

## ONE – First Blood

When Arthur Schreiber heard the giant Hispano-Suiza motor fire, roar into life, a thrill ran through him unlike any other he had known in all his twenty-two years. The power of the great engine shook him. He trembled, gripped the surrounding metal seeking refuge from all that was to come. He sweated, and for long shuddering moments asked himself why the crazy idea had ever entered his head. But it had. He was in the plane. It had begun.

Earlier, waiting alone in the breaking dawn, Arthur had gone over what he intended to do, wondering again how he'd come so far. He wasn't the only one involved. There were others who had encouraged him, urged him to go ahead, said the idea was brilliant, had never been achieved before. If he wanted to be famous, he'd better do something about it before he got any older.

The more he thought about it, the more appealing the plan became. And, once he set his mind on something he found it almost impossible to put aside. His stubbornness had got him into trouble before. There'd been times when he'd wanted to stop, put the fire he'd started out, turn his bike around and ride back home, but had never been able to cut and run. Putting an end to any escapade, once he'd begun, would have been like giving up before he'd discovered what he could do.

But this time Arthur had not started out alone. Harry Clarke had been with him. The friend, who lived a few streets away, had agreed to join him. They'd talked about it together, planned how to get a name for themselves, but Harry had lost his nerve. Right at the last moment, while they waited in the misty dawn, before the crowds gathered, the pilots arrived, or any of the press and radio reporters turned up with their notebooks, microphones and enthusiastic assistants, Harry said he wasn't going to get on the plane. It was too risky. They'd either die or end up in jail. What's more, his father would thrash him until he bled. His mother would make him wash out his mouth with soap. Harry Clarke was terrified of his parents, and pretty scared of Arthur's too.