

Flying at Carnmoney



Lilian Bland

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For

the entrepreneurial ladies

of the north of Ireland

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Chapter One

Lilian's Idea

"I'm going to build a glider, Aunt Sarah," said Lilian.

She was holding a postcard in her hand. It was from her Uncle Harry. He had just visited the Paris Air Show.

The postcard had a picture of Blériot's aeroplane. Louis Blériot had been the first man to fly across the English Channel. He had flown from Calais in France to Dover in England. He had won a prize of one thousand pounds from the *Daily Mail*. Early in the morning of 25 July 1909 he landed just behind Dover Castle. His flight from France had taken thirty seven minutes.

His photograph appeared in lots of newspapers.

"Speak up, girl!" said Aunt Sarah. She was nearly eighty years old. She had trouble with her legs and could not walk far. She did not go out of the house much. She was a little deaf. She turned her ear trumpet towards Lilian. It had a big brass funnel at the end of a long rubber tube.

"I want to fly, Aunt Sarah. I want to build a glider," said Lilian. "Uncle Harry has been to the Air Show in France. He's seen all sorts of new aeroplanes. There's some information about Monsieur Blériot's aeroplane on the back of this postcard."

Lilian was quiet for a few moments, while she studied the card carefully.

"I'm going to build my own glider and fly it here at Carnmoney," she announced.

"Oh now, Lilian, don't be silly," said Aunt Sarah crossly. She was used to Lilian's mad ideas. "This is another of your wild plans. You're always up to something. Why can't you be like other girls? You're always going off on your own on that horse of yours, wearing trousers like a man! You disappear for hours at a time, riding all over the countryside."

Lilian said nothing. She looked through the window at the Cave Hill in the distance.

"And I've heard you go down to the car garage in the village," continued Aunt Sarah. "You spend a lot of time talking to the mechanics while they are working on the engines. Then you come home with your clothes covered in filthy oil."

Lilian continued to look through the window, saying nothing.

"Or you spend all your time at the boys' club in the village, firing guns with the young fellows there. Or you teach them judo and wrestling. Lilian, I've even heard a terrible story from Mrs Stewart and her daughters. They say they saw you smoking a cigarette! I hope that wasn't true."

Lilian still said nothing.

"Why can't you behave better, Lilian?" Aunt Sarah continued, trying a different approach. "Look at Betsy and Mary Stewart. They're such nice, quiet girls, and so well behaved. It won't be long until they're both

married and well settled. They certainly aren't the sort of girls who go racing round the countryside on horseback."

"But Mary and Betsy are so boring!" said Lilian at last. "I'd hate to be like them."

"So what do you want to do?" asked her aunt.

"I want to be different," replied Lilian, tossing her thick dark hair. "No, Aunt Sarah, my mind's made up. I'm going to build a glider. Flying is wonderful! I remember sitting for hours and hours when I was in Scotland last year, watching gulls soaring high into the sky, then diving down to earth again. I want to make a glider that will fly as well as any bird."

"It'll cost you a lot of money," said Aunt Sarah. She wanted to try one more time to change her niece's mind. She knew that Lilian would be hard to stop after she had a new plan in her head.

"Well, I've got money," said Lilian, smiling happily. "I've got all the money that I've earned from my work for the magazines in London. So I'm going to use it to build my glider, so that's that."

Lilian smiled again.

Lilian was a very beautiful and strong-minded young lady. She worked as a sports journalist and photographer in London. She wrote stories for magazines and used her camera to take pictures. For one magazine she had written an article about horses and had taken all her own photographs. Another

magazine had sent her to write about the birds that lived on the remote islands off the coast of Scotland.

"Aye, Lilian, I suppose that's that," said Aunt Sarah, setting her ear trumpet down again. "But I'll have to tell your father, you know. I'll be writing to him again soon."

Lilian said nothing.

She looked out at the Cave Hill again.

Chapter Two

Lilian's Family

Lilian lived with her Aunt Sarah at Tobercooran House in Carnmoney.

Lilian's mother had died when Lilian was a baby. Lilian did not have any brothers or sisters.

Her father, John Bland, was a famous artist. He was Aunt Sarah's brother. He painted pictures of animals and people. Some of his work is in the National Gallery. He often travelled to big cities to meet other artists in different parts of Europe.

Lilian had grown up at Carnmoney and had loved the time she spent in the countryside.

Miss Shepherd was her teacher. She came to live at Tobercooran House when Lilian was eight years old. She had been quite strict and did not have many problems with her young pupil.

