

## Wreckage

The waves on Lake Washington lapped over Betty's feet.

'Now, don't you go paddling in the water,' said Joe. 'At least, not till I go in with you.'

Betty didn't in the least mind not paddling for there was so much to see. Her brother Joe was hauling part of the fuselage of a small aircraft from the lake. She could hear him puffing and panting with the weight of it. After he landed it on the beach, Joe swam further out and brought back another piece of wreckage.

'What's that?' four-year-old Betty asked.

'It's another bit of the aircraft,' he explained, as he shook himself like a dog when he came out of the water. 'Come and I'll show you.'

The girl jumped up and ran to her brother. He was eight years older than her and seemed so grown up.

'Look, see!' said Joe. 'These are parts of an amphibious aircraft that crashed into the lake.'

'What's a fabulous aircraft?' asked his little sister.

Joe ruffled her hair. 'It's not a fabulous aircraft,' he grinned. 'It's an amphibious aircraft.'

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‘What’s that?’ Betty wanted to know.

‘Come and I’ll show you as well as tell you because I’ve collected quite a bit of it now.’

As they walked along the lakeside Joe explained, ‘An amphibious aircraft can take off and land on water. This one crashed when it was coming in to land.’

‘Was the pilot hurt?’

‘No,’ Joe told her. ‘He bailed out on time.’

‘I hope he could swim,’ the little girl said.

‘I’m sure he could,’ answered her brother. ‘I don’t think anyone would fly an aircraft that takes off and lands on water unless he could swim. Now, come and see this.’

Joe pointed to each piece of wreckage and told Betty what it was.

‘This is part of a float,’ he said. ‘The floats keep the aircraft from sinking. And there’s the cockpit where the pilot sits.’

‘Can I sit on the pilot’s seat?’ asked the child.

‘I don’t think so,’ laughed Joe. ‘I’ve just hauled it out of the lake and it’s waterlogged. I think Mum might not want you to go back home soaking wet.’

‘Look! There’s something else in the water,’ yelled Betty.

‘I think it’s part of the aircraft’s wing,’ Joe told her, squinting against the evening sun to see what he could see. ‘You have a look at the bits here while I swim out

for it. And please don't fall and hurt yourself. I don't want to take a wounded sister home.'

Joe walked into the lake until he was nearly out of his depth before starting to swim. And it wasn't long before he appeared back, dragging part of a wing behind him.

'What have you two been up to?' Dad asked, when they arrived home much later than usual.

'Joe pulled a fabulous aircraft out of the lake,' Betty told her dad and Bill, her twin brother.

Dad laughed. 'That would be the amphibious aircraft that came down,' he said. 'We'll go tomorrow and have a look at the pieces.'

'May I go?' asked Bill.

'I'll take you,' Betty told him. It was a good feeling to have seen something exciting that her twin hadn't seen.

That was Betty Greene's first encounter with an aircraft. But that was fair enough because it was 1924 and there weren't all that many others around then.

Joe was very keen on aircraft and took flying lessons when he was fourteen years old.

'Do you want to watch Joe's lesson?' Mum asked one day.

'Yes, please!' the twins said in unison.

They climbed into their car and Mum drove them to Renton Field, a landing strip not far from their home in Medina, on the shores of Lake Washington.

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‘That’s a single-engine Curtiss Oriole,’ Betty told Bill, as Joe sat at the aircraft’s controls and the engine roared to life.

Her twin was much more interested in cars than in aircraft. They watched as their brother flew the small aircraft round Renton and eventually back to the airfield. He even managed to land with only a few bumps along the ground. Joe must have been good at what he was doing because he was flying solo when he was still fourteen years old!

Betty admired her older brother so much that for a long time she thought he was the best pilot in the world. That was until 1927 when a very wonderful thing happened and made Joe fairly jump up and down with excitement.

‘Charles Lindberg is coming to Seattle!’ he said. ‘Please, please can we go to see him?’

Mr and Mrs Greene grinned. ‘I think we’d all like to see him,’ said their mum.

Charles Lindberg was a real hero. He had just won the Orteig Prize for flying solo and non-stop from New York’s Long Island to Paris. That flight made him the first person in history to be in America one day and in Europe the next.

‘How long did his flight take?’ Betty wanted to know. She was as fascinated by aircraft as Joe was.

‘It took thirty-three-and-a-half hours,’ said Bill. ‘The flight was 3,600 miles (5,794 kilometres) long. That means he flew at an average speed of 107 miles (172 kilometres) an hour.’

Bill was good at maths!

The family went to the stadium at the University of Washington to see Charles Lindberg fly overhead in the very same aircraft that had crossed the Atlantic Ocean.

‘It’s called *Spirit of St Louis*,’ Joe told Bill, though his little brother already knew that.

Captain Lindberg circled round the stadium and then flew off. Betty felt somehow let down. She would have loved to have seen the pilot who had done such a wonderful thing.

