

18E

Written by

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Based on historical events.

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BLACK SCREEN

Airport ambience before we see anything.

Distant announcements. Luggage wheels. Flip-board clicking.

No music.

INT. PORTLAND INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT - AFTERNOON - NOVEMBER  
24, 1971

Fluorescent light. Cigarette haze. Holiday travel bustle.

Families in coats. Businessmen in narrow ties. A child  
dragging a stuffed bear.

A mechanical departure board CLACKS overhead.

SEATTLE - 3:00 PM - ON TIME

At the Northwest Orient Airlines counter, a TICKET AGENT (mid-  
30s, chewing gum) stamps paperwork without looking up.

A MAN steps forward.

Mid-40s. Dark suit. Conservative tie. Overcoat folded neatly  
over one arm. Briefcase in the other hand.

Unremarkable.

He slides cash across the counter.

MAN  
One to Seattle.

The agent counts the bills.

TICKET AGENT  
One way or round trip?

A beat. He doesn't hesitate.

MAN  
One way.

She tears the ticket. Stamps it.

TICKET AGENT  
Name?

A small beat.

MAN

Cooper.

She types.

TICKET AGENT

First name?

MAN

Dan.

TICKET AGENT

Flight 305. Boarding at Gate 52.

She hands him the ticket.

For a moment, she looks at him.

He offers a polite nod. Nothing more.

He turns and walks away into the crowd.

The camera stays on the agent for a half second longer.

She moves to the next customer.

History passes her by unnoticed.

CUT TO:

INT. GATE 52 - BOARDING AREA - LATER

Passengers seated. Newspapers open. Ashtrays mounted on armrests.

An overhead announcement:

PA ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

Northwest Orient Flight 305 to  
Seattle is now boarding.

The man joins the line.

No rush. No nerves.

Just another traveler heading home for Thanksgiving.

CUT TO:

INT. BOEING 727 - TAXIING - DAY

Engines hum.

Flight attendant FLORENCE SCHAFFNER moves down the aisle checking seatbelts.

The man sits in 18E.

Window seat.

He places his briefcase carefully at his feet.

He adjusts his tie.

Outside the window, rain begins to speckle the glass.

He looks forward.

Expression unreadable.

The plane begins to roll.

TITLE CARD:

18E

November 24, 1971

No score.

Just engines building toward takeoff.

FADE OUT.

INT. BOEING 727 - CLIMB OUT - AFTERNOON

The engines deepen.

Rain streaks across the window.

Seatbelt sign still illuminated.

The MAN in 18E reaches up and presses the call button.

A soft DING.

From the rear jump seat, FLORENCE SCHAFFNER (early 20s, composed, professional) unbuckles and stands.

She moves down the aisle.

SCHAFFNER

Yes, sir?

He looks up at her - polite, neutral.

MAN  
Bourbon and Seven.

She nods.

GALLEY - MOMENTS LATER

Ice clinks in a plastic cup.

Miniature bourbon bottle cracked open.

She tops it with 7-Up.

BACK TO 18E

She hands him the drink.

He pays in cash.

No small talk.

He lights a cigarette.

Raleigh.

Inhales.

Exhales slowly.

The cabin is ordinary.

Across the aisle, a BUSINESSMAN folds a newspaper. A MOTHER helps a child with a coloring book. Someone laughs quietly two rows up.

The man in 18E watches none of it.

He studies something in his lap.

He finishes half the drink.

He reaches for the in-flight magazine.

Flips past an ad.

Tears out a page carefully.

From his coat pocket - a pen.

He writes.

Deliberate. Block letters.

He folds the page once.

Neat.

INT. CABIN -NIGHT (CONT'D)

Schaffner settles back into the rear jump seat behind him.

The plane levels off.

The MAN turns slightly and hands her the folded note.

She smiles politely - assuming.

SCHAFFNER

Thank you.

Without looking, she slips it into her purse.

He watches her.

A beat.

He leans back toward her.

Quiet. Calm.

Close enough that only she hears him.

MAN

Miss.

She turns.

His voice is even.

MAN (CONT'D)

You'd better look at that note.

A pause.

MAN (CONT'D)

I have a bomb.

No music.

Just engine hum.

Schaffner studies his face.

He isn't smiling.

He isn't threatening.

He isn't emotional.

He simply means it.

She slowly reaches into her purse.

Opens the note.

INSERT - THE NOTE

MISS - I HAVE A BOMB IN MY BRIEFCASE.

I WANT YOU TO SIT BY ME.

Neat. All caps.

She lowers the note.

Looks at him.

He gestures to the empty seat beside him.

Businesslike.

MAN

You can read it later.

A small beat.

MAN (CONT'D)

Bring your purse.

She sits.

The engines continue their steady hum.

INT. BOEING 727 - CRUISE - AFTERNOON

The engines steady at altitude.

Passengers relaxed.

A man two rows up laughs at something in a magazine.

Beside 18E, Schaffner holds her composure.

SCHAFFNER

What do you want?

He removes a pair of dark sunglasses from his coat pocket and puts them on.

He speaks evenly.

MAN

Two hundred thousand dollars.  
In negotiable American currency.

She nods, memorizing.

MAN (CONT'D)

Two front parachutes.  
Two back parachutes.

A beat.

MAN (CONT'D)

Have the money here by five  
o'clock.

She swallows.

SCHAFFNER

Anything else?

MAN

No funny business.

He rests the briefcase on his lap.

Opens it a few inches.

Inside -

Red cylindrical objects. Wires. A battery.

Nothing theatrical.

He closes it.

He gestures to her notepad.

MAN (CONT'D)

Write it down.

She writes carefully.

Her handwriting tightens slightly.

He watches her hand move.

No hurry.

No agitation.

Just procedure.

INT. BOEING 727 - CABIN - AFTERNOON

Schaffner finishes writing.

Her pen pauses.

She looks at him.

SCHAFFNER

I need to tell the captain.

He nods once.

Permission granted.

MAN

Take your purse.

A beat.

MAN (CONT'D)

Leave the note.

She stands.

Walks forward.

Not too fast.

Not too slow.

Passengers barely notice.

A businessman shifts to let her pass.

A child kicks the back of a seat.

Normal life continues.

Behind her -

18E sits still.

Smoking.

INT. COCKPIT - CONTINUOUS

Captain WILLIAM SCOTT flies manually.

First Officer BILL RATA CZAK monitors instruments.

Flight Engineer HAROLD ANDERSON adjusts a dial.

The cockpit door opens.

Schaffner steps in.

Closes it quietly.

The three men glance back.

She is composed.

But pale.

SCOTT

What is it?

She hands Scott the written demands.

He reads.

Doesn't react outwardly.

Hands it to Rataczak.

SCHAFFNER

He says he has a bomb.

A beat.

SCHAFFNER (CONT'D)

I saw it.

No one speaks for two seconds.

Just engine noise.

Scott picks up the intercom.

SCOTT

(to cabin)

Tina.

INT. CABIN - CONTINUOUS

TINA MUCKLOW (early 20s, steady presence) turns from mid-cabin.

MUCKLOW

Yes, Captain?

SCOTT (V.O.)  
Come forward.

INT. COCKPIT - MOMENTS LATER

Mucklow enters.

Scott hands her the note.

SCOTT  
You'll sit with him.

Mucklow reads quickly.

Looks at Schaffner.

No panic.

Just understanding.

SCOTT (CONT'D)  
Florence, stay here.

Take notes. Everything.

Schaffner nods.

BACK TO CABIN

Mucklow walks down the aisle toward 18E.

He watches her approach.

Still calm.

She sits beside him.

MUCKLOW  
I'm Tina.

He studies her.

MAN  
Good.

A small beat.

MAN (CONT'D)  
Let's keep this simple.

INT. COCKPIT - SAME TIME

Scott flips a switch.

Keys the mic.

SCOTT  
Seattle Center, Northwest Three  
Zero Five.

Static.

SEATTLE ATC (V.O.)  
Northwest Three Zero Five, go  
ahead.

Scott keeps his voice level.

SCOTT  
We have a situation aboard.  
Possible hijacking.

A pause.

SEATTLE ATC (V.O.)  
Confirm, Northwest Three Zero Five?

SCOTT  
Affirmative.

He glances at Schaffner.

She writes.

INT. COCKPIT - AFTERNOON

Scott holds the mic.

Seattle Center responds again - more alert now.

SEATTLE ATC (V.O.)  
Northwest Three Zero Five, state  
your nature of emergency.

