

*John
goes
Gliding
Ann
Welch*



JOHN GOES GLIDING

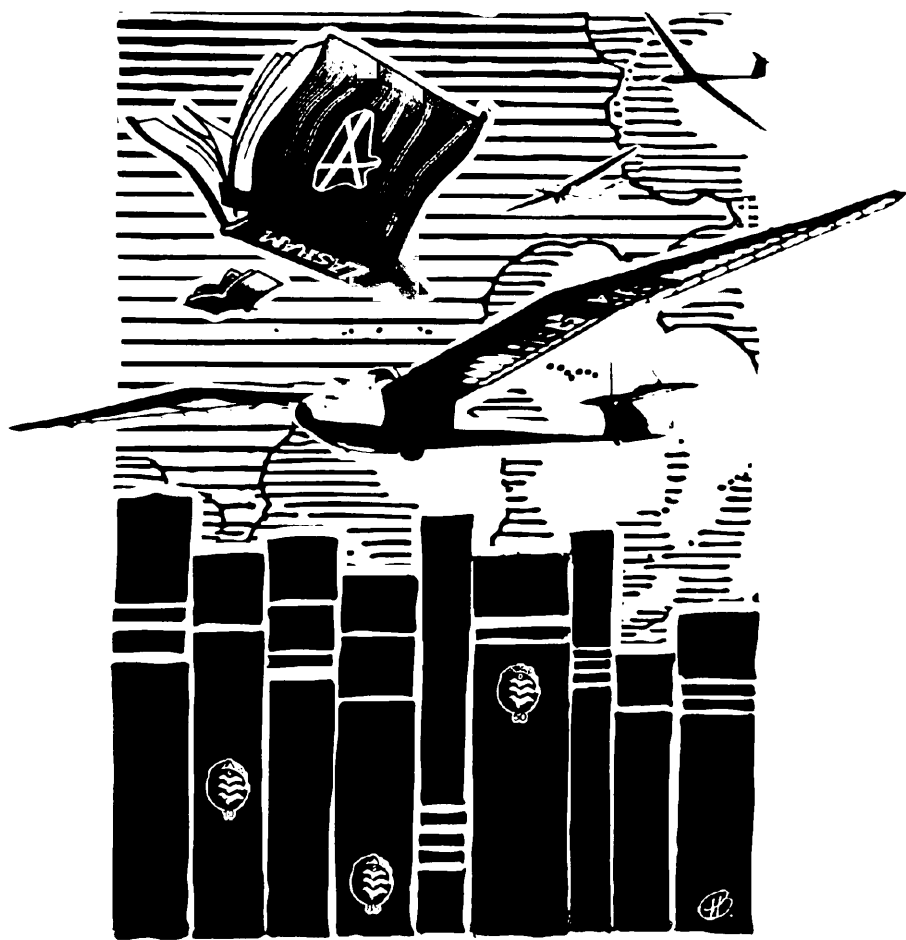
When John arrives at the dark country railway station of the village where he is to spend his holidays, his heart sinks. What on earth can a London boy *do* in the country?

If he is fortunate, one of the things he can do is to learn to glide. And this is what John does. He learns from the very beginning: from the correct way to push a glider out of its hangar up to the time when he “goes solo”. And as John learns, the reader shares with him the skills and thrills of this exhilarating sport.

Girls and boys who may never have John’s opportunity will be captivated by the book, while for those who have started gliding or who hope to do so it is in addition a practical and eminently readable ‘manual’. It contains an appendix giving addresses of gliding clubs, membership fees and other useful information.

Ann Welch, who has three children of her own, is one of England’s leading glider pilots. She holds the British National Women’s record for a Goal Flight (328 miles; Poland, 1961). She is Chairman of the British Gliding Association Instructors’ Panel, and has been manager of the British Team at seven World Championships.

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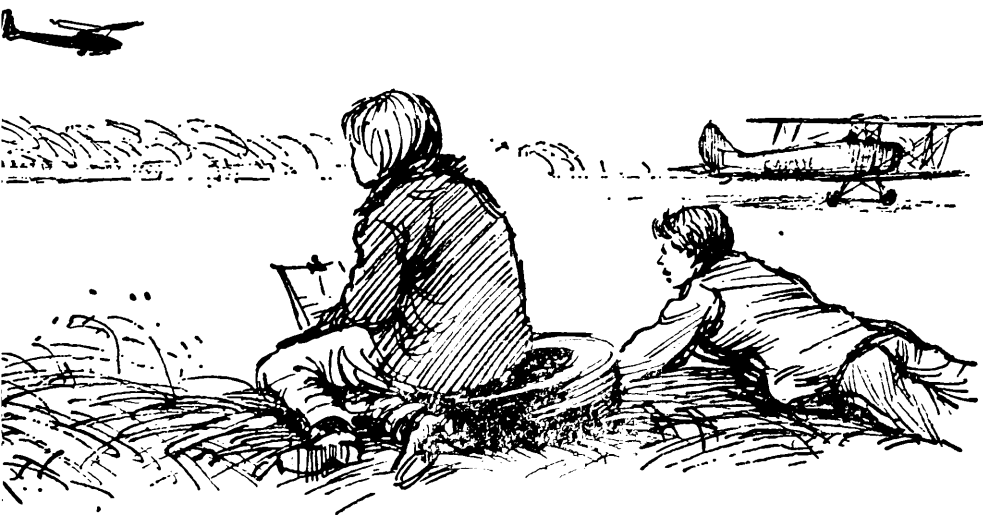
to Wally

Ann Welch

ANN WELCH

London July 1978

John Goes Gliding



Illustrated by
JOSEPH ACHESON

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JOHN GOES GLIDING

The New Holidays

JOHN'S first term at boarding school passed more quickly than he had expected, and four days before Christmas about fifty boys safely completed an exuberant journey in the London-bound express. A master saw five of them across to Waterloo and into various south-west-bound trains.

One and a half hours later, in dripping foggy darkness, John climbed down on to the slippery platform of Middle Wanborough Halt. No one else got out of the train, and he suddenly realized that he was the last passenger left. A single electric light over the "Way Out" accentuated the gloom, and a shadowy ticket collector, waiting patiently in the diffused glow, was the only human in sight.

John picked up his two suitcases, and stood still wondering what to do. The ticket collector did not move, but John felt he was being thoroughly inspected. There was obviously no one to meet him. He knew his aunt's house was three miles from the station, but three unknown miles, in this dark, lonely countryside, was something he did not relish. In London it would have been easy, because he had lived there all his life, and the nearness of houses and people made unknown streets seem familiar. Here it was so strange and empty. He looked round as the

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train clattered away into the night, and then walked hesitantly towards the ticket collector.

The old man looked him up and down slowly.

“And where might you be thinking of going?”

John had not quite expected this, but pulled himself together and said:

“Well, my aunt, Miss Vickery, that is, is meeting me.”

“Oh, that’s all right. If Miss Vickery’s coming, you’d better sit in my little office here, it’s warmer than hanging about in the damp. You don’t know how quick you can get rheumatics in the damp. Come on in, but you better give me your ticket, ’fore I forget.”

John handed over a crumpled bit of cardboard and followed the old man into a warm but stuffy little box. It was permeated by the smoky smell of countless years of coke fires; a blackened tin kettle was balanced on top of the stove.

“We’ll have a drop of tea while we wait,” said the old man. “I expect the train was cold, it usually is after Aldershot. All them soldiers keep the temperature up quite a bit.”

“Do you know my aunt?” asked John.

“Oh, everyone knows Miss Vickery.”

“Did you know she would be late?”

“Not specially, but she usually is: what with her old car, and her committee meetings, and arranging things for the institute, and ... Why, bless my soul, here she is now. You must either be an important guest, me boy, or Harry at the garage has been quicker than usual fixing her car.” He hobbled out of the little office. “Evening, Miss Vickery. Your boy’s here. We’ve been keeping him warm in the office.”

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"Thank you, Tom. I do not know what will happen to all my visitors when you retire. The windscreen wiper wouldn't work, and the fog is very thick along by the stream, so I was a bit slow coming."

John looked at his aunt for the first time, and saw that she was very tall, with thin legs and long feet. Her face was thin and long, and her nose bony. A hat of no particular shape sat casually on her head, and hid her scraped-up hair, apart from a few short wisps. She was wearing a check tweed suit under a fawn raincoat, and there was kindness, and a sort of obstinacy, in her face. John had never seen anyone quite like her before, and felt stupidly shy.

"So you are John," she said, and a kindly smile lit up her face, which became attractive, and lost its tendency to plainness. "I am sorry to be late, but I expect Tom told you that it is quite usual, I'm afraid. Perhaps one day I shall get a new car, and probably spend hours waiting for my visitors instead."

At this, Tom looked up in disbelief.

"I will give you a hand with these cases, if you're going to put them in the usual place," he said.

"Thank you, Tom." She turned again to John. "Is this all your luggage?"

"Er, yes, Aunt." He picked up a big case, and followed Tom to a 1934 Austin Seven saloon, into the back seat of which, after a brief struggle, they wedged the luggage.

"Thank you, Tom, and you won't forget that I'm expecting half a dozen cordon apple trees on the Andover train some time this week."

John smiled goodbye to Tom and settled himself beside Aunt Evelyn. She pressed the big starter button on the

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dashboard, and with a grinding noise the engine sprang shuddering to life. A second later the car had leaped abruptly forward, and then settled back to a steady, noisy progression.

John never forgot this first introduction to the classic of small motor cars, or the startling journey along foggy lanes at such a speed that he could not see the corners until they were into them. In the feeble flickering headlights the drive to Wan Park seemed endless. The way was always narrow, and the hedges leaned inward as though trying to squeeze the lane away. He felt sure that he would never find his way about.

Finally the little car bumped along a straggling village street, and turned in through tall iron gates. The drive was short and the front door paint gleamed under a misty lamp. His aunt backed without any fuss into the dark recesses of a garage, a slight bump indicating that they could go no farther.

"Well, John, here we are, and I hope you are going to be very, very happy, although I have absolutely no idea what a London boy will find to do in the country."

They got out of the car, and John immediately tripped over what was apparently a platoon of watering cans. He apologized, blushing in the dark, and tried to pick them up, but Aunt Evelyn only laughed.

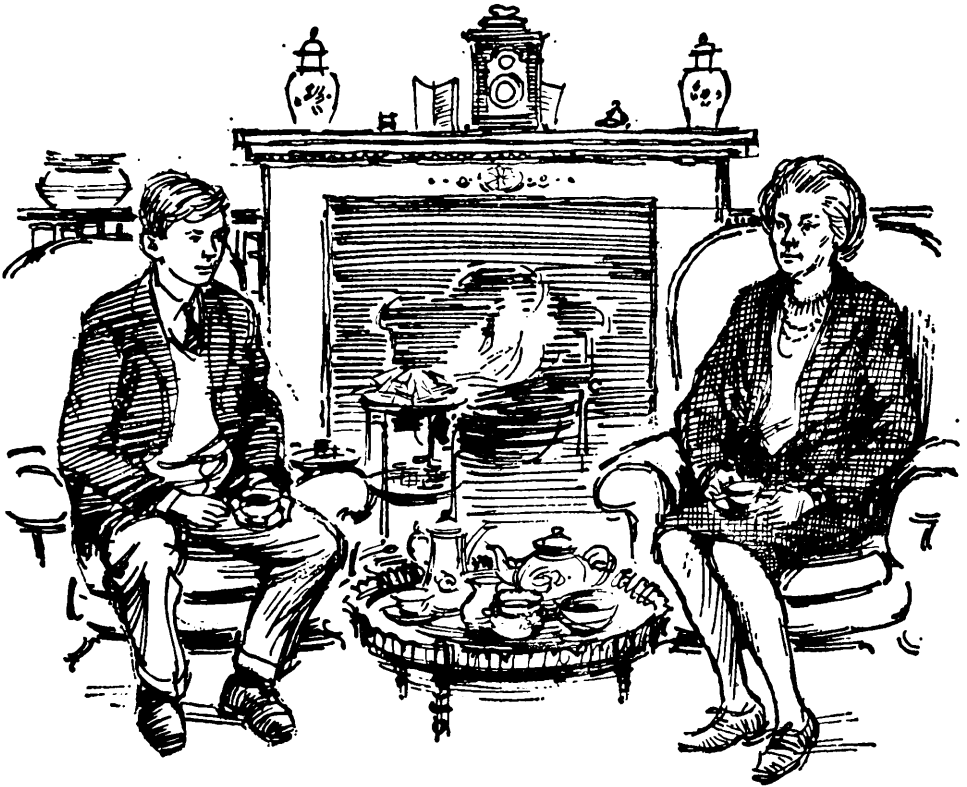
"Never mind. Everyone does that, because I always forget to tell them in time. Perhaps if you cannot find much to do here, you might knock in some nails to hang them on."

It was even more difficult getting the suitcases out of the car than it had been to fit them in. Finally they succeeded, although not without further protest from the

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watering cans, and went into the house. The sudden warmth and light made John blink, and he became aware that nearly all the walls were white. There were some big pictures in heavy gilt frames, and many mirrors.

John followed his aunt into the sitting-room, which



had an air of comfortable untidiness. There was a large log fire in a deep hearth with bookshelves on each side, which extended the whole length of the room. Everywhere was the indefinable but pleasant scent which came from a fire where only wood was burnt. A black-and-white cat rolled over luxuriously on the hearthrug and started to purr as they entered. But John's attention was

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mostly drawn to a large brass tray, standing on little wooden legs, on which tea was set ready. Beside it was a silver three-tiered cake stand, on which there were plates piled high with home-made scones, cakes, and brown bread-and-butter.

"Are you hungry?" asked Aunt Evelyn.

"Oh, yes. I feel as if I haven't eaten for days."

"That's excellent. My gardener's wife, Mrs Perren, insisted on making these for you this morning, so you had better show your appreciation."

They sat down in the two big armchairs on either side of the fire. John was ravenous, and could not think of anything to talk about, so he ate his way steadily through a plate of scones instead. His aunt let him take the edge off his hunger without interruption, for she already liked this boy who had come rather unexpectedly into her life.

"How did you enjoy your new school?" she asked eventually.

"Very much, really. It was funny at first, but most of the chaps were all right."

"And your father? I expect he writes to you very often?"

John smiled happily. "Oh, yes, I get a letter every week, and Dad always tells me something interesting about Africa, or the different journeys he has done. They went in canoes down the Zambezi, I think it was, not long ago, and Dad's canoe was ripped open on a rock and he only just managed to swim to the bank before a crocodile arrived. I wish I had been there," he added thoughtfully, surveying a plate of cakes.

Aunt Evelyn put them on the arm of his chair, and said, "It is a very long time since I last saw your father.

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We rather lost touch after your mother died, and it was only when I saw the notice of your father's appointment in *The Times* that I was able to find out where you were."

"I don't remember my mother," said John. "What was she like? Father does not like to talk about her."

Aunt Evelyn relaxed in her tall-backed chair.

"She was the greatest friend I ever had, as well as being a distant cousin. You are very like her in some ways, with the same brown eyes and thick dark hair. You would have got on well together."

John finished his second chocolate cake, and then said, "It was very kind of you to have me for the holidays. I should have had to stay at school otherwise, and that would have been awfully dull."

"But there is something which has been worrying me. What are you going to find to *do* here? You are used to London with all its entertainments, but the nearest town is four and a half miles away, and when you get there it is only an overgrown village. But as for being kind having you here," she went on, "I would have done anything for your mother, and I am just very happy to do what I can for you." She looked at the empty plates and smiled. "Dear old Mrs Perren will not have to be told you enjoyed your tea."

* * *

The next morning John woke up early. He threw the cold hot water bottle out on to the floor, and lay looking round the little white room with its tall window. When he got up he found that it faced towards the village street, but two large holly trees prevented him from seeing very much. It was still rather foggy. Although he could see

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some wooden farm gates on the other side of the road, he could not see where they led to.

After a very early breakfast, Aunt Evelyn had gone to Winchester on some errand of mercy, so John ate his alone, giving some bacon rinds to the cat, who spurned them and stalked off, leaving them on the carpet. John hurriedly threw them into the fire before anyone came into the room, and then he wandered out into the garden, where he found Mr Perren pruning apple trees.

"I 'ear you've lived all your life in Lunnon, Master John?" But without waiting for a reply, he shook his head, and said, "Must be terrible lonely with all those people rushing about their own business."

John's eyes opened. This idea surprised him.

"Lonely! I should have thought it would be far more lonely here with no one about."

"It ain't ever lonely in the country, you feel somehow at 'ome – settled like. But in Lunnon you can't get near the earth, it's all covered up and artificial." He snipped off a long thin shoot, muttering, "And all those people for ever in a hurry."

John laughed. "In London there is always something to do. You need never have a dull minute. It is very nice here, of course, but there isn't really very much to do except walk and plant seeds and things."

It was the old man's turn to laugh.

"Young feller," he said, "there is always something to do, or see, or learn about for them as keeps their eyes open. Go off with you for a walk now, and get some good clean mud on them town shoes of yours."

"But I don't know which way to go, or where anywhere leads to."

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"When I was a boy, me lad, I didn't 'ave to be told where to go to, I went and found out."

"Well, I will, too, when I've got a bit more used to being here. Can I help you?"

Mr Perren slowly climbed down off his steps and looked around.

"You could gather up all these prunings, and put them on the 'eap over there, and burn them."

"All right," said John, "but will they burn if they are wet?"

He got no answer, so he started collecting the wood from beneath each tree, and stacking it on the heap. With a critical eye Mr Perren watched the neat way in which he gathered small bundles of the twigs, and by lunch time it was all cleared up so thoroughly that even Mr Perren could not find anything to complain about.

"I think perhaps I will go for a walk this afternoon," John said before going into the house.

The gardener's weatherbeaten face broke into a grin.

"You'll probably see some pheasants if you go that away to the big wood, but don't be late for tea. Mrs Perren has made some of her special gingerbread for you."

Lost

AFTER lunch John set off down the lane and, passing the village shop, bought himself some chocolate. There were only a few scattered houses and then the woodland began. He turned down a track labelled "Forestry Commission. Please keep to the footpath. Do not light fires." Underneath the notice were two long-handled twig brooms. The track dwindled, and after a few hundred yards John came to a green ride cutting through the trees across his path. It was covered with hoof marks and he turned along it in curiosity. For the next hour he explored the paths and rides, turning from one to the next as his fancy took him. He saw a few rabbits, and once a sudden crackling of the undergrowth near by made him jump.

It was becoming rather more misty, and John began to feel it was about time to go home, so he turned along a broad straight ride, expecting it to lead back to the original footpath. A large pheasant rose noisily, and flew across in front of him, and he wondered how such a heavy looking bird managed to stay in the air at all.

After about ten minutes' walking, the broad ride narrowed down to a mere pathway, and brambles were beginning to grow over it. John explored along it a little way, but it was beginning to get dark, so he retraced his steps, and hurried along the ride until he came to another

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intersection. He explored this one, too, until it also became overgrown, so he stopped to puzzle out which way to go next. Suddenly an owl hooted just above his head, and its long-drawn mournful cry gave him such a fright that he started running head down as fast as he could. Then he realized that he was being a fool and, having no more breath left, he stood and panted, looking all around him in the gloom for something familiar. But there was nothing, and no sound except the gentle drip of moisture from the fir trees towering above him. Memories of Hansel and Gretel kept coming stupidly into his mind, and he thought for a moment of leaving trails of white pebbles, or beans, or something behind him. But he hadn't any pebbles and he was quite sure that woodmen did not really spend their time following trails all over the place, so he told himself not to be an idiot, and turned up his coat collar against the damp penetrating cold.

He called "Help" loudly, but only a faint echo came back to him.

He started to walk along a ride until he came to another crossing, where he stopped and thought. Then he stuck a stick in the ground in the middle of the ride he had come down, and turned left. After about quarter of a mile this too came to a brambly end, so he turned back and at the crossing stuck a stick into the middle of this path. Then he started along the ride opposite the first one he had chosen. This went straight for some way and then curved gently to the left and went downhill. John knew that he had not been on any slopes before, but decided to go on with his plan of following every path properly to its end. But this one seemed to have no end. It went on and on, until he felt more lost and miserable

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than ever. Then the path turned right, and quite suddenly opened out into utterly empty flatness. Ahead was just damp grass. John hesitated, unable to decide which way to go. He had read stories about people trying to walk straight in the dark, and ending up more or less where they had started from. He soon began to feel very cold, so started to walk along the edge of the forest, but after a while found that he was walking along in the grass bordering what appeared to be a main road, so he walked on the road. Then a very wide road branched into his road from the left, and on the principle that big main roads must go somewhere, he turned along it. It seemed a rather peculiar road, without pavements or even a white line, and however hard he looked he could not discover any telephone wires, nor could he see any lights.

Another main road crossed his, and he explored round the huge area of asphalt and found that four ways led from it, but he now did not know which one he had come in by. He felt like crying, he was so cold and tired. If only someone would come and help him. The bright lights and noise of London surged up in his mind, and he wished more than anything in the world that he could still be there, and that his father had never gone to Africa.

Then for an instant he thought he saw a light. However much he stared, it did not appear again. He started along the roadway towards where he thought it had been, and sucked a toffee which he discovered in one of his pockets. The sweet familiar taste cheered him up a little as he walked on, his feet aching. Then he saw the light again, and this time the faint yellow spot stayed. Immediately he broke into a run towards it, and fell over a pile of old motor tyres. This startled rather than hurt

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him, and he continued more carefully towards a shadowy building. It was an old wartime hut, but there was glass in all its windows and a well-trodden path around it. John soon discovered a door, which was slightly open, so he peered in, and got the surprise of his life.

Seated at a table, half-facing him, was a man. His hair was well-brushed, and he wore a dark blazer with gleaming buttons; the light of a single candle stuck in a beer bottle showed up a fresh white shirt and a cleanshaven face. He was quite alone, and was eating a plateful of eggs and bacon. John could see three yolks still on the plate. Beside him was a pint mug of steaming coffee.

The door creaked, and the man looked up, seeing him standing there.

"Hullo," he said. "Come with Mephisto?"

"Er - no," gulped John, not understanding what he was talking about.

"Oh, bother. That truck's always late, and we want to start early tomorrow morning."

John did not know what to say, and the man must have sensed his bewilderment, for as soon as he had swallowed a large mouthful, he said:

"You a member here?"

"No," said John, "I'm lost."

"That's very careless of you," said the man, quite unmoved. "Come on in, it is warmer."

He looked up at the damp and weary figure who came into the candlelight.

"You look a bit the worse for wear. Have some of this."

The man poured half his coffee into another mug, and pushed it across the table to John, who took it gratefully

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in both hands, feeling the warmth come into his chilled fingers, and its steamy fragrance on his face.

After a few gulps he felt more like himself again. The man was eating steadily, but handed him a chunk of bread and cheese.

"How did you come to get lost? Where do you live?" he asked between mouthfuls.

"I am staying with my aunt in Wanborough for the holidays." Then he added by way of explanation, "I only arrived yesterday."

"But the village is a bare two miles from here."

John felt rather silly.

"I went for a walk in the forest, and couldn't find my way out."

The man leaned back and yawned.

"Oh, well, they say it is a very good thing to get lost at least once in your life, it is less likely to happen again."

Then he got up.

"I suppose you were expected home hours ago, and the entire household will now be wearing out their voices calling for you in the forest. Or didn't they know which way you went?"

"No, I don't think so. I was expected back at quarter past four, but I should think it must be later than that now."

"You're dead right there." The man looked at his watch. "It is now precisely seven fifty-three. Come on, I'll run you back in my car."

He drained his mug of coffee, and went out of the door with John following and mumbling his thanks.

The man went straight to a shiny car which John had not seen parked on the grass. They got in, and the man

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drove slowly over the rough ground, and accelerated up a narrow road.

“What are you doing during your stay?”

“I don’t know really. I live in London, but my father is abroad. My aunt said she did not know what I could find to do in the country.”

“Well, you seem to have occupied yourself pretty thoroughly today. But if you really have nothing to do, you can always come and give us a hand. There is plenty of work, but you’ll probably have some fun too.”

“Er, thank you very much, but I don’t understand. What could I do, and when?”

“I’m sorry.” The man laughed. “We run a gliding club on the disused airfield here.”

“A gliding club?” asked John astonished. “You mean you fly here?”

“Yes, that’s right. You might persuade your aunt to let you learn. We have a two-seater.”

John did not answer immediately. He was beginning to realize that the empty roads he had walked along must have been the runways of an airfield. He should have realized that; he had seen plenty of photographs in his flying magazines.

“Do you fly aeroplanes here as well? I want to be an airline pilot, and fly all over the world.”

“No, only gliders, except for one aeroplane that we use to tow them up.”

“But gliders are so slow. They can’t be much fun really. And if you do manage to fly some distance, you have all the bother of getting them back again.”

“But the fun of managing to stay up in the air without an engine, and flying hundreds of miles without any

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noise is terrific. It's fun retrieving them too. You should try it."

They drove slowly along the village street.

"That's where I live," cried John, recognizing the tall gates in the gleam of the porch lamp.

The man stopped and John got out. He had just managed to say thank you when the door opened, and a flood of light dazzled him as his aunt ran out.

"John, oh, John," she cried with relief in her voice.

In the warmth, close by a roaring fire, he told her of his meeting.

Aunt Evelyn did not scold him. She, like the man at the gliding club, knew that getting really lost was something that you did not want to do again in a hurry.

Gliders in Daylight

A PART from sleeping late and having a few dreams, John was none the worse for his adventure. He was rather quiet at breakfast, and during one of the longer pauses Aunt Evelyn said, "I suppose you want to go to the airfield?"

He brightened immediately.

"Oh, yes, please. I was trying to think which would be the best way to ask you, after last night."

His aunt smiled. "We were all desperately worried when you didn't come, but that is over now. Of course you can go. I wish I had thought about it before. Mr Perren told me a year ago that a gliding club had started there, but I had forgotten, and gliders do not make a noise to remind you, like aeroplanes. I have to go to Basingstoke this morning, so I can drop you on the way, and pick you up again at twelve thirty. I really shall be punctual this time, as I have a Women's Institute meeting at two sharp, so mind you don't get lost again."

Aunt Evelyn deposited John on the road by the clubhouse. Everything looked quite different in the daylight; he could now see other buildings and, about a hundred yards away, a big black hangar. There was no one in sight, and he was wondering what to do when he heard a faint grumbling sound coming from the hangar, and one of the huge doors started to open. He walked over and

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found about six people pulling out a glider. There were several others inside, but it was too dark to see much, so he stood and watched while another one was brought out. They were both silver and red, but one was larger and fatter. The six people were chatting together and, having got the second glider parked beside the first, five of them went away, leaving a very tall young man, in a woolly hat, who started looking carefully over the aircraft. John moved a little closer to watch.

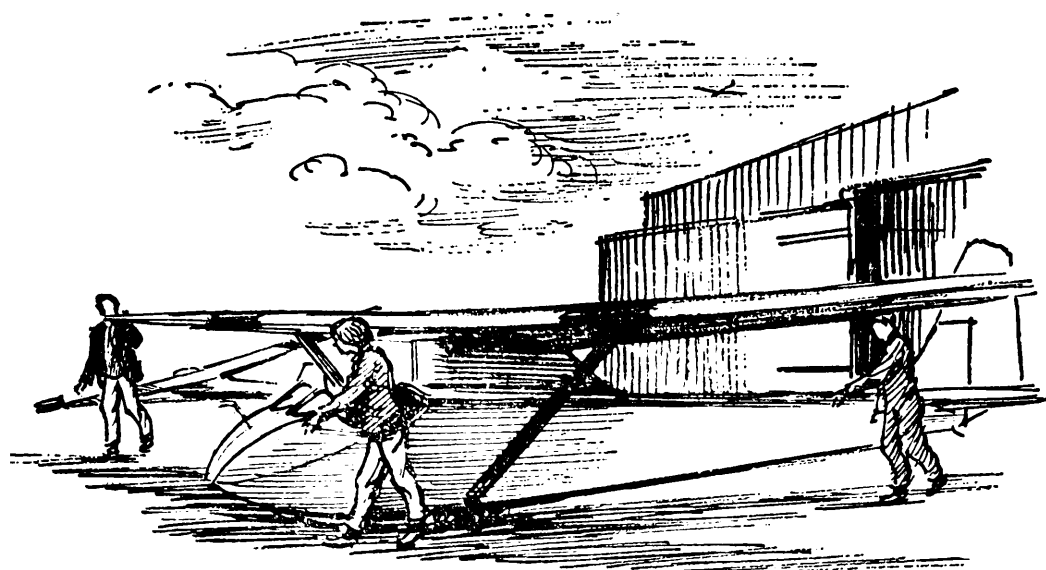
Without looking up, the tall man said, "Lift the wing tip, will you?"

John was just starting to say that he was not a member of the club, when the other said, "Come on. Don't just stand there. Winter days are short, and we want to get going."

So he went to the wing tip and lifted it, resting it on his shoulder. The tall man bent head downwards into the open cockpit, which contained two seats, side by side. He moved the controls slowly, checking them. Then he walked all around the glider, touching it lightly with his finger-tips, and stopping occasionally to look carefully at something. He walked around John without seeing him, intent on his inspection. He examined the landing skid and wheel, and then went to the tail and, opening tiny doors, peered inside with a pocket torch.

John was becoming excited. This glider seemed substantial, and looked as though it could fly better than the ones he had read about. Presently the tall man wrote something in a little book, and patted the nose of the glider.

"You're all right for another day, Daisy," he said, half to himself.



