



*a HUMPHY & TEX adventure*

# FLIGHT OF THE GOOFUS BIRD

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*Down with a dead motor on the cold waters of the Atlantic they were at the mercy of the U-boat that lay in wait. Humpy and Tex faced a terrible death, but then there was their beloved Goofus bird—*

**A** COCKROACH cautiously thrust his head and shoulders out of the crack in the wall of Ile Tudy's dispensary. It was really a wall, and the cockroach thought of it as a wall if he considered the matter at all. But "Doc" Parrish, the first-class pharmacist's mate, was a salty tattooed bird, fresh from destroyer duty, and he insisted on calling it a bulkhead.

Doc was sitting in his swivel chair now, at the desk

where he made out F cards and typhoid-prophylaxis records for the senior surgeon to sign. "Humpy" Campbell and "Tex" Malone, the seaplane station's famous enlisted flying team, were perched on the glass-topped counter where Doc occasionally mixed salts, Dobell's gargle, and iodine.

"Psst!" Tex cautioned in a stage whisper. "There's one, Doc."

"A big one," Humpy exulted. "Have you got his range?"

"I always got the range," Doc answered loftily. "But I give 'em a fightin' chance. Wait until he gets under way across that bulkhead."

The cockroach took his bearing and decided that the coast was clear. It paid to take no chances of late. Time was, he remembered, when the French had operated a sardine factory here and paid no attention to mere cockroaches. But now the American sailors had come, and of late the bodies of many well-known cockroaches had been found, stiff and stark, on the deck.

"Now or never," this particular cockroach told himself. He girded his loins and emerged from the crack. The next shelter was a full yard away, behind the filling cabinet where Doc kept the health records.

"There he goes!" shouted Tex.

Doc Parrish raised his hand. It held a glass tube, with an attachment such as you find—or found—on bottles of charged water. He pressed the lever with his thumb; a thin stream shot across the intervening distance and struck the scurrying insect full in the face. It froze him in his tracks, and he fell lifeless.

"Hell, you're a sharpshooter, Doc," Humpy exclaimed. "What is that stuff?"

"Ethyl chloride," Doc answered laconically. He failed to mention, as pharmacist's mates still do today, that ethyl chloride is rather expensive, even on the medical-department supply table, and was never intended as a cockroach exterminator.

"Sure stops 'em, don't it?" Tex said. "Let me see."

He took the tube and squirted a bit on his hand. The flesh turned white with the cold.

"Say, that's what they used once on a boil I had. Then they jabbed it with a knife," Humpy declared.

"Yeah, it's good for that," Doc explained. "It's also a knockout anaesthetic. You drop that on gauze held over the patient's nose, while he counts aloud. He never counts higher than seventeen."

"I knew a bird once that couldn't count past ten," Tex said.

"Aw, pipe down," Humpy demanded. "None of your personal experiences."

The Texan climbed down from his seat and thrust his hands in the pockets of his leather flying jacket. "I'm goin' over and see how Emma is gettin' along," he announced.

Humpy glared at his flying mate. "Keep on calling that pigeon 'Emma,' and I'll bust you so hard they'll be lookin' up your next of kin," he warned. "That's a boy pigeon, and his name is Mike."

"A boy pigeon, hell," snorted Tex. "She's a goofus

bird, that pigeon, but she's a girl pigeon and a lady, at that. They may not call her anything but a number over at the loft, but if she flies with us, she flies in the observer's cockpit with me—and I say her name is Emma."

The dispensary door slammed behind them. Doc could hear them going down the station street arguing the question of sex with a fine disregard for delicacy. Emma or Mike, it seems, was a goofy sort of bird if nobody knew its gender.

It was less than an hour later when the two flyers reported to the captain, and they saw something was brewing the instant they entered his office.

"Campbell!" barked the skipper.

"Yes, sir," answered the first-class boatswain's mate.

"I've got a job for you—a hell of a job. You and Malone, here, flew all the way to the Western Front some time ago, in a seaplane. Now I want you to fly one pretty far out over the Atlantic, and locate a single, solitary ship."

"Yes, sir."

The skipper smiled grimly. "It's too bad if you're forced down very far out. And it's worse if you fail to find this ship. Of course, you have excellent visibility to-day—a high ceiling. Perfect flying weather, for a wonder. Now, get this."

