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WEIRD TALES ISSUED 1st OF EACH MONTH

He That Hath Wings

By EDMOND HAMILTON

The story of a modern Icarus—David Rand was a freak of nature, a glorious winged freak, who had experienced the freedom of the sky and could no longer be tied to the ground

DOCTOR HARRIMAN paused in the corridor of the maternity ward and asked, "What about that woman in 27?"

There was pity in the eyes of the plump, crisply dressed head nurse as she answered, "She died an hour after the birth of her baby, doctor. Her heart was bad, you know."

The physician nodded, his spare, clean-shaven face thoughtful. "Yes, I remember now—she and her husband were injured in an electrical explosion in a subway a year ago, and the husband died recently. What about the baby?"

The nurse hesitated. "A fine, healthy little boy, except——"

"Except what?"

"Except that he is humpbacked, doctor."

Doctor Harriman swore in pity. "What horrible luck for the poor little devil! Born an orphan, and deformed, too." He said with sudden decision, "I'll look at the infant. Perhaps we could do something for him."

But when he and the nurse bent together over the crib in which red-faced little David Rand lay squalling lustily, the doctor shook his head. "No, we can't do anything for that back. What a shame!"

David Rand's little red body was as straight and clean-lined as that of any baby ever born—except for his back. From the back of the infant's shoulder-

blades jutted two humped projections, one on each side, that curved down toward the lower ribs.

Those twin humps were so long and streamlined in their jutting curve that they hardly looked like deformities. The skilful hands of Doctor Harriman gently probed them. Then an expression of perplexity came over his face.

"This doesn't seem any ordinary deformity," he said puzzledly. "I think we'll look at them through the X-ray. Tell Doctor Morris to get the apparatus going."

Doctor Morris was a stocky, red-headed young man who looked in pity, also, at the crying, red-faced baby lying in front of the X-ray machine, later.

He muttered, "Tough on the poor kid, that back. Ready, doctor?"

Harriman nodded. "Go ahead."

The X-rays broke into sputtering, crackling life. Doctor Harriman applied his eyes to the fluoroscope. His body stiffened. It was a long, silent minute before he straightened from his inspection. His spare face had gone dead white and the waiting nurse wondered what had so excited him.

Harriman said, a little thickly, "Morris! Take a look through this. I'm either seeing things, or else something utterly unprecedented has happened."

Morris, with a puzzled frown at his superior, gazed through the instrument. His head jerked up.

"My God!" he exclaimed.

"You see it too?" exclaimed Doctor Harriman. "Then I guess I'm not crazy after all. But this thing—why, it's without precedent in all human history!"

He babbled incoherently, "And the bones, too—hollow—the whole skeletal structure different. His weight——"

He set the infant hastily on a scale. The beam jiggled.

"See that!" exclaimed Harriman. "He weighs only a third of what a baby his size should weigh."

Red-headed young Doctor Morris was staring in fascination at the curving humps on the infant's back. He said hoarsely, "But this just isn't possible——"

"But it's real!" Harriman flung out. His eyes were brilliant with excitement. He cried, "A change in gene-patterns—only that could have caused this. Some pre-natal influence——"

His fist smacked into his hand. "I've got it! The electrical explosion that injured this child's mother a year before his birth. That's what did it—an explosion of hard radiations that damaged, changed, her genes. You remember Muller's experiments——"

The head nurse's wonder overcame her respect. She asked, "But what is it, doctor? What's the matter with the child's back? Is it so bad as all that?"

"So bad?" repeated Doctor Harriman. He drew a long breath. He told the nurse, "This child, this David Rand, is a unique case in medical history. There has never been anyone like him—as far as we know, the thing that's going to happen to him has never happened to any other human being. And all due to that electrical explosion."

"What's going to happen to him?" demanded the nurse, dismayed.

"This child is going to have wings!" shouted Harriman. "Those projections growing out on his back—they're not just ordinary abnormalities—they're nascent wings, that will very soon break out and grow just as a fledgling bird's wings break out and grow."

THE head nurse stared at them. "You're joking," she said finally, in flat unbelief.

"Good God, do you think I'd joke about such a matter?" cried Harriman. "I tell you, I'm as stunned as you are, even though I can see the scientific reason for the thing. This child's body is different from the body of any other human being that ever lived.

"His bones are hollow, like a bird's bones. His blood seems different and he weighs only a third what a normal human infant weighs. And his shoulder-blades jut out into bone projections to which are attached the great wing-muscles. The X-rays clearly show the rudimentary feathers and bones of the wings themselves."

"Wings!" repeated young Morris dazedly. He said after a moment, "Harriman, this child will be able to——"

"He'll be able to fly, yes!" declared Harriman. "I'm certain of it. The wings are going to be very large ones, and his body is so much lighter than normal that they'll easily bear him aloft."

"Good Lord!" ejaculated Morris incoherently.

He looked a little wildly down at the infant. It had stopped crying and now waved pudgy red arms and legs weakly.

"It just isn't possible," said the nurse, taking refuge in incredulity. "How could a baby, a man, have wings?"

