

FIRST

By

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FIRST

On screen legend: 1896 DAYTON

INT BEDROOM - DAY

Two severe looking young men. WIL ("WIL") WRIGHT, early thirties and his younger brother ORVILLE ("ORV") WRIGHT, late twenties.

A bedroom out of the Adams Family. Wil lies in bed, above him hang the skeletons of bats and birds. Ancient books are everywhere. Strange half built kites cover the room.

Orv sits on a chair by the bed. Wil looks weak.

Close on a newspaper photograph of aviation pioneer Otto Lilienthal, the original "Batman". Wil reads aloud.

WIL

Lilienthal broke his neck. Last words... "Sacrifices must be made"

ORV

How could this happen, Wil?

WIL

Don't know, something wrong with his glider.

Orv stands up and checks out a model Wil has built of Lilienthal's glider.

ORV

You think you can figure it out?

WIL

Got to.

ORV

Your fix idea on the bike chain worked. Won that race.

WIL

That makes me feel good.

Wil shakes Orv's hand.

CUT TO:

EVENING

Wil, still in bed, writes a letter.

WIL (V.O.)

I feel confident that one day man will fly. I wish to obtain such papers as the Smithsonian Institution has on this subject. I am an enthusiast, but not a crank or lunatic. Having a heart condition which limits my physical capabilities, you can be assured I will not destroy myself in some ill-conceived machine. I only wish to avail myself to all that is known in hopes that I may make a small contribution to the future inventor who will attain success.

We see Wil address the envelope to The Smithsonian Institution, Washington DC.

CUT TO:

EXT. SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION - DAY

An imposing red brick castle in Washington DC.

INT. SMITHSONIAN MAILROOM - DAY

A room right out of "Citizen Kane". A clerk empties a new mailbag onto a pile, sending letters sliding to the floor.

EXT. DUNES KITTY HAWK - DAY

On screen legend: KITTY HAWK, 1901

Close on the freckled face of a Carolina boy, TOMMY TATE. He stares upwards with eyes full of wonder.

Wider. Wil lies across the lower wing of a twenty foot long glider restrained by two long ropes.

Orv and CAPTAIN TATE, Tommy's father, hold the ropes that tether the glider twenty feet off the ground.

Wil's intense eyes concentrate on the wind, the wings, and how the glider reacts.

Behind them stretches an endless expanse of rolling sand dunes interrupted only by their small tent and a few scrub oaks bent over by the relentless sea breeze.

Wil's airborne POV: over the far side of the dune lies the sea. A mile on, a weathered house sits alone by the shore, Captain Tate's home and life saving station in Kill Devil Hills.

Three miles beyond that he can begin to make out the wooden buildings of the small town of Kitty Hawk.

TOMMY

How high would he go if we cut
him lose?

Before Orv can answer the boy, Wil yells out.

WIL

Haul me in.

They carefully start to pull in the ropes.

The glider settles to the sand. Wil rolls off and over into the sand. He looks up at the moon.

WIL (CONT'D)

Feels right, wind's perfect.

A coin spins across the sky.

ORV

Heads.

Orv catches it before his brother can grab it first.

ORV (CONT'D)

Heads it is! I guess today's the
day.

WIL

Not for you.

ORV
I got dressed up for this.

Orv points to their box camera on a tripod nearby.

WIL
So did I.

ORV
(Disdainfully)
Hardly.

WIL
We're not going to argue. Grab
that wing tip before the wind
changes.

ORV
I don't remember agreeing not to
argue.

WIL
I do... if you would Captain, the
other wing.

Wil positions the glider into the wind, pulls the ropes off
the wings, climbs back on board and takes the control: a
stick connected by a lever to the forward elevators.

He positions his hips between two pulleys that bend the
wings to maintain level.

WIL (CONT'D)
One thing...

Tommy and Captain Tate, fascinated, watch Wil's every move.

WIL (CONT'D)
Promise me you won't pursue this
after...

ORV
You're not getting out of it that
easy.

TOMMY
If you die, can I have your
bicycle, Mr. Wright?

Captain Tate restrains his opportunistic son.

WIL

Orv has first dibs on all my stuff. You'll have to negotiate with him.

Wil looks over at Orv and screws his locomotive engineer's hat backwards.

CUT TO:

"WING TIP" SHOES

Digging hard into the sand. Pounding legs.

Orv and Captain Tate running flat out. They hold opposite ends of the fragile wings.

The white sateen fabric stretched tight over the bent spruce spars reflects the late afternoon sunlight. Brass wires glint like gold.

Wil's dark suit pants and vest stand out sharply against the sky.

As the slope of the dune drops away, his wing-men heave Wil and his glider into the sky with a rush.

The wind and music soar. Wil lifts the elevator, gently aiming up and away. His strong profile looks even more hawk-like in this position.

For a second the craft seems motionless, hanging in the balance. The entire craft vibrates with the updraft, stirring to life.

Finally, the wind embraces the glider, sending it skywards. Wil screams out.

WIL

Forward rudder, good -- maybe too good.

Orv runs down the dune, chasing after his airborne brother.

Wil's face is a mask of concentration, his eyes squint into the reflected glare of the sun off the endless dunes.

The glider wings straight out for a distance of two hundred feet, clearing another dune.

The view explodes as the hill drops away to reveal another great expanse of sand.

Tommy gallops his marsh pony beneath the glider and up the dune. Their labrador life saving dog chases the shadow of the craft and barks.

A flock of startled gulls take wing.

ORV
Thirty feet! Still level...

Wil casts a quick glance down at his earthbound brother beneath him.

Orv gives Captain Tate the signal to snap a photograph.

Wil soars out over the sand for another hundred feet before the rising thermals hit the glider, lifting her nose too high. Wil tries to correct using his elevator.

He overcorrects, starting a harrowing series of roller coaster ups and downs. Each overcorrection leading to another larger and more dangerous one than before.

Orv holds his breath.

Wil rushes towards the sand with the speed of a diving kite. He pulls out just in time and climbs back up, only to find he has overcompensated again.

WIL
I'm losing her! Control's all
over the place!

The glider's upturned nose catches the wind flat on it's undersurface. With no wind rushing over the wings, she stalls, falling away tail first.

The forward elevators slow the fall as the glider slips thirty feet towards the sand and pancakes in.

Wil braces for impact as he plows into the sand. He doesn't move.

Orv charges in, sand flying. With trembling hands, he rolls his brother over. Wil's eyes are shut. Orv is in agony.

ORV
Wil!

Wil can't hold it any longer. His death mask gives way to a wicked grin. He spits out a mouthful of sand.

WIL

Been to heaven brother.

Wil bears his startled brother. They roll down the dune, wrestling like boys.

ORV

Hey! You're getting dirt on my shirt.

Orv brushes off his perfectly starched white shirt.

WIL

What are you talking about?
There's nothing in every
direction but sand for twenty
miles. I've seen it.

CAPTAIN TATE

She just needs some feathers is
all.

Tommy and Captain Tate go after the glider as the wind starts to blow her away.

WIL

It's the devil controlling her -
that rig in front saved my neck.

ORV

My turn.

WIL

Nope. I promised Pop I wouldn't
let you kill yourself.

ORV

I promised Sis I'd do the same
for you. So?

WIL

A promise to Dad is a lot more
serious -- no comparison.

ORV

Wil c'mon, your neck's in one
piece.

Wil starts to drag the busted glider back up the dune.

WIL
We can fix this tonight.

ORV
Now it's we?

WIL
Want to adjust that forward
elevator. Sooner we gain
control, the sooner you go up.

ORV
Give it here -- I'll take it.

WIL
I feel fine Orv, never better.

They each grab a hold of a wing tip and trudge up the dune,
dragging the glider like a wounded pterodactyl.

INT. WRIGHT'S TENT - NIGHT - STORM

The Hatteras light house beacon sweeps over Kill Devil
Hills.

A hurricane oil lamp flickers. A bicycle lies nearby, under
one of the pair of folding cots.

Their tent is spartan, nothing inside but tools and a few
tins of food. Some things are jury-rigged together,
Robinson Crusoe-style. Orv did manage to bring along his
guitar.

Outside, the tempestuous wind HOWLS. An Outer Banks gale is
building.

Orv sits in the shed next door with the glider, busy
bracing the glider's cracked strut.

Wil has lost himself in writing a letter to his mentor,
Octave Chanute.

Both brothers now wear work clothes, early Levi's and
collarless shirts, leather and canvas work vests.

The sound of the driving rain splattering on the tent adds
to the storm but Wil is oblivious. The tent leaks and he
barely notices.

WIL (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Dear Professor Chanute,
I wouldn't have found Kitty Hawk
if you hadn't steered me to the
Carolinas. The winds are strong
but steady and her sand
forgiving. As you predicted, my
obsession with flight has
increased in severity. I worry it
will soon cost me an increased
amount of money, if not my life.

THUNDER. Majestic thunderheads boil against the darkening
skies. Out of the tent flap, Wil momentarily watches a lone
gull trying to find shelter from the storm.

Wil's Voice Over continues to play over the storm.

WIL (V.O.) (CONT'D)

My motivation remains purely
scientific, I seek neither fame
nor fortune. The task is to link
a thousand correct assumptions
but I'm convinced the path to the
future lies in control -- of the
machine and of one's emotions
while airborne.

CUT TO:

EXT. INDIANA LAKESHORE - DAY

The remote shore of Lake Michigan. The lake dunes are
softer than Kitty Hawk's and covered with rich greenery.
There are no houses in sight.

A single, large tent, upscale compared to the Wright's.
Inside are posh camping chairs and luxury steamer trunks.
Oriental carpets lie on the sand. Matched wolf hounds sit
on either side of the tent's entrance.

Photographers and press men mill around outside. This is
the big leagues.

OCTAVE CHANUTE, famous American Railroad engineer, born in
France, reads Wil's letter. The white-haired professor is
still dashing in spite of his years.

AUGUSTUS HERRING, his hired associate, stands nearby, wearing jodhpurs and riding boots. An attractive man, around forty years old. A southern blue blood.

HERRING

Another letter from the Dayton boys?

CHANUTE

Mr. Wright reports from somewhere called Kitty Hawk -- their glider has performed better than expected.

HERRING

You believe him?

CHANUTE

Perhaps he exaggerates. I always did. He's young, inexperienced.

HERRING

You left out uneducated, naive and reckless.

CHANUTE

Be that as it may, he may come up with something. "One little contribution", he says. Kitty Hawk does seem a good find.

GEORGE SPRATT, MD, thirty, their medical assistant and fellow "Aeronaut," helps Herring start to unveil his flying machine with three wings. This is the "AEROGLIDER KATYDID".

HERRING

(disdainfully)

"Mechanical controls..."
What a ridiculous concept.

CHANUTE

Dr. Spratt if you would be so kind as to assist Herring in hauling the glider to the top of the dune. History beckons.

DR. SPRATT

Dayton is on your way to the Smithsonian, Professor Chanute.

Chanute nods in agreement.

HERRING

Every time one of those amateurs
breaks his damn neck with some
ill-conceived machine, it gives
the public the wrong perception --
sets us all back.

CUT TO:

EXT. #7 HAWTHORNE STREET - NIGHT

American Gothic. A handsome street in Dayton, wet from the rain.

Bicycles fight for the right-of-way among a handful of horse drawn carts and coaches along a tree-lined suburban street. The tall elms overhead turn the street into a tunnel.

INT. DINNING ROOM - NIGHT

The Wright family sits around a dining room table covered with the remains of dinner.

A conversation with their esteemed guest, Professor Chanute, is in progress.

The room feels heavy and wooden, with Craftsman and Mission style furnishings. Books line the ample shelf space.

MILTON WRIGHT, early 70s, sits at the head of the table, looking stern as Moses in his high starched collar and high-backed chair.

KATE WRIGHT, an attractive young college woman, sits to his left. She and her father look on as the brothers talk to Chanute.

A cardboard box from a bicycle tire inner tube sits on the table. Next to it, the Wright's plans for a new glider, and Lilienthal's table of figures on various wings shapes.

ORV

Wil's idea. I wish I had thought
of it.

WIL

(to Chanute)

You see, with a twist, one side
goes up and the other down.

ORV
Levels the wings.

Wil, excited, demonstrates flexing the long narrow box in opposite directions by its ends, creating a helical twist.

WIL
Controlling the leading edge, I
can alter the air flow just like
a bird's wing.

CHANUTE
But the machine must respond
automatically! Lilienthal
understood that.

Worried looks are exchanged.

WIL
I fully acknowledge the many
brilliant men that went before us
Professor, but that doesn't mean
they were right.

Milton and Kate hang on Chanute's every word.

ORV
Means they're dead.

CHANUTE
Even if your so called "manual
controls" give the illusion of
responding, you will be
completely overwhelmed by the
sensations of soaring.

Chanute looks at the brother's plans. Simple, clear
drawings on brown wrapping paper.

CHANUTE (CONT'D)
Not to mention this wing shape
contradicts his figures.

WIL
I can only trust my life to my
own calculations.

ORV
We're going to show the world how
to fly with our next glider.

MILTON
(to Wil)
We are, are we?

ORV
Yes, we are.

MILTON
I'll pray we all live to see it.
Milton looks to Orv and then back to Wil.

KATE
I'll get the coffee started. Wil,
you want to give me a hand?
Kate motions Wil to follow her into kitchen. Wil's mind is
still in the clouds.

KATE (CONT'D)
(clearing her throat)
Wil? Hello?

WIL
(catching on)
Please excuse me.
Wil joins Kate in the kitchen.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Kate and Wil, trying to regroup.

KATE
He thinks you're getting ahead of
yourselves.

WIL
Ahead of him, you mean... hope he
doesn't take my idea.

KATE
Gentleman from Washington with
PHDs, unlimited funding,
positions of great
responsibility... do not need
your ideas, Wil.

WIL
I don't think he even understands
it, actually.

KATE

Please, the man engineered the
transcontinental railroad!

WIL

True, last century.

KATE

I wouldn't worry about anyone
stealing your ideas, sounds like
you can't give them away.

WIL

Perhaps we've just never had
anything they wanted before.

INT. DINNING ROOM - NIGHT

Milton and Orv are getting more bad news back in the dining
room.

CHANUTE

If there is a dominant tyrannical
thought, it is the conception
that the problem of flight can be
solved. Once this idea invades
the brain, it possesses it
exclusively. It is then a
haunting thought, a walking
nightmare, impossible to cast
off.

MILTON

But your own efforts have proven
such an inspiration.

CHANUTE

Thank you. My esteemed colleagues
and I are trying to determine if
a flying machine can be built, in
no way should this be
misconstrued by overzealous
amateurs as evidence that it is
possible.

ORV

So you see no chance at all...?

CHANUTE

You and your brother may make
your one small contribution to
science... one day, perhaps.
With all due respect, Mr. Wright,
why should two bicycle mechanics
succeed where so many great minds
have failed? Alexander Graham
Bell, Thomas Edison, Otto
Lilienthal, the list is endless,
all the way back to Leonardo.

(holds up the cardboard
box)

An inner tube box... you might as
well ask the hand of God to hold
you up.

MILTON

Man has always been held up by
the hand of God, Professor, this
seems merely a question of
height.

