

THE STORY OF THE WRIGHT BROTHERS

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THE STORY OF THE WRIGHT BROTHERS

FADE IN:

EXT. GRASSY HILLSIDE - SUNRISE

OTTO LILIENTHAL, a stocky, red-bearded aviator.

Lilienthal is atop a hill in a jacket and short breeches. He pulls a leather skullcap onto his head and checks himself.

He hefts a large, BAT-WINGED GLIDER onto his shoulders and runs the glider down the hill.

The glider lifts him from the ground. He soars awkwardly over the hillside, hanging from the glider by his armpits.

He energetically kicks his legs from side to side to steady his flight.

He drifts about fifty feet from the ground when the glider suddenly swoops up in the air. He climbs on the wing to level the glider. The nose rises perpendicular to the ground, then the glider flips over and dives.

He clutches the glider as it PLUNGES into the earth, EXPLODING in a cloud of dust.

As the dust settles, a heap of cloth and protruding framework are piled at the bottom of the hill.

CUT TO: DAYTON DAILY HEADLINE 1896

FLYING MAN CRASHES!

with a photograph of Lilienthal's wreck.

PULL BACK TO REVEAL: WILBUR WRIGHT (29)

in a work shirt, roughly dressed, reading the paper at the breakfast table.

Sitting opposite him is ORVILLE (26) in sharp attire, reading and finishing coffee.

Also at the table in clerical garb is MILTON WRIGHT (68), a bishop, and KATHARINE (22), serving breakfast.

WILBUR
Lilienthal is dead!

ORVILLE
What?

WILBUR
(showing the paper)
He crashed his glider!

Orville takes the paper from Wilbur.

MILTON
Who's Lilienthal?

WILBUR
The world's greatest aviator!

KATHARINE
He can't be too good if he's dead.

All laugh but Wilbur.

WILBUR
That's not funny, Kate.

ORVILLE
(handing back the paper)
It's too bad. He was our only
hope.

WILBUR
Somebody must continue his
experiments.

ORVILLE
Someone will.

WILBUR
Who? Chanute? Bell? They're
working toward automatic stability.
They won't get anywhere.

MILTON
Automatic what?!

WILBUR
Automatic stability! I'll show
you.

He gets behind Orville, taking the silverware from his hands.

WILBUR (CONT)
Stay put, Orv.

WILBUR
(to Milton)
Most aeronauts today are trying
build a flying machine that lifts
the pilot in the air, carries him
where he wants to go, and puts him
down safe again--without any effort
from the pilot at all.

ORVILLE
The machine does the flying for
him.

WILBUR

The results are like this--pretend
I'm the machine.

Wilbur crouches behind Orville and reaches around him with the knife and fork. He cuts a slice of ham and raises it to Orville's mouth. Orville chases it anxiously but the meat falls in his lap.

ORVILLE
Try again, Will.

Wilbur raises another piece of ham, this time poking Orville with the fork.

ORVILLE (CONT)
Ouch--that's enough!

Katharine and Milton laugh.

WILBUR
Lilienthal says that the pilot
should control the flight himself.

Wilbur jams the knife and fork back into Orville's hands. Orville cuts the ham and eats it without effort.

MILTON

A lot of foolish waste.

KATHARINE

Flying an aeroplane can't be as simple as all that.

WILBUR

Yes it can, Kate. It can be as simple as riding a bicycle.

EXT. WRIGHT CYCLE COMPANY - DAY

A small BOY topples on his bicycle. Orville picks him up off the ground.

ORVILLE

Are you hurt?

The boy shakes his head.

ORVILLE (CONT)

That was much better.

BOY

I'll never learn to ride.

ORVILLE

You mustn't give up. What did Uncle Orv teach you?

BOY

Practice makes perfect.

ORVILLE

That's right. Now come back tomorrow for another lesson.

BOY

Tomorrow! But, Orville--

ORVILLE

I have to go to work. Plenty of little boys want a bicycle just like yours. Who is going to build them if I don't?

BOY

Uncle Wilbur.

ORVILLE

(laughing)

If you can get Wilbur to do any work then you can run the shop yourself! Get on home now.

Orville sees him off and enters the store.

INT. WRIGHT CYCLE COMPANY - DAY

Wilbur is idly reading a book at the counter when Orville enters.

ORVILLE

Did you finish those orders from yesterday?

WILBUR

I was getting to them.

ORVILLE

How about getting to them a little quicker?

WILBUR

(reading)

Chanute says that flight must be controlled on three axes; latitude, longitude, and altitude. Do you think he means each separately or each together?

ORVILLE

I don't care, Will. I don't care and I won't care until after business hours. You read at breakfast, you read at work, you read all evening in the parlor and all night in bed. Spend a little time on your work.

WILBUR

This is my work.

Orville takes the book from him.

ORVILLE

Bicycles is your work. This is your pipe-dream. If you weren't my

brother you wouldn't have a job.
Now go upstairs and get something
done.

Wilbur trudges upstairs. Orville calls after him.

ORVILLE (CONT)
...and leave the flying machines to
the experts.

Orville looks at the book in his hand. It is EXPERIMENTS
IN AERONAUTICS by OCTAVE CHANUTE.

EXT. POTOMAC RIVER - DAY

An older gentleman, neatly dressed with a Van Dyke beard,
OCTAVE CHANUTE (64); and his student, AUGUSTUS HERRING
(33), greet a portly, bearded ALEXANDER GRAHAM BELL (49)
on a houseboat.

HERRING
Octave Chanute, I'd like you to
meet Alexander Graham Bell.

Chanute offers Bell his hand.

BELL
Mister Chanute, I'm glad you could
come observe my experiments.

Chanute speaks with a slight French accent.

CHANUTE
I am honored to be here, Mister
Bell. Honored to meet the great
inventor. My wife uses your
telephone all the time.

CUT TO: GLENN CURTISS (25), pulls a release cord.

An aeroplane model shoots down a rail atop the scow. It
is CATAPULTED off the end of the track and drops toward
the water.

Bell and Chanute are disappointed as it falls.

The sputtering motor keeps the model just off the water's
surface, and it starts to gain altitude. It begins a
slow, climbing turn, and rises into the sky.

Curtiss and the workmen cheer and scream.

Chanute smiles and gives Bell his hand again.

CHANUTE

Congratulations, Mister Bell.
What's next?

BELL

What do you mean?! All I have to
do now is put a man on board.
That's how close I am to having the
world's first aeroplane.

INT. WRIGHT CYCLE COMPANY - DAY

Wilbur, lost in thought, is fidgeting with a CARDBOARD
BOX.

Orville, counting money at the register, looks to Wilbur
and shakes his head.

ORVILLE

You'd better start sweeping up.
Sis' will have a fit if we're late
for dinner.

Wilbur ignores him, examining the long, flat cardboard
box, open at both ends. He contorts the box. He rotates
it clockwise, then reverses the twist and rotates it
counter-clockwise. Suddenly, Wilbur LIGHTS UP.

WILBUR

Orville! Look at this!

ORVILLE

Will, I want to get home.

WILBUR

But watch this!

Orville looks to Wilbur, who is twisting the cardboard
box.

ORVILLE

It's a box.

WILBUR

No! No! Look, I'm twisting it.

ORVILLE

So you're twisting it?

WILBUR

So don't you see, Orv? It's an
aeroplane!

EXT. WRIGHT'S BACK YARD - DAY

Wilbur stands in the side yard of the house flying a BOX KITE. There are FOUR STRINGS connected to it, and Wilbur holds them with both hands. Milton and Orville watch on.

MILTON

An aeroplane!

WILBUR

That's right, Pop. I want to build
an aeroplane.

MILTON

Don't be foolish, Wilbur. Where
are you going to get that kind of
money?

WILBUR

I've saved up almost three hundred
dollars.

MILTON

That money's for something more
important than flying machines.

ORVILLE

It doesn't look like an aeroplane.

WILBUR

No? Watch this--I can make it go
up!

Wilbur pulls the strings. Everyone watches the kite
rise.

WILBUR (CONT)

And I can make it go down!

Wilbur reverses the controls, and the kite dives toward
them.

All three drop to the ground to avoid being hit.
Milton shakes his head disapprovingly to Wilbur.

INT. WRIGHT REPAIR SHOP - DAY

Wilbur shows Orville a map of North Carolina. He points to a lone city by the shore.

WILBUR

Kitty Hawk!

ORVILLE

I've never heard of it.

WILBUR

Nobody has! It's perfect!
Absolute privacy. No one will know what we're up to. No one can tell the world what we're doing wrong. You know how the newspapers are all over this thing like it's the next motorcar.

ORVILLE

What did the Weather Bureau say?

WILBUR

Winds averaging 15 miles an hour, and sand for safe landings. Sand in all directions!

ORVILLE

And hills?

WILBUR

Sand dunes a hundred feet high. It's perfect!

ORVILLE

But what about the shop?

WILBUR

Pop can mind the shop. He's done it before.

Orville picks up Wilbur's kite and shakes his head. He steps over to a FULL SCALE GLIDER that is constructed in

the workshop. He holds up the box kite model to compare. They are identical in design.

The glider's frame is made of wood and the two curved wings are covered with white muslin. It has a wingspan of 16 feet. There is a smaller cloth-covered surface protruding from the front, used as an elevator.

ORVILLE

Pop won't like it. You've spent nearly a hundred dollars already.

WILBUR

Pop couldn't be against us having a vacation. Just think of it as a pleasure trip.

EXT. KITTY HAWK - DAY

There are a few weathered buildings, nothing civilized to speak of.

The wind HOWLS through the alleys and open spaces; BLASTING everything with sand.

The streets and yards are all sand and weeds. A few ragged people wander the streets.

A wagon moves through the small village. The wagon driver is BILL TATE (40), a local Kittyhawker. Orville, in his starched-collar suit, sits beside him. Wilbur rides happily in the back with their supplies.

The wagon leaves the town and crosses the sandy flats near the dunes.

TATE

You two's crazy wanting to stay way out in the sand dunes. You sure you wouldn't rather stay at my house in town?

ORVILLE

We don't mind roughing it a little.

(aloud, sarcastic)

It is a pleasure trip, after all.

TATE

I don't see how you could call this
a pleasure.

WILBUR

It's perfect, Mister Tate! Sand,
wind and privacy! Everything we
seek!

Tate is puzzled.

ORVILLE

(to Tate)

We have foolish pleasures.

EXT. KILL DEVIL HILLS - DAY

The brothers fly the FULL-SIZED GLIDER as if it were a
kite. They control it with four cables, just like the
small model.

It hovers ten feet off the ground, and the force of the
wind nearly pulls the glider from their hands.

TATE

If that ain't the craziest thing I
e'er seen!

WILBUR

(ignoring Tate)

Pull it down, Orv.

They pull the glider back down to the earth.

WILBUR (CONT)

I want you to hold this end, Mister
Tate.

Wilbur hands Tate the control cables and moves to the
pilot's position. Orville is suddenly worried.

ORVILLE

Are you sure you're ready to ride
that thing?

WILBUR

Isn't that what we built it for?

ORVILLE

It doesn't look safe.

WILBUR

Look, Orv, there's two ways to learn to ride a bicycle. One is to sit on a fence post and watch everyone else until you've got a fair idea how it's done, and the other is to get on the thing and ride it yourself. One way is safest, but the other tends to produce the best riders.

ORVILLE

But this isn't a bicycle, Will.

Wilbur, determined, takes the pilot's position, laying prone in the center of the bottom wing.

ORVILLE (CONT)

Okay. But don't try to make any fancy turns. Just fly a nice straight line.

Wilbur nods. They raise the machine and Wilbur into the air.

Wilbur smiles with exhilaration as it lifts him from the ground.

Suddenly the glider swoops up. Wilbur grabs hold of the bracing.

It bobs up and down chaotically, and drifts up about twelve feet. Wilbur clutches the machine in terror; fear streaking across his face!

WILBUR

(panicked)

LEMME DOWN! LEMME DOWN!

They pull the glider down and Wilbur jumps off, collecting himself. Orville and Tate are laughing.

ORVILLE

Easy as a bicycle.

INT. MEETING ROOM, BELL'S FACTORY - DAY

Several men sit around a large table with books, papers, and drawings. Around the table is Chanute, Herring, Curtiss, and Bell.

Behind Bell is the model flown previously, a placard before it reading THE AERODROME.

BELL

(addressing the room)

Gentlemen, the government is granting me fifty-thousand dollars to construct the world's first flying machine.

The room erupts with astonishment.

CHANUTE

Fifty thousand dollars!

BELL

That's right! I'm putting everyone of you to work immediately.

Bell steps over to the model.

BELL

I'm going to build a full-scale flyer from this model--large enough to carry a man on board.

Murmurs fill the room again. Herring shouts accusingly over the crowd, full of bloated arrogance.

HERRING

It won't fly, Mister Bell!

BELL

What's that, Mister Herring?

The room quiets down.

HERRING

I said it won't fly!

BELL

Why not?

Chanute places a hand on Herring's shoulder, stopping him. Chanute speaks, retaining diplomacy.

CHANUTE

Gentlemen, my pupil, Mister Herring, and myself have been working in Chicago. It is his opinion--and I believe I must support him--it is our opinion that the Aerodrome works fine as a model, but will never work as a practical aeroplane. We believe it to be unstable.

HERRING

If you want to build a flying machine, we have some of our own theories that we believe--

A voluminous rise in conversations drowns him out. Bell quiets the room.

BELL

Quiet, please! Quiet! Tell me, Chanute! Have you or the estimable Mister Herring had any success with your experiments?

CHANUTE

Not yet! But--

BELL

But I have! That's plain enough. We shall use the Aerodrome as a model.

CLOSE UP of the Aerodrome model. CUT TO:

INT. BELL'S FACTORY - DAY

Herring topples the model. It smashes on the ground. Design plans are scattered everywhere.

Herring and Bell argue amongst several onlookers, including Glenn Curtiss.

BELL

I don't care what your opinions are!

HERRING

Obviously!

BELL

I hired you to do a job!

HERRING

I cannot do something I do not agree with!

Chanute breaks in, remaining calm.

CHANUTE

Gentlemen, gentlemen! What is the problem?

BELL

Your pupil has been a thorn in my side from the start, Octave!

HERRING

(to Chanute)

He claims that the slower the Aerodrome moves, the stronger the lift it will achieve!

BELL

That's correct!

CHANUTE

That's incorrect, Alex. It defies logic.

BELL

So, you dispute my theory too, Chanute!

CHANUTE

I certainly do. You see--

HERRING

Your theories are ridiculous!

BELL

I want you off my project, Herring!

HERRING

Gladly!

