

A WOMAN'S QUEER LIFE.

HER BUSINESS IS TO JUMP FROM BALLOONS ON A PARACHUTE.

There are Lots of Risk About It, But It is Very Fascinating She Says—Sensation of Falling From Great Heights—Adventures That Brought Her Near Death.

'Aeronauts ever retire? Well, seldom. Usually we keep putting it off from time to time. Then something happens and very likely it is too late to retire. We may be killed or maimed for life. That ends our career and we are soon forgotten.' So said Ida Leroy a young aeronaut of 22 years the other day to the N. Y. Sun.

'It's a queer sort of life and yet perhaps it's as good as any other. It's one of those professions in which you once get never to leave again. Why? For several reasons. To begin with, there's a certain fascination about it that none of us can explain. The excitement is pleasing to us all. You go up like a shot and come down faster sometimes. It's all over in a moment, you hear the crowds applaud, evidently you have satisfied them, and your work is over. We do not work many hours and while the pay we get is not what it ought to be considering our risks, yet it is enough to make a fair living. That's why I am an aeronaut. It's as easy a way to make a respectable living as I know of. Dangerous? Why, yes, but I never think of that. I'll have plenty of time to consider that end of the business when fate overtakes me, as I suppose it will some day. It gets the best of every aeronaut I ever knew and I have met quite a number in my times. They all meet their day and when they do they wish that they had retired as they had planned long ago.

'The leading qualification to make a successful aeronaut is nerve and lots of it. If you have the nerve and a cool head, you're all right. If you have not, don't be aeronaut. You can't be timid and trust to luck. Be nervy and let luck take care of itself and the chances are that you will come out all right. Always keep a cool head, no matter what happens. That applies to all business, but more to ours than any other. A merchant or board of trade man may lose his fortune. We do not lose our fortune but our lives. So you see we have more at stake than the average professional or business man. They have their lives left when they fail; we lose all in a single fall. That's why we are careful not to lose our nerve. Happen what will, we are never frightened. We keep a cool head, do the best thing we can in the emergency and trust to luck that we will come out all right. No, I have never been frightened or had any presentiment of danger. Not even in my first trip did I feel anything but confident that I would come back safe. You see we are a sort of reckless people; we do not fear death and that helps us a great deal. I have watched during the five years that I have been following this business my friends killed one by one, but I can't say that I am not feeling as safe and easy today as I ever was. Of course, it is only natural that when these accidents come to our notice that we are more careful. It is true I examine the seams of my parachute with greater care than at other times, but that extra precaution is soon forgotten and I go along at the same old gait. I am always reasonably careful and that is probably why I have been lucky.

'I got into this business in a somewhat peculiar manner. My home is in Dayton, Ohio, although I make my headquarters at Mount Vernon. About five years ago I attended a fair at Osborne, Ohio, where Mlle. Victoria Le Roy made an ascension. The ease and grace with which she went up attracted my attention. My reckless disposition got the better of me and I told a friend of mine that I felt that I could do that feat as well as Mlle. Victoria. That night as I went home, my friend dared me to try it. Now, if there is any one thing in this world that I will not submit to it is being dared. I wrote a note to Mlle. Victoria and told her I wanted to become an aeronaut. She answered that I might join her. I left my home and two days later was ready to take my first trip.

'Victoria was a dear, but of course she had an eye to business. She advertised that I would take my first trip up, and of course it drew out a tremendous crowd to see a 17-year-old girl undertake so dangerous a voyage. I will never forget how I felt. I was not afraid, but a little nervous. As the time for the ascension came on the managers of the affair began to fear that I might back out, but I told them I was game enough to go up as soon as they could inflate the bag. Victoria told me just what to do. The last words were 'Keep cool and don't lose your nerve and you'll come out all right.'

'I went up between two and three thousand feet—that is the usual distance aeronauts fly—and then Victoria signalled me to make the parachute leap. That was

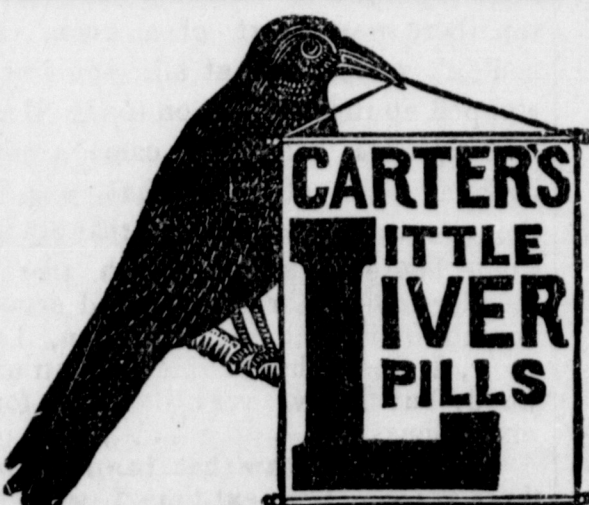
the critical moment. But I did just as I was told and away I went. It seemed to me that the parachute would never open. I dropped and dropped, and then as I was about to give up all hope the parachute spread open and I came down slowly. It was a queer feeling that came over me. I felt thankful, and for the time I concluded that it ever I reached the ground safely I would never leave it again in a balloon. I did not know how to control my breath. That is something Victoria had forgotten to tell me, and I could scarcely breathe when I landed. But I came down safe. The crowds cheered me time and again and it was not until then that I really realized that I had completed my first trip.

