

A Birdie in the House

By FANNIE HURST

(Continued from last week)

"You're right restless down here at the Springs, aren't you, Miss Della?"

"Restless! Well, rather! Me down here in the Allimentary Canal zone, when it's Aero week and the Motor Cup races at home!"

"To think of a little Cutey like you being so crazy over airplanes. Aren't you afraid, Miss Della, to—"

"Afraid! Why, I've taken two flights already. I was among those present in Revillon's famous plane the time he carried a passenger at the Chicago meet. I went up with Arch Meyer the first time he tried out his old monoplane. I—"

"Just full of pep, ain't you!"

"Why, there's not an airman ever dropped in at the office while I was stenographing that I didn't invite myself up with. Afraid! Gee, I can taste a flight now. Cloud in my mouth and rain before it's rain in my face! A feeling like all of a sudden my feet are cut free from asphalt and the world has slid out from under me. Up-up-up! With this warty old planet dropping away like a pebble off a cliff. Scouting on wings through the middle of a million years! That's the way it feels to you, Mr. Ganz, to go flying through space, if your rudder is vertical and the air gusts let the planes alone."

"Well, if—if you ain't just full of high jinks, I tell you a fellow like me, who lets himself get close up to forty with his nose and eyes to the grindstone, sometimes just keeps them there from habit unless something like you comes along to wake him up."

"You self-made men, Mr. Ganz, are sometimes like home-made flying machines. After you get wings, you don't know how to use 'em."

"You bet I've been sleeping, Miss Della, but I'm awake now and—and you woke me."

"Flying, Mr. Ganz, is like any other principle where—"

"Now just don't you begin to get right away from the subject of—you and me like you did last night, Miss Della, when you wouldn't let me say what I've got in my heart to."

"It's you who changed the subject, Mr. Ganz. We were talking about airplanes and I was trying to tell you that we were standing on the edge of the air age. We've finished with the Stone age and the Iron age and all the other ages and now we are ready for the—"

"But, Miss Della, what I got in my heart to tell you is more important—"

"There are no limits to the airplane, Mr. Ganz, that's what makes it the greatest of all inventions. Mountains, seas, valleys and rivers won't be any more of an obstacle to men hereafter than a relief map is to you, if you wave your hand over it."

"But—"

"I worked in an aero office for six months. Mr. Ganz, I've heard them talk first-hand and seen what the boys with the ideas and the nerve are doing. Why, I know a boy right this minute who is putting the finishing touches to a biplane out in his back shed that not only is going to do the fanciest flying this world has ever seen, but if ever he can get it before the public, is going to give the government the thrill of its life in national defense. I know another fellow, too, Ed Waller of Dayton, is—"

"Man wasn't made for flying, Miss Della, or the Almighty would have given him wings, just like he wasn't made for water or he'd have fins."

"And he wasn't made for roller-skating or the Almighty would have given him casters, is that your idea, Mr. Ganz?"

"Where I'd like to see you, Miss Della, is in a little nest right down here close to earth in a little elegantly furnished, steam-heat and janitor-service flat-for-two on the south side of Chicago."

"You're like mommy and papa, you haven't the vision of an owl in the sun. That's what's the matter with all of you. All your noses are worn off at the end from the grindstone. You've never dreamed a dream. You've never sat in an airplane and felt it give that little pulling lift that clears the ground, and suddenly felt yourself skimming up past the swallows to the sky. Oh! Oh! Oh!"

"But, Miss Della, I know a young man got consumption from such high air as that. He—"

"It's the boys with the dreams and the imagination and the fifth dimension in thinking, Mr. Ganz, not the grindstones, who have given the world the joys and modern conveniences. Take Bjorn Bjorstedt, the first man to violate in the great exhibit flights at Great Neck. There's a fellow who slept on park benches and ate from door to door, so he could put

every cent in perfecting that engine of his. Take Arch Meyer, the fellow I was telling you about. That boy could make easy money in any business he made up his mind to, but what does he do, give up his dream? He does not. He's going to demonstrate by fancy flying and double-looping the loop four times his first exhibit, that his heavy machine is the most practical—"

"But to get back, little Cutey, to that nest for two. Don't think, Miss Della, this pain in my left side is sciatica. It's just like, Miss Della, you had taken a little arrow and stabbed me right through the heart."

