

Wayne Dorothy

Dorothy Dixon and the Mystery Plane



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Содержание

Chapter I	4
Chapter II	14
Chapter III	25
Chapter IV	31
Chapter V	40
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	45

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Chapter I AT THE BEACH CLUB

“Here he comes again, Dot!”

Terry Walters balanced on the edge of the beach club float and pointed upward toward the approaching airplane.

Dorothy Dixon bobbed up beside the raft, blew the water from her nose and reached a long tanned arm for the young man’s ankle.

“Here *you* come into the drink, you mean!” she gurgled.

Terry yelped, lost balance, and recovering desperately, dived over her head. His departure rocked the float, so that Phil Stanton’s lanky figure poised on the diving board, lurched and fell awkwardly into the water.

Betty Mayo, hugging her damp knees on the middle of the float, shrieked her approval of this double exploit.

“Swell work, Dorothy!” she laughed as that young lady pulled herself aboard. “You’ll catch it in a minute though!”

Dorothy stood up. Her scarlet bathing cap flamed against the ash blue sky and her wet suit clung to her slender form like a sheath of black lacquer.

“Maybe!” Then, in quite a different tone: “Goodness, Betty, he’s missing!”

Betty sprang to her feet. “You’re crazy – ” she retorted as she caught sight of Phil and Terry knifing their way back to the float. “Why’d you try to scare me? Those boys are all right.”

But Dorothy was staring skyward.

“Not the boys! I mean the plane, Betty. Over there beyond the club house. His engine’s missing. Bet you an ice cream cone he’ll have to land!”

“No, you won’t,” Betty flashed back. “I don’t know a thing about airplanes, and I’ll take your word for it. Ooh, Dorothy – do you think he’ll hit the roof?”

“Oh, he’s all right – ”

“Yes, he’s over the roof now – but *look!*” Betty’s voice rose to a shriek. “He’s aiming the plane straight for us – it’ll hit this float – ”

The last word was no more than a gurgle. Betty had dived overside.

Dorothy did not trouble to turn her head. With her bare feet firmly planted on the timbers, her straight body balanced easily to the float’s gentle rocking, she gazed interestedly at the big amphibian sweeping down toward her.

On came the plane, losing altitude with every split second, and

sailed over her head a bare thirty feet above the water. Then as she faced about to watch it land, the tail of her eye caught sight of Terry hauling himself over the edge of the float.

“Get you for that last one!” he cried, and scrambled to his feet. “Who laughs last, you know!”

“I know – ” mocked Dorothy, evading his grasp and running up the springboard. She dived and her body entered the water with scarcely a sound.

As she rose she turned lazily on her back.

“Come and get me!” she tantalized. Then as she saw him start in pursuit, she rolled over and headed out toward the seaplane which now floated two or three hundred yards away toward the mouth of the inlet and Long Island Sound.

Terry knew the speed developed by her flagrantly perfect crawl, and did not attempt to follow her. He chuckled as he watched the bob of scarlet and the flash of a brown arm that was all he could see of Dorothy.

“Hey, where’s Dorothy?” called Betty as she and Phil clambered on to the raft.

“Halfway to Boston, I guess. Race you to the beach for the cones!”

All three cut the ruffled surface of the water with a single splash.

Dorothy’s interest in the airplane that had just landed was twofold. Since qualifying for her private pilot’s license earlier in the summer, she had met most of the owners of planes living in

or near New Canaan. To the best of her knowledge the Loening Amphibian which her father had given her for rounding up the Martinelli gang was the only one of that model privately owned in that part of Connecticut. That the plane lying just ahead on the water was a duplicate of her own meant that the owner was not a local person.

Dorothy was a keen aviatrix and proud of her airbus. She wanted to compare notes with the owner of this amphibian. She was also curious to learn where the plane came from; and why every day for the past few weeks it had appeared over the Club at about this same time of an afternoon. At five-thirty sharp the crowd of young people on the beach would see it, a speck in the north, coming from over the ridge country back of the Sound. Flying at an altitude of not more than five hundred feet, it would swing over the beach club and cross the Sound, to disappear in the ether toward the dim line of the Long Island shore.

Terry jokingly termed it the Mystery Plane. He told Dorothy that its owner made these daily flights in order to show her how a plane should be managed in the air. She usually returned his good-natured teasing with interest, but each time she saw the amphibian, her curiosity increased.

As she swam nearer it was plain that this airship was actually the same stock model as her own. With the retractible landing wheels drawn up, the spoon-shaped hull of the biplane, with its two open cockpits aft of the inverted engine, floated easily on the water. The aviator, she saw, was busily engaged in going over

his engine.

Dorothy stopped swimming when she was a few yards from the amphibian.

“Hello, there!” she called, treading water. “Need any help?”

The man looked up from his work, evidently perceiving her for the first time. Dorothy was surprised to see that the face below the soft helmet and goggles was bearded to the eyes.

“No, thank you,” he answered and went on tinkering with the motor. The words, although courteous enough, were spoken in a tone that showed plainly that he wished to end the conversation then and there.

Dorothy was persistent and not easily discouraged.

“Located the trouble?” she asked.

“Not yet,” replied the man without lifting his head.

“Looks like loose manifold, or gas connection, to me.”

There was no reply to this helpful suggestion.

She began swimming toward the plane again.

“Mind if I come aboard?” she called.

The bearded aviator straightened his back and faced her again, his right hand grasping a monkey-wrench.

“No. I do not wish it,” he flared. “Why for do you bother me? Keep off, I tell you.”

For the first time, the girl in the water noticed his strong foreign accent.

“Aren’t you polite!” she mocked. “I don’t suppose you’ll mind if I come alongside and rest a moment?”

“You stay where you are, young woman.” As the man’s anger grew, his accent became stronger. “I haf no time to bodder wid you. Go away – and stop away!”