'After that one the rest came easy, and now I think nothing of going up in a balloon as long as I know the balloon I am going to ride. The worst of it is to get started. The inflating of the bag is what makes me nervous, especially on windy days. But once under way I forget all about being nervous or feeling tired. I concentrate all my thoughts on my work. I dismiss all suspicion of danger. I watch every rope, see that the parachute is in readiness and when I am up high enough I drop. When I land I study the ground as far as possible and usually I come out safe.

'Adventures? We all have them and some are exciting enough for any ordinary use. Of the 150 times that I have ridden a balloon my closest call was at Vicksburg, Miss., a year ago last December. You see I can't swim. I had gone up believing that I was going to go away from the river, but instead I struck a current of air that carried the balloon over what is known as Centennial Lake. I dropped right into the water and there I was helpless. My parachute soon began to get so wet that the canvas would not hold me up. The people on shore saw me and were rowing toward me as fast as they could, but the question was whether I would hold out long enough. I had just about given out when the boat arrived and I was picked up. It was a close call and the next day I was unable to ride the balloon.

'That same summer I had another narrow escape. It was over in Paris, Ohio. The weather was perfect and I was slowly coming down with my parachute in a railroad yard. As I looked about I saw two trains coming toward each other, and as nearly as I could reckon they would meet about the place I was going to land. You know you can't guide a parachute and I was therefore utterly helpless. Well, I landed right between two trains. It looked for a moment as if I was going to be cut up, but just then the engineers saw me and they stopped their trains. They came down from their cabs and helped me roll up my parachute, which was dangling across the tracks. When that had been done they started their trains and I returned to the fair grounds.

'I had another adventure at Piqua, Ohio which might have cost me my life had I lost my nerve and head. That was last year. There was an awful jam at the park from which I was going up, and the old country people were continually meddling with my ropes. I thought everything was all right and sat in my trapeze when the balloon went up. I intended to do a side leap with the parachute. In that act the parachute is only tied to the balloon with a cord which breaks with the weight of the aeronaut's body when the drop is made. As I soared up I noticed that the farmers had broken the string and my parachute



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MRS. GILHULA.

On the advice of friends she commenced taking Burdock Blood Bitters. The results that followed were little short of marvellous. Her strength and vigor returned and in a short time she was completely cured. Mrs. Gilhula is to-day in the full enjoyment of good health, and in all these years there has not been the slightest return of the trouble.

Here is the letter Mrs. Gilhula wrote at the time of her cure:

"About four years ago I was taken sick with stomach trouble and consulted several of the leading physicians here, all of whom pronounced the disease to be cancer of the stomach of an incurable nature, and told me that it was hardly to be expected that I could live long. Afterward the two doctors who were attending me gave me up to die."

"By the advice of some of my friends, who knew of the virtues of Burdock Blood Bitters, I was induced to try it, and I am now happy to say that after using part of the first bottle I felt so much better I was able to get up. I am thankful to state that I am completely cured of the disease by the use of B.B.B., although it had baffled the doctors for a long time. I am firmly convinced that Burdock Blood Bitters saved my life."

Here is the letter received from her a short time ago:

"I am still in good health. I thank Burdock Blood Bitters for saving my life twelve years ago, and highly recommend it to other sufferers from stomach troubles of any kind." ELIZABETH GILHULA.

lay on the ground. There were only two things to do. One was to stay with the balloon until it came down; the other was to jump. The balloon had already gone up nearly a hundred feet. It would be dangerous to leap, so I stayed with it. I went up about 3,000 feet and then opened the valve. We came down pretty fast, but I had had time to collect myself and was equal for my new ride. I kept cool and landed safe. Had I lost my nerve and jumped when the parachute was gone I would not be here to tell about it.

'I had another exciting time in Cincinnati a year ago. I was making an ascension and everything seemed to be going safely when I suddenly noticed a big hole in the balloon. Before I could prepare myself to leap the balloon burst, and for a second or two I was undecided just what to do. I had heard before of the danger of a bursting balloon and remembered how several aeronauts in recent years had been hurt by such accidents. I resolved not to duplicate that trick, and although my parachute was already beginning to fall from the balloon, I jumped. I must have fallen 800 feet before the parachute spread out. When once the chute was in working order I looked up to see what had become of my balloon. I saw that I had jumped none too soon, for it was now only a big soaring sheet which was fast falling to the ground. Had I delayed leaping with the parachute I should have lost my life. It is another example which shows that an aeronaut must keep cool, no matter what the danger.

