



Wings

John Monk Saunders

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The United States of America, at the start of the twentieth century, and Johnny Powell is the wild boy of his dependable, middle-class neighbourhood.

When Johnny is given a car, he sets about converting it into a racer, much to the displeasure of local residents and the shame of his father.

What Johnny does not realise is that, in using the car to woo fellow university student Sylvia, he is also breaking the heart of his lifelong friend Mary-Louise Preston, who has secretly loved him for years. Sylvia, in turn, is in love with one David Armstrong.

With the stifling attitudes of his parents and neighbours closing in on him, Johnny looks for a way to escape, and to pursue his desire to fly. With the Great War raging in Europe, Johnny enlists and is accepted into the US forces as an airman.

Believing that Sylvia returns his love, and confident in his likely flying and combat abilities, Johnny feels invincible as he sets off for training. However, while his knowledge of engines and natural skills as an airman are clear, his lingering immaturity is, ultimately, Johnny's greatest liability.

When he is posted to France alongside David Armstrong, Johnny is brought up against the realities and brutalities of war, as well as the complications of love and loss. Over time, Johnny and David develop a camaraderie and friendship that supports both men through the war – until tragedy strikes.

Returning from war in 1919, Johnny is a changed man, much more thoughtful and wise than the speed-loving, risk-taking youth who left. Back in the arms of his family, and Mary-Louise, he looks forward to a post-war world and the life that awaits him, conscious of how his future – and the futures of his friends and neighbours – have been forever changed by the far-off war in France.

'Wings' is based on a silent film by Paramount, the first film ever to win an Academy Award for Best Picture, and has been praised for its exploration of the emotional impact of the Great War upon its pilots.

John Monk Saunders was an American novelist, screenwriter and film director. He served in the Air Service during World War I as a flight instructor in Florida, but was never able to secure a posting to France, a disappointment that frustrated him for the remainder of his life. His screenwriting credits include *Wings* (1927), *The Legion of the Condemned* (1928), *The Last Flight* (1931) which he adapted from his own novel *Single Lady*, and the documentary film *Conquest of the Air* (UK, 1936), which he also co-directed. He died in 1940.

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