

**HOWARD WINSTON'S
LAST FLIGHT**

a musical fantasy by
David Jacklin and Dan Black
from an original concept by
Dan Black

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Howard Winston's Last Flight was given its premiere performance August 3 to 29, 1987 by Perth Summer Theatre, in the theatre of St. James' Parish Hall, Perth, Ontario, with the following credits:

PST Artistic Director, David Jacklin
General Manager, Normalyn McLellan

Howard, Ted Marshall
Lily, Alix Goulet
Reuben, Stephen Flett
Clare/Vida, Merle Matheson
Al/Jerry, David Jacklin
The Boy, Zachary Smith

THE CHARACTERS

Howard Winston, an elderly man, now wheel-chair bound, sufferer of a recent stroke.

Clare, Howard's grown daughter. |

Vida, Howard's mother. |

| these roles are doubled

Jerry, Clare's husband. |

Al, Howard's father. |

Lily, a girl whom Howard meets as a boy, later his wife and Clare's mother. We see Lily only as a young woman.

Reuben, a boy who befriends Howard and whom Howard looks after in adult life. We see Reuben only as a young man, but his "old" body is onstage throughout, in the form of a dummy in a wheel-chair.

The Boy, Howard's memory of himself as a youth.

THE SETTING

One set representing the outdoor patio of a nursing home somewhere in Canada, circa 1990. There should be one doorway leading to the rest of the home mid-stage right with an additional entrance below the door; part of a garden with trellises and arches is shown stage left, with entrances through, above and below it. A wall with rising decorative ends stretches upstage, extending from the garden stage left to the wall of the home stage right. This wall is a minimum of six feet high, and as much more as the sight lines will allow. It needs a runway built behind it to allow The Boy and Al to walk "on top" of it.

The set should be made to look like modern stonework – nice enough, but still with an institutional feel to it.

MUSICAL NUMBERS

ACT ONE

1.	p. 1	OVERTURE.....	Instrumental
2.	p. 4	LILY SAYS.....	HOWARD
3.	p. 6	THE REAL WORLD.....	CLARE/HOWARD
4.	p. 17	BORN ON WINGS.....	HOWARD
5.	p. 19	THE WAY OF THE WORLD.....	AL/VIDA
6.	p. 21	LILY SAYS, reprise.....	HOWARD
7.	p. 23	I DON'T UNDERSTAND HIM.....	LILY/HOWARD
8.	p. 27	QUARTET.....	VIDA/REUBEN/AL/LILY
9.	p. 32	WATCH ME NOW.....	HOWARD/COMPANY

ACT TWO

10.	p. 35	ENTR'ACTE.....	Instrumental
11.	p. 36	HE'S AN OLD MAN.....	JERRY/CLARE
12.	p. 40	HOWARD, IT'S BEAUTIFUL HERE..	LILY
13.	p. 42	FIRE IN THE NIGHT.....	LILY/VIDA/AL/REUBEN
14.	p. 45	FIRE IN THE SKY, 1st reprise..	LILY
15.	p. 47	FIRE IN THE SKY, 2nd reprise..	LILY
16.	p. 48	FIRE IN THE SKY, 3rd reprise..	LILY
17.	p. 51	EASY COME, EASY GO.....	HOWARD/THE CROWD
18.	p. 53	EASY COME, EASY GO, reprise...	REUBEN/THE CROWD
19.	p. 58	LILY, IT'S BEAUTIFUL HERE.....	HOWARD/LILY
20.	p. 60	FINALE (WATCH ME NOW).....	HOWARD/LILY
21.	p. 63	FINALE ULTIMO.....	Instrumental

INSTRUMENTATION

The musical score was originally created on and conceived for computer-controlled synthesizer playback. With modern equipment, it could be performed live by 3 keyboardists. A printed condensed score, specialized samples and full score in General Midi format are available, along with a performance CD.

HOWARD WINSTON'S LAST FLIGHT
a musical fantasy in two acts

ACT ONE

fifth draft

(the veranda of a rural nursing home; late afternoon in early fall; a deck with a wall bordering each side; lounge chairs and plants; behind we see trees and sky stretching off to the horizon; turned US is a wheelchair with someone (OLD REUBEN) sitting motionless in it)

(music as house lights dim; it sounds something like birds singing; then over that comes the growing sound of a pursuit plane, with sporadic gunfire which gets louder and louder then zooms overhead as the stage and house lights suddenly go dark; the music ends; sounds of birds chirping as the lights come up; OLD REUBEN is in his wheelchair DL; HOWARD sits in his, DC, tossing bird seed about; CLARE sits in a lounge chair reading the National Enquirer; she looks up at OLD REUBEN)

CLARE: Disgusting; watching him drip like a leaky faucet.

(HOWARD's motion attracts her notice)

Father! Father, stop throwing that about! People will slip in it.

(JERRY enters, businesslike and efficient)

JERRY: I have to go, Clare. I've just got time to run across town and close the deal. I'll be back at five, alright?

CLARE: If you have to. Watch the driving.

JERRY: Goodbye, Howard.

(no answer)

CLARE: He doesn't even know you're there. Just look at him, staring off into God knows where.

JERRY: It's getting worse.

CLARE: I know. What are we going to do?

JERRY: I don't know. I have to go.

CLARE: Jerry, we have to discuss this.

JERRY: Now?

CLARE: Why not now?

JERRY: I told them on the phone I'd be there in fifteen minutes.

CLARE: We were going to spend the afternoon, here. We. The two of us.

JERRY: This is important.

CLARE: So is my father.

JERRY: I know that, but when the beeper calls . . .

CLARE: I'm going to drown that beeper in the pool, someday.

JERRY: Well, before you do, wait 'til the pool is paid for. I'm going to be late.

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(JERRY kisses CLARE quickly and exits; HOWARD is still feeding the pigeons)

CLARE: Father, will you stop that?

HOWARD: *(still tossing)* They're singing, Reuben. Can you hear?

CLARE: 'Course he can't hear! Crazy old coot.

HOWARD: Coot! Coot! The owl has a hoot! Coot! Coot! The finch stole the flute!

CLARE: Hush! I'm trying to read.

HOWARD: Reuben . . . his name is Reuben. Reuben likes hockey . . . hockey likes Reuben. Poor, poor Reuben.

CLARE: Why is it, every time I come here, I can't relax?

HOWARD: *(to CLARE)* Your name is Heather . . . Heather likes weather. Weather don't like Heather . . . poor, poor Heather.

CLARE: It's Clare, Father! Clare!

HOWARD: Clare . . . Clare . . . only daughter Clare . . .

CLARE: The man wins a balloon.

HOWARD: Clare . . . Clare . . . chubby old mare.

CLARE: That's enough!

HOWARD: *(whinnying)* Whee-hee-heeee! Whee-hee-heee!

CLARE: I'll call Nurse Stark! She'll lock you in your room with . . . what's-his-name.

HOWARD: Doc Oliver . . . Doc Oliver likes Shakespeare . . . Shakespeare likes Doc Oliver . . . poor, poor doc.

CLARE: He's worse than you are. They caught him last week, reciting Hamlet.

HOWARD: So?

CLARE: While peeing off the balcony onto the junipers. They should send him away.

HOWARD: Poor, poor Clare.

CLARE: Cut it out. I'm tired. I spent all morning at your house, tossing out back issues of Aviation Weekly. There must have been thousands of them. Piled everywhere. I'm glad I got you out of there when I did.

HOWARD: No. No. No, you're not.

CLARE: Don't argue!

HOWARD: No. You're not like her.

CLARE: Like who? What on earth are you talking about?

HOWARD: Not like Lily. Poor, poor Lily.

CLARE: Mother is dead, so stop comparing me to her, and for God's sake, stop saying, "Poor, poor."

HOWARD: Lily . . . Lily. Poor . . . Lily. She's coming. We're going to fly together. Far, far away.

CLARE: You're not flying anywhere.

HOWARD: How come?

CLARE: Because.

HOWARD: 'Cause why?

CLARE: Because you're a silly old fool who has just had a stroke.

HOWARD: Doesn't stop me from flying. Never stopped Isabel. Wheels up at eighteen-hundred hours.

CLARE: You're going to bed at eighteen-hundred hours. You need lots of rest.

HOWARD: *(sits straight and pulls on a pilot's cap)* Clouds! I have to be strong to fly in clouds.

(he holds out his arms like wings)

The pigeons taught me. They're my friends. Isabel taught me. She was my friend. But, she never taught me about landing.

CLARE: Stop it! You and your God damn pigeons! Do you have any idea how much crap I had to clean off your porch? You're lucky the postman didn't slip and break a leg. Dirty, filthy birds.

HOWARD: *(rolling away from her)* No. No, you're not.

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(music; he listens to the birds)

How's that? You don't say? Lily's bringing my wings. Sweet . . . sweet Lily.

CLARE: Don't be ridiculous.

HOWARD: I've waited such a long, long time.

CLARE: I'll call Nurse Stark. Do you want to be locked up, like Doc Oliver?

HOWARD: LILY SAYS THEY'RE BEAUTIFUL WINGS.
ALL GOLD AND SILVER.
LILY SAYS SUCH BEAUTIFUL THINGS.
YOU OUGHT TO HEAR HER!

LILY TELLS ME SECRETS,
WHERE AND HOW AND WHY.
SHE WILL COME FOR ME, YET!
HELP ME TO THE SKY, ON MY

GOLD AND SILVER WINGS,
LIGHTER THAN A CLOUD.
WHEN I WEAR MY WINGS,
LILY WILL BE PROUD.

Oh, you will, Lily!

CLARE: That does it! Nurse Stark! Nurse Stark! Where are they when you need them?

(she exits into the home)

HOWARD: LILY SAYS MY NAME'S ON THE WINGS.
FLIGHT LEF-TENANT WINSTON.
IT'S NOT EASY EARNING YOUR WINGS.
YOU HAVE TO STALL AND SPIN SOME.

LILY'S KEPT THEM SAFELY,
WAITING FOR THIS DAY.
SOON THE CLOUDS WILL TAKE ME,
I'LL BE ON MY WAY, ON MY

GOLD AND SILVER WINGS,
LIGHTER THAN A CLOUD!
WHEN I WEAR MY WINGS,
LILY WILL BE PROUD.

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SOME FOLKS TRY TO SOAR UP ON HIGH,
BUT NEVER EARN A FEATHER.
OTHERS WIN A PLACE IN THE SKY
AND FLY FOREVER!

ON THEIR
GOLD AND SILVER WINGS . . .
SHINING IN THE AIR.
WHEN I WEAR MY WINGS,
I CAN JOIN THEM THERE.

LILY SAYS THEY'RE BEAUTIFUL WINGS,
ALL GOLD AND SILVER!
LILY SAYS SUCH BEAUTIFUL THINGS.
YOU OUGHT TO HEAR HER!

LILY SAYS SHE'S COMING FOR ME!
I MUST BE READY!
LILY SAYS THEY'RE WAITING FOR ME!
LILY, I'M READY!

LILY SAYS . . .
LILY SAYS . . .
LILY SAYS . . .

Clare?

LILY SAYS . . .

Clare!

SOME FOLKS TRY TO SOAR UP ON HIGH,
BUT NEVER EARN A FEATHER!
OTHERS WIN A PLACE IN THE SKY,
AND SOME FIND ONLY BONES . . .

(music ends; CLARE returns)

CLARE: They're never around. But, I will find them if you don't behave yourself. It's like having a child. Shall we lock you up?

HOWARD: No! No cage. I have to be able to fly!

CLARE: Then try to be sensible. We don't want you to get hurt, that's all. If you don't know what's going on around you, we'll have to lock you up.

HOWARD: If you lock me up, I'll be stuck here on the ground. Stuck like Reuben is stuck. You won't do that to me, will you? Tell me you won't do that. I did it to Reuben! Sorry, Reuben. Sorry. Poor Reuben! Poor Lily! Poor . . . poor!

CLARE: Stop that! This is the real world here!

(she goes to him and rubs the back of his neck)

Rest, father. Nice and easy. That's it. Clare will look after you, now. Poor, poor Pa.

