

SPRING CREEK.

Written for and published in the WATCHMAN twenty-five years ago. BY JOHN W. MOORE.

Written as a School Exercise for his Little Girl. 'Tis something very nice, I think. In summer's twilight glow, To roam beside the placid brook, Where Spring Creek's waters flow. It gives the mind a backward stroll To by-gone happy hours, And soon revives the languid soul Like lilies freshed by showers. I see its waters lash the stones, And watch the spray go by, I hear its laughing, liquid tones, And hear the echoes die. I then in meditation peer A hundred years from now, And wonder if Spring Creek will cheer The people then, as now. And will the gray siltarian rocks That o'er beside the stream, Stand there like some great city blocks As now to me they seem? Will autumn then bright colors bring And paint the forests gay? Will birds their songs as sweetly sing Where Spring Creek's waters play? I oftimes muse and linger where The bubbles rise and foam, To stay awhile and frolic there, Then float on down the stream. Will we like them, just loiter here, Where golden sunbeams play, And only fill a certain sphere, Then, like them pass away? Shouldn't I wander far from here, And dwell where splendor glows, I'll ever hold in memory dear, The land where Spring Creek flows. BELLEFONTE, PA.

THE SIREN OF THE AIR.

When his barograph marked twelve thousand feet, Reese pushed the yoke of his warping-wheel forward a few inches, and gave a slight inclination to the foot-bar of the rudder. The monoplane, which had been climbing up into the wind so sharply as to remain almost motionless as far as horizontal progress was concerned, settled to a level keel and began to describe a wide circle, gracefully lifting its outside and lowering its inside wing like a bird when it turns. From behind the trailing edge of the lowered wing, its driver looked down on the creeping expanse of earth two miles below. The hangars and pylons and crowded stands of the aviation-field were pressed together, made small, blurred, as though seen through the wrong end of a misted telescope. The broad field itself seemed not larger than a lady's handkerchief; it was almost lost in the blur of villages, boulevards, railroad-tracks, and tree-clumps of the level Long Island country. To north and south, as the great bird swept steadily on its arc, appeared expanses, smooth and polished like metal—the Atlantic and the Sound. Shapes like beetles represented the ships. "It might be Lilliput," said Reese, aloud, bending his helmeted head over the inch-wide rim of aluminum that separated him from space. The strangeness of sheer height and aloofness had written awe on his face. He lifted his eyes from the Atlantic to the ceiling walls of sky, dark blue with the thinness of air, dazzling like steel with the resplendence of untempered sunshine, which curved downward all around him. He was as though suspended in the monstrous metal reflector of a monstrous electric light, dazzling, blazing distance was all around him. "God! he muttered; 'is n't this—' There was a catch of awe and rapture in his voice—'is n't this tremendous! And lonely! A man on a mountain-peak would n't be half so much alone.' Behind the glass of his goggles his wide, hazel eyes shone with a dull excitement, like that which the first exhilaration of champagne. His rapid ascent, the thin, icy air, the powerful hum of the muffled motor, the blazing sunshine, the voice and fingers of the wind, the sweep of his winged machine obeying the circular blur that showed the tractor's power at the invisible supporting structure that thrilled along the steel nerves of the great bird into his hands—all these new and strong forces registered themselves on the brain of the man, doubled the time of his heart-beats, made him quiver more with excitement than with the cold that suggested itself despite his furs. There was no fear on his keen face; rather exultation, triumph, delight in the presence of danger. A strong swimmer might have struck out toward sirens on their rocks with such an expression of eager, abandoned joy. "They shall mount up with wings as eagles!" he chanted somewhat wildly, glad of the sound of his voice in the strange emptiness and silence of the place. His eyes wandered along the dazzling, blue-black horizon to a blazing mass of snow-like mist that was forming on the seaward side. "I wish I could go to sleep—like a grigate-bird on the wing," he finished inconsequently. He had got little sleep the night before, the nearness of his first real flight, his first unattended trip toward the sun, had been too poignant. From his first lesson in "grass-cutting" with an instructor in the seat behind him, he had dreamed of this; height and distance allured him as by some affinity with his nature, with the very blood in his veins. His privateer ancestors of 1812, his balloonist great-uncle, his grandfather who had been a naval officer, had bequeathed him their love of free spaces and adventure. The care of this father, a well-to-do professor in a technical school, to bring the boy up to the teaching profession had not survived young Reese's first sight of an aeroplane. The professor bowed to the inevitable; John Faraday Reese gave up higher mathematics to adventure on the highways of the sky. As the machine completed its three-mile circle and came once more up into the wind, Reese straightened it out again, and pulled back a little on the yoke that worked the big double elevator in the tail. The great wings turned upward again, soaring. Playing the controls as instinctively as though the machine had been a part of him, the driver kept his eyes on the lethargic needle of the barograph. From beneath drooping eyelids he watched it crawl upward over the