Doctor Harriman said swiftly, "It's

due to a deep change in the parents' genes. The genes, you know, are the tiny cells which control bodily development in every living thing that is born. Alter the gene-pattern and you alter the bodily development of the offspring, which explains the differences in color, size, and so forth, in children. But those minor differences are due to comparatively minor gene-changes.

"But the gene-pattern of this child's parents was radically changed a year ago. The electrical explosion in which they were injured must have deeply altered their gene-patterns, by a wave of sudden electrical force. Muller, of the University of Texas, has demonstrated that gene-patterns *can* be greatly altered by radiation, and that the offspring of parents so treated will differ greatly from their parents in bodily form. That accident produced an entirely new gene-pattern in the parents of this child, one which developed their child into a winged human. He's what biologists technically call a mutant."

Young Morris suddenly said, "Good Lord, what the newspapers are going to do when they get hold of this story!"

"They mustn't get hold of it," Doctor Harriman declared. "The birth of this child is one of the greatest things in the history of biological science, and it mustn't be made a cheap popular sensation. We must keep it utterly quiet."

THEY kept it quiet for three months, in all. During that time, little David Rand occupied a private room in the hospital and was cared for only by the head nurse and visited only by the two physicians.

During those three months, the correctness of Doctor Harriman's prediction was fulfilled. For in that time, the humped projections on the child's back

grew with incredible rapidity until at last they broke through the tender skin in a pair of stubby, scrawny-looking things that were unmistakably wings.

Little David squalled violently during the days that his wings broke forth, feeling only a pain as of teething many times intensified. But the two doctors stared and stared at those little wings with their rudimentary feathers, even now hardly able to believe the witness of their eyes.

They saw that the child had as complete control of the wings as of his arms and legs, by means of the great muscles around their bases which no other human possessed. And they saw too that while David's weight was increasing, he remained still just a third of the weight of a normal child of his age, and that his heart had a tremendously high pulse-beat and that his blood was far warmer than that of any normal person.

Then it happened. The head nurse, unable any longer to contain the tremendous secret with which she was bursting, told a relative in strict confidence. That relative told another relative, also in strict confidence. And two days later the story appeared in the New York newspapers.

The hospital put guards at its doors and refused admittance to the grinning reporters who came to ask for details. All of them were frankly skeptical, and the newspaper stories were written with a tongue in the cheek. The public laughed. A child with wings! What kind of phony new story would they think up next?

But a few days later, the stories changed in tone. Others of the hospital personnel, made curious by the newspaper yarns, pried into the room where David Rand lay crouching and thrashing his arms and legs and wings. They babbled broadcast assertions that the story was true,

One of them who was a candid camera enthusiast even managed to slip out a photograph of the infant. Smeary as it was, that photograph did unmistakably show a child with wings of some sort growing from its back.

The hospital became a fort, a place besieged. Reporters and photographers milled outside its doors and clamored against the special police guard that had been detailed to keep them out. The great press associations offered Doctor Harriman large sums for exclusive stories and photographs of the winged child. The public began to wonder if there was anything in the yarn.

Doctor Harriman had to give in, finally. He admitted a committee of a dozen reporters, photographers and eminent physicians to see the child.

David Rand lay and looked up at them with wise blue gaze, clutching his toe, while the eminent physicians and newspapermen stared down at him with bulging eyes.

The physicians said, "It's incredible, but it's true. This is no fake—the child really has wings."

The reporters asked Doctor Harriman wildly, "When he gets bigger, will he be able to fly?"

Harriman said shortly, "We can't tell just what his development will be like, now. But if he continues to develop as he has, undoubtedly he'll be able to fly."

"Good Lord, let me at a phone!" groaned one newshound. And then they were all scrambling pell-mell for the telephones.

Doctor Harriman permitted a few pictures, and then unceremoniously shoved the visitors out. But there was no holding the newspapers, after that. David Rand's name became overnight the best known in the world. The pictures con-

vinced even the most skeptical of the public.

Great biologists made long statements on the theories of genetics which could explain the child. Anthropologists speculated as to whether similar freak winged men had not been born a few times in the remote past, giving rise to the world-wide legends of harpies and vampires and flying people. Crazy sects saw in the child's birth an omen of the approaching end of the world.

Theatrical agents offered immense sums for the privilege of exhibiting David in a hygienic glass case. Newspapers and press services outbid each other for exclusive rights to the story Doctor Harriman could tell. A thousand firms begged to purchase the right to use little David's name on toys, infant foods, and what not.

And the cause of all this excitement lay and rolled and crowed and sometimes cried in his little bed, now and then vigorously flapping the sprouting wings that had upset the whole world. Doctor Harriman looked thoughtfully down at him.

He said, "I'll have to get him out of here. The hospital superintendent is complaining that the crowds and commotion are wrecking the place."

"But where can you take him?" Morris wanted to know. "He hasn't any parents or relatives, and you can't put a kid like this in an orphan asylum."

Doctor Harriman made decision. "I'm going to retire from practise and devote myself entirely to observing and recording David's growth. I'll have myself made his legal guardian and I'll bring him up in some spot away from all this turmoil—an island or some place like that, if I can find one."