HOWARD: Pa . . . poor, poor Pa. He thought he could go without wings.
Wake. Wake.
Munch. Munch.
Off to work.
Bang, bang his hammer sang.
Collect his pay.
Back home to wake, wake another day.
Poor pa. He fell to you know where. He burned to a crisp.

CLARE: Breathe deeply, father. Close your eyes. Remember how you used to fall asleep on the porch? It was so quiet. The sun streaming in. The breeze off the lake. That's it. Reuben likes naps.

HOWARD: *(suddenly sitting forward; musical sting)* Reuben likes hockey. Feed the birds.

CLARE: Shhh. The birds will be here when you wake.

HOWARD: *(musical sting)* Reuben.

CLARE: So will Reuben.

HOWARD: *(musical sting)* So will Lily.

CLARE: *(music under)* WHY DO YOU SAY THOSE THINGS?
MOTHER'S DEAD!
WHY CAN'T YOU GET THESE THINGS
THROUGH YOUR HEAD?
SHE DIED TEN YEARS AGO!
REMEMBER?
IT WAS AN AIRPLANE CRASH.
REMEMBER?

OH, WHAT'S THE USE?
HE DOESN'T LISTEN.
THERE'S SOME EXCUSE;
IT'S HIS CONDITION.
HE DOESN'T KNOW
WHAT'S GOING ON
IN THE REAL WORLD.

(music vamps; CLARE sits and picks up her Enquirer)

Good God, what's next? There's some guy in Texas who thinks he's a camel.
Hasn't touched water for a month, and he's turning into a hunchback.

OH, WHAT'S THE USE?
HE DOESN'T LISTEN!
JUST PUT YOURSELF
IN HIS POSITION.
HE DOESN'T KNOW
WHAT'S GOING ON
IN THE REAL WORLD.

HE'S OLD AND PAST THE POINT
WHERE HE CAN TELL WHAT'S FANTASY.
I'M TOLD THESE VISIONS SOON
WILL BE HIS WHOLE REALITY.

LIVING IN A DREAM WORLD WHERE THE
PAST IS PRESENT, TOO.
NEVER KNOWING WHAT IS REAL

OR WHAT IS FALSE OR TRUE.

SOMEONE BETTER SHOOT ME,
IF I EVER GET LIKE THAT.

(spot on HOWARD)

HOWARD: OH, MOM! I WROTE A LITTLE POEM.
OH, MOM! YOU WANNA HEAR A POEM?
IT'S ALL ABOUT MY WINGS.
IT'S CALLED "OF ALL THE THINGS"!

OF ALL THE THINGS I WISH TO BE,
A PIGEON'S WING TAKES HOLD OF ME.
OVER FIELDS AND OVER LAKES,
I FLY SO HIGH, FOR GOODNESS SAKES.

SOME SAY I'M CRAZY.
SOME SAY I'M BLUE,
BUT I JUST TELL THEM,
I LOVE TO COO.

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*(silhouetted against the sky, a boy's figure is seen, walking
along the top of the railing; a woman's voice (CLARE as
VIDA) is heard from the darkness)*

VIDA: Howard! Where'd you get to, boy?

HOWARD: Up here, mom. Up on the widow's walk.

VIDA: Land sakes, boy! What in heaven's name are you doing up there? Are you
trying to get yourself killed?

HOWARD: No. I'm just talking.

VIDA: Talking? Did you say talking?

HOWARD: Yep. Been talking all day.

VIDA: Talking to whom?

HOWARD: Miss Isabel. Miss Isabel Pigeon. She's telling me about flapulation.

VIDA: Flapu . . . what?

HOWARD: Flapulation. It's what the pigeons call flying.

VIDA: Off the roof! When your Pa comes home, he'll take his belt to you. You know what he says about being on the roof. You know what he says . . . you know what he says . . .

(lights back to CLARE and HOWARD)

CLARE: You know what it says here? Some guy in Alaska thinks he's a grizzly bear! Really! Told his family he was going to hibernate for the winter, went into the basement and he's been asleep for three months. Some people.

OH, WHAT'S THE USE?
HE DOESN'T LISTEN.
HE DOESN'T HEAR.
IN HIS CONDITION,
HE DOESN'T KNOW
WHAT'S GOING ON
IN THE REAL WORLD.

Father, do you want to go in? It's a little chilly. Father?

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OH, WHAT'S THE USE?
HE DOESN'T LISTEN!
HE TALKS TO GHOSTS
AND APPARITIONS.
HE DOESN'T KNOW
WHAT'S GOING ON
IN THE REAL WORLD.

EACH DAY, HE'S MORE UNCLEAR.
HIS MIND IS FADING BIT BY BIT.
EACH DAY, I SHOW UP HERE.
READ MAGAZINES OR LEARN TO KNIT.

EVERY DAY HIS DREAM WORLD SEEMS TO
HOLD HIM MORE AND MORE.

IF THAT'S THE WAY THAT I'LL END UP,
I'D RATHER DIE BEFORE.

SOMEONE BETTER SHOOT ME,
IF I EVER GET LIKE THAT.

HOWARD: OH, MOM! I KNOW A LITTLE SECRET,
MOM! PROMISE ME YOU'LL KEEP IT?
I KNOW A GREAT, BIG SECRET.
SHE TAUGHT ME HOW TO FLY!

(THE BOY reappears in silhouette; he is flapping his arms, very gracefully)

Flapulation rule number one: lean way, way out over the roof and . . .

VIDA: Not again! Have you no brains, boy? Get back!

HOWARD: Flapulation rule number two: Stretch your wings and then flap as hard as you can.

(THE BOY quickens his pace)

VIDA: Howard! Your father will crucify me!

(silence for a moment as THE BOY flaps his arms; he stops)

HOWARD: What's the matter, mom? I ain't gonna fly. Least not until Miss Isabel teaches me to land.

VIDA: You scared me half to death, boy! I ought to smack you.

HOWARD: Sorry.

VIDA: Get down this instant!

HOWARD: Mom!

VIDA: This instant! *(a sound)* Dear God! It's your father! It's your father! Father . . .

(lights back to CLARE and HOWARD; THE BOY's silhouette fades)

CLARE: Father? Father?

HOWARD: NOW I'M ALL ALONE,
NO ISABEL, NO LILY.
MOTHER GONE AND FATHER, TOO.
(I'M ALL ALONE.

CLARE: (I'M HERE FOR YOU, FATHER.
JERRY AND I, MY HUSBAND AND I!

HOWARD: Clare?

CLARE: Yes.

HOWARD: I DON'T UNDERSTAND.
MY FRIENDS ARE GONE, JUST REUBEN.
REUBEN, WHO CAN'T HEAR ME NOW.
(I'M ALL ALONE.

(
CLARE: (OH, WHAT'S THE USE?

(WHAT WILL WE DO WITH YOU, JERRY AND I?
(WE'VE GOT OUR OWN LIVES TO LIVE.

(
HOWARD: (WHAT WILL I DO, NOW HERE ALL ALONE?

CLARE: (YOU KNOW THAT WE LOVE YOU, JERRY AND I.
(BUT WE'VE GOT OUR OWN LIVES TO LIVE.

(
HOWARD: (EVERYONE'S LEFT ME HERE ALL ALONE
(MOTHER AND LILY AND . . .

(LILY SAYS THEY'RE BEAUTIFUL WINGS . . .
(LILY SAYS SUCH BEAUTIFUL THINGS . . .

(
CLARE: (DAD, ARE YOU LIST'NING?
(HE CAN'T EVEN HEAR!

(WHAT'S THE USE? WHAT'S THE USE? WHAT'S THE USE?
(HE DOESN'T KNOW . . .

(
HOWARD: (SHE'S COMING. I'M WAITING. I'M READY.
(READY TO FLY . . .

(THERE IN THE SKY IS THE . . .

(
CLARE: (WHAT'S GOING ON IN THE . . .

BOTH: REAL WORLD!

(music ends)

CLARE: Hey, listen to this. Says there's this eighty-year old Boston fisherman who has developed gills and a dorsal fin. How 'bout that? Father? Father?

*(no answer; lights change; music; LILY enters, oblivious to
THE BOY above, who is talking to the pigeon)*

HOWARD: That's no good. You can't fool me. You have to spread your tail feathers more.

(LILY stops and looks cautiously about)

And lift your rump up.

(LILY is shocked)

HOWARD: And stick your breast 'way out. That way, you catch the breeze.

(she finally sees him)

LILY: I can see you!

HOWARD: I'm sorry?

LILY: I said, "I can see you!"

HOWARD: Well, I can see you, too.

LILY: Obviously! And, you ought to be smacked!

HOWARD: Why is everybody into smacking, today?

LILY: What you really need is soap . . . for your mouth.

HOWARD: Why?

LILY: For saying those things.

HOWARD: What things?

LILY: You know . . . breasts . . . and rumps. You're not even supposed to notice that I have them.

HOWARD: I didn't. Do you? Oh, yes, you do.

LILY: Stop that!

HOWARD: Poorishum.

LILY: What?

HOWARD: Poorishum. It means . . . sure, no problem.

LILY: I've never heard of it.

HOWARD: Oh, it's a word alright, but you won't find it in any dictionary.

LILY: Then it can't be a word.

HOWARD: It is.

LILY: In what language? Martian?

HOWARD: Pigeon.

LILY: Pigeon what?

HOWARD: Just pigeon. When you came along, I was talking to one. A pigeon friend, Miss Isabel. You're as pretty as she is, so I might as well talk to you in her language.

LILY: Aren't you kind of old to be playing with pigeons?

HOWARD: That's where you're wrong. See, I'm not playing. I'm learning to fly.

LILY: And, this Miss . . . Isabel's teaching you?

HOWARD: That's right. Today, it's a test. I have to tell her what she's doing wrong and what she's doing right. She hasn't stumped me yet.

LILY: You're serious, aren't you? I'd like to fly.

HOWARD: You would?

LILY: *(She twirls)* Sure. Floating. Spinning. Gliding. It would be like dancing in the air.

HOWARD: Everybody else thinks I'm strange.

LILY: I'd better go.

HOWARD: I bet Miss Isabel'd teach you, if I asked. She's very nice.

LILY: I have to go to the hospital.

HOWARD: Are you sick?

LILY: I'm a volunteer. I carry bed-pans and change sheets. All those sick, old people. It's so sad when they get like that.

HOWARD: Too bad you have to go. Maybe some other time.

LILY: Maybe. What's your name?

HOWARD: Howard. Howard Winston.

LILY: Well, Howard Winston, don't fall.

HOWARD: I won't.

LILY: I mean it. Be careful. It's a long way down.

HOWARD: Poorishum. If I get into the air this afternoon, I'll glide by the hospital to see you.

LILY: Don't go out of your way.

HOWARD: Oh, it's only about four lullasweeps.

LILY: Lulla . . .

HOWARD: . . . sweep. That's a pigeon word. It means the average distance you can glide without needing to flapulate on any given day. It varies according to altitudes and wind conditions, but today, the hospital is about four lullasweeps away. So, I'll glide by, later.

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LILY: You do that. Keep your tail feathers up.

HOWARD: Always.

(she exits)

Hey! What's your name?

(lights change)

Her name was Lily. Lily was the only human who understood. Except Reuben.

(REUBEN enters with his stick, playing hockey)

I think, at the end, he understood. He just didn't know how. Poor, poor Reuben.

HOWARD: OF ALL THE THINGS I WISH TO BE,
A PIGEON'S WING TAKES HOLD OF ME.
OVER FIELDS AND OVER LAKES,
I FLY SO HIGH, FOR GOODNESS SAKES.
SOME SAY I'M CRAZY.
SOME SAY I'M BLUE,
BUT I JUST TELL THEM

I LOVE TO COO.

REUBEN: *(speaking upward)* Hey, you up there! Yeah, you! What the heck do you think you're doing?

HOWARD: Quiet! You'll frighten her.

REUBEN: Frighten who?

HOWARD: Miss Isabel. We're hiding out.

REUBEN: You got a girly on our roof? A girly?