Aunt Sarah had married Uncle William. He had been a famous general who had served in the army in many different parts of the world. He had lived in South Africa, Canada, Fiji and India. He had died when Lilian was ten years old.

Lilian remembered her Uncle William very well. He was an old man with small gold glasses and a bushy grey moustache.

Uncle William had been an important scientist and astronomer as well as a good soldier. He had done a lot of important scientific work while he lived in foreign countries. He had recorded the movements of the stars from the different places where he had been stationed.

He was very interested in painting and pictures. After he died he left three thousand pounds to the National Gallery.

His grave is in the churchyard at Carnmoney. It has a big Irish cross, with lots of figures carved in stone.

Aunt Sarah had gone to Fiji with her husband. They had been stationed there for a nearly a year. She had written a book about everything that she and Uncle William James had seen and done while they were there.

Chapter Three

Building the Glider

Lilian began to read and study as much as she could about gliders and aeroplanes. She wanted to know how they worked and what she needed to do to build one for herself.

She studied the information Uncle Harry had put on his postcard. She started to draw pictures of the sort of glider she wanted to build.

She read everything she could find about Louis Blériot and his famous flight across the Channel. She went to the library in Royal Avenue in Belfast to study all the magazines and books she could find.

She also read magazines and books about the Wright brothers. Wilbur Wright and his younger brother Orville lived in North Carolina in America. They had become very famous because they had built and flown the world's first aeroplane with an engine. On its first flight just before Christmas 1903 their aeroplane *Flyer* had flown a hundred feet.

She went to the shipyard at Queen's Island in Belfast to meet some of the engineers who worked for Shorts and Harland and Wolff. They had never spoken about their work to such an intelligent and interested young lady.

Lilian soon filled several big notebooks with pictures and ideas for her glider.

In October 1909 Lilian went to a big aeroplane show in Blackpool. Lots of aeroplane experts were there, including Harry Ferguson and John Williams from Belfast. They were also gathering information; like Lilian, they also wanted to build an aeroplane in Ireland. Lilian filled another big notebook with pictures and ideas she could use for her glider.

As she gathered information she started to make her plans for a small model glider.

"Don't worry," said Lilian to Aunt Sarah one morning at breakfast. "The glider's not dangerous. I'm building a little model, just like a kite. I'll give it to the boys' club in the village. Where's the danger in that?"

"Hmff!" grunted Aunt Sarah. She had learned long ago to be suspicious when Lilian said something was not dangerous.

When she had finished her plans Lilian got down to work.

She took over an old shed at the back of Tobercooran House. No one had used it since Uncle William had died. In it she found many of his old tools.

Lilian used old scraps of wood to make her model glider. She covered the wings with linen cloth. Soon her model glider was ready.

Lilian took it out into the sloping meadow at the back of Tobercooran House. There was a light breeze.

She set the little glider carefully on the ground at the top of the field, then ran down the slope pulling the

glider on a thin rope. It jumped off the ground, rose a couple of feet into the air, then dived into the thick grass.

Lilian went back and tried again. This time the little model rose in the air and soared high into the sky.

Every time the model glider crashed or landed Lilian changed something to improve it. Sometimes she tightened the cloth on the wings or changed the angle of the rudder that steered the glider.

The third time the glider went higher and stayed up longer.

"Hurrah!" yelled Lilian, cheering in a not very ladylike way. "My glider flies!"

Lilian worked hard all morning, testing the glider and making it fly.

One person watched all the activity with a lot of interest.

"What are you doing, Miss Lilian?" asked a young man who had been working in the garden. He had been standing at the gate for a few minutes watching Lilian running up and down the meadow.

"Hello, Joe," said Lilian, coming closer to him. She was glad of the rest. "I'm testing my glider. Isn't it wonderful? If it works well I'm going to build a much bigger one. I'm going to fly it here at Carnmoney."

"Well, good luck, Miss Lilian," said Joe. "I'd better be getting back to my work. I've lots of jobs to do for your

aunt. She'll be cross if I stand here all day chatting to you."

At the end of the morning Lilian had made up her mind.

"Joe, isn't it good? The model glider works very well," said Lilian as she walked back towards the house through the garden where Joe was working. "I really think my design will work. I'm going to build a bigger glider, the same size as Blériot's aeroplane."

Chapter Four

Getting the Materials

Lilian went to Belfast to buy the material she needed. She used some of the money from her writing to pay for the materials she needed. She bought wood for the body and wings of her glider.

"Spruce is best, Miss Bland," said the man in Corry's timber yard in Belfast. Lilian had explained what she wanted to do and he was very helpful. Like the engineers in the shipyard, he had never had a customer quite like Lilian before.

