

Wright Jack

Famous Flyers and Their Famous Flights



Jack Wright

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CHAPTER I – Exciting News

Bob Martin stood outside the large redbrick house and whistled. He whistled threenotes, a long and two short, which meantto Hal Gregg inside that Bob wanted tosee him, and to see him quickly. Somethingwas up. At least, that was what it shouldhave meant to Hal, but evidently it didn't, because no answering whistle came out toBob, and no head appeared in any of thewindows.

Bob whistled again, this time a little moreshrilly, and he kept on whistling until apale, spectacled face appeared at an upstairswindow. The window was thrown open, and Bob shouted up before Hal Gregg had a chance to speak.

“Hey, what’s the idea of keeping mewaiting? Hurry up, come on down, I’vegot something great to tell you.”

“Hold your horses. I didn’t hear youwhistle at first. I was reading,” called downHal.

Bob snorted. “Put it away and hurry updown. Books can wait. You should hearthe news I’ve got to tell you.”

“The book’s swell,” said Hal. “It’s thatnew book on aviation I got for my birthday.Is your news more important than that?”

“You bet it is,” yelled Bob. “And if youaren’t down here in two seconds, I’m goingto keep it to myself. And won’t you besorry!”

Hal laughed. “I’ll be down in one second.I’m not going to have you knowinganything I don’t know. You’re too smartnow.” The dark head disappeared from thewindow, reappeared atop the narrow shouldersof its owner at the front door within a few seconds, bobbing about as he leapeddown the front steps two at a time. HalGregg joined his pal Bob under the mapletree on the Gregg front lawn.

The two boys made a strange contrast asthey flung themselves down in the shade ofthe tree. They were the same age, sixteen, with Hal having a little edge on his friend.But Bob could have passed for the otherboy’s big brother. He was a full head taller, his shoulders were broader, his complexionruddier. He was the typical outdoorboy, with tousled brown hair, a few unrulyfreckles, and a broad pleasant face. Hal Greggwas short and slight, with sloping narrowshoulders. His complexion was dark, andhis large, serious eyes were hidden behindshell-rimmed eye-glasses. Yet though theywere such a badly matched team, the twoboys were fast friends.

Their friendship had begun strangely. Inthe first place, they lived next door to eachother, on a quiet, shady side-street in thelarge city of Crowley. Bob had lived therefirst, while the red brick house next to hishad been empty for a long time. NobodyBob’s age had ever lived in that house, andhe had grown to look at it as an old fogeysort of a house, very dull, and fit only forgrownups. It didn’t seem as though youngpeople could ever live in it. So he’d beenpretty much excited when he found out thatthe house had been sold, and that a boy hisown age was going to move in.

But his first glimpse of Hal was a disappointedone. “Oh, golly, just my luck,”he said to his mother. “Somebody my ownage moves in next door at last, and lookwhat he turns out to be.”

Mrs. Martin had also caught a glimpseof Hal as he had got out of the automobilewith his mother, and entered the house. “Heseems to me to be a very nice boy,” she saidquietly.

“Nice! That’s just the point. He looksas though he’s so nice he’ll be as dull asditchwater. I’ll bet he’s the kind that can’ttell one airplane from another, and buyshis radio sets all made up, with twenty tubesand all kinds of gadgets. Lot of fun I’llhave with him!”

Mrs. Martin smiled and said nothing. She was a wise mother. She knew that if she praised Hal too much he would seem just so much worse in her son's eyes. So she resolved to let him decide for himself, just as she always let him decide, whether he wanted Hal for a friend or not.

For several days Bob saw nothing of Hal, but one day, as he rode his bicycle up the driveway that separated the two houses, he heard someone hail him. He looked over into the Gregg yard and saw Hal there, stretched out in a steamer chair, an open book in his lap. He looked very small and puny. Bob got down from his bike. He was embarrassed. Hal hailed him again. "Come on over," he called.

Bob got down and walked over to where the other boy was sitting. The meeting between two strange boys is usually a hard one, with suspicion on both sides. But Hal seemed surprisingly pleasant. "I've seen your riding around," he said, "but I haven't had a chance to call you before. I'm Hal Gregg. You're Bob, aren't you?"

"Sure," grinned Bob. He was beginning to think that this Hal might not be such a bad sort. "How did you know?"

"Oh, I'm a Sherlock Holmes. Anyway, I've heard your mother calling to you. And if she calls you 'Bob,' that must be your name."

Bob laughed, "You're right, she ought to know," he said. But he didn't know what to say next. Hal filled in the gap.

"You go swimming a lot, and bicycling, don't you?"

"Sure," Bob replied. "That's about all a fellow likes to do in summer. Don't you swim?"

Hal's forehead wrinkled. "My mother doesn't like me to go swimming," he said. "I've never had a bike, either. You see, my mother's always afraid that something'll happen to me. She hasn't got anybody but me, you know. I haven't got a father, or any other family. I guess that's what makes Mother so anxious about me."

"My mother never seems to worry very much about me," said Bob. "At least, she never shows it."

Hal looked at Bob enviously. "You don't have to be worried about," he said. "You're as husky as they come."

Bob felt himself getting warm. This wasn't the way for a fellow to talk. All of his friends called each other "shrimp" or "sawed-off," no matter how big and husky they might be. None of them ever showed such poor taste as to compliment a fellow. He guessed, and correctly, that Hal hadn't been with boys enough to learn the proper boy code of etiquette. But he just said, "Aw, I'm not so husky," which was the proper answer to a compliment, anyway.

"You sure are," said Hal. "You see, I was a sickly child, and had to be taken care of all the time. I'm all right now, but my mother doesn't seem to realize it. She still treats me as though I was about to break out with the measles any minute. I guess that's about all I used to do when I was a kid."

"With measles?" laughed Bob. "I thought that you could get those only once."

"Oh, if it wasn't measles, then something else. Anyway, here I am."

Bob's opinion of the boy had sunk lower and lower. He saw that they weren't going to get on at all. Why, the boy was nothing but a mollycoddle, and not much fun. "What do you do for fun?" he asked, curiously.

"Oh, I read a lot," said Hal, picking up the book in his lap.

Bob's mind was now more firmly made up. A fellow who spent all his time reading was no fun at all. And he needn't think that Bob was going to encourage any friendship, either. "What's the book?" he asked.

"A biography," said Hal.

"Biography!" thought Bob, but he looked at the title. It was a life of Admiral Byrd.

