

STAGGERWING

Written by

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Based on
STAGGERWING
A Novel
by
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FADE IN: ACT I

EXT. DAWN. UNDER A CLEAR BLUE CALIFORNIA SKY.

A 1933 Waco F-Series biplane, engine roaring, blasts into the scene. The plane loops and rolls in a series of spectacular stunts. In the open fore and aft cockpits sit MAGGIE ROCKWELL and her instructor LUKE WHITNEY.

EXT. MORNING. UNDER A CLEAR BLUE CALIFORNIA SKY.

The biplane lands and taxis over to a large aluminum hangar. Across the top of the hangar a sign reads: WHITNEY AVIATION.

Maggie and Luke climb out of the cockpit onto the wing and jump to the ground. Maggie, 23, is lean and athletic. She pulls off her goggles and leather helmet, exposing green eyes and long, lush auburn hair.

Luke, 41, tall and thin, removes his goggles and whistles softly.

LUKE

Maggie, ten years teaching stunt flying, never had a student pick it up so fast.

MAGGIE

Must be the instructor.

LUKE

We both know that's not true.

MAGGIE

Forget the stunts, Luke. We both know what I want.

LUKE

(smiles)

A new dress?

MAGGIE

(scrunches up her face)

No way. I hate dresses.

LUKE

A manicure?

MAGGIE

Very funny. I want to race in the Bendix this summer.

LUKE
No? Seriously?

MAGGIE
(scowls at him)
Word is they're going to let the
ladies compete again. I want in.

LUKE
So you remind me several times a
day, Maggie. And don't think I
don't wish I could sponsor you. But
with this sour economy, and no sign
of a recovery, I just don't have
enough business to make it happen.

MAGGIE
There must be somebody out there
who needs a good female pilot.

LUKE
You know I keep asking.

Maggie smiles and kisses Luke quickly on the cheek.

MAGGIE
Gotta run. Work to do or I won't
graduate.

Maggie lopes off toward her 1930 Chevy pickup at the edge of
the airfield. Luke watches Maggie, sighs, shakes his head.

LUKE
(quietly to himself)
If only I was twenty years younger.

Maggie turns and waves.

LUKE (CONT'D)
(shouts)
I'll see you later at the shoot!

MAGGIE
(shouts back)
Let's just hope the wind doesn't
pick up again.

EXT. AFTERNOON. THE CALIFORNIA DESERT.

A movie set. CAMERAMEN, SOUND MEN, ASSISTANT DIRECTORS and
PRODUCERS, GRIPS, and ACTORS mill about. The wind blows a
gale. Dust flies everywhere.

The German director ERIC VON STEINMAN enters, takes charge.

VON STEINMAN
(shouts into a megaphone)
Action!

Movie cameras, covered in canvas to protect them from the harsh desert conditions, roll. Sound grips steady their microphones.

A few seconds pass before a rider on horseback gallops into view heading straight for the camera. Moments later Luke Whitney's biplane is first heard and then seen flying low over the desert. The plane flies over the horse and rider.

Fifty yards behind and closing fast, half a dozen other riders on horseback make chase.

The strong wind tosses the small plane about. The tips of its wings nearly touch the ground. A rope ladder dangles from the fuselage. It twists and turns in the wind.

The rider, standing in the stirrups, reaches out and tries to grab the bottom rung of the ladder. The wind blows and the sand flies, making the task next to impossible. Still, the rider tries as the cameras roll.

And then, an instant later, the rider's out of the saddle and off the horse and bouncing along the hard desert floor.

EXT. AFTERNOON. THE CALIFORNIA DESERT.

Several people rush to the rider's assistance but quickly the rider, Maggie Rockwell, is up and dusting herself off. She might be bruised and a little battered but more than that she's hot. Steaming hot. Fire in her eyes and jaw set, she fast moves in the direction of the director, Von Steinman.

But just before she reaches him and starts to tear his head off, she sighs, pivots, and marches off into the desert.

The biplane lands. Out of the cockpit and onto the wing comes Luke Whitney. He's hotter even than Maggie, smoke billowing out of ears and nose. He hops off the wing, beelines for Von Steinman, his voice rising above the howling wind.

LUKE
You arrogant fool! We told you it
was too windy! We told you to wait
until the winds died! But would you
listen? No. You insisted we go. And
what did you do? You damn near got
Maggie killed!

EXT. AFTERNOON. THE CALIFORNIA DESERT.

Maggie loads her little palomino, ABBIE, into a trailer hooked to her pickup at the edge of the movie set. Luke ambles up.

LUKE
How you feeling?

MAGGIE
Like I fell off a horse.

LUKE
(smiles)
Imagine that. And a horse running as fast as a plane can fly.

MAGGIE
(shrugs)
Be a little sore tomorrow, that's all. Nothing's broke.

LUKE
You're one tough hombre, young lady.

MAGGIE
You grow up on a ranch you're going to fall off horses. I'm not worried about me. I'm worried about Abbie.

LUKE
Problem?

MAGGIE
She came up limping after I fell.

LUKE
Uh oh.

MAGGIE
Nothing too bad but definitely a hobble. I'll get a good look at her once I get her cleaned, fed, and stabled.

LUKE
Then you'll be glad to hear there's a schedule change. Director Von Stupidman has some interior scenes tomorrow and likely the day after. We won't reshoot this scene for a couple days.

MAGGIE
(nods)
Give Abbie some time to rest.

LUKE
Exactly. Listen, kid, I hesitate to say anything but feel like you might want to hear.

MAGGIE
Hear what?

LUKE
I had a call this morning. After I got back to the shop.

MAGGIE
From who? Amelia Earhart? She looking for a copilot?

LUKE
You're nobody's copilot, kid.

Maggie climbs out of the trailer, dusts herself off.

MAGGIE
You got that right, old man.

LUKE
(smiles)
You know who Walter Beech is?

MAGGIE
(sarcastic)
Walter Beech? Hmm. No, Luke. Never heard of Walt Beech. You ever heard of Franklin Roosevelt?

LUKE
Okay, okay. No need to be sassy. I've known Walt since the mid-twenties, since well before he started Beech Aviation.

MAGGIE
Yeah?

LUKE
So Walt's chief design engineer is a real nice fella named Ted Wells. Ted's the guy who called me this morning.

MAGGIE

Spit it out, Luke. I need to take care of Abbie, soak my bruised body in Epsom salts, and study for finals all before I pass out.

LUKE

Beech has a new aircraft. Whole new design. Ted's design. I don't have the particulars yet but Beech is seriously thinking about entering the plane in the Bendix race.

MAGGIE

(excited)

That's big news. So why did they call you?

LUKE

They wanted to know if I wanted to fly her.

MAGGIE

But you can't.

LUKE

(nods)

I told them I broke my back in a crash last fall and an hour in the cockpit is about all I can stand. After that the pain drains me. To have a shot at winning the Bendix you need ten-hour stints in the cockpit.

MAGGIE

(curious)

So... what did they say when you told them you couldn't race?

LUKE

(smiles)

I think you mean, what did I say?

MAGGIE

Let's not argue semantics.

LUKE

(shakes his head)

Trouble with you and me, kid, is you want me to be your instructor and mentor and father-figure and I want you to be my girlfriend.

MAGGIE

Oh no, that would ruin everything.
It always does.

LUKE

Not always.

MAGGIE

Did you tell them you had a pilot?

LUKE

I told them I had someone who might
be interested.

MAGGIE

Someone who *might* be interested?

LUKE

They're looking for a *male* pilot,
Maggie. Over and over Ted was like,
is *he* experienced? How many solo
hours does *he* have? Does *he* have
any long distance flights?

MAGGIE

(sighs)

I can fly every bit as good as a
man. Better than most.

LUKE

True. But you have only a middling
number of solo hours. And I think
the farthest you've flown is maybe
from Bakersfield to Burbank.

MAGGIE

Is this some alternate reality,
Luke? You yourself have said, more
than once, if you had the money,
you would sponsor me in the Bendix
Trophy Race. So what gives?

LUKE

Well heck, Maggie, a couple things.
It's easy enough for me to say I'd
sponsor you cause I can't. Then of
course, if I'm dead honest, I'd
worry about you, as it's a grueling
and dangerous race and every year
there's at least a couple crashes,
often with fatalities.

MAGGIE

You're talking gibberish.

LUKE

Yeah, maybe, but then there's this.
I don't think a couple good old
midwestern boys like Walt Beech and
Ted Wells would put a girl in the
cockpit.

Maggie, irritated by Luke's long list of excuses, practically paws at the dirt like some riled up steed. When he finally winds down, she moves to the cab of her pickup, opens the door, hops in, and slams the door closed.

MAGGIE

(through the open window)
You just call those good old boys
back, Luke Whitney, and tell 'em
you got a pilot. I'll take it from
there.

And with that Maggie turns the key, guns the gas, and spins off in a cloud of dust and dirt.

EXT. AFTERNOON. CALIFORNIA SCHOOL OF ENGINEERING (CSE).

Maggie turns onto the campus of the California School of Engineering. She follows the road past classrooms and dormitories and laboratories, out around the gymnasium and the football stadium to an open field with a large barn and horse stables off to one end.

Beside the stables is another field enclosed by low bleachers where the university plays its polo matches. A horse and rider charge up and down the polo field, stopping, pivoting, moving backwards, turning, racing forward.

Maggie watches the rider from her truck for several seconds before parking the truck and trailer next to the stable.

EXT. AFTERNOON. THE STABLES AT CSE.

Maggie steps out of the truck and gently unloads Abbie from the trailer. They cross to the wide front door of the stable. Abbie has a slight limp.

MAGGIE

Hello? Anybody here? I'm looking
for Fernando.

No reply. Maggie leads Abbie around the side of the stable where she finds a spigot with a hose attached. Beside the hose are buckets and brushes. Abbie gets a bath.

A horse and rider appear. The same horse and rider Maggie saw on the polo field.

FERNANDO
Hello. Might I help you?

Maggie turns, shields her eyes from the sun at the rider's back, gives a little wave.

MAGGIE
I don't know. Maybe. I'm looking for Fernando.

The rider removes his polo helmet, exposing a lush mane of dark brown, almost black hair.

FERNANDO
I'm Fernando. How may I help?

Maggie further shields her eyes for a closer look.

MAGGIE
Was that you... on the polo field?

FERNANDO
Yes.

MAGGIE
Some pretty fancy rider, Mister.
That pony knows how to dance.

FERNANDO
(smiles)
Thank you.

MAGGIE
Do you play on the university polo team?

FERNANDO
(shrugs)
I play a bit. Mostly I exercise the ponies. Give a little instruction.
Keep the stables clean.

MAGGIE
So, you work for the university?

FERNANDO
I work, yes, but I am a student also.

MAGGIE
Really? What year?

FERNANDO

I am in my senior year.

MAGGIE

No! Seriously? So am I.

FERNANDO

I know.

MAGGIE

You know? How do you know?

FERNANDO

(hesitant)

It's a large university, but not that large. I have... I have seen you around.

MAGGIE

Oh you have, have you?

FERNANDO

(nods)

Do you need assistance with your horse?

MAGGIE

Right. My horse. Usually I keep Abbie at a stable in Burbank but I'm doing some... some stunt work not far from here. The university gave me permission to board Abbie for awhile. Name's Maggie. Maggie Rockwell. They told me to come out and look for Fernan— to look for you. So, well, here I am.

Fernando swings effortlessly off the polo pony.

FERNANDO

No one said a word to me, but no matter, I can get Abbie settled. Plenty of empty stalls. Plenty of oats also, hay, whatever you need.

MAGGIE

Thank you.

FERNANDO

What kind of stunts do you do?

MAGGIE

Oh, well, you know, just some... some things for the movies.

FERNANDO
For the movies. Sounds exciting.

MAGGIE
Not really. But it pays pretty well. And you know, with tuition and room and board, and books.

FERNANDO
Oh, I know. The expenses. I spend more hours working than going to class and studying. Not really any time for anything else.

MAGGIE
Exactly. These rich kids who party all the time, who go up to the mountains and down to the beach on weekends. Almost four years I've been here and I've never done any of that.

FERNANDO
(nods)
Why don't I show you Abbie's stall and give you a little tour so you'll know where everything is.

They start toward the entrance. Abbie limps.

FERNANDO (CONT'D)
Your pony is injured?

MAGGIE
We took a little fall earlier. Once I get her fed and comfortable I'll take a look.

They enter the stable.

INT. LATE AFTERNOON. OFFICE OF WHITNEY AVIATION.

Luke Whitney sits at his desk in his office crowded with aviation paraphernalia.

LUKE
(speaks into his phone)
Yes operator, I'll hold.

GUY NELSON, Luke's chief mechanic, enters the office.

GUY

She's sputtering, boss, due to
dirt, dust, and sand.

LUKE

(sighs)

Spic and span, Guy. I don't care
how long it takes. We shoot again
in a couple days so I can't afford
any mischief with the engine. We
need that movie money. Certainly
aren't making any giving lessons.

GUY

Got it, boss. No problem.

Guy exits.

LUKE

(into the phone)

Ted, that you? Luke Whitney... Yup,
twice in one day. I got to thinking
about what I said earlier... Yeah,
about the pilot you might want to
consider for the Bendix. Well
here's the thing, Ted. That pilot.
She... well, she's a girl... Yup, a
girl, Ted. Well, a young lady...
Early twenties. And just the cutest
thing you ever did see... Yeah, I
know, I know. But here's the thing,
Ted. And you know I wouldn't tell
you this unless it was a hundred
and ten percent true. This gal,
she's just... she's just about the
best student I've ever had. By a
long shot. Smart as a whip.
Excellent instincts. Super quick
learner. Hell, she's about to
graduate from Cal Engineering with
a dang degree in aeronautical
engineering... No, I'm serious.
Plus she's courageous as all get-
out. Flies right on edge of risky
but never crosses the line. Sharp.
Intuitive. A real natural... Yeah,
Ted. You talk to Walt. Let me know
what you think. It'd be worth your
while to at least meet her... Okay
Ted, so long.

Luke hangs up, sighs, stretches.

INT. LATE AFTERNOON. CSE STABLES.

Maggie stands in the stall with Abbie. She has Abbie's right front leg bent so she can inspect the hoof. She cleans out some compacted dirt and sand.

Fernando stands just outside the stall.

FERNANDO

Anything unusual?

MAGGIE

A lot of gunk in there. I think it was irritating her. She'll be fine.

FERNANDO

No bruising below the knee? I saw a bit of swelling and her gait looked more like fetlock or coronet rather than hoof.

MAGGIE

(glances at Fernando)
You can tell that by watching her walk a few steps?

FERNANDO

I've spend some time around horses.

MAGGIE

Well that makes two of us. And Abbie here, she's not some fancy thoroughbred or highfalutin polo pony. She's just a tough little palomino. Shrugs off injuries as easily as shooing away pesky flies.

FERNANDO

I did not presume to think I knew your pony better than you, Miss Rockwell. I was merely making an observation.

MAGGIE

What are you, a vet?

FERNANDO

I am not but if you take a look-

MAGGIE

I don't want to be rude but I need to get Abbie squared away and crack the books. I don't know about you but I have finals coming up.

FERNANDO

Yes, I do too. Do you mind if I
just...

Fernando steps into the stall. He strokes Abbie's mane and withers, speaks to her softly. He goes down on one knee and gently takes the pony's right front leg from Maggie.

FERNANDO (CONT'D)

You see here, on the inside, just
in front of the fetlock, a tiny bit
of swelling, not even the size of a
pinto bean.

Fernando takes Maggie's hand. She momentarily pulls away but then allows him to guide her fingers across the pony's lower leg.

FERNANDO (CONT'D)

There. Do you feel it?

MAGGIE

(after a moment)

I feel a bit of a bump but it's
practically invisible. How did you
see it?

FERNANDO

I didn't see it but I gathered as
much from her gait. She was doing
her best to only put pressure on
the outside of her right hoof. That
usually indicates a bump or bruise
with inflammation to an interior
ligament behind the coronet.

MAGGIE

That's a mouthful.

FERNANDO

She'll be fine. Just needs to relax
for a few days. I'll talk to the
stable boy, which would be me, and
tell him to keep cold compresses on
the leg for the next twenty-four
hours. I believe that will help
with the inflammation.

MAGGIE

I don't think that's necessary.

FERNANDO

She'll heal faster and have less
pain.

MAGGIE

But I live twenty minutes away. I
don't have time tonight to drive
out here and apply-

FERNANDO

The stable boy lives less than one
minute from here.

MAGGIE

You live here?

FERNANDO

In a room over in the barn. So I'll
just come over every couple hours,
check on Abbie, and change the
compress. Nothing to it.

MAGGIE

You'd do that for me?

FERNANDO

Well, I don't know if I'd do it for
you. You're a tad ornery, if you
don't mind me saying. But yes, I'll
definitely do it for Abbie. She's a
sweetheart.

Maggie frowns, but then smiles.

INT. NIGHT. THE SMALL HOUSE MAGGIE SHARES WITH HER ROOMMATE.

Maggie studies at a wooden table in a small spartan kitchen. The clock on the wall reads 10:15. It's dark outside the windows. She reads from a thick textbook and makes notes in her notebook.

The kitchen door opens. In walks BETTY ANDERSON, Maggie's roommate. Betty wears a white waitress's uniform. She sighs, kicks off her shoes, sits.

BETTY

I'm not going to make graduation.
Gonna wither and die first.

MAGGIE

(smiles)

No you won't and yes you will.

BETTY

I don't have the energy to brush my
teeth or crawl to my bed. How am I
going to finish my dissertation?

MAGGIE

You just will. That's all. We always do. We never think we will but we do. For four years now. Come on, Betty, just a few weeks to go.

BETTY

I'm as good as almost dead.

MAGGIE

(laughs)

Right. Almost. But not quite. Take a shower. That'll wake you up.

BETTY

I'm too tired to shower. And so mad I want to kill someone.

MAGGIE

Stiffed again, huh?

BETTY

Couple spent nine dollars and sixty-five cents on dinner. Sodas. Green salads. Chicken steaks. Even ice cream. You know what they left?

MAGGIE

Ten dollars?

BETTY

Exactly. I wanted to follow them out to their car and throw the thirty-five-cent tip at them.

MAGGIE

Don't do that, Betty. Rent's due. Electric bill's overdue. It's the Depression. Everyone's strapped.

BETTY

Then maybe skip the ice cream and give your long-suffering waitress the extra buck.

MAGGIE

Thirty-five cents is kind of insulting.

BETTY

(sighs)

When am I going to meet some rich guy to take me away from all this?

MAGGIE

(laughs)

Never! I hope. Who wants that life?
Some rich guy telling you what to
do and how to dress and when you
can hang out with your friends.
Forget that nonsense. We're getting
engineering degrees, honey. Gonna
write our own tickets, be who we
were meant to be, not who someone
else wants us to be.

BETTY

Right now for a hot bath and a week
in Honolulu, I'll be whoever you
want me to be.

MAGGIE

I met someone today.

BETTY

Clark Gable? James Cagney? Everyone
says he's not cute but I think he's
divine. I love his smirk.

MAGGIE

You would.

BETTY

So who then? Someone rich and
handsome I hope.

MAGGIE

Definitely handsome. Definitely not
rich.

BETTY

Avoid him like the plague.

MAGGIE

You're awful.

BETTY

Realistic.

MAGGIE

He works out at the university
stable where I'm boarding Abbie
while I work on the picture about
the bank robbers.

BETTY

That's just what you need, Mag. A
stable boy.

MAGGIE

I don't need or want any boy. I'm just saying I met him and he was very nice and very good looking. And he's a senior, though for some reason I've never seen him before.

BETTY

Works at the stable, huh?

MAGGIE

Yes, knows a lot about horses but I forgot to ask him his major.

BETTY

Fernando Martin.

MAGGIE

Fernando. Yes. You know him?

BETTY

I know who he is. There's some mystery around him.

MAGGIE

Mystery?

BETTY

He enrolled junior year. Went back east his first two years. Somewhere snazzy like Princeton or MIT. He's supposedly a whiz at polo.

MAGGIE

That's a rich man's sport.

BETTY

So maybe he's rich. Handsome and rich.

MAGGIE

Definitely not rich. Lives out there in the barn. Shovels horse manure and exercises the horses for his room and board. And I think he said something about giving riding lessons to help pay his tuition.

BETTY

Hmm. Okay. So definitely not rich. I think he's at the ag school.

MAGGIE

Agricultural engineering?

BETTY

(nods)

He's pretty easy on the eyes.

MAGGIE

Yes he is.

BETTY

Like one of those movie stars you hang around with.

MAGGIE

I do stunts, Betty. I don't do movie stars. Empty as peanut shells with swollen egos.

BETTY

You're bad. And the reason you don't know Fernando is the same reason you don't know ninety-five percent of your classmates. Because all you do is fly, ride, and study. Fly, ride, study. Fly, ride, study. Planes, horses, and books. You wouldn't know it but the senior class voted you both Most Boring and Most Invisible.

MAGGIE

Okay point made. So what about him?

