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who served in the WAAF and ATA.

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Worrals Takes A Trip

FLIGHT OFFICER JOAN WORRALSON, W.A.A.F., better known to her personal friends as ‘Worrals’, sat chin in hand on an empty oil-drum and gazed moodily across a deserted aerodrome at the rolling cloudscape beyond.

‘The fact is, Frecks,’ she told her friend and comrade, Betty Lovell, who sat in a similar attitude on an adjacent drum, ‘there is a limit to the number of times one can take up a light plane and fly it to the same place without getting bored. Four or five times a week for three months I’ve been doing just that, taking battered Tiger-Moths back to the makers for reconditioning. It’s about as exciting as pedalling a push bike along an arterial road; less, in fact, because on the road there are at least hogs who try to push you off. Men can go off and fight, but girls — oh no.’ Her voice took on a note of sarcasm. ‘Now if

they’d only let me take up a kite like that once in a while,’ — she indicated a Reliant fighter with an inclination of her head — ‘I should feel I was getting somewhere.’

Frecks smiled faintly.

‘You’d get somewhere all right,’ she agreed warmly. ‘You’d probably hit the ground so hard —’

‘Rot!’ broke in Worrals impatiently. ‘I flew one the other day.’

‘Yes, but Bill Ashton was in it too, and having an instructor on board makes a lot of difference.’

‘He sat with his hands up, so that I could see he wasn’t touching the controls.’

‘All the same, he was *there*,’ persisted Frecks. Her voice took on a new interest. ‘Did he show you how the guns worked?’

‘Yes, I made him. There’s nothing to it. You just press a button on the control column, and brrrr-r-r-r.’ Worrals made a noise which was evidently intended to be an imitation of several machine-guns firing simultaneously. Actually, it was nothing like it.

‘Well, you’re luckier than I am at any rate,’ returned Frecks dolefully. ‘They won’t even let

me take a machine off the ground.'

'You're in the Service, and that's something. After all, you're not eighteen yet.'

Frecks looked pained. 'Coming from you, I call that pretty good. Why, you've only just turned eighteen yourself.'

'Three months ago,' corrected Worrals. 'And you know as well as I do that I only got my ticket quickly because I happen to have an uncle in the Service to vouch for me. Don't forget I'd been flying solo for a year before the war. You'll get your wings when you're eighteen.'

'What has age to do with it?' protested Frecks, warming to her subject. 'I can handle a machine as well as you can.'

'Unofficially, yes — officially, no. The government takes the view that a girl of your tender years is not to be trusted with valuable aircraft.'

Frecks's lips curled scornfully. 'You're telling me! My goodness, if they only knew the risks they were taking when they gave you *your* brevet —'

'Patience, child, patience,' interrupted Worrals. 'The boys will be back from patrol any minute now; I want to watch for them.'

She resumed her scrutiny of the hori-

zon, a faint smile playing about the corners of her mouth, for there was some justification in Frecks's complaint. They could both fly, and they had both been gazetted as officers in the W.A.A.F., but, whereas Worrals wore the coveted 'wings' on the left breast of her tunic, regulations forbade Frecks to put hers up until she had attained the age of eighteen. For three months they had been attached to 'N' Squadron, a Home Defence Unit under Squadron Leader McNavish, but with a training squadron on the same aerodrome. Worrals's duties consisted almost entirely in returning old training machines for reconditioning, and bringing back new ones, but as she was allowed to carry a passenger there were many occasions when she was able to take Frecks with her.

Not even her friends could truthfully call Worrals pretty, although her features were regular enough — perhaps too regular: but that she was attractive in a way not easy to define, no one could deny. She was dark; her hair was brown and always tidy; her eyes, the same colour, were steady and thoughtful except when softened by a flash of humour — as they often were. They

could also gleam aggressively when things went wrong. Her nose was well cut, with delicately chiselled nostrils, and balanced a firm mouth with lips that were, perhaps, judged by orthodox standards of beauty, a trifle too thin. Of average height, her figure was slim and neat — prim, the lower school had sometimes called her when she had occasion to exercise her authority as Head of the School to check those who would disturb the peace; for, inclined to be studious when not on the playing fields — and there were those who said she took games too seriously — she had no time for horseplay. She carried herself with a quiet air of authority that seemed to come natural to her, and a confidence for which a year of travel to polish up her favourite subject, languages, may have been partly responsible.