BELL

And you can go with him, Octave!

CHANUTE

Me?

BELL

You put him up to this, didn't you?

CHANUTE

We have discussed the matter in depth, but I don't see--

BELL

This project doesn't need your kind of dissent!

CHANUTE

If I can be of no help to you, I see no reason to stay.

Chanute and Herring turn and leave the office.

BELL

(shouting after)

Too many cooks, Octave!

INT. WRIGHT REPAIR SHOP - DAY

Octave Chanute and Augustus Herring examine the Wrights' new glider.

It is much larger than the previous one. It has a twenty-two foot wingspan and a chord of seven feet. The wings are covered with thick muslin, and they are curved to form a deep camber.

Chanute looks it over with keen interest.

Wilbur and Orville wait anxiously for his response.

Herring studies the elevator and shakes his head.

Chanute looks under the wing and shakes a brace to test its strength.

CHANUTE

Sturdy.

He continues to look over the machine. Wilbur becomes anxious.

WILBUR

Thank you for responding to our letter. This is more than we expected. We really thought you'd consider us cracks, but we are interested in your opinion.

They both turn to the brothers, Chanute seemingly impressed, Herring obviously unimpressed.

CHANUTE

My interests, Mr. Wright, are for science, wherever it may be. Even in a bicycle shop.

WILBUR

So what do you think?

CHANUTE

Your construction is excellent.

HERRING

Granted, but your design is rather simplistic.

CHANUTE

How does it operate?

WILBER

Show him how it works, Orv.

Orville lays prone on the pilot's seat.

WILBER

If you want the machine to go up or down, you move this surface. We call it the elevator.

Orville mechanically pulls the lever. The elevator flips up and down.

WILBUR

And if you want to make a turn, you just move your hips.

Orville shifts the hip cradle and the wings TWIST like the CARDBOARD BOX.

CHANUTE

(again impressed)

The entire wing warps! Do that again.

Orville warps the wings once more.

CHANUTE (CONT)

I must say, this machine is quite a novelty.

WILBUR

Thank you.

HERRING

Have you considered attaching a motor?

WILBUR

Later. First we must learn to control the flight.

ORVILLE

Gravity is our motor.

HERRING

Your machine will not react to winds. It is very unstable.

WILBUR

Orville and I don't think automatic stability is a very practical theory.

HERRING

No?! Our own gliders use automatic stability--

CHANUTE

With some success.

WILBUR

You once said that flight must be controlled on three axis. Did you mean each individually or each at once?

CHANUTE

Each at once, naturally! How else can the machine be affected by the wind?

WILBUR

We thought the pilot should control the flight on each axis-- independent of each other.

ORVILLE

Pilot the aeroplane himself.

CHANUTE

But can a pilot react quick enough for sudden changes in the wind?

WILBUR

Lilienthal believed so.

HERRING

Lilienthal!

ORVILLE

And if the pilot has full control, he can react against the winds as well.

CHANUTE

Lilienthal's theories are long out-dated. Haven't you considered the danger--

WILBUR

The real danger is not being able to control the flight. If I were to put myself in the air with only the winds to guide me, then I would be worried. So I've put all my faith in Lilienthal's theories.

CHANUTE

But Lilienthal is dead.

Wilbur is silenced. Chanute looks over to Herring and Herring gives him a slight nod.

CHANUTE (CONT)

Have you tested this machine to prove if your theories will work?

WILBUR

No, not thoroughly.

ORVILLE

We plan to return to Kitty Hawk
this summer when the bicycle season
quiets down.

CHANUTE

(indicating Herring)

Perhaps my pupil could go with you?

WILBUR

No, thank you! We would rather
work alone.

ORVILLE

Just a minute, Will.

(to Chanute)

What are you suggesting?

CHANUTE

The news reporters found us in
Chicago. We need a new place to
practice; someplace private--and I
believe a communal spirit would be
best for everyone.

ORVILLE

If you were to accompany your
student, Mister Chanute, we
shouldn't worry.

CHANUTE

I will go, certainly; but I can
assure you that Mister Herring is
most trustworthy.

EXT. WRIGHT CAMP - DAY

Wilbur and Orville help unload Chanute and Herring's
things from Tate's wagon.

Herring stands atop the wagon, looking over the terrain.

HERRING

Look at this! Have you ever seen
such a desolate place?

CHANUTE

Yes. I used to live in Kansas.

HERRING

How are we supposed to work out here?

CHANUTE

We'll simply have to do without our common luxuries, which I'm certain the Wrights have already grown accustomed to.

ORVILLE

That's not true, Octave. Without our sister, I have to do all the cooking myself.

WILBUR

Which my stomach is very unaccustomed to.

Orville looks over a large crate beneath a pile of suitcases and boxes.

ORVILLE

Is this your glider?

CHANUTE

Yes. I believe it is one of my finest achievements--the absolute pinnacle of aviation.

EXT. KILL DEVIL HILLS - DAY

Herring bolts down a hill carrying Chanute's machine. Orville runs alongside.

It is crudely built, made from cardboard tubes joined together to move freely with the winds.

The glider flaps up and down, barely holding together, as Herring charges forward.

Herring makes a few desperate hops to get the machine off the ground, but nothing helps.

A few pieces fall off as he runs.

He stops at the bottom of the hill where Wilbur and Chanute are waiting. Herring drops the glider to catch his breath.

CHANUTE

Theoretically, it's a masterpiece.

WILBUR

That put your theory to the test!

HERRING

Nonsense! The machine will fly if the wind picks up.

ORVILLE

If the wind picks up, there won't be anything left to fly with.

A few drops of rain pelt the earth, erupting into a downpour.

CHANUTE

Quick! Save the glider!

They grab the glider and run it back towards camp.

The glider quickly soaks and COLLAPSES under its own weight as they carry it. They drop what's left on the ground.

Everyone circles the remains, bowing their heads. Orville nudges Wilbur, and Wilbur respectfully takes off his cap.

Chanute shakes his head and sighs sorrowfully.

EXT. KILL DEVIL HILLS - DAY

Wilbur shoots out on the glider over the crest of a dune. He tries to keep an even path, but the machine dips up and down just off the sand.

Wilbur struggles with the controls; concentrating on guiding a straight line.

He coasts in close to the ground at a high speed; watching the left wing, trying to drop it down.

The glider STRIKES the sand hard and DIGS IN, spinning the glider on its wingtip!

Wilbur is thrown forward into the elevator, SMASHING IT!

EXT. WRIGHT CAMP - DAY

Wilbur has a BLACK EYE and ABRASIONS on his face.

He watches Herring and Orville fly the glider as a kite. Orville puts a scale on the control cable and reads the pull.

ORVILLE

Twelve pounds!

WILBUR

That's a third of what it should be.

ORVILLE

So what's the problem?

HERRING

Obviously Lilienthal's theories are wrong!

CHANUTE

If you continue you'll be killed.

WILBUR

Continue? I can't even fly in a straight line, much less make a simple turn. How can I continue?

ORVILLE

Maybe Lilienthal was wrong!

WILBUR

His theories are sound. There's something eluding us. The shape of the wing, perhaps.

CHANUTE

When I first started experimenting, I built a wind tunnel to take measurements in.

WILBUR

A wind tunnel?

CHANUTE

It's cheaper than building gliders
to test your theories--and it's
safer too.

INT. WRIGHT REPAIR SHOP - DAY

Orville turns on the motor that runs the WIND TUNNEL. It is a small box with a fan at one end and a window to view inside.

INT. BELL'S FACTORY - DAY

A scaffold surrounds Bell's Aerodrome. Several workers are busy with the construction. Enormous wings grow from the top.

INTERCUT: WRIGHT REPAIR SHOP

Wilbur lays out the TEST SURFACES in a neat and orderly fashion. There are over 150 experimental wings on the table, each properly marked.

INTERCUT: BELL'S FACTORY

Men climb the scaffolding. Others shuffle through charts and papers. Some men apply tools to the machine, tightening bolts and cutting braces to fit. Dozens of people each attend to their jobs. The whole operation is organized, mechanized.

INTERCUT: WRIGHT REPAIR SHOP

They place the surfaces on a fragile wire device made from bicycle spokes and hacksaw blades. They put the surface and device in the tunnel and copy down readings into notebooks. They end up with piles of charts and papers containing their findings.

INTERCUT: BELL'S FACTORY

Glenn Curtiss directs the work crew as a steam engine is lowered into place. Alexander Bell watches over. Several men grab the motor and set it onto the aeroplane's frame. Curtiss unhooks the winch cable and gives the clear signal. The hook is taken away. Curtiss starts up the engine. The pistons grind up and down.

INTERCUT: WRIGHT REPAIR SHOP

Wilbur holds up test surface #12 and smiles. He looks at its edge. It appears IDENTICAL to the cross-section of a modern airplane wing.

EXT. KITTY HAWK - DAY

Wilbur soars out over the dunes. The flight is radically improved. It flies a straight, steady course down the length of the hill, swift and graceful.

Wilbur brings it in low to the ground, coasting just a few inches off the sand.

Orville runs alongside the glider.

ORVILLE

You're doing great, Will! Take it up and try to make turn.

WILBUR

Right!

Wilbur pulls up and the glider hangs in the air. He then drops down and gains a swift increase in speed. He BULLETS down the hillside!

Wilbur warps the wings to induce a turn. The outside wing rises and the inside wing dips close to the ground. The glider starts to turn. Wilbur circles around and heads back for Orville. A PERFECT TURN!

EXT. KILL DEVIL HILLS - DAY

Herring charges down the hillside carrying an oscillating-wing glider. It has three wings with pointed

tips and a large tail. The wings are built to rock freely in the wind.

Herring repeatedly jumps into the air to make it fly. This only carries him a few feet. The wings flap WILDLY in the wind and the whole machine is UNSTABLE.

Chanute waits for him at the bottom of the hill. Herring arrives out of breath.

HERRING

This blasted machine is worthless!

CHANUTE

I'm afraid the Wrights have left us far behind, Augustus.

INT. CABIN - NIGHT

Orville adds figures on a piece of paper. He shakes his head, pondering the figures.

He climbs the ladder to a loft where the beds are. Wilbur, Herring, and Chanute are sleeping.

Orville wakes Wilbur. He speaks softly, not to wake Chanute or Herring.

ORVILLE

We've got a problem, Will.

WILBUR

What now?

ORVILLE

We haven't got enough money left to come back to Kitty Hawk next summer.

WILBUR

There's nothing left?

ORVILLE

A little, but even if we work all year at the shop, there won't be enough to buy a motor, let alone a machine large enough to carry one. I was thinking we should ask Chanute for help.

WILBUR

No! We'll find some money!

ORVILLE

How?

WILBUR

I don't know! We'll think of something.

CUT TO: HERRING

his eyes open, hearing the conversation. He smiles, and goes back to sleep.

EXT. KILL DEVIL HILLS - DAY

Wilbur in flight!

He moves the cradle and induces a turn.

The glider makes it perfectly. It soars with grace and beauty!

Wilbur practices expertise in control; to everyone's satisfaction.

They launch Wilbur again, run through the sand, and chase after the glider; playing like CHILDREN with GIANT TOYS!

EXT. HILLTOP - DAY

The group climbs atop a hill with the glider, preparing for another flight. Orville steps into the pilot's position.

ORVILLE

I'm going to fly it this time.

WILBUR

I thought it was too dangerous for you!

ORVILLE

It looks safe enough now!

Orville grabs hold of the controls.

WILBUR

Okay! But don't do anything
tricky. Just a straight line.

Orville nods. They send him off. He tries to keep a steady flight down the hillside, but it is erratic. Orville works hard at the controls.

Wilbur chases after him, shouting up instructions.

WILBUR (CONT)

Take it up, Orv! Up!...Watch the
left wing!...Not too high!

Orville swoops close to the ground and then rises high. The glider angles up and hangs dead in the air for one breathtaking moment, then falls backwards and CRASHES!

Wilbur digs frantically through the wreckage. There is a heap of sticks, cloth, and flying machine, with Orville in the center without a bruise or scratch.

Orville climbs out laughing.

ORVILLE

Practice makes perfect!

They laugh together.

EXT. CABIN - NIGHT

The small group of men sit near the cabin. A fire blazes before them.

Wilbur plays the harmonica. Orville plays the mandolin, singing. Chanute sings and dances around the cabin with Herring.

They finish their song, Chanute sitting down to catch his breath.

CHANUTE

That was fun.

ORVILLE

One more?

CHANUTE

No! Please!

Everyone calms down. Orville quietly plays.

CHANUTE (CONT)

I am going to France shortly to make a few speeches. I would like to tell them about your experiments.

WILBUR

Exactly what will you tell?

CHANUTE

(chuckling)

Don't worry, Wilbur. I will not say anything to give away your precious secrets.

WILBUR

I'd rather you said nothing at all.

CHANUTE

Oh? Would you keep all this knowledge to yourself?

WILBUR

For the time!

CHANUTE

I thought your interests were for science!

WILBUR

I just don't want someone to get riled up about our ideas and get hurt because of them. I'll risk my own neck with my own theories.

CHANUTE

They would risk their own neck at their own choice.

HERRING

(goadng)

What are you afraid of? Some Frenchman taking your ideas further than you thought possible? Perhaps building a working aeroplane?

WILBUR

Certainly not.

CHANUTE

Then why keep it secret?

HERRING

It seems to me you worry about thieves!

INT. BELL'S FACTORY - DAY

Herring chases Bell through the factory corridors. Bell is walking quickly to get away.

BELL

I don't need any new ideas, Herring.

HERRING

Yes, but these are entirely original. I've just been with the Wright brothers--

BELL

The Wright brothers? Who are they?

HERRING

They're flying down in North Carolina.

BELL

(laughing)

If anyone was flying in North Carolina, I would know about it.

Bell enters the factory and tries to close the door. Herring stops him, holding it open.

HERRING

Their ideas are revolutionary, Mister Bell. Just ask Octave Chanute!

BELL

Augustus, I have little left of that government grant to give you, so you are really wasting your time.

HERRING

But Mister Bell--

BELL

I'm sorry, Herring, but I am very busy.

Bell closes the door on him.

INT. CHANUTE'S HOME - NIGHT

Chanute opens the door to his study and shows in Wilbur and Orville. Chanute closes the door and turns on the lights.

Dozens of aeroplane models blanket the ceiling.

They immediately catch Wilbur's attention. Chanute notices Wilbur's interest.

CHANUTE

Everything is here. The multiple-wing, Penaud, Pilcher, Mouillard, the Aerodrome, the Avion--

WILBUR

Lilienthal?

Chanute points out the bat shaped glider.

