

She arrived by air on Monday afternoon. It was the first time that a guest had come in this fashion and the household was appreciably excited. Under Jock's direction the boiler man and one of the gardeners pegged out a dust sheet in the park to mark a landing for her and lit a bonfire of damp leaves to show the direction of the wind. The five trunks arrived in the ordinary way by train, with an elderly, irreproachable maid. She brought her own sheets with her in one of the trunks; they were neither silk nor coloured, without lace or ornament of any kind, except small, plain monograms.

Tony, Jock and John went out to watch her land. She climbed out of the cockpit, stretched, unbuttoned the flaps of her leather helmet, and came to meet them. 'Forty-two minutes,' she said, 'not at all bad with the wind against me.'

She was tall and erect, almost austere in helmet and overalls; not at all as Tony had imagined her. Vaguely, at the back of his mind he had secreted the slightly absurd expectation of a chorus girl, in silk shorts and brassière, popping out of an immense beribboned Easter egg with a cry of 'Whoopce, boys.' Mrs Rattery's greetings were deft and impersonal.

'Are you going to hunt on Wednesday?' asked John. 'They're meeting here, you know.'

'I might go out for half the day, if I can find a horse. It'll be the first time this year.'

'It's my first time too.'

'We shall both be terribly stiff.' She spoke to him exactly as though he were a man of her own age. 'You'll have to show me the country.'

'I expect they'll draw Bruton Wood first. There's a big fox there, daddy and I saw him.'