It must have been the attraction of opposites that resulted in a mutual affection between her and Betty Lovell, who was fair, casual, and appeared to take nothing seriously — except perhaps tennis, on which she expended more energy than her slight wiry figure seemed capable of containing, especially when playing a losing game. Betty's mirror having told her

that she had no pretensions to good looks, she wasted no time in trying to devise by artificial means what nature had denied her. The result was a frank untidiness which not even Worrals could cure. Her straight flaxen hair was usually out of control, and her blue eyes laughed at those who advised lemon juice for the freckles which appeared every summer on each side of her small aggressive nose, to provide her with a nickname which she accepted philosophically, as she accepted everything else that came along.

“They don't hurt,” she explained naively to those who urged their obliteration. In her heart she admired Worrals for the shrewd common sense that lay behind her calm brown eyes, and, though fearless herself, for a courage which she felt instinctively was there should it ever be called into action. She had not yet seen it displayed — but that was soon to come.

For the rest, each was confident of the unshakable loyalty of the other, a loyalty that had not yet been tested severely although this, too, was shortly to be weighed in the grim balance of active service.

They were still waiting for the evening patrol

to come in when an orderly arrived and, addressing Worrals, informed her that the Commanding Officer wished to see her forthwith at Station Headquarters.

Worrals got up. 'I wonder what the old bear wants now,' she breathed.

'You'll learn,' advised Frecks, affecting a slight sing-song drawl which, consciously or unconsciously, she sometimes employed, having — to use her own expression — 'caught it' from the screen, to which she was devoted.

'Oh, cut it out, Garbo,' jibed Worrals, who professed abhorrence of Hollywood jargon, although it often made her smile, even when she found herself catching the habit from Frecks. 'I'll be back,' she called, and walked quickly towards Headquarters.

She knew why she had been sent for as soon as she crossed the threshold, for her particular pal among the officers of the Service Squadron, Flight Officer Bill Ashton, was already there, standing at attention, looking very uncomfortable.

The C.O., Squadron Leader McNavish, regarded her coldly; and when Squadron Leader

McNavish looked cold, junior officers swore they could see their breath. In appearance, at any rate, he bore no resemblance whatever to a bear, in spite of Worrals's hastily snatched epithet. He was a small, fierce-looking Scot from Aberdeen. His hair, of reddish tint, bristled, and a 'guardy' moustache of the same hue gave him more the expression of a belligerent wire-haired terrier. His eyes were steely blue and had a gimlet-like quality that was definitely disconcerting. There was nothing smooth, or soft, or reassuring about Squadron Leader McNavish, D.S.O., D.F.C., even at the best of times; but he was a fighter, as a double row of medal ribbons under his wings testified. When he spoke it was as though the ice were cracking, ice that was roughened by a slight Scots burr.

'Miss Worralson,' he began without preamble, 'I have been informed that contrary to standing orders you have had the temerity to make a flight in a Reliant. Is this correct?'

Worrals wasted no time in futile argument.

'Yes, sir.'

'You've read standing orders?'

'Yes, sir.'

‘Perhaps you think because you have a near relative a senior officer in the Service, routine orders don’t apply to you?’

Worrals flushed slightly. ‘No, sir.’

‘You think, perhaps, this is a school outing?’

Worrals clenched her teeth and forced the words through them. ‘No, sir.’

‘You made the flight with Flying Officer Ashton?’

‘Yes, sir, but —’

‘Silence!’ The C.O.’s fist made the inkwell jump. ‘You know he will be punished?’

‘It was not his fault, sir,’ protested Worrals hotly. ‘I persuaded him to do it.’