CHANUTE

Yes, even Otto Lilienthal.

Wilbur and Orville study the room. It is cluttered with books and papers. A large drawing table holds the designs for a new glider. Orville looks them over. Chanute picks up the small model of Bell's Aerodrome.

CHANUTE

I am worried about Alexander Bell. His Aerodrome is nearing completion.

WILBUR

Why should that worry you?

CHANUTE

He may finish before you.

WILBUR

This isn't a race, Octave.

CHANUTE

But if some rich man should give you the money to work year round, without the burden of the bicycle shop--

WILBUR

We make enough at the shop to--

CHANUTE

I happen to know Carnegie! Would you like me to wire him?

Wilbur considers this for a moment, then smiles.

WILBUR

Andrew is too hard-headed a Scotchman to be interested in flying machines.

CHANUTE

I could convince him otherwise.

WILBUR

If any strings are going to hold our machine in the air, Octave, they'll be strings we tie ourselves.

CHANUTE

You speak for your brother, as well?

ORVILLE

Until I can see an honest living in it, I'm with Wilbur. Aeroplanes are no career.

INT. TRAIN - DAY

Wilbur and Orville are riding home. They remain silent, Orville agitated.

ORVILLE

I'm not certain I approve.

WILBUR

Then why did you agree?

ORVILLE

It was obviously what you wanted.

WILBUR

I don't think Chanute is always acting in our best interest.

ORVILLE

What if Bell succeeds?

WILBUR

If we do this thing, build this machine, there's going to be a lot of people interested, people with an awful lot of money. We are entitled to that money, as inventors, for doing the work. Why do it otherwise?

ORVILLE

I understand, but we need an engine first.

WILBUR

We'll build one.

ORVILLE

You're crazy! The tools would cost more than the engine. All we've got is a drill press and a lathe.

WILBUR

It can be done.

INT. WRIGHT REPAIR SHOP - DAY

Wilbur runs the drill press into an aluminum block, cutting out cylinders for pistons.

Wilbur forms a smooth cylinder out of the aluminum on the lathe.

Wilbur and Orville fit the pistons into the engine block.

Wilbur and Orville complete a new skeleton frame for the machine. This one is the largest yet, 40 feet across.

Propellers are mounted on the machine's frame. They are turned with bicycle sprockets, and are connected to the engine block with bicycle chains.

Wilbur starts up the motor. It revs to life.

WILBUR

Listen to it, Orv! It's fantastic!

Orville gives Wilbur a slap on the back.

The engine SPUTTERS and EXPLODES! A cloud of black smoke pours out.

INT. BELL'S FACTORY - DAY

Bottles of champagne are opened. The room is full of LAUGHTER and CHATTER. A table is set up with drinks and food. The workers celebrate the completion of the Aerodrome.

The finished Aerodrome is in the back of the factory, it's wings towering over the workers. A banner hangs from it which reads SUCCESS AT LAST.

Octave Chanute finds Alexander Bell in the crowd and hands him a glass of champagne.

CHANUTE

Alex, thank you for inviting me. I had my doubts about this machine of yours at first, but I'm really impressed with how it turned out. It is a masterpiece!

BELL

Listen, Octave--this business about the Wright brothers flying gliders in North Carolina--is it true?

CHANUTE

Yes. I was with them.

BELL

Do you think they will fly anytime soon?

CHANUTE

I understand they've run out of funds, and they have too much pride to ask for money.

BELL

(relieved)

Good!

Curtiss taps Bell on the shoulder.

CURTISS

We're ready!

BELL

(to Chanute)

Excuse me.

Bell clears a space around him.

BELL

Everyone! Everyone! Your attention please! As you know, we are to unveil the Aerodrome next week--a month earlier than we expected!

Cheers from the crowd.

BELL (CONT)

I would like to announce that the first pilot of the Aerodrome will be Mister Glenn Curtiss.

Everyone applauds. Bell puts his arm around Curtiss.

CURTISS

I propose a toast. To the world's first aeroplane flight!

CHANUTE

To the Aerodrome!

Everyone cheers and drinks. A photographer snaps a photo of the Aerodrome.

INT. WRIGHT REPAIR SHOP - DAY

Orville looks at the photo of Bell's Aerodrome in the paper. The SUCCESS AT LAST banner is prominently displayed. Orville puts the paper down.

ORVILLE

I guess that's it. We were so close.

WILBUR

He hasn't flown yet.

Wilbur stands before the assembled flyer, complete with motor, filling the repair shop.

WILBUR (CONT)

How long before we can get to Kitty Hawk?

ORVILLE

I don't know. One month's work for travel costs. Another for the rest of the parts we need. We're flat broke. Business is--well, there isn't much business. Assembly lines make bicycles quicker and cheaper than we do.

Wilbur stares out the window. A heavy snowfall has blanketed the city.

WILBUR

Too cold to go now anyway.

INT. WRIGHT PARLOR - DAY

Katherine sits in her rocking chair and urges Milton on.

Milton steps up to the blazing fireplace and faces his sons.

MILTON

This Octave Chanute's a pretty important fellow, isn't he?

WILBUR

He's a world respected engineer.
He built the first bridge across
the Missouri River.

ORVILLE

And he's considered the top
authority on aeronautics.

Milton nods and looks at a photograph of his wife on the
fireplace mantle.

MILTON

All this building and inventing,
you got that from your mother. She
was always good with her hands.

His gaze moves to the fireplace.

MILTON

When you boys built this fireplace,
I thought you'd wreck the house,
but it turned out fine. Then you
built the front porch, those
printing presses, bicycles.
There's no denying you can build
these things, but a flying machine?
Men like Chanute build bridges, and
they can't make a flying machine
that works. I just want to ask you
boys if you really think you can do
this?

WILBUR

Pop, I think we're onto something
no one else has thought of. All
the details are down, we just have
to try them out.

ORVILLE

Wilbur's right! Once we raise some
money we could have a finished
aeroplane within a year.

Milton stares into the fire, taking a deep breath.

MILTON

Well, Kate said you were having
trouble. I was thinking of selling

our little farm in Cedar Rapids,
and giving you boys some of the
money to help you along.

ORVILLE

Pop! You can't be serious?

MILTON

When have I not been serious?

ORVILLE

Thanks, Pop! I promise, by the end
of the year, we'll be in the air.

Orville shakes his hand. Katherine smiles quietly.

WILBUR

So I guess this means you have some
faith in us?

MILTON

No! I still think it's poppycock,
but I'm an old man. What do I know
about poppycock?

EXT. KITTY HAWK - DAY

A newspaper sits under an oil can. The headline reads
BELL'S AERODROME FLIES.

Wilbur picks up the can to reveal the final word
TOMORROW.

He carries the oil can to the Wright Flyer, mounted on a
long, wooden rail. Orville helps him turn the propellers
and the engine spurts to life.

Wilbur adds some oil. Orville proudly watches the
operation. Clouds of dust circle the machine.

Wilbur steps over to a line of seven COASTGUARDSMEN,
huddled together to keep warm. All of them have
handlebar mustaches. One of them stands with a camera on
a tripod.

WILBUR

Are the witnesses ready?

They nod their heads enthusiastically.

Wilbur returns to the flyer. Hearing a noise in the engine he steps closer, listening.

The engine BACKFIRES! Wilbur and Orville jump away from it.

A thick cloud of exhaust spurts out. The machine vibrates.

There is a loud SNAP as the propeller chains break loose from the machine, and a GRINDING as the chains run through loose metal tubes.

WILBUR

Shut it off! Off! Off!

Orville reaches in and shuts off the motor.

The propellers come to rest with a METALLIC CLANKING. The metal tubes are badly twisted.

Wilbur and Orville examine the damage with long faces.

The coastguardsmen shuffle away disgruntled.

EXT. POTOMAC RIVER - DAY

Large ice floes dot the surface of the water. A light snow is falling. A houseboat sits anchored in the river. On top of it are the supports and catapult to launch Bell's Aerodrome. Atop that is the gigantic machine itself, nearly as large as the boat.

Bell and Chanute shake Curtiss' hand, and Curtiss climbs through the wires and bracing to a cloth covered cockpit.

Curtiss wears a light jacket and thin clothes. Everyone else wears heavy overcoats to protect themselves from the cold.

Some workmen paddle Bell and Chanute out in a rowboat for a good view of the flight.

Curtiss dons riding goggles and signals that he is ready. The steam engine is started.

Reporters and photographers on the banks of the river prepare to record the flight.

Bell waves a flag, signaling the houseboat.

There is a GROANING as the machine is released. It SHOOTs down the catapult rail and is FLUNG into the air.

The whole machine TWISTS and COLLAPSES on itself, turning upside-down and PLUNGING into the river.

Curtiss sinks underwater with the machine; his jacket caught on a bracing wire. He takes off his jacket and swims toward the surface. An ice floe blocks his way and he dives again.

Bell's boat and other rescue boats converge on the crash, searching for Curtiss.

Curtiss pops up out of the water some distance from the crash. He waves to the rescue boats.

CURTISS

Over here! Over here!

EXT. COASTGUARD STATION TOWER, KITTY HAWK - DAY

A COASTGUARDSMAN looks out across the Atlantic Ocean. The horizon is clear. He turns to the other side of the tower and looks toward the sand dunes, pulling up his collar to keep out the cold wind.

Tiny specks at the base of the hill are the Wright camp. He raises his spyglass and looks.

SPYGLASS P.O.V.: A flag is raised over two camp buildings.

The coastguardsman climbs down the tower and rings a bell on the side of the station. Six uniformed coastguardsmen scramble and bump into each other as they form a line in front of the station house.

COASTGUARDSMAN

The Wright boys are ready again!

EXT. WRIGHT CAMP - DAY

The repaired Flyer is mounted on a wooden rail. Wilbur and a crewman turn the propellers and the engine spurts to life. Orville crawls into the pilot's position.

Wilbur gives a listen to the motor to make certain it is running properly. He nods to Orville.

The coastguardsmen stand behind the machine with cold, morbid faces. Wilbur circles the machine and huddles them together.

WILBUR

Listen, boys. Try not to look sad if Orville doesn't leave the ground. Try to laugh and holler and cheer him up. Okay? He's takes it pretty hard.

The coastguardsmen reluctantly agree.

Wilbur goes to the right wingtip and removes the support. He waves to Orville. Orville pulls the release lever and the aircraft LUNGES down the track.

Wilbur runs alongside holding the wing. He lets go as the Wright Flyer LIFTS from the ground.

Wilbur stops in his tracks, astonished. THE FIRST FLIGHT! The coastguardsmen jump and shout HOORAHS!

The Flyer BULLETS through the air, just off the ground. The propellers THRUST it forward.

Orville SOARS through the sky like a bird!

Orville lands 120 feet from the rail. Wilbur and the coastguardsmen rush to the machine. They crowd around Orville and congratulate him. They LAUGH and HOLLER and CELEBRATE.

INT. WRIGHT REPAIR SHOP - DAY

Katharine rushes up the stairs shouting.

KATHARINE

Boys! Boys! This letter just came!

She hands the letter to Wilbur; who reads it.

WILBUR

It's from the patent office.

KATHARINE

Open it, Will!

Wilbur tears open the envelope and takes out the letter. He reads it quickly at first, then slowly. Orville waits anxiously.

ORVILLE

What? What does it say?

WILBUR

They refused our patent.

ORVILLE

Refused!

KATHARINE

What for, Wilbur?

WILBUR

(reading)

The device is clearly inoperative and incapable of performing its intended function.

ORVILLE

Ridiculous! Are they telling us the aeroplane doesn't fly?

WILBUR

That's what it says.

ORVILLE

Then what did I do at Kitty Hawk?

Wilbur removes a cardboard innertube box from the envelope.

WILBUR

They sent back our model, too.

INT. LAWYER'S OFFICE - DAY

HENRY TOULMIN (55), very well dressed and dignified, sits behind his desk across from Wilbur and Orville. He studies several documents.

TOULMIN

(without looking up)

Patent litigation is tricky.
Trying to protect the machine
itself won't do you much good.
We'll try to patent the three-axis
control system. That's your most
promising feature, as well as this
wing-warping mechanism....

He looks up and removes his spectacles.

TOULMIN (CONT)

But first I would advise you not to
show the flying machine in public.

Orville and Wilbur look to each other.

TOULMIN

(cont, seeing their
apprehension)

Wait until you're protected by a
patent. It's no guarantee, but it
helps, and that's just in the
states. Overseas it's next to
impossible. But you don't want
anyone stealing your ideas, do you?

ORVILLE

We've already announced a public
flight outside of Dayton. The
newspapers will be there, our
friends, family, everyone from
town.

TOULMIN

That might be a problem.

EXT. HUFFMAN PRAIRIE - DAY

FIFTY PEOPLE, including reporters, have gathered to watch
the Wrights fly in a small, tree-lined pasture.

Katharine and Milton are in the crowd.

Orville waves to the audience. They quiet down and focus
attention on the machine.

A derrick with a counter-weight is used to give the machine extra thrust during launches. Wilbur pulls the release lever, the weight in the derrick drops, and the Flyer is pulled down the track.

The crowd is hanging in silence as the machine nears the end of the rail.

It slides off and stops, never leaving the ground. The crowd GASPS and breaks into murmuring conversations, straining to see if Wilbur is alive.

Chanute looks around to see everyone's concern.

Wilbur climbs out of the wreckage and waves. The relieved audience CHEERS and APPLAUDS.

CUT TO:

Orville, in the Flyer, slides off the rail without leaving the ground. The disappointed crowd GROANS.

CUT TO:

Wilbur is ready for his flight. Orville leans close.

ORVILLE

We don't want to look like complete fools. Take it up a few feet and then crash.

WILBUR

Okay!

Wilbur shoots down the track, lifting off at the end. He hops a few feet and hits the ground. The crowd LAUGHS. Chanute watches as many people start to leave.

CUT TO:

The spectators are gone. Only Wilbur and Chanute remain.

Orville soars out over the prairie; reaching the end, circling back, and continuing. The glider flies perfect.

Wilbur and Chanute watch on.

CHANUTE

Stunning.

WILBUR

I guess we've scared off the thieves.

CHANUTE

Still holding on to secrets?

WILBUR

We're keeping our secret until we can arrange to sell it.

CHANUTE

Sell? To whom?

WILBUR

Well, we made an offer to the war department, but they didn't seem too interested.

CHANUTE

That's not surprising, after their fiasco with Bell. Would you object to my putting a flea in the war department's ear?

WILBUR

I don't want a flea in anybody's ear.

CHANUTE

What are your plans, then?

WILBUR

We're looking into foreign markets.

