

# *Mayday*

*by*

*Vixxy Fox*



The aircraft's engine never stopped in its roaring efforts to keep them aloft. To the aviator behind it the heart of his aircraft appeared alive and defiant; refusing to give into the elements that wished to beat them down.

Hand on the stick, Samuel sat in the open cockpit gritting his teeth to keep them from chattering as the cold spread over him from the rain. The mission was to save a life and in that he felt justified taking the risk. When the package was delivered he'd prepared, knowing what the weather was like to the west of his airport. The leather flight suit he wore was oiled to keep the water out but it wasn't working so well. The weather, now developing into more than a simple pea soup of mischief, easily found its way past this defense.

Equally bad was his ability to see through his aviator's goggles. Those were meant more to protect his eyes from the wind and exhaust fumes swirled back in his direction on a good day. Wiping them with the gloved fingers of his left hand did little to help. The best he could tell, his ship was holding steady at eight thousand feet. The engine instruments also showed a caged but steady wild beast. As he flew he muttered many thanks to the 'Flying Saints' for his Pratt and Whitney.

Then it got worse.

The hail began with a torrent that lasted only a few seconds. The pilot was struck in the head and body several times by pea sized ice pellets alerting him to the dangers. It was all he could do not to turn around and look behind just from a force of habit developed during The Great War.

‘That was then, this is now,’ he admonished himself mentally. ‘THINK! Rain is bad enough but you can brave that. Hail is another story. If it stays small the worst it will do is sting. If it goes bigger then it can knock you unconscious and poke holes in the fabric just like machinegun bullets.’

Leaning down he checked to see that his carburetor heat was full on. It was while he did this that the next maelstrom of hail pummeled his craft. This time the ice crystals were the size the marbles he’d played with as a child. His mind flashed an image of when he’d knocked Billy Braddock’s favorite marble out of the ring. Billy was half again larger than Samuel and the village tough guy among the other children. Inflamed he’d attacked the smaller child, only to find out what it felt like to have a foot firmly planted in his crotch. The fight didn’t last long after that but it began the pilot’s reputation for being pugnaciously stubborn.

When he looked up he found the fabric of his right wingtip flopping in the wind. Checking the compass as best possible he applied a touch of left rudder to compensate for the drag.

“STAY WITH ME!” he yelled to the wing as if it were a living person. “JUST A LITTLE BIT LONGER! WE CAN DO THIS!”

His craft began losing altitude though it struggled not to. It was like a wounded deer trying to run uphill after being shot in the thought it could move faster than the hunter in that direction; never understanding it’s life blood was flowing away.

There was no radio for the pilot to send a Mayday on. The portable radios of the 20’s were hardly all that portable. They also only had a Morse key and a headset. As much as the pilot was now shivering he probably couldn’t have sent out an S.O.S. even if he’d wanted to. What then if someone even heard him?

‘Where are you?’

‘In the sky.’

‘Where in the sky?’

‘I have no idea. Can’t see.’

Wiping his goggles again the Fox managed to see his artificial horizon. It told him he was wing low to the left and he knew he was winding down. It was a dead man’s spin and had to be corrected before the name could be brought to fruition. Caressing the stick to the right he again consciously compensated with the rudder for the drag of the loose fabric. Keeping as scrunched as possible behind the small windshield he checked his compass and found, miraculously, the aircraft was still on course.

With a tearing sound over and above the noise of the engine, the flopping fabric departed and his body automatically adjusted the controls so he was flying straight. If he’d been in a monoplane he would have crashed by now.

“S.O.S.” the pilot cried aloud, “Save Our Ship... Save Our Ship.”

*‘That didn’t do so well for the Titanic, did it?’ his mind told him. ‘As I recall they heard the message all the way in New York City, but what good did it do?’*

“WE’RE GOING TO MAKE IT!” he yelled, as a last blast of hail hit his wings. Some of the ice stones punched holes in the fabric... and then he was through the storm and met by a patch of sunny blue. The blue was above him and the ground no more than three hundred feet below. A quick glance at the altimeter showed eight thousand still. He smacked it with a fist and the needle quickly dropped to match what his eyes told him.