ORV

Excuse me for a second.
Apparently Wil can't engineer the
coffee, either.

Orv goes out in the kitchen.

MILTON

I know my sons. Nothing will
keep them from testing their
ideas.

They hear the brothers in the kitchen arguing.

CHANUTE

Perhaps my protege, Professor
Herring, will talk sense into
them. He's assisted by my medical
man in case of emergencies.

MILTON

I'm not sure if that makes me
feel better or worse, but thank
you.

EXT. WRIGHT HOUSE - NIGHT

Chanute gets in his carriage. Wil and Kate see him off, standing under a gas street light.

CHANUTE

The dinner was as good as
anything Paris has to offer
Katherine.

KATE

You're too kind, Professor.
(in French, subtitles)
[Perhaps, one day you'll show me
Paris.]

CHANUTE

(In French, subtitles)
[It would be my pleasure,
Katherine.]

Wil keeps his gaze fixed on Chanute disappearing down the wet street and into the misty night.

From the foyer, Milton and Orv watch through the window.

Wil holds the door for Kate.

MILTON

Your mentor suggests that on your
return to Kitty Hawk you consider
flying his glider -- the one with
automatic controls.

WIL

This is how they keep you down.
If their bad math doesn't kill
you, their machines will.

KATE

(Starstruck)
Paris.

WIL

(to Milton)
I invited him for you -- wanted
you to know this was real and I
wasn't a lunatic...

MILTON

Never thought you were. I'm
Honored that he came.

WIL

I can't back off now.

MILTON

Everyone has their own idea of
the future, Wil. I'm no expert,
but I do know a man has to fight
for control of his own life... no
matter where he is or what he
does. Who do you think taught
you that?

WIL

You've been saying that my whole
life.

MILTON

Your mother would have said the
same thing

WIL

She did. I can't care too much
what Chanute thinks anymore.

MILTON

If you show Washington up, those
people will not make any effort
to control their emotions. They
will come after you with
everything they've got.

WIL

They'll change their minds when
they see it.

(back to Orv)

C'mon, got an idea.

Wil and Orv head to the shop. Kate is left with her father.

MILTON

I shouldn't complain, all this
certainly has given him something
to live for again. I'm glad to
see it.

KATE

If you're not going to worry then
I won't either.

MILTON

Scares the crap out of me --
pardon my French.

Kate is taken aback.

KATE

They'll look out for each other.

MILTON

That's always been my plan.

INT WRIGHT BROTHERS' CYCLE WORKSHOP - NIGHT

Wil enters and looks at the bicycle wheels all around them.

Steam punk motif. Beautiful cast iron machines fill the space.

ORV

Are we going wheeling or winging?

Orv fires up the lone home-made, one cylinder MOTOR.

The leather drive belt skips into motion, driving the overhead line shaft that runs the length of the shop.

We follow the spinning axle as it puts other drive belts into motion, powering up drill presses, band saws, and lathes that all spring into action, turning, spinning, sawing. Then back to Wil.

WIL

Let's wing it.

Smiling, Orv sets to work. Wils never let him down.

A wall of wing sketches and model wings crafted out of metal.

Wil thinks, sketches, and measures. Orv leaves no gap between thought and action, he works quickly and assuredly.

The brothers throw tools back and forth, barely needing to look up to catch them as they design new wings.

Wil tacks a new wing sketch on the wall.

Orv turns the fan of their home made wind tunnel.

DISSOLVE TO:

LATER

Many more new sketches and charts of wind tunnel data now cover the walls.

Wil holds a small wing model in his hand. The brothers' technical debates are lightning fast and almost incomprehensible.

WIL

So as the wing tilts down the
center of lift... has to move.

Wil moves his finger across the bottom of the wing, back to front. Orv takes the model from him.

ORV

I'm not trying to change your
mind now, just thinking this
through, so don't interrupt. The
air moves slower as the angle of
attack becomes less so the center
of lift moves back, right? Aren't
we saying the same thing?

WIL

I hope not because what you just
said sounds wrong. Forward not
back!

Wil grabs the wing.

WIL (CONT'D)

I'll take your side... just so
you can hear how bad that idea
is. The center of pressure starts
near the leading edge in level
flight and moves back as the wing
tilts up... actually, when I say
it sounds pretty good.

The shop's motor thumps away. Kate pokes her head in, she can't understand a word.

ORV

That's what Lilienthal thought.

WIL

That's what worries me.

ORV

Me too. And I don't like it when
I hear you say it.

WIL

So you agree with me? Forward?

ORV

When the angle of attack is up or
down?

WIL

Give me that wing!

Kate enters as Wil puts the scale model into their wind
tunnel and turns on the FAN.

KATE

I can't listen to you two scrap
anymore.

WIL

Just shop talk.

ORV

It's called "the creative
process".

KATE

Call it what you want, it doesn't
make it any easier to listen to!
Have you been up all night?

WIL

Don't know.

KATE

Get out of here, both of you.
I'll take care of the shop.

The powered drill presses and lathes are all running at
full tilt. Kate turns off the motor that drives them all.

The little model wing slowly stops flying in the
windtunnel.

Kate watches her brothers continue to argue, moving their
hands like wings as they leave.

EXT. POTOMAC RIVER, WASHINGTON - DAY

We follow the flight of a very strange double-winged steam powered five feet long model as it wings its way across the Potomac. It resembles a huge insect.

Both sides of the shoreline are vistas of uninterrupted wood line.

EXT. HOUSEBOAT, POTOMAC RIVER - DAY

We pan back to see PROFESSOR SAMUEL PIERPONT LANGLEY, esteemed President of the Smithsonian Institution, a very excited white-haired and bearded patriarch in his late 60s.

Langley, holding a stopwatch, joins ALEXANDER GRAHAM BELL and Chanute. Bell, camera in hand, snaps off a photograph. The world famous inventor of the telephone is from Scotland and sounds it.

LANGLEY

Sixty seconds! You get it, Mr. Bell?

ALEXANDER GRAHAM BELL

(Thunderstruck)

She's still flying!

CHANUTE

(clapping)

Nothing less than a triumph!

Langley is practically strutting.

Behind Langley the full-size version of the flying model is being constructed - called the "Aerodrome", its almost 40 feet long.

Langley and his "Aerodrome" are atop their mighty houseboat. A floating wooden mansion four stories tall moored off shore.

Several small steam-driven launches service her like a mother ship.

The commotion and construction outside and inside the house boat is intense.

Two dozen men, all working at a furious pace, finishing work on a great launching ramp, using STEAM driven machine tools.

CUT TO:

INT. WRIGHT BROTHERS' BICYCLE WORKSHOP - DAY

The brothers pack up the pieces of their new glider in several crates.

ORV

Promising Dad you'll keep me in
one piece is good for you.
You'll never let me die if it
means it would prove you wrong
about anything.

WIL

If we can't control her now,
we've got no one to blame but
ourselves.

Wil drives the last nail home. Orv writes "Kitty Hawk" on the crates.

EXT. DUNES KITTY HAWK - DAY

Cloudy, cold and remote. A sense of almost limitless, desolate, natural beauty.

The empty crates sit in the sand. Tommy watches from the dunes atop his marsh pony, its wild mane blown back by the stiff ocean breeze.

The wind is so strong and steady, Orv and Captain Tate don't have to run to launch the glider. They let go and the craft hangs in mid-air, held steady by the rushing wind's invisible hand.

Wil, atop his machine, feels her wanting to fly.

Orv looks up at his brother's face, hovering ten feet above his. No cameras this time, just work clothes.

ORV

(elated)

How amazing is this?

Wil works the stick, raising her up and down, testing the new elevators and new fixed vertical tail rudder. They both work like a charm.

ORV (CONT'D)

She's all yours.

Wil lowers the nose and dives down the face of the huge dune with a sudden rush, soaring out and over the heads of Orv and Tommy.

ORV (CONT'D)

(whispering)

Make her turn, Wil.

Wil glides out about a hundred feet then starts to bank the glider over into the onshore crosswinds.

WIL

Banking, now!

One wing drops, the other reaches high, aiming at the clouds. Orv can't help but lean, pretending he's up there too.

Wil angles tighter, but something is clearly wrong. Spiraling in, Wil tries to control the craft, but she slips and slides into an ever tightening spiral... a death spiral.

The glider augers hard into the sand. Wil tumbles out across the dunes like a rag doll.

Orv sprints to the crash site, but before he arrives, Wil is already standing, shaking himself off. He spits out a mouthful of sand.

WIL (CONT'D)

I want to go again. Right away!
She turns alright but once she
starts she won't stop.

Wil, his shirt and pants torn, his leg gashed and bleeding, is obviously high on adrenaline.

ORV

She's all torn up, Wil, and so
are you.

WIL

Right away, I said!

Wil trudges up the steep slope of the dune. With Orv's help, they carry the glider up the dune.

WIL AIRBORNE

The broken elevators lashed and rewired. Wil turns in the other direction. Another fierce tailspin.

Orv, grimacing, watches him crash again.

Wil, sitting in the sand, screws his cap on tighter.

WIL (CONT'D)
Somethings wrong, radically
wrong.

ORV
How are you supposed to know
you're doing this right when no
one else has ever done this
before? Let me try.

WILL
You're not going anywhere till we
solve this problem.

ORV
I gave up girls for this!

WIL
If she ever works, you'll get
them back and then some.

ORV
Only if I'm doing some of the
flying...

CUT TO:

WIL

a few bloody makeshift bandages of wing fabric wrapped
around his battered limbs and forehead.

Another glide, another deadly spin. He slips forward and
plummets out of the spiraling glider. Free falling nearly
three stories to the ground.

Luckily, he lands on the steep angle of a dune and rolls, tumbling to a stop at the bottom.

Wil is down on his knees. His glider broken and plowed into the sand. Orv comes into his field of view, standing over him.

WIL

If we can't turn, this thing is
no better than riding a
cannonball. There must be
something we haven't thought of.

Orv casts his look skywards and starts cursing.

ORV

Tell us, Goddam it!

WIL

I'm thinking.

ORV

Not you, Wil.
(pointing skyward)
Them. Damn eagles.

WIL

Hate to tell you, brother, but
those aren't eagles. They're
turkey buzzards.

The buzzards don't say a word.

The brothers, defeated, manhandle their machine back to camp.

As they climb the steep dune, Wil rubs his chest over his heart. Orv notices and doesn't say a word.

INT. TENT - NIGHT - WIND

Orv, on the other side of the tent, watches his brother fly in his sleep. Feverishly working controls, banking into marvelous loops and turns. Wil almost rolls out of his cot. Orv heaves a cup at him.

WIL

Why'd you wake me up?

ORV

Can't watch you crash again.

Wil rolls back over. Outside the WIND is working herself into a frenzy.

ORV (CONT'D)

Listen to that. She must be mad at us.

WIL

Don't know why. When flying happens... in 50 years, it'll be because the government threw everything they had at it... not a couple of nobodies...

EXT. SHORELINE - STORMY NIGHT

Kill Devil Hills, a mile away. Captain Tate and a handful of LIFESAVING REGULARS fire small ROCKETS offshore towards three masts of a wreck. Only the masts are visible above the waterline.

A dozen or so survivors hang on. It is difficult to tell them from the tattered sails flapping in the GALE. The lines pulled by the rockets fall short, blown back by the driving wind.

WIL & ORV

awake. They spot a signal flare lighting the angry night sky.

TOMMY

On the beach holding a hurricane lantern.

Bodies and debris wash ashore with every pounding WAVE. SCREAMS of pain and panic carry over the whipping wind. Tommy's labrador retriever, a rope around his neck, swims along the beach looking for survivors.

Wil and Orv sprint over the dunes.

For a second, the lighthouse searchlight breaks through the storm and illuminates the beach.

Below them, the brothers see a few sailors hanging onto bits of wreckage, hatches, barrels, planks from a cargo of lumber.

Captain Tate barks orders to his brave crew.

Half dressed, the Wright brothers run into the surf-line.

Orv pulls a ship-wrecked sailor up onto the beach, turns and leaps back in the surf. In the darkness and rain, it's difficult to make out the extent of the disaster.

Wil swims to a half drowned sailor. He is shocked to discover the "sailor" is a YOUNG WOMAN passenger, drowning under the weight of her clothes.

Wil carries her up to the beach, where MRS. ADDIE TATE and tends to the survivors.

The young half-drowned woman won't let go of Wil's neck. She mutters something incoherently in French. Wil looks at her in awe. He slowly pries her arms off his neck. He just risked his life to save MADEMOISELLE MINERVA.

MINERVA

Is this America?

Wil nods, leaning in close to hear her over the gale. She speaks English with an accent.

MINERVA (CONT'D)

What year is it?

WIL

1902. I have to help the others...

MINERVA

Your name, tell me.

WIL

Wil Wright.

Wil finds her a blanket. He heads back for other survivors.

Minerva slumps over. She lies amongst the wind whipped dune grass wrapped in her blanket looking like a Michelangelo.

CUT TO:

EXT. KILL DEVIL HILLS LIFE SAVING STATION - DAY

The next morning, cloudy and calm. The storm has blown itself out.

A dozen shipwreck survivors, wrapped in blankets, mill about the porch of the life saving station. The station is a quaint two story house with an enclosed lookout tower and a boathouse with a ramp for launching lifeboats.

Tate's men bring in bodies on pony-drawn carts. Some survivors are curled up asleep on the porch, laying anywhere there is space. Others, sitting on the dunes, stare blankly out to sea. Some cry softly.

Addie Tate hands out mugs of steaming coffee and biscuits.

Wil hands over some tins. The labels read: coffee, tea, sugar.

WIL

We had some canned goods. Orv and I thought...

MRS. TATE

That's very kind of you.

CAPTAIN TATE (V.O.)

About a third of 'em were swept clear down to Kitty Hawk. The sea got the rest.

Captain Tate looks out at the sea, gnaws his pipe.

CAPTAIN TATE (CONT'D)

I wouldn't try and cross that ocean, no Sir. And I've been a sailor my whole life.

WIL

(overwhelmed)

How can God let this happen?

MRS. TATE

You listen to me, Wil Wright, God is Good, the devil is bad, hell is hot, and this I know but more than anything... The Lord meant man to live where he put him. Not on the ocean or up in the clouds.

CAPTAIN TATE

But then we wouldn't have a job, would we, Addie?

MRS. TATE

Maybe not, but we'd all live a lot longer. Are you listening, Mr. Wright?

WIL

Yes, Ma'am, every word.

Wil looks across the dunes.

His eyes find Minerva walking along the sand in her blanket.

EXT. BEACH - DAY

Wil standing next to his bike stares at her, then quickly turns away.

As Wil pedals away, Minerva notices him. She turns and starts walking tentatively in his direction.

Minerva reaches the top of a dune to see Wil biking away into the distance. The brothers' tent and shed are about 2 miles away in a flat between the dunes.

Minerva comes across the remnants of the Wright Brother's first glider, half buried in the sand. The torn wing cloth flaps in the wind like a wounded sea bird.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. CAMPSITE - DAY

Tommy has a ten pound drumfish slung over his shoulder.

Orv ties the last knot and hands a new kite to Tommy. The kite resembles a schooner, complete with sails and a rudder for a tail.