He leaned over his desk. Tex and Humpy stooped to hear the low tense words.

"One of the navy's Q-boats is out there, disguised as a lumber ship. She can unship that lumber quicker than you can bat an eye, and she's got four-inch guns fore and aft. They made her up to look like a dirty tramp, and they even left her wireless off, so we have to send her orders by plane. You can drop alongside and refuel. Look at this chart. Here's Point Penmarch. The Q-boat is somewhere in this area. You'll fly straight out this way."

"Aye, aye, sir."

The captain extended his hand. "Luck to you both," he said. "Take a pigeon, you may need him."

"Her, sir," Tex corrected. "Her name's Emma."

A little later the motor of the I-37 sputtered, then roared, deep-voiced and reassuringly. Humpy allowed it to warm up while he secreted the Q-boat orders in one of his boots. Then he bit deeply into a plug of tobacco and gave her the gun.

Tex waved laconically to their shipmates on the shore. The I-37 moved out across sparkling waters with gathering speed, sloughing through the ripples and then touching only their tops. Humpy pulled on the stick, and she lifted cleanly, shook the sea

water from her pontoons, and shot away to the west, a rapidly diminishing speck against the blue of the morning sky.

The pigeon's cage jiggled with the motor's vibration, and the frightened bird huddled in one corner. Even Tex's finger, poked through the bars, failed to reassure it. This was only its second flight.

"A few more hops, and she'll be air-minded," Tex told himself as though the pigeon had not been flying longer than either he or Humpy. "I remember when I felt the same way about it."

He looked back to see Ile Tudy vanishing in the haze of distance, and was glad that Humpy Campbell was rated the best flyer at the seaplane base when it came to keeping on a set course. This time they were not circling above a convoy that dotted the water below. Soon there would be no coast line to reckon from; somewhere out there on that wide loneliness of heaving water, a disguised ship cruised about, waiting for a slender periscope to jab the surface. It was their job to find her.

"How's Mike?" Humpy bellowed into the high-pitched drone of the motor and the scream of wind in the struts. Tex barely heard the unintelligible words, but he sensed their import and thumbed his nose vulgarly in reply.

"Emma's doin' fine, you swab," he yelled in return. Little by little this sailor from the Texas Panhandle, who had never seen salt water until America declared war, was picking up navy terms. He had even progressed to the extent of calling his rope a line. Right now, it was coiled neatly beneath his feet. There was always something reassuring about the presence of that rope to the former cowboy. He glanced at it fondly, and settled in his seat comfortably.

HUMPY climbed! steadily to something like three thousand meters, then leveled her off and pushed on to the west. They could see for seemingly interminable distances on every hand; it was one of those exceedingly rare days in the history of the Ile Tudy station when they found perfect flying weather.

The rolling swells far beneath them were tiny ripples on a sapphire pond, flecked here and there with tiny dazzling whitecaps. Far down on the southern rim of the world, a smudge of black smoke floated—a troopship or freighter leaving France.

They roared on for more than an hour. Nothing broke the sameness of the horizon. Just as Tex had begun to wonder if the Q-boat had not shoved off for

other parts, he sighted a tiny vessel, hull-down on the western horizon, almost dead ahead. It was miles away, along that tight-drawn silver line where sky and water met and merged.

"Hey!" he yelled at Humpy. The pilot saw the ship at almost the same time, turned, and nodded. Then he resumed the business of flying. The whole thing had been too easy, so far.

During the next few minutes, Tex watched the ship on the horizon grow until he could make out something of her lines. She appeared to be carrying lumber, all right. There was little doubt but that she was the Q-boat.

A sudden sputter came from the motor, and Tex's own heart skipped a beat in response. A couple of cylinders missed, then took up their firing again. Tex saw Humpy leaning forward anxiously. The entire motor cut out with a sudden silence that smote on their ears strangely, fired half-heartedly for a few revolutions and then died.

The I-37 lost altitude rapidly, gliding down toward those roaring swells.

"What the hell?" demanded Tex.

"Either something's wrong with the ignition or we're out of gas," Humpy shouted over his shoulder. "Stand by for a ram, sailor. It won't be so easy, makin' a dead-stick landin' on those swells."

He labored frantically, choking the motor and manipulating the switch. The motor did not respond. The ocean's bright surface rushed up to meet them; swells which had seemed insignificant from the height of a moment before began to take on terrifying size.