CHANUTE

You should display your machine to as large a public as possible.

WILBUR

And make a spectacle of ourselves to an accident loving crowd?

CHANUTE

To show the world what you've created! Generate interest! Get people excited!

WILBUR

We can't show the machine until
it's sold. As it is we have a hard
time keeping people away--

Wilbur looks to Orville as the engine of the Flyer begins
COUGHING and SPUTTERING.

Orville looks around, confused. The engine quits
running, and the propellers slow down to a stop.

Wilbur watches on, concerned. Orville appears calm at
the controls as he glides the machine in and lands it
neatly next to Wilbur and Chanute.

WILBUR

What happened?

Orville steps up on the machine, and looks in the gas
tank.

ORVILLE

How long was I up there?

WILBUR

(checking his stopwatch)
Nearly eighteen minutes.

ORVILLE

Looks like we'll need a bigger gas
tank!

EXT. HUFFMAN PRAIRIE - DAY

Orville, Chanute, Milton and Katharine sit outside the
aeroplane shed on a picnic blanket drinking lemonade as
they watch Wilbur fly. Wilbur passes over the shed and
the family CHEERS and LAUGHS.

CUT TO: A small gathering of fifteen locals watch the
Flyer circle the pasture.

CUT TO: The inter-urban rail car passes Huffman Prairie
as Orville is flying. He pulls alongside the rail car
and follows it down the length of the field. The
passengers stick their heads out of the windows and point
at the Flyer. Orville waves to them, then veers off to
circuit the prairie.

Wilbur watches the rail car pass--at all the people witnessing the flight.

CUT TO: Wilbur and Orville are putting the Flyer in the shed at the end of the day.

WILBUR

Too many people have seen us in the air.

ORVILLE

Our flights are getting longer all the time. We can't hide it anymore.

WILBUR

We should quit flying.

ORVILLE

That's a bit drastic, don't you think?

WILBUR

We've gotten our practice. Something will bull the market soon and we can sell the Flyer, but it's got to be mutual.

Wilbur hangs a lock on the shed door and waits.

ORVILLE

I don't know, Will.

WILBUR

It's as much your machine as it is mine.

ORVILLE

Maybe we can go back to Kitty Hawk.

WILBUR

We need to put our energies into selling. We aren't getting anywhere flying around.

ORVILLE

But I like flying. I don't want to give it up.

WILBUR

Neither do I, but if we don't put it away someone else is going to build one just like it. Where does that get us? We've done the work, now it's time to claim our earnings. Until then, we can't trust anyone to see it.

Orville ponders, then closes the lock, sealing the Flyer away.

EXT. HUFFMAN PRAIRIE - DAY

They show the empty flying field to HART BERG (48), a British Emissary.

BERG

But if you don't trust me to see your machine, why should I trust that you really have one?

WILBUR

We don't expect you to simply take us at our word.

BERG

I certainly hope not.

EXT. HUFFMAN'S HOUSE - DAY

Torrence HUFFMAN, an aging farmer, stands in the doorway. Wilbur, Orville, and Berg are on the porch. Huffman points away toward the flying field.

HUFFMAN

The boys flew that contraption down in the field o'er yonder.

BERG

So you have seen the machine fly?

HUFFMAN

Oh, yes! A big, white thing just over the trees. I kept on shocking till I got down to the fence, and the durned thing was still in the

air. I thought it would never come down.

Wilbur and Orville take Berg to the local farmers, getting testimonies from each.

Then they present him to the local businessmen of Dayton. All nod their heads to Berg's questions or make motions imitating the aeroplane in flight.

EXT. DAYTON TRAIN STATION - DAY

Wilbur and Orville show Berg to the train.

BERG

You've convinced me, but that doesn't mean I can convince my people back in England. I'll do my best to make a sale. Your terms seem reasonable enough, so I shouldn't have any problems.

WILBUR

Thank you. Have a safe trip.

Berg shakes their hands.

CUT TO: A GERMAN EMISSARY

Shaking the Wright brother's hands at the train.

GERMAN EMISSARY

The Kaiser will be very interested, Herr Wright.

ORVILLE

That's good. Have a safe trip.

CUT TO: CAPTAIN FERDINAND FERBER

A French Emissary, shaking hands at the train.

FERBER

I expect a sale in no time, Monsieurs.

WILBUR

Thank you. Have a safe trip back to Paris, Captain Ferber.

Ferber boards the train.

INT. AERO CLUB DE FRANCE, PARIS - NIGHT

Several well-dressed men fill the meeting hall. In the director's chair, seated above all, is EARNEST ARCHDEACON (50), an overweight, near-sighted CIGAR fiend.

The French Emissary, Ferber, is there with several other French aviators, including SANTOS-DUMONT. A heated argument is progressing. Archdeacon strikes the table with a metal ruler to quiet everyone down.

ARCHDEACON

Gentlemen, sil-vous plait!
Silence!

FERBER

My own gliders were designed from their theories! I see no reason to doubt them!

ARCHDEACON

The Wrights have flown or they have not flown. They possess a machine or they do not possess one. They are in fact either fliers or liars!

SANTOS-DUMONT

It is difficult to fly! It is easy to say, "We have flown!"

ARCHDEACON

If they do not have an aeroplane to show for their boastful claims, it is easy to assume that they are liars!

The group breaks into DEBATES and ARGUMENTS. Archdeacon hits the table again. They quiet down.

SANTOS-DUMONT

Tell us, Captain Ferber, who is funding the Wright brother's experiments?

FERBER

They built it themselves--paid for it themselves!

CLUB MEMBER

They are simple bicycle clerks!
They cannot afford such
experiments!

SANTOS-DUMONT

Why isn't their government paying
them any attention?

ARCHDEACON

Because they do not yet have a
machine! Gentlemen, we must hurry
and do something to beat the Wright
brothers! The flying machine must
not be completed in America!

EXT. BOIS DE BOULOGNE, FRANCE - DAY

Hundreds of Parisians are gathered to watch the flight of
the '14-Bis' flying machine. It is a gigantic assemblage
of box like shapes covered in cloth.

The crowd stands in two long lines down the length of the
field, forming a runway for the machine.

An automobile pulls up with Earnest Archdeacon.
Archdeacon reaches out and shakes the pilot's hand. It
is Santos-Dumont.

ARCHDEACON

Bon chance, Santos!

SANTOS-DUMONT

Merci, Archdeacon!

Santos boards the aeroplane. Several photographers snap
pictures of him. He stands erect in a wicker basket at
the controls. The motor is started, and the crowd CHEERS
WILDLY.

Santos blows a kiss and starts a run across the field.
Archdeacon follows alongside in the automobile. The
crowd closes in behind them.

After rolling a great distance, Santos leaves the ground.
The crowd SWELLS with SHOUTS and CHEERS as he takes off.

Santos looks ahead and sees the spectators draw together
in front of him. He grabs the controls and noses the

machine up. It barely rises over their heads. The automobile halts before the spectators as the aeroplane continues on.

Santos finds a clear spot beyond. He lands on two, wire-spoke wheels, which collapse under the machine when he hits the ground.

Everybody SCREAMS! Women CRY! One even FAINTS!

Dumont is pulled out of the wicker basket by a horde of people and is carried to Archdeacon's automobile.

ARCHDEACON

Magnifique, Santos! C'est bon!
C'est bon!

(to the crowd)

Today we have witnessed the world's
first aeroplane flight!

The audience ROARS with cheers!

INT. WRIGHT REPAIR SHOP - DAY

Glenn Curtiss looks at a photograph of Orville piloting the Flyer at Kitty Hawk, with Wilbur running alongside the machine. Wilbur and Orville are with him.

WILBUR

That's Orville making the first flight. If you only know what we went through trying to beat you into the air.

Curtiss shuffles through a few more photographs, coming upon a document.

CURTISS

Your patent?

WILBUR

That's it.

CURTISS

1906! Three years from patent to flight. Where have you been hiding all this time?

WILBUR

We've been perfecting the Flyer.
We're looking for buyers right now.

CURTISS

Chanute told Bell you had succeeded
and no one believed him. Then you
just disappeared. If this
machine's as good as you say, you
could have sold it long ago.

WILBUR

We have some very interested
parties in Europe.

ORVILLE

As a matter of fact, Wilbur is
traveling to England next week to
discuss a deal.

CURTISS

You're going to show them the
machine?

WILBUR

Oh no, just discuss a deal. We
hope to draw a contract first.

Curtiss spots a motor in the corner of the shop. He
stoops down and looks it over.

ORVILLE

How long have you been Bell's
assistant?

CURTISS

From the beginning, ten years I
guess. I build his engines.

ORVILLE

That was our first engine.

CURTISS

He wants me to start on a new one.

WILBUR

Is he planning to experiment again?

CURTISS

You're not the only ones with plans. I leave for Nova Scotia tonight.

EXT. BEINN BHREAGH, NOVA SCOTIA - DAY

A tremendous mansion on Cape Breton Island, built on a promontory overlooking the ocean. There are eleven fireplaces and two conical towers.

CUT TO: The interior is equally luxurious.

Bell and Curtiss enter a lush parlor.

LIEUTENANT SELFRIDGE (30), in army uniform, and a few others are in the room admiring the furnishings.

BELL

Good afternoon, gentlemen. Have a seat, please.

Everyone sits down, except Bell.

BELL (CONT)

Gentlemen, I want to establish an organization whose sole purpose is getting man into the air. I want a flying machine that not only gets off the ground, but stays off the ground! Glenn Curtiss here will direct the experiments. Lieutenant Selfridge, I'd like you to be our secretary, if you have no objections.

SELFRIDGE

Certainly not, Mister Bell.

BELL

Good! Your first job is to record these proceedings.

(to Curtiss)

Could you get him some ink and paper, Curtiss?

Curtiss obliges.

BELL

I want everything written down. I don't want any piece of information to slip by unrecorded--

SELFRIDGE

Mister Bell, are we trying to beat the Wright brothers?

BELL

There is no beating the Wrights, Selfridge! The Wrights have already flown--just ask Curtiss--but nobody's heard from the Wright brothers in four years! If they're not going to sell their flying machine, then I'm going to sell mine. There's money to be made in aeroplanes and I'm going to make it....On the other hand, I would like to beat the French!

CURTISS

Here, here!

They all laugh and agree.

INT. LONDON TAILOR - DAY

Wilbur is being fitted for a new suit. Octave Chanute and Hart Berg, the British Emissary, oversee the operation.

WILBUR

I don't see what's wrong with the clothes I have on.

CHANUTE

If you are going to be an international businessman, Wilbur, you must look like an international businessman.

WILBUR

But I still feel like a bicycle clerk.

CHANUTE

Exactly why we must get you out of these clothes.

WILBUR

I don't see what difference it will make.

CHANUTE

I hope it will make quite a difference. There has been some difficulty with the negotiations.

WILBUR

What difficulty?

BERG

Every country in Europe is trying to build their own flying machine.

WILBUR

But they're thinking about flying machines, and I'm thinking about business.

BERG

Nobody is interested in your Flyer. Nobody even believes you have one.

WILBUR

Is that England's opinion?

BERG

England simply wants to steer it's own course. They would rather not deal with the Americans.

WILBUR

I see. What about Germany?

BERG

Have you had communication with a Captain Ferber of France?

WILBUR

Yes, I've written him several times.

BERG

A letter to Ferber was translated in a German newspaper. The Kaiser took great offense at what was written.

CHANUTE

What did you write?

WILBUR

Nothing! I've written nothing against the Germans.

BERG

That may be, but the Kaiser is furious. He refuses to co-operate with us in the sale of your machine.

WILBUR

I see. What do you suggest?

BERG

I suggest you go to France.

CHANUTE

The French public is in such a fervor over the aeroplane, we could sell it to them at any price.

WILBUR

Very well.

BERG

Of course, if you would agree to make some demonstration flights, it would help greatly.

WILBUR

No demonstrations.

BERG

But who is going to buy a machine that nobody has ever seen?

WILBUR

Who is going to buy a machine when they've seen how it works and can build one themselves?

CHANUTE

That's a chance you should take.

WILBUR

The French will simply have to trust me.

INT. FRENCH GOVERNMENT OFFICE - DAY

Wilbur sits down in an OFFICIAL'S office. The Official looks over contracts. He is especially friendly and genial.

FRENCH OFFICIAL

I trust you, Monsieur Wright.
Your requests are reasonable.

WILBUR

Thank you.

FRENCH OFFICIAL

Your offer is one million francs.

WILBUR

Correct.

FRENCH OFFICIAL

In exchange for one working aeroplane and exclusive European rights to France for six months. If you do not deliver a working machine to us, our contract is void.

WILBUR

That's right.

FRENCH OFFICIAL

Very well, Monsieur Wright. I will speak to my superiors. I can almost guarantee a deal.

EXT. COUNTRY HILLSIDE - DAY

Several people stand on a grassy hill. Several rocks and boulders lie about and people are sitting on them. Among the crowd is Wilbur and Chanute.

Ferber steps up and shakes Wilbur's hand. With him is Earnest Archdeacon.

WILBUR
Captain Ferber.

FERBER
Earnest, this is Wilbur Wright.

ARCHDEACON
(ignoring Wilbur)
Octave. What brings you to France?

CHANUTE
I am negotiating the sale of
Wilbur's machine.

ARCHDEACON
That is good. I will do anything I
can to help you, Octave. I have a
lot of pull with the government.
Whatever you need, just ask.

CHANUTE
Thank you. If I need any
assistance, I'll know who to come
to.

They walk away together up the hillside. Wilbur and Ferber follow.

WILBUR
How does he know Chanute?

FERBER
Everyone knows Octave Chanute! He
told us all about your experiments
at Kitty Hawk. It was quite
inspiring.

ARCHDEACON
Thanks to your speeches, Octave,
the aeroplanes of France are now
type de Wright.

WILBUR
Type de Wright?

FERBER

As you will see, my own glider is an exact replica of your Wright Flyer.

Ferber continues to the top of the hill where a flimsy, crude version of the early Wright glider is waiting. Several assistants help him with the machine.

ARCHDEACON

(to Chanute)

You have paved the road to aeronautics. It has been a virtual renaissance.

Ferber charges down the hillside. The wind catches the surfaces and the loose cloth billows out. The frame wobbles as he runs. Eventually, he lifts from the ground and glides to the bottom of the hill, shifting his weight to maintain balance much as Lilienthal did. The small crowd applauds.

ARCHDEACON (CONT)

A perfect glide! What do you think, Octave? A perfect glide.

CHANUTE

Excellent! An excellent glide.

Archdeacon moves to congratulate Ferber. Chanute follows, but Wilbur stops him.

