



# Maiden Flight: A Novel

*Harry Haskell*

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## **Maiden Flight: A Novel** Harry Haskell

*Maiden Flight* is the true-life story of the Wright sister who in 1926 left her world-famous and intensely possessive older brother to marry newspaper editor Harry Haskell, the man she loved, and suffered the unhappy consequences. An international celebrity in her own right, Katharine embodied the worldly, independent, and self-fulfilled New Woman of the early twentieth century. Yet she remained in many ways a Victorian. Torn between duty and love, she agonized for months before making her devastating break with Orville at age fifty-two.

Cast in the form of three interwoven first-person memoirs, *Maiden Flight* is imaginatively reconstructed from personal letters, newspaper reports, and other documents of the period—in particular, Katharine’s lively and extraordinarily revealing love letters to Harry. In allowing Katharine to step outside of Wilbur and Orville’s shadow, it sheds new light on the central role she played in their private lives, as well as on her often misunderstood contribution to their scientific work. Above all, *Maiden Flight* celebrates Katharine’s abundant store of what she called “human nature”—her lively and perceptive outlook on life, her great capacity for both love and indignation, and her acute and sometimes crippling self-awareness.

## **Maiden Flight: A Novel Details**

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Author : Harry Haskell

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# From Reader Review *Maiden Flight*: A Novel for online ebook

## Laurie Notaro says

Harry Haskell has written a revealing, moving and poignant story about his grandfather, Katharine Wright and her brother Orville. I never knew this story, but it is structured beautifully, and the three interweaving stories are seamless and compelling. Wonderful for aviation fans and those who just love a nicely written story that will swallow you up and show you a different side of history at the same time. Really great book.

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## Veronica says

*Maiden Flight*, Harry Haskell's fascinating novel about the sister of the famous Wright brothers who designed, built and flew the first successful airplane in 1903, is told in memoir form through the voices of Katharine Wright, Orville Wright, and Henry J. Haskell (Harry), the man who stole Katharine's heart when she was nearly fifty years old. Katharine's life until then had centered around her brothers Orville and Wilbur, their work, and their struggle for proper acknowledgment by the Smithsonian Institution for their accomplishment.

Haskell has used Katharine's, Orville's, and Harry's voluminous correspondence as well as other sources to inform his colorful book. Katharine, a strong, active, and opinionated woman, mourns the sudden death of her brother Wilbur in 1912, and subsequently devotes her life to being Orville's helpmeet; they are constant companions, unusually close for siblings. When Harry, a long-time friend (and editor of the *Kansas City Star*), loses his wife, Katharine offers her support, which turns into sudden and unexpected love. The resulting emotional turmoil as she tries to resolve her conflicting feelings of passion for Harry and loyalty to her beloved brother Orville forms the heart of this story. Katharine's confusion as she struggles with this disturbing situation is palpable. Harry patiently tries to support her as she swings back and forth, while Orville harshly turns his back and blames her for leaving him to marry Harry.

In addition to this engrossing story of late-life love, we learn quite a bit about other events of the time, Oberlin College (where Katharine and Harry met as students), various interesting people, the Wright family home in Dayton, their summer place in Georgian Bay, Canada, and Harry and Katharine's home in Kansas City. Katharine's writing is lively and full of observations about everything around her. I found myself totally immersed in her life and perspectives.

Katharine, speaking of her seven-minute maiden flight in Pau, France, with her brother Wilbur: "*...I could make out the snow-capped peaks of the Pyrenees glimmering in the distance as we swooped and soared above the farm fields. Never in my thirty-four years on earth had I seen such a heart-stopping sight. And not until I fell in love, many years later, would I feel like such a giddy young thing again.*"

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## Theresa Sivelle says

I like the way this was written, going from one perspective and another written like journal entries by the individuals. What a different life.

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### **Ann Otto says**

Little has been written about women who flew or played a part in early aviation in other ways. This is particularly true of Katherine Wright. Wilbur and Orville Wright never married, and their mother died when they were young, leaving sister Katherine to serve a role as both wife and mother. It was assumed that she would never marry, but she did years after Wilbur died, leaving Orville. Author Harry Haskell is the grandson of Katherine's husband Henry (Harry) J. Haskell, and he uses letters and other documentation to develop this creative non-fiction which weaves the voices of Orville, Katherine and Harry around the events surrounding Katherine falling in love and leaving home. She experiences many emotional ups and downs, and we feel for her, especially her final chapter. Thanks to the author she finally gets some of the recognition she deserves.