Scott glances at Rataczak.

Keeps it controlled.

SCOTT  
Male passenger. Claims to have an  
explosive device.  
Requesting instructions.

A beat.

Silence on the frequency.

Then—

SEATTLE ATC (V.O.)  
Northwest Three Zero Five, maintain  
present heading.  
Stand by.

Scott sets the mic down.

Schaffner writes: 2:59 PM — ATC notified.

CUT TO:

INT. SEATTLE AIR ROUTE TRAFFIC CONTROL CENTER — SAME TIME

Fluorescent lighting.

Headsets.

Radar scopes glowing green.

Controllers exchange looks.

One man covers his mic.

CONTROLLER  
We've got a hijack.

Not loud.

Just factual.

A supervisor stands.

Already moving.

CUT TO:

INT. NORTHWEST ORIENT OPERATIONS — MINNESOTA — LATE AFTERNOON  
(CST)

Phones ring.

A teletype machine chatters.

A dispatcher reads from a slip.

DISPATCHER  
Flight 305. Possible air piracy.

BACK TO:

INT. BOEING 727 - CABIN

Mucklow sits beside him.

He removes his sunglasses briefly.

Looks out the window.

Cloud cover below.

MAN  
How long to Seattle?

MUCKLOW  
About twenty minutes.

He nods.

Then:

MAN  
Tell the captain we'll circle until  
the money's ready.

She absorbs that.

Stands.

Walks forward.

INT. NORTHWEST ORIENT OPERATIONS - MINNESOTA - LATE AFTERNOON  
(CST)

A supervisor listens on a headset.

His expression tightens.

He hangs up.

Turns.

SUPERVISOR  
Get Mr. Nyrop.

INT. DONALD NYROP'S OFFICE - MINNEAPOLIS - MOMENTS LATER

Quiet.

Dark wood paneling.

A framed company route map on the wall.

DONALD NYROP, early 50s, composed, executive calm, listens on the phone.

No panic.

Just calculation.

INTERCUT WITH OPERATIONS ROOM.

SUPERVISOR (V.O.)  
Passenger claims he has a bomb.  
Demanding two hundred thousand and  
parachutes.

Nyrop doesn't interrupt.

NYROP  
Any injuries?

SUPERVISOR (V.O.)  
No, sir.

A beat.

Nyrop looks out his window.

NYROP  
Pay him.

Silence on the other end.

NYROP (CONT'D)  
Cooperate fully.  
Keep the passengers safe.

He hangs up.

No flourish.

Just decision.

CUT TO:

INT. SEATTLE AIR ROUTE TRAFFIC CONTROL CENTER - SAME TIME  
Radar scope showing Flight 305 circling over Puget Sound.  
A supervisor leans in.

SUPERVISOR  
Notify Sea-Tac operations.

CUT TO:

INT. SEATTLE-TACOMA INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT - OPERATIONS ROOM  
Phones ringing.  
A police liaison already present.

AIRPORT OFFICIAL  
We've got a confirmed hijacking  
inbound.

The word lands.

Hijacking.

CUT TO:

INT. SEATTLE POLICE DEPARTMENT - DISPATCH FLOOR  
An officer answers.  
Listens.  
Stands.

SPD OFFICER  
Call the Bureau.

CUT TO:

INT. FBI SEATTLE FIELD OFFICE - LATE AFTERNOON  
Fluorescent lighting.  
Metal desks.  
Ashtrays full.  
A phone rings.  
An agent answers.

Listens.

His jaw tightens.

FBI AGENT  
How much?

Listens.

FBI AGENT (CONT'D)  
Get the bank moving.

He covers the receiver.

FBI AGENT (CONT'D)  
We need two hundred thousand in  
twenties.  
Unmarked.

A beat.

He adds:

FBI AGENT (CONT'D)  
And four parachutes.

That lands even heavier.

BACK TO:

INT. BOEING 727 - CABIN - LATE AFTERNOON

The plane banks gently.

Holding pattern.

Sunlight fading.

Passengers shifting.

A man checks his watch.

An overhead announcement:

SCOTT (V.O.)  
Ladies and gentlemen, we're  
experiencing a minor mechanical  
issue.  
We'll be circling briefly before  
landing in Seattle.

Murmurs.

Not fear.

Just inconvenience.

Seated in 18E, Cooper watches the clouds.

Still.

INT. BOEING 727 - LATE AFTERNOON

The aircraft banks again.

Cloud cover thinning.

Below - faint shoreline.

Mucklow sits beside him.

Passengers restless but not alarmed.

He looks out the window.

Studies the terrain.

A long beat.

MAN

Looks like Tacoma down there.

Mucklow glances out.

She can't quite tell.

MUCKLOW

Could be.

He nods once.

He knows.

CUT TO:

INT. SEATTLE FIRST NATIONAL BANK - VAULT AREA - LATE  
AFTERNOON

Metal drawers sliding open.

Stacks of \$20 bills.

A supervisor speaks quietly to a teller.

BANK SUPERVISOR

Unmarked.  
Federal Reserve San Francisco  
series.

Bundles are stacked.

Counted.

Recounted.

Rubber-banded.

Placed into a canvas bag.

A camera clicks.

An FBI technician photographs serial numbers.

No music.

Just mechanical precision.

CUT TO:

INT. SKYDIVING SCHOOL - SEATTLE - LATE AFTERNOON

A small hangar.

Parachutes pulled from storage racks.

An instructor looks confused.

INSTRUCTOR

He wants two mains and two  
reserves?

A plainclothes officer nods.

The instructor grabs what's available.

One reserve - a training chute.

He hesitates.

No time.

Hands them over.

BACK TO:

INT. BOEING 727 - HOLDING PATTERN

Mucklow studies him discreetly.

MUCKLOW  
Why this flight?

A beat.

He almost smiles.

MAN  
It's not because I have a grudge  
against your airline.

He looks forward.

MAN (CONT'D)  
It's just because I have a grudge.

Delivered flat.

Not theatrical.

Just matter-of-fact.

CUT TO:

INT. NORTHWEST ORIENT OPERATIONS - MINNESOTA

A wall clock ticks.

A dispatcher updates a board:

FLIGHT 305 - HOLDING

Nyrop watches silently.

BACK TO CABIN

A PASSENGER in a cowboy hat stands near the rear.

Leans toward Mucklow.

COWBOY  
What's the mechanical trouble?

Cooper watches him.

Amused at first.

Then less so.

MAN

Sir, return to your seat.

The cowboy ignores him.

Mucklow gently guides the man away.

The tension is subtle.

INT. BOEING 727 - HOLDING PATTERN - LATE AFTERNOON

The aircraft banks again.

Passengers beginning to murmur now.

A man checks his watch.

A woman asks a flight attendant quietly-

PASSENGER

How long are we going to circle?

Mucklow answers professionally.

MUCKLOW

Shouldn't be much longer.

Beside her, Cooper lights another cigarette.

He glances at her.

MAN

What time is it?

She checks.

MUCKLOW

Four twenty.

He nods.

Still on schedule.

CUT TO:

INT. SEATTLE POLICE DEPARTMENT - CONFERENCE ROOM

Maps spread out.

Phones ringing.

An officer addresses a small group.

SPD COMMANDER

No heroics.  
He says he has a bomb, we assume he  
does.

An FBI agent enters.

FBI AGENT

Money's being assembled.  
We'll need serials recorded.

The room tightens.

This is federal now.

CUT TO:

INT. SEATTLE FIRST NATIONAL BANK - BACK ROOM

Stacks of twenties.

Ten thousand bills.

Counted.

Bundled.

Placed into a canvas bag.

An FBI technician adjusts a microfilm camera.

Click.

Click.

Click.

Serial numbers preserved.

BACK TO:

INT. BOEING 727 - CABIN

The sun is lower now.

Light turning gray.

Cooper looks out.

MAN

Weather in Seattle?

MUCKLOW

Rain.

He nods.

He expected that.

INT. COCKPIT

Scott speaks to ATC.

SCOTT

Northwest Three Zero Five  
requesting status on ground  
arrangements.

SEATTLE ATC (V.O.)

Stand by. Money en route.

Scott exhales quietly.

Schaffner continues writing notes.

We see her pad:

4:32 PM – Money being assembled 4:35 PM – Parachutes  
confirmed

CUT TO:

EXT. SEA-TAC RUNWAY - DUSK

A section of runway lights turned on.

Airport vehicles clearing space.

A mobile stair truck positioned.