John still stood holding the wing tip, and seemed to have been forgotten, for the tall man started to inspect the other glider. He did not know whether to put the wing of the big two-seater down, and go and hold the tip of the smaller glider or not, but as he hesitated some of the others returned with a car, backed up to Daisy, hooked a short length of rope on to her nose, and drove slowly off, so there was nothing for him to do except go as well, still supporting the wing tip. A slight girl of sixteen, only a year older than himself, walked along at the nose, her hand on the side of the cockpit, and a man walked by the tail, lifting it whenever they turned or went over rough ground. In this manner they proceeded slowly to the other side of the airfield. John realized that he had been taken for one of the members, and thought this rather fun. Eventually they stopped, the girl unhooked the towing cable, and the car drove away. The glider was turned so that the wing tip which he held was pointing into the wind.

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“O.K., put it down,” said the man who had been walking by the tail.

John hesitated, and then lowered the wing tip on to the grass where an old motor tyre was put on it.

The girl was writing something in a book, sitting on a pile of tyres near a signalling lamp. She looked across at him.

“What are you flying? I’m making out the list.”

“Me? But – I’m not a member.”

The two of them looked at him in surprise.

“But you were with Daisy so I thought—”

“Someone told me to hold the wing, and then you came and towed the glider away, and I didn’t think I could just let go.”

“I should think not, but are you going to join the club?”

“He’d be a mutt if he does, having been dragged all this way against his will,” said the man. He turned to John. “You see, we usually like to get people’s money before they find out how much work is attached to gliding.”

John looked at each of them in turn.

“I’d like to join but I don’t know whether I can, but I don’t mind the work, I haven’t really anything else to do.”

“Oh, that’s fine,” said the girl. “Stay as long as you like. By the way, what’s your name?”

“John.”

“Mine’s Pam, and this is Mac – short for Mackay.”

At that moment the smaller glider arrived, pulled by four people, among whom was the man who had taken him home the night before. The neat clothes had been replaced by a flying suit and gum-boots.

GLIDERS IN DAYLIGHT

"Hullo." He caught sight of John. "So your aunt let you out again; some people never learn." He turned to a brown-haired man with laughing blue eyes, who had been helping to wheel out the glider, and announced, "Mike. This is our nocturnal visitor."

Everyone looked curiously at John, and Mike said, "I got lost myself once, and I was scared stiff. It's a pretty easy thing to do."

Pam broke in, "And as soon as the poor fellow gets here today, he's dragged all over the airfield hanging on to a wing tip without even being asked if he wants to."

"Never mind." Mac laughed. "It's as good a way as any to start gliding. It's all a bit unexpected."

Suddenly finding himself the centre of interest, John felt embarrassed, and was glad when Mike said, "Here comes the tractor with the winch cable. I'll instruct Pam first in Daisy. Hurry up, everyone, we want to get a lot of launches today."

And once more John found himself forgotten.

The rest of the morning passed quickly. He had never seen gliders launched before, and was startled by the quickness of the take-off, and the steepness of the climb. The winch at the other end of the airfield wound in at about forty miles an hour the thin steel cable, which had been hooked into the release mechanism in the glider's nose. Although John could understand that the winch was able to pull the glider along, it was not so easy to see why it climbed as well. Pam told him that the pilot had to pull the stick back to make the aircraft go up, and that the big two-seater, which everyone called Daisy, usually got nearly a thousand feet high on the launch.

During the morning the instructor sent Mac off on his

JOHN GOES GLIDING

first solo flight. They all watched the glider climb steep and straight to the top of the launch, fly round the airfield, and glide gently back towards the earth through the cold winter air. John wished more than anything that he could have been the pilot.

Carefully Mac turned in towards the runway to make his approach into wind, and flew quite close to the little group, to make a good landing about a hundred yards away. They ran over to the glider to wheel it back for the next launch, and the instructor smiled at Mac's happy face, and asked him what it felt like to be solo.

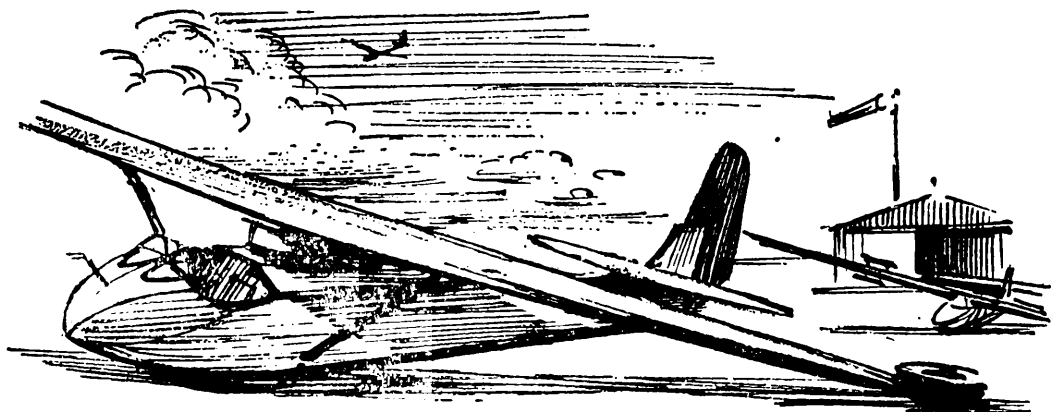
"Jolly fine, but was the landing all right?"

"Probably the best you'll make for some time, Mac," he said.

John did as much as he could by helping to pull the gliders back to the launch point, putting tyres on the wing tips when they were not being used, so that the wind would not blow them over, and keeping the log sheet which recorded the details of each flight.

All too soon it was half past twelve, and he could see his aunt's car pull up in the lane.

* * *



GLIDERS IN DAYLIGHT

At lunch John suddenly asked if he could learn to glide. His aunt did not seem very surprised, but told him that he would have to write to his father.

"If you wrote immediately after lunch, and went by bus into Alton and posted it airmail, it would go today," she said.

He jumped up from the table and was halfway through the door, when his aunt called him back.

"I think you ought to think seriously about this matter, John. Your father has not got money to waste, and you may not like it once you've started. How do you know you really want to fly? Have you ever been up in the air?"

"No, I haven't, but I've always wanted to be an airline pilot ever since I was quite small. But I had never thought about gliders. They look wonderful in the sky, like great birds. And this morning I saw somebody go on his first solo flight. I know I shall like it, and I promise I won't start and not go on. Really I won't."

"You had better stop talking, and write that letter, or you will be persuading me to start as well. The bus goes at ten past two."

John ran upstairs three at a time and, sitting on the bed, wrote a long letter to his father. He gave all the reasons why he should be allowed to join the gliding club, and ended by saying that he was writing the letter at his aunt's suggestion.

Then he caught the bus, posted the letter, and returned, feeling that time had come to a standstill. He calculated that it would take five days for a reply to arrive, unless his father was away on one of his journeys; these sometimes lasted for six weeks, by which time he

JOHN GOES GLIDING

would be back at school. He reread his father's recent letters to see if there was mention of future expeditions, but there was nothing.

To everyone's surprise a letter arrived airmail on the fourth day. John tore it open and could hardly read it he was so excited. It was quite short:

Dear John,

As learning to fly gliders will apparently turn you into a paragon of well-exercised hard-working obedience, you had better start forthwith.

My bank will be forwarding twenty-five pounds to Aunt E. for this purpose. Not to be spent all at once.

Write soon.

Your loving FATHER

John handed the letter to his aunt, too excited to speak. She read it out of politeness, although she knew the answer from his face.

"You had better eat a good breakfast," she said, smiling at him. "It will be cold out on that field all day. And wear an extra sweater, and your thickest shoes."

First Flight

"ALL right, John. I'll fly you next." Mike looked up from the log sheet that he was studying. "Get into the right-hand seat, and Pam will help you do up the straps."

Excitedly he clambered over the side of the two-seater's cockpit, sat down on the plywood seat with its hard cushion, and stared at the instruments and controls in front of him. He felt someone pull the safety harness up from behind his back.

"These two straps go over your shoulders, and join on your tummy with the two that you are probably sitting on."

John half-lifted himself, pulled out the tough canvas straps, and Pam clipped them all together. He felt restricted and locked in the cockpit, but also secure.

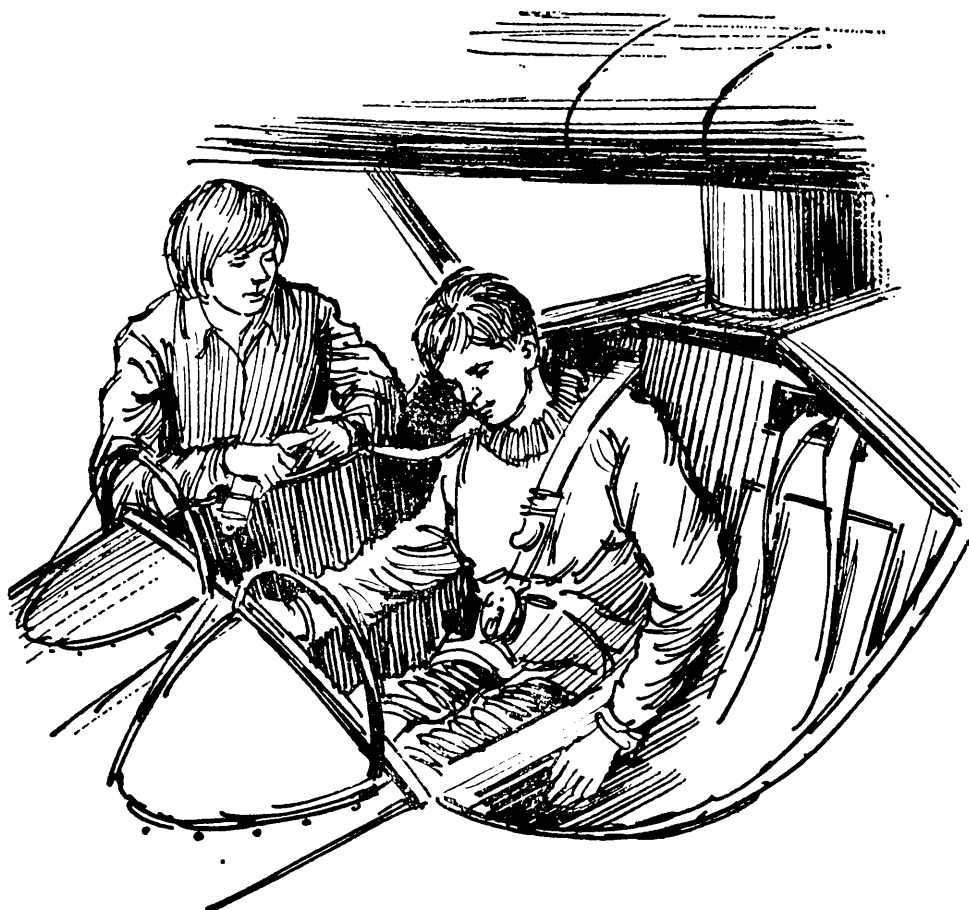
"All right?" Pam smiled. "Is that tight enough?"

"Feels too tight."

"That's fine, you'll soon get used to it. Some instructors like to have your life squashed out before you start."

John laughed and looked at Pam, noticing how slim she was; flying obviously was not a matter of strength.

The instructor now got into the left-hand seat, and without looking at his straps did them up almost unconsciously. He slipped into the cockpit as though it were his favourite armchair, and he had an air of quiet



efficiency about him which was reassuring. He turned to John and gave his harness a tug.

"Comfortable?"

John nodded.

"Can you see out properly, and can you reach the controls? Put your feet on the rudder pedals."

Mike looked down into the cockpit at John's muddy boots.

"Yes, that's all right. You don't need any more cushions. Have you ever been in the air before?"

John shook his head. Somehow he was not finding it

FIRST FLIGHT

very easy to talk. He felt excited, afraid and happy, all muddled together.

"Well, today is a good day to start. It is cold, but the air is smooth. You have seen gliders go up steeply on a winch launch, haven't you?"

"Yes."

"It does feel a bit like going up in a lift at first, but you will soon get used to it. Many pupils get so used to it, in fact, that they have to be restrained from trying to climb vertically. On this flight, then, we will take off and climb until we are nearly above the winch, when I will release the cable. With any luck we will then be about a thousand feet up. We will do a circuit to the right, out over those trees, and then fly round to land. When we are in the air, look out and see if you can pick up any landmarks. Before we start, however, we must check the controls, and hook on the launching cable."

Mike looked towards the group of people standing near the signalling lamp.

"Wing up, somebody," he shouted.

The glider was brought to an even keel, as someone lifted the wing and stood holding it.

Mike went on, "When I move this control stick, the aileron surfaces on the wings and the elevators on the tail move, and when I move the pedals, the rudder moves.

"The object of testing the controls before flying is not only to check that they are connected up properly, but also to see that a cushion has not slipped between the seat and the stick, or that a cat has not curled up behind the rudder pedals while you were at lunch."

John laughed. "Does that really happen?"

"It has – only once as far as I know, but if it happened

JOHN GOES GLIDING

once it can happen again, and you don't want to be the one who flies with a spitting, screeching animal, do you?"

"Oh, no."

"Right. The best way to check the controls is to move the stick in one direction – say to the left – fully, and see what does happen is what should happen. So when you move the stick to the left, the left aileron should move up, and the right aileron down. Then test all the other controls just as carefully."

John looked along at the wing tips, and could see the control surfaces move, and then the elevator on the tail, up for stick back, and down for stick forward.

"Now, just try them for yourself while we are waiting for the cable to arrive."

John put his hands and feet on the controls of the glider, and moved them slowly about. Soon, however, the tractor fussed its noisy way towards them, dragging out the winch cables. One was pulled over to the two-seater and Mackay crouched down by the nose ready to hook on.

"Open," he shouted.

Mike turned to John. "See that yellow knob just below the instrument panel? It is for hooking on and releasing the cable. Pull it now and shout 'Open'."

He did as he was told.

"Close," came the voice from under the nose.

"Now let it go," said Mike.

As John loosened his grip, the yellow knob clicked back, and the cable was attached.

"Good," said Mike. "Now we are ready to fly. All this checking and everything seems a lot of bother when you start, but it soon comes automatically."

FIRST FLIGHT

Then he turned to the signaller, who was waiting with an Aldis lamp in his hand.

"All clear above and behind?"

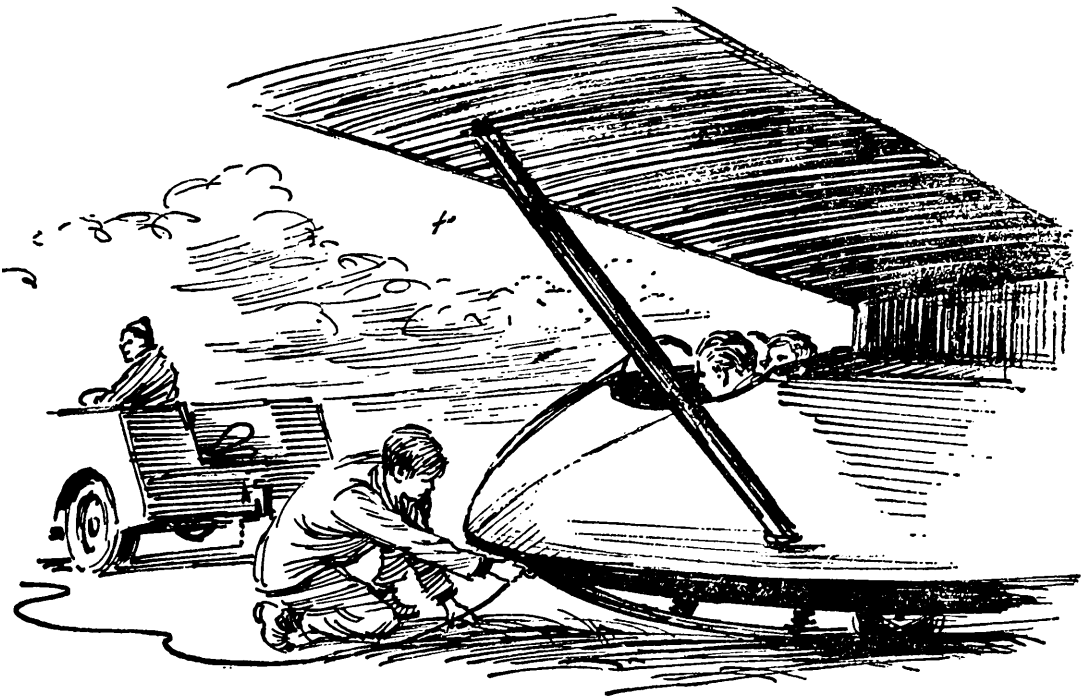
"Yes."

"Take up slack."

The signalling lamp winked long flashes, telling the driver of the far winch to wind in slowly. John watched the curve of the cable lying ahead of them slither sideways through the short grass, and come up taut. The cable ring clinked in the release, and the tail of the glider lifted slightly, and dropped back on the ground. John suddenly shivered with anticipation.

"All out," shouted Mike in his ear.

The lamp flickered quickly to the winch driver, and at the far end of the bleak winter field a slight smoke haze accompanied the faint noise of an engine.



JOHN GOES GLIDING

The glider suddenly moved forward, and John grasped the side of the cockpit. Mike's voice was reassuring.

"Here we go. The glider leaves the ground quite smoothly, and starts to climb."

John felt the acceleration in his stomach, and the cold wind cut sharply on his face, taking his breath away. The grass was rushing past them, and he could feel the landing wheel touching the unevenness of the hard ground. Then suddenly the bumping stopped, and the grass vanished. Ahead was only the pale cold sky.

His fingers squeezed the cockpit side with apprehension.

"We are climbing steadily now. Look out, and you will see that the angle is not really so steep as it probably feels first time up."

John turned his head, and saw some ground again. It was reassuring, even if it was only the view of the runway at an odd angle.

"We are getting near the top of the launch now," came Mike's voice again. "Notice that the angle of the climb gets less and less steep."

John tried to look around, but everything seemed to be rather unreal, and the rush of air was breathtaking.

"I am going to release the cable now. Always pull the knob twice to make sure."

There was a click, the noise and the airflow lessened, and they were floating along on an even keel, almost in silence. It was a strange feeling. There seemed nothing to hold them up, but somehow it felt as if the glider were sitting on a great cushion of air. It was both exhilarating and peaceful.

He looked at Mike, who grinned back.

FIRST FLIGHT

"Look around," he said. "You live near here. Can you see your house?"

John stared about him. The view was superb, but too huge to be looked at all at once. Hundreds of fields in all directions faded gently into the haze of the horizon, their pattern broken by woods and smoky villages. The dull blue-green of the pine forest smoothed out below. As the glider banked gently to turn, he could see the pattern of rides cut like ruled lines across it. Seeing it now made him feel that it was fantastic to have got lost. It looked so clear and simple. He could not spot his aunt's house or even the village, although he knew it must be beyond the forest.

"See that white building away over there?"

John looked along Mike's pointing finger.

"That is a factory at Basingstoke. It is quite a good landmark for setting off on a cross-country flight in that direction. You can easily glide to it if you are only two thousand feet up."

The glider turned again, and the airfield spread before them, the great runways built for war, and the geometric patches of green between.

Mike was talking, and John tried to listen, but there was so much to see.

"We are coming in to land now."

The glider banked, and the tops of spiky trees flashed into view. John gripped the cockpit side again with a sudden start. The trees disappeared quickly, but had seemed so close. Mike's comforting voice continued:

"As we get near the ground we gently change the altitude of the glider so that we are floating along just above the ground, gradually losing speed. We try to

JOHN GOES GLIDING

keep the glider just off the ground until it is ready to land."

John was fascinated by the rush of the blurred green underneath, and hardly noticed that the biting cold air was dying away. There was a slight rumbling feeling, and the green became grass. Everything had stopped. They must be on the ground. Surprised at this idea, he looked suddenly at the instructor. Mike was smiling at him, his eyes twinkling.

"How did you like it?" he said.

"Jolly well." John was overwhelmed, and did not feel the inadequacy of his words. It was just as though he had suddenly come upon a whole new world. "When can I start learning properly?"

"If possible I will take you up again after lunch, when you have had time to think about this trip. In the meantime, watch the others. You can learn a great deal that way."

John fumbled with his harness and, still in a dream, climbed out as someone else got in.

Now Try it Yourself

DURING lunch the gliders had remained at the launch point weighted down with tyres on their wing tips, and John realized that it must have been some of these which he had fallen over in the night. Lunch had been bread, cheese and hot soup, but he had no great appetite, and was impatient to get in the air again. There were so many things to find out. How was it that they had flown all around the airfield without his realizing that they had done so? He had been most surprised when he had seen the landing area in front of them again. And how could you make the glider land exactly where you wanted as Mike had done?

“There’s Daisy to push!” It was Pam’s voice. She was keeping the log sheet, and was looking at the glider as it floated past them towards the far winch. Two pupils, at a jog trot, went to fetch the glider, and John followed them. He was a good runner and soon caught up. Then they all slowed down to a walk, breathless.

Meanwhile the single-seater Swallow was being launched, and John watched it climb higher, and grow smaller until it crossed in front of the sun and the glare dazzled him.

When they reached Daisy, the two-seater had been turned round ready to be wheeled back.

JOHN GOES GLIDING

"Can't you land nearer to the launch point than this?" complained one of the pushers. He did not mean it seriously, but the pupil was depressed, and just said, "Sorry."

Mike was used to this sort of banter.

"Walking is good exercise," he said. "No one can learn to land in the right place until he finds out why he lands in the wrong one. Come on now, faster everyone, or we shall be here all day."

John was holding the wing tip, and as they pushed the two-seater the instructor talked quietly to his pupil. Patience was not one of John's stronger virtues, and he was relieved and glad when at last Mike told him to get in and do up his straps.

This time he managed it without help, and with only a little prompting succeeded in checking the controls. But the second winch launch seemed just as alarming as the first, probably because he had assumed that he would have got used to it. As soon as the speed had settled down after release, Mike began to demonstrate how the controls worked in the air.

"If I move the stick to the left," he said, "the left wing goes down. Look out at it, and you will see how it cuts the horizon, while the right wing is up in the air. Now I will bring the glider back to level flight."

John looked at Mike's hand on the controls, and then again out at the wings.

"If I put the stick to the right, the right wing goes down. Again return to level flight. Now I want you to try that. You've got the controls."

John's grip tightened on the stick, and he moved it gingerly to the left, but nothing seemed to happen.

NOW TRY IT YOURSELF

"A little more. Don't be afraid of it."

John tried again, moving the stick firmly to the left, and the great wing slowly heeled over.

"Good. Now back to level flight, and try it to the right."

When John had experimented again, Mike took over, glanced quickly at the airfield, changed direction slightly, and said:

"If I move the stick forward, the nose goes down, and the glider flies faster."

John felt the speed increase as the air rushed past his face, and the whistling noise grew louder. Mike had to shout.

"Now, if I move the stick back, the nose of the glider comes up, and we fly slower. If we fly too slowly, the glider will stall."

Mike put the glider back on an even keel.

"You try it."

This time John's touch was bolder, and the glider's nose went down more sharply than he expected, leaving his stomach behind, as though he were on a switchback.

"Gently," said Mike calmly, "there's no hurry. Now bring the nose up with a backward movement of the stick."

John was over-careful this time, and again nothing much seemed to happen. Mike took charge once more and settled the glider again on a straight glide at the right speed.

"Look straight ahead, John, and see where your wind-screen cuts the horizon. Remember what it looks like, as this gives you a good idea of your altitude, and therefore of speed. Listen to the noise, and feel the air on your face.

JOHN GOES GLIDING

All these things will help you to keep the speed right. Take the controls, and try to keep the speed just as it is, and the wings level."

John gripped the stick, and concentrated hard on the pale line of the horizon through the top of the windscreen.

"You are flying too slowly, put the nose down a bit."

John moved the stick forward, and the horizon jerked up above the windscreen.

"Easy does it. You only need to move the controls very gently. All right. I've got her now. We are too low to practise any more on this circuit. Keep your hands and feet lightly on the controls, and follow me while I do the approach and landing."

Once again Mike put the two-seater down right at the take-off point, and they could stay in the glider, while the launching cable was brought to them.

As soon as the cable was hooked on again, Mike called out, "All clear above and behind? Take up slack." And as the cable was hauled up tight by the far, impersonal winch, "All out."

The glider ran forward, and once again John felt the sudden smooth rush as they left the ground and started the steep climb. This time he found that he was more used to the sensation and could look around, although he still felt scared if he looked backwards and downwards at the tiny receding figures by the launch point.

The clink-clink of the release knob being pulled collected John's attention.

"Here we are then. See if you can keep her level and at this speed. It's all yours."

Mike took his hands off the controls and John tightened his hold on the stick as though the glider would drop if he

NOW TRY IT YOURSELF

did not hang on. Immediately the nose lurched up in the air.

"Hold the stick lightly," said Mike again. "You are using far too much strength. A thumb and two fingers is enough. Look. Like this." He felt Mike's firm but gentle fingers ease the glider back on to its steady way.

"Try again. Only gentle control movements are needed."

John wriggled in his seat, and stared at the horizon through the windscreen. He kept the stick very still, and the horizon stayed in the same place.

"That's better. Now, put the left wing down – that is enough."

As the glider heeled over, John unconsciously tried to resist it by keeping his body vertical, and as his body muscles tensed, so did those of his fingers.

"Now level up."

He heaved at the stick as though trying to bring the wing up by sheer force. His efforts resulted in the glider banking over the opposite way. The noise had increased as well, and the air battered his face. John was not sure what had happened, although he knew that he had been too rough with the controls again.

"Gently, gently. You are working much too hard. All right, I will level her up."

Once again Mike smoothly brought the glider back on to its peaceful course, and after this John suddenly started to do better. His speed wandered a little, but he found he was managing to keep the glider flying along without anything startling happening. All too soon Mike said:

"I've got her now for the landing."

JOHN GOES GLIDING

John loosened his grip on the stick, and was surprised to find how tightly he had been holding it, in spite of Mike's words, for his fingers felt quite stiff.

After this they did a third circuit together, and Mike showed him how the rudder worked.

"If you move your left foot forward, the glider yaws or swings to the left. And if you move your right foot forward it yaws to the right."

He felt the skiddy feeling which resulted from doing this, and tried to remember what Mike said.

"The rudder is not a very important control for ordinary flying. It is not the main control for turning the glider, but only helps you to do smooth turns."

This seemed odd, as he had always thought that rudders were for turning. It all seemed rather complicated. Mike went on:

"The main controls for turning are the ailerons. Remember, that if a wing goes down, the glider will start to turn in that direction. That is why it is important to see that your wings are quite level when you are trying to fly straight. If one wing is down, no amount of poking about with the rudder will make you go properly straight."

As the short winter day faded, and the air smelt smoky with the coming frost, the gliders were wheeled back to the hangar. Much to John's surprise, Mike and another member called Pete started to take Daisy to pieces. Pam and he helped by holding the wing tips as instructed, and in about ten minutes Daisy was spread out on the concrete floor. Two wings, two struts, one fat fuselage, and a tailplane.

"Do you know why the two-seater has been dis-

NOW TRY IT YOURSELF

mantled?" John asked Pam, as soon as he could get a chance. "Won't there be any flying tomorrow?"

"Oh, yes, but it is being taken on an expedition to Eastbourne to fly at a club on the cliffs near there."

"Are you going?"

"I hope so. I asked Mike as soon as I heard, and he said I could."

"Do you think he would let me?"

"I don't know," said Pam doubtfully. "He doesn't usually take pupils until they can do turns properly. He says it is a waste of their money or something, and he likes to teach turns in calm air and not in half a gale over a cliff. At least, that is what I heard him tell someone about a month ago."

"Do you think it would be all right to ask him?"

"Who? Mike? I should. He certainly won't bite your head off. Go on, there he is now."

John hurried over to where Mike was examining the tow bar of one of the trailers used for taking gliders by road.

"Please, do you think I could come tomorrow?" he asked.

Mike straightened up and looked at him.

"I don't think it is worth your coming and expecting to fly," he said. "Not only have we enough customers for Daisy without you, but it may be very windy, and you haven't really done enough yet. After all, you only started today."

"I know," said John, "but couldn't I just come and watch?"

"Yes, you can certainly do that, but we are leaving very early. If you can be standing in the middle of your

JOHN GOES GLIDING

village street at six o'clock tomorrow morning, we will pick you up. But I am afraid we won't be able to hang about if you are not there, as the days are so short at this time of year, and we want to get in all the flying we can."

"I will be there, really I will."

"All right, then, but bring some warm clothes. You'll be standing around on the cliff top for the best part of the day, and strong cold winds are forecast."



Soaring by the Sea

IT WAS bitterly cold and still dark as John stamped about in the road waiting for Mephisto, the club truck, to collect him. Aunt Evelyn had raised no objections to the expedition, and had packed up some food, and given him a Thermos of hot chocolate. He had waited about for nearly ten minutes already, and feeling the bulky package in his pocket thought hungrily of the thick lumps of cheese, and the moist, fresh, thickly-buttered brown bread, although he had eaten breakfast less than half an hour ago.

He looked impatiently down the road and wondered whether they had forgotten him, gone through the village early, decided not to go, had a puncture, and so many other things that he had almost given up hope of ever seeing them again, when Mephisto careered up the street, its lights full on. The brakes squeaked as it drew up sharply.

“Jump in quick,” shouted a voice, “we’re late.”

But John did not notice this glimpse of the obvious, for he was relieved that he had not been forgotten after all. He clambered into the gloomy back as Mephisto moved off, its red rear lamp gleaming on to the trailer and picking out the fuselage of the two-seater.