“But I just want – ”

“I don’t care *what* you want. Come alongside, and I’ll use this wrench on you!”

“Oh, no you won’t!”

Terry Walters slipped round the engine and tripped up the aviator. Before that irate person knew what was happening he found himself flat on his back with a hundred and sixty pounds of young American kneeling on his chest, menacing him with his own monkey-wrench.

“That’s not a nice way to talk to a lady!” Terry remarked dispassionately eyeing his victim. “Ask her pardon like a good little boy. Do it quickly, my friend, or I’ll plant this wrench in the middle of that bush you call a face!”

“I didn’t mean nossing,” the man grunted.

“Try again!” Terry whacked his captive’s shin with the wrench. “Also try to cut the double negatives. Our English teacher says they’re bad form and – ”

Terry’s banter stopped with a yelp of pain as the man’s head jerked upward and his teeth snapped on the hand which held the wrench.

Dorothy, who had swum to within a few feet of the amphibian, saw Terry thrown to one side. Like cats, the boy and the man seemed to land on their feet – but now it was the strange aviator

who held the monkey-wrench.

“Look out, Terry!” shrieked the girl as she saw the man’s arm swing upward.

The small deck forward of the lower wing section was far too narrow to permit dodging. Terry did the only thing possible under the circumstances to save himself. Three seasons on the football team of the New Canaan High had made that young man a quick thinker. He dove below the swinging blow and tackled the aviator just above his knees. It was a well aimed tackle and the two went hurtling overside to disappear with a splash.

Terry’s blond head was the first to appear. Then as the aviator’s came popping up, facing the other way, young Walters seized him by the shoulders and sent him under once more.

“Let the man alone, Terry!” commanded Dorothy. “Can’t you see he’s swallowed half the Sound?”

“But he’d have brained me with that wrench, Dot – ”

“I’ll ‘Dot’ you if you take liberties with my first name!” Miss Dixon shook her fist above her head, “Anyway, it’s my fault. I butted in. That man and his plane are none of our business.”

They were swimming back toward the float now and a glance over her shoulder told Dorothy that their late antagonist was pulling himself aboard the amphibian.

Terry saw him too, and waved a hand. But the foreigner, occupied in wringing water out of his clothes, disregarded them.

“I’ve had enough of the water for one day,” declared Dorothy between strokes. “How’s the wrist? You might have been badly

hurt, Terry.”

Terry motioned toward the float. “But I wasn’t, old thing,” he chuckled. “Come over to the raft a moment, before we go ashore. I’ve got something I want to show you.”

“Make it snappy, then,” she rejoined. “You and I have got to be at Silvermine by seven-thirty, you know. Curtain up at eight-thirty – and you remember what Mr. Watkins said about any of the cast being late?”

Terry swung himself up on the decking and gave a hand to Dorothy.

“I’m only a chorus man,” he grinned. “We’ll both get to the Sillies in time. Look at this – ”

He opened his hand and held it out, palm upward.

“I’m not interested in seaweed!” Dorothy’s tone was full of disgust.

“Seaweed, nothing! That’s a piece of your friend’s beard!”

“You don’t mean to tell me you pulled it out?”

“Not out, dearie – off. That wasn’t his own hair that lad was wearing.”

“A *false beard*?”

“What else?”

Dorothy pursed her lips. “Well, that amphibian and its pilot are two of the most mysterious things I’ve ever run into.”

“I wonder what he is up to, Dot – I mean, Dorothy?”

“I wonder, too. By the way, how did you happen out there – and just at the right minute? I thought I saw you start a race for

the beach with Betty and Phil?”

Terry nodded his wet head and laughed. “That was only a bluff to make you think I wasn’t coming after you. As I saw you were having an argument with him, and I didn’t like the way he was acting, I swam around the tail of his plane and got aboard on the farther deck – and – well, you know the rest. Why did you want to go aboard?”

“Curiosity, pure and simple. Have you any idea why he flies over the Club nearly every afternoon, and always at the same time?”

“No – have you?”

“Not the dimmest. But now that I know friend pilot wears false whiskers, I’m certainly intrigued.”

“Come again,” frowned Terry. “I didn’t get that last one. Did you say *intrigued*?”

“Cut the clowning. This is serious, Terry. That fellow is up to some mischief, or he wouldn’t disguise himself.”

Behind them the amphibian’s engine sputtered, then roared.

“I’ve got an idea,” said Terry as the two watched the plane taxi out toward the takeoff. “Why don’t you get your bus and follow that bird some afternoon?”

“I’d already decided to do it tomorrow. Want to come?”

“You bet! How do you expect to work it?”

“Look here, if we’re going to make that show on time, we’d better go right now. We’ll make our plans later. Come along.”

Their bodies cut the water with hardly a splash as they raced

for the beach. Out in the inlet the amphibian rose gracefully into the air and headed into the mist which was creeping up Long Island Sound.

Chapter II

THE THREE RED LAMPS

In the wooded valley of the Silvermine, some three miles from the village of New Canaan, lies the famous artists' colony which bears the name of that rippling little river. In the midst of this interesting community, the artists have built their Guild House, where exhibitions of paintings and sculpture are held. And here it is that once a year they give that delightful entertainment known as the Silvermine Sillies.

The casts of the Sillies invariably comprise the pick of local talent from the two communities. Dorothy had starred in the musical show given by the New Canaan High School the previous winter. She had a lovely voice and a natural talent for acting. She loved amateur theatricals. But that she should have been assigned a part in the Sillies while yet in High School was a compliment beyond her expectations. She had worked hard at rehearsals and under an assumed calm was wildly excited on this, the opening night of the show.

She left Terry on the beach, after cautioning that young man again not to be late, and ran up the shingle to the Dixons' cabana, which, together with its gaily painted counterparts, flanked the long club house at the top of the beach.

