

The Man

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problem," though he was sure she never understood. She changed hands with an ashtray and ran her fingers in his hair.

"Yeah, I guess it is, Sarah," he said. He avoided her eyes, but though he knew it wouldn't do any good, he suddenly wanted to talk very much. "There's just some nights that I don't feel up to meeting people like that—just don't feel like I can handle the job."

"Oh no," he answered. "But Sarah, every time I see a boy about that age, I kind of wither up a little inside—that should have been our son—our Charles, sitting there... I just don't know why we..." He trailed off, and his wife bent down a little and kissed his forehead.

"Neither do I honey, but we musn't brood about it—we just ought to be thankful we have Nancy." Her voice became solicitous. "You just musn't worry about things so much, Len—I almost wish you'd spend more time in the shop—you're always relaxed when you're building a plane or something."

She knelt down by the chair. "Will you show me the new one you're making? It looks real pretty."

The front door opened, and Nancy came in, a little flushed but otherwise composed. "Better scratch Ron off the list, Mom," she cried, kicking off her shoes. "Hey, what's going on here—you two look like you were praying or something."

"Nothing's wrong, Nancy," said. "Your father and I were just talking." She looked back at Leonard. "She wants to have you show it to her, too—c'mon, dear."

So he got up, grumbling to hide his pleasure, and led them up the stairs, while they exchanged significant looks behind his back.

He picked the little plane up by the landing gear, and showed them the tiny motor, and the control stick inside the cockpit.

"Oh Daddy, it's beautiful!" said Nancy. "It's just like a real airplane, with all the gauges and wires and all." She stroked the wing. "And you really saw Lindbergh in Portland?"

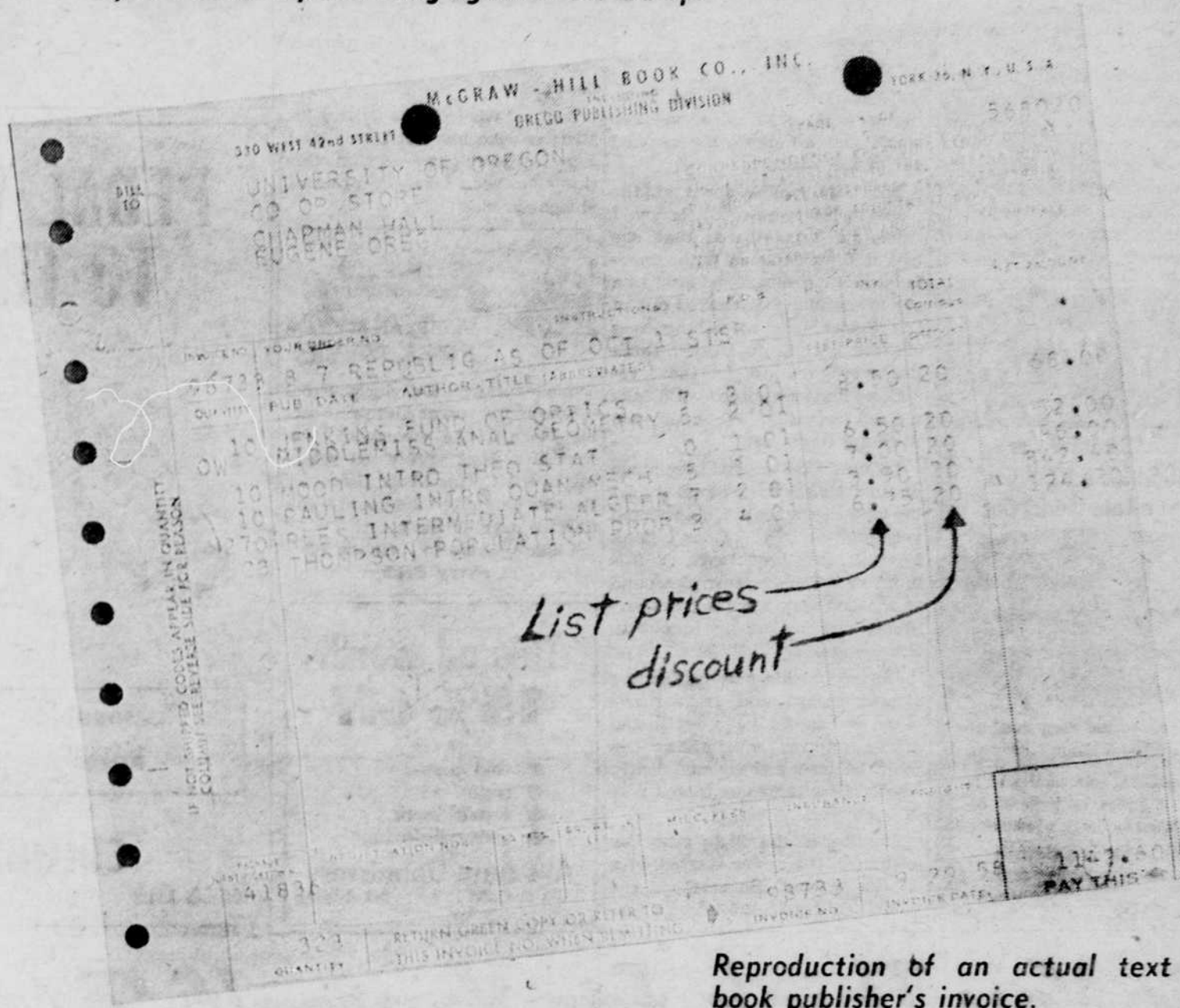
His wife put a hand on his shoulder. "It's just about the best one you've made yet, Len—wish I could arrange my flowers like you build models. You're not going to try to fly this one, are you?"

Leonard Stebbins stood moving the plane in little turns and banks, aware that he was being flattered, but feeling suddenly confident and happy. "Hell yes, I'm going to fly it," he said, and his profanity made them narrow their eyes a little. "What good's

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