WILBUR

What do they mean, type de Wright?

CHANUTE

Ferber's glider merely incorporates a few of your ideas.

WILBUR

It's an exact copy of our machine!

CHANUTE

It doesn't perform half as well as your glider.

WILBUR

But theoretically, it's the same. All they need is practice--

ARCHDEACON (O.S.)

Octave!

CHANUTE

It doesn't matter right now.

WILBUR

It's thievery!

CHANUTE

We are not going to sell your
aeroplane unless you are absolutely
cordial.

ARCHDEACON (O.S.)

Octave! Come now!

CHANUTE

Go and congratulate the pilot.

Wilbur succumbs. They go to shake Ferber's hand.

INT. FRENCH GOVERNMENT OFFICE - DAY

Earnest Archdeacon lights up a CIGAR.

He stands across from the French Official. Santos-Dumont
is behind him.

ARCHDEACON

I believe we are in common interest
when I say that Wilbur Wright has
no business with our government.
Do you agree?

FRENCH OFFICIAL

I understand, Monsieur Archdeacon.

ARCHDEACON

Good. The aeroplane must be
perfected in France.

EXT. AIRFIELD IN ISSY, FRANCE - DAY

The automobile pulls up to the airfield. Wilbur and
Chanute get out as newspaper men swarm in around them.
They shout questions in French and English. Several
photographers snap pictures of them.

Earnest Archdeacon wades through the throng, gesturing and shouting.

ARCHDEACON
Monsieur Chanute! Monsieur
Chanute!

Archdeacon finds them and leads them away.

ARCHDEACON (CONT)
Come this way!

They enter the airfield, followed closely by the reporters. Hundreds of people fill the grandstands and the area surrounding.

At one end of the field is the Voisin-Farman aeroplane. It is a poor imitation of the Wright Flyer, complete with a motor. Santos-Dumont is at the machine, preparing for a flight.

Wilbur and Chanute take a seat in the stands.

ARCHDEACON
That is Santos' flyer. Much like
your machine, oui?

WILBUR
His nerve is unquestionable. Does
it fly?

ARCHDEACON
Certainly! He is going to try and
win the prize for the first one
kilometer flight. The award is
fifty thousand francs!

Wilbur whispers to Chanute.

WILBUR
I've already flown one kilometer.

Chanute shrugs as the engine starts up.

ARCHDEACON
(proudly)
Here goes my man now!

Santos-Dumont launches the machine into the air, and then makes a 1.5 kilometer flight in a complete circle.

He is thrust forward by the engine with little control over where he goes.

He roars past the grandstand, wavering through the air. The spectators leap to their feet with excitement; Wilbur with fright.

WILBUR

Suicide!

The frantic crowd MOBS the airfield as the aeroplane passes. They SCREAM and SHOUT. They TRAMPLE others underfoot.

Santos-Dumont looks for a place to land, but all he sees is a mass of people surging forward.

Wilbur looks to Archdeacon, who is LAUGHING and pointing at the aeroplane.

People rush CHAOTICALLY about the field.

Santos-Dumont spots a clear area and makes a CRASH LANDING, breaking up the machine.

The people grab him and carry him over their heads in triumph.

He is BLEEDING profusely from the crash, but doesn't appear to notice, caught up in his moment of glory.

INT. FRENCH GOVERNMENT OFFICE - DAY

Wilbur and Chanute confront the French Official, who has now lost his congeniality.

FRENCH OFFICIAL

I'm sorry, Monsieur Wright, but the government will not accept your offer.

WILBUR

If they do not agree to the purchase price, I am still willing to negotiate.

FRENCH OFFICIAL

It is not the price, Monsieur Wright. The government is still

not convinced of your honesty. We cannot take your word that your machine will fly. If would agree to a demonstration flight--

WILBUR

No.

FRENCH OFFICIAL

As you wish. France intends to pursue its own interests.

INT. ARCHDEACON'S OFFICE - DAY

Wilbur and Chanute stand in the doorway of a dark office. Earnest Archdeacon sits behind a massive desk with a lamp and a model of the Lilienthal glider, smoking a CIGAR.

ARCHDEACON

Come in, Octave. Monsieur Wright. Thank you for coming. Sit down, please.

They step into the room. Wilbur notices several people lounging about in the shadows. They sit down.

ARCHDEACON

You are having trouble with your negotiations, oui?

WILBUR

Yes we are.

ARCHDEACON

(laughing)

There are many important people in France, Wilbur, who don't even believe you can fly. Cigar?

WILBUR

No, thank you.

Archdeacon offers Chanute a cigar.

CHANUTE

No.

ARCHDEACON

But whether you can fly or cannot fly is inconsequential when dealing with the government.

CHANUTE

I thought it was the whole point.

ARCHDEACON

No, no. Certainly, you can understand, Monsieur Wright, being an American businessman, that money is the point of every issue.

WILBUR

What are you suggesting?

ARCHDEACON

I am suggesting that you ask the government for more money.

WILBUR

More money?

ARCHDEACON

I would not want to cheat you from your fair share, Monsieur Wright. If you are to employ my services, certainly you must increase your purchase price to compensate.

CHANUTE

Increase!

WILBUR

How much, exactly?

ARCHDEACON

I would say...three million francs.

WILBUR

That's preposterous!

ARCHDEACON

You have little choice, Monsieur Wright. Without my help, the French government will have nothing to do with you.

WILBUR

I see. It's not an offer, it's
blackmail! You've stopped my sale
so you could draw some graft for
you and your greedy bandits!
Otherwise, you've got Santos in
that flying deathtrap and you'll
take my offer and sell his machine
instead, right?

Archdeacon does not answer. Wilbur gets up to leave.
Chanute follows. Wilbur turns back.

WILBUR

Chanute told me I could sell at any
price; but if that's the price I
have to pay, I don't want any part
of it.

ARCHDEACON

Suit yourself, Monsieur Wright. I
thought you were a better
businessman.

Wilbur and Chanute leave. Archdeacon puts out his CIGAR.

ARCHDEACON (CONT)

He'll be back.

INT. WRIGHT PARLOR, DAYTON - DAY

Wilbur, Orville, and Chanute:

CHANUTE

The French are far behind us.

WILBUR

(boiling)

But they are catching up while we
rest upon our oars! It is
practice, practice, practice which
tells, and the other fellows are
getting it!

ORVILLE

No amount of practice will sell the
machine!

WILBUR

That's what's important right now.

CHANUTE

You seem driven by a desire for great wealth!

WILBUR

You're the only one to ever accuse us of that!

CHANUTE

Why else should you hide the aeroplane?

WILBUR

We have every right to our work as inventors--to do with as we please!

CHANUTE

You have an obligation to the advancement of science.

WILBUR

We still must protect our ideas.

CHANUTE

Ideas that may save another aviator's life? One of those Frenchmen may die while you wait to fill your pockets.

WILBUR

That's your concern, Chanute!

CHANUTE

Mine!

WILBUR

You insisted on telling everyone about our machine! They started making copies the day you left France four years ago. It's exactly what we feared!

CHANUTE

I don't see how that affects anything.

WILBUR

If Europe wasn't so busy trying to build their own aeroplane, they would be much more interested in buying ours.

CHANUTE

So you blame this on me?

WILBUR

That's right!

CHANUTE

I've done what I could to help you and--

WILBUR

We don't want your help, Chanute!
You're not helping! You're getting
in the way!

Chanute stops, deeply hurt.

CHANUTE

Very well. Perhaps you can do
without my help.

Chanute turns and marches out of the room.

Orville starts after him, but Wilbur stops him.

ORVILLE

What are you doing, Will? All this
business about hiding the aeroplane
isn't getting us anywhere.

WILBUR

You're taking his side?

ORVILLE

Because he's right. We're not
going to sell the Flyer unless we
make some demonstration flights.

WILBUR

I am not going to show my machine.

ORVILLE

Our machine!

WILBUR

Look, it's pointless to get angry about this.

Orville sees Chanute out the window.

ORVILLE

Will, he's standing out on the porch. Tell him to come back in.

WILBUR

No.

ORVILLE

It's got to be forty degrees out there.

WILBUR

He's responsible for all this. When he accepts that he can come in. I told him from the start our experiments were not common knowledge.

ORVILLE

Well I say we get the aeroplane out, fly it to Washington D. C., and land it on the White House lawn--then ask them what they want for it.

WILBUR

Orv, you're missing the point. Chanute has everyone thinking they can build their own aeroplane, and the truth is they can. If we could do it, anyone can, anytime.

ORVILLE

That's why we've got to jump at the wolves. Show our teeth! You're not such a keen businessman, Will. I kept our bicycle store going for years without much help from you. If Chanute and I say fly the thing in public then maybe you ought to consider it. We're bound to lose either way so why not give it a try?

EXT. WRIGHT PORCH - DAY

Wilbur steps onto the porch and stands looking out. Chanute faces away, wrapping his arms around him to keep warm.

WILBUR

Cold out here.

CHANUTE

Yes. Yes it is.

They stand for a moment in a chilled silence.

WILBUR

Listen, maybe we need--

CHANUTE

You have no respect for me, Wilbur. I have been trying to fly much longer than you and I, well... I couldn't do it. Maybe you don't respect me because of that, but that does not make me useless.

WILBUR

You're not useless.

CHANUTE

I don't know why you resist me. Maybe you're afraid I'm jumping on your coat tails. Maybe I am.

WILBUR

Come inside, Octave. We can talk.

CHANUTE

No. I'm going home.

WILBUR

Home? Chicago?

CHANUTE

I am offended, Wilbur, and I want to go home. I have more important things to do than get in your way.

WILBUR

Suit yourself. You do what you want.

Wilbur goes inside and slams the door.

INT: WRIGHT FOYER - DAY

Wilbur turns to Orville sitting on the steps. They look at each other a moment, Orville resigned not to argue.

Wilbur marches up the stairs past him.

EXT. HUFFMAN PRAIRIE - DAY

Wilbur unlocks the shed door and opens it.

The flyer is packed away neatly inside.

Huffman and his sons help Wilbur take it out of the shed and load it on a waiting wagon.

INT. WRIGHT REPAIR SHOP - DAY

Wilbur is dismantling the flyer and packing it in a crate as Orville comes up the stairs. Wilbur continues his work without looking.

ORVILLE

There you are. What are you doing?

WILBUR

Isn't it obvious?

ORVILLE

How'd you get the machine?

WILBUR

I went and got it.

ORVILLE

Where are you sending it?

WILBUR

France.

ORVILLE

France? Does that mean-

WILBUR

Yes.

ORVILLE

I guess you have it all worked out?

WILBUR

Yes, thank you.

Orville watches a moment as Wilbur works.

ORVILLE

Enjoy your trip.

Orville turns and goes down the steps.

EXT. AIRFIELD IN NOVA SCOTIA - DAY

The Gold Bug, so called for its insect appearance, is prepared for a flight. It is a slight departure from the Wright's design. Bell's boys surround Glenn Curtiss. Bell shakes Curtiss' hand.

BELL

Good luck with the Gold Bug,
Curtiss. Only one kilometer.

CURTISS

If the French can do it, so can I.

Curtiss climbs into the cockpit. Bell's boys jump on an automobile that carries them a kilometer away, where two flags mark the finish line. A large crowd is gathered there.

The automobile stops. Bell gets out and is met by Augustus Herring.

BELL

Mister Herring. What are you doing
here?

HERRING

I couldn't have missed this, Mister
Bell. Success at last!

BELL

(shrugs him off)

Well, I'm glad you could join us.

Bell takes a flag and waves it.

Curtiss takes off. He flies the length of the field, trailing a cloud of thick exhaust. He passes several of those cheering at the finish line, and continues beyond.

A motorcycle follows the machine, driving through the black cloud of exhaust. The motorcycle pulls up to Bell as the applause dies. A MESSENGER in military uniform hands him a letter.

BELL

What's this?

MESSENGER

A cable from the War Department,
Mister Bell.

Bell opens the letter as the crowd looks on.

SELFRIDGE

What does it say?

BELL

The government, the American
government, is taking bids for the
purchase of an aeroplane.

SELFRIDGE

Excellent! We can sell the Gold
Bug.

BELL

Wait, there are special
requirements. The aeroplane must
be capable of carrying two men at a
speed of forty miles an hour, and
must be able to stay aloft for at
least one hour.

SELFRIDGE

That's impossible!

HERRING

There's not an aeroplane in the
world that can do that!

INT. WRIGHT KITCHEN - DAY

Wilbur and Orville read the letter at the dinner table.

ORVILLE

It seems tailored to our machine.

WILBUR

Yes. That's about as fast and far as we could fly. How did the government learn what we could do?

ORVILLE

I don't know.

WILBUR

I do.

ORVILLE

Look Will, just because he's helping out--this is a good thing.

WILBUR

You knew?

ORVILLE

No. I mean, he said he knew a lot of people. I didn't think it would hurt if he just talked to them.

Wilbur glares at him, betrayed.

ORVILLE (CONT)

I didn't ask him to do it. He offered it. You can't blame me.

WILBUR

I guess not. What else does it say?

ORVILLE

All entrants must deposit ten percent of their bid for consideration.

WILBUR

Why such a large deposit?

ORVILLE

To keep out the mountebanks, I would guess. How much should we bid?

WILBUR

How much have we got?

ORVILLE

We can spare about twenty five hundred dollars.

WILBUR

That's twenty five thousand for each machine; a fair price. So I guess I'm going to Washington instead.

ORVILLE

You're going to France. I'm going to Washington.

INT. WRIGHT REPAIR SHOP - DAY

The pieces of the Flyer are packed neatly in a crate.

Wilbur closes the lid and nails it shut. He places a label on it which reads:

WILBUR WRIGHT

LE MANS, FRANCE

Four men grab the crate and carry it out of the shop.

Behind it Orville is nailing an identical crate. Orville slaps a label on it which reads:

ORVILLE WRIGHT

FT. MYER, VIRGINIA

Wilbur turns to Orville as he's about to head down the stairs.

WILBUR

Good luck in Washington.

ORVILLE

You too.

Orville continues to work without looking. Wilbur waits a moment then descends the stairs.

Orville goes to the window to see the crate being loaded on a wagon. Wilbur climbs aboard and the wagon takes off.

EXT. FORT MYER - DAY

A convertible drives past the barracks. Orville and MAJOR SQUIRE (35), a stocky career soldier, are in the back.

SQUIRE

We were expecting you to be the only person to place a bid, but there were two others.

ORVILLE

Two others?

SQUIRE

Alexander Graham Bell and Augustus Herring.

ORVILLE

Herring?