Leaning out to the side of the cockpit he found his goal now in sight, a small field with a single windsock mounted atop a windmill used to pump water for a cattle trough. Here a single touring sedan sat quietly awaiting his arrival.

Keeping his throttle full on, he circled the area just once to assure there were no cattle happily munching grass where he needed to be. A few minutes later he was bouncing down the field his throttle chopped for the landing. No sooner had the aircraft stopped and he reached out to ground the magnetos, shutting off the engine.

In the silence that followed he moved his goggles to the top of his head, removed the ear plugs from his long ears and then breathed a sigh of relief. For a moment he didn’t move as he simply enjoyed the feeling of being alive.

He’d done it. Though there was still thunder in the distance, he was safe on the ground; and yet a part of him wanted to still be back up in the blue of the sky.

The sound of the luxury sedan pulling up grounded his attention. Two doors opened and two canines got out of the back. An Austrian Wolf bearing a dueling scar across one cheek stayed well back while an American Boxer in a very expensive business suit approached.

“Did you bring the package?” the Boxer yelled out to him as he walked.

Reaching behind his seat, Samuel pulled out the leather satchel delivered to him and climbed out of the cockpit moving stiffly to meet the fellow. Snatching it, the Boxer clicked the latches open and pulled forth a bottle of whiskey which he held up in the air so the Wolf could see it. “I told you he could do it! You owe me five big, Rother!” With his words came the thunder of the storm which was now catching up. A few fat raindrops fell upon them emphasizing this fact.

The pilot, seeing the whiskey, became furious. “You told me it was medicine for a sick child!”

“Stuff it Sammy boy,” the Boxer growled at him. “What difference does that make? You’ll get your pay all the same, plus a bonus just because I’m generous.”

The Fox reached out and snatched the bottle away, throwing it onto a nearby rock ensuring it would smash to pieces.

The startled Boxer yelled, "You'll pay for that!" and then moved forward while swinging a round house punch anticipating the lesson he would teach the smaller Fox about respect.

Stepping inside the punch, Samuel hit him with a quick jab to the chin and he went down like a ton of bricks. Apparently the Boxer had a 'glass jaw'.

"I quit," the Fox responded and then kicked the Dog in the ribs for good measure.

When he looked up, he found the car's chauffeur aiming a pistol at him. The Wolf moved between them and raised a paw indicating he should not fire.

"Seeing that you are no longer employed," he told him, his accent hardly noticeable, "I have a job for you if you want it."

"Thanks but no thanks," Samuel told him. "Seeing that you're a friend of Mr. Chomps here, I'm figuring it's not a job I'd want."

"He is not a friend," the Wolf told him, "He is only an occasional business partner; though that will now most likely change to not at all. You see, he lied to me also. I was told you would make a trip here on your own with no other reason than you love to fly... that was the wager."

"You don't fly in a storm like that unless it's life or death."

"Obviously you were moved by the thought of a sick child. For that I shall have your airplane fixed. You should rightfully not have risked the storm."

Samuel pointed at the unconscious underworld type lying on the ground. "How do I know I'll be safe from him? He might be a creampuff but I know for a fact he's got some pretty rough friends."

"Leave that to me."

"What's the job?"

"I need an expert stunt pilot for a movie I am to film. I have the best mechanics, the best airplanes, and my best pilot just had... shall we say... an unfortunate accident. He made to dive and his wings folded up. The crash will be spectacular on the silver screen, no?"

The mobster groaned, and Samuel kicked him again. "There's your bonus!" he yelled at the prostrate figure as the rain began falling in earnest.

Looking back to the Wolf he smiled and nodded. "Done deal but I'm not riding into town with this guy. The stupid bastard almost got me killed."

The Wolf smiled. “It’s my car. I think he can walk. It will be therapeutic, yes?”

“I like the way you think,” the Fox told him with a smile.

In the back of his mind, however, a small voice warned that the Devil was always friendliest when you first meet him.