

Lavell Edith

Linda Carlton, Air Pilot



Edith Lavell

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Chapter I *A Dangerous Ride*

A blue sports roadster, driven by a girl in a lovely crêpe suit of the same color, threaded its way through the traffic of Spring City's streets to the concrete road that led to the aviation field on the outskirts. Passing the city's limits, the car sped along under the easy assurance of its competent driver, whose eyes were bluer than its paint, deeper than the dress that she was wearing. They were shining now with happiness, for the end of this ride promised the most thrilling experience of her life. That afternoon Linda Carlton was to have her first flight in an airplane!

She parked her car outside of the field and locked it cautiously. Jumping out, she fairly skipped inside the boundary.

A tall, good-looking young man in a flier's suit came from one of the hangars to meet her.

"Miss Carlton?" he said, extending his hand.

"Yes – Mr. Mackay. You see I'm here – a little early, I expect. You haven't forgotten your promise?"

His pleasant face darkened, and he looked doubtfully at the sky.

"I'm afraid it may rain, Miss Carlton. We've suspended pleasure trips for today. But perhaps tomorrow –"

"Oh, no!" she cried in deep disappointment, and the young man believed that her eyes grew moist. "I can't get away tomorrow, or any other day this week. You see I'm a senior at school, and I'm just rushed to death."

"Well, that's too bad," he said, looking again at the sky. "And of course it may not rain after all. But orders are orders, you know."

The girl looked down at the ground, probably, he thought, to hide the tears that would come to her eyes. She was so pretty, so serious, so anxious to go up. It evidently wasn't only a whim with her; she really wanted to fly – like Amelia Earhart, and Elinor Smith. How he hated to deny her!

"Isn't there something you could do?" she finally asked. "Take me up as one of your friends – not as a visitor to the aviation field... Why, Mr. Mackay, suppose your sister came to see you today, wouldn't you be allowed to take her up?"

"Yes," he replied, smiling. "But that would be on my responsibility, not the school's."

"Then," she pleaded, and she was radiant again with enthusiasm, "couldn't *I* be your responsibility?"

He nodded, won over to her wishes.

"If you put it that way, Miss Carlton, I can't refuse! But I'll have to take you in the plane I'm working on now – making some tests with – and it isn't the most reliable plane in the world. Not one we use to take visitors up in."

"But if it's safe enough for you, it's safe enough for me. I'm satisfied."

"I'm afraid your parents wouldn't be," he objected.

"There I think you're wrong," she asserted. "My father believes in taking chances. He has always let me do dangerous things – ride horseback, and drive a car and swim far out in the ocean... And my mother is dead."

"Very well, then," agreed Mackay. "Please come over here with me. I have been trying to fix up an old biplane, and I think I have her in shape now. But we'll both wear parachutes for precaution."

Her heart fluttering wildly from happiness, but not at all from fear, Linda accompanied the young flier across the huge field to the runway, where a biplane was resting in readiness for its test. Mackay put her into the cockpit, examined the engine again, and the parachutes, helped her to fasten one of the latter on, in case of an accident, and started the motor. A minute later the plane taxied forward, faster and faster, until it rose from the ground.

"Oh!" cried Linda, in a tone of deepest joy, although her companion could not hear her for the roar of the motor. "Oh, I'm so happy!"

Up, up, up they went, until they reached the clouds, where the atmosphere seemed misty and foggy. But it did not matter to Linda that the sky was not blue; nothing could spoil the ecstasy she experienced in knowing that at last she was where she had always longed to be.

Never for a moment was she the least bit dizzy. The sensation of floating through the air was more marvelous than anything she had ever dreamed of.

For some minutes she just allowed herself to dream of the future when she herself would be in control of a plane, sailing thus through the skies. Then she remembered with a start that if she ever expected her ambitions to be fulfilled, it would be necessary to learn how flying was accomplished. She began to examine everything in the cockpit. It was too noisy to ask her companion any questions, but she watched him carefully and tried to figure out what she could for herself. She identified the joystick, which controlled the plane, and she recognized the compass and the altimeter, which registered the height – now sixteen hundred feet – to which they had climbed. All the while she made mental notes of questions she would ask her pilot when they reached the ground.

Up, up they went until at last they were beyond the clouds, and saw the bright sunshine about them. It was symbolic to Linda; she resolved that in after life, whenever she was unhappy or distressed, she would fly on wings to the clear sunlight above. It was almost as if there she would actually find God.

She was so happy that it was some time before she noticed the queer sound the motor was making. Then, glancing questioningly at her companion, she saw a tight, drawn look about his lips, a ghastly pallor in his face. Something was evidently wrong! The motor made an uneven sound, threatening to stall, and the plane went into a tail-spin. Mackay was frantically leaning forward, doing something she did not understand.

"Motor's dying!" he cried, as he managed to right the plane. His voice shook with greater dread than he had ever before experienced. For, fearless though he was for himself, he was scared to death for the pretty girl at his side.

What a fool he had been, he thought, to allow her to come! He would give his own chances of safety that minute if she could be sure of her life! So young, so sweet, so utterably lovely! A great lump rose in his throat, as he took another look at his engine. But he was helpless.

Grim with terror, he pointed to her parachute. And then, to his amazement, he realized how perfectly calm she was!

"You step off first," he said, thankful they both had their parachutes. "I'll stay with the plane as long as I can."

Never in his life did Ted Mackay go through such a horrible moment as that instant when Linda Carlton, at a height of two thousand feet, stepped so bravely from the edge of the plane into the yawning space below. Even if he himself were killed, he could never know sharper agony. Yet the girl herself was gamely smiling!

He managed to pilot the plane a little farther, in the hope that when it did crash, it would not come anywhere near her, and then, when he could no longer keep it from falling, he stepped off himself.

Down he went, and his parachute opened with perfection, but he, in his tenseness, thought only of Linda, and of her luck with hers. And he prayed as he had never prayed before in his life, not even at his most perilous moments, where death seemed most certain.

No descent ever seemed so slow, so prolonged, but at last he reached the ground. And there, still smiling at him, was lovely Linda Carlton!

Chapter II

Graduation

"Thank Heaven you're safe!" cried Ted Mackay, as he disentangled himself from his parachute. "You certainly are a game little sport, Miss Carlton!"

"I don't see why," returned Linda. "People jump from planes with parachutes every day!"

"I know. But it was all so sudden. And it is always a pity when anyone's first flight ends disastrously. It makes you feel that you never want to see an airplane again."

"Well, it won't make me feel that way," replied the girl, lightly. "I'd go up again right away if you'd take me."

"I'm afraid I can't. But I'm mighty glad to hear you talk that way. I think you're cut out for a flier. Now let's hunt the wreck."