Bob's eyes lighted up. "Oh, say," he said, "is that good?"

"It's great," said Hal. "You know, I read every book on aviators that comes out. I've always wanted to be one – an aviator, you know."

Bob sat up and took notice. “Gee, you have? Why, so have I. My Uncle Bill’s an aviator. You ought to know him. He was in the war. Joined when he was just eighteen. I’m going to be an aviator, too.”

“You are? Have you ever been up?”

“No,” said Bob, “but I’m going someday. Bill’s going to teach me how to pilot a plane. He’s promised. He’s coming to visit us some time and bring his own plane. Dad takes me out to the airport whenever he can, and we watch the planes. I’ve never had a chance to go up, though.”

Hal’s eyes clouded. “I hope you get to be an aviator,” he said, “I don’t think that I ever shall. My mother’d never allow me to go up.”

“Oh, sure, she would,” consoled Bob, “if you wanted to badly enough. Have you ever built a plane? A model, I mean?”

“Have I? Dozens. One of them flew, too. You’ve got to come up to my workshop and see them,” said Hal eagerly. “I read every new book that comes out. I think that airplanes are the greatest thing out.”

“You’ve got to see my models, too. I made a *Spirit of St. Louis* the year that Lindy flew across the Atlantic. Of course it isn’t as good as my later ones. Say, we’re going to have a swell time, aren’t we?” At that moment Bob knew that he and Hal were going to be good friends.

And good friends they were. There were a great many things about Hal that annoyed Bob no end at first. Hal was, without a doubt, his mother’s boy. He was afraid of things – things that the fearless Bob took for granted. He was afraid of the dark – afraid of getting his feet wet – afraid of staying too late and worrying his mother. And then he was awkward. Bob tried gradually to initiate him into masculine sports – but it irked him to watch Hal throw a ball like a girl, or swim like a splashing porpoise. But he had to admit that Hal tried. And when he got better at things, it was fun teaching him. Bob felt years older than his pupil, and gradually came to take a protective attitude toward him that amused his mother.

Mrs. Martin smiled one day when Bob complained about Hal’s awkwardness in catching a ball. “Well,” she said, “you maybe teaching Hal things, but he’s teaching you, too, and you should be grateful to him.”

“What’s he teaching me?” asked Bob, surprised.

“I notice, Bob, that you’re reading a great deal more than you ever have. I think that that’s Hal’s influence.”

“Oh, that,” said Bob, “why, we read the lives of the famous flyers, that’s all. Why, that’s fun. That’s not reading.”

Mrs. Martin smiled again, and kept her customary silence.

The strange friendship, founded on the love of airplanes, flourished. The boys were always together, and had invented an elaborate system of signals to communicate with each other at such times as they weren’t with one another. Two crossed flags meant “Come over at once.” One flag with a black ball on it meant “I can’t come over.” These flags, usually limp and bedraggled by the elements, horrified the parents of both Bob and Hal when they saw them hanging in various intricate designs out of windows and on bushes and trees in the garden. But since they seemed necessary to the general scheme of things, they were allowed to go unmolested, even in the careful Gregg household.

The friendship had weathered a summer, a school year, and was now entering the boys’ summer vacation again. It was at the beginning of this vacation that Bob whistled to Hal and called to him to come down to hear his wonderful news.

“Well,” said Hal, “spill the news.” It must be said of Hal that he tried even to master the language of the real boy in his education as a good sport.

“Bill’s coming,” said Bob, trying to hide his excitement, but not succeeding very well.

“What?” shouted Hal.

“Sure, Captain Bill’s coming to spend the summer with us. He’s flying here in his own plane.”

“Oh, golly,” said Hal, and could say no more.

Captain Bill was the boys' patron saint. It had been through his uncle Bill that Bob Martin had developed his mania for flying. Captain Bill Hale was Bob's mother's youngest brother, the adventurous member of the family, who had enlisted in the Canadian army when he was eighteen, at the outbreak of the war. When the United States joined the big battle, he had gone into her air corps to become one of the army's crack flyers, with plenty of enemy planes and blimps to his credit. A crash had put him out of commission at the end of the war, but had not dulled his ardor for flying. For years he had flown his own plane both for commercial and private reasons.

As Bob's hero, he had always written to the boy, telling him of his adventures, encouraging him in his desire to become an aviator. He had never found the time actually to visit for any length of time with his sister and her family, but had dropped down from the sky on them suddenly and unexpectedly every so often.

But now, as Bob explained carefully to Hal, he was coming for the whole summer, and was going to teach him, Bob, to fly.

"Oh, boy, oh, boy, oh, boy," Bob chortled, "what a break! Captain Bill here for months, with nothing to do but fly us around."

Hal did not seem to share his friend's enthusiasm. "Fly us around? Not us, Bob, old boy – you. My mother will never let me go up." Hal's face clouded.

Bob slapped him on the back. "Oh, don't you worry. Your mother will let you fly. She's let you do a lot of things with me that she never let you do before. We'll gether to come around."

But Hal looked dubious. "Not that, I'm afraid. She's scared to death of planes, and gets pale if I even mention flying. But that's all right. I'll do my flying on the ground. You and Bill will have a great time."

"Buck up," said Bob. "Don't cross your bridges until you come to them. We'll work on your mother until she thinks that flying is the safest thing in the world. And it is, too. We'll let Captain Bill talk to her. He can make anybody believe anything. He'll have her so thoroughly convinced that she'll be begging him to take you up in the air to save your life. See if he doesn't! Bill is great!"

Hal was visibly improved in spirits. "When's Bill coming in?" he asked.

"Six tonight," said Bob. "Down at the airport. Dad says that he'll drive us both out there so that we can meet Captain Bill, and drive him back. Gee, wouldn't it be great if he had an autogyro and could land in our back yard?"

"Maybe he'll have one the next time he comes. What kind of plane is he flying?"

"His new Lockheed. It's a monoplane, he says, and painted green, with a reddish nose. It's green because his partner, Pat, wanted it green. Pat's been his buddy since they were over in France together, and anything that Pat says, goes. It's got two cockpits, and dual controls. It's just great for teaching beginners. That means us, Hal, old boy. Listen, you'd better get ready. Dad will be home soon, and will want to start down for the port. Say, does that sound like thunder?"

The boys listened. It did sound like thunder. In fact, it was thunder. "Golly, I hope it doesn't storm. Mother won't let me go if it rains."

