal of an old woman where Sybil is concerned and it is easier to give up to him than to try to argue him out of an idea. Take the trip easy, Ris; we don't need to make time. What we want to demonstrate is the practicability of the machine, and we ourselves already know that it is thoroughly practical, and we therefore ought to be able to convince the world of the fact."

Orissa nodded.

"How about gasoline?" she asked.

"Both tanks are filled. There's enough to run you a hundred miles in air and fifty miles in water, which is far more than you will require. Be gentle with the steering gear; it is such a long connection that it doesn't respond as readily as the old one, and I guess I've made the rods a trifle too light. I mean to rig up a more substantial device as soon as I get time, but this will do you all right if you don't jerk it. Put a little more strength to the wheel and turn it gradually, that's all."

"I understand," she replied. "Are you ready, Sybil?"

"Waiting on you, Ris."

"And I think the crowd is waiting on us."

The band was at this moment playing its loudest and most stirring tune and as the two venturesome girls, dressed in appropriate aërial costume, appeared on the field, wildly enthusiastic shouts rose from ten thousand spectators. Chesty Todd had decorated the braces of the machine with bunches of fresh violets and the aluminum and nicked parts shone gloriously in the sun.

"Be good, Sybil," said Mr. Cumberland. "Take care of her, Orissa."

The girls laughed, for this was the old gentleman's customary parting warning.

"All right, Ris," said Steve.

She applied the power and one of the mechanics gave the propeller a preliminary whirl. Then Orissa threw in the automatic clutch that started the machine and it ran forward a few feet and promptly rose into the air. A moment later it was speeding straight out to sea, at an altitude of a hundred feet, and the wonderful voyage of Stephen Kane's new Hydro-Aircraft was begun – a voyage destined to vary considerably from the program mapped out for it.

CHAPTER IV

THE ALUMINUM CHEST

Orissa realized quite perfectly that Sealskin Island was much farther away from the mainland than it appeared, so on leaving the shore she pursued a direction straight west for several miles, intending to make a turn and proceed south to the island which was the terminus of her flight. That prolonged the trip somewhat, but she figured it would prove more interesting to the spectators, since for a part of the journey she would be flying parallel with the coast. On the return she planned to run straight back from the island.

When she decided they had reached a point about as far out as was the island, she attempted to make the turn – a mere segment of a circle – but in spite of Steve's warning Orissa was surprised at the stiffness of the steering gear. The engines were working beautifully and developing excellent speed, but the girl found she must apply all her strength to the wheel to make the turn.

She succeeded, and brought the head to bear directly upon the island, but the gear grated and stuck so persistently that Orissa's effort sent the entire craft careening at a steep angle. Sybil gave a gasp and clung to the supporting rods and both girls heard a loud "chug" that indicated something was wrong; but the Kane balancing device was so perfect that almost immediately the machine righted itself and regained its equilibrium, darting swiftly and in a straight line in the direction of the island.

"What was it?" asked Sybil, putting her head close to Orissa's to be heard above the whir of the motors behind them.

"The steering gear binds; that's all," was the quiet response. "I think it will work better when we are in the water."

"But what made that noise? Didn't something give way?" persisted Sybil.

"Glance behind us, dear, and see."

Sybil carefully turned so as to examine the parts of the aëroplane.

"Oh!" she exclaimed.

"Well?" said Orissa.

"That chest that Steve loaded us with. It has broken away from its fastenings and is jammed edge downward against your gear."

Orissa thought about it.

"That's unfortunate," said she. "I suppose the bolts broke when we tipped so badly. But it hasn't interfered with our engines any."

"No," answered Sybil, still examining the conditions; "but it has interfered seriously with your control, I fear. Both your levers are thrown out of position and even the front elevator bars are badly bent."

For the first time a worried expression appeared on Orissa's face.

"If that is true," she said, "our best plan is to return at once."

"Do," urged Sybil, her dark eyes very serious.

Orissa tried to turn the wheel. It resisted. She applied more strength. Something snapped and the released wheel whirled so freely that the girl nearly lost her seat. Recovering instantly she turned a pale face to her companion and said:

"We're wrecked, Sybil. But don't worry. With the boat under us and in this quiet sea we shall be quite safe."