Harriman found such a place, an island off the Maine coast, a speck of barren sand and scrubby trees. He leased it, built a bungalow there, and took David

Rand and an elderly nurse-housekeeper there. He took also a strong Norwegian watchman who was very efficient at repelling the boats of reporters who tried to land there. After a while the newspapers gave it up. They had to be content to reprint the photographs and articles which Doctor Harriman gave to scientific publications concerning David's growth.

DAVID grew rapidly. In five years he was a sturdy little youngster with yellow hair, and his wings were larger and covered with short bronze feathers. He ran and laughed and played, like any youngster, flapping his wings vigorously.

He was ten before he flew. By then he was a little slimmer, and his glittering bronze wings came to his heels. When he walked or sat or slept, he kept the wings closely folded on his back like a bronze sheath. But when he opened them, they extended much farther than his arms could, on either side.

Doctor Harriman had meant to let David gradually try flying, to photograph and observe every step of the process. But it did not happen that way. David flew first as naturally as a bird first flies.

He himself had never thought much about his wings. He knew that Doctor John, as he called the physician, had no such wings, and that neither did Flora, the gaunt old nurse, nor Holf, the grinning watchman, have them. But he had seen no other people, and so he imagined the rest of the world was divided into people who had wings and people who didn't have them. He did not know just what the wings were for, though he knew that he liked to flap them and exercise them when he was running, and would wear no shirt over them.

Then one April morning, David found out what his wings were for. He had climbed into a tall old scrub oak to peer at a bird's nest. The child was always

inordinately interested in the birds of the little island, jumping and clapping his hands as he saw them darting and circling overhead, watching their flocks stream south each fall and north each spring, prying into their ways of living because of some dim sense of kinship with these other winged things.

He had climbed nearly to the top of the old oak on this morning, toward the nest he had spied. His wings were tightly folded to keep them out of the way of branches. Then, as he reached up to pull himself the last step upward, his foot pressed on the merest rotten shell of a dead branch. Abnormally light as he was, his weight was enough to snap the branch and he fell cleanly toward the ground.

Instincts exploded in David's brain in the moment that he plummeted toward the ground. Quite without will, his wings unfolded with a bursting whir. He felt a terrific tug on them that wrenched his shoulders hard. And then suddenly, marvelously, he was no longer falling but was *gliding* downward on a long slant, with his wings unfolded and rigidly set.

There burst from his innermost being a high, ringing shout of exultation. Down—down—gliding like a swooping bird with the clean air buffeting at his face and streaming past his wings and body. A wild, sweet thrill that he had never felt before, a sudden crazy joy in living.

He shouted again, and with instant impulse flapped his great wings, beating the air with them, instinctively bending his head sharply back and keeping his arms flattened against his sides, his legs straight and close together.

He was soaring *upward* now, the ground swiftly receding beneath him, the sun blazing in his eyes, the wind screaming around him. He opened his mouth

to shout again, and the cold, clean air hammered into his throat. In sheer, mad physical ecstasy he rocketed up through the blue with whirring wings.

It was thus that Doctor Harriman saw him when he chanced to come out of the bungalow a little later. The doctor heard a shrill, exultant cry from high above and looked up to see that slim winged shape swooping down toward him from the sunlit heavens.

The doctor caught his breath at the sheer beauty of the spectacle as David dived and soared and whirled above him, gone crazy with delight in his new-found wings. The boy had instinctively learned how to turn and twist and dive, even though his movements had yet a clumsiness that made him sometimes side-slip.

When David Rand finally swooped down and alighted in front of the doctor with quick-closing wings, the boy's eyes streamed electric joy.

"I can fly!"

Doctor Harriman nodded. "You can fly, David. I know I can't keep you from doing it now, but you must not leave the island and you must be careful."

BY THE time David reached the age of seventeen, there was no longer any need to caution him to be careful. He was as much at home in the air as any bird living.

He was a tall, slim, yellow-haired youth now, his arrow-straight figure still clad only in the shorts that were all the clothing his warm-blooded body required, a wild, restless energy crackling and snapping in his keen face and dancing blue eyes.

His wings had become superb, glittering, bronze-feathered pinions that extended more than ten feet from tip to tip when he spread them, and that touched

his heels with their lowest feathers when he closed them on his back.

Constant flying over the island and the surrounding waters had developed the great wing-muscles behind David's shoulders to tremendous strength and endurance. He could spend a whole day gliding and soaring over the island, now climbing high with mad burst of whirring wings, then circling, planing on motionless wings, slowly descending.

He could chase and overtake almost any bird in the air. He would start up a flock of pheasants and his laughter would ring high and wild across the sky as he turned and twisted and darted after the panicky birds. He could pull out the tail-feathers of outraged hawks before they could escape, and he could swoop quicker than hawk on rabbits and squirrels on the ground.

Sometimes when fog banked the island Doctor Harriman would hear the ringing shout from the gray mists overhead and would know that David was somewhere up there. Or again he would be out over the sunlit waters, plummeting headlong down to them and then at the last moment swiftly spreading his wings so that he just skimmed the wave-crests with the screaming gulls before he rocketed upward again.