A surprisingly few minutes later, Dorothy reappeared, her

bathing suit having been discarded for an attractive linen sports frock, and jumped into her car.

The distance between Tokeneke on Long Island Sound and New Canaan back in the hills of the Ridge Country is slightly under eight miles. Luckily, on her drive home, Dorothy encountered no traffic policemen. Notwithstanding summer traffic and the narrow, winding roads, she pulled into the Dixon garage on the ridge a mile beyond the village, a bare ten minutes later.

Another change of costume and she ran downstairs to the dining room. Her father and a friend were about to sit down at the table.

“Sorry to be late, Daddy,” she apologized, slipping into her chair. “Good evening, Mr. Holloway.”

“Good evening, Miss Dorothy,” returned the gentleman with a smile. “You seem a bit blown.”

“Some rush!” she sighed, “but I made it!”

“Youth,” remarked her father, “is nothing if not inconsistent. We dine early, so that Dorothy can get to the Sillies at some unearthly hour, and – ”

His daughter interrupted.

“Please, Daddy. I had an awfully exciting experience this afternoon. I’d have been home in plenty of time, otherwise.”

“At the Beach Club?”

“Yes, Daddy.”

“Well, suppose you tell us the story, as penance.” He turned

to his guest. “How about it, Holloway? This should interest you, one of the club’s most prominent swimming fans!”

Mr. Holloway nodded genially. He was older than Mr. Dixon, between fifty and sixty, tall and rather thin. He had the brow and jaw of a fighter, and his iron-grey side-whiskers gave him a rather formidable appearance. But Dorothy liked him, for his eyes, behind his horn-rimmed spectacles, beamed with friendliness.

“The Beach Club, eh?” He leaned back in his chair. “Yes, I take a dip most afternoons. Wonderful bracer after mornings in the city in this hot weather. You ought to get down there more often.”

“Well, there’s a pool at the Country Club, and I’d rather play golf,” argued his host. “I haven’t been to the Beach Club this summer, but Dorothy tells me that the cabana you’ve built is quite a palace – much larger and more ‘spiffy,’ I think was the word, than those we ordinary members rent!”

“I like to be comfortable and have some privacy when I entertain my friends down there,” Mr. Holloway admitted. “But I’m interested in hearing Dorothy’s story. I was there this afternoon, but I didn’t notice anything unusual.”

“Did you see the airplane that landed in the cove?”

“Why, no. What time was that?”

“A little after five-fifteen.”

“I had already left for home. I’m rarely at the club after five o’clock. I like a bright sun when I’m in the water. What about the plane?”

While Dorothy told of her experience with the bearded pilot, the two gentlemen continued their meal in silence.

“A nasty customer – that!” snapped her father when she had concluded. “But then, my dear, you shouldn’t allow your keenness for aviation to over-excite your curiosity. Let it be a lesson to you not to interfere with other people’s private business.”

“You say that he wore a false beard?” interjected Mr. Holloway. “Now I wonder why the man wants to disguise himself? And why he was so standoffish about his plane?”

“He’s probably in training for some test or endurance flight and wants to keep his identity secret for the time being,” suggested Mr. Dixon. “There’s often a lot of hush-hush stuff about such things – that is, until the stunt comes off – and then the secretive ones become the world’s worst publicity hounds!”

Dorothy remarked the change that came to their guest’s face: the eyes narrowed, the mouth grew harder; something of his levity disappeared.

“Perhaps,” he said slowly. “But whatever his reason for wishing privacy, we can’t have club members insulted by strange aviators in our own cove. I shall take it up at the board of governors’ meeting tomorrow. In future we will see to it that no more airplanes land on club waters. Do you think you would recognize the man without his beard, Dorothy?”

“I don’t think so – but Terry, who was nearer to him, swears he could spot him anywhere.”

“If he should do so, ask him to report the matter to me, and I’ll see that the man at least offers apology.”

“Thank you, Mr. Holloway.” Dorothy was pleased at this interest. “I’ll tell him.”

“You three had better leave well enough alone,” her father declared bluntly. “The plane is probably being flown over a set course which happens to take it over the club. That aviator seems to be a surly customer. My advice is to forget it...”

Dorothy pushed her chair back from the table.

“You’ll excuse me, won’t you?” she smiled. “I’ve got to run, now.” She went to her father and kissed him. “Please don’t be late, Daddy. I come on the first time right after the curtain rises – it will spoil my evening if you two aren’t there!”

Mr. Holloway’s kindly eyes twinkled behind his glasses.

“Nice of you to include me. I wouldn’t miss the first number for anything. I’ll see that we’re both there in time.”

“Don’t worry, sweetheart.” Her father patted her hand. “We’ve got a small matter of business to go over and then we’ll be right along. Success to you, dearest.”

“Bye!”

A fine rain was falling when Dorothy stepped into her car. As yet it was more a heavy mist than a downpour. But with the wind in the east she realized that this part of the country was in for several days of wet weather. She drove carefully, for the winding wooded roads were slippery. Upon arriving at the Guild House, she changed at once into costume.

The Silvermine Sillies, like Mr. Ziegfield's more elaborate Follies, is invariably a revue, consisting of eighteen or twenty separate acts. As Dorothy stood in the wings, waiting for her cue, shortly after the first curtain rose, she was addressed by the stage manager:

"Have you seen Terry?"

"Not since this afternoon. Why?"

"He's not here."

Dorothy was fighting back the stage fright that always assailed her while waiting to "go on," but which always disappeared as soon as she made her entrance. She turned her mind to what the manager was saying with an effort.

"You mean he hasn't shown up?" she asked a bit vacantly.