"It's strong but it is easy enough to bend," he said. "We can use steam to get it into the shape you need. Then for the skids underneath you'll need ash. It's very tough wood and it'll do the job very well."

Lilian also ordered some light bamboo poles to use for the wings and lots of thin wire, as well as a large pot of glue, nuts and bolts of various sizes and a big box of wood screws.

The following day the horse-drawn van full of Lilian's materials arrived at Tobercooran House. She was very excited and helped the men stack the timber neatly in Uncle William's old shed.

Then she started work on her glider. She sawed the wood, and planed it smooth, and drilled holes to join

the bits together. Finally she covered the frame she had built with thick linen cloth.

She used photographic chemicals to make the linen cloth stronger and waterproof.

Lilian worked hard, often until late at night.

"What's all the noise at Tobercooran these days?" one man asked another as they sat outside Abernethy's shop in the village in the evening. "I hear banging and drilling and hammering when I'm walking home that way, even well after dark. Does anyone know what's going on?"

"No one knows for sure," his friend replied. "But it's probably one of Miss Lilian's schemes."

"Aye, you're probably right," said the first man. "That young lady's always up to something. I suppose we'll find out soon enough what she's up to this time."

One other person at Abernethy's shop took a lot of interest in what was going on at Tobercooran House. It was Joe Blain who helped Lilian's aunt look after the big gardens round the house.

The next day Joe went to the shed where Lilian was working. He found her working at the bench.

Her thick brown hair was tied up and stuffed under an old hat. Her long dress was covered in dirty marks. There was even a patch of oil on her cheek.

"Joe, you've come just in time," said Lilian. "I need someone to help me with my glider. Here, hold this while I put the glue on."

Soon Joe was Lilian's assistant, helping her get the glider ready for its first flight.

"It'll never fit into Uncle William's old shed," said Lilian. "I'll move into the old coach house."

Joe helped her clean the coach house and move in all the equipment that she had used to make her glider.

They carried the big glider in pieces across the yard and into the coach house. It took both of them to carry the body of the glider because it was big and quite heavy. The wings were not so heavy but they were hard to control when they were being moved.

When Lilian had finished work on each of the parts she worked outside in the yard, putting all the pieces together. She bolted the wings on to the body of the glider, then attached the rudder with thin wire; it was used to control the direction of the glider.

Chapter Five

The Glider Takes Off

"The glider's nearly ready, Joe," said Lilian one morning a few days later. "Now it's time to see if she'll fly!"

Joe helped Lilian push the big glider into the field on the side of Carnmoney Hill.

"This isn't the best place," Lilian said. "We really need a place with a lot more wind. We'll have to take it up to the top of the hill, up near the old quarry. There's a lot more wind for flying gliders up there."

They took deep breaths and started to push the big glider across the rough field. It was very hard work.

"We're going to need more help," said Lilian. She stopped and stood still, puffing and panting in the middle of the field. "Can you get some help from the boys in the village?"

"I'll go round the houses in the village and see who I can find," said Joe.

He returned half an hour later.

Soon half a dozen boys from the village were holding the ropes that held the glider. Little John McIlwaine ran behind the bigger boys, pulling one of the ropes.

With their help Joe and Lilian managed to get the glider much further up the hill.

"Come on, boys!" shouted Lilian. "Push and shove and pull! It won't take us long to get her up into the sky."

After a lot of effort they managed to get the glider to the top of the field, pointing down the gentle slope which was covered in grass.

"Well done, everyone!" said Lilian. She was becoming more and more excited. "I knew we would be able to do it."

But no matter how hard Lilian and Joe tried they were not able to get the glider to move fast enough to take off into the air. The boys ran off down the slope, pulling the ropes when Lilian told them.

"I know what's wrong," said Lilian. "The ground's too rough. Let's pick up all the stones and make the ground smoother for the skids."

They all set to work, piling the stones they collected under the hedge at the top of the slope.

But it was no use.

Lilian climbed all over the glider, making changes to help it take off. She changed the angle of the wings and adjusted the rudder.

"It's no good, Joe," said Lilian. "We need more help. I'm sure the glider will work well but I need some assistants who are a bit stronger than the boys."

They left the glider where it was and then walked slowly down towards the house.

Lilian was thinking quietly.

After lunch Lilian went down to the police station in Whitewell. She met Sergeant Benton, the officer in charge, and told him about her problem.

Sergeant Benton was very amused by the young lady's unusual request, just as the man in the timber yard had been. He promised to do what he could to help.

Chapter Six

The Flying Policemen

Later that afternoon Sergeant Benton arrived at Tobercooran House with three of his men.