BETTY

About who?

MAGGIE

Fernando.

BETTY

Oh, him. Interested, huh?

MAGGIE

No.

BETTY

I told you all I know. Why do you want to know about him anyway? You two are a couple peas in a pod. It's not like you're going to go out on a date with him. You've been here for almost four years and he's been here almost two years and you've both been out on the exact same number of dates. Zero.

MAGGIE
I'm too busy to date.

BETTY
Dating is a very normal and natural
thing for young people to do, Mag.
You should try it sometime. It's
occasionally even fun.

MAGGIE
I'll try it. After I graduate.

Betty pulls herself up and starts across the kitchen.

BETTY
You do that, Rockwell.

MAGGIE
Maybe I will.

BETTY
I won't hold my breath. Going to
sleep now. Gonna set the alarm for
four so I can get up and study.
Night night.

MAGGIE
Good night, Betty. Sleep tight.

INT. MORNING. CSE STABLES.

Maggie enters the stable just as dawn breaks to the east. She searches around for a light switch but then notices a spot of light coming from the far end of the stable. She walks down between the stalls until she reaches Abbie's stall, where she finds Fernando unwrapping a compression bandage from around the pony's right front leg.

MAGGIE
You're up and at it early. Only
folks raised on farms and ranches
up and at it this early.

Fernando turns and smiles.

FERNANDO
Good morning, Miss Rockwell.

MAGGIE
I know a Mrs. Rockwell, my mother.
And Granny Rockwell, my grandma.
But I don't know any Miss Rockwell.

FERNANDO

Are you inviting me to call you by
your given name?

MAGGIE

Yes, Mr. Martin, I'm inviting you
to call me by my given name. Now,
how's my girl?

FERNANDO

Come see for yourself.

Abbie is happy to see Maggie. They have hugs and kisses. Then Maggie squats down next to Fernando in the hay-filled stall. She gently rubs the pony's fetlock.

MAGGIE

Nothing. Perfectly smooth.

FERNANDO

Wrapped it snugly with ice-cold
compresses throughout the night.
Pulled the inflammation right out
of there.

MAGGIE

Amazing. Is she still limping?

FERNANDO

Let's see.

Maggie takes Abbie by the halter and leads her out of the stall. They walk back and forth. No limp.

MAGGIE

Well done, Mr. Martin. Or should I
call you Doctor Martin?

FERNANDO

(smiles)

Fernando is fine. And yes, the cold
compresses helped. But Abbie would
have recovered just as well with a
few days' rest. I suggest you keep
her stalled for another day or two
anyway. Just to be sure.

MAGGIE

Luckily that's possible since we're
not needed on the movie set until
later in the week.

Maggie leads Abbie back into the stall. Gives her water and oats. She finds Fernando in a nearby stall, mucking.

MAGGIE (CONT'D)

You must not have slept much last night if you kept changing Abbie's compression wrap.

FERNANDO

With horses and other domestic animals you learn to sleep in two- and three-hour stints. I'm lucky that I can put my head down almost anywhere and nod off in seconds.

MAGGIE

My daddy's the same. He says it's due to a clear conscience and a happy soul.

FERNANDO

I'm not sure I possess those but I like the way your daddy thinks. He a rancher?

MAGGIE

(nods)

Montana. Used to have a sizable spread first started by my great granddaddy. Just a shell left now what with free range all but dead, corporate ranching, taxes, and now this darn Depression. Less than a hundred acres and a few hundred head left, and those'll be on the auction block soon if the economy doesn't improve.

FERNANDO

Very sorry to hear that, Maggie. I know it's been tough times for ranchers and farmers.

MAGGIE

Well, the Rockwells aren't shedding any tears. Good times and bad, we make our way.

FERNANDO

So how did you come to be here in California? A long way from home.

MAGGIE

(smiles)

Only school between here and there that would admit a girl desirous of studying aeronautical engineering.

FERNANDO
(whistles softly)
Aeronautical engineering. That's
impressive.

MAGGIE
Yup. And I'm good at it. I want to
design, build, and fly airplanes.

FERNANDO
You're an inspiration.

MAGGIE
I don't know about that, but I do
know I need to get some work done
before classes start, so thanks so
much for caring for Abbie. And
since you were up half the night
with her, I want to pay you
something.

Maggie starts to dig in the pockets of her dungarees.

FERNANDO
Not necessary. It's my job. Plus I
wanted to care for her, see if a
course of ice-cold compresses would
have a positive effect on the
inflammation.

MAGGIE
Still, I'd feel better if...

Maggie pulls a few crumpled dollars from her pocket, starts
to push them in Fernando's direction. Fernando clasps his
hand around her palm, shakes his head. Their eyes lock. For
several seconds. Maggie looks away first.

MAGGIE (CONT'D)
I... I... I really need to go.

And she hurries off.

EXT. MORNING. BEECH AVIATION. WICHITA, KANSAS.

A first look at the STAGGERWING, a biplane with its top wing
slightly aft of its bottom wing to aid in stability and
passenger comfort.

The plane sits on the tarmac under a clear blue midwestern
sky just outside Beech Aviation's large steel and glass
hangar.

WALTER BEECH, the owner of Beech Aviation and TED WELLS, the chief design engineer, stand beside the plane.

WALT

The contract's signed, Ted. We're going to enter her in the Bendix.

TED

Glad you decided to let her go, Walt. She's been running smooth. Once we get that Pratt and Whitney radial tuned just right we'll see speeds well over two hundred miles an hour. I don't want to jinx us but with the right pilot, good weather conditions, and a little luck, we could not only compete in this race, we could win it.

WALT

(smiles)

Let's not get ahead of ourselves, Ted. My goal is to finish the race to prove the plane's reliability. The Staggerwing is a businessman's airplane, and sure, he wants speed, but more than that he wants comfort and dependability. He wants to know this piece of equipment will get him where he wants to go, and then back home again.

TED

She's a handmade airplane, Walt. Right down to the upholstery on her seats. Quick and reliable.

WALT

If Beech has any shot at surviving this Depression, Ted, that plane right there has to be a success.

TED

I know, Walt. And I know we've got most of our eggs in this basket. Competing in the Bendix is going to help us protect it.

WALT

(nods)

I'm committed, Ted. It'll cost us some serious money to run the race, but the publicity will hopefully make it worth the cost.

TED

I'm sure it will, and why I'm going all out to get a win. If we can average two hundred miles an hour while limiting the number of refueling stops to two or even one, I'm confident we have a chance.

Walt nods and takes a walk around the airplane. Ted follows.

WALT

So where do we stand with a pilot? I almost decided not to go after hearing about Luke Whitney's back. No better man for the job.

TED

The search goes on. All the big names—Doolittle, Haizlip, Turner, Davis—those boys are out. Either they're flying for someone else or they're committed elsewhere.

WALT

What about Jimmie Mattern, Bennett Griffin? Gatty? Post?

TED

Post and Mattern are tied up with other projects. Griffin's injured. Gatty remains a possibility but he's looking for a fat payday.

WALT

Anyone else?

TED

Luke recommended someone. Really went out of his way to plead this pilot's case. Said in all his years flying and instructing he's never seen anyone better.

WALT

Sounds promising. When do we meet this guy?

TED

That's the thing. It's not a guy.

WALT

(frowns, rubs his chin)
A gal?

Ted nods.

WALT (CONT'D)

Hmm. I don't know. What did you tell him?

TED

I told him I'd talk to you.

WALT

Are they permitting the ladies in the race this year?

TED

They are.

WALT

Some first-class female pilots out there.

TED

That's a fact. And they soak up the publicity.

WALT

Earhart. Cochran. Markham. But I don't know, Ted.

TED

Luke tells me she's a real looker.

Walt nods, rubs his hand over the fuselage.

WALT

Can we trust her to a girl?

TED

No harm in talking.

WALT

She's out West with Whitney?

TED

I believe so.

WALT

If she's willing to come to Wichita sure, okay, we'll talk.

INT. MORNING. A CLASSROOM AT CSE.

Maggie sits in the small classroom with SEVERAL OTHER STUDENTS. Maggie and Betty are the only females.

THE PROFESSOR stands in front of the class.

PROFESSOR

As long as you pass your final exams, you will soon graduate with degrees in aeronautical engineering from the California School of Engineering. The Depression has battered the aeronautical industry, but don't despair. There are jobs out there. Plenty of opportunities. And the economy won't stay in the doldrums forever. But right now I want to go back to basics. Flying 101. You walk into an interview. The guy, without even shaking hands or saying hello says, 'Tell me why a plane doesn't fall out of the sky. And keep it simple.'

Maggie's arm shoots up.

PROFESSOR (CONT'D)

Why did I feel certain, Miss Rockwell, I'd see your hand first.

MAGGIE

It's a matter of air pressure, as the Wright brothers realized out on the dunes at Kitty Hawk. We can get into the physics, into gravity and air molecules, the whole complex dance of lift, thrust, and drag. But for thousands of years men, and women, have watched birds take off, fly, soar, and land, and so we've known all along that such a truly magical thing is possible. We just needed to figure out how birds do it, and what they have in common. Wings for one thing. You need wings if you're going to fly. And you need to know how to shape those wings. The shape of the wing is the key. Airplane wings are shaped to make air move faster over the top of the wing. When air moves faster, the pressure of the air decreases. So the pressure on the top of the wing is less than the pressure on the bottom of the wing. This difference in pressure creates a force upon the wing that lifts the wing, and therefore the airplane.

The professor looks impressed. He nods. The male students stare straight ahead. Betty first applauds then she sticks her fingers in her mouth and whistles noisily.

INT. LATE MORNING. CSE STABLES.

Maggie enters the stables and approaches Abbie's stall. The two have a nice reunion and then Maggie checks Abbie's right front leg. She finds no swelling so they head outside.

EXT. LATE MORNING. UNIVERSITY POLO FIELD.

Maggie exits the stable with Abbie and sees activity over on the polo field. They walk in that direction.

The university polo team practices. Maggie watches the action from a corner of the bleachers. It's immediately clear one of the players is superior to the others in both his skill with the mallet and his horsemanship. This player is Fernando.

INT. LATE MORNING. CSE STABLES.

Back in the stable Maggie brushes, waters, and feeds her pony. But after putting Abbie back in her stall, Maggie lingers. She checks to see if the polo practice has ended. She mills about, repeatedly glances toward the polo field.

EXT. LATE MORNING OUTSIDE THE CSE STABLES.

Practice finally ends. Fernando rides to the side of the stable, dismounts, and tethers his pony in the shade where he removes saddle and tack. He provides the pony water and begins to bathe the animal.

Maggie, watching from inside, finally emerges. She acts surprised to see him.

MAGGIE

Oh. Hi! I just stopped by to check on Abbie. She seems much better.

FERNANDO

(nods)

She's a quick healer.

MAGGIE

You think I could ride her hard day after tomorrow? We're shooting this action scene in the desert first thing in the morning.

FERNANDO

Canter her tomorrow to see how she responds, but yes, I think she'll be ready to run.

Maggie kicks at some rocks in the dust.

MAGGIE

Those polo ponies sure run hard.

FERNANDO

(glances at Maggie)

They're a special breed with lots of training.

MAGGIE

I'll bet. You play well. Head and shoulders above the others.

FERNANDO

Not really. It's just practice.

MAGGIE

Are you the star of the team?

FERNANDO

(shrugs)

Hardly. So what about this action scene you're shooting? Sounds exciting.

Maggie smiles, gives a little shrug.

MAGGIE

The bad guys have been chasing me all night. Well, not chasing *me* but chasing the character I play. Well, not the character *I* play but the character the actress plays. Irene Dunne. Have you heard of her? A real snoot. Thinks God made the world just for her. Anyway, Miss Dunne can't ride a mule tethered to a post much less a stunt pony out on the open desert, so that's where I come in. I'm the stunt lady. And in this crazy stunt we're going to shoot in the desert, I'm on Abbie with the bad guys closing fast when suddenly along comes this airplane with a rope ladder dangling—

FERNANDO

Airplane? In a cowboy movie?

MAGGIE

Sure. Why not? No reason you can't have cowboys and airplanes in the same movie.

FERNANDO

No, I suppose not.

MAGGIE

Anyway, because you were, you know, so nice about helping with Abbie and all, and you wouldn't take any money, well, I thought... I thought you might want to, maybe, you know, come out and watch the shoot.

FERNANDO

The movie shoot?

MAGGIE

Well, one scene of the shoot. One scene of the movie.

FERNANDO

So you're... inviting me?

MAGGIE

I am.

FERNANDO

Day after tomorrow?

MAGGIE

(nods)

But you'll have to get up early.

FERNANDO

I'm an early riser.

MAGGIE

I'll be here by four thirty to pick up Abbie. Takes about forty-five minutes to get out into the desert where we'll film the shot. Cameras will start rolling soon as that sun pops its head over the horizon.

FERNANDO

So if I have this straight, I'll be watching you on horseback playing Irene Dunne who plays a character being chased by bad guys.

Maggie smiles, nods.

MAGGIE
Sounds about right.

FERNANDO
I wouldn't miss it for the world.

EXT. AFTERNOON. WHITNEY AVIATION & FLIGHT INSTRUCTION.

Maggie pulls into the parking lot of Whitney Aviation and Flight Instruction. There's a single shabby hangar large enough to accommodate half a dozen small aircraft.

INT. AFTERNOON. WHITNEY AVIATION & FLIGHT INSTRUCTION.

Maggie enters the hangar through the wide double doors.

Two airplanes occupy the hangar. A wooden work bench fills one wall. Engine parts, tires, struts, propellers, and other aircraft paraphernalia lay strewn about.

Maggie crosses to a small office in back. Luke sits at his desk paying bills and cursing under his breath.

MAGGIE
(knocks)
You look grouchy. Trouble in paradise?

LUKE
You're late.

MAGGIE
Is that news?

LUKE
When you're late I do paperwork, which means bill paying, which makes me grouchy.

MAGGIE
I'll do it for free. Well, instead of paying for lessons.

LUKE
You haven't paid for a lesson in months. Maybe a year or more.

MAGGIE
Yeah but I keep a tab. Once I'm gainfully employed I'll write you a big fat check.

LUKE
I won't hold my breath.

MAGGIE
(smiles)
Probably a good idea. Now shall we
go flying?

EXT. AFTERNOON. IN THE AIR IN LUKE'S WACO BIPLANE

Maggie in the front seat, Luke in the rear seat. They fly north toward the Sierra Nevada in search of clouds. They find some over the Sequoia National Forest, but nothing carrying rain or electricity. Maggie flies through towering cumulus clouds.

EXT. AFTERNOON. WHITNEY AVIATION & FLIGHT INSTRUCTION.

Back over the airfield, and after performing some dips and rolls, Maggie lands and taxis over to the hangar. Maggie and Luke climb out onto the wing and jump to the ground.

MAGGIE
That's the trouble with being a
pilot in California. Never any bad
weather. How can I learn to handle
adverse conditions if I don't get
to practice.

LUKE
Was that a question?

MAGGIE
Not really.

LUKE
Didn't think so. And as for bad
weather: fly around it.

MAGGIE
(shrugs)
When I compete in the Bendix I'm
not worried about my ability to
take off with excessive quantities
of fuel. I'm not worried about
finding a place to land if I'm dead
empty and just gliding. I'm not
worried about my endurance or my
ability to stay awake right through
the night. What I'm worried about
is bad weather. Rain. Wind. Thunder
and lightning.

LUKE

What do you mean, *when* you compete in the Bendix? I think you mean *if* you compete in the Bendix. Lots of aviators dream of competing in the Bendix Trophy race, kid, but only a handful actually get to go up.

MAGGIE

Yeah, well, old man, I'm part of that handful. You'll see.

LUKE

I don't doubt it for a second. So here's the thing: Rain's nothing to worry about, especially with a modern enclosed cockpit. Wind, unless it's blowing a gale, is a nuisance but nothing to lose sleep over. Electrical storms can be scary but they're typically isolated events, relatively small in size, and visible from dozens of miles away. This year the Bendix Trophy race flies east to west. New York to LA. Which is good because weather usually comes out of the west, so you can see what's coming long before it hits you. You have four choices. Over. Under. Left. Or right. Anywhere but dead into it. Left or right are typically your two best choices.

MAGGIE

You make it sound simple.

LUKE

Flying is simple. Nothing to it. But it's an unnatural experience so people tend to make it complicated.

MAGGIE

(nods)

You call Walter Beech back?

LUKE

I called.

MAGGIE

Yeah?

LUKE

Talked to Ted Wells. Walt's chief engineer.

MAGGIE

And?

LUKE

And, well, he didn't hang up on me.

Maggie rolls her eyes and shakes her head.

MAGGIE

You know, Luke, I grew up with three brothers and a father who never ever mentioned the fact that I was a girl. I birthed calves and roped steers, mended fences and fired the branding iron. No one ever once said to me, you're just a girl. Girls don't do that.

LUKE

I get it, Maggie. Hear you loud and clear. I was once a guy who thought guys were tougher and stronger than girls, but my acquaintance with you caused me to change my mind. But that doesn't mean I can change the minds of other fellas. They need to learn for themselves.

A bell on the outside of the hangar starts clanging.

LUKE (CONT'D)

That's my telephone. Likely my parts supplier about a piston set I need. Let me see if I can reach the receiver before he hangs up.

Luke hightails it into the hangar.

Maggie takes a seat on the bench outside, stretches her arms up over her head, tips her head back and takes in the late afternoon sun. She leans back, closes her eyes, almost drifts off before Luke reappears.

LUKE (CONT'D)

Phone call.

MAGGIE

For me?

LUKE
(nods)
Yup.

MAGGIE
Who would call me here?

Luke shrugs and starts back to his office. Maggie follows.

INT. AFTERNOON. WHITNEY AVIATION & FLIGHT INSTRUCTION.

Maggie steps into Luke's office. Luke hands her the phone.

MAGGIE
(into the receiver.)
Hello... Yes it is. Who's this?

Maggie's eyes open wide. She looks at Luke, points at the receiver.

MAGGIE (CONT'D)
(into the receiver)
Yes, of course... Well the school
year's winding down, lots of work,
finals to study for but... I'll
make it happen, sir... Absolutely.
As soon as possible... I understand
perfectly... No guarantees... Yes,
someone with more experience. I
don't blame you. But let me assure
you, Mr. Wells. I'm your pilot.
None better out there. Long as
there's fuel in the tank I'll keep
flying. I don't need food. I don't
need rest... New York to LA nonstop
if it was possible... Yes sir and
thank you very much, sir. You won't
regret this, sir. Not for a second.

Maggie listens a moment, then hands the receiver back to Luke. She throws her arms in the air, lets out a quiet scream, and dances a jig around the office.

LUKE
(into the receiver)
Right, Ted. I'll be sure to tell
her... Yup, no problem. So long.

Luke ends the call.

MAGGIE
Problem?

LUKE

Nope. Ted just wanted me to
reiterate: no guarantees.

MAGGIE

I'm not looking for guarantees, Mr.
Whitney. I'm looking for
opportunities!

INT. EARLY MORNING. CSE STABLES.

It's still dark when Maggie enters the stable and makes her way down to Abbie's stall where she finds Fernando already up and at it and tending to her pony.

MAGGIE

Morning.

FERNANDO

Morning. I fed her and we went for
a little walk. Leg's as good as
new.

MAGGIE

(smiling)

Am I still home? Asleep? Dreaming?

FERNANDO

I don't think so. Shall we go?

MAGGIE

(nods)

I have a favor to ask. I was up
till all hours working on a paper.
I was hoping you might drive so I
could catch a little nap. Once we
hit Route 58 it's a straight shot.

FERNANDO

It would be my pleasure to drive.

INT. EARLY MORNING. INSIDE MAGGIE'S PICKUP.

Fernando drives. Maggie rides shotgun. They drive through the dark along a deserted highway.

FERNANDO

In my country women drive. But it's
rare for a woman to drive if she is
in the car with a man.

Maggie stares at him in the dim light of the pickup.

MAGGIE

A lot of baggage to unpack there,
Mr. Martin. But I'll need to unpack
it later as I can barely keep my
eyes open. Just one question.

FERNANDO

I'll do my best to answer.

MAGGIE

What crazy country are you from
where women don't drive if there's
a man in the car?

FERNANDO

Argentina.

EXT. MORNING. MOVIE SET. CALIFORNIA DESERT.

Director Von Steinman stands atop a high platform, megaphone in hand. The sun is just about to pop over the horizon. The air is still, not a wisp of wind. The movie crew-cameramen, sound men, grips, assistant directors-prepare to shoot the scene.

VON STEINMAN

Let's roll this, people! We'll
never get better conditions!

An ASSISTANT DIRECTOR standing beside Von Steinman raises a white flag into the air, pauses, and brings it down sharply.

Cameras roll.

Fernando stands off to the side, out of the shot, looking interested but anxious.

Across the flat desert, a couple hundred yards distant, a lone rider on horseback appears.

Moments later a larger group of riders chasing the lone rider comes into view.

