

Love's Labor

by

Vixxy Fox



The engine of the airplane roared, being held at a 'touching the red line' highest of RPM's dared for cruise speed as its nose was pointed due 'Home'. This particular point on the compass moved about depending upon where the aviator was called to be; but it was a fixed position on his heart.

After getting airborne the pilot's destination travel distance was an incredible two hundred miles. Being able to travel this distance, strike, and go home again was something the military was keenly aware of and researching, but for now the skies belonged to private enterprise and advancements in aircraft design belonged to those brave enough to risk the venture. The idea was a simple problem of math. Traveling by automobile the trip would have taken more than a full day depending upon the roads; if there were any. If there were train tracks laid down between the destinations, it might take from three hours to eight dependent upon the train being an express or if it was required to stop at every whistle stop along the way. Once the train stop was reached, if the tracks were still a good distance away from your final destination, you were back to traveling by car, truck, bus or hay wagon.

In his airplane, the pilot could make this distance in a mere two hours and set down in any open field close to where he or his passengers had to go. Already he had contracts with several large hotels that had agreed to keep a landing area clear; which also doubled up as a golf course.

The pilot smiled at the thought that his engine's voice sounded as if it were saying, 'HOME!' No matter where he went it did seem to know the way back by heart. For the pilot's part, though it was very tempting to do so, he knew not to keep his engine at full power for much more than take off as doing so was risking serious damage.

The mother-almost-to-be howled in her pain of labor; cursing her Tod in between gasps for causing this excruciating malady. After one such painful push she growled at the midwife,

“When I get my paws on that bastard I’m going to squeeze his Foxhood until it turns purple and falls off!”

The wise old vixen only smiled, dabbing at her charge’s forehead with a wet washcloth. “You are not the first to have voiced those same words my dear, nor will you be the last. You can trust this old thing that when this is all over you will be pushing these bad memories to the very back of your mind until they are all forgotten and it won’t be squeezing you’ll be do’n with that Foxhood.” She gave a chuckle, “Except maybe for the type of squeezing that got you into this predicament in the first place.”

“Where’s my husband?”

“I had the telegraph send word to the aerodrome in Kingsford just as your Jebediah instructed. I’m sure he’s on his way back.”

That same Fox was presently wondering exactly how fast he was really going. Part of the options he had when ordering his aircraft was the type of airspeed indicator to be installed. He opted for the more simple instrument since it was less likely to break. This probably was a mistake; with simplicity also came inaccuracy. His wasn’t the fastest aircraft in the sky but it certainly wasn’t the slowest either. Go too slow, however, and you would quickly fall out of said sky. Purchased just the previous year with thoughts of building up a mail delivery and passenger service, he was just now, thanks to the slowness of the government and its Air Mail Act of 1925, licensed and properly vetted. He’d been in Kingsford exactly for that purpose which could not put off by any amount of time for any reason.

“Uncle Sam appreciates your patience,” the senior clerk informed him slowly as he held out a large envelope, “And wishes for me to give to you this properly stamped and documented license which gives you the honor and privilege of starting the Johnson Airline and Flying Service. On a personal note I have watched your labors quite closely... you have been doggedly persistent for a Fox.”

“Thank you, sir,” the pilot replied formally in acceptance, “It has been a labor of love to be sure. Now, not to appear rude and impatient, I just received a cablegram telling me my wife is now in the throes of a different kind of labor.”

The old Fox Hound smiled at him. “You best be off then. Tally Ho; and I hope for you that it’s a boy.”

In the cockpit of his new airplane Jebediah had exactly three flying indicators; an altimeter, a compass, and an inclinometer. For airspeed he looked to his left where, mounted on one wooden wing stay, was a metal plate bearing the image of a clock face with painted numbers representing his speed in knots per hour. Aviation, reflecting its naval forebears, chose to hold on to the nautical measurement of distance. On the other side of the plate and mounted on a pintle that came all the way through to the indicator needle, was a small wing like arm that moved with the

strength of the wind rushing past it. The needle was pushing an unheard of one hundred and twenty miles per hour.