'I have had many other adventures, in fact every other trip or two involves some sort of excitement. I have hung in tree tops for half an hour at a time, have fallen in fields of cactus in Texas, and have landed on the roofs of houses. I have bumped up against chimneys and barbed wire fences, but the worst injury I ever received was a sprained knee. I usually manage to come down on my feet, and have lately developed the act of breaking the fall by dropping on my knees and toes at about the same time. That breaks the fall considerably, and one is in less danger of being hurt. All told, I have been lucky; but there is no telling when you meet your day. Victoria met hers. She was the most nervy woman I ever knew. She feared nothing. Why, one day in Detroit I saw her make a decent when she was so lame that she could not walk without crutches. She hobbled to the trapeze and, as the balloon went up, she held on and left her crutches behind. Of course she hurt herself when she came down. But she was under contract to ride the balloon that day, and Victoria never backed out. She was too nervy. A year after she made that ride she was killed in St. Louis. Her sister lost her nerve and retired. I am still in the business and don't intend to quit just yet.

'New novelties are constantly being invented in the balloon business, just like everything else. In order to make money at the business nowadays we must be up to date. You see, there are so many aeronauts nowadays. Take the little town of Sturgis, Mich. Why, over there alone there are fifty nine. Every other person you meet on the street is an aeronaut. School boys go up in a balloon for a quarter in that place. That town has done more to hurt our business than all the others in the country. The competition there is so sharp that they cut prices, and that hurts the business. But they can't introduce the novelties; only experts can do that. It is not every aeronaut who can shoot himself out of a cannon in midair. Nor will every balloonist dare to make a night ride and shoot himself out of a cannon in midair. Nor will every balloonist dare to make a night ride and shoot off fireworks as he goes along. That is terribly dangerous be-

cause you are apt to fire your balloon without knowing it. Then, again, you don't know where you will land with your parachute. I have done all these, but I can't say that I am fond of night rides. A day ride is good enough for me; but, of course, I will do it at night if they pay me well enough for it. In fact, it is the money we are all after. In that respect our business is the same as any other. The business man schemes for the dollar, we court fate and danger for it. It's a great world, I tell you.

ELI KING'S TAME TOAD.

A Marvellous Maine Creature Which Came to an Untimely End.

Everybody who lives in New Acadia, Maine has heard Eli King tell the story about his remarkable tame toad and the wonderful feats of strength which the toad had performed while it was a guest under Eli's bark covered roof. No one knows the exact facts in the case, because the story was magnified after Eli went away from home. Down at St. Leonard's and Grand Falls the toad was no bigger than a bushel basket or a small washtub, while around Modawaska it was the size of a cart body and could swallow a veal calf at one sitting without winking more than one eye at a time. Of course, Eli's limited linguistic talents tended to mystify his hearers and to magnify the toad, so that many of his auditors carried away exaggerated ideas that were not conveyed in the conversation, but as the only language Eli is capable of using is made up from Cannuck-er French, Algonquin patois and slangy English picked up in lumber camps, it does not follow that he intended to tell an untruth, though no professional liar could obtain more satisfactory results than Eli when he started to give the history of 'le gros crapaud.'

Eli came home from the drive twelve years ago last spring, bringing a glass jar filled with water in which were a hundred or more dark, shiny, globules hitched together with a glutinous string. He said he had found them at the edge of a bog near Portage lake, and was taking them to his little girl, Toine, who would wear them around her neck for beads. Before he could put his good intentions into practice the beads had turned into polywogs inside the jar. The orphan toads soon put out legs and were able to scamper away to the garden. There was one fat and lazy tadpole that refused to imitate its more active kindred, retaining its tail and gills and feeding on what the King family gave out until it was a year old, by which time it weighed two pounds and could swallow pieces of meat the size of a hen's egg. The second summer it put out a pair of sturdy hind legs, but held on to its tail and gills until the third season, when it weighed six pounds and was the biggest kind of a toad ever seen in Maine.

The toad lived in the kitchen garden the first year after it became an adult, digging a hole in the compost hedge and catching and eating all the insects and birds that came within range of its tongue. After a time insects grew scarce and the toad took up the habit of catching the chickens as they ran about the grounds, varying its diet once by devouring a litter of small kittens that had been left unguarded. When the mother cat came along and objected to the sacrifice of her offspring the toad put out its tongue and gathered the parent to a family reunion of cats which was assembling inside its skin.