After they had located the damaged plane, and examined its shattered pieces, they hiked back to the aviation field together, talking all the while about flying. Linda asked Ted one question after another, which he answered as well as he could without having a plane to demonstrate, and he promised to lend her some books on the subject.

"You must come over and take a course of instruction at our Flying School," he advised. "As soon as you can."

"Oh, I hope to!" she assured him, eagerly. "Maybe after I graduate. Why, I'm almost eighteen! Most boys of my age who cared as much about it as I do would have been flying a couple of years. Because you can get a license when you're sixteen, can't you?"

"Yes... It's going to be fun to teach you," he added, as they approached the field, and Linda stopped beside her car. "Good-by! I'll expect to see you soon!"

His hope, however, was not fulfilled until two weeks later, when Linda again slipped over to the field, between engagements, for another ride in the air. This time she was only one among a group of visitors, and she went up in a plane that was both new and trustworthy.

Her time was so limited – it was a week before Commencement – that she had only chance for a few words with Ted Mackay. She told him that her class-day was the following Friday, and she timidly invited him to a dance which she was giving at her home the night before the event.

"Thanks awfully," he said, more thrilled than he dared tell her at the invitation, "but I couldn't possibly come... You see, Miss Carlton – I wouldn't fit in with your set."

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Linda in disappointment, "We're not snobs, just because we go to Miss Graham's school!"

"Well, then, put it this way," he added: "I'm absolutely on my own – and I don't even have evening clothes!"

She smiled at his frankness, but she did not know that he told only part of his story – that he was supporting his mother and helping to put his younger sister through High School.

"All right, then – have it your own way – Ted," she agreed, holding out her hand. "I'll hope to see you some time after class-day."

From that hour on, it seemed as if every moment was filled with more things than she could possibly do. At last Friday came – as hot as any day in mid-summer, though it was still early June.

Soon after two o'clock the audience began to arrive, and at half-past, the twenty-two graduates, in their white dresses, with their large bouquets or American Beauties or pink rose-buds, filed in to take their seats on the flower-decked platform in the garden of the school grounds.

Fans waved, and the flowers wilted visibly, but nobody seemed to notice. For with the exercises the fun began, and everybody listened intently to the jokes and the compliments which came in turn to each and every member of Linda Carlton's class.

After Louise Haydock, the president, made her brief speech of greeting, the presenter took charge, and her remarks and her presents were clever without being cruel. Most of the latter she had purchased from the five-and-ten, but they all carried a point. To Linda Carlton she gave a toy car, because she thought that was what the latter was most interested in, and then she asked her to wait a moment, that she had something else for her.

Linda stood still, smiling shyly, and wondering whether her next gift would have anything to do with airplanes.

"Linda," continued the presenter, "we have this bracelet for you – in token of our affection. You have been voted the most popular girl in the class."

"Oh!" exclaimed Linda, and her eyelids fluttered in embarrassment. She was so surprised that she didn't know what to say. Some of the other girls, who had been secretly hoping for this honor, which was always kept as a surprise until class-day, had even prepared speeches. But Linda had never given the matter a thought.

"I – I – thank you so much," she finally managed to stammer, as she stepped forward to receive the bracelet.

The audience stirred and clapped, for the girl was a favorite with everybody in Spring City.

"She certainly looks sweet today," whispered Mrs. Haydock, the mother of Linda's best friend. "There is nothing so becoming as white."

"Yes," agreed her aunt, who had taken care of Linda ever since her own mother had died when she was only a baby, "but I do wish she hadn't worn those flowers. She had half a dozen bouquets of American Beauties, and she picked out those ordinary pink roses! Sometimes Linda is queer."

"Yes, but who sent them?" inquired the other woman. "Probably the reason lies there! Ralph Clavering?"

"Ralph Clavering wouldn't buy a cheap bouquet like that – with all his father's millions!" exclaimed Miss Carlton. "No; he did send flowers, but Linda didn't wear them. These had no card."

Their conversation stopped abruptly, for the class prophet was being introduced. Twenty-one girls on the platform leaned forward expectantly, anxious to hear what the future held in store for them. Of course nobody actually believed that this girl could foretell their lives, but it was always fascinating to speculate about their fortunes.

She began with the customary jokes.

"Sara Wheeler" (the thinnest girl in the class), "is going into the food business, but will eat up the profits. However, she'll weigh two hundred pounds before she goes bankrupt..."

"Sue Emery, on the contrary, will finally succeed in reducing her weight – when she gets away from these girls and stops talking about it, instead of doing it – until she becomes Hollywood's star dancer..."

"Linda Carlton and Louise Haydock – the double I's, we call them, because they are always together – will both marry wealthy men and become the society leaders of Spring City..."

At these words, Linda's Aunt Emily nudged Louise's mother, and smiled.

"That would suit us, wouldn't it, Mrs. Haydock?" she asked.

"Just what we want for our girls!" nodded her companion, in satisfaction.

It was over at last, the fun and the excitement, the class-day that the girls would keep in their memories for the rest of their lives. Hot, but happy, the graduates came down from the platform to find their friends and their families. Some of them wanted to linger, to talk things over, but Linda Carlton was anxious to get away. It had been wonderful to receive that beautiful bracelet, but somehow it would spoil it to talk about it.

And, in spite of all her happiness, there was a little hurt in her heart. Her father hadn't come home for his only child's graduation!

She came to where her aunt was standing, and put her arm through hers.

"Are you ready, Aunt Emily?" she asked.

"Of course, dear – if you want to go so soon. But wouldn't you like to stay and see your friends, and thank them?"

"Oh, I'll write notes," replied Linda.

"There's Ralph Clavering over there," remarked Miss Carlton, nodding in the direction of a tall, well-dressed young man on the other side of the lawn. "You could thank him for his flowers. He'll probably think it queer if you don't, especially since you didn't wear them."

Linda smiled carelessly.

"Ralph Clavering probably sent roses to half a dozen girls today," she said lightly. "It's his boast that he's in love with the whole class!.. No, I want to go home, Auntie. I'm tired."

"Certainly, dear. We'll go right away."

Nodding to friends as they walked across the beautiful garden where the out-door exercises had been held, they came to Linda's shining sports roadster, parked just outside the gate. It had been her father's present to her on the day that she was sixteen, and she had taken such care of it that even now, after a year and a half, it looked almost new.

"I think it was wonderful for you to receive the bracelet as the most popular girl," Miss Carlton said, as she got into the car. "Everything was really perfect – even the prophecy about your future."