lined paper strip. Twelve thousand five hundred, twelve thousand seven hundred fifty, thirteen thousand, thirteen thousand and two hundred feet. Despite the sharp angle at which the big bird poised, the ascent was growing more gradual; the thinned air offered less grip for the tractor, less support for the wings. To increase the power of the motor, Reese cut out the muffler. The rapid musketry of the exhaust broke out, strangely sharpened and clamorous in the attenuated air. With something like a shudder, he threw over the lever that muffled the engine. His nervousness was on edge; the strange sound hurt. The barograph marked thirteen thousand six hundred feet. Still they climbed, enveloped in a blaze of sunshine that was to the tempered sunlight of the earth's surface as diamonds to glass. Despite the zero air, Reese's temples inside his padded leather helmet were bathed in sweat. He was panting, and fine, red lines appeared on the smacking surface of his eyeballs. Below the mask of his goggles his face was drawn into deep, straining lines of exultant determination. "Up we go!" he shouted. His voice seemed smothered in a vacuum, but he disregarded the strangeness. "Sixteen thousand and a world's record, or bust!" He glanced again over the quivering rim of the car. A fine white mist, a mist that gave back the blazing sunshine like cloth of spun-glass, had shut out the earth. It was as though a cover had been put over the mouth of the tremendous reflector instead of which a midge in the globe of an arc light. The very air seemed to turn to flames and ice. A great wave of melancholy gathered, rose, and broke over him; he was alone in an inhuman world that blazed and swayed, that burned and froze, that had no stability, that allowed him air only in searing little gasps. "Nevertheless," he muttered, biting at his hardened nether-lip—"nevertheless, up we go!" He closed his eyes for a moment to get rid of a slight vertigo caused directly by the glare of the aluminum hood that covered the engine. Colored blotches of light danced before his eyeballs, and the rushing of the icy wind rang on his brain like faint voices. He could hear the feverish whispering of the blood in the tympanum of his ears, like a magnified replica of the sound that sometimes comes just before sleep. He felt sleepy. "Sixteen thousand!" he muttered to himself, crushing down his dizziness and languor. "Sixteen thousand! Sixteen thousand feet!" "No, twenty thousand!" The voice was singularly musical, thin, and clear. "Yes, twenty thousand!" In the thrill of determination that the voice gave him, he momentarily overlooked the queerness of its presence. "Twenty thousand feet high!" "Higher than even the condon dares!" He opened his eyes in some faint distress and perplexity of mind, and blinked through his goggles. In the forward seat, turned three quarters toward him, was a woman, a girl. He could hardly make her out at first, for the dazzle of the aluminum hood was just beyond her, and she was dressed all in white—white, knitted wool and some close, white fur that was almost as dazzling as the aluminum itself. A white, knitted cap was pulled down over her head; a few strands of hair, blazing with the sun's own color, lay around the snow-white oval of her face. "I did n't know—I had the two-seater," he remarked dazedly. His voice was thin and whistling; he raised it to make himself heard above the hum of the motor and screw. "I thought I took out the one-place machine; I'm out for altitude, you know." Her eyes, blue-black and flashing like the sky, regarded him with a little look of questioning; her mouth's faint scarlet line turned down a trifle at the ends, suggesting polite surprise. "I don't mean to intimate that I'm not delighted to have you along," he assured her warmly. "I merely forgot; it's the first time I've been anywhere near as high as this, and it makes me feel slightly dippy, not bad enough to make me afraid of losing control, of course, but still—not just right." "You look—magnificent!" Her voice left a ringing echo in his ears. "Oh, I feel all right, aside from the fact that I can't remember engaging a passenger for this trip." "That's not worth worrying about now," she assured him, smiling in a dim, dangerous way into his eyes. "What does the barograph read?" He had to bend down close to read the dial. "Fifteen thousand three hundred," he said with a stray air, and lifted his head to stare at her. "I'll not cut the muffler until we stop rising; the exhaust makes a ghastly clatter up here. It jabbars like the ghost of itself." "I love it, it sounds—high," she said, and again he was thrilled by the weird music of her voice. It allured, it inspired like a bugle-note, and yet there was a chilling something in it. It reminded him of the "ice-crackle," that peculiar trilling reverberation from the expanding of thin, new ice on the skating rinks of his boyhood. One glided along over the thin, glass-clear surface, one saw the steel-blue water just beneath, one heard the sudden silvery "ice-crackle" of the ice-crackle, and one put his whole soul into speed. He stared at her, racking his benumbed wits to remember her place on his passenger-list. Like most of the new pilots, he was accustomed to earn an honest penny now and then by taking up persons with the desire and the necessary fifty dollars. She frankly yielded herself to his inspection; she turned farther around in her seat and smiled at him. "You don't remember me?" "No; that's astounding, but true." She was exquisite, perfect in every line, beautiful with the abstract beauty of an idealist painter's work. An artist might have called her a "pure type"; there was no little trick of outline or coloring to give personality, character, to the flawless symmetry of her face. She seemed less a real woman than some ideal created to embody an idea; she might have stood for "Purity," or, perhaps better, "Danger." Her beauty lost nothing by its impersonality; to Reese's sun-dazzled eyes, at least it was all the more poignant. The faint scarlet of her eyes, the flashing gold of her hair, and the sheer radiant white of all the rest of her allured, intoxicated, astounded. He breathed quickly for reasons other than the thinness of the air. She was unhuman, almost superhuman, for sheer perfection of line and color. "Well, you have been staring at me for some time," she said without the slightest show of self-consciousness. "Do you like me?"