And then, flying barely ten feet above the desert floor, a biplane roars over the heads of the charging group on horseback.

A rope ladder dangles from the cockpit of the plane. The plane slows slightly and keeps pace with the lone rider.

An instant later, the rider, a female with long hair blowing beneath a black cowboy hat, stands in the stirrups, reaches high overhead, and grabs the bottom rung of the rope ladder.

She scurries up the ladder just as her horse gallops past the platform where Von Steinman and his assistants watch the action.

EXT. MORNING. MOVIE SET. CALIFORNIA DESERT.

The crew mills about, excited by the success of the shot.

Fernando stands off to the side looking relieved.

The biplane lands nearby. Luke and Maggie climb out of the cockpit onto the wing and drop to the ground. Crew members surround them and offer their congratulations.

As the crowd disperses, Fernando steps forward.

FERNANDO

That, Miss Rockwell, was absolutely terrifying.

MAGGIE

(smiles)

Not as terrifying as it looked.
Luke and I practiced a whole bunch
of times to make sure it was even
possible.

Luke steps forward, reaches out his hand to Fernando.

LUKE

Luke Whitney.

Fernando takes the hand, briefly reacts to the aggressive grip.

FERNANDO

Fernando Martin.

LUKE

You with the movie, Fernando?

FERNANDO

No, just a friend of Maggie's.

LUKE

A friend, huh?

FERNANDO

(nods)

You must be Mr. Rockwell.

Maggie steps between them.

MAGGIE

Okay, okay, that's enough, boys.

The two men eye one another.

FERNANDO

That's a beautiful plane. A Waco I believe. Set up for stunt flying.

Luke gives Fernando a steady gaze.

Maggie sighs and shakes her head.

MAGGIE

If you two bulls will excuse me, I'm going to find my pony, make sure she's okay.

Maggie removes her goggles and leather helmet and hands them to Luke. She exits.

Luke and Fernando watch her go.

LUKE

You're right. Set up for stunts. You know something about flying?

FERNANDO

A thing or two.

LUKE

Care to go up?

FERNANDO

Sure. A flight over the desert would be fun.

Luke hands Fernando the helmet and goggles.

They climb into the cockpit. Fernando up front, Luke aft.

They taxi and take off.

EXT. MORNING. THE CALIFORNIA DESERT.

Aerial shots of Luke and Fernando flying over the desert, the biplane performing a variety of rolls, dips, and barrels. The crew, necks craning, watch the action.

MAGGIE

Looks like Luke's doing his best to make Fernando throw up and maybe pass out. Poor thing.

The plane lands. Maggie crosses to where the plane comes to a stop. Fernando is out of the cockpit first, onto the wing, and down on the ground with a great leap.

Luke comes out a bit slower, jumps off the wing, and lands with a grunt.

FERNANDO

Now that was great fun. Thanks so much, Luke. That's a heck of a stunt plane.

Maggie gives first Fernando, then Luke, the once over.

MAGGIE

Those were some pretty wild rolls up there, Mr. Whitney. Were you trying to make my friend lose his breakfast?

LUKE

(smiles)

Maggie, for your information, that was Mr. Martin on the stick through most of those maneuvers.

MAGGIE

What?

LUKE

You heard me.

Maggie looks plenty shocked.

INT. MORNING. MAGGIE'S PICKUP.

Maggie drives. Fernando rides shotgun. They cross the desert.

MAGGIE

Just a whole lot of mystery here, Mr. Martin. I hardly know where to begin. You live in the university stables but ride and play polo at some kind of crazy level. Out of the blue you tell me you're from Argentina where women don't drive if men are in the car. And now the topper of toppers I find out you're an aviator with exceptional stunt-flying skills.

FERNANDO

I'm hardly an aviator.

MAGGIE

You impressed Luke Whitney. One of the most experienced pilots in the whole country.

FERNANDO

I did a couple tricks is all. The plane does all the work.

MAGGIE

We both know that's not true.

FERNANDO

That bit of horsemanship and then dismounting onto that rope swinging wildly in the wind impressed me. I hope you get paid handsomely to put yourself at risk like that.

MAGGIE

Again with the redirect. You're practiced at the art, Mr. Martin.

FERNANDO

Hardly practiced.

MAGGIE

Then you won't mind telling me where you learned to fly.

FERNANDO

Argentines volunteer a year or two of military service. I served in the Escuela de Aviación. And there I learned to fly.

MAGGIE

What about the stunts? The dives and rolls? Where did you learn those moves?

FERNANDO

In this country barnstormers often perform tricks for entertainment and money, but in my country it is part of combat readiness training. In a dogfight you better know how to roll your plane to avoid enemy combatants or you're a sitting duck itching to get shot down.

Maggie turns and studies Fernando for several seconds.

MAGGIE

Hmm.

INT. AFTERNOON. CSE STABLES.

Maggie leads her just-bathed pony back to her stall. She brushes Abbie, gives her food and water.

Maggie exits the stall and walks toward the exit, glancing into the other stalls as she passes by. In the doorway she looks around, obviously searching for Fernando.

INT. AFTERNOON. CSE MAIN BARN.

Maggie enters the barn, passes the tack room and additional stalls, and finally reaches Fernando's room at the rear. She peers inside.

Fernando sits at a wooden desk, his concentration on a thick textbook. In addition to the simple desk there is a dresser and a narrow bed not much larger than an army cot. Some pants and shirts hang on pegs on the wall. The other walls are bare. A family photograph occupies the top of the dresser.

Maggie takes it all in, then knocks softly. Fernando turns and smiles.

FERNANDO

Hey.

MAGGIE

Hey.

FERNANDO

Sorry to disappear like that. Like you, I have tons of work before we graduate.

MAGGIE

No problem. I'm heading out but just wanted to thank you for coming this morning.

FERNANDO

Thank you. It was quite an experience. Very exciting.

MAGGIE

Yeah, well, I was thinking. You know, thinking... probably not something women do in Argentina.

FERNANDO

Thinking? I can assure you women do plenty of thinking in Argentina.

MAGGIE

Okay, wise guy. That's not what I meant. I meant we hardly do it here either.

FERNANDO

Do what?

MAGGIE

Ask a man out on... Oh, forget it. I sound like such an idiot. It's not like this would be anything like a date or anything...

FERNANDO

Wait. A date? Did I miss something?

MAGGIE

No, not a date. I don't date. Too busy, and, well too... suffocating. But still, I thought we might go out... later, you know, after we get our work done, and, well, grab something to eat.

FERNANDO

So you are asking me out on a date?

MAGGIE

(frowns)

No, I'm not. Not a date. Something to eat.

FERNANDO

Grab something to eat? You and me?

MAGGIE

Yes.

FERNANDO

Tonight?

MAGGIE

Yes.

FERNANDO

Okay.

Maggie glances at Fernando, then away.

MAGGIE

Okay? Did you say okay?

FERNANDO

(smiles)

Yes, I said okay. I don't date either. So it's definitely not a date. It's just something to eat.

MAGGIE

Right. Exactly. Something to eat.

FERNANDO

Everyone has to eat.

MAGGIE

Even people who don't date.

FERNANDO

I'm too busy, and broke, to date.

MAGGIE

Me too. Same with me.

FERNANDO

Only one problem.

MAGGIE

(frowns)

What?

FERNANDO

I don't have a car.

MAGGIE

(smiles)

I have my truck. I'll pick you up.
At eight.

FERNANDO

Make it nine. I have to make up for
those hours I spent in the desert.

Maggie smiles again. And exits.

INT. LATE AFTERNOON. MAGGIE AND BETTY'S KITCHEN.

Maggie sits at the kitchen table scribbling furiously. She stops to scan the pages of her textbook, then begins scribbling furiously again.

There's a knock on the kitchen door. Maggie stands, crosses the kitchen, opens the door.

Luke fills the doorway.

MAGGIE

Well well, not every day the famous
Luke Whitney shows up at my door.

LUKE

Not every day Luke Whitney comes
bearing gifts either.

MAGGIE

Gifts?

LUKE

We're going to Wichita, kid.

MAGGIE

Wichita!? When?

LUKE

Friday.

MAGGIE

I have class Friday.

LUKE

Friday morning. Flight doesn't
leave till late afternoon.

MAGGIE

Flight? We're flying? To Wichita?

LUKE

(nods)

I made a few calls. Called in a few
markers. Secured us two round trip
tickets on a TWA DC-2 out of LA
bound for St. Louis with stops in
Winslow, Albuquerque, Amarillo, and
you guessed it, Wichita. We'll hit
the ground around seven a.m., be at
Beech Aviation not long after, and
have a look at this fancy new plane
they're calling Staggerwing.

Maggie gives Luke a hug and a kiss on the cheek.

MAGGIE

Luke, I can't believe this. But the
tickets must've cost a fortune.

LUKE

(smiles)

Didn't cost one red dime.

MAGGIE

How's that?

LUKE

Like I said, called in some
markers. It helps to know people in
high places.

INT. EVENING. THE CAMPUS DINER.

Maggie and Fernando sit across from one another in a faux red-leather booth in a small chrome and glass diner. It's late, after nine o'clock. The other booths are empty.

A GENTLEMAN sits on a chrome stool and sips coffee while he reads the newspaper at the long chrome counter.

MAGGIE

It's nice being out late, you know,
on a date that's not a date.

FERNANDO

(smiles)

A date that's not a date.

MAGGIE

Out late.

FERNANDO

Feels kind of great.

MAGGIE

What should we call it if it's not
a date?

FERNANDO

Fate?

MAGGIE

That's kind of scary.

FERNANDO

Yeah but it rhymes.

MAGGIE

There's that.

FERNANDO

Right, there's that.

MAGGIE

You've never been married or
anything, right?

FERNANDO
(shocked)
Of course not.

MAGGIE
Just thought I'd ask.

FERNANDO
You're an assertive one.

MAGGIE
So I've been told. Blame my father.

FERNANDO
I learned to play in Argentina. As
a boy. On the pampas.

MAGGIE
That's interesting. You learned to
play what on the pampas?

FERNANDO
Polo. I played... as a boy... in
Argentina, and so, when I came
here, I was able to... play for the
university team.

Maggie smiles and shakes her head.

MAGGIE
Just full of surprises, aren't you?

FERNANDO
I just thought you should... I
thought you might want to know.

MAGGIE
Oh, there's all kinds of things I'd
like to know, Mr. Martin.

Fernando drops his eyes, lifts his cup of coffee, sips.

MAGGIE (CONT'D)
Maybe I'll get some answers someday
if we, you know, ever go out on a
real date.

FERNANDO
(smiles)
I don't think we'd ever do anything
as bold as that.

MAGGIE
You never know, Mr. Martin.

The kitchen door swings open. Betty enters carrying a large tray with hamburgers, French fries, and milk shakes.

BETTY

Here we go, kids. I know you must be starving as it's almost time for breakfast.

MAGGIE

(smiles)

I could eat a whole steer. Can't remember the last time I ate.

Betty sets the food on the table.

BETTY

Fernando, I'm going to embarrass my friend by saying I've been waiting tables in this dump for two years, and this is the very first time she's ever come in with a fella.

MAGGIE

Let's just nip it in the bud, Bets.

BETTY

I mean, look at her. Over-the-top gorgeous, easily the prettiest girl in our class, and an aeronautical engineer to boot. Which is maybe a little scary for the boys, and sure she's kind of a rough cob, pushy and ornery, but still, you're the first, so, well... enjoy!

Betty spins away, heads for the kitchen.

FERNANDO

(softly)

I don't think she knows we're not on a date.

MAGGIE

I don't think so either. But later, back at our little house, I'm still going to kill her.

INT. NIGHT. MAGGIE'S PICKUP.

The old Chevy pickup pulls up to the barn. Fernando drives. Maggie, half asleep, sits beside him. Fernando turns off the engine. Maggie stirs.

FERNANDO
I should drive you home.

MAGGIE
(sleepily)
Don't be ridiculous.

FERNANDO
I could drive you home, drive back
here, and pick you up in the-

MAGGIE
Just stop. That's the boy who grew
up in a country where girls don't
drive talking. Here girls drive...
and ride horses... and fly planes..
and study engineering.

FERNANDO
You're half asleep, Miss Rockwell.

MAGGIE
That's Maggie to you, Mister. And
for your information, I'm wide
awake. Sure, I've been up since,
what, 3:30, but I'm wide awake now.

FERNANDO
Are you sure?

MAGGIE
Let me show you.

Maggie opens the passenger door, slides out, walks around the front of the truck to the driver's door. She opens the door.

MAGGIE (CONT'D)
Come on, Mr. Martin, professional
polo player and military combat
pilot, step out of the truck.

Fernando steps out. They stand close, face to face.

MAGGIE (CONT'D)
Well.

FERNANDO
Well what?

MAGGIE
Well are you going to just stand
there or are you going to kiss me?

They embrace. And kiss.

ACT II

INT. EVENING. PASSENGER COMPARTMENT OF A DOUGLAS DC-2.

Maggie and Luke sit side by side on a DC-2. A DOZEN OTHER PASSENGERS sit fore and aft.

A STEWARDESS serves sodas and snacks. The cabin is a bit noisy but very luxurious.

MAGGIE

This is perfectly insane. I can't believe we're flying commercially to Kansas. I didn't know such a thing was even possible.

LUKE

Douglas Aircraft Company started this service to the Midwest just a few weeks ago. And already they've announced the DC-2's successor, the DC-3 that'll be bigger, faster, more powerful, and carry twice as many passengers.

MAGGIE

It's crazy how fast the aviation industry is moving.

LUKE

(nods)

Think about it. It's just three short decades ago Orville made that first twelve-second flight.

MAGGIE

And now we're sitting here at twenty thousand feet in the lap of luxury sipping Cokes and cruising at two hundred miles an hour.

LUKE

Just the beginning. Wait'll Douglas or Boeing or Lockheed gets Rockwell on the payroll. That's when things will really start popping.

MAGGIE

(shrugs)

I don't know. The way the economy's tanking I'm not sure I'll ever get a job.

LUKE

Hey, that's not the spirit.

MAGGIE

I had that interview with Curtiss Aviation a couple weeks ago. They were impressed with my resumé, then told me they didn't anticipate any new hires for at least a year.

LUKE

Economy's just another pendulum, kid. Swings back and forth.

MAGGIE

Whatever you say, old man.

EXT. EARLY MORNING. WICHITA MUNICIPAL AIRPORT.

The DC-2 lands. Maggie and Luke, looking a little sleepy and discombobulated, disembark and cross the tarmac to the terminal. They each carry small leather satchels.

INT. EARLY MORNING. WICHITA MUNICIPAL AIRPORT.

Maggie and Luke sit at a booth in the airport cafeteria. They eat eggs and drink coffee.

LUKE

I can't say I got much sleep.

MAGGIE

I did some sleeping but more waking since it felt like we were landing and taking off every five minutes.

LUKE

(smiles)

I'm sure Douglas is still working on its schedules. Flying overnight with stops along the way doesn't seem ideal.

MAGGIE

At least we made it in record time. Would've taken two days by train. And forever by car.

LUKE

You got that right.

EXT. MORNING. BEECH AVIATION. WICHITA, KANSAS.

Beech Aviation. Luke Whitney, Ted Wells, and Walter Beech stand on the tarmac outside the large Beech Aviation hangar. It's midmorning under a clear blue midwestern sky. High above a cherry red biplane climbs, circles, descends, and climbs again.

TED

I have to be honest with you, Luke. Walt and I agreed to this meeting out of our mutual respect for you. We can see this gal can fly, and it's clear as day she's a looker with a sparkly personality that would be an asset in any publicity.

LUKE

Yeah?

TED

But, well, we have a lot riding on this Bendix race. Maybe even the survival of Beech Aviation.

Luke nods, glances skyward, pauses.

LUKE

I hate to think Maggie and I came all this way just out of your respect for me, Ted. Now don't get me wrong, I appreciate the regards and you giving her a look, but if you knew before we got here you'd wink and pass, I would've stayed home.

TED

Aww hell, Luke. She's a kid. Some solo hours but not what you'd write home about. Just about no endurance experience at all. Has she flown at night? Bendix could demand night flying depending upon when you take off and how long you take to cross. What about bad weather flying? I think we can both agree California pilots are notorious for mishandling bad weather.

LUKE

She learned to fly in Montana, Ted. Hellish weather up there.

WALT

Staggerwing's a brand-new aircraft, Luke. We've tested her thoroughly, but still a brand-new aircraft. And as we all know, brand-new aircraft find all kinds of ways to test our mettle. I'd hate to put that young gal in harm's way due to a landing gear problem or a mechanical glitch or a clogged fuel line. I'd feel awful if something happened.

LUKE

She knows the risks, Walt. And she's not only a very cheeky kid but very few pilots flying these days have as deep an understanding of how a plane works and what keeps a plane aloft as Maggie Rockwell. She's just about to receive her degree in aeronautical engineering.

WALT

So you've told us, Luke. Obviously that's very impressive. Still...

LUKE

Look, if you've got someone with loads of long-distance experience, I get it, I'd go with them over Maggie also. But all I'm asking is, don't reject her out of age or gender. She's up to the task.

The Staggerwing flies over the airfield. Maggie performs a perfect barrel roll less than a hundred feet off the tarmac.

Luke smiles and shakes his head.

WALT

(frowns)

That's not a damn stunt plane.

LUKE

Maybe not, Walt, but pretty smooth execution nevertheless. I swear that girl could fly a soup can.

EXT. MORNING. BEECH AVIATION. WICHITA, KANSAS.

Maggie lands the Staggerwing flawlessly and taxis to where the three men stand. She opens the cockpit door, slides out onto the lower wing, and jumps to the ground.

MAGGIE

That, gentlemen, is some airplane!
Fast. Agile. Responsive. Performed
that barrel roll all by itself. And
the cockpit! My goodness! I could
live in there. I'd call whoever
designed that cockpit an
aeronautical genius. Give me the
fuel and I'll fly New York to LA
nonstop with second place still
back trying to clear the Rockies.

Luke smiles and quietly shakes his head.

Walt and Ted exchange glances. Walt does not look
particularly happy.

INT. AFTERNOON. A WICHITA TAXI.

Maggie and Luke sit side by side in the back seat.

LUKE

Kudos for being yourself, Maggie,
but you might've poured on a little
too much gasoline.

MAGGIE

You can never have enough gasoline,
Mr. Whitney.

LUKE

I don't know. A couple pretty
conservative Midwest businessmen
those two.

MAGGIE

Maybe so but they sure did move
their eyes liberally over you know
who. My my. Up and down and over
and under. Like they were trying to
escape bad weather.

LUKE

(laughs)

And that barrel roll! I thought
Walt Beech was going to have a
heart attack right there on the
tarmac.

MAGGIE

They'll hire me to fly the Bendix.
Just you wait and see.

LUKE

I kind of thought they were looking
for someone with... a little more
experience.

MAGGIE

That was just a ruse so they can
get me cheap. What they don't know
is I'd fly that beautiful plane in
the Bendix for free. Heck, if I had
the money, I'd pay them to let me
fly it.

LUKE

(shakes his head)

You're something, kid. A real
firecracker. But I'm just saying,
don't get your hopes up.

MAGGIE

My daddy always told me when your
hopes die you die. Maybe you don't
actually die but your soul dies.
And then your heart.

EXT. AFTERNOON. CSE STABLES.

Maggie pulls into the stable area in her pickup. She climbs out, sees a large crowd has gathered over at the polo field. The parking lot is packed with automobiles, including many expensive ones, Rolls Royces and Aston Martins.

Maggie walks over to the field, slips in through a side gate.

A polo match is underway. Horses charge up and down the field. One player races out front. He makes a deft move and easily scores a goal. It's Fernando.

The crowd roars.

Maggie, impressed, smiles and shakes her head.

INT. AFTERNOON. CSE STABLES.

Maggie brushes Abbie outside her stall.

Fernando, sweaty and dirty from the polo match, approaches the stall.

FERNANDO

You're back! How did it go?

MAGGIE

(shrugs)

I'm going to stay positive but the truth is, they don't want a girl. It was plain as day. All but said so out loud.

Fernando takes Maggie's hands.

FERNANDO

I'm so sorry to hear that. So short-sighted of them.

MAGGIE

We'll see. Maybe I'm wrong. Or maybe I'm just a dreamer. Maybe I'll never fly in the Bendix.

FERNANDO

I feel pretty sure you will.

MAGGIE

Well, I hate to admit this but I feel pretty sure I missed you.

FERNANDO

(half smiles, half laughs)
You did not.

MAGGIE

Actually I kind of did.

FERNANDO

It was barely two days.

MAGGIE

Meaning what? You didn't miss me?

Fernando glances over his shoulder to make sure no one can hear.

FERNANDO

I wouldn't admit it if I did.

MAGGIE

Coward. You missed me.

Fernando squeezes her hand.

MAGGIE (CONT'D)

I just watched some of the polo match. You were easily the best player out there.

FERNANDO
I don't think so.

MAGGIE
You play with such ease and
confidence.

FERNANDO
Yes, well, that was our final game
of the season.