"Your perception is remarkable," returned the harassed stage official with pardonable sarcasm. "No, Terry isn't here. Do you know whether he had any intention of putting in an appearance at this show tonight when you last saw him?"

Dorothy was wide awake now. "Of course he had!"

"He didn't mention some more important date, perhaps?"

"Of course not. Terry wouldn't do such a thing!"

"Well, he goes on in less than two minutes. Who in blazes am I to get to double for him? Deliver me from amateurs! There's your cue, Miss Dixon – better take it!"

"Hey, you, Bill!" she heard him call to a stage hand, as she made her entrance. "Duck into the men's dressing room and bring me Terry Walters' overalls and wig. Here's where I do his

stuff without a makeup!”

Terry failed to show up during the first part of the program, so during the intermission, Dorothy slipped out front and sought the delinquent’s father and mother in the audience.

“Why, my dear, I’m quite as surprised as you are,” gurgled Mrs. Walters. “Isn’t this rain disgusting? You looked perfectly lovely Dorothy – and you did splendidly, splendidly, my dear. I thought I’d die when your rope of pearls broke and you went hunting for them – a perfect scream, my dear – the funniest thing in the show!”

“Those were Betty Mayo’s pearls,” said Dorothy. “I wasn’t in that act. You say Terry left the house in plenty of time, and he expected to drive straight down here?”

Mrs. Walters had said nothing of the kind, but Dorothy had known the lady for years, and had long ago devised a method of securing information from her.

“He didn’t even wait for dessert, my dear. He probably went to the movies or remembered some other date. Boys are like that!”

“Terry isn’t.” His father spoke up. “He must have been going to pick someone up and give them a lift down here – then blew a shoe or something. Still, I don’t like it. I hope the boy hasn’t met with an accident.”

“Oh, don’t say that, Reggie! You make me feel positively faint. I know he has gone to the pictures.” Mrs. Walters was nervously emphatic. “Don’t be so silly, dear – I know he has.”

“You know nothing of the kind,” declared her husband.

“But, Reggie dear – ”

Dorothy hurriedly excused herself and went back stage.

But by the time the final curtain was rung down, no Terry had appeared. Dorothy was really worried. Betty was giving a party to a number of the cast at her house in White Oak Shade, but despite protests, Dorothy made her regrets and went to look for her father.

“I think I’ll beat it for home, Dad,” she announced, buttonholing him near the door.

“I’ll be along in a few minutes, darling. I certainly am more than extra proud of you tonight. I never realized what an actress you are. But you look troubled – anything the matter?”

“I’m worried about Terry. I know he wouldn’t deliberately put us all in this hole. He’s not that kind.”

“Probably had a break-down,” consoled her father. “Excuse me, dear, I want to speak to the Joneses over there.”

Dorothy drove a six-cylinder coupe whose body had seen better days, though she claimed for its engine that the world had not seen its equal. With her windiper working furiously, she came cautiously along Valley Road, her big headlamps staring whitely ahead. The rain was pelting down now, and since she must have a window open, and that window was on the weather side, one arm and part of the shoulder of her thin slicker were soon black and shining.

“Something he couldn’t help – that’s what made Terry let us down,” said her subconscious mind, and she wondered how

any of the cast could have expressed contrary opinions. She was glad she had refused Betty's invitation. She liked Terry and was deeply concerned about him. He wasn't the sort to default unless something unforeseen and unusual occurred. Mrs. Walters said he had been full of the show at dinner and had spoken about getting to the Guild House early. Something had come up, that was certain. And that something, after he had started for Silvermine in his car. The more she thought about it, the more mysterious it seemed. She would phone the Walters again as soon as she reached home. Maybe he would be back by that time.

The car skidded round the turn into the Ridge Road that ran past the Dixon place. A mile farther on, Dorothy decided it would be well for her to keep her mind on the road ahead. A few minutes before, a lumbering truck had almost driven her into the ditch, and now, with a mile to go, she saw ahead of her three red lights. She slowed her engine until she came within a dozen yards of them.

They were red lamps, placed in a line across the road, and if they meant anything, it was that the road was under repair and closed. Yet she had passed the truck going at full speed just beyond the corner. From its lights, she was sure it had come along this stretch of road.

She peered through the open window and saw on her left a dilapidated stone fence, the top of which was hidden under a blanket of wild honeysuckle. She saw by her headlights a gap where once she knew a five-barred gate had blocked the way to

the open field. All this she took in at a glance, for Dorothy knew exactly where she was. Then she turned again to her scrutiny of the road and the three red lamps.

“Well!” said Dorothy to herself. She switched out all the lights of the car, and taking something from her pocket, she opened the door quietly and stepped into the rain. She stood there for a while, listening.

There was no sound except the swish and patter of the storm. Keeping to the centre of the road she advanced slowly toward the red lights, picked up the middle one and examined it. The lantern was old – the red had been painted on the glass. The second lantern was newer, but of entirely different pattern. Here also, the glass pane had been covered by some red, transparent paint. And this was the case with the third lamp.

Dorothy threw the middle light into the ditch and found satisfaction in hearing the crash of glass. Then she came back to her car, got inside, slammed the door and put her foot down on the starter. The motor whined but the engine did not move. The car was hot and never before had it failed. Again she tried, but without success.

“This looks suspicious,” she muttered to herself.

She sprang out into the rain again and walked to the back to examine her gasoline tank. There was no need, for the indicator said, “Empty.”

“I’ll say suspicious!” she muttered again, angrily, as she stared down at the cause of her plight.

She had filled up just before dinner, but notwithstanding that fact, here was a trustworthy indicator pointing grimly to “E”; and when she tapped the tank, it gave forth a hollow sound in confirmation.

Dorothy sniffed: the air reeked with fumes. Flashing her pocket light on the ground she saw a metal cap and picked it up. Then she understood what had happened. The roadway, under her light, gleamed with opalescent streaks. Someone had taken out the cap and emptied her tank while she was examining the red lamps!