"I'm not worrying – especially – Ris," was the reply; "but it occurs to me to wonder how you're going to get down to the ocean."

"Why?"

"You can't stop the engines, unless one of us crawls back over the planes."

"I can cut off the spark." She tried it, but the engines chugged as merrily as before. "Guess there must be a short circuit," gasped Orissa.

"And you can't depress your elevator, I'm sure."

"I'll try it," announced Orissa, grimly.

But the fatal chest balked her attempt. The elevator was steadfastly wedged into its present position; the engines were entirely beyond control and the two helpless girls faced one of the most curious conditions ever known in the history of aviation.

At an altitude of perhaps a hundred and fifty feet from the water the aëroplane sped swiftly on its way, headed a trifle to the west of south. It passed Sealskin Island even while the girls were discussing their dilemma, and stubbornly maintained its unfaltering course. The air conditions were perfect for flying; scarcely a breath of wind was felt; the sky above was blue as azure.

Suddenly Sybil laughed.

"What now?" demanded Orissa.

"I was thinking of the consternation on shore at about this moment," explained Miss Cumberland. "Won't they be amazed to see us continue this course, beyond the island? Not understanding our trouble, Daddy will think we're running away."

"So we are," replied Orissa. "I wish I knew where we are running to."

"I suppose we can't stop till the gasoline gives out," said Sybil.

Orissa shook her head.

"That's what scares me," she admitted. "Even now the Mexican shore is a mere line at the left. We're gradually diverging to a point farther out at sea, and when at last we alight, drained of the last drop of gasoline, how are we to run the boat back?"

"We can't. Steve's wonderful Hy will become a mere floating buoy on the bosom of the rolling blue," responded Sybil lightly. "Oh, I'm so glad I came, Ris! I'd no idea we were going to have such fun."

Orissa did not return her chum's smile.

"Sit still and balance her, Sybil," she said. "I'm going to make an investigation."

Exercising the necessary caution she turned and knelt upon the foot bar, clinging to the seat rail and in this position facing the Aircraft so she could examine its mechanism. Sybil had described the condition of things quite accurately. The engine control was cut off and as the gasoline tanks fed from the rear Orissa had no way of stopping the flow. The steering gear was broken and the front elevator firmly wedged in position by the chest.

"I wonder if we could manage to move this thing," she said, and getting a hand on one corner of the aluminum chest she gave a tug and tried to raise it. It proved solid and unyielding. Not heavy in itself, or perhaps in its contents, the thing was caught between the rods in such a manner that no strength of the girls, limited in movement as they were, could budge it a particle.

Realizing this, and the folly of leaving the seats to get at the gasoline feed, Orissa resumed her place and faced the inevitable as bravely as she could.

"Steve told me," she said to Sybil, "that the gasoline would last a hundred miles in air and fifty in water; that's at least two hundred miles in an air line. Have you any idea where we shall be by that time?"

"Not the slightest," responded her companion, cheerfully. "Ocean, of course; but latitude and longitude a mystery – and not important, anyhow."

Sybil Cumberland was a reserved and silent girl on most occasions. Few were attracted toward her, on this account. Her dark eyes seemed to regard the world with critical toleration and she gave one the impression of considering herself quite independent of her fellows. Moreover, Sybil was eccentric in character and prone to do and say things that invoked the grave displeasure of her associates, seeming to delight in confusing and annoying them. But there was a brighter side to this queer girl's nature, which developed only in the society of her trusted friends. On any occasion that demanded

courage and resourcefulness she came to the front nobly, and at such times Sybil Cumberford became vivacious, helpful and inspiring.

Here was such an occasion. Danger was the joy of Sybil's heart and the "breath of her nostrils." Indifferent to the ordinary details of life, any adventure that promised tribulation or disaster was fervently welcomed. Then the girl's spirits rose, her intellect fairly bristled and she developed an animation and joyous exhilaration entirely at variance with her usual demeanor.

So now, as Orissa Kane, a girl of proved courage and undaunted spirit, grew solemn and anxious at the perilous condition that confronted them, Sybil Cumberford became gay and animated.