Linda frowned at the recollection of those words; she hadn't liked that prophecy at all. As perhaps only Ted Mackay realized, her ambition was to fly, to fly so expertly that she could go to strange lands, do a man's work perhaps, carry out missions of importance. She wanted to be known as one of the best – if not *the* best – aviatrix in America!

Ever since she was a child she had had some such longing. Perhaps it was her father who had been responsible for it. Restless and unhappy after her mother's death, he had given his baby to his sister to take care of, and had wandered from one place to another, only coming home every year or so, to see how Linda was growing. As if to make up to her for his absences, he brought her marvelous presents – presents that were intended rather for a boy than for a girl. Early in life she had learned to shoot a gun, ride a horse, and drive a car. No wonder that she dreamed of airplanes!

Her aunt, on the other hand, disapproved of this way of bringing up a girl. She wanted Linda to be just like the other fashionable wealthy young ladies in Spring City, to spend her time at parties and at the Country Club, and later to marry a rich man – like Ralph Clavering. Naturally the words of the class prophet pleased her.

Nor had she any idea that Linda did not agree with her, for her niece had always kept her dreams to herself. There was no use talking about them, Linda thought, for her aunt would never understand.

"And I guess the prophet was about right," continued Miss Carlton. "Any girl that gets seven bunches of flowers from seven different boys, won't have any difficulty getting married."

"But I don't want to get married, Aunt Emily!" protested Linda.

"Not yet, dear – of course. Why, you're only seventeen! I couldn't spare you now – just when you're free to be at home with me. Besides, I think every girl should have two years at least to do exactly as she pleases!"

Exactly as she pleases! Why, that would mean learning to fly! Oh, if Aunt Emily could know the fierce longing in her heart to become a really fine pilot, to train herself to make her mark in the world!

"So I want you to have a happy, care-free summer," continued the other, totally unaware of her niece's thoughts. "At first I thought we would go abroad, but on the whole that would be too strenuous, after this hectic year. The other girls' mothers agree with me. Mrs. Haydock and I were talking about it today, and we've practically decided to go to a charming resort on Lake Michigan that she says is most exclusive. There you can be with all your best friends."

Linda said nothing; she just couldn't be enthusiastic about wasting three months in that fashion. When she had been hoping to stay at home and enroll for a course at the Spring City Flying School!

"You'd like that, wouldn't you, dear?" persisted Miss Carlton, as Linda steered her car through the wide gates of their spacious estate. "You could swim and drive and play tennis and dance to your

heart's content! With Louise – and – and – the Claverings! Mrs. Haydock told me they are going there too. Why, you'd meet all the right people!"

Linda sighed. Aunt Emily's ideas of the right people were not exactly hers – particularly at the present time. She wanted to meet flyers, men and women noted in the field of aviation, not merely wealthy society folk. But she could not say that to her aunt; the latter was afraid of airplanes, and had only grudgingly given her consent that Linda go up in one. Naturally she had never mentioned her accident.

"Well, we'll talk our plans over later," said Miss Carlton, when Linda failed to make a reply. "I guess you're too tired to think about anything now. And," she added as she stepped from the car, "don't you want to leave your car here, and let Thomas put it away?"

"No, thank you, Auntie," she replied, for she did not like even so capable a chauffeur as Thomas to touch her precious roadster. "It'll only take a minute."

As Linda walked slowly back to the house, she was thinking of Ted Mackay. For she believed those wilted flowers at her waist were his. There had been no card, but they had come from a small flower shop at the other end of Spring City – not the expensive shop that most of her friends patronized. She would go over to the school soon, and thank him. But she would have to tell him that she was obliged to give up her own plans for the summer! Tears of disappointment came into her eyes, and she wondered if there weren't some way it could be arranged. Maybe if she asked her father...

The thought of her father drove everything out of her mind. He hadn't even bothered to come home! Nothing else seemed to matter.

As she entered the living-room, she found her aunt waiting for her.

"Come in, dear – and get some rest," said Miss Carlton. "You look so tired that you actually seem unhappy."

Linda forced a smile.

"Is something worrying you, dear? Or is it just the heat and the rush?"

"I don't know," answered the girl, sinking into a deep chair by the window. "I – I – guess I'm just foolish, Aunt Emily." There was a catch in her voice. "But I'm so disappointed that Daddy didn't come for my Commencement. And I wrote to the ranch three times to remind him!"

Miss Carlton nodded; her brother's ways were past her understanding. How anybody could be so indifferent to such a lovely daughter as Linda! And yet when he was home, no father could be more affectionate. It was just that he was absent-minded, that he hated to be tied down to dates and places. He might be at his ranch in Texas now, or he might have wandered off to Egypt or to South America, without even telling his family. He had been like that, ever since Linda's mother had died.

"I'm not so surprised at that as I am at his not sending you a present," commented Miss Carlton. "He may never have received your letters – or he may drop in a week late... But you mustn't let that worry you, Linda – you have to take your father as he is... And you must get some rest for tomorrow."

"Tomorrow?" repeated the girl, vaguely.

"Yes. The Junior League Picnic. You haven't told me whom you invited."

"Why – I – a –"

"You forgot to invite anybody!" laughed Miss Carlton. "I know you – why, you're something like your father about social engagements, my dear! And of course all the nicest boys will be asked already! I know that Louise is going with Ralph Clavering – Mrs. Haydock told me today."

"That's fine," commented Linda, indifferently. "They're great pals."

"But whom will you ask? At this late date?"

"I really think I'd rather stay home, Auntie, if you don't mind. Because – well – Daddy might come – and I'd hate to be so far away. They're going all the way over to Grier's woods, I recall hearing Dot say, and you know that's at least fifteen miles."

"Of course, dear – do just as you like," replied her aunt, putting her motherly arms around her. "Only don't count too much on your father's coming!"

So Linda went to bed that night, little thinking that her plans would be changed the following morning, and that, in later years, she was to look back upon that day as one of the most wonderful of her whole life!

Chapter III

Her Father's Gift

As Linda had no plans for the day after her class exercises, she had intended to sleep late. But the arrival of her chum, Louise Haydock, accompanied by Ralph Clavering and his Harvard room-mate, Maurice Stetson, changed things for her.

At half-past eight her aunt came into her bedroom, half apologetically, half smiling.

"Linda dear, I want you to wake up," she said. "You have company."

"Yes?" replied the girl sleepily.

"You are rested, aren't you? And it's so much cooler. It's a real June day – the kind the poets write about!"

Linda sat up in bed, and blinked her eyes. Then suddenly she thought of her father. Did Aunt Emily mean he had come?

"Daddy?" she asked excitedly. "Do you mean he's here?"

Miss Carlton's smile faded; she had not meant to mislead her niece. It was cruel to disappoint her.