"What I was trying to show you, Mr. Ganz, is that you're wrong about flying. If you were to get yourself interested in the greatest invention of all time and put up a purse now and then for fancy flying, to help along the boys who are grinding back at death and making the history of the airplane, you'd get so wrapped up in the vitals that make a heavier-than-air-machine fly, and—that maybe you'd forget your own vitals, Mr. Ganz. Just try to imagine yourself flying at night, Mr. Ganz, with the air like ink around you, and—"

"The night air is bad for me, Miss Della, my joints—"

"Night air!" cried Miss Della, thrusting her face forward as if she would drink in aerial champagne. "Why, the day they shut in my sleeping porch at home and I've got to stop sneezing the stars all night, then let me die, say I, let me die!"

"There was a time, Miss Della, I was just like you, nothing could get the best of me. There's nothing the matter with me now, Miss Della, except all that's ailing me since my mother died is—I need a home, Miss Della; regular meals again and—and somebody to—care one way or another about me, little Cutey, somebody to—"

"Please, Mr. Ganz, don't—"

"It's living around without a home has done it, Miss Della. When I had a regular living I had my health, and—and when I got my health, and Della, I—I'm as chipper as they come."

"Of course, you are."

"Home cooking is all I need, Miss Della. My doctor says if I stick to my diet and keep out of the night air until the swelling gets out of my joints—"

"Look," cried Miss Kessler, suddenly throwing back her head to sniff the fumes of autumn, "why it's just like coming out of twilight into high noon, isn't it? Look at those links and the flat country beyond staring back at the sun. Gee!"

They had emerged from the leafy shade of the woods into the white light of a sun-drenched morning. In the middle distance on the close-cropped links, a woman buoyantly poised for stroke let fly her brassie.

"Look down there by De Leon, Miss Della, all of them at their sun baths. I tell you there's nothing like warm rays for getting the rheumatism out of you."

"Why—why—gee!"

"What, Miss Della?"

"Gee, whiz!"

"Miss Della!"

"I must have been dreaming. Look, will you! It never struck me before. Look out there. What a field for a flight!"

"A flight?"

"What a rise a biplane could get off land like this. What a rise!"

"Just look over there in the sun, will you? Tom Riley, himself, Hirkhimer, them two big guns from New York and the whole crowd of them. I tell you it's a pleasure to be down here with all those big names, eh, Miss Della?"

On benches dragged from the shade trees pat out into the white morning, a group of Hotel Cadillac guests spread themselves to the sun, the running line of their conversation as insistent as the up and down rume of a bagpipe. Upon the knot of them, rapidly spread out there as if grouped by Watteau for a conceit in oil, Miss Kessler flashed her inspired eyes.

"Mr. Riley!" she cried and clapped her hands.

The proprietor of the Hotel Cadillac raised two hundred pounds of democracy and affability from a slat bench and executed an ambitious bow.

"Good-morning to you, little lady, and if you aren't as chipper as a chipmunk as usual."

Toward Mr. Ganz the proprietor of the Hotel Cadillac extended a heavy hearty arm.

"Well, Ganz, how are my springs treating you?"

"Great, Mr. Riley, except somehow my joints—"

"Mr. Riley, I've got an idea!"

"You've got an idea, little Miss Della? That's nothing new for you."

"It just hit me bing in the eye. It—it's immense, Mr. Riley."

"What is it now, little one, a dance in the grill or a long-distance water drinking contest?"

"I want you to look, Mr. Riley; you, Mr. Ganz and Mr. Hirkhimer; you, Mr. Chalmers and Mr. Mange and Mr. Lobenz. Look, Mrs. Van Ritz, out there over the fields and what do you see? Look!"

"I see ride in vrontd of me, Miss Gezzler, one preddy little gur-rl."

"Oh, oh, look again, Mr. Hirkhimer; you, Mr. Riley, Mr. Lobenz. All of you! Don't you see?"

"Mr. Percival Chalmers, of Boston, leaned forward, his hands clasped over the top of his cane.

"Beg pardon, where did you say?"

"There! There!" cried Miss Kessler, and sprang at a bound to a bench, standing aloft there with her arm outflung full stretch.

"Where, Miss Kessler?"