Bob laughed. "I wouldn't worry about you getting wet if it stormed," he said. "What about Bill, right up in the clouds? Of course, he can climb over the storm if it's not too bad. But you hurry anyhow. We'll probably get started before it rains, anyway."

At ten minutes to six Hal, Bob and Bob's father were parked at the airport, their necks stretched skyward, watching the darkening, clouded skies for the first hint of a green monoplane. No green monoplane did they see. A few drops of rain splattered down, then a few more, and suddenly the outburst that had been promising for hours poured down. Bob's father, with the aid of the two boys, put up the windows of the car, and they sat fairly snug while the rain teemed down about them. The field was becoming sodden. Crashes of lightning and peals of thunder seemed to flash and roll all about them. All of the airplanes within easy distance of their home port had come winging home

like birds to an enormous nest. The three watchers scanned each carefully, but none was the green Lockheed of Captain Bill.

The time passed slowly. Six-thirty; then seven. Finally Mr. Martin decided that they could wait no longer. "He's probably landed some place to wait for the storm to lift," he said. "He can take a taxi over to the house when he gets in."

Reluctant to leave, the boys nevertheless decided that they really couldn't wait all night in the storm for Captain Bill, and so they started for home.

Very wet, and bedraggled, and very, very, hungry, they arrived. Hal's mother was practically hysterical, met him at the door, and drew him hastily into the house.

Mr. Martin and his son ran swiftly from the garage to the back door of their house, but were soaked before they got in. Entering the darkened kitchen, they could hear voices inside.

"Doesn't that sound like – why, it is – that's Bill's voice," shouted Bob. The light switched on, and Bill and Mrs. Martin came into the kitchen to greet their prodigal relatives.

"Hello," said Bill, "where have you people been? You seem to be wet. Shake on it."

"Well, how in the – how did you get in?" shouted Mr. Martin, pumping Bill's hand. "We were waiting in the rain for you for hours."

"I know," said Bill, contritely, "we tried to get in touch with you, but we couldn't. You see, I came in by train."

"By train!" exclaimed Bob. "By train!"

"Why, sure," laughed the Captain, "Why, aren't you glad to see me without my plane? That's a fine nephewly greeting!"

"Oh, gee, Bill, of course I'm glad to see you, but – well, I've sort of been counting on your bringing your plane."

Bill laughed. "The plane's coming all right," he said. "We had a little accident the other day, and the wing needed repairing. I decided not to wait for it, but to come in on the train to be with you. So Pat McDermott is bringing the plane in in a few days. Is that all right? May I stay?"

"Yup, you can stay," said Bob. "But I want something to eat!"

"Everything's ready," said Mrs. Martin. "You change your clothes, and come right down to dinner."

"Sure thing," said Bob. But he did not change immediately. He stopped first to put two crossed flags in the window, which meant to Hal, "Come right over."

CHAPTER II – Captain Bill

Hal couldn't come right over. He had to be fussed over, steamed, dosed, and put to bed so that he would suffer no ill effects from his soaking that evening. But he was over bright and early the next morning. It had rained all night, and was still raining in a quiet, steady downpour, when Hal appeared at the Martin home, dressed in rubbers, raincoat, muffler, and carrying an umbrella to protect him on his long trek from his own front door to his friend's. Captain Bill would have been startled at the strangely bundled figure of Hal, but he had been warned, and greeted Hal without a blink of an eyelash. In fact, as soon as Hal had been unwrapped from his many coverings, and had spoken to them all, Captain Bill discovered that he was probably going to like this boy after all, and was pleased that his nephew had such good judgment in choosing a friend and companion.

They talked that morning, of course, about airplanes, and the boys told how they had been reading about the famous flyers, and of their hopes to be flyers themselves some day. Bill had been a good listener, and had said very little, but after lunch Hal said what had been on his chest for a long time.

“Captain Bill, we've been doing all the talking. Why don't you tell us a story?”

The Captain laughed. “I think that Bob's heard all my stories. I'm afraid that they're a little moth-eaten now. But how about the two of you telling me a story? Some of the things that you've been reading so carefully. How about it?”

“We can't tell a story the way you can, old scout,” said Bob. “Anyway, we asked you first.”

“All right, I'm caught,” said the Captain. “But I'll tell you a story only on one condition. Each of you has to tell one too. That's only fair, isn't it?”

Bob and Hal looked at each other. Hal spoke. “I'm afraid I won't be able to,” he said, blushing. “I can't tell stories, I'm sure I can't.”

Captain Bill knew that it would be tactless at that moment to try to convince Hal that he could tell a story. It would only increase the boy's nervousness, and convince him only more of the fact that he could not spin a yarn. So he said, “Well, we'll tell ours first, and you can tell yours later. After you hear how bad ours are, you'll be encouraged.” Then Bill had an idea. “How about having a contest?” he said. “The one who tells the best story gets a prize.”

“What prize?” asked Bob quickly.

“Now, you take your time. We'll decide on the prize later. We'll have to let Pat in on this, too, I suppose, but he's going to give us some competition. Pat's a great storyteller. I'll tell my story first. Then Bob can tell his, after he's had some time for preparation; then Pat will probably want to get his licks in; and Hal will come last. He'll have the benefit of our mistakes to guide him. How about it?”

“All right with me,” said Bob, eagerly. He was keen about the idea.

But Hal seemed less enthusiastic. His natural reticence, he felt, would make it torture for him to tell a story. It would be all right just for Bob – and he was even getting well enough acquainted with Captain Bill to tell his story in front of him – but this Pat McDermott – even his name sounded formidable. Captain Bill didn't give him a chance to say aye, yea, or nay, but went on talking.

“I think that we ought to choose subjects that you two know about,” said Bill. “How about stories of the aviators – of Famous Flyers and their Famous Flights?”

“Great!” said Bob. “Gee, I want Lindbergh.”

“Lindbergh you shall have,” said Captain Bill. “What's yours Hal?”

“I don't know,” said Hal. “I'll have to think it over. But – I think that I'd like to take the life of Floyd Bennett – if I may.”

“Of course,” said Bill. “I think that I'll tell about Admiral Byrd – do you think he'd make a good story?”

“Marvelous!” said Bob, with his usual enthusiasm. “What'll we leave for Pat?”

“Pat can take whomever he wants to take,” the Captain said. “He’ll have to take what’s left. That’s what he gets for coming late. But what do you say we wait to start the contest when Pat comes?”