The C.O.’s face registered incredulity. He blinked. He frowned. His eyes gimleted into Worrals.

‘What’s this?’ he purred, in tones of disbelief, ‘You, wearing an officer’s uniform, persuade another officer to break standing orders. Officers? I’ll no’ believe it. Why did you do it?’ The final question shot out like a burst of machine-gun fire. In spite of herself Worrals flinched.

‘I thought it might be a good thing if I learned how to fly a Reliant. An emergency could arise

when I might be called upon to fly one.’

Squadron Leader McNavish permitted himself to smile. It was like a ray of watery sun breaking through a December cloud.

‘Miss Worralson,’ he said biting, ‘if and when it is decided to teach young women to fly fighting aeroplanes — and for the sake of everyone else in the sky I hope that time is not yet — you will receive your orders from me. I see that you have been granted week-end leave, starting to-morrow. Your leave is cancelled. That’s all.’

‘But —’

The C.O. snarled like a wounded tiger. ‘I said that’s all.’

‘Yes, sir.’ Worrals marched stiffly from the room, her face pink and white alternately. In the outer office an orderly-room sergeant was humming under his breath, ‘We’re in the army now.’ Worrals didn’t stop until she came to the oil-drum.

‘What was it?’ greeted Frecks. ‘Did he want to congratulate you on your ability to fly Reliants?’

‘Not exactly,’ returned Worrals bitterly. ‘He nearly bit me in halves and then cancelled my leave.’

‘What? Say, that’s too bad. The old bear ought to be muzzled.’

‘On the contrary he was quite right. I acted against orders,’ answered Worrals evenly. ‘I’m sick about Bill, though. He’s on the mat, too.’

Presently Bill walked past smiling. ‘Don’t worry, kid,’ he called.

‘Don’t call me kid,’ flared Worrals. Then, with a change of tone: ‘What did he do to you?’

‘Same as you — cancelled my leave. I’ve got to do a week at the advanced post instead. I’m going off right away by car.’

‘Sorry, Bill.’

‘Forget it. S’long, Worrals. S’long, Frecks. Be good girls.’

He walked on, debonair and unperturbed.

‘I feel awful,’ muttered Worrals, as she watched his car disappear. ‘I’ve lost him his leave.’

‘Okay, okay, don’t burst into tears about it — the airmen are watching,’ murmured Frecks. ‘And,’ she continued quickly, ‘here comes the old bear himself. He looks about as congenial as a scalded cat.’

Squadron Leader McNavish went first to the Reliant, where he spoke to the mechanic on

guard; then with knitted brows he walked over to the girls. He stopped in front of them, but for a moment appeared to be at a loss for words.

‘Er — Miss Worrals,’ he got out at last, ‘how did you get on with the Reliant when you flew it the other day?’

Worrals started, then stared.

‘Perfectly all right, sir. She was no harder to fly than a Tiger.’

‘You think you could — er — fly one again?’

Worrals’s eyes saucered. ‘Of course, sir.’

The C.O. seemed to find it difficult to come to the point. ‘The fact is,’ he snapped at last, ‘I’ve just sent Mr. Ashton away, and now I am informed he was the only reserve pilot on the Station. There’s been a minor crash at the advanced post and they need another machine right away to replace it. The weather’s right for the Boche to make another raid on the aerodrome, so I daren’t go myself. Do you think you could fly’ — the C.O. nodded towards the Reliant — ‘that aircraft down to the post? It’s only a matter of a ten minutes’ flight. I could send transport to bring you back.’

Worrals’s eyes glowed, and it was only with difficulty that she kept a straight face, for the

C.O.'s embarrassment was almost painful to watch.

'It's as good as there, sir,' she promised.

'Thank you, Miss Worrals — I mean Worrals-son.'

'Do you mind if I take a passenger, sir?'

The C.O. glanced at Frecks, knowing who was meant. He hesitated.

'The Reliant flies better with a passenger,' prompted Worrals.

'All right — but for goodness' sake never tell your uncle.'

'I wouldn't think of such a thing,' murmured Worrals reproachfully.