Police vehicles kept at distance.

No flashing lights.

Low profile.

CUT BACK TO:

INT. BOEING 727 - CABIN

Cooper shifts.

For the first time, a trace of impatience.

MAN

This shouldn't take this long.

Mucklow stays calm.

MUCKLOW

They're cooperating.

He looks at her.

MAN

They'd better be.

Still no raised voice.

INT. COCKPIT

ATC again.

SEATTLE ATC (V.O.)

Northwest Three Zero Five, you are  
cleared to descend.

Runway arrangements complete.

Scott nods.

SCOTT

Beginning descent.

He flips switches.

The nose lowers.

INT. CABIN

The sensation of descent.

Passengers look relieved.

A few smiles.

They think it's over.

Cooper watches the wing flap adjust.

He knows what's next.

EXT. SEA-TAC RUNWAY - DUSK

Rain misting under runway lights.

Flight 305 touches down.  
Tires hiss on wet asphalt.  
No music.  
Just reverse thrust.

INT. BOEING 727 - TAXIING - DUSK

Passengers relieved.  
A few clap lightly.  
They think it was mechanical.  
Cooper does not react.  
He watches the window.  
The plane taxis far from the terminal.  
Farther.  
A darker section of runway.  
It stops.  
Engines idle.

INT. COCKPIT

Scott speaks calmly.

SCOTT  
We're in position.

ATC responds.

ATC (V.O.)  
Ground crew approaching. One  
representative only.

Scott turns slightly.

SCOTT  
He insists front stairs only.

A beat.

SCOTT (CONT'D)  
No one else near the aircraft.

INT. CABIN

Mucklow leans toward Cooper.

MUCKLOW  
They're bringing the money.

He nods.

MAN  
Passengers stay seated.

She relays that forward.

EXT. RUNWAY - CONTINUOUS

A lone figure walks across the tarmac in civilian clothes.

This is AL LEE, Northwest's Seattle operations manager.

He carries a canvas bank bag.

Police vehicles sit far back.

No sirens.

No flashing lights.

Just distance.

INT. CABIN

Passengers peer through windows.

Some curious.

Still unaware.

Cooper watches through the glass.

Steady.

INT. COCKPIT

Scott watches the lone figure approach.

SCOTT  
He's here.

INT. CABIN - FRONT DOOR

The forward air stairs are rolled into place.

Door opens.

Cold air enters.

Mucklow stands.

Cooper gestures.

MAN

You bring it back.

She nods.

Walks forward.

Passengers whisper as she passes.

EXT. AIRSTAIRS - DUSK

Mucklow steps down into the rain.

Al Lee hands her the bag.

They do not speak much.

He avoids eye contact.

She turns and climbs back up.

INT. CABIN - CONTINUOUS

The door closes.

Mucklow walks down the aisle.

Every passenger watches her now.

She carries the bag past them.

No one yet understands.

She reaches 18E.

Hands it to him.

He sets it on the empty seat beside him.

Opens it slowly.

Inside:

Stacks of \$20 bills.

Rubber-banded.

Dense.

Heavy.

He removes one bundle.

Checks it.

Satisfied.

He closes the bag.

MAN

You can release them.

That line lands.

Mucklow processes it.

INT. CABIN - MOMENTS LATER

Scott's voice over PA.

SCOTT (V.O.)

Ladies and gentlemen, please gather  
your belongings and deplane in an  
orderly fashion.

Passengers confused.

But obedient.

They stand.

Begin filing forward.

As they pass 18E, most don't look at him.

A few do.

He sits calmly.

Canvas bag at his feet.

Smoking.

Untouched.

As the last passenger exits:

Silence in the cabin.

Only:

• Cooper • Mucklow • Cockpit crew

He now has:

• \$200,000 • Control of aircraft

Fade out on:

Him sitting alone in the last row. Money beside him.

Engines idling.

FADE TO BLACK.

INT. BOEING 727 - CABIN - NIGHT

The aircraft sits in darkness far from the terminal.

Engines continue to idle.

Rain taps the fuselage in steady pulses.

The cabin is empty now.

Vacant seats. Fold-down trays. Ashtrays. Coats left on hooks.

Only:

• Cooper • Tina Mucklow • Captain Scott • First Officer  
Rataczak • Flight Engineer Anderson

Cooper sits in 18E.

Canvas money bag beside him.

Briefcase at his feet.

He looks toward the front.

MAN  
Parachutes.

Mucklow nods once.

Moves forward.

INT. COCKPIT - CONTINUOUS

Mucklow enters. No panic. Just focus.

MUCKLOW  
He wants the parachutes.

Scott nods.

He keys the mic—careful with tone.

SCOTT  
Seattle Ground, Northwest Three  
Zero Five.

ATC (V.O.)  
Northwest Three Zero Five, go  
ahead.

SCOTT  
Status on parachute delivery.

A pause.

ATC (V.O.)  
Approaching now. Stand by.

Scott switches off.

Rataczak glances back at Mucklow.

RATACZAK  
He specify type?

MUCKLOW  
Front and back. Two each.

Anderson watches gauges.

ANDERSON  
Mexico City's not happening without  
fuel.

Scott doesn't answer yet.

He looks at the rain streaking the windshield.

INT. CABIN - NIGHT

Mucklow returns down the aisle.

Cooper hasn't moved.

He watches her approach the way a man watches a clock.

MUCKLOW

They're bringing them now.

MAN

Good.

He lights a cigarette.

The glow reflects in the window.

He exhales slow.

It isn't calm.

It's controlled.

EXT. SEA-TAC RUNWAY - NIGHT

A small airport vehicle creeps through the mist.

A cart behind it—four parachute packs stacked, straps tied down.

A lone figure walks beside it.

No lights beyond the vehicle's low beams.

Police vehicles remain far back. Unlit.

Watching.

Waiting.

INT. BOEING 727 - FRONT DOOR - NIGHT

The forward air stairs are rolled in again.

Door opens.

Cold wet air enters.

Mucklow steps down.

A NORTHWEST GROUND MAN hands her the chutes without meeting her eyes.

NORTHWEST GROUND MAN

Two mains. Two reserves.

She doesn't respond.

She takes them.

Turns.

Climbs back into the aircraft.

Door closes.

The cabin seals.

INT. CABIN - NIGHT

Mucklow carries the parachutes down the aisle.

Cooper watches.

She sets the packs on the seat beside him and the floor at his feet.

He leans in.

Inspects.

Methodical.

Hands that know how to check webbing and buckles.

Not expert—yet not unfamiliar.

He flips one over.

Reads the label.

He doesn't like what he sees.

                                  MAN  
                                  Open that one.

                                  MUCKLOW  
                                  Which—

                                  MAN  
                                  That one.

She kneels. Unfastens the reserve.

Opens the flap.

Cooper looks inside.

Not at the canopy first.

At the stitching. The wear. The harness.

A training rig.

He closes it carefully.

No anger.

Just a small change in his breathing.

MAN (CONT'D)

This is a dummy rig.

Mucklow holds her face neutral.

MUCKLOW

It's what they had.

MAN

They have more than this.

He looks toward the front.

MAN (CONT'D)

Tell them not to play games.

Mucklow stands.

INT. COCKPIT - CONTINUOUS

Mucklow enters.

Scott and Rataczak look at her—reading her.

MUCKLOW

One reserve is a training chute.

Scott's jaw tightens.

RATACZAK

Jesus.

Anderson watches the panel.

ANDERSON

If he thinks we're sabotaging—

Scott keys the mic.

SCOTT

Seattle Ground. We need a replacement reserve parachute. Not training equipment.

ATC (V.O.)  
Stand by.

Scott keeps his voice even.

SCOTT  
Not negotiable.

He releases the mic.

A beat.

Mucklow doesn't sit.

MUCKLOW  
He says no funny business.

Scott holds her eyes a moment.

SCOTT  
We're not doing funny business.

INT. SEA-TAC OPERATIONS ROOM - NIGHT

Phones. Headsets. Cigarette smoke.

A NORTHWEST OPERATIONS SUPERVISOR speaks low into a receiver.

SUPERVISOR  
We don't have another reserve on  
the field.

A beat.

SUPERVISOR (CONT'D)  
The FBI says—

He stops. Listens.

His eyes go to an FBI MAN in a rumpled suit.

The FBI man doesn't raise his voice.

FBI MAN  
Then get one from wherever you can.

SUPERVISOR  
It's not a pizza.

The FBI man just stares.