“Yes, oh, yes, I think that that would be much better,” said Hal, relieved that the ordeal would at least be postponed, even if it could not be avoided altogether. “I think that we ought to wait until Mr. McDermott comes.”

The Captain laughed. “Don’t let him hear you call him ‘Mr. McDermott’” he said. “He’s Pat to everybody, and to you, too.”

“I’ll try to remember,” said Hal, miserably, thinking of what a complicated world this was.

It was still raining outside. The boys and the Captain, seated in the library, or rather, sprawled in the library, could see the streams of rain splash against the windows and run down in little rivers until they splashed off again at the bottom of the pane.

Captain Bill yawned and stretched. “Not much to do on a day like this. I’m mighty anxious to get out to the airport as soon as it clears up. What’ll we do?”

Bob had an idea. “Couldn’t we sort of sneak one over on Pat?” he said. “Couldn’t we have a story, one not in the contest, now? It wouldn’t count, really, and it would give us a little rehearsal before Pat gets here.”

“Who’s going to tell this story?” asked Captain Bill, looking just a bit suspiciously at his nephew.

Bob grinned. “Well, I thought that maybe you would. Seeing that you’re the best story-teller anyway.”

“Go long with your blarney. But I guess I will tell you one. It will be a sort of prologue to the rest of our stories. It’s about the very first flyers and the very first famous flight.”

“The Wrights?” asked Hal.

“The Wrights,” said the Captain. “Wilbur and Orville, and their first flight at Kitty Hawk, North Carolina.”

CHAPTER III – The Wright Brothers

The Captain had first to fill his pipe, and stretch his legs before he began his story.

“Of course,” he said, “we can’t really say that the Wrights were the first men to fly, or to build a machine that would fly. Even in the middle ages Leonardo da Vinci drew up plans for a flying machine. Just before the Wright’s experiment Langley had stayed up in the air in a machine invented and built by himself. If he had not died at so unfortunate a period in his experimental life, perhaps he might have been the inventor of the airplane.

“The Wrights invented the airplane in the same degree that Thomas Edison invented the electric light. Men had experimented with both inventions for many years. But it took the genius of the Wrights, the genius of an Edison to bring together these experiments, to think through logically just where in they were right and where they were wrong, and to add the brilliant deduction that brought their experiments to a practical and successful end. Edison’s discovery was dependent upon the finding of the proper filament for his bulb; the Wrights’ success hinged upon their discovery of the warped wing, which gave them control over their plane.

“The fact that the Wrights were not the first to fly does not detract from the thing that they actually did. At the time that they were making their first flying machine, any man who tampered with the subject of flying through the air was looked upon as crazy. And this was not more than a quarter of a century ago. Seems funny, doesn’t it? But they were not to be discouraged. They knew that they were right, and they went ahead. They had many set-backs. Their planes were wrecked. What did they do? They just built them over again, and were glad that they had learned of some new defect that they could re-design and correct.

“You notice that I always talk of ‘the Wrights’ as though they were one person; everybody does. In fact, they almost were one person. They were always together; lived together, played together, although they didn’t play much, being a serious pair, and worked together. They never quarreled, never showed any jealousy of each other, never claimed the lion’s share of praise in the invention. They were just ‘the Wrights,’ quiet, retiring men, who did much and talked little.

“From early childhood it was the same. Wilbur Wright, the elder of the two, was born in Milville, Indiana, and lived there until he was three years old with his parents, Milton Wright, bishop of the United Brethren Church, and Susan Katherine Wright. In 1870 the family moved to Dayton, Ohio, and in 1871 Orville Wright was born. From a very early age the two were drawn to each other. Their minds and desires were similar.

“When Wilbur decided that he would rather go to work after being graduated from High School, Orville decided that he, too, would give up his formal education, and devote himself to mechanics.

“They were born mechanics, always building miniature machines that actually worked. They did not stop studying, but took to reading scientific works that were of more help to them than formal education. In this way they learned printing, and built themselves a printing press out of odds and ends that they assembled. On this they began to publish a little newspaper, but they gave this up when another opportunity presented itself.

“Bicycles were coming in at that time, and the Wright brothers set up a little shop to repair them. From the repair shop they developed a factory in which they manufactured bicycles themselves. Their business was very successful, and they were looked upon as young men who were likely to get along in the world. This was in 1896.

“That year Otto Lilienthal, a famous German experimenter, was killed in his glider, just at the peak of his career. Wilbur read an account of his death in the newspaper, and discussed it with his brother. The event renewed the interest that they had always had in flying, and they set about studying all of the books that they could find on the problem of flight. They soon exhausted all that they

could get, and decided that their groundwork had been laid. From then on their work was practical, and they discovered principles that had never been written, and which resulted in the first flight.

“The first things that they built were kites, and then gliders that were flown as kites. The Wrights were after the secret of the birds’ flight, and felt that they could apply it to man’s flight. Their next step was the construction of a real glider. But the country around Dayton was not favorable for flying their craft. They wrote to the United States government to find a region that had conditions favorable to their gliding. That is how the obscure Kitty Hawk, North Carolina, came to be the famous place that it is. It happened to have just south of it three hills, Kill Devil Hill, Little Hill, and West Hill. Between the hills was soft drifting sand, that would provide a better landing place than hard earth in case of a spill. The winds were steady and moderate.

“To Kitty Hawk the Wrights went. Here they glided to their heart’s content, until they decided that they had learned to control their flights, and were ready to build a plane with power. They went back to Dayton in 1902. They designed and supervised the building of the motor themselves, one that would generate twelve horsepower. Satisfied, they set out once more for Kitty Hawk, with the motor and parts of their plane carefully stowed away.

“They got down there in the early autumn, but found so many difficulties to overcome, that they could not make the first tests until December. In the first place, they discovered that a storm had blown away the building which they had built to work in when they first got to Kitty Hawk. However, everything was at last ready, the weather favorable, and the plane was hauled up Kill Devil Hill, and guided toward the single track of planks that had been laid down the hill.

“Who was going to get the first chance to pilot the plane? Who was going to be the first man to fly? Orville insisted that Wilbur be the one; Wilbur insisted that Orville should be the first. They decided it by flipping a coin. Wilbur won. He got into the plane, unfastened the wire that held the plane to the track, and started down. He ended in a heap at the bottom of the hill, uninjured, but with several parts of the plane damaged.