John discovered Mackay, and Pete, who was one of the

JOHN GOES GLIDING

best pilots in the club, huddled under blankets, trying to keep warm. There were also about five others whom he did not recognize. Mac told him that Dennis was driving, and that Mike and Pam were also in the front.

They drove for nearly an hour and a half before it began to get light, and everyone was kept busy adjusting coat collars, flying suits and rugs to keep out the freezing draughts which seemed to penetrate the back of the truck in spite of its tight-laced canvas cover. Mac had some chocolate which he shared round. It was soft and warm – about the only thing that was. John had no idea in which direction they were going, or how long the journey would take, but he was quite happy listening to the talk of his new friends. Pete was discussing the National Championships of the previous summer in which he had come third, and John was fascinated by the accounts of some of the flights, because he had not realized that gliders could really race against each other, or fly to a distant turning place and then fly back home again. He did not know even what made them stay up.

At last Mephisto stopped at the field gates leading to the Gliding Club, and after some fumbling with the catch they bumped slowly across the short turf towards the hangar hidden in a sheltered hollow. The truck doors clanged, and John and the others clambered stiffly out of the back.

“Hallo there,” shouted Mike.

A door at the side of the hangar opened, and a man looked out.

“Oh, so you’ve arrived at last. We expected you by half past eight, and I think we’ve eaten all the breakfast. Anyway, come in and get warm.”

SOARING BY THE SEA

The door led into a small, dark and rather smoky room pervaded by an appetizing smell of bacon and coffee, which they found was not finished after all. Enough had been kept for them, and they wasted no time in eating it.

"Come on now," called Mike, "we came to fly. The two-seater here did an hour before breakfast and got to eight hundred feet. The wind is blowing straight up over the cliff and is stronger now, so it should give us some excellent soaring. The plan is this. We rig Daisy here in the shelter of the hangar, and tow her out to the launch point with Mephisto. The wind is very strong so everyone must hang on so that she doesn't blow over. Launches are by winch, just like at home. I will try to do flights of half an hour each with all of you, so when Daisy is in the air you can help the people here, but when Daisy comes in to land you must be ready to get her back to the launch point without delay, otherwise we won't get everyone a flight. All right, let's get cracking."

Carefully the two big wings were lifted off the trailer and then, rolling on its single wheel, half balanced and half carried, the tubby fuselage was lowered carefully to the ground.

"John, you steady the fuselage while we put the wings on, starboard one first. Dennis, you hold the wing tip."

Quickly everyone went to his place, and lifted the right wing into position, gently shifting it so that the fittings came in line, and the steel bolts could be slipped home. Then the strut, already pinned to the fuselage at its lower end, was swung up and attached to the under surface of the wing.

Meanwhile others had put on the tailplane, and linked

JOHN GOES GLIDING

up the elevator control. The left wing was gently eased into place and secured, and its wing strut attached. As soon as this had been done the glider became rigid and strong, and could be left with one wing tip resting on the ground while the ailerons were connected. Then it was carefully inspected all over, while gulls screamed and whirled about in the wild air above.

It needed all of them to hang on during the tow to the launch point, for as soon as they moved out of the sheltered hollow the sea wind hit them with great force. It had a lovely salty freshness that made everyone feel good, but Mike had warned them it was powerful enough to blow the two-seater right over on its back if they left it unattended, or facing into wind, without anyone in the cockpit. John was walking at the wing tip, on the windward side, and in gusts it needed all his strength to hang on, as the wind tried to heave the great wing up in the air. The whole glider trembled.

By now the solid grey cloud sheet had broken, and patches of pale but vivid blue were letting the winter sunshine stripe the cliff top.

Mike was taking Dennis on the first flight, and John watched the two-seater, bumping a little in the gusty wind, rise effortlessly to the top of the launch and then turn away to the cliff edge, while the winch cable rippled down to the ground again, trailing its little parachute.

"I wonder how high they will get," said Pam, at his elbow.

"I don't know. I've never seen a glider soar before."

"Oh, well, you will now; the wind from the sea must be rushing upwards over the cliffs – you can feel how strong it is here – and as long as they fly to and fro above the

SOARING BY THE SEA

cliff edge, in the rising air, the glider will be able to stay up, rather like the ping-pong balls you see on top of the fountains of water at fun fairs."

John was watching Daisy, his eyes half shut against the wind. As she reached out over the edge, the glider banked gently and turned along the line of cliffs. Slowly, almost imperceptibly, she rose higher and higher, until she turned back again from the far end of the high cliffs nearly eight hundred feet up. When he looked again, after helping to launch one of the local gliders, a sleek shiny blue Swallow with an enclosed cockpit, Daisy was at about a thousand feet, with the sun glinting on her silver wings as she turned against a patch of blue-black cloud.

* * *

An unexpected chance came for John late in the afternoon. The sky had cleared and was an icy blue, becoming yellow in the south-west as the sun hurried out the short winter day. The air was colder, and the wind just as strong.

"Jump in," Mike had shouted as the glider came to rest neatly by the launch point – John was sure he could land on the proverbial sixpence.

"Hurry – we've only got about twenty minutes before it's too dark."

John fumbled with his straps while Mike got the cable hooked on.

"All ready." He cast a quick critical glance at the straps. "O.K., signaller – take up slack."

Very quickly the cable came up taut, and rattled in the release.

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“All out!”

A slight jerk, and Daisy leaped off the ground, lifted quickly by the powerful wind. Mike climbed her steadily through the gusts, while John watched the sea, which he had not really seen until this moment, spread out before him as the grassy cliff top receded below. The water was pale green and spattered with breaking white waves.

The release clicked as Mike pulled the knob, and they were floating free. John could feel the surge of the rising air as they flew out over the sharp white cliff and turned along the edge into the lift. He was sitting on the side towards the Channel, and could see the grey land only by looking across the cockpit past Mike's face. He was startled by the appearance of the sea from high above it. From his summer holidays he thought of it as something soft and flexible and wet. He knew it had power, and he had often been knocked over by waves, but from up here it looked hard, like steel, and utterly strange. The low sun did not dance on the wavelets, but laid a path of brass. Then the glider turned and he found himself looking over the dull inland with grey frost in the valleys, and a dirty bank of cloud in the sky.

“You fly her, John. You can look at the view any time.”

John took the controls, and stared at the horizon.

“Try to keep her going along as we are now, just on the sea side of the cliff edge. Don't get blown back over the cliff, or we'll be in air that's sinking down again.”

Mike leaned back and looked out over the water. The air was smooth at a thousand feet and John managed quite easily to keep the speed about right, and the

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wings level, but somehow the cliff kept disappearing underneath, instead of staying just on the land side of them.

“Do a turn to the right. Remember? Right wing down and a little right rudder to help you go smoothly into the turn. All clear behind?”

Mike looked back, to see that they would not run into other aircraft.

John banked the glider to the right and started the turn, but instead of the speed staying the same with its steady whistling noise, the glider got faster and the noise grew to a scream. He got alarmed, but Mike only said, “Watch your speed,” and looked away again. John tried bringing the nose up by moving the stick back, but the turn just seemed to get noisier and sharper. The line of dazzling brass swung across his view and then the grey haze of land.

“All right, come out of that diving turn – level the wings and a little of the opposite rudder.”

The glider lurched rather than swung back on to an even keel, the nose came up in the air and the noise died away.

“Recheck your speed – you’re too slow now – gently.”

John put the stick forward, and the nose bobbed down, giving him a slightly empty feeling in his tummy.

“Gently, man, this glider can fly itself much better than you will ever be able to, but it needs guiding – so loosen that grip on the stick.”

John released his grasp, and his whole body lost its tense feeling. Mike’s voice came again.

“Turn gently, *gently*, back along the cliff line, unless you want to go to France.”

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John suddenly realized that they were pointing straight out to sea, and the cliffs, now yellow in the evening sun, were small and far behind. But he did as he was told, and the turn stayed smooth and pleasant.

"We couldn't really get to France from here, could we?" His eyes looked so surprised that Mike laughed.

"No, silly, just about as far as that Packet."

John then saw the cross-Channel boat. It looked toy-like and quite still, with a fan-shaped immovable wake. It did not seem possible that it contained people and noise.

"It should reach Newhaven in about half an hour's time," said Mike. "Now we are at the end of the cliffs again. Gently turn, always outwards from the edge or you'll get quickly blown back into the down-draught."

Carefully he banked the glider and put on a little rudder.

"Good, that's enough."

John steadied the wings, and the nose swung round facing the sea, and the pale hazy horizon. As the cliffs came into view again he pulled out of the turn and settled down to bear once more along the jagged line of cliffs far below. At last he was beginning to get an idea of his position in the air. Until now he never seemed to know really where he was or what had happened to get him there.

"We'll have to go in soon, it's getting dusk. Fly along towards that headland, then I'll take over and go in and land. Their Swallow is going in now – see it?"

John looked to where Mike was pointing and saw the blue glider turn steeply ahead of them and dive back across the cliffs into the gloom of the winter landscape. The last of

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the sun glinted for an instant on its cockpit cover as it disappeared into the haze.

"Has he been flying all the time we have?" asked John.

"Yes, he's been tagging along behind us most of the time, except when he threw those loops."

John looked surprised but did not say anything. He had not seen the Swallow at all, in spite of trying to look out for other gliders as he had been told.

He managed to fly steadily towards the headland, and was able to take quick looks at the cross-Channel steamer, which still seemed to be in much the same place, as though it were fixed for ever in the steely sea. There was another boat in sight, too, a tiny sailing dinghy, almost underneath them, and quite close in to the cliffs. It, too, seemed stationary and held in the grip of the sea. He knew nothing about sailing, and so did not realize that the little boat was drifting helplessly towards the chalk cliff and its foaming breakers. High in the impersonal silent sky, neither John nor Mike could hear the roar of the waves, nor the shouts for help of the boy and the girl as, wet and cold, they tried desperately to keep their broken-masted dinghy from disaster.

"I've got her, John," came Mike's familiar voice. "We'll go in now."

He felt Mike's hands take charge and the glider curved round in a beautiful steep turn. He watched the sea and the cliffs swing past below, and again saw the little boat. But it did not look the same as before, it was so close to the cliffs, and although he had never been in a boat, he sensed that something was wrong. The line of greeny-white foam fitted hard round the cliff foot, and there was no beach. Impulsively he shouted to Mike.

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Mike looked at his down-pointed hand, steepened up the turn until they were almost on their sides, gyrating round and suspended by nothing. He spotted the boat at once, and action followed. John couldn't help a gasp as his stomach rose inside him when Mike dived steeply to get a better look. The whistle rose to a shriek, and they seemed to be pointing straight at the sea. Down, down they went and John found it difficult to breathe, but a quick glance showed him the usual quiet confident instructor in whom he had come to have great faith.

Suddenly the white cliffs flashed past close to the wing tip and John had a sudden view of the little boat in a mad swirl of breakers. It was swinging about wildly, and no longer looked still as it had done from high up. Two pale faces were staring up at them. Then the scene vanished, and John felt his body pressed down into the cockpit as Mike pulled the glider up into a steep climbing turn. The fantastic shriek softened into the usual whistle, and the glider turned and went in to land. The rough cliff top seemed to rush underneath. It was dotted with scrubby bushes, and chalky rabbit burrows. There was a smooth bit by the hangar, and Mike threw the glider on to this, and before it had stopped rolling was half out of the cockpit. As he ran towards the hangar he shouted back:

"Look after Daisy."

John grabbed the controls, but the glider was still and lifeless, one wing resting on the short turf. He undid his straps and got out. The last few minutes had left him in a whirl.

Two people came up.

"What's the matter with your instructor?" said one.
"Looks as if you've scared the daylights out of him."

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“We saw a boat under the cliffs. It was in trouble. Mike’s gone to get help,” John spluttered as they turned the glider round out of wind.

They heaped some tyres on the wing, and in the gathering dusk ran to the hangar. Someone had just finished telephoning the coastguards.

The Rescue

THE club members hurriedly collected torches and the Aldis lamp used for winch-launching signals and started to run to the cliff edge. It was getting dark and John, following, kept tripping over great flints or stumbling in holes. Mike and some others caught him up.

"Lucky you spotted them," he said, as they trotted along. "I hope the lifeboat gets there quickly. It'll be a jolly near thing. There's no beach or even climbable rocks down there, and they can't possibly survive for long in that sea."

Flickering torchlight ahead showed them that the cliffs ended with a vertical drop into the water. Someone shouted that the edge was unsafe and might crumble away without warning, but even so he had risked this and was lying on his stomach shining a powerful torch into the roaring darkness below, searching for the little boat.

The wind at the cliff edge had a frightening force, and John could barely stand against it.

"Quiet," shouted someone, and the word was scarcely heard.

Meanwhile a few people with the signalling lamp and battery had gone to a rock jutting out about fifty yards away and were searching the cliff foot from an angle.

THE RESCUE

"We'll never hear their shouts in this wind," someone said.

"Glad I'm not down there," cried another.

Suddenly the signalling lamp was swung straight at them and winked furiously.

"They've spotted them. Come on."

They all ran along the cliff top, keeping away from the jagged edge, and gathered behind the man with the lamp. He was directing its gleam steeply down into a narrow indentation in the cliff face which was half hidden by the spray from the waves. There was no sign of the little boat.

"They're in there," he shouted. "They must be on a ledge or something. I saw them wave – well, one person waved. I'll bet they're absolutely frozen. Can't see the dinghy anywhere. Wish the lifeboat would hurry."

His disjointed talk stopped, and there was silence while they all peered down the shaft of light. John could see a shadow on the cliff face in between the waves, and thought he saw some movement.

The light faltered and went out, and the sudden blackness hit them.

"Here, someone, hold this, my fingers have gone numb."

John was nearest, and had his gloves on. He took the lamp and pressed the switch. The long finger of light picked out the surging sea, the cliff foot, and then the shadowy place where two people were marooned.

Suddenly a searchlight pricked from out at sea and steadied on the spot where the Aldis lamp pointed. It was the lifeboat, and as it came nearer, its powerful light shone on two forms huddled together in a crack in the

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rotten chalk face. The lifeboat came closer, and then stopped.

At the same instant John heard new voices. The police and coastguards had arrived on the cliff top. They had great hanks of rope, and more torches. Two of them leaned over John's shoulder and looked down the beam of the lamp, which he tried to hold steady.

"The boat can't get in there. We'll have to go down. Find something to fix the ropes to, and hurry. It's not high tide yet. They won't be able to hold on much longer."

Mike shouted, "We've got a truck that will do all right. I'll bring it over." He ran into the darkness without waiting for an answer, with Dennis following him.

The men were laying out the ropes, and people seemed to be running in all directions. Soon, however, Mephisto came bumping over the grass, and Mike parked it at right-angles to the cliff edge. As a precaution, someone else wedged the wheels with flints. Two uniformed men started hunting round it for a solid place to tie the end of the rope.

In the middle of all this excitement, the police sergeant, held by the ankles by Pete and one of the coastguards, was hanging head down over the cliff edge, shouting to the couple below.

"We are letting down a rope. Sit in one – loop – put the other – under – your – arms." He repeated this several times before a waved arm told him the instructions had been heard. Carefully the rope was lowered; the wind whipped it around like a lash, but it was caught. Long minutes passed and then the sergeant waved his hand.

THE RESCUE

"Haul away, but go easy. It's the girl, and she looks all in."

Carefully the girl was hauled over the cliff edge and willing hands lifted her to safety. She could not stand up, and was moaning, her face blue with cold. Someone carried her to an ambulance that John had not noticed arrive.

The rope went down again, and those lying on the cliff top changed places with fresh helpers.

For a long time nothing happened; then the rope came up empty.

"It's no good," shouted the sergeant. "He's too weak. Someone'll have to go down."

Immediately Mike moved forward. "I'll go," he said quietly. "I've done some rope work on mountains."

He tied the spare end of the rope around his waist and looped it over his body with accustomed ease. He went feet first over the edge, facing the cliff.

"Go slowly, and steady as you can."

He pushed his body away from the face with his feet and disappeared. A tuft of thrift and some chalk broke away and clattered into the darkness. The rope was paid slowly out for what seemed an age, and then slackened. Mike had reached the ledge. The sergeant stared down in silence. John felt himself shivering all over.

Nothing happened, and the sergeant did not move. The minutes passed terribly slowly. Suddenly he raised his hand.

"Haul away!"

The strain was taken, and the rope eased in. John went to the end of the line and pulled too. The load was tremendous. They must be coming up together.



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Suddenly the edge of the cliff beneath the sergeant gave way with a dull roar. His head and shoulders vanished with the turf and flints, and the two hanging on to his legs began to slide towards the darkness beyond. They yelled, and just in time about four others hurled themselves down, grabbing coats, feet or anything that came to hand. The sergeant was pulled back. He had lost his helmet, but would not leave his position.

"Haul away," he shouted. "Ten feet more to go."

"Stop now."

It did not take so long to get the youth over the cliff, although he was unconscious, as Mike was holding him partly away from the face. Carefully he was rolled over the edge, where a doctor took charge and had him carried to the ambulance.

Then Mike pulled himself up, helped by the tireless sergeant, and stood dripping and shivering beside them.

The rescue was over, and suddenly everyone felt wet and very cold. The ambulance had gone, and the coastguards started quietly coiling up their ropes as though a routine practice had just finished. A constable with a notebook was talking to one of the club members.

Someone said, "Good show, Mike, but you'd better get those wet clothes off."

And then they all started back to the clubroom, which was soon filled with shivering people, smoke and steaming cups of tea and soup, which two of the girl members had thoughtfully brewed up.

Everyone was talking about the rescue, except Mike who looked exhausted. He had borrowed some clothes, rather too large for him, and was sitting sipping his tea, both hands round the cup. Dennis came over to him.

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"We've got Daisy de-rigged and on the trailer. Everything's ready when you are."

Mike looked up.

"Oh, thanks, Dennis. I'd forgotten all about poor old Daisy. I'll come right away, we must be hours behind schedule as it is." He got up and turned to the Southern Club members. "Thanks for the day's flying, chaps. You certainly provide entertainment in these parts."

"Thanks to you, Mike. Those two wouldn't have had a chance if you hadn't spotted them."

"Don't blame me." Mike smiled. "It was John here who did that."

The long journey back passed fairly quickly, for John quite soon fell asleep. Afterwards he remembered being woken up, stiff and cold, at his aunt's house, blinking in the sudden light and warmth, muttering something about drowning, which startled his aunt even more than his late arrival, and falling into a bed warmed by a hot water bottle.

Landing is not so easy

By two o'clock the rain had stopped, and everyone was hurrying to get out the gliders so that the short winter afternoon would not be wasted. Several days had passed since the visit to the south coast but John still felt rather helpless, as he did not know how to drive the tractor or the winch, and he could not inspect the gliders to see that they were airworthy. The other members seemed to be able to do all these jobs, even Pam, who was a girl, and not really much older. John felt cross, as he thought of her. "She knows everything," he thought petulantly.

Sulkily he took his usual place on the two-seater's wing tip, as five of them walked it out to the launch point. But his mood soon gave way to enjoyment of the clear rain-washed afternoon, and the sight of Daisy floating overhead with the sun on her.

John's turn came at last, and he had just finished doing up his straps and checking the controls when Pete came up. He was grinning, and with him was a worried woman holding by the hand a small girl, who wore jodhpurs too big for her, and whose cheeks were stained with tears.

"Sorry to interrupt, Mike, but this lady says she has lost a Shetland pony and could you possibly find it?"

John saw Mike's eyes twinkle and the beginnings of a

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smile being suppressed with difficulty. He looked at the woman.

“Oh, please,” she said. “You see he isn’t our pony. We are only looking after him for a friend. He’s white, and not much bigger than a large dog.”

Mike’s imagination floated over the hundreds of fields and woods he knew that he could see from the air.

“Whereabouts do you think he is?” he asked, rather hopelessly.



“I last saw him in the paddock behind our house, which is the white one about half a mile over there.” She pointed and everyone looked, although the trees on the edge of the airfield hid all beyond.

The little girl looked up at John, sitting at the controls.

“Oh, please find Rocky, he might have fallen down a well or anything – poor Rocky,” and she started to weep.

“I’ll do what I can,” Mike told the woman. “Don’t worry, we’ll have a good look round.”

Pete led the couple away from the glider, and someone hooked on the cable.

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"Ready to launch?" called the wing tip man.

"Yes, ready," said Mike, and added, turning to John, "Now, my lad, you're here to learn to fly. I'll look for the pony. You just concentrate on what you're doing."

The cable tightened; then the glider accelerated forward, and stopped bumping as it rose into the air.

Mike shouted, "Tell me when you think we are at the top of the launch and ready to release."

John looked over the side, and could see the cable curving down underneath them to the winch. There was a tuft of grass caught on it, which swayed gently.

"Don't look right out. Try to judge by the general position of the winch."

John pulled himself in a little, but was fascinated by the way everything grew smaller on the ground as they got higher.

"About - now," he cried.

"A little early, but not bad. Release the cable now."

The glider rose free, settled to a steady speed, and then Mike handed over the controls.

"Fly her round the airfield, keeping a little outside the boundary, while I look for this wretched animal."

With that, Mike stared out over the side towards the white house now visible beyond the spinney, and left John to his own devices.

He looked at Mike, who apparently was not interested in the flying, so he edged into a gentle turn in which the speed got slower and slower, and then faster and faster. He still moved the stick jerkily when making corrections, and looked sideways at Mike, who appeared not to have noticed the unsteady flying.

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"Turn a bit right," Mike shouted suddenly. "O.K., keep it at that."

John peered ahead where Mike was looking, but he could see nothing.

"All right, turn left again. False alarm."

This time John's turn was steadier, and he trusted himself to look out and study a small meadow which had recently been ploughed up, but it was empty.

By now they had glided right round the field and were quite low. As they turned across wind for the approach, Mike started laughing, and he was still laughing as he took over from John to land.

Pete and the woman ran up.

"Did you see him?" they asked together.

Mike stopped laughing with an effort. "There's an animal like a large white dog in the garden of the white house," he said, "and it looks as though it's in among the vegetables. Your wanderer has certainly returned, but I doubt if you'll have any cabbages left by the time you get home."

The woman looked even more harassed than before, but the small girl was beaming and jumping up and down.

"Rocky's found," she shouted, "and I don't like cabbages."

Dennis drove them to the edge of the aerodrome on the tractor, and they hurried off through the trees.

Mike turned to John. "That's the fun and games over, so on this next circuit you can try to land yourself. You've watched me do it enough. Can you remember what to do?"

"I think so. I must approach with enough speed, remembering not to get too slow, but as I get near the

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ground I must start to check the glide, to hold the glider off the ground until I am floating along just above the grass – daisy-cutting, you called it; then I have to go on trying to keep the glider just off the ground as it slows down until it is ready to land by itself, on the wheel and tail skid together. I must remember to keep the wings level, and to keep it straight after landing.”

“Excellent, you’ve told me how to do a very good landing. Now let’s try it out in practice. Make your final approach straight, so you are not still fiddling about with turns when you ought to be thinking about the landing. And you can take over halfway up the winch launch on this circuit too, but don’t release until we both agree.”

His blue eyes twinkled at John, who was concentrating too hard to notice. Mike loved instructing, and was at his happiest when his pupils were trying things out for the first time themselves.

Mike took off and about halfway up the launch, when the glider was climbing smoothly, he handed over control.

“Keep her just as we are,” he said.

John felt his hand tighten on the controls, and then, remembering what Mike had spent so much effort in teaching him, slackened his grip until just his fingers and thumb were holding the stick. He sat very still, hoping that he would do nothing wrong. As they got near the top of the launch he peered over the side, unknowingly moving the stick the same way.

“Your wing is going down, climb her level on the launch.”

John unbelievably looked out along the wing, and saw

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that they were indeed banked well over. As he hurriedly levelled up, there was a sharp "ching", and the nose of the glider reared up in the air. For an instant he was confused and did nothing, and then with a jerk moved the stick forward, so that both he and Mike left the seats and were pressed up into their safety harness. His tummy felt as if it were in a London lift.

"Easy there, we're not on the big dipper," came Mike's even voice.

John settled the glider at the right speed, and then said: "What happened?"

"You were so long getting the wings level, that you forgot we were nearly at the top of the launch, and we overflowed the winch. When that happened, the automatic safety release came into action and let go the cable for us. However, always pull the release knob to make absolutely sure you haven't got a part of the cable still attached."

John pulled the knob twice.

"Turn left – fly steadily and don't rush things."

John wriggled in his seat to settle down, put on bank, and a little rudder. He managed to keep his speed right, but forgot to look round for other aircraft, and then continued the turn too far so they were almost pointing into the airfield again.

"Turn gently right and fly along parallel to the boundary and just outside it."

Mike's unhurried words always helped when he got into a muddle, and he managed to fly all the way along the side of the airfield without anything further going wrong; he then banked and flew along the lee boundary of the field, staring hard at the landing area, and wondering when he should start the final approach into the wind.

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He looked at Mike who nodded his head towards the field, so he gently started the turn which would bring him into wind for his first landing.

"Check your speed and keep her really straight."

John glanced quickly at his wing tips, and increased speed a little to make sure he would not get too slow by mistake. Then he looked at the ground, which was beginning to rush past in a blur as he got closer to it. He suddenly had a tremendous urge to land at once, and get this suspense over. His eyes began to get mesmerized by the ground and he found himself looking almost straight down by the glider's nose, instead of well ahead.

"Begin to check your glide. Hold her off gently." Mike's voice was calm, but John's actions were rough and unpractised; one minute they were hurtling towards the ground and the next seemed to be shooting upwards like a startled lark.

"Don't get too slow."

John got the nose down again, and once more the grass rushed at him.

"Gently, John – gently. Only very slight movements. Now, ease the stick back – that's enough – wait. Now, gently try to keep her off the ground – keep her off, keep her off."

At this moment Daisy suddenly hit the ground with her wheel and bounded into the air.

"Do nothing, wait for it."

John did nothing, but not because he was obeying Mike. He did not seem to have any more initiative; he had made his effort and his brain seemed to have quietly stopped work.

Daisy floated for a second or so after the bounce and

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then delicately subsided on to the ground, John being galvanized into action again by Mike shouting: "Keep her straight, till you've stopped rolling."

When they had finally come to rest Mike said:

"Not bad for a first attempt, but tell me what you think your worst fault was."

"Diving at the ground, and then pulling her up too much, and then forgetting I had to keep straight after landing."

"Well, at least you know what you did wrong, so there is hope for you; but remember, a child of eight has enough physical strength to fly a glider, so you have much more than is ever needed. You fly this glider as though you are training to be an all-in wrestler or something."

They had landed farther into the field than when Mike was flying, and Pete and Pam came to help push them back to the start. John was not really feeling very pleased with himself. It was all very well to say "Fly gently", but Mike could not know the feeling of impulse, and the something-about-to-go-wrong hurry that he had all the time he was flying, and which made him correct so jerkily.

An Olympia was just being launched as they got back to the start, and John watched it climb steeply on the wire. Suddenly, about one hundred feet up, without any noise, its nose jerked up, and it hung tail down and silent like a huge bird of prey. A short end of winch line dangled from the release hook. Then its nose swung down until it was in a steep dive, and the length of cable fell away. The Olympia glided straight ahead and landed somewhere by the winch.

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Mike climbed into Daisy again.

"That was the first time that Stef had the winch cable break in an Olympia," he said. "He managed quite well."

"But isn't it dangerous if the winch cable breaks just after the glider is in the air?" asked John.

"Only if the glider is climbed too steeply near the ground. Cable breaks are not uncommon, and the glider should be flown in such a way that if there is a break, or the winch fails, the glider can be landed safely. After a break, the two ends of the cable are quickly knotted or spliced together, and you can launch again with only a few minutes' delay."

"How long ago did Stef start flying?"

"I think he did a little as a boy, at his home in Poland before the war, but I'm not sure. He started here last year. He's a good chap – one of the most cheerful in the club."

The cable was being mended by the tractor driver, and as there would still be a few minutes before it arrived, Mike asked John how he would do a take-off.

"Keep the wings level, I suppose, and not try to take off until we have enough speed."

"Yes, that's right, get the glider going so that it is running along on its main wheel only. When it is going fast enough it will take itself off quite smoothly and start to climb. See that it is not allowed to climb too steeply until you have speed and height."

John nodded his head thoughtfully, and Mike looked at him.

"Well," he said, "think you could do it?"

John looked up quickly.

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"Me do the take-off, and the flying, and the landing?"
He clearly did not believe his ears.

"Don't you want to?"

"Oh, yes."

"Well, you have got to start some time, so it might as well be now."

The tractor drove under the up-tilted wing and the cable was taken off. John went through the now familiar drill of hooking on and control check almost without thinking, and then they were ready.

As the glider started to move forward he tried to concentrate on getting it to roll only on its wheel, but first of all the tail skid bumped, and then the nose went down and the skid grated on the tarmac, but as they moved faster it seemed to become easier, and suddenly John realized that the noise had ceased and they were airborne. Mike's voice broke in:

"Not too steep yet, wait until we are a little higher before climbing fully."

John pushed the stick forward to get the nose down, and the cable became slack, and then tautened with a surge. But after this, nothing went very wrong except that he let the left wing go down without noticing it, and the glider drifted across the runway. By luck he managed to judge the time to release quite well, and felt gloriously elated when they were flying smoothly and free a thousand feet up.

Carefully he turned to the left so as to fly round the airfield, with Mike prompting him how to arrive at the approach with the right amount of height. It was a lovely afternoon, clear and crisp, with all the shadowed places on the ground marked out by frost. Smoke curled gently

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out of cottage chimneys and drifted away in streamers on the dying wind; the sounds of a dog and a motor cycle came up to them, clearly heard above the glider's gentle whistle.