Tex unbuckled his safety belt. If they capsized on landing, he had no desire to hang head under, while he struggled to free himself from the cockpit.

"Save Mike if we crack up," Humpy shouted. "We'll need him."

They glided to a splash atop a surging swell, skidded sickeningly down into the trough beyond, and were caught and lifted high by the next wave. The I-37 threatened to heel over, caught her balance just in time and rode it out safely. Then she lost headway, slipping idly down into the next trough. They were safe for the time being at least.

Humpy pushed back his goggles and took a deep breath.

"Here you are, sailor," he exclaimed. "I'll take a peep at the motor and the gas tank. But you might as well get ready to send an S.O.S. back to Ile Tudy by Mike."

"By Emma, you mean," Tex growled.

"All right, all right," Humpy swore. "Have it your way. Let's don't argue about a thing like that now. We ain't got anything to rig a sail with. We'll be damn lucky if we ever get back to Ile Tudy. Hell!"

"What's hell?"

"We've had a leaking gas tank ever since we took off, I guess. Nothing left. Here, I'll write a message; gimme the paper. We can't see that damn Q-boat, if that was her, from the surface, and she can't see us."

"No, there ain't much chance of them findin' us soon," Tex agreed. He removed the aluminum cylinder from the pigeon's leg and took out the tightly rolled tissue paper. The tossing of the plane made writing a difficult job, but Humpy managed to scrawl his S.O.S.

"Forced down at 12:32 with no gas, tank leaking" it read. "About hundred and ten miles out. Campbell and Malone."

He handed Tex the message; the latter read and grunted, then placed it in the receptacle on the pigeon's leg. He opened the door of the cage and held it aloft. Nothing happened.

"Take off, Emma, take off," the observer urged.

The pigeon chattered a sleepy protest, thrust its head outside the door, and surveyed the watery wastes. Then, as quickly, it withdrew to the inside of the cage.

"You got your flight orders; take off," Tex repeated.

Still the bird failed to leave. Tex felt his arm growing tired. He lowered the cage and allowed it to rest on the cowling, while he argued with the pigeon and called it names unfit for a lady. Finally he reached a determined hand inside the cage and grasped the pigeon.

"Toss him," Humpy advised. "That's the way you're supposed to do homing pigeons. He'll have to fly then."

"Good-by, Emma," Tex said. His hand shot upward.

There was a hurt look in the pigeon's eyes as it catapulted into the air. It spread its wings, circled gracefully several times, as homing pigeons always do before starting a flight, and came to a two-point landing on the plane's wing.

"Well, I'm damned if I ever saw such a lazy bird," Tex swore.

"If I had something to throw at him—" Humpy began. He rummaged in the cockpit, but found nothing.

The pigeon eyed them, unblinking and unashamed. It bobbed clumsily along the wing to the fuselage, balancing with uplifted tail when the plane rose on the bosom of the swells. Then it took a short hop, perched on the cowling of the observer's cockpit, and entered its cage.

Tex stared in amazement.

"In the navy two weeks, and prefers caulkin'-off drill, like a man with three hash marks," he drawled. "Emma, I'm ashamed of you. Please take off for Ile Tudy, and let 'em know we're in a helluva jam."

"Emma, hell!" retorted Humpy. He spat a vicious stream of tobacco juice into the unoffending Atlantic. "Anybody'd know, now, that this is a boy bird. As a usual thing, the female of the species is more industrious than the male."

"It's not a boy bird," Tex retorted. "She needs a beauty sleep. Look at her. Maybe when she takes a nap she'll take off."

"And by then it'll be night, and they'll never find us in the dark. And I ain't been seasick in two cruises, even while I was on destroyers when they did everything but a barrel roll.

But if I have to pitch up and down in this plane, I'm going to get seasick."

The pigeon let them know it didn't care, and that it had no reason to worry. It squatted nonchalantly on the deck of its cage and closed its eyes. Tex regarded it with deep disgust.

"Carrier pigeon, hell!" he snorted. "Emma, you couldn't carry disease germs."

"That's where you're wrong," Humpy argued. "Carrier pigeons ain't the kind that carry messages. The guy in charge of the pigeon loft told me that carrier pigeons are called that because of the way they carry their heads. This is a homing pigeon."