A maid brought them into the sitting room where Aunt Sarah was reading the *Newsletter* with a large magnifying glass. After lunch each day she spent most of the afternoon reading the local newspapers.

"Good heavens!" she exclaimed, putting down the glass and reaching for her ear trumpet. "What's happened? It's not every day we get a visit from the police. Is Lilian in some sort of trouble again?"

"Oh, there's nothing to worry about," said Sergeant Benton to Aunt Sarah. "We're here to help Miss Lilian with her glider."

"Ah dear!" said Aunt Sarah. "She's got you to help her, too. Joe's getting very little time to keep my garden neat and tidy because he's spending so much time with Lilian's glider. I think flying is dangerous, not at all the sort of thing a young lady should be doing. But I can't stop Lilian doing what she wants."

Sergeant Benton and his men left the room and went out into the fresh air.

Lilian was talking to Joe in the yard outside the old coach house. She was very pleased to see the big, burly police sergeant and his men.

"Come this way, Sergeant Benton," she said. "I'll show you my glider and you can help me fly it."

Lilian took the policemen across the fields to the old quarry.

"Now listen carefully," said Lilian, speaking seriously to her four burly helpers. She could be quite bossy when she wanted to get things done. "I want each of you to hold a corner of the glider's wings, at the bottom, like this, and carry her down the slope while Joe and I get her up in the air. It'll be easy, really. There's a good wind today. It's an excellent day for flying."

The policemen did what Lilian asked. They had never helped anyone get a glider into the air before, and they certainly were not used to being told what to do by such an energetic young lady. They took off their helmets and jackets and set them neatly on the ground. Two of them rolled up their sleeves. This job looked like it was going to be hot work.

"Right, off we go!" said Lilian. She ran off down the slope, pulling the rope tight.

The four burly policemen set off down the slope too, each holding a corner of the wings.

The strange group moved more and more quickly down the slope in silence. The skids under the glider moved faster and faster over the smooth grass.

Lilian steered the glider with an old pair of bicycle handlebars.

After a few moments the great glider caught the fresh breeze and rose off the ground. It started to soar higher

and higher, with the four policemen still clinging on tightly!

"Yes! Yes! It's flying! It's flying!" yelled Lilian, clapping her hands and jumping up and down in excitement.

"Jump, men, jump!" yelled Sergeant Benton. "Jump or we'll all get killed!"

All the policemen let go, one after the other, and tumbled back to the ground. One policeman landed in a place where one of Aunt Sarah's cows has left a big cow-pat. His face and hair were covered in grass and muck.

Without the weight of the policemen the glider rose higher and higher into the air.

Joe and Lilian tugged at the rope. A couple of the policemen ran over to help. After a long struggle they all managed to get the glider back safely on the ground.

"It works! It works!" yelled Lilian excitedly. "Thank you! Thank you!"

Lilian persuaded the policemen to help her try again. They pulled the glider back to the top of the slope. Then off they went again, running down the hill. This time each man let go just as the rising glider was about to pull him into the air.

The glider rose off the ground and then landed again.

"Again! Again!" shouted Lilian. "Let's have one more go!"

Every time they launched the glider it hopped higher off the ground and stayed in the air for longer.

"That's enough for one day, I think, Miss Lilian," said Sergeant Benton. He could see his men were not used to so much exercise and were starting to get tired. "We have important duties back at the police station."

The sergeant was really thinking of the excellent dinner that was waiting for him and his men.

"Thank you again, Sergeant Benton," said Lilian, smiling brightly at the policeman. "It's been a great day. Isn't flying wonderful?"

"Oh yes, it is indeed, Miss Lilian," agreed the sergeant. He was glad their part in this young lady's latest project was over.

The four policemen put on their tunics and helmets again. Then they all walked slowly away from the field where the glider lay.

"I'll come up again this evening," said Lilian. "The glider's safe enough here. After all, she's not likely to fly away, is she?"

Everyone laughed.

Joe and Lilian went to Tobercooran House.

Lilian was very pleased with her glider.

The policemen headed back to Whitewell. They weren't used to so much excitement in one day. Life was quieter at the police station.

Chapter Seven

Building the Aeroplane

Later that afternoon Lilian had another of her great ideas.

"Joe, Joe!" she called, going out to the vegetable garden where he was weeding an onion bed. "Don't you realise what this means, Joe? If the glider can carry Sergeant Benton and three of his men, who are big and heavy, why can't she carry an engine and a pilot? If the Wright brothers can build an aeroplane, why can't I? Why can't we turn the glider into an aeroplane?"