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### **Cara says**

Could not stand the writing style.

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### **Sylvia Dugan says**

Living in Oakwood, Ohio, which is where the Wright family's home Hawthorne Hill is located, I've read a lot of books about Wilbur and Orville and their work on building the first viable aircraft. I was also familiar with Katherine Wright's position as the sister of the family and how she helped her brothers in gaining recognition of their achievement.

Harry Haskell's book has made Katherine come alive much more than the other books did because they mainly focused on the brothers' achievements. This is a well-written and interesting account of the relationship between Haskell's grandfather, Katherine, and Orville Wright. I recommend it to anyone with a taste for history and especially that connected with the Wright family.

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### **Carolyn Russett says**

Maiden Flight is the true-life story of the Wright sister who in 1926 left her world-famous and intensely possessive older brother to marry newspaper editor Harry Haskell, the man she loved, and suffered the unhappy consequences. An international celebrity in her own right, Katharine embodied the worldly, independent, and self-fulfilled New Woman of the early twentieth century. Yet she remained in many ways a Victorian. Torn between duty and love, she agonized for months before making her devastating break with Orville at age fifty-two.

this book was written by Harry Haskell's grandson. After reading the WRIGHT BROTHERS, it was interesting to read this part of history. But it read like a textbook to me vs a novel... It is told in narrative format between the three main characters. While the content is interesting I can't agree with all the reviewers that gave it 4-5 stars. Found it very dry to read.

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## **The Irregular Reader says**

More reviews on my blog [www.theirregularreaderblog.wordpress.com](http://www.theirregularreaderblog.wordpress.com)!

You've surely heard of the brothers Orville and Wilbur Wright. The Wright Brothers took the first sustained flight in Kitty Hawk in 1903. However, you may not have heard of the Wright Brothers' little sister, Katharine.

Katharine helped raise her older siblings, and was the first in the Wright family with a college education. Once her socially awkward brothers became worldwide celebrities, she left her teaching job to help Wilbur and Orville deal with well-wishers, journalists, and irate members of the scientific community. For years, Katharine took care of her older brothers, and with Wilbur's untimely death in 1912, she and Orville became incredibly close.

While in her 50s, she fell in love with an old school friend, Henry Haskell (the Grandfather of the author). When the two were married in 1923, Orville considered their union the ultimate betrayal. He cut off all ties with his sister and refused to even go to her wedding. Haskell's book details this period of her life.

The book is engagingly written in the first person, from Orville, Henry, and Katharine's point of views. The tone is that of a journal entry or a letter to a good friend. Haskell does a good job of creating a unique voice for each of the three, and no wonder: he used their own letters as the primary source for the book. The story stutter-steps through time, doubling back on itself occasionally so we can see certain events through more than one perspective. This occasionally makes the chronology a bit tough to follow, but overall the method worked well.

In fact, my biggest complaint about the book is that there wasn't more. The characters will reference something in passing, and I generally found myself looking to the Wright brothers' Wikipedia page (I have a little bit of guilt over that) to get the full story. While I understand that the structure Haskell chose does not lend itself to long, detailed backstory, I do wish he had been able to include more detail.

In all, lovers of history or historical fiction will enjoy this intimate portrayal of a fascinating woman. Katharine Wright is a fiercely intelligent and forward-thinking woman in a time when women's rights were just starting to take flight (ha).

A copy of this book was provided by the publisher in exchange for an honest review. Maiden Flight is currently available for purchase.

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## **Sharon says**

It takes a magician to write in three separate, such convincing voices, and that is only one achievement in this brilliant epistolary novel, Maiden Flight by Harry Haskell, which examines the poignant romance between prominent newspaper editor Henry J. "Harry" Haskell (grandfather of the author) and Katharine Wright, sister of Orville and Wilbur Wright, aviation's most famous early pioneers.

By weaving together three imagined journals, a technique which heightens the immediacy of the story for the reader, the narrative brings us backstage into the minds of three captivating individuals. They each surprise us with the depth of their emotions, even the reticent, scientific Orville Wright, who stops speaking to his sister, Katharine, when she leaves their home in Ohio to marry Haskell. Katharine is the star here, a woman raised to be an independent thinker, who provides the backbone for the Wright family, staying home to support her father and brothers after her mother has died, then handling her brothers' publicity and social contacts after giving up her career as a high school Latin teacher. She reaches middle age without ever thinking she might marry and have a family of her own.