"I don't think it's either," Tex returned. "She acts more like a setter pigeon. She's a goofus bird!"

THEY tossed on the heaving swells. Both swore stoutly they were not seasick, but each saw that the other's face was pale and each knew the other was not acquainted with fear. There was a difference in tossing idly here in the sun, with no headway to create a breeze, and in smashing through mountainous seas in a plate-straining destroyer.

Tex was slumped in his seat, lulled into a lethargy of despair and nausea by the unceasing swing. He prayed that the pontoons were watertight and would remain so; that the visibility would remain good, so that any ship that passed might see them. Humpy climbed atop the upper wing and peered hopefully into the west, where they had sighted the supposed Q-boat.

"She must've been headed the other way," he said. "She ain't close enough for us to see her yet. Maybe she's cruisin' around and will come back this way."

The pigeon was back on the deck of the observer's

cockpit. No use trying to get it to fly when it didn't want to.

To the south, there was only a restless expanse of green and blue, reflecting the sun in a brightness of hues. To the east, where the coast lay far beyond their restricted horizon, there was nothing in sight. If a convoy should pass far enough out to sea it was possible that help would come from that direction; but they always headed down through the straits of Belle Ile, and that was farther in.

Then Humpy stared, rubbed his eyes, and nearly lost his precarious footing as the I-37 lifted high on a swell.

"Good God!" he exclaimed.

Tex Malone jerked upright and stared at the spot where Humpy was pointing, stared open-mouthed at an object on the waves. It was no illusion, no trickery of waves and sun.

The slim gray finger of a periscope was snaking through the water toward them. It came leisurely, with the swells dipping to expose six and eight feet of its menacing length, then lifting to set the lens awash in a flurry of foam. It was rising of a sudden. The bulk of a conning tower broke surface with a swishing wake, and streamed water that gleamed in the sun. A portion of the whaleback showed on either side, gray and slimy, and the black-snouted deck gun rose from its well forward.

"It's a submarine!" Tex exclaimed, as though that information were wanting. "A Kraut submarine!"

"You don't say," Humpy answered sarcastically. "Do tell."

Tex paid no attention. "And this plane ain't got a machine gun," he continued. "Nothin' but a couple of bombs. You got a six-gun—why don't you use it?"

The submarine was on surface now. They could see the periscope revolving to take in the extended horizon afforded on top of the water. It focused toward the west and remained there for several minutes; then it sank back into the conning tower as the ship came nearer, cruising with easy grace.

"Why don't I use this popgun against that steel hull?" mocked Humpy. "Listen, you rubber sock, what do you think I got here—a five-inch? You better be good and don't throw any rocks at them Heinies, because we'll be prisoners in about ten minutes."

The U-boat was standing by, now, not a hundred yards away. The hatch of the conning tower rose, and the gold braid of an officer appeared. Men followed him as he descended to the deck, and they manned

the gun, pointing it in an uncomfortably straight line toward the I-37.

"Don't move, or we'll blow you out of the water," the officer called through cupped hands. "Throw your sidearms overboard."

Humpy consigned the revolver to the deep, and Tex cursed aloud.

"Stand by, and we'll throw you at line," the German shouted.

An order was passed down the conning tower, and the sub silently slipped closer. She was less than thirty yards away, when a deck hand threw a line across the plane's fuselage. Humpy made it fast around a strut, and the men on the deck of the sub heaved away.

"Greetings, my friends," smiled the commander, as the plane's port wing grated against the curving side of his ship. "I shall be delighted to board your vessel and execute a neat little plan. We can use you to very good advantage."

He had a Luger in his hand, as he stepped upon the upper wing and gazed anxiously west. He was short and thick-set, but evidently his stature did not prevent him from seeing something that delighted him very much. Humpy looked in the same direction. The smoke of a ship was smudged against the horizon. Even as he watched, the stack of the vessel hove into view. Apparently the Q-boat was heading back, awaiting the orders which were to come by plane, in accordance with prearranged plans. The seaplane tilted under the German's weight as he made his way to the fuselage, motioning for a petty officer to follow. The latter also carried a pistol. He took the pilot's cockpit and settled in it comfortably, while the commander slid aft with surprising agility and motioned for Tex to give up the observer's seat. He tapped the observer's sides as Tex arose, grunted when he found no weapon and then spied the pigeon.