"No, dear. It's only Louise – with Ralph and another boy. They want you to wake up, and go on the picnic."

"Oh, I see... But you know I didn't invite anybody, Aunt Emily."

"That's just it. You're to go with this other boy. He's Ralph's room-mate, and he's here on a visit. You will go, won't you, dear?"

"Yes, of course, if Lou wants me to. I'll get dressed right away... And Auntie, may I have some strawberries up here, to eat after I take my shower? That's all the breakfast I'll want."

"Certainly, dear. I'll send Anna up right away. And how soon shall I tell Louise that you'll be ready?"

"Ten minutes!"

Linda jumped out of bed, and began to sing as she took her cold shower. It was a wonderful day – a good world after all! Of course the picnic would be fun; she was glad now that she wasn't going to miss it. Lou was a peach to arrange things for her in this way! And it would be exciting to meet a new man. She wondered what he would be like, and hoped she would find him nice. But, even if she didn't, it wouldn't be necessary to stay with him all day. There wasn't much "two's-ing" in their crowd.

Ten minutes later she found her visitors on the porch, singing and amusing themselves, for Miss Carlton had gone to oversee the packing of Linda's lunch. Ralph introduced his friend, Maurice Stetson, a short, light-haired youth, who was utterly at ease with everybody, and who seemed to think that he was born to be funny. Indeed, he called himself "the prince of wise-crackers." Linda, who was both sensitive and shy, was afraid she would be made uncomfortable by his comments.

"Miss *Linda* Carlton," he repeated, solemnly shaking her hand. "The famous Lindy's namesake?.. Let's see – what year was that when he flew the Atlantic? About twenty-seven? Why, you can't be more than three years old!"

Linda smiled; she really couldn't laugh at the silly remark, though the others seemed to think him exceedingly witty.

"And is your ambition flying?" he asked.

Linda blushed; she had no desire to admit her dreams and ambitions to the general public.

"Doesn't everybody want to fly now-a-days?" she countered.

"Not your uncle Maurice!" replied the youth, gravely. "My dad gave me a plane, and I wrecked it. I'm through! My flying almost took me to the angels!"

"What's this?" interrupted Miss Carlton, coming out on the porch with a hamper of lunch for the picnic. "You've been in an airplane accident?"

"And how!" he replied, feelingly.

"Now you see, Linda! You better not go over to that field again! I'm so afraid of planes!"

"All right, Aunt Emily," replied the girl, graciously. "You needn't worry today, anyhow. We're going to the picnic in cars."

But, had Miss Carlton seen Maurice Stetson behind the wheel of his yellow sports roadster, hitting seventy-five miles an hour, and all the while keeping up a conversation not only with Linda beside him, but with the couple in the rumble-seat as well, she would not have felt so satisfied.

Nevertheless, nothing happened, and the picnic promised to be lots of fun. The girls had selected a beautiful wooded spot outside of the city, where a lovely stream widened into a small lake, deep enough for swimming.

Most of the others had already arrived in their cars, when Louise's party drove up. Two large tents, on opposite sides of the lake, had been set up early in the morning for bath-houses.

"Everybody into their suits!" cried Sara Wheeler, who seemed to be managing the picnic, because her mother was the chaperon. "First one into the water gets a prize!"

"Then I get it, without even trying," remarked Harriman Smith, a nice boy, and a particular friend of Linda's, "because I have mine on now! I got dressed in it this morning, and carried my other clothing."

"Lazy brute!" exclaimed Maurice, enviously, wishing that he had thought of such a labor-saving device.

In fifteen minutes the whole crowd were in the water, diving and swimming, and ducking each other, and finally dividing off into sides for a game of water-polo. It was only when they actually smelled the steaks that Mrs. Wheeler's cooks were broiling, that they were finally induced to leave the lake and get dressed.

A treasure-hunt through the woods was the program for the afternoon. Linda, who had expected to be coupled with Maurice Stetson for this event, was agreeably surprised to find herself with Ralph Clavering. Louise's doing, in all probability! No doubt she guessed that her chum did not care for Maurice.

They walked along slowly, keeping their eyes on the ground for all possible clues, chatting at intervals about the class-day and the usual gossip, and now and then, when they met other couples, stopping to compare notes. Finally Ralph spoke about his plans for the summer months.

"I'm hoping to persuade your aunt to go to Green Falls with us, Linda," he said. "There will be quite a bunch of us together. Dot Crowley, Sue, Sally Wheeler, and of course Lou and Kit – from your sorority, and some of the boys from our frat, besides several from Spring City. Harry Smith's going to get a job as a life-guard, and Maurice has promised to go. We ought to be able to make whoopee, all right!"

"Sounds good," admitted Linda, absently.

"Yes, and I really think we could pull off some serious work there."

"Serious work?" repeated Linda. As far as she knew, Ralph had never done any real work in his life.

"Yeah. In the competitions, I mean. I think if we go after it tooth and nail, you and I'd make a pretty good team to pull down the cup for the tennis doubles. They have a big meet at the end of the season that's the talk of the whole Great Lakes region... And Sally swings a mean club in golf. And look at Louise's diving!"

"Yes, that's true," agreed Linda. She had always liked golf and tennis and swimming, but somehow this year they had all lost their charm. It was different after you graduated, she decided. Then you wanted to make something out of your life – like Ted Mackay. There was no more time to be wasted.

"Promise me you'll go," begged Ralph, leaning over eagerly and putting his hand on her arm. Instinctively she drew it away, but before she could answer, Louise and Maurice appeared from a cross-path that was hidden by tall bushes.

"Why, there's my little Lindy!" cried Maurice, though Linda was several inches taller than he was. "Grieving for papa?"

"Shedding tears," laughed Linda. But the words made her think of her own father, and she grew sober. Suppose he were home now – waiting for her! He never stayed more than a day; how she would hate to miss him!

"Has anybody found the treasure yet?" she inquired.

"I've found *two* treasures," replied Maurice complacently, looking first at Louise and then at Linda.

"Forget it!" commanded Louise, tersely, lifting her head. She, like Linda, was tall, but in that the resemblance ended. Her dark, sleek hair was short and almost straight, and she wore earrings – even in swimming. She said she felt undressed without them – "practically immodest," were her exact words.

"No, but really – ?" persisted Linda.

A wild shout from Dot Crowley, followed by a chorus of "Whoopee!" from half a dozen others, answered Linda's question immediately. Dot always was lucky. The others ran to the spot where the crowd was gathered, and Dot, a tiny, vivacious blonde, who could take child's parts in the amateur plays, was holding two boxes of golf balls triumphantly up to view.