SQUIRE

Understand, both of them have placed lower bids than you, so if either one are able to meet the requirements, the government will be forced to purchase their machine over yours. I'm sorry, but those are the rules.

ORVILLE

That's only fair, Major.

The automobile pulls up to a large balloon shed and stops.

SQUIRE

This building will house your machine until it is ready for its flight. We normally use it for airships. As you can see, it is right next to the practice field.

Orville looks across a gigantic open field next to the garage. It is many times larger than Huffman's prairie.

SQUIRE (CONT)

I hope the field is large enough.

ORVILLE

Yes. It's exceptional.

INT. WORKSHED - LE MANS RACETRACK - DAY

A large garage door opens on a dark work shed. Wilbur enters followed by Hart Berg.

BERG

Is this enough space?

WILBUR

Yes, plenty.

They come upon BERTRAND (18), sweeping up the floor.

BERG

This is Bertrand, your assistant.
He can help you with any odd work
you need.

WILBUR

Do you speak English?

BERTRAND

A little, Monsieur Wright.

WILBUR

Good.

(to Berg)

Have my things brought here, Mister
Berg. I'll sleep with the machine
until it's ready.

BERG

The factory is hardly
accommodating.

WILBUR

I'll get the most work done this
way.

INT. MAJOR SQUIRE'S OFFICE - FORT MYER - DAY

Major Squire stands at a map of the area around Ft. Myer. Orville, Bell, Curtiss, Selfridge, and FOULOIS face him.

Squire points out a course marked on the map.

SQUIRE

In order to meet the war department's requirements, your machines must be able to make a ten mile cross-country trip. The course begins at the airfield here, to Shuter's Hill in Alexandria, and back to the base. Although we tried to plot the safest course possible, as you can see, three deep ravines must be crossed, and there is a forest over a mile wide in which there are no landing places whatsoever. Any questions?

No one responds.

SQUIRE (CONT)

Good. You will be required to train two pilots to fly the machine, one of which you will take on the cross-country flight. The trainees are Lieutenants Selfridge and Foulois.

Squire points them out.

SQUIRE (CONT)

Is this clear?

ORVILLE

Major Squire, isn't Selfridge one of Bell's employees?

SELFRIGE

I have recently terminated my employment.

SQUIRE

I'm sorry, Mr. Wright, but Selfridge is one of the very few army personnel qualified for aeronautics.

ORVILLE

Yes, I suppose he is.

SQUIRE

Good. You are required to fly at a minimum of forty miles an hour. However, for each mile over forty, two-thousand dollars will be added to the purchase price of the aeroplane. A fast machine will get a hefty price. Do you both understand the guidelines as I have told them?

BELL

I do.

ORVILLE

Yes.

SQUIRE

As soon as Mr. Herring arrives, he will be likewise briefed. Until then, gentlemen, you have the field for practice.

INT. WORKSHED - LE MANS RACETRACK - DAY

Wilbur and Berg are putting the machine together. Wilbur sets a fire pot under the cloth covering of the wings and walks away.

BERG

What is that for?

WILBUR

It's too humid. This should dry out the cloth so we can stretch it further. Let's try it again.

The wings are nearly covered except for one end. Wilbur, Berg, and Bertrand grab the cloth at the end of the machine and try to pull it over the frame.

They strain with all their might and finally stretch it over the end.

They sit back exhausted, rubbing their hands.

Bertrand suddenly cries out!

BERTRAND

Feu, Wilbur! Feu! Feu!

A fire catches on the cloth covering.

Wilbur grabs a bucket of water and douses the flames. There is a hole about a foot square in the center of the cloth.

Wilbur throws the empty bucket on the floor and kicks the machine.

EXT. FORT MYER FLYING FIELD - DAY

Orville watches as Curtiss flies the Gold Bug. It flies as well as the Wright Flyer.

Selfridge is riding with Curtiss. They make a rough turn and land near Orville.

CURTISS

What do you think, Orville?

ORVILLE

I think the mechanism you use to control your aeroplane is covered in our patent.

CURTISS

What do you mean? Are you threatening a lawsuit?

ORVILLE

If you intend to make a profit with that machine, Curtiss, I would have no alternative.

CURTISS

If you feel like going against Alexander Graham Bell in patents court, go right ahead.

ORVILLE

You will inform Mr. Bell of his infringement.

CURTISS

I certainly will, Mr. Wright.

Orville, satisfied, turns and leaves.

SELFRIDGE

Doughty little man, isn't he?

INT. LE MANS FACTORY - DAY

The Flyer is assembled. The motor is running. Berg and Bertrand look over the machine. Wilbur steps up and looks over the motor.

BERG

Everyone has been asking when you will be ready.

WILBUR

I'm ready now.

BERG

Now! You'll fly today?

WILBUR

No, tomorrow.

BERG

Why wait?

WILBUR

I never work on Sunday.

BERG

They all want to see you fly.

WILBUR

And they can wait until tomorrow.

A rubber tube pops off the machine. A stream of BOILING WATER sprays Wilbur on the arm and side. Wilbur jumps away and shouts in PAIN.

Bertrand grabs him and lowers him to the floor.

Berg rushes to a medical shelf and grabs a bottle of PICRIC ACID. He pours it on Wilbur's arm.

Wilbur screams again. He rolls on the floor in AGONY.

CUT TO: WILBUR IN HIS COT.

A DOCTOR examines his injuries. His shirt is off. There is a TWELVE INCH BLISTER around his arm, and another on his side.

The doctor goes to Berg.

DOCTOR

C'est diê à l'acide picrique qu'il ne souffre pas d'injure sérieux. Il doit se reposer pendant quelques journées, et faire toutes précautions pour cette blessure.

BERG

Merci, Docteur.

The doctor exits.

WILBUR

What did he say?

BERG

Everything will be fine. He wants you to stay in bed a few days and rest.

INT. BALLOON SHED - FORT MYER - DAY

Orville and Foulois lower the engine onto the Flyer's skeleton. Orville places it on the frame.

There is a knock on the door. A guard opens it. Major Squire enters, followed by Bell and Curtiss.

SQUIRE

Mr. Wright?

ORVILLE

Yes?

SQUIRE

Mr. Bell would like to speak with you.

ORVILLE

Fine. Send him in.

Squire steps to the door and lets in Bell and Curtiss.

BELL

Mr. Wright, I have not stolen any ideas from you nor have I ever seen your machine. I would like to know exactly how you intend to challenge me?

ORVILLE

Our patent covers the three-axis pilot control system your machine incorporates.

BELL

But that's the very basis of flight. No machine could work without control of all three axis. It would be like driving a motorcar without a steering wheel.

ORVILLE

Nevertheless, that is the mechanism we have patented.

BELL

Well, I'm sorry Orville. That's not enough to scare me out of this competition. If you want to take me to court you may, but I don't think any legal system would uphold a patent so general and broad. Come along, Curtiss.

ORVILLE

Suit yourself, Mr. Bell.

Bell turns and leaves followed by Curtiss.

SQUIRE

You understand that if Bell succeeds, the government will purchase his aeroplane regardless of your performance. He has placed a lower bid than you.

ORVILLE

I understand.

SQUIRE

And of course, if Mr. Herring makes an appearance with some sort of flying machine, he is still in the running, but we haven't heard any word from him.

ORVILLE

Thank you, Major.

Squire leaves. Orville turns to Foulois.

FOULOIS

It's ready, Mr. Wright

ORVILLE

Start it up.

Foulois turns the propeller and the engine revs to life. Orville steps up to it and listens intently.

EXT. LE MANS RACETRACK - DAY

Wilbur listens to the motor of the flyer, making an adjustment with his screwdriver. His arm is bandaged up.

There are TWO HUNDRED PEOPLE scattered through the grandstand. Archdeacon, Santos, and the French Official take a seat. Archdeacon lights up a cigar.

ARCHDEACON

Now we shall see if Monsieur Wright is a bluffeur.

The propellers turn and the engine starts. The crowd perks up and watches.

Wilbur takes a seat at the controls. He warps the wings and waves to the workmen, who clear the track.

Wilbur pulls the launch lever. The catapult weight drops. The flyer is slung down the length of the track, and lifts off the end.

The crowd is RACKED WITH AWE! They break into CHEERS and APPLAUSE! Archdeacon and the Official are dumbstruck.

Wilbur shoots down to the end of the field. The CHEERS turn into SCREAMS as Wilbur heads directly toward a row of trees.

Archdeacon and the Official leap to their feet.

ARCHDEACON

The trees! The trees!

The spectators SCREAM! The flyer reaches the end of the field, and just before the trees, Wilbur pulls the wing-warping lever and induces a TURN. The Flyer BANKS and makes a tight, perfect circle at the end of the track.

Wilbur flies back, passing close to the stands. The spectators react as if they had seen a MIRACLE: shouting, screaming, and crying HYSTERICALLY; almost PSYCHOTICALLY!

Archdeacon and the Official look at each other in disbelief.

EXT. FORT MYER AIRFIELD - DAY

Lt. Selfridge takes off his coat and hat, giving them to Curtiss. He walks to the Wright Flyer and shakes Orville's hand.

SELFRIDGE

I'm ready for my lesson, Mr. Wright.

ORVILLE

Climb aboard!

They take their seats on the aeroplane. On the edge of the field are a horde of spectators, nearly TWO THOUSAND.

Squire and Foulois turn the propellers, and the engine comes to life. Selfridge waves to Curtiss. Orville pulls the release lever.

The Flyer shoots off the end of the rail and skids along the grass a hundred feet. Orville wrestles with the controls until he rises into the air. There is a general UPROAR from the spectators watching.

Orville keeps the Flyer just off the ground and circles the field. Selfridge watches Orville work the controls.

Orville passes the spectators and circles again. He goes higher to make a wider circuit.

He rises about 100 feet over the balloon shed and turns. There is a TAPPING sound in the rear of the machine. Orville looks over his shoulder to see what it is.

SELFRIDGE

What's wrong?

Orville shakes his head. There are two loud THUMPS. Orville reaches over and shuts off the motor.

ORVILLE

I'll take it down!

The Flyer suddenly VEERS SHARPLY to the right. Orville grabs at the controls. Selfridge clutches the machine. Straight ahead are several trees in Arlington Cemetery.

SELFRIDGE

Watch the trees!

Orville pulls on both levers, but nothing happens. He pulls the wing-warping control, and the Flyer DIVES straight for the ground.

It falls fifty feet in the first second.

SELFRIDGE

Oh! Oh!

Orville pulls the levers again and again. He grinds his teeth as...

The Flyer SMASHES into the earth at a tremendous velocity. The wings CRUMPLE, the skids COLLAPSE, the engine RIPS from the spars and strikes the soil.

A cloud of dust surrounds the machine.

The crowd falls silent.

Squire runs toward the crash.

Bell rises to his feet.

Three mounted cavalry men arrive at the crash. They are followed by hundreds of spectators on foot, which are followed by automobiles HONKING their horns.

Squire pushes his way through the crowd. Soldiers try to hold everyone back.

The dust clears. BROKEN, SPLIT SPARS protrude from the TWISTED CLOTH of the machine. Orville and Selfridge are BURIED under the pile.

Squire helps the soldiers lift the wing away. Orville is underneath, his face coated with BLOOD and dirt. He is moaning softly. Squire and others lift him out of the wreckage.

Several more pieces of the machine are lifted away before Selfridge is found. He is face down in the mud. His clothes and the grass around him are DRENCHED IN BLOOD. They lift him out of the puddle. There is a SIX-INCH GASH on his head.

Squire loosens Orville's tie and opens his collar. Three Army doctors arrive and look him over. Orville is placed on a stretcher. Squire watches them carry Orville away through the mob of people.

EXT. LE MANS RACETRACK - DAY

Wilbur and some workmen lift the flyer onto the track. Hart Berg watches on.

A MESSENGER pedals across the field on a bicycle. He rides up to Wilbur.

MESSENGER

Monsieur Wright! Monsieur Wright!
J'ai ici un câblogramme pressant du
majeure Squire en Amérique.

The messenger hands him the TELEGRAM. Wilbur reads it.

WILBUR

Il vît encore?

MESSENGER

On n'a rien dit.

Wilbur gives the cable to Berg, grabs the messenger's bicycle, and climbs on.

WILBUR

I'm going into town in case there's more news.

BERG

What news? Wilbur! Your demonstration!

Wilbur turns and pedals off across the field.

MESSENGER

Mon bicyclette!

Berg looks to the grandstand full of people, then to the cable.

EXT. HOSPITAL PORCH - FORT MYER - DAY

Major Squire, Alexander Bell, and Glenn Curtiss wait outside the army hospital. They are all silent; except Bell, who paces back and forth muttering.

BELL

It's frightful.

The DOCTOR comes out of the hospital, blood on his clothes. Bell goes to him. Everyone waits for news. The doctor is grim.

DOCTOR

I'm sorry. Lieutenant Selfridge is dead. There was a fracture to the skull. He died on the operating table.

There is a moment of silence as Bell sits down.

SQUIRE

Doctor, what about Orville?

DOCTOR

Mr. Wright has three fractures in his leg and has broken several ribs, but he should recover.

SQUIRE

Thank you, Doctor.

Squire leads the doctor back inside.

INT. HOSPITAL - FORT MYER - NIGHT

Orville lays in bed with his leg in traction. His abdomen is bandaged about the ribs. A cut on his forehead has been cleaned and dressed. There are bruises here and there on his body.

Several pieces of the BROKEN MACHINE lay on the covers and at his bedside. He is examining the propeller parts.

A quiet knock alerts him and he looks up to find Octave Chanute in the doorway.

CHANUTE

Hello, Orville.

ORVILLE

Octave, come in.

Chanute enters the room and goes to Orville's bedside.

CHANUTE

I didn't know if I would be welcome, but I had to see you anyway.

ORVILLE

Certainly, you're welcome. As it is, Will and I both feel pretty sore about the things we said to you. I hope you can forgive us.

CHANUTE

Of course, Orville. How are you doing?

ORVILLE

I'm fine. They treat me like a king.

Chanute looks down at the parts in Orville's lap.

ORVILLE

I've been trying to figure out what went wrong with the Flyer.

Chanute takes the part from his hand.

CHANUTE

Leave that to me, Orville. The best thing for you right now is not to think about aeroplanes.

INT. HOSPITAL - FORT MYER - DAY

Orville sits alone in the bed, motionless and silent.

A distant AEROPLANE MOTOR can be heard, growing louder and louder.

Orville listens as the motor gains in volume. The sound seems to go right over his head.

APPLAUSE follows as thousands of spectators are heard.

Orville looks down in resignation.

Chanute gloomily enters the hospital room.