MAGGIE
(sighs)
Everything's winding down. Soon
we'll graduate. Which feels crazy.
I feel like I just arrived here but
it's been almost four years.

FERNANDO
The future's coming fast.

Maggie looks away, brushes Abbie. Pauses.

MAGGIE
So, what do you think you'll be
doing, say, a year from now?

Fernando glances at her, then he, too, looks away.

FERNANDO
Hard to say.

MAGGIE
Why's that?

FERNANDO
You know why.

MAGGIE
I'm just a silly girl with big
dreams. I don't know anything.

FERNANDO
Maggie, listen...

MAGGIE
I'm listening. I hear birds singing
and horses whinnying and the wind-

FERNANDO
This was all so... unexpected.

Maggie continues to brush Abbie.

MAGGIE

What's that, Mr. Martin?

FERNANDO

I was just... rolling along. You know, studying. Working. Riding. Like some ascetic.

MAGGIE

Ascetic?

Fernando hesitates. Maggie waits.

FERNANDO

After my mandatory military service I was sent north to the States.

MAGGIE

Sent by whom?

FERNANDO

My family. To New York. Columbia. Where my parents were educated. Where they met.

MAGGIE

Your parents met at Columbia? As in Columbia University?

FERNANDO

Yes. I spent my freshman year there. And most of my sophomore year, but then, well, then things turned... bad. I was a kid. Hadn't grown up yet. Didn't understand my responsibilities. I drank. Gambled. Hung out with all the wrong sorts.

MAGGIE

This sounds crazy, Fernando. Like you're describing... a different person.

FERNANDO

In many ways I was a different person. They tossed me out. Bad behavior and bad grades. And of course they informed my parents, which caused quite an uproar. My father, well, let's just say his disappointment was profound.

MAGGIE

But all's well now?

FERNANDO
(shrugs)
Working on it.

MAGGIE
So how did you wind up all the way
out here?

FERNANDO
I worked for a year. Slowly drifted
west. Various menial jobs. Janitor
in a hospital. Farm laborer. Not
much out there with the Depression.
Finally decided I needed to go back
to school. Get my degree.

MAGGIE
Smart move.

FERNANDO
(nods)
I had a few polo connections. The
coach convinced the right people
I'd be an asset, and, well, here I
am.

MAGGIE
Lucky me.

FERNANDO
And me.

MAGGIE
So what about your dad?

FERNANDO
Back in Buenos Aires.

MAGGIE
He'll be here for graduation?

FERNANDO
(shrugs)
He hasn't committed yet, but I'm
hoping. He pretty much disowned me
after I got thrown out of Columbia.

MAGGIE
What? That's crazy. And it's been
how long? Three years? Have you
seen him? Talked to him?

FERNANDO
A few letters is all.

MAGGIE

What about your mom?

FERNANDO

We write but behind my father's back. He'd be angry if he knew she was writing to me.

MAGGIE

Right. Of course. Makes sense. Yours is a country, after all, where women don't drive if men are in the car.

Fernando smiles, but then sighs.

FERNANDO

Well, I like to think it's more complicated than that, but I am hoping by earning my degree and showing my maturity I will be welcomed back into the bosom of my family.

Maggie crosses to Fernando and gives him a hug.

MAGGIE

It's all so sad. I can't imagine not having the constant love and support of my mom and dad.

FERNANDO

I don't mean for it to be sad, Maggie. I just wanted you to have a sense of my journey. I'd hoped to finish my time here at university cloistered and focused, but I can't deny the strong feelings I've developed for you. And in such a short time. You asked what I thought I'd be doing a year from now. A short time ago I could've told you. I hoped to be back in Argentina. But now, well, I'm not so sure.

MAGGIE

Because of me?

FERNANDO

(laughs)

You? No way. Don't be silly. I've decided to take up tightrope walking and join the circus.

Maggie slugs him on the shoulder.

MAGGIE
Watch your step, buster.

FERNANDO
Anyway, that was my long-winded answer to your question about the future. And now I'll pose the same question to you. What do you think you'll be doing a year from now?

MAGGIE
Me?

FERNANDO
Yes. You.

MAGGIE
I've been plotting my future ever since I was a little girl and this barnstormer landed his little plane on the road in front of our ranch up near Bozeman and for one dollar he gave me my first airplane ride. Before we even landed I'd decided to be a pilot, fly around the world, set records, do stunts, and then, once I had that out of my system, I'd go to work for some company that made airplanes and I'd design the coolest, fastest, best-looking planes to ever leave the earth behind.

FERNANDO
That's something, Maggie. That's really something.

MAGGIE
This summer I'm going to fly in the Bendix, Fernando. I might not win but I'm going to compete. A year from now I hope to be sitting at a drafting table in Seattle working for Boeing or Burbank for Lockheed or Long Beach for Douglas. But with the Depression killing hopes and dreams at a furious rate, all that might never happen.

FERNANDO
A little patience. It'll happen.

MAGGIE

(shrugs)

But then there's the matter of this young man I met. I've been ignoring young men like the plague since I arrived here four years ago. Eyes on the prize every second of every day. No room for extracurricular affairs or activities. Aeronautical engineering is not for the lazy or the distracted. But then, just when I thought I'd made it, cleared the last hurdle, who shows up and diagnoses my pony's leg injury?

Their eyes meet. A long pause ensues.

FERNANDO

What are we going to do?

MAGGIE

Well right now you're going to kiss me, hard, on the mouth, as I've been thinking about a kiss ever since I took off for Kansas. And after that, well, we'll just have to wait and see.

Their second kiss is even more robust than their first.

INT. EVENING. MAGGIE AND BETTY'S KITCHEN.

Maggie studies at the kitchen table. Betty enters.

BETTY

Hey.

MAGGIE

Hey.

BETTY

Back from Wichita?

MAGGIE

Earlier today, yeah.

BETTY

And?

MAGGIE

They don't like girls.

BETTY

Say what?

MAGGIE

They don't want a girl pilot.

BETTY

What are they, stupid? Did they actually say that?

MAGGIE

Might as well have. Though Luke Whitney says they just want someone with more experience. And I guess that's possibly true and I guess I can't blame them.

BETTY

Hopefully they'll come to their senses.

MAGGIE

Hopefully, but I'm not holding my breath.

BETTY

And so, you know, have you seen Mr. Easy On the Eyes?

MAGGIE

(shrugs)

Well, you know, I had to go out to the stables to check on Abbie.

BETTY

Of course you did. And?

MAGGIE

And what? We haven't even been on a date.

BETTY

Oh don't hand me that line, Maggie Rockwell. Four years now I've known you and not once have you even looked at a boy until Mr. Martin showed up.

MAGGIE

Okay, okay, he's cute and polite and smart and he rides like a dream and flies planes but it's not gonna happen, Betty. Too complicated.

BETTY

Love is supposed to be complicated.
That's how we know it's love.

MAGGIE

Who said anything about love?

BETTY

Your eyes scream it.

MAGGIE

(shakes her head)

You're ridiculous. He's from
Argentina for crying out loud. And
that's where he's going after
graduation. I'm not going to
Argentina.

BETTY

I hear it's very nice there.

MAGGIE

I'm not following some boy to South
America. Now leave me alone. All
kinds of work to do.

BETTY

Go ahead. Try to deny your heart.
You won't win.

MAGGIE

I'm gonna win that Bendix race and
then I'm going to win this coveted
spot at Lockheed. My interview's
tomorrow morning. Ten o'clock
sharp. Wanna come?

BETTY

Can't. Too much work. But you know
I wish you luck.

MAGGIE

I'll need it.

EXT. MORNING. LOCKHEED AVIATION HQ IN BURBANK.

Maggie pulls into the parking lot in her old pickup, steps out, and heads for the front door.

She pauses out front, glances up at the imposing building, takes a couple of deep breaths, and steps inside.

INT. MORNING. CONFERENCE ROOM LOCKHEED AVIATION HQ.

Maggie sits at a long conference table looking both nervous and annoyed. She checks the clock on the wall and shakes her head.

DAN DOLAN enters. He's a middle-aged gentleman in a fancy suit and slick-backed hair. He crosses to the head of the table, sits, opens his briefcase, rifles through a stack of papers without bothering to acknowledge Maggie.

Maggie waits. Several seconds pass.

DOLAN
Bachelor of Science from California
School of Engineering. Aeronautical
engineering. Impressive.

MAGGIE
Well, almost. Graduation's coming
up. But I'm graduating summa cum
laude.

Dolan does not look up from his papers.

DOLAN
Well done. You must work hard.

MAGGIE
Super hard. And I'm super smart.
And I'm a pilot.

Dolan looks up and studies Maggie.

DOLAN
You fly?

MAGGIE
Yes, sir. Stunt pilot. I just
completed a picture with MGM. Eric
Von Steinman directed, starring
Irene Dunne and Leslie Howard.

DOLAN
(nods)
And what kind of position are you
looking for, Miss... Rockwell?

MAGGIE
Design engineer. I submitted my
résumé and application.

DOLAN
Hmm, I see.

MAGGIE

I want to design planes. Aviation technology is moving at the speed of light. Or at least it seems so. Lockheed is on the cutting edge. Or should be. You hire me and we'll make magic together.

Dolan glances at Maggie, then returns to his papers.

DOLAN

Typically new female employees start on the line.

MAGGIE

On the line?

DOLAN

In pre-assembly. Sorting parts. Checking quality.

MAGGIE

Including female employees with aeronautical engineering degrees from CSE?

DOLAN

We don't see many female applicants from CSE.

MAGGIE

Well you're looking at one.

Dolan shrugs. Maggie looks annoyed.

MAGGIE (CONT'D)

You're not serious?

DOLAN

It's rare for any inexperienced hire to go straight to design.

Maggie sighs, shakes her head, takes a breath.

MAGGIE

What's the salary?

DOLAN

It's not a salaried position.

MAGGIE

Wonderful. So what's the wage?

DOLAN

With that degree, if you're hired,
you might start as high as seventy
cents an hour.

MAGGIE

Seventy cents?

DOLAN

We have Negros on the line making
half that. It's the Depression,
Miss... Rockwell. People line up
every morning looking for work.
Practically begging for it.

INT. AFTERNOON. FERNANDO'S ROOM IN THE BARN.

Fernando sits at his desk. Maggie, furious, paces.

MAGGIE

I swear I wanted to strangle him.
So smug and condescending. When he
said typically new female employees
start out on the line I almost
punched him in the nose.

FERNANDO

(laughs)

Probably better you didn't.

MAGGIE

Why? I'm not going to get the
stupid job.

FERNANDO

You never know.

MAGGIE

Oh but I do know. It's just like
Walter Beech and Ted Wells. They
humored me, let me fly their plane,
but they're not going to hire a
girl. And you can bet your last
dollar the old boys' club at
Lockheed isn't going to let a girl
into their lair either.

FERNANDO

Because you have to work so much
harder, success will be all the
sweeter.

MAGGIE

What if there isn't any success.
What if I'm just... shut down?

FERNANDO

That doesn't sound like the Maggie
Rockwell I know.

Maggie has stopped pacing. She puts her face in her hands.
And begins sobbing.

Fernando stands, crosses to her, gives her a warm embrace.

FERNANDO (CONT'D)

Go ahead. Let it out. It's good to
let it out once in a while.

MAGGIE

(continues to sob)

I'm such an idiot. I can't believe
I'm crying. How weak and pathetic.

FERNANDO

Yup, that's Maggie Rockwell in a
nutshell. A weak, pathetic idiot.

Maggie manages a chuckle, then slugs Fernando on the arm.

MAGGIE

Stop.

FERNANDO

Come on, let it out. You're allowed
to be human. The strongest toughest
girl I've ever known is allowed to
be human. And after you let it out
we're going to saddle up and go for
a long hard ride and put all this
stuff we can't control completely
out of our heads. And after that
we're going to come back here and
I'm going to grill you a big juicy
hamburger with peppers and onions
and after that we'll put on some
records and dance and after that
who knows but rest assured by
morning the world will once again
look rosy to Miss Maggie Rockwell.

EXT. LATE AFTERNOON. THE ROLLING HILLS NEAR CAMPUS.

Maggie and Fernando ride.

EXT. EARLY EVENING. STONE PATIO BEHIND THE BARN.

Fernando grills hamburgers. Maggie sets a salad on the picnic table. Fernando serves the steaks. They eat. Maggie is all smiles.

EXT. EVENING. STONE PATIO BEHIND THE BARN.

Music plays on the Victrola. Tango music.

Fernando teaches Maggie to tango. She struggles at first but soon finds the rhythm.

They dance close, and as the evening winds down they engage in a strong embrace and a long, lavish kiss.

EXT. DAWN. THE CSE STABLES.

The sun rises over the horizon. It casts a long shadow over Maggie's old pickup.

INT. MORNING. MAGGIE AND BETTY'S KITCHEN.

Morning sunlight streams in the kitchen window.

Betty sits at the kitchen table and pours over her textbooks. She glances at the clock on the wall: 8:47.

Moments later Maggie enters through the kitchen door. She makes very brief eye contact with Betty then crosses to the kitchen sink where she first gets a glass of water and then begins to wash her hands. Several seconds pass.

BETTY
Awful long hand wash.

Maggie says nothing.

BETTY (CONT'D)
Hands must be really dirty.

Still Maggie says nothing.

BETTY (CONT'D)
Four years we've been roomies. Not once have you not come home.

MAGGIE
(still washing)
Sorry, I fell asleep.

BETTY
You fell asleep?

MAGGIE
Yes, I fell asleep.

BETTY
Did you think I might be worried?

MAGGIE
Come on, Betty, I said I'm sorry. I
fell asleep. Besides, I'm twenty-
three years old and you're not my-

As Maggie says this she turns around and finds Betty smiling.

MAGGIE (CONT'D)
What?

BETTY
He called me.

MAGGIE
Who called you?

BETTY
Your boyfriend.

MAGGIE
My boyfriend?

BETTY
Fernando called last night, Mag.
Around ten thirty. Told me you'd
conked out on his sofa and he
didn't have the heart to wake you.

MAGGIE
Seriously? He called?

BETTY
Pretty considerate guy.

Maggie dries her hands, sits across the table from Betty.

MAGGIE
I swear I don't know what I'm going
to do.

BETTY
I guess that depends on whether or
not you're falling in love with
him.

MAGGIE
I barely know him.

BETTY
That rarely makes any difference.
Are you infatuated with him? Do you
lie awake at night thinking about
him? Dreaming about him? When he
holds you in his arms and kisses
you on the mouth does your whole
body turn to jello? When you ran
off to Wichita to convince some old
guys to let you fly their airplane
did you find yourself anxious to
get back into the arms of Fernando
the handsome and mysterious man
from Buenos Aires?

MAGGIE
I think that's enough Betty.

BETTY
(smiles)
Okay, I'm being mildly flippant.
But only mildly. Love doesn't come
around and knock on your door every
day, girl. Knocks more like once
every five or ten years.

MAGGIE
Stop.

BETTY
Not quite yet. Look, I know you
want to be the next Amelia Earhart
and after that the female version
of Wilber Wright but we're talking
here about a guy who calls your
roommate at ten thirty at night to
tell her you're perfectly okay but
fast asleep so I won't lie in bed
and worry when you don't show up.

MAGGIE
(sighs)
He's going back to Buenos Aires,
Betty. After graduation he's going
home. To Argentina.

BETTY
You've already played that record.

MAGGIE
He taught me to tango.

BETTY
I'll bet he did.

MAGGIE
But soon he'll be thousands of
miles away.

Betty pantomimes playing a small violin.

BETTY
Aww, Maggie, you poor thing. Let me
play you a sad song on my little
fiddle.

Maggie snarls, pushes back her chair, and exits into the bathroom.

EXT. AFTERNOON. MAGGIE AND BETTY'S FRONT PORCH.

Maggie, showered and in clean clothes, sits on the front porch studying. She reads, underlines, makes notes.

A pickup pulls up along the road out front. Luke Whitney reaches out a hand and gives a wave.

Maggie waves back.

Luke comes slowly out of the truck and up the brick walk. He rests a foot on the bottom step, tips his felt fedora.

LUKE
Afternoon, Miss Rockwell.

MAGGIE
(smiles)
Afternoon, Mr. Whitney. To what do
I owe the pleasure of this visit?

Luke takes off his hat, pulls a handkerchief from his pocket, and wipes his brow.

LUKE
Well, I was... in the neighborhood.

MAGGIE
Sure you were. A mere twenty miles
from home and more from your place
of business.

LUKE
I had... an errand.

MAGGIE

Of course you did. And did you
forget we have a date to fly at
four? Now come on, out with it.

LUKE

Out with what?

MAGGIE

You didn't drive into town to chew
the fat. You came with news, and we
both know there's only one piece of
news I'm interested in, so let's
have it. Nay or yea. I can take it
either way. At least I think I can.

Luke hesitates, rolls his shoulders.

MAGGIE (CONT'D)

It's nay, isn't it? Those cowards!

Maggie stands, slams her textbook down on the porch floor.

MAGGIE (CONT'D)

I can't believe I flew halfway
across the country just so those
two old fools could gawk at me.

LUKE

It's not like that, Maggie. It's
just that Jimmy Baker's become
available, and he's been in the
race twice, finished it once, and-

MAGGIE

Finished it once dead last.

LUKE

But he has experience. He-

MAGGIE

He's a guy, Luke. A man. A boy
really but properly equipped.

LUKE

Maggie!

MAGGIE

Oh don't Maggie me. That was my
last best chance. Short of God
dropping a Wedell Williams 44 or a
Howard DGA-6 out of the sky I'll be
watching from the sidelines.

LUKE

The Staggerwing was a long shot,
kid. But there'll be other shots.
If not this year, next year,
which'll give you another whole
year of flying experience.

MAGGIE

I'm ready this year, old man. I'm
ready now. I'm serious. It's now or
never.

LUKE

You think that cause you're young
and ornery and you don't know yet
life's long. It takes patience to
conquer our ambitions. Patience.
Grit. Fortitude.

Maggie rolls her eyes, shakes her head.

Inside the phone rings. Maggie stands and goes inside. Luke
kicks at some loose stones on the brick walk.

INT. AFTERNOON. MAGGIE AND BETTY'S KITCHEN.

Maggie enters the kitchen. Lifts the receiver off the phone
attached to the wall.

MAGGIE

(into the receiver)

Hello... Yes sir, this is Maggie
Rockwell... Yes, that's correct...
Also correct, summa cum laude...
Thank you... Well, I have to say, I
busted my hump for those grades.
Outworked every other student in
the aeronautical engineering
department, all but one of them a
man. While they played, I worked.

Maggie pauses, listens. Her expression goes from worked up
and determined to ticked off and defeated.

MAGGIE (CONT'D)

Really? Are you sure? That's it...
Maybe you have me mixed up with...
Yes, but could you just check? I
can't believe that's all I'm being
offered with my credentials... Yes,
the Depression... No, I understand.
I just thought maybe... Well, never
mind... Thank you. Goodbye.

Maggie places the receiver back on the cradle. For several seconds she just stares at the wall, at the phone. Her hand covers her mouth. She crosses to the sink. Stares out the window at the tiny back yard. After a moment she turns and sits at the kitchen table.

And begins to sob.

Luke enters through the screen door. He listens for several seconds, then quietly makes his way to the kitchen. He sits across from Maggie, covers her hand with his.

LUKE
Sorry to bring you that lousy news,
kid. But I really think-

MAGGIE
That was the hiring department at
Lockheed. They offered me a job.

LUKE
That's great.

MAGGIE
Twenty hours a week. Forty-three
cents an hour.

Luke whistles softly. Maggie's sobs increase. Luke squeezes her hand.

MAGGIE (CONT'D)
Four years busting my hump... four
year killing myself... and... and
nothing to show for it but a lousy
part-time job on an assembly line
earning what? A couple dollars a
day.

LUKE
Damn. Okay. Okay. It's okay, kid.
It's gonna be okay. These are just
bumps in the road. You know, a
little turbulence is all. Clear
skies ahead. You'll see.

Maggie's sobs increase. She's really crying now.

MAGGIE
It was all such a waste of time...
and energy... and money. There's no
room for women.

Luke stands, steps around the table, helps Maggie up. She rises. He holds her close.

LUKE

That's not true, kid.

MAGGIE

It is true. I'll get married... and have a bunch of babies and once in a while look up in the sky when I hear a plane pass overhead.

Luke grabs Maggie's arms firmly and takes a step back. He takes a long look at her.

She hangs her head as the tears run down her cheeks.

LUKE

I stopped by here to see Maggie Rockwell. I guess she's not home. There's some other girl here. Some other girl having a bad day and feeling sorry for herself.

MAGGIE

(frowns)

I'm not feeling sorry for myself.

LUKE

No? You could've fooled me.

MAGGIE

I'm just... ticked off. It's all so unfair.

LUKE

What's unfair?

MAGGIE

Life.

LUKE

Life's unfair?

MAGGIE

For girls, yes.

Luke sighs, turns, crosses to the sink, draws a glass of water, drinks, looks out the window.