HOWARD: Shhh!

REUBEN: Has she . . . *(looking around and whispering)* Has she . . .

HOWARD: Has she what?

REUBEN: You know. Has she got nice jugs?

HOWARD: Jugs?

REUBEN: You know . . . bazoos.

HOWARD: Oh. No bazoos.

REUBEN: Figures.

HOWARD: What figures?

REUBEN: That any girly you'd have on our roof'd be flatter'n pee on a plate.

HOWARD: Keep your voice down.

REUBEN: Why should I? It's my house.

HOWARD: Whisper.

REUBEN: Why'd ya pick our roof? Take her to yours.

HOWARD: Can't. My pa'd shoot her.

REUBEN: Your pa'd shoot a girly?

HOWARD: Says he'll blow her head off.

REUBEN: Wow! Your pa must be one mean old man.

HOWARD: He is not!

REUBEN: He shoots girlies.

HOWARD: He does not!

REUBEN: He threatens to!

HOWARD: He does not!

REUBEN: Now, who's yelling?

HOWARD: I am not!

(sound of wings fluttering)

You scared her!

REUBEN: I scared her?

HOWARD: Isabel! Come back!

(REUBEN watches Isabel fly)

REUBEN: It's a bird.

HOWARD: She trusted me.

REUBEN: A god-damn pigeon.

HOWARD: I told her it was safe.

REUBEN: What the hell are you doing on my roof, talking to a god-damn pigeon?

HOWARD: It's a secret.

REUBEN: Yeah, I'll bet it is.

HOWARD: Well, it is.

REUBEN: You better tell me. My pa's got a gun, too, you know.

HOWARD: No!

REUBEN: Well?

HOWARD: She's teaching me to fly.

REUBEN: You belong in a loony-bin.

HOWARD: Who was pretending he was Joliet? She's teaching me to fly!

REUBEN: Alright! She's teaching you to fly. A pigeon, with a brain the size of a walnut, is teaching you to fly. What do you waste your time doing things like that for?

HOWARD: I don't think it's wasted. Better'n skating around, hurting people.

REUBEN: Sissy. My Pa says, after scratching your butt, the best feeling in the world is skates slicing ice.

HOWARD: He's never been flying. Miss Isabel says it's the most wonderful, the most beautiful thing that any person can do.

REUBEN: You mean any pigeon.

HOWARD: People, too.

REUBEN: Squawk! Squawk! Quack! Quack!

HOWARD: Not a duck; a pigeon.

REUBEN: Coo! Coo! Cuckoo!

HOWARD: Not quite. I tuck my arms in this way. Then I drop my shoulders some. Pull in my neck and look away.

REUBEN: *(following instructions)* From what? Look away from what?

HOWARD: The sun. We pigeons never look at the sun.

REUBEN: Oh. *(beat)* I am not a pigeon! You got pigeons on the brain.

HOWARD: Didn't think you'd understand.

REUBEN: You calling me stupid?

HOWARD: No, not stupid.

REUBEN: What, then? Go on, I dare ya.

HOWARD: You just don't believe, that's all.

REUBEN: I believe.

HOWARD: In what?

REUBEN: In hockey. Kid Carson! Kid Carson steals the puck! Belts one player and another! Crosses the blue line. In front of the net! He shoots; he scores! Kid Carson!

HOWARD: Kid Carson, huh? Hey, want to play a game?

REUBEN: What kind of game?

HOWARD: I'll act something out. You guess what I am. Then you act something out, and I guess.

REUBEN: That's for sissies.

HOWARD: Alright. You probably couldn't guess anyway.

REUBEN: Who says I couldn't! You're on.

(music; slowly lights cross-fade to THE BOY, on the rail, miming a bird hatching from an egg, as HOWARD sings)

HOWARD: Good. Watch me, now.

WATCH ME, NOW.
WATCH AND SEE.
WATCH THE CHANGES
INSIDE OF ME.

I GROW SMALL,
I GROW LIGHT.
I GROW DOWN AND
OUT OF SIGHT.

WE ARE BORN AND GROW AND DIE
AND SOME WILL RUN AND SOME WILL FLY,
AND EARLY ON, I KNEW THAT I
WAS BORN WITH WINGS.

TIME, THAT'S MEASURED DAY BY DAY,
AND BEAT BY BEAT, WILL SLIP AWAY.
EVERY WHISPER THAT WE PRAY

IS BORNE ON WINGS.

I FEEL MY YEARS UPON ME . . . ECHOES . . .
BEAT UPON MY INWARD EAR . . .
I HEAR THE YEARS BEHIND ME . . .
WHISPERS NOW . . .
NOW, THEY SHOUT . . .
WHISPERS, ONCE AGAIN!

THESE ARE FACES; THESE ARE DAYS;
AND THEY REFUSE TO FADE AWAY.
AND SO, I HOLD THEM WHILE I MAY,
THESE YESTERDAYS.

(THE BOY continues his mime to music)

WE ARE BORN AND GROW AND DIE,
AND SOME WILL RUN AND SOME WILL FLY,
AND, EARLY ON, I KNEW THAT I
WAS BORN WITH WINGS . . .

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(the music ends as THE BOY's mime does; CLARE has exited)

REUBEN: Not bad. I know what it was.

HOWARD: Good!

REUBEN: A chicken hatching.

HOWARD: Not a chicken.

REUBEN: A pigeon.

HOWARD: Right. You do one.

REUBEN: That's easy.

*(using his hockey stick as a gun, he mimes shooting, cleaning,
baking and eating, a pigeon)*

Well?

HOWARD: You're horrible.

REUBEN: Pigeon pie's delicious!

HOWARD: Cannibal!

REUBEN: Nutcase! Get off our roof!

(he swings his stick at HOWARD)

HOWARD: Careful!

(VIDA enters as REUBEN swings his stick)

REUBEN: Come on, pigeon! Off our roof!

VIDA: Stop it! Stop it! You'll kill him!

(REUBEN stops and looks at VIDA for a long moment, then runs out)

VIDA: Why was he doing that?

HOWARD: He doesn't understand.

VIDA: I see. I think you'd better come down.

HOWARD: Miss Isabel's gone. I don't know if she'll ever come back.

VIDA: Your father will be along any minute. He'll . . .

HOWARD: He doesn't understand, either. He never will in a million years.

VIDA: Please, Howard. I won't say it, again.

HOWARD: Miss Isabel! Come back, Miss Isabel!

VIDA: Get down!

AL: *(OFF)* VIDA!

VIDA: It's your father! Quick, boy, hide yourself!

AL: Don't try to hide him! I see the idiot! Our roof ain't enough for him. Now, he's got to go climbing on the neighbour's! Get down here and take your medicine, boy.

(music; AL hauls off his belt)

VIDA: HE'S JUST A BOY, AL.

AL: HE'S NEAR A MAN.

VIDA: IT'S LIKE A TOY, AL.

AL: LET GO MY HAND!
VIDA, I'M GONNA TEACH HIM
A FACT OR TWO OF LIFE.
IT'S TIME TO TEACH HIM
A FACT OR TWO OF LIFE!

VIDA: HE'S ONLY YOUNG ONCE.

AL: DOWN ON THE GROUND!

VIDA: BUT, WEREN'T YOU YOUNG, ONCE?

AL: AND, LIFE GOES 'ROUND!

VIDA, THE WORLD'S GOT NO PLACE
FOR FOOLS AND NUTS, LIKE HIM.
IT'S ONE BIG RAT RACE, AND
STRENGTH AND BRAINS WILL WIN.

IT'S THE WAY OF THE WORLD, VIDA.
EVERYONE BUT MY SON'S GOT THEIR FEET ON THE GROUND.
IT'S THE WAY OF THE WORLD, VIDA.
WORK GET DONE? NOT MY SON!
HE'S UP FLYING AROUND!
GOTTA COME DOWN SOMETIME, SOON.
CAN'T STAY THERE ALL AFTERNOON.
GOTTA GROW UP, BOY!
THAT'S THE WAY OF THE WORLD.

VIDA: BUT, IF WE TALK, AL?

AL: WE'VE TALKED TOO MUCH!

VIDA: AND, WHAT HE NEEDS IS..?

AL: A FIRMER TOUCH!

VIDA, WHEN I WAS HIS AGE,
I WORKED SIX DAYS A WEEK!
BUT IN THIS SOFT AGE,
THESE KIDS TURN OUT TOO WEAK.

JUST LOOK UP THERE, GIRL!

VIDA: I'VE SEEN, AL, BUT . . .

AL: OR, DON'T YOU CARE, GIRL?
(spoken) Our son's a nut!

VIDA, IT'S FOR HIS OWN GOOD.
THE FUTURE'S BLEAK FOR FOOLS!
WE'RE PARENTS; WE SHOULD
MAKE SURE HE LEARNS THE RULES.

IT'S THE WAY OF THE WORLD, VIDA!
HE'S ONLY GONNA MAKE IT
WITH BOTH FEET ON THE GROUND.
IT'S THE WAY OF THE WORLD, VIDA!
WHAT'S HE GONNA DO
WHEN WE'RE NO LONGER AROUND?
GOTTA WISE UP, SOMETIME, SON.
AIN'T A LOT OF PLACE TO RUN.
GOTTA COME DOWN, BOY!
THAT'S THE WAY OF THE WORLD!

VIDA: AL, YOU'RE MUCH TOO HARD.
AL, YOU'RE JUST TOO TIRED.
AL, COME AWAY AND LET
HOWARD COME DOWN ON HIS OWN.

AL: IT'S THE WAY OF THE WORLD, VIDA!
THE KID'S FAR TOO OLD TO BE PLAYING WITH BIRDS!
IT'S THE WAY OF THE WORLD, VIDA!
LESSON NUMBER ONE:
HE'S GONNA COME DOWN TO EARTH!

THAT'S THE WAY OF THE WORLD!

(AL swings with his belt)

AL: Howard! Get down here! Now!

VIDA: You'll make him fall!

AL: Shutup!

*(he pushes her aside and swings again with his belt; THE BOY
topples backward off the wall and disappears with a piercing*

scream; music ends; a frozen moment)

Oh, Christ!

VIDA: Howard!

(she runs out)

AL: It wasn't my fault! It wasn't me; it was that damn bird up there! That damn pigeon! Vida!

(he exits as well)

HOWARD: OF ALL THE THINGS I WISH TO BE,
A PIGEON'S WING TAKES HOLD OF ME.

Clare!

SOME SAY I'M CRAZY . . .

SOME SAY I'M BLUE . . .

BUT, I JUST TELL THEM

I LOVE TO COO.

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When I saw you, Lily, I thought you must be an angel. So white, so white.

LILY SAYS THEY'RE BEAUTIFUL WINGS.

ALL GOLD AND SILVER.

LILY SAYS SUCH BEAUTIFUL THINGS.

YOU OUGHT TO HEAR HER!

LILY TELLS ME SECRETS,

WHERE AND HOW AND WHY.

(music continues under)

How odd I felt, watching you there. Floating, spinning, gliding without care.

SOME FOLKS TRY TO SOAR UP ON HIGH,

BUT NEVER EARN A FEATHER.

OTHERS WIN A PLACE IN THE SKY

(enter LILY as nurse's assistant; she crosses in front of HOWARD and opens a window; her arms are raised like wings)

HOWARD: I fly with angels. Sweet, lovely, white angels.

LILY: Well, look who's awake.

HOWARD: You have beautiful wings.

LILY: I do?

HOWARD: Just there. Can't you feel them?

LILY: Oh, that. That's old Mr. Baxter's porridge. He's taken a dislike to it.

HOWARD: No! It's feather dust. It's magical.

(LILY feels HOWARD's forehead)

LILY: Have the headaches gone?

HOWARD: *(looking down over the side of his wheelchair)* Wow!

LILY: What is it? Tell me!

HOWARD: Look!

LILY: Where?

HOWARD: Down there! Can't you see? People. Hundreds of people.

LILY: I still don't see anything.

HOWARD: They're like ants. Hello, down there! Look, Lily! We're flying! It must be your magic feather dust. It's wonderful! Whee!