"Ah, pigeons are excellent when broiled, don't you think?" he said. "I shall have my steward attend to that later. Sit there—so!"

Tex straddled the fuselage, his back to the German. He had an uncomfortable feeling, knowing that the Luger was pointed at the small of his back.

"The pilot will stand on the wing as he is, and wave his coat for help," the German continued. "I have been observing that ship over there. It has cruised up and down—strange actions for a lumber vessel. I have been too wise to attack, for the Q-boats use lumber as a disguise very often. We shall see, however. Mueller!"

An under officer on the deck answered, and the

captain gave orders in a crisp tone. The men on the submarine entered the conning tower, and the hatch clanged shut. The gun vanished into its well, a bell clanged faintly through the steel hull, and the deck went awash.

The sub was diving where she lay—almost underneath the plane. But her skipper and a petty officer remained on the I-37. Humpy and Tex stared at each other in bewilderment. The submarine commander hummed a gay tune and chuckled.

“You are puzzled, eh?” he asked pleasantly. “I shall explain. Note where the periscope is now?”

The submarine had descended only a few feet. The periscope head was against the side of the plane’s fuselage; it peered over the lower wing in what amounted to a concealed position. The plane was still fast to a ring bolt on the submarine’s deck.

“To hell with explaining!” Humpy flared. “I see through your lousy trick.”

“All’s fair in war,” laughed the officer. “You drop bombs on us when we have no way to fight back. Why shouldn’t we lie here and let you signal that ship for help? Then when it comes near enough to make a certain target for a torpedo, and not near enough to see our periscope against your plane, I shall merely tap the periscope with my Luger, and the torpedo will be launched. You are to see the show free—and if you want to live, don’t try wigwag or code signaling. Schneider will keep you covered. I shall take care of the observer. Wave your leather coat, pilot.”

Humpy could see the lumber ship looming larger on the western horizon. The line to the sub’s deck checked their up-and-down motion to a great extent, and his head was clearer as the dizziness passed. Something had to be done, and done quickly, but he could see no way out.

He removed his coat slowly. Let the ship come closer—near enough to read his signals—and he’d flash something to warn them of danger. He’d let the German shoot before he’d lure that vessel to certain doom. It was two lives against many, any way you looked at it.

“Wave that coat.”

Humpy swept the leather garment against the sky. The Germans were crouching low in the cockpits. When the ship drew near, the men on its bridge would see only the Americans on the disabled plane.

Tex suffered mental torture. If only he had a gun! If he had any sort of weapon—he thrust his hands in the pockets of his leather jacket, and the few seconds

that passed without the crack of a gun showed him the move had gone by unnoticed.

HIS hand closed on glass, hard and cold, and his mind flashed back to a moment that seemed centuries ago. In reality it was that very morning, when he had unintentionally pocketed the tube of ethyl chloride in the Ile Tudy dispensary. Ethyl chloride—it was potent stuff. It killed cockroaches and froze boils. It would put a man to sleep by the time you counted seventeen—but a hell of a lot could happen while you counted seventeen.

The time dragged by. Everybody on the plane was quiet. Only Humpy, standing on the upper wing, waved the coat until his arms ached with the strain. The rest were inactive, except for Tex, who squirmed on his uncomfortable seat, thinking desperately. The ship drew nearer, first coming at a tangent, then suddenly heading straight for the plane. She had sighted them.

“So far, good enough, my friends,” commented the submarine commander. “A clever scheme, don’t you think? I am proud of it. Picture their surprise when one of their own planes apparently launches a torpedo.”

“And you’d waste a tin fish on that lousy lumber packet?” Tex derided. “Why don’t you let your ship come to the surface and fight her like a man? She ain’t armed, anyway.”

He swung about, slipping one leg down low and shifting as a cowboy shifts in his saddle, to look at the German officer.

“Don’t be too sure about that,” retorted the captain. “I have had experience with your accursed Q-boats. That lumber amidships is probably what you Yankees would call a stall.”

That the German was nervous, was quite apparent to the Texan. Any submarine commander might well be nervous, with his ship below, and he and an enlisted man tossing on the surface trusting to the accuracy of one torpedo. If it missed, the approaching ship would certainly open fire on them, seeing through the ruse.