TOMMY

How'd you learn to make things?

ORV

Always took everything apart. Lucky for me, Wil likes to put stuff back together.

(looks at the fish)

Fair trade?

TOMMY

I'll say!

Tommy runs off, tossing the kite into the air. It soars gracefully skyward, its hinged rudder reacting to the wing.

Orv watches the kite turning into the wind on the end of its string.

Wil, now inside the tent, plays his harmonica. He can see the kite. Across the dune Minerva is watching too.

Her backlit hair unfurls in the wind across her beautiful face.

Wil watches her hair fan out. High above her the kite sails among the clouds.

Orv moves his hands almost as if he's up there, flying on that schooner. He watches it's rudder.

A flash of an idea crosses Orv's face.

Orv rushes back into the tent. Wil's not there.

ORV

Hey Wil! Wil! You know our fixed rudder... What if...

INT. SHED - DAY

Wil yells out from the shed.

WIL (O.C.)

It moves...

Orv sees that Wils got the same idea and he's already reworked the glider's rudder. He pulls a wire through a pulley and it changes the angle of the rudder just like the kite's rudder.

WIL (CONT'D)

Generates torque in the opposite direction.

ORV

Has to take care of the pressure buildup around the low wing.

WIL

This is going to work.

ORV

Kind of nice the way everyone
seems to have left these secrets
for us to discover, don't you
think?

WIL

Very.

Wil sees Minerva behind Orv, still walking the dunes,
wrapped in a shawl.

The gruff VOICE of Captain Tate interrupts.

CAPTAIN TATE

Mr. Wright, I got someone here to
see you. A Professor Herring.

To their amazement, Captain Tate has just accompanied
Chanute's associate to their remote campsite.

CAPTAIN TATE (CONT'D)

Brought him in from the mainland.
And this is Dr. Spratt.

Herring's glider is crated atop a wheeled cart pulled by
the marsh pony. Herring motions Dr. Spratt to start to
unload.

HERRING

I realize Professor Chanute had
some difficulty convincing you to
give up on your ideas. I felt if
you saw the genuine article, you
might finally realize that the
path you're on is as deadly as it
is useless.

WIL

(restraining himself)

Thank you for your concern, Mr.
Herring.

Herring struts around, wind gauge in hand, taking readings.
Wil and Orv are too shocked to say much of anything. He
certainly looks commanding.

HERRING

You've got yourselves quite the
spot here.

WIL
No easy discovery.

Orv moves close to Wil. A quick aside.

ORV
Maybe I should change.

WIL
Don't worry about it.
(back to Herring)
Professor Chanute suggested the
Carolinas -- but he never
actually came here.

Captain Tate and Tommy watch Spratt unloading his gear.

HERRING
Can these locals be trusted?
This machine is top secret.

ORV
I'd trust them with my life.

Captain Tate cracks a smile.

THE KATYDID

Herring's glider. We see it in all its glory. Inspired, but insane. A macabre bird-like triple winged glider right out of Jules Verne.

Dr. Spratt wears the contraption like a great bird-man. He strikes an action pose, cradled vertically in a leather harness suspended below an opening between the wings.

HERRING
The Katydid. As close as man has
ever come to nature's design of
the winged creatures of the
heavens.

Herring straps Dr. Spratt in.

HERRING (CONT'D)
You are looking at almost two
decades of advancement. I won't
overwhelm you now with the
complexities. Shall we lay claim
to the future, Dr. Spratt?

DR. SPRATT

This wind is blowing like all
hell.

HERRING

Nothing is as powerful as an idea
whose time has come.

Dr. Spratt runs, with the help of a shove from Herring,
down the dune and takes off... sort of.

Swinging his legs from side to side and fore and aft,
Spratt tries to adjust the center of gravity and maintain
his equilibrium.

HERRING (CONT'D)

Behold, flight!

The glider's wings look marginal in size and lift.

Spratt descends down the side of the steep dune almost a
hundred feet. The entire "glide" has been little more than
a insane free-fall.

Wil and Orv watch in disbelief from the shed thirty yards
away.

ORV

Looks like a toy!

Spratt impacts, flaying across the dune. The wind knocked
out of him. Herring turns to the brothers, proudly.

ORV (CONT'D)

Wil, am I missing something?

WIL

(smiling, calling out)
That's great, just great.
(to Orv)
Get our glider.
(to Herring)
...just great.

Herring takes out his tape measure. He pounds in a marker.

HERRING

Hard to find the words to
describe it, isn't it? The
movable tail is fitted with a
spring attachment that responds
automatically...

(MORE)

HERRING (CONT'D)
 I coined it "the regulator." In fact, I'm on my way to Washington to see Langley myself and advise him of our field work. Chanute is pressing our breakthroughs in Paris.

Spratt groans, still gasping for air. Captain Tate and Tommy rush to him.

Herring strides down the dune, stringing out his tape measure in the wind.

HERRING (CONT'D)
 Captain, don't stand there, make yourself useful. You can tell your grandchildren you carried Augustus Herring's Aeroglider, the Katydid. Careful!

CUT TO:

THE WRIGHT GLIDER

streamlined and beautiful in its pure functional simplicity, it's twice the wingspan of Herring's "toy". Orv stands by, ready to go. Wil is preparing for the moment of truth, double checking every detail.

Orv could argue, but he doesn't. He just helps Wil aboard.

Orv holds one wing tip. Captain Tate drops the Katydid and takes the other.

HERRING
 You've got to give this up. It's madness.

ORV
 (ignoring Herring)
 Elevators forward, wings level...

Orv and Captain Tate charge down the dune and heave Wil into the wind with all their might. The glider surges out into the sky. Wil works the elevator controls, moving her up and down.

Herring and Spratt are thunderstruck. This is the real deal.

Wil flies the glider out across the dunes a hundred feet, two hundred, three hundred.

And then to top it off, he slowly banks, rolling his hips to the high side and moving the rudder at the same time. Flying like an eagle, he completes the first turn in history.

ORV (CONT'D)

One-eight-zero!

Wil circles back and glides along the return leg, soaring towards the distant figure of Minerva atop the next dune.

The shadow of the craft rushes towards her at thirty MPH, dark on the white sand. She looks up into the sky as it passes over her upturned face.

Her hair blowing in the wind, she recognizes Wil and smiles. Wil looks down and sees that face. He circles back around her and heads for the campsite.

Wil levels out, sails back and over other dune and gently lands, swishing across the sand low and fast, coming to a skidding stop nearby.

Orv runs towards his brother, letting out a victory HOOT.

Herring's whole career has just flashed in front of his eyes. Dr. Spratt is floored.

SPRATT

You believe that?

HERRING

Those wings are wrong.

SPRATT

The size of it!

HERRING

And the controls are suicide.

SPRATT

Guess he just doesn't know it isn't supposed to work. We better not tell him.

Captain Tate and Tommy hold onto the glider as the brothers congratulate each other.

WIL

We each make our little contribution.

They both laugh. Herring looks at their glider, deeply confused.

Wil surprises Orv with a big bear hug, lifting his laughing brother right off the ground.

WIL (CONT'D)
You've got to try this!

CUT TO:

ORV'S PROFILE

in the wind. Just as handsome as Wil, but more boyish, less hawk-like. Atop the glider, he looks more comfortable than he should. Like he belonged there all along.

WIL (CONT'D)
(soft)
Godspeed, brother.

Orv glides across the sky.

Wil watches him, moving his body in sync.

Orv goes farther and higher than Wil.

CUT TO:

EXT. TENT - NIGHT

Orv is sitting with Tommy, looking up at the stars, playing his guitar and singing "Camptown Races." His victory song. Tommy is still holding his kite.

TOMMY
Is there really a race to see who
is going to show everybody how to
fly?

ORV
(smiling)
There is now.

TOMMY
That why Mr. Herring is drawing
pictures of your glider?

Orv is up like a shot.

INT. SHED - NIGHT

Herring is measuring and copying the brothers' design down in his journal. The door to the shed flies open. Herring thinks about hiding his notes and tape measure, but it's too late. They get in a tussle over the notebook.

Wil appears and pulls them apart.

HERRING

Your brother suddenly seems to
think my notebook belongs to him.

Orv doesn't want it to end like this, not with Herring in one piece.

WIL

Control... control.

HERRING

With some modifications this
machine has potential. Of course,
it needs refinement.

WIL

We all need refinement.

ORV

Some of us more than others.

HERRING

It's far from perfect.

WIL

Agreed. But you're smart enough
to know what we have
accomplished.

HERRING

Let's stop playing games.
(grabs his notebook back)
I want you to know I'm prepared
to explore it's potential with
you. For, shall we say, a half
interest.

ORV

You're too generous.

HERRING

My expertise in this area will
make all the difference.

WIL

To whom?

HERRING

To you! I may bring in an
investment from the Smithsonian,
or perhaps even the Department of
War. You do realize what that
would mean? Power! To do more
than glide you will need a motor.
The engine's the more difficult
problem.

WIL

Power's not going to help if you
can't fly. But I'm glad to hear
you're impressed.

HERRING

Seeing my Katydid obviously made
the difference.

Wil and Orv just about fall over.

ORV

How? By showing us how not to
build a flying machine?

HERRING

It was the automatic tailfin, my
"regulator," that resulted in
your success. Clearly.

ORV

We built that glider before you
even got here

HERRING

You don't expect anyone to
believe you? With Spratt as my
witness, Chanute and Langley
won't.

ORV

They better.

Orv moves towards Herring, but Wil steps in the middle.

WIL
Please give Professor Chanute our
best, Mr. Herring. I know you
will. Good night.

Herring storms out. Orv is livid. Wil looks like stone.

CUT TO:

EXT. DUNES KITTY HAWK - DAY

The next morning. Herring and Dr. Spratt, lead by the
Tates, walk back across the dunes headed for civilization.
The brothers watch them go from the top of the dune.

WIL
It must be awfully good, if
Herring wants it so bad.

ORV
Apparently when they approve of
something it becomes theirs.

WIL
They can't all be like him.

Wil chews a blade of dune grass and reflects.

WIL (CONT'D)
You remember that self righteous
pompous blowhard, the one who
took over Pop's ministry and then
embezzled all the church's
money...

ORV
And then got Dad thrown out for
catching him stealing?

WIL
Yeah, well, the Smithsonian is
called the "Cathedral of
Science".

ORV
Herring does remind me of that
theif.

WIL

Both of them smart as all hell.
Augustus Herring's New Jersey
Tech. Worked with Langley at the
Smithsonian, studied under
Alexander Graham Bell. PHD's in
engineering and physics.

ORV

We'll he just learned how to make
a flying machine from two bikers
who never graduated high school.

WIL

Must drive him crazy, but the
most important thing he learned
here today wasn't how to copy our
glider, or even how to fly it...

ORV

What, then?

WIL

He learned it was possible.
You've got to wonder how long a
man like that would continue
risking his life and career
without being sure of success.

ORV

As briefly as possible. At least
Lilienthal risked his own neck.

WIL

We better get to work on that
engine. I learned something else
today -- this world doesn't care
who started this, who breaks
their neck or who goes broke.

ORV

Why not?

WIL

Because finishing first is
everything.

The Wrights watch Herring's group as they disappear in the
distance. Tommy's flying airship kite brings up the rear.

Will looks over at Minerva haunting the dunes.

WIL (CONT'D)

Think I figured out who she is too.

ORV

Yeah, one of those french spies?

Wil chuckles.

WIL

Minerva is the name of the muse of machines... of industry.

Orv watches her too.

ORV

And a french spy.

WIL

Minerva is also the goddess of war, so maybe you're right.

CUT TO:

EXT. HOUSEBOAT, POTOMAC RIVER - DAY

Herring with Alexander Graham Bell on the roof of the houseboat. The "Aerodrome" sits on her launching mechanism, poised for greatness.

HERRING

I've drawn up some suggestions based on my successful field research.

ALEXANDER GRAHAM BELL

Has Chanute seen these?

HERRING

I think these are a little past our dear old Parisian friend... if you know what I mean?

ALEXANDER GRAHAM BELL

Go on.

HERRING

Notice the double strutted wing, and the aerodynamic position of the passenger.

(MORE)

HERRING (CONT'D)
 Forward elevators here and a
 movable rudder. Controlled
 gliding is possible

One look at these plans and it's clear Herring has ripped
 the Wrights off for all they're worth.

HERRING (CONT'D)
 It's revolutionary! Distances of
 almost a mile were covered in my
 prototype.

ALEXANDER GRAHAM BELL
 Where is your machine?

HERRING
 Lost in a storm, sorry to say.

ALEXANDER GRAHAM BELL
 Perhaps some tests should be
 financed.

Herring beams.

HERRING
 We each try to make our little
 contribution.

CUT TO:

EXT. FERRY BOAT - DAY

Wil and Orv are on Tate's ferryboat, the LOU WILLIS, back
 to Manteo. Minerva sits by the other rail, making the
 first leg of her long journey back to France. She's quietly
 sewing.

Wil sees Minerva looking his way. He gives her a tight
 lipped smile and doffs his denim cap.

WIL
 You can go first, Orv, I'm not
 stopping you this time.

Orv joins Minerva at the rail. Wil watches out of the
 corner of his eye.

With Orv's opening line, he's got her laughing. Wil knows
 Orv's a natural at two subjects, women and gliding.

ORV AND MINERVA

She stitches the snow-white fabric in her lap as she talks.
Her sewing bag sits nearby.

ORV

We're not as crazy as the Tates
say we are.

MINERVA

I adore crazy men.

ORV

I can be crazy.

Minerva looks back at Wil catching him looking. She watches
him as he turns back to the gulls.

MINERVA

I owe him everything.

ORV

You couldn't have picked a better
hero than my brother.

Minerva smiles, happy that Orv has spoken from his heart so
generously.

MINERVA

I asked myself why he saved me
when so many others drowned.

ORV

You mustn't feel guilty.

MINERVA

Oh, I did. But then I knew. He
saved me so I could fly.

ORV

(rattled)

Flying is a very dangerous
science, more dangerous than sea
travel.

MINERVA

Flying is too beautiful to be
just a science. Something so
splendid must be art.

Mademoiselle gives him a fervent look.

ORV

Sometimes the wind does seem to
be talking to me.

MINERVA

That's the muse, Mr. Wright.

ORV

Wil said that was your job.

Mademoiselle Minerva smiles a Mona Lisa smile.

Wil watches but tries not to.

EXT. DOCKSIDE MANTEO - DAY

A small ferry slip. A couple of wooden fishing boats.
Manteo is still nowhere. Wil and Orv watch as Minerva is
met and taken away by a baroque posh carriage. Obviously,
from her entourage and carriage, the woman is very wealthy.

Wil can say whatever he wants, Orv knows there is an ache
in his brother's heart.

ORV

Before I was just in love with
the idea of her...

WIL

I figured that was a good place
to stop.

ORV

She wants me to take her up.

WIL

Up on what?

ORV

You know... Flying.

Wil laughs.

WIL

What'd you say?

ORV

Whatever she wanted to hear. I
think she's in love with me.

WIL
(sarcastically)
I can just imagine her lying on
the wing next to you.

ORV
Me too. I was willing to let you
go first, brother.

WIL
I'm trying to leave this earth
Orv, not get more attached.