LILY: I think you'd better rest, now, Howard.

HOWARD: Can't rest. We've got to flapulate or we'll fall. *(he does so)* Come on. Flap hard before you fall.

LILY: Howard . . .

HOWARD: Flap!

(she starts to flap; music)

LILY: Like this?

HOWARD: You've got it! Now, just make for longer sweeps.

LILY: How's this?

HOWARD: Wow! You're beautiful! An angel! Keep your tail feathers up.

LILY: I DON'T UNDERSTAND HIM, AT ALL.
HE SHOULD BE PLAYING OUTDOOR SPORTS.
HE SHOULD BE DOING ALL THOSE SORTS OF THINGS THAT
YOUNG BOYS ALWAYS DO.
I GUESS IT'S TRUE . . .
IT TAKES ALL KINDS TO MAKE A WORLD.

HOWARD: Flap harder, Lily.

LILY: AND, HOWARD, YOU'RE ONE OF A KIND.

I DON'T UNDERSTAND HIM, AT ALL.
HE ISN'T HANDSOME, STRONG OR TALL.
IN FACT, HE'S PLAIN AND SORT OF
SMALLISH, WHEN YOU THINK ABOUT HIS AGE.
I'D GUESS SIXTEEN.
NOT THAT I CARE, HE'S JUST SO STRANGE.

HOWARD: Race you to that cloud!

LILY: BUT, FUNNY, HE STAYS ON MY MIND.

HOWARD: UP HERE, I'M SOARING.
DOWN THERE, IT'S BORING.
GO WITH THE BREEZE AND
FLOAT WHERE I PLEASE.

WINGS FLAPULATING.
LUNGS RESPIRATING.
HEART POUND-ULATING.
HEAD IN THE CLOUDS.

FOUR SAILING BEATS WILL TAKE ME
FOUR LULLASWEEPS AWAY AND
FIVE THOUSAND FEET ABOVE THE
EARTH AND THE CLAY.

HERE WE GO, SOARING, LILY.
WE'LL GO EXPLORING. WILL YOU
REACH OUT AND TAKE MY WING AND
WE'LL FLY AWAY.
WHAT DO YOU SAY?

LILY: I DON'T UNDERSTAND HIM, AT ALL.
HE SEES THE WORLD IN HIS OWN WAY,
BUT HIS OWN WAY IS SO
OUTRAGEOUSLY HIS OWN,
YET SOMEHOW RIGHT.
HIS TALK OF FLIGHT
SEEMS SO FAMILIAR, CALM AND SANE.
SO, HOWARD, LET'S FLY ONCE AGAIN.

HOWARD: (UP . . . HERE . . . I'M . . . SOARING.
(DOWN . . . THERE . . . IT'S . . . BORING.
(FLOAT . . . WHERE I PLEASE.

LILY: (HE'S A SHY AND QUIET BOY.
(I'M A KIND OF QUIET GIRL.
(MAYBE, IT MAY BE.

(THEY ALL THINK HE'S SOMEWHAT STRANGE.
(I DON'T THINK HE NEEDS TO CHANGE.
(HE'S NOT STRANGE TO ME.

HOWARD: (WINGS . . . FLAPU . . . U . . . LATING.
(HEART . . . POUND . . . U . . . LATING.
(HEAD IN THE CLOUDS.

(FOUR SAILING BEATS WILL TAKE ME
(FOUR LULLASWEEPS AWAY AND
(FIVE THOUSAND FEET ABOVE THE
(EARTH AND THE CLAY.

LILY: (HE'S NOT A HANDSOME ONE, BUT
(WHEN ALL IS SAID AND DONE,
(I THINK I'D RATHER HAVE A
(DREAMER WITH WINGS.

(WHY NOT GO SOARING WITH HIM?
(SURE WON'T BE BORING WITH HIM.
(REACH UP AND WE'LL GO
(FLAPULATING AWAY.

HOWARD: (WHY NOT COME SOARING, LILY?
(WE'LL GO EXPLORING. WILL YOU
(REACH OUT AND TAKE MY WING AND
(WE'LL FLY AWAY.

LILY: WHAT CAN I SAY?

HOWARD: I'M WAITING.

LILY: I'M READY.

HOWARD: I'M FAINTING.

LILY: HERE, STEADY!

BOTH: WE'RE SOARING!
WE'RE SOARING!

LILY: (WHY NOT?

(
HOWARD: (AT LAST!

(music ends)

Proshumlow.

LILY: What? PERUSAL COPY ONLY

HOWARD: Proshumlow. It's what a boy pigeon says when he meets a girl pigeon.

LILY: Proshumlow. Did I say it right?

HOWARD: Eeckzackrow! That means "You're not kidding."

LILY: Am I turning into a beautiful pigeon?

HOWARD: Eeckzackrow!

(silence falls between them; AL and VIDA enter opposite)

AL: Chrissakes, he coulda been killed! I hope you're satisfied.

VIDA: Hush! We aren't supposed to agitate him.

AL: Well, he agitates me! He's an embarrassment. He's too old to be playing with damn birds!

VIDA: He's just a boy.

AL: 'Cause you never let him grow up!

VIDA: Shh! She'll hear.

AL: Good, I hope to hell she does!

VIDA: Al, we have to be patient. We have to try to understand. Howard's going to need us now like never before.

AL: He's gotta start acting like other kids. He should be playing hockey, not hanging from roof-tops. All the other kids play. I played. Look at that Reuben Carson.

VIDA: Stop comparing.

AL: I just want what's best for him. A kick in the pants . . . that's what he needs.

LILY: Mrs. Winston.

VIDA: Yes, miss?

LILY: *(showing VIDA two long, white feathers)* They found these in Howard's . . . in your son's hands. He must have grabbed them when he fell. He won't let us throw them out.

VIDA: They're Isabel's.

LILY: She should have taught him how to land.

VIDA: I'm sorry?

LILY: Nothing. I'll be down the hall . . .

VIDA: Yes?

LILY: . . . if you need me.

(LILY exits; AL takes the feathers)

AL: What'd I tell you? He's an embarrassment.

VIDA: I'm not embarrassed.

AL: I bring my kid in for treatment and what do they find? Feathers! They'll think I'm some kind of freak!

VIDA: Shh!

AL: I want him out of the trees, Vida. I want him to go down to the rink and strap on a pair of skates. I'm there. I stand by the boards until some dumb-ass says,

"Hey, Al, why ain't your boy playing the game?" I tell that dumb-ass, "My boy's got other interests." The dumb-ass says, "Oh, yeah? Like what?" And, I say, "Pigeons." Damn, friggin' pigeons.

VIDA: Someday, he'll learn to fly. Then you won't be saying those things.

AL: Most air-travel he'll ever see is falling off the widow's walk. You lay it out for him, Vida. You hear me? Lay it out for him.

VIDA: What are you going to do?

AL: Why?

HOWARD: Pa! Please! Don't shoot her.

AL: I won't shoot it.

VIDA: Al. He'll never forgive you.

AL: Vida, I promise. I will not shoot that bird.

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(AL exits; music as VIDA bends over HOWARD)

VIDA: Your father loves you, Howard. He only wants what's best for you. You gave him quite a scare, falling like that.

HOWARD: I didn't fall, Mom! I flew! Isabel was right. It's wonderful!

VIDA: You nearly killed yourself! Next time, you won't be so lucky.

HOWARD: Isabel hasn't taught me about landing, yet. Once, she does, though, I'll be in the air and soaring. Wait and see!

VIDA: Shh!

WHY DO YOU WANT TO SOAR, ANYWAY?
HOWARD, THERE'S THINGS TO DO HERE.
LIFE OFFERS LOVE AND JOY, EVERYWHERE.
JUST KEEP YOUR FEET ON THE GROUND.

YOU THINK I DON'T UNDERSTAND, BUT I DO.
YOU DON'T BELIEVE I WAS YOUNG, ONCE, LIKE YOU.
I HAD MY DREAMS, BUT I
TRADED THEM ALL, LONG AGO.

AS YOU GROW OLDER, DREAMS SLIP AWAY;

FADE INTO VAGUE MEMORIES.
IF YOU WANT ANY PART, COMPROMISE.
HALF A DREAM'S BETTER THAN NONE.

WHEN I WAS SEVENTEEN, I CHOSE A WAY.
I CAN'T REGRET THAT CHOICE, EVEN TODAY.
I HAD MY DREAMS, BUT THEY
FADED AWAY LONG AGO.

*(lights change; enter AL, above, with a shovel; REUBEN,
below, with his hockey stick)*

REUBEN: DON'T NEED TO BE NO FLYING ACE.
OUT ON THE ICE, I KNOW MY PLACE.
WHEN EVERYBODY'S SCREAMIN' "SCORE!"
IT'S NOT A GAME, ANYMORE.

AL: THAT STUPID BIRD HAS GOT TO GO.
IT'S LIKE A PILE OF DIRTY SNOW.
IF IT WAS HARMLESS FUN, BEFORE,
IT'S NOT A GAME, ANYMORE!

AL & REUBEN: IT'S NOT A GAME, ANYMORE!
IT'S FINE FOR KIDS TO PLAY THEIR GAME.
ONE DAY, THEY'LL FIND IT'S NOT THE SAME,
AND, COME THE DAY THEY LEARN THE SCORE,
IT'S NOT A GAME, ANYMORE!
IT'S NOT A GAME, ANYMORE!

(music continues, under)

AL: Where are you? Dirty, stinking bird. Think you can turn my son's head to
mush? I hear you! Come out and Mr. Winston'll give you a treat. There you
are. Hold still, now.

(he is about to clobber Isabel when REUBEN speaks up)

REUBEN: Hi, Mr. Winston! Whatcha doing on the roof?

AL: Oh, hello, there, young Reuben. Just . . . cleaning the eaves.

REUBEN: My pa uses a rake.

AL: Yeah, well, I guess that makes sense. Maybe I ought to get him to come help
me.

REUBEN: Pa's busy sharpening my blades. Got a big game, tonight.

AL: You're quite the player, I hear. Too bad my boy ain't too keen on hockey. You could play together.

REUBEN: Howie's okay. He just needs somebody to look out for him.

AL: Yeah, that's true. Look, we're going to pick him up from the hospital in half-an-hour. Want to tag along?

REUBEN: That'd be swell! I'll have to go ask, first. Can I leave mystick here? I can run faster.

AL: Sure, sure. No hurry, now. Lots of time.

(REUBEN runs off; AL returns to hunting)

Alright. Where are you?

IT'S NOT A GAME ANYMORE!

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(LILY enters)

LILY: UP IN THE CLOUDS, WE LOOP, WE
WHIRL AND WE FLY.
TWELVE LULLASWEEPS WILL TAKE US
THREE MILES HIGH.

WINGS SPREAD, SO SILENTLY, WE
SLIDE OVERHEAD.
SUNSET WILL FIND US WHERE OUR
WINGS MAY HAVE LED.
THE WINDS ARE OUR BED.

LOOK UP AND SEE THE STARS
KEEP PACE WITH OUR GLIDE.
LOOK 'ROUND, THE AIR IS CLEAR
WITH NO NEED TO HIDE.

LOOK DOWN AND SEE THE SHADOWS
TOIL INTO DARK.
LOOK UP! WE SAIL A VOYAGE
NO COMPASS CAN MARK,
THE DOVE AND THE LARK.

AND, DOWN BELOW, THE WORLD

IS SLOWLY TURNING, STILL,
WHILE HERE, ABOVE, WE SAIL ON
SILENT WINGS.

AL: There you are! No, no. Don't fly away. Come here, Isabel. Is that your name? Come here.

(LILY approaches and observes)

That's right. Come to Poppa.

(AL strikes downward, viciously, again and again)

Dirty, no good, stinking bird!

(he stops, out of breath, sees LILY)

AL: I was . . . uh . . . cleaning the eaves.

LILY: There's blood on your shovel.

AL: Is there? Well, would you look at that?

LILY: There's feathers down here.

AL: Is that so? Cats after birds. They're holy terrors. Yeah, cat must have got her.

