

Phantom Flight

written by

Mohammad Khan

Address  
Phone  
E-mail

FADE IN:

EXT. BELLONI AIR BASE - EARLY MORNING

The red sun slowly rises on the horizon as a Cessna 172 emerges from the darkness landing smoothly on the runway in the middle of the sunbeams. The sound of the plane cuts through the silence only disturbing the nearby ocean.

The amber sunlight reflects off the metal body of the plane and highlighting a red army Corps of Engineers insignia painted on the side.

The plane lands and comes to gentle stop. The pilot, MARISSA, climbs out of the plane wearing a moss green Army corps of engineers uniform.

The base was dark except for a single lit room.

The runway glistens from the sunlight, still wet from the morning dew.

Birds fly in the air above. Hawks, eagles, falcons travel the air free from bounds.

INT. BELLONI AIR BASE - EARLY MORNING

Marissa walked through the dark hallways to the only lit room where another officer waited.

MIKE sat by computers with a weather radar on his computer. Papers surrounded the computer and covered the desk. The night slowly grew brighter outside as the sun rose.

MIKE

Thanks for coming in this late.

Marissa pulls up a chair.

MARISSA

Did you need something?

Mikes moves to the side showing the doppler radar

MIKE

Nathan and Mohammad are on the South island. They've run out of vaccines due to a storm a few days ago. They need you to deliver the more vaccines to the island tonight.

MARISSA

But it looks like there's another storm coming on the journey.

MIKE

I know. But they need you to do this tonight. President's giving the state of the union in a few days and it'll look good if we fully vaccinated the world by then.

Mike leans back in his chair.

MIKE (CONT'D)

We should've finished a few days ago but the storm destroyed some of the vials and we've kept that quiet. This is off the books. No one can know about this.

MARISSA

Surely you can't be serious.

MIKE

I am serious. And don't call me Shirley.

Mike grabs a file from his desk.

MIKE (CONT'D)

The speech is at 6 pm EST and the election is in 11 months. It'll look good if we can do this. We have 12 hours to get the medicine to the island.

MARISSA

The storm might be a problem. Is that going to the island?

MIKE

You may cross paths with it. I've notified FAA and other branches, no one will be in your airspace. It's 1000 miles. What do you say? You're my first and only choice.

MARISSA

I can't make the journey. My plane has a range of 700-800 miles even with the spare fuel.

MIKE

There are smaller islands along the way, you can refuel there. I wouldn't worry.

MARISSA

Can't you ask Elliot? New England district has the better planes. I just fixed my plane yesterday and don't know if it's ready for a 1000 mile journey.

MIKE

He's on leave with family.

MARISSA

Kelly?

MIKE

She's in Europe on a different assignment.

MARISSA

Alex?

MIKE

Home sick.

MARISSA

So..

MIKE

Yep. You're my fourth and only choice.

MARISSA

Alright... What am I carrying?

MIKE

3 small fridges holding the vaccines. 600 lbs total. They'll be on their own power supply but keep them near 0 Celsius.

MARISSA

I don't know about it.

MIKE

(under breath)

As if my first 5 choices weren't available

MARISSA

I thought there were only 3.

MIKE

Let's not get caught up on the math.

Mike hands her a radio.

MIKE (CONT'D)

Squawk at 700 only. We'll communicate that way. The island is also on the same frequency. Remove any unnecessary cargo off the plane and I'll meet you outside with the vaccines.

EXT. BELLONI AIR BASE - MORNING DAWN

The aura of the sun glows on the horizon illuminating half the sky. The light shimmered off the gentle water.

A light mist waits for Marissa as she began searching for extraneous cargo. Empty water bottles, food wrappers, anything that can be thrown out. She grabs the flight manual and keeps it onboard by the cockpit.

Mike came outside with a lift and the 3 small fridges.

They load the fridges onto the plane and are pushed to the back of the plane atop soft cloth seats.