Minerva turns and gives them one last look. Orv waves back
but Wil could swear she was looking at him.

CUT TO:

EXT. HOUSEBOAT POTOMAC RIVER - DAY

Langley looks over Herring's designs.

LANGLEY
And what is indicated here?

HERRING
Flight controls, Sir. With the
addition of these mechanisms, the
Aeronaut would be able to
maintain full control over the
craft during the entire flight.

LANGLEY
The last thing I desire is anyone
toying with the Aerodrome's
delicate balance in mid-air.

Herring makes a face. The key technicians all watch, with
some satisfaction, happy to see the boss admonish the
imperious Professor Herring.

LANGLEY (CONT'D)
Who put this idea into your head,
Herring?

Herring knows he can't tell the truth.

HERRING

I get all my ideas from the same source, Sir, the meticulous study of science.

LANGLEY

I only hope Chanute is telling these same ridiculous notions to the French, then I know our lead is secure.

CUT TO:

INT. THE WRIGHT HOUSE - NIGHT

From the living room window, we can see the lit windows of the workshop glowing in the twilight. Gas lamps cast Gothic shadows of Wil and Orv working late, like blacksmiths at their forges.

KATE (V.O.)

(reading)

"Dear Mr. Wright and Mr. Wright,
Only a lunatic would attempt to install a gasoline engine in a machine intended to leave the surface of the planet."

Pull back to reveal Kate reading letters to Milton. Her older and much more conservative brother, LORIN WRIGHT, is there visiting.

KATE (CONT'D)

(reading)

"Impossible. Dangerous. Insane." It goes on and on. Here's the stack.

LORIN

Well, what are they doing now, then?

KATE

Building their own engine.

Milton's face turns grave.

MILTON

But that's impossible, all those professionals couldn't have made it more clear.

LORIN

It's almost as if they're compelled to do whatever the world says can't be done.

MILTON

(to Wil's defense)

May God grant your brothers wisdom to match their courage.

KATE

You're asking a lot. I'd settle for half as much.

CUT TO:

EXT. DUNES KITTY HAWK - DAY

A crisp fall day at the beach. A perfect day. The Wright camp is even larger than last year's, but the glider is nowhere to be seen.

Wil and Orv both wear leather jackets, precursors of the now famous flight jacket. They are in the midst of yet another argument.

ORV

Today could be our last chance to beat Langley.

(looking north)

That's snow on the way. Lets try her now, Wil.

WIL

Not on the Sabbath. That was another promise to our old Man I intend to keep. Did you get those propeller shafts to hold?

ORV

Hell, if it gets any colder, they'll freeze on by themselves.

Orv heads back into the shed.

INT. SHED - NIGHT

The wind HOWLS outside. Wil lies in his canvas hammock, laid across the roof rafters of the shed.

Below him is their new flying machine, THE FLYER, sitting poised in the darkness. A large double-winged shape with two great eight foot propellers mounted in back.

ORV

I was thinking we should call her
"The Flyer." Got a nice ring to
it. "Fly right in a Wright
Flyer." Just picture it, the
whole sky filled with our
machines.

Orv opens the tiny stove to throw a piece of driftwood in, attempting to keep warm. For a second, the golden light illuminates the Flyer. A vision of the future. He shuts the stove and hauls himself up into his bunk across from Wil's.

WIL

One day the world will look back
on what we do tomorrow, if we're
lucky and the winds favor us, and
they'll say it was nothing.
Nothing at all.

ORV

They may say that about what you
do tomorrow, but not me.

Orv is still disgruntled about losing the day. He rolls over in his bunk.

WIL

The machines of the future will
go higher and faster than anyone
can imagine.

Orv laughs out loud.

ORV

Yeah, but never on Sundays.

Wil stares at the Flyer, the spark of golden stove light burning in his steady gaze.

EXT. HOUSEBOAT, POTOMAC RIVER - DAY

This is the big day in D.C. The Potomac river bank is lined with Washington dignitaries. Smart uniforms and lacy dresses. Langley's houseboat sits just off shore.

Herring stands by holding a tarpaulin. All sorts of official emblems, seals and markings adorn its protective canvas. "The Great Aerodrome" is spelled out in big official letters.

This is the grandeur of the Washington establishment. The press jostle each other for the best spots to set up their cameras.

GENERAL GEORGE L. GILLESPIE is there representing the military interests.

GENERAL GILLESPIE

(in progress)

And now the genius who heads our team, Professor Samuel P. Langley.

LANGLEY

Thank you, General Gillespie. Before we have our rendezvous with destiny, I must thank the Smithsonian Institution and the Department of War and Fortification, and all the distinguished scientists who have helped bring about the most significant invention of the ages.

(Applause)

We give you, and the future generations who will fly her, the Great Aerodrome. Lieutenant!

Everyone gasps as a young handsome officer, LT. THOMAS SELFRIDGE pulls the tarpaulin back, revealing the strange and wondrous flying machine. Magnesium flashes go off like fireworks. It looks overbuilt and yet fragile with its twin sets of great insect like wings, one set in front and one back by the tail.

Climbing into the small seat is test pilot, CHARLES MANLY, wearing a corklined life vest.

GENERAL GILLESPIE

The Aerodrome will change war forever. American air power will control the skies from horizon to horizon.

The young pilot is visibly nervous. He wears oversize goggles and a leather jacket. The ENGINE is fired up. The wings shudder and shake. The crowd cheers. Langley shouts into the ear hole in Manly's helmet, like a coach at a football game.

LANGLEY

Now remember, Manly, it's all automatic. Leave everything to the Aerodrome and your place in history is assured. You'll be on the far bank in ninety seconds.

Langley checks the aneroid barometer sewn into the thigh of Manly's pants to indicate altitude. The fifty foot drop to the river looks awful high from where Manly sits, raised up on the steel superstructure of the catapult track.

Sounds of STRAIN can be heard as great forces are being coiled under the catapult.

Manly looks a mile away to the Virginia side of the river. A small reception committee is there, framed in red, white and blue bunting that flaps in the gusty wind. To Manly it looks light years away. All around him, shiny brass gears and linkage arms PISTON away, shaking him and the craft like a leaf.

EXT. DUNES KITTY HAWK - DAY

The wind whips surface sand over the dunes in sheets. The emptiness of Kitty Hawk feels all the more remote now that we've seen Washington D.C.

Captain Tate and three of his fellow seaman from the lifesaving station are there to lend a hand. They wear pea coats and woolen sailor's caps against the December cold.

Behind them, the Flyer is ready. Two wings, two propellers, one engine. Bare-bones.

FISHERMAN

How much they paying you?

ANOTHER

Better get what you can, they may
not be around too much longer.

Wil takes his position at the controls, stretching out
across the wing. Next to his head, their small engine, and
behind him the two surprisingly large pusher propellers.
Wil takes a deep breath.

WIL

Ready!

Orv spins a propeller, Wil opens the throttle. The ENGINE
emits its staccato report. Both propellers whirl, driven
by a length of bicycle chain.

Tommy runs for cover. He peers over the dune with his dog.
A wooden track, really just a length of two-by-fours, has
been laid out as a runway at an additional cost of four
dollars.

The engine spits fire and smoke. Crudely constructed, it's
as dangerous as a bomb. No fuel pump, carburetor, or spark
plugs, gasoline is gravity fed from a quart tank mounted by
Wil's head.

Wil grips the stick. He nods, and the surfmen cast off her
restraining wire. She rolls forward faster than Wil
expected. He suddenly finds himself half way down the
track. He yanks back, giving her too much stick.

The 600 pound Flyer lifts too quickly, like a rearing pony,
instantly stalling. It dips back, tail first, and whacks
into the sand next to the track. A non-event.

Wil wants to go again, but some of the landing carriage
skids are broken and bent. Orv comes over and shuts off the
engine. The propeller blades clack to a halt. Tate and his
men grab the Flyer to steady her in the stiff wind.

WIL (CONT'D)

Too sensitive in this wind. I
want to rework the controls.

ORV

We don't have the time, and she
doesn't need it, Wil.

Orv waits. Wil's brain is racing. Success hangs in the air,
they can both feel it.

WIL

I know exactly what I did wrong.

ORV

Take a look at the skids, Wil.
We're not going anywhere today.

The brother's disappointment is palpable. This may cost them the race.

EXT. HOUSEBOAT, POTOMAC RIVER - DAY

A hush comes over the crowd. Langley is about to release his fifteen ton, hundred thousand dollar launching mechanism. His houseboat is really the first aircraft carrier, and just as expensive.

LANGLEY

I give you the miracle of flight!

Langley fires off a SKYROCKET to alert the photographers. A tugboat on the river HOOTS. Herring stands next to General Gillespie.

Langley releases the restraining cable. Manly holds his breath. A very loud GRINDING noise, then the craft is pushed down the sixty foot rail at an ungodly speed by the catapult mechanism. The crowd SCREAMS. Manly has a look of abject terror on his face. It's like a rocket sled. Positively lethal.

The flying machine plummets off the end of the houseboat's roof like a ton of bricks and drops straight down. More magnesium camera flashes. Twisting in mid air, the machine writhes like a wounded dragon till it breaks in two along its spine and crashes five stories into the dark waters below.

Women scream and faint. Langley reels. It looks bad for Manly. He tries to hold onto whatever he can. Some tough ass soldiers laugh, till their officers cast reprimanding looks their way.

Two row boats converge on the floundering wreck. It's still thrashing in the water, making strange HISSING sounds and flapping bits of shattered wing. It's in its death throes. Manly pulls himself up by the guide wires, fighting his way to the top of the wreck. He's CURSING a blue streak.

Langley is shaking. He stands at the edge of the roof, bracing himself, and looks out over the scene of one of the greatest scientific failures in history. He turns to the crowd, and for a second it's as if all of Washington is staring at him.

A rescue team lead by Lt. Selfridge brings Manly, dripping with freezing water, to Langley.

MANLY

Jesus H. Christ, Langley! You weren't goddamn kidding when you said my goddamn place in history was assured. No one will ever forget this disaster, not in a million goddamn years.

General Gillespie looks at Herring, then to Langley.

GENERAL GILLESPIE

He's goddamn right about that.

LANGLEY

You must have touched something?

MANLY

The only thing I managed to hold onto was my wingnuts!

Manly pulls off his altitude gauge and throws it as far and high as he can. Manly continues his tirade as soldiers drag him off.

Gen. Gillespie looks on as Langley watches as his life's work slowly sinks into the Potomac.

LT. SELFRIDGE

Sir, she's going down.

GENERAL GILLESPIE

Once it's in the water, Lieutenant, it's the Navy's problem.

LANGLEY

(desperate)

A cable snagged -- the launching mechanism betrayed us, the Aerodrome is not at fault.

EXT. DUNES KITTY HAWK - MORNING

Morning. Cold and bleak. A winter wind in the air. The Wright Flyer sits at the ready, her skids fixed. Wil stares at her, deep in thought. Tate mans the camera, breathing into his hands to keep them warm. Orv's got on his best duds.

ORV

Not out to beat you, Wil.

WIL

Hope you do.

Wil wanted to be first more than anything, but he's trying not to think of that now, he's too busy double checking everything again. He shakes his brother's hand.

WIL (CONT'D)

(worried)

Don't lift her too fast in this wind.

Orv is eager as hell to get on with it, but Wil won't let go of his hand, as if he isn't sure if he'll ever see Orv alive again.

ORV

Tell me when.

The unmuffled ENGINE is whaling away. Wil turns to the cold and somber crew.

WIL

(aside)

Come on men, this isn't a funeral.

Orv and the Flyer move down the track faster and faster. Orv feels relaxed, confident he'll better his brother's effort no matter what. Wil runs along side the wing tip like a coach along the sidelines.

WIL (CONT'D)

Steady... Easy, easy... Lift Off!

Orv feels the skids clear the track. He gently pulls back on the stick. She starts to climb ever so slowly. Wil stands on his toes, urging her on. Suddenly, Orv is flying.

Captain Tate's hand shakes with excitement. His pipe falls out of his mouth. Orv flies out past the end of the track and over the sand... into history. For the first time, man has broken the earth's grip with a heavier than air machine.

Orv's hand works the stick. He's got the right touch. His hips roll back and forth to level and bank the wings, anticipating each correction. Wil watches and works the controls in his mind's eye.

The musical score sweeps us along. The sound of the engine like a drum, the beat of the machine age.

ORV

Come on, you.

Orv feels the engine's kick in the pit of his stomach. The Flyer pushes on steadily into the wind, her propellers pushing her forward, her wings lifting her. It's all come together.

Orv guides her back to the sand where she skids gently along, skimming and skipping till she comes to a complete rest. It's done, the race is won.

Orv lays his head down on her wing and kisses it. Behind him, left in the distance, Wil comes running.

Captain Tate and the others run over to join them. Orv climbs free, and heads toward Wil.

Wil hugs Orv so hard his brother can't breathe. Orv smiles ear to ear. Tate and his sailors grab hold of the craft against the strong wind.

WIL

I can't say who I'm more proud of, you or our Flyer.

ORV

Thanks Wil, that means a lot.

WIL

(to Tate)

Did you take the picture, Cap?

CAPTAIN TATE

(ebullient)

I... I can't remember.

WIL

Hope so, because no one is going to believe what just happened.

Orv estimates his flight.

ORV

About a hundred twenty feet -- you should have no problem beating that.

CUT TO:

WIL

sailing over Orv at the 120 mark.

Orv runs after the craft which lands a long way away.

ORV

Eight hundred easy! I'd have to
say that's the first, not my hop.

Wil smiles.

Two brothers, the only men in the whole world who know the secrets of building an aircraft and flying it. They literally, "own it".

The rest of the world, like Captain Tate and his crew, will take a long time catching up with them.

CUT TO:

EXT. POTOMAC HOUSEBOAT - DAY

The Aerodrome sails off its catapult for the second time.
The crowd gasps.

Another unmitigated disaster. It breaks in two and dives five stories into the Potomac.

This time Lt. Selfridge's crew carries Manly off on a stretcher. No curses, just deathly silence.

In a secluded work area, General Gillespie endures Langley's conspiracy theories.

LANGLEY

Sabotage! Someone is out to stop
us!

They're interrupted by the arrival of the press.

GENERAL GILLESPIE

Ah hell, here come the buzzards.

Reporters crowd the General, their skepticism now confirmed.

REPORTER

Washington Post. General, a few
words, please.

(MORE)

REPORTER (CONT'D)

Can we now declare flight impossible? Is that safe to say, Sir?

GENERAL GILLESPIE

We had to be sure, now we are. Manned flight is impossible. Officially impossible.

REPORTER

So we've paid a fortune to find out something can't be done?

GENERAL GILLESPIE

When our nation's security is at stake, it's a small price. Thank you and good day, gentlemen.

The General charges away. Langley follows at his heels.

They walk past Bell and Herring.

LANGLEY

I only need fifty thousand for repairs. It's not impossible!

GENERAL GILLESPIE

Number one on the list of the impossible, Professor, is you getting another dime.

LANGLEY

But I've worked on this for sixteen years. You can't let all that go to waste.

The General never looks back. Alexander Graham Bell pats his old friend on the back as Langley walks away with a look of confused heartbreak.