Five minutes later she was in the cockpit, with Frecks in the gunner's seat. The propeller was a whirling arc of light.

'Hold your breath,' she sang, and eased the throttle open. The engine roared. The tail lifted, and the aircraft sped like an arrow towards the clouds. From about 2,000 feet Worrals made a swift survey of the landscape to pick up her landmarks, for the aerodrome, heavily camouflaged, could not easily be distinguished. The ceiling was lower than she had thought, great masses

of cumulus cloud drifting sluggishly across the sky from just above her head for several thousand feet. Knowing that she might encounter the patrol which by now must be on its way home from its North Sea assignation, and aware of the danger of collision in such conditions, she decided to go above the murk into the clear. She knew the position of the advanced post, where a Flight was kept in readiness for instant action, too well to have any qualms about finding it. A little more backward pressure on the stick and the Reliant leapt to — in professional parlance — the 'sunnyside'.

As she levelled out she saw a grey shadow, some distance below her, glide swiftly from one cloud back to the next. It was a plane, a slim, twin-engined, high-wing monoplane, with ultra-tapered wings. Instantly a puzzled expression crossed her face, for although she saw the machine only for a moment she had time to note that the type was unknown to her; which was strange, she thought, because she prided herself that there was not a machine in the sky that she could not recognize at sight. Oddly enough, too, the machine carried no nationality markings.

However, she was not unduly concerned, assuming it to be a new British type under test. Uppermost in her mind was satisfaction that she had kept clear of the clouds.

‘Did you see that?’ she called to Frecks.

‘See what?’

‘Evidently you didn’t. A strange machine has just disappeared into the clouds below us.’

‘Goodness ! I hope it wasn’t a Hun,’ cried Frecks, her voice shrill with alarm.

‘There’s always a possibility of running into one,’ replied Worrals casually. Which was, of course, true.

It is doubtful if even she knew what made her switch on the radio at that moment, although she afterwards said that it was merely curiosity, to see if it was working. Anyway, she switched it on and tuned in. Almost at once came a man’s voice, level, calm, dispassionate: *‘with tapered wings. Station XXB calling all aircraft Fighter Command. In area 21-C-2, twin-engined, high-wing monoplane with tapered wings, painted grey, no markings. Last seen heading south. This aircraft must be stopped at all costs. Station XXB calling all aircraft Fighter Command . . .’*

The message was repeated and then cut out. Long before it had ended the Reliant was streaking back over its course towards the towering mass of cumulus into which the strange monoplane had disappeared. That it was the one referred to by the announcer Worrals had no doubt whatever. Not only did the description tally, but she was in the zone indicated by the letter 21-C-2. Eight words of the significant signal drummed in her ears. *‘This aircraft must be stopped at all costs.’* At all costs.

That could only mean one thing, and Worrals’s lips went parchment dry at the unmistakable meaning of the grim signal. The grey monoplane had got to be shot down. Doubtless the sky was full of British fighters seeking it — yet, perhaps, she was the only pilot who had seen it.

Moistening her lips she gave the Reliant full throttle and tore on. Banking round the big cloud, and at the same time diving steeply, she found herself in a world of detached, solid-looking masses of gleaming white mist. Swiftly she examined the cloudscape, section by section, but not another plane was in sight. The only movement was the shadow of her own machine, huge

and distorted, surrounded by an opalescent halo, flashing at fantastic speed across a cloud-bank beside her. Further to the west where the sun was beginning to set the glare was terrific, and might have concealed a hundred machines. Holding out her hand at arm's length and extending her fingers, she peered through the slits and was just in time to see a grey shadow sink into the lower layer of billowing vapour. In a split second the Reliant's nose was round, tilted down in a screaming dive towards the spot.

'What's going on?' yelled Frecks.

'Did you get that signal through your earphones?'

'Yes.'

'The wanted machine is just in front of us. I'm going after it.'