"Do I have to give one box to that lazy kid?" she demanded, pointing scornfully at her long-legged partner, Jim Valier, who had been languidly following her around. At the time when she had discovered the prize, he was lolling under a tree, resting his "weary bones," as he said, smoking a cigarette.

"Sure you do!" he drawled. "Didn't I supply the brains to our combine?"

"Brains!" repeated Dot. "Where did you get 'em? I'll have to have you arrested for stealing 'em, if that's the case! But here – take your box!"

"Couldn't possibly," he said, waving them aside with his cigarette holder. "Besides, I hardly ever play golf. Too fatiguing."

"How about your school-girl figure?" asked Maurice. "Aren't you afraid if you don't exercise, you'll lose it?"

Everybody, even Linda, laughed, for Jim Valier was about the world's thinnest youth.

"He's really afraid somebody will mistake him for a golf-stick, and bang a ball with him," remarked Ralph.

In groups, and some in pairs, the whole crowd went back to the lake. After all that exercise and excitement, everybody wanted another dip to cool off. It was six o'clock by the time they all piled into their cars, and half-past when Linda reached home.

Hoping to find her father, as she had been hoping every day that week, she dashed up the steps quickly, merely waving good-by to her companions as the sports car shot from the driveway. And then, miraculously, she saw his beloved face at the door!

"Daddy!" she cried rapturously, rushing breathlessly into his arms.

He was taller than Linda, with a straight, lithe figure like that of a much younger man. His hair was dark, with just a little gray at the temples, and his skin deeply tanned from his out-door life. A sort of habitual smile played about his lips, as if he had made up his mind to find life pleasant, no matter what came.

"My dear little girl!" he said, quietly, patting her hair. "Will you forgive me for coming a day too late? Your Aunt Emily tells me that both Commencement and class-day are over – and you are an old Grad now!"

"Yes, but I don't mind, Daddy, so long as you came today!" she replied, squeezing his hand. "Maybe it's better this way, because I've been so rushed lately that I wouldn't have had much time to see you."

"You must tell me all about everything," he said, drawing her arm through his, and leading her down the steps of the porch. Of course he thought he meant what he said, but Linda knew from experience that if she did tell him, he wouldn't be listening. A dreamy expression so often came into his eyes when she chattered, and she would wonder what he was thinking of. Strange lands – or his ranch out west – or perhaps her mother?

"Where are we going?" she asked. "I really ought to dress for dinner, Daddy. You know what picnics are."

"Yes, To be sure. But I want to show you your graduation present."

"My present?" There was excitement in her tone; it was sure to be something wonderful – and unusual. All the girls were wild with envy when Kitty Clavering received a real pearl necklace from her father. All – except Linda. She had no desire for pearls, or for any jewelry, for that matter. She had known that her father's present would be much more thrilling. At least – if he didn't forget!

"You didn't think your old Dad would forget you, did you, Honey?" he asked.

"No – no – of course not... But, Daddy, where is it? Why are we going out back of the house?"

"We have to walk over to our big field across the creek," he explained, mysteriously.

"The big field? Why?.. That's a hot walk, Daddy. No shade at all! If you want a nice walk, we ought to go in the other direction, down towards the orchard, where there are some trees."

"Trees are the one thing we don't want," he replied, solemnly. "You're going to hate trees, after you get my present, daughter."

"Hate – trees?" Linda's eyes were traveling all over the landscape, scanning it in vain for a clow. And then, as they mounted a slight incline, the thing came into sight. The marvelous, wonderful present! Too good to be true! Her heart stopped beating, her legs shook. She clutched at her father for support.

A beautiful, shining airplane! A superb Arrow Sport! The very kind she had been reading about, had been longing some day to possess! And even a hangar, to keep it in safety!

"Daddy!" she gasped, hoarsely.

He was watching her face, rapturously.

"You like it?"

"Oh!" she cried, wrapping her arms around his neck, and suddenly bursting into tears. "How could you know that I wanted it so much?"

He patted her hair, a little embarrassed by her emotion.

"I just tried to imagine what I would want most if I were your age... You know, dear, you're your father's own girl! You look like your mother, but you're much more like me... A strange mixture..." He was talking more to himself now, for Linda was almost running, pulling him along excitedly. "Feminine beauty – with masculine ambition..."

But Linda was not listening. She had reached the plane now, and was walking around it, enthralled. Touching its smooth surface, to make sure that it was not only a dream. Dashing back to hug her father, and then climbing into the cockpit, to examine the controls, the instruments, the upholstery. If she lived to be a hundred years old, no other moment could hold greater happiness than this!

Her father smiled softly in satisfaction. He wanted her to have all the happiness that he had somehow missed. Money couldn't buy it for him; but money spent for his daughter could bring it to him in the only possible way now.

"You're not a bit afraid?" he asked, though he knew from her shining eyes that his question was unnecessary.

"Dad!"

"And now the question is, who can teach you to fly? Unfortunately, the man who brought it here for me couldn't stay, even to explain things to you – although of course there is a booklet. But I understand there's an air school here at Spring City..."

"Yes! Yes!" she interrupted. "I've been there – been up with one of the instructors. Can we drive over for him tonight?"

"My dear, you can't take a lesson at night," he reminded her. "You know that."

"Oh, of course not!" she agreed, laughing at her own folly. "But tomorrow?"

"Yes, certainly. At least we can see about it. You have to pass a physical examination first, I understand."

"And I want to take the regular commercial pilot's course, Daddy! I want to go to the bottom, and learn all about planes, and flying. May I?"

"I don't see why not... You needn't stop for the expense."

Linda blushed; she hadn't been thinking of the expense – she never did. But perhaps she ought to now, for the plane must have cost a lot of money. At the present, however, something else was worrying her.

"It was the time I was thinking of," she admitted. "Aunt Emily wants to go away in a week or so. And oh, Dad, I just couldn't bear to leave this!" There were actually tears in her eyes.

"Of course not, dear. Well, we'll see if we can't compromise with your aunt. Stay at home the rest of June and July, be content with a private pilot's license for the present, and then go away *in* your plane in August. Wouldn't that suit you?"

"To the ground – I mean to the skies!" corrected the happy girl.

"And now we must get back to dinner," he reminded her. "Aunt Emily's waiting."

Solemnly, tenderly, as a mother might kiss her baby, Linda leaned over and kissed the beautiful plane. Then giving her hand to her father, she walked back to the house with him in silence, knowing that now her greatest dream was fulfilled.

Chapter IV

Summer Plans

The news of Linda's magnificent present spread like wildfire. She never knew how it got about, for she didn't call anybody. In fact, she would have preferred to keep it a secret for that evening at least, and just spend her time over the booklet, talking things over with her father.