"An aeroplane, Miss Lilian?" asked Joe, getting to his feet and brushing the soil off his knees. "Is an aeroplane not a bit dangerous?"

"No, Joe, think positively," said Lilian. "If Louis Blériot can fly from France to England I don't see why I can't build an aeroplane to fly here at Carnmoney."

Joe said nothing.

"I've made up my mind, Joe. I want to build a real aeroplane," Lilian continued. "I want a proper aeroplane, with an engine, so I can really fly. I must get an engine."

"But, Miss Lilian, where can you get an engine?" asked Joe. "Can you make one?"

"No, I can't make an engine. That would take too long. And I don't have the right equipment," said Lilian. "But I can buy one."

"I'm sure engines are very expensive," said Joe. "They cost a lot of money."

"I've been reading about engines in my flying magazines," said Lilian. "There's a company which makes engines for aeroplanes. It's called AV Roe. It's near Manchester."

Lilian lost no time in starting work on her latest idea.

She wrote a long letter to Mr Roe. He was a successful engineer with a big factory in Salford in the north of England. His company made engines for cars. In the last few years they had also started to make small engines for aeroplanes. Lilian described in detail what she wanted and included some rough drawings she had made as she worked on her ideas. She explained carefully what she needed.

Arthur Roe wrote back quickly, offering to build and test a 20-horsepower engine for Lilian's glider.

Lilian and Joe set to work to make changes to the glider, so that the engine and a pilot could sit in it. They made the frame stronger. They changed the skids under the glider to take wheels with rubber tyres. The aeroplane soon had two big wheels with thick black tyres at the front and a small one wheel at the back.

In the evenings Lilian studied articles about the Wright brothers and other people who were building aeroplanes.

Sometimes the local newspapers had pictures and stories about Harry Ferguson and his new aeroplane.

“If he can build an aeroplane and fly it, then so can I!” Lilian was thinking.

A few weeks later another letter arrived from Arthur Roe. He told Lilian that her new engine was ready.

In June 1910 Lilian set off from Carnmoney. She was going to cross to Manchester to collect her new engine.

Chapter Eight

Getting the Engine

It was late in the evening when Lilian arrived in Manchester.

She had booked a room in the Mayfair Hotel. It was warm and comfortable. She slept well after her long journey across the Irish Sea.

The next morning Arthur Roe came to the hotel to collect Lilian. He was a tall, slim man in his forties. As they drove through the streets of the city in Arthur Roe's shiny new Morris car they started talking about engineering and engines and cars and flying. Lilian found it all very interesting and enjoyed the chance to talk to such a great expert.

Lilian told Mr roe about how she had built her glider. He laughed loudly when she told him about Sergeant Benton and the policemen, especially the poor man who had fallen into the cow-pat.

After they arrived in Salford Arthur Roe took Lilian on a tour of the factory. She saw engines for cars and aeroplanes being made. Arthur Roe was very proud of everything that his factory produced and all the ideas his engineers had for new products and inventions. The factory was noisy and busy, with lots of people working hard.

Lilian was very interested in everything she saw. She asked lots of questions.

Then at last Arthur Roe took Lilian to see her engine. Lilian was very pleased with it. She made a lot of detailed notes in her big book about how to fit the engine to a strong part of the aeroplane.

"Make sure the bolts are tightly fitted, Miss Bland," said Arthur Roe. "There can be a lot of vibration when the engine starts running. We don't want it to shake itself off."

He also demonstrated how to attach the propeller and how to start the engine. Lilian made a lot more notes and took some photographs to help her remember Arthur Roe's instructions.

At the end of the visit Lilian paid for her engine and set off for the railway station at Victoria. Arthur Roe drove her in his car, following an open lorry that carried the engine in its big wooden crate.

He arranged the engine in the carriage for Lilian. She was very different from his other customers. He had enjoyed the chance to talk to someone with so many new ideas about flying.

The train whistled and started to move slowly out of the station towards Liverpool.

"Goodbye, Miss Bland," called Arthur Roe as the train moved away. "Good luck with your aeroplane. Happy flying!"

Lilian waved at Arthur Roe, then closed the window and sat down in the carriage.

She was on her way back to Carnmoney. In the carriage with her was the engine for her aeroplane, well protected in its big wooden box.

Two other passengers in the same carriage were watching Lilian and her box. They could see that Lilian was excited.

“Excuse me, miss,” said one of them. “What’s in your box? It seems big and heavy.”

“It’s the engine for my new aeroplane,” replied Lilian.

“What an aeroplane?” asked the other.

Lilian explained her plans to the two other passengers.