Never yet had David been away from the island, but the doctor knew from his own infrequent visits to the mainland that the world-wide interest in the flying youth was still strong. The photographs which the doctor gave to scientific journals no longer sufficed for the public curiosity, and launches and airplanes with moving-picture cameramen frequently circled the island to snap pictures of David Rand flying.

To one of those airplanes occurred a thing that gave its occupants much to talk about for days to come. They were

a pilot and cameraman who came over the island at midday, in spite of Doctor Harriman's prohibition of such flights, and who circled brazenly about looking for the flying youth.

Had they looked up, they could have seen David as a circling speck high above them. He watched the airplane with keen interest mixed with contempt. He had seen these flying ships before and he felt only pity and scorn for their stiff, clumsy wings and noisy motors with which wingless men made shift to fly. This one, though, so directly beneath him, stimulated his curiosity so that he swooped down toward it from above and behind, his great wings urging him against the slip-stream of its propeller.

The pilot in the open rear-cockpit of that airplane nearly had heart failure when someone tapped him on the shoulder from behind. He whirled, startled, and when he saw David Rand crouching precariously on the fuselage just behind him, grinning at him, he lost his head for a moment so that the ship side-slipped and started to fall.

With a shouting laugh, David Rand leaped off the fuselage and spread his wings to soar up past it. The pilot recovered enough presence of mind to right his ship, and presently David saw it move unsteadily off toward the mainland. Its occupants had enough of the business for one day.

But the increasing number of such curious visitors stimulated in David Rand a reciprocal curiosity concerning the outside world. He wondered more and more what lay beyond the low, dim line of the mainland over there across the blue waters. He could not understand why Doctor John forbade him to fly over there, when well he knew that his wings would bear him up for a hundred times that distance.

Doctor Harriman told him, "I'll take you there soon, David. But you must wait until you understand things better—you wouldn't fit in with the rest of the world, yet."

"Why not?" demanded David puzzledly.

The doctor explained, "You have wings, and no one else in the world has. That might make things very difficult for you."

"But why?"

Harriman stroked his spare chin and said thoughtfully, "You'd be a sensation, a sort of freak, David. They'd be curious about you because you're different, but they'd look down on you for the same reason. That's why I brought you up out here, to avoid that. You must wait a little longer before you see the world."

David Rand flung a hand up to point half angrily at a streaming flock of piping wild birds, heading south, black against the autumn sunset. "*They* don't wait! Every fall I see them, everything that flies, going away. Every spring I see them returning, passing overhead again. And I have to stay on this little island!"

A wild pulse of freedom surged in his blue eyes.

"I want to go as they do, to see the land over there, and the lands beyond that."

"Soon you shall go over there," promised Doctor Harriman. "I will go with you—will look out for you there."

But through the dusk that evening, David sat with chin in hand, wings folded, staring broodingly after the straggling, southing birds. And in the days that followed, he took less and less pleasure in mere aimless flight above the island, and more and more watched wistfully the endless, merry passage of the honking wild geese and swarming ducks and whistling songbirds.

DOCTOR HARRIMAN saw and understood that yearning in David's eyes, and the old physician sighed.

"He has grown up," he thought, "and wants to go like any young bird that would leave its nest. I shall not be able much longer to keep him from leaving."

But it was Harriman himself who left first, in a different way. For some time the doctor's heart had troubled him, and there came a morning when he did not awaken, and when a dazed, uncomprehending David stared down at his guardian's still white face.

Through all that day, while the old housekeeper wept softly about the place and the Norwegian was gone in the boat to the mainland to arrange the funeral, David Rand sat with folded wings and chin in hand, staring out across the blue waters.

That night, when all was dark and silent around the bungalow, he stole into the room where the doctor lay silent and peaceful. In the darkness, David touched the thin, cold hand. Hot tears swam in his eyes and he felt a hard lump in his throat as he made that futile gesture of farewell.

Then he went softly back out of the house into the night. The moon was a red shield above the eastern waters and the autumn wind blew cold and crisp. Down through the keen air came the joyous piping and carolling and whistling of a long swarm of wild birds, like shrill bugle-calls of gay challenge.

David's knees bent, and he sprang upward with whirring wings—up and up, the icy air streaming past his body, thundering in his ears, his nostrils drinking it. And the dull sorrow in his heart receded in the bursting joy of flight and freedom. He was up among those shrilling, whistling birds now, the screaming

wind tearing laughter from his lips as they scattered in alarm from him.

Then as they saw that this strange winged creature who had joined them made no move to harm them, the wild birds reformed their scattered flock. Far off across the dim, heaving plain of the waters glowed the dull red moon and the scattered lights of the mainland, the little lights of earthbound folk. The birds shrilled loud and David laughed and sang in joyous chorus as his great wings whirred in time with their own, trailing high across the night sky toward adventure and freedom, flying south.

All through that night, and with brief rests through the next day also, David flew southward, for a time over endless waters and then over the green, fertile land. His hunger he satisfied by dipping toward trees loaded with ripening fruit. When the next night came he slept in a crotch high in a tall forest oak, crouched comfortably with his wings folded about him.

It was not long before the world learned that the freak youth with wings was abroad. People in farms and villages and cities looked up incredulously at that slim figure winging high overhead. Ignorant Negroes who had never heard of David Rand flung themselves prostrate in panic as he passed across the sky.