LILY: How can you tell it's a she, Mr. Winston?

AL: Well, I, uh . . . let's see. It's got white feathers, right? It don't take a bird genius to figure it out. What kind of male bird would go around with white feathers?

LILY: I see what you mean. Howard's coming home today, isn't he?

AL: Yeah, picking him up in half-an-hour.

LILY: That's good.

AL: Listen, why don't you come along with us to pick him up? A nice, sensible girl like you's just what he needs.

LILY: Does he?

AL: For a friend, I mean. I mean, he's a nice enough kid, you know, he's just . . . weird, sometimes.

LILY: I think he's nice.

AL: You do? Well, then!

LILY: I'd like to come along.

AL: Sure! Sure! Well, that Reuben should be back, shortly. Why don't you go hop in the car, while I finish up here? Be right with you.

(LILY exits; AL picks up the carcass of a bird from the wall and holds it up; he picks up REUBEN's stick and nods as lights fade on him; up on VIDA and HOWARD)

VIDA: IT'S TIME TO PUT AWAY CHILDISH THINGS,
NOW, THAT YOU'VE GROWN TO A MAN.
LIFE'S MADE FOR WORK, NOT PLAY. LABOURING
WILL BRING YOU AMPLE REWARD.

VIDA: DOES ALL THIS WORRY AND TALK MEAN A THING?
ARE WE JUST TALKING AROUND IN A RING?
DON'T DIE FOR DREAMS.
AS YOU GROW UP, THEY'LL ALL FADE AWAY.

(music continues under)

Here they come. Time to go home, now. Your father and Reuben and, Lily, too. Ready?

HOWARD: Don't throw out the feathers, Mom. I have to give them back to Isabel.

(music ends; lights fade on VIDA)

HOWARD: The hurt never stops when the blows do. It goes on. Home we came, one, two, three. Home again, and what do we see?

(lights up on Isabel "crucified" on REUBEN's hockey-stick)

Isabel! Who'd have thought the little bird had so much blood in her?

(REUBEN and LILY enter; THE BOY's silhouette reappears on the wall; he takes Isabel off the stick)

REUBEN: God, what a mess!

HOWARD: Some game, huh, Reuben? Here, Kid Carson, you forgot this!

(THE BOY throws the stick at REUBEN)

REUBEN: Howie!

HOWARD: And, she never did teach me about landing.

LILY: Howard, come down. You're not supposed to be climbing.

(music)

HOWARD: It hurts.

LILY: Then, come down!

HOWARD: I can't.

REUBEN: Howard!

HOWARD: Shutup!

REUBEN: You're being crazy! What're you trying to prove?

HOWARD: You know! Don't you? Well, just watch!

WATCH ME, NOW! WATCH AND SEE!
OH, THE CHANGES INSIDE OF ME.

I GROW STRONG. REACHING HIGH.
I CAN SHOW YOU! JUST WATCH ME FLY!

THEY WERE BEAUTIFUL WINGS . . .
SO STRONG, SO WHITE.

THEY WERE BEAUTIFUL WINGS.
I RECALL EACH NIGHT.

(THE BOY plucks feathers from Isabel and sticks them into his sleeves)

LILY: Howard! Come down!

HOWARD: HOW WE HURT THE ONES WE NEED.
HIDDEN WOUNDS THAT SOFTLY BLEED
AND COLOUR THE AIR.

I'M SORRY, CLARE. LILY? ISABEL!

THEY WERE BEAUTIFUL WINGS . . .
AS SOFT AS RAIN.
THEY WERE BEAUTIFUL WINGS.
I FEEL HER PAIN!

THOUGH WE HURT THE ONES WE LOVE.
THAT WON'T STOP THEM DREAMING OF
THOSE WINGS IN THE AIR.

I'M SORRY, CLARE. LILY? REUBEN!

REUBEN: Howie!

HOWARD: WATCH ME NOW!

REUBEN: HOWIE, COME ON DOWN AND GET YOUR
FEET BACK ON THE GROUND.

HOWARD: WATCH ME GOOD!

LILY: I KNOW YOU CAN SOAR, BUT WHAT IS
KILLING YOURSELF FOR?

HOWARD: I'VE GOT WINGS, NOW!

LILY & REUBEN: HOWARD, PUT YOUR
FEET BACK ON THE GROUND!

HOWARD: SHE SAID I WOULD!

(AL and VIDA enter)

ISABEL!

AL: VIDA, HOLD ME BACK OR ELSE I'LL
BEAT HIM 'TILL HE'S BLACK AND BLUE!

HOWARD: I WON'T CRY!

VIDA: HOWARD, DON'T BE CRAZY, DEAR!
I KNOW YOUR MIND IS HAZY, DEAR, BUT . . .

HOWARD: EVERYBODY!

AL: SONNY, SEE THIS BELT? IT'S GONNA
(RAISE A LOAD OF WELTS!

VIDA: (HOWARD, IF YOU FALL, YOU MIGHT NOT
(EVER FLY, AT ALL.

REUBEN: ((BET YOUR BRAIN GOT JARRED. YOU KNOW THE
(GROUND IS AWFUL HARD.

LILY: ((WHY NOT START OFF SLOWER? SAY, A
(PORCH OR SOMEWHERE LOWER?

(YOU KNOW YOURSELF THAT WIDOW'S WALK
(IS JUST TOO HIGH!

VIDA: ((DO YOU HAVE TO BE SO CRAZY?
(HOWARD, WHY?

REUBEN: ((I MEAN, THERE'S LOTS OF WAYS TO PLAY
(WITHOUT THE SKY!

AL: ((I'M NOT TOO OLD TO SCALE THAT WALL,
(IF I JUST TRY!

HOWARD: JUST WATCH ME FLY!

(THE BOY leaps off; he stays up, then begins to flapulate and rises a couple of feet)

HOWARD: THEY WERE BEAUTIFUL WINGS,
MADE DEW-DROP LIGHT.
THEY WERE BEAUTIFUL WINGS,
STRETCHED OUT IN FLIGHT.

THEY WERE BEAUTIFUL WINGS . . .
NOW, THEY'LL UNDERSTAND!
THEY WERE BEAUTIFUL WINGS . . .

LILY: But, Howard! You don't know how to land!

*(a panicked look from THE BOY, out, then at the ground;
music cascades downward as lights go to black; lights up on
empty stage)*

END OF ACT ONE

HOWARD WINSTON'S LAST FLIGHT

a musical fantasy in two acts

ACT TWO

fifth draft

(as the lights come up, CLARE sits with HOWARD, on the veranda; OLD REUBEN remains motionless in his wheelchair; CLARE reads)

CLARE: Barney Dempsey. Age seventy-three. Says here, doctors have implanted moose antlers on his head. He's from Utah. Good god, he's been shot at, and chased by wolves and mountain lions. The operation lasted fifty-two hours. Imagine. Moose antlers.

HOWARD: The birds. I can't hear the birds.

CLARE: Hush. Don't strain yourself.

(she tucks in his blanket)

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Comfy? Good. There's still a few minutes of sunlight.

(she sits on her lounge, again)

They've taken away what's-his-name—Oliver? Doc Oliver? That actor. Nurse Stark told me that this time, he not only peed on the junipers, but on Nurse Stark's brand-new Volvo. It went straight through the windows.

HOWARD: I can't hear the birds. They've left me.

(JERRY enters behind HOWARD)

CLARE: Shh. *(to JERRY)* It's getting worse.

JERRY: It will. I got half-way there and decided to come back.

CLARE: It doesn't matter.

JERRY: Yes, it does.

CLARE: Alright. They'll beep you, again.

JERRY: I'll drown it. He hasn't noticed me.

CLARE: I know. What'll we do?

JERRY: Just hang on.

CLARE: I feel helpless. He's worse, each day. He'll soon be as bad as Reuben.

JERRY: There's Extended Care.

CLARE: A mental hospital.

JERRY: A psychiatric home.

CLARE: Jerry . . .

JERRY: Well . . .

CLARE: Not that.

JERRY: What, then?

(music)

CLARE: Not that.

JERRY: HE'S AN OLD MAN, CLARE.
AND WITH OLD MEN, THERE IS
NOTHING WE CAN DO, BUT
WAIT A YEAR OR TWO AND
THEN, THERE'LL BE JUST US TWO.

CLARE: Jerry!

JERRY: HE'S AN OLD MAN, CLARE.
THOUGH WE KNOW HE HAS
THE VERY BEST OF CARE,
HE HAS NO WILL TO LIVE
THAT'S ONE THING WE CAN'T GIVE

(HE'S AN OLD MAN, CLARE.
(
CLARE: (I REMEMBER I WAS TEN,
IT WAS NEAR THE SUMMER'S END,
AND THERE WERE WALKS ALONG THE SHORE . . .

JERRY: (YOU HAVE TO FACE THE FACTS.
(

CLARE: (A CLEAR SEPTEMBER DAY
THAT HAS LONG SINCE SLIPPED AWAY.

HOW I WANT THAT DAY, ONCE MORE.

BUT, WHEN MOTHER DIED,
ALTHOUGH I CRIED, IT SEEMED
PAPA DRIED UP
DEEP INSIDE.
HE'S NEVER BEEN THE SAME.

THERE WERE WARM DAYS IN WINTER
WITH MOONLIGHT ON SNOW . . .
LONG NIGHTS IN SUMMER
WITH NOWHERE TO GO.

WE WERE HAPPY, THEN.
AS SIMPLE AS THAT.
I WAS HAPPY, THEN.
THOSE DAYS WHEN I SAT
WITH MOMMA AND POPPA AT HOME!
WITH MOMMA AND POPPA AT HOME!
LIFE WAS HAPPIER THEN!

JERRY: HE'S AN OLD MAN, CLARE.
AND HE'S HAD A VERY
LONG AND HAPPY LIFE, WITH
YOU AND WITH HIS WIFE.
THROUGH THE JOY; THROUGH THE STRIFE.

CLARE: That's true.

JERRY: HE'S BEEN HAPPY, CLARE.
THOUGH I KNOW HE'S OFTEN HARD TO UNDERSTAND,
AND SOMETIMES OUT OF HAND
HE'S HAD LOVE; HE'S HAD FRIENDS.

(HE'S AN OLD MAN, CLARE.

CLARE: (HE'S AN OLD MAN, JER.

JERRY: (YOU HAVE TO FACE THE FACTS.

CLARE: (HE'S SUDDENLY GROWN OLD.

AND, IT'S SO HARD, JER.
IT'S SO DAMNABLY HARD TO BE
PATIENT AND KIND.
THOUGH (I KNOW THAT HIS MIND IS TO BLAME,

JERRY: (YOU KNOW THAT HIS MIND IS TO BLAME.

CLARE: STILL, IT'S HARD JUST THE SAME.

JERRY: (HE'S AN OLD MAN, CLARE.

CLARE: (I REMEMBER SEVENTEEN,
I CAN'T RECALL JUST WHERE I'D BEEN,
THERE WAS SOME PICTURE SHOW I'D SEEN . . .

JERRY: (YOU HAVE TO FACE THE FACTS.

CLARE: (AND POPPA WAITED IN THE RAIN,
THEN HID BEHIND A WINDOW PANE.
HOW I WANT THOSE DAYS, AGAIN!

BUT, THEN MOTHER DIED,
AND HOW I TRIED TO
BE THE PRIDE OF
FATHER'S EYES.
IT'S NEVER BEEN THE SAME.

THERE WERE WARM DAYS IN WINTER
WITH MOONLIGHT ON SNOW . . .
LONG NIGHTS IN SUMMER
WITH NOWHERE TO GO.

WE WERE HAPPY, THEN.
AS SIMPLE AS THAT.
I WAS HAPPY, THEN.
THOSE DAYS WHEN I SAT
WITH MOMMA AND POPPA AT HOME!
WITH MOMMA AND POPPA AT HOME!
LIFE WAS HAPPIER THEN!

JERRY: HE'S AN OLD MAN, CLARE.

CLARE: YES, I KNOW.

JERRY: AND WITH OLD MEN . . .

CLARE: YES, I KNOW . . .