“Oh! That’s interesting,” they both said as Lilian told them more about her plans for flying at Carnmoney.

Then they were quiet again. Everyone looked out the window of the carriage.

"I've got the glider and now I've got an engine," Lilian said quietly to herself, looking out at the fields as the train headed for Liverpool. "I'm going to build an aeroplane. I'm going to fly!"

Chapter Nine

Ready to Fly

It was late in the afternoon when Lilian arrived home in Carnmoney. She was impatient to get started.

"Joe! Joe!" she called as soon as her aunt's pony and trap arrived in the drive and stopped in front of Tobercooran House.

Joe was clipping the hedge at the side of the house.

"Joe, I had a wonderful time," she said. "Arthur Roe is a wonderful man, he was so helpful. I've got the engine. Can you help me with it as soon as I've got changed?"

Joe and Lilian worked far into the evening. They mounted the engine onto the body of the glider, then attached it with some metal nuts and bolts.

Lilian followed the instructions she had received from Arthur Roe very carefully, looking at the big notebooks.

"Oh dear, Joe, these bolts aren't long enough," said Lilian. "We'll need stronger ones. Can you please go to Corry's for them in the morning? We'll need them if we're going to do this job properly."

"Aye, Miss Lilian, I'll get them," replied Joe. "I have a few other messages to do for your aunt."

"That's as much as we can do tonight, Joe," said Lilian. She was tired but very happy. "In the morning I'll develop the photographs I took, then we can try to get

the engine started. Oh, isn't it exciting, Joe? I'm going to be the first person in Carnmoney to fly!"

"Ah, Miss Lilian, I can see you're excited," said Joe. He wasn't the sort of person who shows excitement easily. "It'll be a big day for Carnmoney when you fly here."

In the morning Lilian worked by herself, developing the pictures she had taken during the visit to Arthur Roe's factory.

Joe arrived back from Belfast in the middle of the morning. They tightened the new bolts so that the new engine would not move when Lilian turned it on. Then she fixed the wooden propeller to the nose of the aeroplane.

It was late in the evening when they finished.

"Can we start the engine, Joe?" said Lilian. She was as impatient as ever.

"No, it's too dark, Miss Lilian," said Joe. "We may as well leave it till tomorrow. We've done all we can. We'll test the engine first thing tomorrow."

"Well, come back as early as you can in the morning, Joe," replied Lilian. "Tomorrow's the big day! Tomorrow I'm going to fly!"

Chapter Ten

The May-Fly Takes Off

Joe was back at Tobercooran House just before eight o'clock the next morning. The sun was shining and the sky was blue.

Lilian had just finished her breakfast. She was keen to get going.

"Good morning, Joe," she called, walking out into the yard. She was wearing a thick pullover and a pair of men's trousers. Her hair was crammed into a man's cap.

They dragged the aeroplane out into the field. It sat at the top of the gentle slope in the field on its rubber wheels, ready to takeoff.

"Wait a minute, Miss Lilian," called Joe. "Everything's not right. Something's missing."

"What's the matter? What's wrong, Joe?" asked Lilian impatiently.

"What about petrol?" asked Joe. "You need petrol for the engine but you haven't got a tank."

"Well, I can't go all the way back to Manchester for a petrol tank," said Lilian. "I'll have to find something else."

She went into the house and looked for another container she could use to hold petrol.

She came back a few minutes later. She was carrying an empty whiskey bottle and Aunt Sarah's ear trumpet.

"What are those for, Miss Lilian?" asked Joe.

"They're for the aeroplane," said Lilian. "The bottle will hold petrol for the engine. Aunt Sarah's ear trumpet is the best tube I could find."

It only took them a few minutes to attach the bottle of petrol securely to the body of the aeroplane. Joe joined the petrol to the engine using the rubber tube from Aunt Sarah's ear trumpet.

At last the aeroplane was ready!

Lilian got into the pilot's seat and started the engine. It chugged a couple of times, then roared into life. There was a terrible noise, like cats fighting, but it worked.

"We're ready!" she shouted. "I want to fly!"

"No, not yet, Miss Lilian!" shouted Joe. "We need a name. What will we call the aeroplane?"

"The *May-Fly!*" called Lilian, laughing happily over the loud noise of the engine as it warmed up. "If all our hard work has been successful she may fly – or she may not, and we have been wasting our time."

Both Joe and Lilian laughed.

"She's light and she'll travel very fast," Lilian continued. "We'll call her the *May-Fly!*"

Lilian revved up the engine. The propeller whirred round faster and faster!

Then the aeroplane started to move forward. At first the *May-Fly* moved slowly but soon she was racing faster and faster over the rough field.

