



MEN WITH WINGS

BASED ON THE TECHNICOLOR
PARAMOUNT PICTURE OF THE
— SAME NAME —

SYNOPSIS.

Scott Barnes, aircraft designer now flying the mail; Patrick Falconer, bored with looking after his father's estate, and Peggy Ranson Falconer, mother of a baby girl, face the responsibilities of life in 1920, seventeen years after they, as children, built kites, watched Peggy's father go to his death in an aeroplane of his own making. Pat, combat pilot, has come home from the World War a restless hero with his bride, Peggy. Scott, third member of the triangle, loving Peggy, is a bachelor.

CHAPTER VII

T IRED and dirty from his mail run, Scott Barnes wearily mounted the stairs leading to his apartment. At the top of the flight he paused, his eyes widening with surprise as he saw the door ajar. He advanced, stuck his head inside.

Pat Falconer was in the little, one-room bachelor abode, cheaply furnished, untidy, piled high with books, charts, blueprints and drawings of aeroplanes. Pat was reading a magazine, sitting in a chair beside the wall bed, which looked as if it hadn't been made for a week. He looked up at Scott, ran his hand nervously through his hair.

Scott saw that he was haggard, his face lined and drawn, his skin pale and grey.

"Oh—hello, Pat," he said.

"Hello, Scotty," Pat replied.

Scott pulled his wadded helmet and goggles from his coat pocket, tossed them on to another chair. Then he went into the bathroom, filled the wash basin, dipped into it. Pat lit a cigarette, rose, went to the door, leaned against it. He inhaled deeply, then blurted:

"Scotty, I've got to get out of this town."

The words had no effect on Scotty. He continued to wash his hands and face. Pat pressed:

"The night Patricia was born I got drunk with some friends who are going over to fly with the French in Morocco. I signed up to go with them."

He leaned forward nervously, watching Scott's back for a faint sign of reaction, found none. Pat's voice rose as he continued. His words were clipped, tense.

"I can't breathe around here any more. It's driving me mad, sitting around. Sleeping with my eyes open."

Scott dried his hands and face with a towel, jammed it back on to

its rack, brushed by Pat as if he had neither seen nor heard him. Pat followed, saw him sit down, took a chair opposite him. He groped for words for a minute. Then he faltered:

"You—you don't understand, Scotty. You've never had that ache inside of you. You're satisfied. As God is my judge—I wish I were!"

He leaned forward in his chair, his eyes appealing to his friend. Still Scott said nothing.

"Nobody who has been through a war can just come home and forget—like turning off a light," Pat explained. He saw that Scott's face was a mask and that his eyes were boring into him, as if reading his soul. Slowly, he got to his feet.

"The boat sails to-night, Scotty," he said. "I'd say good-bye to Peggy and Patricia—but if I tried it I wouldn't go. And I've got to go."

Pat was staring at the carpet. Slowly his head came up. There was a half-smile on his face and a far-away look in his eyes as he added:

"When the motor is making me deaf again . . . and the propeller is blowing the hair off my head . . . and I can smell that funny stink of castor oil . . . and see some big, blue mountains to climb over . . . then I'll be happy again."

He shot a pleading look at Scott. "Will you look after Peggy and Patricia for me until I come back?" he asked.

Scott finally replied:

"You know I will . . ."

Pat rose, walked to the door. Scott followed. Pat turned, extended his hand. Scott gripped it tightly. Tears welled in his eyes.

"Goodbye, dirty face," Pat choked. He went out, closing the door behind him. Scott stood staring at the door, listening to Pat's even steps on the stairs.

His face clouded at contemplation of the job which faced him. He changed his clothes, slammed a hat on his head, went downstairs, crawled behind the wheel of a battered roadster. A few minutes later he turned it into the driveway leading to the entrance to the Falconer mansion. The butler greeted him, admitted him. Just as he stepped into the reception hall he looked up. He saw Peggy starting down the stairs. She was dressed in a negligee. Her face was pale. She came down the steps slowly and with difficulty, leaning heavily on the banister.

Scott watched her, waited in pitying silence, his jaw set firmly. He started as Peggy gave him a searching look and said, flatly:

"He's gone, isn't he?"

"Yes," he replied. Peggy held tightly to the banister to steady herself.

"Where?" she asked.

"Morocco," he told her.

Scott explained slowly, carefully, about the way Pat felt.

"I knew this was coming . . . but so soon . . ." Peggy said, dully.

"He'll be back," Scott assured her. "He's got something inside of him. He's got to kill it—wear it out."

"I knew he was restless and unhappy," she said, half to herself. "I knew Patty was a disappointment to him." She paused. "I'm glad he didn't say good-bye to me. I'd have cried and begged him to stay and been a fool . . ."