"There, Mr. Mange. Out there before you, ladies and gentlemen, is the greatest natural aviation field in this great and glorious country of ours."

"Natural what?"

"Aviation field. Get me? Why, with a field like that drawn right up alongside the Hotel Cadillac, we can get all the airmen in the world here. Why, it—why, it's immense!"

"That's right, little missy, give us a recitation. Wake us up around here. Put some pep into us, eh? Play up!"

"Play up nothing, Mr. Riley, and if you're the good hotel man I think you are, you'll sit up and take notice of what I'm telling you. Out there in that flat country with nothing but ant-hills for obstacles, you've got the making of a record-breaking aero meet with nothing but class A exhibits flying, and the biggest crowd down here that these springs ever dreamed of having in a million years. Just look! No water, no hills, no treacherous air



"Get the Crowds Down Here."

currents. Nothing but country flat as sky. An exhibition flight down here will be a riot. I tell you. A riot!"

"By golly, she's right!" said Hirkhimer. "By golly, a man like you, Riley, with such a following like you got in Indiana could make for your springs here a sensation."

"Get the crowds down here," continued Miss Kessler, enthusiastically. "You've got the whole Middle West to draw on and the East and the South, too, for that matter. I tell you, it's a great scheme, Mr. Riley. Aviation's the great question of peace and war. Let's have a flight! I just wonder it didn't hit me before. I know the whole air gang. I know them all, I tell you, and if you big bugs will get up the purse, I can get you any of the fancy fliers of the world down here for an exhibition flight."

"But Miss Kessler—"

"I know a man's got a biplane in his back shed right now that will focus the eyes of the world on Cadillac Springs over night, if we can get him down here for his first exhibition flight. What would you say if I could get him down here on a moderate purse, for the first exhibition flight of a machine that's going to put flying forward a quarter of a century, for you? This is the kind of a field he needs to prove that he's done that little thing! Ask any aviator the value of a flat country. Why, I've got so much faith, ladies and gentlemen, in that Meyer biplane and in her new stabilizer that I—I'd stake a million dollars on it, if I had it. I'd back my soul on that machine."

"Loog how eggited she gets. Ain't it a treat, Riley, to see her!"

"But—"

"Start the ball rolling! Who'll start her? Who? Mr. Ganz, you're a successful business man who told me not ten minutes ago that my smile was worth five thousand. Prove it. Look at it now. Is it still worth the money? Start the purse with that five thousand, Mr. Ganz, and if she don't loop the double loop four times and write each loop in fire, purse refunded like I promised. Start her with five thousand, Mr. Ganz. Are you a gentleman of your word, Mr. Ganz, and game enough to start her with five thousand?"

"Miss Della, you—you're only fooling. Such a little cut-up!"

"Fooling! If I was any more in earnest I'd break a blood vessel!"

"Dot's ride, Miss Gezzler, nudge him bay."

"Start her with five thousand, Mr. Ganz. Come in on your share, Mr. Riley. It's your enterprise, after all, and you go him a couple of thousand better. It's cheap at the price, Mr. Riley. Bjorstedt got twenty thousand for his last flight and came down in ten minutes with a broken rudder, but just the same he put Great Neck on the map. Don't be a bunch of pikers. You, Mr. Lobenz, if you're the good sport I think you are, what's a few thousand to you? Come on in it, Mr. Chalmers, and I'll make you forget what ails you; you, Mrs. Van Ritz, if you're a gentleman of your word, Mr. Ganz, you'll start the ball rolling with that five thousand."

"Twenty—twenty-five—hundred, Miss Kessler, is all I—I—"

"Good! Twenty-five hundred for a starter. Mr. Max Ganz of Chicago starts the ball rolling with twenty-five hundred. Am I bid more? Am I bid more? It's your enterprise down here, Mr. Riley, and the net results will be yours. The proprietor of the Hotel Cadillac must head the list. Am I bid

more? Five thousand, if you're a good business man and know a good thing when you see it. Five thousand for a hundred thousand worth of publicity! Five thousand?"

"Five thousand!"

"Hurrah! Five thousand from Mr. Riley, and don't let them leave you at the post, Mr. Hirkhimer."