"It's such an unusual thing, and so wholly unexpected!" she said blithely. "I'm sure, Ris, that no two girls who ever lived – in this world or any other – ever found themselves in a like dilemma. We're as helpless as babes, chummie dear; only no babes were ever forced to fly, willy-nilly, for hundreds of miles through the air to some forlorn spot in the dank, moist ocean."

Orissa let her chatter. She was trying to realize what it might mean to them and how and when, if ever, they might be rescued from their difficulties.

"Our great mistake," continued Sybil, as they swept along, "was in not rigging the machine with a wireless outfit. To be sure, neither of us could operate it; but a wireless, in such a case – if we understood its mysteries – would solve our problem."

"How?" asked Orissa.

"We could call up the shore at San Diego and tell them what's happened, and give them the direction in which we are flying; then they could send a fast steamer for us, or perhaps Madeline Dentry would loan her yacht."

"They may follow us with a steamer, anyhow," said Orissa, thoughtfully. "If we manage to land safely, Sybil – which means if we drop to the water right-side-up – we could float for some days, until we were found and rescued."

"Thirst is a terrible thing, at sea; and hunger is almost as bad."

"But in that dreadful chest, which has caused all our trouble, Steve told me he had packed provisions. Probably there is water there, too," asserted Orissa, hopefully.

"Yes, Dad said there was lunch for two. Well, that's one good feed we shall have, anyhow, provided the chest doesn't get away from us entirely, and we can manage to open it. In its present position, neither event is at all probable."

She seemed to love to discover and point out the gloomy side of their adventure, that she might exult in the dangers that menaced them.

Meantime, swift and straight as an arrow the Aircraft continued on its course. Not a skip to the engines, not an indication of any sort that the flight would be interrupted as long as a drop of gasoline remained in the tanks. They could only be patient and await the finale as bravely as possible.

CHAPTER V

THE LAST DROP OF GASOLINE

Hour after hour they flew, while each hour seemed, to Orissa, at least, a month in duration. Sybil chatted and laughed, refusing to take their misfortune seriously.

"But," said she, "I'm getting famished. An air-trip always stimulates the appetite and that lunch of Steve's is so very near to us – and yet so far! I How did he expect us to get at the repast, anyhow?"

"Why, in water," replied Orissa, "the chest and its contents would be handy enough. I do not think it would be safe for us to creep into the boat underneath us now, for we must maintain the aerial balance; but, even if we could get below, we couldn't open the chest while it is wedged crosswise among the braces and levers."

"All true, milady," commented Sybil, her usually pale cheeks now flushed with excitement. "Our present stunt is to 'sit still and take our medicine,' as the saying goes."

By this time the Mexican coast had vanished entirely and only the placid blue waters of the Pacific remained visible, even from the altitude of the Aircraft. Once or twice they sighted a small island, bleak and bare, for this part of the ocean is filled with tiny islets, most of which are unfertile and uninhabited. Farther along, in the South Pacific, such islands have verdure and inhabitants.

At about four o'clock a change occurred in the atmospheric conditions. A brisk wind arose, blowing steadily for a time from the southwest and then suddenly developing puffs and eddies that caused the Aircraft to wobble dangerously. One powerful gust seized the helpless flying-machine and whirled it around like a toy balloon, but failed to destroy its equilibrium because the girls balanced it with their bodies as well as they might. When their craft was released, however, it pointed in a new direction – this time straight west. An hour later a similar gust swept its head to the southward, and in this direction it was still flying when the red sun dipped into the water and twilight fell.

"I don't like this, Syb," said Orissa, anxiously. "If the gasoline holds out much longer it will be dark, and when we drop our danger will be doubled."

"What will be the fashion of our dropping, anyhow?" asked Sybil. "We can't volplane, with no control of the rudder. Chances are, dear, the thing will just tip over and spill us in the damp."

"Hold fast, if it does that," cautioned Orissa. "If we become separated from the boat we will drown like rats. The engine may swamp the boat, in any event, but it has air compartments which will keep it afloat under any favorable conditions, and we must trust to luck, Sybil – and to our own coolness."