She refastened the cap, which was airproof, waterproof, and foolproof, and which could only have been turned by the aid of a spanner – she had heard no chink of metal against metal. She did not carry reserve fuel, but home was not more than a mile down the road, round the turn. And she knew there was a path from the gap in the stone wall, across the field and through a belt of woods that would halve the distance.

She sent her flashlight in the direction of the open gateway. One of the posts was broken and the rotting structure leaned drunkenly against a lilac bush. In the shadow behind the bush, she was certain that a dark form moved.

Dorothy lingered no longer, but switching off her light, she turned on her heel and raced up the road.

Chapter III

WHERE'S TERRY?

Behind her, Dorothy heard a shout, and that shout lent wings to her feet. Scared as she was, she grinned. For she was probably doing the only thing her would-be assailants had not counted on. She was running away from the red lights and home, sprinting down the road the way she had come. Overhead, tall elms met in an archway, and from the darkness at her back came the quick patter of footsteps. Suddenly they stopped.

Dorothy gave a sigh of joyous relief, for around the bend in the road she saw the double gleam of headlights, shining through the wet. Stopping short in the middle of the road, she switched on her flashlight again and waved it frantically from side to side.

“Daddy!” she cried as the big car drew up. “I was sure you weren’t far away. Gee! but I was glad to see your lights.”

Mr. Dixon snapped open the door and Dorothy slipped in beside him.

“Why, what are you doing out here? Have a breakdown?”

“H-holdup,” she panted. “My car’s down the road. Step on it, Dad – maybe we can catch them.”

“An ounce of discretion is sometimes worth forty pounds of valor,” he began, throwing in the clutch.

Dorothy cut him short. “Look!” she cried excitedly, and for

all Mr. Dixon's cautious announcement, the car jumped forward with a jerk. "See, Daddy! There's my tail light! They've turned it on again. And the red lights have disappeared."

"What red lights?"

"Tell you in a minute. Better slow down. My car's out of gas. I've got a piece of hose in the rumble. We can siphon enough from your tank into mine to get me home."

Mr. Dixon brought his car to a stop directly behind Dorothy's coupe.

"Before we do anything, I want to hear exactly what happened, dear. You scared your fond parent out of a year's growth when I caught sight of you waving that light in the middle of the road!"

"Poor old Daddy." She threw an arm about his neck. "You weren't half as frightened as I was. Those men were pelting down the road behind me and –"

Her father broke in. "Well, they seem to have disappeared now. Let me hear the beginning."

In a few short sentences, Dorothy told him.

"So you see," she ended. "There's nothing more for us to do about it, I guess, except to put some gas in my tank, and go home."

"Wait a minute. Hand over that flash, please." He opened the door and with an agility surprising in so large a man, sprang into the wet road and ran toward the gap in the wall.

As he ran, Dorothy saw a light flash in his hand. Then he went out of sight behind the wall but she could still see the gleam

through the bushes. Presently he came back to where she was standing beside the car.

“Vamoosed!” He tossed the flash onto the seat. “As there’s no car on the road ahead they must have beat it over the field. I wonder why they didn’t hold you up when you’d stopped for those red lanterns? Strange. Also, why do you suppose they switched on your lights?”

“It’s beyond me. Well, Daddy, if you’ll pull alongside we’ll siphon the gas. This place and the rain and everything gives me the shivers. Let’s talk it over when we get home.”

Soon they were under way, and they continued on to the Dixon place without further incident.

“Your shoes are soaking wet, Dorothy. Go up to your room and change them, my dear,” decreed her father. “While you’re doing that, I’ll phone Walters.”

When Dorothy came downstairs her father was in the living room.

“Come over here and sit down,” he said, making room for her on the lounge beside him. “Terry has not come home yet. The family pretend not to be worried – and that’s that. I said nothing about what happened to you on your way back from Silvermine.”

His daughter groaned. “Oh dear – if we could only figure out – but those three red lights seem to cinch things, Daddy.”

“Hardly that. But they do make it look as though this disappearing business is pretty serious – ”

Dorothy interrupted him eagerly: “Then there isn’t any doubt

in your mind but that our experience at the club this afternoon is accountable for Terry's disappearance, and my holdup?"

Mr. Dixon, who was filling his pipe, struck a match and puffed contemplatively.

"We can't jump at conclusions, my dear. My first idea about that plane may be the right one. On the other hand, this business tonight certainly forces one's suspicions. If Terry doesn't show up by morning, we'll turn the matter over to the police and start a thorough search. But I do think it wise to keep the story of the amphibian and its pilot to ourselves."

Dorothy nodded. "You mean that if we spread our suspicions to the police, they'd let the cat out of the bag and the man would be on his guard?"

"That's just it. And then you must remember that we really have no facts to go on as yet."

"Well, I think I'll go to bed," yawned Dorothy. "Do you mind if I try to trail that plane with my own?"

"Not if you'll promise to be careful, dear. In fact, I think it's a good idea. But one thing I must insist upon and that is – you're to keep me posted. No more of this taking things into your own hands, as you did with the Martinellis. It's too dangerous. Confide in your old Dad, girl, and we'll do a lot better."

Dorothy was half way across the room, but here she turned and ran back to her father and kissed him. "Of course I'll tell you everything. Isn't it too bad, though, that Bill Bolton is away? He'd have been a wonderful help. Have you any idea what he is

doing?”

“All I know is what his father told me – that he’s off on some government job. It may be Secret Service work, again. Anyway, he’s to be away indefinitely, I understand. Now, just one thing more.”

“Oh, *Daddy!* *More* instructions to take care of myself?”

Mr. Dixon laughed at her outraged expression, and relit his pipe.