The supervisor swallows that.

SUPERVISOR (INTO PHONE) (CONT'D)  
Call the jump school again.  
Anything that opens.

INT. CABIN - NIGHT

Cooper sits back.

The parachutes lie beside him like tools.

He opens the canvas money bag again.

Looks down at stacked twenties.

He reaches in.

Pulls out a bundle.

We see his hands do math without saying math.

He sets it back.

Closes the bag.

MAN  
Mexico City.

Mucklow stays calm.

MUCKLOW  
They said we'll need fuel.

MAN  
Then you stop for fuel.

MUCKLOW  
Reno.

A beat.

He considers.

MAN  
Fine.

Another beat.

MAN (CONT'D)  
But we depart now.

Mucklow doesn't answer.

She turns and moves forward.

INT. COCKPIT - NIGHT

Mucklow enters.

MUCKLOW

He says Mexico City. Stop in Reno.  
Depart now.

Anderson looks at the fuel panel.

ANDERSON

We're not topped off.

Scott watches the runway ahead.

SCOTT

How short?

ANDERSON

We've taken on some. Not full.

Rataczak leans toward Scott.

RATACZAK

If we delay too long he'll assume  
it's intentional.

Scott nods once.

SCOTT

Get me Ground.

He keys the mic.

SCOTT (CONT'D)

Seattle Ground. Confirm fuel  
status.

ATC (V.O.)

Fuel trucks are still servicing.  
Stand by.

Scott closes his eyes for half a second.

Then opens them.

SCOTT

We need it completed immediately.

ATC (V.O.)

Copy.

Scott releases the mic.

He looks at Mucklow.

SCOTT  
Tell him we're fueling.

MUCKLOW  
He's watching.

SCOTT  
Then tell him anyway.

INT. CABIN - NIGHT

Mucklow returns.

Cooper is staring out the window.

Nothing to see but runway lights and rain.

MUCKLOW  
We're fueling.

MAN  
How long?

MUCKLOW  
A few minutes.

He doesn't look at her.

MAN  
It's already been minutes.

Mucklow holds.

A beat.

Cooper finally turns his head slightly.

MAN (CONT'D)  
Do you understand what happens if  
this device goes off?

Mucklow doesn't blink.

MUCKLOW  
Yes.

MAN  
Good.

He reaches down.

Touches the briefcase with his shoe.

Not opening it.

Just reminding her it exists.

EXT. SEA-TAC RUNWAY - NIGHT

Fuel trucks are parked beneath the wing.

One. Then another arriving late.

Hoses snaking.

A man in a raincoat waves a flashlight.

No sirens.

No rush.

But everything is rushed.

INT. COCKPIT - NIGHT

Anderson watches the refueling gauge.

Needle crawling.

Too slow.

RATACZAK

We need the gear down and flaps  
fifteen once we level at ten.

Scott nods.

He keeps his voice low.

SCOTT

He gave specifics for a reason.

Anderson glances at Scott.

ANDERSON

Rear stairs.

Scott doesn't respond.

He doesn't have to.

INT. CABIN - NIGHT

Cooper checks his watch.

The first real sign of impatience.

It's small.

His finger taps the metal rim once.

Then stillness again.

MAN

What time is it?

Mucklow checks her watch.

MUCKLOW

Seven twenty.

He nods.

But his eyes have changed.

He looks toward the rear of the plane.

Not moving yet.

Just looking.

INT. SEA-TAC OPERATIONS ROOM - NIGHT

The FBI MAN is on the phone now.

FBI MAN

Yes. I understand. Bring what you have.

He hangs up.

Turns to the Northwest supervisor.

FBI MAN (CONT'D)

No replacement reserve available.

SUPERVISOR

Then that's what he gets.

The FBI man's eyes don't leave him.

FBI MAN

If he thinks we sabotaged him, he blows the plane.

A beat.

SUPERVISOR  
Or he cancels the jump and keeps us  
airborne all night.

The FBI man processes that.

Not fear.

Just grim calculation.

INT. CABIN - NIGHT

Mucklow returns from the front.

Cooper watches her face for information.

MUCKLOW  
We're leaving with what we have.

A beat.

He considers.

MAN  
Then we leave.

Mucklow nods.

He looks down at the reserve again.

MAN (CONT'D)  
Bring me a knife.

MUCKLOW  
A knife?

MAN  
A pocketknife. From the galley.

Mucklow doesn't move immediately.

MAN (CONT'D)  
Now.

She goes.

INT. GALLEY - NIGHT

Mucklow opens a drawer.

Plastic cutlery.

Nothing sharp.

She opens another.

A small service knife—dull, rounded.

Not enough.

She looks up.

Sees a FLIGHT ATTENDANT EMERGENCY KIT compartment.

She hesitates.

Then opens it.

Inside: a small utility blade.

She takes it.

Closes the compartment.

INT. CABIN - NIGHT

Mucklow hands Cooper the blade.

He nods once.

No thanks.

Receipt.

He opens the training reserve rig.

Carefully.

He takes the blade and begins cutting fabric.

Not hacking.

Deliberate.

The sound of tearing nylon is loud in the empty cabin.

He removes canopy material in sections.

Making space.

Mucklow watches.

MUCKLOW  
What are you doing?

MAN  
Making it work.

He keeps cutting.

Then opens the money bag.

Begins transferring bundles into the hollowed reserve container.

One bundle at a time.

Orderly.

Heavy.

The money changes from "bag" to "weight."

A thing to carry on a body.

INT. COCKPIT - NIGHT

Anderson watches the fuel gauge reach full.

ANDERSON  
Fuel complete.

Scott nods.

He keys the mic.

SCOTT  
Ground, Northwest Three Zero Five  
ready to taxi.

ATC (V.O.)  
Roger. Taxi clearance follows.

Scott releases the mic.

He looks back at Mucklow through the open cockpit door.

SCOTT  
Tell him we're moving.

INT. CABIN - NIGHT

Mucklow returns.

MUCKLOW  
We're taxiing.

Cooper doesn't look up.

He finishes loading the reserve container.

Closes it.

Secures straps.

He stands for the first time since passengers left.

Not dramatic.

Just a man standing.

He looks toward the rear of the aircraft.

MAN  
Close the curtain.

Mucklow does it.

The curtain slides.

The cabin becomes divided—front and rear.

A small thing.

But it changes everything.

EXT. SEA-TAC RUNWAY - NIGHT

The 727 begins to roll.

Slowly.

Turning away from the lights.

Disappearing into rain.

Police vehicles remain where they are.

Watching the taillight blink vanish into mist.

INT. COCKPIT - NIGHT

Scott advances throttles gently.

The aircraft taxis.

Rataczak keeps his eyes on instruments.

Anderson watches panels.

A light on the overhead flickers—steady again.

RATACZAK

Once we're airborne, he'll want the configuration.

SCOTT

We'll give it to him.

A beat.

ANDERSON

If he drops the stairs...

Scott nods once.

SCOTT

Then we keep flying.  
No heroics.  
No plan.  
Just compliance and survival.

INT. CABIN - NIGHT

Cooper sits again in 18E.

Reserve container strapped and ready.

Parachutes beside him.

Briefcase at his feet.

Mucklow stands near the curtain.

Cooper looks up at her.

MAN

When we take off, you stay forward.

MUCKLOW

Yes.

He watches her a moment.

MAN

No sudden moves.

MUCKLOW

Understood.

He looks away.  
Lights another cigarette.  
The tip glows.  
Rain rattles the fuselage.  
The engines rise.

INT. COCKPIT - NIGHT

The throttles advance.  
The engines deepen.  
Rain streaks sideways across the windshield.

SCOTT  
Power set.

RATACZAK  
Airspeed alive.

The aircraft accelerates slowly - heavier now.

ANDERSON  
Fuel load confirmed.

Scott keeps his eyes forward.  
No heroics.  
Just flying.

INT. CABIN - NIGHT

The vibration increases.  
Cooper remains seated in 18E.  
Reserve container strapped and ready.  
He doesn't brace.  
He doesn't tense.  
He waits.  
The runway lights blur past the window.

INT. COCKPIT - NIGHT

RATACZAK  
Eighty knots.

SCOTT  
Check.

RATACZAK  
V-one.

A beat.

RATACZAK (CONT'D)  
Rotate.

Scott eases back.

The nose lifts.

Heavy.

Deliberate.

EXT. SEA-TAC RUNWAY - NIGHT

The 727 lifts into black rain.

Gear still down.