Frecks uttered a strange sound, something between a gasp and a moan. The next moment the Reliant was swallowed up in a swirling fog as it plunged into the cumulus. Worrals watched her altimeter. She knew she was getting low, and the cloud was thicker than she had supposed. Fog, fog, and still more fog — it raced past, grey and impenetrable, blotting out everything. It was

confusing. The instrument needles began to jerk about in an alarming fashion. In sheer desperation she throttled back and steadied the machine into a glide, the wind wailing over the wings. Then, with the altimeter needle quivering on the thousand feet mark, to her infinite relief she was through. Below lay an open English countryside, grey and dour, beneath the canopy of cloud, open fields divided by hedgerows, with occasional houses and grazing cattle. A grey horse stood out conspicuously. The scene was photographed on her memory.

At first she feared that she had lost her quarry, for there was no sign of it. Then she saw it, and caught her breath in amazement, for it was on the ground — or so low that it appeared to be on the ground, she was not sure which. It was about a mile ahead, skimming between two woods, over a long strip of sward punctuated by small yellow spots. From the air it was a curious phenomenon, this speckled strip of green, but Worrals knew it was a golf course, the yellow spots being sand bunkers.

With her eyes still on the machine she opened the throttle wide. The engine bellowed. Simulta-

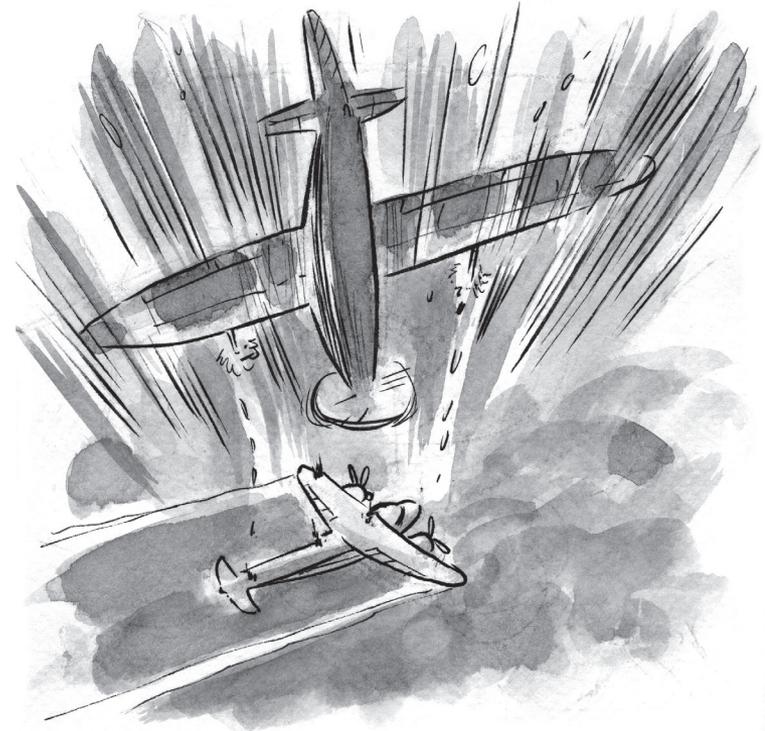
neously she noted several things. She distinctly saw the tiny round blob that was the pilot's head turn from black to white, and she knew he was looking up at her. On the ground a man was running into the trees. Something seemed to fall from the monoplane, which banked steeply and then zoomed up into the clouds. Worrals's hands and feet moved swiftly, and the Reliant followed it, perhaps 400 yards behind.

It is not to be supposed that she was undisturbed by this swift sequence of events; on the contrary, her nerves were tingling like banjo strings. Her mouth was dry and her heart was pounding furiously. Yet her brain seemed clear and her actions automatic. She made them without thinking. It gave her a thrill to realize that she no longer had to think about flying the machine; it had become mechanical, and for the first time she knew how pilots must feel in a dog-fight. The ordinary risks of handling a high-performance aircraft disappeared in the face of dangers more urgent and more apparent.