Herring intervenes, cornering Bell.

HERRING

Mr. Bell, allow me to introduce Mr. Glen Curtiss. He's a bike man.

CURTISS

Motor bikes. It's an honor, Sir.

HERRING

Builds his own engines. A racer.
This is the man who can beat the
competition.

ALEXANDER GRAHAM BELL

What do you make of Mr. Herring's
designs Mr. Curtiss?

CURTISS

With enough power -- skies the
limit.

CUT TO:

INT. WRIGHT HOUSE - NIGHT

The house is decorated for Christmas. A fire glows warmly
in the fireplace. Wil has a letter clenched in his fist.

ORV

The letter from the patent
office, Wil?

WIL

"The Patent Office will not grant
a patent to any machine declared
scientifically impossible..." It
goes on from there.

Wil angrily crumples the letter and throws it into the
fire.

ORV

What are we going to do?

WIL

They've left us no choice.

EXT. HUFFMAN PRAIRIE, DAYTON - DAY - LIGHT RAIN

A steady drizzle is coining down. No wind. The barns and
fields of Huffman Prairie are glistening with raindrops.
This is Ohio cow pasture, wide open meadowland ten miles
from Dayton. The brothers have chosen it because of its
remoteness.

Only a barn and one tall locust tree interrupt the half
mile long field.

In front of the barn, Orv stands on a soap box delivering his best "sales pitch" to three reporters. Benches have been set out for a lot more reporters, who obviously didn't bother.

There are, however, a couple curious and loyal locals. Orv has invited his girlfriend AGNES, and her upstanding family, as well as his old high school buddy, PAUL DUNBAR, a black man who works at the Western Union telegraph office.

Lorin Wright has come with his wife and children.

Behind Wil is the Flyer. Wil is working frantically on the aircraft's engine.

Kate and Milton look on, concerned, listening to Orv's speech. Everyone is slowly getting wet. An American flag hangs limp in the calm air. Orv is the salesman. He winks at Agnes, who is dolled up for the occasion.

ORV

(improvising)

When I was a boy, Bishop Wright
always told me, you've got to
excel at something worthwhile,
know it better than anyone.
That's what America is, a place
where a man is free to pursue his
dreams.

The home crowd CHEERS. Milton takes Kate's arm. She smiles at her father.

MILTON

Where are the rest of the
newspapermen?

KATE

Since the Langley fiasco, there
isn't much interest.

Orv walks hurriedly back to Wil. He is still banging away on the engine. Wil is not remotely as together as usual.

WIL

(messing with the magneto)

Does this go there or here?

ORV

You asking me? Now?

WIL
Have to put it somewhere...
Until I can figure out where that
somewhere is, we aren't moving.

ORV
Try there.

WIL
Where?

ORV
There! What are we going to do
about the wind?

WIL
Keep talking, it has to pick up.

ORV
Move over, let me have a crack at
that thing. I'm only good one on
one, you're better with crowds.

WIL
Crowds? There are maybe five
reporters out there.

ORV
Four. You think, one day, they'll
give all these things names?

Wil turns to the almost empty press box. He looks at the
limp flag, then faces his family. This is not good.

REPORTER
Getting wet out here folks. Lets
go!

Kate hands out a few extra umbrellas. Wil turns to all the
people he's known since boyhood. Their presence obviously
means a great deal to him.

Wil looks over at his father and sister standing against
the barn, trying to stay dry under the eaves.

REPORTER (CONT'D)
Yeah, yeah. How much longer?

WIL
For it is only when we attempt
the impossible that we make the
truly great discoveries.
(MORE)

WIL (CONT'D)

Not just of this world, but of ourselves. The words of Bishop Milton Wright. No photos please... we have a patent pending...

The locals smile and clap. Orv does too. Milton might have a tear in his eye, but the rain makes it hard to tell. Two reporters hoot and holler. They are getting more and more impatient. Dunbar shakes his bead. Wil looks over at Orv, who still hammers away at the engine.

Wil rushes back over to Orv. He tries to even out the SPUTTERING engine.

ORV

I don't know, Wil, maybe you better keep talking. She doesn't sound nearly as good as you do.

A momentary breeze causes the umbrellas and hats in the crowd to rustle.

WIL

We've got to go now.

Wil climbs on board. Milton and Kate watch with baited breath. The breeze is light, too light. Just a few random gusts. The crowd falls silent.

The Flyer chugs unevenly down the wooden track, shaking off raindrops. Wil listens to the engine sputter and cough. He gives her full throttle. The wind shifts, then dies.

This is Wil's big flight in front of his whole world. His chance to be first. And one pitiful little hop off the ground is all he gets.

Without sufficient wind, he doesn't have the power to lift off. The Flyer falls back to earth barely thirty feet from the end of the track. The skids stick into the mud. The engine, wet with rain, coughs one last time, then dies. The end.

Reporters jeer derisively, then turn for home. Wil's a total laughing stock. The local crowd is disappointed too. Agnes looks embarrassed.

REPORTER

I told you! Wait, sometimes they blow up at the end.

Kate and Milton approach Wil, who couldn't be more distraught.

MILTON

(aside; to Kate)

Well, if they don't go higher
than that, we certainly don't
have to worry.

Desperate, Wil messes with the engine. He looks up to see
the press heading home. And the local crowd. To add insult
to injury, the wind finally starts to pick up.

ORV

Come back! The wind is picking
up.

ANOTHER REPORTER

They should have gotten
themselves a balloon.

Milton and Kate come over to congratulate Wil. They don't
comprehend the extent of his disappointment. Lorin tries to
explain things to his disappointed kids.

MILTON

(patronizing)

Quite uplifting. I'm proud of
you. Both of you.

KATE

Very impressive. Especially the
speech.

WIL

No, no, you don't understand. It
stalled. That was nothing!

Kate sees how much Wil is hurting. Orv chases after the
retreating press. He finds himself wading through a sea of
mud. Dunbar tries to help.

DUNBAR

Come back, please!

It's a bust, a total and complete bust. The rain gets
heavier. Everyone left is getting soaked to the skin.

Wil sits there and just shakes his head. Kate tries to
console him. Orv stomps the muddy ground.

MILTON

That's what happens when you try
to change the world, son.

WIL

We have changed the world. It's just the world doesn't know it yet.

ORV

Have to wait for a day with the right wind. Like Kitty Hawk's.

Wil is not the type to let his disappointment show, but he isn't going to forget this failure for years.

WIL

We aren't showing anyone anything again till we can fly when and where we want. Wind or no wind. We either go up or shut up. No more speeches.

CUT TO:

INT. WRIGHT HOUSE - DAY

Milton flips through the paper, searching. Kate sits at the desk, writing a letter to Professor Chanute.

MILTON

And here we are. On the back page, thank goodness. Wright Brothers "Liars not Fliers" it says.

KATE

Don't let them see that. I don't think Wil's heart could take it

MILTON

It says here, and this is from the New York Times, "A man carrying aircraft may eventually evolve if mathematicians and mechanics work for the next ten million years." They don't know my boys. I bet they do it in half of that.

EXT. LE MANS, FRANCE - DAY

Professor Chanute is with a companion, MONSIEUR ARNOLD FORDYCE.

Fordyce, a well-to-do gentleman in his fifties, is a well connected Paris dignitary. In the background, we hear a speech in French. The crowd applauds.

Chanute holds Kate's letter.

CHANUTE

Miss Wright informs me her
brothers have flown.

FORDYCE

I appreciate the pride you feel
in your former students, but it
will be here in France, my good
friend, that man will introduce
the world to flight.

Chanute and Fordyce stand near a dirt track. Pull back to reveal the French countryside in every direction, bucolic Monet meadows. A few barns are all that dot the colorful surroundings.

This is Le Mans, destined one day to be the famous race track, but now it's an open pasture for training race horses and testing the latest flying machines on the continent.

Fordyce can barely contain his excitement.

FORDYCE (CONT'D)

Alberto Santos Dumont is our
finest Aeronaut.

All eyes are on the spectacle in front of them. A propeller driven zeppelin is being "flown" by the famous early Aeronaut Alberto Santos Dumont. Reporters have set up a bank of box cameras.

Dumont throws kisses to the crowd. He might as well be an opera star. Women spectators shriek and flinch as he glides overhead.

FORDYCE (CONT'D)

Do you still think your American
students will be first?

CHANUTE

I may have to switch horses in
this race.

CUT TO:

INT. AERIAL EXPERIMENTATION ASSOCIATION - DAY

An oil-stained newspaper with tools on it. A photograph of the Wright's at Kitty Hawk.

This is Alexander Graham Bell's industrial research facility and estate in Nova Scotia. A small personal factory. One of his bizarre box kite flying machines sits in the background. Another costly monument to genius gone totally wrong.

Pan to Herring and Curtiss building an aircraft very similar to the Wright Flyer. Nearby is Herring's notebook from Kitty Hawk.

HERRING

Makes exactly no sense! Shit.
Shit. Shit.

Herring peers at the grainy newspaper photo through a magnifying lens.

HERRING (CONT'D)

I know what we must do.

CURTISS

Bout time.

HERRING

You're going to Dayton. They
know me...

CURTISS

And that would be to...?

HERRING

We musn't let these brothers get
ahead of us.

CURTISS

What do you expect me to say when
I get there?

HERRING

Say... you're going to the State
Fair.

Herring shows Curtiss the State Fair ballon advertisement in the same paper.

CURTISS

Don't know a damn thing about
ballons...

HERRING

Talk about whatever you want! Say
you're a fellow biker -- they'll
like you, you never graduated
high school either.

EXT. HUFFMAN PRAIRIE SKY - DAY

Local dairy farmers watch Orv fly.

FARMER

Two bits says he hits the tree.

Orv, airborne in the Flyer, circles a big honey locust tree. Wil watches as his daring brother wings his way around, banked over as far as he can go, near vertical, locked in a tight figure eight. This is a flying first, another in the string of the impossible.

Wil's look of amazement becomes terror. Orv's so close, he brushes against some branches. Orv just barely makes it out of this stunt. But there are no cameras here. No cheering crowds. Just two farmers and Wil.

Nearby Milton watches too.

And, unfortunately for Orv, honey locusts are covered with thorns about three inches long.

INT. HUFFMAN SHED - NIGHT

Wil is picking thorns out of Orv's head and face, and few from his arms and back. Thin rivulets of blood pour from his scalp.

WIL

Don't get carried away up there.

ORV

I made it didn't I?

WIL

We're after hard won information
here, don't go turning these
tests into your personal joyride.

Wil pulls out another thorn. Dabs on alcohol, knowing it stings he uses plenty.

WIL (CONT'D)

Just received our second patent rejection.

ORV

To hell with Washington.

Milton enters excited. Kate with him.

MILTON

You've stolen the elixir of flight from God himself!

WIL

We earned it -- didn't steal anything.

MILTON

Miraculous! How can any patent office say flying is impossible?

WIL

"Officially impossible". That's even more impossible.

MILTON

Have you written Congressman Nevin, asked to show him a demonstration?

WIL

No reply.

KATE

It came today while you were flying into trees -- he sent your letter on to the War Department.

(Reading with an edge)

"Our budget does not allow us to fund, aid or solicit such speculative, fanciful inventions as rocket ships, perpetual motion machines and aeroplanes. We do, however, wish you success with your future endeavors."

Wil grabs his gloves and hat, does up his black leather flight jacket. If he doesn't do something, he'll explode.

ORV

Where are you going? Washington?

WIL

Can't think of a better time to do the impossible.

ORV

What do say we go up together?
We've never done that.

A look of concern crosses their father's face. Wil clocks it.

MILTON

If something happened to both of you...

(poignant pause)

...all your secrets would be lost.

WIL

Better stay on the ground, Orv.

WIL FLYING OVER HUFFMAN SHED

He's doing figure eights, making history with every turn.

Below him a motorcycle speeds along the road that runs beside the meadow. The driver is pacing him.

Wil buzzes the motorcycle. They race each other. It becomes a game of hawk and mouse.

Racing side by side, followed by a friendly game of chicken.

Wil finally peels off leaving the motorcycle in the dust.

The biker takes off his goggles, it's Glen Curtiss. He watches Wil land on the other side of the meadow as darkness falls.

Wil taxis towards the shed.

INT. WRIGHT HOUSE - NIGHT

Orv and Kate in the Kitchen. Making fudge. Wil enters.

WIL

Test flights are over.

Orv beats the fudge senseless.

WIL (CONT'D)

Someone will just copy it if we
continue business as usual.

(Matter of fact)

Fudge needs sugar.

ORV

You're not keeping me down, Wil,
those days are over.

WIL

I'm not going to argue.

ORV

Listen, I'm just stating the
facts, Okay? Dad's short on the
church budget. Kate runs the
bike shop, when she's not
teaching school. We're not making
a dime with any of this and its
been over five years, brother.
Think about it.

WIL

I have.

ORV

One state fair. Just one is all I
ask. They're paying ten grand
for the best flying machine. We
can beat a ballon!

Orv would like to let Wil have it with the fudge.

ORV (CONT'D)

Those Aeronauts are getting rich.

WIL

Ten grand is not rich! You don't
get it, they'll never respect us
in Washington unless we can
command real money -- millions.
I'm locking her away till we find
the right buyer.

Wil storms out.

ORV

Millions? What happened to "one small contribution..." and "I'm not in this to get rich..."

KATE

The money's just a symbol. It's the acknowledgment that comes with it...

EXT. HUFFMAN SHED - NIGHT

Wil takes out a hammer and nails, he's going to nail the shed door shut.

Curtiss crosses the meadow on his motorbike.

Wil is immediately intrigued by this biker in leathers on his radical machine.

CURTISS

This your field? Sorry to trespass, I just had to take a chance.

WIL

Nice bike.

CURTISS

Nice flying machine.

WIL

Haven't seen you around here before.

CURTISS

Came to see the balloons -- but you put them to shame...

WIL

Thanks. How much power does she have?

CURTISS

Twenty two horses, twin-V. I built everything from the wheels up.

WIL

Only way to really know anything. Looks as good as she runs.

CURTISS

What do you have in her?

WIL

About half of what you got, but half the weight -- all aluminum block.

CURTISS

Didn't even know you could pour something like that. How'd you get into this?

WILL

My brother and I run a cycle shop. Guess you could say one thing led to another.

CURTISS

You learn this in college?

WIL

Never went, but don't tell anyone.

CURTISS

(smiling)

Me either.

WIL

They don't teach what you need anyway.

INT. WRIGHT BROTHERS' CYCLE WORKSHOP - NIGHT

Orv is already hard at work on something, taking out his anger on wood and steel. Kate closes up the shop.

ORV

He's got no girlfriend, no wife, probably never will, just that machine. He can't lock her up -- she's my girl, too.

KATE

He wants to control it, like he does up there.

ORV

Well, guess he's going to have to
get over not having the only
Flyer.

KATE

Each of you always made sure the
other never made a mistake...
It's not right, you building a
Flyer on your own.

ORV

As soon as she's done, you're
going up with me. And everybody
else who wants to.

EXT. HUFFMAN SHED - NIGHT

Wil's obviously glad to finally have a kindred spirit who
acknowledges how amazing his creation is.

CURTISS

What's that rig do?