Through all that winter there were reports of David from the southland, reports that made it evident he had become almost completely a creature of the wild. What greater pleasure than to soar through the long sun-drenched days over the blue tropic seas, to swoop on the silver fish that broke from the waters, to gather strange fruits and sleep at night in a high tree close against the stars, and wake with dawn to another day of unfettered freedom?

Now and again he would circle unsuspected over some city at night, soaring slowly in the darkness and peering down curiously at the vast pattern of straggling lights and the blazing streets choked with swarms of people and vehicles. He would not enter those cities and he could not see how the people in them could bear to live so, crawling over the surface of the earth amid the rubbing and jostling of hordes like them, never knowing even for a moment the wild clean joy of soaring through blue infinities of sky. What could make life worthwhile for such earthbound, ant-like folk?

When the spring sun grew hotter and higher, and the birds began to flock together in noisy swarms, David too felt something tugging him northward. So he flew north over the spring-green land, great bronzed wings tirelessly beating the air, a slim, tanned figure arrowing unerringly north.

He came at last to his goal, the island where he had lived most of his life. It lay lonely and deserted now in the empty waters, dust gathering over the things in the abandoned bungalow, the garden weed-grown. David settled down there for a time, sleeping upon the porch, making long flights for amusement, west over the villages and dingy cities, north over the rugged, wave-dashed coast, east over the blue sea; until at last the flowers began to die and the air grew frosty, and the deep urge tugged at David until again he joined the great flocks of winged things going south.

North and south—south and north—for three years that wild freedom of unchecked migration was his. In those three years he came to know mountain and valley, sea and river, storm and calm, and hunger and thirst, as only they of the wild know them. And in those years the world became accustomed to David, al-

most forgot him. He was the winged man, just a freak; there would never be another like him.

THEN in the third spring there came the end to David Rand's winged freedom. He was on his spring flight north, and at dusk felt hunger. He made out in the twilight a suburban mansion amid extensive orchards and gardens, and swooped down toward it with ideas of early berries. He was very near the trees in the twilight when a gun roared from the ground. David felt a blinding stab of pain through his head, and knew nothing more.

When he awoke, it was in a bed in a sunlit room. There were a kind-faced elderly man and a girl in the room, and another man who looked like a doctor. David discovered that there was a bandage around his head. These people, he saw, were all looking at him with intense interest.

The elderly, kind-looking man said, "You're David Rand, the fellow with wings? Well, you're mighty lucky to be living." He explained, "You see, my gardener has been watching for a hawk that steals our chickens. When you swooped down in the dusk last night, he fired at you before he could recognize you. Some of the shot from his gun just grazed your head."

The girl asked gently, "Are you feeling better now? The doctor says you'll soon be as good as ever." She added, "This is my father, Wilson Hall. I'm Ruth Hall."

David stared up at her. He thought he had never seen anyone so beautiful as this shy, soft, dark girl with her curling black hair and tender, worried brown eyes.

He suddenly knew the reason for the puzzling persistence with which the birds sought each other out and clung together

in pairs, each mating season. He felt the same thing in his own breast now, the urge toward this girl. He did not think of it as love, but suddenly he loved her.

He told Ruth Hall slowly, "I'm all right now."

But she said, "You must stay here until you're completely well. It's the least we can do when it was our servant who almost killed you."

David stayed, as the wound healed. He did not like the house, whose rooms seemed so dark and stiflingly close to him, but he found that he could stay outside during the day, and could sleep on a porch at night.

Neither did he like the newspaper men and cameramen who came to Wilson Hall's house to get stories about the winged man's accident; but these soon ceased coming, for David Rand was not now the sensation he had been years ago. And while visitors to the Hall home stared rather disconcertingly at him and at his wings, he got used to that.

He put up with everything, so that he might be near Ruth Hall. His love for her was a clean fire burning inside him and nothing in the world now seemed so desirable as that she should love him too. Yet because he was still mostly of the wild, and had had little experience in talking, he found it hard to tell her what he felt.

He did tell her, finally, sitting beside her in the sunlit garden. When he had finished, Ruth's gentle brown eyes were troubled.

"You want me to marry you, David?"

"Why, yes," he said, a little puzzled. "That's what they call it when people mate, isn't it? And I want you for my mate."

She said, distressed, "But David, your wings—"

He laughed. "Why, there's nothing

the matter with my wings. The accident didn't hurt them. See!"

And he leaped to his feet, whipping open the great bronze wings that glittered in the sunlight, looking like a figure of fable poised for a leap into the blue, his slim tanned body clad only in the shorts which were all the clothing he would wear.

The trouble did not leave Ruth's eyes. She explained, "It's not that, David—it's that your wings make you so different from everybody else. Of course it's wonderful that you can fly, but they make you so different from everyone else that people look on you as a kind of freak."

David stared. "You don't look on me as that, Ruth?"

"Of course not," Ruth said. "But it does seem somehow a little abnormal, monstrous, your having wings."

"Monstrous?" he repeated. "Why, it's nothing like that. It's just—beautiful, being able to fly. See!"