LUKE

Kid, you've taken a couple punches here today. Been knocked down. When you get knocked down you got two choices: get up or stay down. I might be wrong but best as I can tell you're not the stay-down type.

(MORE)

LUKE (CONT'D)

So go ahead and cry those tears but then get on with it. God gave you gifts most people, including most boys, would kill for. Beauty. Grit. Grace. And all that intelligence.

MAGGIE

It's... it's all for nothing if no one will give me a chance.

LUKE

Really, Maggie? Seriously? No one's given you a chance? CSE didn't give you a chance? I didn't give you a chance? MGM didn't give you a chance? A couple of businessmen in Kansas didn't give you a chance because they didn't think you had enough experience. And some giant impersonal company has given you a crappy, low-paying, kick-in-the-butt chance because the country's in the middle of a depression with more than half the people out of work. I hate to say it, Maggie, because you know how highly I think of you and... and well heck how much I love you, but... well, you're just thinking small.

Maggie starts to retaliate but stops. She sits.

LUKE (CONT'D)

Look, I know it's tough to swallow but life beats us up pretty good sometimes. It's how we respond to the beatings that distinguishes the winners from the losers.

MAGGIE

Yeah, well, maybe... But right now I feel like a loser, and besides that I have a paper to finish, and finals to study for, and, and, and, well, well that's it, so... if you don't mind.

Luke nods, crosses to the door, pulls it open.

LUKE

I hear you loud and clear, kid. Lesson at four. Don't be late.

Luke exits.

EXT. LATE AFTERNOON. THE SKIES OVER WHITNEY AVIATION.

Maggie and Luke aloft in Luke's biplane. Maggie up front. She puts the plane through a series of rolls and dips. They fly around some big, lovely clouds. Maggie is all smiles.

The plane descends, levels, does a double barrel roll before they land, climb onto the wing, and jump to the ground.

LUKE

That was some wild flying, kid. All the angst from earlier came busting loose.

MAGGIE

(smiles)

You want to hear something pitiful?

LUKE

Sure.

MAGGIE

That was the second time in less than twenty-four hours.

LUKE

Second time what?

MAGGIE

Second time I bawled my brains out. Second time I cried like a spoiled baby who didn't get what she wants.

LUKE

Kid, we all have our moments. So when was the first time?

MAGGIE

Last night. With Fernando. I cried those crocodile tears 'cause I knew darn well Beech was never going to hire me to fly his airplane.

LUKE

(frowns)

Last night huh? With Fernando. Hmm.

MAGGIE

(laughs)

Oh my, what's this? A tad jealous, Mr. Whitney. A bit possessive?

Luke mutters something under his breath. Maggie takes his arm and together they walk across the tarmac.

EXT. EARLY EVENING. CSE STABLES.

Sunset at the stables. Maggie pulls up in her truck, finds Fernando grooming Abbie.

MAGGIE

Hey.

FERNANDO

Hey. I was just running her a bit.

MAGGIE

That's so sweet of you. Thank you.

FERNANDO

She really loves to go full out.

MAGGIE

Peas in a pod, Abbie and me.

Fernando and Maggie embrace. Kiss.

MAGGIE (CONT'D)

Thanks also for calling Betty last night after I conked out.

FERNANDO

I didn't want her to worry.

MAGGIE

(smiles)

Well it was awful sweet of you.

FERNANDO

(nods)

It's nice to see you looking happy.

MAGGIE

You should have seen me earlier.

FERNANDO

How's that?

MAGGIE

Just maybe the worst day ever.

FERNANDO

What happened?

MAGGIE

First I found out Beech Aviation doesn't like female pilots and has zero interest in me piloting their new airplane in the Bendix race.

FERNANDO
I'm sorry, Maggie.

MAGGIE
Yeah, well then, like ten seconds after I got that news, Lockheed called and offered me this really swell part-time assembly line job for just about no money that felt like a giant slap in the face.

FERNANDO
Job market's brutal out there.

MAGGIE
And worse when you're a woman.

Fernando draws her close and gives her a loving embrace. Maggie accepts it happily.

They lead Abbie back to her stall, settle her inside.

FERNANDO
I think you need something to eat.

MAGGIE
I do. I haven't eaten all day.

FERNANDO
Then let's go fire up the grill.

MAGGIE
And get the music playing.

They exit the stables.

EXT. EVENING. STONE PATIO BEHIND THE BARN.

Fernando gets the grill started. Maggie fetches colas from the cooler. They sit at the picnic table.

FERNANDO
I know you've had your heart set on flying in that cross-country race.

MAGGIE
A pipe dream.

FERNANDO
It's always good to dream.

MAGGIE
Maybe.

FERNANDO

I had never heard of the Bendix race till you mentioned it to me, but now I've had a chance to read up on it. I have to say, it's quite an undertaking.

MAGGIE

It's a lot of flying in a short amount of time.

FERNANDO

Sounds like it was conceived to encourage airplane designers to experiment with new models and improve cross-country flying techniques like fly-by-instrument and navigation.

MAGGIE

I'm impressed. That's exactly what the race is about. Even though for me it's about the competition. The winning.

FERNANDO

That doesn't surprise me. But I'll tell you what did surprise me.

MAGGIE

What?

FERNANDO

The number of planes that compete in the race.

MAGGIE

Not many.

FERNANDO

Exactly. The first year seventeen planes took off and only a few finished. And since then fewer and fewer planes have entered. Last year only eight signed up, six took off, and just three finished.

MAGGIE

It's a tough grind. A long flight. A whole lot of time for things to go wrong. Mechanical breakdowns. Bad fuel. Bad weather. Pilot error with navigation. Fuel consumption. Or just sheer exhaustion.

FERNANDO
Quite a challenge.

MAGGIE
It's amazing anyone finishes. But I think this is going to be a banner year. Partly because there are some excellent new airplanes out there built for this kind of flying. And because us girls are once again, after a two-year hiatus, allowed to attend the party.

FERNANDO
Female pilots couldn't compete?

MAGGIE
That's correct. Bendix deemed the race too dangerous. Which is true, it is dangerous. No question. Half a dozen pilots have been killed over the years. Including two female pilots.

FERNANDO
So that's why organizers grounded the ladies?

MAGGIE
Also correct. But the reasoning is flawed. If a female pilot, knowing the risks, wants to race, and some fool's willing to give her an airplane, who's to say she shouldn't be able to compete?

FERNANDO
Excellent point.

MAGGIE
Thank you.

FERNANDO
So... what if someone, you know, what if someone was willing to give you a plane?

MAGGIE
Are you kidding? I'd be all over it in a heartbeat.

FERNANDO
No reservations?

MAGGIE

Absolutely none. I am one hundred percent certain I possess the three qualities needed to compete in the Bendix. I'm a competent pilot and navigator. I have the stamina to finish the flight. And I have the mechanical aptitude along with the knowledge of how a plane operates to handle problems both in the air and on the ground.

FERNANDO

(nods)

All true, but, well, you might lack the confidence.

MAGGIE

What!?

FERNANDO

Just kidding.

MAGGIE

You better be.

FERNANDO

I might be able to help.

MAGGIE

What are you talking about?

FERNANDO

I've been thinking.

MAGGIE

Fernando, there's reasons so few planes enter the race. Difficulties and dangers are only two of the reasons. A serious lack of good, experienced pilots is a major problem. But most of all there's the cost. The high cost preempts all but a few entries. And I'm not just talking about the cost of the airplane. There's your pilot. Your mechanics. Your fuel. And really if you want to have any chance of finishing, let alone winning, you need good experienced ground crews wherever you have designated stops for refueling. You can't just stop at a gas station along the side of the road.

FERNANDO
(smiles)
No, I guess not.

MAGGIE
You have to accurately calculate the maximum distance of each leg, then find an airport in that vicinity and make sure you have a qualified mechanic there in case of trouble. Slower planes burn less fuel and so make fewer stops, whereas faster planes generally burn more fuel and so make more stops. The key is balance, some middle ground where—

Maggie slows abruptly, glances at Fernando.

MAGGIE (CONT'D)
Sorry, I get rolling on this subject and get carried away.

FERNANDO
I love it. I love your passion.

MAGGIE
You do? Most men find it a bore. But okay, you do. Good. I'm glad. So I just wanted to, you know, paint you a picture. The Bendix is a very tricky, and very expensive, endeavor.

FERNANDO
Yes, from my reading, I was able to gather that. And it's why I say, I might be able to help.

Maggie stares at him.

MAGGIE
Yeah, but what do you mean? Help how?

FERNANDO
I might be able to put together a team. No guarantees of course but I think—

MAGGIE
Wait. I'm confused. I know you can pilot an airplane but how could you possibly...

FERNANDO

Before I make any inquiries or set anything in motion, I first want to make sure-

MAGGIE

Hang on. Just hang on. Fernando, I'm serious, what it takes, to compete in the Bendix, I mean, you're getting through school...

FERNANDO

Shoveling horse manure.

MAGGIE

And taking care of the stables and playing polo. Which in my book is all one hundred percent noble and laudable, unlike the rich kids who go to a couple classes every day and spend the rest of their time sashaying around campus, going to parties, and waiting to go to work in Daddy's business. But, well, it does put a damper on the idea of you sponsoring me in the Bendix.

FERNANDO

My family, Maggie, we have varied interests.

MAGGIE

Interests?

FERNANDO

We own land. That was the start a few generations back. Land on the pampas. Cattle farms mostly. That's where I learned to ride. But also, more recently, crops, especially wheat, corn, and soybeans.

Maggie just sits and stares.

FERNANDO (CONT'D)

My grandfather moved the family into transportation to save the money being spent getting his cattle and crops to market. He started with trains, then, when the government started building roads, trucks.

Maggie continues to stare.

FERNANDO (CONT'D)

And later, my father, he moved the family into ships, bulk carriers to haul products out of the ports in Buenos Aires, La Plata, and Bahia Blanca.

MAGGIE

This is crazy, Fernando. You're talking crazy. You're a stable hand. You live here in the barn. What is all this talk?

FERNANDO

As I mentioned, in New York, a few years ago, I did not live up to my father's expectations. I let him down. I let the family down. But I found a way to redeem myself. In my own eyes and hopefully in his eyes. He knows I will soon graduate. With high honors. I hope he will attend the graduation. And if he does, Maggie, he will very likely fly here from Buenos Aires in one of the company airplanes. We now have a small fleet, as Argentina is a large country traversed far more quickly by air. I am hopeful one of these planes, perhaps our Curtiss-Wright or our B-2 Brown could-

MAGGIE

Fernando! Please! Stop! My head is spinning. It's too much to take in. I don't know who you are or why you are suddenly telling me all this.

FERNANDO

I just want to help, Maggie. I just thought-

MAGGIE

No! Stop! I don't know what you're talking about. I don't know what's true.

And with that Maggie stands and moves quickly toward her truck.

FERNANDO

Maggie! Wait! I'm sorry. That was too much information too fast.

Maggie has already reached the truck by the time Fernando starts after her. She climbs in behind the wheel and starts the engine. Fernando approaches the driver's side door.

Maggie floors the accelerator and spins away in a cloud of dust.

INT. NIGHT. MAGGIE AND BETTY'S KITCHEN.

Maggie and Betty sit at their kitchen table. Betty's books and notes are spread across the table. They have obviously been discussing the details of the scene out at the stables.

BETTY

Okay, Maggie, that was quite a mouthful, but if I had to sum up: You tell Fernando about the jerks in Kansas and the jerks in Burbank, and he tells you he's rich and might be able to get you a plane for the big race, and you freak out, scream at him, and zoom away in your truck. Is that about the gist of it?

MAGGIE

It's an absurd oversimplification.

BETTY

Is it?

MAGGIE

Yes.

BETTY

How so?

MAGGIE

It's just... way more complicated than that.

BETTY

Yeah? How so?

MAGGIE

First of all, will the real Fernando Martin please stand up? Is he the dirt-poor stable boy shoveling manure or the rich kid who can order me a Curtiss-Wright? And if he's anything close to the latter he certainly should have given me a clue long before this.

BETTY

Really? Why?

MAGGIE

Because... Just because.

BETTY

Exactly. You fell for the dirt-poor stable boy. Can you imagine the girls chasing after that good-looking boy if he's actually rich? But always he has to wonder if they want him or his money. And then along comes Maggie Rockwell, All-American girl, and she falls for him even though he lives in a room in the barn and shovels horse manure to pay his room and board. Think about that and maybe you'll figure out why he played his hand so close to the vest.

MAGGIE

Yeah, okay, maybe, but...

BETTY

But what, Maggie?

MAGGIE

Him trying to buy me off with an airplane.

BETTY

Buy you off?

MAGGIE

It's distasteful... Unsavory.

BETTY

You're ridiculous. That's your men-are-out-to-get-women thing. Maybe he just loves you and wants to help you fulfill your dream.

MAGGIE

Or he's made the whole thing about his family up and he's... he's...

BETTY

Okay, that's enough for now. You've gone cuckoo, girl, totally around the bend, and I have to study.

Betty grabs her books, enters the bedroom, closes the door.

Maggie sits and sighs.

The phone rings. Maggie looks at it but doesn't move to answer. It rings a few more times.

BETTY (CONT'D)
(from the bedroom)
Are you going to get that?

Maggie doesn't move. Betty enters and answers the phone.

BETTY (CONT'D)
(into the receiver)
Hello... Oh hi, Fernando.

MAGGIE
(mouths the words)
I'm not here.

Betty rolls her eyes, shakes her head.

BETTY
No, Fernando, she's not home...
Maybe at the library... Yes, of
course, I'll tell her... Bye bye.

Betty hangs up, heads for the bedroom, stops, turns.

BETTY (CONT'D)
Coward.

EXT. MORNING. THE SKIES OVER WHITNEY AVIATION.

The next morning in the skies over Whitney Aviation Maggie and Luke practice high-G pylon turns and safe-separation turns.

EXT. MORNING. WHITNEY AVIATION.

The plane lands and taxis over to the hangar. Maggie and Luke exit the plane and cross the tarmac.

Maggie does her best to sound casual and nonchalant.

MAGGIE
By the way, someone asked me last night if Fernando was from some well-to-do family in Argentina. Of course I didn't have a clue, but I told them I didn't think so. I mean, he lives out at the stables and takes care of the horses.

LUKE
(shrugs)
You got me. Maybe ask Fernando.

MAGGIE
That would be awkward. What do I say? Is your family loaded?

LUKE
Sounds like a plan to me.

MAGGIE
Oh forget it.

LUKE
(laughs)
Let me make a couple calls. I'll let you know what I find out.

INT. EVENING. MAGGIE AND BETTY'S KITCHEN.

Maggie sits at the kitchen table studying. The phone rings. She doesn't answer it.

INT. MORNING. UNIVERSITY LIBRARY.

Maggie works on a paper at a large table strewn with books.

INT. AFTERNOON. UNIVERSITY CLASSROOM.

Maggie and OTHER STUDENTS take a test.

INT. EVENING. MAGGIE AND BETTY'S KITCHEN.

Maggie studies at the kitchen table.

Betty enters, hears the phone blaring, looks at Maggie, rolls her eyes, and answers.

BETTY
Hello... Hi Fernando... No, sorry.
Not here... Oh you know, busy busy.
School winding down. Everything
happening at once... Yes, I told
her... Absolutely, yes, I'll tell
her again... No problem. Bye.

Betty hangs up the phone, stares at her roommate. Maggie does not look up.

BETTY (CONT'D)
Have you lost your marbles, girl?

EXT. LATE AFTERNOON. OUTSIDE MAGGIE AND BETTY'S HOUSE.

Fernando shows up at the house. He arrives in a taxi, comes up the front walk, and knocks on the door.

INT. LATE AFTERNOON. MAGGIE AND BETTY'S HOUSE.

Maggie, in the kitchen studying, stands and crosses to the door that leads to the living room. She can't see who's at the front door but through the window she sees the taxi.

Another knock on the door. Maggie doesn't move.

FERNANDO
(from outside)
Maggie, are you in there? Come on,
Maggie, I know you're in there.
Your truck's in the driveway plus I
ran into Betty on campus. She told
me you were home. I just want to
apologize. I didn't mean to upset
you. I just wanted to help.

Maggie looks like she might start to cry but still she doesn't move.

FERNANDO (CONT'D)
I'm just a stable boy, Maggie.
That's where I'm happiest.
Especially when you're there with
me. That's about the happiest I've
ever been in my whole life.

Tears well up in Maggie's eyes.

FERNANDO (CONT'D)
I'm going now, Maggie. I don't want
to upset you. But rest assured,
I'll be back.

Maggie waits, listens, steps into the living room. She sees Fernando climb into the taxi. The taxi drives away.

INT. EVENING. MAGGIE AND BETTY'S KITCHEN.

Maggie lies on the sofa, eyes closed, textbook across her chest. A firm knock hits the front door. Several knocks.

Maggie wakes with a start. The textbook hits the floor with a thud. She glances out the window, sees Luke's pickup at the end of the driveway.

Another knock on the door. Maggie stands, opens the door.

LUKE
Tarnation, girl.

MAGGIE
What?

LUKE
Glad to see no harm's come to you.

MAGGIE
Harm?

LUKE
I've called half a dozen times and no answer. Figured I'd better come over and see for myself.

MAGGIE
See what for yourself? I've been... studying.

LUKE
Ever think of answering the phone? Ah forget it. Gotta talk. Inside or out? Nice breeze out here on the porch.

Maggie, slightly disorientated, rubs her eyes, shakes herself awake.

MAGGIE
I guess outside would be nice.

LUKE
Well come on then. I have news.

EXT. EVENING. MAGGIE AND BETTY'S FRONT PORCH.

Luke and Maggie sit on the porch swing.

LUKE
What do you want first? Good news or news about your boyfriend?

MAGGIE
Did you find something out?

LUKE

Sure did. From a couple sources. One an old friend in New York who does business in South America, especially Argentina. That long-distance call cost me a fortune but I'll just add it to your tab. And another friend who works at the university and is privy to all kinds of interesting catnip.

MAGGIE

Catnip?

LUKE

First off, the name's pronounced Martín with an accent over the i. Not Martin like the film actress Mary Martin. It's a common surname in Argentina.

Maggie, still half asleep, struggles to catch up.

MAGGIE

Martín, not Martin?

LUKE

Correct. Estancias de la Familia San Martín is a sprawling business.

MAGGIE

Estancias de la Familia San Martín?

LUKE

(nods)

Interests in everything from agriculture to shipping.

MAGGIE

That's what he told me.

LUKE

What who told you? Never mind. It's not a publicly traded company, this Ranchos de la Familia, so the true value is hard to figure but by all accounts it's a multi-million-dollar business. Like everything else it's taken a hit during the Depression, but because their core industry is agriculture, and people need to eat, they've weathered the storm pretty well.

MAGGIE
(in shock)
And Fernando, he's related?

LUKE
He's related all right. Big time.
This is where my university contact
comes in. I had to promise her a
zipped lip and a flight up to Tahoe
with a dinner out before she'd
spill the beans.

MAGGIE
I'll bet she's young and pretty.

LUKE
Not as young or pretty as you, kid.

MAGGIE
Okay, old man, get on with it.

LUKE
Long and short of it, Fernando San
Martín is the scion of this wealthy
family. His father runs the show.

MAGGIE
But... but then why's he living in
the barn, shoveling horse manure?

LUKE
He arrived here a couple years ago,
applied to school, took the entry
exams. He did well but didn't get
admitted till he showed his prowess
on the polo field.

MAGGIE
What about his family?

LUKE
The university had no idea he was
connected to some wealthy Argentine
family. That only came to light
later when someone recognized him
at a polo match.

MAGGIE
(nods)
He wanted to put himself through
school. Without his father's help.
A lot of this he told me. But not
for a second did I think he...

LUKE

What?

MAGGIE

Nothing. Let's just say... I owe
him an apology.

LUKE

Probably we should've guessed
something like this. I mean, the
telltale signs were there. It
didn't really add up. You know, him
being a stable boy when he was a
world-class polo player who could
also fly airplanes.

MAGGIE

(smiles)

I think that's what I liked about
him. Then... out of the blue, he
tells me he can get me an airplane
to compete in the Bendix.

LUKE

(whistles softly)

That's news to me.

MAGGIE

Just happened.

LUKE

Well I guess he can afford it, but
it won't be necessary. You ready
for the good news?

MAGGIE

Good news?

LUKE

I told you I had good news. Walter
Beech changed his mind. He wants
you to fly the Staggerwing.

MAGGIE

No way! What?

LUKE

Yup. The man came to his senses. Of
course, it didn't hurt that Jimmy
Baker crashed in a pylon race and
broke his leg, but any way you
shake it, kid, you're going to
pilot the Staggerwing in the Bendix
Trophy race.

EXT. EARLY MORNING. CSE STABLES.

Maggie parks her pickup beside the stables and climbs out. She finds Fernando just exiting the barn, halter in hand.

MAGGIE

Hey.

FERNANDO

(smiles broadly)

Hey.