Scott caught a sweet, sad expression which he had not seen on her face since they'd been children, as she confessed:

"Scotty—I was so happy for a while. It was like being in heaven—just to be with him."

Scott Barnes's reserve cracked for just a moment as he said:

"I wish he were hearing this—instead of me."

Peggy didn't seem to hear.

"He'd have stayed and done his duty if I'd asked him—but he wasn't made to do his duty," she continued, wearily. "It's funny—I'd rather have him for only a little while than any other man for a lifetime . . ."

"You're—taking it swell," Scott said.

"I was ready for it," Peggy confided. "I'll just have to wait . . . to have a vacation in my life until he comes back."

Scott tried to share her mood. But he said, grimly:

"If he isn't cured the next time I see him, I'm going to do a little doctoring on him—with a baseball bat."

Peggy brightened.

"That's a promise," she said.

"You go to bed, now," he told her. "How about dinner to-morrow night, and a show?"

"I'd love it."

"It's a date," he agreed. "I'll be going. Good night."

As he spoke, he turned, walked to the door.

"Good night," Peggy said, softly. For a moment, he looked at her in silence, then went out. Peggy started down the last step or two, trying to smile. As the door closed behind him and she heard his footsteps die away, a cry of anguish came from her throat. She crumpled to the floor, lay there, wracked by sobs.

Pat had brought a crisis which in time became less sharp, but the ache never died from Peggy's heart. Scott tried to comfort her, but felt strangely inadequate, strangely apart from her. If anything, during these weeks and months, his love for Peggy grew, became more engulfing. And with that protecting devotion came a love for her child, Patricia.

In the late summer of 1920, both Pat and Scott contributed to one of those crises which were always arising in the offices of the Underwood "Daily Record" where, at all times, Hiram Jenkins, uncle of Scott, and Hank Rinebow, were bickering.

Late one afternoon Hank drifted from his editor's desk, grabbed a piece of copy from the telegraph operator—and then raced into Hiram's office.

"Here's somethin' for us to splatter all over the front page to-night!" he exclaimed. "They've just completed the first run of the transcontinental air mail! New York to San Francisco!"

Hiram's hat remained on his head and his feet remained on his desk.

"Nope," he said.

"But this is history," Hank argued. "They've—"

"Been carryin' the mail across the continent in trains for years," completed Hiram.

Hank's voice rose as he argued: "This is planes, not trains. Trains don't fly."

Hiram rocked his feet off his desk, sat bolt upright, banged his fist on his desk.

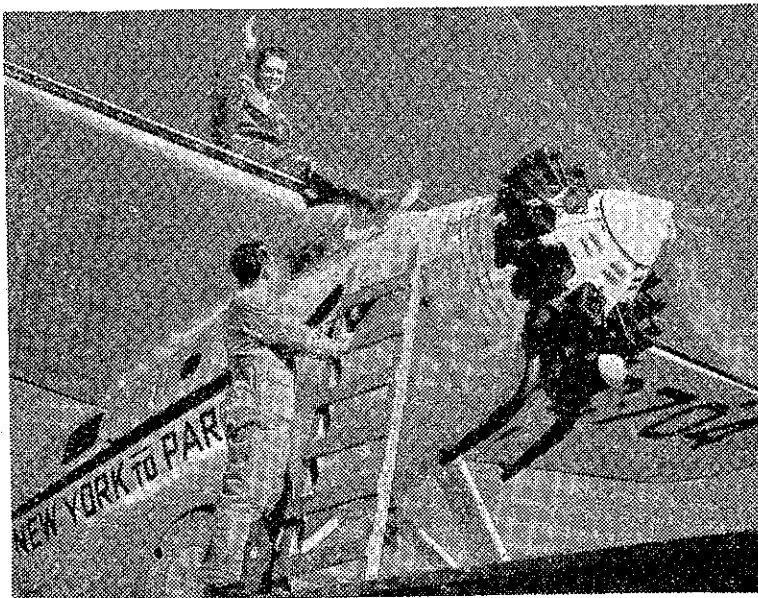
"Just a minute!" he snapped.

"I got a story here about Pat Falconer. He just ended a war in Morocco single-handed. Blew up a well and caused a whole tribe to surrender! The French are gonna decorate him."

"The French," Hank stormed, "decorate everybody."

"He's a local boy!" shouted Hiram. "He's wounded. May lose a leg. That's news!"

"A local boy flew the first leg of that transcontinental mail run, too. (Continued on next Page.)"



★ THE FIRST ATLANTIC FLIGHT.—"His streamlined monoplane was poised, ready to take off on the first leg of his long hop. Mechanics warmed the motor of the ship, which bore the legend 'Miss Patricia—New York to Paris.'" (Fred MacMurray in a scene from "Men With Wings.") ★