"All right, Ris. A watery grave doesn't appeal to me just now," was the reply. "I'm too hungry to drown comfortably, and that's a fact. On a full stomach I imagine one could face perpetual soaking with more complacency."

"Huh!" cried Orissa. "Listen!"

Sybil was already listening, fully as alert as her chum. The speed of the engine was diminishing. Gradually the huge propeller slackened its rapid revolutions, while its former roar subsided to a mere moan.

"Thank goodness," said Sybil, fervently, "the gasoline is gone at last!"

"Look out, then," warned Orissa.

With a final, reluctant "chug-chug!" the engine stopped short. Like a huge gull the frail craft remained poised in the air a moment and then a sudden light breeze swept it on. It was falling, however, impelled by its own weight, and singularly enough it reversed its position and proceeded before the wind with the stem foremost.

Splash! It wasn't so bad, after all. Not a volplane, to be sure, but a gentle drop, the weight of the heavy engine sustained by the "air-cushions" formed beneath the planes.

Orissa wiped the spray from her eyes.

"That would have been a regular bump, on land," Sybil was saying affably, "but the old ocean has received us with gracious tenderness. Are we sinking, Ris, or do we float?"

How suddenly the darkness was falling! Orissa leaned from her seat and found the water had turned to a color nearly as black as ink. Beneath her the bow of the aluminum motor boat was so depressed that it was almost even with the water and as it bobbed up and down with the waves it was shipping the inky fluid by the dipperful.

She scrambled out of the seat, then, to step gingerly over the unlucky chest and crouch upon a narrow seat of the little boat, near the stern.

"Come, Sybil," she called; "and be very careful."

Sybil promptly descended to the boat, which now rode evenly upon the waves. In this position the propeller was just under water and the engine rested over the center of the light but strong little craft. But propeller and engine were alike useless to them now. Overhead the planes spread like huge awnings, but they carried so little weight that they did not affect the balance of the boat.

"Steve planned well," murmured Orissa, with a sigh. "If only he had never thought of that dreadful chest, we would not be in this fix."

As she spoke she kicked the chest a little resentfully with her foot, and it seemed to move. Sybil leaned forward to eye it as closely as the gathering darkness would allow.

"Why, Ris," she exclaimed, "the thing has come loose. Help me to tip it up."

Between them they easily raised the chest to its former position, where it rested just before them. Steve had bolted it at either end, but one of the bolts had broken away and the other had bent at almost a right angle. Perhaps this last bolt would have broken, too, had not the chest, in falling, become wedged against the braces.

"This horrid box has heretofore been our dire enemy," remarked Sybil; "but let us be forgiving and encourage it to make amends – for it holds eatables. How does the cover open, Ris?"

Stephen had shown Orissa how to work the sliding catch and in a moment the girl had the lid open and held it upright while Sybil searched within.

"Hooray! We've discovered a regular cafeteria," said the latter, jubilantly, as she drew out a number of parcels. "I was afraid we'd have to nibble, Orissa, so as not to gorge ourselves to-night and starve to-morrow; but I reckon there's enough to last two delicate girls like us a week. What shall we tackle first?"

"Let us plan a little, dear," suggested Orissa, restraining her own eagerness, for she was hungry, too. "We cannot possibly tell to-night what this precious chest contains or how much food there really is. We must wait for daylight to take an inventory. But here are some tins, we know, which will keep, and that package of sandwiches on your lap is perishable; so I propose we confine our feast to those for to-night."

"Perishable it is, Cap'n," answered Sybil, consuming half a sandwich at a single bite. "If there's only a pickle to go with these breadspreads I shall be content. It's not only luncheon that we're indulging in, you know; it's our regular dinner, as well, and there ought to be two courses – pickles and sandwiches – at the least."

"You must feel for the pickles, then," returned Orissa, intent upon her own sandwich, "for it's too dark to use eyes just now."

Sybil found the pickles – who ever put up a lunch for two girls without including pickles? – and declared she was quite content.

"If we hadn't discovered the eats, my dear Cap'n," she remarked with cheery satisfaction, "I think I could have dined on my own shoes. That's a happy thought; we'll keep the shoes in reserve. I'd no idea one's appetite could get such an edge, after being tantalized for a few hours."