BOTH: THERE IS NOTHING THEIR CHILDREN CAN DO . . .

(music ends)

CLARE: No psychiatric homes, alright, Jer?

JERRY: Alright.

(she notices the silence)

CLARE: That's odd. Did you notice? You can't hear the birds. I wonder where they've gone?

JERRY: South, I guess.

(his beeper goes off)

Damn.

CLARE: Go.

JERRY: Sure? PERUSAL COPY ONLY

CLARE: PLEASE CONTACT THE AUTHOR FOR RIGHTS
Go.

(JERRY kisses CLARE and exits)

HOWARD: Isabel left me, too. Reuben! What we do to each other.

CLARE: Hush, father! That was a whole lifetime ago. There's been a war and mother . . . and me. Do you remember, now?

HOWARD: I remember.

CLARE: Good.

(she returns to her reading)

HOWARD: I remember . . .

(LILY enters, panting, after a climb)

LILY: Not fair! You ran too fast!

HOWARD: I flew.

LILY: Someday, you'll have to teach me.

HOWARD: You know how.

LILY: Maybe. Oh, look! Feathers. See?

HOWARD: Yes.

LILY: Maybe, I can put them on and fly.

HOWARD: It takes more than that.

LILY: I know.

(silence for a moment)

Shall we play a game? I'll guess the bird sounds and you tell me if I'm right.

(no answer)

Hello?

HOWARD: What?

LILY: Where were you?

HOWARD: There.

(he points up)

The clouds are perfect this evening.

LILY: For what?

HOWARD: For flying up into the sunset.

LILY: Then soaring back down and feeling the moisture from the clouds cool your wings.

HOWARD: Proshumlow.

(she puts the feathers on him)

LILY: Let's do it. Come on! Flapulate!

HOWARD: No. Tonight's a night for staying on the ground.

LILY: Yes, it is.

(silence, again; music)

Look, the lights are coming on all over. It's like . . . stars there . . . *(pointing up)* . . . and stars there . . . *(pointing down)*

(HOWARD is looking up again)

Howard.

LOST AMONG THE CLOUDS.
AND WHY PULL HIM DOWN?
THERE'LL BE OTHER DAYS
WHEN HE'LL STAY ON THE GROUND.

THIS IS BEAUTIFUL.
THE BREEZE AND THE SKY.
AND THE BEST OF ALL . . .
WE'RE HERE, YOU AND I.

HOWARD, IT'S BEAUTIFUL HERE.
WITH STARS UP AND DOWN.
ISN'T IT BEAUTIFUL, HERE?
I'M SO GLAD WE FOUND
THIS PLACE TOGETHER.
'CAUSE WE'RE TOGETHER.

AREN'T WE?

HEAD UP IN THE CLOUDS.
GROW WINGS IF YOU WILL.
I CAN UNDERSTAND.
I WON'T HOLD YOU STILL.
AND, IT'S BEAUTIFUL.
WE'LL DREAM OUR OWN WINGS.
CLOSE OUR EYES, WE'LL SEE WHAT
DREAM WINGS MAY BRING.

HOWARD, IT'S BEAUTIFUL, HERE
THE AIR SEEMS TO SHINE.
THERE'S JUST THE TWO OF US, HERE.
IT'S YOURS AND IT'S MINE.
WE'RE HERE TOGETHER . . .
AND, WE'RE TOGETHER . . .
I KNOW.

(HOWARD comes out of his reverie)

HOWARD: They said, at the induction centre, they'd never seen anyone more suited to flying. I laughed.

LILY: I envy you. Soaring, looping, zooming.

HOWARD: Falling.

LILY: Don't. Look out at the stars.

AND, DOWN BELOW,
THE STARS SHINE ON,
AS HERE ABOVE,
THE DAYLIGHT'S GONE.

OUR WINGS HAVE GROWN
AT LEAST OUR DREAMS
SOMEHOW, WE'VE FLOWN . . .
AND, NOW, IT SEEMS
THAT WE'RE TOGETHER . . .
AREN'T WE?

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HOWARD, IT'S BEAUTIFUL HERE.
ISN'T IT BEAUTIFUL HERE?
AND, WE'RE TOGETHER . . . ?

HOWARD: 'Course we're together.

LILY: I KNOW.

(music ends)

When you're up there flying, think of me, down here.

(lights fade on them; sound of a drumbeat, underneath; up on AL)

AL: When you're up there flying, Howard, think of us, down here! Make us proud, son! Show them what a Winston's made of!

(up on VIDA)

VIDA: For your country, Howard! For your mother and father!

(up on LILY)

LILY: Remember our dream wings, Howard. Keep them safe.

(up on REUBEN)

REUBEN: Keep my skates good and sharp, Pop! I'll show the Hun he can't mess with Kid Carson.

AL: Be a hero, son, or be nothing at all!

REUBEN: Shoot them! Shoot them! Shoot them all!

LILY: God keep you safe, Howard. God keep you flying.

VIDA: And, write often.

LILY: FIRE IN THE NIGHT!
THE SIRENS SCREAM; THE BOMBS ARE FALLING.
KEEP HIM FAR AWAY FROM THEM.

VIDA: FIRE IN THE NIGHT!
OUR SONS MUST GO; WE CANNOT FOLLOW.
YOUTH IS TORN AWAY FROM THEM.

AL: FIRE IN THE NIGHT!
THE CANNON WAKE, SPIT FIRE AND DEATH DESCENDS.
NOT ONE GETS AWAY FROM THEM.

ALL THREE: FIRE IN THE NIGHT . . .

AL: Keep score, Howard! Tell us how many you grind into the fields and knock into the sea!

VIDA: Keep safe, Howard! Keep well and remember us back here.

REUBEN: *(a la Foster Hewitt)* Carson has the gun. He loads. He aims. He shoots! He scores! Another one for Kid Carson!

LILY: Howard! Keep your tail feathers up.

ALL FOUR: FIRE IN THE NIGHT!
THE CIRCLES, CROSSES SWIRL ABOVE.
LEAVING TRAILS OF LIFE OR DEATH.

FIRE IN THE NIGHT!
THE HURRICANE OF SMOKE AND STEEL
LEAVES TWISTED GHOSTS AND BROKEN MEN.

FIRE IN THE NIGHT!

AS FALLEN ANGELS TO THE EARTH BELOW
AS THUNDER BOLTS COME CRASHING DOWN.
FIRE IN THE NIGHT!

REUBEN: GIVE ME WINGS OF STEEL
AND POINT ME TO THE BATTLE ZONE.
IT'S THE SAME OLD FEEL OF
BLADES AND ICE I'VE ALWAYS KNOW.

FALLING FROM THE SUN,
KID CARSON HAS THE GUN!
HE'S THERE! THE CANNON ROARS,
HE AIMS, HE SHOOTS, HE SCORES!
HURRAH FOR CARSON!

LILY, AL & VIDA: HURRAH . . .

REUBEN: (GIVE ME WINGS OF STEEL
(

LILY, AL & VIDA: (FIRE IN THE NIGHT!

REUBEN: (AND POINT ME TO THE BATTLE ZONE.
(

LILY, AL & VIDA: (THE SIRENS SCREAM, THE BOMBS ARE FALLING . . .

REUBEN: (THEY WON'T GET AWAY FROM ME.
(

LILY, AL & VIDA: (KEEP US FAR AWAY FROM THEM.

*(music ends; lights switch to HOWARD with a beer mug;
REUBEN approaches)*

REUBEN: Well, if the fire-pits of Hell ain't freezin' over. Howard Winston! How the hell
are you?

(HOWARD stares blankly at him)

Howie, it's me. Kid Carson!

HOWARD: I know.

REUBEN: So! Fresh, shiny new wings, eh, Howie? You on ops, yet?

HOWARD: Reported today.

REUBEN: What squadron?

HOWARD: Two-four-two.

REUBEN: Hey, that's my outfit! I'll always remember the number 'cause it reminds me of my last hockey game. Two goals, four assists and two cheap penalties.

HOWARD: I know.

REUBEN: You remembered that?

HOWARD: No. I know we're in the same squadron.

REUBEN: Well, why didn't you look me up?

(HOWARD doesn't answer)

Look, Howie. I got a little pull around here. I got three kills, you know. Well, two and seven-eighths. What say I have a talk with the C.O. and get you as my wing-man?

HOWARD: You don't even know if I can fly.

REUBEN: Are you kidding? All that time you spent on my roof must have been for something. I bet you're a natural. Jeez, I think of you, up on the roof with that pigeon . . .

HOWARD: Isabel.

REUBEN: That's right. Jumping off the roof, to prove you could fly. Stupid, dumb son of a . . . you know, that pigeon's blood did something to my hockey stick. It was the best one I ever used after she was crucified on it. Shoulda dipped all my sticks in pigeon blood.

HOWARD: Shutup.

REUBEN: You'd have saved yourself a lot of hurt if you'd clubbed her yourself, instead of waiting 'till somebody else did.

HOWARD: SHUTUP!

REUBEN: Take it easy, Howie.

HOWARD: If you mention one more word about Isabel, I'll shove this glass down your throat and go in after it.

REUBEN: It's the enemy you fight, wing-man. Not me.

HOWARD: Your wing-man's gotta be somebody you can trust.

REUBEN: Right! You got spunk, even if you do have pigeons on the brain. Besides, anybody's better than the turkey I got, now. I need somebody with some fight. It'll be just like the old days!

HOWARD: Which old days would those be, Reuben?

REUBEN: *(not listening)* Carson and Winston, together again! I'll knock 'em down and you stomp on 'em!

HOWARD: Hurrah for Kid Carson! Ha!

REUBEN: I'll tell you, Howie. You're one of the screwiest guys I've ever known. But, you told me something once, and it's taken me ten years to learn it was the truth.

HOWARD: What was that?

REUBEN: You said flying was the most beautiful thing anyone could do.

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(the snare drum begins again; lights up on LILY)

LILY: FIRE IN THE SKY!
THEY LIFT THEIR EYES, TAKE WING
AND JOIN THE DANCE.
TURNING, WALTZING, FOUR MILES HIGH.

FIRE IN THE SKY!
THE QUARRY'S EYES, UNSEEN,
BEHIND THE MASK,
CAN HE FEAR AS MUCH AS I?

FIRE IN THE SKY!
FIRE IN THE SKY!
FIRE IN THE SKY!

(lights on HOWARD, below in his chair, and REUBEN, on the wall; they are flying)

REUBEN: Well, this is it, Howie. Welcome to the Battle of Britain. It's up here you'll realize that God made one hell of a mistake.

HOWARD: You mean, allowing this war?

REUBEN: Hell, no! War's no mistake! It takes years of planning. Nope, the mistake was eyes.

HOWARD: Eyes?

REUBEN: Yeah, He gave us two up front, but forgot all about the back. A mistake if ever there was one. So, we gotta compensate. Never fly straight for more than five seconds; never turn the same way twice in a row and never shoot without checking your mirror. Otherwise, you'll end up with your tail blown wider'n Hudson's Bay.

HOWARD: I don't want to fly straight, anyway. It's loops and spins I wanna do.

REUBEN: No! Never loop! They'll pick you off at the top, when you're out of steam.

HOWARD: Spins, then.

(he does a spin in his wheelchair)

REUBEN: Get back up here and keep your eyes on the sun. That's where they come from.

HOWARD: But, pigeons never look at the sun.

REUBEN: Well, that's why pigeons are sitting ducks.

HOWARD: That's a laugh.

REUBEN: You won't think it is, first time you see half a dozen Messerschmidts falling out of the sun like seeds out of a rotten orange.

HOWARD: It's too beautiful up here for that. Wings aren't for war.

REUBEN: Tell that to the next Messerschmidt you see.

HOWARD: OF ALL THE THINGS I WISH TO BE,
A PIGEON'S WING TAKES HOLD OF ME.
OVER HILLS AND OVER LAKES,
I FLY SO HIGH, FOR GOODNESS SAKES . . .

REUBEN: Cut the chatter, Winston! Quick, make angels!