"Yes, wonderfully," he declared, as calmly frank as she herself was. "And yet I remember ever meeting you before?" He shook his head. "If you'd recall the circumstances. The lessened atmospheric pressure up here makes my head feel as big and empty as a balloon." "Oh, it makes no difference; acquaintances begin only when they get interesting, anyway. How you stare! What are you thinking about me now?" He had been casting about for words, a metaphor, to describe her; in his youth he had made metaphors, boy's way, to put into verses. "I was thinking that you are like this height," he cried, bending toward her over the yoke of the warping-wheel. The great bird lurched drunkenly, and he threw over the wheel to bring it back into equilibrium. He laughed, made recklessly by the answering light in her eyes, and he lurched in the other direction like a swooping eagle. "Yes, you are like height. You are beautiful, you allure, you call to all a man's manhood and daring; and yet there is something in your look that makes me tremble, as though you were a blade pointing at my throat. Come, we're three miles above you a little? For you are wonderful and beautiful—beyond belief." "Why, and so are you. Or is it only this dizzy loneliness that makes us think so?" "Who are you?" he demanded. "I knew I'd engaged to take up several women this week, but no one like you. Who are you? Give me a name to call you by. Tell me who you are." "Why, only your poor feminine passenger," she laughed, bending toward him. One lithe arm and hand, gauntleted nearly to the elbow in close, white, glistening fur, lay along the aluminum edge of the car. "As for my name, how do you like Alta?" "Good! I remember just enough Latin to appreciate it. Alta—High! Well—" He threw back the head recklessly—"I'm out for altitude!" "Perhaps you'll attain it. Only keep your elevator-flaps well lifted!" He threw back the yoke with a laugh. In bending toward her he had permitted the machine to gain the level once more. The great bird slanted upward at an abrupt angle, and poised, quivering. "You are dazed," she cried. Her level eyes dared him, her lips were parted and promised. He closed his eyes for a moment, made giddy by her radiance and by the blaze of the untempered sun on the aluminum hood just beyond her. The reflection surrounded her with an aureole like white flames. "Instinctively he sensed the danger of the lift of the wings; he had no need to look at the needle of the level-indicator to know that the machine was threatening to slide backward into the abyss." "Why do you shut your eyes, height-seeker?" she demanded. "Are you afraid? What does the barograph read now?" "Sixteen thousand three hundred," he said shortly. "A record, I believe; but what of it? No, I'm not afraid," he added, stifling his neck and fixing his bloodshot eyes on her untroubled eyes and dangerous lips; "I'm not even afraid of you. It's you who'd better be afraid of me. Do you know we were ready to drop backward a minute ago?" "I felt it. It was superb. We must have gained two hundred feet in that one tremendous lift. And yet I think—you were afraid." The blood rushed into his face; flames leaped up in his eyes; he was ready to leap up in his eyes. "Perhaps I can prove I wasn't by letting go the controls and coming over there to you. We'd be together for as long as it took us to drop three miles, anyway. Shall I?" "Oh, brave words—and true! I believe you look your words; you are a demigod by the look on your mouth and eyes; you are a man no longer! So, Spirit, send us upward once more till we poised over the abyss! Height and the spirit of adventure! Throw back the yoke with a laugh, as you did before." "What! I do?" "Yes! What a price?" "It is right. Well—when the barograph marks twenty thousand feet, I will come and sit at your knees!" "It is what I had on the tip of my tongue to ask," he shouted, wild with exaltation. "No, you'd block the rudder! We will go down to the warp alone—a proper finish. Down twenty thousand feet, with the rudder blocked!" "Yes. Is it a bargain?" "A bargain!" he shouted, and turned his face up into the candent dome of sky and lance of cloud. His arms jerked the yoke of the elevator back until the wheel touched his breast; the machine leaped upward like a diver, soared, poised trembling. He threw back the lever that cut out the muffler. The exhaust broke out in a weird salvo like sharpened rifle-bullets. He sensed off the precipitate angle again they had gained way once more, and again they leaped up to its high-limit. They bounded upward, swaying, clattering, whistling through the knife-edged wind. And all the while she smiled into his face. He no longer noticed the barograph; he was no longer troubled by the gaze of inspiration and allurement that trickled of scarlet started from both his eyes; his blackened lips gasped for breath; his bulging bloodshot eyes left her only to glare over the powers at his command. He was all resolve and eagerness; he was determination incarnate. He shot one hand forward, ungloved, to adjust the carburetor, which was beginning to fail for lack of air. He threw back and forth the lever that put extra pressure on the gasoline tank. With demoniac abandon he worked the hand-pump that jettied oil on the flying bearings of the engine. "Do-er! Accomplisher!" He started at her voice. The reflection of his own exaltation was on her; her face quivered, yearned toward him. With a steady, sinuous movement she drew herself back over the low back-rest of her seat, and she lurched back over the yoke that held the warping-wheel. She sat up, sideways, near him, lifted her face slowly until it curved backward like a flower on the fair, white stem of her throat, and offered him the curved, scarlet miracle of her lips. As he bent toward her the sky became black. As from the depths of a dream he heard her voice chanting, "I have done." "The ages dreamed of this that you have done." Her voice was like a softened, hundred-toned ice-crackle. He trembled in his coma, and then relaxed as for a long fall in sleep. The voice went on: "The Chaldeans sculptured bulgins on their man-gods and on their sacred bulls.