And he sprang upward with great wings whirring—up and up, climbing into the blue sky, dipping and darting and turning up there like a swallow, then coming down in a breathless swoop to land lightly on his toes beside the girl.

"Is there anything monstrous about that?" he demanded joyously. "Why, Ruth, I want you to fly with me, held in my arms, so that you'll know the beauty of it as I know it."

The girl shuddered a little. "I couldn't, David. I know it's silly, but when I see you in the air like that you don't seem so much a man as a bird, a flying animal, something unhuman."

David Rand stared at her, suddenly miserable. "Then you won't marry me—because of my wings?"

He grasped her in his strong, tanned arms, his lips seeking her soft mouth.

"Ruth, I can't live without you now that I've met you. I can't!"

IT WAS on a night a little later that Ruth, somewhat hesitantly, made her suggestion. The moon flooded the garden with calm silver, gleamed on David Rand's folded wings as he sat with keen young face bent eagerly toward the girl.

She said, "David, there is a way in which we could marry and be happy, if you love me enough to do it."

"I'll do anything!" he cried. "You know that."

She hesitated.

"Your wings—they're what keep us apart. I can't have a husband who belongs more to the wild creatures than to the human race, a husband whom everyone would consider a freak, a deformed oddity. But if you were to have your wings taken off——"

He stared at her. "My wings taken off?"

She explained in an eager little rush of words. "It's quite practicable, David. Doctor White, who treated you for that wound and who examined you then, has told me that it would be quite easy to amputate your wings above their bases. There would be no danger at all in it, and it would leave only the slight projection of the stumps on your back. Then you'd be a normal man and not a freak," she added, her soft face earnest and appealing. "Father would give you a position in his business, and instead of an abnormal, roaming, half-human creature you would be like—like everyone else. We could be so happy then."

David Rand was stunned. "Amputate my wings?" he repeated almost uncomprehendingly. "You won't marry me unless I do that?"

"I can't," said Ruth painfully. "I love

you, David, I do—but I want my husband to be like other women's husbands."

"Never to fly again," said David slowly, his face white in the moonlight: "To become earthbound, like everyone else! No!" he cried, springing to his feet in a wild revulsion. "I won't do it—I won't give up my wings! I won't become like——"

He stopped abruptly. Ruth was sobbing into her hands. All his anger gone, he stooped beside her, pulled down her hands, yearningly tilted up her soft, tear-stained face.

"Don't cry, Ruth," he begged. "It isn't that I don't love you—I do, more than anything else on earth. But I had never thought of giving up my wings—the idea stunned me." He told her, "You go on into the house. I must think it over a little."

She kissed him, her mouth quivering, and then was gone through the moonlight to the house. And David Rand remained, his brain in turmoil, pacing nervously in the silver light.

Give up his wings? Never again to dip and soar and swoop with the winged things of the sky, never again to know the mad exaltation and tameless freedom of rushing flight?

Yet—to give up Ruth—to deny this blind, irresistible yearning for her that beat in every atom of him—to know bitter loneliness and longing for her the rest of his life—how could he do that? He couldn't do it. He *wouldn't*.

So David went rapidly toward the house and met the girl waiting for him on the moonlit terrace.

"David?"

"Yes, Ruth, I'll do it. I'll do anything for you."

She sobbed happily on his breast. "I knew you really loved me, David. I knew it."

Two days later David Rand came out of the mists of anesthesia in a hospital room, feeling very strange, his back an aching soreness. Doctor White and Ruth were bending over his bed.

"Well, it was a complete success, young man," said the doctor. "You'll be out of here in a few days."

Ruth's eyes were shining. "The day you leave, David, we'll be married."

When they were gone, David slowly felt his back. Only the bandaged, projecting stumps of his wings remained. He could move the great wing-muscles, but no whirring pinions answered. He felt dazed and strange, as though some most vital part of him was gone. But he clung to the thought of Ruth—of Ruth waiting for him—

And she was waiting for him, and they were married on the day he left the hospital. And in the sweetness of her love, David lost all of that strange dazed feeling, and almost forgot that once he had possessed wings and had roamed the sky a wild, winged thing.

WILSON HALL gave his daughter and son-in-law a pretty white cottage on a wooded hill near town, and made a place for David in his business and was patient with his ignorance of commercial matters. And every day David drove his car into town and worked all day in his office and drove back homeward in the dusk to sit with Ruth before their fire, her head on his shoulder.

"David, are you sorry that you did it?" Ruth would ask anxiously at first.

And he would laugh and say, "Of course not, Ruth. Having you is worth anything."

And he told himself that that was true, that he did not regret the loss of his wings. All that past time when he had flown the sky with whirring wings seemed

only a strange dream and only now had he awakened to real happiness, he assured himself.

Wilson Hall told his daughter, "David's doing well down at the office. I was afraid he would always be a little wild, but he's settled down fine."

Ruth nodded happily and said, "I knew that he would. And everyone likes him so much now."

For people who once had looked askance at Ruth's marriage now remarked that it had turned out very well after all.

"He's really quite nice. And except for the slight humps on his shoulders, you'd never think that he had been different from anyone else," they said.