Then suddenly everything became much smoother. Lilian looked down. She could see the ground getting further and further away.

"I'm flying!" she yelled. "I'm flying!"

The *May-Fly* flew on for a few yards. Then Lilian brought the aeroplane down with a thump on the rough ground at the edge of the big field.

Joe came running across the field, shouting and waving his arms.

"You were flying!" he shouted excitedly. "The aeroplane works!"

Lilian sat still for a few moments after the *May-Fly* came to a stop. Then she climbed out of the pilot's seat and got back onto the ground.

In the next few days Lilian flew the *May-Fly* many times over the fields in Carnmoney.

Every time she went up into the sky she got better and better at controlling the little aeroplane.

All the people round Carnmoney heard the *May-Fly* and its noisy engine.

"What's happened?" one man asked. "Grimshaw's mill must have blown up!"

"There's been a terrible accident!" said another man.

"No, no," said a third man. "It's thunder. A terrible storm is coming."

But none of them was right. The noise came from the *May-Fly*.

Soon dozens of people came to stand at the edge of the field. They watched Lilian working on her aeroplane. They had never seen or heard anything like it before.

After a few days Lilian realised that the field at Carnmoney was not very good for flying.

"The field here is too small and it's a bit rough," Lilian said. "We need somewhere bigger."

Then Lord O'Neill heard about Lilian and the *May-Fly*. He lived at Shane's Castle at Randalstown.

He sent a letter to Lilian at Carnmoney. He offered her the chance to use his land at Randalstown.

**Shane's Castle
Randalstown
County Antrim**

Dear Miss Bland

I have heard about your glider. I've also heard that you hope to build an aeroplane and fly it at Carnmoney.

I am also interested in flying and aeroplanes.

If I can help you in any way please contact me.

Yours sincerely

O'Neill

Chapter Eleven

Flying at Shane's Castle

Lilian was very pleased with this offer.

She took the engine off the *May-Fly* again.

Lilian and Joe took the *May-Fly* twelve miles to Randalstown on a big open cart that was pulled by a couple of big brown and white horses. They also brought a couple of bicycles for the journey back to Carnmoney.

Dozens of people came to watch as the strange machine moved along the road.

The procession passed through Antrim. People laughed and cheered as the *May-Fly* passed along the main street. Lilian walked in front, smiling and waving to the crowd. She had never been shy and she was enjoying herself very much.

Then they arrived at Lord O'Neill's castle at Randalstown.

"Welcome to Shane's Castle, Miss Bland," said Lord O'Neill. "And welcome to the *May-Fly*!"

"Lord O'Neill, you are very kind," said Lilian, looking at the wide green lawns around the castle. The grass stretched far away down to the shores of Lough Neagh in the distance. "The ground here is flat and smooth. This is a wonderful place for flying!"

“It’s a pity the weather is so bad today,” said Lord O’Neill.

Lilian and Joe stayed at the castle for an hour, hoping that the weather might improve.

They worked on the *May-Fly*. The weather continued wet and miserable, and it was too windy for safe flying.

Lilian and Joe got ready to go back to Carnmoney.

As they rode away on their bicycles Joe pointed to a distant corner of the grass, near the edge of the water.

“Look!” he said. “There’s a bull. It’s loose in the field where you want to take off.”

“Well, I hope the *May-Fly* can move quickly,” replied Lilian with a laugh. “If the bull gets angry and charges at me I will have to fly to escape.”

Chapter Twelve

Taking Off at Shane's Castle

The weather was very bad during August.

Nearly every day Lilian and Joe rode their bicycles to Shane's Castle.

At last, after several weeks, the weather got better.

It was a bright Wednesday morning at the beginning of September.

"Let's try again," said Lilian. She was standing with Joe and Lord O'Neill on the grass beside the *May-Fly*.

The sun was shining and a few clouds were moving slowly across the sky.

Joe filled the whiskey bottle with petrol. Then he fitted it to the tube from Aunt Sarah's ear trumpet that took the petrol into the engine.

Lilian put on her flying hat with her long hair stuffed tightly into it. Then she clambered into the pilot's seat and took her position in the seat. She started the aeroplane. It took a few minutes for the engine to warm up. The propeller flew round faster and faster as the *May-Fly* got ready for take off.

The aeroplane started to move more quickly, until it was racing over the short grass towards the edge of Lough Neagh.

After thirty feet on the grass the *May-Fly* rose gently into the air.

"I'm flying! I'm flying!" shouted Lilian.

Lots of people had come to watch. They cheered and waved as the *May-Fly* went higher and higher into the blue sky.