Tex watched the commander. He was smoking a cigarette, slumped low in the cockpit and puffing nervously. He removed the cigarette with one hand, flicked the ashes off, and replaced it in the corner of his mouth, speaking out of the other side.

“Behind that lumber may be guns,” he said, and he gestured ever so slightly with the Luger. Now was the time.

Tex shot his right hand from his coat pocket with a sudden sweeping motion. Sunshine gleamed on flashing glass. He pressed the lever on the tube of ethyl chloride.

A thin stream of the highly volatile, very inflammable liquid struck the German full in the face. There was a burst of flame, a scream of pain. Some of the fluid reached the commander's eyes adding to the searing heat.

The petty officer turned, startled at the howls, and saw the skipper's Luger slip overboard as he raised hands to claw at his face. He whipped his own automatic around to kill Tex Malone, but Humpy brought the heavy leather coat down hard on the outstretched gun hand, smothering the move. Then the pilot leaped for the German's throat. They grappled half in and half out of the cockpit, wrestling desperately for possession of the gun.

Tex Malone had cut off the stream of ethyl chloride; the flame vanished in an instant. Now he flung himself upon the submarine officer and began squirting the anesthetic into his adversary's blistered face once more. Doc Parrish had said it would put a person to sleep by the time you counted seventeen, and the sailor was growing impatient. He did not consider the neutralizing effect of administering it in the open air, as compared to inhalations through gauze. He wanted results, and the German apparently had no intention of going to sleep.

The officer struck out blindly, tears streaming down his face, gasping incoherently with the pain. Tex had a fleeting picture of his red distorted features, eyelashes and eyebrows gone in that swift burst of flame; then he lashed out with clenched right.

"This'll put you to sleep," the sailor panted.

*Smack!* The blow struck squarely on the officer's chin. His head snapped back into the void of unconsciousness, and his tense frame relaxed. The battle in the after cockpit had been won.

Tex turned hurriedly to see how Humpy was faring. The pilot had forced his adversary's head back against the cockpit's rim and was choking him until his eyes nearly popped. Tex reached forward and wrested the Luger from weakening fingers.

"I got it," he exclaimed. "Now, I'll shoot this damned periscope glass out—"

"Don't!" Humpy gasped. "You can't. That glass is plenty thick. They'd let go the torpedo—the ship is near enough now—and they couldn't miss very well. Here, I got it. We'll blind her this way."

He threw his leather coat over the periscope. Tex was quick to grasp the idea. He seized his beloved rope from the deck beneath his feet and hurriedly dropped a loop over the coat, drawing it snug.

The submarine was simply and effectively blinded. Had the two sailors been able to see through the steel hull that lay a few feet under the water, they would have appreciated the confusion that reigned in the control room.

"I'll signal her now," Humpy exclaimed. He stood erect on the wing again, and began a swift semaphore with his hands.

There were muttering and faint Teutonic curses from the submarine skipper who was reviving. Tex cracked him neatly on the jaw again; it worked better than ethyl chloride.

"One move outa you and I'll see if these Kraut guns shoot straight," he told the petty officer forward. "You're up Salt Creek sailor, and you ain't got a paddle."

The seaplane suddenly began to lift out of the water. It was the submarine coming up under her. The under lieutenant had no way of telling what had happened to blot out the vision of his periscope; he dared not submerge and leave his commander on that plane above. Courageously enough he chose to come to the surface and fight.

The conning tower rose not three feet from where Tex crouched with the pistol. Its hatch lifted and Tex fired. The bullet ripped against the steel and screamed away into space. No head emerged for a time; there were confused yells and hoarsely shouted orders floated up from the conning-tower depths. Then a pair of grimy hands reached out.

"*Kamerad!*"

"We got the situation damn well in hand," Humpy exulted. "Look at that."

The lumber ship heaved to a hundred yards away. A dummy deck house folded up like a primer at recess and a businesslike four-inch gun menaced the submersible as the ship warped in until she lay almost alongside. Everything was over.

"Hey," Humpy shouted suddenly, "I forgot all about Mike. See if he's all right."

Tex leaned headfirst into the cockpit and emerged with a grin of triumph, holding something tightly between his thumb and forefinger.

"Mike, hell!" he retorted. "Her name is Emma. Lookit this egg. She had work of her own to do—that's why she wouldn't fly home!"