"A thousand doolar, Miss Gezzler, but I want from way up in the air he should drop one thousand packages Minto chewing-gum when he reaches two thousand feet."

"No sooner said than done! One thousand from Mr. Hirkhimer and now you, Mr. Lobenz. How much?"

"You can't expect a man in the automobile business, Miss Kessler, to subscribe to aviation."

"Why not? The biggest automobile man in the world started out manufacturing one-horse shays. How much, Mr. Lorenz? Good! Let me put you down for one thousand each, and now you over there, Mrs. Van Ritz. Let's have health, wealth and beauty on our list, and it's up to you to supply the last. How much, Mrs. Van Ritz? How much?"

"Two thousand." Spoken coldly as through a wet blanket and the yellow head still held in profile.

"Catch me, darlings, while I faint! Eleven thousand five hundred, and before the day is over, it'll be twice that. Ladies and gentlemen, you're helping to make the history of the air, and I'm proud of you!"

She jumped lightly down without the proffered aid of Mr. Riley and Mr. Ganz and darted into the shaded track leading up toward the hotel.

"But, Miss Kessler—"

"I'm off to the hotel to send off telegrams before you change your minds. Hold my hat, Mr. Ganz, until I come back. Wait!"

And she was off, her vivid face thrust forward and her elbows laid back against her slim sides.

In the bay of the veranda, plying her plaid needle and the rose growing in her pattern, Mrs. Kessler glanced up at the rush of her daughter's approach.

"Why, Della baby—what excitement you got! Della, you got news for mamma?"

"Yes, dear! Yes, dear!"

"In your face I can see it. Della! Ganz! Della, you got news for mamma?"

"Yes, mommy dear—but—"

"Gott in Himmel!" cried Mrs. Kessler, rising, her voice running high and her crochet rolling to the floor.

"Great news, mommy dear, only let me pass, I must hurry. Great news!"

"Della, did he—"

"An exhibition flight down here, mommy. The longest purse and the biggest flight of the year. The biggest flight of the year, mommy dear. Let me go. Let me go!"

"Gott in Himmel!" repeated Mrs. Kessler, reseating herself and as if her vocal chords had suddenly rusted.

On the night of the exhibition flight of the Meyer biplane at Cadillac Springs, the air of Indian summer hung heavy with the smooth ingratiating quality of milk. September night lay on the stubble fields but grided into by a series of white arc lights swung from temporary poles and pouring, as hot steel is poured, their light upon an improvised grandstand and an adjoining section of roped-off space for the standing throng; upon a temporary shed erected at the opposite end of the field and upon the doughy outstanding faces of twelve thousand waiting spectators, mortared into a wall five breasts deep around the roped-in section.

In the front row, her crimson sweater pushed half back from her shoulders and her small hands gripping the splintery hand-rail until she knuckles sprang up white, Miss Della Kessler drove her dark gaze down the length of the field.

"Why, oh, why, don't he start? I'll run down again to the field and—"

"Della, I want you should sit right in this box by your papa and Mr. Ganz and Minna and me. I don't see no girls down there, only men around, Minna, his own sister, can sit quiet here until he goes up, and so should you."

Miss Minna Meyer, snug to her literal teeth in a gray wool jacket and a gray wool muffler wound high and revealing only her eyes and her high-pitched cheek bones, turned in her swaddlings toward Mrs. Kessler, her voice percolating through wool.

"Mrs. Kessler, if I was to have stuck around on the dump ground every time brother made a trial flight of his machine, I'd be in my grave now from sciatic pleurisy."

Mr. Ganz looped himself farther across the back of Miss Meyer's chair.

"From what, Miss Meyer?"

"Sciatic pleurisy, Mr. Ganz. I'm a great sufferer from it."

"I wonder, Miss Meyer, if that could be what I sometimes feel in my left hip."

"Certainly it is, Mr. Ganz. It's a condition of the sockets."

"That's it then. Sciatic—what?"

"Pleurisy."

"Pleurisy. I can tell you, Miss Meyer, in the three days you've been here at the Springs, you've told me more about myself than the doctors in six diagnoses could. It was worth the twenty-five hundred, Miss Meyer, just to have you come here. The minute I'm out in the night air like now, right away in my left thigh I get such a twinge that—"

"Could it be his valves are hindering his flight, Minna? Could it?"