MIKE

There is a stretch where you'll lose radio contact with but you might be in range for the island.

Marissa climbs into the plane and does the pre-flight checklist. She checks the knobs, circuit breaker, wings, etc.

MIKE (CONT'D)

There will be buoys indicating where to land.

She finishes the check and closes the door.

MIKE (CONT'D)

Good luck. We're all counting on you.

INT. 10,000 FEET - 400 MILES TO GO

The plane flies smoothly through the sky. Dark clouds on the horizon.

An iPad with a map sits on top the controls as guide.

Marissa keeps her head on swivel and files calmly.

Her radio screeches.

MIKE (ON RADIO)  
Marissa how's the flight?

MARISSA  
Storm clouds on the horizon. What  
are the islands near by? Ones that  
I can land on?

MIKE (ON RADIO)  
There's....

Mike fumbles through papers.

MIKE (ON RADIO) (CONT'D)  
East island to your west.

MARISSA  
What?

MIKE  
Yeah-I know. It'd be on your east  
if you came the other way but - You  
can land there. It's a small place.  
Shouldn't have much issue.

Marissa opens the flaps and prepares to land as the clouds  
roll in.

EXT. EAST ISLAND - DOCKS

The plane tied to the dock undulates in the turbulent waves  
as Marissa refuels the engine.

She checks her watch. 8 hours till the speech. She keeps the  
radio latched to her waist.

Light rain begins to patter upon the ocean and distant  
shelters.

JACOB (O.S)  
XXXXXXXXXXXXCCCCUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUU  
UUUUUSSSSSSSSSSSEEEEEEE MEEEEEEE!

Marissa turns to see a man, Jacob, wearing Hawaiian shirts,  
shorts and a hat waving jubilantly in drunken stupor. Only  
thing missing were his sunglasses and he'd pass as a tourist.

Marissa puts the fuel into the plane and faces the approaching man.

JACOB (CONT'D)

Allow me to present myself.  
Sergeant Jacob of the New England  
district.

MARISSA

(shaking his hand)  
Lieutenant Marissa, South Atlantic  
Division. It's an honor to meet you  
Sergeant.

JACOB

Isn't it? Now what are you doing on  
east island in uniform? Are you on  
leave?

MARISSA

No, I'm stopping to refuel. I'm  
headed North to South island.

JACOB

South island you say? Traveling  
with the storm. A bit dangerous  
isn't it? Especially in a modified  
Cessna.

MARISSA

I'm not staying long. I need to  
leave soon.

JACOB

Splendid! Won't you join me for  
lunch. I know a restaurant down the  
street who's giving discounts to  
those in uniform.

Marissa hesitates, glancing back at the plane.

JACOB (CONT'D)

Your plane will be here when you  
return. You have my word.

INT. EAST ISLAND RESTAURANT

Fresh air travels through the restaurant's open layout. The  
palm leaves outside sway into the area.

Restaurant goers are dressed in short shirts and pants, ready  
for the warm weather and wind.

Marissa and Jacob sit in the corner table near the door.  
Jacob leans against the wall as he sits

JACOB  
(waving to the waiter)  
Do you want anything?

Marissa shakes her head. She keeps her eyes on the skies and her plane in the water. Some kids notice the red army corps of engineers insignia.

The waiter arrives. Jacob looks at the list and points to a drink.

JACOB (CONT'D)  
Not to worry, they're just curious.  
You don't have anything exciting in  
the plane do you?

MARISSA  
Seats and a steering wheel.

JACOB  
(amused)  
So why are you here Lieutenant?  
President's giving an address later  
tonight, I thought you'd be near by  
since your division completed the  
vaccination of South Island.

She keeps her eyes on the kids, now in a larger group.

MARISSA  
Flying clears the mind.

JACOB  
You fly often?...

MARISSA  
I do. I just fixed my engine  
yesterday.

JACOB  
(over)  
....Into unrestricted air?

Marissa doesn't respond.