"Do you realize, Sybil," asked Orissa in a grave tone, as she took her second sandwich, "that we must pass the night in this wiggly, insecure boat?"

"What's insecure about it?" demanded Sybil.

"It won't stand much of a sea, I fear. This attachment to the Aircraft was intended for pleasant weather."

"All right; the weather's delightful. Those long, gentle rolls will merely rock us to sleep. And – Oh, Ris! – we'll have rolls for breakfast."

"Do be serious, Syb! Suppose a storm catches us before morning?"

"Then please wake me up. Where do you suppose we are, anyhow?"

"I've no idea," answered Orissa, soberly. "We must have traveled a couple of hundred miles, but it wasn't in a straight line, by any means. Let's see. Perhaps a hundred miles on our first course – over Sealskin Island and nearly south – then forty or fifty miles north – "

"Oh, no; west."

"Yes; so it was. Then twenty-odd miles south, ten miles or so east, a couple or three miles west again, and then – and then – "

"Dear me! Don't bother your head with it, Orissa. We zigzagged like a drunken man. The only fact we can positively nail is that we were getting farther away from home – or our friends, rather – every minute. That's a bad thing, come to think of it. They'll never know where to search for us."

"True," responded Orissa. "But I am sure they will search, and search diligently, so we must manage to keep afloat until they find us. What shall we do now, Sybil?"

"Sleep," was the prompt reply. "If we lift this seat off – it seems to be removable – I think there is room enough for us both to cuddle down in the bottom of the boat."

"Oh, Sybil!" This from Orissa, rather reproachfully.

"Well, I can't imagine anything more sensible to do," asserted her chum, with a yawn. "These air-rides not only encourage hunger, but sleep. Did you cork that bottle of water? I want another drink."

"I – I think we'd better economize on the water," suggested Orissa, "at least until morning, when we can find out if there's any more in the chest."

"All right. Help me bail out this overflow and then we'll cuddle down."

"Steve said there were two blankets in the chest," said Orissa, presently, when the bottom of the boat was dry. "I'll search for them."

She found the blankets easily, by feeling through the contents of the chest. Offering no further objection to Sybil's plan, she prepared their bed for the night. Neither of these girls had ever "roughed it" to any extent, but in spite of the peril of their situation and the liability of unforeseen dangers overtaking them, they were resourceful enough and courageous enough to face the conditions with a degree of intrepid interest. Afloat on an unknown part of the broad Pacific, with merely a tiny aluminum boat for protection, with final escape from death uncertain and chances of rescue remote, these two carefully nurtured young girls, who had enjoyed loving protection all their lives, were so little influenced by fear that they actually exchanged pleasantries as they spread their blankets and rolled themselves in the coverings for the night.

"The lack of a pillow bothers me most," remarked Sybil. "I think I shall rest my head on one of those cans of baked beans."

"I advise you not to; you might eat them in your sleep," was Orissa's comment.

"May I rest my head upon you, chummie dear?"

"You may not. Try the engine."

"That's hard. And there are enough wheels in my head already, without pounding my ear with them. Suggest something else."

"Your own elbow, then."

"Thanks, dear. Where's that slab of aluminum that used to be a seat?"

It was a happy thought and furnished them both with a headrest. The seat was not an ideal pillow, but it answered the purpose because there was nothing better.

CHAPTER VI

CASTAWAYS

"Well, I declare!" exclaimed Orissa, sitting up.

After a moment Sybil said, sleepily:

"Go ahead and declare it, Ris. Only, if we're drowned, please break the news to me gently!"

"How strange!" muttered Orissa, still staring.

Sybil stirred, threw off the blanket and also rose to a sitting position.

"If it's a secret," she began, "then – Oh, goodness me!"

During the night the boat with its great overhead planes had gently floated into a little bay, where the water was peaceful as a millpond. Two points of black rock projected on either side of them, outlining the bay. Between these points appeared an island – a mass of tumbled rocks guiltless of greenery. There was a broad strip of clean, smooth sand on the shore, barely covering the slaty ledge, but back of that the jumble of rocks began, forming irregular hillocks, and beyond these hillocks, which extended for some distance inland, there seemed to be a great dip in the landscape – or rockscape – far back of which arose a low mountain formed of the same unlovely material as all else.