The Reliant clawed its way through the clammy vapour once more into the sunshine, and a glance revealed the monoplane speeding south-

wards just above a cloud-layer. The zoom had carried Worrals far above it, and she knew that with her extra height she could overtake it. Her face, although she did not know it, was like white marble; her lips a thin straight line; her eyes, expressionless. The hand that moved towards the gun control was stone cold.

She jerked the handle up. Her thumb found



the small round button which, when pressed, would spurt a hail of death. 'I've got to do it,' she told herself. Then again, 'I've got to do it. This is war.'

She eased the control column forward and the grey monoplane seemed to float towards her. Her feet adjusted the rudder-bar, bringing the gun sights in line. Nearer and nearer floated the monoplane until it seemed to fill them. It was all quite impersonal. She could see nobody in the machine. The aircraft was just a thing, an object that *'had to be stopped at all costs.'* Almost viciously she jammed down the button. Instantly, little specks of orange flame spurted from the muzzles of her guns. They ended in gleaming silver lines that leapt across the intervening distance and ended at the starboard engine of the grey monoplane. Black smoke swirled aft. The sickly reek of it, mingled with the biting fumes of cordite, poured into Worrals's lungs. She coughed.

When she looked up the monoplane had disappeared.



Grey Horses

WORRALS FLEW ON FEELING STRANGELY LIMP. The events of the last few minutes had assumed the character of a dream, a vivid nightmare from which she could not awaken. She tried to make herself believe that these things were not really happening, but the self-deception failed. She was, too, not a little appalled, for in spite of her remarks to Frecks it had never occurred to her that even although she wore a uniform she might find herself involved in actual war. In her heart she hated war, but lately she had learned to hate more those who made it inevitable by wanton aggression, or by forcing barbaric creeds and doctrines upon those who only sought peace. When that happened, then resistance was the only answer. At such times every member of the threatened community owed a duty to the State, and once that decision was made there could be

no turning back, no flinching from the ordeals that must certainly arise, however distasteful they might be. Had she failed to do what she had just done, then not only would she have betrayed the allegiance she had sworn when she accepted the King's Commission, but she would have proved herself unworthy of her uniform and all that it stood for.

'Are you all right, Frecks?' she called.

'Yes,' answered Frecks weakly. 'You hit it.'

'Did you see where it went?'

'Yes, into the cloud.'

'Hold tight, I'm going to have a look.'

Worrals throttled back, and easing the control column forward began groping her way down through the cloud. A barrage balloon loomed up in front of her like a monstrous apparition, and she had to swerve wildly to avoid it, for this was a danger she had completely forgotten. However, the shock did much to restore her to normal. The ground, fast darkening in the evening light and sullen under its misty cloak, came into view; a short distance ahead the sea licked a brown sandy beach, but of the monoplane there was no sign.

She recognized the place, and was relieved to find that she was no great distance from her original objective — the Squadron's advanced post.

She spent five minutes looking for the grey monoplane, and then gave it up, deciding that her duty was now to deliver the machine without further loss of time, and to hand in her report.

Her nerves relaxed as she lowered her wheels and landed on the emergency ground that was now occupied by the advanced post, more commonly known in the Squadron as the 'A.P.' A little group of officers were standing outside the sandbagged shelter which they used as a mess; they turned to face the Reliant when it appeared, and then hurried forward to meet Worrals as she taxied up to them and switched off. Among them was Bill Ashton.

His face was a picture. 'Stiffen the crows!' he gasped. 'What are you doing here?'

Worrals jumped down. 'The C.O. told me to bring this machine along,' she answered quickly. 'Did you get a signal about a grey monoplane?'

'Too true we did.'

'I picked up the message in the air. I had just seen the machine, so I went back after it. I had a

shot at it and I think I got its engine.'

Bill's lips parted in amazement and he threw up his hand in a gesture of helplessness.

'You only *think* you hit it? Well, somebody certainly hit it, and it must have been you because nobody else saw it. It's down — crashed only a few fields away.'

Worrals gulped. 'Was anybody — hurt?'

'The fellow who was flying it is in a bit of a mess, but otherwise all right. He's a civilian, too.'