“The Wrights were nothing daunted. They repaired the plane as quickly as possible, and on December 17, they were ready for the second trial. It was Orville’s turn, of course. He loosened the wire; the plane started down the hill; at the end of a forty-foot run it rose into the air. It kept on going, in a bumpy, irregular course, now swooping up, now diving down, for 120 feet, then darted to earth. The flight had taken in all just twelve seconds, but the Wrights had flown.

“I suppose you’ve seen pictures of that first plane. It wasn’t much more than a box in shape, a biplane, with no cockpit at all, just the wings held together by struts, and a seat in the center for the pilot. A man had to be tough to fly one of those planes. The wonder is that any of them escaped with their lives. They had to sit up there exposed to all the elements, and pilot the clumsy planes. And yet they grew into skilful and expert pilots, and could loop the loop and figure eight in them! The Wrights themselves were excellent flyers. This seems only natural, with their natural born gift for mechanics. It was well that they were good flyers, because it was up to them to prove to the world that their craft was safe, and practical.

“It was hard at first. People were skeptical as to whether the Wrights really had a ship that flew. Some of their tests were unsuccessful, and they were laughed to scorn. However, France, who had been more advanced than the United States in the matter of experimentation in flying, became interested in the new flying machine, and sent representatives over to the United States to inspect it. With the French approving of it, the United States became more interested. The government offered a prize of \$25,000, for anyone who would build a plane that would travel 40 miles an hour, carry enough fuel and oil to cruise for 125 miles, and fly continuously for at least an hour, with two persons weighing together 350 pounds. The Wrights built such a machine, and the government not only gave them the \$25,000, but an additional \$5,000 besides.

“In the meanwhile Wilbur Wright had gone to France, where he participated in many flights, and won the hearts of the French people by staying in the air for an hour and a half. At the end of the year, 1908, he stayed in the air over two hours.

“The Wrights were showing what they could do. Flying became the rage. Society took it up, and traveled to the Wrights to see their planes. But the Wrights, no more impressed by this than they were by anything else, kept right on working. They were financed by a group of able financiers in the United States, and founded the Wright Aeroplane Company for the manufacture of planes, and they were content.

“After 1909, their point proved, the Wrights did very little flying. They spent their time in engineering problems, making improvements on the planes that they were redesigning and manufacturing.

“They did some more experimenting with gliders, but this was in order to perfect the art of soaring.

“In May, 1912, Wilbur Wright died, and broke up the famous partnership that had existed for so many years. Since his death his brother has lived quietly. He has not flown, and has acted as advisor to his company as they turn out more and more modern planes. He is one man who has lived to see a thing that he started himself grow into a blessing to mankind. And if the airplane isn't that, I'd like to know what is.”

“I think so,” said Bob.

“Who are you to think so?” asked Bill, sitting up very suddenly.

Bob was non-plussed for a moment, but then saw that his uncle was joking, and laughed. They were interrupted by the ringing of the doorbell.

“Well,” said the Captain, “who could be out in weather like this?”

They heard the front door open, voices, and then the closing of the door. In a short while the footsteps of Mrs. Martin sounded on the steps, and she entered the library.

“A telegram for you, Bill,” she said, and handed it to him. “My, you three look cozy up here. I suppose you've been yarning, haven't you?” She gave her brother a playful poke.

Captain Bill, who had risen when his sister came in, offered his chair before he opened the telegram. “Join us, won't you, Sis?”

His sister laughed. “I really can't go before I see what is in the telegram,” she said. “Of course, I suppose I should be polite and pretend not to be interested in it, but I am. We all are, aren't we, boys?”

Bob and Hal grinned.

“Well, then,” said Bill, “I guess I'll have to see what's in it.” He opened the telegram, and glanced hurriedly over it. “Pat's landing tomorrow,” he said. “He wants us to be out at the airport to see the *Marianne* come in.”

“Hurray!” shouted Bob, and went into a war dance.

His mother looked at him tolerantly. She was used to Bob's antics. “What time is Pat coming in?” she asked.

“He didn't say. In fact, that's all he didn't say in this telegram. But I guess he'll start out about dawn and get here around noon. Anyway, we'll be going down to the airport tomorrow morning to look around. We'll stay there until that Irishman rolls in.”

“What will you do about lunch?” asked the practical Mrs. Martin.

“Why, we'll eat at the airport restaurant,” said Bill. “Don't worry about us, Sis.”

Mrs. Martin looked dubious. She glanced at Hal. She knew that Hal's mother liked to supervise her son's meals, and did not care to have him eat at strange places. Mrs. Martin felt that it would be a shame to spoil the expedition for such a trivial reason, so she said, “I have an idea. I'll pack a lunch for all of you tonight, and you can take it with you tomorrow. How will that be? You can eat it anywhere around the airport. It'll be a regular picnic. There are some nice places around the port that you can go to. How about that?”

Bob answered for them. “That will be great. Gee, Bill, do you remember the picnic baskets that Mom can pack? We’re in luck.”

“Do I remember?” said Bill. “How could I forget? You fellows had better be up pretty early tomorrow.”

“You bet we will, Captain,” said Bob.

Then Hal said, “I guess I’d better be going. My mother will be wondering if I’m never coming home. I hope that I can come with you tomorrow.”

“Hope you can come with us? Why, of course you’re coming with us. We won’t go without you,” Captain Bill said explosively.

“I’ll see,” said Hal. “I’ll ask Mother. Maybe she’ll let me go. But anyway, I’ll let you know. I’ll put up the flags in the workshop window. All right?”

“Sure,” said Bob, and walked out with Hal. He saw the boy to the door, and warned him again to be sure to come.

When the two boys had left the room, Captain Bill turned to his sister. “Say,” he said, “do you think that Hal’s mother really won’t let him come, or is the boy looking for a way out?”

“Why, what do you mean?” asked Mrs. Martin.

“Just this,” said Bill, and puffed vigorously on his pipe. “I’ve been watching the boy, and I think that he’s afraid.”

“Afraid of what?”

“Afraid of actually going up in an airplane. I feel that a change has come over him since there has been an actual chance of his learning to fly,” explained the Captain.

His sister looked pensive. “But he’s always been so interested in flying. That’s all the two of them ever talk about.”

“Perhaps. When there was no immediate chance of his going up in a plane. Now that there is, I think he’d like to back out.”