"It's an island!" gasped Sybil, rubbing her eyes to make sure they were working properly. "Now, see here, Cap'n Ris, I want it understood right now which one of us is to be Robinson Crusoe and which the Man Friday. Seems to me, I being the passenger and you the charioteer, the prestige is on my side; so I claim the Crusoe part. I can't grow whiskers, and I'm not likely to find a parrot to perch on my shoulder, but I'll promise to enact the part as well as circumstances will permit."

"I can't see a sign of life," announced Orissa, regretfully. "There isn't even a bird hovering over the place."

"Lizards and snakes among the rocks, though, I'll bet," responded Sybil, with a grimace. "All these rocky Pacific islands are snaky, they say. I wonder if I can learn to charm 'em. You don't object to my being Crusoe, do you?"

Orissa sighed; then she turned to her cheery comrade with a smile.

"Not at all," said she. "But I'll be Columbus, the Discoverer, for I've discovered a desert island while you were peacefully dreaming."

"There's no desert about your island," stated Sybil. "A desert would be a relief. What you've discovered, Miss Ris Columbus – or what's discovered us, rather – is a rock heap."

"Desert or not, it's deserted, all right," maintained Orissa.

"And you may not have discovered it, after all," said Sybil, musingly examining the place. "These seas have been pretty well explored, I guess, and although no nation would particularly care to pin a flag to this bunch of rocks, the maps may indicate it clearly."

"Ah, if we only had a map!" cried Orissa eagerly.

"What good would it do us?" asked Sybil. "It couldn't help us to find ourselves, for we don't know what especial dot on the map we've arrived at. With Muggins' Complete Atlas in hand, and a geography teacher thrown in, we wouldn't be able to pick out this island from the ones that litter these seas."

"That is, unfortunately, quite true," sighed Orissa; "and anyhow it's not worth an argument because we have no map. But we must be up and doing, Sybil. If we are to keep ourselves alive, we must take advantage of every favorable circumstance."

"What time is it?" yawned Sybil.

Orissa looked at her watch.

"A little after six."

"Call me at eight. I can't get up at six o'clock; it's too early, entirely."

"But you went to bed at about seven."

"Did I? Well, how about breakfast?"

"We must inspect our stores and take inventory. Then we must plan to make the provisions last as long as possible."

"How dreadful! Why, this is a real adventure, Ris – threatened famine, and all that. We're regular castaways, like we read about in the fifteen-cent story magazines, and I wouldn't be surprised if we had to endure many inconveniences; would you?"

"Sybil," said Orissa earnestly, "we are face to face with privation, danger, and perhaps death. I'm glad you can be cheerful, but we must understand our terrible position and endeavor to survive as long as possible. We know very well that our friends will have a hard time finding us, for they cannot guess what part of the ocean we descended in. It may take days – perhaps weeks – for them to discover us in this dreary place, and meantime we must guard our safety to the best of our ability."

"Naturally," agreed Sybil, duly impressed by this speech. "Your head is clearer and better than mine, Orissa; so you shall take command, and I'll gladly follow your instructions. You mean to land, don't you? I'm tired of this cramped little boat and even a rocky island is better than no refuge at all."

"Of course we must land," replied Orissa; "and that, I think, must be our first task. The shore is only a stone's throw from here, but we're fast on a sand bar, and how to get off is a problem."

Sybil began to take off her leggings, then her shoes and stockings.

"We'll wade," she said.

Orissa peered over the side.

"It's very shallow. I think we can wade to shore, Syb, and pull the Hy in after us. We must get the whole thing high and dry on the beach, if possible."

Sybil plumbed the water by tying a can of sardines to a cord from around one of the parcels.

"I guess we can make it all right, Cap'n," she said. "It's not very deep."

"It may be a lot deeper closer in. But I guess we'll have to take a chance on it. And if the worst comes to the worst we *can* dry our clothes on the beach."