'Is it one of our machines?'

Bill shook his head. 'Don't ask me. It's all a mystery. We may know more about it later — or we may not. The machine was evidently making for the sea, and the Air Ministry were certainly upset about it.'

The other officers crowded round while Frecks joined Worrals on the ground. They were profuse in their congratulations.

'Your transport's here to take you back,' announced Bill. 'There's no desperate hurry, though. Come into the mess and have a cup of tea — it's on the table.'

'I could certainly do with one,' declared Worrals feelingly. 'By the way, does the C.O. know

about this plane being shot down?'

'He knows it's down, but he doesn't know who did it.'

Frecks shook her head sadly. 'It's going to be a bad business for us when he finds out,' she drawled ruefully.

'I shouldn't worry too much about that: you did a nice job,' declared Bill. He grinned. 'In fact, I couldn't have done it better myself.'

'Coming from you, I take that as a compliment,' announced Worrals, for Bill Ashton already had eight enemy aircraft to his credit.

'Just a minute, Bill,' she went on quickly. 'Let the others go inside — I want a word with you.'

Bill glanced at her face and saw that her expression had become serious.

'What's wrong, kid?' he asked quickly.

'I do wish you wouldn't call me kid,' snapped Worrals. 'How old are you anyway — twenty?'

'Nearly,' laughed Bill. 'What's on your mind?'

Worrals explained. 'When I get back to Headquarters I shall have to make a report. I'm wondering how much to say, and I'm not thinking altogether about the monoplane. That's all straightforward. When I first saw it I saw some-

thing else, something. . . Oh, I don't know. . . perhaps I'm talking through my hat.'

'Go on — what was it?'

'The machine seemed just about to land. I'm sure the engine was off anyway, because the instant I opened my throttle I saw the pilot look up at me. If his engine had been on he wouldn't have heard me. There was also a man on the ground. He bolted into the trees. The man in the machine seemed to be waving or signalling to the man underneath, but the moment he saw me he zoomed up into the murk.'

'But — '

'Just a minute — I haven't finished yet,' went on Worrals quickly. 'Three times during the past week our aerodrome has been raided — in daylight. Hasn't it struck you as odd, considering how well the aerodrome is camouflaged, that enemy aircraft can find us so easily? Why, I have a job to find the place myself. How much harder it must be for a pilot who has never seen the aerodrome before.'

Bill's eyes clouded. 'What are you getting at?'

'Just this. Call me a fool if you like, but I've got a nasty feeling that there's something funny

going on.'

'Woman's intuition, eh?' Bill was frankly sceptical.

'Intuition that's so strong that if I'd never seen the aerodrome before I could bomb it any day I liked,' declared Worrals curtly.

'You don't mean that?'

'I certainly do.'

'What gives you that idea?'

Worrals drew a deep breath. 'Have you noticed that on the south side of the aerodrome, within a mile of it, a grey horse has been turned out to grass?'

Bill's eyes went round with wonder. 'I can't say that I have. What's a grey horse to do with bomb raids, anyway?'

'Only this. Once or twice in bad weather that horse has given me a line on the aerodrome, but I must admit that until to-day I never gave it a thought that somebody else might do the same thing — if he knew the horse was there. You see, at the place where that monoplane was going to land, or near it, there was also a grey horse turned out to grass. It stood out like a piece of chalk on a blackboard. Now, if I was an enemy pilot, and

crossed the coast at Sandford Bay, which can't very well be missed, I should be able to see that first grey horse, the one that grazes near our aerodrome. I'm talking about flying pretty high, of course. If I dropped a bomb a mile beyond that second horse I should be pretty certain of hitting our aerodrome — whether I could see the aerodrome or not. Now do you get my meaning? That's all. Keep it to yourself — I don't want people to laugh at me for an alarmist. The question is, are these horses just a coincidence, or has somebody put them there? At the rate we're being bombed . . . I'm beginning to wonder . . . Ought I to report it to the C.O.?'

