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Winifred Habbamock

having fulfilled all the conditions required by
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Pilot is hereby brevetted as such.



Winifred Habbamock

The Aviatrix

July 11, 1924

STILL HEADING UP THE coast. My hair doesn't like the salt; I have to keep my flight cap on after shows because I look like a street urchin without it. But on the good side, show attendance has been cracking good. Apparently the Bernard Dexter Flying Circus has some name recognition here, but in my defense, I didn't know that Old Dexy was from these parts. Guess he's got family in the area, but every time I bring it up, it looks like he sucked on a lemon, so of course I make sure to mention it on the regular.

The show numbers have been solid, and I'm hoping Poppy forgets the bet we made about that, because my pocketbook is mighty thin right now. Speaking of wagers, we were sitting down to a meal at the Beached Whale in New Bedford – and what a name for an inn! I half expected them to show us to a pile of blubber instead of a bed. Anyway, all of us were there except Winston and Robin: me and Old Dexy and Poppy and Virgil, even Alphonse, although of course he didn't say anything. Virgil talks enough for ten people anyway, and he was in rare form today, treating me like a greenie when I've been flying only a year less than him. So finally I got fed up with it and told him if he thought he was cock of the walk, then he wouldn't mind making a little wager to see who should be getting top billing, Virgil Bennet or Wini Habbamock. Normally, Old Dexy puts a stop to that sort of thing, but he was arguing with the barman, who is his cousin or knows his cousin or something like that.

So we shook on it, and Poppy bet that I'd come out on top, which was a real vote of confidence. After supper, we started brainstorming ideas for tricks that'll shut Virgil's stupid bragging mouth for good. So far, our best idea is to do a cartwheel on the wing. I can already picture the posters featuring my name: Winifred Habbamock, the Girl Without Fear.

July 12, 1924

BAD NEWS. LAST NIGHT, AFTER I FINISHED my diary entry and climbed into bed, Poppy reminded me about the show attendance bet. I told her I'd settle up after we got paid, but all she wanted was bragging rights. She's the bee's knees, and I told her so, but she's brought up those bragging rights seven times already today. Good thing we're friends. Otherwise I'd sock her in the mouth and not think twice.

We're heading into Plymouth for the weekend. I'll be flying all day Saturday, and we get Sunday off, although I got to practice the new cartwheel trick.

Had another letter from Ma encouraging me to come home and marry one of the Winston boys. Don't know how many times I can tell her I'm not interested in working a farm and popping out some stupid man's babies. So I said that Winifred Winston was an awful name and I wasn't about to use it. Not that she'll listen. She's never understood my flying, not even after I took her up a couple times. In retrospect, the barrel rolls weren't a smart call.

July 15, 1924

THE CARTWHEEL TRICK IS SCARIER than I expected. I've done some wing walking, and it's a real gas, but doing an acrobatic trick too? Hoo-ee! It's hard to tell what's up and what's down, but I figured it out. Poppy's already planning on what to do with the money once the boys pay up. She wants to buy a dress – I think she's got a shine for Alphonse, although she won't admit it. If she starts talking about popping

out his babies, I'll kick her. I'm not keen on being the only girl in this show; who would I bunk with?

We're on the road to a little place called Arkham. Never heard of it, but I think a small show is just the right place to debut the new trick. I'm thinking about buying a new silk scarf to tie around my neck while I'm flying like Marie Meyer. I bet it would look aces when I'm cartwheeling.

July 17, 1924

ARKHAM IS A TENSE LITTLE PLACE. THE people here don't smile much, but they snatched up our pamphlets, so I think they'll come. Poppy and I smell like fish now, because Old Dexy assigned us to cover the docks. One of the boats was from Innsmouth, and I've never seen so many people who look like frogs. We kept ribbiting under our breath and got called out for rudeness, but it's not our fault the sailors have such enormous eyes. Their money will spend regardless.

I need a bath before bed though.

July 18, 1924

I KNOW I'VE TOLD SOME TALL TALES IN these pages, and I can barely believe the story I'm about to tell, but I swear this is true. Cross my heart and hope to die.

The show started out plenty normal. We set up in a field belonging to the Samsons, and Old Dexy was right furious because Pa Samson was nowhere to be found, and he'd offered to let us use the barn but left it locked up tight. We made do, though, like always.