MAGGIE

Sorry. I'm a fool. Always have been and probably always will be.

FERNANDO

You don't need to be sorry.

MAGGIE

I know all about Estancias de la Familia San Martín.

Fernando looks momentarily startled, then sighs.

FERNANDO

Okay.

MAGGIE

Look, Fernando, I'm mule-headed and not very good at friendship let alone, you know, the whole boy/girl thing. I guess I always just assume people have ulterior motives.

FERNANDO

Often they do. And I suppose that includes me. You see, Maggie, I love you, and of course I'd like that love reciprocated, but I didn't want my family or the family business to have anything to do with how you felt about me.

Maggie steps forward, takes Fernando's hands, looks him in the eye, holds his gaze.

MAGGIE

I fell in love with the stable boy and I'm still in love with the stable boy. When you suddenly turned into this person offering to get me an airplane, well... I sort of... flipped out.

FERNANDO
I understand.

MAGGIE
And now you don't need to get me an airplane because Beech Aviation wants me to fly their brand-new plane in the Bendix Trophy race.

FERNANDO
Seriously? I'm so happy for you.

They embrace and kiss. And then turn to watch the sunrise.

MAGGIE
It's so beautiful out here. Quiet and peaceful.

FERNANDO
I love this place. It's been a lot of early mornings and hard work but I'm going to miss it. Two years I've been here and it's given me the opportunity to find out who I am and what's important to me.

MAGGIE
You want to share?

FERNANDO
Share?

MAGGIE
You know, tell me who you are and what's important to you.

FERNANDO
(smiles)
It's not that simple to put into words, but I think every day I need a little time for solitude and contemplation, and I want above all else to respect others.

MAGGIE
I like that.

FERNANDO
Also, well, I've been thinking.
About the future.

MAGGIE
A reckless enterprise.

FERNANDO

(nods)

It can be... uncertain. But I've been imagining a future... with you.

MAGGIE

With me?

FERNANDO

Yes. Though actually, these past couple days, I've been imagining a future... without you. And those thoughts have been... disquieting.

MAGGIE

Disquieting?

FERNANDO

(nods)

I guess what I'm saying is, I'd much prefer to imagine a future with you. A future together.

Maggie does not immediately respond. Her face is a mass of emotion.

MAGGIE

A future together. That sounds nice.

Fernando smiles. Maggie returns the smile. They embrace.

But looking over his shoulder at the sun rising in the eastern sky, Maggie's smile has given way to a look of concern and uncertainty.

INT. AFTERNOON. MAGGIE AND BETTY'S KITCHEN.

Maggie enters the kitchen. The phone rings. Betty steps out of the bedroom, waves to Maggie, and answers.

BETTY

(into receiver)

Hello... Yes she is. Hold please.

Betty covers the mouthpiece and turns to Maggie.

BETTY (CONT'D)

How did the final go?

MAGGIE

I think I aced it.

BETTY

Congrats. To both of us. Nothing left but graduation.

MAGGIE

It's been quite a ride.

BETTY

We'll celebrate later. I need to get ready for work.

Betty hands the receiver to Maggie and enters the bedroom.

MAGGIE

(into receiver)

Hello... Yes, this is she... Yes... No... Seriously?... Well it's just that... that's not good news... I will, yes... Thank you. Goodbye.

Maggie hangs up the receiver.

MAGGIE (CONT'D)

Darn it!

BETTY

(from the bedroom)

Trouble?

MAGGIE

I didn't want the stupid job anyway.

Betty enters wearing her waitress uniform.

BETTY

Lockheed?

MAGGIE

(nods)

No new orders so they've just announced a hiring freeze.

BETTY

Terrible luck graduating now in the middle of all this mess. I almost wish we had another year of school.

MAGGIE

Be awhile before things get better.

BETTY

Look on the bright side. At least you have a rich boyfriend.

MAGGIE
I don't want a rich boyfriend.

Betty heads for the door, pulls it open.

BETTY
Maggie Rockwell, you are such a
terribly silly girl.

Betty exits.

Maggie frowns. And sighs.

EXT. LATE AFTERNOON. WHITNEY AVIATION.

Maggie pulls up to the hangar in her pickup, climbs out. She sees Luke's plane and Luke's truck but no Luke.

INT. LATE AFTERNOON. LUKE'S OFFICE AT LUKE AVIATION.

Maggie finds Luke in his office, lying on the ratty old sofa.

MAGGIE
You okay?

LUKE
I'll live. Just tweaked my back
moving some spare parts.

MAGGIE
You want to skip flying today?

LUKE
Heck no. I can hobble out there.
Just go easy on the old guy today
with the spins and rolls.

MAGGIE
Lockheed called. Reneged on their
crappy job offer.

LUKE
Probably for the best. Dead-end
job. Better off going to work for
me. You'll soon be qualified to
give lessons. And one of these days
I'm gonna have the dough to design
and build my own plane.

MAGGIE
I can give lessons to your dozens
of nonpaying customers.

LUKE

(laughs)

Might as well starve here on the
edge of the desert as well as
anywhere else.

MAGGIE

Hey, I've got the Staggerwing. I'll
worry about the rest of my life
after we capture the Bendix Trophy.

LUKE

That's the spirit.

The phone rings. Luke makes his way to the desk, answers.

LUKE (CONT'D)

(into the receiver)

Whitney here... Ted, how's things?

Maggie steps closer.

LUKE (CONT'D)

(into receiver)

Hmm, yeah, I hear you... No, I
wouldn't be comfortable with that
either...

Maggie pantomimes.

LUKE (CONT'D)

(into receiver)

Sure, I see the problem... Engine
vibration. A combo of things... Odd
though it popped up after so many
successful trial flights...

Maggie's face goes through several contortions.

LUKE (CONT'D)

(into receiver)

Thanks for letting us know, Ted...
I'll definitely tell her... Okay,
so long.

Luke ends the call.

MAGGIE

You gotta be kidding me!?

LUKE

Stability problems. Haven't been
able to figure it out. Plane's all
over the sky.

MAGGIE

Yeah, okay, but they will, right?
Figure it out?

LUKE

Working on it night and day, kid.

MAGGIE

They'll figure it out. They have to
figure it out.

Luke returns to the sofa, sits with a grunt.

LUKE

I'm sure they will. Ted's a smart
guy. But for now, I hate to be the
bearer of bad news, Beech pulled
the Staggerwing from the Bendix.

INT. NIGHT. THE UNIVERSITY DINER.

It's quite late. After nine. Two of the booths and a few of
the counter stools are occupied with DINERS. Betty serves.

Maggie and Fernando enter, in a bit of a rush.

FERNANDO

Don't worry, we have plenty of
time. It's not a big deal.

MAGGIE

I'm just saying, you don't have to
eat with me. I'm perfectly capable
of eating by myself.

Fernando starts to reply but Betty calls from behind the
counter.

BETTY

Table for two? Right this way.

Betty grabs two menus and leads them to a booth.

BETTY (CONT'D)

Getting kind of late. Was starting
to think you dined elsewhere.

Maggie shrugs, rolls her eyes.

Maggie and Fernando sit.

MAGGIE

Got a little hung up is all.

FERNANDO

I'm going to order a cab now so I don't have to wait later. Hi Betty. How are you? Would you mind if we order? What do you think, Maggie? Are you good with hamburgers, fries, and milkshakes?

Maggie shrugs.

FERNANDO (CONT'D)

Good. Thanks, Betty. Vanilla shake for me please.

Fernando turns and moves to the phone booth near the restrooms.

BETTY

I sense a little tension.

MAGGIE

Not even a smidgen.

BETTY

Just another day in paradise then.

MAGGIE

(smiles)

All good. Lost my airplane again. Mechanical problems. And Fernando's parents are here for graduation. He just found out. They're due at the hotel any minute.

BETTY

He seems kind of jazzed up.

MAGGIE

You think? He hasn't seen either of them for almost three years.

BETTY

Wow! No wonder he's jazzed.

The kitchen bell rings.

BETTY (CONT'D)

I'll be back. And I'll tell Al to get your order out asap.

Maggie nods. Betty exits.

Fernando returns, sits.

FERNANDO

Talking to my father on the phone earlier, I didn't know what to expect. I was nervous. It's been so long we've been estranged. Barely a letter for almost three years. I've communicated with my mother, so I knew how he was and how the family was, but still, I don't know, it's all very emotional.

Maggie squeezes Fernando's hand.

MAGGIE

You must be very happy he's come.

FERNANDO

I wasn't sure he would.

MAGGIE

Then this is a very good day.

FERNANDO

(sighs)

It's like... I've been holding my breath for nearly three years.

BETTY

You must be excited to see them.

FERNANDO

He told me... all is forgiven. My indiscretions. My lack of respect for the family. He is in touch with the university. Either the provost or the president. So he knows what I've accomplished. My high academic honors.

MAGGIE

And how you did it all on your own. Without his assistance. That's the best part, Fernando.

Fernando seems not to hear. He rattles on.

FERNANDO

He told me how proud he was of me, how I could now take my proper place in the family. Definitely after graduation I'll return home. See my siblings. Aunts, uncles, cousins. We are a large family, Maggie. You'll come. Meet them all.

MAGGIE
I'll come? To Argentina?

FERNANDO
Yes, of course.

MAGGIE
Maybe for a visit. Someday.

FERNANDO
With my father's stamp of approval
it will be, after all this time, a
triumphant return.

MAGGIE
But you're not... we're not... I'm
not staying.

Fernando glances out the window, sees a cab pull up.

FERNANDO
Excuse me. Let me just tell him to
wait.

Fernando exits. Maggie sighs.

Betty brings the food on a large tray.

BETTY
Where did he go?

Maggie points out the window. Betty smiles, put the food on
the table, returns to the kitchen. Fernando returns.

FERNANDO
Sorry.

Maggie says nothing. Fernando squeezes ketchup on his food
and begins eating. Maggie sighs and tries a fry.

MAGGIE
Lockheed called earlier. Hiring
freeze. They withdrew their offer
of employment.

Fernando eats, shrugs.

FERNANDO
It wasn't much of an offer, Maggie.
You don't need that job.

MAGGIE
I don't?

Fernando shakes his head, slurps his shake. Maggie eats a couple more fries. Fernando stuffs a few fries in his mouth.

MAGGIE (CONT'D)

They took the Staggerwing away from me again. Mechanical trouble.

FERNANDO

What?

MAGGIE

I don't know all the details. But as of now Beech has cancelled its entry in the Bendix Trophy race.

Fernando finishes his fries, wipes his mouth.

FERNANDO

That's a tough break, Maggie.

MAGGIE

Yeah.

FERNANDO

Let me talk to my father. Maybe get you outfitted with a proper plane.

Maggie sits. Sighs. Fernando reaches into his pocket, pulls out a twenty-dollar bill, tosses it casually on the counter.

FERNANDO (CONT'D)

I need to run but take your time. We'll talk tomorrow. Love you.

Fernando exits.

Maggie stares at the twenty, then she shifts her gaze out the window as Fernando slips into the back of the taxi and closes the door. She looks forlorn, almost teary-eyed.

Betty returns.

BETTY

And off he goes.

MAGGIE

He wants to marry me. Wants to whisk me off to Buenos Aires.

BETTY

Lucky you.

MAGGIE

Yeah. Lucky me.

ACT III

EXT. AFTERNOON. THE UNIVERSITY FOOTBALL STADIUM.

A COUPLE HUNDRED GRADUATES sit in folding chairs on the field as the graduation ceremony unfolds. FRIENDS and FAMILY occupy the bleachers under a clear blue late afternoon sky.

THE UNIVERSITY PRESIDENT is in the middle of announcing graduates who earned high honors.

UNIVERSITY PRESIDENT
Aaron Joyce, Magna Cum Laude.

Applause as AARON climbs onto the stage.

UNIVERSITY PRESIDENT (CONT'D)
Barton Lindsey, Magna Cum Laude

Applause as BARTON climbs onto the stage.

UNIVERSITY PRESIDENT (CONT'D)
Fernando Martin, Summa Cum Laude.

Applause as Fernando climbs onto the stage.

Fernando's parents, GILBERTO and HELEN SAN MARTIN, applaud.

UNIVERSITY PRESIDENT (CONT'D)
Margaret Rockwell, Summa Cum Laude.

Applause as Maggie, beaming and waving, climbs onto the stage.

Maggie's parents, RICHARD and CAROL ROCKWELL, hoot and holler and clap with vigor.

EXT. AFTERNOON. THE UNIVERSITY FOOTBALL STADIUM.

Graduation over, the graduates mingle with their families.

Fernando stands off to the side with his parents. They speak quietly. Gilberto has his hand on Fernando's shoulder. They stand close.

GILBERTO
Son, the storm has been weathered.
The sun has again risen and the
winds have grown calm. I cannot
begin to tell you of the pride I
feel in my heart.

Fernando and Helen smile. They all embrace.

Not far away, in a mass of chaos, Maggie introduces Betty to her parents, Richard and Mary Rockwell.

BETTY

This is so great to finally meet
you guys after all these years!
Everything Maggie has told me, it's
like I already know you.

The Rockwells smile.

RICHARD

The family's first college graduate
and with a degree in aeronautical
engineering no less.

MAGGIE

Mom, Dad, don't move. Don't wander
off. I want you to meet Fernando.
Let me see if I can find him.

Maggie moves through the crowd, finally spots Fernando.

MAGGIE (CONT'D)

Fernando! There you are!

Maggie steps up to him, takes his arm.

Fernando turns from his parents, sees Maggie, and smiles.

FERNANDO

Maggie!

MAGGIE

Bad time?

FERNANDO

No, no. We were just... enjoying
the moment.

MAGGIE

Pretty spectacular moment.

Fernando nods, then turns back to his parents.

FERNANDO

Mother, Father, I would like you to
meet my very good friend, Maggie.
Maggie Rockwell.

The Martins step forward, smile, shake hands with Maggie.

Maggie actually blushes as she returns the greeting.

GILBERTO

I see my son has been keeping very
fine company.

Maggie blushes even more deeply.

HELEN

It is nice to meet you, Maggie.
Fernando has written me about you
and never has he gushed with such
enthusiasm. Now I see why.

Maggie smiles through her crimson cheeks.

MAGGIE

You've caught me off guard. I'm all
balled up.

Helen squeezes Maggie's hand. Everyone smiles.

MAGGIE (CONT'D)

Fernando, do you have a second to
say hello to my parents? I'd like
you to meet them before everyone
wanders.

FERNANDO

Of course.

(to his parents)

Please excuse me a moment.

They nod.

Maggie and Fernando turn and cross the field.

MAGGIE

They're so sweet.

FERNANDO

(nods)

I think all will be well.

Maggie squeezes his hand. A moment later she rejoins her parents, shoves Fernando between them.

MAGGIE

Mom, Dad, this nice-looking boy,
also a Summa Cum Laude graduate, is
Fernando Martín of Buenos Aires,
Argentina. He's kind of sweet on me
so you best take a liking to him.

Carol Rockwell steps forward, big smile on her face, and gives Fernando a hug.

CAROL

Maggie mentioned you in a letter,
Fernando, then in a phone call.
Very nice to finally meet you.

FERNANDO

Likewise, Mrs. Rockwell. I've heard
much about you.

CAROL

Hmm. Don't believe a word of it.

Richard Rockwell extends a big, callused hand, gives Fernando's hand a firm shake.

RICHARD

Nice to meet you, son.

FERNANDO

Same, sir.

RICHARD

Maggie tells me your family does
some ranching.

FERNANDO

That's correct, sir.

RICHARD

She also tells me you'd like to
visit Montana one day and spend
some time on our little ranch.

FERNANDO

Looking forward to it, sir.

RICHARD

Well any friend of Maggie's is
always welcome.

FERNANDO

Thank you, sir.

OTHER CLASSMATES crowd in. Chaos ensues.

Fernando squeezes Maggie's hand.

FERNANDO (CONT'D)

I better get back.

MAGGIE
Of course. I will see you later.

Fernando exits.

EXT. MORNING. CSE STABLES.

Maggie pulls up in her pickup, climbs out, looks around.

INT. MORNING. CSE STABLES.

Maggie visits with Abbie, then looks for Fernando.

INT. MORNING. CSE STABLES.

Maggie finds Fernando in his room in the barn. His bags have been packed. The room looks empty and nearly deserted. He puts a few last things in his satchel.

MAGGIE
Hey.

FERNANDO
Hey.

MAGGIE
You look about ready to go.

FERNANDO
I wish you were coming.

MAGGIE
I can't. Not now.

FERNANDO
(nods, sighs)
I don't want to go either.

MAGGIE
Then why go?

FERNANDO
It's been three years, Maggie. I need to see home. I want to see my siblings. My horses. My dogs.

MAGGIE
(smiles)
I understand.

FERNANDO

I'll miss this place. I loved it here. The peace and quiet. The pleasant routine. And then you came and it made everything perfect.

MAGGIE

You're going to make me cry. I told myself on the way over here I would not under any circumstances cry.

FERNANDO

It's temporary. We'll work it out.

MAGGIE

We want to think so, Fernando, but Argentina is a long way from here.

FERNANDO

Airplanes are beginning to make it not quite so far.

MAGGIE

It's not just distance, Fernando. It's language and culture and money and power, and none of that even takes into consideration my lifelong dreams and ambitions.

FERNANDO

Love can overcome all that, Maggie.

MAGGIE

I grew up with love, Fernando. My mother loved my father. My father adored my mother. They both loved my brothers and me to death. Sure, there were hard times and plenty of battles and lots of discipline, but the love was... I don't know, you could smell it in the air. Feel it on your fingertips. To this day all that love makes me secure in the world. No matter what happens I can count on that love.

Fernando listens, sighs, sits on the edge of the bed.

FERNANDO

I know, Maggie. All that love. All that security. It's what drew me to you. At least in part. You're brash and confident, but also there's... something... solid there... a rock.

MAGGIE

That's what love is, Fernando. A rock.

Fernando nods.

MAGGIE (CONT'D)

I can't go to Argentina, Fernando. I could visit. I'd love to visit. Your parents seem so nice. But not to live.

FERNANDO

Maybe you would come and never want to leave.

MAGGIE

Maybe I would. But distance and family aside, you and I have a basic disconnect about the future. Yes, I love you. You're strong and smart and determined. You're sweet and gentle and polite. You're Hollywood handsome and we'd have great-looking kids. But I'm not a housewife, Fernando. A quiet, demure, well-behaved housewife. Not here in America and not all the way down there in Argentina.

FERNANDO

But that's not fair, Maggie. That's not what I-

MAGGIE

I'm a pilot, Fernando. A flyer. An aviator. And now with my degree secured, I'm going to make aviation history. I'm going to be the first woman to design an entirely new airplane unlike anything anyone has ever seen. That's who I am. That's who I want to be.

Fernando listens, nods, and after a moment sighs again.

EXT. MORNING. CSE STABLES.

Fernando puts his bags in the trunk of a taxi. Fernando and Maggie embrace. Kiss.

After a moment Fernando climbs into the back of the taxi, closes the door, lowers the window, and waves.

Maggie waves back. She's still waving as the taxi disappears in the distance. Rivers of tears stream down her face.

EXT. MORNING. THE SURROUNDING HILLS.

Maggie gallops Abbie through the hills as the sun rises.

EXT. LATE MORNING. CSE STABLES.

She returns to the stables and finds her parents waiting for her. They drive a newer, fancier pickup and pull a brand-new trailer. Maggie dismounts.

MAGGIE

Hey. Just needed one last ride
before you haul my pride and joy
back to Montana.

RICHARD

You sure you want us to take her?

MAGGIE

I don't want you to take her, not
now or ever, but I get a plane for
the Bendix or a job offer halfway
across the country, I'll need to
pick up and go in a hurry. She'll
be best for now back on the ranch.

Richard nods. Maggie leads Abbie to the side of the stable. She pulls off her saddle and tack. Carol helps.

CAROL

I know I've asked, and I know you
don't want me to ask again, but I'm
your mother so I'm going to-

MAGGIE

Mom. No.

CAROL

Are you sure, sweetie? Even for a
few weeks? A month?

MAGGIE

If I come home, I'll get comfy. And
when I get comfy I'll get lazy. And
fall into some indolent routine.
And time will pass. And a year from
now I'll still be on the ranch.

CAROL

I know, hon, but with school over
and the lease on your house up at
the end of the month and Betty
moving back to Texas... and...

MAGGIE

And Fernando a million miles away
in Argentina.

CAROL

Home doesn't sound so bad.

Maggie nods, hugs her mother.

MAGGIE

Home's the best, Mom. It'll never
be as good as home. Ever. Not here
or anywhere. But you know me. Not
happy unless I'm out with the dogs
raising a covey of quail or riding
broncs in the rodeo or soloing in
an airplane before anyone teaches
me to land the stupid thing.

Carol nods. Mother and daughter embrace.

The tears flow.

INT. NIGHT. MAGGIE AND BETTY'S KITCHEN.

(The next few scenes depict the passage of time. Maggie sits
at the kitchen table writing a letter.)