"I don't know, Della. You're getting me all worked up, too. Chills and

fever in my legs—comes, not at once."

"Now, now, Miss Minna, just don't you let your little fire-cracker, Miss Della, get you all worked up."

"Right this minute I'm in a terrible chill, Mr. Ganz, please excuse how I'm trembling. I wonder, Della, if—if anything's wrong! Oh—oh!"

"I tell you, Kessler," said Mr. Ganz, leaning across the dim silverying silhouette of Miss Meyer, "you got a daughter that is born to be a general in the army. Some girls are born to run people and to run homes and some to be generals in armies. She's a general, I tell you. Just look how she got the whole hotel of us out here in the night air where we don't belong."

"How she engineered it all, though! Eh, Ganz? Fifteen thousand dollars she raised like it was fifteen cents. Over night she makes a rich man out of a poor boy. Like Tom Riley says himself, Napoleon couldn't do so well. My little girl she's a good one, eh, Ganz? Better as her old papa."

"A general in the army, I tell you, Kessler."

With her full back turned to the pattering of conversation and oblivious to it, Miss Kessler swayed suddenly farther from the group.

"Look, papa, there's a new batch of people coming in from the station. There's fourteen thousand here to-night, if there's a soul, not counting the Louisville Tech. school. Fourteen thousand, if there's a soul."

"Oh, my poor hands, how cold! Whenever my brother flies, it's just like all my circulation had slowed down. Needle prick in my arms and—"

"Needle pricks, did you say, Miss Meyer? Right this minute my left side feels like a tea kettle singing. It ain't the circulation worries me, Miss Minna, only the doctor says—"

"Well, let me tell you, Mr. Ganz, that poor circulation should worry you. Any book on health hints will tell you that poor circulation is first cousin to paralysis."

"Papa! Minna! Mommy! Look, they're pulling out the machine. See!"

The roped-off crowd swayed suddenly forward, scattering ejaculations.

"Is that it? Is that him? Is that he? Raugh! Raugh! Cut it out! That ain't him. There he is! Raugh!"

Miss Kessler's hand reached out to close tightly over her parent's.

"Oh, Pa, that's Arch. See! The tall thin fellow pulling down his cap."

"Yes, that's brother. See, Mr. Ganz. That's him. Oh, my poor hands!"

"Poor little hands!"

"They're strapping him in!"

"It's the fireworks I'm afraid of. Suppose it should catch! He's never used them in trial flights. Oh, my poor hands!"

Into the flare of three arc-lights, a huge winged skeleton ran forward on wheels, pushed by three lunging attendants, head first. Then she stood with her beetle-like wings flung wide and the inners of her thrumming to be off.

"Oh, my brother! Oh-h-h!"

"Now, now, Miss Minna!"

"I tell you, Mr. Ganz, I—I'd rather we had to live in a tenement all our lives than to see him risk his life like that. What's a fifteen-thousand-dollar purse, if—if he don't win it and gets killed trying to do the double loop four times? A helpless girl like me that's never been strong—"

"Now, now, Miss Minna!"

"I never wanted him to fly, Mrs. Ganz. Let the other boys take the risks. Arch, I always said, but—"

"I guess you're a little like me, Miss Minna. As I tell Miss Della, where my two feet belong is right on the ground where the Almighty put 'em."

"That's me every time, Mr. Ganz, just so it ain't damp."

He leaned forward, talking beneath the din of the crowd and through the wool muffler directly into the concealed ear of Miss Meyer.

"Funny how—how we like the same things, ain't it, Miss Meyer?"

"Y-yes—ain't it!"

"Now, for instance, take me, I—I always say, Miss Meyer, let the high-fliers do all the high flying they want, but my idea of real living, Miss Minna, my—my idea of real living is—"

"Yes, Mr. Ganz?"

"Is a—a little elegantly furnished, steam-heated nest for two, Miss Meyer, on the south side of Chicago with—"

"Oh—Mr. Ganz! Oh—"

"It is, Miss Minna. I can tell you it ain't all sciatic pleurisy in my left side, Miss Minna. Since I met you it—it's just like you had taken a little arrow and shot me right in the heart. That—that's the kind of a pain I got there now. You—you get me, Miss Minna—Minna?"

"Mr. Ganz—M-max!"