It was the perfect day for flying. Clear blue skies without a cloud as far as the eye could see. Breeze off the water was light, which settled my nerves, because there's nothing like an ocean wind to toss an aeroplane around like a bean in a basket. The beginning of the show went just fine. The crowd cheered real loud at my loop-de-loops, but they always do. Virgil pulled out all the stops. His trick run ended in an impressive dive, cutting it so close to the ground that a few ladies screamed.

I couldn't let him win. But as I climbed into the sky to make my final run, the oddest thing happened. The clouds rolled in faster than I've ever seen. In the space of a blink, the sky went from clear to stormy, and an unexpected wind buffeted my wings. Those cartwheels were scary enough on a clear day, and I thought about cutting them but I wouldn't give Virgil the satisfaction.

My heart was hammering like blazes as I tied the rudder in place and climbed out of my seat. The plane rocked and shuddered beneath me, but I defy death for a living. I did my cartwheel just as I soared past the stands, and I could hear the cheering of the crowd over the buzz of the engines.

As I dropped back into the pilot's seat, my plane plunged into the clouds. The air closed in, choking and



clammy. My instruments went haywire; gauges spinning in wild circles. I was flying blind. Thunder rattled my teeth in their sockets and a bolt of lightning lit the clouds all around me. Then something smacked against the hull of the plane, hard enough to make the engine stutter. At first I thought it was a bird, but it wasn't.

I don't really know what it was.

It didn't have feathers, just knobby, rough skin. Kind of gray colored. Instead of wings, it had a mass of tentacles like a squid. They bunched and shoved as it swam through the air like it was water. It had only

one eye, smack in the middle of its face, and it fixed on me like it was thinking I'd make a real good meal. That was scary enough.

Then the beaked mouth opened and it said my name.

"Wini!" it screeched. At first I thought I was just imagining it. Birds sometimes sound like they're saying words but they aren't, you know? But then – I swear on a stack of Bibles – it said, "Winifred Habbamock!"

I was scared out of my wits. It dove at me; its tentacles wrapping around one arm, and tried to pull me from my seat. I jerked the yoke, dropping abruptly out of the sky. It tried to keep hold, but I was strapped in and it



wasn't strong enough. I veered off, hoping to lose it in the storm as the winds tried to knock me out of the sky. Another bolt of lightning struck so close that my hair stood on end, but my only hope of survival was to lose the thing in the clouds, so I plunged into the deepest, darkest one as fast as I could. My heart raced as I flew into the depths of the storm, wind tossing me around so hard that I bit my tongue. Slowly, the horrid cries of the thing faded away.

I had no clue where I was, and any pilot will tell you that flying blind will earn you a one-way ticket to heaven, so I aimed for the dim disk of the sun. Sure enough, I popped out above the clouds, rattled but alive. I was shaking something fierce, but I'd made it.

The clouds started to thin just as fast as they'd arrived, and I kept an eye out for that squid-bird, but it didn't show up again. I was home free except for one problem: I didn't know where home was. Somehow I'd ended up over the ocean. Nothing but water as far as the eye could see. I was inexplicably miles off course. Luckily I had a full fuel tank, and my gauges stopped dancing around, and I made it back to the farm safe and sound.

When I got there, Old Dexy yelled at me longer than he ever has. I told everyone about the squid-bird, but they didn't believe me. Virgil said I made it up to distract everyone from the fact that I nearly killed myself. But I know what I saw.

It knew my name.

July 19, 1924

I WENT BACK TO THE SAMSON farm today. Old Dexy is talking about grounding me, and Virgil won't shut up about how I was hallucinating, so I need proof. A fellow about my age answered the door with a shotgun. He was friendly enough – said his name was Hank – and seemed like he was gonna invite me in until I brought up

the squid-bird. Then the smile dropped off his face like butter off a hot pan, and he tried to shut the door in my face. I could tell he knew something, but no matter how much I begged he wouldn't fess up.

Maybe it was foolish, but I went hunting for the squid-bird. I think I was trying to convince myself that I had nothing to be afraid of. I didn't find it, although I heard it calling my name off in the distance a few times. As the light fell, I stumbled across a giant nest deep in the woods, full of dry bones with all their innards sucked out. Big bones too. Suddenly my worries about being carried away and eaten didn't seem so ridiculous. I admit it, I got awful spooked. I didn't run back to the truck, but I sure did hurry.

I'm not done yet though. I'm thinking I should rig up some kind of net to my plane in case I run into it again. The skies are mine. I'm not letting some monster take them away from me.

Even if no one believes me, I know what I saw.