Hurriedly, John squinted at the landing place, frowning with concentration.

"Turn in now, and get straight for the final approach."

Again the ground started to rush towards him, and he deliberately made his fingers relax on the controls.

"Look well ahead."

He was nearly overcome with the desire to rush on to the ground and get it over and done with, but he knew he would be miserable if Mike had to take the controls away from him. Gently he started to check the glide.

"Not too soon – maintain your speed."

He did nothing, but just waited, hoping all would be well. The ground got closer, and he checked again – gently – and Mike said nothing. Very carefully he moved the stick further and further back and although the grass was blurring past it seemed to be getting neither nearer nor further away. Then there was a slight bump, and again John did nothing, for no better reason than he could not think what to do. Then there was a gentle rumbling and they were on the ground.

Mike looked at him with mock surprise.

"I couldn't have done better myself. But don't spend your time thinking that you have got the answer to landing, or you'll never do a good one again. I won't say 'beginner's luck', that would be unfair, but very often the first great effort does the trick, and after that the effort doesn't seem to get made so often."

John only half heard the words, but Mike understood

JOHN GOES GLIDING

the excitement of the first successful landing. He had, after all, been a learner himself once, a fact he tried never to forget. This was one of the reasons his pupils liked flying with him so much.

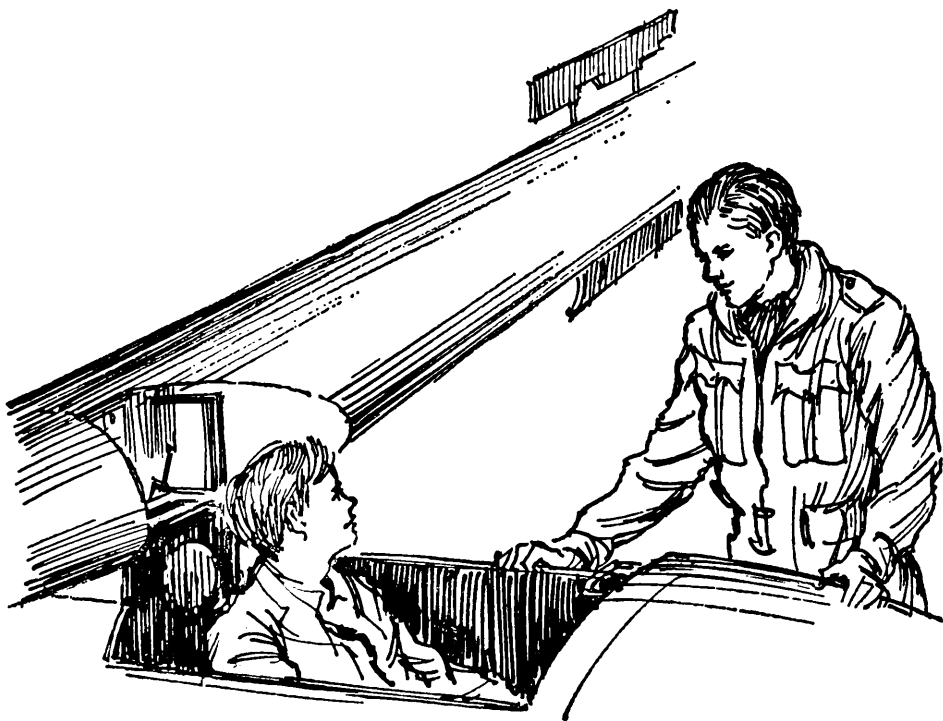
The Lost Swallow

JOHN had forgotten his earlier fears that time would pass slowly in the country, and soon there were only a few days of the holidays left.

The morning had started clear and bright, but soon big masses of cloud were developing, and from some of them ragged curtains of rain or hail were falling. So far the showers had missed the airfield, although the wind became gusty and changed direction as they passed by. John, who had now managed four or five landings on his own, some of them rather bouncy, was sitting in Daisy with Mike.

“Today we will learn about the airbrakes. These are the short strips that come out of the wing when you move this lever. When they are out you must get the nose well down to keep up your speed. This steeper glide makes it easier to land in a small space. When we next come in to land, approach with extra height, and open the brakes. Hold them open until you are about fifteen feet from the ground and about to start the landing, then close them and keep them closed until you are on the ground. Obviously, if you are getting lower than you expect on the approach, shut the brakes earlier.

“Later you will be able to adjust your approach to very fine limits indeed by varying the amount of airbrake



you have out, and by landing with them out, but at present close them before landing.”

On his first circuit, John came in to land without enough spare height to open the brakes for more than a few seconds in spite of Mike’s prompting. It seemed difficult to come in higher than usual, as it made the far end of the airfield look so close. But he realized, using the brakes himself, the power they had to enable the glider to land short, so on his second circuit he came in really high, knowing that Mike would always get him out of trouble.

It was fun coming steeply down, and gave him a feeling of control over the glider which he had not had before.

“Close the brakes now,” said Mike, as they rapidly approached the ground.

THE LOST SWALLOW

John did so, and managed to hold off properly, making a tidy landing, in spite of the gusty wind. They pulled the glider back to the launch point, watching a dark storm cloud approaching north-west of the airfield.

"I hope that monster keeps its distance," said Mike dubiously, "because on this circuit I want you to try to land with the brakes out. You will find that the time you usually have for holding off and landing is less, because the glider slows down quickly and so you have to be more accurate in your flying. Above all have plenty of speed in hand, otherwise the glider may stall before you are ready to land."

By the time they reached the launch point again, Mike knew that the black storm cloud would pass to the north and that its heavy shower would not affect them. The base of the cloud was indistinct from its dark veil of rain, and being opposite the sun produced a rainbow quite low down. Mike looked thoughtfully at this rainbow, and at its outer and fainter twin, as the glider was turned round, and then jumped quickly into his seat.

"Hurry, John. I think I can show you something that you have never seen before."

He looked again at the dark cloud, and gave the signal for take-off. Then they climbed to the top of the launch, with John concentrating on the flying, and Mike staring fascinated at the rainbow.

"Look, now," he cried, as John pulled the release. "Look at that!"

John stared unbelievably. He could see a complete circle of rainbow, not just the half he had seen hundreds of times from the ground, but all of it, clear and distinct like a gay hoop. Outside it was the second bow, and this

JOHN GOES GLIDING

was nearly complete as well, only a very small section at the bottom being lost in the earth.

They flew about, looking at the rainbow and its dark cloudy background, until they were down to six hundred feet, when the bottom of the bright ring touched the ground and was swallowed up.

"Go ahead now and sort out an approach from where we are, and remember, brakes out for the landing, and plenty of speed."

Mike sat back and watched the rainbow slowly fade, while John flew out over the boundary of the airfield, over the spinney and then turned into wind for his approach.

He opened the brakes, hearing the muffled roar of the disturbed air around them, and glided into the airfield fast and steep. The ground seemed to rush up towards him as it had during his first attempts at landing, but he felt more confident now in his ability to arrive back on the ground fairly smoothly. He started to hold off, and was surprised at how quickly the speed died away with the brakes out.

"Not too soon."

John kept the glider's nose down until the ground seemed very close, and he felt that if he did not flatten out now they would fly right into the grass. Gently he eased the stick back, and as the attitude changed, there was the gentle rumbling as the wheel ran along the ground. He was surprised at the quickness of the landing and let Daisy swing away to the left before they stopped rolling.

"I'm sorry," said John, as he tried too late to straighten the glider, and the big wing subsided on to the ground with a clattering noise.

THE LOST SWALLOW

"Yes, you must try to keep straight on the ground, but that was a good attempt at landing with airbrakes. We will get some more practice in later, if the weather holds. The trouble with these storm showers is that sometimes in the afternoon they spread themselves and link up, and just produce general dirty weather."

John took over the flight log when they got back to the launch point, and Pam went up with Mike. It was sunny in between the storms, and the sky was full of colour as though it was spring.

After a while a man John had not seen before came over.

"Put my name on the list, will you?"

"O.K.," John said cheerfully. "On Daisy?"

"Well, I fly Olympias actually," said the man, "but I haven't been here for two years, so I expect the instructor will want me to have a check circuit first. The name is Green."

"Shall I put you down on the Daisy list, and for the Swallow as well? There isn't an Olympia out today."

"Oh, all right, but won't you be getting an Olympia out later?"

"I don't think so. Mike said that we have got enough gliders here to look after as it is. He is afraid of one of these squalls arriving and blowing them over."

The man looked round the sky, but it was quite clear and blue overhead, the clouds were only in the distance.

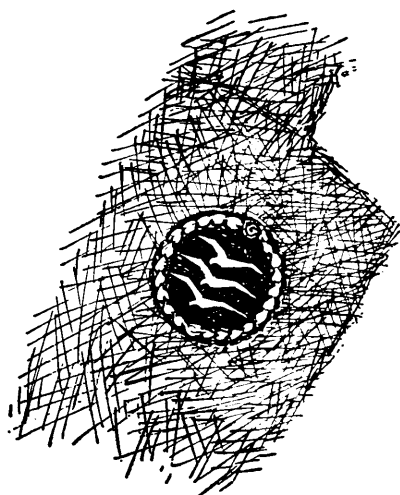
"When can I get this check on Daisy? I should only need one, so it should not interrupt flying much."

John noticed he wore the expert's Silver C badge in his buttonhole, and it was worn with age, the enamel slightly chipped.

JOHN GOES GLIDING

“Oh, quite soon I should think. Mike may be able to fit you in after Pam, who is flying now. Did you get your Silver C here?”

“No, I did some of the flights for it before the war, and then finished it off abroad afterwards.”



Mike came over.

“Who is next?” he asked. “Pam has had her three circuits.”

John did not get a chance to introduce the visitor.

“I came today to do some Olympia flying,” Green said, “but as I haven’t been over since Jimmy, who was instructing then, left, I suppose you will want to give me a check.”

“I’m afraid so,” said Mike. “It is a club rule, and anyway it is only sensible if you haven’t flown for some time. When did you last pilot anything yourself?”

“I borrowed a glider in Suffolk last summer and did a circuit.”

“Hm, what is your total flying?”

THE LOST SWALLOW

"About one hundred and ten hours on gliders, and twenty hours on aeroplanes. Can you fit me in straight away?"

Mike looked round at the pupils who were waiting, and then at his watch.

"I think so," he said. "There's about two hours left of daylight, and not very many people to fly. Jump in now, the cable is just coming. Sorry," he said to Mackay who was holding Daisy's nose down, "can that lesson on landing across wind manage to wait one circuit?"

"Of course, Mike. I won't go away."

Mike laughed and did up his straps, talking to Green at the same time.

Daisy climbed away on the launch, and completed the circuit with a good landing. John noted "five minutes" in the log.

"Have you flown a Swallow before?" asked Mike, as they wheeled Daisy back.

"Yes. I flew the first one made several times, and I have done quite a lot of flying on Olympias."

"Hm," said Mike again. "Well, your flying is all right, so go and do a circuit in the Swallow. Just a simple circuit for the first one; no circling, or anything fancy, the wind is gusty when these storms approach."

They turned the little Swallow into wind, and Green climbed in. Mike reminded him of the speeds to fly it, and gave him some other useful bits of information.

"And don't forget, just a plain circuit, and land well into the airfield. We don't mind pulling you back."

"O.K.," said Green, nonchalantly, and hooked on the cable.

The Swallow went up very straight on the launch, and

JOHN GOES GLIDING

Mike and Mackay got into Daisy, which had been moved into position. While Mackay was checking his controls, Mike watched Green. He was now flying away to the left as instructed, but soon turned down wind so that he was above the edge of the airfield.

"He is too close in to make a good approach," Mike muttered to himself. "He should keep farther out to give himself room to turn."

"Shall I hook on?" asked Mackay.

"Yes, but don't give the signal to launch until I say."

"Right."

Mike watched the Swallow reach the lee boundary of the airfield and then unexpectedly and wrongly turn away. He jumped out of the cockpit to see better. The Swallow did a complete circle and arrived back facing the airfield still with height to spare, but the strong wind was drifting it back over the woods.

"Come on, straight in," said Mike. "You will reach here all right now, even though you have broken golden rule number one of never turning your back on the airfield once you have started the approach."

"He's going to do another circle," said John, who had come over to stand near Mike.

"He'd better not," said Mike grimly, "he'll never get back here if he does. But you're right, he *is*."

The wind had started to come in gusts again, as a new storm grew nearer, and the Swallow turned away from them to start another circle. Then the pilot suddenly must have realized that the wind was stronger than he had thought, and the turn became steeper until the Swallow was facing them again, and pointing into wind.

They all watched the glider creep towards them getting

THE LOST SWALLOW

lower, and wondered if it would manage to clear the top of the spinney.

“He’s not going to make it,” said Mike quietly, his hands thrust deep in his pockets. “Turn Daisy round, and put some tyres on the wing tip, someone. Our friend Green, or Blue, or whatever his name is, is not going to get over the top of those trees.”

Hurriedly they parked the big two-seater, watching the Swallow getting lower and lower. It was creeping nearer home all the time, but Mike’s experienced eye knew that it could not possibly succeed.

For a second John thought it had managed to avoid the trees after all. Then quite suddenly it disappeared, without a sound.

Immediately they all started running towards the edge of the airfield, although by the time they got to the road they were completely out of breath. They walked across it, and climbed the wire fence into the wood.

Glider up a Tree

“HELP!” shouted a voice.

“Where are you?” called Mike, leading the way towards where the sound had come from.

“I’m here – up a tree.”

Mike snorted with anger.

“Are you all right?”

Pam burst out laughing, and Mike looked at her sharply.

“You did not sound as though you meant that,” she said.

“Well, I bet you he is. This sort of carelessness never seems to hurt the person who most deserves it.”

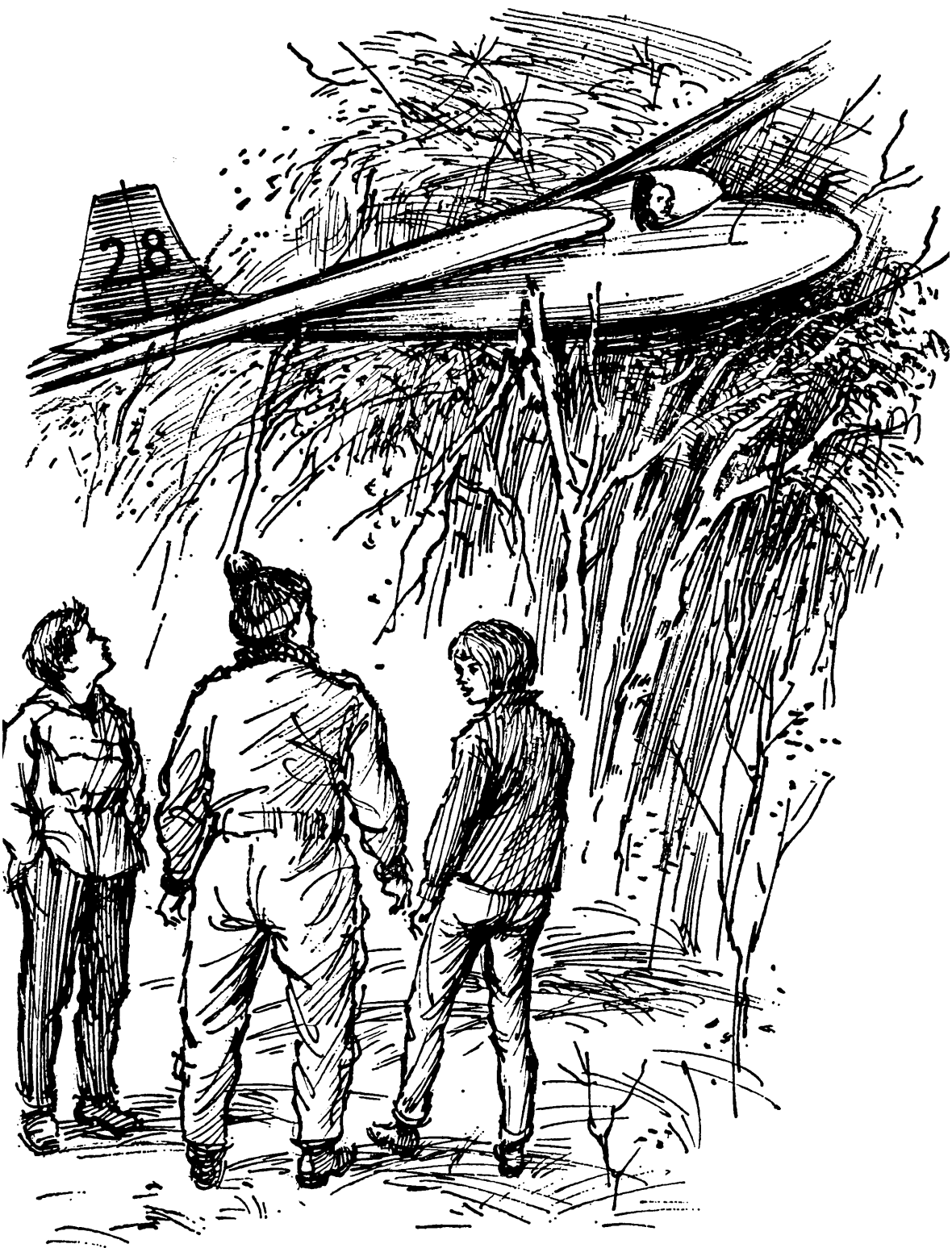
The invisible voice came again.

“Yes, I’m all right. But hurry.”

They started to run through the undergrowth, and suddenly saw the glider almost above them, sitting on the bushy tops of some silver birches nearly twenty feet up; it rocked every time the pilot moved.

“Stay in the cockpit,” shouted Mike. “If you get out, it will fall backwards and do a lot more damage. Don’t move until I return with some ropes, and this time do what you are told.”

Mike looked round. “Pam, you stay here, and stop any



JOHN GOES GLIDING

small children that turn up from climbing those trees. I know there aren't any here now, but they seem to come up out of the ground within ten minutes of a glider landing anywhere outside the field."

With that he turned, and followed by John and Mackay, set off back to the airfield. There would obviously be no more flying that day, so Mackay went to take Daisy back to the hangar, with the help of the others who had stayed at the launch point to look after her. At the clubhouse they met Stef, the Pole, who had just arrived.

"Is it true?" he asked, grinning broadly.

"Yes, you old sinner. I suppose you like climbing trees."

"Oh, yes. I come to help you at once."

"Well, double off to the workshops and bring as much rope as you can lay your hands on – old winch wire will do if you can't find rope. John, you collect torches, matches and anything that will produce a light. It will be dark in an hour, and by the look of the sky I wouldn't be surprised if it snowed. It will take two or three hours to get that glider down, if we don't want to break it in the process. I'm going to get some tools. We meet here in five minutes."

John ransacked the clubhouse, and collected two bicycle lamps, four boxes of matches, and three other torches.

Stef returned festooned in coils of rope and wire, looking as though he were going to climb mountains, and then Mike came back.

"My bike is here," Stef said proudly, pointing to a powerful motor bicycle.



"When did you acquire that, Stef?" asked Mike, astonished.

"Last week." Stef grinned. "Come, I think I am safe on it now."

"All three of us?"

"Yes, we get to the wood quicker, I expect."

"You had better do more than expect." Mike laughed and got astride the pillion.

"You come on the tank in front of me, John."

John did as he was told, his pockets bulging with torches, and Stef let in the clutch. Slowly they bounced over the rough grass, and then sped along the perimeter track towards the spinney. John's eyes were watering with the cold, and Mike was trying to find something more solid than coils of rope to hang on to.

JOHN GOES GLIDING

At the edge of the airfield they left the bike and ran across the road into the wood. As Mike had predicted, Pam and the tree were surrounded by small children, and she was holding one strong little boy by the coat collar with both hands.

There was no sight of Green.

"Where is he?" asked Mike.

"As soon as you left, he climbed down and would not take any notice of anything I said. The glider started to slide backwards as you thought it would, but fortunately got stuck in a branch. Then these children started arriving, and I heard Green say he had an appointment in London and could not wait any longer. By the time I had stopped the kids from shinning up the tree he had gone."

"Oh well, it will save me losing my temper," said Mike.

"I think it's a dirty trick, leaving everyone else to do the work."

John was angry that Mike had been treated like this, and that the culprit should have slipped away, leaving the Swallow still in the trees.

Mike and Stef were walking slowly round the birches, trying to see the best way of tackling the job without upsetting the glider from its delicate balance in the top branches.

Then Stef threw a rope over one of the big lower limbs, and pulled himself up like an acrobat.

"Can I go up too?" John asked. "I'm light."

"All right," said Mike smiling. "Climb on my back and then Stef will pull you the rest of the way."

As soon as they were both up the tree, Mike called:

"Stef. I think you had better take off the port wing

GLIDER UP A TREE

first. The other wing is well supported, but just to make sure the whole glider doesn't fall when it is relieved of the weight of one wing, you had better lash it."

"I'll do that," said John. "Throw me some short lengths of rope, Stef."

"Be as quick as you can," came Mike's voice from below. "We have only got about three-quarters of an hour of daylight left, and there's some really dirty-looking weather coming this way."

John reached the Swallow and was surprised to find that out of the shelter of the wood the wind was quite strong, and the little branches swayed and drummed against the fabric of the glider. He put one piece of rope round the landing wheel, and tied it to the branch he was standing on. By this time Stef's head was somewhere near his feet.

"I think, John, you must climb across to that other tree where the wing tip is, and hold it, while I take this end of the wing from the fuselage. Then I will tie on some rope and try to lower it, while you must see the wing tip does not slip out of the tree."

Carefully, John worked his way out along a branch until he could get a good hold on a higher bough in the next tree, and then he pulled himself up over it, and slowly climbed into the flexible little branches above. As soon as he could reach the wing tip, he looked for somewhere to tie his rope. The end hinge of the up-tilted aileron seemed substantial enough, so he tied it there, and twisted it around his arm so that it would not run out too fast, and waited for Stef to remove the pins holding the wing to the fuselage. It was much more difficult doing this in the top of a tree than in the hangar, and Stef took

JOHN GOES GLIDING

a long time. It was awkward hammering out the pins when he could not reach them properly. A few flakes of snow fell, and John could see that the sky was dark and menacing.

"I am ready now," called Stef. "Hold your rope tight, until my end of the wing is more towards the ground."

Carefully he lowered the root end of the wing, easing it gently whenever it came in contact with the lower branches. Mackay had now climbed halfway up the tree, and was helping to keep the fabric from being further punctured by twigs.

"Very slowly," he called. "Mike can nearly reach the end now."

John eased out the rope, until it suddenly went slack.

"We've got it," Mike shouted up to them.

John let go of his rope, and the long thin wing was drawn out of sight, and laid on the ground below.

"Quick," shouted Stef. "We must get the tailplane off while the fuselage is still held properly in the trees, and it is nearly dark. Can you climb up to the other side of it, and remove the pins, while I disconnect the elevator?"

He eased out the pip pin, and unscrewed the main attachment bolts.

"Now lift the tailplane up a little," he called. "I have a rope on it, and we can lower it to Mac."

This done, Stef moved over to the fuselage again, to disconnect the other wing.

"I not think you can get out to the tip of this wing, John. There is no tree there."

"Shall I go as far as I can?"

"Yes, and tie your rope to the wing through the hole where the airbrakes come out."

GLIDER UP A TREE

“Right.”

“It was nearly dark now, and John flashed his torch through the branches to see which way he should go. Several people on the ground were pointing lights upwards, but so many shadows were thrown by the lower branches that it was difficult to see. The wind was gusting stronger now, and it was starting to snow heavily. Carefully he edged his way along, while the branches swayed and trembled beneath him and the feathery twigs whipped into his face. Stef watched him patiently, saying nothing. Then John half jumped and half swung on to a strong-looking limb of the next tree, and managed to catch hold of some small stuff to steady himself. From here he could almost reach the wing, and did not have much difficulty in getting his rope on and tied to a near-by branch.

While Stef took out the pins John found himself shivering, and could feel his toes begin to go numb. The snow kept going down his neck; Stef’s short beard and hair were quite white, and in gusts the flakes came so thickly that for a few seconds it was difficult to see at all. Again Stef had some difficulty getting the wing off, and John felt scared with nothing to do, and the tree swaying in the windy darkness. But at last it was lowered safely to the ground.

Now there was only the fuselage left. John climbed down his tree a little way, and with the wing removed, found an easier way to cross to the other tree again, and was soon up beside the other two.

“Go to the tail again, if you can, and tie this rope round it,” Stef shouted to him, shielding his face from a blast of snow-filled wind.

JOHN GOES GLIDING

Once again John crawled along towards the tail, hanging on to anything that felt solid, and stopping every few feet to find where the bigger branches had gone to. He took much longer to tie the rope this time, and in doing so dropped the torch. Without it he felt lost and frightened.

Mackay was holding a bicycle lamp for Stef, who was trying to free the fuselage from the bigger branches in which it seemed to be wedged.

"What's the trouble?" came Mike's voice, faint above the wind.

"The fuselage is stuck," shouted Stef. "We cannot move it without sawing off a branch."

"You must leave it," called Mike. "It is too dangerous to stay up there any longer in this weather. Come down!"

"But the Swallow, she is no good without a body," cried Stef.

"I can't help that. You must come down now. It is snowing harder than ever."

"Please to send up a saw," pleaded Stef.

"No."

"Then we must try without."

Stef brushed the snow from his eyes, and took hold of the fuselage in his big hands and tried to shake it bodily out of the grip of the tree, but all that happened was a cry for mercy from John, who was nearly rattled off his branch.

Then Stef heard a quiet voice. "Here is your saw," and Mike was on the branch behind him.

Stef took it with a grin, and very soon cut through the offending bough.

GLIDER UP A TREE

"Timber!" shouted Mackay, laughing, as it fell with a crash through the lower branches.

It was now only a matter of lowering the fuselage nose first on its ropes, and this was just completed when the bough on which John was leaning with all his weight snapped off. He fell with a crash into the branches below.

"Are you all right?" Mike called, probing the snowy darkness with his torch; for a while he could see no sign of John, and there was no answer.

"John!" he shouted.

A snowy figure, still hanging on to the rope, emerged from a mass of small bushes.

"I'm - all - right. I just got a mouthful of snow."

The dismantled Swallow now lay untidily on the ground. There were a few tears in the wing fabric, and it was wet and dirty, but otherwise seemed undamaged. John found himself shivering again, and his hands were tingling. The children had disappeared long since. Mike came over and inspected him with his torch.

"Nice work. But are you sure you didn't hurt yourself when that branch broke?"

"Yes, quite sure, Mike, really."

The torchlight shone straight into his face.

"Well, you will certainly need a good wash before you go home to your aunt, or we won't be seeing any more of you, and that would be a pity, as you are beginning to be quite useful."

At that moment Dennis came through the trees.

"Hullo, Mike. I've brought a trailer along, and some more helpers. We can get this lot loaded, so you tree-mongers can go back to the clubhouse and get warm." He laughed suddenly. "At the moment you look like a lot of

JOHN GOES GLIDING

white-haired niggers, especially that one.” And he pointed at John.

Mike went off to apologize to the farmer for any damage done to the trees, and the rest of them walked back across the airfield. The squall had passed. The wind was gentle, and only a little snow was falling, but the whole field was white and ghostly in the darkness. It was difficult to believe that only a few hours earlier they had been flying Daisy in bright sunshine.

And so passed the last day of the Christmas holidays. The next morning Aunt Evelyn saw John off on the Waterloo train.

“I suppose I ought to give you the usual parental advice,” she said. “So work hard, don’t get your feet wet, and write to me if you get time.”

“I’ll certainly do that,” he promised. “And I’m longing to spend next holidays in the lonely countryside – it isn’t as quiet as I thought.”

Bet on a Lark

AT THE end of the spring term John received a letter from his aunt, telling him that she was in bed with influenza, and would not be able to have him for several days. In a daze he read the rest of the letter:

... and as you will, of course, not want to miss any flying you must come on the usual train with your holiday clothes in a suitcase. You can leave your trunks with the ticket collector at Wamborough Station and I am sure you will be able to walk with your case to the Gliding Club, it is only three miles and you are strong. I have arranged with the club for you to live there until I am better, but please telephone me when you arrive, so that I shall not worry about you. I am very sorry about being ill, but I am sure it will only be for a few days.

Your loving AUNT EVELYN

It was a perfect spring evening when John set out to walk to the airfield after a noisy day of trains and smoke; the sky was clear except for a few little ragged cumulus clouds tinged yellow in the east. The air was warm and the lane rich with scents and earthy smells. He looked up

JOHN GOES GLIDING

at a blackbird singing in an ash tree which was just turning green, and then saw a glider circling. It was red, and glinted in the sunshine. High in the air and spiralling steadily round, it became smaller and softer as though dissolving into the sky.

John walked slowly up the hill, backwards much of the time, watching the glider. It stopped circling and flew very straight towards the sun, and was too quickly hidden from him by a row of elm trees. John ran quickly, his suitcase bumping against him, to where he could see the glider again. He was out of breath and found that he had to look straight up into the sun to see it. The Olympia was flying towards him, and diving. While he watched it pulled up into a loop. As it dived out from being upside down, the pilot lifted it immediately into another loop, and then dived again, this time swinging up and over in a chandelle. The glider accelerated earthwards, then the nose rose up again. This time it paused for a second in a steep attitude and then fell away steeply into a spin. It did two turns with the sun flashing each time on the cockpit cover, before coming out and going immediately and dizzily into a steep turn, chasing its tail round and round. Quite suddenly, as though the pilot had awoken from an exhilarating dream, he levelled it up and pottered quietly away towards the south-east corner of the airfield, where he started circling again at about six hundred feet. John found he was almost running, excited by the joy and freedom of the unknown pilot. The Olympia looked so beautiful, and the smooth, flowing movements of its silent aerobatics were the stuff of dreams.