“Not exactly – you seem to have the luck to generally land on your feet. But, I want you to consider this: if the bearded aviator or his associates *are* behind Terry’s disappearance, they kidnapped him because they thought he would recognize the man. And they tried to do the same thing to you tonight.”

“Why on earth should they fear being recognized?”

“Haven’t the slightest idea. It depends on what they’re up to. There must be a strong motive behind it. You don’t strike a match unless you want a light. But unless we’re chasing moonbeams, something illegal is going on and if there is a hunt for Terry tomorrow, I don’t want you to take part in it.”

“You think they’ll try to get me again?”

“It is highly possible.” Her father got to his feet and put his hands on her shoulders. “So promise me you won’t go running about country byroads in your car, even during daylight hours. If you must go out at night, either I or Arthur must be in the car with you.” (Arthur was the Dixons’ chauffeur-gardener.) “There’s no use trying to pretend I’m not worried about this mysterious

business. Be a good girl and don't make it harder for me, please."

"I'll be good, Daddy. If I find out anything tomorrow, I'll report at dinner."

"That's my girl," he beamed, and kissed her good night. "I shall nose about, myself, a bit. I'm sure that you and Terry know that bearded aviator or some of his friends. Otherwise, he wouldn't be so perturbed about recognition. Unless we're all wet, Dorothy, this affair is made up of local people. Mind your step – and we'll see. Go to bed now and get a good rest – I'm coming upstairs as soon as I've locked up."

Chapter IV

THE THUNDERHEAD

Dorothy telephoned the Walters next morning, to learn from a maid that Terry was still missing, and that Mr. Walters was down in the village, putting the matter in the hands of the police.

“May I speak to Mrs. Walters?” she asked.

“I’m afraid not, miss. Mrs. Walters has been up all night. Doctor Brown has given her a sleeping powder and issued orders that she is not to be disturbed.”

“If there is anything that I can do,” said Dorothy, “telephone me.”

“Thank you, miss. I’ll tell Mr. Walters when he comes home.”

Dorothy rang off and went about her household duties with a heavy heart.

Later on she motored to the village to do her marketing, and upon her return found that her father had telephoned. She immediately called up the New Canaan Bank, of which he was president.

“Any news, Daddy?” she inquired anxiously, as soon as she was put through to him.

“That you, Dorothy?” she heard him say. “Yes – Terry’s car has been found.”

“Where, Daddy?”

“On a wood road in the hills back of the Norwalk reservoir. The car was empty. A farmer driving through there found it early this morning and phoned the license number to the police.”

“But what in the world could Terry have been doing way over there? I know that road. It’s no more than a bridle path – the reservoir is three or four miles beyond Silvermine.”

“My opinion is that Terry was never anywhere near the place,” explained her father. “He was undoubtedly held up, removed to another car and his own run over to the spot where it was found.”

“No sign of him, I suppose?”

“No. I’ve talked with Walters. The poor man is nearly off his head with worry. We’re getting up searching parties to cooperate with the police. I’ll see you at dinner tonight. It will be impossible for me to get home at noon.”

“I’ll hope to have some news for you, then,” said Dorothy.

“Going up in spite of the rain?”

“I’ve got to. We can’t afford to waste time – the weather’s not so bad.”

“There are storm warnings out all along the coast.”

“I’ll be careful, Daddy.”

“All right. Bye-bye till dinner time.”

“Bye.”

She hung up the receiver and for the rest of the morning, busied herself about the house, determined not to let her mind dwell upon the darker side of this latest development. After lunch she changed into flying clothes and went out to the hangar.

Unlocking the doors, she set to work filling the amphibian's gasoline tanks. Then she went over the engine carefully and gave it a short ground test. After that, the instruments came under her inspection. Altogether, she gave her plane a thorough overhauling, which was not entirely necessary, but kept her from thinking and helped to kill time.

About twenty minutes to five she ran the amphibian out of the hangar and took off into the teeth of a fine rain. It was no part of her plan to fly in the neighborhood of the Beach Club until the plane she was seeking should put in an appearance. Her self-imposed duty was to spot the mysterious amphibian and to follow it to its destination without allowing the pilot or an understudy to spot her.

So instead of banking and heading for Tokeneke, when her bus had sufficiently topped the trees, she continued to keep the stick back so as to maintain a proper climbing angle. Back in her first thirty hours of early flight training, it would have been difficult for her to keep *Will-o'-the-Wisp* (more often termed Willie or Wispy) at the correct angle safely below the stalling point, unless she could first recognize that angle by the position of the plane's nose relative to the horizon. On a wet day like this with an obscured horizon it would have been well-nigh impossible: at best, a series of bad stalls would have been the result. But now her snapping gray eyes sparkled with exhilaration; she no longer needed the horizon as a guide. Between leveling off every thousand feet or so, to keep the engine from overheating, she

shot *Will-o'-the-Wisp* up to six thousand, maintaining the proper angle of climb by the "feel" of the plane alone.

With her altimeter indicating the height she wanted, she leveled off again; then, executing a sharp reverse control or "flipper" turn to the left she resumed straight flight again by the application of up aileron and opposite rudder. The plane was now headed south, several points to the west of the Beach Club.

The visibility was even poorer than at a lower level, but the young pilot knew this part of the country as she knew her own front lawn. Either dropping or swerving her plane's nose at frequent intervals so as to get an unimpeded view ahead, she passed over the wooded ridges toward the shore, over the city of Stamford and out over the slate grey waters of Long Island Sound.

That body of water is some six or eight miles wide at this point, and upon reaching the opposite shore, Dorothy commenced a patrol of the Long Island shore line from Lloyds' Neck, which lies just west of Oyster Bay, to the farther side of Smithtown Bay, a distance of fifteen or sixteen miles. And as she flew, she kept a sharp lookout for planes appearing out of the murk toward the Connecticut shore.