Enter Mr. Haskell, who had been a close friend in college but who married someone else, a sweetheart he was already attached to. By the time his wife dies in 1923 Katharine has already enlisted Haskell's help in tackling some of Orville's wrangles with the Smithsonian, and the friendship between the two families had become solidified.

Author Haskell's magic has been to reveal the slow process of courtship between these two individuals. We see the polite, circumspect newsman reaching out to the woman he loves, and yet his hand shakes. We listen as Katharine debates her motivation to save him from aggressive widows, telling herself only she is afraid of losing his friendship. Her emotional and physical needs appear to surprise even herself. The book ends with a bittersweet story, the estrangement from her brother which is never mended, and a marriage which must have been a solace but which also came with new complications and stresses.

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### **Juliana Lee says**

Disappointing account of Katharine Wright's love life rather than her accomplishments as a college educated woman and sister of Orville and Wilbur Wright.

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### **Terri says**

Really enjoyed this book from a historical perspective and from a woman's perspective. At last Kate's story is told. Behind every great man is a woman but this woman wasn't that far behind. The relationship between her and one of her four brothers, or , was unusual for today but maybe not so for back in the 20s.

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### **Peggy says**

The story of Katharine Wright, the Wright brothers' sister. Written in the voices of Katharine, her brother Orville, and Harry Haskell (her husband). Mainly a look at their feelings...Katharine and her desire to leave her home and marry, Orville and his feeling of loss and desertion when Katharine weds, and Harry's response to both. No real plot and somewhat redundant.

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## **Emily says**

I received a free advance copy from the publisher in exchange for my honest review.

This story about the famous Wright Brothers' not-so-famous sister was an interesting part of the historical story I'd previously not known.

The story is told by three narrators - Katharine (the Wright sister), her eventual husband and Orville Wright. I felt the three-narrator format got a little repetitive, but I was impressed with how distinct each voice was. It was hard to imagine all three characters were written by the same author.

I really liked Katharine. She had a bright, cheerful spirit. Orville was heartbroken and rather sad, I thought, but likeable. Katharine's husband was a bit stuffy, and I thought his sections read like a history book. But I felt that really fit the time period.

Overall, I was impressed with this well-done book!

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## **Meg - A Bookish Affair says**

4.5 stars. If you're a history lover, you probably know that Wilbur and Orville Wright were the first men to fly and they were renowned for their plane. They were true pioneers and innovators but did you know they had a sister? I had no idea until I read this book! Katharine Wright was a vivacious woman who helped her brothers deal with their fame, trials, and tribulations. She was successful in her own right as well. Told in three voices: Katharine, Orville, and Katharine's eventual husband, Harry Haskell (the author is the grandson of the Harry in the book), this book sheds light on a woman who has largely been lost to history as have so many of those women that have supported the famous men in their lives.

Oh, historical fiction! You do me so right! This book largely takes place well after Wilbur and Orville made their famous flight. What I didn't realize is that for decades, literally decades, the Wright brothers were tangled in a battle with the Smithsonian Institute over who really flew first. The Smithsonian contended for many years that it was actually Samuel Langley, a name that has now fallen out of common knowledge, who was the first to fly. The Smithsonian did not admit that it was the Wright Brothers until 1942! The detail of the battle is fascinating and you can feel the frustration by all sides in the book. I love learning something that I haven't known about before!

Not only is there a strong historical element of this book but there is a very human element as well. Katharine spends a lot of her young life supporting her brothers and their work. She takes care of them and many times seems to put them before herself. Eventually she falls for Harry Haskell, a friend from school, and she falls hard. She realizes that this is something that she wants to pursue and it may mean facing difficult times with her brother. I really liked how the author explores this change in dynamic between Katharine and Orville.

I also have to mention the writing style. The way that the book is set up feels very much like a memoir. Our three characters are looking back into the past. It was great to get a perspective of the action from these different points of view. The author does a great job of creating very separate voices for each of the characters. This was a great book!

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**Barb Leitch says**

Great story of the relationship between Orville and his sister Katherine.

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