One day when Eli's toad was strolling about the lawn trying to stalk a flock of geese it discovered a twenty foot section of garden hose, believing no doubt that it had discovered a large edible snake. The rubber and linen coatings of the hose proved to be very hearty food for a stomach accustomed to cats and poultry. The toad was taken ill and fell away from 36 pounds in August to less than 20 pounds when it went into winter quarters in October.

The following spring Eli's toad came out fat and sleek. Its back was completely covered with great green warts, causing strangers to mistake the batrachian for a giant hubbard squash. Three or four farmers who passed by when the toad was sitting out on the piazza in the sun hauled up their horses and wanted Eli to send them some seed from his gigantic squash. As the year advanced and the onions came up in the garden Eli's children made a small harrow from millwood and forty penny spikes and equipping Eli's toad with collar and harness employed it to drag a cultivator between the garden rows. Eli says the story that he used the toad to rake his hay is an unqualified falsehood. He tried it one day, but the toad made such long leaps that it broke all the teeth out of his horse's mouth, so he had to give up the idea. One week when head winds prevailed on Hine's pond and he had a lot of logs to get down to the small mill he employed his toad as a towboat with good results. By standing up on his raft and driving the sharp hook of his pick pole into the toad's back, he was able to get 2,000 feet of logs to the mill every day.

The number of cunning and amusing tricks which Eli's pet was capable of performing made it the pride and admiration of two countries. On the annual field day when all the people of Van Buren turned out to do honor to St. Francis Xavier Eli entered his toad for several events, winning the running broad jump and the standing high jump easily and breaking the Maine and New Brunswick records at both, and distancing a field of sixteen skilled competitors in the great handicap hurdle race. In the evening while a dance was in progress in 'Phonse Violette's' barn the defeated athletes took Eli and his toad to the hotel and gave them a grand banquet. The toad drank unlimited rum punch and cocktails, and emptied a whole case of lager beer, swallowing the bottles without stopping to remove the patient airtight nozzles. This precaution saved the toad from getting intoxicated and enabled it to conduct Eli to his home in honor but it brought on a severe fit of indigestion and ultimately led to the premature death of 'legros crapaud.'

After it had grown so large that it had to squeeze itself between the door jams in order to enter the house the toad could no longer gather insects enough to sustain life. The Kings saved up potato parings, mouldy bread and other household waste until it filled a coal hod and then dumped the mixture down the toad's throat. One hodfull a day was enough, provided it contained a due amount of solids. If the food was mostly dishwater and slops the toad would come around later and call for more. In case his wants were not supplied he would clean off the supper table, leaving nothing but the dishes about the cloth.

About the time the weather was getting cold enough to start a coal fire in the parlor stove the toad showed signs of failing having symptoms of angina pectoris, which were no doubt brought by the two dozen bottles of beer that still remained in storage in his stomach. The Kings had started a coal fire on Sunday afternoon for the purpose of cheering up a young man who was coming to call on the young woman of the family in the evening. After he had gone Mrs. King told her husband to shake down the stove and put on a hod of coal to keep the fire until morning.

Sometime during the evening the young woman had invited the toad into the parlor in order to display its peculiar talents to her visitor. After she had seen the young man to the door and talked with him about the weather for half an hour the toad chattered and ran up to bed without thinking of the toad. Eli entering the parlor in the dark and mistaking the red morocco lining of the toad's open mouth for the glowing coals inside the stove, poured a half bushel of coal down the toad's throat. Before they could hitch a tackle to the toad's legs and hoist it up so the coal would out the family pet had succumbed to a sudden fit of indigestion.

All the honors that a poor but sorrowing family could bestow upon one who had been deeply loved was given to the pet toad. It was buried in a warm loamy grave upon a sunny hillside. Families came from twenty miles around to witness the burial. The grave was banked deeply with golden-rod and wild aster blossoms. After the funeral Eli went home and gave himself up to despair. He brought two pigs and put them into a pen, feeding them from the coal hod in a vain hope of forgetting the lost toad. For two years his grief grew upon him. His wife had captured two thirty toads and was still feeding them with the intention of weaning Eli from his great sorrow. He worked little, spending most of his time near the toad's grave. One day in midsummer, three years after the funeral he went out and did not return to dinner or supper. Mrs. King and Poinette lighted a lantern and went to look him up. As they approached the grave they heard Eli singing an old ballad about love and liquor and pretty girls. They knew from the tone of his voice that he was far gone in liquor. A nearer view revealed Eli lying by the open grave drinking a bottle of beer.

'Majee!' cried he in ecstasy. 'Ah'm feel bad no more. Ze fool been beam dig out le gros crapaud, but heem braw all ze beer. Ah'm drink eet, me. Sacre! Ah'm was glad le gros crapaud was dead.'

While he was trying to stand on his head to give vent to his great joy the two women caught him and dashed him home.

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