(they climb)

HOWARD: SOME SAY I'M CRAZY,
SOME SAY I'M BLUE,
BUT, I JUST TELL THEM
I LOVE TO COO.

REUBEN: Bandits at three o'clock. Angels 16.

HOWARD: They look like tin pigeons.

REUBEN: I'm starting to worry about you. Pigeon four to Pigeon leader. Tally-ho! Tally-ho! I am engaging, now.

HOWARD: OF ALL THE THINGS I WISH TO BE . . .

REUBEN: Not now, pigeon-brain, we got a job to do. Coming?

HOWARD: Where are we going?

REUBEN: Down there!

HOWARD: Sure!

(sound of planes diving, growing louder)

REUBEN: Hold still, turkey. Just a little closer. Past the blue line! Now!

(machine guns sound, loudly; an explosion and flash; the planes zoom)
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That's four!

HOWARD: Three and seven-eighths. Oh-oh, there's one behind me.

REUBEN: Break off, Howie! I got my hands full!

(more planes and machine guns)

HOWARD: He's shooting at me. Up!

(sound of plane climbing)

REUBEN: No! Don't loop!

(the plane slows, then dives)

He made it, he made it. You're on him, Howard! Blast him!

HOWARD: I can't.

REUBEN: Shoot!

HOWARD: They don't work.

REUBEN: 'Course they work.

HOWARD: My fingers. They don't work.

REUBEN: They're on you, Howie! I can't get to you. Shoot!

HOWARD: I can't.

REUBEN: You miserable, useless tin pigeon! Go ahead, get spattered on the ground, like your dirty, filthy pigeon friend! Dead like Isabel! You can join her in pigeon heaven.

(HOWARD reacts and wheels his chair about; sounds of planes and guns; three explosions)

Three! He got all three! Tin pigeon, nothing. You're a god-damn steel eagle, Howie! You're a natural! I knew it!

(lights up on LILY; music)

LILY: GIVE ME WINGS OF STEEL
AND POINT ME TO THE BATTLE ZONE.
IT'S THE SAME OLD FEEL OF
LIFE AND DEATH WE'VE ALWAYS KNOWN.

IT'S CARDS, WITH ACES HIGH,
THE LOSER GETS TO DIE.
THE WINNER GETS TO TRY
TO LIVE ANOTHER DAY.
HURRAH FOR HEROES!

(lights down on LILY; up on CLARE)

CLARE: Father, you wouldn't believe what I found beneath that pile of Aviation Weekly.

HOWARD: You found my wings?

CLARE: No, silly. I found a box. A beautiful, wooden box with brass handles. And, guess what I found inside the box?

HOWARD: My wings?

CLARE: Wrong, again. It was full of old photographs of you and mom. Why you hid it there, I'll never know. There was one picture, crisp as the day it was taken. It must have been after the war, because you were standing there in your

uniform. Mom was wearing her veil. You were both laughing and staring straight up into the sky.

HOWARD: We were looking for our wings.

CLARE: Well, the photographer should have told you to look into the lens. In just about every picture, you're looking off somewhere.

HOWARD: Lily found her wings. I'm still looking.

CLARE: Well, anyway, I just thought I'd mention it in case you were wondering where it went. Jerry and I will keep it safe for you. Maybe, I'll put them into an album. Did you hear me, father? Father?

(lights fade on CLARE; up on LILY)

LILY: IT'S CARDS, WITH ACES HIGH,
THE LOSER GETS TO DIE.
THE WINNER GETS TO TRY
TO LIVE ANOTHER DAY.
HURRAH FOR HEROES!

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HURRAH . . .

FIRE IN THE SKY . . .

*(lights up on the pub, with HOWARD, reading a letter;
REUBEN enters)*

REUBEN: Well, if it's not the Steel Eagle! Whatcha doing, Howie? Celebrating? Three in one day! Hey, bring my pal a pint, will you? This kid's a natural!

HOWARD: Stop it!

REUBEN: What? Listen, you could be up for a gong, here.

HOWARD: I don't want any medals.

REUBEN: Modest, too. No extra points for that.

HOWARD: I just want to fly.

REUBEN: You and me both. What a team we are. Bouncin' them Jerries; watchin' 'em burn!

HOWARD: I said "fly".

REUBEN: *(after a moment)* Yeah.

HOWARD: That's all you know, isn't it? Death and destruction. Each one down is another point. How many points do you get for pigeons?

REUBEN: You can't let it get to you, Winston. You'll end up back on the funny farm.

HOWARD: It wasn't a funny farm. It was a recovery home.

REUBEN: Yeah, okay.

(silence; REUBEN notices the letter)

Letter from home? Is that what's eating you? What's the matter? Get a "Dear Howie"?

HOWARD: Stop calling me that.

REUBEN: Can't be as bad as the one I got.

HOWARD: Leave.

REUBEN: You know, Winston, you'd be hard to put up with, if you weren't such a ring-tailed snorter in the air.

HOWARD: Yeah, I'm just a flapulating fool.

REUBEN: So, did you write home, yet? Let them know about your kills?

HOWARD: No.

REUBEN: Your dad wrote me. Said he's keeping a chart of all the local boys. Said he kept the space right at the top for you. You oughta let him know right away. I mean, you're just one behind me.

HOWARD: I said "no".

REUBEN: Okay. *(silence)* Say, guess who's at the Air Force hospital in town? That Lily Lyedecker.

HOWARD: Lily's here? In England?

REUBEN: Saw her with my own two eyes. She was quite a sight, standing there with that bedpan.

HOWARD: How'd you know she was here?

REUBEN: Letters.

HOWARD: Lily wrote to you?

REUBEN: Sure. Why not?

HOWARD: No reason, I guess.

REUBEN: She was asking about you. In fact, I was going to see her, now. Want to come along?

HOWARD: No.

REUBEN: I'm thinking of marrying her, when I get out. What do you think?

HOWARD: Go ahead.

REUBEN: It's not like she's your girl, is it?

HOWARD: No, it's not like that.

REUBEN: What the hell is the matter with you, Winston? For God's sake, stand up for yourself!

HOWARD: Why?

REUBEN: 'Cause I'm taking your girl.

HOWARD: She's free to do as she wants.

REUBEN: Christ, the only thing that gets a rise out of you is pigeons. And, I don't know how to take that away from you.

HOWARD: You did a good job the first time around.

REUBEN: Howie . . .

HOWARD: STOP CALLING ME THAT! You took one thing, but you can't take anything else, because I give it all to you! How do you fight Kid Carson, the great killer? So, I won't even try. Your name can stay at the top of my father's list forever. I'm going to fly, just fly. You don't know what flying is supposed to be, but I had a pigeon to teach me. You think those great, big, horrible machines are flying? You think engines and gasoline are flying?

REUBEN: What are you on about?

HOWARD: She never had a chance to teach me about landing! Otherwise, I'd be in the clouds and soaring! But, don't think you can stop me, this time. I'm no pigeon — I'm a steel eagle, remember?

REUBEN: Did you get hit in the head?

HOWARD: Just get far away from me, pigeon killer! Stay far away.

REUBEN: I don't need this. See you at the base, pigeon-brain.

(he walks away)

Little Howie's a mean drunk.

(music; REUBEN moves toward AL, VIDA and LILY, who, in silhouette, are the crowd)

AL: *(with Yorkshire accent)* Oi, Canada! Let's have one for Canada, here, luv. Up the colonies!

REUBEN: And, up you!

(shrieks of drunken laughter)

VIDA: *(also with accent)* Cheeky!

HOWARD: WHO NEEDS WHO AROUND?
I'VE DONE QUITE WELL TO NOW.
DON'T NEED YOU AROUND.
TO TRY TO TELL ME HOW
TO LIVE MY LIFE.

I DON'T NEED ANYONE FOR THAT.

WHO NEEDS WHO AROUND?
BEEN ON MY OWN FOR YEARS.
DON'T NEED YOU AROUND.
TAH-TAH. GOODBYE AND CHEERS.
I'LL SEE YOU, FRIEND.

I DON'T NEED ANYONE, ANYTIME, ANYHOW.
JUST WATCH ME NOW . . .

THE CROWD: EASY COME; EASY GO!
IT'S BEEN PLEASANT. EVEN SO,
NOW IT'S OVER. WE BOTH KNOW,

EASY COME; EASY GO.

HOWARD: WHO NEEDS HER AROUND?
I'M BETTER ON MY OWN.
PEOPLE CROWD AROUND.
I'M HAPPIER ALONE.
I'VE GOT MORE ROOM.
I'VE GOT MORE ROOM SO I CAN FLY.

WHO NEEDS WHO AROUND?
I ONLY NEED TWO THINGS.
SPACE TO MOVE AROUND.
AND MY GOLD AND SILVER WINGS.
JUST NEED THOSE THINGS.

I DON'T NEED ANYONE, ANYTIME, ANYHOW.
JUST WATCH ME NOW . . .

THE CROWD: EASY COME; EASY GO!
IT'S BEEN PLEASANT. EVEN SO,
NOW IT'S OVER, WE BOTH KNOW,
EASY COME; EASY GO.

HOWARD: IT'S PEOPLE WHO'VE HELD ME DOWN ON THE GROUND.
FATHER AND REUBEN, AS WELL.
AND PEOPLE WHO CLING AND WHO WANT TO HOLD ON.
THERE'S MOTHER AND LILY, AS WELL!

WHAT'S THE USE? WHAT'S THE USE? WHAT'S THE USE?

I DON'T NEED ANYONE, ANYTIME, ANYHOW.
JUST WATCH ME, NOW!

*(he rolls out, leaving his letter; REUBEN leaves the crowd and
picks it up)*

THE CROWD: EASY COME; EASY GO!
IT'S BEEN PLEASANT. EVEN SO,
NOW IT'S OVER, WE BOTH KNOW,
EASY COME; EASY GO.

REUBEN: Hey, Howie! You forgot your letter! Howie!

(after a moment, he opens the letter and reads; light on VIDA)

VIDA: Dearest Howard: It's very difficult for me to know how to begin this letter, so I

will just tell you, straight from the heart. Your father is dead. The doctors tell me he just worked himself to death. All his life, he worked so hard to have things that he never had a chance to enjoy any of them. The worst part was his weakness toward the end. It was very difficult; you know how he prided himself on his strength, but in the end, it failed him. It hurt him a great deal.

I have not had a letter from you for a long time. Lily writes, but tells me she has not heard from you, either. Please find the time, as I am very much alone, now. Keep safe. God bless you. Mother.

REUBEN: Ah, Howie.

(THE CROWD have been humming under; VIDA rejoins them)

THE CROWD: (EASY COME . . .

(
REUBEN: (EASY COME . . .

THE CROWD: (EASY GO.

(
REUBEN: (EASY GO.
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THE CROWD: (IT'S BEEN PLEASANT . . .

(
REUBEN: (EASY COME . . .

THE CROWD: (EVEN SO . . .

(
REUBEN: (EASY GO . . .

THE CROWD &
REUBEN: NOW IT'S OVER, WE BOTH KNOW
EASY COME; EASY GO.

EASY COME; EASY GO.

LILY: Time, gentlemen, please.

(they exit separately; HOWARD rolls on)

HOWARD: OF ALL THE THINGS I WISH TO BE,
A PIGEON'S WING TAKES HOLD OF ME.

If pigs had wings, they'd be pig-juns.

(lights up on REUBEN on the wall)

REUBEN: Pigeon four to Pigeon six. Answer.

HOWARD: SOME SAY I'M CRAZY . . .
SOME SAY I'M BLUE.

REUBEN: Answer, Howard! I can see you!

HOWARD: BUT, I JUST TELL THEM,
I SEE YOU, TOO.

REUBEN: Pigeon four to Pigeon six . . .

HOWARD: Pigeon six to Pigeon four. Go away.

REUBEN: What are you doing, Howard?

HOWARD: Flying.

REUBEN: It's unauthorized.

HOWARD: It's beautiful.

REUBEN: What's your altitude?

HOWARD: Angels thirty-seven and climbing.

REUBEN: A Hurricane won't pull those angels.

HOWARD: I know. I'm pulling the "Hurri".

