

Excerpt from *Wings*

- Arthur Kopit

NARRATOR: *In her earlier years, Emily Stilson was a pilot and wing-walker, one of a small daring band of men and women who walked on the wings of planes to entertain crowds below. She has been hospitalized for a stroke. Initially she cannot understand what has happened to her, and confusedly thinks she has been captured by "the enemy" during World War II and installed in a remote farmhouse. She has partial expressive aphasia.*

MRS. STILSON: Captured. After crashing. Captured after crashing by the enemy and brought here to this farm masquerading as a hospital. Why? For I would say offhand information. Of what sort though hard to tell. For example, questions such as can I raise my fingers, what's an overcoat, how many nickels in a rhyme, questions such as these. To what use can they be to the enemy? Hard to tell from here. Hard to tell from here. Nonetheless, I would say must be certain information I possess that they want well I won't give it I'll escape! Strange things happen to me that they do! Good thing I'm all right! Must be Rumania. Just a hunch of course... Ssh, someone's coming

DOCTOR: Mrs. Stilson, if you don't mind, I'd like to ask you some questions. Some will be easy, some will be hard. Is that all right?

MRS. STILSON: Oh yes I'd say oh well yes that's the wither of it.

DOCTOR: Good. Okay. Where were you born?

MRS. STILSON: Never. Not at all. Here the match wundles up you know and drats flames fires I keep careful always—

DOCTOR: Right... (*Speaking very slowly, precise enunciation*) Where were you born?

MRS. STILSON: Well now well now that's a good thing knowing yush of course wouldn't call it such as I did andinurations or aplovia could it? No I wouldn't think so. Next? (*Pause*)

DOCTOR: Mrs. Stilson, are there seven days in a week?

MRS. STILSON: ...Seven... Yes.

DOCTOR: Are there five days in a week? (*Pause*)

MRS. STILSON: (*after much pondering*) No.

DOCTOR: Can a stone float on water? (*Long pause*)

MRS. STILSON: No.

DOCTOR: Mrs. Stilson, can you cough?

MRS. STILSON: Somewhat.

DOCTOR: Well, would you show me how you cough?

MRS. STILSON: Well now well now not so easy what you cromplie is to put these bushes open and—

DOCTOR: No, no, Mrs. Stilson, I'm sorry – I would like to hear you cough.

MRS. STILSON: Well I'm not bort you know with plajits or we'd see it wencherday she brings its pillow with the fistils opening. I'd say outward always outward never stopping it (*Long silence*)

DOCTOR: Mrs. Stilson, I have some objects here

NARRATOR: *The doctor takes a comb, a toothbrush, a pack of matches, and a key from his pocket, sets them down where she can see.*

DOCTOR: Could you point to the object you would use for cleaning your teeth?

NARRATOR: *There is a very long silence. Finally Mrs. Stilson picks up the comb and shows it to him. Then she puts it down. She waits.*

DOCTOR: Mrs. Stilson, here, take this object in your hand.

NARRATOR: *The doctor hands Mrs. Stilson the toothbrush.*

DOCTOR: Do you know what this object is called?

MRS. STILSON: (*With great difficulty*) Toooooooovvvv...bbbrum?

DOCTOR: Very good. Now put it down. Now, pretend you have it in your hand. Show me what you'd do with it.

NARRATOR: *Mrs. Stilson does nothing.*

DOCTOR: What does one do with an object such as that, Mrs. Stilson? Mrs. Stilson, what is the name of the object you are looking at?

MRS. STILSON: Well it's...wombly and not at all...rigged or tuned like we might twunter or toring to work the clambness out of it or---

DOCTOR: Pick it up.

NARRATOR: *Mrs. Stilson picks up the toothbrush.*

MRS. STILSON: *(As soon as she's picked it up)* Tooovevebram, toove-britch bratch brush bridge, two-bridge.

DOCTOR: Show me what you do with it.

NARRATOR: *For several moments Mrs. Stilson does nothing, then she puts it to her lips, holds it there motionless.*

DOCTOR: Very good. Thank you.

NARRATOR: *Mrs. Stilson sighs heavily, and puts the toothbrush down. The doctor gathers up his objects and leaves.*

MRS. STILSON: Dark now again out the window on my side lying here all alone... Yesterday my children came to see me *(Pause)* Or at least, I was told they were my children. Never saw them before in my life. Time has become peculiar.

NARRATOR: *The next day the doctor returns.*

DOCTOR: *(Warmly)* Hello, Mrs. Stilson. Mrs. Stilson, do you know why you're here?

MRS. STILSON: Well now well now *(She gives up)*

DOCTOR: You had an accident. At home. Not in an airplane. It's called a stroke. This means that your brain has been injured and brain tissue destroyed, though we are not certain of the cause. You could get better, and you're certainly making progress. But it's still too soon to give any sort of exact prognosis.

NARRATOR: *The doctor leaves.*

MRS. STILSON: I am doing well of course! They still pretend they do not understand me. I believe they may be mad. *(Pause)* No they're not mad, I am mad. Today I heard it. Everything I speak is wrong. SOMETHING HAS BEEN DONE TO ME!

NARRATOR: *A look of horror comes over Mrs. Stilson's face. She swings her arms in fury and begins to scream.*

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NARRATOR: *A few days later Amy, a rehabilitation therapist begins working with Mrs. Stilson. With Amy's help, Mrs. Stilson is able to remember something about her days as a pilot and wing walker. When she is alone, she takes refuge in those memories,*

although they are unbearably painful as they remind her of all she has lost. Amy tries to help her put her emotions into words.

AMY: What is it, Emily? What are you feeling?

MRS. STILSON: Something...wet

AMY: Do you know what it is?

MRS. STILSON: Don't ...can't say find it word.

AMY: Try. You can find it.

MRS. STILSON: Wet...thing, many, both sides yes.

AMY: Can you name them? What are they? You do know what they are.

MRS. STILSON: *(Pause)* Tears?

AMY: That's right, very good. Those are tears. And do you know what that means?

MRS. STILSON:.... Sad?

AMY: Yes, right, well done, it seems...that you are sad.