WIL

Bends the wings... see this
pulley, runs a wire to the wing
tip... both sides.

CURTISS

So that's how she turns, huh?

WIL

That and the rear rudder and this
elevator -- connected here and
here...

CURTISS

Thought my bikes were radical...
you figured all this out on your
own, huh?

WIL

With my brother.

CURTISS

I'd say you guys have a great
future!

WIL

I appreciate that.

Wil proceeds to show Curtiss more of his hard won secrets.

INT. WRIGHT BROTHERS' CYCLE WORKSHOP - NIGHT

Orv laying out planes for his own Flyer.

KATE

You should tell him.

ORV

Why? He'd just stop me. And you better not tell him either.

KATE

Nothing would make your competition happier than if you guys split up. Wil's always put you first.

ORV

So he shouldn't mind if I make his job a whole lot easier and put myself first.

Kate leaves, worried she'll end up stuck in the middle.
Orv goes back to work.

INT. HUFFMAN SHED - NIGHT

Wil nails shut the shed door, entombing the Flyer.

In the background we see Curtiss, heading down the road, waving goodbye.

Wil finishes nailing and prepares to settle down in the shed. He's got a cot and the basics.

CUT TO:

INT. DAYTON HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Curtiss reports to Herring as he draws the Flyer from memory. He's pumped.

CURTISS

It's impressive.

HERRING

Of course, it's half mine!

CURTISS

He never mentioned you.

HERRING

He's smart enough to know by now,
being first isn't just about
flying. You've still got to
convince the bastards. And as
luck would have it, he can't seem
to get a patent.

Herring looks at the crude schematic like it's a treasure map.

HERRING (CONT'D)

I'm going to cable Bell, he needs
to notify the War Department
about our "recent breakthroughs".
He talks to Gillespie every week.

CURTISS

Maybe you should let me see how
much I can remember first.

HERRING

America can't wait!

CURTISS

You're a regular patriot Herring,
arent you?

HERRING

Don't give me that. You've got
to kill some Indians if you want
to win the frontier.

Curtiss stops sketching.

HERRING (CONT'D)

I gave them their chance to move
up in the world. You're smarter
than them, you took it. Draw!

Curtiss, resigned, goes back to sketching from memory.

CUT TO:

INT. HUFFMAN PRAIRIE SHED - MORNING

Wil, like a watchdog, sleeps in the shed under his Flyer, his hammer not far from his hand.

He wakes to see a well-to-do gentleman lurking outside. We recognize Fordyce, Chanute's friend from France.

Fordyce spies through the barn boards.

WIL

You want it... Here it is.

Wil hammers a board loose with one blow, it pivots around and drops Fordyce like a sack of cement.

INT. WRIGHT HOUSE - DAY

Kate has carefully bandaged Fordyce's head. He's propped up on the living room couch.

WIL

(to Fordyce)

You mean to tell me this whole time Chanute has been in France, saying he's responsible for inventing the Flyer... our Flyer?

FORDYCE

You are his students. He showed you all he knew. Why, then, shouldn't the French be the first?

ORV

Because we were first. And we happen to be American.

FORDYCE

Regardless, the French authorities have sent me to make you an offer.

Fordyce hands over a letter. Orv grabs it first.

ORV

(stunned)

Two hundred thousand.

FORDYCE

A prophet is never appreciated in his own land.

ORV

Prophets, plural. Francs or dollars?

FORDYCE

American dollars. If your first public flight is in France.

Fordyce awaits a reaction from Wil that doesn't come.

FORDYCE (CONT'D)

So, when can I see a demonstration?

ORV

Today is good.

FORDYCE

Excellent.

WIL

Sorry about the bump, but there will be no demonstration.

FORDYCE

The Ministry of War must have assurances other than Chanute's.

ORV

(aside to Fordyce)

I wouldn't mention Chanute again if I were you.

FORDYCE

But I came all this way, surely I am entitled to a viewing?

WIL

We came a long way, too.

FORDYCE

You leave me no choice but to return to France. They will be very disappointed.

ORV

One second, if I may...

Orv is thinking money. He pulls Wil aside.

ORV (CONT'D)

He's one of us, Wil.

Wil looks over at the dapper European.

WIL

You wish.

ORV

He loves flying machines!

WIL

I haven't waited this long to let it go to the first big shot who says he's going to pay us after he likes our demonstration. I want a contract before he sees it.

ORV

No one has ever done business like that.

WIL

Exactly, no one has ever flown before either. Listen. We do what the contract says they pay. We can't deliver, they don't owe us a dime.

ORV

The people on top aren't going to sit down with us unless they see something first.

WIL

Now you sound just like the War Department in Washington, they don't take us seriously either. Maybe you should work for them?

ORV

I'm trying to work for somebody!

WIL

Give him one for the road and send him home.

ORV

One day you and I are going to have to settle up on a few things, brother.

WIL
You keeping track?

Wil exits. Orv looks after him, fuming.

INT. DARKROOM - DAY

Orv shows Fordyce photographs of the Flyer airborne. Orv handles these like contraband. Fordyce is stunned. He sees one of Orv's girlfriend Agnes done up "European style", standing next to the aircraft.

ORV
I've taken her up over 200 feet,
she'll do fifty and circle for an
hour, easy.

FORDYCE
Impossible!

ORV
Ask my father and sister if you
don't believe me. Take that one
back with you and show it to
whoever needs to see it.

Orv hides the photo in a newspaper that sticks out of Fordyce's shoulder bag.

INT. WRIGHT BIKESHOP - NIGHT

Orv with Wil. Another suited gentleman is just leaving the shop.

WIL
You gave him a photograph to take
back to the French?

ORV
Come on, they can't copy from
that photo.
(Curious)
Wil, who was that?

WIL
While you were handing out photo
souvenirs, the British War office
sent their own man snooping
around.

ORV
The British? Now they're
interested?

WIL
Only for the moment. I sent him
packing and quick.

ORV
Tell me you didn't.

WIL
Of course I did. He gave me and
the shop the once over. I've seen
that look before -- he was never
going to believe a word I said.

Orv runs over to the window and looks down the street.

WIL (CONT'D)
Forget him. He just wanted to
know what the French were up to.
He called it Chanute's machine
too, Orv. I can't believe that
man is running around Europe
saying we built this for him.

ORV
Forget that old man. Worry about
his friend Herring.

Orv pulls a section of "The New York Times" out of his back
pocket and hands it to Wil.

Wil looks the photo on the front page.

ORV (CONT'D)
I bet the war department takes
them seriously. Fordyce brought
this.

WIL
(Reading)
"Alexander Graham Bell and
Augustus Herring team up to
conquer the air. Daring
motorcycle racer... and motor
builder... to pilot". This guy!

ORV
Who's he?

WIL

I owe you an apology, Orv...
Curtiss, Glen Curtiss.

ORV

You know him?

WIL

The night after you hit the thorn
tree... a biker came by and we
started talking. He's got a cycle
shop, too -- builds a mean
bike... you would have liked him.

ORV

...you nailed the shed shut,
right?

WIL

Sure I did... right after I
showed him the Flyer.

ORV

Why?

WIL

He's one of us...

Wil slumps down. Orv starts to pace.

ORV

Don't tell me they aren't
smart... or they'll never figure
our stuff out...

Wil is suddenly off in his own world.

WIL

You know I was just thinking
about how lucky we've been. All
the special little things that
came together. It's like we
said... almost like the muse was
waiting for us in Kitty Hawk,
just us.

ORV

Our muse seems to have switched
sides.

WIL

You, me, Kitty Hawk, Mom's kites,
the bike shop... Sis, Pop. No
one could put a combination like
this together again and that's
what it took.

ORV

So they took it.

WIL

Maybe you were right -- one state
fair and we would have had our
week of fame and paid for all
this. Gotten our thousand dollars
back.

Wil rubs his heart. Orv puts his hand on his brothers
shoulder.

INT. WRIGHT HOUSE - NIGHT

Kate and Milton are in the kitchen trying to make sense out
of all of this.

KATE

They're lousy businessmen, both
of them.

MILTON

Well, they shouldn't have to go
through this. It's a waste of
their God given talents.

KATE

I'm the one who has managed the
bicycle business all these years.
They should let me handle this
now. Not to mention the fact I'm
the only one who speaks a word of
french around here.

MILTON

French?

KATE

Fordyce cabled. They want to
continue negotiations.

MILTON
Did you write him?

KATE
No... Not directly.

MILTON
Chanute? Kate, are you fanning
the fires in France?

KATE
Just a little note, we're
friends. Wil's going to meet them
in New York.

MILTON
Without a signed contract?

KATE
It's the only way we'll ever get
Washington interested. He asked
for twice as much money -- the
French will never pay it.

MILTON
If the Europeans think that
flying machine is going to help
them kill each other with greater
felicity they'll pay whatever it
costs...

KATE
Then we're going to be very, very
rich.

INT. TRAIN - NIGHT

Wil rides the "Gotham Limited" to New York City.

CUT TO:

INT. HUFFMAN SHED - NIGHT

Orv builds another Flyer, alone. His skilled hands creating
in wood, cloth, and steel. He seems more determined than
ever.

CUT TO:

INT. BANK OF FRANCE, NEW YORK CITY - DAY

Wil meets with several French bankers and Chanute. He does not look happy wearing Orv's suit, feeling like a bit of a hayseed in this ornate and opulent room.

Wil is painfully aware of the scrutiny he's under. Being judged is one thing, but added to that is the irritation of being picked apart in a foreign language.

WIL

Everyone I talk to acts as if you invented our Flyer, and Orv and I were merely your students.

CHANUTE

I know you mean to drive up the price, but the way you exaggerate its capabilities...

WIL

You haven't even seen our Flyer.

CHANUTE

Neither has anyone else! The longer this goes on, the greater the chance you will lose everything.

Chanute hands Wil a contract.

CHANUTE (CONT'D)

If by some miracle you can do this -- no one will be more surprised than me.

It's signed! Wil can't believe it.

WIL

So why did they sign it?

CHANUTE

If it weren't for my name adding credence to your machine, this wouldn't have happened.

Wil's plan to use the French has backfired.

EXT. NEW YORK CITY - NIGHT

A moody Wil walks along the streets of New York City. Lt. Selfridge steps in front of him.

LT. SELFRIDGE
May I have a word in confidence,
Mr. Wright? I have been
instructed to tell you that
Washington is interested in your
Flyer.

WIL
I just signed a contract with the
French!

LT. SELFRIDGE
We are aware of that.

WIL
I see.

LT. SELFRIDGE
How soon can you be in
Washington?

WIL
I thought you were talking to
Bell and Herring?

LT. SELFRIDGE
We are, but they didn't sign with
the French...

CUT TO:

EXT. HUFFMAN PRAIRIE SHED - DAY

Orv is finishing his Flyer. Kate watches.

KATE
I can't believe you asked Agnes
to fly before me!

ORV
I only said that.

KATE
Oh, really?

ORV
What are you doing?

Kate is getting ready to fly, putting on Wil's jacket and goggles, tying up her skirt.

KATE
I'm going up before Agnes.

ORV
Slow down...

KATE
That is, unless you want Wil to find out about this.

ORV
You wouldn't.

Kate smiles like the cat that ate the canary.

EXT. HUFFMAN PRAIRIE - DAY

Kate, airborne, lying on the wing next to Orv. Orv flies out and over the lush spring meadowlands of the prairie. She smiles broadly at Orv. What a ride!

Paul Dunbar gives chase on his motorcycle, holding up a telegram.

KATE
(yelling over the wind)
I can't be late for dinner.

ORV
We can catch the last trolley.
Hold on.

Orv swoops down toward the ground. Kate screams out loud. Orv races the trolley as Kate holds on for dear life. The trolley conductor is thrilled.

Orv lands just in front of the train car. Kate makes a dash for it.

ORV (CONT'D)
Promise you won't tell.

KATE
(hollering out)
Hold that train!
(MORE)

KATE (CONT'D)
(to Orv)
I won't, if you won't.

Dunbar arrives on his motorcycle, telegram in hand.

ORV
What news?

Dunbar hands him the envelope.

DUNBAR
From the patent office in
Washington!

Orv reads it. He laughs out loud.

ORV
(yelling out to Kate)
We got it!

KATE
The Patent! At last!

ORV
Finally, something they can't
take away from us!

CUT TO:

INT AERIAL EXPERIMENT ASSOCIATION - NIGHT

We see the latest AEA aircraft, inspired by the Wright
Flyer but with one key difference: small ailerons have been
added near the wing tips. Herring, Lt. Selfridge and
Curtiss refer to a copy of the Wright's patent.

CURTISS
These ailerons aren't covered by
their patent.

HERRING
Maybe. I know a better way to
beat it. A sure way.

CURTISS
How?

HERRING
Raise Langley's Aerodrome, fly it
and it negates everything they've
done.

LT. SELFRIDGE

But it doesn't fly...

HERRING

It will when we're done raising it... A couple "vintage modifications..." just to lift it, mind you.

LT. SELFRIDGE

You're a better engineer than I thought, Herring.

CURTISS

They're gonna sue, I would.

BELL

Of course, but they'll settle. This goes to court, it'll be years from now, very expensive years, by then we'll have moved past their machine. I'm calling Henry to get his lawyers. He hates patents with a vengeance.

Alexander Graham Bell heads for the door. He turns.

BELL (CONT'D)

This battle will be won on the ground, not in the air.

Bell's exits.

CURTISS

Who's Henry?

HERRING

Henry... as in Ford.

CUT TO:

INT. OFFICE OF WAR, WASHINGTON D.C. - DAY

Wil reports to General Gillespie and his aide. Lt. Selfridge is there.

LT. SELFRIDGE

We want specifics, Mr. Wright: passenger capability, distance, time. To the letter.

WIL

She can circle and fly over 25 miles non stop, and stay aloft for at least an hour. Cruising speed fifty miles an hour.

LT. SELFRIDGE

Can you carry a passenger?

WIL

Someone to hold a gun or drop a bomb you mean? Yes. The French asked the same question. One passenger can be carried next to the pilot...

GENERAL'S AIDE

(interrupting)

And you think these capabilities are now within the range of actual possibility?

WIL

Yes, Sir, as I stated in my letters. Numerous letters.

LT. SELFRIDGE

And this aircraft is what you've agreed to deliver to the French?

GENERAL GILLESPIE

Your family French Wilberry?

WIL

No Sir, Wil-bur. Father's family is British. Mother's German.

GENERAL GILLESPIE

They're the reason the frencies and brits want the damn thing so bad. Keep an eye on the Hun.

WIL

You could still have the first public flight in the United States. If we move quickly.

GENERAL GILLESPIE

I think this is more of a wait-and-see situation.

WIL
But General, Sir...

GENERAL'S AIDE
(cutting him off)
We'll let you know.

LT. SELFRIDGE
Thank you, Mr. Wright, we'll be
in touch.

Wil is ushered out by the aide. Gillespie looks at Lt. Selfridge.

GENERAL GILLESPIE
How close are our guys?

LT. SELFRIDGE
Year away, at least. Spoke with
Bell and Herring. No one can do
this...

GENERAL GILLESPIE
With the French chasing this
thing, I want my ass covered.

The General signs the contract.