REUBEN: Howard, are you on oxygen?

HOWARD: Pigeons don't wear oxygen masks.

REUBEN: You're not a bloody pigeon!

HOWARD: Oh, yes, I am. I'm pigeon six.

OF ALL THE THINGS I WISH TO BE . . .

REUBEN: Come down!

HOWARD: Come up! The stratosphere is fine, today. Whee!

REUBEN: I'm at angels thirty-two and I can't hold it much longer.

HOWARD: That's 'cause you don't believe.

REUBEN: Howie, I read that letter. I'm sorry about your father. He was a good guy.

HOWARD: Poor Pa. He thought he could go without wings. He tried to make me do without them.

REUBEN: Howie, I figured out what you were saying, in the pub. I'm no pigeon killer. I never touched that bird.

HOWARD: Don't lie.

REUBEN: God's truth, buddy.

HOWARD: You crucified her! You smashed her, bashed her, trashed her with your stick.

REUBEN: No!

HOWARD: A PIGEON'S WING TAKES HOLD OF ME . . .

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Reuben, you ever wonder what it's like?

REUBEN: What?

HOWARD: Crashing.

REUBEN: All the time.

HOWARD: It's funny. I can see the plane crashing, but I never see me crashing.

REUBEN: Fancy yourself a parachutist, eh? Not me. I'm not going to have somebody shoot my legs off while I dangle. I go down with my plane. All or nothing, as they say.

HOWARD: As they say . . . but, I don't mean parachuting. What if, instead of down, you decided to go up?

REUBEN: It's not a decision we get to make.

HOWARD: Try it. Just decide to go up and believe in it. I've learned that's the real secret to flapulation. You don't even have to wave your arms, much, as long as you believe.

REUBEN: I'll have to remember that.

HOWARD: Oh, it'll work.

REUBEN: Bandits at ten o'clock low! Climbing! I'm unarmed, Howie.

HOWARD: Then come up!

REUBEN: I can't. They're closing.

HOWARD: Two and a half lullasweeps, I'd say. Okay, boys, tally-ho!

(he wheels his chair around in intricate patterns)

REUBEN: What do you think you're doing?

HOWARD: Pigeon defence rule number one. Get 'em dizzy.

REUBEN: Shoot!

HOWARD: I don't think so. Get out of here, Reuben!

REUBEN: There's one on your tail! I got no guns, Howie! Shake him!

HOWARD: I can't!

REUBEN: I'll get him, Howie!

(REUBEN leans forward; sound of plane diving)

Four and seven eights. Call it five!

(an explosion; REUBEN falls backward off wall)

HOWARD: He's falling! Up, Reuben! Not down! Up! You gotta believe! Come on! Flapulate!

(sound of planes, guns and explosion; lights up on CLARE, reading)

CLARE: One second, you're in a trance and the next second you're pestering me. What is it?

HOWARD: Nothing . . . it's too late . . .

CLARE: How'd you get way over there?

HOWARD: Barrel roll.

CLARE: Nonsense. You probably don't even remember. Now, you know why we've

had to put you here.

HOWARD: It's no good! I need my wings!

CLARE: Fine. Shall I bring your medals, too?

HOWARD: Lily has my wings.

CLARE: Gone, again. Jerry'll be here soon. Let's not have a scene.

HOWARD: Poor Clare . . . poor Pa . . . poor Reuben.

*(lights change; LILY enters, pushing OLD REUBEN
downstage; sound of birds)*

HOWARD: Lily.

LILY: Howard! How long have you been there?

HOWARD: A short while.

LILY: It's past visiting hours.

HOWARD: I know. Does he say anything?

LILY: I heard him humming, this morning.

HOWARD: How was it? I mean, was it happy, or sad?

LILY: Neither, I suppose. It was kind of steady — like an engine.

HOWARD: An airplane engine?

LILY: I can't say for sure. Deep and solid.

HOWARD: *(looking into REUBEN's eyes)* Yes, he's still up there. I can hear it — derrrrrr!

LILY: He should have died, you know, but he didn't hit nearly as hard as he should have. They said it was as if he was slowing down.

HOWARD: He was flapulating. He nearly got the hang of it, too. It's those landings that get you.

LILY: He was so strong. Kid Carson. So strong. I wonder where his mind is now?

HOWARD: Up there, I hope. Wheeling and gliding down some great big hockey rink in

the sky.

LILY: That's nice.

HOWARD: Very nice. I called him a pigeon-killer.

LILY: Pigeon-killer?

HOWARD: Miss Isabel Pigeon.

LILY: Oh, Howard . . . all these years. It was your father.

HOWARD: He wouldn't have. He promised.

LILY: I saw him.

HOWARD: Poor Pa. The only things he could understand were things he could see and touch. He believed that his strength was the only strength you could live by. In the end, it let him down.

LILY: In the end, we all get let down.

HOWARD: That's hard.

LILY: It's life. But, it shouldn't stop us dreaming, Howard. Do you remember our dream wings? What happened to them, Howard?

HOWARD: I lost track of them, somewhere. Maybe, because I lost track of you.

LILY: I kept writing.

HOWARD: I quit answering. I didn't even know you were here, until Reuben told me.

LILY: I wrote Reuben to find out why you hadn't written. He came to see me. We talked about you.

HOWARD: He followed me up to explain that, didn't he?

LILY: We may never know.

(music)

HOWARD: Are we too late for the dream-wings, Lily?

LILY: Never too late.

HOWARD: Why? I'm not much.

LILY: Remember, in the hospital, that first time, you taught me a pigeon word . . .
poorishum.

HOWARD: Sure.

LILY: I already knew what it meant.

BOTH: THOUGH WE MAY TRY,
TO FLY ALONE,
THERE'S TOO MUCH SKY,
FOR ONLY ONE.

OUR WINGS HAVE GROWN
AT LEAST OUR DREAMS
AND BACK, WE'VE FLOWN . . .
AND, NOW, IT SEEMS
THAT WE'RE TOGETHER . . .
AREN'T WE?

HOWARD: LILY, IT'S BEAUTIFUL HERE.
ISN'T IT BEAUTIFUL HERE?
AND, WE'RE TOGETHER . . . ?

LILY: 'Course we're together.

BOTH: I KNOW.

*(music ends; lights change and LILY moves away and exits;
CLARE is in her deck chair; HOWARD mumbles)*

HOWARD: I know, Lily. I know.

CLARE: Did you say something, Father?

HOWARD: Where's Lily? She was here a second ago.

CLARE: Mother is dead.

HOWARD: Where's Reuben?

CLARE: Reuben is in his chair, like he always is; drooling, like he always does.

HOWARD: Lily will be back.

CLARE: No, father. She died in an airplane crash a long time ago.

HOWARD: But, they never found that airplane.

CLARE: It went into the sea.

HOWARD: No, it went up and up. Lily found her wings.

CLARE: I'm sure that's so. She went up to join the angels.

(LILY is lit, on the wall, with wings)

LILY: Oh, handsome! Howard.

HOWARD: Lily.

LILY: I'm not sure if I joined the angels, but the first part's right. I went up. You showed me, Howard. I just . . .

HOWARD: Flapulated!

LILY: That's it.

CLARE: What do you mean?

HOWARD: Lily! Beautiful Lily!

CLARE: Don't. Jerry will be here soon. Let's not have another scene.

HOWARD: But . . .

LILY: Poor Clare. She's like your father. She can't understand.

HOWARD: No.

CLARE: That's it. You sit and I'll finish my reading.

HOWARD: Yes.

(he waits until CLARE's attention is elsewhere, then wheels over to the wall)

LILY: How do I look?

HOWARD: You look like a silver feather. The rarest and most beautiful of all feathers; an angel's feather. Beautiful Lily. Did you bring them?

(LILY motions and wings descend on wires)

LILY: Do you like them?

HOWARD: They're everything I dreamed of.

LILY: Isabel made them. Look, she even stitched your name under the feathers. Oh, Howard, we've been waiting for such a long time. You must try them on.

HOWARD: Here?

LILY: You know of a better place, flyboy?

HOWARD: And, if they don't fit?

LILY: They'll fit.

(music; HOWARD manoeuvres under the wings and they settle onto him)
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HOWARD: OF ALL THE THINGS . . .

They feel so comfortable!

. . . I WISH TO BE . . .

LILY: They look wonderful! The handsomest flyboy around.

HOWARD: . . . A PIGEON'S WING . . .

They seem to be a bit short.

LILY: A wee bit, but they'll grow with use.

HOWARD: They'll get used!

LILY: What are you waiting for? Flapulate!

HOWARD: Reuben. I can't leave him. He can't fly.

LILY: That's not Reuben. The real Reuben has been up there shooting pucks through clouds for years. You should see him play cloud hockey. He's a natural.

HOWARD: I'd like to see that.

LILY: Then flapulate.

HOWARD: Now?

LILY: Now.

(HOWARD strains in his chair)

You have to believe more.

HOWARD: But, I still don't know how to land.

LILY: Howard, you never have to land again.

(HOWARD slowly rises from his chair through the following, until he is standing)

HOWARD: WATCH ME NOW!
WATCH AND SEE!
SEE THESE WINGS?
THEY WERE MADE FOR ME.

LILY'S HERE!
SAY GOODBYE!
SHE BROUGHT MY WINGS.
JUST WATCH ME FLY!

THESE ARE BEAUTIFUL WINGS,
(ALL SILVER-WHITE.

LILY: (
(HOWARD, THEY'RE BEAUTIFUL WINGS.
THEY'RE MADE FROM A STAR.

HOWARD: THESE ARE BEAUTIFUL WINGS,
(SO GOLDEN BRIGHT!

LILY: (
(HOWARD, THEY'RE BEAUTIFUL WINGS,
THEY'LL CARRY YOU FAR.

BOTH: ALL THE DREAMS YOU'VE PUT AWAY
CAN AT LAST COME TRUE SOME DAY
IF YOU JUST BELIEVE.

LILY: YOU'RE NEARLY THERE!

HOWARD: LILY?

BOTH: FLAPULATE!

THESE (THOSE) ARE BEAUTIFUL WINGS . . .
THEY'RE MADE WITH SKILL.
THESE (THOSE) ARE BEAUTIFUL WINGS . . .
AND SOAR, WE WILL!

WHERE WE GO, WE WON'T DECIDE.
WE'LL JUST FLY ON, SIDE BY SIDE!
I'M HOLDING YOUR HAND.

LILY: AND, DON'T LET GO.

HOWARD: READY?

LILY: WAITING!

HOWARD: WATCH ME NOW!

LILY: WE'RE ALL WAITING, LOVE,
WE'RE JUST A LULLASWEEP ABOVE.

HOWARD: WATCH ME GOOD!

LILY: IF YOU JUST BELIEVE, YOU'LL SOON BE
FLOATING PAST THE EAVE.

HOWARD: I'VE GOT WINGS, NOW . . .

(the music pauses, suspended; HOWARD is on his feet)

Lily? What time is it?

LILY: Eighteen hundred hours.

HOWARD: Wheels up. Grab my hand, Lily!

OF ALL THE THINGS I WISH TO BE . . .

(HOWARD slowly sinks back as his wings ascend; behind him,

LILY reaches out and THE BOY comes up onto the rail, with wings; music continues as CLARE stirs)

CLARE: Out on the veranda, Jerry!

(JERRY enters, looking harassed)

JERRY: Sorry I'm late. The damn traffic . . .

CLARE: Don't worry, honey. I've been reading and enjoying the sun. It's been perfect. He's hardly stirred all afternoon.

JERRY: We'll have to hurry.

CLARE: Sure.

(she starts to pack up her things; JERRY moves to HOWARD, slumped in his chair)

JERRY: Goodbye, Howard. Thanks for minding Clare.

CLARE: It's disgusting when they drool like that. Father, don't slouch. Sit up!

(no movement; JERRY takes a closer look)

JERRY: Howard? *(a beat)* Oh, my god . . . Clare.

(JERRY turns his head to CLARE, who looks up at him; freeze; lights to black; music ends)

END OF MUSICAL