*June 5. Dear Fernando, It's only been a few days since our
goodbye and already I feel like it's been an eternity.*

EXT. MORNING. THE SKIES OVER WHITNEY AVIATION.

Maggie and Luke fly.

INT. NIGHT. THE UNIVERSITY DINER.

Maggie and Betty sit in a booth drinking coffee.

INT. MORNING. MAGGIE AND BETTY'S KITCHEN.

Maggie reads the want ads in the newspaper (dated June 14).

EXT. MORNING. THE SKIES OVER WHITNEY AVIATION.

Maggie and Luke fly.

INT. NIGHT. MAGGIE AND BETTY'S LIVING ROOM.

Maggie writes another letter while sitting on the sofa.

June 22. Dear Fernando, It's been weeks. I still haven't heard from you. I miss you so

INT. MORNING. MAGGIE AND BETTY'S KITCHEN

Maggie and Betty stand in the kitchen packing glasses and dishes into cardboard boxes.

INT. NIGHT. THE UNIVERSITY DINER.

Late at night. Betty and Maggie at the diner. They sit on stools at the counter. No customers. Just the cook cleaning up back in the kitchen. They drink milkshakes.

BETTY

Still hard to believe this is all coming to an end.

MAGGIE

(sighs)

You're going to leave for Texas and I'll never see you again.

BETTY

Oh stop it. We both know that's not true. That's just your doom and gloom talking ever since graduation. Ever since your boyfriend took off for South America. Ever since you didn't get to fly in that airplane race.

MAGGIE

Maggie Rockwell, sad sack.

BETTY

Exactly. A whole lot of people have it a whole lot worse than you.

MAGGIE

I know. Of course I know. Still doesn't prevent me from feeling sorry for myself.

BETTY

Come to Texas.

MAGGIE

And do what?

BETTY

You'll meet my brother. He'll get
your mind off your Argentine.

MAGGIE

I'll never see Fernando again
either.

BETTY

Ugh. I'm going back to the kitchen
and clean the fryer. Anything's
better than sitting here listening
to you.

MAGGIE

I should've kept Abbie here with
me. I miss her.

BETTY

Woulda. Coulda. Shoulda.

MAGGIE

What?

BETTY

Nothing. So you're all set with
your room at the boarding house?
You paid Mrs. Wyatt?

MAGGIE

Huh?

BETTY

The boarding house, Mag. We need to
be out of our house tomorrow.

MAGGIE

Right. Yes. Mrs. Wyatt. I'm good.
Can't wait. My own little room with
one little window that looks out
over a back alley where they keep
the garbage cans and the old tires.
Just what I've been dreaming of.

A few tears run down Maggie's cheeks.

Betty stands, embraces her friend.

EXT. MORNING. WHITNEY AVIATION.

Maggie arrives in her pickup. She climbs out and heads for the hangar.

INT. MORNING. WHITNEY AVIATION.

Maggie enters the hangar and finds Luke on a stepladder working on the engine of his plane.

MAGGIE

Hey.

LUKE

Sorry, kid. No flying today. Still grounded. Still waiting on those carburetor parts.

MAGGIE

Didn't come to fly. Just to say hey.

LUKE

A social visit, huh? I called you earlier. Phone's turned off.

MAGGIE

We vacated yesterday. At a boarding house now over on Maple Street.

LUKE

Betty leave for Texas?

Maggie nods. Luke climbs down, wipes his greasy hands on a rag.

LUKE (CONT'D)

Well then, I guess we best get ready to race.

MAGGIE

Race?

LUKE

After I called you this morning I got in the truck to come look for you, but then I had this crazy premonition.

MAGGIE

Premonition?

LUKE

I had this vision of me up on that ladder and you walking into the hangar and me saying best get ready to race, and so instead of jumping in the truck and trying to find you, I just cooled my heels and waited for you to come to me, and sure enough, here you are.

MAGGIE

Did you fall and hit your head?
What are you babbling about?

LUKE

We're going to New York, kid.
Leaving asap. Ted Wells called.
That Staggerwing stability problem.
Turned out to be nothing but some
engine mounts causing the plane to
vibrate. Beech is back in the game,
Maggie. And not only that, they're
in it to win it. With the world's
coolest plane and most beautiful
pilot at the helm.

INT. MORNING. A TRAIN CAR.

Maggie and Luke on the train to Chicago. Luke sits in the dining car. Maggie joins him.

MAGGIE

This has been a crazy whirlwind,
Luke. I'm happy to just sit and
catch my breath.

LUKE

We'll be in Chicago tomorrow night.
Fly to New York the next day. Be
there in time to get yourself fully
acquainted with the Staggerwing.

MAGGIE

I can't believe it's happening. I
woke up this morning thinking it
must be a dream.

LUKE

Not a dream, kid.

MAGGIE

Feels like one.

LUKE

Nope. It's happening, I mean, hey, things can still go wrong. In this biz they go wrong more than right. On average less than half the planes that register to compete in the Bendix make it to the finish line. A quarter to a third never get off the ground. But Ted Wells and Walt Beech are a couple pros. They wouldn't have green-lighted this if they weren't confident. Still, there's a few things I haven't told you.

MAGGIE

Uh oh. Such as?

Before Luke can reply THE WAITER comes to take their order.

MAGGIE (CONT'D)

Turkey club and a coke, please.

LUKE

Same for me. Thanks.

The waiter exits.

LUKE (CONT'D)

Right up front, it's all good.

MAGGIE

I'll be the judge of that.

LUKE

(smiles)

After all the starts and stops, I don't blame you. First off: flight plan. Ted's in the process of setting up three refueling stops.

MAGGIE

Why three? I'll need two at most.

LUKE

Exactly. He's setting up the first stop in Indiana. You'll use it if you need it. Second one will be at Beech HQ in Wichita, where you'll take care of any mechanical issues.

MAGGIE

Makes sense.

LUKE

And finally a third stop at a strip northeast of Phoenix. If winds and fuel consumption demand two stops, it'll be Indiana and Phoenix. If one'll do, you'll stop in Wichita.

MAGGIE

Likely depend on headwinds.

LUKE

And storms. And course changes. And mechanical problems. And navigation-

MAGGIE

Okay, okay. I get your drift.

LUKE

Good. Remember, Maggie, this isn't a quick spin out over the desert. This is the whole cotton-pickin country you have to cross. If all goes well, fourteen, fifteen, even sixteen hours in the air with your butt in that seat. Hyper-focused every single second.

Maggie nods.

LUKE (CONT'D)

Have you heard of Time magazine?

MAGGIE

Sure. My parents had it delivered to the house when I was a kid.

LUKE

They're doing a major piece on aviation in next week's issue. Part of the article will talk about the Bendix race.

MAGGIE

Nice.

LUKE

It gets nicer. The issue will hit newsstands on the day of the race.

MAGGIE

Perfect.

LUKE

They want an aviator on the cover.

MAGGIE

Like Lindbergh or Amelia?

LUKE

They've been on the cover. Time wants somebody new, somebody with a good backstory. And now with the ladies back in the race after a two-year absence, they're thinking an aviatrix. They want a woman.

MAGGIE

Wait. What? Are you saying they want me? How do they even know about me?

LUKE

Ted told them about you. But all the lady pilots in the race are being considered. I believe there are four. Maybe five. A couple solo pilots and one or two tandems. So we'll see. A Time photographer is going to take some pictures.

MAGGIE

(shakes her head)

Incredible, the difference a day makes. Twenty-four hours ago I was moving into Mrs. Wyatt's boarding house thinking I was just about the most hapless creature on earth.

Luke laughs. Their sandwiches and sodas arrive.

INT. AFTERNOON. PASSENGER COMPARTMENT OF AN AIRLINER.

Luke and Maggie fly from Chicago to New York. Out the window the skyscrapers of Manhattan. Then over the East River and across Brooklyn to Floyd Bennett Field.

LUKE

Floyd Bennett Field. Race takeoffs from here. Then due west for the City of Angels.

MAGGIE

Fuel me up and let's roll.

The plane lands.

The passengers begin to disembark.

EXT. AFTERNOON. TARMAC FLOYD BENNETT FIELD.

Walt Beech and Ted Wells are on the tarmac to greet Maggie and Luke. Handshakes all around.

TED

Just want to apologize for the late notice. We practically had the plane ripped apart and had started to wonder if there was a flaw in the original design when one of our mechanics found a pair of loose bolts on the engine mount, and the rest, hopefully, is history.

Maggie and Luke nod.

MAGGIE

Can I get a look at her? Is she in one of these hangers?

WALT

(smiles)

We're keeping her down the road a piece. Away from prying eyes. Want to unveil her at the pre-race event the day before departure. We even flew in under cover of darkness.

Luke and Maggie nod and smile.

They all climb into a large sedan and start off.

EXT. AFTERNOON. A SMALL ISOLATED AIRSTRIP.

The sedan pulls up. Maggie, Luke, Ted, and Walt step out. They approach a large barn. Ted and Walt open the doors.

Inside rests the Staggerwing, draped in drop cloths. Ted and Walt remove the cloths and roll the plane out into the late afternoon sunlight.

She has a new paint job, still red but with white accents.

MAGGIE

Wow!

LUKE

Looking sharp.

They walk around the biplane, examine and appreciate its beauty and design.

TED

You can't see them but what you have here is essentially a giant flying fuel tank. We've got tanks in the wings, in the tail, in the fuselage, including where the two rear passengers typically sit.

LUKE

But she'll get off the ground?

TED

Fully loaded she'd struggle on this short grass runway but on the long, paved runway at Bennett Field that runs straight out to sea, she'll get up, no problem. We took plenty of practice runs in Wichita.

MAGGIE

Can I take her up?

TED

She's light on fuel, so just a short spin.

They do a pre-flight check. Maggie climbs into the cockpit and fires up the powerful radial engine. Soon she's airborne.

The men watch from the tarmac as Maggie circles the airstrip, climbs and then descends, and comes in for a perfect landing.

INT. EVENING. A RESTAURANT.

Maggie, Luke, Walt, and Ted sit at a table having dinner. Their meals have been served and half eaten.

TED

(to Maggie)

So tomorrow, early, we'd like you to take her up. You'll have fuel for four hours of mid-altitude, high-speed flying. Head east, out over Montauk, then north up around Cape Cod, and after you've been in the air about an hour and a half, turn around and retrace your route. Take notes. We'll want to hear what you learned.

MAGGIE

I can do that. Can't wait. Itching to go.

TED

Every sound you hear, Maggie. Every concern you have. And of course we'll be interested in how you feel, if we can do anything to make you more comfortable. Lot of hours in the seat. Leg cramps, sore back, cranky shoulders all make a long flight longer. And then fatigue sets in and fatigue leads to bad judgment.

Maggie nods.

TED (CONT'D)

We'll have a couple days to iron out any problems.

LUKE

Maggie and I went over the three fuel stops but I'm assuming you'll go over everything in more detail.

TED

Absolutely. The night before the race. We're tracking the weather. Our hope is minimal headwinds and all the way to Wichita. We're all set up just outside of Bloomington if necessary.

MAGGIE

What's our top speed?

TED

She'll do two twenty, two twenty-five, faster with a tailwind, but fuel efficiency is as important as top speed. At two hundred miles per hour you're burning significantly less fuel than wide open. One fuel stop at two hundred mph will deliver better results than two stops at two hundred and twenty mph.

Maggie trades glances with Luke. Luke shrugs.

WALT

A few other details. And Maggie, I want you to understand, this stuff is important, both for the success of Beech Aviation and for your future as an aviator.

MAGGIE

Whatever it takes to succeed.

WALT

Tomorrow afternoon is the photo shoot at Bennett. Luke told you about Time magazine, but rest assured there'll be photographers there representing newspapers and magazines from all over the world. We have a special get-up for you, snazzy brown leathers with a Beech Aviation patch sewn onto one side and a Staggerwing patch sewn onto the other. Please wear that jacket during the shoot. It's pretty obvious you're a very photogenic young lady but remember to smile and when answering questions make sure to mention both the company and the airplane.

MAGGIE

I can do that, Mr. Beech. No sweat.

WALT

(smiles)

For these next few days, and maybe long after that if all goes well, you're the face of Beech Aviation.

Maggie again glances at Luke. This time Luke smiles.

TED

The day after tomorrow we move the Staggerwing to Floyd Bennett. The day before the race all the planes taxi around the tarmac for public viewing. Photographers will be back looking to grab shots of the pilots with their planes. It's a horse and pony show but it's excellent P.R.

MAGGIE

I hear Amelia's flying.

TED

(nods)

Her twin-engine Lockheed Electra. With a copilot. Helen Rickey.

MAGGIE

Hard to grab attention away from Amelia. She's a sponge.

TED

Just keep smiling, Maggie. You'll
get plenty of attention.

EXT. AFTERNOON. FLOYD BENNETT FIELD.

A beautiful summer day. Lots of activity inside the hangars and out on the tarmac. HUNDREDS OF PEOPLE have gathered. The public is here, as are many PHOTOGRAPHERS and REPORTERS from newspapers, magazines, and radio.

Airplanes and pilots vie for attention. A large contingent surrounds AMELIA EARHART.

A smaller but growing contingent has gathered around Maggie Rockwell who stands on the steps of the Floyd Bennett Field Terminal Building. She stands several feet above a group of REPORTERS shouting questions at her while photographers pop flashbulbs in her face.

Maggie seems entirely unfazed by the attention, as though she'd been doing this all her life. And she looks spectacular in her leathers with her green eyes shining and lovely locks flowing in the breeze.

REPORTER ONE

Where's this snazzy new flying
machine, Maggie?

REPORTER TWO

Yeah, Maggie, when do we see this
new plane, this... what's it
called?

MAGGIE

The Staggerwing! A bold new design
by Walter Beech and his chief
designer Ted Wells. Fellas, I gotta
tell you, I was flying her this
morning. Flew up to Nantucket and
around the tip of Cape Cod, and I
gotta say this is one terrific
airplane. Good enough, in my humble
opinion, to win the Bendix.

Off to the side Walt and Ted break into wide grins. Luke slaps them on the back.

LUKE

I told you, fellas.

Flashbulbs pop.

REPORTER THREE
What's powering that Staggerwing?

MAGGIE

Beech has a few different engines for the Staggerwing depending upon the plane's purpose, but the engine in the one I'll be flying into LA is the 450 horsepower Pratt and Whitney R-985. The best of all possible worlds. Powerful. Fast. Fuel efficient. And most important of all, dependable. Rock solid for a flight around the block or a race across the country.

The buzz spreads. The crowd grows. Soon it feels like Maggie has pulled just about everyone into her magnetic field.

Walt Beech just stands there and shakes his head.

WALT

You told us she had charisma, Luke, but it's the first time in our long acquaintance that I have to charge you with gross understatement.

LUKE

This is all good, Walt, but the best part is, the kid can fly.

EXT. MORNING. FLOYD BENNETT FIELD.

The following morning, under overcast skies, another large crowd has gathered at Floyd Bennett Field. More planes are on display, including Earhart's Lockheed Electra, Paul Pomeroy's Douglas DC-2, and Bill Gulick's Vultee V-1A.

Luke, Ted, and Walt stand on the edge of the tarmac and look skyward off to the east. Ted brings binoculars to his face, adjusts the focus knobs.

TED

Here she comes.

Moments later the Staggerwing soars over the field, turns, makes another pass, but this time lower, less than a hundred feet off the runway. Halfway across the field the plane does a double barrel roll that sends the crowd into a frenzy.

SPECTATOR ONE

Who is that?

SPECTATOR TWO
What plane is that?

SPECTATOR THREE
Gotta be a stunt pilot.

SPECTATOR FOUR
I think it's Maggie Rockwell. In
her Beech Staggerwing.

Maggie turns once more and this time comes in smooth and easy, a perfect landing, stops practically at the feet of her bosses. In her leather flight jacket, leather flying cap, and goggles, Maggie gives the crowd a chance to arrive before she exits the cabin and stands at the front of the lower wing.

Reporters gather and begin shouting.

REPORTER ONE
Sweet piece of flying there, Miss Rockwell! Where did you learn that?

MAGGIE
First learned in Montana, Mister.
Only way to avoid flocks of crows
and buzzards!

REPORTER ONE
Crows and buzzards?

MAGGIE
Then I made the acquaintance of that gentleman over there, the one and only Mr. Luke Whitney, and he took a cocky young pilot and turned her into the gal who's going to win this year's Bendix Trophy race.

REPORTER ONE
You sound confident.

MAGGIE
I am confident. After all I've got the best plane. Best mechanics. And the best designer.

Maggie points to Ted Wells.

MAGGIE (CONT'D)
And of course the very best owner.

And she points to Walter Beech.

A REPORTER and PHOTOGRAPHER from Time push through the crowd.

DOWNING

(shouts)

Al Downing, Miss Rockwell. Time magazine. We thought we might take a few pictures of you aboard your airplane. What do you say?

MAGGIE

I say sure.

Maggie poses on the wing, then climbs down and poses with one hand on the propeller, then aft standing with her hand on the tail. Flashbulbs pop.

DOWNING

I hear you're more than just a pilot, Miss Rockwell. I hear you're pretty good at riding horses.

MAGGIE

Grew up on a ranch in Montana, Mr. Downing. You learn to ride before you learn to walk.

DOWNING

Ha! Good one Miss Rockwell. Is it true you've done some stunt riding for the pictures? For Hollywood?

MAGGIE

I believe that's true, sir.

DOWNING

I'm also told you're a pretty smart gal, Miss Rockwell. In fact, word is you just graduated Summa Cum Laude from the California School of Engineering. And with a degree in aeronautical engineering no less.

MAGGIE

You wouldn't sound so flabbergasted Mr. Downing, if I was a boy.

DOWNING

Say what?

MAGGIE

(smiles)

Anything a boy can do I can too. Plus a few things boys can't do.

REPORTER TWO

Such as?

Maggie winks and smiles.

MAGGIE

I'll keep that between me and my maker. But I will tell you this: I don't just fly airplanes; I plan to design 'em too.

INT. AFTERNOON. MEETING ROOM AT FLOYD BENNETT FIELD.

RACE OFFICIALS meet with PILOTS and their SPONSORS. BOB EWING is the head official. He stands at a podium.

EWING

First off, welcome and thanks for participating in this year's Bendix Trophy race. This year, as you know, we're flying east to west, New York to LA rather than LA to Cleveland like in years past. Also we're happy to welcome our female flyers back for this year's race.

Light applause for the ladies in the room.

EWING (CONT'D)

We've had two late scratches, so we now stand at nine racers, six planes piloted by male aviators and three planes piloted by female aviators. We've changed the rules a bit and though I'm sure you're all aware of these changes I just want to briefly go over them.

BILL GULICK raises a hand and stands.

GULICK

Is it true, Bob, we're giving the ladies a little head start? They're going to fly to Pittsburgh after the meeting and start from there?

The ladies grumble. The gentlemen titter.

AMELIA EARHART stands.

EARHART

If there's anybody needs a head start, Bill, it's you in that gas guzzling, slow-flying Vultee. You could start in St. Louis and I'd still beat you to the coast.

Laughter from both the ladies and the gents.

EWING

No head starts but we will have a staggered start. Remember, it's a timed race. It's not who reaches LA first, it's who reaches LA fastest. You'll go off one by one every fifteen minutes or so starting at three am tomorrow morning.

PAUL POMEROY raises a hand and stands.

POMEROY

How is departure order determined?

EWING

In a minute we'll draw numbers out of a hat. One through nine. If you draw one you pick your departure time first. Draw nine you pick last. Clock starts the second your wheels leave the ground. The race will end at eight p.m. Pacific time tomorrow night. So even if you choose to depart New York at seven o'clock tomorrow morning, you'll have sixteen hours to finish.

Bob leaves the podium and walks around the room with his cap turned upside down in his hand. One by one the pilots draw a slip of paper from the cap.

Maggie glances at the number, shows it to Luke, Walt, and Bob. They move to the back of the room to confer quietly.

LUKE

Drawing four will pretty much allow us to depart whenever we like. In the past there's always been a rush to get off early. Personally, I don't like this strategy. First of all, you're up in the middle of the night, which resets your clock, and not in a good way. It's going to be a very long day, so you want to get some rest, maybe even some sleep. And second, why fly in the dark if it's not necessary. We know there's a storm building over the Midwest and possibly heading east. I don't want that to hit me in the dark if I can help it.

MAGGIE

I'm anxious to go, probably won't be able to lie down, let alone sleep, but what you say makes sense, Luke.

TED

What time does the sun rise?

LUKE

Five twenty-eight. But plenty of light in the sky before that. Any time after four forty-five works for me.

WALT

I'd love for there to be enough light to get some pictures of the Staggerwing taking off.

TED

Good idea, Walt. But really, Maggie, it's your call.

MAGGIE

What's the hurry? Let's roll at five thirty.

The men nod in agreement.

MAGGIE (CONT'D)

A five thirty takeoff will let me rest till around four, then get up, take a shower, take a little walk, have breakfast, and arrive here at the field a bit before five ready and raring to go.

