

## The inner voice of Hubert Latham

**Staging:** A chair sits stage centre facing the front

**Characters seen:**

Hubert: Passionate, and unreserved. Shows the world what he can achieve if he puts his mind to it. Sees the birds everywhere.

Narrator: As unobtrusive as a butler and given to a touch of the melodramatic.

**And unseen:**

They: ...is always the birds.

Narrator: Our hero enters, [HUBERT ENTERS AND SITS DEJECTEDLY ON THE CHAIR] showing signs of agitation. His thoughts swarm, try to take flight, then drop dead as stones.

He sits.

Hubert: The birds mock me.

Me, toiling down here.

They, laughing at me.

Narrator: He jabs his hand into the air, as if to spear the birds with finality.

[POINTS TO THE BIRDS WITH VENOM] They don't toil, up in the breeze.

Me, down here in the fug.

Hubert: Me? You're asking me why they mock?

Narrator: He is incredulous at the naivety of your question.

Hubert: Don't you ever wish you had it in you?

[PAUSE]

Narrator: [WITH A SUBTLE HINT OF SARCASM] Cataloguing his vast accomplishments takes some time.

[HUBERT EMPHASISES WORDS WITH HIS ACTIONS]

Hubert: I've been pasting and stretching cotton canvas. Splitting and binding cane. Bats' wings stretch from a bucket seat, which requires doses of a flying squirrel's daring. Gossamer threads span taught to brace against the air. Wires pull from leaver to lash point, giving control to a headlong fall. Week upon week of test and trial, and all that time They have laughed.

[BACK IN HIS SEAT]

They don't 'worry'. They don't think of 'tomorrow'.

Me? I do.

Narrator: He stands and steps up to the precipice, looking out. He sees, and yet does not see.

Hubert: It's not far; it's only a few miles.

Narrator: His gaze falls

Hubert: But to me it is a cliff walled chasm.

Narrator: It stretches out before him

Hubert: A nightmarish - hellish - boiling water, leaping and reaching, eager to drag me down.

That is not the only fall I will take, if I fail.

Narrator: He spins on the spot. With clenched fist he strikes a determined yet pathetically heroic pose.

Hubert: Failure is the red rag that burns me. I will not let them laugh. I will not let them have the last say.

[COLLAPSING IN UPON HIMSELF, WHISPERS] Yet they do.

Week upon week of test and trial, and all that time 'they' have soared. Teasing, trying cries, demanding attention, and kindling jealousy.

Narrator: [DRAMATICALLY] He checks his helmet of valour, lowers his goggles of clear thinking... [QUICKLY] and pulls on his gauntlets to keep his hands warm. He lifts his head and issues his challenge to the assembled...

Hubert: [SEATED] I am ready!

Narrator: He guns the engine, the chocks are pulled away.

Hubert: I am coming!

[HUBERT GOES INTO SLOW MOTION]

Narrator: [STEADILY] We see his face reflect the relentless grass slope toward nothing. He rides his craft like a rodeo bull, the wheels bouncing over clods of earth. The nothing comes nearer and reveals itself to be the chasm. He pulls back on the controls and...

[CHANGE PACE]

Hubert: I am here!

Narrator: He reaffirms his anticipated future.

Hubert: It's not far. It's only a few miles.

Narrator: The thrill of the wind against his cheeks and the slapping of helmet straps - buoy his heart. He shouts to his ever present companions.

Hubert: Can you see me? Can you see me? Look at me! Still laughing? Still think this is your domain? Still think I'm nothing?

I have left the meadows behind! I have left rock and earth; the ties that bound me have been broken!

Narrator: His eyes fix upon his destination.

Hubert: It's not far! I can see it! There.

[HUBERT IS BRACED IN HIS SEAT]

Narrator: He exults.

[SAVOUR THE EXALTATION]

[SHOUT] CRACK!

Narrator: Shocked by snapping gossamer, he yaws left, then right... His eyes dart around the craft looking for the source of the sound that so dreads him.

Hubert: That damned cable has gone; my Achilles' heel. I cannot help but look down, and see the nearing waves, and see the shadows of Their circling.

[HUBERT STANDS AND FRANTICLY ATTEMPTS TO BRING THE CRAFT INTO A GLIDE]

Narrator: Fighting for control he wrests the craft into a pitching glide that brings the groping waters nearer.

[HUBERT PAUSES ARMS LOCKED IN POSITION, HOLDING THE CONTROLS WITH ALL HIS MIGHT, AS HE SETTLES ON THE WATER. HE MOVES FROM TENSE TO CALM. THE CRAFT AND HIMSELF SAFE, HE RELINQUISHES THE CONTROLS AND SITS. HE LIGHTS A CIGARETTE]

Narrator: He sits again, takes from his pocket a silver case and lights a comforter.

Hubert: Me, shivering down here.

They don't shiver in the breeze.

Me, down here...

Narrator: He takes a distasteful drag and lets it out in a bitter sigh.

[PAUSE]

Hubert: The birds mock me.