As John topped the next rise he could see the airfield;

BET ON A LARK

the far windsock was lifting gently in the evening breeze, and a puff of blue smoke came from the distant winch as its engine revved up for a launch. The red Olympia was still in the air, floating towards him about four hundred feet up. Then it flew overhead into the sun again, and he could just see it curve round on its approach. Peacefully, as if it had all the time in the world, it floated over the grass and came to land near the hangar, just as John arrived at the clubhouse. Distantly he saw Stef get out, who stood and stretched just as though he, too, were waking from a dream.

Pam was in the club building.

"Hullo," she said. "I hear you are living here for a few days. You'll have to do some work for a change, we've been getting up at six o'clock."

"Six! Why, that's worse than school. I hope my aunt gets well soon."

Pam laughed. "I'm staying with friends this week, and isn't it awful, they don't have breakfast till nine."

John threw his cap at her, but missed.

"Have you gone solo yet?" he asked. "I can't until I'm sixteen, anyway, but how many circuits have you done now?"

"Forty-one."

"I've done twenty, but I know I'm not nearly ready yet. Don't worry about forty. I read somewhere that sometimes good pilots are very slow at learning, and that one of our best took years."

"Well, that's hopeful. By the way, you've got a bed booked in the east bunkhouse. You'd better go and dump your stuff, or you will be too late to put the gliders away."

JOHN GOES GLIDING

"That's all right, you can do that."

"No such luck, I'm helping to cook supper, and if I leave here you won't get any."

"I'd better hurry then." John laughed. "Anyway, what is there to eat?"

"Nothing much. Bacon, egg and beans, stewed gooseberries and custard, and coffee, if I can find it."

"Good thing gliding gives you an appetite." John jeered as he ducked through the doorway to avoid a well-aimed wooden spoon.

In the east bunkhouse, named because of its exposure to those winds in winter, John found a bed with his name and a pile of blankets on it. It was the top of a double bunker, and he threw his suitcase up, looked round to see that seven of the eighteen beds appeared to be taken, and went out to fly.

* * *

One warm morning a few days later they were all lying on the grass at the launch point waiting for a tangled cable to be sorted out by the winch crew. Although it was only April it was shirt-sleeve weather, and the grass was beginning to grow tufty and green. John was lying on his back watching a lark singing loudly above him.

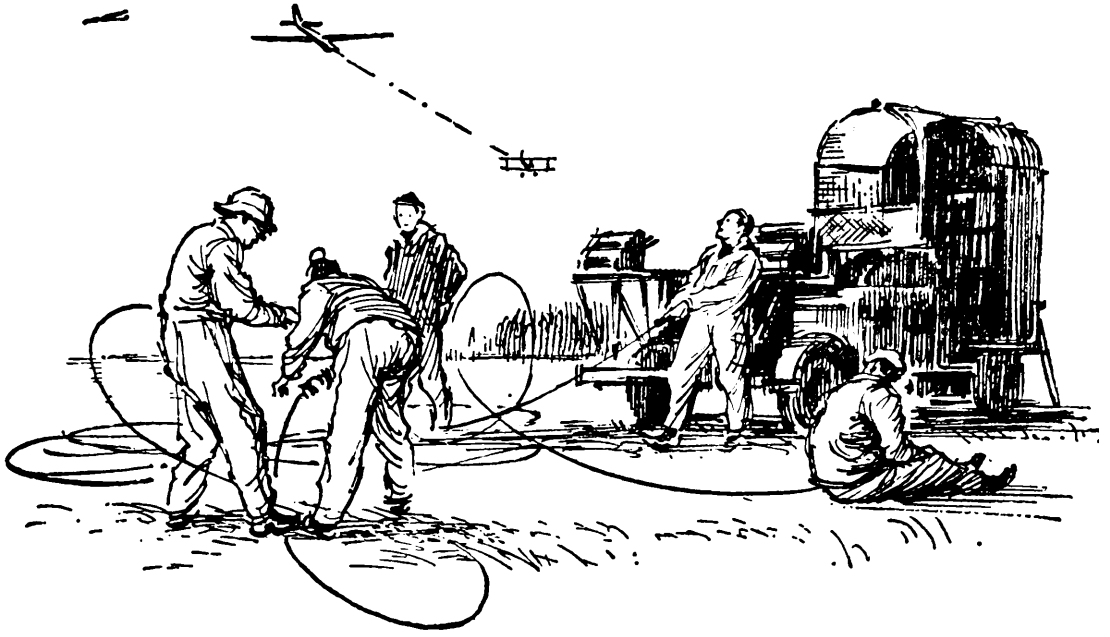
"How long do you reckon he'll stay up?" Mike's voice broke in.

John half rolled over. "Oh, hours if he's got any sense."

"How long do you think, Pam?"

"I don't know," she said, "they seem to sing up there all day."

Mike looked at his watch. "Well, I bet you that lark will be back on the earth within two minutes from now."



They looked at him unbelievably. The lark was spiralling upwards and singing as though it would burst with joy. The wings were invisible with its effort to reach the sun. As it rose higher, the little bird became more difficult to see in the dazzling blue. With hands shading eyes, they managed to keep it in sight. Then it ceased to climb, although it continued to circle, and John realized that it had also stopped singing, but that other invisible larks had taken up its song. Carefully they watched the little bird. It was still circling, but irregularly now, and in every circle it closed its wings and swooped a little lower, before fluttering them again. The circles got bigger, and the swoops more pronounced, until after one headlong plunge the lark landed about twenty yards away. The elapsed time on Mike's watch was one minute forty seconds, and the sky was still full of song.

Pam and John still felt sure this must be a coincidence.

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"Look," said Mike, "there is one taking off now. Watch him. The time is two minutes to eleven."

To begin with, the lark was easy to see as he leapt upwards on his happy wings. He spiralled and sang, and, just like the one before him, almost disappeared; then, about one and a half minutes after leaving the ground the flight changed, and the irregular swooping circles gently brought the bird back on to the warm grass.

"One minute fifty seconds." Mike laughed. "It's a cert. You can win every time. Just say, 'I bet you can't find a lark that will stay airborne three minutes,' and you won't go wrong. The longest flight I have ever timed was two minutes five seconds here last summer."

"It doesn't seem right," said Pam. "Don't they want to stay up on a day like this? I would."

"But then you have to pay for each of your launches, and theirs are free," Mike said smiling.

At that moment the tractor arrived pulling the cable, and they launched the Olympia. After releasing, it wandered hesitatingly around, and then swung into a circle. For a little while it did not gain any height but meandered round and round, slowly drifting with the wind until it was directly overhead. Then its circles tightened and it seemed to be drawn up from them, gently getting smaller and hazier as it soared into the sky. Soon it was difficult to see through the glare of the blue. John was puzzled. Soaring in the air rising over a hill he could understand, but there was nothing here but blue sky.

Mike said: "He's found a thermal, and a good one too by the look of it." Then seeing John's frowning face he explained: "A thermal is a sort of bubble of warm air

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which rises up from the ground on a summer day. It will form over places like villages or cornfields, which get warm more quickly than woods or lakes. On a day like this there is probably a thermal going up to about four thousand feet every few miles. The glider circles round and round to stay in the rising air, and although it is still gliding down *through* the air, the air itself is going up, and if it is going up faster than the glider is gliding down, then the glider will gain height."

"Who is in the Olympia?" asked Pam. "I had my eyes shut counting larks when it took off."

"Stef, and he'll certainly fly a long way if determination and sheer muscle have anything to do with it," said Mike. "But seriously, Stef should be a lesson to you, John. He must have five times your strength, but he refrains from using it when flying – thank goodness."

Pam got up to fly the Swallow, to which she had been converted after twelve solo flights in Daisy, and Mike quickly noticed John's envious glance as she sat in the single-seater ready to go. He got slowly to his feet and stretched.

"You can't go solo until you're sixteen," he said.

"I know, and it's another two weeks yet." Then he looked at Mike suddenly. "But I'm not ready yet, am I?"

"No, not yet, but you could be if you really got rid of your ham-fisted flying. You've got some more to learn, including how to plan a circuit of the airfield, so that you have some chance of landing where you want to, and you must generally knock the rough old corners off your handling of the aircraft."

After tea John's turn came again, and he managed to

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fly the whole circuit without any help, except for a prompt to make the last turn in to land. So Mike told him that it was about time he learnt about stalling and spinning.

“When a glider is flown too slowly it will stall, and if it is stalled when turning, it may spin,” he said. “You must learn what the glider feels like just before it starts to spin, so that you can avoid doing it accidentally, and also the proper recovery action. This is very important. It is full opposite rudder, slight pause, and stick steadily forward until the spinning stops. Can you remember that?”

John nodded again, and Mike went on.

“If we get a good high launch, I will show you a spin, and then you can do one back to me.”

Daisy climbed steeply into the sky, and managed to reach a little over a thousand feet, with John feeling both apprehensive and excited.

Mike looked all round to make sure the sky was clear, and then went into a slow flat turn. The familiar whistle died away and the glider felt balanced on a pin-point. Mike’s voice was strangely loud.

“If I do a horrid flat turn like this, getting slower and slower, the glider will suddenly start to—” but Mike’s voice was lost in the violent lurch, and a tumbling of the horizon and sun that made John gasp. Suddenly he found himself looking straight at the earth which gyrated slowly, and then, equally suddenly with a rush of roaring air, at the sky, which appeared again, looking strangely clear. Then the glider came smoothly out of a turn, and the chaos had vanished.

“All right. You do one. Spin to the left.”

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John was not in the least sure what had happened, so he tried to move the controls to make the glider fly too slowly in a bad turn, as Mike had done, but he could not tell whether he was doing it right or what would happen. Unevenly the glider slithered round, but that was all.

“Go on, John,” came Mike’s voice. “You’ll soon get used to it.”

John made the glider fly slower. The horizon started whipping round, and he felt confused and forgot Mike’s instructions. He put the stick forward. The speed increased, and the fierce airflow made tears come into his eyes. Then he tried to level up, and a draught swept sideways across the cockpit, but almost at once Daisy was again riding sedately through the sky. John breathed with relief and glanced at Mike. He was sitting in the other seat, smiling, and pulling his ear.

“That was very interesting,” he said, “but it wasn’t a spin. We are too low now to try another one, so go and land.”

On their third circuit, after talking with Mike on the ground, John managed to get the glider into a spin, and took the proper recovery action, but forgot one thing which Mike had reminded him about – to look out for other aircraft.

Because it was a weekday, and there were not so many people to fly as at weekends, John was able to have four circuits instead of the customary three. Mike briefed him to practise continuous turns, and then sat back in the instructor’s seat while John started a left turn. He was beginning to feel very confident about his ability to do left turns, and always hoped Mike would not make him

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do right-hand ones which he always did badly because, for some reason, he could not keep the speed correct.

The Olympia was far in the distance, and the Swallow was on the ground waiting to be launched, as John swung round and round on his left turns in the clear sunny air.

Then Mike said, "I think we must be in a weak thermal. We're not losing any height."

John continued to circle the two-seater and soon they had climbed up higher than they had been on the launch, and were soaring like the Olympia. He scarcely dared to breathe and flew as carefully as possible, while the altimeter needle crept to fourteen hundred feet. He felt sure that everything on the ground had grown smaller. It was the first time that he had been in a thermal and it was wonderful to be able to rise like a bird.

Then Mike said, "All right, this lift is too feeble to be worth chasing, and we've drifted away from the airfield. Go in and land."

Mike was sitting back, his hands idly on his lap as usual, but his eyes were quietly watching something else that John had not seen.

Cheerfully, John swung from his left turn into a right, the exhilaration of soaring overcoming his dislike of right turns. He was thinking only of going higher and higher, and flying far across the unknown country, when something large and solid reared up in front of him. It was another glider, huge, grey, sinister and very close, and the unexpectedness was startling. John's tummy fluttered and he felt unable to do anything. The glider seemed to be rushing towards them until it was almost on top of them.

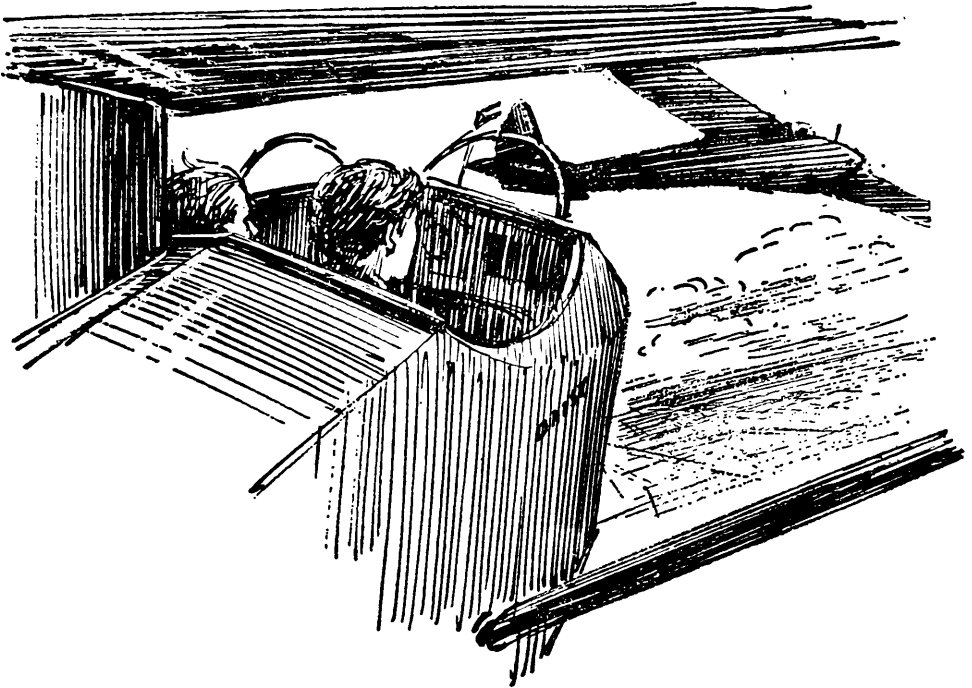
BET ON A LARK

“Mike! Mike! What shall I do?” cried John.

Mike’s voice came stonily. “I don’t know. You are flying this glider.”

He dithered, turned violently to the left and dived. The grey glider vanished, and when he next saw it, it was circling peacefully about one hundred feet above them.

John looked at Mike again, but he still seemed to be



taking no interest in the flight. So, scared, he fumbled the glider round the airfield, went in and made a bouncy landing.

Then Mike came to life.

“Well?” he demanded.

“Where did that glider come from? I – I didn’t see it at all. Gliders shouldn’t come so close when they can see someone else is flying there.”

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"John." Mike looked even more stern. "That glider started to circle there when we were on the launch. He was above us, and you started to do turns underneath him. As we climbed up to his level, you barged straight into his bit of air, and then expected me to get you out of trouble."

"But we might have had a collision."

"Yes, we might, except that he was watching us, and I was watching him, and when at last you couldn't fail to see him, he was actually getting out of our blundering way."

John gave Mike a long look. "I'm very sorry," he said. "I really will remember to look round."

At that moment the grey glider, a Skylark, landed. Its pilot climbed slowly and stiffly out, but with an air of luxury.

"Hullo, Derek," said Mike. "Where have you come from this time?"

"The Long Mynd, in Shropshire," he said, stifling a yawn and leaning against his glider. "I was hoping to get my Gold C distance, but I think this place is less than the three hundred kilometres distance I need."

"Why didn't you go on with that thermal just now?"

"Oh, it wasn't up to much, and then I lost it."

"Well, jolly good effort, anyway. We will measure up the mileage at supper, just in case."

"O.K., but I'm sure I'm short on distance. Anyway, it was a most enjoyable trip – dead easy really – beautiful thermals all the way. I was never below two thousand feet until I got here."

John made himself inconspicuous, because he could not help thinking that quite apart from giving himself a good

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fright, he had probably spoilt Derek's flight for the coveted Gold C.

At that moment Pete came out to the launching point, waving a piece of paper.

The Retrieve

"STEF'S got to Dungeness," shouted Pete. "It's well over fifty kilometres, so that will complete his Silver C. I know he's got the height, and he did five hours hill soaring on Harting Ridge last winter. He'll be as pleased as punch."

"Well, I suppose we'd better organize some retrieves," said Mike. "How are you getting back to the Mynd, Derek?"

"I wouldn't mind an aero-tow from you," Derek said. "My trailer got broken last week, and I was going to have to borrow one unless I could get a tow back from wherever I landed."

"Well, I'm sure Stef won't mind coming back by car. He spends so much on his flying that he would probably welcome the cheaper retrieve."

"Is it much cheaper to retrieve by car, when you count all the meals you stop for on the way back?" said Pete grinning.

Mike laughed. "Depends who goes," he said.

There was thoughtful silence for a few moments, then Mike said, "Well, let's *do* something. Who have we got?" He looked slowly round, in case he had missed anyone out. "Like to take the Tiger Moth, Pete, and do the aero-tow? You haven't had much flying this week."

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Pete smiled. "You bet." Then he looked serious. "But I haven't finished putting the carburettor back on the tractor."

"Oh, someone else can do that, surely."

"I'll fix it," said Dennis.

Pete looked suspicious. "O.K., but don't leave the float out this time."

Everyone laughed, including Dennis, who said, "All right, all right; it was just a slip."

"Well, that's the aeroplane settled. You'd better get moving, otherwise you will be benighted at Crewe or some such place." Mike looked at everyone again. "Now, who will take charge of the road retrieve. Dennis?"

"I'm sorry, I can't possibly. I've got to get home this evening."

Mike sighed. "I know Duncan can't go for the same reason, so that just leaves me. Ah, well, what's another late night. Dennis, you get the gliders put away. John, you find quarter-inch maps to cover from here to the other end of Kent, and I'll go and get the Vanguard and trailer. And Pam, see if you can make some sandwiches or something and find a crew. I shall need two bodies."

"Can I come?" asked Pam quickly.

"Yes, certainly, if you want to, but we won't get back here before two o'clock tomorrow morning."

"I don't mind, I've never been on a retrieve."

Pam ran towards the clubhouse and caught up John.

"I'm going," cried Pam. "We're taking the Vanguard. I've got to get some food for the journey, and look for another helper."

"Oh, I'll come," said John eagerly, starting to run too. For some reason, the prospect of the journey into the

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night to look for a glider was exciting, but he didn't know why. It was, after all, just a journey in an ordinary car on ordinary roads, but it seemed more like an expedition into the unknown with the companions he liked best.

He soon found maps in the office, and seeing a large scale one of the Kentish coast took that too. Then he went out to help Mike hitch the long thirty-foot silver trailer on to the car, fix the safety rope, and check the oil, water, petrol and tyres.

"Pam says you want to come," said Mike without looking up.

"Oh, yes, can I?"

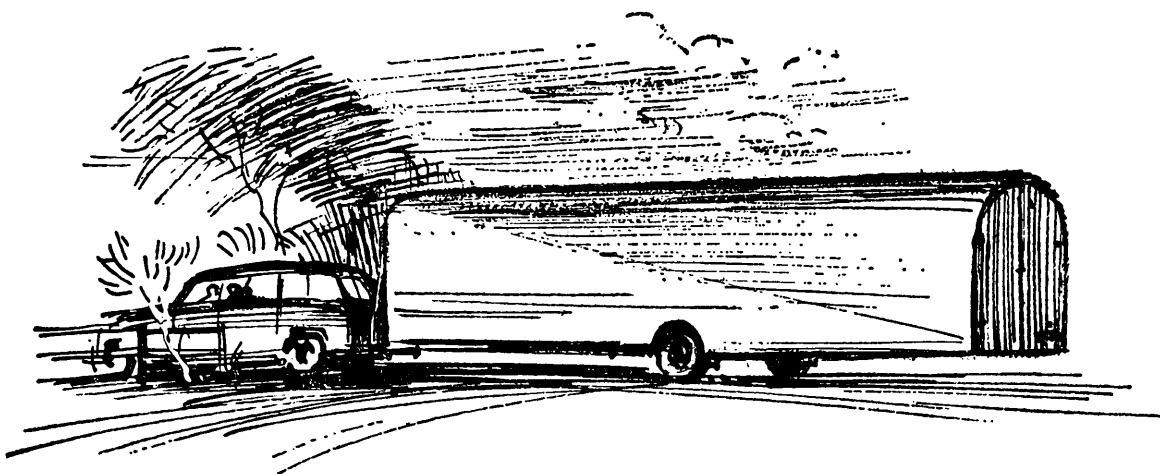
"Certainly, but it's quite dull really, and gets cold in the middle of the night. You'd better bring a coat or something."

John ran to the bunkhouse, seized his overcoat, and a blanket off the bed, stuffed some chocolate in a pocket and ran back to find Mike and Pam sitting in the wide front seat of the Vanguard. The engine was running, and as soon as he jumped in beside them, Mike let in the clutch and they drove slowly out of the gate.

Mike smiled. "You're navigator, and don't you dare get us lost."

"I don't really know where we are trying to go to," said John.

"Here is the information that Pete took down when Stef telephoned. I should think the best way would be something like Guildford, Dorking and then south-east towards the coast road. There may well be a better route, but please don't try any short cuts. They never work, unless you know them very well indeed."



John unfolded and folded his maps in the confined space until he could see all the possible roads, and soon found that Mike's guess was as good as any.

The time was five o'clock.

They drove in silence for about half an hour, along the Farnham by-pass and on to the Hog's Back. In the villages and towns, people stared curiously at the long silver trailer, and John felt more and more cheerful as the miles went by. It was such fun to be on a journey and not know where you were going. Although he scarcely knew why.

Slowly the sun set behind them, and the evening grew dusk, fading out the country over which the Olympia had flown in the full life of the day. Lights appeared and Mike asked Pam to share out the sandwiches. They were thick, with slabs of cheese, and they ate them, spilling crumbs and listening to the steady clank-clank of the tow bar as the trailer bumped over the uneven road.

Much of the time John was not sure whether they were on the right road or not, but they did not get lost. The right town always turned up at the right time, and he felt

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that Mike probably did not need a navigator as much as he had made out, but he did not like to test this theory by putting away his maps in case Mike thought he wasn't bothering.

At half past nine they joined the coast road and eventually came to the village near which Stef had landed. There was no one about, so Mike went into a pub to see if anyone knew of the glider's whereabouts. He was successful, and came out accompanied by at least six people who stood and pointed out directions in a flood of smoky yellow light. Finally Mike thanked them and returned to the Vanguard.

"Apparently Stef's landed at Redditch Farm, in the third field after the wood on the land side of the road."

They drove slowly along, staring into the dark; then the headlights glittered on some shiny object by the grass verge at the same moment as Stef jumped into the road waving his arms.

Mike stopped so that the car lights shone on the dismantled Olympia. The two wings were laid end to end, and then the tailplane, while the fuselage leaned against the fence. They got out of the car, and Stef came up grinning.

"Oh, I am so very glad you come," he said in his odd English.

Mike slapped him across the shoulders.

"Jolly good flight, Stef. That's knocked your Silver C off properly. Any difficulties?"

"Not really. Twice I get very low, but always there is a thermal at the last minute."

"What do you call the last minute, Stef?" asked Mike suspiciously.

"Well, about four hundred feet."

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"Did you say four hundred feet, Stef?"

"Yes, I know that is a little low, and I should be thinking only about the landing, but it is a wonderful day, and I am sure thermals must come and take me up, and—"

"And they did, I suppose."

Stef looked straight at Mike and grinned. "Yes, they did."

"Well, now you've got your Silver C you can afford to become an old and steady pilot and not go gallivanting round looking for lift over strange country at under one thousand feet at the very, very least. You remember?"

"Yes, I remember," said Stef penitently, but unable to make his expression completely serious.

Mike shook his head in mock sadness, and started walking towards the glider.

"Come on, you so-and-so, let's get the glider in the trailer."

The ground was wet with dew and the Olympia slippery and difficult to hold. Twice John felt the wing tip he was carrying nearly slide from his grasp, but managed to hang on. First of all the tailplane was clipped up into the roof of the trailer, then the two wings stood in their rests on either side of the long narrow space, and lastly the fuselage was lifted, wheeled into its central fitting and secured. Stef shut the doors and Mike checked the rear lamp.

John and Pam crossed the road and leaned over the fence looking down at the sea. It was high tide and the waves beat rhythmically against the foot of the sloping sea-wall. The others joined them and they looked out at the lights of ships in the Channel and breathed the cool salty night air.

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"I like to fly across there – to France," said Stef, "but I am not high enough."

"At four hundred feet you're dead right," Mike said teasingly.

Stef laughed. "When I get here by the sea I am at two thousand feet."

"Well, you want at least eight thousand feet to get across in safety, and with some hope of getting a thermal on the other side, so that you could go on into France or Belgium." Mike's voice was thoughtful. "It would be such fun. It has only been done a few times before." He sighed. "Oh, well, I suppose we'd better be on our way. I imagine you have had something to eat, Stef?"

"No – but I have a swim. I must wait till after dark because I have no costume." Stef grinned widely at them and all three stared back at him.

"Swim, in April? Stef, you must be mad!"

"No, it is very nice. I like swimming."

Again Mike shook his head. "Stef, you're incorrigible."

Driving back along the coast road Pam noticed a lighted café with steamy windows and a notice which said, "Egg and chips until 11 p.m."

"Look," she shouted, "I'm sure Stef must be hungry, and I know I am."

They drew in to the side of the road. "It's not a bad idea," Mike said. "It'll give us something to think about, or sleep on, during the journey back. It's a pity you haven't got a driving licence, Stef, or you could fumble this lot home, and I could sleep peacefully in the back."

"Sorry." Stef grinned. "Instead I poke you to keep you awake."

"You'll do nothing of the sort. Touch wood, I have

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never actually fallen asleep while driving, although I have reached the stage where match-sticks to keep my eyes open would have helped."

The café was empty and the waitress put down her knitting with a sigh, but perked up when she saw the trailer outside. She asked what was in it, and then served them all with the biggest plate of chips, eggs and tomatoes they had had for a long time. While they were eating, she leaned over a chair and told them a long and dismal story about an aeroplane which had once crashed in the sea near by.

The moon rose soon after they left the café, and they caught a glimpse of its yellow lane across the water between the houses of the sea front. Then they turned off the coast road and settled down to the long journey home.

Soon Pam and Stef were asleep, but John tried to stay awake to check on the signposts and help Mike with unwrapping chocolate or lighting the very occasional cigarette that he smoked. But it was difficult, as the steady drone of the engine and the warm stuffy air in the car made him feel so drowsy, and when the street lights and the headlamps of other cars started dancing up and down, in spite of all his efforts to make them keep still, he had to pinch himself and wriggle to keep awake.

Mike looked at him and smiled.

"You go to sleep. I think I know the way all right, and you want to fly tomorrow in your right senses."

"No, I'm all right, really." He lied. "I can easily keep awake."

Suddenly Pam coughed and John started up, forced open his eyes and peered out on an unfamiliar road.

He looked at Mike, who was leaning slightly forward in

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the driving seat. His face was pale and tired. As John wriggled again in his seat, Mike straightened himself and said, "Nearly home, everyone."

John looked at the next signpost and realized that he had been asleep for at least the last forty miles.

"Would you like something to eat, or another cigarette?" he asked Mike, feeling angry with himself at having failed.

"No, thank you." Mike smiled. "You finish the chocolate."

At half past two they parked the precious Olympia outside the clubhouse, and in the moonlight each gathered up his own possessions, and sleepily went to bed.

What is a Thermal?

THE next day, after flying, John returned to his aunt's house. She was very pleased to see him and full of apologies for her indisposition, and asked him hundreds of questions during their drive home in the Austin Seven. His big case was again wedged in the back seat, looking as though it would never come out.

The kindly interested questions went on throughout a supper of all his favourite food, until at last Aunt Evelyn, feeling that at least a few of her questions should be answered sensibly, looked at him more closely.

"John," she said sternly, "what time have you been getting up at that place?"

"Oh, not very early, really, about six o'clock."

"And what time did you go to bed last night?"

John laughed sleepily. "Well, I didn't; it was two o'clock today."

"All right, my boy, breakfast in bed for you tomorrow morning. Your father won't thank me for letting you grow black shadows under your eyes at fifteen."

"Oh, I can't, Aunt Evelyn, flying starts before breakfast, and I must be there to help get everything out."

"John, the forecast says rain, and I say breakfast in bed." John knew that it was useless to argue.

Aunt Evelyn was right, and at nine o'clock he woke to

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find the rain lashing the window. As he turned over, he felt that bed was sometimes a very nice place.

The weather cleared after lunch, and John walked over to the club to find everyone clustered round a new glider. It had about the same wing span as Daisy, but was much more shapely, with two seats, one behind the other, enclosed in a transparent Perspex cockpit cover. The word Eagle was on the side.

Pete was peering in through inspection panels, Dennis was trying out the front pilot's seat, and Pam was sitting in the back waggling the controls about. Others were prodding and poking the new aircraft as though it were an exhibit in a cattle show.

Mike was standing in front of it, his hands deep in his pockets, and there was a thoughtful look on his face. John stopped near him, wondering if he would be allowed to fly in the new glider.

"Like our acquisition?" Mike said, without turning his head.

