

Dead Reckoning

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Based on True Events

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EXT. AIRSPACE OVER SEATTLE - DAY

Flying over downtown Seattle. The Space Needle, waterfront piers, and skyscrapers that climb forever into an August sky.

Over Safeco Baseball Field, the infield swollen with concertgoers in front of a massive stage. A giant screen flashes "Pearl Jam."

Ferries slide along the still Puget Sound inlet. In the distance, an Orca surfaces briefly. Its distinct curved dorsal fin protrudes from the water.

A passenger jet roars overhead descending into SeaTac airport. The air traffic control tower rises in the distance.

FADE IN

INT. BATHROOM - MCGINNIS HOME - DAY

JACK MCGINNIS (60S) rubs shave gel enthusiastically onto his face. He's bright with energy. Eyes clear and focused.

Dedicated to a fault, Jack is a man who has worked for a living. Not hard labor, but a job with incredible pressure.

He stands in front of a fogged-up mirror wrapped in a towel that barely makes it around his waist. His hand squeaks as he clears the haze from the mirror.

His cell phone buzzes on the sink.

Jack wipes his hand and answers.

JACK
This is Jack.

He holds the phone out to look again at the number, confused.

JACK (CONT'D)
He's overdue? Any radio contact?
(beat)
OK, keep me posted.

Jack looks back at his phone, thumbing through the contacts until he scrolls to "Sean." His thumb hovers over the "call" button for a moment.

Then he sets it down next to a full bottle of shave gel.

CAROL (O.S.)
Who was that?

JACK

The Peninsula airport. Sean hasn't
landed yet.

His wife enters. CAROL MCGINNIS (60s) watches, her head
cocked to one side, gray hair spilling over her shoulder,
arms folded. She senses Jack's not telling her something.

JACK (CONT'D)

He was flying today. I know the
manager at Peninsula and asked him
to keep an eye on him.

CAROL

You're not concerned? Jack, is
something wrong?

Jack waves her off.

JACK

Everything's fine.

INT. BATHROOM - MCGINNIS HOME - DAY

ONE YEAR LATER

A fogged-over medicine cabinet mirror. Wrinkled fingers wipe
across the moist glass, squeaking, revealing...

Jack's face. Deep lines frame tired eyes that mask pain, or
anger, or both.

Jack squeezes the last remnants of blue shave gel out of the
tube and into his hand and swirls it onto his stubbly face.

He scrapes the razor across his face, then he sees Carol
watching in the doorway of the bathroom.

JACK

What? I don't have time for this.

INT. BEDROOM - MCGINNIS HOME - DAY - CONTINUOUS

Jack slips on a short sleeve dress shirt and slacks, and
wraps a tie around his neck tying it into a half-windsor.

CAROL

It's hotter than the Mojave in
August. A tie?

Jack ignores her and continues to wrap the knot.

He finishes and grabs two unsharpened yellow Ticonderoga pencils off the dresser and slips them into his shirt pocket.

CAROL (CONT'D)
How professional is passing out in front of your students?

Carol approaches, straightens the knot, and cinches the tie around his neck.

CAROL (CONT'D)
You told them?

JACK
Told them?

Carol rolls her eyes, as she continues to hold the tie.

CAROL
We agreed teaching would be part-time. Your leave runs out soon and they're going to want you back in the tower.

JACK
Yeah, about that.
(beat)
Maybe this is what I'm supposed to be doing now. You know, for Sean.

CAROL
A career change? We have plans. Couple more years then you retire.

JACK
Who's going to teach them?

CAROL
There are a hundred people out there who can teach this stuff.

She cinches the tie tighter.

JACK
Right. Like the one who taught Sean?

Carol reacts, but she checks her emotions, being a seasoned professional at hiding her pain.

Jack leans in to kiss Carol and she cinches the tie just a little tighter.

JACK (CONT'D)

Hey!

She relaxes the knot and smooths the tie.

CAROL

We've talked for so long about getting back to our lives.

JACK

There's no getting back to our lives.

CAROL

What would Sean have wanted you to do?