For the engine there were four indicators; RPM, oil pressure, oil temperature, and manifold pressure. So far, all of them were doing their jobs as was the engine which was rock solid roaring along as if it too had an expectant mother at home. Everything was in the 'quick reference' green bands of the indicators and that suited the pilot fine. Slapping on the side of the cockpit he yelled out, "We're having a baby!"

The airplane made no real reply, but continued on with the pilot watching the countryside below for the landmarks he'd made an effort to become familiar with. To help in this he had actually paid a handful of farmers to paint the roofs of their barns different colors. It was a good clear day and at five thousand feet it was as if he could see off into forever. Of course... his binoculars helped.

Hearing the airplane's engine in the distance, Willy looked at Horace and winked. "Heads up old buddy, he's com'n. I'm think'n we won't have much time to convince him he needs a ground crew so we need to impress him with our zeal to help."

"We're good," the Horse told him in his deep voice.

"Of course we are," the Cat replied, "But so is he. Mitch Fluger... you remember Mitch?"

The Horse nodded. "Crashed and died two years ago."

"Yeah... well... Mitch said this guy is one of the best flyers he'd ever seen. He's sharp. He's real sharp. He got seven kills in the war fly'n Spads."

"But he can't fix an engine."

"Nope he can't."

"And he can't stitch a seam."

"Nope he can't."

"He needs us."

"Yup; he does."

"We need a job."

"Yup; we do."

There was a loud scream from the house near where they waited and then a baby's high pitched cry sounded out clear as a bugle call to the chow hall.

"He's also got good timing," the Horse said, nodding to the house.

"As soon as he lands you chock the wheels and let me do the talk'n," the Cat told him.

"Always have."

Jeb circled the small field just once making sure of the windsock's direction and then eased his aircraft down for a landing where it bounced twice and then settled. After a short taxi to the hangar next to his house, the engine was cut and he was climbing out of the cockpit where he was met by a Cat holding his paws together to form a stirrup.

"Who are you?" the pilot asked as he continued climbing out, accepting the help.

"Your new ground crew," the mechanic told him with a smile. "I'm Willy and the fella set'n the chocks is Horace. We'll talk later; right now I'm thinking you're needed in the house being I heard a baby crying."

"I...ah... oh dang!"

With that the Fox was running to the house where the midwife held the door open for him. Charging into the bedroom he found his wife lying in the bed holding a small bundle of fur to her chest. Laughing, he kissed her on the cheek and then plucked the child from her arms, holding it above his head, all the while making airplane noises as he turned circles. Then, cuddling his nose into the child's fur, he said, "I'm going to teach you to fly like no other person before you; you can count on that."

"Jeb," his wife managed, her voice sounding ever so tired.

"Hmmm?" he asked dreamily, not taking his eyes from his new babe.

"It's a girl."

He turned to his wife, one eyebrow going up. "Really?"

"Why would I lie?" She managed with a weak smile. "We had a 50/50 chance that it would be; and don't think I'm going through this again."

Moving to her, he passed the baby back and smiled a very happy smile. "I don't care," he told her. "She's still going to be the best flyer ever and you can bet she's going to break some poor pilot's heart."

Reaching out to the vase of flowers on the bed table, he plucked one from the bunch and held it next to his new daughter's face. "She's going to be prettier than a Chrysanthemum ya betcha and I don't think I'd trade her for all the boys in the world."

"Life's a tragedy but for the small moments like this," said a deep voice from the entrance to the bedroom.

Husband and wife looked to the door and found it blocked by the bulk of a Horse. "And you would be?" both asked.

A set of paws grabbed the Horse's arm and pulled him back from the door. There was a hiss whisper saying he should have knocked first, after which there was a polite knock. "Can we come in, sir?" the Cat asked.

"Come," the Fox told him, reverting to his military training.

The mechanic moved around the corner, his hat in his paws. "You've got a tear in the rudder and an oil leak on the number three cylinder. If you'd like we can fix that."

"Tomorrow," the pilot told the fellow, "For now I think we might rest and possibly think of dinner. Dismissed."

"Yes, sir. Of course, sir. Thank you, sir."

When the mechanic had gone, the pilot's wife asked, "Who are those fellows?"

Leaning down to cuddle his daughter again, the pilot told her, "I haven't the foggiest clue in the world."