So the months slipped by. In the little cottage on the wooded hill was complete happiness until there came the fall, frosting the lawn with silver each morning, stamping crazy colors on the maples.

One fall night David woke suddenly, wondering what had so abruptly awakened him. Ruth was still sleeping softly with gentle breathing beside him. He could hear no sound.

Then he heard it. A far-away, ghostly whistling trailing down from the frosty sky, a remote, challenging shrilling that throbbed with a dim, wild note of pulsing freedom.

He knew what it was, instantly. He swung open the window and peered up into the night with beating heart. And up there he saw them, long, streaming files of hurtling wild birds, winging southward beneath the stars. In an instant the wild impulse to spring from the window, to rocket up after them into the clean, cold night, clamored blindly in David's heart.

Instinctively the great wing-muscles at his back tensed. But only the stumps of his wings moved beneath his pajama jacket.

And suddenly he was limp, trembling, aghast at that blind surge of feeling. Why, for a moment he had wanted to go, to leave *Ruth*. The thought appalled him, was like a treachery against himself. He crept back into bed and lay, determinedly shutting his ears to that distant, joyous whistling that fled southward through the night.

THE next day he plunged determinedly into his work at the office. But all through that day he found his eyes straying to the window's blue patch of sky. And week by week thereafter, all through the long months of winter and spring, the old wild yearning grew more and more an unreasonable ache inside his heart, stronger than ever when the flying creatures came winging north in spring.

He told himself savagely, "You're a fool. You love Ruth more than anything else on earth and you have her. You don't want anything else."

And again in the sleepless night he would assure himself, "I'm a man, and I'm happy to live a normal man's life, with Ruth."

But in his brain old memories whispered slyly, "Do you remember that first time you flew, that mad thrill of soaring upward for the first time, the first giddy whirl and swoop and glide?"

And the night wind outside the window called, "Remember how you raced with me, beneath the stars and above the sleeping world, and how you laughed and sang as your wings fought me?"

And David Rand buried his face in his pillow and muttered, "I'm *not* sorry I did it. I'm not!"

Ruth awoke and asked sleepily, "Is anything the matter, David?"

"No, dear," he told her, but when she slept again he felt the hot tears stinging

his eyelids, and whispered blindly, "I'm lying to myself. I want to fly again."

But from Ruth, happily occupied with his comfort and their home and their friends, he concealed all that blind, buried longing. He fought to conquer it, destroy it, but could not.

When no one else was by, he would watch with aching heart the swallows darting and diving in the sunset, or the hawk soaring high and remote in the blue, or the kingfisher's thrilling swoop. And then bitterly he would accuse himself of being a traitor to his own love for Ruth.

Then that spring Ruth shyly told him something. "David, next fall—a child of ours——"

He was startled. "Ruth, dear!" Then he asked, "You're not afraid that it might be——"

She shook her head confidently. "No. Doctor White says there is no chance that it will be born abnormal as you were. He says that the different gene-characters that caused you to be born with wings are bound to be a recessive character, not a dominant, and that there is no chance of that abnormality being inherited. Aren't you glad?"

"Of course," he said, holding her tenderly. "It's going to be wonderful."

Wilson Hall beamed at the news. "A grandchild—that's fine!" he exclaimed. "David, do you know what I'm going to do after its birth? I'm going to retire and leave you as head of the firm."

"Oh, dad!" cried Ruth, and kissed her father joyfully.

David stammered his thanks. And he told himself that this ended for good all his vague, unreasonable longings. He was going to have more than Ruth to think about now, was going to have the responsibilities of a family man.

He plunged into work with new zest.

For a few weeks he did entirely forget that old blind yearning, in his planning for things to come. He was all over that now, he told himself.

Then suddenly his whole being was overturned by an amazing thing. For some time the wing-stumps on David's shoulders had felt sore and painful. Also it seemed they were much larger than they had been. He took occasion to examine them in a mirror and was astounded to discover that they had grown out in two very large hump-like projections that curved downward on each side along his back.

David Rand stared and stared into the mirror, a strange surmise in his eyes. Could it be possible that—

He called on Doctor White the next day, on another pretext. But before he left he asked casually, "Doctor, I was wondering, is there any chance that my wings would ever start to grow out again?"

Doctor White said thoughtfully, "Why, I suppose there *is* a chance of it, at that. A newt can regenerate a lost limb, you know, and numerous animals have similar powers of regeneration. Of course an ordinary man cannot regenerate a lost arm or leg like that, but your body is not an ordinary one and your wings might possess some power of partial regeneration, for one time at least." He added, "You don't need to worry about it, though, David. If they start to grow out again, just come in and I'll remove them again without any trouble."

David Rand thanked him and left. But day after day thereafter, he closely watched and soon saw beyond doubt that the freak of genes that had given him wings in the first place had also given him at least a partial power of regenerating them.

For the wings were growing out again,

day by day. The humps on his shoulders had become very much larger, though covered by his specially tailored coats the change in them was not noticed. They broke through late that summer in wings—real wings, though small as yet. Folded under his clothing, they were not apparent.

David knew that he should go in and let the doctor amputate them before they got larger. He told himself that he did not any longer want wings—Ruth and the coming child and their future together were all that meant anything to him now.