"She's a beauty. Does she really belong to the club?"

"Yes. We've bought her to teach people how to soar on thermals, to fly in the clouds, and to navigate across country. That's the real purpose of learning to fly gliders, you know, only it's easily forgotten in the rush and tumble of trying to get all you people solo."

John smiled at Mike's friendly dig at him and then looked puzzled and said, "How do you fly across country?"

"Oh, what a question just after lunch." He took his hands out of his pockets and sat down on a pile of tyres. "It needs an awful lot of talking, but I'll make it as simple as I can. You know what a thermal is, and how to use it?"

WHAT IS A THERMAL?

“Yes, I think so. It is warm air rising, and you circle round and round to go up in it, and – er, unless the air is very dry a cloud will form at the top.”

“Good. Now when you have circled up in your thermal as high as you can, you set off in the direction you want to go. This is usually downwind to begin with, although later you will be able to soar across or even against the wind.

“Once you have left the thermal and started off, you must keep your eyes open for signs of more lift. Fly towards other cumulus clouds – the bright crisp ones, not the ragged sort because they are dead and you will find nothing there. As you approach the cloud, watch the variometer, and when it shows rise, it means that you are entering the upcurrent, but be careful, as thermals are easy to lose.

“Wait a few seconds until you are sure you are right into it before starting to circle, otherwise you may turn right back outside it again. If you are getting more lift on one side of your circles than the other, then edge each subsequent one carefully towards where the lift is strongest. Then go on circling. From several thousand feet you will be able to see for miles in every direction. Even the Isle of Wight is visible from here on a clear day, so use your map, and try to identify what you can see.

“When you get up near cloud base, set off again towards another cumulus. If, however, you can’t find any clouds, and begin to get low, you must search the ground for likely sources of lift. Keep over brightly coloured land, small towns, ploughed fields and heather, but keep away from damp marshes.

“If you cannot find any more thermals, and the variometer persists in showing sink, then you must search for

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somewhere to land. But you must start looking early, when you are still around two thousand feet. Decide on a good field, and when you are down to one thousand feet forget about soaring and concentrate on making a sensible approach and a good landing.”

“What sort of fields can you land in?”

“Oh, almost any good field which is smooth and large, has good approaches, and which does not slope downhill the way you want to land. You can learn a lot about your field from the air. For instance, if there is a stream along one side, the ground almost certainly slopes down towards the water, so don’t land that way unless you want a swim. If the colour of the field changes abruptly it probably means that there is an electric fence across it that you cannot see. In the same way you must always assume that any road running along the edge has telegraph wires on it. Don’t land in standing corn, it is not fair on the farmer, or the club for that matter, as you will almost certainly damage the glider’s tail. Stubble fields are all right and new pasture, although very old grass may be hummocky. As soon as you have landed, and pegged down the glider, go and find the farmer, and above all shut the gates.

“Most farmers are kind and helpful, and usually give you a jolly good tea, so do everything you can to be considerate to them, although you may have difficulty in preventing hordes of children, who seem to appear from nowhere, from trampling on everything in sight.

“But cross-country flying is great fun. The moment at the top of your first thermal, when you realize that you have finally set off, and that you cannot return to your home airfield against the wind, and you must go on, is

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always exciting. You don't know what lies ahead, or how far you will go, or where you will land. It is all up to you – the decisions you make and your determination to succeed. You may fail and land ten miles down the road, or you may end the day with a record in your pocket.”

Mike suddenly rose to his feet.

“What am I chattering on like this for? You're not solo yet, and never will be unless we go and do some flying. Come on.”

Daisy was sedately doing circuits from the western end of the main runway, and while they walked round the perimeter track Mike checked through John's log book. How many circuits had he done altogether? How many practice cable breaks? Spins and stalls? Turns? Take-offs and landings? Rules of the Air? At the last one John shook his head.

“Right then. If two gliders are meeting head on, how do they avoid a collision?”

“Would it be the same as for ships at sea?”

“Yes, and what's that?”

“Both ships have to swing away to the right, so they pass port to port.”

“Good. Now, two gliders are coming in to land together, which has the right of way?”

“The one which is nearer the ground?”

“That's right. The one which is lower. But a word of warning. Never stand up for your rights in the air. It is always possible that the other pilot hasn't seen you. The Rules of the Air say that it is the responsibility of every pilot to do what is necessary to avoid a collision.” A twinkle in Mike's eyes gave way to mock severity. “So you had better not forget to look round today.”

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The memory of the grey glider coming at him leapt to John's mind, and he again felt the fear inside him, but he did not notice Mike's understanding glance, or realize that he had deliberately let him get near the other aircraft to give him a lesson for the future when he would be flying alone.

John did not forget to look out for other aircraft either that day or for the next three that he flew with Mike in Daisy. Sometimes the instructor would take less and less interest in the flying, and look over the side at the drifting country below, as though he were bored with the whole procedure, but as soon as John felt that his flying was getting really quite good, Mike would come to life.

"That last turn was a bit wild. Was it necessary to fly quite so close to the main road?"

"No, Mike, I'm sorry. I could have turned earlier." But he did not add aloud, "It was such fun to make those people standing by the parked cars think I was going to land on them. They all ducked even though I was miles above them."

John no longer felt nervous when he flew; he felt more and more confident now that he could land smoothly and control the two-seater properly. He knew he would be able to fly solo quite easily, if only the days would hurry past until his sixteenth birthday, but there were still two to go.

On the last circuit of the day he hung on to the launch too long before releasing, in order to get as much height as possible. The cable fell on top of the winch, and caused a tangle which wasted twenty minutes before anyone else could be launched. John, who was happily trying to circle

WHAT IS A THERMAL?

in some weak lift, did not notice this; Mike's observant eyes had seen the hold-up on the ground and knew why it had happened, but he said nothing. Then John came in to land. His final turn was perfect, and the two-seater slipped neatly over the hedge with only about five feet to spare, landing smoothly right at the launch point.

He jumped out cheerfully. He had never thought he would be able to fly so well, and visions of perfect landings stretched away into the future. Mike must be pleased with him, and he turned to hear his congratulations, but the quiet voice only said, "There is obviously no point in your having any more instruction before your birthday, as your flying has become so good that you can now drop the cable precisely on top of the winch. Perhaps you might spend the next two days with Dennis in the workshops. He is scraping the old paint off the green Olympia, and I am sure he could do with some help."

John opened his mouth to say he wanted to go on flying with Mike more than anything, but no words came, and he looked so surprised that Mike added: "Never mind, the days will go very quickly."

John was fortunately not given to sulking, and he set to work with a will, draped in an old boiler suit. He got green paint in his hair, as well as over his hands and face, but he made such a good job of scraping the fuselage that at lunch on the second day Dennis jokingly asked if he could be attached to the aircraft committee and spend a lot more time in the workshops.

Mike looked thoughtfully at John's anxious expression and said, "Perhaps; I'll give the matter some consideration," and John hoped he was right when he thought he saw just the faintest smile come into Mike's eyes. He

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realized now that he had been very silly. Coming in low over the hedge left no margin for anything to go wrong at all, and then trying to hang on to the launch for too long ... He knew he had been showing off, and he knew from past and bitter experience of falling from roofs and bicycles that it didn't really pay. It had been very nice of Mike not to have ticked him off properly in front of everyone else, for he knew now that he had deserved no less.



First Solo

WHEN John woke up on his birthday morning it was raining, with low cloud and a moaning wind.

At breakfast Aunt Evelyn did her best to cheer him up by telling him that the forecast had said it would clear before dark. Then she gave him his presents. There was one parcel without stamps, one from his father – airmail and decorated with several strange African stamps for his collection – and another small one. He opened this one first, as he recognized the handwriting of his father's old housekeeper. It contained two slabs of chocolate and two handkerchiefs. There was also a note in spidery writing:

I hope you will find these useful, as I always remember you used to run out of both. Hoping you are well and taking care of yourself.

N A N

His father's parcel contained a long letter which he put in his pocket to read in his room, and a fine knife in a hand-made decorated leather sheath. The knife was well balanced and had a good grip, and John flourished it while his aunt examined the sheath.

Lastly he opened his aunt's parcel. Inside was a blue ski jacket with a zip and a built-in hood. Hurriedly, he

JOHN GOES GLIDING

tried it on and drew the hood strings tight under his chin.

"Thank you, Aunt, very much. It's just the thing for gliding."

"That's what I thought. You come back here looking as though your hair had been through the sound barrier."

"I'm sorry." John laughed. He ran his fingers through



his curly hair, and started to transfer his knives, string, nuts and bolts and other useful items into the new pockets.

His aunt looked out of the window at the grey weeping day.

"Try to remember the jacket's only showerproof, wind-proof and snowproof, and isn't designed for weather like this."

FIRST SOLO

"I will put my mac over the top until I get to the club. There won't be any flying today, probably, but I ought to help Dennis finish the overhaul on the green Olympia. It's rather fun working on a glider that's all taken to bits, and seeing its insides."

"Well, you be careful, and don't screw anything up the wrong way."

"There's no fear of that, Aunt Evelyn, really there isn't; gliders are very safe."

"I didn't say they weren't – if left alone," retorted his aunt.

"But Dennis knows all about gliders, and he tells me exactly what to do, and then comes and inspects it when I've finished," John explained.

"All right." His aunt smiled. "I was only joking. You go along now, but don't be late for your birthday supper. Seven o'clock sharp. Mrs Perren is coming to help me, and has insisted on making something special for you."

After John had gone, Aunt Evelyn got down to work. Then she had two committee meetings and only managed to get back home at half past six. It had stopped raining rather suddenly about an hour earlier, and she had a chance to look round the kitchen garden before tidying her wispy hair before supper. She put some crackers on the table, with a guilty feeling that perhaps John was rather old for such things, but she had chosen ones containing fireworks rather than paper hats or charms. As seven o'clock struck, she made some finishing touches to the table, and put a few letters which had come by second post on John's plate. She poked the fire – she liked fires until summer had really come to stay – and Mrs Perren came and stood in the doorway.

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"Everything's ready," she said. "Is he not back yet?"

"No, drat the boy." Aunt Evelyn frowned.

The hall clock chimed a quarter past and Mrs Perren trotted in again.

Aunt Evelyn was wandering about the room. "How can we keep it hot without spoiling?" she asked.

"I think it will be all right for a little while – I've got it in the oven, on low." She hesitated, then said, "Perhaps he's had an accident."

Aunt Evelyn looked up sharply. "Oh, no, of course not, besides he said they probably wouldn't be flying today."

"Perhaps he's been run over on the way home."

"Oh, nonsense, the boy's as safe as I am on the roads. Please don't be so depressing. All the same, I do wish he would come," she added. "He's usually quite punctual for meals." She poked the fire again and pushed a wisp of hair off her forehead. It was growing dusk outside and Mrs Perren turned on the lights.

"Makes it more cheerful at times like these," she said mournfully.

"What's the matter with you?" Aunt Evelyn said crossly. "Of course the boy's all right. If anything had happened the club would have telephoned."

"Oh!" Mrs Perren put her hand over her mouth in a startled gesture. "I forgot to tell you, the phone's been out of order since lunch, they rang to say they would be working on the line."

For a moment Aunt Evelyn looked worried. "But the airfield is only two miles away, if that; someone would have come in a car if there had been an accident. Please don't think of anything else, you're getting me all jittery."

FIRST SOLO

The clock struck a quarter to eight. Mrs Perren went to the kitchen to mourn over the spoiling dishes, and Aunt Evelyn stared into the dusk before drawing the curtains.

Suddenly the front door crashed open, and John skidded into the room, complete with the mat still under his feet. His hair was on end, his face red and he was absolutely breathless.

Mrs Perren rushed in from the kitchen.

"Are you all right, have you hurt yourself – what happened?" she asked without a stop.

"Oh, be quiet," said Aunt Evelyn impatiently. "He's obviously quite all right." She looked sternly at John. "I particularly asked you to be back by seven tonight. Why weren't you?"

But he just capered round the room, and finally flung his arms round Aunt Evelyn's neck, playing havoc with her wisps.

"I've gone solo, I've gone solo!" he chanted.

Aunt Evelyn disengaged his arms and sweeping her hair aside, looked at him surprised.

"I thought you weren't going to fly today."

"I know, but the rain stopped and – oh, I'm sorry I'm late, but I forgot the time, and oh, it was wonderful."

Mrs Perren hurried in with bowls of hot soup.

"And you are all right?" she asked again. "Not hurt?"

"Oh, no, Mike said I was jolly good. I never thought I would go solo today. Oh! Aunt Evelyn, on my birthday too."

He sat down in his chair, trying to straighten his tie and smooth his wild hair. Aunt Evelyn sat down too, and served the soup. She so wanted to hear John's story from

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the beginning that she didn't give that obvious glance at his hands, which could make him go and wash them without a word being spoken.

"Well, John, as soon as you've taken the edge off that appetite, you can tell me everything that's happened."

Mrs Perren went to have a look at the next course, leaving the doors wide open.

"Well, I worked on the green Olympia until about three o'clock. Then, as the weather was clearing, I went to help push out the Eagle as Mike wanted to do a test circuit."

Aunt Evelyn had never heard of the Eagle but did not interrupt.

"Mike had wanted to do quite a lot of flying on it but he did everything he had to in two circuits, so we got out Daisy, as there was someone wanting a joyride, and Mike said he would fly me if there was time. But when we arrived with Daisy at the launch point the joyrider had disappeared, so I went instead.

"The wind wasn't strong and it wasn't at all bumpy, and I managed to fly round the circuit all right except that I bounced a bit when I landed. Mike ticked me off, and told me I was a careless so-and-so, who could do better if he tried. I think this must have made me a bit cross, because I got determined to make the best landing ever on the next circuit. But I didn't, although it was much better than the first.

"Then we pushed Daisy back again for the third circuit – we usually have three in a row – and Mike said, 'Get yourself in. You can have ballast this circuit instead of me. You're just wasting my time now.' I didn't believe him at first, so I said, 'Do you mean I'm to go solo?' and

FIRST SOLO

he said, 'Yes, don't you want to?' so I said, 'Yes please, but what will happen if I bounce on landing again?' 'Well,' he said, 'you'll just bounce, won't you?' So I checked the controls while the ballast weight was put in, and the loose straps in the other seat done up. Then Mike said, 'Just do exactly the same sort of circuit as you did last time, but remember the glider will be a little lighter and seem more buoyant than with my weight aboard. Land well into the airfield; about one hundred yards ahead of where we are now will do fine. O.K., off you go.'

"Then he hooked on the cable, and I felt scared. I could hear my voice saying I was ready to launch, but I didn't seem to know I was saying it. Then the cable pulled through the grass and just moved the glider, and I suddenly felt I didn't want to fly. But the signaller gave 'all out' and we started moving forward faster and faster. It was like a dream. Then we started climbing, and I didn't feel frightened any more. It was easy to keep straight on the launch, as there wasn't much wind, and we seemed to be climbing very quickly, probably because of being without Mike's weight. Then at the top I released, and found that I was a bit higher than usual. As soon as I levelled off and turned left, I couldn't help looking at the instructor's seat, but it was odd without Mike, and only the straps done up holding nobody, so I didn't look there any more. It was wonderful flying along by myself knowing I could turn whenever I wanted, and I felt I wanted to turn the glider towards some hills in the distance and just fly away, then I realized it was time to go back. So I did, and tried to think about the approach because I wasn't sure whether I was too high or too low, but when we got to the other end of the field

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we seemed about all right, so I turned across wind, keeping just outside the boundary, and then when I came opposite the launch point I turned into wind. For an instant I thought I had turned too soon, and was much too high and I would run out of the far end, but I opened the airbrakes – those are things to make the glider come down more steeply – and just flew straight into wind; then I knew the approach was all right and I would land about the middle of the landing area. I flew sort of over and past the launch point and just saw Mike and the others watching me and had an awful feeling that I was going to bounce and bounce and bounce in front of them. So I started to level out very carefully, and then it all came like a dream again, and I suddenly found we had landed, and there hadn't been any bounces – not real ones, anyway. I managed to keep Daisy straight until we stopped, then I suddenly realized I had been solo. The others came up and pushed the glider back and Mike said it was jolly good, and so did the others. Then he made me do two more flights just to prove the first wasn't a fluke and to get my 'B' certificate. Then I suddenly found out what the time was, and I ran all the way home without stopping." He paused at last for breath. "I'm awfully sorry. I hope I didn't spoil supper."

Aunt Evelyn smiled. "I think it's still just all right, but you'd better get on with your soup and find out."

When the excitement had died down, John opened a second letter from his father which told him that he could buy himself a bicycle as soon as he had gone solo. It was only the timely appearance of a roast chicken that kept John in his seat, and not dancing round the room.

On to the Swallow

A FEW days later, John received a small packet with a London postmark. It was his gliding certificate, complete with his photograph and a paragraph in six languages asking the authorities of other countries to help him. At least he imagined that was what it said if the meaning was the same as the paragraph in English. There was also a small round badge to go in his buttonhole. On it were two white gulls and the letter G on a blue background.

He put it into the lapel of his jacket and thought about the badges he had seen the other members wearing. Two white gulls for a B, and three for a C soaring badge. Pam had qualified for her C two days earlier, soaring for fifteen minutes and gaining quite a lot of height. Some of the members wore the Silver C which had the three birds surrounded by a laurel wreath, and one or two had a Gold. John thought enviously of their voyages thousands of feet up into thunderstorms, or hundreds of miles across unknown country. Still, no one else at school even had a B as far as he knew.

That afternoon he arrived at the club on a brand new bicycle. As there was no one in the clubhouse, he bicycled over to the launch point.

"Hullo, plutocrat," said Pam, admiring the shiny bike.

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"Just the man," said Dennis. "Just nip over to the office on that steed of yours and fetch us another log sheet. We've run out."

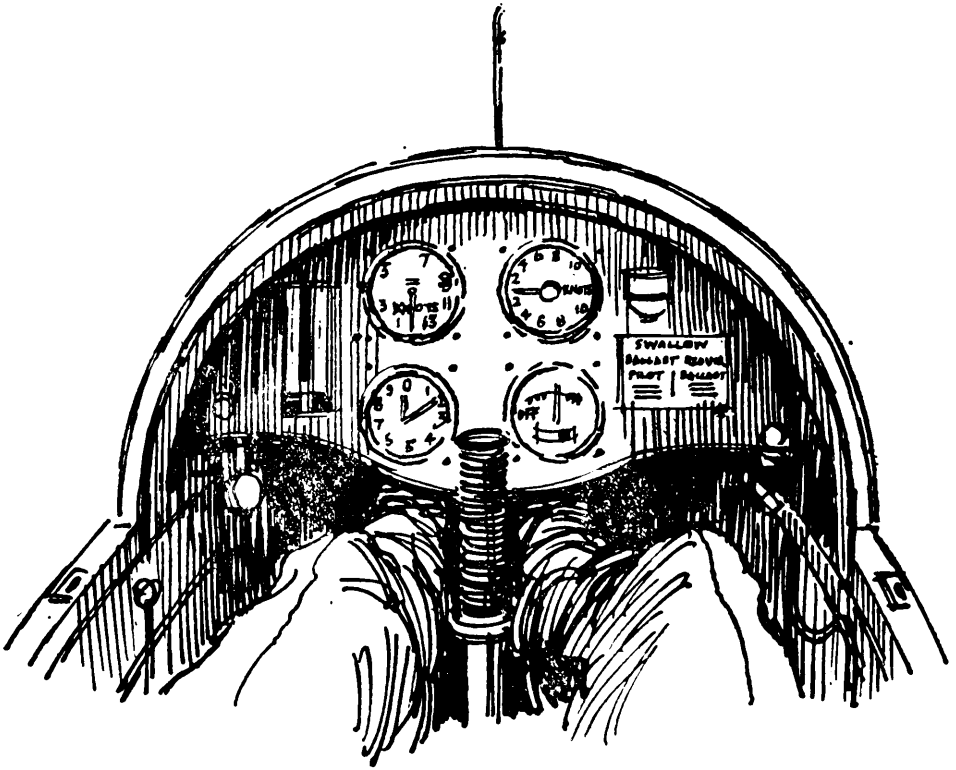
"On one condition." John laughed, pedalling precariously slow circles on the tarmac.

"What's that?"

"Put my name down on the flying list, or my turn won't come round today."

"Doesn't deserve to," said Dennis; "rolling up when all the work is done. But we will."

There had been a great deal of flying during the early part of the day, as the thermals were good. Three Olympias had reached nearly four thousand feet, and the Eagle had disappeared into the distance at a great height.



ON TO THE SWALLOW

John's turn came late when thermal activity was dying down. He had a check flight with Mike, and then a couple of circuits alone. When he landed Mike told him he could fly the little single-seater Swallow. It was parked cross-wind at the edge of the runway, and he was told to sit in the cockpit and familiarize himself with the controls. John studied the instrument panel. The stick and rudder pedals were comfortable to his hands and feet, and the airbrake lever was easier to use than that in Daisy.

The instruments looked complicated. There was an airspeed indicator, an altimeter, two variometers, a compass, and also a turn and slip indicator for flying blind in clouds.

Mike came and leaned against the wing beside him.

"You'll find this glider lighter to fly, and more responsive – quicker on the controls," he said. "Try to get the right attitude to fly by feel, but as a check the airspeed indicator should read forty miles an hour in the air. Come in faster for the approach, not less than forty-five miles an hour. The airbrakes are more powerful than Daisy's, so do not have them more than half open for the landing.

"Here comes the cable now. Let's turn you round into wind. Stay in the cockpit." They pulled the glider into position for the launch, and John did up the straps. Mike fitted on the Perspex canopy through which the sun felt hot on his face.

"Do just a simple circuit, and no fancy stuff. Can you remember the speeds I told you?"

"Not less than forty in the air, and forty-five for approach."

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“Good.” He patted the aircraft on the nose. “You’ll like the Swallow, she’s great fun to fly.”

As soon as he started moving, John felt the liveliness of the little glider after the gentle ponderousness of Daisy, and almost before he was ready for it, the Swallow had leapt into the air and started climbing steeply. Quickly he checked her so that if the cable broke he would not be left in a stalled attitude, and then settled down to get the best out of the launch.

It was nice having only the narrow cockpit. It made him feel so much part of the glider that he wanted to turn and dance all over the sky, as though the wings sprouted from his own shoulders. But instead he arrived smoothly at the top of the launch, released the cable, and turned left to start his circuit. He had reached nearly thirteen hundred feet on the launch, and was able to practise a few turns, and then fly round well outside the airfield until reaching the downwind boundary. Then he turned in high, as Mike had said, and for a moment felt that he had overdone it, and was so high that he would float out of the far side of the airfield. But as he opened the air-brakes, with the nose well down to maintain speed, the glide steepened and the earth rapidly came up to meet him. These brakes certainly made landing easier, almost like pointing to the place where you wanted to land and arriving there, or at least not far away.

When John judged he was about fifteen feet up, he closed the brakes, and then checked his glide prior to landing. The controls of the Swallow were so crisp and quick that he was sure everyone could see the jerkiness of his flying. The glider seemed to respond before he expected it, and waltzed along just above the ground.

ON TO THE SWALLOW

Carefully, he tried to hold her off until she was slow enough to land. The canopy prevented him looking out very much, and for a moment he felt restricted in the cockpit; then the Swallow settled herself into the grass, rustled along a few yards, and the wing quietly subsided to rest. He had not floated nearly so far as he had thought, and soon Pam and Stef came to push him back.

"You like the Swallow?" Stef asked.

"Oh, yes, it's quite different. It's as though you have your own wings that fit."

"You wait till you fly Olympia," said Stef, and touched his fingers to his lips. "That really is something."

Mike sent John up for another circuit, and then told him to help Stef push a glider back to the hangar for the night. They parked it in the dim cavernous building; Stef took the barograph out of the locker under the wing and stopped it ticking.

"Is that to tell you how high you've been?" asked John, looking over his shoulder.

"Yes. You must carry one if you make records, because it marks the flight path of the glider on a chart. Look, here is my soaring of this afternoon – just more than one hour."

He pulled off the case and pointed to a smoked black drum which was rotated by clockwork. On it was a scratched line which switchbacked up and down.

"Each hump shows a thermal. You see in the second one I get higher than the others, nearly six thousand feet – I am just in cumulus, but afterwards I could not climb up into another one. Somehow the lift was weak, or I am

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stupid and lose it just below cloud. Will you carry the barograph while I take the parachute? We must put them in the office."

"Do you always have a parachute in the Olympia?"

"Yes, all soaring gliders have them, but I do not really know why, as you never seem to use them. It is perhaps for flying inside thunderstorms where the air is wild. But I think if you open your airbrakes early, you cannot go so fast by mistake when you are blind in cloud that the glider comes in pieces."

"Why? Do airbrakes keep the glider from going very fast, as well as helping the landing?"

"Oh, yes. With the airbrakes out the glider cannot fly too fast. On the Olympia the brakes do not let it fly faster than a hundred and twenty, which is its highest permitted speed. It can't go faster than this even diving vertically downwind."

"Have you ever jumped by parachute?"

Stef looked happy. "Yes, many times, in the war mostly. It is quite nice."

"I don't think I would like it."

"After you have done it, it is enjoyable."

Stef picked the parachute out of the cockpit and put it in its canvas bag. Then he turned again to John.

"If it is a free jump, you go out head first, wait a little while – a few seconds – then pull the rip cord."

"But what happens if you can't find it?"

"Then you must look down at the harness and see it. I think that sounds silly, but often people forget it is possible to look at yourself, when the earth is floating anywhere." John laughed, and Stef went on, "But gliders are so safe there never seems to be opportunity for

ON TO THE SWALLOW

parachuting. Perhaps one day there is a little tiny war somewhere, and I can jump again.”

They walked back to the clubhouse in the soft evening light, just as Daisy landed near the hangar, throwing up a few sparks as the skid-sheath grated along the tarmac, and Mike's voice could just be heard explaining something to one of the new pupils.

With Mike in the Eagle

THE next day John woke early. There was something about the warmth and brilliance of the morning that got him out of bed, made him rush through breakfast, get on his bicycle and ride as fast as he could to the club.

As soon as he arrived he was shouted at to help get the gliders out of the hangar. There seemed more people about than usual, and everything that could fly was being brought out.

“What’s the excitement?” John asked Pam, as together they lifted Daisy’s tail and carried it over the bumpy drainage ditch at the hangar entrance.

“The forecast is wonderful. Mike says it’s the day of the year. He’s in an absolute panic to get going. He and Dennis are going to fly the Eagle together, perhaps to break a distance record or something.”

They wheeled Daisy to the launch point, watching little puffy cumulus clouds growing like mushrooms all over the blue sky. The north-west wind was cool but gentle, and the clear air felt full of life. Above them the larks were singing, and the Swallow circled lazily nearly three thousand feet up, climbing towards a new-born cloud. Suddenly there was a shout from behind, and Stef, laughing, started to pass them with an Olympia. He was

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heaving her along tail first, with only one person on the wing tip to help him.

"Hurry up, you slow ones," he shouted. "To fly a long way today you must start soon. Look at those rooks, they are in a thermal already."

John and Pam started pushing Daisy as hard as they could, and a race for the launch point started, with no one bothering to look at the rooks. Somehow Daisy managed to keep just ahead, probably because even Stef's strength could not equal the five people who were pushing the two-seater.

Stef stood and laughed, the sweat trickling into his curly beard. "Now we are not in a state to fly until we are again cooler."

But it did not matter, as two Olympias were already lined up ready to be launched, and the Skylark and Eagle were waiting for a tow to two thousand feet with the tug aeroplane.

Mike had his parachute on and was standing by the cockpit of the Eagle, looking at the sky, drumming his fingers on the wing, and then glancing towards the clubhouse.

"Have any of you seen Dennis?" he called. "I want to get started and he's vanished. He promised he would come straight out. This is the day of the year, and we've got seven hours' soaring ahead if we can start now."

"I saw him in the hangar about half an hour ago," said Pam.

John had never seen Mike in this excited mood. He seemed quite different.

"It's early yet," said Pete calmly. He was sitting waiting, map on his knee, in the Skylark, with its sleek

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white fuselage and red wing tips. "You watch, I'll come straight down without finding a single thermal, even with an aero-tow."

"Nonsense," said Mike, "you couldn't go wrong today. Oh, good, here comes the aeroplane at last, but I wish Dennis would hurry."

John saw the Tiger Moth taxiing towards them over the grass, and then noticed that a thin tow rope of nylon was laid out in front of the Skylark. Mackay ran out and



held up the free end to show the aeroplane where to go. The rope was about one hundred and fifty feet long, and the Tiger taxied up to it and turned into wind. Mackay bent down to hook the cable into the towing hook on the tail skid.

"That's Dennis in the Tiger," called Pete in surprise.

Mike looked up. "What on earth's he doing there? Duncan said he would do the towing today."

Then the Skylark was ready to start, so John prepared to run on the wing tip, and Pete signalled the tug pilot to

WITH MIKE IN THE EAGLE

take up slack and tow the glider off. John found he had to run further holding the wings level than with a winch launch, as the acceleration was much less. As soon as the sixty-foot span Skylark had taken off, it climbed about ten feet from the ground and flew along level until the tug became airborne; then they climbed away together into the distance.

By now Mike was nearly beside himself.

"Stef," he shouted, "find out what Dennis was doing in that aeroplane, and when Duncan is going to get here. Dennis is supposed to be with me in the Eagle."

Stef and Mackay came up to the agitated Mike.

"Dennis said Duncan phoned and cannot come, so he is going to do the towing instead, because there is no one else. He is furious that he can't come with you, but if he does no one gets an aero-tow."