CHANUTE

Bell has done it.

ORVILLE

Even if I fly now, the money goes to Bell.

CHANUTE

I'm sorry, Orville.

ORVILLE

I guess it's up to Wilbur.

EXT. WORKSHED - LE MANS RACETRACK - DAY

A group of people are clustered around the shed, waiting silently. Hart Berg stands at the door of the shed.

Bertrand goes to the door followed by a frail old man, his GRANDFATHER, pushing a worn out bicycle.

Hart Berg stops them.

BERG

I'm sorry, Bertrand. You can't go in.

BERTRAND

Why not?

BERG

Wilbur is working. He isn't seeing anyone.

BERTRAND

When will Wilbur fly?

BERG

Wilbur isn't flying anymore, not while there's a danger.

BERTRAND

My grandfather came to see him fly.

BERG

Votre grandpère deora rentrer chez soi.

The work shed door opens. Wilbur steps out.

WILBUR

Bertrand, entrez.

INT. WORKSHED - LE MANS RACETRACK - DAY

Wilbur paces into the room, nervously twisting a piece of wire in his hands.

Bertrand follows Wilbur.

BERTRAND

Monsieur Wright, I want you to meet my grandfather.

Bertrand shows in his grandfather, still pushing the bicycle.

WILBUR

Enchante! Vous-vous portez bien?

The old man takes his hand.

GRANDFATHER

Très bien, merci.

BERTRAND

He came from Chartres to see you fly.

WILBUR

Chartres! That's sixty miles away.
Vous êtes venu quatre-vingt dix
Kilomètres pour voir l'aeroplane?

GRANDFATHER

Ce n'aurait pu être possible si je
n'avais pas réparé le bicyclette.

WILBUR

Bicyclette?

BERTRAND

Oui, bicyclette.

Wilbur looks at the old man's bicycle.

WILBUR

He came sixty miles on this?

BERTRAND

Oui, to see l'aeroplane.

EXT. LE MANS RACETRACK - DAY

Wilbur emerges from the camp shed with Bertrand and his grandfather. There is a group of people, including Berg, near the door, staring in SILENCE.

They pass through, ignoring the others.

Several people line the sides of the field. They open up and let Wilbur pass. He sternly walks out toward the Flyer, the grandfather pushing his bicycle and Bertrand following.

The grandstand is filled to capacity; with people spilling off onto the field and beyond. When they spot Wilbur, everyone quiets to SILENCE.

There are over TEN THOUSAND spectators.

Wilbur crosses to the Flyer. Bertrand takes the old man's bicycle and Wilbur helps him into the passenger seat. The audience remains SILENT.

Wilbur takes a seat, turning his cap backwards. The workmen turn the propellers. The engine starts up, and TEN THOUSAND PEOPLE CHEER!

Wilbur looks out over the grandstand, to the grandfather, then down at the release lever. HE PULLS IT!

The glider shoots down the rail as the spectators rise to their feet! Wilbur lifts off the ground.

He circles the field, and as he passes the grandstand, there is a DEAFENING EXPLOSION OF CHEERS from the seats!

Wilbur looks to the grandfather and smiles. Grandfather looks to Wilbur, then to the ground below, completely delighted. He begins to laugh and holler, and Wilbur joins him, as they circle the track.

EXT. FORT MYER AIRFIELD - DAY

Herring's wood and cloth aeroplane sits on the open field. Its giant engine is SPURTING and CHUGGING, causing the entire machine to BOUNCE up and down. It STRAINS to pull away from its anchor.

Herring turns a CRANK and the wings EXPAND twenty feet. The tips wave up and down. Squire, Chanute and Foulois look on.

SQUIRE

Will it hold up against the Wright's Flyer?

HERRING

Absolutely! It is far better than the Wright's Flyer. The Flyer can only hold two people. Mine can hold twelve!

FOULOIS

(laughing)

There aren't that many aroNUTS in Washington?

SQUIRE

Enough of that, Lieutenant.

HERRING

(to Foulois)

I have eliminated the problems
inherit in the Wright's design. I
can assure you, Lieutenant, that my
machine is as safe as a motorcar.

Herring climbs aboard, offering a passenger seat to
Foulois. Foulois politely refuses.

SQUIRE

Go ahead, Foulois.

FOULOIS

But, sir--

Squire stands over him. Foulois shrugs and boards the
plane. Herring waves to clear the track. Workmen around
the plane clear out quickly.

Herring pulls a lever, disconnecting the aeroplane from
its anchor. The plane lurches down the field.

It gains a tremendous amount of speed, hugging the earth.
Foulois clutches on tightly.

FOULOIS

When do we leave the ground?

HERRING

Any moment!

At the far end of the field, a sergeant is drilling his
troops. They are lined up in three rows, perfect
formation.

The soldiers see Herring coming towards them. They stand
their ground.

Herring looks ahead and sees the platoon. He works
frantically at the many levers, but none of them seem to
affect the machine.

The soldiers stand their ground.

FOULOIS

Mr. Herring?

Herring closes in.

The soldiers remain!

FOULOIS (CONT)

Mr. Herring!

Herring, closer, faster!

When it's obvious that Herring isn't changing course, the soldiers scatter in all directions.

The sergeant, confused, turns to see what's happening.

Foulois raises his arms and covers his eyes.

The sergeant falls to the ground just as the wing passes over him.

Herring crashes into a wooden building, going through the outer wall.

INT. FORT MYER HOSPITAL - DAY

Orville walks the hospital floor using two canes. It is slow and difficult. Chanute walks alongside him in case he falls.

Squire enters the room.

SQUIRE

Have a seat, Mr. Wright. I have good news.

Orville walks over to his bed and sits down. Squire hands him a folder.

ORVILLE

Yes, Major.

SQUIRE

The review board has looked over your case and decided that Lieutenant Selfridge's death was an accident resulting from a propeller malfunction that could have in no way been avoided or foreseen.

ORVILLE

That is good news.

Squire hands him a folder stuffed with papers.

SQUIRE

Here is the report. I hope it will help you prevent future accidents?

ORVILLE

I will look this over. Thank you, Major.

SQUIRE

There's more! Due to Mr. Herring's failure to meet the requirements, of which leaving the ground is the first priority, the Army has decided to grant you an extension of time.

ORVILLE

Extension? Bell has completed the trials. I thought that settled the competition.

Squire looks to Chanute, who nods him on.

SQUIRE

The board is aware of your pending lawsuit. If you're able to win the patent rights you will be allowed to make your trial flight. If you succeed they will accept your bid.

ORVILLE

Is Bell aware of this?

SQUIRE

He agreed to the proposal.

ORVILLE

How long do I have?

SQUIRE

However long it takes for you to heal and resume flying.

ORVILLE

Now that I'm getting around, Chanute and I thought we might go to France and see Wilbur. I don't

like doing all this without his help.

SQUIRE

Very well, Mr. Wright.

INT. HANGAR IN NOVA SCOTIA - DAY

Glenn Curtiss is alone working on the Gold Bug.

Augustus Herring enters the hangar.

HERRING

Glenn!

Curtiss stops working and looks.

CURTISS

Augustus! What brings you here?

HERRING

Orville Wright has left for France.

CURTISS

So?

HERRING

I heard about you and Bell, and I understand that Bell is backing down to the Wright's lawsuit.

CURTISS

Certainly not! Alex has nothing to lose. The Wright brothers will end up suing every aviator in the world!

HERRING

But eventually they will win! Their patent is solid!

CURTISS

I know. We've looked it over.

HERRING

Would you be willing to speak to Bell on my behalf.

Curtiss eyes Herring suspiciously.

CURTISS

You know Alex never got along with you.

HERRING

This time I believe he will listen.

Herring holds up a legal document.

CURTISS

What's that?

HERRING

A patent, filed in 1904.

CURTISS

Two years before the Wright brothers.

HERRING

It covers the same principles as their patent.

CURTISS

You stole their ideas?

HERRING

Who's to say they didn't steal from me. After all, my patent was filed long before theirs.

CURTISS

Do they know about this?

HERRING

Only you and I.

Curtiss takes the patent and looks it over.

HERRING (CONT)

They have no grounds for a lawsuit. If I were more vindictive, I would take them to court.

Curtiss considers this, then leans forward, excited.

CURTISS

Why don't you?

HERRING

I couldn't hope to win against their reputation. That is why I came to you.

CURTISS

Bell's reputation and your patent?

HERRING

Alone, we are helpless, but together...

CURTISS

I'll speak to Bell tonight!

EXT. WORKSHED - LE MANS RACETRACK - DAY

Berg drives up in his automobile. Chanute and Orville are in the back.

Wilbur steps out of the work shed when the motor cuts off.

He sees Chanute help Orville out of the car and hand him his canes. Orville approaches Wilbur.

WILBUR

Hello, Orv.

ORVILLE

Wilbur.

WILBUR

You look well.

ORVILLE

I'm doing all right. Just a little pain in my hip anymore.

WILBUR

I'm sorry I couldn't be there. If it makes you feel any better, everything has gone so well over here

ORVILLE

The negotiations?

WILBUR

I've converted the masses.
Everyone in France is screaming
"Wilbur! Wilbur!" all the time. I
expect a sale in no time, and a
good one at that.

ORVILLE

Good.

WILBUR

Octave.

Wilbur extends his hand and Chanute takes it.

WILBUR (CONT)

Thank you for helping Orville. I'm
sorry about everything.

CHANUTE

No, Wilbur, I'm sorry.

WILBUR

Let me show you how I've set up.
If you thought Huffman's Prairie
was big..

Wilbur waves off Berg and shows them into the work shed.

INT. DECORATIVE CHAMBER - FRANCE - NIGHT

Chanute sits at a table surrounded by well dressed
DIPLOMATS.

CHANUTE

Ich verstehe, Kaptain Kehler.

RUSSIAN DIPLOMAT

Tsar khotite pravii sovershenii.

CHANUTE

Chei tsenoi, Volstov?

GERMAN DIPLOMAT

Fünf tausend mark pro maschine.

ITALIAN DIPLOMAT

Italia e disposto a pagare il
doppio.

FRENCH DIPLOMAT
 Qu'est-ce qu'il a dit?

CHANUTE
 Le déligat italien a offert dix
 mille marks.

BRITISH DIPLOMAT
 Ten thousand marks! Preposterous!
 How many pounds is that?

CHANUTE
 I don't know off-hand.

BRITISH DIPLOMAT
 I'll double it, whatever it is.

SPANISH DIPLOMAT
 ¿Por qué los italianos pagan en
 marks?

INT. DECORATIVE HALLWAY - NIGHT

Wilbur and Orville move down the corridor speaking to the French Official from before. Orville walks on a cane.

FRENCH OFFICIAL
 Any problems we may have had in the
 past are all forgotten?

WILBUR
 What about Archdeacon?

The French official shakes his head.

FRENCH OFFICIAL
 Monsieur Archdeacon is now in
 prison.

Wilbur rolls with laughter, but is cut short by a LOUD COMMOTION in the next room. They open the doors and enter.

INT. DECORATIVE CHAMBER - NIGHT

A roomful of men, shouting and arguing in many languages.

In the center of them all is Octave Chanute, retorting in as many languages to calm them down.

Wilbur and Orville enter the room. They all stop arguing and focus on Wilbur.

WILBUR

Octave, what's going on?

CHANUTE

I'm sorry, Wilbur. We had gotten into a bit of a quarrel.

WILBUR

What about?

CHANUTE

Whom is to purchase your aeroplane.

WILBUR

Well, gentlemen, I'm sorry to tell you that Orville and I have already signed a contract with the French government.

Wilbur slaps the French official on the back.

A wave of murmurs pass through the room.

CHANUTE

What do you mean? For what?

WILBUR

Two million francs for all European rights!

CHANUTE

Is that all?

FRENCH OFFICIAL

(TRIUMPHANT)

Vive la France, Messieurs!

The room bursts into EXCLAIMATIONS and multi-lingual SHOUTING as everyone surrounds Wilbur and Orville. Chanute pushes his way to them.

CHANUTE

I could have gotten five times that amount!

WILBUR

Since when are you selling our
aeroplane?

CHANUTE

I'm only trying to help.

WILBUR

We appreciate your help, Chanute,
but you have to stop!

CHANUTE

Stop?

WILBUR

Stop helping us!

The room quiets down, attentive to the conversation.

WILBUR (CONT)

It's very kind of you to go all out
for us like this, but you're
getting in the way. We can handle
this ourselves.

CHANUTE

I see.

Chanute checks his composure, looking about the room.

CHANUTE (CONT)

If you will excuse me, Gentlemen.

Chanute turns and leaves.

WILBUR

Octave. Wait!

INT. DECORATIVE HALLWAY - DAY

Chanute continues down the hallway, upholding his
dignity.

Wilbur comes out of the chamber followed by Orville and
the foreign diplomats.

WILBUR

Octave! Don't do this again!

CHANUTE

I am a burden to you, Wilbur.

WILBUR

You're a pain in the ass, but don't walk out.

Chanute stops and turns.

CHANUTE

Why not?

WILBUR

Because you're still my friend.

CHANUTE

You are my friend, too. That is why I was helping you. That is what friends do!

WILBUR

I know, and I appreciate it. But you're hurting us more than you're helping.

CHANUTE

Perhaps I have made a mistake or two, but you have made your own mistakes.

WILBUR

And I'm responsible for my mistakes. I don't want to be responsible for yours too.

CHANUTE

Do you know what you're turning down?

WILBUR

I know, but we've gotten everything we wanted.

CHANUTE

Have you, Orville?

ORVILLE

Look, we can't be in two places at once. I thought we'd give the

aeroplane to the French and concentrate on sales back home.

CHANUTE

Just because you have divided interests doesn't mean you should give the machine away. You don't have to manage every detail yourself but at least take what's rightfully yours.

WILBUR

You were so willing to give the machine away the last time we were here.

CHANUTE

I am trying to look out for your interests.

FRENCH OFFICIAL

They have already signed the contract.

Chanute notices all the diplomats are attentive to their conversation. He breaks them up.

CHANUTE

Gentleman, please.

They back away, remaining engaged with their argument. The French official stays.

CHANUTE (CONT)

I don't know why you insist on refusing my help. After all the good I done for you two..

WILBUR

The great philanthropist! We asked you once to come look at our machine. We never asked for anything else.

CHANUTE

I know.

WILBUR

We don't want anything else.

CHANUTE

I know.

WILBUR

Most of all I don't want to argue with you.

CHANUTE

Neither do I.

WILBUR

Then why are we arguing?

They stop. Chanute regains his dignity.

CHANUTE

I will try my best not to help you.

WILBUR

That would be help enough.