But of course the rest of the crowd couldn't understand that. These young people, who saw their parents every day of their lives, just couldn't believe that a normal fun-loving girl like Linda would prefer a father's society to theirs. They didn't know that Linda had always longed to know him better, to understand him, to talk over with him her greatest dreams and ambitions. Because there had been nobody to talk to in that intimate fashion. Aunt Emily never had understood her, and never would. The kind-hearted woman saw, of course, that her niece was pleased with her graduation present, but she could not realize the girl's overwhelming joy in the possession of a plane. To her, even a string of imitation pearls would have been more desirable.

They talked their plans over at dinner, Linda's father taking her side in urging that the vacation be postponed until August.

"You don't mind, do you, Emily?" he asked his sister.

"Well, I can't say I don't mind," she replied, a little sharply. "But of course I wouldn't spoil Linda's fun. But I am wondering whether you have been wise, Tom. Linda is tired out; instead of going to school and learning some more, she ought to be resting... But your presents have never shown a great deal of wisdom, I fear."

Her brother laughed.

"Sometimes it's better to be foolish," he remarked.

"Not if Linda breaks her neck!"

"Which she isn't going to do!" contradicted Mr. Carlton, confidently. "Linda's careful – and she's thorough. I know that, from the way she drives her car – and takes care of it."

"Cars and airplanes are different matters!"

"Not so different as you might think. In some ways, cars are more dangerous, because you have to consider traffic – what the other fellow is going to do. And there's so much room in the skies!"

"But if something goes wrong – there's nobody there to help her," objected Miss Carlton.

"Well, Emily, you'd be amazed at the perfection of the airplanes they are putting out now-a-days. They're as different from the old-fashioned ones of the World War, as the first two-cylinder automobiles from the sixes and eights of today."

"But there still are a lot of crashes – and deaths," insisted his sister.

"That doesn't say Linda will crash! Linda is going to be a good pilot – learn it all thoroughly!.. Why, Emily, you don't think I'd be willing to take any chances with my only child, do you – if I didn't consider it safe?"

He smiled fondly at Linda, but his sister drew down the corners of her mouth a trifle scornfully. As if his affection could compare with hers, though Linda wasn't her own child! He saw the girl two or three times a year at the most, while Aunt Emily was with her every day of her life!

"Well," she added, "I'm afraid you'll feel out of the crowd by the time August comes and they have been together all that time at Green Falls!"

"Do you mind missing it, my dear?" her father asked, gently.

"Not a bit!" replied Linda immediately, her eyes shining at the thought of what she was gaining. Miss Carlton abruptly changed the subject.

"Do you remember a man named Clavering, Tom?" she asked.

"I remember the name. Connected with oil, wasn't he? Very wealthy?"

"A millionaire, I think," replied Miss Carlton, as if the news were the most important thing in the world. "Well, he has bought an estate just outside of Spring City, and his daughter has just graduated in Linda's class."

"Yes?" remarked her brother, wondering what possible difference that could make to him.

"Well, the Claverings are planning to spend the summer at Green Falls, on Lake Michigan – the resort that Mrs. Haydock and I have selected... And there is a son in Harvard, who is going to be there."

"Yes?" It still didn't dawn on the man what his sister meant. Perhaps that was because he was not worldly, and money and position didn't mean much to him. Or perhaps it was because it had never occurred to him that his little Linda was old enough to be thinking about getting married.

"You certainly are slow at comprehension at times, Tom," she said, "for a smart man. Do I have to tell you in so many words that young Ralph Clavering is interested in Linda?"

Linda blushed, and Mr. Carlton opened his eyes wide in amazement.

"Well! Well! Well!" he exclaimed.

"Dad!" protested Linda, nervously. "Don't be so serious! Aunt Emily thinks that because she loves me, everybody thinks I'm grand. But as a matter of fact, Ralph Clavering doesn't like me any better than half a dozen other girls. And I don't believe he likes me nearly so well as Louise – though I haven't given the matter any thought."

"How any boy could fall for Louise Haydock is more than I can see!" put in Miss Carlton. "She is a nice girl, but she has ruined what looks she had by cutting her hair off so short, and wearing those dreadful earrings all the time –"

"Aunt Emily!" interrupted Linda. "Please don't forget that Louise is my best friend!"

"Even so, I don't have to admire her appearance, do I?"

In a man's fashion, Mr. Carlton was getting very tired of this small talk. He stirred restlessly.

"Well, it's settled then, about the summer, isn't it?" he asked. "I'd like to drive over early tomorrow morning to this Flying School, and make the arrangements about your course. Because tomorrow night I'm taking the sleeper back to the ranch."

"Dad!" cried Linda, in disappointment. "You don't have to go that soon, do you? Oh, I wanted you to see me fly!"

"I'll be back again, as soon as I can. But just now I'm having trouble with some Mexicans who came over the border and have been threatening us. I've got to be on the job. My help aren't any too reliable."

"You won't be in any danger will you, Daddy?"

He shrugged his shoulders indifferently.

"Guess not," he replied.

At the conclusion of the meal, Miss Carlton, who always liked to have Linda's young friends about, suggested that she call some of them on the telephone and give them her news, inviting them over to celebrate with her. But Linda shook her head.

"There's only one person I'd like to tell about it," she said, "and I'm afraid I couldn't reach him by phone, for I don't know where he lives. That's a boy over at the school, who has taken me up a couple of times."

But, as friends like this did not interest her, Miss Carlton dismissed the subject and went out to consult her cook. Linda's father, however, felt differently.

"What's his name?" he asked, indulgently. "Maybe we could locate him, if we put in a call at the school. There would probably be somebody about who would know his address."

"Ted Mackay," answered Linda.

Mr. Carlton's eyes narrowed suspiciously, and the smile died from his lips. His daughter trembled. What could he possibly have against Ted?

"What's the fellow look like?"

"He's big – with red hair, and blue eyes, Why? Do you know him, Daddy?"

"Think I know his father – to my sorrow. Same name – description fits, too. Likable chap, when you first meet him, isn't he? Looks honest and kind, and all that?"

"Oh yes, Daddy! And he is so nice, too. And so clever!"

"I don't doubt it. So is his father – in his own way. Well, if he's the son of the man I know, you're to keep away from him. Do you understand, daughter?"

"Yes, but Daddy, don't you think it's only fair to give me a reason?" she pleaded.

"I'd rather not. Can't you take my judgment as worth something, Linda?" He spoke sternly.

The tears came to Linda's eyes, and she looked away.

"Mayn't I even speak to him?" she asked, finally.