Jack ignores her and heads down the hall, then stops at an open bedroom door. He looks back at Carol, eyes on fire.

CAROL (CONT'D)

Sorry. Was just putting something away. I'll close it. You go on.

Jack leans into the room but looks away and grabs the doorknob, giving it a firm tug closed.

He continues down the hall, then stops without looking back at Carol

JACK

I need to make sure these students don't end up...

Carol's eyes close tightly. She so desperately wishes her husband's pain would subside.

JACK (CONT'D)

...like Sean.

Carol opens her eyes as they trace up to a framed photo.

INSERT - PHOTO of Jack, Carol, and a young man in his 20s. A younger version of Jack. This is SEAN.

BACK TO SCENE

Carol holds on the image, the pain of her loss evident in her eyes. The floor creaks and groans as Jack makes his way down the hall and out the door.

EXT. CARGO BAY 1 - SEATAC AIRPORT - DAY

Stubby aircraft tow tugs race along the pavement to and from hangars, pushing aircraft here and there.

In front of a sign for "Cargo Area 1," a tow tug emerges and approaches a Horizon Airlines commuter plane.

The tug stops in the road and in front of the twin-propeller plane that's supposed to be put into the adjacent open hangar.

Driving the tug is RICHARD RUSSELL (30s). Slightly pudgy with a brown mop of hair and a mischievous smile. The kind that makes you wonder what he's up to.

Richard gets out and eyes the area. He sees a group nearby and reaches for a clipboard, pretending to write something on it.

He slips a yellow pencil back in the clipboard when he sees the group walking toward him.

A SUPERVISOR instructing new ground service agent TRAINEES approaches Richard.

SUPERVISOR

See this everyone? This is NOT where he is supposed to be. Never stop your tug in the middle of a pathway like this.

The supervisor looks at Richard, fuming.

SUPERVISOR (CONT'D)

You lost?

Richard mumbles something under his breath, then smiles.

RICHARD

Nope, just getting into position to...

The supervisor stops him.

SUPERVISOR

What the hell are you doing? Clearly you're clueless.

He grabs Richard's ID badge from his safety vest and looks at it closer, then at Richard trying to make a connection.

RICHARD

I'm Richard, you know?

SUPERVISOR

I don't care who you are.

RICHARD

Sir, I was just getting into position to place this aircraft...

SUPERVISOR

Stop talking. You're embarrassing yourself. Who's your supervisor?

Richard looks around confused.

RICHARD

You are. You trained me.

Snickers from the trainees as the supervisor grits his teeth. He leans in uncomfortably close to Richard's face.

SUPERVISOR

Your tug is not where it's supposed to be. Is this hard for you to understand?

RICHARD

Like I was trying to say...

Having had enough of the conversation, the supervisor RIPS Richard's badge off and tosses it on the ground.

Richard is crushed and fights to check his emotions.

SUPERVISOR

Take the tug back into the hangar. You're done for the day.

The supervisor walks the trainees away from a stunned Richard.

Richard's head drops out of shame. He looks on the ground at his badge. BOLD black numbers rest under his badge photo. The name Rich handwritten under that.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

An air conditioner rattles away, attempting to cool the stuffy room as STUDENTS watch, mostly uninterested.

Two sharpened yellow pencils lay neatly next to one another on a podium. Jack takes one and holds it up.

Jack wiggles it in the air, indicating a position.

JACK

NOTHING will prepare you more for flight than knowing this. It could mean the difference between you making it to your destination...

Some students, mostly the younger ones, sit up and pay just a little more attention.

JACK (CONT'D)

...or crashing.

Jack watches the students. The ones paying attention still aren't getting it. This frustrates him.

His hand tightens around the other pencil. He stops and intensely stares at the class.

JACK (CONT'D)

If you lose your way with your instruments, THIS is the only way you're going to make it safely on the ground and not end up...

Jack pauses and wipes his forehead in the sweltering heat of the ground school classroom.

JACK (CONT'D)

Dead reckoning. Go ahead, write it down. Calculating one's current position...