Flaps extended.

It climbs slowly into the overcast.

INT. COCKPIT - NIGHT

RATACZAK  
Positive rate.

SCOTT  
Gear stays.

Anderson nods - that was expected.

The aircraft pushes into cloud.

Visibility gone.

INT. CABIN - NIGHT

The cabin shudders lightly.

The rain becomes a constant roar.

Mucklow stands near the curtain.

She watches him.

He watches nothing.

Just forward.

MAN

Altitude?

MUCKLOW

Climbing.

He nods once.

Satisfied.

INT. COCKPIT - NIGHT

RATACZAK

Passing three thousand.

ANDERSON

She's heavy with gear down.

The plane wobbles slightly.

Scott trims gently.

SCOTT

Hold her steady.

No panic.

Just precision.

EXT. NIGHT SKY - OVER WASHINGTON

The aircraft breaks briefly through a thinner cloud layer.

Then disappears again.

INT. CABIN - NIGHT

Cooper stands.

Not abruptly.

He lifts the reserve container.  
Feels the weight distribution.  
He moves toward the rear of the aircraft.  
The sound of engines fills the empty cabin.  
He stops at the aft air stair panel.  
Studies it.  
Does not touch it yet.

INT. COCKPIT - NIGHT

A small amber light flickers briefly.

ANDERSON  
Aft stair circuit's live.

Scott nods.

SCOTT  
He'll test it.

RATACZAK  
We'll feel it if he drops it early.

Scott keeps his voice even.

SCOTT  
Maintain heading south.

INT. CABIN - NIGHT

Cooper runs a hand along the interior wall near the aft stair.

He kneels.

Examines the release lever.

Wind noise leaks faintly through seams.

He listens to the aircraft.

Feels its movement.

He stands again.

Turns toward Mucklow.

MAN  
Go forward.

She hesitates - barely.

Then moves.

INT. COCKPIT - NIGHT

Mucklow enters.

Closes the cockpit door behind her.

The cabin beyond is now unseen.

Scott does not turn.

SCOTT  
He sent you forward.

She nods.

MUCKLOW  
Yes.

No one speaks for a moment.

Only engine noise and rain.

INT. CABIN - NIGHT

Cooper is alone.

He adjusts the harness over his suit jacket.

Tightens straps.

Opens the rear curtain fully.

The cabin now feels longer.

Empty.

He reaches toward the aft stair release handle.

Pauses.

Listens to engine rhythm.

The aircraft trembles in mild turbulence.

He waits.

INT. COCKPIT - NIGHT

ANDERSON  
Leveling at ten thousand.

RATACZAK  
Airspeed one seventy.

The aircraft feels unsettled.

Gear down.

Flaps fifteen.

Bottom of its comfortable envelope.

SCOTT  
Keep it there.

A beat.

ANDERSON  
She's going to wallow if we hit  
gusts.

Scott says nothing.

INT. CABIN - NIGHT

Cooper grips the handle.

He pulls.

A mechanical WHINE.

The rear stair begins to lower into black air.

Wind explodes into the cabin.

Loose paper lifts from seatbacks.

The aircraft shudders.

INT. COCKPIT - SAME

A red indicator light flashes.

ANDERSON  
Aft stair down!

The tail dips slightly.

RATACZAK  
We've got buffeting.

Scott steadies the yoke.

SCOTT  
Hold it steady.

INT. CABIN - NIGHT

Wind now violent.

Rain slicing sideways.

The darkness beyond the stair is absolute.

Cooper steps toward it.

Reserve container secured.

He grips the handrail.

The aircraft jolts again.

He waits.

Times it.

Listens to the engine pitch.

INT. COCKPIT - NIGHT

RATACZAK  
Ten thousand steady.

ANDERSON  
Pressure fluctuation.

Scott adjusts trim.

No one speaks about what they know is happening.

INT. CABIN - NIGHT

Cooper looks once toward the front of the plane.

No emotion.

No speech.

He steps onto the lower portion of the stair.

Wind nearly rips him sideways.

He holds firm.

The aircraft dips again.

A heavy, sudden downward pressure shift—

Then—

He disappears into black rain.

The stair rebounds violently upward.

INT. COCKPIT - NIGHT

A sharp pressure bump.

Tail momentarily unstable.

RATACZAK

There.

Scott keeps flying.

No reaction beyond the task.

SCOTT

Maintain heading.

A beat.

No one breathes for several seconds.

Only engine hum.

INT. COCKPIT - NIGHT

No one speaks.

Rain continues to hammer the windshield.

The aircraft steadies.

RATACZAK

You feel that?

SCOTT

Yes.

A beat.

ANDERSON  
Pressure fluctuation's stabilizing.

Scott keeps his eyes forward.

SCOTT  
Maintain one seventy.

RATACZAK  
Aft stair light still on.

Scott nods.

He does not turn around.

No one suggests going back.

They all know better.

INT. CABIN - NIGHT

The rear stair hangs open into darkness.

Wind still roaring.

Empty.

Rows of vacant seats.

The reserve canopy scraps lie scattered near 18E.

A cigarette still burns in an ashtray.

Unattended.

The money bag is gone.

Only loose nylon fibers remain on the floor.

The cabin is now a hollow space.

INT. COCKPIT - NIGHT

RATACZAK  
You think he—

Scott doesn't let him finish.

SCOTT  
We fly the airplane.

Silence again.

They fly.

EXT. NIGHT SKY - OVER SOUTHWEST WASHINGTON

The 727 pushes through cloud layers.

A faint shadow far above—an F-106 fighter.

Struggling to maintain position.

The fighter peels off, climbs.

Unable to sustain slow speed.

INT. COCKPIT - NIGHT

ANDERSON

Fuel consumption's up with the  
drag.

Scott nods.

SCOTT

We continue to Reno.

A beat.

RATACZAK

Do we verify?

Scott considers.

Long pause.

SCOTT

Not yet.

He keeps flying.

Professional.

Controlled.

INT. CABIN - NIGHT

Wind continues to howl.

The stair shudders with turbulence.

Nothing moves near it.

No figure.

No silhouette.

Only darkness.

INT. COCKPIT - NIGHT

Time passes.

No dialogue.

Just engine hum.

Scott glances at his watch.

8:24 PM.

He keys the mic.

SCOTT  
Seattle Center, Northwest Three  
Zero Five.

ATC (V.O.)  
Northwest Three Zero Five, go  
ahead.

Scott keeps his tone level.

SCOTT  
We experienced a pressure  
fluctuation approximately twenty  
minutes ago.

A beat.

SCOTT (CONT'D)  
We believe the passenger may have  
exited the aircraft.

Silence on frequency.

Then—

ATC (V.O.)  
Confirm exited?

SCOTT  
Affirmative.

A longer silence.

ATC (V.O.)  
Understood. Continue to Reno.

No excitement.

No drama.

Just acknowledgment.

INT. SEA-TAC OPERATIONS ROOM - NIGHT

An FBI agent holds a receiver.

FBI AGENT  
Say again?

He listens.

His jaw tightens.

FBI AGENT (CONT'D)  
He jumped?

He looks at the others in the room.

No celebration.

Just disbelief.

INT. COCKPIT - NIGHT

RATACZAK  
We'll need to secure the stair  
before landing.

ANDERSON  
Hydraulic stress might've warped  
it.

Scott nods.

SCOTT  
We'll deal with it on the ground.

Another beat.

RATACZAK  
You think he made it?

Scott keeps his eyes forward.

SCOTT  
We fly the airplane.  
That's all that matters.

INT. CABIN - NIGHT

The cigarette finally burns out.

Smoke fades.

The stair continues to vibrate.

The void below remains absolute.

EXT. NIGHT SKY - LATER

The aircraft descends through cloud toward Reno.

Landing gear extends.

Flaps deploy.

The aft stair remains partially lowered.

INT. COCKPIT - NIGHT

RATACZAK  
Reno tower cleared us straight in.

SCOTT  
Good.

A beat.

ANDERSON  
You want to brief them?

Scott nods once.

SCOTT  
They already know.

EXT. RENO RUNWAY - NIGHT

The 727 touches down.

Heavy.

The stair scrapes lightly before bouncing.

Reverse thrust.

The aircraft slows.

No applause.

No passengers.

Only rain and runway lights.

INT. COCKPIT - NIGHT

The aircraft comes to a stop.

Engines idle down.

Scott finally exhales.

Long.

He turns in his seat.

Looks toward the cabin.

For the first time since takeoff.