Bill looked grave. 'I don't think I should put that in the report,' he said slowly. 'A better plan would be to mention it to the C.O., and leave him to judge whether or not it ought to be passed on to the Intelligence people.'

'You must admit that a spy, or a fifth columnist, could mark aerodromes in such a way?'

'Now you put it like that — yes,' admitted Bill. 'I'll fly around and have a look at these gee-gees myself at the first opportunity. It certainly is an idea, and I'll think about it. Meanwhile,

you'd better be getting back, or the Old Man will be biting bits off his whiskers and spitting them all over his desk. Come on, you've just time for a dish of tea.'

After a quick tea and a wash the girls felt better, particularly as Squadron Leader McNavish had by this time been told over the telephone of the monoplane episode — without the wires fusing.

In half an hour they were back at the aerodrome. Leaving the car, they made their way quickly to Headquarters where the C.O. awaited their arrival.

There was a peculiar look on his face as he greeted them. 'Miss Worralsen,' he said succinctly, 'when I asked you to deliver an aircraft for me, I did not, I trust, imply that you were at liberty to engage enemy machines, or otherwise take part in war operations?'

'You did not, sir,' confirmed Worrals. 'But the signal expressly called all aircraft of the Fighter Command. The machine I was flying came into that group, consequently it came under the direct orders of the Higher Authority.'

A flicker of what might have been humour

glinted in the C.O.'s frosty eyes. 'How did you come to have the radio turned on?'

'If the radio is not to be turned on, sir, for what purpose is it installed in an aircraft?'

Squadron Leader McNavish actually smiled.

'You know all the answers, don't you?' he said softly. 'As one pilot to another I congratulate you on your skill and initiative — now wait a minute — but officially, I must warn you that you simply must not do this sort of thing. What would your uncle say if he knew? Think what propaganda the enemy would make of the incident if it were learned that — er — ladies were now manning British fighter aircraft.'

'It might give them ideas in the same direction,' suggested Worrals. 'The guns fired just as well for me as if a noble Wing Commander had pressed the button.'

'Yes — er — no doubt, no doubt. Guns are like that; they have no discrimination,' muttered the C.O. crisply.

'May I ask what all this business with the monoplane was about?'

'Officially — no, but since you were concerned with the affair I can tell you, for your private ear

alone, that an enemy agent nearly succeeded in getting away with one of our hush-hush prototypes. To prevent complications I have informed the Air Ministry that it was brought down by one of my officers, without mentioning names, you understand. You may get credit for the action later. Never refer to it again.'

'There's just one other thing, sir,' said Worrals, and told of her suspicions regarding the grey horses. The C.O.'s smile grew broader as he listened. To upset Worrals even more, he patted her arm affectionately. 'Don't let success go to your head, my girl,' he said suavely. 'Our job is flying aeroplanes. Spy watching is a business for the counter-espionage people. Forget about the livestock.'

Worrals rejoined Frecks. 'There are moments,' she said bitterly, some time later, as they sat talking in her quarters, 'there are moments, I say, when I wonder whether some of our senior officers have sawdust in their heads instead of brains. Here I get an inspiration and offer it to the C.O. on a plate. What does he do? Does he fall on my neck and call me Sherlock? No. Does he say, '*Brilliant, my dear Watson?*' No. He says,

'*Forget it*' — just like that. When the enemy come over again and blow a lot of new lily ponds in the aerodrome, he'll still be walking about scratching his head, wondering how they found the place.'

'Are you going to forget it?' inquired Frecks.

'I am not,' declared Worrals emphatically.

'So what?'

'In view of what I did to-day, I'm going to ask for my week-end leave to be restored,' decided Worrals. 'After what's happened he can't very well turn it down. Your leave still stands, so we'll go together.'

Frecks's blue eyes blinked. 'Go where?'

'To have a closer look at these gentlemen who go in for grey horses and wait for stray aeroplanes on a golf course,' returned Worrals calmly.

'You're crazy,' snorted Frecks. 'You'll get shot — or something horrid.'

'We shall see,' prophesied Worrals, with greater accuracy than probably she imagined.