“There is his mother to consider, of course,” said Mrs. Martin. “She would undoubtedly object very strenuously if he merely went to the airport. You must remember that he’s all she has. She’s always so careful of him.”

The Captain snorted. “Too careful,” he said. “She’s made the boy a bundle of fears. Bob has helped him get over some of them, but I think that they’re cropping out now. It will be very bad for Hal if he funks this. I think that it will hurt him a great deal. If he succeeds in overcoming his fears now for once and for all, if he learns to go up in a plane, even if he may never fly on himself, he will be a new boy. He’ll never be afraid again. But one let-down now, and he will be set way back – even further back than when Bob first met him.”

“I think you’re right, Bill,” said his sister. “But what are we going to do about it?”

The Captain shrugged his shoulders. “I think the best thing to do with the boy is not to let him know that we know he’s afraid. Treat him just as if he were the bravest lad in the world. I’ll take care of that. But I can’t take care of his mother. I never was a lady’s man,” smiled Captain Bill. “You’ll have to attend to that.”

Mrs. Martin’s brow wrinkled. “I think you’ve taken the easier task,” she said with a wry smile. “I’d much rather teach a boy to overcome his fears than teach a mother to overcome hers. But I’ll try,” she added, and hoped against hope for success.

Bob burst into the room. “How about something to eat?” he said. “I’m starved!”

“As usual,” said his mother. “I would like to hear you just once complain about being not hungry.”

“All right, mother,” said Bob. “If you want to hear me complain about that, you just feed me a good dinner now, and I’ll do my best to complain about being not hungry – after I finish it.”

“You’re an impossible son,” said his mother, but smiled fondly at him. She really didn’t believe it.

CHAPTER IV – Some War Heroes

Whether secret springs were put into operation by Mrs. Martin that afternoon or not, nevertheless Hal was able to join the party going to the airport early the next morning. It was a beautiful morning. It had stopped raining, and the sun, coming out strong and bright, had dried everything so thoroughly that only an occasional puddle here and there on the road showed that it had rained at all. The drive to the port was pleasant, too; the port being about a mile out of town, and at least five miles from the Martin home.

When they arrived, the day's program was in full sway. A huge tri-motored plane was loading passengers for a cross-country trip. As the three approached the port, they saw the great plane rise into the air and take off exactly on schedule. Smaller planes were flying about above the airport, and on the ground mechanics were working over several planes that needed overhauling. Captain Bill wanted to go first to the administration building, a large white brick structure, modern as any office building in appearance. He wanted to see the head of the airport, an old friend of his, and make the final arrangements for the care of his plane when it came in.

As they were about to enter the building, a tall, heavy-set man passed them, on his way out. Captain Bill started, and half-turned. "Well, if that didn't look like –" he began, then turned and went on into the building. "Looked like an old flying buddy of mine. But of course, it couldn't be. Old Hank never was that fat. Never had an ounce of fat on him. All skin and bone. But you never can tell, eh, boys?"

"You'll be getting there yourself, someday, be careful," laughed Bob.

John Headlund, delighted to see Captain Bill, jumped up from his desk, and pumped his hands up and down. "If it isn't the Captain! Man, it's great to see you again!" Headlund and Bill had flown together in France, and although they had kept in touch with each other a few years after they had returned to America, the press of business had kept them apart, and they had not seen each other for years. Captain Bill presented the boys.

"They're going to bring new business for you, Headlund," said Bill. "Here are two of America's future flyers."

The boys grinned.

Headlund, after wishing them success, turned again to Bill. "Do you see any of the old boys?" he asked.

"Pat McDermott's my partner," said Bill. "He's flying the old boat in this afternoon sometime."

"He is! That's great! And quite a coincidence, too. Do you know who was here – left just before you came in?"

"Not Hank Brown!" shouted Bill. "By golly, I thought I recognized that face! Old Hank! What was he doing here?"

"He's got a ship down here in one of our hangars. It's a beauty – a four passenger cabin plane, with the pilot's seat up front – a beautiful job. Listen, Hank's gone down to the hangar now to look it over. Maybe you can catch him down there. It's Avenue B, the last hangar in line."

"Great. I'd like to see Hank. Last time I saw him he was in an English hospital, eating porridge and not liking it at all. Who would have thought that the old skinny marink would have put on all that poundage? Old Hank fat! And flying in a cabin plane. Come on, fellows, we've got to go down there and see him." He turned to Headlund. "I'm going to be in town all summer, Heady, and I guess you'll be seeing plenty of me. What street did you say? Avenue B?"

Captain Bill and the boys hurried out, found the right road, and walked along it until they came to the last hangar. A beautiful plane, black and aluminum, stood outside. But as they approached, there was nobody to be seen.

"Aho, there!" shouted Bill. "Anybody here know Hank Brown?"

Hank himself appeared from the other side of the plane, where he had been conferring with a mechanic. "I'm Henry Brown," he said, peering from behind gold-rimmed glasses at Bill and the boys. His face registered no sign of recognition at first. Then suddenly it lighted up, he rushed forward, and gripped Captain Bill's hand in his, slapping him heartily on the back with the other. "Well, Bill! You old sock! Where on earth did you come from? What are you doing here? Where have you been?"

Bill, delighted to see his old buddy, laughed at him, and poked him in his now well-padded ribs. "One question at a time, Hank. What are you doing here? And how come you've got this grand ship?" asked Bill.

"I asked you first," laughed Hank.

They spent the next ten minutes telling each other just what they had been doing since their last meeting. They spared the details, but each was satisfied with the other's story. Hank had done well as the manager and later as president of his father's steel plant. Prosperity had ironed out the wrinkles that had always twinkled around his steely grey eyes, and contentment had added inches to his waistline, but he was still the same generous, fun-loving Hank that the boys had known in France.

"Listen," said Hank. "Come on in and try the plane. See how comfortable it is. Say, this is some different from the old rattletraps we used to fly, isn't it?"

"But we had some good thrills in them, didn't we," said Bill. This meeting with Hank was bringing back memories that had not stirred in him for many years.

"Let's get in here where we can talk in comfort," said Hank.

They mounted a little step that the mechanic set for them, and entered the side door of the plane. The inside was amazingly luxurious. Along both sides were upholstered seats, covered with multi-colored cushions. There were built-in fixtures, and everything to make for the greatest ease in traveling. The pilot's seat could be partitioned off by a glass sliding door up front.