"The Greeks made their dream articulate in the myth of Daedalus and Icarus. "Leonarde da Vinci laid aside the brush that made the Mona Lisa to grope for the realization of this dream that we have made real. "To fly, to spread wings on the impalpable air, and soar, to follow the way of an eagle in the air. "To skim the invisible columns of the sky—are not men become as gods now in the air?" "You have dreamed true, Spirit—Spirit of Dreams and High Emprise; you are all men who aspire. "How beautiful you are in the torture of accomplishment! The very chords on your throat are lute-strings to sing of victory. "The blood from your nostrils is a libation to the jealous powers that you have trampled underfoot. "Beautiful, wonderful, holy—my lover, whom I love!" He was suddenly aware of a great rush of wind and of the delirious, gripping sensation of falling. Drunk with his voice and beauty, he had forgotten warping-wheel, rudder-bar, elevator-yoke, everything. The cutting air roused him; frantically he threw the elevator down, drawing his head backward before the yoke to his breast. The great bird shuddered and swung nizzily to one side. He remembered that she was blowing the rudder-bar; painfully, ineffectually, as in a dream, he warped down the lower wing, biting his lips in an agony of helplessness. "Why struggle further? You have attained—you have attained!" he heard her voice chanting in his ears; her lithe arms sprang to meet each other about his neck. "Kiss me—kiss me, Spirit!" she cried, with her icy cheek pressed to his. "I am height!" He threw her off. "No," he shouted, struggling to keep his eyes on her, "I have attained; you are made—we are both made. Don't you understand? This is death! "Kiss me!" she repeated in her voice of ice and silver. "How wonderful is this death! Where are your arms, Spirit? Am I not beautiful? Look at me!" He threw her off. 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