Beneath the gray wool packet their hands met and clasped. A rumble ran through the crowd. Miss Kessler shot forward like a streak, leaning dangerously beyond the rail.

"He's off!"

"Raugh! Raugh! Chee-e-e-e!"

The pulse of the distant machine leaped suddenly into thousands and the winged monster, like the restored bulk of some antediluvian monster of earth and air, shot forward in a straight line, whizzing down the smooth face of the field. A shout went with it and the human hedge, five faces deep, was suddenly white with up-turned faces.

"Raugh! Chee-e-e-e!"

Tip-tilting suddenly, as if it had drawn its talons up and under, it rose in perfect whirling flight.

"Oh, mommy! mommy!"

"Gott in Himmel, a boy should take such chances!"

"He's testing the wind, see, the

current is blowing him a little."

"Oh, my God, his engine missed then! Hear? Oh, my brother! Hold my hands—Max."

"See, papa, he's picking up again. Now he's edging into the wind. His controls are working perfect. He's climbing. See him mount! See him mount! Oh! oh! oh!"

The throbbing of the engine was suddenly remote, then more remote, as if tulle portieres of air and space were drawing together as the machine flew through them into uncharted altitudes.

Finally silence and only a white sea of faces turned upward to a black angle, flying against a star-spangled sky and circling over the field once, twice, thrice.

"He's getting ready to loop. He's looping! Look, he's dipping for the first loop. Oh, mommy!"

"Gott in Himmel!"

"Oh, my brother!"

Suddenly the remote flying thing dipped a bit and from beneath its planes two streamers of fire streaked the sky.

A great booming shout rose.

"Oh, my brother! It's the fireworks I'm afraid of, Max!"

"He'll dip now. Watch, mommy, he'll dip now."

The machine fell forward into a loop, curving up again, down again, up again; the red comet-tails circumscribing its double course in fire.

"One!" rose in bombardment from the crowd.

The hieroglyphic of fire hung for a moment, then another vertical dive and another double circle of fire.

"Two!"

"Two!"

"Max, my—my poor knees won't hold me."

"Poor, poor little knees!"

"Three!"

"Max, dear, I think I—I'm going to faint."

"I'm here, little one, to catch you."

"What's that falling down? Chewing-gum! Take a piece, Max, dear. It—it's good for you after meals."

Miss Della Kessler twined her small hands together and beneath that gate of voices, spoke quietly upward.

"Steady, Arch. Steady! You've looped three and you can make it four. Steady, Arch! Steady!"

A light jeer rose from the crowd.

"S'matter up there! Cold feet? Three ain't four! What's got you? Dizzy? Loop her up there! Loop her up!"

"Only once more, Arch. Steady, old boy!"

"Loop her up there! Chee-e-e-e!"

"What if his engine is—"

"Four!" And with the great spiral of fire from the final loop still dragging across the sky, the hum of the descending engine grilling down again into the night, and the silent swoop of an engine vapouring, Miss Della Kessler stood quiet amid the tumult of a crowd gone mad, a booming in her ears but her little face still upward in the attitude of a flower.

Through the human swarm, which had tumbled the ropes and flowed like water from a broken main across the field and toward the aircraft just settling itself to earth with its wings ever spread, Miss Della Kessler gouged, wormed, elbowed her little way. Men with their shouts still smoking on their lips resisted the small figure and granted her reluctant right of way. In the tight tangle immediately surrounding the machine, the crimson sweater was quite torn from her, but she emerged into the small guarded area about the still coughing craft, as it hurtled there out of the crowd.

From the heart of the winged monster, goggled, legged and bulky of bulk in a double-breasted leather



"Cutey!" He said, "Cutey, Little Sweetheart!"

jacket, a figure moved simultaneously forward and a shout thundered up from throats long since raw.

"Arch!" cried Miss Kessler and under cover of those shouts, speech became pantomime. "Archiboy! Archiboy-darling!"

Taking her hand in his gauntlet and regarding her through goggles clouded with sudden mist, he leaned to her under cover of that same shouting.

"Cutey!" he said. "Cutey, little sweetheart!"

A tremor ran down his arm and through the gauntlet to her finger-tips.

(THE END)

We favor the open shop that is closed to the slave-driver.