Chanute turns to the diplomats.

CHANUTE

Thank you, gentlemen. Any further business must be conducted with the French government.

FRENCH OFFICIAL

Come this way, Messieurs, and we shall discuss our options.

The French official leads the diplomats away, leaving Wilbur, Orville, Chanute alone.

WILBUR

I'm sorry, Chanute. You are right to get the most money, but we have too much to attend to right now.

ORVILLE

I agree.

WILBUR

Orville tells me that Bell is manufacturing machines.

CHANUTE

With intent to sell.

WILBUR

Then we can't waste our times here
and lose our foothold back home.
We have to go back and take him to
court.

INT. FEDERAL COURTROOM - DAY

Bell, Curtiss, and Herring sit at the defense table
represented by EMERSON NEWELL.

Across from them are Wilbur, Orville, Chanute, and their
lawyer, Toulmin.

JUDGE

Present your evidence, Mr. Toulmin.

Toulmin approaches the bench with a patent.

TOULMIN

The plaintiffs present a patent for
their flying machine, filed in the
year 1906.

Toulmin hands the Wright's patent to the judge.

JUDGE

Thank you, Mister Toulmin.

NEWELL

Your honor, the defense can produce
a patent covering the same
principles, filed in the year 1904,
two years before the plaintiffs, by
Mister Augustus Herring.

JUDGE

Very well. A decision can be made
if the bench examines both of your
patents.

Herring removes his patent from his briefcase and hands
it to Newell. Newell approaches the bench and gives it
to the judge.

JUDGE

Misters Wilbur and Orville Wright,
Misters Alexander Graham Bell and
Augustus Herring--you present

yourselves as experts in your field. The court respects your knowledge and expertise. It is unlikely that the court will understand the technical issues as well as any one of you, but it is up to the court to decide the validity of your claims. Understanding that the technical issues involved are complex, the court will appoint a committee to examine your patents in order to understand the mechanisms involved and the wording of your claims. The committee will determine the infringing party and it may come down to the one who filed his patent first, Mister Herring. Does everyone in the courtroom comply to this procedure.

Toulmin and Newell both agree.

JUDGE (CONT)

Very well, this case is postponed until the committee has reached a decision.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Orville and Chanute sit silently in sorrow. Wilbur lays across the bed and Toulmin examines papers spread on the table. Each is lost in their own thoughts.

ORVILLE

We'll lose it all!

WILBUR

Everything we've worked for, and Herring takes it just like that.

CHANUTE

Doesn't it matter enough that you did it?

WILBUR

It will have to.

There is a knock on the door. Wilbur gets up and opens it.

A LITTLE MAN with a chafe of papers smiles back.

LITTLE MAN

Mr. Wright, I'm Clyde Jacobs from
the U. S. Patents Office.

INT. FEDERAL COURTROOM - DAY

The room is silent. Both sides sit patiently, waiting. Jacobs sits with the Wrights.

The patent committee files into the room.

JUDGE

The court will hear the report of
the patent committee.

The COMMITTEE LEADER rises with a prepared speech. Both tables lean in to hear his testimony.

COMMITTEE LEADER

Your honor. The committee has been swayed by many factors, the most important being the involvement of both parties at Kitty Hawk, North Carolina in the year 1902. It was during this period that many ideas were exchanged making the true inventor of the aeroplane impossible to determine. The committee believes that the flying machines described in both patents are identical in design and function, and therefore grants all patent rights to the initial applicant, Augustus Herring and company.

Bell sits back, satisfied.

JUDGE

Mr. Toulmin, do you have anything to add in your defense.

TOULMIN

Your honor, I would like to present one last testimony, Mr. Clyde Jacobs.

As Jacobs approaches the bench, Newell whispers to Bell.

NEWELL

Who is he?

Bell only shrugs. Newell looks to the others, but know one knows who he is.

TOULMIN

Mr. Jacobs, you work the for the U. S. Patents Office, correct?

JACOBS

Yes, sir.

TOULMIN

What do you do there?

JACOBS

Among other things, I am the chief examiner of aeronautics patents.

TOULMIN

So you yourself examined the Wright's patent application?

JACOBS

Yes I did?

TOULMIN

And did you also examine Mr. Herring's patent application?

JACOBS

No, I didn't.

TOULMIN

Who did?

JACOBS

No one.

TOULMIN

Why not?

JACOBS

Because the office has no records of patents filed by Augustus Herring; not in 1904 or any other year. I do, however, have proof of the Wright's patent.

Jacobs reaches in his jacket and removes an envelope.

NEWELL

Isn't it possible, Mr. Jacobs, that the patent office has lost Mr. Herring's records.

JACOBS

Yes, it is possible.

TOULMIN

Your honor, the witness would like to examine Mr. Herring's patent.

JUDGE

Very well, present him with the evidence.

Herring's patent is brought out and given to Jacobs.

TOULMIN

Has this patent been granted by your office?

JACOBS

Yes, this looks like our patent, but considering we have no record, I would guess this patent is a forgery.

TOULMIN

A forgery! Your honor, I request that Mr. Herring's patent be turned over to the patent office for verification.

JUDGE

Is that all right with the defense?

Newell turns to Bell, who turns to Curtiss, who turns to Herring's empty seat. Bell looks to the courtroom door as it swings shut.

BELL

It's a fake! Stop him!

Curtiss rushes for the exit after Herring. Murmurs pass through the patent committee.

JACOBS

I followed the case in the paper.
I was waiting for one of you to
come into my office, but none of
you did.

Bell looks to Newell, lost for words. Bell calmly takes up his coat and briefcase, and dutifully walks out of the courtroom.

TOULMIN

Well, I guess verification isn't
necessary.

Toulmin looks to the Wrights. All smile.

JUDGE

Mr. Newell, your defense has left
the room.

NEWELL

Yes, your Honor. It seems the
defense has decided to defer to the
plaintiffs.

JUDGE

In light of present circumstances,
the court has no choice but to rule
in favor of Wilbur and Orville
Wright.

The judge bangs his gavel on the desk. Wilbur and Orville rise to their feet and congratulate Jacobs.

Newell grabs up his papers and hurries after Bell.

EXT. FORT MYER - DAY

Wilbur and Orville walk alongside the balloon building onto the airfield. The Flyer is being wheeled to the launch rail. Several men raise the weight to the top of the derrick.

A crowd of TEN THOUSAND has gathered to watch the trials.

Wilbur and Orville meet with Foulois and discuss the flight. Foulois, in military uniform, has a compass sewn onto his left leg and a barometer on the right. A map is jammed into his belt and two stopwatches hang about his neck. Wilbur wears a stopwatch, too.

WILBUR

(to Orville)

Remember, the faster you go, the more money we'll get for the machine; but don't take any unnecessary risks.

ORVILLE

I know. Don't worry. I shall not only be careful and more careful, but also most careful, and cautious as well.

PRESIDENT TAFT arrives and takes a seat in a private box with other cabinet members. Curtiss and Bell are in a box together. Chanute, Katharine and Milton have front-row seats. HONKING horns are heard in the distance.

Orville and Foulois climb into the machine. Wilbur and Squire turn over the propellers. Wilbur grabs a signal flag. Orville waves and pulls the release lever. The machine leaves the rail.

Orville circles the field to the applause of the spectators. He picks up speed and passes between two posts on the field. Wilbur drops the signal flag. Many officials in the stands start their stopwatches. Foulois starts his watch. Wilbur starts his.

The Flyer departs the confines of Fort Myer and begins a journey toward Alexandria.

Wilbur watches Orville depart through field glasses.

EXT. CROSSCOUNTRY - DAY

Orville keeps a steady altitude of 125 feet. The terrain below turns from buildings to barren forest and rocky hillsides.

Foulois looks at the map and the compass on his leg and points directions.

They fly over a forested valley. The Flyer passes over the next ridge close to the treetops.

Foulois points into the distance.

FOULOIS

There's the mid-point marker!

Far off, a sausage shaped balloon is anchored in place. Orville nods and heads for the balloon.

They pass to its right, steady on their course.

EXT. SHUTER'S HILL - DAY

A colorful balloon is tethered to Shuter's Hill, marking the turning point of the course.

A mass of people are gathered on the hill. They cheer and throw their hats as Orville passes overhead.

Foulois stops the watch. Orville circles around and heads back to Fort Myer. They pass the balloon again, waving to the people below. Foulois starts the second watch.

EXT. CROSSCOUNTRY - DAY

Orville flies at 400 feet.

ORVILLE

I'm going to let it out!

Orville dives and pushes the speed. They pass the mid-point balloon.

The Flyer dips into a large valley. Orville calmly pulls the machine over the far ridge.

EXT. FORT MYER - DAY

Wilbur watches the horizon for any sign of the Flyer. He looks at his watch and paces the field.

A WATCHMAN in a tower shouts.

WATCHMAN

Here it comes!

Everyone looks to see Orville and Foulois approaching in the distance. Then the Flyer suddenly dips down below the horizon.

There is a GASP from the crowd. Wilbur looks through the field glasses, searching anxiously.

For moments, nothing is seen, then the Flyer reappears slowly, much closer. Murmuring conversations of relief pass through the crowd.

Orville noses the Flyer down for increased speed as he flies into Fort Myer.

The audience is in a FRENZY! Hundreds of AUTOMOBILE horns can be heard over the cheers and applause!

Orville and Foulois SCREAM AND SHOUT as the Flyer passes between the two posts.

Everyone stops their watches. Wilbur looks at his watch, figures the airspeed in his head, and makes a victory dance in the center of the field.

Orville circles over Arlington Cemetery and lands the machine. Wilbur is the first one there, with a joyous grin across his face.

WILBUR

You did it, Orv! You made it!

ORVILLE

How fast?

WILBUR

Forty two! Two miles over!

ORVILLE

Twenty nine thousand dollars!

A congratulating crowd clusters around the Flyer.

PULL BACK to reveal a SWARM of people, including Bell, Chanute, Milton, Katharine, and Squire. There is rejoicing and happiness.

CONTINUE PULL BACK showing THOUSANDS of people massed around the aeroplane. The SOUND slowly fades away.

SILENCE!

The Wright Flyer is a tiny, white rectangle in the center of an enormous swarm.

PRESIDENT TAFT (V.O.)
 For the work you have done in
 aeronautics, and for the
 technological advancement of
 mankind, I present to you, Misters
 Orville and Wilbur Wright, the Aero
 Club of America gold medals.

INT. THE WHITE HOUSE - DAY

APPLAUSE! President Taft stands at a podium with Wilbur and Orville. There is a large crowd. Octave Chanute and Alexander Graham Bell stand behind the Wright brothers.

Taft puts a medal around Orville's neck, and another around Wilbur's. Wilbur looks at it and smiles.

WILBUR
 Thank you, Mr. President.

Wilbur and Orville proceed to shake Taft's hand, then Bell's, and finally Chanute's. Wilbur and Chanute embrace.

EXT. UNION STATION, DAYTON - DAY

The train pulls into Dayton's Union Station. Wilbur, Orville, and Chanute watch out the window.

A banner reads WELCOME HOME. The station is crowded with THOUSANDS of people. Two horse drawn carriages are waiting. Milton sits in one, Katharine in another.

WILBUR
 So much for a quiet evening at
 home.

EXT. DAYTON STREETS - DAY

FACTORY whistles blow. A THIRTY-GUN canon salute sounds off. MARCHING bands begin to play. A parade leads the two Wright brothers from the station.

As they parade down the streets, they shake hands with all the spectators. The parade is complete with floats, one sporting a poor representation of the Wright Flyer.

Mobs of people shake their hands.

Wilbur pulls his arm in for a rest, shaking blood into it. He motions for Chanute to start shaking hands. Chanute reaches out and takes his place.

Orville pulls his arm in.

ORVILLE

Start shaking, Pop! They don't
know the difference.

Milton reluctantly starts shaking hands.

Wilbur and Orville slide down in their seats and watch Chanute and Milton shake everyone's hands.

An open carriage follows with Squire and Katherine. They are chatting with each other, oblivious to the surrounding crowd.

EXT. DAYTON RACETRACK - DAY

The rest of the town is gathered at a nearby racetrack.

The Wright family is on display--Orville and Wilbur in new business suits, Milton in clerical garb, and Katharine in fabulous French fashions.

Behind the family, in a grandstand, are a THOUSAND school children. They are dressed in RED, WHITE, AND BLUE to form an American flag. They sing a chorus of AMERICA THE BEAUTIFUL.

EXT. WOODLAND CEMETARY - DAY

Orville and Chanute stand over the grave of Wilbur Wright. The headstone is engraved "First in Flight" with the years 1867-1912.

Chanute leads Orville away to an automobile.

Orville walks with a heavy limp.

INT. WRIGHT AEROPLANE COMPANY - DAY

A large warehouse; a line of Flyers under construction; several parts and machines. Dozens of workers are busy at the machines; applying tools, setting braces, stretching cloth--a production assembly line.

Orville stops to examine the cloth covering of the most complete machine. It hangs loose on the frame.

CHANUTE

It's within the safety standards.

Orville continues on, where another line is assembling motors. He looks over the finished product and shakes his head.

CHANUTE (CONT)

There isn't time to be meticulous.
You've got too many orders.

ORVILLE

The craftsmanship is pathetic.

CHANUTE

It's an assembly line! You can't
tighten every bolt yourself.
They're not bicycles! They're
aircraft! Every country in the
world wants one, and you've got to
build each and every machine! It's
your invention!

ORVILLE

It's Wilbur's invention. He
dreamed it up. I just built it.

CHANUTE

You told me you wanted an honest living from aeroplanes. This is honest!

Orville looks over the mass of workers, the production line.

ORVILLE

I can't do business this way.

INT. WRIGHT OFFICE - DAY

A STRANGER sits across from Orville, his back to the camera, unseen, anonymous, CIGAR in mouth.

He signs a document and gives it to Orville.

Orville signs. Octave Chanute looks on somberly.

CHANUTE

(to Orville, unapproving)
One million dollars, and you've washed your hands of the aeroplane.

Orville sits in silence, feeling both the relief and the loss.

CHANUTE

Orville?

Orville mechanically rises and shakes the stranger's hand.

ORVILLE

(expressionless)
Thank you.

EXT. WRIGHT FIELD - DAY

Chanute helps Orville into the backseat of an automobile. The seat has been custom fitted with shock absorbers to eliminate sudden jolts. The car starts off across the flying field.

A Flyer passes over them and continues on, the pilot anonymous.

Orville watches the Flyer as they drive away, until a jarring bump shoots pain through his hip. He rubs it out, turns, and looks ahead.

FINAL FADE OUT.