SCOTT

All right.

He unbuckles.

INT. BOEING 727 - CABIN - NIGHT - RENO

The engines wind down.

The rain is lighter here.

The rear stair still hangs partially lowered.

The cabin is dim.

Empty seats.

Cut nylon scattered near 18E.

The cockpit door opens.

Scott steps out first.

Rataczak behind him.

Anderson remains near the cockpit panel.

Scott pauses halfway down the aisle.

He studies the cabin.

It is still.

No bomb blast.

No body.

No sound.

Only the aircraft cooling.

Scott walks slowly toward the rear.

INT. CABIN - REAR SECTION - CONTINUOUS

The aft stair is visible now from inside.

Lowered into the dark.

Wind no longer violent—just residual.

Scott stops a few feet short of it.

He looks down.

Nothing.

Blackness.

RATACZAK (O.S.)

He's gone.

Scott doesn't answer.

He turns.

Looks at 18E.

INT. CABIN - ROW 18 - CONTINUOUS

The seat is empty.

A black clip-on tie rests folded neatly on the seat cushion.

An ashtray holds several cigarette butts.

Cut canopy fabric on the floor.

No money bag.

No briefcase.

Scott studies the tie.

Doesn't touch it.

INT. COCKPIT - SAME TIME

Anderson keys the mic.

ANDERSON

Reno Tower, Northwest Three Zero  
Five secure on runway.

A pause.

ANDERSON (CONT'D)

Passenger no longer aboard.

Silence on frequency.

Then—

RENO TOWER (V.O.)

Understood.

EXT. RENO RUNWAY - NIGHT

Airport vehicles approach now.

This time with flashing lights.

Police.

FBI.

Caution replaces distance.

INT. BOEING 727 - FRONT DOOR - NIGHT

The forward door opens.

Cold Nevada air enters.

An FBI AGENT boards first.

40s. Controlled. Not theatrical.

He looks at Scott.

FBI AGENT

Captain.

Scott nods.

FBI AGENT (CONT'D)

Where was he?

Scott gestures toward the rear.

INT. CABIN - CONTINUOUS

The FBI agent walks down the aisle.

Two local officers behind him.

They stop at 18E.

The agent studies the tie.

The cut canopy.

He kneels.

Picks up a scrap of nylon.

FBI AGENT

He used the reserve.

Another agent appears behind him.

FBI TECH

Money bag's gone.

They move toward the rear stair.

Look down.

Flashlights beam into darkness.

Nothing visible.

INT. CABIN - ROW 18 - LATER

Evidence markers now in place.

The tie bagged.

Cigarette butts collected.

Fabric scraps gathered carefully.

The FBI agent stands.

Looks once more at the empty seat.

FBI AGENT  
What time was the fluctuation?

Scott checks his watch reflexively.

SCOTT  
Approximately eight eleven.

The agent nods.

Makes a note.

No one speculates.

No one guesses survival odds.

They just record.

EXT. SOUTHWEST WASHINGTON - NIGHT (INTERCUT)

Dark forest.

Rain falling through pine branches.

Wind moving treetops.

We hear only distant storm.

Nothing else.

INT. RENO AIRPORT - HOLDING ROOM - NIGHT

Scott, Rataczak, Anderson, and Mucklow sit at a long table.

Coffee cups.

Ashtrays.

An FBI agent across from them.

FBI AGENT  
He never raised his voice?

SCOTT  
No.

FBI AGENT  
He seemed experienced?

A beat.

SCOTT  
He seemed prepared.

The agent writes that down.

Mucklow stares at the tabletop.

Still processing.

INT. RENO AIRPORT - HOLDING ROOM - NIGHT

The FBI agent closes his notebook.

FBI AGENT  
Did he appear nervous?

SCOTT  
No.

The agent looks at Mucklow.

FBI AGENT  
Miss?

Mucklow doesn't look up immediately.

MUCKLOW  
He was calm.

A beat.

MUCKLOW (CONT'D)  
Polite.

The agent writes that down.

Polite.

He closes the folder.

FBI AGENT  
We'll need detailed statements from  
each of you again in the morning.

Scott nods.

FBI AGENT (CONT'D)  
We're assembling search teams in  
Washington now.

Mucklow finally looks up.

MUCKLOW  
In this weather?

The agent doesn't answer directly.

FBI AGENT  
We don't have a choice.

CUT TO:

EXT. SOUTHWEST WASHINGTON FOREST - NIGHT

Rain.

Pine trees.

Darkness broken by vehicle headlights.

Military trucks push slowly down muddy logging roads.

Men in rain ponchos unload equipment.

Portable floodlights power on.

Generators hum.

A Washington State Trooper studies a topographic map under a flashlight.

FBI AGENT (O.S.)  
Pressure bump at eight thirteen.

Another agent marks a grid on the map.

FBI AGENT #2  
Wind shear at altitude.

STATE TROOPER  
He'd drift east.

FBI AGENT  
Or he never opened.

No one responds to that.

They continue marking grid squares.

INT. SEATTLE FBI FIELD OFFICE - NIGHT

Phones ringing nonstop.

Maps taped to walls.

An enlarged sectional chart of southwest Washington pinned up.

An agent circles an area near Ariel, Washington.

FBI SUPERVISOR  
Based on cockpit estimate and wind  
vectors—

He draws a line.

FBI SUPERVISOR (CONT'D)  
—he lands somewhere here.

Another agent shakes his head.

FBI AGENT  
If the time's off by even thirty  
seconds—

He moves the line miles east.

FBI AGENT (CONT'D)  
—he's somewhere else entirely.

Silence.

They both know how vast the forest is.

EXT. FOREST - NIGHT

Searchers move through dense brush.

Flashlights cutting through rain.

Boots sink into mud.

A searcher finds something caught on a branch.

He pulls it down.

Just a piece of bark.

He drops it.

Rain continues.

INT. RENO AIRPORT - NIGHT

Technicians photograph the 727's aft stair.

Close-up of hinge stress.

Close-up of hydraulic lines.

FBI PHOTOGRAPHER  
We'll need angle-of-descent  
modeling.

An FAA investigator nods.

FAA INVESTIGATOR  
At one seventy, stair drag would've  
altered pitch.

The FBI agent from earlier stands quietly.

Listening.

Processing.

INT. SEATTLE NEWSROOM - NIGHT

Typewriters clack.

Phones ringing.

A REPORTER hangs up a phone.

REPORTER  
Passenger name was Dan Cooper.

An editor scribbles on a notepad.

EDITOR  
Spell that?

REPORTER  
C-O-O-P-E-R.

The editor flips through a police bulletin.

Sees a previous reference to a suspect named "D.B. Cooper."

He writes it down without thinking.

D.B. COOPER.

The presses begin to roll.

EXT. SEATTLE - MORNING NEWSPAPER DELIVERY - DAWN

Stacks of fresh newspapers.

Headline:

"D.B. COOPER PARACHUTES FROM JET"

Bundles tossed onto porches.

The name is born.

INT. FBI FIELD OFFICE - MORNING

An agent slams a newspaper onto a desk.

FBI AGENT  
His name wasn't D.B.

Another agent looks at the headline.

Too late.

Phones already ringing.

FBI AGENT #2  
That's what they're calling him  
now.

The supervisor exhales.

FBI SUPERVISOR  
Then that's who he is.

EXT. FOREST - DAY

Helicopters sweep low over treetops.

National Guard troops spread in a grid.

Men shout coordinates.

No sign of a parachute.

No body.

Just endless green.

INT. FBI OFFICE - DAY

Serial numbers from the ransom money projected onto a wall.

An agent points.

FBI AGENT  
Ten thousand bills. All twenties.

Another agent writes instructions.

FBI AGENT #2  
Notify banks nationwide.

A clerk begins typing a nationwide bulletin.

INT. SEATTLE FBI FIELD OFFICE - DAY

A chalkboard filled with numbers.

Wind speeds. Headings. Time stamps.

An FAA engineer stands beside an FBI supervisor.

FAA ENGINEER  
Pressure fluctuation logged at  
eight thirteen.

He draws a line on a sectional map.

FAA ENGINEER (CONT'D)  
Airspeed one seventy knots. Flaps  
fifteen. Gear down.

He calculates drift.

Marks a landing corridor near Ariel.

Another agent shakes his head.

FBI AGENT  
If he exited thirty seconds later-

He moves the chalk line miles south.

FBI AGENT (CONT'D)  
-he's somewhere else entirely.

Silence.