"I could have done the towing, why didn't he come and ask? He'll never get any cross-country flying at this rate."

Stef smiled. "If you fly the aeroplane, then you cannot fly the Eagle. I think it is not possible to be in two aircraft at the same time – even for you, Mr Mike. It is better you get in the Eagle and take someone else – it is a lovely day."

Mike leaned back in the cockpit and smiled up at Stef.

"You're quite right. It was just that I was looking forward to the trip with Dennis." He leaned out and looked at the people near the launch point. There was Pam, but she was better off trying to do some soaring on her own. There were four new pupils on Daisy, but they hadn't done enough to enjoy a long trip, and the continuous circling might make them airsick. There was



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Stef, but he wanted to fly his favourite Olympia, and Mackay wanted to do some more solo flying. All the others standing about were pilots waiting their turn to go across country on their own. That seemed to account for everyone. Mike was puzzled. Surely there was someone else. He looked again and spotted John, half hidden by Daisy's wing.

"John," he shouted. "Would you like to come on a cross-country flight – that is if we get some lift to start with?"

"Me?" John pointed to himself with an astonished look on his face.

"Yes, you. I'm not cross-eyed yet, although I feel it sometimes."

John was so surprised and excited that he did not know what to say.

"In this?"

"Yes, yes. Now. In this. Hurry."

"Oh, yes, please." John suddenly woke up to the opportunity and ran for his jacket. When he got back, Stef was waiting to help him on with the parachute, and to tuck him into the back cockpit.

Mike was in front, adjusting his instruments, fiddling with his maps and checking the controls.

"Hurry, hurry," he said frantically, "we are wasting precious soaring weather. Here's the tug now. Are you all right?"

John wriggled in the tight harness as Stef playfully ruffled his hair before fitting the transparent cover over the two of them.

"Yes, I'm ready," called John, trying hard to think of what he had forgotten.

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The aeroplane taxied in front and the nylon rope was hooked on at each end. It was hot in the closed cockpit, and John could just hear the engine of the Tiger ticking over.

“Ready to launch,” shouted Mike, giving a thumbs up sign to the wing tip holder.

Slowly the aeroplane stretched out the nylon rope, and a little flurry of dust thrown up by the slipstream pattered over the glider as they began to move bumpily forward.

John could just see Stef’s legs, running at the wing tip; they moved quicker and quicker and then started to lag behind the glider, slowing down. A few more rumbles and they were airborne. He looked ahead now, past Mike’s brown hair, at the aeroplane still bounding along the ground. Then, as he watched, it too lifted into the air and they started to climb. The speed built up until they were doing sixty miles an hour, and the air roared past the little windows in the cockpit canopy. Every now and again the aeroplane would bob up ahead of them, and shortly afterwards the glider would surge up as it, too, hit the rising air. Somehow Mike seemed to keep the glider steady on tow in spite of all the turbulence and bumps they hit.

Looking down, as they went into a gentle turn, John reckoned they were about as high as he had been on his first Swallow launch. They were about a mile away from the airfield now and John could see it for the first time as just part of the countryside rather than the centre of everything.

“I’m sorry I was in such a panic to go, John,” Mike shouted. “This is the best soaring weather we’ve had this

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year, and you have to get going early to make the most of it."

"Where *are* we going to?" called John.

"I don't know. I've declared Dover as our destination, but we might end up anywhere."

At that moment the tug aeroplane turned again so as to arrive at two thousand feet near the upwind side of the airfield. It nosed about for a thermal to leave them in, and after about half a minute was evidently satisfied, as it rocked its wings, signalling for them to release.

Mike tugged at the yellow knob, and the Tiger dived steeply away to the left, flailing its rope. John watched it out of sight, and then realized that the noise had died away to a soft whistle, and the speed had dropped back to just over forty miles an hour. Mike half looked over his shoulder, and John could see that he was smiling, and the worried look had disappeared.

Destination Unknown

“WELL, here we are. Now to see what we can make of the day. There are some maps in your cockpit; see if you can keep track of where we are. I’m going to visit that cumulus about a mile ahead of us.”

The Eagle flew towards the cloud which grew softer and quite formless as they approached. It spread overhead, its brightness lost, as Mike started to circle. The variometer needle fidgeted about and Mike carefully shifted his circling under the grey mass until it steadied at just over three hundred feet per minute rise; then he turned and John watched the airfield, small and map-like, drift below and start to recede. There could be no going back now; the future was entirely their own, and their world a glider, far up in the hazy blue sky.

As he watched, the familiar field became misty, and suddenly disappeared. They had been drawn up into the cloud. John looked at the back of Mike’s head, now slightly forward as he concentrated on controlling the glider only by its instruments, and realized that the usual sound of the glider had become subdued in the grey gloom. Suddenly he felt lost, and grasped the edge of the seat. He didn’t know which way up he was or whether Mike was turning left or right; sometimes it felt like one way, and immediately afterwards like the other way. The

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cloud thinned for a moment, and the light seemed to come from below. He felt the saliva come into his mouth, and swallowed hard to stop himself feeling sick. Everything felt unreal, as though this would go on for ever, and the ordinary world did not exist any more. He looked imploringly at the back of Mike's head, but managed not to say anything.

Then, without warning, they came out of the cloud. John was quite dazzled by the brightness, and the sun felt hot on his face as the Eagle turned towards it. Some of their cumulus cloud was still above them, soft and very white, but the main mass sloped away beneath, obscuring much of the grey-green of the earth. All round the horizon was scattered cumulus, dazzling white and cream, with hard cauliflower tops, while above, the sky was a clear deep blue.

John searched for the airfield, but could not see it. He looked at the map but could not recognize any features, so he studied the instruments. The altimeter showed over five thousand feet – a mile above the earth.

"That was a useful little cloud," said Mike, half turning his head. "Those two patches of water below are Frensham Ponds. Did that cloud make you feel sick?"

"Not really. Well, only for a second."

"It often does, just to begin with. Shout if you ever want to come out of cloud. Anyway, we won't be able to go in any more for a while, as we will soon be crossing the airline routes, where it is forbidden."

Mike carefully studied the clouds all round and looked out for a check on wind direction. There was a heath fire near one of the ponds, and it showed the wind blowing from north of west.

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"We will have to keep making up to the north wherever possible, John, otherwise the wind will drift us down to the coast this side of Brighton. I'm going to make for that big cumulus south of Guildford."

John could see a lot of clouds all round, and they all looked fairly big. As he could not spot Guildford, he just had to wait until Mike started towards it. They had sunk down to three thousand feet by now, and increased speed to reach the new cloud as quickly as possible, but before they got there the Eagle flew straight into the middle of a newly-formed thermal in clear air. Mike went into a steep climbing turn until the extra speed had been used up, and then circled steadily. Often he looked up into the blue, and John suddenly saw him point.

"Look, there is the new cloud beginning to form above us now. It is only just a wisp at present, but by the time we get up there it will have become a real cumulus."

John stared through the Perspex roof, shading his eyes with a hand. Above them a ragged little tail of cloud swirled gently like a weed in a slow-flowing stream, then other little fluffy bits appeared, separate from it, and some grew on to it, and some vanished again into the deep blue. But all the time the wisps were becoming more solid, and whiter, and the cloud was growing stronger. It seemed flat because it was nearly above them, but John knew it must also be growing upwards like a fairy-tale castle.

Again, as they flew close underneath, the cloud became soft and shapeless and it was difficult to tell how far above them it was. Once more the ground grew hazy as the glider was drawn up into its depths, but this time

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Mike straightened up and flew on into the sunshine, so that the Eagle pointed towards a distant range of white cloud mountains.

"See if you can fly me straight towards that mass of clouds. We don't want to go quite as far as them. They are somewhere between Reigate and Epsom, but there is nothing else about just at the moment, and the chalk face of the North Downs below us now may provide some lift if all else fails. The slopes face the sun and get nice and warm."

John put his hands and feet on the controls and tentatively moved them to find out what the Eagle was like. He felt nervous, not because he was frightened, but because he did not want to waste any of their precious height by flying at the wrong speed, or by going off course. He wanted this flight to go on as long as possible, and not to end early because he had flown badly.

"That's fine. Keep her like that."

Slowly, John relaxed, and thoroughly enjoyed being in control of the glider high above this strange countryside. Then, without warning, the smooth air became slightly turbulent, and then became smooth again.

"There's something here, John. Let me fly her for a bit."

John slouched back in his seat, grinning with happiness. Flying the Eagle with Mike was like being a co-pilot and no longer a pupil. Carefully, Mike searched out the lift; it was very weak and they crept upwards slowly. The altimeter was reading only two thousand feet, and there seemed to be a great many houses and roads beneath them, with no large fields for landing. Although they were not gaining much height, the wind was helping

JOHN GOES GLIDING

them a little, and they crossed a small town, circling persistently.

“What town is that?” asked John, but there was no answer from the front seat.

Mike was using all his skill to keep in this feeble lift, and the voice did not break through his concentration. On part of each circle, when the light was just right, John could see a faint reflection of his tense face on the Perspex of the cockpit cover. It seemed ages since Mike had taken over, but they had gained only about five hundred feet. Their height of two thousand five hundred feet over broken and built up country meant that if this thermal failed they would have to spend so much height flying towards open country that it would be sheer luck if they flew into any more lift. Inch by inch Mike fought his way up, flying the Eagle with immense care, altering his turn whenever the variometer indicated that the lift might be better to one side or the other, searching the sky for new cumulus, and watching the ground for fields and to see which way the wind was drifting them. John did not speak again and did not dare to move in case it disturbed him. Mike said nothing, but grimly held on to the thermal.

At last they managed to reach two thousand seven hundred feet, and the town had drifted away beneath them, giving way to heath and woodland on rising ground, so that although they were climbing higher, the earth was not yet any further away.

There was a cumulus developing a few miles downwind, and Mike was watching this, wondering when he would dare to leave his present position and speed towards where he hoped the new thermal would be. He had just

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decided that he would hang on and slowly climb another two hundred feet to make sure, when the air became dead. The weak, miserable thermal had finally died.

Quickly Mike straightened up and made for the cumulus he had been watching, now well developed and bright with sunlight. He increased speed to get through the sinking air quickly and flew towards that point in space where all his instinct and practice told him the thermal would be. To John the suspense was unbearable as they flew through the quiet air, hoping as hard as they could. But Mike was right and the lift was there; and it was very strong.

He relaxed as soon as he had started circling again.

"I wish we had come here sooner, instead of messing about in that wretched bit of no-sink," he said.

"This is a fine thermal," cried John exuberantly, as he watched the altimeter needle move steadily round.

"It's so good that I think even you couldn't lose it. Like to try your luck?"

"Oh, yes, please."

"All right, she's all yours. Just keep her going as we are."

While John flew, Mike leaned back, refolded his map, studied the sky carefully and then looked at his watch.

"We've been going just on two hours."

But to John the time had gone much more quickly.

"Open out your circles a bit. This is a huge thermal, we might as well make use of its size."

He did as he was told, and the Eagle, flying large lazy circles, rose rapidly under the cloud which had now grown huge and dark above them. As they came closer, a fringe of soft grey vapour hung down all round them as though

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they were going up inside a bell, and the air became rough.

"We mustn't stay here, we are near one of the airways where we will have to stay clear of cloud by a thousand feet. I will take her for a bit. It is a pity, but rules are unfortunately rules."

As they flew out into the sunshine again, Mike looked sadly back at the cloud.

For the next twenty miles the lift was patchy, and on two occasions they sank so low that John was sure that they would have to land. At one time they circled over a farm for nearly fifteen minutes, and watched men working in the stackyard, who did not look up or know that they were there. Then they rose once again to over five thousand feet, and flew straight and fast towards Kent.

"You fly her, John, while I have a look at the map. Keep her as we are. You haven't got a compass on your instrument panel, so keep the sun just behind the starboard wing tip. Cloud base is up to five and a half thousand feet now, so we have plenty in hand."

As John flew on happily through the sparkling air, the ground below looked as though it were not moving at all, but was just a wonderful patchwork of open country with dark woods and green and brown fields, with the pale olive of the flattened downs away to the north. Mike told him that the tiny patches of white were orchards, and the long pencil line drawn straight and almost parallel to their track was the railway to Ashford. And over all this world was the dappled pattern of the cloud shadows, a picture of the sky imprinted in soft blue-purple on the land. Although it was full of light, the round and ragged shadows from the sky took the sparkle

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from the streams, and the brightness from the orchards and villages, as they crept coldly along.

For the next half-hour soaring was easy, and Mike let John do much of the flying. "... Just like having stepping stones," someone had once said, and it was just like this, hopping from thermal to thermal, climbing near cloud base, and then wandering on their silent way. John began to get the feel of the rising air, and to know when to start circling, and where the lift might be found. It was fun experimenting and searching round for this invisible lift, and there was such a feeling of achievement when it was discovered. But whenever he made a wrong decision, Mike's voice would say:

"I should turn away more to the left here," or "If you make your circles a little tighter, you'll get into the stronger lift," and he would follow Mike's advice, and the lift would be there, waiting for them.

"Look ahead and to the right," said Mike. "Can you see anything?"

For a few seconds John looked unbelievably at a distant pale flatness.

"The sea," he shouted. "Is it really the sea?"

"Yes, it really is, and do you see where the land juts out, right in the distance?"

"Yes."

"That's Dungeness."

"Near where Stef landed?"

"Yes, that's right, we have come along almost the same route as he did."

And John thought of Stef in his favourite Olympia, circling up silently into the sky as they had done, and flying over the countryside like a ghost. He realized now

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why Stef had looked so happy that night, and why out of sheer delight he had gone swimming in the cold sea.

There were not many clouds near them now, but far ahead an enormous mass was developing, with towering pinnacles and castles reaching upward, distorting into mere shapes and giving way to new and prouder crests.

Mike was having to work harder again, as thermals were scarce with great voids between, where the air was flat and lifeless.

Slowly they crept across the Kentish plains towards the big clouds, while John looked at the pictures in them and Mike hoped that they would still be growing and alive by the time they could get there. Certainly they showed no sign of dying away yet. One massive thunder-head, nearly three miles above the earth, was softening into the anvil shape which was composed of ice crystals.

Gradually they worked towards them. The coast was closer now and the white line of the surf marked it clearly. Mike did not say much, and appeared to have forgotten John's existence. He would look at the clouds ahead, and study them for some minutes, then he would look at the sea, and at his watch, while all the time the clouds were getting closer and more threatening as they lost their brightness, and reached out with dark shapeless fingers.

An idea was growing in Mike's head, but at first he refused to entertain his own thoughts.

Clouds can be Tough

“JOHN?”

“Yes?”

There was a pause and then Mike said slowly, “If we can get some really good height in those clouds ahead, it will be possible to fly across the Channel, and if we cross it we might manage to find some lift on the other side.”

“Let’s try, please, let’s go!” cried John.

“It’s not so easy. Firstly, do you really want to risk this with me? There *is* a risk, if I calculate wrong and we end up in the sea.”

This was almost the worst thing that Mike could have said if he had wanted to put John off, as he would have risked any adventure with Mike, whom he trusted absolutely, and landing in the sea only conjured up pictures of being picked up by a cross-Channel ferry, with hundreds of passengers lining the rails, and patting him on the back as he climbed dripping aboard.

“And,” Mike went on, “there is also your aunt to think of. Would she mind?”

“Oh.” John had completely forgotten Aunt Evelyn. “She’ll be expecting me back to supper,” he said rather stupidly.

“Don’t worry about that. Someone at the club is bound

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to ring her and tell her what is happening. But do you think she would be upset if she thought we were flying the Channel – it's only been done a few times before in a glider."

"No, I don't think so, not if I'm with you," said John, hoping that Mike would not ask any more questions. But Mike was insistent.

"We shall have to go into cloud to get enough height, and this cloud ahead will be no picnic, although fortunately it is clear of the airway. You will be frightened, cold and almost certainly feel sick, and wish that you had never started; you'll hate every minute of it."

For a moment John was silent. He loathed feeling sick, and the previous small cloud had made his stomach feel queasy, but he was more frightened of showing Mike he was afraid than of the danger itself. He did not really like being in cloud, but neither did he want to spoil Mike's chances of a flight which might never occur again. Then suddenly he knew that he wanted to go more than anything.

"You have only got to say if you don't want to, and we will land at Lympne – it is below us now. Don't mind me, just say if you don't want to."

"I do want to go, Mike, I promise."

Mike turned his head, grinning, and said:

"This is it then."

He put up the speed and dived towards the biggest, blackest part of the cloud; even before they reached it the air became rougher, and in one bump they left their seats. Mike nosed around for the lift, and after flying through a strong and turbulent downcurrent, hit it, and surged upwards into a turn. Very few circles brought

CLOUDS CAN BE TOUGH

them into the dark mouth of the thunderhead, and as the chilling dimness swamped them, Mike said:

"Here we go, hang on," and John gripped the seat hard and hunched his shoulders into the straps.

Until they reached seven thousand feet, the air was fairly smooth, and apart from the sinister darkness of the great cumulus he found that he did not mind it so much as the previous cloud. Rain drummed on the glider, spluttering in by the edge of the cockpit cover, and a little drip started on to his left leg, but as they rose higher the drumming changed to a strange whispering sound and John saw the rain had become snow, thousands of flakes rushing out of the nothingness towards them.

The lift grew stronger, and with the snow the air grew wilder. As the gusts hit them, the glider shuddered, and they felt the vibration through the long wings. Some of the turbulence was so violent that the glider fell away leaving them above their seats with the straps biting into their shoulders and their stomachs left behind.

John's feet kept leaving the floor and then banging down again as the glider surged madly up once more, so he wedged them into the cockpit sides to control them, and hung on to the seat tightly. He hoped and longed that all this would end soon and they would come out into the sunlight; but it did not end, and the air grew wilder and they were flung about ceaselessly, with Mike fighting to keep the glider under control. Now lightning flickered around them, and the creaks of the straining glider were lost in the crack of thunder.

John did not feel sick, but he knew for the first time in his life what fear really meant. Everything all round them was so vast and powerful, and the glider was so

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little. Above and below was this terrifying power and at the same time nothingness. The darkness pressed in on him, and was only relieved by the occasional ghostly lightning. Nothing kept still, and he was shivering violently, but he did not know if he was cold or not. If only everything would stop for a moment, just enough to let him know that this would not go on for ever. He felt he could not bear it any longer, and looked imploringly at the back of Mike's head, trying to will him to go out of the cloud, to go and land, even in the sea, anything rather than this. He wanted to shout, but no words came. Instead he hunched up his shoulders even more and shut his eyes, but quickly opened them when he found that this made him feel sick, and instead looked at the instruments.

The altimeter said eleven thousand three hundred feet – more than two miles above the earth – and John's eyes opened wide with surprise.

"Mike," he shouted, "we're over eleven thousand feet."

"I know," said Mike. His voice was tired. "I think we must be very near the top – I hope."

Gradually the darkness left them, and the turbulence grew less violent. The variometer now showed only two hundred feet a minute rise, and soon the cloud became translucent, like early mist on a summer morning before the sun has reached through. Then they came out, at least John thought they must have, although he could not see anything through the cockpit cover.

Mike pushed at his little clear-vision panel on the left side of the cockpit cover, and with a slight cracking noise it opened.

CLOUDS CAN BE TOUGH

"Ice," said Mike. "Can you see it all along the wings through your little window? It is all over the cockpit cover, but the sun will melt it soon. Trouble is, it will spoil the performance of the glider and make us come down pretty fast until it has gone."

John pushed open his window and looked out along the deep red wing with its strip of white ice. It was not smooth as he had expected, but looked like hundreds of little horns or antlers sticking forward into the airstream. The air was cold, with the smell of winter.

Slowly the ice softened and dried off the cockpit cover, and John looked out again at the sky, now a deeper blue than he believed possible. The great cloud lay sleepily behind them as its turrets and towers sank back and dissolved into clear air. Its life was finishing. No longer had it the power to frighten, or to carry a glider miles up in its roaring, thrusting midst, and soon it would lie flat, like a tattered blanket keeping the sun from the earth, until it disappeared for ever.

"How are you feeling, John?" Mike asked, flying with his left hand, and exercising the cramp from his right.

"All right now, thanks."

"It was a rough brute, that one, but it's given us a good leg up. We must be somewhere just off the coast near Dover. Look ahead now, you can see France."

John leaned forward as much as his straps would let him, and as Mike moved his head to one side, John could see a coastline, pale grey in the shadow of its own cumulus. But in between there was the sea, and above it a clear blue sky, with no cumulus, and no thermals to help them. They had to get across with the height they already had, and it looked such a very long way.

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Suddenly there was a rattling noise at the tail, and he started in alarm.

"It's all right," called Mike, "only some ice melting and bits breaking off and hitting the tail. With any luck it will all go soon, and we shall stop sinking so fast. We've got plenty of height to reach the other side with this glider's ordinary performance, but the ice may make it marginal – our sink is nearly four hundred feet a minute instead of the usual hundred and fifty, and we've nearly twenty miles of sea in front of us."

Mike looked back at the land, and John knew he was wondering whether to take this last chance of returning. Far below there was a steamer approaching what must be Dover harbour, and two fishing boats near the coast. Ahead there was nothing but the pale metallic sea, quite empty.

Mike looked towards France again, and leaned slightly forward as though to help the glider on its way, and John knew he had made up his mind to go.

"The wind at this height is drifting us a bit up-channel," said Mike, almost to himself, and as the ice cleared, he flew faster, and tried to sit back and stop worrying. He ran his fingers through his hair, and then moved his left arm along the side of the cockpit cover.

A large aeroplane flew past far beneath them. It was going towards England, its passengers safe and comfortable. John fidgeted in his seat which suddenly felt hard, but he did not envy the aeroplane passengers. They flew on over the sea, John enjoying the excitement, and Mike outwardly calm but filled with doubts, worries and calculations.

He knew that he should not have started gallivanting

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across the Channel with a pupil. He was a gliding instructor, not a record breaker. What a fool he would look if they did not get across. Even if they were picked up safely, which was most uncertain, the glider would be a total loss. If only he had not gone quite so high in that beastly cloud, and collected so much ice. It had lost them over two thousand feet of precious height before even properly leaving the English coast. Mike looked back hopelessly, because he knew it was no longer possible to reach England against the wind. Towards France it helped them, but there was no way back.

They must be about halfway now, and had less than four thousand feet left.

One Field in France

JOHN was leaning forward to the limit of his straps, and Mike could just feel his breath on the back of his head.

"It still looks a long way. Will we get there all right?"

"I certainly hope so," answered Mike. "I'm going to get it in the neck if we don't."

"We've got a gliding angle of about one in twenty at this speed," he thought to himself, "and the wind is helping us a bit – say one in twenty-five to allow some margin. And we've got ten miles to go, nine if we just get to the beach – say ten. Ten miles at one in twenty-five. About two thousand feet needed, plus about five hundred feet for the approach and landing, say two thousand five hundred feet. Well we've still got three thousand five hundred, so that is a thousand feet to spare. It's a certainty – but it still looks an awful long way."

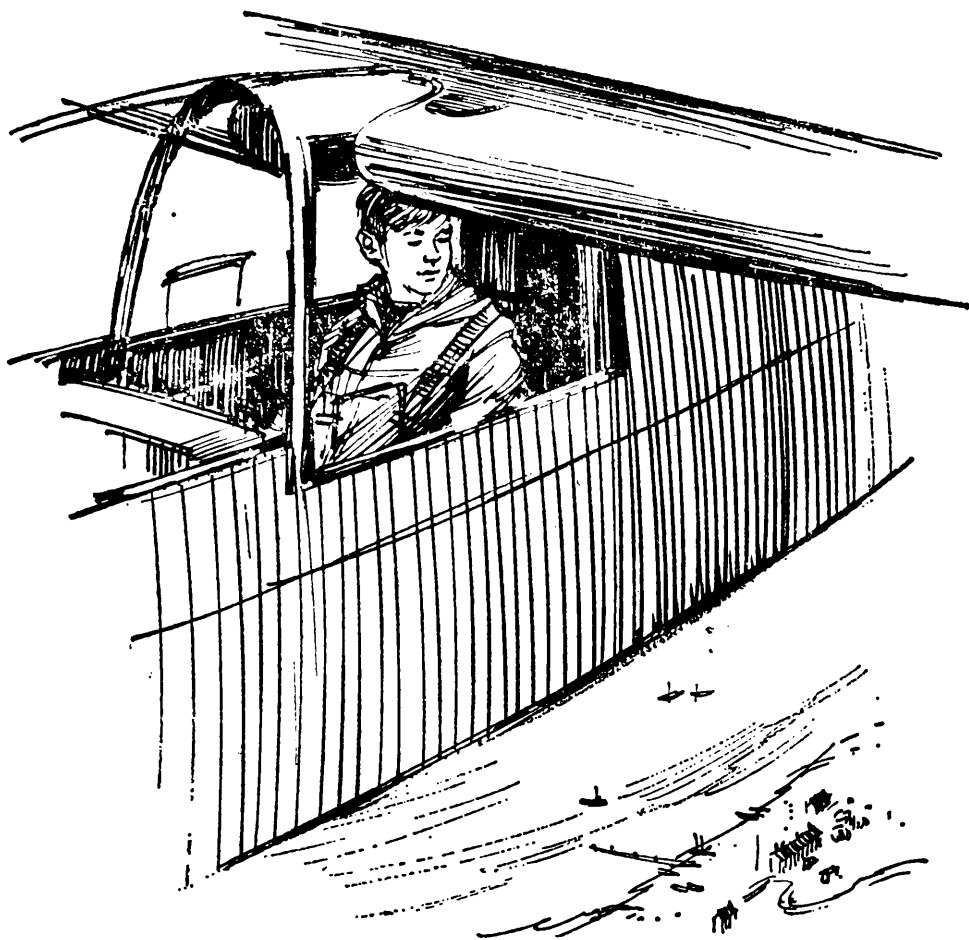
"I can't see any boats anywhere," said John.

"Shut up, cheerful. I don't think we're going to need them."

"Will we reach the coast from here? It looks miles still."

"It is miles – eight to be exact – but if this glider lives up to its makers' expectations we should do it easily."

John looked down at the hard empty sea below, and the metallic glitter of the sun on the unmoving waves,



and felt a little frightened, so he stared ahead at the coastline emerging from the distance, and found that he could just see specks of houses on the sea front.

There was good cumulus over the land, and he wondered whether they would be able to climb up again to it.

The Eagle sank lower, and not a ripple disturbed the calm air to give them hopes of lift. The coastline stretched ahead, tantalizing, and making Mike want to dive towards it, but he knew that to fly faster would make them sink faster, and he tried hard to keep the speed at fifty miles an hour.

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Two thousand five hundred feet and four miles to go. They could see a little harbour now, and houses scattered along the coast and rolling grassland behind.

Mike's hand was tense on the controls and he consciously relaxed it, and straightened his body a little. He felt exhausted, but impatient. If only he dared hurry.

John was getting intensely excited and had great difficulty in keeping his mouth shut, but as the moment came when they crossed the wide rippled beach of France, he could contain himself no longer.

"We've done it, we've done it," he shouted suddenly in Mike's ear, and startled him out of his wits.

"Oh, John, don't frighten me like that, it's worse than the tail falling off!"

"I'm sorry, Mike, but we've done it, and we've still got nearly two thousand feet. It doesn't seem possible, it looked so far away."

"Reliable things, these gliders." Mike grinned, and flew straight across the outskirts of a little town to a cluster of houses on a sunny slope about a mile inland.

"We might find some lift here if we're lucky. It's our only chance. If we don't, we'll have to land."

John could barely sit still he felt so excited, and as Mike reached the sunny slope and started to search for lift, he watched the variometer in suspense. But nothing happened, the air remained calm, and steadily they lost their precious height: one thousand four hundred feet; one thousand one hundred feet.

The houses were close now, and John could see that they were somehow different from English houses. They were down to eight hundred feet, and Mike was keeping his eye on a large field where they could land.

ONE FIELD IN FRANCE

"One last turn over the slopes, John, and if nothing comes up, we will have to land. It's a pity, but there is nothing else for it."

Mike banked gently, and flew the Eagle on a curving path over the slope and the little houses, but the air remained lifeless.

"O.K., then, in we go. The field is large and looks smooth enough."

Mike pushed his map down beside him, and looking in towards the field brought the glider round in a steepish turn, so that he could land into wind – and immediately flew into lift. He continued the turn to get the measure of the thermal, and then carefully shifted his circles towards the far side of the field.

"At last we've got some lift," cried John. "We won't have to land here after all."

"You wait a bit, we are only five hundred feet up. We've got to work this tattered thermal up into something a lot stronger, or we will just drift, and be let down over that broken country downwind of us."

Carefully and with infinite patience Mike sought out the best part of the thermal, and foot by foot the Eagle was persuaded to go up.

It was surprisingly hot low down, and John felt himself sweating just trying to sit still and keep quiet. With each circle he could see the Channel, and as they climbed he could just discern the coast of England. It looked so very far that John found it difficult to believe that they had come across all that water. But as they climbed higher, they also drifted away from the sea, until from five thousand feet, and still just below cloud base, they could see far inland, and looked ahead into the unknown country.

JOHN GOES GLIDING

For the next half-hour it was easy to stay up, and Mike again let John do some of the flying. They had, however, to keep bearing away southwards, for towards the Belgian frontier the clouds had flattened, and by joining together, were keeping the sunlight from the ground so that thermals could not grow. John was entirely happy. Having got the feel of the Eagle, he found he could circle fairly accurately, and at the same time have a good look at the countryside. Sometimes the thermals would be invaded by screaming swallows, diving and twisting close past the glider as they searched the upcurrent for the insects and early butterflies which had been sucked away from the warm hedgerows and swept high into the air. The scent of pollen was often quite strong, too, and occasionally some large dusky swifts joined in the picnic as well. John had not noticed any swallows yet in England, although Pam insisted that she had seen one a week previously.