The sun was showing brilliantly above the horizon as the two girls stepped into the water. Both could swim fairly well, but where the boat was grounded on the sand bar the water was scarcely knee-deep. They dragged Steve's invention over the bar with little difficulty, the wheels materially assisting their efforts. Beyond the bar the water deepened in spots, and once, as they drew the wrecked Hy after them, the waves reached perilously high. Then they struck the shelving beach and found hard sand under their feet.

By pushing and hauling energetically they managed to run the boat, with its attached planes, to the shore, where the wheels on either side enabled them to roll it up the slope until, as Orissa said, it was "high and dry."

"Seems to me," remarked Sybil, panting, "we ought to have breakfasted first, for all this exercise has made me ravenous. That'll diminish our precious store of eatables considerably, I fear."

With the machine safely landed they proceeded to dress themselves, after which Orissa arranged upon the sand the entire contents of the aluminum chest. A kit of tools, adapted for use on the Aircraft, together with some extra bolts, a strut or two and a coil of steel wire were first placed carefully on one side.

"With these," said the girl, "I can easily repair the damage to our machine."

"But what's the use, without gasoline?" asked Sybil.

Orissa had no reply to this. She proceeded to inspect the provisions. Mr. Cumberford had a way of always providing enough for a regiment when he intended to feed a few, so in ordering lunch for two girls on an aerial voyage his usual prodigality had been in evidence. Perhaps with an intuition that a delay or even an accident might occur to Sybil and Orissa, the old gentleman had even exceeded his record, in this instance. A big box of dainty sandwiches had been supplemented by three cartons of biscuits, a whole Edam cheese, a bottle of pickles, two huge packages of cakes and eighteen tins

of provisions, provided with keys for opening them. These consisted of sardines, potted ham and chicken, baked beans, chipped beef and the like. In another parcel was a whole roasted duck, in still another an apple pie, while two jars of jam completed the list of edibles. For the voyagers to drink Mr. Cumberford had added two half-gallon jars of distilled water, a bottle of grape juice, two of ginger ale and one of lemonade.

The girls examined this stock with profound gravity.

"I wish," said Orissa, "there had been more bread and biscuits, for we are going to need the substantials rather more than the delicacies."

"Thank goodness we have anything!" exclaimed Sybil. "I suppose we must breakfast on the cakes and jam, and save the other truck until later."

"That's the idea," approved Orissa. "The cakes won't keep for long; even the sandwiches will outlast them, I think."

"True, if I eat all the cake I want," added Sybil. "Cakes and jam make a queer breakfast, Orissa. In New England the pie would be appropriate."

"Let's save the pie – for lunch."

"Agreed. Breakfast isn't usually my strong point, you know."

As they ate, seated together upon the sands, they cast many curious glances at the interior of the island – a prospect forbidding enough.

"Do you know," said Orissa, "the scarcity of food doesn't worry me so much as the scarcity of water. Grape juice and ginger ale are well enough in their way, but they don't take the place of water."

"We may possibly find water on this island," replied Sybil, after a little thought.

"I don't believe it. I've an idea that, hunt as we may, we shall find nothing more than rocks, and rocks, and rocks – anywhere and everywhere."

"That's merely a hunch, and I distrust hunches. It will be better to explore," suggested Sybil.

"Yes; I think we ought to do that. But – the snakes."

"Ah, the exclusive rock theory is already exploded," said Sybil, with a laugh. "Yet even snakes can't exist without water, can they? Just the thought of the wrigglers makes me shudder, but if they are really our co-inhabitants here we won't be safe from them even on this shore. Have we anything in the way of clubs?"

Orissa considered the question. Then she went to the machine and with a wrench unfastened the foot-bar, which was long enough to extend across both seats and was made of solid steel. She also took the bolts out of one of the levers, which when released became an effective weapon of defense. Thus armed, and feeling somewhat more secure, the girls prepared to move inland to explore their new habitation.

They found the climb over the loose rocks adjoining the shore to be quite arduous, and aside from the difficulties of the way they had to exercise constant caution for fear of snakes. They saw none of these dreaded reptiles, however, and when they came to the hillocks they selected a path between the two most promising and began the ascent, keeping close together. So jagged were the tumbled masses of rock and so irregular in their formation that it was not a question of walking so much as crawling, but with their leggings, stout shoes and thick cloth skirts they were fairly protected from injury.

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