GENERAL GILLESPIE (CONT'D)
Wilberry won't deliver and we
won't pay. Done. Dismissed.
(Under his breath)
Goddam French.

CUT TO:

EXT POTOMAC RIVER - DUSK

A barge dredges something up from the muck, hoisting it
with block and tackle.

Herring and his crew of hired hands pull Langley's "Great
Aerodrome" out of the river. It hasn't moved since that
infamous day. It rises up on CLANKING chains, dripping with
mud.

Herring and Curtiss are covered with mud, head to toe. The
scene is lit with torches and gas lights.

From the dark wooded river bank, Loren Wright is taking
photographs.

INT. AERIAL EXPERIMENT ASSOCIATION - DAY

Herring works on retrofitting the Aerodrome. The hanger door is open. Lt. Selfridge sits in the open office nearby.

CURTISS

Enters the hanger holding Loren by the lapels.

CURTISS

Found this reporter-guy taking
photographs.

LOREN

I'm with the Times.

Selfridge comes over.

SELFRIDGE

This is top secret, if we catch
you around here again we'll shoot
first and ask questions later.
Got it?

LOREN

Yes, Sir.

They take Loren's camera and show him the door.

CUT TO:

EXT. DUNES KITTY HAWK - DAY

Wil and Orv are in their old shed at Kitty Hawk, or what's left of it. It's been almost six years since the brothers made their historic first flight.

Wil sits on his suitcase by the stove in a funk.

Orv shows Wil Loren's photos of the Aerodrome. He looks at a shot of it being raised up, another with it just skimming over the water, piloted by Curtiss.

ORV

They're flying the Aerodrome, or
something they call the
Aerodrome.

WIL
You couldn't make this stuff up.
That's Curtiss.

ORV
And Herring.

WIL
You sent Loren?

ORV
Kate... I'm not that smart.

WIL
Pays to have a family.

Wil has to grin.

WIL (CONT'D)
The French agreed to everything I
wanted... even that crazy money.

ORV
A quarter million! France! The
land of inventors!

WIL
While DC was wasting their time
with this dinosaur...
(photo)
...The crowned heads of Europe
were ready to make a deal with us
nobodies. I thought about trying
to get out the France contract --
but after shooting our mouths off
we've got to deliver.

ORV
We do! Yes!

WIL
Your Flyer done?

Orv shocked, nods.

WIL (CONT'D)
Kate told me. That worked out,
only way we can fly in two places
at once.

ORV

One of us is going to come in second -- you realize that don't you?

WIL

You want these guys to beat us while we're both in France?

(re: photo)

I sure don't.

ORV

Not the war I wanted. Flying against each other.

WIL

This is your chance, you're the best.

ORV

After you, I am.

WIL

Promise me you'll check and double check everything, then go over it again. Don't let that machine out of your sight. Sleep with it. Stay away from everybody, they'll distract you. I know you. You'll be explaining wing lift to society debutantes.

ORV

Don't worry. In Washington they only act like they're royalty... your audience actually will be.

WIL

Well good, then they won't be talking to me anyway.

Captain Tate arrives with Tommy, now a strapping teenager.

CAPTAIN TATE

Good to see you Mr. Wright, Mr. Wright. Remember this guy?

WIL

Tommy! You look like a man!

CAPTAIN TATE
 (affectionately)
Looks like one.
 (back to Wrights)
 Miss Kitty Hawk much?

WIL
 I think about this place every
 day.

CAPTAIN TATE
 Thought by now everybody would be
 talking about your Flyer.

ORV
 So did we.

WIL
 Soon.

CUT TO:

EXT. STEAM SHIP - DAY

Wil stands alone on the stern of a steam tanker. The Atlantic, dark and mysterious, surrounds him on all sides.

Wil looks off, a stalk of dune grass stuck in his mouth. Behind him, lashed to the deck, is his Flyer in her shipping crate.

Seagulls wing effortlessly overhead.

INT. LE MANS BARN - DAY

Wil waits in a barn nearby the same horse racing track where we saw Alberto Santos Dumont fly his balloon, but now the crowds have long gone.

The Flyer crate arrives with a crash. Written across the front in bold paint is the single word, "BLUFFEURS." Wil eagerly starts to open it. But he doesn't have to do much, as the crate falls open on its own.

His Flyer is virtually demolished, his tools stolen. The fabric is torn and tattered. It looks like a small bomb went off inside.

Fordyce, irate at the sight of this, runs after the delivery cart to object. The workmen mock him in response, calling him a traitor to his country.

Fordyce returns, fuming.

FORDYCE

It wasn't easy getting your machine through customs. They didn't believe it could fly.

WIL

What does this mean, "Bluffeurs"?

FORDYCE

Fakers, as in bluff. Can you fix it?

WIL

Not without my tools, that's certain. If you want the first flight in France -- this isn't a good start.

FORDYCE

I will see what I can do. I have made arrangements for you to stay in a farmhouse nearby.

WIL

I'm staying here. This is fine. Just get me my tools. Any tools.

Fordyce slips out the door, Wil looks around. The barn has a certain Mediterranean charm, but not much.

CUT TO:

INT. LE MANS BARN - NIGHT

Wil tries to put his Flyer together with his bare hands and whatever he manages to find in the old barn. It's just about hopeless.

Wil manages to fire up the MOTOR. It runs rough before stalling out.

Wil hears HORSES circle around outside. A rider heaves a bottle into the barn and gallops off, LAUGHING.

The bottle hits the engine, a water hose breaks loose. Boiling water sprays across Wil's exposed chest and arm. He's scalded where his shirt was open.

Wil fights the pain of 3rd degree burns directly over his heart.

CUT TO:

WIL

works alone on the Flyer. He looks weary and nervous. His bandages covered in grease and oil.

He's hurting. Locals yell out TAUNTS from the hedgerows.

Fordyce enters with food and drink. Wil buttons up his shirt, covering his wounds.

Wil hasn't made much progress, parts are everywhere.

FORDYCE

I hear reports about Washington
and your brother. You haven't
forgotten our agreement, have
you?

WIL

No. As I remember it called for
several test flights.

FORDYCE

Of course.

WIL

Tests are usually conducted in
private.

Wil motions outside.

The small but very antagonistic crowd, a lynch mob
actually, calls out "Bluffeurs" and worse. This is the most
fun they've had in ages. We recognize one or two of the
most vocal ones from Dumont's horrific flight.

Wil looks over at their faces. A tableau of disbelievers.

FORDYCE

I hope they're not right.

WIL

Coming all this way was nothing
but a mistake.

FORDYCE

You want me to tell that to my
higher ups?

WIL

Yeah, do that -- tell them I may
not be here in the morning.

Wil slams down his wrench.

EXT. FORT MYERS PARADE GROUNDS, WASHINGTON D.C. - DAY

A great expanse of neatly groomed grass complete with troop
tents and smart looking color guards on horseback. A few
early military vehicles complete the image.

Gillespie's tent serves as HQ. Everything is spit polished
perfection. Brass eagles mounted on flags and embroidered
on countless seals.

Orv and Paul Dunbar arrive in a horse drawn wagon. The
sight of Generals, color guards and gleaming cannons is
more than a little intimidating.

A soldier calls out derisively to Orv.

SOLDIER

The Hicks from Hicksville have
arrived.

Orv rolls past a big tent marked HQ. Lt. Selfridge,
standing in the doorway, watches him roll past.

Herring and Curtiss sit inside. Orv hasn't seen Herring
since Kitty Hawk he almost forgot how much he hates him.
Nearby, he notices Dr. Spratt.

CUT TO:

EXT. LE MANS BARN - NIGHT

A mysterious woman in a cloak enters Wil's barn. Wil looks
up. She lifts her hood and we recognize another face from
Kitty Hawk, Mademoiselle Minerva. If Herring's got a face
to hate, this is the face to love.

WIL

Are you who I think you are?

MINERVA

The one who made all this happen?
Yes.

WIL

The storm? Kitty Hawk?

MINERVA

I'm glad you didn't forget me,
because I haven't forgotten you,
Mr. Wright.

WIL

This can't be.

MINERVA

It's only because of me you're
here.

WIL

You are one of the higher ups?

MINERVA

So are you, and I expect you to
live up to it.

WIL

Why didn't someone tell me?

MINERVA

I thought you might not come.

WIL

(tersely)

You're right.

Minerva looks at the Flyer. She looks at the torn fabric on
the wings. Nearby, she sees his half-packed suitcase.

MINERVA

I can help you.

WIL

What do you think you're going to
do... Exactly?

MINERVA

What is it you still need? Your
brother?

WIL

Leave him out of this.

MINERVA

I did.

CUT TO:

MINERVA'S HANDS

Mademoiselle Minerva sewing for Wil, and he doesn't look at all happy about it.

Outside voices and hoof beats. A voice screams out from the darkness "BLUFFUER AMERICAIN." Wil's missing tools are heaved viciously into the barn.

Some CRASH through windows. One narrowly misses Minerva. Wil, enraged, picks up his hammer and runs outside.

WIL

Lets go, you and me, Napoleon!

Wil is so mad, he looks like he would welcome a good fight.

Minerva defiantly curses them out in French.

MINERVA

(subtitles)

[cowards!]

Wil knocks the rider clean off his horse. He crashes to the ground and runs into the darkness before Wil can bust his head.

The other riders disappear into the fields, laughing and screaming, obviously drunk.

Wil stands by the barn door.

WIL

You figure this is going on in Washington?

MINERVA

Probably this and worse.

WIL

Orv won't be able to handle that...

MINERVA

He's not the man you are.

WIL

That's a nice thing to say after
you told him you loved him.

MINERVA

What! Did he tell you that?

WIL

On the ferry to Manteo.

MINERVA

And you've been putting him first
all these years. Brothers! Ha! I
told him it was you I loved.

WIL

(soft with an edge)
That bastard!

MINERVA

You better make what is yours,
yours... before someone takes it
all.

Wil forgets his burn and rubs his chest absentmindedly,
ouch! He catches Minerva studying him.

WIL

Missed a stitch. There.

Minerva stops sewing and reaches for the basket of food and
drink left by Fordyce.

MINERVA

Lets drink to that heart.

She pours the wine.

WIL

I'm surprised it lasted this
long.

MINERVA

There's nothing wrong with you.

WIL

First you're a spy, now you're
Florence Nightingale.

MINERVA

Why would you believe experts
about your own heart?

(MORE)

MINERVA (CONT'D)
Weren't they all totally wrong
about your Flyer?

Not only is this woman ungodly beautiful, shes seems to be
way ahead of him. Wil drinks.

MINERVA (CONT'D)
How many mountains of sand have
you climbed? A thousand? Ten
thousand?

She refills his glass.

WIL
Is this supposed to make me
forget my brother...

MINERVA
I don't need wine for that.

She kisses him... softly, nicely, gently. Her lips taste
like fresh Beaujolais.

Wil kisses her back, like he's never forgotten her.

WIL
You don't look a day older --
how's that possible?

MINERVA
Another secret for you to figure
out...

CUT TO:

EXT. LE MANS BARN - DAY

Dawn breaks with Wil rolling his Flyer out of the barn.

The Flyer sits on its small catapult. Wil gives Fordyce
the signal to drop the weight.

Lift off. The maiden flight.

Wil clears the barn, in the process scaring a few riders on
horseback who fall off their mounts.

The local farm kids gaze up in wide-eyed awe, as if they've
just seen a god. This is the first time anywhere in Europe
that the public has seen a man take off and fly a heavier
than air machine.

The locals yell out, "Il Vole"... He flies.

Minerva, all alone standing near her carriage, watches the shadow of the Flyer cross the field towards her.

Wil flies overhead. In slo-mo we watch Minerva's face go from brilliant sunlight to shadow and back.

Chanute looks up in amazement and admiration as Wil sails over the tall poplars at the far edge of the half mile oval track. He turns to the mob and sees another familiar face.

SANTOS-DUMOUNT

We are all children compared to
this man.

Fordyce grabs Chanute and kisses him on each cheek.

Wil circles the track and lands near them.

The small crowd rushes across the field chanting, "Veel-bare! Veel-bare!"

WIL

What does Veelbare mean?

FORDYCE

You. Wil-bur.

Wil looks at him with disbelief. It's finally sinking in. He went up "a fake" and came down a hero.

WIL

If only I could change directions
that fast in the air.

Having been disbelieved for so many years by so many people, Wil can't conceive of what is happening.

Completely elated, Fordyce kisses Wil a couple times too.

FORDYCE

I must send telegrams
immediately. The world must know
France has conquered the heavens.

CHANUTE

With my American student!

Wil doesn't know what he has unleashed. Fordyce dashes off.

Wil sees Minerva across the meadow standing alone. She puts her hand on her heart. He's not missing Orv at all.

EXT. FORT MEYERS PARADE GROUNDS - DAY

Orv works a line-up of high society Washington girls.

He worries about the fit of his jacket and his hair. Behind him Dunbar mans the catapult. The Flyer is ready to go.

INT. HEADQUARTERS, FORT MEYERS - DAY

Inside his tent HQ, Gillespie reads a cable, his aides stand at ease.

GENERAL GILLESPIE
Well dammit it all to hell! "Wil Wright flies first in France." The Presidents gonna have my stars. What about our Wright, why isn't he flying? Don't tell me we got the wrong goddamn brother.

Outside the tent, the sound of an ENGINE roars, then a CHEER goes up from the soldiers. Selfridge rushes in.

LIEUTENANT
General, our Wright, he's up there!

GILLESPIE
He better not come down till he has the record. If he does I'll shoot him myself.

Gillespie steps out and looks straight up at Orv circling overhead to the HOOTING and CLAPPING of his troops. The General lets out a war cry WHOOP of his own.

Orv flies triumphant. The military is stunned. Herring looks up and feels sick.

Inside his tent, Herring drops his head in his hands. Curtiss is with him, preparing to leave

HERRING
Where you going, Curtiss?

CURTISS

Don't belong here. It's all him
now.

Half out of the tent, Curtiss looks up.

CURTISS (CONT'D)

Wish I had met them first.

HERRING

They didn't want me, they sure as
hell didn't need you.

ORV

circles the field, waving at the troops. He buzzes down a
row of tents, the soldiers who mocked him hit the deck,
terrified.

DUNBAR

God put something in that boy and
it just hatched.

The debutantes are SCREAMING. Orv flies by low, flashes his
best smile. A few girls faint, keeling over like they were
just machine gunned.

EXT. FORT MEYERS D.C. - DAY

Orv lands to a BRASS BAND and a 21 GUN SALUTE.

Nearby, Gen. Gillespie is ecstatic. He and Selfridge confer
with stopwatches and maps.

SELFRIDGE

Fifty-five minutes. Twenty-five
and a half miles.

GENERAL GILLESPIE

Send a cable from me to the
President and every Senator.
What does he call that thing?

AIDE

The Wright Flyer, sir.

GENERAL GILLESPIE

The Wright Flyer? Army Flyer,
you mean.

The first transatlantic arms race has begun.

Senators and Congressmen with their wives and daughters are arriving. A huge throng is gathering around the edge of the parade grounds. Secretaries of War, Navy, and Commerce, the heavy brass. More hot conservative daughters desperate for excitement.