‘Charles Lindberg’s coming back,’ Joe said, knowing exactly how she felt for he felt exactly the same. ‘He’s going to land at Sand Point Naval Air Station and come back at the head of a motorcade.’

The mention of a motorcade made Bill’s eyes light up. He loved motor cars, and the bigger and more powerful they were the more he loved them.

A short while later there was a cheer from the far end of the stadium. Dad lifted Bill on to his shoulders and Joe lifted Betty.

‘Do you see them coming?’ Mum asked.

They could!

Suddenly the whole stadium was filled with noise.

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‘Lindberg! Lindberg! Lindberg!’ people shouted until they had no voices left.

That night, safely tucked up in bed, seven-year-old Betty thought she could still hear the voices shouting out the pilot’s name. And, when her dad came in to kiss her goodnight, she turned over in bed and said sleepily, ‘Lindberg.’

There were four children in the Greene family. Joe was the oldest, then Al. After that came the twins, Bill and Betty. All four went to church and Sunday school every week with their parents. In fact, it was their dad and mum who started the Sunday school in Medina. It wasn’t just what they were taught on Sundays that showed the Greene children how much the Lord Jesus meant to their parents, it was also how they saw them living day by day. This was especially true one day in May 1928.

The twins were having a great time at a friend’s birthday party about quarter of a mile from their home. They had played some games and it was time to eat the birthday cake.

‘Come and sit at the table,’ said the birthday child’s mum, as she pressed eight candles into the cake.

There was a scramble of hungry children and then silence as they watched the candles’ flames flickering. The birthday child took a deep breath and blew all of them out.

‘Happy birthday to you! Happy birthday to you!’ the others all sang and then the cake was cut.

‘Would you like a piece?’ asked Mrs Greene, who was helping to serve the children.

Bill and Betty grinned. Would they like a piece of cake? Of course they would!

Just then the phone rang. It was for Mrs Greene, who looked puzzled as she spoke on the phone. Then she looked worried and turned her face away from the children.

‘A fire?’ she said, keeping her voice low. ‘Our house is on fire?’

Putting down the phone, she rushed to the door. Opening it, she looked along the road and saw smoke. The Greens’ house was ablaze!

All the children were taken back into the party and Mrs Greene was rushed up the road by car. By the time she arrived at her home the fire was well ablaze. Knowing that Betty and Bill would be very upset, someone ran down the road to tell them that nobody had been hurt, that everyone was all right. The twins tried very hard to join in the party games but they couldn’t concentrate on them at all.

Some hours later, when the fire had been put out and there was no chance of anyone being harmed, Betty and Bill, along with their brothers, dad and mum walked round what had been their home.

‘There’s nothing left,’ said Al. ‘Nothing at all.’

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But Betty could see something she recognised. 'There's a piece of my doll's china tea set,' she whispered, pointing to a little bit of broken saucer. 'And there are just handles left from my chest of drawers.'

Joe looked around at the remains of their home.

'The only things that haven't been burned are the two garden chairs that were on the back porch. 'Someone must have moved them away from the fire,' he told his little sister.

The family all stood in silence looking at the blackened wood and the strange shapes all around them.

'We've so much to thank God for,' said Mr Greene. 'No-one was hurt. Everyone is absolutely fine. We've only lost things and things don't hurt when they go on fire.'

Betty thought about her favourite doll and was sad, even though it wouldn't have felt anything when it burned. Then she thought about her brothers and her mum and dad and was truly glad that not one of them was hurt.

There was a little wooden house in the grounds of the Greens' home and they moved in there.

'The rooms are tiny,' said Bill. 'And there are hardly any of them.'

Mrs Greene smiled. 'What you mean is that our home was big and the rooms were spacious. There are many, many families who have to live in smaller houses than this one.'



Betty thought that the cottage was a bit like a doll's house and decided to enjoy living there.

Just at that moment there was a knock at the door. It was the mum from the party home.

'I've brought down some clothes for the twins,' she said, handing Mrs Greene a bag. 'And some towels too.'

'And I have some saucepans and dishes,' added a friend, who arrived a minute later.

Then there was another knock. This time the gift was clothes for Al and Joe. And as Mrs Greene closed the door she noticed that someone had left two bags of food on the step.

'People are so kind,' she said, as the family opened up all they'd been given. 'Look, someone has even remembered that our Bibles were burned in the fire.'

Dad took the Bible from Mum's hands, opened it and read some verses to the family.

'Let's pray,' he said, and they all closed their eyes.

Dad thanked God for keeping them all safe and for their kind friends who had given them the things they needed.

That night the twins whispered to each other before going to sleep.

'The fire was exciting!' Bill said quietly. 'At least, it was exciting until I knew it was our home.'

Betty wasn't sure if she agreed. Fire somehow seemed a bit too dangerous to be exciting. But nobody was hurt, she thought, as she fell fast asleep. And

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God, who had looked after the family when their house went on fire, looked after them in their new little home.