He wiggles the pencil in the air again.

JACK (CONT'D)

...by using a previously determined reference position...

He takes the other pencil, holds it up.

JACK (CONT'D)

...and advancing that position to another calculated point. THAT is dead reckoning.

Jack moves the first pencil through the air past the second.

JACK (CONT'D)

Looking at where you've been and using that information to calculate where you're going. It applies not to just to flying, but to life as well.

Jack turns away from the class and smiles at his own philosophical gem. He takes one of the pencils and inserts it between his teeth.

EXT. CARGO BAY 1 - SEATAC AIRPORT - DAY

Richard stands next to the aircraft he was supposed to place into the hangar. A seagull cries from above.

The seabird makes micro-adjustments with its wings and hangs midair. Richard watches in awe. It spies him and darts away.

He smiles then climbs into the aircraft, slowly pulling the door shut behind him with the hard CLICK of the lock.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

Jack stands waiting for questions from the students. He looks up at the ceiling.

JACK
Hear that? Follow me!

Jack races to the door leading outside and throws it open. The students look around dismayed.

JACK (CONT'D)
Come on!

EXT. OUTSIDE CLASSROOM DOOR - DAY - CONTINUOUS

Students filter out as Jack points up.

JACK
For thousands of years, mankind has wanted to fly. Just in the last minute of our existence have we been able to do it.

The students look up unimpressed.

JACK (CONT'D)
Looks easy doesn't it? Getting off the ground is a cinch. But landing? That's what makes you a pilot. The ability to land.
(beat)
And live to fly again.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY - LATER

The last student leaves the classroom and Jack surveys the empty desks.

His eyes stop on one desk in particular - its blue plastic seat with empty maple top. Jack sees something.

INT. DEN - MCGINNIS HOME - DAY - FLASHBACK

Jack reaches for a book in his library, "Stick and Rudder."
SEAN (20s) stands across the desk from Jack.

JACK

You sure?

SEAN

Dad, of course. It'll be awesome.

Sean, with his polo shirt tucked into his khaki pants and his hair neatly groomed, is a spitting image of a younger Jack.

Jack hands the book to Sean. A passing of the baton, perhaps.

JACK

Nothing greater a father can do
than teach his son.

SEAN

Don't go all Hallmark card on me.

JACK

Lots of work ahead.

Sean exits and passes Carol standing in the doorway.

She looks on misty-eyed at Jack, who's smiling from ear to ear. She knows what this means to him.

Jack composes himself when he notices Carol.

CAROL

Stop being a poop. You have this
moment to savor - do that. He wants
so much to please you.

BACK TO PRESENT

Sean sits at the desk eager, and ready to learn. Jack stares, shook to the core from the vision. The vision fades.

Jack's cell phone on the podium buzzes bringing him back into the moment. The screen reads "Seattle Center Tower."

JACK
 (Answering)
 This is Jack.

GEORGE (ON PHONE)
 How are you ol' friend? Look we
 have an incident. A hijacking.

INT. SEATTLE AIR TRAFFIC CONTROL TOWER - DAY

CHAOS. Controllers call security, reroute landings, and generally attempt to get a handle on all hell breaking loose.

GEORGE WILLIAMS (60s), often the calm voice in a storm, he's the tower's lead controller and steadying force.

He watches out the tower window as aircraft back up, testing his patience.

GEORGE
 I need you to guide this guy down
 if he gets airborne.

JACK (ON PHONE)
 You know I haven't been in the
 tower since...

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

Jack now paces back and forth, confused by the phone call.

GEORGE (ON PHONE)
 We don't know what his intentions
 are. But's he's taxiing.

JACK
 I can't George. I'm not ready.

GEORGE (ON PHONE)
 You know the aircraft, our system,
 and the regional air space.

Jack steps outside the classroom and surveys sky, searching for something - maybe an answer.

EXT. CARGO BAY 1 - SEATAC AIRPORT - DAY

The security officer reaches over and turns off the tug, then walks over to the item on the ground.

It's Richard's discarded security badge.