"Oh, certainly. Never cut anybody – it's a sign of a little mind to stoop to such childishness. But don't be friendly with him. I dare say there are other instructors at the field, and I'll arrange for someone else to teach you."

The door-bell rang three times, but before the maid could answer it, Louise Haydock dashed into the house, followed by Kitty and Ralph Clavering, and finally, Maurice Stetson.

"Whoopee!" cried Ralph, almost running into Linda's father, who was standing in the dining-room doorway.

"Darling!" exclaimed Louise, embracing her chum excitedly. "We heard the news! Congratulations!"

"And naturally we couldn't wait to see your plane," added Kitty. "But are you sure you've finished dinner?"

"Yes, indeed," replied Linda, introducing her father to everybody except Louise, who of course knew him.

"If it only isn't too dark to see it!" exclaimed Louise. "We've all brought flashlights."

"Then we better trail out immediately," laughed Linda. "And I'll get Aunt Emily. She has only seen it from a distance."

"Better wait for the rest of the crowd," suggested Ralph. "I saw Dot trying to round up some more. They ought to be here any minute."

"Then we might as well wait. Aunt Emily'll be here in a minute."

"What kind of plane is it, Linda?" inquired Maurice. "You're 'Lindy' Junior now aren't you – just as I predicted," he added.

"It's a 'Pursuit,'" answered Linda, ignoring his second remark. "An Arrow Sport."

"Open cockpit?" asked Ralph.

"Yes. See – here's its picture." She waved the folder towards the boys. "It's supposed to be a wonderful little plane for a beginner!"

"From now on, Linda'll talk of nothing but joysticks and ailerons and – " began Maurice, but he was interrupted by the arrival of Dot Crowley and six other young people, all of whom had been packed in her small car.

It was just as she liked it to be, Aunt Emily thought, as she joined the merry, singing group, and started out with them towards the field beyond the house. Mr. Carlton did not go with them this time, and later on, Linda had reason to be thankful for his absence.

It was quite dark now, but both the moon and the stars shone brightly, and the plane was clearly visible. The exclamations of delight and praise from her guests were enthusiastic enough to satisfy any proud owner of such a glorious prize. Linda was happier than ever.

The boys were naturally interested in the mechanics of the plane, the girls in the upholstery of the seats, the charming, deep cushions, which could be removed if it were necessary to use a parachute. They turned on their flashlights, and walked about the biplane, not a little in awe at the idea of Linda's piloting it through the skies.

"It only holds two people," remarked Dot, regretfully. "I wonder if we could pile in extras, like I do with my car."

"I'm afraid not," replied Linda. "But I can take everybody up in turn – after I get my license. I am hoping to bring it to Green Falls in August."

Satisfied at last that they had seen as much as possible for the present, they started to turn back, when Maurice suddenly spied a lonely figure at the top of the incline, some fifty yards away.

"What ho!" he exclaimed. "Who can that be? Yo-ho-ho!" he cried, making a funnel with his hands.

"Not anybody in our crowd," replied Jim Valier, "or he would answer. Hope it isn't a thief – with designs on your new plane."

"We better chase him!" said Jackson Stiles, who was always ready for adventure, "Come on, fellows, let's rush him!"

The boys darted off, all except Jim Valier, who said gallantly that he had better stay as protection for the ladies, though of course everybody knew it was only because he was too lazy to run. The girls laughed and chattered while they were gone – all except Linda, who waited nervously to find out what success they had had.

In less than three minutes, however, they had returned, shamefacedly admitting defeat.

"Maybe the fellow couldn't sprint!" announced Ralph. "I'll bet he's a track-runner – "

"Or a chicken thief!" suggested Maurice.

"Do you think he is a tramp?" inquired Miss Carlton, relieved that the man had disappeared. Tramps were so dirty, so unpleasant!

"Don't think so. Big fellow – not badly dressed, as far as we could see. Had red hair."

"Too bad we couldn't catch him," remarked Maurice, always ready with his jokes, "for his hair was bright enough to light up the plane. We wouldn't have needed our flashes."

"Might have set the 'Pursuit' on fire!" suggested Jim.

Linda frowned uneasily. The description sounded like Ted Mackay. But how did he know that she had a plane, and if he had happened to see it, why didn't he come to the house, and ask her permission to examine it? After all, it was on their own property – nobody had any right to intrude. She thought darkly of what her father had said, and hoped that there wasn't anything crooked about Ted. Why, he seemed more of a friend to her than any of these people – except of course her Aunt Emily, and Louise!

By the time they had reached the house, everybody had forgotten the incident, for Louise turned on the radio, and without consulting Linda, they all decided to dance. Ralph claimed the latter for the first waltz.

"So this will make a change in your summer plans," he said, as if the idea were not wholly to his liking.

"Yes. We're not going to Green Falls till August – maybe not then, if I don't succeed in getting a private pilot's license before that."

"But what about me?" he inquired, and the admiring look he gave her would have pleased Miss Carlton, had she noticed it.

Linda looked puzzled.

"You? Why – you'll never miss me! With all your girl friends!"

"No; I've decided I'm not going to miss you," he said, quietly. "Because I'm going to stay right here in Spring City, and learn to fly along with you!"

"What?"

"Yes. The thing fascinates me. I want a plane, too! I'm going to touch my Dad for one when I get home tonight!"

"But you've promised everybody you'll go to Green Falls!"

"So I will – August first!"

And so, much to Miss Carlton's delight, when the rest of the crowd left Spring City the following week, Ralph Clavering stayed at home with a couple of the servants, and enrolled at the same time as Linda, at the Spring City Flying School.

Chapter V

The First Lesson in Flying

Early the next morning, Linda wakened her father and hurried him through his breakfast. There wasn't a moment to be lost, she told him excitedly, like a child waiting to open her Christmas stocking. She had her car under the portico before he had finished his second cup of coffee.

"Don't drive so fast that you are killed on the way," cautioned her aunt. "Remember, dear, you have the rest of your life to fly that plane!"

But the present moment is the only time of importance to young people, and Linda scarcely took in what she was saying. Besides, the caution was unnecessary; unlike Dot Crowley and Maurice Stetson, she had too much respect for her car to mistreat it by careless driving. Linda loved her roadster as a cavalry general loves his horse.

"You want to do most of your learning on your own plane, don't you, daughter?" asked her father, as he sat down beside her. "I mean – you'd rather bring your instructor back with us, and fly it, wouldn't you?"

"Of course, if that is possible. But don't you suppose I have to go in a class with others, Daddy?"

"Probably not – for it is a small school. Besides, I can arrange for you to have private lessons. It will hurry things up for you."