Yet still he did not say anything to anyone, kept the growing wings concealed and closed beneath his clothing. They were poor, weak wings, compared to his first ones, as though stunted by the previous amputation. It was unlikely that he would ever be able to fly with them, he thought, even if he wanted to, which he didn't.

He told himself, though, that it would be easier to have them removed after they had attained their full size. Besides, he didn't want to disturb Ruth at this time by telling her that the wings had grown again. So he reassured himself, and so the weeks passed until by early October his second wings had grown to their full size, though they were stunted and pitiful compared to his first splendid pinions.

ON THE first week in October, a little son was born to Ruth and David. A fine, strong-limbed little boy, without a trace of anything unusual about him. He was normal of weight, and his back was straight and smooth, and he would never have wings. And a few nights later they were all in the little cottage, admiring him.

"Isn't he beautiful?" asked Ruth, looking up with eyes shining with pride.

David nodded dumbly, his heart throbbing with emotion as he looked down at the red, sleeping mite. His son!

"He's wonderful," he said humbly. "Ruth, dear—I want to work the rest of my life for you and for him."

Wilson Hall beamed on them and chuckled, "You're going to have a chance to do that, David. What I said last spring goes. This afternoon I formally resigned as head of the firm and saw that you were named as my successor."

David tried to thank him. His heart was full with complete happiness, with love for Ruth and for their child. He felt that no one before had ever been so happy.

Then after Wilson Hall had left, and Ruth was sleeping and he was alone, David suddenly realized that there was something he must do.

He told himself sternly, "All these months you've been lying to yourself, making excuses for yourself, letting your wings grow again. In your heart, all that time, you were hoping that you would be able to fly again."

He laughed. "Well, *that's* all over, now. I only told myself before that I didn't want to fly. It wasn't true, then, but it is now. I'll never again long for wings, for flying, now that I have both Ruth and the boy."

No, never again—that was ended. He would drive into town this very night and have Doctor White remove these new-grown second wings. He would never even let Ruth know about them.

Flushed with that resolve, he hurried out of the cottage into the windy darkness of the fall night. The red moon was lifting above the treetops eastward and by its dull light he started back toward the garage. All around him the trees were bending and creaking under the

brawling, jovial hammering of the hard north wind.

David stopped suddenly. Down through the frosty night had come a faint, far sound that jerked his head erect. A distant, phantom whistling borne on the rushing wind, rising, falling, growing stronger and stronger—the wild birds, southing through the noisy night, shrilling their exultant challenge as the wind bore their wings onward. That wild throb of freedom that he had thought dead clutched hard of a sudden at David's heart.

He stared up into the darkness with brilliant eyes, hair blowing in the wind. To be up there with them just once again—to fly with them just one more time—

Why not? Why not fly this one last time and so satisfy that aching longing before he lost these last wings? He would not go far, would make but a short flight and then return to have the wings removed, to devote his life to Ruth and their son. No one would ever know.

Swiftly he stripped off his clothing in the darkness, stood erect, spreading the wings that had been so long concealed and confined. Quaking doubt assailed him. Could he fly at all, now? Would these poor, stunted, second wings even bear him aloft for a few minutes? No, they wouldn't—he knew they wouldn't!

The wild wind roared louder through the groaning trees, the silvery shrilling high overhead came louder. David stood poised, knees bent, wings spread for the leap upward, agony on his white face. He couldn't try it—he knew that he couldn't leave the ground.

But the wind was shouting in his ears, "You can do it, you can fly again! See, I am behind you, waiting to lift you, ready to race you up there under the stars!"

And the exultant, whistling voices high above were shrilling, "Upward—up with us! You belong among us, not down there! Upward—fly!"

He sprang! The stunted wings smote the air wild, and he was soaring! The dark trees, the lighted window of the cottage, the whole hilltop, dropped behind and below him as his wings bore him upward on the bellowing wind.

Up, up—clean, hard battering of the cold air on his face once more, the crazy roaring of the wind around him, the great thrash of his wings bearing him higher and higher.

David Rand's high, ringing laughter pealed out on the screaming wind as he flew on between the stars and the nighted earth. Higher and higher, right up among the shrilling, southing birds that companioned him on either side. On and on he flew with them.

He knew suddenly that this alone was living, this alone was waking. All that other life that had been his, down there, that had been the dream, and he had

awakened from it now. It was not *he* who worked in an office and had loved a woman and a child down there. It was a dream David Rand who had done that, and the dream was over now.

Southward, southward, he rushed through the night, and the wind screamed, and the moon rose higher, until at last the land passed from beneath and he flew with the flying birds over moonlit plains of ocean. He knew that it was madness to fly on with these poor wings that already were tiring and weakening, but he had no thought in his exultant brain of turning back. To fly on, to fly this one last time, that was enough!

So that when his tired wings began at last to fail, and he began to sink lower and lower toward the silvered waters, there was no fear and no regret in his breast. It was what he had always expected and wanted, at the end, and he was drowsily glad—glad to be falling as all they with wings must finally fall, after a brief lifetime of wild, sweet flight, dropping contentedly to rest.
