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The Golden Ticket

by Garf Collins

“I’m back, Gladys. They certainly did me proud,” Terence said as he stumbled into their small bungalow.

“No need to shout dear. You’ve obviously had a few drinks - unusual for you.”

“Well, it was quite a do. They hired a room in the Kings Arms and lots of people came. The Old Man gave a speech and thanked me for my forty years service and guess what? He handed me a check for £1,000 pounds from the company. Then Joe, you know, my boss, gave me a present from our department. A bit mysterious. It’s in this gold envelope. He called it the Golden Ticket and said not to open it until I got home.”

“Come on. Let’s see what it is. Might be a voucher for a nice trip to Majorca for us,” Gladys said as she tore open the envelope. “Crikey. It’s a ticket for a trial gliding lesson. That’s not quite you is it?”

“No, I was looking forward to a bit of time for hobbies but not that. Bit of pottering in the garden. Regular walks. Maybe an occasional cruise with you, love. But gliding? I don’t think so. I’ve never liked flying anyway.”

Terence had been an effective middle manager in his company but had never wanted to ‘take chances with my career’ as he put it. His uneventful working life was paralleled by the cosy domesticity of his marriage to Gladys. Consequently, he put the ticket aside, meaning to talk to Joe about replacing it with something safer.

Two weeks later Joe phoned. "Terence, I'm going to my gliding club on Sunday. I could pick you up and take you for that gliding taster session."

"Oh.. Er.. OK, what time?" He hadn't yet shaken off his habit of following Joe's instructions and felt bound to agree to the arrangement.

On Sunday Terence awoke to bright sunshine and blue sky with little wind – dashing his hope that the weather would give him an excuse not to go.

"Great day for your first flight," Joe said as they set off for the club.

After a briefing, Terence was seated ahead of Tom – the instructor who was taking him up. He saw that the glider was attached to a small plane ahead of them. His hands trembled as he clipped himself into the safety harness. Flight-control gave the signal to go and the plane's engine roared to a crescendo.

Terence felt the glider being dragged along the grass at ever-increasing speed until it was lifted off by the climbing plane. He was surprised to feel a rising excitement as the field dropped away below them. When they were at the right altitude, Tom released the tow line and the plane peeled away with the cable trailing behind it.

As Tom manoeuvred the glider Terence gasped at the sweep of the countryside below them. He was amazed by the almost total silence. There was just the faint whisper of the wind through the stays of the wings. He had never felt such exhilaration. His few flights in cluttered noisy jets on their occasional package holidays had been mere irritations but this was freedom. He felt like an eagle. Below, he caught sight of a bungalow just like his. It seemed incredibly small and insignificant. "Surely that can't be the limit of my experience for the rest of my life," he thought.

"Your turn." Tom said through the intercom. "Put your hands on the controls and feel what I do." After a short time, Terence sensed how easy it was to control the craft and he was allowed to take over.

"There's a good thermal on our left. Steer counter-clockwise."

Terence did as suggested and was thrilled to feel the glider float higher as he spiralled within the up-draught. He began to feel at one with the craft. It was as if the wings were his.

He was very disappointed when Tom said, "Time's up. But you can feel the controls as I take her down."

As the glider approached the landing field Terence was already a convert to gliding. It had taken his mind into another dimension along with his body. He had sensed how limited his life had been and was determined to change in future. He would soar above it by becoming a qualified pilot. The £1,000 cheque would enable him to take the course he'd seen described in the clubhouse. Then he could fly solo regularly to build up his expertise. Maybe he could even become an instructor. These thoughts raced

through his mind while the glider gracefully slid to a stop. Terence was almost overcome with emotion. He had never experienced ambition before.