INT. LE MANS BARN - NIGHT

Wil checks his Flyer. Minerva enters the barn wearing an elegant white dress.

Wil's shyness is gone. Minerva is the first woman that has ever made him feel this confident and complete. He never knew being her champion is what he needed.

MINERVA

Your brother just broke our record.

WIL

Good for him. I was first and now he holds the record...

MINERVA

Do you think your brother could have made all this happen? Kings and Presidents ready to give you anything you want?

The sound of a small BAND playing drifts across the meadow.

Minerva holds up her hand for Wil to take, they start to sway to the MUSIC.

Wil feels the smoothness of her dress on her impossibly small waist.

WIL

This is sateen, isn't it?

MINERVA

Your first glider. I can be inspired too.

WIL

It's better on you.

MINERVA

Thank you. I wore it so you could take me flying.

WIL

You're not serious.

MINERVA

If you won't take me flying --
I'm going to have to give it back.

WIL

You wouldn't.

MINERVA

It's yours!

The dress is starting to come undone. Wil tries to stop her, but can't.

WIL

Don't do that! Please.

MINERVA

How would you feel if someone told you that you could never fly?

WIL

They did.

MINERVA

Then you should understand.

Wil wonders why this woman is always right.

MINERVA (CONT'D)

I knew you would be first... I'm not like all those others.

The dress is off. She's down to her corset. Wils got his hands and his eyes full.

WIL

You certainly aren't.

MINERVA

You should have let me drown.

Wil holds the dress, trying to cover her a bit but not too much. Minerva presses close.

WIL
I'm glad Orv isn't here to see
this.

MINERVA
Kill me now. I beg you!

WIL
You must have a death wish.

MINERVA
A little death wish.

EXT. FORT MEYERS D.C. - DAY

Orv and Dunbar are besieged by the press. We recognize some
of the reporters from the Langley debacle on the Potomac.

REPORTER
Washington Post. Do you think
your brother is a traitor for
flying first in France?

ORV
We both flew in Kitty Hawk, North
Carolina.

MILTON
Almost six years ago.

Orv is excited to see his father has arrived.

REPORTER
Do you have any witnesses? Any
photographs?

MILTON
Matter of fact, I do.

Milton Wright, the proud dad, hands out several copies of
the iconic photograph of Orv's first flight.

The reporters, and many of the soldiers, line up for a
copy. General Gillespie pushes them aside and grabs the
first one.

MILTON (CONT'D)
December 17, 1903, General.

GENERAL GILLESPIE
America was first. I knew it!
(to reporters)
And our Wright brother, this fine
young man! Not his brother!

HERRING

Stands by his tent. Lt. Selfridge is near.

HERRING
We're going to have our day in
court. He may have won the
battle, but not the war...

LT. SELFRIDGE
You recognize that reporter?

Herring sees Loren Wright.

HERRING
The guy we caught... taking
photographs? Right?

LT. SELFRIDGE
He's not with The Times. Just
found out he's another Wright
brother.

Herring is stunned.

LT. SELFRIDGE (CONT'D)
They got you with dirt on your
hands, Herring.

Selfridge walks away past Orv who is signing photos. He's a
rock star now.

Herring spots Dr. Spratt.

HERRING
What are you doing here Spratt?

DR. SPRATT
Came to see a man fly.

Herring moves on and sneaks into Orv's tent to look at the
Flyer. It makes him ill just to be near it. Ironically, in
the midst of this army ground, no one is guarding the
Flyer.

Herring runs his hands over the guide wires. He sees Orv's tools on the ground nearby. He's sweating, his hand is shaking. He can see Orv's shadow on the tent wall. He plucks a guide wire like a harp string. It makes a deep low NOTE.

EXT. FORT MEYERS - DAY

Gillespie strong arms Milton Wright clear of the fray.

GENERAL GILLESPIE

Mr. Wright, we need your son to fly again. Apparently, the French have just broken the one hour mark.

MILTON

The French? You mean Wil, my other son.

GENERAL GILLESPIE

Exactly.

MILTON

This isn't a competition, General.

GENERAL GILLESPIE

I'm afraid it is. The press sees it as one, as does the White House. U-S-A -- number one!

EXT. LE MANS - DAY

The French villagers are all wearing denim hats like Wil's, turned backward. They are buying them up from vendors like souvenirs at a baseball game.

Other French Aeronauts are arriving, in their dashing aviators attire. Everyone is looking up in the sky, their heads moving in sync like at a tennis match. Children are up in the pine trees and on barn roofs, chanting his name, "Vee-bare, Vee-bare!"

Wil and Minerva are flying, sitting side by side. Her dress has been tied up to contain it, like a Christmas tree wrapped in string. Her hand is on his. She looks like a home-coming queen in a parade convertible.

They circle above a large red, white and blue balloon, sent up three hundred feet to serve as a marker.

Wil flies over all the crowned heads of Europe. They "ooh and ahh" like little children. You can't dream this big.

Wil watches Minerva being ravished by the wind.

MINERVA

You made them all look small...
They are small! Don't you dare
stop till I tell you.

Southern France from the air. It has never looked so beautiful. Fields of blue and gold flowers.

With Kings and Queens arriving below him, and his princess next to him, Wil is peaking. Below someone has written his name with whitewash in ten foot letters across a barn roof.

Fordyce stands with a stopwatch and map. A few Aeronauts crowd around, stunned speechless.

FORDYCE

France has regained the record in
time, distance and altitude.

CHEERS all around.

AERONAUTS

Viva le France!

They time Wil's circuits in the air above the racecourse. The crowd HOLLARS with every turn Wil makes.

FORDYCE

I told you a man would fly first
in France, didn't I?

CHANUTE

Of course, I taught him
everything he knows.

Chanute has Kate Wright on his arm!

KATE

Fortunately, he didn't always
listen.

A moments hesitation and then everyone gets her joke.

WIL LANDS

Fordyce, Chanute and Kate meet him on the field. Wil is shocked to see his sister.

WIL

Kate!?

KATE

I couldn't let an open ticket to France go to waste.

WIL

How?

CHANUTE

(smiling)

I made your sister a promise in Dayton, and as a man of my word.

WIL

You came just in time to see me break Orv's record. I want you to meet someone...

Wil looks around, no Minerva in sight.

CHANUTE

Mademoiselle Wright, let me introduce you to the King of Spain.

KATE

Later, Wil. Congratulations! I need to meet the King of Spain. Who's the guy in the funny helmet?

FORDYCE

The Hun.

Wil undoes his leather belt, which he took off and used to tie Minerva to a wing strut.

The field is one great tumultuous celebration. The crowds of people gathered there will tell their grandkids.

Kate can't believe this. A small ORCHESTRA plays, set up in a tent. People are waltzing in the open air to Claude Debussy. Kate's a long way from Dayton, Ohio.

Wil pushes through the crowd towards the barn. Minerva is there waiting for him. Alone.

Wil enters and shuts the doors.

Minerva greets him with a handkerchief full of gifts. Jeweled rings, medals and gold coins glisten.

MINERVA

For you. Don't even remember who gave what.

Wil follows her look out the dusty window at the Royals on the meadow.

MINERVA (CONT'D)

That's Emperor Kaiser Wilhelm II, The Empress Augusta Viktoria, King Edward VII, King Alfonso XIII of Spain. And various assorted Prince and Princesses.

WIL

How am I going to thank those people? Can I call them people?

MINERVA

You can call them anything you want, you have them all in the palm of your hand. How often does one get the chance to make an Emperor beg?

WIL

You know that better than me, I'm sure.

MINERVA

You'll get more... there is no end now. They're ready to go to war over what you created.

Minerva throws the goodie bag at Wil's feet

Wil looks over at the line of crowned heads waiting to have their photograph taken next to the Flyer, like kids with Santa Claus. They push and shove to be first.

Wil's mind is blown. Officially blown.

WIL

Minerva, my muse.

MINERVA

Haha! They call you uneducated...
You're the most brilliant man
I've ever known.

Wil picks up a bottle of Champagne. Minerva certainly knows
the right thing to say.

WIL

If I lose control it will be your
fault.

MINERVA

I hope so!

It's all Champagne and strawberry kisses now.

INT. WRIGHT FLYER TENT - DAY

Orv speaks with his father.

ORV

Why should Wil hold the record?

MILTON

Does it make that big a
difference to you?

ORV

It's not just me, it's America!

Orv goes back to the tent that holds his Flyer.

HERRING

slips away just before Orv enters.

ON THE FIELD

Reporters take pictures as Orv prepares for his flight.
Gen. Gillespie looks around at the crowd, selecting a
passenger.

GENERAL GILLESPIE

What about you, Herring? Seems
the only way to get you in the
air.

Laughter from Lt. Selfridge. Herring shoves Selfridge forward.

HERRING

The Lieutenant deserves the honor.

Orv, no fan of Lt. Selfridge, isn't happy about the choice but he's surrounded.

Paul drops the weights on the catapult.

Orv takes off with Lt. Selfridge on board, determined to beat Wil's records.

Herring smiles and waves good-bye to both of them.

ORV

flying high, the Washington establishment at his feet. He wings his way over cherry blossoms and flowering chestnuts that cover the landscape in pinks and whites.

Orv soars higher than he has ever gone. No thinking, just pure instinct and feel. What he does best. A born pilot.

Lt. Selfridge holds on, smiling into the wind. Suddenly, Orv feels the THUMP of his rudder cable snapping. He tries to compensate.

Orv turns, and to his horror, sees the propeller split apart by a flailing guide wire. Orv fights the controls.

Lt. Selfridge looks at him in terror. Orv cuts the engine and attempts to glide in. But the ground is coming up fast and there isn't enough time to level out.

Even Orv can't get her back this time, but his great skill avoids going straight in.

Orv braces for impact. Lt. Selfridge YELLS out.

They CRASH near the tent complex, sending dozens of men scrambling. The engine tears loose and tumbles through a row of tents. The Flyer turns into a cloud of debris.

Dr. Spratt sees Orv and Selfridge, neither moving, both covered in blood. The doctor and soldiers drag them from the wreckage just before it bursts into flames, sending several tents quickly into an inferno.

Orv and Lt. Selfridge are rushed through the pandemonium in a horse-drawn Military ambulance. Milton fights to stay alongside his son. Paul Dunbar is in tears.

INT. BARN LE MANS - DAY

Wil and Minerva arm in arm.

MINERVA
You know why you succeeded?

WIL
Tell me?

MINERVA
Because you loved this dream more
than all the others.

Minerva gently kisses Wil good-bye.

MINERVA (CONT'D)
I'm going now.

WIL
Will I see you tonight?

MINERVA
No.

WIL
Why not...?

MINERVA
Your sister will tell you.

Wil sees Kate crossing the meadow through the window.

Her face is somber, tears streak down her cheeks. Chanute steadies her.

Wil takes one look at his sister and feels his heart sink. He steps outside, his intuition has already told him.

EXT. LE MANS - DAY

WIL
It's Orv, isn't it?

KATE
He's hurt, it's bad, Wil... his
passenger is dead

Wil, dragging Kate by the hand, starts pushing people
aside.

WIL
Lets get out of here.

Fordyce spots him. Some dignitaries rush over.

FORDYCE
They're going to give you the
Legion of Honor for flying first.

Wil stops in his tracks. He looks around at his royal
audience.

WIL
Orville Wright flew first, Kitty
Hawk, 1903.

The French don't want to hear this.

Wil storms away. Fordyce follows.

FORDYCE
Your contract says you have to
fly with a passenger.

WIL
What are you talking about? I
flew with Mademoiselle Minerva.
She was on the wing right next to
me.

FORDYCE
Who?

WIL
Minerva... you must know her.
She's one of "the higher ups".

Fordyce hands Wil a photo.

FORDYCE
Taken yesterday.

Wil is flying solo. He turns to his sister.

KATE
You were alone Wil. I saw it.

WIL
(distant)
I guess so.

WIL

pushing his way through Emperors and Kings. The royalty crowd around, some take off the jewels they're wearing and throw them at him. The pearls and emeralds fall on the ground, trampled in the mud.

CUT TO:

EXT. ROADWAYS OF FRANCE - NIGHT

Wil's trip to Le Harve. It's a like motorcade for a hero, but it's all pain now.

The village streets are lined with children SHOUTING Wil's name and wearing denim work hats.

Wil holds the photo of himself flying solo. Kate sits silently next to him looking out the other window.

WIL
You know what the big secret was -
trying to be as good as he
thought I was. Alone I would
have messed up, would have died
long ago. There'd be no
airplane.

CUT TO:

EXT. OCEAN LINER - NIGHT

Wil is aboard a posh transatlantic ocean liner, alone at the rail watching the gulls in the moonlight.

He walks into the main lobby of the Liner.

A gold leaf and bronze machine age mural three stories tall illuminated by sparkling chandeliers in the great ball room. The winged figure of Minerva towers over the ages of mankind, arms outstretched, inspiring men to industry through competition and war.

Wil recognizes the face of the woman he loves.

CUT TO:

INT THE WRIGHT HOUSE - DAY

Orv lies in bed. The whole family gathered around him.
Milton greets Wil as he enters.

MILTON

He's been waiting for you.

Wil comes to his brother's bedside. Orv looks like a train wreck, Wil tries not to show his shock.

ORV

You here to make sure I stay
alive?

WIL

Not going to let you make a liar
out of me.

ORV

The President wants us to fly
together, Wil.

WIL

It's time we did.

ORV

But our secrets, you always
said...?

WIL

The secret was always the two of
us.

CUT TO:

EXT. NEW YORK CITY, HUDSON RIVER - DAY

Wil and Orv fly together for the first and only time.
CHEERING crowds of rowdy New Yorkers and wet-eyed
immigrants line the docks, overcome with the wonder of what
two ambitious bicycle mechanics have accomplished all on
their own. The Wright Brothers are the first worldwide
celebrities of the twentieth century. They set the standard
for all others to reach for.

Captain Tate, his son Tommy Tate are on their ferry, docked in New York Harbor.

Firetugs spray water ten stories up, as the Wright Brothers fly towards the Statue of Liberty.

Wil and Orv sit side by side on the wing, Wil at the controls. Smiling, Orv makes a circular motion with his hand. Wil is happy to oblige. They fly around the statue.

The scattered clouds broken by golden slanting rays of sunlight illuminate the golden flame. Kate and Milton stand by the railing of the great torch. A military band on Liberty Island plays the STAR SPANGLED BANNER.

DOCKSIDE

Thomas Edison stands next to PRESIDENT HOWARD TAFT, all three hundred and fifty pounds of him.

REPORTER

Mr. Edison! Mr. Edison! Can you tell us what the difference is between the Wright Brother's Flyer and all the other flying machines?

EDISON

(smiling)

Yes. Their's flies.

President Taft cracks up, as boisterous as St. Nick.

INT. MOON LUNAR LANDER

Tranquility Base lies just outside.

Astronaut NEIL ARMSTRONG is about to step out of the Eagle lander and take his giant step for mankind, sixty-six years since that first flight in Kitty Hawk.

In his silver space suit glove he holds a small bronze plaque with a swatch of wing fabric from the original Wright Flyer.

Neil opens the door of the Lunar Lander. He steps outside into the great unknown.

THE END