The three men sat down on the seats at the side of the cabin. "Gee, they're soft," said Bob. "I could ride all day on these." He jumped up and down a little.

"Remember your manners," said Bill.

Bob stopped jumping and blushed. "Oh, I forgot," he said. He had really forgotten that Hank Brown was an important man, a millionaire. But Hank only laughed.

"How would you people like to take the plane up on its last ride this year?" he asked.

"The last ride?" said Bill. "Why the last?"

"Well, I'm putting her away," said Hank. "That's what I was talking to the mechanic and Headlund about. I was going to spend my summer up in my log cabin in Canada, fishing, and all that. But my wife wants to go to Europe instead. She's going to take the two girls over to France and leave them there in school. That would mean she'd have to come back all alone. I've been intending to go back to take a look around ever since I've been back in America, so I thought I'd take the opportunity of getting over there now with her. I wouldn't take the plane. I won't need a big ship like this. If I want to fly I can pick up a little French or German bus. So I'm putting old Lizzie in the hangar. Seems a shame. But how would you like to go up now? Would you like to try her out?" he asked Bill. "Would I?" said Bill. He slid into the pilot's seat, and looked over the instrument board, to familiarize himself with the instruments with which the plane was equipped. Then he turned back to the boys. "Want to go up?"

Bob was almost beside himself with excitement. "Take her up, Bill go on," he squealed. "Sure we want to go up. Go ahead, Bill."

Hal said nothing. His face was pale. Bill thought that it would be best to ignore him, and just take it for granted that he wanted to go up, too. And Hal, although he was by this time frightened to death, would not admit it. He decided to risk the going up rather than say that he was afraid.

The mechanic taxied the plane out into the open and took away the steps. Bill pressed the starter, and the great propeller began to move. Slowly the ship rolled over the ground, gradually gaining momentum. Finally it rose into the air. Bill handled the huge ship as though it were a toy. Higher and

higher it rose. Bob, looking out of the window, saw the building of the airport whizzing by below them, then disappear into a whirling mass. Were they going? Were they standing still? Bob couldn't tell.

"How high are we?" he shouted at the top of his voice to Hank.

"About 5,000 feet," judged Hank. He was looking over at Hal rather anxiously. He thought that maybe the boy was going to be sick. But Hal manfully hung on, and said nothing.

"We seem to be standing still," shouted Bob.

"We're going, all right. Your uncle is a great one for speed!" shouted back Hank.

The plane was banking now for a turn. They were going back. In a short while Bill had brought the plane down once more into the airport.

"Well, how did you like it?" he said, turning around in his pilot's seat.

"Great!" said Bob.

But Hal was just a little sick. He said nothing, and waited for the world to settle down again.

"You sure handle the ship like you used to in the old days," said Hank admiringly to Bill.

"She's a great ship," said Bill, modestly.

Hank had an idea. "Say," he said impulsively, "how would you like to fly her while I'm in Europe?"

"Gee, Hank, I really don't think" – began Bill. He thought, the same old Hank, always generous, always impulsive.

But Hank was going on with his plan. "Listen, I won't take 'no' for an answer. You fly my plane. And you can fly it up to the Canadian cabin if you want to. Then a perfectly swell vacation plan won't be entirely thrown away. How about it? The cabin is all ready to move into. They've been fixing it up for me. What do you say? Are you game?"

"Game?" said Bill. "Gee, I'm crazy about the idea. But I don't see why you should do this for me."

Hank was embarrassed. "You've been pretty decent to me in other times, remember that, Bill, old boy," he said.

"Forget it," said Bill.

Hank turned to the boys. "Bill here shot down a Boche when the Boche was all but stepping on my tail. Those were the days, eh, Bill?"

"You bet," said Bill. "We sure were glad to get back alive. Remember old Lufbery? Raoul of the Lafayette Escadrille? There was a boy who could shoot them down. Six out of seven in one day. Not bad flying, that. They used to get pretty close to Raoul themselves. He'd come in with his clothes ripped with bullets, but ready to go right out again with the next patrol. Then one day he got his, and there wasn't a man there that wouldn't have given everything he had to save him, either. He'd gone up after a German that nobody seemed able to down. Lufbery climbed up to get above him, and dove. But something went wrong with his plane – God knows what, and those who were watching from the ground saw it burst into flame. Then they saw him stand on the edge of the cockpit and jump. It was horrible. But it was the only way for Lufbery to die – with his plane. He wanted it that way."

Then Hank said, "And Bill Thaw! There was another flying fool. Bill was great fun – always laughing and joking, just as if his next flight might not be his last. Remember what he did to those three German planes when they got fresh with him, Bill?" He turned to the boys. "Thaw," he explained, "was coming back from his regular patrol, when he suddenly came face to face with three German planes. One of them maneuvered to his left, the second to his right, and the third dove below him to fire up. Well, Bill had to think fast, and he did. He side-slipped until he was directly over the plane below him, and fired down. One gone. Then he pulled himself out of a steep dive, and went after the second plane. A quick swoop, and a steep bank, a rapid burst off fire, and the second German went down in a burning nose dive.

"From then on it was nip and tuck, and each man for himself, dog eat dog. It was a pretty even battle. The German was plucky, and ripped into Thaw for all he was worth. But one lucky turn, one

accurate shot, and Thaw had him. Down went his plane. Thaw, his plane in ribbons, his clothes bullet-riddled, limped home, stepped out of his plane with a smile, and a joke on his lips.”

“Golly,” said Bob, “that must have been great fun. I wish I’d been there.”

“What would we have done with a baby in swaddling clothes?” laughed Bill.

“Aw,” said Bob, “you know I mean if I was old enough.”

Hank was looking into the distance, with the far-away look that meant another story was coming on, and Bob stopped talking.

Finally Hank said, “Remember Luke and Wehner? What a team! You never saw two men so different in your life. Frank Luke talked a lot – not always the most modest fellow in the world, either, and made a great to-do about everything he did. But he sure did plenty of damage to the Germans. Joe Wehner was quiet, modest, never talked very much, and never about himself. But still they were always together. Came to be known as ‘The Luke and Wehner Duo.’

“They worked together, too. Went out on the same patrol and always stuck together. Luke’s specialty was shooting down Drachens. Those were the German observation balloons that they sent up behind their lines to observe what was going on in the American lines. Of course, the information they got caused plenty of harm, and anybody who shot down a Drachen was doing a lot of good. But the things were expensive and useful, and the Germans sent them up with plenty of protection. There was always a swarm of planes flying around them and ready to light into any stranger that came near.