Just as suddenly as they had come, the swallows vanished, and Mike pointed out a kestrel which had joined their thermal. His wings were still, with the pinions spread wide, and he was circling slightly above them, using the rising air to soar effortlessly into the sky.

"Swallows are not soaring birds like hawks or gulls," said Mike. "They only go up in thermals to eat, but soon make themselves scarce if anything like this fellow appears."

At that moment the thermal faded out, and John levelled up in the direction Mike told him, which was almost parallel to a very straight road. The countryside seemed emptier than in England, mostly gently rolling

ONE FIELD IN FRANCE

grassland of a pale chalky green, although there were a few biggish woods, and some widely dispersed but compact towns.

It was nearly three o'clock by John's watch, and he realized that he was feeling very hungry, and tired as well. Now the excitement of crossing the Channel was far behind, and the sea long out of sight, the journey suddenly seemed endless.

The clouds were flatter now, and the grey cloudy weather, which had stretched across the sky north of their course since crossing the coast, was moving nearer. Mike had taken the controls again, and was searching around for more lift. There were some big towns ahead, but it looked like an industrial area, in which there were not many good landing fields, so he kept over the more open country to the south. John thought this soft open downland the most beautiful he had ever seen. It was still bright in the sunlight, and the cloud shadows ranged peacefully across it like ghosts.

Then Mike's voice broke in on his thoughts:

"This country beneath was the scene of some of the worst battles of the First World War. Thousands of men died every day, and the ground was so blasted that nothing was left growing."

John felt incredulous; it did not look as though anything had ever disturbed the soft greenness below.

"How long ago was that, Mike?" he asked, thinking furiously of history lessons.

"The year I was born."

"Oh." This was even more unexpected, but he was left to his thoughts as Mike suddenly found some rising air and started to circle again.

JOHN GOES GLIDING

"This lift is getting weak, John, and very hard to find. That clamp away to the north is going to beat us quite soon, I think."

Mike picked up one more patch of lift, and then there was nothing. Far in the direction of Paris there were good cumulus, but nearer the clouds were all dying. There was a big town ahead with three main roads converging into it.

"That's St Quentin," Mike called over his shoulder. "Unless we get more lift, we won't reach it, but we will get as close as we can."

Gradually they lost height, but not even Mike could prise a thermal out of the quietening sky. He sometimes circled cautiously if the variometer even flickered, but it was no good. As they got lower, he flew nearly parallel to one of the main roads, watching the fields, assessing their size, and slope, and checking on the wind direction.

He flicked the cockpit cover with his fingers and pointed.

"See that large field ahead?"

John peered over his shoulder. "Yes."

"Well, unless something turns up, that's where we will land. We are down to nine hundred feet now, and the sky is as dead as mutton."

Mike flew over the field, studying it carefully, then turned and made a quick circuit, more or less over its boundaries. As he flew round he edged out from the field to give himself room to make the approach, and then gently eased out the airbrakes. The glide steepened, Mike turned into wind and went straight in to land.

The grass was fairly long, and it rustled under the fuselage as the glider slowed up and stopped. Lightly one

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wing subsided on to the earth, and the flight was over.

Neither of them spoke for a moment. Mike leaned back and, undoing his straps, tried to stretch in the little cockpit, and John suddenly realized that he was actually in France. It was the first time he had ever been abroad.

They opened the cockpit cover. The smell of warm earth enveloped them, and the sun was hot.

Then they climbed stiffly out as a man, dressed in black and pushing a bicycle, came towards them across the field.



Found by Friends

“BONJOUR, messieurs.”

“Bonjour, monsieur,” said John automatically, repeating the start of every French lesson at school.

Mike looked at him quickly.

“Can you speak French?” he asked, surprised.

John grinned. “I don’t think so, only what I’ve just said. All I can think of now is ‘la plume de ma tante est dans the thingummy’.”

“Vous désirez une plume?” asked the old man, reaching for his pocket.

“Non, non,” said Mike, and John started to giggle.

There was a pause, while they thought how to say something.

“Américains?” asked the man hopefully.

“Non, nous sommes Anglais,” explained Mike slowly.

The man gave a sad lift of his shoulders, and spread his hands. “Pas de cigares?”

Mike got out his cigarettes. “Sorry, no cigars,” he said, offering the old man his case.

“Merci, monsieur.” He smiled, wrinkling his weather-beaten face. He had very pale eyes, and a pale forehead through always wearing a hat.

Mike took a cigarette himself, and the old man brought a box of matches from a deep pocket. For a moment they smoked in silence.

FOUND BY FRIENDS

Then Mike asked, "Vous avez un téléphone?"

"Non, monsieur." The old man smiled again. "Je ne suis pas riche, moi. Je n'ai que ma bicyclette."

Then John tried.

"Où est le téléphone, s'il vous plaît?"

The man waved towards St Quentin, four miles away.

"Il y a des téléphones là-bas."

"Il y a un téléphone près d'ici, oui – non?"

The old man looked thoughtful. "Non? Oui? Je crois ... Non, monsieur. Je ne crois pas. Il n'y a que le téléphone au bureau de poste."

"That's the post office, I think," said John.

"I know that," said Mike impatiently, "but it has taken us five minutes to learn that a telephone exists. How long will it take at this rate actually to reach it?" He started to work out another sentence in his head.

Then John said, "Je suis – I mean, j'ai faim."

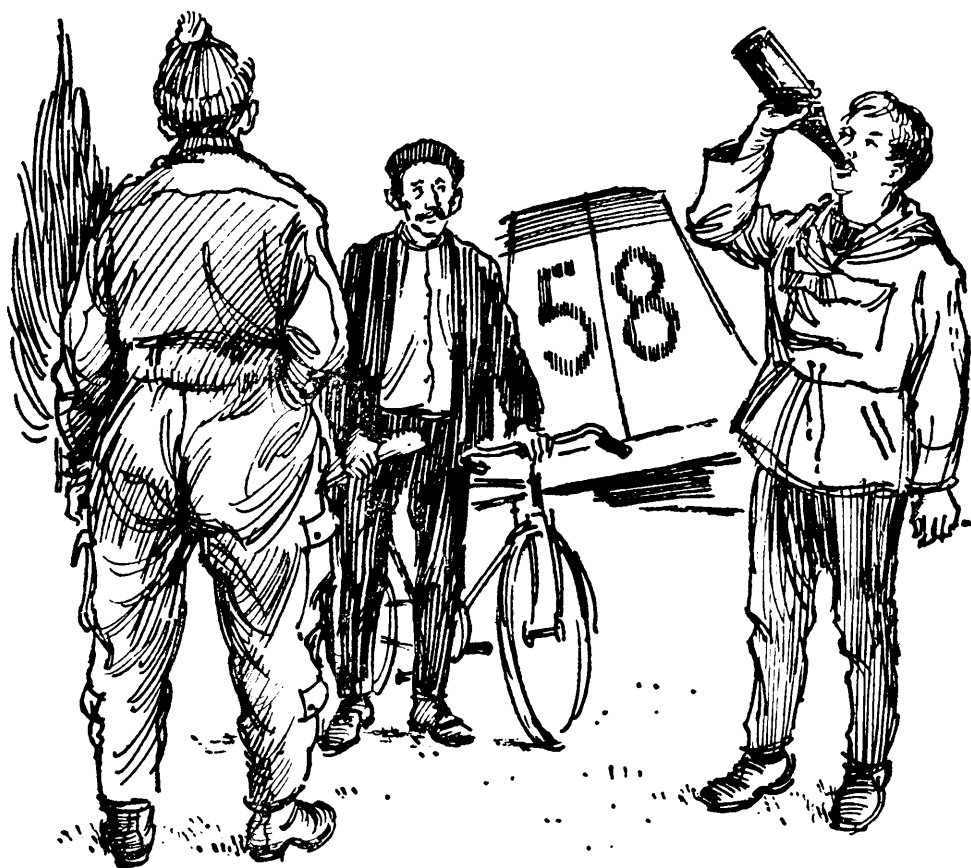
Immediately the old man felt in his pockets, and after bringing a crumpled handkerchief from one, he produced a chunk of bread and some sausage which smelt powerfully of garlic. Mike put his hand to his head.

"Phew, now I shall have to start all over again. For Pete's sake, let's telephone before we eat."

"But I'm terribly hungry!"

"Oh, all right, John, but do try to think out some more French. Mine never was much good."

John took a piece of the bread, but declined the garlic sausage. Then the old man handed him a bottle, which he unthinkingly took to be water. He drank a large gulp, and as the sharp vinegary wine went down his throat, spluttered and handed the bottle back, trying unsuccessfully to say "Merci".



Mike looked at him startled. "What ever is the matter?"

He choked. "I thought - it - was - water."

"What do you people learn at school? Since when has a Frenchman carried water around in a wine bottle? Oh dear, we don't seem to be getting on very fast."

"Perhaps we'd better get on to the road, and stop a car," suggested John.

"That's a fine idea, let's go." He turned to the old man and said, "Auto."

The old man smiled. "Oui, une auto. C'est vite, l'auto. Mais le téléphone est encore plus vite."

FOUND BY FRIENDS

"What is he talking about?" Mike said to himself, then:

"Où est le téléphone?"

"Le téléphone est dans la bibliothèque," chanted John.

"Oh, shut up, and put the parachutes on the wing tip. This is hopeless."

"Non," said the old man slowly, "le téléphone n'est pas dans la bibliothèque, c'est au bureau de poste."

"Quel bureau de poste?"

"Le bureau de poste de Crevisses-le-petit."

"Combien de kilomètres?"

"Un kilomètre." He held up one finger.

Mike looked at John. "I'd better go. Will you stay with the glider?"

"Yes, of course." He sat down by the fuselage.

The old man pointed to him.

"Il est malade? Le vin peut-être?"

"Non, il n'est pas malade. Il garde le – er – glider."

"Il reste pour garder cette machine-là!" The old man pointed to the glider and laughed.

Mike looked annoyed.

"Oui, c'est très – il a beaucoup de valeur."

"Peut-être." The old man shrugged his shoulders. "Mais personne ne passe jamais par ici. Pas nécessaire de garder la machine. Venez tous les deux avec moi au village."

"Oh, come on then, John. He doesn't seem to want to go without you. Let's put on the cockpit cover first."

The old man turned his bicycle round and they set off slowly for the village. He tried to talk to them about something, but, finding they did not understand quickly enough, went on talking to himself.

"I wish this old man hadn't turned up," said Mike.

JOHN GOES GLIDING

"I'm sure we could have found a telephone quicker on our own. Do you realize it's nearly three-quarters of an hour since we landed, and we've done nothing?"

"It's just about teatime at home," said John.

Mike smiled. "Cheer up, there will be plenty more garlic in the village."

They trudged on across the fields.

Mike was looking puzzled. "I believe he is taking us to a village on the other side of this rise, which I'm sure is a lot more than one kilometre away. These country people probably think that one kilometre is anything less than a long way, which in turn is anything over ten kilometres or something."

The old man stopped.

"Un moment!" he said, and went down the bank of a stream that ran near by. Very carefully he pulled up a little net, but there was nothing in it, so he tried another, and then another, each one a little further along the stream.

Mike looked at John with despair in his eyes.

"Monsieur, combien de – fil, er – filets avez-vous?"

"Surely he can't catch fillets," broke in John.

"Idiot! Filets are nets – I think."

The old man straightened his back.

"Une cinquantaine, monsieur."

"Cinquante!" Mike was horrified. "Mais vous ne regardez pas tous maintenant? John, he says he has about fifty of these wretched nets."

"Oh, goodness!" The idea made John start giggling again. If only he could get something to eat!

The old man came up the bank, took off his hat, and scratched his pale head.

FOUND BY FRIENDS

"Non, monsieur. Les autres sont là-bas."

"Thank goodness for that," said John, and Mike said "téléphone" hopefully.

Eventually they came to the village, where a number of children stopped playing in the roadway and followed them. The houses all looked old and tall, and the paint was peeling off. Some chickens scattered noisily at their approach, and a man cycled past with a dead fox over his shoulder.

"La poste," indicated the old man. "Vous y trouverez un téléphone."

They went into the darkness of the house, and as John's eyes became accustomed to the gloom, he saw they were in a large room which was living-room and kitchen combined. In one corner was a steel grille, and an ancient-looking telephone. The old man spoke quickly to a woman with a baby in her arms. They both kept glancing at Mike and went on talking. Then the woman indicated that he should come over to the telephone. He picked up the receiver, and after some delay, a voice said something he did not understand.

"Comment?" he asked.

The muttering came again and Mike looked helplessly at the old man.

"Je veux parler à l'Angleterre," he said. "Voici le numéro."

Immediately the woman ran forward and put her hand on the telephone and spoke rapidly in French. The baby started crying.

"Now what's the matter?"

"I don't know," said John, "but I think she said she must have the money first."

JOHN GOES GLIDING

"Payer," the old man explained. "Il faut payer d'avance."

"That's torn it," said John. "But ask if they will put you on to the police free."

"Je n'ai pas d'argent. Est-ce possible de parler à la police?"

"Oui, bien sûr."

The woman seized the telephone in her free hand, and regardless of the whimpering child began to talk rapidly into it.

Mike sat down on a bench and leaned against the table, not understanding a word.

"This is awful," he said. "It's nearly five o'clock. You'd better go back to that glider. I'll probably be here all night at this rate. I'm sure everyone wants to help" – he glanced at the crowd staring in at the door – "but we are not making much progress." He rubbed his chin with his hands, and John got up to go.

Suddenly there was a commotion outside, and two young men pushed through the children and came into the gloomy room.

"Où sont les pilotes?" the taller of the two demanded.

The old man pointed.

"Ici, monsieur. Ils sont Anglais."

The two shook hands with them both enthusiastically, and John saw with astonishment that they wore in their lapels the familiar small blue badges with white birds.

"You are from ze glider – yes?"

"Yes, who are you? Can you help us telephone to England?"

"We come from ze little gliding centre near here – from where you come? Not England?"

FOUND BY FRIENDS

"Yes, we landed at three fifteen, and it is very important that we telephone to say where we are, but it seems difficult."

"Come, we leave this place. We have a car, and will telephone from our centre."

Mike looked at John.

"Come on." He grinned. "It looks as though we're in luck at last."

Outside was a dilapidated Citroën, and they jumped in the back and waved goodbye to the old man, as it leapt forward with a jerk and drove at high speed down the rough road, leaving a plume of dust behind.

Their new friends were very talkative in a mixture of English and French. They explained that someone else had seen the Eagle flying low and telephoned them. They had set out to look for it, and finding it at last in the field, had started to search the nearest villages for the pilots.

"I think you found us just in time. I was nearly in despair over that telephone," said Mike.

"Well, you have no bothers now." The driver smiled as he swerved violently to avoid a chicken, blasting his horn and grinning over his shoulder.

John was really enjoying this whole crazy situation to the full and nearly burst out laughing when Mike grabbed a ridiculous brocade handgrip in the old car as they bounced wildly round the next corner.

"It's all right for you" – Mike glared at him – "you haven't any imagination, or something. I've never been so frightened in my life."

The horn shrieked again and the Citroën swung out on to the main road, narrowly missing a lorry whose driver shook his fist at them as they flashed past.

JOHN GOES GLIDING

Mike shut his eyes, but opened them again when John nudged him.

"What about the glider? We must have passed it somewhere by now."

"The glider!" Mike leaned forward. "I think we must see if the glider is all right."

The driver lifted both hands off the wheel and dropped them back with a satisfied smile.

"C'est déjà fait – er – it is already done, a pilot from the centre is left by it. He will see it is all right."

"We certainly owe you many thanks," said Mike. "If you hadn't found us we would have really been up the creek."

"Please?" asked the driver. "What is up the creek?"

"It is – well, when you are in a hole, I mean, when everything seems quite hopeless."

At that instant a horse and cart that they were about to overtake swung across the road without warning. The Citroën swerved violently left, then lurched right, and bouncing crazily over the grass verge, regained the road and tore on. Mike lay back with his eyes tight shut.

John laughed. "That's what up the creek means."

Mike looked at him in amazement.

"Doesn't this scare you to death?" he asked under his breath. "It's bad enough being driven on the wrong side of the road without all these alarms as well."

At last the car stopped, and the plume of dust momentarily enveloped them.

"Here is our little centre," said the driver.

They went into a wooden building which had models of gliders hanging from the roof, and photographs on the

FOUND BY FRIENDS

walls. Mike and the driver, who was called Pierre, went off to telephone, and John was left with the friend.

"My name is Henri," he said. "Et vous?"

"John. But I see you have a badge like mine," and he pointed at his buttonhole.

"You also 'ave a B?" Henri asked.

"Yes," said John, unrolling the jacket he had been carrying. "Here it is, but mine has a G at the top, and yours an F. Is that for France?"

"Yes, every country where there is gliding has this badge, and at the top is the letter for the country. If I go to another country I always wear my badge, and often, perhaps in the train or somewhere, I see a person with this badge, and we can talk, and I have a new friend. It is very nice – but you must be hungry. I think we can get coffee now, and perhaps the sandwich."

"I think my friend could do with some as well," John called after him, "if it is possible."

Henri came back with a tray of food, and very soon they were joined by the others.

"Well, I got through," said Mike, "and everything is fixed. These kind people will bring the Eagle here with one of their trailers, and we will put it in the hangar for the night. Then tomorrow morning early our Tiger Moth will fly out from England, and tow us back. Oh, and I asked someone to tell your aunt you were being well looked after." Mike smiled at John. "But I didn't say you had been trying to swig wine out of an old man's bottle."

"I told you I thought it was water."

"Well, the gendarmes will be here soon to examine us for illegal entry into the country, so mind you don't have a go at their drinks."

JOHN GOES GLIDING

John looked alarmed. "The police! I hope we don't have to spend the night in jail."

Mike laughed and put his hand on Pierre's shoulder.

"That has been fixed too. The chief of police is a friend of Pierre's. We were just blown across the Channel and then made an emergency landing. It's quite all right. We're not trying to smuggle anything. It's just that a report has to go on the files."

"What about paying for all this?"

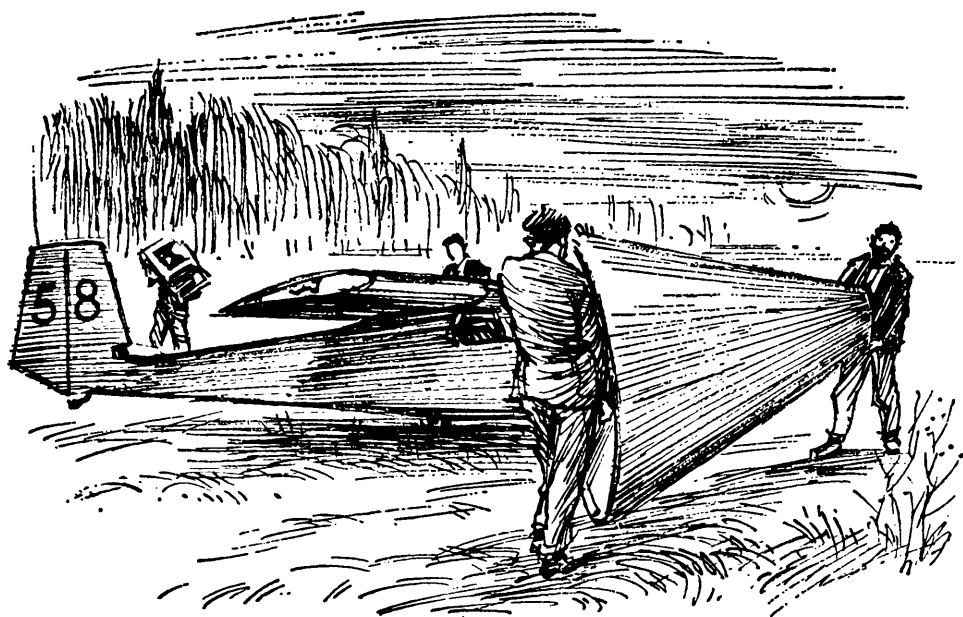
"Well, that's difficult. I told Pierre I would send the money for the telephone call when I got back to England, but he just says we are his guests, and we can do the same for him if he manages to reach England."

"That is right." Pierre laughed. "Now I have, what is it, incentive to glide to England. But now we must get your glider, or it is dark first."

So they all piled into the Citroën, and with a trailer behind, made their way back to the field.

The Frenchmen were very interested in the glider, and had a careful look all over it. The pilot who had been left to guard the glider had already examined it thoroughly, and followed them round eating a large chunk of bread and ham which had been brought for him. He was the same age as John, but wore a Silver C, which John looked at enviously; but as neither of them could speak the other's language, they did little more than grin rather foolishly.

They started to de-rig the Eagle and, as the sun sank below the rolling skyline, lashed it fairly safely on to the trailer with rope, and padded it with sacks, jackets and anything suitable. Mike was fussing round the glider, inspecting wherever he thought it might get rubbed



during the journey, and was secretly afraid of the ride back, with Pierre again driving.

At last they were ready to go, and slowly the car drew the trailer and its precious load out of the field with everyone walking behind to see how she rode. Then they got into the car, except for Henri, who climbed on to the front of the trailer, so that he could shout if the glider started to break loose, and in the growing darkness they drove back to the centre. This time Mike was able to relax, for he soon found that when Pierre was trailing a glider he was a model of care.

Supper was ready when they arrived – steaming plates of veal and potatoes in gravy, and coffee, which they ate hungrily while Henri played his accordion. Mike and John were plied with questions about gliding in England, although they did not have time to answer more than a few of them. Everyone was laughing and talking at once, and John looked round wondering whether it was all

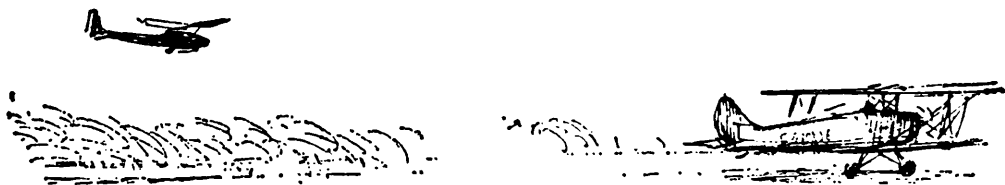
JOHN GOES GLIDING

really true. The police had arrived and, after shaking hands all round, sat down and joined in the conversation.

"Ce n'est qu'une petite formalité," they said, hanging their long capes up on the door.

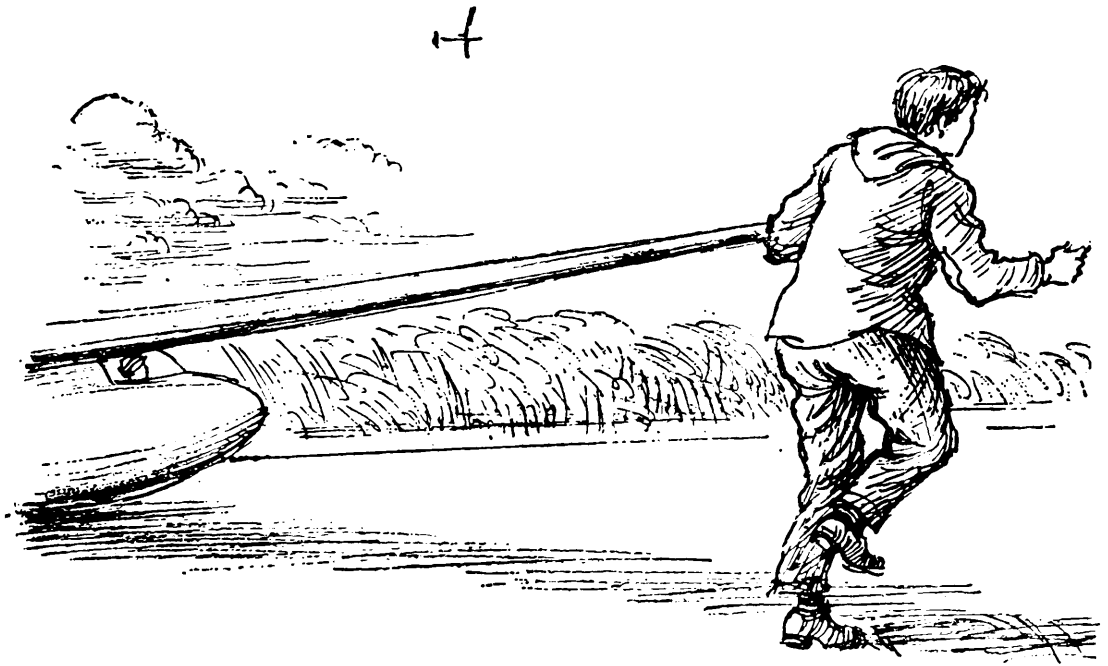
Henri played the accordion well, and ranged from soulful French songs to spirited resemblances of tunes like "The British Grenadiers", when he smiled broadly at the unexpected visitors, his face red with exertion.

That night, as John climbed into the bed which had been lent him, he tried to think back over the day. It did not seem possible that he had got up that morning not even knowing whether he would manage to get into the air at all. He thought of the unexpectedness of going with Mike at the last moment, of the two hundred long miles they had come together, of the excitement of reaching France, of the frustration of trying to telephone, and of the arrival of the pilots who wore the same little white birds, and knew what to do, even though they could not talk together. And tomorrow morning Dennis, who had missed the trip with Mike, would come with the Tiger Moth to tow them home again.



...Now Try it Yourself

[see overleaf]



APPENDIX

The British Gliding Association, Artillery Mansions, 75 Victoria Street, London, s.w.1 will send general information about Gliding Clubs. Most clubs have an annual subscription of from £4 4s. to £8 8s. and an entrance fee of from £4 4s. to £12 12s.

The charges for an ordinary winch launch are from 4s. to 8s. 6d. An hour's soaring costs about 15s. and an aero-tow from 15s. to £1.

Clothes should be warm, waterproof and windproof as airfields always seem colder and windier than anywhere else. Trousers, sweaters and windcheaters are the normal wear.

Clubs and Sites

Aberdeen Gliding Club,
Aberdeen Airport, Dyce, Aberdeen.

Blackpool and Flyde Gliding Club,
The Kite, Blackpool (Squires Gate) Air-
port, Lytham St Annes, Lancs.

Bristol Gliding Club,
Nympsfield, Nr. Stroud, Glos.

Cornish Gliding and Flying Club,
Perranporth Aerodrome, Cornwall.

Coventry Gliding Club,
Baginton Aerodrome, Warwicks.

Derbyshire and Lancashire Gliding Club,
Caphill, Gt Hucklow, Tideswell, Derby-
shire.

Devon and Somerset Gliding Club,
Dunkeswell Aerodrome, Devon.

Doncaster and District Gliding Club,
Doncaster Aerodrome, Yorks.

Dorset Gliding Club,
Gallows Hill, Bovington Camp, Nr War-
ham, Dorset.

Dumfries and District Gliding Club,
Townfoot, Thornehill, Nr Dumfries.

East Midlands Gliding Club,
Rearsby Aerodrome, Leicester.

Essex Gliding Club,
North Weald, Epping, Essex.

Glasgow and West of Scotland Gliding
Club,
Carnemouth, Lanark.

Halifax Gliding Club,
Ringstone Edge, Barkisland, Halifax,
Yorks.

APPENDIX

Kent Gliding Club,
Charing, Kent.

Lakes Gliding Club,
Tebay Gill, Tebay, Penrith, Cumberland.

Lasham Gliding Society Ltd,
Lasham Aerodrome, Nr Alton, Hants.

London Gliding Club,
Dunstable Downs, Tring Road, Beds.

Midland Gliding Club,
The Long Mynd, Church Stretton, Salop.

Newcastle Gliding Club,
Carlton-in-Cleveland, Stokesley, Yorks.

Norfolk and Norwich Aero Club,
R.A.F. Swanton Morley, Nr Dereham,
Norfolk.

Norfolk Gliding Club,
Tibenham Airfield, Norfolk.

Northamptonshire Gliding Club,
Podington Aerodrome, Nr Welling-
borough, Northants.

Ouse Gliding Club,
Rufforth, York.

Oxford Gliding Club,
Weston-on-the-Green, Oxon.

Scottish Gliding Union,
Portmoak, Scotlandwell, Kinross.

Shorts Gliding Club,
Newtonwards Airfield, N. Ireland.

South Wales Gliding Club,
Bedwas, Nr Cardiff.

Southdown Gliding Club,
Firle Beacon, Bo Peep Farm, Itford Hill
Ridge, Nr Lewes, Sussex.

Surrey Gliding Club,
Lasham Aerodrome, Nr Alton, Hants.

Swansea Gliding Club,
Fairwood Airport, Swansea, Glam.

Swindon Gliding Club,
South Marsdon Aerodrome, Swindon,
Wilts.

West Wales Gliding Association,
Haverfordwest Aerodrome, Pems.

Yorkshire Gliding Club,
Sutton Bank, Thirsk, Yorks.

THE AUTHOR

Ann Welch was born in London in 1917 and has been flying and gliding almost all her life. She founded the Surrey Gliding Club in 1938. During the war she was a ferry pilot and flew Spitfires and Wellingtons, and since 1948 has been the Team Manager of the British Gliding Team. Among her recent books have been *Go Gliding*, *Flying Training in Gliders* and *Come Gliding With Me*.

Jacket photograph by
Charles E. Brown