JACOB (CONT'D)  
No way the FAA cleared leisure  
flights in restricted airspace. So  
why are you here Marissa?



The crowd's growing larger around the plane, now police officers looking inside. Someone reaches into the engine and begins siphoning out gas.

Marissa springs out of her seat towards the plane. Jacob follows behind.

EXT. EAST ISLAND - DOCKS

The kids run away as they reach the plane.

MARISSA  
They took my gas!

Marissa looks in the plane to make sure nothing else was taken. Jacob also peers inside.

JACOB  
Not to worry. I know what to do. We go to the police.

MARISSA  
We can take their gas?

JACOB  
Technically, they take it from the people, so we'd just be completing the circle.

MARISSA  
How do we get it?

JACOB  
Buy 'em off.

An officer walks by.

JACOB (CONT'D)  
(to officer)  
Excuse me officer! Would you like some payment in exchange for a few gallons of petrol?

The officer and Jacob walk to the police car hidden in an alleyway. Silently, they exchange items and Jacob returns with a 3 gallons of petrol.

JACOB (CONT'D)  
This should be enough for you to get to South Island.

MARISSA  
I use Diesel.

Jacob looks at the petrol.

JACOB

Well it's close enough. After all,  
you'll need what you can get to  
deliver the medicine.

Marissa takes the petrol and fills up the engine.

JACOB (CONT'D)

Do not worry. I won't tell anyone.  
Good luck.

She starts the engine and it revs up smoothly. The dark  
clouds loom overhead. She takes off in a race against the  
storm.

EXT. 10,000 FEET 20 MILES TO GO

Marissa flies through dense cloud cover towards the island.  
Her radio crackles.

NATHAN (ON RADIO)

M-M...Marissa... you there?

MARISSA

Roger. I'm almost there.

NATHAN (ON RADIO)

...It's Nathan. How soon can you  
land?

MARISSA

I'm not sure.

NATHAN (ON RADIO)

Can't you take a guess?

MARISSA

Not for another 2 hours.

NATHAN (ON RADIO)

.....you can't take a guess for  
another two hours?

MARISSA

No. The clouds won't clear up for  
another 2 hours. I can't see.

NATHAN (ON RADIO)

Oh... Mohammad's set up the buoys  
you should be able to see them when  
you land. They'll light the landing  
area.

MARISSA

I'll keep an eye out. Over.

The radio silences....and so does the plane's engine.

The propellers slow to a stop and the engine sputters out  
black smoke until it dies.

She checks the dial. Thrust from the engine rolls back to 0.

MARISSA (CONT'D)

Engine rolling back.

She takes out the QRH and goes down the checklist.

MARISSA (CONT'D)

Flaps up. At 10,000 ft. 130 knots.  
Confirm engine rolling back.

She turns the knob. No response.

MARISSA (CONT'D)

Confirm.

She takes out the radio.

MARISSA (CONT'D)

Nathan, I've lost engine thrust.  
Coming in for a landing now.

NATHAN (ON RADIO)

Understood. I'll him know.

Marissa pitches the plane down 8 degrees, diving through the  
cloud layer.

The water's surface is colored stony blue and is rough with  
waves beneath the gray sky.

A strong tailwind pushes the Cessna forward.

The buoys undulate drastically in the rough waves, the  
droning red lights illuminate the landing path in the water.

The plane floats skid across the water surface as she tries  
to bring the tail down.

The floats fall atop the water creating a large wake.

The plane zooms across the water towards the island. The buoys once in line, split apart due to the wake.

The plane comes to a slow stop by the dock. Mohammad waits by the docks.

Marissa steps out of the plane.

MOHAMMAD

Nice landing.

MARISSA

How long do we have?

MOHAMMAD

About two hours. We can handle it from here.

Marissa walks down the docks towards the small village. She runs into Nathan.

MARISSA

Can anyone here fix my engine?

NATHAN

We've got time afterwards. We'll see what we can do.