INT. AFTER MIDNIGHT. HOTEL ROOM.

Maggie, in her hotel room, tosses and turns. She sits up, turns on the light. Sighs. Stands. Paces.

She sits at the desk. Turns on the lamp. Pen and paper rest on the desk. Maggie takes up the pen, begins to write:

Dear Fernando, How does love work when there's so much distance between us? How can we possibly

Maggie sighs, shakes her head, crumples up the paper, tosses it in the trash can beside the desk. It comes to rest atop a dozen or more pieces of crumpled-up paper.

Maggie stands, paces, glances out the window. Nothing but darkness out there.

She sits again at the desk, begins to write:

Dear Fernando, I lost my plane. I lost my job. I lost my guy. But I got my plane back. Now if I can just get my guy back.

Maggie gives the letter a quick glance, sighs, folds it into thirds, and stuffs it into a special airmail envelope.

She goes back to bed, lies down, folds her hands across her chest, breathes deeply, and falls sound asleep.

INT. EARLY MORNING. A DINER.

Still dark out. Maggie, Luke, Ted, and Walt sit in a diner near Floyd Bennett Field eating and drinking coffee.

MAGGIE

Crazy question but what do I do
when I... you know.

LUKE

(laughs)

First thing: stop drinking coffee.

MAGGIE

I'm serious.

TED

Behind the seat. A gallon container
with a nice big opening.

MAGGIE

Whew! What if I fill it?

LUKE

Open the window and dump it.

MAGGIE

Hey, these are serious matter for
the ladies.

TED

The other ladies have already left.
Amelia and Helen took off at four.
Katherine Bliss and Audrey Burns
right behind them at four fifteen.

MAGGIE

So who's still on the ground?

TED

Fuller left in his P-35 at four thirty. Pomeroy's set to go as we speak. Then it's just Bill Gulick at five and you at five-thirty.

MAGGIE

(nods)

So ignoring all my bluster about winning, I assume Paul Pomeroy is the favorite?

WALT

No question Pomeroy's customized DC-2 is the fastest plane in the race. And he's won in the past so he knows what it takes. But Earhart's Electra isn't much slower, and you have a pretty peppy little airplane yourself. One fuel stop for the Staggerwing plus a little bad luck for the DC-2 and, well...

LUKE

Heck, this is why we race. If we already knew the winner why bother?

MAGGIE

(smiles)

In it to win it.

EXT. EARLY MORNING. FLOYD BENNETT FIELD.

Maggie, Luke, Ted, and Walt on the tarmac. The Staggerwing stands before them as the sky lightens, though the sun has not yet risen over the horizon.

A line of photographers stands back fifty feet or so behind a rope barrier. Flashbulbs pop.

LUKE

How you feeling, kid?

Maggie, all smiles but obviously a little nervous.

MAGGIE

Never better, old man.

TED

A couple minutes, Maggie. Tanks have been topped off. Engine's warming. Everything in perfect order.

Maggie nods.

TED (CONT'D)

Latest weather shows clear flying east of the Alleghenies. Some light winds out of the northwest and some high clouds that'll be well above you. Let's take advantage of that northwest breeze. Head southwest across Jersey, over Philly, then straight into Maryland and Virginia all the way to the Blue Ridge.

MAGGIE

A slight change.

TED

Yup, but this route accomplishes two things. One, we fly south of the wide band of thunderstorms over the Alleghenies. And two, this is a slightly shorter route to Wichita. It'll be your call once you're west of the mountains. You can head northwest and easily make it into Bloomington for refueling. Or, if you're confident in your fuel supply, due west to Wichita.

MAGGIE

Sounds good.

TED

Light winds and we have a shot of making it with one stop.

MAGGIE

That's the plan.

A YOUNG MAN approaches the group. He says something quietly to Luke, hands him a piece of paper, and exits. Luke reads, whistles softly.

LUKE

Couple early birds are already in trouble. Ron Young's out of the race. Sudden loss of oil pressure on his Curtiss Wright. He had to made an emergency landing in a cornfield out near Lancaster.

WALT

That's a quick exit. And drops the field to what? Eight flyers?

LUKE

Maybe seven. Burt Rodgers just called in from an airfield near Hagerstown. Electrical storms and high winds forced his Brown B-2 down. He's hoping to take off again but has some gauge problems.

TED

If my geography's correct it also means the storm has pushed east of the mountains. Hagerstown's on this side of the Alleghenies.

MAGGIE

I can't take anymore talk. If we're gonna go, let's go.

Luke nods. Ted nods. They look at Walt. It's his plane after all. His company. His money. He strokes his chin, looks at the line of photographers.

WALT

Come on, Maggie. Let's go flying!
Just be careful up there.

Maggie smiles and climbs onto the wing of the Staggerwing. She turns and waves just as the sun climbs over the horizon.

The flashbulbs pop.

INT. EARLY MORNING. THE CABIN OF THE STAGGERWING.

Maggie enters the cabin, closes the door, and settles into the seat. She taxis to the far end of the runway and turns the Staggerwing into the wind. For several seconds she checks gauges, pedals, and switches.

MAGGIE

Come on, baby, just get me off the ground.

The Staggerwing rolls forward, slowly picks up speed, almost seems to lumber under the weight of all that fuel. Together Maggie and her plane use every last inch of runway before they lift off and head southwest over the Atlantic bound for Sandy Hook and the great state of California.

INT. MORNING. THE CABIN OF THE STAGGERWING.

Maggie flies over the Atlantic, then southwest across New Jersey.

EXT. MORNING. A PENNSYLVANIA CORNFIELD.

Ron Young's abandoned Curtiss Wright sits on the edge of the field with a blown gasket.

INT. MORNING. COCKPIT OF A BROWN B-2.

BURT RODGERS works on his aircraft on the tarmac at the airport in Hagerstown, Maryland.

INT. MORNING. LOCKHEED ELECTRA COCKPIT.

Amelia Earhart and her copilot HELEN RICKEY navigate their Lockheed through heavy wind and rain. They look concerned.

INT. MORNING. DOUGLAS DC-2 COCKPIT.

Paul Pomeroy navigates through the same storm.

INT. MORNING. VULTEE V-1A COCKPIT

Bill Gulick also navigates the storm.

INT. MORNING. THE CABIN OF THE STAGGERWING.

Maggie flies over Philadelphia at 212 mph. Clear skies.

INT. MORNING. SEVERSKY P-35 COCKPIT.

FRANK FULLER pilots his plane over Washington, D.C.

INT. LATE MORNING. DGA-6 COCKPIT.

HOWARD BENJAMIN, flying northwest, crosses Lake Erie and heads for Detroit.

INT. LATE MORNING. WEDELL WILLIAMS 44 COCKPIT.

KATHERINE BLISS and AUDREY BURNS follow Benjamin.

INT. LATE MORNING. THE CABIN OF THE STAGGERWING.

Maggie is now west of Washington, the Blue Ridge off to her right along with dark gray clouds and flashes of lightning. Clear skies to the south and east.

INT. LATE MORNING. BROWN B-2 COCKPIT.

Burt Rodgers taxis and takes off out of Hagerstown.

INT. LATE MORNING. LOCKHEED ELECTRA COCKPIT.

Earhart and Rickey clear the storm but something's amiss with the Lockheed. They land at a small airport near Columbus.

INT. LATE MORNING. DOUGLAS DC-2 COCKPIT.

Pomeroy clears the storm east of Cincinnati and flies on.

INT. LATE MORNING. VULTEE V-1A COCKPIT.

Gulick follows Pomeroy.

INT. LATE MORNING. SEVERSKY P-35 COCKPIT.

Fuller flies south to avoid the storm, stays well east of the Blue Ridge.

INT. LATE MORNING. THE CABIN OF THE STAGGERWING.

Maggie flies southwest on the east side of the Blue Ridge.

She shouts over the whine of the engine.

MAGGIE

Gotta head west! South is safe but
south's a loser. Come on, girl,
gotta head west. Gotta make a move!
Blast the weather. It's now or
never!

She takes one last look out her starboard window then turns in that direction, directly for the mountains, directly into the teeth of the storm.

INT. LATE MORNING. THE CABIN OF THE STAGGERWING.

The storm looms dead ahead but still miles off. Maggie checks her gauges, glances out at her wing tips.

She leans forward and peers skyward. Storm clouds reach as high as she can see. Dead ahead the peaks of the Blue Ridge loom. To the northwest the skies look black and ominous.

Maggie changes course slightly, heads southwest. Thunderclaps roar and lightning bolts streak the sky. The first raindrops pelt the windshield. Winds toss the Staggerwing about.

Maggie, face drawn tight, grips the yoke. She struggles to see through the rain and wind. And then, suddenly, there's the tip of a mountain peak looming just ahead.

The stunt pilot takes over. Maggie makes an instantaneous evasive maneuver by turning sharply to port and climbing as quickly as possible. The peak cleared, Maggie levels her ship and keeps flying.

A smile breaks across her face.

MAGGIE

Just about any other pilot, Mr. Beech, would've face-planted your airplane into that mountainside.

She clears the Blue Ridge and levels out at six thousand feet over the Cumberland Plateau as rain gives way to clouds and clouds give way to clear blue skies.

Maggie takes a few deep breaths and checks her fuel supply. She switches from a port fuel tank to a starboard fuel tank. On a piece of paper she makes a few calculations. Taps the point of the pencil on the paper, takes a few seconds to consider her options.

MAGGIE (CONT'D)

Go west, young lady. Wichita here we come. Might be getting close to empty on approach but we'll make it. Gotta make it.

The Staggerwing, Maggie Rockwell at the helm, flies on.

INT. AFTERNOON. SEVERSKY P-35 COCKPIT.

Frank Fuller flies farther south to avoid bad weather.

INT. AFTERNOON. VULTEE V-1A COCKPIT.

Bill Gulick sits on the ground in St. Louis refueling.

INT. AFTERNOON. LOCKHEED ELECTRA COCKPIT.

Earhart and Rickey fly high and straight over the Midwest but the Lockheed's airspeed indicator shows 186 mph. The deep frustration is evident on the famous flyer's face.

EXT. AFTERNOON. DOUGLAS DC-2 COCKPIT.

Paul Pomeroy climbs out of his plane on a remote airstrip west of the Ozarks. He checks the tail of the DC-2. He, too, looks frustrated.

INT. AFTERNOON. WEDELL-WILLIAMS 44 COCKPIT.

Katherine Bliss and Audrey Burns fly on with Kansas City off to the southeast.

INT. AFTERNOON. BROWN B-2 COCKPIT.

Burt Rodgers continues to fly but clearly his airplane is having mechanical trouble.

INT. AFTERNOON. DGA COCKPIT.

Howard Benjamin is over the Great Plains and flying well.

INT. AFTERNOON. THE CABIN OF THE STAGGERWING.

Maggie flies due west beyond the Ozark Plateau near the border of Missouri and Kansas. Headwinds are strong out here on the open plains. The Staggerwing struggles a bit through the turbulence.

Maggie works to keep the plane flying straight and level.

Her eyes constantly shift between the horizon and her gauges. She flips several switches looking for a tank that has any remaining fuel. As she does this she also scans below for possible emergency landing sites in case her fuel runs out.

In the distance an urban area comes into view.

She checks her map, locates Beech Aviation on the northwest side of Wichita, gives the location a tap.

The engine begins to cough and sputter as the fuel tanks run dry. She flips more switches.

MAGGIE

Come on, come on, come on, just a couple more miles.

Maggie spots the runway on the outskirts of the city. She checks for aircraft, spots none.

Running on fumes and practically gliding, Maggie brings the Staggerwing in for a smooth landing. She stops quickly and taxis toward the main hangar where three men stand waiting.

As soon as she stops and shuts down the engine they begin to refuel the plane.

Maggie exits the cabin onto the wing and jumps to the ground.

REN TRAUB, chief mechanic for Beech Aviation, steps forward and shakes Maggie's hand.

TRAUB

Good to see you, Miss Rockwell. You made excellent time. Six hours and fifty-six minutes. We should have you back in the air lickity-split. Just need a few minutes to fill these tanks.

MAGGIE

They're dead empty, Ren. So please fill them to the brim.

TRAUB

Will do, Miss Rockwell. How did it go up there?

MAGGIE

A little weather and a little wind but all said a fine flight.

TRAUB

I'll make a quick inspection. Any items you want checked?

MAGGIE

Some wind noise in the door. Might need securing. That's about it. She's running like a dream.

Traub nods.

MAGGIE (CONT'D)

The pilot needs a quick bathroom break.

TRAUB

(nods)

We'll be ready to roll when you get back.

Maggie dashes for the hangar.

INT. AFTERNOON. DOUGLAS DC-2 COCKPIT.

Paul Pomeroy again needs fuel. He lands at the airfield outside Amarillo. The field is a quagmire after a sudden thunderstorm. Pomeroy's DC-2 gets bogged down in knee-deep mud. He curses, cuts the engine, and climbs out. The favorite to win the Bendix trophy is now out of the race.

EXT. AFTERNOON. AIRFIELD OUTSIDE ALBUQUERQUE.

Burt Rodgers and his Brown B-2 are back on the ground, this time in New Mexico. The race is over for them also.

INT. AFTERNOON. SOMEWHERE OVER TEXAS.

Frank Fuller in his Seversky P-35 is still flying but he's far back and out of contention unless the other falters.

INT. AFTERNOON. VULTEE V-1A COCKPIT.

Bill Gulick in his Vultee is over the Colorado Plateau. He overtakes Howard Benjamin's DGA that left an hour earlier.

INT. AFTERNOON. LOCKHEED ELECTRA COCKPIT.

Earhart and Rickey fly the southern route and are now over Albuquerque, but they continue to struggle with their speed.

INT. AFTERNOON. WEDELL-WILLIAMS 44 COCKPIT.

Bliss and Burns fly over northern New Mexico near the Four Corners. They're in the lead but need to refuel.

INT. AFTERNOON. THE CABIN OF THE STAGGERWING.

Maggie, flying straight and true, races past Amarillo and into New Mexico at nearly two hundred and twenty mph. Despite Ted's advice, she's got the throttle wide open.

MAGGIE
All or nothing!

She passes northwest of Albuquerque. And soon after reaches the border of New Mexico and Arizona. She spots a plane dead ahead flying at a slightly higher altitude.

It's Earhart's Electra.

Maggie ascends, gives plenty of clearance, and flies alongside. She smiles and waves.

INT. AFTERNOON. LOCKHEED ELECTRA COCKPIT.

Earhart momentarily frowns, but then smiles, and waves back.

INT. AFTERNOON. THE CABIN OF THE STAGGERWING.

Maggie, all alone now, passes into California.

MAGGIE

Come on, come on, come on! If we have the fuel maybe just maybe we win this thing.

She flies on.

INT. LATE AFTERNOON. THE CABIN OF THE STAGGERWING.

Maggie passes Palm Springs to the south. She flies through a gap in the mountains and makes her approach into L.A.

She crosses an open desert, then reaches a populated area with scattered houses below. This gives way to more suburban housing, then to a congested urban area.

She spots the Rose Bowl just off to the north, checks her map, and quickly locates the Union Air Terminal northwest of Burbank. Maggie descends from three thousand feet to two thousand and then to a thousand feet.

She spots the runways and a large crowd gathered on the tarmac.

Also on the tarmac are two airplanes: Gulick's Vultee V-1A and Bliss and Burns' Wedell-Williams 44.

Maggie checks her watch: 6:22 Eastern time. 3:22 Pacific Time.

MAGGIE

Under thirteen hours! If I can get this bird on the ground!

The wind direction calls for a landing from the northeast but to save time Maggie decides to fly straight in. But just as she makes her approach, three military aircraft on maneuvers from a local base cross her flight path, nearly causing a midair collision.

Maggie is forced to make an instantaneous flight adjustment. She rolls to starboard, a full barrel roll, descends rapidly, but pulls level before crashing into the runway. No one expected the Staggerwing for at least another hour.

Maggie whistles softly, takes a deep breath, and climbs.

MAGGIE (CONT'D)
Dang, that was crazy close!

She circles, and now coming in with her nose into the wind, she makes a clean landing, and taxis across the tarmac.

The crowd surges forward. Maggie looks confused.

MAGGIE (CONT'D)
What are they doing?

She checks her watch, then glances at the two planes on the tarmac.

MAGGIE (CONT'D)
Katie Bliss left over an hour
before me. And Bill Gulick a half
hour before me. If he's been here
less than half an hour...

Maggie brings the Staggerwing to a stop and shuts down the engine.

The cheering crowd surrounds the plane.

MAGGIE (CONT'D)
My goodness! Did we do it? Is it
even possible...

EXT. EARLY EVENING. TARMAC AT UNION AIR TERMINAL BURBANK.

The Trophy presentation. The seven pilots who finished the race—Maggie Rockwell, Amelia Earhart, Helen Rickey, Katherine Bliss, Audrey Burns, Bill Gulick, and Frank Fuller—sit atop a platform before a large crowd. Five women and just two men.

TROY JACKSON, Bendix CEO, speaks into the microphone.

JACKSON
A terrific race this year. Just
five of nine planes finished but a
heck of a race. Miss Rockwell, if
you'll step up and receive your
trophy and your prize money. I'm
sure everyone would like to hear a
few words from you.

Maggie stands.

A nice round of applause. Some cheers and whistles.

Maggie steps up to the microphone.

MAGGIE

Not too much to say. Just happy I made it in one piece. I give all the credit to Walt Beech and Ted Wells for building such a really spectacular airplane. I just want to thank them for trusting me to fly it. I also want to thank Luke Whitney for turning a novice pilot into a Bendix Trophy race winner!

Maggie holds the trophy up high.

More applause and cheers.

A young man approaches the podium and hands Troy Jackson a stack of magazines. Troy looks, breaks into a wide smile, then hands a copy to each of the pilots on the podium.

Troy then approaches the microphone, hands a copy to Maggie, and holds up a copy for the crowd to see.

It's a picture of Maggie on the cover of Time magazine. And beneath the picture:

MAGGIE ROCKWELL: AVATRIX & AERONAUTICAL ENGINEER

JACKSON

How's that for a storybook ending?

More applause. More cheers. Maggie blushes.

MAGGIE

Well that's kind of embarrassing.

Laughter from the crowd.

MAGGIE (CONT'D)

I guess lastly I just want to say this. For a few years women weren't allowed to compete in the Bendix Trophy race. I thought it was because the boys didn't want us girls to get hurt.

Maggie half turns and opens her right arm to the pilots sitting behind her.

MAGGIE (CONT'D)
But now I see it's because the
fellas were afraid us girls would
beat their pants off.

The crowd roars.

EXT. EARLY EVENING. TARMAC AT UNION AIR TERMINAL BURBANK.

The sun begins to set. The shadows grow long.

The crowd disperses.

The pilots chat among themselves on the podium.

Maggie steps off the podium surrounded by well-wishers. A DELIVERY BOY hands her a telegram. It reads:

CONGRATULATIONS MAGGIE. WELL DONE, KID. WALT, TED & I SHOULD REACH LA TOMORROW. CAN'T WAIT TO CELEBRATE. IN THE MEANTIME THINK ABOUT A FULL-TIME DESIGN JOB WITH WHITNEY AVIATION. I'M GOING INTO PARTNERSHIP WITH WALT ON A WHOLE NEW MODEL & HECK, I'M GONNA NEED A TOP-NOTCH DESIGNER! THE OLD MAN

Maggie shakes her head and smiles.

People shake her hand and pat her on the back.

Suddenly Dan Dolan, the Lockheed guy who interviewed Maggie some weeks earlier, pushes his way through the crowd.

DOLAN
Miss Rockwell! Miss Rockwell!

MAGGIE
(turns)
Yes?

DOLAN
Do you remember me?

MAGGIE
I most certainly do.

Dolan carries a copy of Time magazine in his hand.

DOLAN
Dan Dolan from Lockheed.

MAGGIE
What can I do for you?

DOLAN

It's what I can for you.

MAGGIE

Oh, and what's that?

DOLAN

A job. In our design department.

Maggie has a good laugh over that one. She turns away.

MAGGIE

Doing what? Getting coffee for the
boys?

DOLAN

Miss Rockwell, wait. Don't you...
Aren't you interested—

MAGGIE

Too late, buster. Already have
myself a job. At Whitney Aviation.
In the future, you'd be wise to
remember, a woman can do anything a
man can do, and usually, because
she needs to try so much harder,
she'll almost always do it better.

Dolan's mouth hangs open as Maggie walks on.

The crowd thins. Suddenly no one stands or walks in front of Maggie for thirty or forty feet.

And there, a broad smile on his handsome face, and with his arms outstretched, stands Fernando.

Maggie stops. Stares. Smiles.

And breaks into a sprint that ends when she leaps into Fernando's arms.

INT. AFTERNOON. STAGGERWING CABIN.

Maggie sits in the pilot seat, Fernando in the copilot seat. Several pieces of luggage occupy the rear cabin behind their seats. There are several bouquets of flowers.

They turn and smile at one another as they clasp hands and fly into the clear blue yonder.

THE END