Since she knew it was the bearded aviator's practice to fly at a comparatively low altitude, Dorothy chose to keep *Will-o'-the-Wisp* at this greater height for two reasons. An airplane flying far above another plane is much more unlikely to be noticed by the pilot of the lower plane than one flying at his own level or below

him. Then again, by keeping to the higher air, Dorothy, under normal weather conditions, was bound to increase her range of vision proportionately. Her plan was a good one. But weather is not a respecter of plans. The visibility, poor enough when she started, gradually grew worse and worse. Although what wind there was seemed to have died, long curling tongues of mist crept out of the east, while above her head she saw black thunder clouds, sinking lower and lower.

Now one of the first things any aviator learns is that fog must be avoided at all costs. Any attempt to land in it is attended by considerable danger. Dorothy knew only too well that in case of a fog bank cutting the plane off from its destination, the flight must be discontinued by a landing, or by return to the point of departure.

She glanced overside again. Long Island Sound was no longer visible.

“He’s late now, unless I’ve missed him,” she said to herself. “I’ll finish this leg of the patrol and if he doesn’t show up by the time I’m over Oyster Bay, *Willie* and I will head for home.”

Pushing her stick slightly forward to decrease her altitude, she continued along her course.

Three minutes later, she realized her mistake. The wisps of fog seemed to gather together, and *Will-o'-the-Wisp* sank into an opaque bank that blinded her.

“Gee, but I’m stupid!” she mumbled. “What was it that text-book I read only yesterday said? ‘In the event of general

formation of fog below, an immediate landing must be made before it becomes thick enough to interfere seriously with the approach.' Heavens, what a fool I am! Now that we're in it, though, I might as well see if it thins out nearer the water."

Her compass told her she was flying almost due west. Throttling down the engine, she pushed her stick still farther forward, at the same time applying right aileron and hard right rudder. As the proper gliding angle was reached, she neutralized her elevators and held the nose up as necessary. Next, she checked her wing with the ailerons and eased her rudder pressure. Then having made a quarter-spiral with a change in course of 90 degrees, she applied left aileron and hard left rudder until the wings were level laterally, and with her stick still held forward, continued to descend in a straight glide until she was within fifteen hundred feet of the water. The plane was heading directly back across Long Island Sound toward the Connecticut shore.

But each moment the fog seemed to grow more dense. To land blindly meant a certain nose-in and was out of the question. And even if the mist did not hold to the water's level, to fly lower meant the chance of striking the mast or spar of a ship, a lighthouse, perhaps, or anything else that came her way.

"We're up against it, *Wispy*," she murmured, opening the throttle and pulling back her stick. "If we can't go down, at least we can 'go above,' as they say in the Navy. Beat it for the heavens, my dear. This beastly fog can't run all the way to Mars!"

Dorothy was not frightened, although she knew how serious was her predicament. No pilot likes flying blind in a fog. With the knowledge that what one sees, one hits, it is a nerve-wracking experience.

But Dorothy's nerves were good – none better – and she sent her plane into a long, steady climb, hoping for the best and keeping her vivid imagination well within control.

Headed into the north, she continued her climb, leveling off every few thousand feet to ease the strain on her engine. When the altimeter marked thirteen thousand she began to worry, for the service ceiling of her plane was but two thousand higher. The cold damp of the thick mist penetrated like a knife. Hemmed in by the dank grey walls, she could barely distinguish the nose of her ship. The active needles of the altimeter and rate of climb indicator were the only visible signs that *Will-o'-the-Wisp* was moving at all.

Fourteen thousand feet – intense physical discomfort, added to the nervous strain, were becoming intolerable. Dorothy clenched her chattering teeth in an effort to retain her control. Then with a suddenness astonishing, the fog parted and she sailed into clear air.

Below her the heavy mist swirled and rolled like a sluggish sea, grey-yellow streaked with dirty streamers, while directly ahead loomed a towering mass of cotton-like clouds rising tier upon tier as far as she would see.

A quick glance over her shoulder and to the sides, brought

forth the fact that this small pocket of free air was entirely surrounded by similar cloud formations. There was no time for thought. Automatically, her hand clasp the stick shot forward, bringing down the nose to the position of level flight, and she drove the amphibian straight at the thunderhead. Immediately afterward the plane passed into the cloud, and like a leaf caught in an inverted maelstrom, it was whipped out of her control.

Gripped by tremendous air forces, the amphibian was shot up and sideways, at a speed that burned Dorothy's lungs. Tossed about like a rag doll, with her safety-belt almost cutting her body in two, she was thrown hither and yon with the plane, blind, and without the slightest idea as to her position.

Never in her wildest nightmares had she dreamed that a heavy plane, weighing close to four thousand pounds when empty, could be tossed about in such fashion by currents of the air.

For a space of time that seemed years, she was entirely away from the controls. But gradually, with infinite effort and in spite of the whirling jolts of her air steed, Dorothy managed to hook her heels under the seat. A second later she had caught the stick and was pushing it forward into the instrument board.

Will-o'-the-Wisp reared like an outlawed bronco, then dived until the airspeed indicator showed one hundred and sixty-five miles per hour. Still her downward speed was less than the rate of the upward draft, for the rate of climb indicator told the frenzied girl that the plane was being lifted fourteen hundred feet per minute.

Still diving at 45 degrees, the phenomenal force of the updraft carried the plane to the mushroom top of the cloud, where with a jar like an elevator hitting the ceiling, it was flung forth into the outer air.

Chapter V

HIDE AND SEEK

The strong air current which spread horizontally over the thunderhead blew Dorothy's plane sideways and away from the cloud. An instant later it was roaring downward in the thin air, quite beyond her control, a self-propelled projectile rushing to its doom.