The supervisor studies both lines.

FBI SUPERVISOR  
What's the wind at ten thousand?

FAA ENGINEER  
Thirty to forty knots from the  
southwest.

The supervisor absorbs that.

FBI SUPERVISOR  
So we don't know.

FAA ENGINEER  
We have an estimate.

FBI SUPERVISOR  
We have a forest.

EXT. WASHINGTON FOREST - DAY

Helicopters thrum overhead.

Searchers move through thick brush.

Men shout across ravines.

A National Guard soldier slips in mud.

No parachute canopy visible anywhere.

Only endless trees.

INT. FBI FIELD OFFICE - DAY

An agent places a parachute harness on a table.

FBI AGENT  
He chose a civilian sport chute.

Another agent flips through military parachute manuals.

FBI AGENT #2  
Not ideal for night jump. No  
steering capability.

A beat.

FBI AGENT  
Unless he knew that.

The room goes quiet.

FBI SUPERVISOR  
Or he didn't.

No one knows which is worse.

EXT. RIVERBANK - DAY

Search teams walk along muddy banks.

Poking at debris with sticks.

Nothing.

INT. FBI FIELD OFFICE - DAYS LATER

Wall now covered in tips.

Names pinned.

Former paratroopers.

Ex-military.

Men with grudges.

One agent flips through a stack of letters.

FBI AGENT

We've got hundreds of suspects.

The supervisor rubs his eyes.

FBI SUPERVISOR

Then we eliminate them.

CUT TO:

INT. SEATTLE FBI FIELD OFFICE - DAY

A conference table.

Stacks of tip reports.

Photographs.

One manila folder sits apart from the others.

Stamped: PRIORITY.

An agent opens it.

Inside - military records.

FBI AGENT

Former paratrooper. Vietnam.

Another agent flips through pages.

FBI AGENT #2  
Discharged two years ago.

The supervisor leans back.

FBI SUPERVISOR  
Bring him in.

INT. INTERROGATION ROOM - DAY

A fluorescent-lit room.

A MAN in his 30s sits across from two FBI agents.

He's calm.

Confident.

FBI AGENT  
Where were you November twenty-fourth?

MAN  
Home.

FBI AGENT  
Anyone confirm that?

MAN  
My wife.

A beat.

FBI AGENT #2  
You ever jump at night?

The man smiles faintly.

MAN  
Plenty of times.

The agents exchange a look.

FBI AGENT  
You know a Boeing 727 has rear stairs.

MAN  
So I've read.

A pause.

FBI AGENT  
You follow the news closely?

MAN  
Everybody does.

The agents study him.

He doesn't blink.

CUT TO:

INT. FBI LAB - DAY

The black clip-on tie under glass.

A technician dusts it carefully.

FBI TECH  
No usable prints.

Another tech studies the cigarette butts.

FBI TECH #2  
Filters soaked. Smudged.

An agent watches.

FBI AGENT  
So we've got nothing.

The tech doesn't answer.

EXT. FOREST - DAY

Search teams spread in wider grids now.

Helicopters sweep lower.

Men shout coordinates.

One soldier finds a scrap of fabric tangled in brush.

Excitement.

He pulls it free.

Just insulation from logging debris.

He drops it.

Rain returns.

INT. SEATTLE NEWSROOM - DAY

Phones ringing constantly.

A REPORTER dictates into a phone.

REPORTER

Authorities now refer to the  
hijacker as D.B. Cooper-

An editor doesn't correct it.

The presses continue.

Headline boards update.

"D.B. COOPER STILL AT LARGE"

The name sticks.

INT. FBI FIELD OFFICE - EVENING

Walls now filled with suspect photographs.

Dozens.

Circled names.

Eliminated suspects marked in red.

An exhausted agent removes one photo from the wall.

FBI AGENT

Alibi confirmed.

The supervisor rubs his temples.

FBI SUPERVISOR

Next.

A beat.

FBI AGENT #2

We've got over eight hundred tips.

Silence.

The weight of scale.

EXT. WASHINGTON FOREST - DAY

Search crews move slower now.

Boots heavier.

Rain has turned to wet snow at higher elevations.

A helicopter circles once more - then pulls away.

INT. SEATTLE FBI FIELD OFFICE - DAY

A large topographic map on the wall.

Red grease pencil marking probable jump zones.

An agent erases one of the circles.

FBI AGENT  
Wind model was off.

Another agent stares at the board.

FBI AGENT #2  
Or the time stamp was.

Silence.

The supervisor closes a folder.

FBI SUPERVISOR  
We suspend aerial search tomorrow.

No one argues.

EXT. FOREST - DUSK

Searchers pack equipment.

Floodlights shut off.

Generators die.

Darkness returns to the trees.

INT. FBI FIELD OFFICE - NIGHT

A bulletin board covered in suspect photos.

An agent removes another one.

Stamped: CLEARED.

He tosses it in a box.

The supervisor stands alone at the map.

Looking at the line that shows the flight path.

He stares at it.

Long beat.

Then switches off the light.

INT. SEATTLE FBI FIELD OFFICE - DAY

A typewriter clacks steadily.

An agent types a memo.

INSERT - MEMO  
HEADER:

"SEARCH OPERATIONS SUSPENDED PENDING FURTHER LEADS"

The page feeds through.

He pulls it out.

Sets it aside.

Another memo replaces it.

The machine keeps going.

EXT. WASHINGTON FOREST - DAY

Snow clings to higher ridges.

No helicopters now.

No trucks.

Only wind moving through trees.

The forest has reclaimed the noise.

INT. FAA OFFICE - DAY

Engineers review a 727 rear stair schematic.

One points to a small hinge assembly.

FAA ENGINEER  
If the stair deploys in flight,  
airflow forces it downward.

Another engineer makes a note.

FAA ENGINEER #2  
We'll need a mechanical safeguard.

A supervisor nods.

FAA SUPERVISOR  
Design it.

INT. SEATTLE NEWSROOM - DAY

Headlines pinned to a corkboard:

"D.B. COOPER VANISHES"

"PARACHUTE BANDIT ELUDES FBI"

Phones ring less frequently now.

The story begins to move off the front page.

But the name remains.

INT. FBI FIELD OFFICE - NIGHT

The wall of suspect photos is thinner.

Stacks of files now boxed.

Stamped: CLOSED - INSUFFICIENT EVIDENCE.

An agent seals one box with tape.

FBI AGENT  
Two hundred and fifty interviews.

Another agent responds without looking up.

FBI AGENT #2  
And no parachute.

Silence.

The supervisor stands by the map again.

The grease pencil flight path still drawn across Washington.  
He studies it.

Then slowly wipes part of it away.

EXT. SMALL AIRPORT - DAY (MONTAGE)

A man boards a commercial jet.

Another hijacker demands money.

Headline: "COPYCAT SKYJACKING IN DENVER."

Another: "AIRLINE SECURITY UNDER REVIEW."

A lawmaker speaks into microphones.

LAWMAKER

This will not happen again.

CUT TO:

INT. AIRPORT SECURITY AREA - DAY

Metal detectors being installed.

Passengers empty pockets into trays.

Air travel changes.

The legend spreads.

INT. FBI FIELD OFFICE - LATE NIGHT

Only one desk lamp on.

The supervisor flips through the Cooper file.

Photographs.

The tie.

Aerial maps.

Weather reports.

He pauses at the name typed on the file cover:

"DAN COOPER"

A newspaper clipping falls out.

Headline: "D.B. COOPER STILL AT LARGE."

He studies it.

Then slides it back into the folder.

Closes the file.

INT. SEATTLE DINER - NIGHT

Late.

Nearly empty.

Two FBI agents sit in a booth.

Coats still on.

Coffee cups half full.

A folded newspaper between them.

Headline visible: "D.B. COOPER."

AGENT #1  
You think he made it?

AGENT #2  
In that weather?

A beat.

AGENT #1  
He asked for two chutes.

AGENT #2  
Could've taken someone with him.

Silence.

They both know he didn't.

The waitress refills their cups.

Neither thanks her.

AGENT #1  
Two hundred thousand isn't pocket  
change.

AGENT #2  
It's not a fortune either.

AGENT #1  
He'll spend it.

AGENT #2  
Eventually.

A beat.

AGENT #1  
And when he does—

AGENT #2  
—someone notices.

They sit with that.

AGENT #1  
You really believe that?

AGENT #2  
That much cash can't stay buried  
forever.

Silence.

A long one.

Outside, rain taps the diner window.

