

Gregory Hischak
from *The Center of Gravity*

ORVILLE WRIGHT *An inventor from Dayton, Ohio*

WILBUR WRIGHT *His brother—four years older, also an inventor*

MOTHER *Lillian Wright—mother of Orville and Wilbur*

MARGOT (WRIGHT) *The brothers' childhood friend (and Orville's eventual wife)*

Author's Note: The events of the play are fictitious and centered around December, 1903—the year of the Wright Brothers' last attempt at manned flight. Unfolding in a nonlinear arc from the Wrights' Family residence of Dayton, Ohio to a beach near Kitty Hawk, North Carolina—and back, transitions between scenes will be quick and characters will move nimbly through place and time, the living and the hereafter. Props defining a chair, a bed, a window, a podium, etc, are best kept abstract and malleable. Blocking, lighting, and sound cues (i.e. the sound of waves to introduce a beach scene; the ticking of a parlor clock; a background of cicadas, etc.) may assist the audience through these transitions.

ACT ONE

**SCENE 1 PRELUDE TO A PRESENTATION TO THE WESTERN
SOCIETY OF ENGINEERS IN DAYTON, OHIO / NOVEMBER 1903
AS WELL AS A ROOM IN THE HOUSE OF ORVILLE
& MARGOT WRIGHT/ 1948**

*(There is a hurriedness to the scene with a dropping and shuffling of notes.
45 years separate this pre-presentation conversation and MARGOT's entrance.)*

ORVILLE This isn't how it goes.

WILBUR No, that's how it goes.

ORVILLE Wilbur—

WILBUR That was terrible. Is that how you're reading it, Orville?

ORVILLE You changed it all around.

WILBUR You're going to stand up in front of the Western Society of Engineers—

ORVILLE Wilbur, when did you change this?

WILBUR I massaged it, Orville. *Finessed* it. Start there again.

ORVILLE Where?

WILBUR *I speak for my brother, as well...*

ORVILLE "I speak for my brother as—"

WILBUR My older brother.

ORVILLE "I speak for my *older* brother as well—"

WILBUR Wilbur.

ORVILLE "—My older brother *Wilbur*, as well, when I explain that our experiments undertaken in Sumatra—"

WILBUR I meant North Carolina there.

(ORVILLE pencils the notation onto his notes.)

ORVILLE "Undertaken in North Carolina over the previous five winters with our sustaining wing arise from our mutual passion to understand fully the mechanics of flight."

WILBUR My god, what a flaccid little sermon— *(Up.)* "A PASSION TO UNDERSTAND FULLY." Do you feel it, Orville?

ORVILLE A mutual passion—

WILBUR Do you feel it?

ORVILLE I feel it.

WILBUR Do you FEEL it?

ORVILLE Wilbur, I feel it—

WILBUR *(Reading emphatically.)* "Members of the Western Society of Engineers, let me announce to you today that the development of a heavier-than-air flying machine is a foregone conclusion."

ORVILLE It isn't.

WILBUR *A foregone conclusion*, Orville.

ORVILLE *(Continuing.)* "Before the first decade of this new century is over, man—"

WILBUR And women.

ORVILLE "and possibly a few women will fly from the Atlantic to the Alleghenys in under an hour." Women too?

WILBUR I don't see why not.

ORVILLE Does Mother know about this?

WILBUR She does not. (*Reading.*) “Unlike a bird who jumps from a limb because no one has ever told him he can’t, it is with a clear grasp of the intricacies of power and balance that my brother and I fling ourselves from hilltops.”

ORVILLE A bird?

WILBUR *Unlike* a bird

ORVILLE Wilbur, we’re five minutes away from a presentation to the Western Society of Engineers and you’ve filled our paper with birds.

WILBUR *Finessed* our paper. I hear an introduction.

(*WILBUR starts to exit.*)

ORVILLE Wait, Wilbur.

MARGOT (*Off.*) Orville?

ORVILLE Wilbur.

WILBUR What, little brother?

ORVILLE We haven’t flown.

WILBUR Yet.

(*WILBUR starts to exit.*)

ORVILLE Wait, Wilbur.

MARGOT (*Off.*) Orville?

ORVILLE You’re wearing one of my socks.

(*The brothers are in fact each wearing half of the other’s pair.*)

WILBUR And you’re wearing one of mine—a *mutual* passion.

(*MARGOT enters.*)

ORVILLE They’re socks.

WILBUR It’s showtime, little brother.

(*A rushed exit by WILBUR.*)

ORVILLE Wilbur, wait—

MARGOT The most interesting dream, really.

(*Beat before ORVILLE acknowledges MARGOT.*)

ORVILLE Hmm?

MARGOT I dreamt, old man—I dreamt I was a bird.

ORVILLE A bird, Margot?

MARGOT A bird—having a walking dream.

ORVILLE A *what*?

MARGOT A *walking dream*, Orville. I was a bird having a walking dream.

What were you doing just now?

ORVILLE Quietly withering.

MARGOT You've taken your pills—?

ORVILLE Yes, I've taken my pills.

(*Beat.*)

MARGOT It's the best kind of dream a bird can have, really.

ORVILLE What is?

MARGOT A walking dream—terra firma.

ORVILLE Oh, *terra firma*.

MARGOT Yes, *terra firma*. Your brother was in my dream too.

ORVILLE Wilbur?

MARGOT Wilbur flew out from the old maple. His shadow—

ORVILLE The Norway Maple?

MARGOT I suppose.

ORVILLE I had that tree chopped down years ago.

MARGOT: It was a *dream*, dear.

ORVILLE Like a bird?

MARGOT A bird having a walk—

ORVILLE No, I mean Wilbur was flying?

MARGOT Yes. Like a bird.

(*Beat.*)

ORVILLE (*Dismissive.*) You were having a dream, Margot.

(*ORVILLE removes his shoes, noticing his mismatched socks.*)

MARGOT I was having a dream—a walking dream.

ORVILLE My brothers' dead.

MARGOT I know, Orville—

ORVILLE Dead forty-five years now. Time flies.

MARGOT Orville.

ORVILLE Time flies. Langley flies—*everybody* flies except—

MARGOT The little white pill, Orville.

ORVILLE Yes, the little white one. Have you seen my other sock?

MARGOT Which one?

ORVILLE Well... either, I guess.

(Beat.)

How did he look?

MARGOT He looked good.

(MARGOT exits as WILBUR runs wildly onstage, falling to the ground.)

WILBUR *(Overly dramatic.)* Orville!