"Oh, thank you, Daddy!.. But later, I want to go to a regular ground school, if you will let me." Her tone was as eager as any boy's, starting out on his life work. "And study airplane construction, and wireless – and – and –"

He smiled at her approvingly. What a girl!

"You are ambitious, my dear," he said, but there was pride in his words. "I don't see why not, though... Only, not all at once. As your Aunt Emily reminded you, you have the rest of your life."

"I can't bear to fool!" she exclaimed, impatiently. "Now that I have graduated, I want to get somewhere."

"You're bound to – unless you fly in circles," he remarked, lightly.

"I mean – oh, you know what I mean, Daddy! And you do understand, don't you?"

"Well, not exactly. You don't expect to be one of those independent girls who insist upon earning their own living, do you, dear?"

"I don't know..." Somehow, she couldn't explain. Nobody understood just what she wanted except Ted Mackay, and that was because he had the same sort of goal himself. Ted Mackay! The memory of her father's command hurt her. Must she really give up his friendship? But why? She wanted to ask her father, but he was looking off in the distance, apparently lost in his own thoughts.

So she drove the remainder of the way in silence, absorbed by her own dreams.

The field was outside of Spring City, covering an area of thirty acres, and surrounded by the white fence that was now being used so much by airports. Three large hangars, containing probably half a dozen planes, occupied one side of the field, and, near the entrance was a large building, evidently used as an office and school for the theoretical part of the courses.

"You have been here before, Linda?" asked her father, as the girl locked her car.

"Yes – a couple of times. I feel almost at home."

Scarcely were they inside the grounds, when Ted Mackay, looking huge and handsome in his flyer's suit, came out of the office building. He recognized Linda at once, and his blue eyes lighted up in a smile of welcome. Since he wore his helmet, his red hair was not visible, and Linda, glancing apprehensively at her father, knew that the latter had no idea who Ted was. But, nervous as she was over the meeting that was about to take place, she could not help feeling proud of Ted, and warmed by the frankness of his happy smile.

"Linda!" he cried. (She had called him Ted the second time she met him, so he reciprocated.) "I owe you an apology – and a confession!"

"Yes?" replied Linda, glancing fearfully at her father, though she knew that he had not yet realized who the young man was, or his expression would not have been so beneficent. "But first I want you to meet my father," she said. "Dad – this is Ted Mackay."

She was vexed at herself that she was actually stammering. Acting just like a child! Yet she couldn't forget how stern her father could be. She recalled the day that, as a child, she had sneaked off and played with Louise when her chum had whooping cough. Her father happened to come home – and announced that he would take care of her punishment. And what a punishment! For three whole weeks he made her stay in the house, without a single companion except her Aunt Emily! He said he'd teach her to obey.

But he wasn't storming, or even frowning now. Merely looking politely indifferent, perhaps a trifle superior. He made no motion to shake hands with Ted.

"How do you do?" he said. "Would you be kind enough to take us to the man in charge of this field?"

"Certainly, sir," replied Ted.

Immediately, as if he intended to give the young people no chance for personal conversation, Mr. Carlton began to ask about the courses that were offered.

Ted answered his questions, explaining that Miss Carlton would probably want to become a private pilot at first.

"You have to pass a physical examination," he said, "and get a permit from the Government. Then you must have at least eighteen hours of flying experience – ten with someone else with you, eight of solo flying. There is a written examination, too – all about the rules and regulations that make up the laws of the air. Of course there isn't a lot of traffic, like with the driving of cars," he explained, smilingly, "but you'd be surprised at how many rules there are!"

They had been crossing the field while he talked, and they stopped now at the main building. With a nod of dismissal that was curt, and yet not quite rude, for a muttered, "Thank you," accompanied it, Mr. Carlton left Ted, and took his daughter inside.

A middle-aged man, dressed in a khaki shirt and breeches, was seated at a desk. He looked up as they entered.

"My name is Carlton," began Linda's father, "and this is my daughter. I have bought her a plane, and I have come over to arrange about some lessons in flying."

Lieutenant Kingsberry, a former Army officer, asked them to be seated, and went over about the same explanation that Ted had given, saying that he would be delighted to register Linda, provided that she passed the physical examination.

"I suppose it is not so unusual now to have girls as students?" inquired Mr. Carlton.

"Not for many of the schools," replied the lieutenant. "But it just happens that we so far have not enrolled any of the fair sex. Your daughter will be the first. When does she wish to start?"

"As soon as possible," replied Mr. Carlton.

"Now!" Linda could not help adding.

"Well, I don't see why not," agreed the lieutenant, leniently. "At least Miss Carlton could take the physical examination, because one of our doctors is here now. And if she passes that, Mackay can give her the first lesson."

Linda's expression of delight suddenly died on her lips. For she glanced at her father, and saw the queer, drawn look about his mouth at the mention of Ted's name.

"This – Mackay – " he said slowly, "he isn't your only instructor?"

"He is our best."

"I prefer someone else. Can you arrange it?"

"Why – I suppose so. But if it is only personal reasons, I think you are making a mistake, Mr. Carlton. Mackay is our most reliable flyer – by far our best instructor. We don't expect to have him here more than a month or so. He's had a good offer from a big company."

Linda was glancing shyly, pleadingly, at her father, but he did not even see her.

"Unfortunately I found this young man's father to be most unreliable – untrustworthy – during the period that I employed him on my ranch. The fact is, we are not yet through with the trouble that he started. So you can understand why I should refuse to trust my daughter to his son. It is an unpleasant but true fact that children inherit their father's weaknesses. I should not have a comfortable minute, being miles away, and knowing that she was in his hands."

"Of course I will accept your decision, Mr. Carlton," replied Lieutenant Kingsberry, "and see that your wishes are carried out. I will summon the second ranking instructor – H. B. Taylor."

He called his office boy, a young man learning to fly, and working his way at the same time, and gave the necessary message. A couple of minutes later the man came in, dressed like Ted, but somehow he seemed insignificant to Linda – as if he were the one who was not reliable. She sighed.

Her father remained with the lieutenant and the instructor while she went into the doctor's office for her physical examination. She knew that her eyesight was good, but she felt a little nervous when the doctor examined her heart. It was fluttering so! Suppose all the excitement had been too much for her – and she did not pass! What good would her lovely plane be to her, if she were never allowed to pilot it herself?

But she need not have been alarmed, for she came through with flying colors. Then young Taylor took her over to one of the planes, and began to explain about the joystick, the rudder, the ailerons, and everything else he could think of, in words of one syllable.

Linda glanced at him, frowning. Did he think she was a baby. Or was it because she was a girl that his manner seemed so superior, so condescending? Why, he was wasting a lot of time! Ted would have had her up in the air by this time, perhaps letting her guide the plane herself.

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