AGENT #1  
What if he's dead out there?

AGENT #2  
Then we'll never know.

He folds the newspaper closed.

The name "D.B. Cooper" remains visible on the front page.

CUT TO:

INT. SEATTLE FBI FIELD OFFICE - DAY - 1972

The Cooper file is reopened.

A new set of weather charts pinned to the board.

An FAA aerodynamics specialist stands beside an FBI analyst.

FAA SPECIALIST  
Original drift model assumed  
immediate canopy deployment.

He marks a diagram of a parachute.

FAA SPECIALIST (CONT'D)  
If he delayed pull by even five  
seconds—

He draws a longer trajectory arc.

FAA SPECIALIST (CONT'D)  
—he travels over a mile further  
south.

The analyst studies it.

FBI ANALYST  
And if he exited later than eight  
thirteen?

FAA SPECIALIST  
Then your entire grid shifts.

He erases the previous landing zone circle.

Draws another — miles away.

Silence in the room.

INT. U.S. AIR FORCE BASE - HANGAR - DAY

A civilian parachute rig lies on a metal table.

An AIR FORCE LOADMASTER examines it.

AIR FORCE OFFICER  
Civilian sport canopy. Round.  
Limited steering.

He looks to an FBI observer.

AIR FORCE OFFICER (CONT'D)  
Night jump. Storm conditions. No  
helmet.

A beat.

AIR FORCE OFFICER (CONT'D)  
Survival odds aren't high.

The FBI observer doesn't write that down.

EXT. RURAL AIRSTRIP - DAY

A small test aircraft climbs into gray sky.

Inside: a weighted dummy rigged with a similar parachute.

INT. TEST AIRCRAFT - CONTINUOUS

An engineer checks a stopwatch.

ENGINEER  
Airspeed one seventy.

Another engineer nods.

ENGINEER #2  
Simulated stair deployment.

They push the dummy out.

EXT. SKY - DAY

The dummy tumbles violently before the canopy catches.

It drifts far off the marked target zone.

EXT. OPEN FIELD - DAY

Engineers retrieve the dummy.

They measure distance from intended drop.

ENGINEER  
Three-point-two miles off.

The FBI analyst exhales.

FBI ANALYST  
And that's in daylight.

INT. SEATTLE FBI FIELD OFFICE - DAY

A new map on the wall.

Three possible landing corridors now marked.

Each separated by miles of forest.

An agent studies the spread.

FBI AGENT  
We're chasing a moving target.

The supervisor folds his arms.

FBI SUPERVISOR  
Or he's already buried under snow.

No one answers.

INT. FBI OFFICE - LATE EVENING

The analyst stares at the map alone.

He draws one final pencil line.

Then sets the pencil down.

He knows they will never narrow it further.

FADE TO BLACK.

INT. FBI HEADQUARTERS - WASHINGTON, D.C. - DAY - DECEMBER  
1971

A formal memo slides across a polished desk.

The signature line reads:

J. EDGAR HOOVER.

An aide nods once.

EXT. U.S. AIR FORCE BASE - DAY

An SR-71 BLACKBIRD sits on the tarmac.

Black. Long. Otherworldly.

Ground crew prepare it.

An FBI liaison stands nearby.

INT. SR-71 COCKPIT - DAY

Pilot visor down.

Engines ignite with a rising metallic howl.

EXT. SKY - DAY

The SR-71 streaks over Washington State.

Below: endless forest.

INT. RECON CONTROL ROOM - DAY

High-altitude photographs develop.

Blurry.

Cloud cover.

Weather distortion.

An Air Force analyst shakes his head.

ANALYST  
Visibility's poor.

FBI AGENT  
Run it again.

EXT. SKY - DAY (SECOND PASS)

The Blackbird tears across the sky once more.

INT. RECON ROOM - LATER

Photos laid across a light table.

Broken treetops circled.

White shapes in brush examined.

Each investigated.

None are parachutes.

The FBI agent exhales slowly.

CUT TO:

INT. TEST HANGAR - DAY

The same Boeing 727 configuration.

Gear down. Flaps fifteen.

Agents stand at the aft stair.

A weighted 200-pound sled sits strapped near the opening.

An engineer checks instruments.

ENGINEER  
Airspeed one seventy.

FBI OBSERVER  
Release on my mark.

The sled is pushed out.

INT. COCKPIT - CONTINUOUS

The tail lifts sharply.

A brief pressure shift.

Pilots exchange a look.

PILOT  
That's it.  
The exact movement described on  
November 24th.  
Recreated.

INT. SEATTLE FBI FIELD OFFICE - DAY

A revised landing zone marked on the map.

Now farther east.

Near the Washougal River watershed.

An agent studies it.

FBI AGENT  
That's miles from Ariel.

FBI SUPERVISOR  
Then Ariel was wrong.

Another agent speaks quietly.

FBI AGENT #2  
Or he never made it that far.

Silence.

EXT. CLARK COUNTY - DAY

Sheriff deputies knock on farmhouse doors.

Rural residents shake their heads.

No parachute.

No stranger asking for help.

EXT. LAKE MERWIN - DAY

A small submarine descends beneath the lake surface.

Divers prepare equipment.

Underwater visibility: murky.

They search the depths.

Nothing.

EXT. WASHINGTON FOREST - SPRING 1972

Two hundred soldiers from Fort Lewis move in formation.

National Guard helicopters sweep tree lines.

Civilian volunteers push through brush.

Eighteen days.

Then eighteen more.

No body.

No chute.

No money.

INT. FBI FIELD OFFICE - NIGHT

The revised map.

Multiple projected drop zones.

None overlapping cleanly.

The supervisor studies it one last time.

FBI SUPERVISOR  
Close the active search.

No drama.

Just exhaustion.

Lights go off.

SUPER:

FEBRUARY 1980

EXT. COLUMBIA RIVER - TENA BAR - DAY - 1980

Winter light.

Cold. Flat. Pale.

The river moves slowly.

A YOUNG BOY kneels in the sand near the waterline.

He digs absently with his hands.

A few feet away, his father tends to a small campfire.

The boy hits something firm.

He brushes sand away.

A clump of decayed paper bound by deteriorated rubber bands.

He lifts it.

Confused.

BOY

Dad?

The father walks over.

Takes the clump.

Sand falls away.

Twenty-dollar bills.

Water-stained.

Edges fused together.

The father looks toward the river.  
More paper visible just beneath the sand.

INT. FBI FIELD OFFICE - DAY - 1980

A plastic evidence bag on a metal table.  
Inside: rotted bundles of twenties.  
An agent wearing latex gloves separates them carefully.  
Another agent reads from a ledger.

FBI AGENT  
Serial number... L 042 681 3A.

He checks against microfilm records.  
A long pause.  
He looks up.

FBI AGENT (CONT'D)  
Match.

Silence in the room.  
Another agent exhales slowly.

FBI SUPERVISOR (OLDER NOW)  
How much?

FBI AGENT  
Five thousand eight hundred.

The supervisor absorbs that.

FBI SUPERVISOR  
Out of two hundred thousand.

No one speaks.

EXT. COLUMBIA RIVER - DAY

Agents sift sand carefully.  
Grid markers placed.  
Metal probes pushed into earth.  
Nothing else found.

The river moves past them, indifferent.

INT. FBI FIELD OFFICE - LATE DAY

The old flight path map is brought out again.

Dust shaken off.

An agent marks TENA BAR on the map.

It is not where the original projected drop zone had been circled.

An older analyst studies the distance.

ANALYST  
River transport?

Another agent shakes his head.

FBI AGENT  
Or he walked.

The analyst says nothing.

Because both possibilities lead nowhere.

INT. AIRCRAFT MUSEUM - DAY - YEARS LATER

Behind glass:

The black clip-on tie.

A placard reads:

"Tie worn by hijacker known as D.B. Cooper."

Visitors walk past.

Some pause.

Some don't.

The legend has outlived the search.

CUT TO BLACK.

FINAL TEXT CARDS

On November 24, 1971, a man using the name Dan Cooper hijacked Northwest Orient Flight 305.

A reporter's early error transformed his name into "D.B. Cooper."

The name remained.

He extorted \$200,000 and parachuted from the aircraft over Washington State.

Despite one of the largest manhunts in U.S. history, he was never identified.

In 1980, \$5,800 of the ransom money was discovered along the Columbia River at Tena Bar.

The remaining money has never been recovered.

The FBI formally closed the case in 2016.

FADE OUT.