While shooting upward in the cloud, the violent and intensely rapid gyrations of the airship caused her safety belt to become unclasped, and had her parachute not caught in the cowling, she must have been flung clear of the plane to a horrible death far below.

With her heels still hooked beneath the pilot's seat, she wrenched the parachute loose. Then she closed the throttle and half-suffocated by the force of the wind and lack of breathable oxygen, she commenced to pull the stick slowly backward.

A glance at the altimeter showed a height of eighteen thousand feet – three air miles above earth – and three thousand feet above *Will-o'-the-Wisp's* service ceiling.

Notwithstanding the shut-off engine, the speed of the diving plane was terrific. Dorothy felt the grinding jar of the wind-strained wings as the nose began to rise in answer to the pull of the elevators; and wondered helplessly if they would hold.

The air pressure was agony to her eardrums. Her head reeled. She was well-nigh exhausted. She no longer cared very much what happened.

The plane dropped into a blanket of fog. She felt the wet mist on her face, refreshing and reanimating her. Suddenly she realized that her parachute was starting to fill and would shortly pull her out of the cockpit. With her free hand she reached under the seat and brought forth a sheath knife. A frenzied second later she had rid herself of the flapping bag. As it flew overboard, she tightened her safety belt and placed her cramped feet back on the steering pedals.

Though still fog-blind, she could at least breathe comfortably now as the plane lessened speed in descent. *Will-o'-the-Wisp* still shook and groaned, but no longer fought the pull of the stick. Up came the nose, slowly but surely and with her ailerons functioning once more, Dorothy gained control and sent the plane into a normal glide. The altimeter marked five thousand feet. The dive had been over two miles long.

Another fifteen hundred feet and gradually the mist lightened until it became mere wisps of smoky cloud. Long Island Sound had been left behind. Below lay the wooded hills and valleys of the Connecticut ridge country, cloaked in multi-shaded green. As she still headed north, Dorothy knew now that she had been blown beyond New Canaan. She gave the plane hard right rudder and right aileron and sent it swinging into a long half spiral, which, completed, headed her south again. Almost directly

below, she recognized the Danbury Fair Grounds, with home just twenty miles away.

Again her hand sought the throttle and as *Will-o'-the-Wisp* snorted, then roared, Dorothy breathed a thankful sigh. Fifteen minutes later she had housed her plane in its hangar, and was limping up the porch steps of her home.

Lizzie, the Dixons' servant, met her in the hall.

"Whatever is the matter, Miss Dorothy? You've had an accident – you're half-killed – I know you are! There's blood all over your face – "

Her young mistress interrupted, smiling:

"You're wrong again, Lizzie. No accident, though I know I look pretty awful. I feel that way, too, if you ask me – "

"But the blood, Miss Dorothy?"

"It's from a nosebleed, Lizzie. I assure you I'm not badly hurt. If you'll help me out of these rags and start a warm bath running, I'll be ever so much obliged. A good soaking in hot water will fix me up. Then," she added, "I think I'll be real luxurious and have my dinner in bed."

When the solicitous Lizzie brought up the dinner tray three-quarters of an hour later, a tired but decidedly sprucer Dorothy, in pink silk pyjamas, was leaning back against her pillows.

"My word, I'm hungry!" She seized a hot roll and began to butter it. "I'm off bucking thunderheads for life, Lizzie. But you can take it from me, that kind of thing gives you a marvelous appetite!"

“Yes, miss, I’m glad,” returned Lizzie, who had no idea what Dorothy was talking about. “You certainly look better.”

“By the way, what’s become of Daddy? Hasn’t he got home yet?”

“Oh, Miss Dorothy, I’m so sorry. Sure and I forgot to tell ye – Mr. Dixon won’t be home for dinner.”

“Did he telephone?”

“No, miss. He came home about quarter to five and packed his suitcase. He said to tell you he’d been called to Washington on business and he’d be gone a couple of days. Arthur drove him to Stamford to catch the New York express – he didn’t have much time.”

Dorothy helped herself to a spoonful of jellied bouillon. “Any other message?”

“Yes, miss. He said that Mister Terry hadn’t been found yet. I asked him b’cause I thought you’d like to know. That was all he said. I’m sure sorry I forgot it when you came in, but I – ”

“That’s all right, Lizzie, I understand. You come back for the tray in half an hour, will you? And if you find me asleep, don’t wake me up. I’m tired to death. I need a long rest and I’m going to take it.”

When Lizzie came back she found Dorothy deep in the sleep of exhaustion. She lowered the window blinds against the early morning light and picking up the tray from the end of the bed, tiptoed from the room.

Morning broke bright and clear with no sign of yesterday’s

mist and rain. Dorothy remained in bed for breakfast and it took but little persuasion on the part of Lizzie to keep her there till lunch time. She still felt stiff and bruised and was only too content to rest and doze.

Toward noon she rose and dressed in her flying clothes. Immediately after lunch she went out to the hangar. She slipped into a serviceable and grubby pair of overalls, and spent the afternoon in giving *Will-o'-the-Wisp* a thorough grooming. At quarter to five she was in the air and headed for Long Island Sound.

Half an hour later, with an altitude of ten thousand feet, she was cruising over yesterday's course above the Long Island shore, when she spied a biplane coming across the Sound. In an instant she had her field glasses out and focussed on the newcomer.

"That's him!" she murmured ungrammatically, though with evident relief. "Now for a pleasant little game of hide-and-see!"

The *Mystery Plane* was flying far below, so continuing on her course at right angles, she watched it with hurried glances over her shoulder. When she reached the Long Island Shore line, it was a mile or so behind and below Dorothy's tailplane. So waiting only long enough to be sure that her quarry was headed across the Island, she banked her plane and sent it on a wide half circle to the right. Long Island, at this point, she knew was about twenty miles wide.

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