“Luke and Wehner used to take care of that. Wehner would fly above Luke, looking out for any plane that might come to attack him. If one hove in sight, Wehner would go for him and engage him while Luke flew on and shot down the balloon. Balloon after balloon went down. The Germans were getting wary.

“One day when Luke and Wehner were on their way to see what they could do about three Drachens that were watching the American lines, they met up with a formation of Fokkers. Wehner dived into the uneven battle. Luke flew on, and shot down one, then the other bag. But the gallant Wehner had fought his last fight. One of the Fokkers downed him. Luke, who saw what had happened to his pal, left the remaining balloon and furiously charged the Fokkers. He fought like mad, zooming, diving, spurting fire into those German planes. Two of them hurtled to the ground. The others fled. Luke started for home. On his way he engaged and downed another enemy plane. It was a record that on any other day he would have boasted about. But not that day. His pal had been killed, and Luke was for once silent and speechless.

“Of course, he didn’t give up balloon breaking. He added up a goodly store. But one day he got his, like so many of them. He’d sent three Drachens down in flames that day, when his own plane was so badly crippled, and he was so badly wounded that he was forced to land. He wouldn’t let them take him, though, and he died fighting. When a band of German soldiers approached him, he pulled out his gun and shot six of them before he fell dead.”

It was Bill’s turn. “Of course you boys have heard of Eddie Rickenbacker. There was an ace for you. If it was speed and trick flying that you wanted, Eddie was the man to give it to you. He had a bag of tricks that would get any pursuit plane off his tail. But he didn’t always use them. He didn’t have 26 planes to his credit for nothing. Eddie was a great ace and a great scout.”

Hank interrupted. “Here we go gassing again like two old fogies. I feel like my own grandfather sitting on the front porch and discussing the battle of Bull Run. We are getting old, aren’t we, Bill? These youngsters ought to be glad that they didn’t have to fly those old buses that we used, though. The new planes are great to fly. You two are going to have a grand time. I’d rather fly than travel any other way. But I don’t think that it would be quite the thing to suggest to my wife now that I would rather fly to Europe with her than take the boat. So old Hank will be a land animal this time. Or rather, a water animal, instead of a bird.”

“A sort of – fish?” laughed Bill.

“Shut up, you,” said Hank. “Now, listen, how about that offer of my cabin and my plane for your vacation? It’ll be a grand trip, and I guarantee that you’ll like the cabin on the mountain. Nobody around for miles, except Jake, who takes care of the place for me. In fact, there’s no town for a hundred miles around. About the only practical way of getting there is by plane. Just think, old man, all of that beauty and solitude going begging. You can get right back to nature there, live a wild life, or have all the conveniences of home, whichever you chose. We’ve got the place all fixed up. It’s a real man’s place, and you’ll love it. And I’d like to see somebody who’d appreciate it have it this summer. And I know you would.”

Bill looked at Hank, who was talking so earnestly, with a puzzled look. “Listen, Hank,” he said, “you aren’t trying to persuade me to go up there as a favor to you, are you? Because if you are, you’re crazy. It’s certainly not you who should be doing the begging. We ought to be down on our hands and knees begging you for the place. The only reason I hesitate at all is because I think it’s too much you’re doing for us.”

Hank snorted. “Then you’re going to take the place.”

Bill looked at him fondly, seeing through the strange marks that time had left on this man, the young, awkward boy whom he had befriended in France, when he had been just a young fellow himself, but not so green as the other. Then he said, “What do you say we leave it up to the boys?” He returned to them. “What do you say, Bob? How does a vacation up in the mountains sound to you?”

Bob, his eyes shining, could hardly answer. He hadn’t wanted to show too much eagerness before because he had remembered his manners just in time, and was watching Bill to see how they should respond to Hank Brown’s generous offer. But now that he saw that Bill was favorably disposed, he breathed, “Oh, gee, I think that it would be great! Just great! Let’s go, Bill.”

Hank was amused and pleased by this enthusiasm.

The Captain turned to Hal. “How about you?”

Hal, who had forgotten his misery during the recital of the exciting stories of waraces, and was once more fired with ambition, now that he was safely on the ground, was almost as enthusiastic. “But,” he said as an afterthought, “I don’t know whether I could go, of course. My mother –” his voice trailed off.

Bill reached over and grasped Hank’s hand. “We’ll take it, old scout. Don’t know how to thank you.”

“Don’t,” said Hank. “I’m glad you’re going to go. All you have to do is to wire to Jake when you’re coming. He lights bonfires to mark the landing field, and there you are. I’m going to be in town for two weeks, so you can come up any time to make arrangements. O.K.? Now I’ve got to go. I’ve been spending too much time as it is. Wish I could stay and see Pat, but I can’t. Tell him to come up and see me, will you?”

He bid them goodbye and left in his automobile which had been parked nearby. The next hour was spent in an exciting inspection of the various planes in the airport, from tiny two-seater monoplanes that looked like fragile toys, to huge biplanes; and in a growing impatience with Pat’s delay. Finally a tiny speck appeared on the horizon, but the three of them had been disappointed so often that they did not dare to hope that this was at last Pat McDermott. But it was. He stepped out of the green monoplane and pushing up his goggles, looked around him. He spied his three friends immediately, and hurried to meet them.

“Hi, Irish!” called Captain Bill. “I want you to meet two pals of mine.” He introduced Bob and Hal. “We’re going to teach them to fly.”

The two boys shook hands with Pat. He looked like his name, a tall, broad, husky man with a shock of curly hair that had probably once been red, but which was now brown, with a little gray at the temples; a young face – it was impossible to tell how old he was; and a broad grin that spread across his face and up around his eyes, disappearing into the roots of his hair.

“Well,” he said, without ceremony, although he had been friends of theirs for years, “They’ll make good flyers if they’re not too lazy. And if anybody can make you work, I can. And I will.”

The Captain laughed. “Don’t take Pat seriously,” he said. “He’s too lazy to make you work very hard. But let me warn you that he’s trained army flyers, so you’d better not mind what he says, while he’s teaching you.”

The boys had gone over and were looking at the Marianne. She was a beautifully stream-lined craft, large yet graceful.

Pat noticed the boys’ admiration, and was pleased. “How about taking a ride in her now?” he asked.

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