

J. David Stevens

FLYING

Jimmy names one piglet Wilbur and the other Orville, then sets about making them fly. It is two years before the war's beginning, when Jimmy is fifteen, and I am nine.

My job is to watch the pigs and make sure they don't eat too much. Also I'm supposed to bring Jimmy supplies when he asks. We've been storing them in the barn: an old boat sail, some copper pipe, three discarded leather harnesses, a pile of empty potato sacks.

"You know what this means," Jimmy asks, "when pigs fly? It's like guaranteeing your dreams will come true. No more taxes for Mom and Dad. You'll get that Huffy bike you want. And Karen Edgerton will finally go out with me." He holds a couple of screws between his teeth, then takes them out to say, "Maybe up to the reservoir."

And then we are ready. In the middle of the south field, already cut, we slide Orville and Wilbur's legs through the holes we've made in the sacks, then tug on the harness lines to make sure they're secured to the frame. Jimmy wheels out the motorcycle that Dad brought back after Korea, ties the two lead ropes under the seat, then starts slowly forward. Orville and Wilbur jump up several feet, bump the ground, squeal, then jump up again, skimming the grass. As Jimmy accelerates, they rise higher into the air—like a kite, like a hawk with a pair of stones in its grip. Jimmy makes a broad circle to keep his speed steady, while I chase behind them, laughing and thinking about the Huffy bike that will soon be mine.

It's hard to believe that four years from now Orville, big as a freezer, will win first prize at the county fair. I'll ship the blue ribbon to Jimmy in Vietnam but never know if he gets it, since it will not come back to us in the packet of belongings the army sends.

For the moment, though, Vietnam is not a name I recognize. Instead, I feel my breath grow short from running, and I stop and wave both arms as if to confirm that I'm still there. Jimmy makes a loop at the far end of the field, and as he turns I can see that he is smiling, proud. In the distance, they seem more firmly connected than they are: my brother and these two pigs. All of us seem connected actually, all of us still children, time and innocence and possibility, until the wind unexpectedly shifts, and the pigs drift irrevocably to ground.