Far away on the banks of Lough Neagh a man was fishing. He was holding his quivering rod steady in his hand. He looked up for a moment and saw a very strange sight.

Lilian was hopping along the ground, higher than the treetops!

The man rubbed his eyes in amazement.

Another man was driving a flock of sheep into a field full of fresh grass. He too stood still in amazement, leaning on his stick and watching the *May-Fly* as she hopped high off the grass on the other side of the trees.

One other man who saw Lilian and the *May-Fly* was an old ploughman. He was sitting in the yard of his farm near Milltown. He was busy polishing the metal blade of the plough. He wanted to make sure that it did not get rusty during the winter and would be ready for his work when the spring came.

"Mary! Mary! Come quickly!" he called to his wife.

She came bustling out of the house with her arms covered in flour. She had been baking.

"What's the matter? What's happened?" she asked. "Have you cut yourself on that plough? I'm always telling you to be more careful."

"Look, Mary, look!" said her husband, pointing to the trees in the distance on the edge of Shane's Castle.

"Goodness, what can it be?" asked Mary.

The old ploughman and his wife stood watching the *May-Fly* in amazement.

All around Randalstown people saw the first hops of the *May-Fly*.

Soon everyone was talking about Lilian and her aeroplane. She became quite famous.

During the next few days Lilian and Joe worked hard to make the *May-Fly* better and better.

Soon Lilian was able to fly further and further over the green lawns at Shane's Castle. Every day she went higher and higher into the air. Every day she became a better pilot as she practised flying the *May-Fly*.

The bull never came near Lilian and the *May-Fly*. He did not seem very interested in flying or aeroplanes.

Chapter Thirteen

Driving instead of Flying

Lilian was excited and pleased by her success. She had designed and built her own aeroplane. And she was a good pilot.

“I’m going to build more aeroplanes like the *May-Fly* and sell them,” she told Joe one morning in later September as they were riding back from Randalstown. “We can work together. We can make a lot of money.”

Joe said nothing.

A few weeks later Lilian put some advertisements in flying magazines.

But no one replied to her.

BI-IRISH PLANES

IMPROVED MAYFLY TYPE

Standard or Racing

FROM £250 WITHOUT ENGINE

Wire wheels, control levers (Farman action) made for wires or control rods, strong and light steel tubing — All aeroplane accessories, etc.

GLIDERS, full controls, etc, from £80

As a glider this bi-plane has successfully accomplished glides of over 90 yards — Very stable in gusty winds

With engine it can rise 30ft in a dead calm

Full particulars on application

L. E. BLAND, CARNMONEY, BELFAST

A few days later Lilian's father came to Randalstown to visit his daughter and the *May-Fly*. He had just returned after a long tour of several European cities to visit his friends.

"Lilian, I'm worried about two things," he said to his daughter when he heard about the *May-Fly*. "This aeroplane is too expensive. It's costing you a lot of money to build and fly the *May-Fly*. Also, flying is very dangerous. I don't want you to get hurt."

"But I'm getting better and better," said Lilian. "I'm a good pilot. I'm getting better every time I go up in the *May-Fly*."

"Can I make a deal with you, Lilian?" asked her father. "If you give up the *May-Fly* and stop flying I'll buy you a car. You can drive it instead of flying the aeroplane."

He did not think Lilian would agree. She usually did what she liked.

"I agree!" said Lilian almost at once. "If you buy me a car I'll give up flying."

Her father was very surprised but said nothing more.

Lilian was secretly pleased. Now she was more interested in cars than aeroplanes. Also, she had already spent a lot of money designing and building and testing the *May-Fly*. She was ready for a new challenge.

She had heard about the problems Harry Ferguson had before he won the prize for flying more than three miles at Newcastle.

A few days later Lilian came back to Carnmoney with her new car.

She soon found she liked driving and became very good at it, even if she usually drove too fast on the narrow roads.

Lilian liked cars very much and was interested in how they worked.

She soon started to sell Ford cars all over the north of Ireland. She was a good businesswoman and made a lot of money.

Chapter Fourteen

Lilian in Later Life

A few years later Lilian married her cousin Charles Bland. He was a lumberjack in Canada. Lilian and her new husband went to live in Vancouver.

Before she left Ireland she gave the aeroplane to the boys' club in Carnmoney. She gave the engine to the Science Museum.

In 1935 Lilian came back to England. She lived in Cornwall for many years.

Lilian Bland died in May 1971, aged 93.

She had lived a long and interesting life.

She had been a writer, a photographer, a horsewoman, a driver and a businesswoman - and the first woman in Ireland to build and fly her own aeroplane.